WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Shelley Witzke Kirk

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 7 February 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is February 7, 2016. I'm actually at a beautiful library in Apex, North Carolina with Shelley Kirk, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. Shelley, could you please state your name the way you'd like it to read on the collection?

SK: Do you want me to spell it?

TS: No, just talk it out.

SK: Okay. Shelley [Witzke] Kirk.

TS: Okay. Well, Shelley, thanks for meeting me here at the library. Why don't we start out by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?

SK: In 1963 I was born in Bethesda, Maryland, to a father that was active duty navy. He was stationed in that area, up at Fort Meade maybe.

TS: Up in Maryland?

SK: Up in Maryland, yeah, because he was into the intelligence.

TS: Was he at NSA [National Security Agency]?

SK: I think so.

TS: Yeah? Okay.

SK: I was the last of four children.

TS: Okay.

SK: So I'm the youngest, with very little memories. [both chuckle]

TS: Alright.

SK: All my—My other siblings would sit there and talk about things, I'm like, "I don't remember that."

TS: Right. How far apart are you in age?

SK: My sister and I, two, my other sister, three, my brother, three, and then my sister, four and a half; she's almost five years older. And then it goes down.

TS: Then you had more before you? Or—No, there's just four, right?

SK: Yeah. And then when my dad retired in 1975 my mom's present was my brother, so I have a brother twelve years younger than me.

TS: Oh, okay. So there's five total—

SK: Yes.

TS: —siblings in your family. Okay. But the four of you are packed pretty close together.

SK: Yeah, we did all the navy stuff, so when I talk about my family it's mostly them, not meaning to leave my brother out but he was—

TS: Right, but he came later.

SK: Yeah, so he didn't get to partake in our fun.

TS: So his memory is totally different, right? He's got a different narrative about growing up than y'all did.

SK: Very much so. He's the typical born and raised in one place.

TS: Yeah.

SK: Yeah.

TS: That's very interesting. So your dad was in the navy. Now, did your mom work outside the home?

SK: She did not.

TS: She was taking care of the kids?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay. You're born in Bethesda, and so when you have your first memories as a child, where was your dad stationed? Do you remember?

SK: Dad went overseas—I say overseas, but dad went to different countries frequently, because when he was overseas we didn't always go.

TS: Okay.

SK: Mom's mom and her sisters and brothers were all in Hyattsville, Maryland, [Washington] D.C. area, so—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: That was a growing up place for you?

SK: —he would go—Yeah, he would go, we'd come here and stay, because she had somewhere to stay with her mom, and stuff like that. So we didn't always go, as children, wherever he was stationed.

TS: Okay.

SK: So I think most of my memories would be those; like riding a school bus in that area.

TS: Hyattsville?

SK: Hyattsville.

TS: Okay, I know where that's at.

SK: Do you?

TS: Yeah, I do. Now, that's area's really been built up a lot.

SK: Yeah, not all of it has. [chuckles]

TS: No? What was it like when you were growing up?

SK: Well, he was stationed at Fort—

TS: Fort Meade?

SK: —Meade, so that's where I remember a house—my first remembrance of a house—other than my grandmother's apartment where we moved when Dad wasn't around, which was a very tiny apartment. But I remember the first house being at Fort Meade, on the base there.

TS: Now, was he enlisted or was he an officer?

SK: He was enlisted.

TS: He was enlisted okay. Did he retire, then?

SK: Yes, he retired as first class.

TS: As first class, okay. So you're growing up on military bases then, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: And, of course, you don't know any different.

SK: Correct.

TS: But what was it like? What was your schooling like?

SK: I'd have to say—I would say—I mean, I think that's—I contribute [sic, attribute] that to being an introvert of sorts, because every three years I was in another place, and I didn't make friends easy.

TS: Right.

SK: Because I knew we were just going to leave again, so it's almost like, "Why bother?"

TS: Okay.

SK: That sounds callous, but it's just—it's just how we were; it was our life. So school was school. I mean, I think we went on base, when they had him on base, or I remember we did go with him to Italy when he was stationed in Gaeta [NSA Gaeta]. I have a lot of memories of Italy, only in that they didn't have housing, so we had—if I'm getting ahead of the date [chuckles] —

TS: That's okay.

SK: They didn't have base housing so we were out in town.

TS: Okay.

SK: And we were in a high rise apartment. And I remember the Italians were not nice people. During the winter, snowball fight, they'd put rocks in their snowballs; my brother's knee was busted wide open.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

SK: It could have just been the group in the area we were. I don't know that we were antagonizing as a military family, because you just try to keep to yourself. But when you have to mingle in a place where you don't know the language, you don't know the customs—

TS: Right.

SK: —I just can't imagine how you try to fit in.

TS: About how old were you then?

SK: See, I was trying to remember dates before I got here. I don't remember. Seventies.

TS: Yeah.

SK: I'd have to say early seventies maybe.

TS: So in your young teens. You were born in '63 so maybe ten, eleven.

SK: Then I have the dates wrong. It must be sixties.

TS: Yeah, not quite a teen yet.

SK: Yeah, no.

TS: Okay, pre-teen.

SK: My brother and sister talked about it a lot because they were the two oldest—about the rock fight and stuff—and then they used to talk about how at Halloween—their Halloween was a group of people coming door-to-door, in a musical sense—they'd have instruments or something—and it was more like—I'd put it to, like, a Mardi Gras, now that I know what that's like.

TS: Okay.

SK: And just fun and good times. So it's like you have these two feelings of the Italian people but—And then I remember we'd be walking behind our house—our high rise—and they would spit on us. I mean, just—

TS: Not a good experience.

SK: Not a good—[chuckles] No. But we had to cross railroad tracks and we had to climb down a wall backwards to get to the main street. And I don't know if that was walking to a market. I just have that vision. I don't know where we went. I don't know where we went.

TS: That sounds like a secret path to downtown.

SK: Yeah, I think so. [both chuckle]

TS: It doesn't sound like the normal route you'd take.

SK: Yeah.

TS: Probably your mother wasn't going to take that route, huh?

SK: No. And I just remember when they went away to Naples for a week some Italian lady in our neighborhood or next to—across the hall, and my kid—my older brother and sister was talking about the spaghetti and it was true—true good food. [unclear] Italian, big woman, just the whole—the Italian picture you get of the mama and stuff like that. [unclear]

TS: Do you remember any other places that you were stationed that struck you as a young child?

SK: I don't remember Hawaii.

TS: But you were there?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay.

SK: We—He was at Wahiawa [Naval Computer and Telecommunications Area Master Station Pacific (NCTAMS PAC)], which I think was another secret part of the base or something like that, so.

TS: Okay. So he was in intelligence?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay. Right. You said he was linguist, right?

SK: Right, and he had three languages. So I don't remember—I know Hawaii was towards the end. Gaeta was first, and I think Hawaii was my second memory, so I was a little bit older. And there was public schools there—they didn't have schools on base so it was all

public schools—which I just experienced years later when we were stationed there, my kids going to a public school. I don't know if it was the same but I was not happy with their public schools.

TS: No, you weren't?

SK: If it hadn't changed since back then, then I didn't learn anything. [both chuckle]

TS: So you're a young girl who's more of an introvert, you said, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: What did you like to do? What were your joys in life as a young girl?

SK: Geez, I don't know. I always—I liked reading. I think that's what introverts do, they go to reading, and I just—I loved reading the suspenses and the Stephen King's and the—and I liked listening to the music of the day.

TS: Right. What kind of music did you like to listen to?

SK: What we would call "pop" back then.

TS: Yeah. You had disco, too, in the seventies.

SK: We had disco in the seventies. But I just—so what would be like "Aquarius" [by American pop group The 5th Dimension], stuff like that.

TS: Oh, yeah, "Age of Aquarius."

SK: I just listen to them over and over in my room. My sister and I shared a room.

TS: I remember John Denver was something that we had, and I was trying—I think of all the singers that we had at that time.

SK: The Osmonds, [unclear], Jackson 5.

TS: What else did we have? Did you have, like, Aretha Franklin, any of that kind of music that you listened to?

SK: No. Dad's music was always classical in the house.

TS: Okay.

SK: Mom would love the Nat King Cole and the Johnny Mathis and—

TS: Oh, nice.

SK: And he liked classical music, so.

TS: You had quite a variety, then, of music.

SK: Yes.,

TS: Now, did you play any musical instruments or anything?

SK: I think one Christmas I asked for a guitar and I kind of just played around with, but, no, nothing formal or nothing I took anywhere.

TS: Okay.

SK: Just in my bedroom. [chuckles]

TS: So you're a reader, and know that you're going to move as a young girl, so did you keep to yourself more or did you stick with your siblings?

SK: I would make friends with the next door because in—like, in Maryland you have four houses making a unit, so the neighbors on either end wherever you're stationed, you get to know them and whether they're army or whatever, and they're in the same group as you so you play with them. Like, the outside play. You play till it's dark and then you come in. So we did the dodgeball, all that stuff.

TS: Okay.

SK: Do I have any lifelong friends? No. Like my brother who grew up in one place, he has some.

TS: Yeah. But you were being picked up and moved and it's a little bit different. Now, did you like school?

SK: I loved school. I was an "A" student.

TS: Yeah?

SK: "A" student, honors, and all that stuff.

TS: Do you have a teacher that you felt strongly about that mentored you at all as a young girl?

SK: No, I don't.

TS: Did you have a subject that you really liked?

SK: History, which I got from my dad.

TS: History. What was it you liked about history?

SK: World War II; was fascinating that one person [Adolf Hitler?] could do some much damage. I mean, just how we became the country we are, it was pretty interesting to just—and then the Civil War was my next favorite era.

TS: Okay.

SK: Again, how can a country do that to itself?

TS: Right.

SK: But I just always—It was what we were. Us American when I say "we." That was my interest. And I would sketch or draw or something. Again, nothing that went anywhere, but that was my only other thing I liked to do.

TS: Yeah, neat. Well, because of the type of job your dad had you were at bases that weren't just navy, then, because Meade was mixed [unclear].

SK: Yeah. I remember one of my friends was—her dad was army. That's all I remember; just her name was Caroline. Could I tell you anything else? No. [chuckles]

TS: Did you mind moving around at all, as a young girl?

SK: Well, I think in a family dynamic like that you just go; you don't think about it.

TS: Right. That's what you do, right?

SK: Yeah. And so, I look at my children now, who did it too—shame on me [chuckles]—and it hasn't phased them. They had no one way or the other, so I can only imagine that's how I was. It's like, "Okay, where are we going? When are we going to leave? When will you need me packed?" Stuff like that.

TS: How old were you when your dad retired?

SK: Let's see, it was 1975 minus 1963.

TS: So about thirteen?

SK: About twelve or thirteen, yeah. So he up—We were in Maryland, he up and—this is what I'm told—he had a map of America and he did a whatever one night, he goes, "Oh, I guess we're going to Gastonia." Because he's from Indiana, my mom's from Maryland.

TS: Okay.

SK: And he did not have any clue where—

TS: Figure out where to retire?

SK: Yes.

TS: He just stuck a place on a map?

SK: Then he started doing research, because he went to Belmont Abbey [College], which is a Catholic college. He finished his degree in history, which he wanted to do. He was going to be a teacher when he got out, and that never came to fruition but—so that's how we ended up in Gastonia, which I call home. I was twelve.

TS: Okay.

SK: And I left at eighteen to go into the navy.

TS: Okay.

SK: So that's not a long period, but it was my home, because obviously you're in your teens then—it's just when you have your memories of the important time; not when you're three and learning to play Jacks.

TS: Right.

SK: But meeting your friends and hanging out in streets.

TS: How was Gastonia?

SK: Gastonia was good.

TS: Yeah. What was it like growing up there?

SK: A southern town, a small town, that I wasn't going to stay at. I mean, [unclear] I think that—when people ask me, "Why'd you join the navy?" it's because I didn't see me going anywhere in Gastonia. Now, did I know what I wanted to be? No, but I didn't see me going anywhere, because you just—you grow up there, and you find your job, you get married. I mean, that was most of my friends and their parents, and I guess all those moves—something in my head said, "You're not meant to stay put." So that didn't entice me, even it meant going to one of the colleges or whatever; just, "Nope, time to go. See what else it out there."

