WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Jada Jones

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 11 November 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is November 11, 2015. This is Therese Strohmer, and I'm at the Jackson Library at the University of North Carolina [at Greensboro] to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veteran's Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro, and I'm here with Jada Jones. Jada, could you state you're name the way you would like it to be on your collection?

JJ: Jada Jones.

TS: Jada Jones. No Lee?

JJ: No.

TS: Okay. Alright, just checking. Okay. Well, let's go ahead, Jada, and why don't you start by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?

JJ: Okay. So I was born in Toledo, Ohio, July 1980. And—you want a little more on the background of my childhood and stuff?

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Okay.

TS: Do you have any siblings?

JJ: I do. I have an older sister and a younger brother.

TS: Okay.

JJ: My parents—who were never married—but they split up when I was seven, maybe? And then my mom remarried shortly after that when I was nine, and stepdad moved in, and that kind of stuff.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So—

TS: So you're the middle child?

JJ: Yes.

TS: Okay. So in Toledo, Ohio, was it, like, suburban, urban?

JJ: It was definitely urban.

TS: Okay.

JJ: We lived in low income housing projects. And Toledo, Ohio, is kind of a very poor place anyway. There are no real nice places in Toledo.

TS: All manufacturing?

JJ: Yeah. Well, it was. They used to have the big Jeep plant, and some other automotive, and then those all—

TS: Closed?

JJ: Yes, just a really sad, kind of poor place with no jobs and that kind of stuff, so.

TS: Well, first of all, what did your folks do?

JJ: So my mom was a factory worker, and it kind of went from factory to factory as they closed.

TS: Right.

JJ: And then my dad was a disabled alcoholic.

TS: Okay.

JJ: So. And—

TS: Well, now growing up in Toledo then, were there a lot of other kids in your neighborhood? Did you have any relatives around you?

JJ: There were no relatives. I didn't grow up with any other family. There was—My dad had a couple sisters who had kids, but we were never close; didn't know them really well.

And my mom's only sister lived in West Virginia, so we saw them every couple years at holidays and stuff like that.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Grandparents, not really active or anything.

TS: So you're in your nuclear family unit.

JJ: Right.

TS: Yeah. Well, what did you do for fun? So you're, like, a kid growing up in the nineties, really.

JJ: Yeah. [chuckles]

TS: Eighties and nineties. What'd you do?

JJ: We liked science stuff, and exploring the neighborhood, and catching grasshoppers, I remember.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Things like that. I was always kind of a nerd. I liked—I convinced my mom to get me the Smithsonian Magazine when I was really young so I've always been into the Smithsonian collections, and just thought history was really cool, and things like that. So I read a lot of books. I was, according to my mom, a very quiet child. Didn't really like—friends, and she said that I always seemed like I was too old for the kids my age, and they were, like, immature. And I was like, "No, I have better stuff to do," so—

TS: What do you say about that?

JJ: I would—It's kind of a vague time in my life so I can't say I exactly remember, but I would probably—knowing my personality now—I would probably agree with that.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So.

TS: Yeah. Well, did you play any sports at all?

JJ: I didn't play sports until later after my mom married my stepdad because he—he didn't have any kids, and he wanted to have a boy, and him and I were very close. So he kind of made me play sports and fix cars, that kind of stuff. So I started playing basketball.

TS: Okay.

JJ: So I played basketball seventh, eighth, and ninth grade, and then before the tenth grade I was forward—I played power forward, but I didn't grow any taller so I was like five [feet] one [inches], and the coach told me that I would either try out for point guard or I would not play, and I didn't like that so I didn't play anymore.

TS: That's a whole different position, right?

JJ: Yeah, and it's like learning how to play all over again.

TS: Right.

JJ: So I didn't play anymore. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, how about school? Did you like school?

JJ: I did like school. It was always really easy for me.

TS: Was it?

JJ: Yeah. So I—I was defiant in some ways and would skip class and things, but still pull off A's. And teachers didn't like that very much, but—[chuckles]

TS: Where did you go to school at?

JJ: So I went for high school at [Robert S.] Roger's High School, which is one of the Toledo public [schools].

TS: Okay.

JJ: So really big school. We had, I think, five hundred and sixty in my graduating class.

TS: Oh, yeah.

JJ: Yes.

TS: Yeah, lots of people.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Was it ninth grade that you were in high school or tenth?

JJ: Ninth, yeah.

TS: Did you do any other extracurricular activities or—

JJ: I didn't. I wasn't really that person. [chuckles] I—The one thing I did do is I graduated a year early.

TS: Oh, you did?

JJ: Yeah, so I—we had a zero period option for class so you could take an extra class in the morning, and then you could take a class during your study hall, so if you do that over three years that gives you six extra classes. So that's what I did to—so I graduated at the end of my junior year.

TS: Wow, that's great. That's pretty fast.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: [chuckles] Alright, so you're a young girl growing up in Toledo.

JJ: Yes.

TS: What kind of dreams did you have for yourself?

JJ: I always wanted to go to college. I had really big dreams. I had this idea of having a doctorate and being called "Doctor" when I was really young. I always changed what I wanted to do. I went from lawyer to—at one point I wanted to be a doctor, a professor, and I wanted to be a CSI [crime scene investigation] investigator, and just all kinds of different things. But I knew that I did want to go to college. And—

TS: Sounds like you wanted to be some kind of professional.

JJ: Yeah. Yes.

TS: Well, what was it that attracted you to those kind of jobs?

JJ: I think it was getting out of where I grew up. And so, I knew—There was just very few options, and if you stayed in Toledo you worked at the factory or you worked at the restaurant, and that was all you were doing. And I think I had the vision to see at a young age that I wanted better for any future kids that I had, and I wanted my kids to be able to—I remember that at the beginning of the school year, we had five—we could get five outfits from—if you're from Michigan, you might remember Hills Department Store; it's like a K-Mart. We get five outfits—five shirts, five pants, that's it—and that better last you until the summer, and I wanted more than that for my kids, so.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: I thought I should probably make a decent amount of money, but I also knew that I was smart. I liked school, and I could go to college, even though I was told several times that I couldn't.

TS: Oh.

JJ: So.

TS: Did you have any mentors at school or outside of school?

JJ: Unfortunately, no. I remember—we had—I had a guidance counselor who I would go and see. And I was able to—they had brochures for colleges in the guidance office, and I thought, "Ohio State [University] looks great. What do you think?"

And she told me on a few different occasions, "You're not going to be able to go to college so you should probably look at something else." And to this—I will never forget that.

TS: What kind of grades were you getting? Were you getting good grades?