TS: Did you have, like, a little bit of an adventurous spirit in you, do you think?

SK: Not too much.

TS: No?

SK: A little bit.

TS: A little?

SK: Yes.

TS: Maybe you had a worldview that was a little bit wider.

SK: Yes, I think so.

TS: Yeah.

SK: The kids were nice at school; nobody was throwing rocks at us.

TS: No? Was there any racial conflict, because that would have been the seventies.

SK: Seventy-five-ish. My brother and sister would probably relate to that more than I would.

TS: Yeah.

SK: I don't think so because I didn't remember seeing—if I looked in my yearbook I don't remember seeing a lot of African-American or Hispanics or—it just wasn't there in that town.

TS: Right. So mostly you had white—

SK: White.

TS: —classmates and things like that.

SK: Yes. Baptists—Southern Baptists.

TS: Okay.

SK: In that era.

TS: So you're a young girl in Gastonia and you're growing up, and are you thinking about what you want to do? You ever have an idea, like, "What am I going to be when I grow up?" Or did you have a desire to do anything in particular?

SK: I didn't, that's why when we were all growing up and my one sister—my one brother graduates; he has an opportunity—he had people offering him scholarships for his football ability and his baseball ability, so he went to Western Carolina and did his thing.

TS: Okay.

SK: And then my—Well, my oldest sister, Lee, she stayed up in Maryland when we moved down to Gastonia.

TS: She stayed in Maryland?

SK: She stayed in Maryland and eventually got married and went out to California, so we didn't get that close.

TS: Okay.

SK: Where was I going with that?

TS: No, about, like, your ideas of what you want to do when you grow up.

SK: Oh, yeah. So—And then my other sister graduates and she says she's going to be a special ed [education] teacher and she goes off to East Carolina [University], and I'm like—and I was waiting for that to hit me and it never did. [chuckles]

TS: That you didn't necessarily want to just go into college?

SK: Yeah, and just sort of pick something there, which—funny, my daughter's doing that now. She's like, "I don't know what I want to be." And I'm like—So yeah.

TS: Yeah.

SK: I thought, "You know what? I've got nothing tying me here. Dad enjoyed the navy." And I knew women in the military wasn't popular; I didn't care. I was like, "I'm going to do what I'm going to do." [chuckles]

TS: Okay.

SK: As a matter of fact, I had a boyfriend for two years and I told him eventually, I said, "I'm going to go into the military."

He goes, "No, you're not. No, you're not. No, you're not."

And so, when I joined and signed we probably broke up because he said, "I'm not going to be a person sitting at home." Or whatever, so.

TS: You're like, "Fine."

SK: "See ya. There's more out there, I'm sure." [chuckling]

TS: Yeah. About what age were you when you started thinking about joining the military?

SK: Sixteen, seventeen, because I signed—you can sign with a parent at seventeen—

TS: Right.

SK: —and I did that. And then you're in what's called the delayed entry program—

TS: Right.

SK: —where you just check in with your recruiter once a month, make sure you're still breathing, and you say, "Hi."

TS: Make sure you're still breathing, I like that. Okay.

SK: [chuckles]

TS: Let's see, June of '81 is when you went in, you said, right?

SK: Yes. I graduated in June of '81, so.

TS: Okay.

SK: I wasn't supposed to go until '82. Well, I signed and joined in '81 and I wasn't supposed to go until the fall of '82. It was like a ten month wait for women to go in. At that time I zeroed in on radioman, ships maybe, because my dad was on ships.

TS: Right.

SK: And the school wasn't—a year and a half wait.

TS: Okay.

SK: So the only way I came into the military was an undesignated seaman, which means you're going to go to a ship probably, you're going to be the boatswain mate; the mopper.

TS: Lowest person on the totem—

SK: You're not going to have a say—Yeah, you had to fight—You had to start deciding, and then taking all the right classes to get towards what you want to be. I walked in to say hi one day to my recruiter and he goes, "You want to leave tomorrow?"

And I'm like, "You're lying, right?"

He goes, "No, I just lost a girl because she's pregnant and she has a yeoman [class] "A" school."

I said, "What's a yeoman do?"

So I left the next—I left in twenty-four hours notice.

TS: Did you really?

SK: My friends threw the quickest party. Yeah.

TS: How old were you then? Were you eighteen then, or just seventeen? Not yet?

SK: No, I had to be eighteen.

TS: June of '81. You're making me do the math.

SK: You're making me do the math. [both chuckle]

TS: Sixty-three. You were close.

SK: Let me get my calculator.

TS: Eighty-one, '63. Yeah, you would have been, I think—

SK: Because my birthday's in October, so maybe I was almost eighteen.

TS: Almost eighteen. So you're, like, ready. You were ready. You're just waiting around to go.

SK: And I think that was best, because I would have dreaded going, "Oh my gosh, I've got to go next month. Oh my gosh, I've got to go next month. I've got to go this week." Just to walk in and have twenty-four hours notice was pretty cool.

TS: You didn't have any time to worry about it.

SK: Yeah.

TS: Or back out.

SK: Am I making the right choice? Right, right.

TS: So what did your family and friends think about you joining the navy? Oh, did you ever consider any other service? No?

SK: Air force I liked. Air force, and the day I was going to sign up they were closed. [both chuckle] I kid you not. They were closed.

TS: That was it, they got one chance, right, and they blew it.

SK: Yes. I get this thing in my head. I grew up to be a more—

TS: Yeah. Why did you even think about considering the air force? [unclear] navy—

SK: Not to pick on other services, but when you're in the service you hear about—you call all the other services different things, and the air force was the fun time. They had the cool uniforms. Blue was one of my favorite colors back then. Their boot camp was two weeks shorter, [chuckles] and it was in Texas, not in Orlando [Florida] in the heat.

TS: Texas is in the heat, too, just to let you know. [chuckles]

SK: Yeah, yeah, I know, but it was somewhere I hadn't been, maybe, I don't know.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: And just something different; something that I wouldn't be in dad's shadow, maybe, I kind of felt.

TS: Oh, right, okay, that makes sense.

SK: Yeah. So their loss. [unclear]

TS: That's right, too bad for them. Okay, so your family and friends, what did they think about your decision?

SK: Ninety percent of them—Southern Baptists, same home town—they thought I was the craziest person on earth, and they even—like I said, my boyfriend, he's like, "You're not going to go. You're not going to go. "

TS: Oh, right, yeah.

SK: And I said, "I am." [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

SK: And my best friend, that became my best friend—see, back in that day high school was ten [tenth grade], eleven [eleventh grade], twelve [twelfth grade], not nine through twelve. So ten, eleven twelve. So at tenth grade I made a pretty good friend at our first—my first part time job was Hardee's [fast food restaurant] at fifteen because my mom worked there. So we became pretty good friends, and she was the one giving me the most grief because she was my best friend, we did everything together—got our [driver's] licenses, all that kind of stuff—and she—I was in boot camp, and I kid you not, I got a letter from her, she joined the navy—

TS: Really?

SK: —like, a month after I left, and she goes [unclear]. And we ended up hooking up—we found each other in Orlan—in Charleston, it was so funny. So she ended up there.

TS: How interesting.

SK: Yeah. She was the biggest one going, "What are you doing? You're crazy." She had a boyfriend—"I'm going to get married."

TS: Why did she end up joining?

SK: She told me—she goes—she thought about what I did and she said, "That can't be too bad." [both chuckle] Maybe she didn't want to be barefoot and pregnant.

TS: Right.

SK: Again, the stereotype.

TS: Right. Have other opportunities, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: You can always get married.

SK: That's right.

TS: Okay. And what did your parents think about it?

SK: Oh, they were ecstatic.

TS: Really?

SK: Yeah. They didn't care if I went to coll—their other kids were flourishing and whatever.

TS: Right.

SK: Following dad probably—

TS: Yeah, and your siblings?

SK: We weren't close.

TS: Yeah.

SK: By the time they all started—

TS: They were doing their own thing.

SK: Yeah, and it's funny—

TS: Like, "Whatever Shelley does, Shelley does."

SK: Yeah.

TS: Okay. So it's not the first time you've been away from home, right, by yourself? Or is it?

SK: Yes.

TS: It was?

SK: Yes.

TS: Oh, it was, okay.

SK: We didn't do camp. We didn't have the money to go to summer camp or something like that.

TS: Okay. So it was. How was that?

SK: Remember the question you asked me earlier about my wild—was I wild in Gastonia in my teens years and I said no? I waited till I was in the navy and I cut loose a little bit. But when you get orders to [Naval Station] Great Lakes, Illinois, at eighteen, you're pretty like, "What am I getting myself into?" I didn't want to go to Chicago. It was never on my choice of "where you want to go?"

TS: Was that after boot camp, though?

SK: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

SK: You go to boot camp and you automatically go to your "A" school.

[After basic training, navy recruits attend technical training, usually called class "A" school]

TS: Right.

SK: And then out of A school—you sit in the A school and you wait for your orders.

TS: Right.

SK: And since my A school was self-paced—it was supposed to be done in seven weeks, I did it in four weeks—I think they gave me the crappy—the crappy orders.

TS: Oh, right.

SK: But anyway.

TS: Well, let's go back to when you were in your basic training. Let's talk about being a recruit. So that's the first time you're away from home.

SK: Yes.

TS: You're in Orlando, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: How was that?

SK: I didn't have time to miss them.

TS: No?

SK: I mean, no.

TS: Were you busy?

SK: Yeah. You get there and from then on your life is not your own; four o'clock in the morning till, maybe, nine o'clock at night. You're put everywhere you need to put—You go to galley, you eat; you go out here and you exercise; you go to this class and learn about slipknots or whatever. So everything was programmed and you just were like a follower; you just go—So you didn't really—Your downtime was everything's over, the commander—the company commanders leave you alone, and then you just chit-chat [unclear], and then you've got your guard—some people have to stand guard duty and they start teaching you the responsibilities—you're going to have guard duty wherever you go, you're going to have some kind of watch, something like that. And so, we'd all be under our covers with penlights writing our letters home, or reading our books, or whatever, just waiting for the next day. I mean, you just didn't really think about it, you just —you don't even think that eight weeks is so far away.

TS: But it goes by pretty quickly?

SK: It does. Well, and I went in June.

TS: Okay.

SK: Let me tell you, that was the hottest freaking time of the year. They have a flag system down there and if it was yellow/green, ours was black, which means you don't run, you don't breathe, because it's nothing but humidity. So you walk everywhere instead of running everywhere.

TS: Right.

SK: So most of my time was not too exhausting and overheated, but I did hurt my ankle at one time and I thought, "Oh my God, I'm going to be put back," and then you go into another company you don't know.

TS: Right.

SK: They worked with me. My company commanders are pretty cool. They let me stay with them and I got through my ankle issue and we graduated together.

TS: Was there anything that was particularly hard or challenging about your experience in the basic training?

SK: No. The book stuff was just book stuff and I was a good student. It was pretty cool to learn about a pistol—about a .45—because that was never—nowhere in my life, people around me, were there guns.

TS: No?

SK: No.

TS: Okay.

SK: I mean, it was only a .45, but that was pretty cool. And they had this mock half of a ship—I don't remember what it was called—so you actually got to be on a bow and kind of see—and you learned ropes and stuff like that, and how to climb up and down ladders.

TS: Okay.

SK: Going through it, you don't have time to stop and say, "Wow, I just learned how to shoot a .45. Okay, what's tomorrow?"

TS: Right. Well, had you been physically active before at all?

SK: Well, I wasn't heavy. I mean, I wasn't—Did I have a sport? Did I run? No. I played tennis in high school.

TS: Oh, okay, that's pretty active.

SK: That's pretty active for [unclear] six weeks.

TS: Think about playing tennis today.

SK: Yeah, that was my sport. So no. But I do remember losing about—almost twenty pounds.

TS: Oh, you did?

SK: I didn't have it to lose, but yeah.

TS: Yeah.

SK: Because it was just so hot and you just—

TS: You just keep moving.

SK: —you could sit there and eat and eat and eat but it was all gone by the time your next—running around the two-mile grinder; it's like a big parking lot.

[A grinder is navy slang for the outside tarmac, asphalted area, or courtyard normally adjacent to a barracks which is used to perform musters, drilling, and sometimes "cycling" of recruits in boot camp]

TS: [chuckles] From there you went to your school for your—what is it called?