JJ: Good grades. I graduated with, like, a 3.9 G.P.A. [grade point average]. But this is—this is inner city schools, two thousand students coming through there every day, and generally people don't go to college. If they did, they went to community college, and that was doing really great. People didn't have any money, so her thinking, I guess, was, "Who's going to pay for that?" And so, that was what we were told often.

TS: Really low expectations.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: What did you think when you were told that, then? I mean, at the time.

JJ: At the time—When you hear it enough, it starts to ring kind of true.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: And when you grow up poor, and kind of inner city, the "American Dream" is not something that really applies to you. For me personally, I guess, as a child, you're thinking, "Well the American Dream's great for those people. It just—Unfortunately it doesn't apply to us."

[The "American Dream" is the ideal that every United States citizen should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative.]

TS: But you still kind of felt like you had the tools that worked to get there, but you were—

JJ: I did.

TS: —there was no encouragement.

JJ: Right, no one to help. I didn't know how to fill out a college application. I didn't know that there was financial aid that you could get. Nobody told me that.

TS: Right.

JJ: So by the time I should have applied for college, if I wanted to go—several months before or even the year before, but it's the end and I'm getting ready to graduate and I hadn't done that yet.

TS: Right.

JJ: So.

TS: But you're still a junior.

JJ: Right.

TS: So how old were you when you—

JJ: I was sixteen.

TS: Alright, so what happened next?

JJ: So the military recruiters like to hang out at the schools because that's what they did. They targeted poor kids who felt like they had no other options so—and they were aggressive. They not only hung out at the schools, but they'd stop you and they'd tell you things like, "We can give you a life that you have no other option to obtain. You're not going to able to go to college otherwise, but if you join, stay in for four years, and then we'll pay all—your whole college, and then maybe you can do something with your life after that, because otherwise—"

TS: Did they say those kind of things to you?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JJ: Regularly, and it was almost like they were working with the guidance counselors. I'm thinking they probably weren't, but at the time it seemed like this big conspiracy, because they're telling me, "You can't go to college because you can't afford it," and then they're telling me, "Hey, now we can have a way for you to go to college."

TS: Right.

JJ: And I always had a kind of anti-authority, anti-establishment, kind of attitude as a kid. I was that kid. So I was like, "Stop talking to me," every day. "No, I have no interest in what you're saying, I'm not interested in this at all."

TS: Right.

JJ: And I wasn't even considering it.

TS: What were you thinking about that you were going to be able to do?

JJ: I guess I hadn't really thought about it.

TS: You're sixteen.

JJ: Yeah, exactly. I was going to hang out with my friends for the summer, and maybe—maybe I might go community college—

TS: Figure it out.

JJ: —and figure it out, yeah. But I knew I was—I had some regrets about graduating early.

TS: Okay.

JJ: But by then it was too late. I mean, I could have went back to school and took seven more classes for no reason, but that would have been—

TS: What were your regrets?

JJ: I didn't get to enjoy the senior year that people have, and all the senior activities, and they go on a senior trip, and they do senior skip day, and all that. I didn't get any of that. And I also didn't get that last year to actually figure out what I was going to do next.

TS: Right, that maturing age and—

JJ: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Sixteen is way too young to graduate from high school.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So.

TS: What did you end up doing?

JJ: So I joined the army.

TS: Now, how did that happen, then—

JJ: So there was—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —since you were kind of resisting it.

JJ: Yeah, I was. There was a recruiter who was always kind of talking to me, and I was obviously not interested. And I came home from school one day—it was pretty close to—I probably want to say, maybe two weeks before I was graduating, and I come home, and he's in the kitchen, at the kitchen table with my mom.

TS: He's at your house?

JJ: He's at my house.

TS: How'd he get there?

JJ: He must have contacted her in some way. I actually—to this day—never really asked her how that went down because I have really bitter feelings about it, I think.

TS: Okay.

JJ: It's something that her and I have never talked about. Because I don't even think I could get the words out and completed without just blowing up and being furious. But—

TS: So you come home and there's a recruiter at your house.

JJ: Yes.

TS: The army.

JJ: Right, and my mom, and they're at the table and they have a stack of paperwork, and he says to me, "We can to this the easy way or we can to this the hard way."

TS: That's what he said when you walked in?

JJ: I will never forget it as long as I live. And I'm like, "What do you mean? What are you doing here?" And they had the papers ready. My mom had signed. Everything was ready to go. All I had to do was sign. So—

TS: And you were still sixteen?

JJ: Right. Because you have to have your parent—if you're underage—to join the military.

TS: Right, isn't there a minimum age?

JJ: Sixteen is the minimum.

TS: Is it?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: I thought it was seventeen. Okay.

JJ: They may have changed that since then. I'm not positive but—

TS: Interesting.

JJ: —at the time I was sixteen. So I remember that I just cried, and my mom and him as, like, an intervention trying to convince me that this was really good. And I think that at the time, my mom genuinely thought—because again, the same thing for her, she didn't know about financial aid. She didn't know that maybe I could have actually gone to college. These are things—She has a seven—eighth grade education, so he was able to convince her that this was going to be really great for me too. And I don't think—I guess I don't think it was, like, malicious for her or her thinking, "This is a bad kid let me get rid of her," but—

TS: She was trying to think in your best interest.

JJ: Yeah, so—

TS: Did you just end up signing, then?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: What are you going to do?

JJ: What are you going to do? I mean, I think either—I don't know if this is true or if it's just what they told me, but basically that you're underage so your parents are speaking for you anyways. So he basically told me, "We don't actually have to have your permission."

TS: Really?

JJ: "But it would be nice if we did, so why don't you just go ahead and sign here?"

TS: So then what happened?

JJ: So next couple of weeks I finished school, graduated. I think graduation was on a Friday, and left on Monday.

TS: That's it?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: How were you feeling, yourself? I mean, what's going on?

JJ: I didn't want to go for several reasons. One, because I knew that I wouldn't do well with that kind of authority and structure. But I guess I was trying to think of—again, coming from the situation I came from—think, "Well, maybe this will be a good thing for me." And there were a couple other friends of mine from high school, who were also recruited in the same manner, who joined, and were excited about it or were thinking that it was going to be good. And I actually have a friend that—we're still friends now—and he's now—it's so ironic—he's a recruiter now. He was recruited in the same way, and his—but he's made a career, and he's been in—I guess it's been almost twenty years now—so he posts on his Facebook [social networking website] every day, "Hey, if you're a young kid and thinking you can't go to college, we can help." And—It bothers me a lot.

TS: Yeah, does it?

JJ: Like he doesn't remember how we were recruited. And we talked about it at the time so I know that he felt the same way.

TS: Does he maybe think that he's different—

JJ: I think—

TS: —because he went through it?

JJ: Well, because I think he thinks it really was the best thing to every happen to him. And maybe it was for him because he made a career, he makes really good money, he's travelled the world. He's been to both Iraq and Afghanistan, which to me isn't great but that's part of the job. And he's very "Go Army."

TS: Yeah. Well, alright. Did you get put on a bus to go down to South Carolina?

JJ: Yeah. So we took a bus to Cleveland [Ohio], I want to say, and then flew—

TS: You flew?

JJ: Yeah, to South Carolina. And then when we got to—I remember getting to the airport, and then what was really odd was it was dark and the bus took what I would have

considered to not be the direct route to where we were going. And I was—I wonder if that's on purpose. I think it is on purpose. But backroads, and all the way around, and around in circles, and—

TS: Probably to get you there at a certain time.

JJ: Right, and also you're not going to be able to find your way out of here if you decide you want to run away. [both chuckle]

TS: Oh, maybe. May be true.

JJ: Was my thinking.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So I remember being completely panicked and just, I guess, kind of resolved to the fact that this is what I'm doing, and—

TS: So you really had no preparation.

JJ: No.

TS: I mean, within a month you were gone.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: And did you try to figure out what you needed to do, or did the recruiter give you any sense of what it was going to be like?

JJ: No, they just told me, kind of, what I could bring, which was a couple pairs of underwear, and everything else would be assigned, and you don't need to worry about anything. Don't need to have any money or anything anyway, so.

TS: Right. Had anybody in your family been in the military at all?

JJ: No.

TS: No?

JJ: No.

TS: You didn't have anybody that you could have talked to or—

JJ: No.

TS: —anything like that?

JJ: No.

TS: Alright. So what was it like in basic?

JJ: So it was, I would say, traumatic. Lots of screaming, getting up at four o'clock in the morning to go, and it was just, to me, really fast. Like, we're trying to teach this large group of people how to conform and act a certain way. We have to do it quickly. We've got—what was it?—twelve weeks or something at the time. And I remember that it was cold, even though it was in South Carolina, and it was June. [chuckles]

TS: Okay.

JJ: I don't know if it was just because I was shaky all the time, but it was cold. And the—I remember we had—so you had the bays, and then we had our assigned bay drill sergeant. It was this little tiny Filipino guy who was an Army Ranger, and then he was a drill sergeant, which is the worst combination of two things you could ever have in your life, of just this angry little man, and he had—we had these big giant metal trash cans with the lids, and he would take the lids and bang them together. That's how we woke up every morning. And he would say things like, "If you don't do whatever I'm going to eat this trash can." And he was always talking about eating stuff, and we were just really scared of him. It was crazy.

TS: We're you in an open bay, like, with fifty people on the same—

JJ: Yeah. Right. So there were like, I think, two bunks, and then in each—so probably about fifty—

TS: Yeah.

JJ: And then there were men directly across the hall, so it wasn't really that separate.

TS: Okay. Are you, like, not wanting to be there or are you thinking, "Maybe I can try this," or what was your—

JJ: At first I thought maybe I can try this—

TS: Okay.

JJ: —and try to make the best of it, but it didn't last long. I was in trouble a lot.

TS: How'd you get in trouble?

JJ: Just not doing what they said. Not being on time for anything [chuckles], and I just didn't enjoy being told what to do, and I did—because I—I'm one of those people that kind of wants to know why, so if there's something scientific and you can research it and find

out, okay, why does that work that way, but if—I thought that everything they were doing was stupid. So it's like, "Why? Why do I have to wait in this line when there's nobody else waiting?"

It was just this methodical, "You're going to wait for fifteen minutes regardless if there is somebody in front of you or not."

And I'd be like, "Well, why?" And that didn't go over well.

TS: So constantly questioning—

JJ: Yes.

TS: Yeah. Well, what about physically; the basic training or the obstacle course and things like that? Did you guys do field exercise?

JJ: Yeah, we did field—that was actually the thing that I remember being fun.

TS: Okay.

JJ: We had field exercises with like an obstacle course, and there was—we would go camping, and then get attacked in the middle of the night with, like, mustard gas, which I feel like anyone I've ever asked will tell you that that was the funnest part, too, of basic training. I don't know why, because it's really horrible. But you'd be sleeping in the camp, and then it's like, "Hurry up! You've got to put your mask on!" And then we'd run. It was almost like camping but—and more—

TS: Yeah, right. Right.

JJ: And we did the gas chamber were you had to walk through the gas chamber, and—

TS: How'd you do on that?

JJ: It was awful. Lots of bodily fluids everywhere and—but again, memorable and fun in a really weird sort of way.

TS: You made it through?

JJ: Yeah, and that's something I feel like is kind of an accomplishment.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So—

TS: Yeah, definitely.

JJ: I enjoyed that stuff. The cadence songs are fun [chuckles], so I probably still remember some of them. There was the—we had a drill sergeant who led cadence when we would

run and stuff, and he was actually a really, really nice guy. And he would yell, and say mean things when other people were around, but when they weren't he was really a really nice guy.

TS: Okay.

JJ: So—

TS: Now, was it a mixed unit with men and women?

JJ: It was.

TS: Did you run together?

JJ: We did.

TS: Okay.

JJ: We did everything together except for sleeping.

TS: Okay.

JJ: And that was just across the hall so—

TS: How do you think that worked?

JJ: I guess it was good as far as equality goes, because the way—I don't know, it's tough—because the women weren't treated any different from the men, but then at the same time, there are times when women might need to be treated different than men. For example, because you just started your period when you're out in the middle of the woods, and I remember one of the women was told, "Well, we don't let the men go change their tampon, so if you're in the trenches what are you going to do? Are you going to go change your tampon?" So she was—bled[?] everywhere and—

TS: Oh, my gosh, really?

JJ: Yeah. So again, I get the whole, "We want to make this as equal as possible," but there are things that are different about women that need to have attention, so.

TS: Wow, that's interesting. I hadn't heard anybody not being able to take care of that before.

JJ: Yeah. And then I always kind of stand with my hands on my hips, and I remember the saying was, "Get your hands off of your imagination," because men don't have hips that they put their hands on and women don't either.

TS: Really?

JJ: "Get your hands off your imagination." I was always in trouble for that.

TS: That's a weird one, okay. [both chuckle] Yeah. How are you doing mentally there?

JJ: I think I was just focused, and I was—a couple—I would say a few weeks in I was basically determined, and it was my daily goal to get out. At that point, I—

TS: Get out of the army?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JJ: I hadn't—I think I had given up on thinking that I could make this work, and I just felt that it wasn't right for me, and I was sixteen, and all that kind of stuff. And I started thinking that maybe I could have went to college without the assistance of the military, and even if it was community college, and that kind of stuff, so.