SK: Yeoman.

TS: Yeoman school, okay. How was that?

SK: It was interesting.

TS: Where you go to?

SK: I was typing[?]—Huh?

TS: Where would you go to for that?

SK: Oh, that was Meridian, Mississippi [NTTC Meridian at Naval Air Station Meridian].

TS: Meridian, that's right. Here it is, okay.

SK: A very small place on the map.

TS: [chuckles]

SK: Very out of town, very isolated, because there was an air base there—connected to it. Again, check into my dorm or my barracks or whatever, and get my routine down and on I'd go. Our guard duty there, we called it "armadillo watch" because we'd have to walk around the surface—the area at night and there would be armadillos walking around.

TS: Oh yeah? [chuckles]

SK: So we had the "armadillo watch." And again, I don't have any friends from then, you just kind of—and it's learning how to type on the old typewriters where you actually hear the keys.

TS: IBM Selectric?

SK: Yeah, yeah, the Selectric IIIs. And then you're timed and all that stuff. I didn't take typing or anything in high school. And you have to reach certain—before you go on to the next module, because I told you it was self-paced.

TS: Self-paced, okay. So you have a little bit more freedom here, though, than you did at basic.

SK: Oh yeah, you're like normal. You have nobody breathing over you, I mean—

TS: Just go to your class and come home.

SK: Yes, and if you have watch, go to your watch. You'd go eat and then go hang out in your room. It's more like a dorm then. You're not in the barracks setting of the beds two high and—

TS: When you were in your basic was it like an open bay area?

SK: Very open bay. There was two level beds—top and bottom—all along this one side of the, like, little Quonset huts. You see the little curved—I know you can't see—you see the little round—and they're long; that's kind of what it was.

TS: Okay.

SK: And so—Because there was—

TS: Like a hangar, sort of.

SK: Yeah. I'm trying to remember how many was even in my squadron—or my company.

TS: Like fifty?

SK: Thirty? I can't even remember. [chuckles] Uh-oh.

TS: That's alright.

SK: But anyway.

TS: How was that experience? Because that wouldn't have been something you'd experienced before.

SK: Right. I didn't have—My parents didn't make me fold corners like the navy [chuckles] folds corners. Or fold your bras a certain way.

TS: Right.

SK: Everything was edge to edge to edge. And we were out on our grinder one day doing something and we came back and we had experienced, what's called, a hurricane. Our company commanders didn't like how we did something, and when one does something wrong the whole group gets the picture.

TS: They just threw everything everywhere.

SK: Beds were turned over—Yeah.

TS: Then you had to fix it.

SK: Then we had to fix it.

TS: Yeah.

SK: Then we had to go to chow and come back.

TS: [chuckles] Those were fun times.

SK: Yeah. And you're not told why, it's just like, "Okay, let's just clean up and let's go about our day," so they were the coolest. I thought they were the coolest girl—ladies.

TS: Yeah. But they helped you get through, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: They kind of mentored you through.

SK: They were human. Like with my foot on my [unclear], I'm like, "I've got to come out of my sergeant mode," [chuckles] and yes, they were humans; they were people.

TS: And so, you went from there to, like, a barracks, or dorm, when you were in your training.

SK: Yes.

TS: Did you have a roommate or were they quads?

SK: I can't remember.

TS: Okay. You weren't there very long.

SK: Yeah, and I really can't remember what it was.

TS: That's alright.

SK: But I know being in the navy, as a woman—and when we get to talking about, like, when I get orders to Great Lakes, that's an all-male place—

TS: Well, let's go there.

SK: —so I had my own—

TS: Let's go there.

SK: I got my orders to Great Lakes, which was the training site of Great Lakes where the guys go.

TS: Right.

SK: I'm like, "Who punished me? Why do I want to go back to recruit training command that I just left." [chuckles]

TS: Right.

SK: And I—they'd go by the windows at four o'clock in the morning, singing their songs, and I'm like, "This is hell. I'm back in—I'm back in the company commander part."

TS: But this is your first assignment, right?

SK: Yes. And I had my own room. I mean, a lot of people have roommates and stuff like that, but girls, there was only a handful of us. We had the first floor of a—I don't want to say barracks but—it was four floors, and I think there was rooms on either side of the hall, and then you had a communal place out in front that everybody went, and there was a TV—

TS: Like a dayroom?

SK: Yeah, and there was a TV there and whatever.

TS: Okay.

SK: And they were all the company commanders—the male company commanders—for the recruits, because they'd come home with their—you'd see the red rope around them, so

you got to know them, they were pretty cool. But that whole guy/girl thing starts to become a reality, then it's like—

[Red ropes is slang for the red aiguillette that is worn on the left shoulder by U.S. Navy Recruit Division commanders]

TS: In what way? What do you mean?

SK: There's not enough of us.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: Women, you need to join the navy and come out here and help us out with our numbers because definitely overnumbered with the guys. I mean, it's a guy's navy up until—whatever.

TS: Right. So you're living in the barracks at Great Lakes. Now, earlier you started talking about having your dream sheet [request for their first duty station selection], or where you go. Where'd you want to go?

SK: Florida, San Diego; places that were warm, not near home, because you want to do that; you're out of your house, time to be your person and see things.

TS: Right.

SK: So I just made stuff up like that. I think Texas was [unclear].

TS: Yeah? Just get away.

SK: Yeah.

TS: And so, you were at Great Lakes for a couple years.

SK: I was supposed to be there for all four years.

TS: Okay.

SK: I was only there for two.

TS: Two, okay.

SK: Yes.

TS: You talked about your barracks commander there. Was there any other highlights that you had there that you want to talk about? You said something about the wind chill here.

SK: Oh, yes, I got there, and that winter—I think I got there in—

TS: You said November '83.

SK: Yeah. And that winter was the—on the record books was the worst winter ever; it was eighty [degrees] below with the wind chill factor. My barracks was two streets away. You don't have a bike or anything so you're walking, and I've just never experienced cold like that ever. It didn't get that cold in North Carolina. [chuckles]

TS: No.

SK: So I was just like, "Wow. See, I knew we didn't want to come here."

TS: [chuckles]

SK: So you run to your—you almost run but you can't run because you're in uniform, you've got to follow all those rules.

TS: Right.

SK: You can't run. I remember getting to work and going, "Okay, stay as long as you want. Don't go out for lunch."

TS: "This is it. I made it here and I'm going to stay."

SK: It was so cold, and I went—I had gone home from Meridian because I was allowed to be a real person; I went home and got my car. And so, I drove all the way up to Illinois from Gastonia.

TS: Okay.

SK: So I could hop in my little [Ford] Pinto and it would try to hold the ice [chuckles] but not so much.

TS: Yeah. You had a little Pinto?

SK: A little Pinto.

TS: Ford—A Ford Pinto?

SK: Ford, yes.

TS: Were you enjoying your work? Did you enjoy the job?

SK: Yes. I liked it. We—My first place was in the legal department, so I was helping review packets of the "dischargees" of the male recruits, for psychosis, for urinalysis tests coming back negative and we had to kick them out, or bedwetters, sleep walkers, you name it, and they got discharged. So we, in that department, did the packages that got sent to D.C. to get them out of the military.

TS: Oh, that's interesting. What seemed to be the big reason that they would get out? This is in the recruit stage, right?

SK: Right, and back in the day—and it's changed so many times—but back in that day if you just said you were gay you're out.

TS: Did that happen a lot?

SK: Yeah.

TS: Oh, really?

SK: I think the guys got there and couldn't hang, and I just remember that thought, going, "Well, that's a tough way to go." I mean, it's not stamped on your head the rest of your life, but you're just—you're not dishonorable discharged, it's a general discharge, but that still goes with you for life and it's a non—you can't come back in.

TS: Right. [unclear].

SK: Yeah, and they're told all that and all that stuff and that was just their choice, of staying in eighty below weather marching, I would guess. [both chuckle]

TS: Oh my goodness. Wow. Well, so you want to get out of there. Did you put in for a change of assignment, then, to try to get somewhere else?

SK: No, I had to resign myself to four years of fun. I was—I could not drink in Chicago, and Illinois was not a drinking age at eighteen.

TS: Okay.

SK: Milwaukee was, which was a hop, skip, and a jump away, so I made runs to the border.

TS: Oh, is this where you got your freedom?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay.

SK: Stayed out of trouble; I never once got in trouble.

TS: Did you try to get in trouble? [chuckles]

SK: No, I wasn't going to ruin this chance, no.

TS: Okay. I'm just teasing you, Shelley.

SK: No, no. No, it was—I had no regrets at all, moving along in my first stages of the military. It was like, "This is fun." But you got to be a person and not a recruit. It's like, you're just putting your uniform on and you're going to work.

TS: Right.

SK: Then you come home and the time's yours, if you don't have watch, so it was a pretty good concept, and I got pretty good money—better than Hardees— from being on my own and getting my life started, so it was pretty cool.

TS: Now, when you went in and you signed up when you were seventeen, how long did you sign up for?

SK: Back then you had to only sign up for four.

TS: Okay, so four years. Now, was that it? Like, you thought, "I'm going to try it and just see how four years go," or did you have an expectation of something?

SK: I had no expectation; I was going to go with how it went and go from there.

TS: See what happens.

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay. So you're coming along, you're enjoying your time, although the weather is not something that you'd like to experience again, right?

SK: No, but, I mean, we did go to downtown Chicago and that was pretty cool because I was from downtown Gastonia that had nothing.

TS: Oh, right. Yeah, [unclear] Chicago.

SK: It was Chicago; *the* Chicago.

TS: Right.

SK: So you got those wonder—big eyes. But to answer your earlier question that I avoided on purpose, I met my practice husband there.

TS: Oh, practice husband.

SK: And he got orders—he decided he was going to go be a submariner, and so—he was supposed to be there for four years, too, and he got his orders cut because he had signed up and he was approved to be a submariner, and the training is down in Charleston [South Carolina].

TS: Okay.

SK: I think he went to—I can't even remember now. He must have went training somewhere and then came back to Charleston for his first boat. So that's how—So we got married so I could go with him, otherwise I'd have been there for four years. I mean, it was a good thing at the time, I loved him, and life is grand; I didn't expect to get married so soon while enjoying my freedom, but.

TS: Right. So you get transferred to Charleston.

SK: Charleston.

TS: Now, how was that?

SK: Charleston was pretty cool. Again, I went to extremes. [both chuckle]

TS: Oh, sure, yeah.

SK: My Pinto did not have air conditioning, which I didn't think I needed in Chicago, but then I got to Charleston and—where you couldn't breathe. It's like Orlando, when you walk out and it just sucks your breath away; it's just so miserably hot and humid. But again, I mean, Charleston was Charleston. And like I told you before about the history, they had the slave market down there, they had a lot of memorial history stuff down there from that day—from those days.

TS: Any ghost tours?

SK: Not then. I mean, I am now into them, but back then I—my dad made us watch—something I [unclear]—my dad made us watch scary movies. Not made us, but that was his thing.

TS: So you were there, yeah.

SK: Stephen King—Yes, it was Stephen King and all that.

TS: Well, you said you read his novels.

SK: Yeah, and the Boogie Man and stuff like that, but it was enough to make me not want to—

TS: Right, have that experience?

SK: —have that experience at that age.

TS: Now, where'd you meet your practice husband?

SK: At Great Lakes. He was over in the admin [administration] department and I was in the legal department.

TS: Okay. Alright, so you're in Charleston, and do you have another four year gig there?

SK: Well, two to finish my four-year enlistment because I was two—Yeah.

TS: That's right. Alright.

SK: And that's where my friend shows up after boot camp and says—

TS: Oh, right, the friend from Gastonia?

SK: Tammy, yeah, and she ended up being stationed there.

TS: Okay.

SK: Boy, did I give her crap.

TS: Yeah? What was the highlights of being in Charleston; what was it you liked the best there, about that experience? Either the work or just being in Charleston.

SK: What did I do there? I was in the admin department. Typical admin stuff was like printing the plan of the days, and the plan of the weeks, where you just have different notes: the advancement exam's coming up, or this is coming up, or this is coming up, so you kind of put together a newspaper for the base.

TS: Okay. Was it a 9:00 [a.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.] type job?

SK: Yes.

TS: Did you have extra duty ever?