During this time my mom had moved. She had written a letter that she moved into a two-bedroom apartment, so it was her, and her husband, and then my brother. And I'm like, "Well, what am I supposed to do if I come home? I'm going to be seventeen years old and you're just"—it was as if I was just completely written off at that point.

TS: Right.

JJ: And so, then I was like, "I'm just going to get out of here, and I'm just going to go do something different, and be on my own."

TS: Right.

JJ: So—But one of the things that kind of, I think, led me to that point was I had another drill sergeant—she was a woman—and when I would get in trouble, and do defiant things, she'd call me in the office and be yelling, but then in private, she'd say, "This isn't for you." This isn't—" and she had a relatable story that we had talked about; the way that she was recruited, and that the army was pretty much the only thing that she felt like she could do, and she made a career out of it, and now she's this drill sergeant, and it made her very sad to see people come in who actually did have other options, and didn't want to be here, and didn't want anything to do with it, and now they're trying to brainwash or convince you to conform into this machine. And so, she basically said that she would help me to get out if that's what I wanted.

TS: What did you do with that advice?

JJ: So I kind of made it that that was my goal. But unfortunately, what I had to do was continue to remain defiant and get in trouble a lot.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So I had to—

TS: But you made it through basic.

JJ: Yeah, but towards the end they had written me off, I guess, and so when they would go out—and I didn't even go to the graduation. They had me cleaning the bathroom with toothbrushes while they were out doing stuff.

TS: Really? Even though you were graduating?

JJ: Yeah, but they—I think at that point, they had told me, "We're working on the proceedings of getting you discharged."

TS: Going to out-process [to end a military tour of duty]?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JJ: So I wasn't one of them anymore at that point.

TS: Okay, but you went through a training for the—

JJ: I was there.

TS: Okay.

JJ: But I wasn't given the training, if that makes sense.

TS: So you were there to be out-processed?

JJ: Yes.

TS: And so, they kind of gave you odd jobs. So that's what's happening while you're there.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Okay, so then you get—so you're done with basic—

JJ: Yes.

TS: And then where do go?

JJ: So I stayed in the same place, and then just did—like you said, just odd jobs until—and I almost felt like they were taking their time, because how long does it take to get me a plane ticket?

TS: How long did it take?

JJ: So—

TS: It was like a—

JJ: It would have been—wait—October—let's see, July to—no, those dates are wrong.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: I'm sorry.

TS: That's okay.

JJ: So December was when I would have—

TS: Signed up.

JJ: No, June was when I signed up, so I would have started, like, July, and then I got home in February—

TS: February of '98?

JJ: Yeah. So I guess it was probably around November or December when the processing started.

TS: Okay.

JJ: So then they just had me for—I mean, because it was a good three months while I was just hanging out. [chuckles]

TS: About three months

JJ: Yes.

TS: What were you doing all that time?

JJ: So I was still doing the PT [physical training] and all the stuff that they were doing every day, and—

TS: So you went to the AIT [Advanced Individual Training] section—

JJ: Yes.

TS: —in the barracks.

JJ: Right, but I didn't go to—

TS: The classes?

JJ: They have, like, the classes. Yeah, I didn't go to any of the classes.

TS: So you're like—what do they call that duty? Like, you're casual.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Casual status. Was that what it was?

[While in "casual status" soldiers complete menial tasks in support of the mission while they wait for their assigned training date]

JJ: Yes, exactly.

TS: Okay. So you're dressed in your uniform.

JJ: Yes.

TS: Did you have a particular person that was over you?

JJ: The woman drill sergeant.

TS: Okay.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Was she kind?

JJ: She was very nice to me.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: And supportive of—

TS: What was happening?

JJ: —doing the right thing, yeah.

TS: Yeah. So what are you doing every day?

JJ: I remember cleaning the bathroom with toothbrushes. I think that was kind of early on just to tell me like, "We hate you," kind of thing.

TS: Right.

JJ: I did paperwork stuff. Since I—The reason why, I guess, they selected me to be the ninety-one layman[?] for—oh, that was another thing. I didn't get to pick what job I wanted.

TS: Right.

JJ: And I thought, "What if I wanted to do—a mechanic on the airplanes or something?" And there are these "womanly" jobs—the secretary and administrative stuff—and that's what I was selected for. And was never shown, maybe, a list of things that you might want to do, and—

TS: Was that with your recruiter or—

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Oh, okay.

JJ: Yes, so I was already chosen—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So the time when you signed up—

JJ: Right.

TS: —with your mom and everything.

JJ: Yes, it already said, "This is what your job title is going to be."

TS: Oh.

JJ: So—and I think—

TS: Do you think that if you had a chance to do a different kind of job you might have—

JJ: Definitely.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Because I think if it was something that I could have considered to be a career that I would actually be interested in.

TS: Right.

JJ: Because the military has careers just like—the same as civilian careers so—and there was lots of stuff that I was interested in at that time. So my things to look forward to were six months of training on how to be a secretary, and then being a secretary, and that wasn't—

TS: Nothing at all that you were interested in.

JJ: Not at all.

TS: No.

JJ: So yeah, I do think that that would have made a big difference.

TS: Did you try to get that changed at all while you were in?

JJ: I didn't.

TS: Or you didn't think of it? You were just, "I want out."

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Okay. So you spent all this time on this casual status.

JJ: Yes.

TS: And you're just doing odd jobs—

JJ: Yes. There was filing, a lot of paperwork. I worked in—I remember working in the medical clinic; paperwork, filing, stuff like that.

TS: Yeah. Was there anything at all memorable in a positive way about that experience?

JJ: There was a—my bunkmate in the barracks, who years later, once I was able to kind of stop being traumatized and come to terms with it, I tried to remember—and I couldn't remember her name, and to this day I cannot remember her name, and I wish I could because I'd look her up on Facebook or something. I can picture—I know exactly what she looks like, but I don't remember, and we went by last names anyways so that would be what I remembered if I did.

TS: Right

JJ: But we became very, very close during that time, and so I think it bothers me—like, why can't I remember her name?—And even a couple years later—obviously, it's been almost twenty now—but back three, four years later I just—it was almost like I had completely blocked out that whole experience.

TS: Right. Probably, you were trying to.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Was it in basic or in the AIT?

JJ: In the basic.

TS: That's right, because you're AIT was not really real. [chuckles]

JJ: Right. Yeah.

TS: Okay. Alright.

JJ: But we spent every waking minute together for months, and—

TS: Yeah.

JJ: She had—I remember her story, she had two small kids. She had, like, a two-year-old, and a three-year-old, and she was eighteen, and really was wanting a better life and thought that this would be good for them. And no fathers. Her parents had the kids while she was doing this, and—So I bet—I would imagine that she probably did the career thing.

TS: Yeah, stayed in.

JJ: Yes.

TS: So you got out.

JJ: Yes.

TS: And then what happened?

JJ: Then I come home to a two-bedroom apartment that I had nowhere to stay on. But no, during this time, apparently my mom and step-dad split up. And so, I came home, and it was that day or a couple days later after I got back that he was over to pick up his stuff because he was moving out. And that was really hard for me because him and I were

really close, and I was really mad at her, and didn't even want to talk to her. And it turned out that the problem started because he didn't agree with her sending me.

TS: Oh, really.

JJ: He didn't think that was right, and apparently they had fought about it beforehand. And I didn't know any of this. And when he—when I was—And he never wrote me letters, and she always wrote me letters. And I guess, he was just too hurt by it, too upset by it, and then he couldn't look at her anymore after that, and that ended up being why they split up.

TS: Interesting.

JJ: Yes.

TS: How many years later, almost twenty.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: When you reflect back on it, do you still have a lot of the same bitterness that you felt at that time?

JJ: I do, and I think—I don't think about it a lot, I don't talk about it a lot, and I actually—when I mentioned it to Beth Ann Koelsch [Curator, Women Veterans Historical Project], I was mad at myself for slipping up and mentioning it because I don't like to talk about it, and then that prompted her to obviously think that I should have this interview, but—so that's the reason why I don't like to talk about it, because I am really, really bitter about it, but I think when preparing for this I started to—there are only very close friends of mine that even know that I used to be in the military.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: I realized, though, within the last couple days or so that there's a path that my life went on that would not have happened if I didn't have that experience.

TS: Why?

JJ: Because I probably—given a different circumstance, if I was encouraged to go to college—which I could have gotten into any, I'm sure, that I applied to, and gotten financial aid or even scholarships or whatever it is—went to college, graduated when I was twenty. I would have been, at the time, probably a criminal investigator, which is completely opposite of what I want to do now.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: And possibly taken a job that I worked forever and hated, and I wouldn't have traveled the way that I did. I moved to China—lived overseas—did the teaching English thing.

TS: Oh, you did?

JJ: Yes.

TS: Okay.

JJ: Which I probably wouldn't have done if I had this career that I had to do, and had gotten married, and had kids young, and that kind of stuff.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So it set my life on a path that would have been completely different than the traditional "go to college".

TS: When you were talking to the young women that were in basic with you—

JJ: Yes.

TS: —did you get any sense of how many different cultures and people from around the country were there? Did that strike you at all?

JJ: It did, and I remember she was—she was either Mexican or Puerto Rican. She spoke Spanish fluently, and—but there was such a big mix of everybody there, even just in my little bay of fifty people. There was a couple Asian girls. There were—There was—I remember there was a Filipino girl, because she kind of related to the Filipino drill sergeant, and I'm like, "Why is he so mean?"

And she's like, "No, that's just how they talk." [both chuckle] And—But yeah, there was everyone.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Everyone.

TS: Did that strike you? I mean, I don't know in Toledo, what kind of mix you had at your school or anything.

JJ: To me it wasn't different because Toledo is a very multicultural place, I would say. What's different is being in the South to me.

TS: Oh, really. Okay.

JJ: Yeah. So to me it was like going from one same to the other, seeing just lots of the same people.

TS: In a different type of environment.

JJ: Right. But I do remember that there were a lot of women in positions of power, which to me was odd—not odd, but different than what I was used to, because anything I had experienced—the teachers were generally women, but the principals, the administrators, all the people who were important, were men. So there were women who were colonels, and really high up important people, and drill sergeants. There was as many female drill sergeants as there were men. Stuff like that, so.

TS: So that kind of struck you?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: A little bit. Maybe didn't even process it all at that time, but later.

JJ: Yes.

TS: Yeah, interesting. So what did you end up doing when you got out?

JJ: So I—After I came home, and I didn't like that my step-dad wasn't there, and it was just my mom and my brother in a two-bedroom apartment., I slept on the couch for a little while, and she—my mom had me driving my brother to school, and I was kind of her errand person, and I was like, "I'm not going to do this anymore," so I petitioned to get emancipated, and I did, because apparently that's pretty much a no brainer for the courts, because when you've been in the military it's like, "Yes, you're an adult now."
So I got emancipated, and I'm only seventeen still at the time. And then me and another friend of mine got an apartment, and then I went to community college because that's where I could go.

TS: Where did you go?

JJ: I went to Owens Community College in Toledo. You're familiar? [chuckles]

TS: I am actually, yeah. What years where you there?

JJ: So that would have been '98 to 2000.

TS: Yeah?

JJ: And then—It was good for because the classes that I took started to make me understand what I was actually interested in, and what I really didn't want to do. I started out taking criminal justice classes, and then really hated that. And took a couple history classes, and philosophy because I just thought it was cool, and then it turned out that it was cool, and that's what I loved so—

TS: So that's what you started to follow?

JJ: Yes.

TS: Then what did do when you finished there?

JJ: So—

TS: Did you transfer or—

JJ: I think I—that would have been 2000. I have moved a lot so it gets really cloudy. I—

TS: You don't have to know exactly.

JJ: Well, there's like an order—

TS: What's the next stage for you?

JJ: There was several years when I didn't go to college after that. Then I moved to—out to LA [Los Angles, California] for a while because I went through "I want to be a film maker" stage, and—

TS: Why not go to LA?

JJ: Yeah, that seemed to be the place to be. So lived in LA for a year and was a waitress, which was cool; that was a really fun, awesome time. And then I thought, "Okay, I should actually probably finish college and do that." So then I moved back to Toledo, and transferred to the University of Toledo. And was there for a couple of years, and then I got this itch of "I got to get out of here," so that's when I moved to China. It was before—And I hadn't graduated with my bachelor's [degree] yet. So that's when I lived in China for a little over a year, taught English. Came back because I was homesick, but regretted coming back immediately.

TS: You had a culture shock when you came back?

JJ: Worse than going over there.

TS: Yes.

JJ: And was just sad and depressed for a long time, and thought, "Why—" because at that point I didn't have any offers of people wanting to pay this two thousand dollar plane ticket for me to go back over there.

TS: Right.

JJ: But if I would have just stayed I could have kept the job, and all that. It was interesting so—

TS: Well, you didn't know.

JJ: Right.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So—

TS: How old are you then?

JJ: That was—I got back from China in 2006, so I would have been twenty-six.

TS: Okay. How did you end up here?