SK: Yeah, everywhere you went you had a watch.

TS: Okay.

SK: I don't remember what that one was.

TS: But you had to do something there.

SK: Yeah.

TS: You had some notes here. So you were getting promoted pretty—

SK: Pretty good first time around.

TS: Pretty good, yeah. You made it to E-5?

SK: In under four years, which was good.

TS: That is; that's pretty quick. And you went on a dependent cruise for the submarine. What was that like?

SK: Yes, because he—like I said, his first sub was up there, and it took fourteen hours for the whole thing because we had to go four hours out before he could even—the captain could even dive.

TS: Okay.

SK: Because it was the shallow harbor of Charleston.

TS: Oh, right, okay.

SK: So then once we got down there we got to experience how small—I think I put in there, the captain put a string on one end of the bulkhead to the next end of the bulkhead, to where it was just taut, and by the time we were out there and dove and was walking around it was, like, swinging because of the compression of the force of the water from the—being underneath

TS: Okay. Interesting.

SK: And I went and saw where my husband's work station was, which was a five [feet] by five cubicle. The computers, you see these steel bars wrapped around it to keep it there in rough waters, it was very interesting.

TS: Yeah.

SK: And they let us taste the food, and the captain did the little bow and stern, kind of, ups and down so you could see the stuff slide, and I told him, "You can have it. It's worth every bit of your extra pay. Get me back on land." [both chuckle] That's all I want to do.

TS: Is that right?

SK: Yes.

TS: Was it uncomfortable when they did the dive?

SK: It was.

TS: Yeah.

SK: We weren't water people in my family growing up; we weren't—we didn't go boating, we didn't go—none of that stuff.

TS: You're just in the navy.

SK: Yeah, I know. I know. That was quite a line for most of my life. You're in the navy and you don't like water.

TS: That is pretty funny.

SK: Yeah, no, it's just—I mean, they had a mission. Well, and I think I put a little bit more detail than necessary.

TS: That's okay.

SK: But communication—For a newlywed, not knowing what that's supposed to be about, and he's gone for three months and then comes back smelling like a diesel engine, pasty pale white because they don't surface, and then he's only doing so much and then he's back out again, so I had a hard time with that. I didn't know what it was supposed to be like, but I wasn't—I didn't like that at all. I mean, for the three months I'm like—I wasn't one of those widows who go to the bar, and I'm a good person. My parents raised me right and I was home or with Tammy, and doing running and staying in shape, that kind of stuff. But—Because you still had—every year you had physical fitness tests.

TS: Right.

SK: Twice a year.

TS: So you had to stay up with that?

SK: Yeah.

TS: So it's difficult to keep a connection and a relationship when your husband's on a submarine.

SK: Yeah, because even when—you're supposed to be allowed to communicate with them—they're called "family grams"—you only get, like, twenty words.

TS: Oh, really?

SK: And you can't say anything negative like your dad's sick, the dog died.

TS: Oh.

SK: Because it's read by five people before it goes—it gets transmitted to the sub, four or five people read it there and make sure there's nothing that's going to make these guys go bonkers because it's bad news from home.

TS: Right.

SK: So you're just saying stupid stuff like, "Love you. Can't wait for you to get back." But it's one sided. They can't send it back to us.

TS: Okay. So you get no feedback at all.

SK: No.

TS: You're not really sure what's going on. That did have to be tough.

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay. When your four years were up, what happened then?

SK: We were talking about where he was going to go next—where we were going to go next. Then he decided he wanted to go on the—there's two types of subs, boomers and fast attacks. He was on the boomer [ballistic missile submarine].

TS: Boomers and—

SK: Fast attacks [nuclear-powered attack submarine].

TS: Oh, fast attacks, okay. What's a boomer?

SK: The boomer, it's mission is just—I don't know if I can even remember the details—But it's mission, obviously, is different. Fast attack is they go where they're supposed to go and they're going to launch missions.

TS: Okay.

SK: The boomer kind of circles underneath, kind of monitors. They have a grid, they circle it for three months

TS: Okay. More like a reconnaissance, sort of, maybe?

SK: Yes. And they had to cruise [golden bloom?]. So he decided—I got to know the real him. He's pretty one-sided, conceited, it's all about him, but hey, he got me out of Great Lakes so I'm okay with that. [both chuckle]

So he has to go to Orlando to Nuclear [Field] A School and all this other stuff, and so I try to get orders to Orlando and my detail—because when you're married you're not—as they tell you, they don't—"Your spouse doesn't come in your sea bag. If I need you to go where I need you to go, you're going to go. If you're married, oh well. If you can get in that same area, good for you. If not, you're navy property," more or less.

TS: Okay.

SK: So as big as Orlando was back then, and they couldn't find an admin position.

TS: Wow, that's—

SK: I was pretty—Yeah, I was pretty devastated because I was enjoying the navy. I was—You said back then, in the beginning, I didn't know what to expect, but I wasn't ready to leave.

TS: Right.

SK: He told me I was leaving so he could go to Orlando.

TS: Oh, he did?

SK: Yeah. And I was stupid enough to say, "Yes, Dear." That's why I joined the reserves as soon as we got down there, so I could keep my day to day kind of stuff, because I knew this wasn't going to last. We just—We didn't have kids so we just knew. I knew that this wasn't going to be the one for life. But I tried to do all my part and say, "Well, I do this for you and I do this for you." But anyway. [chuckles]

TS: So you did go to Orlando but then you got out.

SK: Yes.

TS: And you're doing the reserves. Now, did you work somewhere while you were—

SK: Yes, different places. Where did I start out? Where? Gosh, I can't even remember. I just remember the last place I was at was a law—working as, like, a mini paralegal kind of thing because I had the whole two years of experience with legal up in Great Lakes.

TS: Right.

SK: And it was a mom—a dad and son operation. They were—What's the type of practice where they go take stuff because you don't pay your bills?

TS: Collection?

SK: Yeah. And I sat in on some depositions where the—

TS: Debt collection? Small claims court?

SK: Well, I—you hit it, yeah. Whatever they did, I just did the paperwork. But I'd be in a deposition with them and I'd see them look at the parent—or the person—they go, "Well, you're wearing a gold necklace. That stroller's probably a hundred dollars. I want that."

And I was just, "Really? People are like that?"

I mean, pay your bills. So they would walk out without a stroller if he said, "I'm keeping your stroller."

It was exciting, but again, I was like, "I just want to go back in the navy. This is not fun."

And then I had a really bad accident that has given me neck problems for—even now. A drunk driver hit me. I was at a light, he was going about thirty-five [miles per hour], the police said. His lights weren't on because he was drunk, and there's a guy in front of me—this isn't navy stuff but anyway—so the guy—the drunk hit me, I hit the guy in front of me, it was pouring down rain. The next thing I know the guy is speeding off, because he knows he's going to be in trouble. The guy in front is helping me write is tag down. But anyway, he got nothing; that's another thing.

So it took me a long time to—my point to this is, I would have tried to go back in the navy a lot sooner. But it didn't interfere with me still being a reservist, but it was a lot—

TS: Took a while to recover from that?

SK: Yeah, it did. So eventually then I kept—because I worked—Oh, and then before I came back as the fulltime I came up kind of mini fulltime, and I was in the office helping the officer recruiters recruit people, so I was a paperwork—

TS: [unclear]

SK: Yeah, so I was a paperwork kind of person, so I was almost—I had one foot in the door back in the navy. And so, then I go to my enlisted recruiters going, "You've got to tell me when something comes open because I really want to come back in."

TS: So you're trying to do different things to make sure that you can get back in.

SK: Yes.

TS: Did your husband know that you were going to try to get back in?

SK: At that point he had cheated on me and left me.

TS: Okay.

SK: So I didn't care.

TS: So you're on your own right now?

SK: I was on my own, yeah.

TS: Okay. So that's why it took you—because of the accident and just trying to get your ducks in a row [idiom meaning to get your affairs organized] to go back in?

SK: Yeah, because I went back to him, like, twice, and then—and my very best friend, still now, she goes, "You know how many times we moved you up and down stairs in apartments?"

I said, "I know." [both chuckle] "I know." But anyway.

TS: What was the draw that made you want to go back in the navy? What was it that was drawing you back?

SK: That was my first reality of, degrees kind of mean something. Who cares that I had four years in the navy? It wasn't important as veterans are looked at now. Or, "Gosh, you learned to take orders, you're a good—you've got your ducks in a row, and how to be a worker bee," more or less, "and morals and integrity." Whatever. But that wasn't so much on the outside. So I didn't know what I was supposed to be looking for to a make a comparable salary.

TS: Right, so your pay was way less.

SK: Yes. Oh yeah, because you get paid to eat off base. When you live off base you get paid to eat, you get paid to live there, and yeah, money's pretty good. And I advanced quick.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So it was a sense of security in a way?

SK: I think so. And why not? This didn't work so if they can get me back in I've got nothing else to lose, because that part of my life was over so why stay in Orlando anyway; I didn't want to go there.

TS: Right. When did you finally get back in, onto active duty?

SK: I reenlisted January—

TS: Ninety-two?

SK: —'92.

TS: Is that what it says here? Looks like—yeah, '92. And you were in Orlando when you—

SK: You know what? I have that wrong.

TS: Okay.

SK: Eighty-nine, '92—

TS: Was it before or after the Gulf War? Do you remember?

[The Gulf War occurred from 2 August 1990 to 29 February 1991. Codenamed Operation Desert Shield for operations leading to the buildup of troops and defense of Saudi Arabia, and Operation Desert Storm in its combat phase, it was a war waged by coalition forces from 35 nations led by the US against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait]

SK: It was '89 because—It was the fall of '89—

TS: Eighty-nine?

SK: —because I got there in January of '90 and I met my husband two years later. So yeah, it was '89, and once again I'm going from Florida.

TS: Okay, so '89.

SK: Yeah, sorry.

TS: No, that's alright. I think you had your time in Charleston too long, because you went to '88 but you were only in two years.

SK: It was only two years; yeah, two years in Great Lakes and two years in Charleston.

TS: Right. We'll fix those after I'm here. Alright, so you're back in '89.

SK: Yeah. I didn't care where they sent me, just please don't let it be Great Lakes again. [both chuckle] You don't have a say yet again because you're back in, and kept my nose clean.

TS: Did you keep your rank because you'd been reserve?

SK: Yes, I did.

TS: Okay.

SK: I got to go in as an E-5.

TS: Okay. Where'd you get to go?

SK: [chuckles] What were my choices? They were Treasure Island, *i.e*. San Francisco; Point Mugu, which is south of Ventura; California. Guess where I was going? I was going to California.

TS: Oh, yeah. So you had your choices more in California basically. Was that okay with you?

SK: North, up by the earthquakes, or south. [both chuckle] So I went south.

TS: Good. Okay. So you went to Point Mugu?

SK: Yes, which is, like, sixty miles away from Los Angeles.

TS: Okay.

SK: A very pretty place.

TS: Yeah. How was that assignment? Did you go back in as the same—

SK: Yeoman; same job.

TS: Yeoman?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay. Tell me about there. What was that like? Were you there for four years?

SK: [chuckles]

TS: No?

SK: What is it with men? No, I was only there two. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: And I met my true soul mate, the love of my life. He was due to rotate in two years, and I was like, "Man, I just can't get anywhere long." I was just like, "Two years is it."

TS: How long were you there before you guys got married?

SK: Let's see. So I started January of '90, including all my travel time. I met him—He was—When did his results come out? He was a E-6 and he had just found out that summer that he had made chief, so he—him and I got to know each other because—I don't know if I

can summarize what it means to become a chief, but the whole process is interesting, and there's a lot of paperwork, and there's a lot of things you have to do to teach you, because you're moving from worker bee to manager. So they have a lot to teach you to break that chain, and you usually can't stay where you work because you were friends with that person, drinking the night before, the next day you've got your anchors on, you're their boss.

TS: Okay.

SK: So I was helping him—

TS: That's a good explanation of that. That's a great explanation of that.

SK: So I was helping him do his research, because you have—they give you stupid stuff to research, like how many bells are on St. Paul's Cathedral [London]; just stupid stuff to just keep you busy. And he would always come up looking at the admin type of stuff, like publications and whatever; "What does the lead policy say for this?" and stuff. So that's how we met, because I was the one he would always go to.