JJ: So I then moved to Orlando [Florida], because a friend and I decided we were going to pull out a map, close our eyes, and point to it. So we did that and Orlando happened to be the place that came up. So her and I both moved there. We were there for a while, then my mom got sick.

TS: Okay.

JJ: And so, my mom has stage four breast cancer.

TS: Okay.

JJ: So at the time, it was stage two or three or something, it wasn't—but she was living in Nashville [Tennessee], and that's also where my brother and his wife lived too. And so, I decided that I would move to Nashville and help or do whatever I could since she just got this diagnosis, and stuff like that. So I moved to Nashville. And then my mom had remarried another guy at that point, and he had gotten a really good job in Colorado after I'd been in Nashville about a year; so then they were going to move to Colorado. And I was like, "Well, I don't want to be in Nashville. What am I doing here?" So I had a friend living in Burlington, North Carolina.

TS: Okay.

JJ: And she said, "Well, I know you've been talking about wanting to go back to school and finish your degree. We have UNC Greensboro here. I hear it's a good school. Maybe look into it."

So I thought, "Sure, why not." So I did that, and then I moved to Burlington and lived with her, and came to UNCG and finished my bachelor's finally.

TS: Good, and then you decided to go for your master's [degree]?

JJ: Yeah, that was after a year of realizing that a bachelor's in history is completely worthless [chuckles], and couldn't get a job, anything at all. I was bartending and then selling insurance.

TS: What year was this though?

JJ: This was 2012. I finished in 2012 but didn't—because I was short one class so I didn't get my degree until '13. But—So a couple years of selling insurance, waiting tables, and bartending.

TS: Right.

JJ: And then I thought, "I should go back to school and be really serious about what I want to do finally." [chuckles] So that's what I did.

TS: So that's when you got in the LIS [Library and Information Studies] program?

JJ: Yes.

TS: How did you like UNCG?

JJ: I really like UNCG, and that's what made me—I was actually living in Florida after I graduated, because my friend that I moved to Orlando with was still there so I thought, "Sure, I'll move back to Orlando."

TS: Was she in Orlando?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JJ: So—she still lives there—and when I thought that I wanted to go back to school to get a master's, I had a mentor who—he's an adjunct history professor here—and we had always kept in contact, and he was great; one of my favorite professors of all time. But he encouraged me to consider LIS instead of a master's in history, and he was currently working on his PhD in history, and he's like, "This is personal experience. I don't think that you want to teach, and I don't think that you want to be a professor, so that limits your options even if you have a master's degree in history. But have you considered archives? LIS? Library Science?"

And I'm like, "No, I don't even know what that is." So I looked into it and—

TS: Oh, interesting.

JJ: Yeah, so I never—seeing librarians wherever, at school or at the public library, I never considered that they had a really high education.

TS: Right.

JJ: And most people don't; I think that's pretty common. And then once I found that out, I was like, "Oh, that might actually make sense because they're, like, the smartest people in the world." [both chuckle] So I applied for the program and got in, and then moved back to Greensboro.

TS: Okay, and have you liked the program?

JJ: I do, yeah. I really like the program. I think it was the best decision, I'm really glad that I did that instead of the history, or instead of not going back to school, I guess.

TS: Right. Well, do you have any professors that have really inspired you or classes that you've had?

JJ: My inspiration mostly comes from the internship and assistantships I've had, like, in Special Collections. My boss is Dr. Keith Gorman [Assistant Dean for Special Collections and University Archives]. He's been like a mentor to me. And then I work—not necessarily directly with the other archivists and things up there, but I see them a lot, and they look at my résumé—and Kathelene [McCarty-Smith], and Beth Ann, and Jennifer [Motszko], and stuff like that. So that's been really great for me. And then I also work at the—internship at the reference desk in the Jackson Library, so the librarians there have all been really great mentors, too.

TS: Yeah, so it's kind of a little community—

JJ: Yeah.

TS: —that you have with support.

JJ: It is very supportive.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Especially compared to all of my previous experiences in life.

TS: Is that right?

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. So you feel like you're on a good road right now?

JJ: Yes, I do.

TS: Do you?

JJ: It's funny, though, because I think of things like, "Wow, I could be retiring from the military—" what? "—two years from now."

TS: Yeah.

JJ: "A year and a half from now." And those are the kind of things that make me a little bit regretful, because as much as I have disdain for the military, I also recognize when it's good. For example, my bunkmate, she was able to make a career out of that, a good life for her kids. That's probably the best that she could have possibly done.

TS: Yes.

JJ: And I think that that's great. I have another really good friend who's in the navy, and she was on a really bad path. She was using drugs heavily, and it was just really bad and not going well for her. And then she joined the navy, and it's been the greatest thing that's happened to her.

TS: Really?

JJ: Yeah, she's been—I guess it's been about five years now. She reenlisted after, and I remember when she joined she thought, "I'm just going to do this, and get them to give me a GI Bill in four years. It'll be great." And then she reenlisted, and thought this was the best thing. She has a three-year-old daughter, and she's pregnant again, and married, and husband's in the navy, too, and everything's really, really great for her.

So I can recognize when it's really good for people, and I wonder sometimes if I wasn't so young, and not capable of making that kind of life changing decision, if I would have possibly been able to reap the benefits of being in the military. Maybe not for twenty years, but maybe for four years, maybe for eight years; something like that, so.

TS: Yeah, but you were very young, and you were thrown into it.

JJ: Right.

TS: So that's a completely different thing than if you had volunteered for it, for sure.

JJ: Yes. Right.

TS: Well, if someone said, "Hey, I'm thinking about going in the military," what would you say to them? Man or woman.

JJ: I think it depends on the person, and what their personal life is, and what their reasoning is for wanting to join. If it's a high school kid that says, "I'm thinking about joining because I have no other options," I am going to deter you as much as physically possible from that. If it's somebody, like my friend, who's like, "I really need the structure. I can't get off these drugs. I have no future," then sure, I might encourage it.

I think for women—again, as a woman though, women need to be very aware of what it's going to be like, and need to make sure that they're okay with that. Because I think things like women being told—for example, I was told when I joined, "You won't ever go to war." That's not true. [chuckles] That's not true at all. So that is a possibility as well. But also to know that not only are you being treated like men when it comes to all of the physical stuff, and then going to war, but you're going to be treated like a woman when it comes to the job that you are told that you can do. And when it comes to possibly the—how seriously you're taken by the other—by the men, and things like that.

TS: Yes.

JJ: So—But I think that's life in America for a woman. So it's just more, maybe, of a concentrated version of that, but that's—

TS: Even though you weren't in very long, and you were doing a lot of odd jobs—

JJ: Yes.