TS: Well, you're a good student, so.

SK: [chuckles] Well, and it's what I did as a young'un [child]. He was in a very bad place, though. He had a very bad separation, and I had not a whole lot of interest in him in the beginning because he was so mean and grumpy, but.

TS: Yeah?

SK: Anyway, after I learned to know him and we got together I saw why. I got to learn the ins and outs of that other half. But anyway. I mean, you're in southern California and you've got beaches and—

TS: So this was a good station for you?

SK: This was a—Yes. I would have liked to have stayed the whole four years, but—

TS: But then you got married.

SK: I got married. [chuckles]

TS: And so, now, this time, where were your husband's orders?

SK: Well, I said, he made chief so he had to leave.

TS: Okay.

SK: By that time—See, I got there in January, I took the advancement exam in March—I made E-6 in, like, under seven years, so it—[chuckles]

TS: In and out, too, wow? That's great.

SK: So I made E-6, which you still can't fraternize, is the word you hear.

TS: Right.

SK: Because he became that brown shirt [higher rank] while I was still a blue shirt [lower rank]. We weren't in the same com—We were in the same command but he soon left to, like—they transferred him, temporary, to another place, which he wasn't in my command anymore, technically.

TS: I understand. Sure.

SK: But he was on paper. Anyway, we tried to find that seabag[?] option that we all could be in because we're married, and where can we go together.

TS: Right.

SK: Washington, D.C. was the place.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: He went to Andrews Air Force Base, was assigned there, and I went to the Pentagon.

TS: Okay, pretty close.

SK: Yeah. We lived in Alexandria. He did the commute, because back in that day traffic going towards Maryland was better than traffic coming back; so we didn't live in Maryland, was my point, because that's where all the traf—I mean, he'd still get stuck—It'd take him and hour and half sometimes to come home, crossing the George Washington Bridge, and all that stuff. I had a subway right under my building that took me home.

TS: Took you right home?

SK: Yes.

TS: You took one of the lines home?

SK: [chuckles] Yes.

TS: That's pretty handy. So you're there in—

SK: We got there in '92.

TS: Ninety-two.

SK: Yeah, because we got married at home in Gastonia.

TS: Okay. So you're there in '92, and you're at the Pentagon. What was the Pentagon like?

SK: I'm at the Pentagon. That was the coolest thing ever. It was '92, so—Was the Persian Gulf over?

TS: Ninety-one, '92.

SK: Yeah. Because I remember we were in Hawaii before we left California, and we were doing a vacation because we were so close to Hawaii; it's like, "Let's go to Hawaii."

And his base called him and said, "We don't want to worry you, and you're not being recalled, but when you come back we might have missions going over to the desert." Well, how much fun did we have on our—[chuckling] on our vacation?

TS: Not very much, I'm sure.

SK: Not very much.

TS: Oh, my goodness. Yeah, so it's right around that time, so the Pentagon was, pretty much, hopping then, I would imagine.

SK: It was.

TS: What department did you work in?

SK: My directorate—is what it was called—was Chief of Naval Operations. In the reserve component he was a four star admiral—three star admiral. He was in charge of all the reserves, all over. He was dual hatted. His Chief of Naval Reserve title was down in New Orleans where his other command was, and when he was up in D.C. he would have another title but it was all the same thing. And just the—just walking around that place—

TS: What was it like? I've never been there. I don't know what it's like.

SK: [chuckles] I mean, because I had—you had to get all these clearances, and I didn't have to have Top Secret then, but I remember walking down the hall and Colonel [Colin Luther] Powell, who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff then, just walked right by me. I mean, of course he had his entourage, but it's like, "I know him."

TS: [chuckles]

SK: "And that's pretty cool that we almost touched shoulders."

TS: That's right.

SK: I mean—just because you knew that was the hub, and it was so exciting. I mean, I didn't get into the bowels because I was only an E-6, but it was just exciting to go, "I work at the Pentagon." That's, like, the biggest office building in the whole world. There's fifty thousand people working there.

TS: That's right. That's right.

SK: It was just fun. I mean, it was long, hard work. It was ten hour days.

TS: This question I don't think I have on my sheet but I'm going to ask it: What kind of amenities do you have at the Pentagon? You hear stories about, like, anything you want is in there. Like, there's a gym and there's a grocery store and there's a barber shop and—

SK: It's all true.

TS: It's all true?

SK: The gym is called the POAC, the Pentagon Officers' Athletic Club, but enlisted were allowed to go.

TS: Okay.

SK: Three lanes of—A three lane pool, because when we did our physical fitness tests, with all my injuries, I would swim mine. That was a pretty cool pool. They had the saunas and whatever. They had racquetball. A small gym. Gyms today are humongous and have everything, but it was just a small—but it was enough for you to go to the machines and you could go—of course, they encourage it.

TS: Like weights and stuff?

SK: Weights and treadmills and—They didn't have a whole lot of fancy stuff. They had ellipticals.

TS: Like a bicycle?

SK: Yeah, stuff like that. Bikes, and I think ellipticals were just coming out. And they had aerobics classes, which me and my friend started doing, and that was pretty cool because I never knew what an aerobics class was. But anyway.

TS: Right.

SK: So you just need that break in the day, and they give you—you don't have, like, "You've got an hour lunch and you've got a half hour to work out, so you better be back in an hour and a half." They give you that time because they know the hours you work.

TS: You're going to stay late and come in early, maybe.

SK: Yes.

TS: You're not on, like, a clock; you don't punch in and punch out.

SK: Not there because the missions were too different. Like, when you're just in a—like in Charleston, there was no mission, I was sitting at a desk doing paperwork.

TS: Right.

SK: So I could leave at 4:30 [p.m.]. But just the whole mission and what was needed; you stayed till it was needed.

TS: What was a typical day like, then?

SK: Well, I went—I was in two areas at the time. The first place I went to was, again, something about legal and [unclear] legislative side of things I was in that little corner, where there was four officers and a civil servant and me. They did all the legal work for the reserves, I think I have in there. Our admiral went to the Hill—Capitol Hill—Congress—every year and fought for his budget. So we had to put together all the pieces and parts he had to speak on. It could be six hundred pages, so we're working on that for the rest of the year, for the next year. So he gets all this and he's called in front of Congress and he makes his presentation.

TS: You get all the data and the minutiae behind the report for him to be able to—

SK: Why we can justify—Why we can have the data justify why we need more money and things like that.

TS: Well, that's interesting because you're learning about, like, the engine behind what's going on.

SK: Yes. Yes, and I loved it. I loved every bit of it. But there was a barber. There was a little Belk's [department store]. Can you believe it?

TS: Oh, Belk's?

SK: There was a little, mini Belk's down there.

TS: Really?

SK: Who's going to run down there and buy hose for eight dollars?

TS: Right. Well, if you need it you need it, right?

SK: [chuckles] Right. And there was a little—There was a clinic—we had our own medical clinic, our own dental clinic. There was a couple other stores. There's, like, a—like, a 7-Eleven-type store, and we would go in there and just grab a [unclear] [piece of food?] or whatever.

TS: It's kind of like at Fort Meade—a little bit—the NSA [National Security Agency].

SK: Yeah.

TS: Similar to that. Although, I think the Pentagon sounds much bigger.

SK: I was on the outer ring, which is called the "D" Ring, because it's "A" on the inside, and it comes out A, B, C, D. The outer ring is the "D" Ring and it's a mile long if you walked it.

TS: So the "D" Ring was what was hit during 9/11?

SK: Hit. That was my office.

[The September 11, 2001 attacks, or 9/11, was a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on the morning of 11 September 2001. The attacks killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others]

TS: Your office?

SK: That was my office, where that plane hit.

TS: Your old office?

SK: Yes.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

SK: It really was, because I could sit there and watch [President George [Walker] Bush—Daddy George Bush—land in his helicopter and come into the Pentagon, and I'd sit there and go, "I can't believe I'm in the middle of this. That's the President of the United States."

TS: Well, let's talk about that, then. When 9/11 happened—

SK: I wasn't there then.

TS: No, but you're still in the service; you're still in the navy.

SK: Yes.

TS: And you knew. That must have just been—I can't even imagine.

SK: I was trying to remember quickly, "Oh my God. Who do I know that's still there?"

TS: Right.

SK: Because people would get in there and stay, year after year after year, because you could go down the hall to another one and just be in the minutiae of it all. And I couldn't remember anybody close to me—because I think an admiral died, and just lots of people, but. But that was my part of the "D" Ring and it was so freaky, I'm like, "I worked there." Because I could sit and watch George Bush land. And I'd watch the snipers get on the hill over by Arlington [National Cemetery]. Anytime he was landing they'd post the snipers, they'd stop the traffic. Yeah, so it was pretty—I didn't have time to think about it at the time because we just saw the Twin Towers when it happened [unclear].

TS: Right, and then you heard about the Pentagon, right?

SK: Yeah, because that was like thirty minutes later or something.

TS: Right. So pretty busy. Wow, I can't imagine that. But you enjoyed being at the Pentagon.

SK: Yes.

TS: How long were you there?

SK: Three?

TS: Three years? Two, three—

SK: I think I actually did my orders. [chuckles]

TS: Alright. Now, you were selected as "Sailor of the Year"?

SK: Yes, for the E-6 [National Chief] Petty Officer Association, and the E-6 is in that whole—I can't even put a number to that, but I couldn't believe I got it. I don't know how I got it. [chuckles]

TS: Well, that's pretty cool.

SK: Yeah, and I have that picture that I'll send you.

TS: Yeah, that would be great.

SK: They send you to the professional photo studio and you're posted.

TS: Now, here you wrote a little bit about some of the off duty stuff that you volunteered for. You want to talk about that?

SK: Well, I created the Petty Officer First Class Association [First Class Petty Officer Association] for the Pentagon. They didn't have anything like that. And I think you're just so busy you don't have time to—hey, we can still do good, we can still try to help somebody, and our day's not that busy because we—most of the people were regular navy, like I was in the beginning. So being reservist, our group was smaller but I wanted all of us—because we were all E-6s—[unclear]

TS: Right.

SK: And I won't lie, part of that is this was a check in the block to help make chief, was your volunteer activities and stuff like that.

TS: Oh, okay. So it was a way to help get that box checked off?

SK: Yes. Of course, we all were there because we wanted to be there, so we did some—I remember one house we helped for Habitat for Humanity. We were sent there on a Saturday, and our section was stuck in the yard removing bamboo.

TS: Oh my goodness.

SK: Have you ever tried to pull bamboo?

TS: Yes, I have.

SK: [chuckles]

TS: Yes, I have.

SK: Oh my God, my hands were bleeding by the time I got home.

TS: Oh, yeah. Okay, I have much sympathy there because—Yes, it's not an easy task at all.

SK: No, we weren't even on the inside; those were the electricians and the carpenters.

TS: Yeah. But you were clearing it for just the yard space and stuff.

SK: Yes.

TS: Oh my gosh, yeah.

SK: And then we did Special—We were involved in Special Olympics a lot because they're year-round, kind of, so we would go help them. We wouldn't be their coaches but we'd be their timers or we'd be their—just be their support team, their cheerleaders.

TS: Yeah.

SK: That was special. They're special people.

TS: Yeah, it's a great organization. Oh, that's the Budget Book?

SK: Yeah, that he took to the Hill; the admiral.

TS: Yeah, we talked about that. So yeah. Now, when you signed up the second time—when you reenlisted—

SK: Yes.

TS: —what were your expectations then, because you were an E-5 and then became E-6 really quickly.

SK: Yes.

TS: So what were your expectations when you came back in?

SK: Chief was my goal.

TS: Chief.

SK: Senior Chief would have been nice.

TS: So that meant that you were going to retire.

SK: Yes, [unclear].

TS: So you had an expectation to retire.

SK: Well, I had the experience of being out, and maybe it was everything else on the personal side, but I wanted no part of being in that anytime soon, so.

TS: Yeah. So that was a goal?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay. You spent your three years at the Pentagon, and then did you put in for an assignment somewhere else, or with you and your husband, did you—

SK: My husband, who had made E-7 when we were in California, now made E-8.

TS: Okay.

SK: His rating is an aviation rating and it's very small. You almost have to die before you get an advance; somebody has to die to get that spot because it's so small. I mean, literally, like, six—three people will get advanced out of the whole—

TS: Very difficult to get that, okay.