TS: —did you ever face any kind of sexual discrimination or any of that kind of stuff?

JJ: I was called names that would only be used for women.

TS: By who?

JJ: By drill sergeants, people in authority positions, things like that. So—

TS: Yeah.

JJ: There was name calling. I don't recall hearing any of the men being called names. Not that they weren't treated—yelled at and things like that, because they were. That was just part of basic training.

TS: Right.

JJ: That's what you did, but—yeah. So there was definitely name calling. But—

TS: But nobody took you aside, during the time that you were waiting to get out, to harass you or bother you?

JJ: No, I didn't feel necessarily harassed. But I was treated with—

TS: Isolated.

JJ: Yeah, and treated with, like, just this disgust of, "How could you?" So—

TS: Right, because you were not one of them anymore.

JJ: Right.

TS: Yeah, I think you said that once.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Well, what do you think about the idea of women in combat?

JJ: I think if that's what they want to do, then I think that that's great. I think that women should be allowed to do everything that the men can do. They certainly are trained the same way, and can definitely shoot the guns, and be in combat situations with the same ease—I don't want to say ease—but the same way as men can. They have the exact same training. I think women, physically, are just maybe not as strong as men; just like physiologically possibly. But to me, combat situations and things like that are more mental than anything. If you're trained to use the weapons, you're trained about the procedures of being in the trenches, and all those kind of things, I don't see why they can't do the exact same as men.

TS: The other kind of controversy that was going on—it was actually in play when you were in—was the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was the official U.S. policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members, while barring openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual person from military service. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed 20 September 2011]

JJ: Yes.

TS: Which has since been repealed. What do you think about that whole controversy of homosexuals in the military?

JJ: I was always—I—The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" thing I thought was crazy because that's just a really big form of discrimination, and so why can't I tell you that I'm a homosexual if I am, so—I don't remember any personal experience with it or anyone—meeting anyone personally who said that they were gay and had to keep it a secret or anything like that, so I don't know. But my opinion was always, like, "What? Who cares? Why do you have to keep that quiet?" It didn't make any sense to me.

TS: Doesn't matter?

JJ: Yeah, didn't matter to me at all.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So—

TS: Well, what do you think civilians may misunderstand about people who are in the military? Or just about the military itself?

JJ: I think that civilians don't understand the rigorous, maybe, mental and emotional training, and things that people in the military go through. And I think that people who know somebody who's been in the military, or especially come back from war, and things—that they might recognize that they come back a completely different person. And I think that I can say the same for even somebody who hasn't been to war but has just been in the military. They have this like tactic which would work really well if they had prisoners of war or something, but—of this, like, tearing you down completely to the ground, and then building you back up, and implanting the idea that they want you to have. And that's such an interesting concept to me; and I think maybe people don't—don't know that that is what happens, but that is exactly what happens. And that's why you have people who are—in my opinion—"Go Army! Go Army!"—when maybe six months ago, they were like, "The army's horrible, I don't want to be here." And I think that, very easily, had I decided to, "I'm just going to go ahead and give this a chance, and it'll be great," then I would have very likely been one of those people as well.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: It's just the—the psychological way of—and I don't necessarily say it's like brainwashing because their giving you wrong ideas, but they are giving you the ideas of this is how you should live, this is how you should think, this is how you should act, and it becomes your own ideas at one point.

TS: Well, you buy into it.

JJ: Right.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So—to the point where you think it's not—it's actually something I came up with. It's my idea, not something that somebody gave me.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: Which is ultimately the main thing that I didn't like. I understand, I guess, when you're in situations of combat and things like that, you have to have a group of people who are willing to take orders, and without questioning them; without saying, "Well, that doesn't make any sense." And everybody on the same page and doing all the exact same things. I understand that. There's only one way to do that, and that is to convince everyone that that's their idea. So—But it seems sort of "Nazi-ish" to me.

TS: Yeah. So that's kind of how you felt sometimes; you were disruptive, and not wanting to go along with the program.

JJ: Right. Yes.

TS: Yeah. But you wanted to be disruptive too.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: How else are you going to get out?

JJ: Exactly. Well, and I knew that I had my ideas, and your own ideas are not—the phrase of, "If I wanted your opinion, I'd give it to you"—

TS: Right.

JJ: —happened a lot. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So that just wasn't the way that my brain worked, and I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

TS: Right.

JJ: To conform to it, so.

TS: Do you feel like you're a pretty independent person?

JJ: Very independent.

TS: Yeah, strong willed?

JJ: Yes.

TS: Yeah. What does patriotism mean to you?

JJ: I think patriotism is recognizing that we live in the greatest country in the world, and the benefits that we have for being here, but also there are things like—things in the [United States] Constitution that say that we should stand up and form a revolution if necessary, and things like that. So those to me—which may be anti-patriotism ideals to some people—are to me what it means, kind of, to be an American. Having that right, and standing up for what you believe in, and the fact that because we are in America we have that choice, and we can do that. And so, that's what I would want to do.

TS: Yeah. [both chuckle] That's interesting. Well, is there anything that I haven't covered that you want to cover that occurred, in relationship to anything that we've talked about?

JJ: The only other thing that I think was really funny that stands out to me about the experience was—and I don't know if this is something that they have in the air force as well—but they had—what do they call it?—it was like patriot juice or America juice. It was something juice, and it was this—

TS: I don't recall anything like that.

JJ: Nothing like that?

TS: No.

JJ: I want to say—

TS: Where was it at?

JJ: Freedom juice or something, but they had it in the—when you would go for chow [U.S. Military food (eg. breakfast, lunch, dinner)]—

TS: Chow Hall.

JJ: —and it was this green—but the rumor was, and everybody—you learned it, and everybody knew it—was that it suppressed the sexual urges, because they did have men and women together, and at some point you could probably find a way to sneak over there and—but no one did because we had to drink this juice every day. And you had to drink it. And you had to get at least one cup, and you had to show that it was empty when you were done, and turn it upside down. We had to have one with every single meal. And they would say, "Well, it's got a lot of electrolytes and you need that because we're working hard," and whatever, but that was the belief; that they had put some kind of a chemical in it to suppress sexual urges.

[There is no evidence that the army laces food or beverages with anaphrodisiacs, or drugs that reduce sexual desire]

TS: Really? I had not heard that before.

JJ: Yes.

TS: That's interesting. How did you like chow? Was it all right?

JJ: Yeah, the food was actually pretty good. And they—We were encouraged to eat a lot of food because, I guess, of all the physical activity, so they didn't have us on these like healthy diets. I remember they had pizza and burgers and all kind of good stuff, so.

TS: Was the physical activity okay for you?