SK: Yes. So he made [E-]8, and so it was time for orders and it's like, well, he was already at one squadron. How many squadrons are over in Maryland on [Joint Base] Andrews? And there was another one. And detailers are right in Washington so I couldn't have anybody tell me that he wasn't in my seabag[?] and that I wasn't—

TS: You could go and find out, right?

SK: You cannot tell me in Washington, D.C. they could not put a paper-pusher. I mean, he was the harder job to fill, and once they found his, just a matter of where are you going to put me. I would have loved to just stay in the Pentagon. But they put me up on the Hill—which we called "up on the Hill"—which is the BUPERS, back—that was the acronym.

TS: Right.

SK: Bureau of Personnel Enlisted [Bureau of Naval Personnel]—Anyway.

TS: Right.

SK: [chuckles]

TS: That sounds good.

SK: And I actually went into the advancement exams section, because you have to have the worker bees that pull all the records for—if you know anything about advancement exams in the military, it's a test you take and whatever, and so if you cut off—if you make the cut off then you're in the group, and when you're in the group that group gets looked at by—a whole bunch of people come in for special orders. They all come in and sit and that's their mission for three weeks. Looking at microfilm—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Going through those records?

SK: Yes. Grading them on a piece of paper, like, they did this, they did that. That's why I said checkmark is literally—if you have this, checkmark, checkmark, and then the list comes out and those are the selectees.

TS: And you said you were on a board that supported the E-9—E-8, E-9s selections?

SK: E-9. And that's where my husband made E-8 and I could not tell him.

TS: Oh, you knew he made it.

SK: I knew for a week and I had to go home with a straight face, I wouldn't look at him.

TS: [chuckles]

SK: Because he'd be glaring at me coming in the door, he goes, "I'm going to look for a sign. I'm going to look for a sign." Because obviously [AZ?] is up front. If we had that one pretty much done we were going all the way down to the yeoman. It was hard, but I had integrity. I did not give in.

TS: You did not tell him?

SK: I did not tell him.

TS: Oh my goodness.

SK: And he hates me for it.

TS: That is pretty—

SK: He still throws it in my face, but I did not tell him, because we were sworn, we did an oath.

TS: It sounds like you're pretty proud that you didn't tell him.

SK: He didn't see it that way. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, how long did he have to wait?

SK: A week.

TS: Well, that's not long, is it? At BUPERS, did you enjoy that experience, of the job?

SK: A learning curve. Yeah. Again, long hours. Everything in D.C. is long hours, because you have to include the commute, and just it's not worth going home for an hour and having to come back or whatever, so.

TS: Right. Learning curve?

SK: We were starting to talk about a family—Huh?

TS: You said learning curve, though. What was the learning curve?

SK: How to put on that khaki like he did.

TS: Oh, really?

SK: A chief, yeah. I had to be—what were they looking at. I mean, I didn't do anything illegal. I observed. My eyes can't help what they look at.

TS: [chuckles]

SK: And everything that I had heard—because everybody talks—well, you don't know but—Every time you go somewhere, and the exams are always in March and September, and those are the worst two months other than the physical fitness test months that you can have in the military, because it the whole stress of you study, you study, you study. You sit down one day and you take a four hour test and then it's out of your hands, and then you just go back and breathe and wait and see what happens. And my test grades—I was an early candidate because I made first class so early, and that's a—that wasn't a—that sounds good but it wasn't a positive when you're trying to advance because they look at, I guess, experience. I don't have enough at only [E-]7.

TS: Okay.

SK: I mean, a perfect score—Even though it's a hundred and fifty question test, a perfect score is eighty; it's a whole curve thing. I was getting sixty—Every test was sixty-eight. I actually had a seventy one time. I'm like, "This is going to be my year." Nope. So I mean, just—You don't know what that big group that comes in for three weeks from all over, what that leadership looks for, and you really don't know how many spots are open. Like I said with my husband's rate, there was only three.

TS: Right.

SK: Yeoman was usually—it's a pretty big common rate.

TS: But you've got more people competing for it, too, right? As a percentage. So you're trying to make your goal. Did you enjoy living in the D.C. area?

SK: If we had time to enjoy it. His commute would be an hour and a half coming home so it'd be 8:00 maybe, 8:30. It's not like we went bar hopping; we just weren't that way.

TS: Now, you started talking about starting to think about having a family and I cut you off.

SK: That's okay.

TS: This is where you started thinking about it really heavily?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay.

SK: We had the medical center there, and I was born in Maryland, and we thought we'd have enough time. We thought this was going to work, because he has two children from that first awful marriage out in California.

TS: Right.

SK: And when I met him I said, "I'm going to want kids, so that has to be the whole package," and he really had to think about it because he doesn't know his two children and that's the sad part; he doesn't know his girls; he didn't get to spend a lot of time with them.

So we ended up getting married so that was our answer, so he was okay with that. Then obviously, he was getting older. I mean, he's six and half years older than me.

TS: Okay. So you're planning.

SK: We're planning, yeah.

TS: It's interesting because there's a lot of discussion about women in the military, a lot of people think if they become a mother they shouldn't stay in.

SK: Exactly. And that's true.

TS: Yeah? Is that what you think?

SK: Yes. I lived it, yeah.

TS: But you were a mother.

SK: Well, just the whole—or they got pregnant because they didn't want to stay on the ship or—it was never positive light that we were put in, because we got pregnant. Because all of a sudden, we couldn't lift things. The men were like, "Well, now I have to do more because she can't lift a fifty pound bag of mail," or—it was just what it was back in that day. "Now she can't run the physical fitness test."

TS: So a man who maybe got injured doing something dumb [chuckles], right, and was on temporary duty, can't do those things either.

SK: Right.

TS: Do they get as much harassment about it?

SK: No.

TS: No?

SK: No. Just the women.

TS: Yeah. Did you get pregnant? Were you—

SK: I don't know how much of this you want to put on the record. I don't want a whole lot of it on the record, but it was—we took fertility treatments.

TS: Okay.

SK: And Bethesda was the place to be because we got it free.

TS: Oh, good.

SK: Which would have been ten thousand dollars a try or something. We were pretty persistent. It took us eighteen months, now we have our now twenty-one year old today because of it, so it wasn't easy.

TS: No. Did you have her while you were at BUPERS or you had her later?

SK: I had her—him—

TS: Him, sorry.

SK: That's okay.

TS: I forgot which ones were which.

SK: Aaron[?] was first.

TS: Okay.

SK: Up in D.C. So I was at the Pentagon.

TS: At the Pentagon? Okay. You said '95?

SK: Yeah, so by the time I got—Yeah, time I got to BUPERS, which was '95 to '97, I'd already had [unclear].

TS: One of them. Okay. Let me ask you, then, a little bit about that. Let's talk about being a mother and in the navy. So you and your husband are both in. Did you have to have, like, a plan?

SK: We had to sign papers, what was called Page 13 [a document with administrative remarks], which is just a generic page that goes in your service record, saying I understand this doesn't mean I can't go to a mission if I'm called or whatever. It's kind of like the seabag thing. It's just like—because we had to get Power of Attorneys, we had to get people who would take care of him if we both got recalled.

[All military members who have dependents and are either single or part of a dual-military couple must have a Family Care Plan. It is the means by which a military member plans in advance for the care of his/her family when they are deployed, TDY, or otherwise not available because of military duty]

TS: Rights.

SK: So we had to do that whole side of things, which normal people don't have to do. But it made sense.

TS: So you had to plan for who would take care of your children if you were both deployed, or if something like that happened.

SK: Yes.

TS: Did that ever happen?

SK: No.

TS: Never happened. So you both, I'm sure, were working crazy different hours.

SK: Yes.

TS: So the childcare, was that satisfactory?

SK: If you're familiar with D.C. you know Anacostia [historic neighborhood], and the navy yard is right across the way. They had a daycare center. You can go on as soon as you have a—almost a positive pregnancy test. The waiting list is [unclear]

TS: Oh, to get on the waiting list.

SK: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Okay.

SK: So we ended up—somebody was looking out for us—we got in fairly quickly. You get six weeks off as a woman, free, for lack of a better—take care of your baby for the first six weeks; the whole bonding thing.

TS: Maternity leave.

SK: Maternity leave, right. And then I would take two weeks more just to have that rounded.

TS: Out of your vacation or something?

SK: Yeah, that would be vacation; the two weeks of vacation.

TS: Because we don't get sick time.

SK: No. [both chuckle] You're right, you don't. [unclear] And we just had to work out the commute of dropping him off, because I used the subway before.

TS: Oh, right.

SK: Now there has to be a car. Dan has to drop him off and get back on that bridge. I mean, you do what you do but, yeah, we got in and they—my point was, sorry, to answer your question—

TS: No, no, it's quite alright.

SK: —they have extended hours because they know. They know people don't—

TS: Oh, because of the environment that people are working in.

SK: Yeah. So they're like 6:00 [a.m.] to 6:00 [p.m.] or something, or something, or 6:00 to 7:00. They were there at six o'clock in the morning to drop off and they were there until you picked them up. And they were good people.

TS: So you're in the D.C. area, and it's a time when—let's see—you started in there—I think you said—how'd you call George Bush—the daddy.

SK: The daddy?

TS: Is that what you said, the daddy?

SK: Daddy George Bush. [chuckles]

TS: So he's there—

SK: Reagan was in obviously long—when I first—

TS: Long before. You're in a real politically heightened environment at the Pentagon. Was that something that you were aware of? Did you admire any of the presidents, or do you have any thoughts you would like to say about any of them? Or, like you said, Colin Powell.

SK: Well, he's your Commander in Chief, so of course you've got that line in your military training that you can't badmouth him.

TS: Right.

SK: You can't—I mean, not in public, anyway, because that's your Commander in Chief; he tells you what to do ultimately. I was never a political person, and I'm still not, but I kind of follow now because I feel like I need to, as an American, have that one vote that might count. In the navy it doesn't matter. But anyway. I didn't follow that route. I mean, I liked George—I kind of would just see what they would do for us.

TS: Okay.

SK: Like, I think in my notes I said Ronald Reagan loved the military. He probably started that trillion dollar debt because he made sure we had what we needed to have. And then almost every president after him has taken a little bit, a little bit, a little bit; budget, budget, budget. And then the whole mission when I joined the navy a long time ago was to fight two fronts. We now could only fight one front, because of the presidents that have been there, and budgets or whatever. So we—I'm not sure how we would do right now. And then we're in Iraq and Iran and Afghanistan for, in my opinion, way longer than we need to be. So I liked what he did. I mean—who was after him?

TS: He, as in Reagan?

SK: Reagan and—

TS: The Bush?

SK: Daddy Bush.

TS: I'll have to remember that from now on; Daddy Bush, okay.

SK: Yes, please don't let there be a brother Jeb. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay. So even though this is, like, D.C. and you talk about inside the beltline, right—

SK: Yes.

TS: —outside the beltline, you're just living your life and being—

SK: Part of the enlisted side of it in the day to day stuff.

TS: Right.

SK: Yeah, the missions and whatever, just—I would be interested, obviously, because with my husband [unclear] going to be attached to that mission.

TS: Right. Right.

SK: So—And he had some—he had some runs over in that area.

TS: Now, what was his job?

SK: His job, if I can say it right, is—the abbreviation is—because mine was Yeoman, YN; his was AZ, Aviation Maintenance Administrativenman [Administrationman]; something like that.

TS: Okay.

SK: He did the, let's say, logs and records of the airplanes and supply.

TS: So you got, like, the—what do they say in the navy?—the fleet side and the aviation side?

SK: Yes, the black shoes [surface or submarine duty] and the brown shoes [aviation duty].

TS: Black shoes and brown shoes, that's right. So he's in the—

SK: Brown shoes.

TS: —the brown shoes, where they fly.

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay. So he's helping take care of the side where there's the planes.

SK: Yes, it's the missions and those.

TS: Okay. Did he go on any of the carriers or anything?

SK: Yes. Before I knew him. He would tell me about the carriers he was on for a short period of time.

TS: Did he deploy while you guys were married?

SK: No.

TS: Not at all? But he did have to do certain short term TDYs [temporary duty] and stuff?

SK: Yeah, he would go—he'd go to Spain and stuff, he'd be gone for a week or so, but they were training missions.

TS: Training.

SK: Yeah, and then—

TS: Not long term deployments.

SK: No, but our planes were so old even back then that he would always be delayed because their parts, they'd break. They'd have to get the parts. They'd have to get them from somewhere.

TS: Did you guys ever take any hops anywhere, or do anything like that?

SK: I did once when I was in California.

TS: Okay.

SK: They let me go as—because you're not part of the squadron, obviously—you're the admin—but they let me go with one of their runs to—their training runs to Grand Cayman.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: Yeah, tough. [chuckles]

TS: Nice. How was that?

SK: I mean, you're in and out—I mean, you really don't—

TS: Not very long?

SK: Yeah, not very long, but enough to make a quick tour.

TS: Get to see the beach?

SK: Yeah. And see the conch house and—conch shell house.

TS: Oh, right, okay.

SK: It was pretty cool. But that was it. He has way more fun stories than I do.

TS: Oh, he does?

SK: Yeah.

TS: I don't know. You've got some really good stories here. After BUPERS—you were there for three years—two years?

SK: Two years. Three years in the Pentagon, two years at BUPERS.

TS: Okay. Now, did your husband then get another assignment and you had to follow? What happened then?

SK: He was due to move again and, of course, I have to look where he's going.

TS: Right.

SK: And now we have a child so I have to look at daycare situations and whatever.

TS: A little more complicated.

SK: Yeah. We started looking at—there's two—he was starting to look at Pennsylvania, there's a city up there called Lansdowne, and there's a naval—it's decommissioned, but Naval Air Station [Joint Reserve Base] Willow Grove, in Pennsylvania.

TS: Willow Grove?

SK: Willow Grove. It's about sixty miles northeast of Philly [Philadelphia]. So again, somewhere else we hadn't been, but it wasn't too far from D.C. so we didn't have to travel that far. So that's where we went, and they were able to find me a spot. And I was still trying to make E-7.

TS: Okay.

SK: Still trying to make chief.

TS: Right.

SK: I know all the ins and outs now and—actually, you know what? I said that wrong. It was my turn to say, "I'm leaving. I'm cutting my orders short. I'm going to this place because I can make chief there.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: So I had that backwards for once. I guess I was so used to it being the other way around.

TS: I led you there, so I'm sorry.

SK: That's okay. So I found my spot and—

TS: Okay, so you get a job—

SK: I get the brown shoes, I get to go up to a squadron.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: And they found a place for him.

TS: I see, okay.

SK: And I made—I got there—

TS: Why did you think you were going to make chief there then?

SK: I was just at the place where you learn how to make it [chuckles] for two years.

TS: But what was it about being there—

SK: It had to have—Well, you had to—qualification. EAWS is the Enlisted Aviation Warfare qualification.

TS: Okay. You needed to get that box checked off?

SK: I needed to get a pin [promotion to E-7 Chief Petty Officer]. Yeah, I needed something that was above and beyond, and for a yeoman there's not much we could do to get anything above and beyond.

TS: Okay.

SK: So we were really having to be neck and neck and we didn't have—If I was single I could have went to a different route to try to make chief quicker.

TS: Oh, I see, okay.

SK: Because you could pick harder duties. There are independent duty stations where you go by yourself for a year or something. So I just knew it would be time, and since I had made E-6 so early I thought, "I have time but it doesn't mean I like it." [both chuckle]

TS: Right.

SK: We got there—what'd I say? January seems to be our month we moved.

TS: It looks like May; May of '97, it says on here. Seem about right?

SK: Let me see. May of '97. We left in '97. Okay, May. I had to get my bearings.

TS: It's okay.

SK: May. I'd taken—When's the chief's test?

TS: You said—

SK: September.

TS: Yeah.

SK: So the chief's test—

TS: They're going through it, right? They're checking it—

SK: I'm trying to do my math. So March—I'm still E-6 so I take it in March and September.

TS: Okay.

SK: And I'd taken it in March and then moved up to there. Results came out in June, and I made chief almost as soon as I got there.

TS: In June? Oh, right away, okay. And so, what was it like to be promoted to chief petty officer?

SK: Everything I wanted it to be.

TS: Yeah? Well, tell me more than that.

SK: It was pretty cool. [chuckles]

TS: What does that mean?

SK: Well, you had that break in the line. All of a sudden—Technically, my husband and I were fraternizing until I made chief, because he was E-7/E-8, I was still E-6. If somebody wanted to be a dork—some officer wanted to be a dork—we could have got in trouble.

TS: Right.

SK: Gotten captain's mast or whatever, court martial, if they wanted to go that far, but they could because the legal manual said we couldn't do that.

[A captain's mast is a procedure whereby the commanding officer must: make inquiry into the facts surrounding minor offenses allegedly committed by a member of the

command; afford the accused a hearing as to such offenses; and dispose of such charges by dismissing the charges, imposing punishment under the provisions of military law, or referring the case to a court-martial]

TS: So now you've got that—

SK: I'm going to double check my dates and all that and I'll get back to you on that. But anyways.

TS: That's okay.

SK: That was my goal. I guess that's why I was so happy about it, because that was my goal, I reached it by myself. I didn't have anybody—Because you just hear things, and as a woman it's like, "Oh, she got that because she's a woman. Oh, she got there because she's a woman."

TS: Right.

SK: That gets so old.

TS: You think that sometimes the men get it because there's an "ol' boys" network?

SK: I used to think that until I got to BUPERS.

TS: And then not so much?

SK: Yeah. It's all the numbers then and you just have to do your best to get your numbers there, and then if you have that part you can only hope there's advancement numbers. And then once those two meet, you're in.

TS: So you think it's pretty even keeled, fair?

SK: I think it's fair. I had a whole different mouth about it after—[both chuckle] afterward. I was with everybody else—

TS: That's a good phrase.

SK: I was with everybody else before then going, "God, how did they pick those people?"

TS: Interesting.

SK: "I know that person and he shouldn't be an E-6."

TS: Yeah. That's an interesting way to look at it. So you were very proud then?

SK: Yeah.

TS: Now, you have a little blurb in here about you survived initiation.

SK: Chief's initiation. You know you here all these stories, and my dad told me stories even though he never made chief, but his stories were the seventies where you're actually smoking pot [marijuana] on the fantail. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, really?

SK: I didn't say that. He told me that, but I didn't say that. Drugs, and you're driving million dollar ships, and whatever. To where I am in my day, and it's a rite—it's a passage.

TS: A rite of passage?

SK: Since I didn't go to college I don't know what ini—what do you call those?

TS: Like, a fraternity or a sorority?

SK: Yes. It's kind of the same thing but two hundred times worse, because my sister and all that told me what it was really like to be in a fraternity. But anyway. It's just that big step. You're given hell for six weeks. And I almost brought my charge book, and maybe I'll bring it next time I bring you stuff. Because I look at it every year when it's that season.

TS: Yeah. Explain what a charge book is for someone kind of looking at this—

SK: A charge book is, once you make—once you know you've made the advancement—you don't know when you're putting it on but you know you have to at least wait until September—and the first person—because when you've made advancement, no matter what the grade was, there was a cycle. The first cycle of—Depending on when you fill in the numbers would be—you'd get paid in September for E-6, you'd get paid in December because you were in the middle of the pack. So that was all how you got paid.

TS: Okay.

SK: And it was kind of that same way for chief. It doesn't matter—Everybody got pinned in the middle of September, no matter what month it was. Like that [unclear] middle of September—

TS: But you might have gotten paid earlier.

SK: Pardon?

TS: You might have gotten paid for it earlier or later.

SK: Yeah. You just don't have it yet. You're not getting paid at that rank. So you just have to get your mind set that from June—the day—because I was in my office and the—my first class—who was my first class in the Pentagon, kind of followed him—and he said, "Master Chief wants to talk to us."

I'm like, "Well, that can't—" I had no—I wasn't putting anything together. I said, "Man, if it's the master chief, I did something wrong." I've always kept my nose clean, so I was kind of nervous.

TS: Worried about it? Yeah.

SK: Yeah. So we walk in—anyway. I don't remember the minute by minute because it was a blur once I heard what he said.

TS: Yeah?

SK: And within hours you're getting your green log book. It's a green notebook about eight and a half [inches] by eleven [inches], like a normal sized notebook. It's military grade so the green covers are like a canvas.

TS: Okay.

SK: For you to draw on and stuff. It's got about a hundred pages, like a composition book would have. And this is where you will have all the words of all the chiefs in your area of wisdom, partaking on these pages their wisdom to pass on to you on how to be a good chief petty officer. And some of those are pretty funny. And so your job was to tote that around, it never left your side, and if they got hold of it it got run up the flagpole, taken on an airplane to a mission somewhere.

TS: Did you keep yours?

SK: I have mine.

TS: Okay.

SK: Nobody got ahold of mine. And my husband stayed out of it.

TS: Oh, really?

SK: Here I am for a week not knowing—not telling him he's made E-8, and he's not partaking, which I thought, "Okay, he paid me back somehow."

TS: [chuckles]

SK: Because he didn't want to be involved in giving me the crap, and I thought that was pretty nice of him. So that never left our side. And we just had projects. Like, we had to build a box for it. We put our emblems on it and we—you could kind of have some free—

whatever—and then you had a lock and you had a key. We actually made a lock on it so if they stole it they couldn't get into it, but it was—

TS: But they had it.

SK: They have it and they can break into it.

TS: Sure. Did you have to do any ropes, because you all are doing—

SK: We had to do lanyards.

TS: Lanyards, okay.

SK: Yes, we had to do some lanyards.

TS: Alright.

SK: And we're graded on all that stuff. We had to make—I think my most fun experience was making our work group. It was twelve eggs, blown out. I've got a headache. You dressed them like sailors. You put—

TS: [chuckles]

SK: You made reports on them every day, like, did they show up for muster, whatever; this one went to the infirmary. It was really kind of funny. But it teaches you how you have to track your people.

TS: Okay.

SK: And they would steal them and you're like, "You've got a AWOL [absent without official leave] egg. Where is he?" Stuff like that. And I'm like—So anyway. But all of it, you don't see it; you really don't see it. You're like, "I can't take another day of this," because they really ream you, they really bring you crap, and it's just really like—you don't see a purpose of it. Like, "Go shine my shoes." You have to come into the chief's mess every morning, you'd have to serve them coffee and doughnuts, and if they had shoes they wanted you to shine they'd take them off and you'd have to shine—it's just that kind of petty stuff.

And then you had a book of songs you had to learn that made no sense. And of course you had to learn the—what's the—"Anchor's Aweigh" [official song of the U.S. Navy]—you had to learn "Anchor's Aweigh" inside out and backwards and stuff. And it just all comes together and they really—it's hard to say, but going through it, and people I've heard before, as I was jealous listening to them going through it, it's like—because it was a secret. I mean, it really was secretive. You can't tell—You can't talk about it. You can't take pictures, which they did just because you do obscene stuff. And it's a brother—we're called a brotherhood now—brothers and sisters—and you have them for life, you really do. I might have to go get some water. I feel like I'm getting hoarse.

TS: Yeah, here, we can pause it. Alright? Or do you want to finish what you're saying or you want to pause it right now? We can pause.

SK: We'll pause it right now.

TS: Okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: —interesting story too.

SK: Well, I don't know how much I'm not allowed to be saying.

TS: No? Well, I got back on, so. Well, hopefully—

SK: Because you're not supposed to tell anybody it. It's just a big rite of passage.

TS: Well, it's interesting because it's a tradition, and it had to feel really satisfying, I guess.

SK: Yeah, that's a good word. That's one of the words. You just have a lot, and to see my husband go through it, I would—well, my then-boyfriend—I would say, "Why do you put up with that stuff? Why do you let them do that to you?" [chuckles] I mean, he wouldn't tell me the secrets he wasn't supposed to tell me because I wasn't a chief yet.

TS: Right.

SK: But I'd have to see him get up at four o'clock in the morning, and go march around the commander's house and sing "Anchor's Aweigh" or something. [both chuckle]

TS: But you became—Like you said, it became part of something special, and not everybody gets to reach that pinnacle.

SK: Ten percent, is what I was told.

TS: Ten percent? Okay.

SK: It was 10%.

TS: So the top 10% of people—

SK: Reach chief.