JJ: It was—I enjoyed it because I now kind of like working out; you get the endorphins and stuff. But it was more like you want to be able to pass the test, and know that I can do this many pull-ups, and this many push-ups, and run as many miles as the men, and that kind of stuff. So it's—it was kind of a competitive thing, so that was—that was fun.

TS: Do you have some pride in being able to keep up, and do those kind of things while you're in?

JJ: Yeah. Yes.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: And another thing I do have pride in, is I shot expert.

TS: Oh, you did?

JJ: Yeah, so I was a natural with the rifle for some weird reason.

TS: Had you shot before?

JJ: I hadn't.

TS: No?

JJ: And—Yeah, I don't know why, but—So we had the final—there were little tests along the way, and there was always forty targets, and then the final test was forty moving targets. And they would pop up, and you were laying in the trenches, and it was so fun. So I ended up with forty out of forty, and got a little expert pin that I can wear on my shirt.

TS: Wow!

JJ: I still like shooting now.

TS: Do you?

JJ: Yes.

TS: You still do it?

JJ: Yes.

TS: Well, that's cool. So that's something that you probably would have never had.

JJ: Yeah, I think so.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: And I remember the bruising in the shoulder from [recoil]—that just never went away because you just kept shooting, and it was like, "Uh."

TS: Yeah.

JJ: But I really enjoyed that, and was proud that I could get really good at it. I actually, at one point, thought I could go to war, but I didn't want to because I was against what war was.

TS: Right.

JJ: So—

TS: Well, your "today" self, what would you tell your sixteen-year-old self back then about how to cope or something?

JJ: I guess I would maybe say to consider this as something that could possibly be a good thing. And maybe, like you said, ask, "Is there an option for a different job? Can I do something different?" Because I had time before AIT started that I could have—I mean, I don't know if that was an option—and maybe if I would have picked a different job and had that training and could have enjoyed it. Being in the army, even if it was just for the four years, and then doing whatever I wanted to do after that, or possibly deciding that I want to stay in because traveling the world is a big passion of mine, and that's one way to do it. And the friend of mine that I do have, he's been in, like, every country in the world, and he's got all these amazing pictures, and he just has had the time of his life. So I guess if I would have known that it might have been worth considering staying in, and not being a jerk to everyone while I was there.

TS: Well, you might never have been able to get over the resentment of how it came about either.

JJ: Right.

TS: I mean, that's an awful huge obstacle—

JJ: Right.

TS: —to overcome, at any age.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Not even just a young sixteen-year-old.

JJ: Yes.

TS: So yeah.

JJ: But if I could have maybe looked at it separately, like, "This was really messed up, but look at these benefits that I have now," I maybe could try it.

TS: Right.

JJ: Because it was almost like—I don't want to say a wasted year of my life, but I came back with this general discharge that caused me to not get any of the assistance that I was promised in the beginning, and friends were different. They weren't—and I was different. I was a different person when I came back so maybe that's why—

TS: How do you think you had changed?

JJ: I think I was more against authority at that point. So if a teacher said, "Introduce yourself."

And I'm like, "What!? Why are you telling me what to do?" and that kind of stuff.

So I had future issues with bosses, managers, teachers, things like that. So conflicts that I may not have had otherwise. But I just, at that point, felt like everybody was just trying to conform me, and tell me to do something, and—yeah, so. This has actually been a lifelong, up until now, struggle. So—

TS: Yeah. Well, it's always a lifelong—

JJ: Yeah. Yeah, it is.

TS: We're always trying to perfect ourselves.

JJ: Right.

TS: Right. So looking back—

JJ: Yes.

TS: —you are a veteran.

JJ: You think?

TS: You were in, and when you think about things like tomorrow is Veteran's Day—

JJ: Yeah.

TS: —what do you think about that?

JJ: I've never—like I said, never considered myself to be a veteran. I don't ever go to IHOP [International House of Pancakes] and get free pancakes or whatever, because I—for me, a veteran is somebody who—I mean, not necessarily somebody who's been to war, because I don't think that's a requirement, but service to the country. And I don't feel like I've given service.

I mean, they paid me. They trained me. So I spent the whole time either training or hanging out not doing anything. But I don't feel like I did any service. And even if it would have been months—a few months of doing the job of secretary afterward then that's still service because I'm doing something. But I never felt like I did any service for the country or for the military.

TS: Yeah.

JJ: So I never—I don't participate—I'm never done veteran activities or—

TS: Yeah.

JJ: I don't answer "yes" on questionnaires that say: "Are you a veteran?"

TS: You made it through basic training. You got a marksman.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: There's lot of things that you did that millions of young people have never done. Just by the time that you went in there.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. What would you tell your mom today?

JJ: [chuckles] The thing that I've always, I guess, wanted to tell her that I probably never will—because she doesn't have a lot of time left, and at this point I try to just keep our relationship happy and good.

TS: Positive.

JJ: Yeah.

TS: Right.

JJ: But I would like her to acknowledge and consider what that did to me on a lifelong level, not just for the year I was there. And there's the feeling of abandonment. There's the feeling of, "Oh, I want to get a two-bedroom apartment, so you get out now." And I don't want her to—because I've heard her tell the story, and it will make me really angry. She makes it sound like it was my idea and I came to her like, "I want to join the army."

TS: Right.

JJ: And I almost think she actually believes that because she's told it that way so many times.

TS: Right.

JJ: So I would just like for her to acknowledge like, "This was you. I had told this drill sergeant where he could go twelve different times [insult him] before he showed up at the house. And had no interest in this, and it definitely set my life on a different path than what it would have been—not necessarily that that's a bad path, but acknowledge that you are responsible for that."

TS: Yes.

JJ: "Not me." So—

TS: And that recruiter.

JJ: Yeah. Well, that was his job, and he did a good job, I guess.

TS: Well, I don't know that his job is to get somebody involuntarily into the military.

JJ: Right. Right.

TS: I'm pretty sure it's not. I mean, just telling your story today I think exposes some of those practices that probably still do go on. Most of them are just great.

JJ: Right.

TS: Like your friend that you talked about.

JJ: Yes.

TS: But those kind of things need to be exposed for what they are. I think. So I'm glad you came to talk today, to talk about those kind of things; the not-so-great side of military recruiting, in the inner city—

JJ: Right.

TS: —in that case, and when people are really vulnerable.

JJ: Yes.

TS: And you certainly were in a vulnerable position, I think.

JJ: Yes.

TS: I'm really glad you came to talk today.

JJ: Thanks.

TS: Anything else you want to add?

JJ: I think that's about it.

TS: Yeah. Well, thanks, Jada.

JJ: Thank you.

TS: I'll go ahead, and turn it off.

JJ: Okay.

[End of interview]