TS: Enlisted in the navy, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: That's really excellent. And now, you had said how your husband, when he made it he had to transfer out, but you had just gotten to the station.

SK: Right, and I went to—I already got orders to Patrol Squadron 64 [VP-64]. Its sister squadron was down the hall, literally—[VP-]66—and because my friend—my chief, Rocky, who I knew from the Pentagon, took me down and gave me the news, he already had that job so I had to—again, the powers that be—I got to go down the hall. There was an empty spot there that I could fill. It was an E-8 spot but he still let me fill it as an E-7.

TS: Okay.

SK: But I was right down the hall, there was no big change or anything.

TS: That was cool. How was life different as a chief petty officer in the navy?

SK: I think getting to that point was way more fun [both chuckle], because the whole reason you want to be there is because—we have this term "go ask the chief, ask the chief, ask the chief," and this person, we don't know how they ever knew all the stuff they knew, but they would get you that answer no matter what. So that whole "ask the chief" kind of thing.

TS: Right.

SK: I had got that and I don't think I made bad decisions—I mean, I don't think anybody didn't like me. It was hard to do that break, like I was telling you about, from your friend to now you're the leader. And I didn't know those people down the hall, but still, it's like you were just wearing that shirt yesterday.

TS: Right.

SK: And now you're wearing this. You have to just make that whole mindset of relating to them, and do you want to turn into a jerk and order everybody to do everything? No. You still want to be their friend—for lack of a better word—but you ask them what they need—you tell them what they need to get done, and you make sure it gets done, and that's your job. How they do it. My theory was how they do it is: okay, they're allowed to make mistakes, and then if they get to that point then we—"How'd you get there?" I always—I wasn't the thumb[?]—"You will do it my way."

TS: Not micromanaging.

SK: Right, no—yeah. Because my theory was always—because I guess I had those chiefs is, "You need something? Tell me what you need. Tell me when you need it. And go about your way and get it done."

TS: You give them the tools that they need to succeed.

SK: Yes, and the guidance if they would have questions.

TS: But let them figure it out.

SK: Yes, and that's—I guess that's just the mentoring that—

TS: Did you have good mentors yourself, then?

SK: I did, yes.

TS: Anybody you want to talk about on this interview, to say thank you to?

SK: Well, my bud Rocky. Rocky Mountain [or Melton?]. He's over in Hawaii now. He's a civilian. He made you laugh.

TS: Turn it off [the recording]?

SK: No.

TS: Okay.

SK: I mean, I took a little bit—

TS: So Rocky Melton was one of your most admired?

SK: Yes, because he ended up being my sponsor.

TS: Okay.

SK: Kind of like the AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] kind of thing. I mean, it's like they're supposed to help you through this transition, which is a joke. [both chuckle] He did everything but help me, but—and he'd be in the corner snickering while they embarrass me. But anyway. I guess you just remember your first—your sponsor is the one who—[emotional] Sorry.

TS: It's okay.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Alright, you ready?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay, so you said you went through, like, a period—six weeks or so—of really tough time.

SK: Yes.

TS: And then what happens next?

SK: It culminates into the weekend. It's starts on a Friday. And not to mention, for that whole six weeks you're going through this, you have no job. Somebody else is doing your job.

TS: Oh, really? Is that right?

SK: You're supposed to be doing it but you go, "I've got no time for this." And of course, every—all the [unclear]—

TS: So you have to get through the rite of passage.

SK: Yes. So they all give you that support.

TS: And everybody knows it so it's not like—

SK: Exactly.

TS: —you're slacking off.

SK: Exactly. [chuckles]

TS: This is your job now, is to go through this process.

SK: Yes. It all culminates until that weekend, because you're usually pinned a Saturday or Sunday, but I'm still in the reserve—active duty reserve side so we still worked weekends, where the reservists come in and we train them, whatever they need to do. So we all go to a hangar, like, at four o'clock Friday. We get this ridiculous list of stuff to bring: one big list of disgusting food, and then one big list of your clothes, your sleeping bag, and whatever.

TS: Okay.

SK: And just, when you get those lists you're like, "This isn't going to be fun. This isn't going to be fun." [both chuckle]

TS: Right.

SK: "An octopus? Okay, let me see. What am I going to be doing?"

TS: A lot of strange items?

SK: Very strange. And everybody has it so—I mean, you've been with these guys for six weeks, and it's just—they've got families too. Dan had to become a single parent, pretty much, to Aaron[?].

TS: Is that your husband?

SK: Yeah.

TS: Yeah, okay.

SK: To Aaron[?] because—Pick him up at daycare, take him, because I wasn't—I wasn't in a frame or—I had other things to do. But he went through it. I think that was my crutch because had I been with somebody else, like a civilian, I can't imagine trying to explain that to a civilian.

TS: Right. Exactly.

SK: Again, I'm not allowed to say a lot. You get there Friday night and they just have this—you have a schedule of different stations you go to for "training." And you just go through these stations and then you stop and you make them dinner. And then you stop and then you go through the really rough part. It's a trust issue because you have to trust your fellow chiefs. They always have your back and you always have theirs. Again, like, in hindsight I can tell you about it, but going through it, it's like, "What purpose—" I was pretty stubborn.

TS: At the time, it's not pleasant, right?

SK: Right. I was pretty stubborn then. I'm pretty mouthy [inclined to talk a lot; opinionated], as my husband would tell you. Well, you learn to because you have to give it right back to them or you're not reaching your potential.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: So you dish it right back to them. And we were allowed to cuss back then. [both chuckle]

TS: Thank goodness, right?

SK: In private, yeah. You just go through the whole—and then you get up. They let you sleep for thirty minutes, and on the schedule it says you get a three hour sleep in between your agenda, but you actually have thirty minutes and they're waking you back up. When you're standing there on that day, at that pinning ceremony, you're teetering because you're just so tired.

TS: Exhausted, I'm sure.

SK: Yeah, you're just so tired, and you have to march in and—anyway. So you get to the culmination where they've accepted you as a chief petty officer, and everybody's got the hugs, and you're still all full of—

TS: Whatever.

SK: —whipped cream—[both chuckles]—whatever is on your clothes, because you bring all three pair of dungarees and you get through all of them.

TS: Okay.

SK: But you get to clean up nice for your uniform—for the khaki uniform.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: Because halfway through you go to the exchange and you try it on because you have to get it ready. So you get to wear it for the first time. It's your halfway point where it's like, "I can do this." Because you're in all this ridiculousness and you're halfway through going, "Okay. Okay. Three more weeks, that's all. That's all." And this is you in the mirror, so.

TS: Right.

SK: And then that's—And then you get up, you have the invites, and your family starts coming into the drill hall, and they've got the chairs set up, they've got the color guard, and the red carpet, the bullets for the piping. Very traditional, very ceremonial, and very—what it's supposed to be. And then your family and friends come in.

TS: And they don't know all this that you've been through. They just know that's you're getting—

SK: But you weren't there for six weeks. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, yeah, okay.

SK: You weren't there for six weeks, and you owe it to all those people standing behind you in that brown uniform. Then you walk in, you've been singing "Anchors Aweigh" for six weeks—

TS: [chuckles]

SK: —but when you're walking in singing it, means a whole lot more and you know why you learned the words. And then you just have the—it's pomp and circumstance, and your

sponsor, who didn't help you for six weeks, sits there and puts your hat on, grinning like, "I'm so proud of you. I did nothing for you but you're mine."

TS: Right.

SK: And then your loved ones put your anchors on your collar, and you're a chief petty officer that easy.

TS: Yeah.

SK: That easy, that day. [chuckles]

TS: And then that's it, right?

SK: Yeah, and then you move on, and next year you're those chiefs bringing in the new team; the new babies. And you're—I get to be in this side—

TS: That was a lot more fun?

SK: Oh, way more. [both chuckle] I'd say yes. I mean, I lost twenty pounds and—

TS: In those six weeks?

SK: In those six weeks.

TS: Did you really? Oh my goodness.

SK: Yeah, because you're just—you've got to finish this project, and you've got to make the eggs, and you've got to make the box, and you've got to—

TS: Do all the things to—

SK: Yes, and each group had to do a skit on that weekend. So we had to practice the skit and learn our history and—

TS: Was it worth it?

SK: Yes.

TS: Yeah.

SK: Not a hesitation; every darn bit of it.

TS: Yeah. So you're chief, then, now, and you and your husband are both chiefs, right?

SK: He's a senior chief, yeah.

TS: He's a senior chief. So you're in Pennsylvania. Actually, you did talk a little bit about how you have to separate yourself, and now you're the manager, and things like that.

SK: Yes.

TS: Did you get to do anything really fun while you were at Willow Grove?

SK: Well, I call that six weeks fun, after the fact. [chuckles]

TS: That's true. Alright.

SK: Well, we started talking about our second child, because we didn't—we didn't want an only—well, when I say "we," of course, he has the two children.

TS: Right.

SK: I didn't want an only child, so we talked about the second one; how hard was that going to—How hard was that going to be, and it was hard. We still had our ties to D.C., so it just took us more time than normal people, but we had Sierra in Pennsylvania; we had her before we left. We went to—Anyway, to your question—We went to Hershey, Pennsylvania. We did those kinds of things because Aaron was starting to be at that age where it would be fun. He'd be on the little baby rides and kiddie rides.

TS: Right.

SK: And I wasn't yet pregnant with Sierra. But it wasn't really a whole lot to do. I mean, we had literally spent holidays going to New York—or Maryland—

TS: See family?

SK: —I mean, North Carolina—Yeah—because you're so far away, that's just what—

TS: So your time off you're seeing family, you're doing a lot of that.

SK: Yeah.

TS: So you were three years here at this station, right? And something in here you say you were on a training mission in the [Lockheed] P-3 [Orion]?

SK: Oh, that's when I was getting qualified to—for that enlisted aviation warfare.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: And so, part of the training I got—I actually had to back a plane—like, a P-3 out of the hangar.

TS: By yourself?

SK: And used the bra—No, they were—I mean, I was in a seat and they were all there hovering, waiting to grab whatever in case I messed up, and then I got to—because I had to know how the brake worked, for whatever reason. So just stuff like that.

TS: That's kind of cool.

SK: Yeah, because I was now in my husband's world, because he'd been a brown shoe forever.

TS: Right.

SK: And here I am on that side, trying to get that qualification, learning all kinds of stuff I didn't need to know. [chuckles] And it was hard to learn. I mean, those guys—

TS: A different kind of learning, right?

SK: And a small piece I forgot to add, back with my husband. Going to Pennsylvania, he could only take that spot if he became an air crewman, which is a special designation and a special school. And so, he has six weeks in Pensacola [Florida] before we got up there. He knew he had to pass. He was an older man by then. They were "young chickens"—as he put it—in his group, in his class. He came back ten, twelve pounds less, because it's a lot of pool work and rescue and—because you're training to be the stewardess if the plane goes down, or something happens, you're the air crewman, you're designated, you're qualified.

TS: You have to help everybody.

SK: You get to call all the shots. And how to fix something, or whatever. That was a big step for him because he didn't think he could do it. He's like, "If I was younger—"
I said, "That's how we have to get to Pennsylvania together."

TS: "This is what we're doing."

SK: And his proud accomplishment, I think, in his life, was passing that.

TS: Being able to get through that.

SK: I think that was important because I talk about how sacrifices are made, and I actually had to do one for him and he had to do one for me. That was pretty intense, because he said it was a tough six weeks; he didn't think he'd get there.

TS: But he did.

SK: He did. He did.

TS: Well, that actually a pretty neat story.

SK: So we've each had each other's back at that point of our relationship. Still new marriage, and we just had our first kid. Now we're thinking about a second kid, and how the navy part fits in. And we start thinking about what's going to happen after.

TS: You leave that station in 2000, and where'd you go from there?

SK: Raleigh.

TS: Oh, you went back to North Carolina.

SK: Well, like I said, we were culminating to the end; at least of his time. I mean, because he had already done twenty-four by then. He got out after twenty-four. And so, we talked about when[?] do we want to retire, where do we want to call home, and he did not want to be in New York, where he was—grown up and born there. So—And he—My whole family and all of us just got along, and he loved the family, and they loved him, and so we just thought we'd be near them. And his family wasn't—His parents ended up moving to Tennessee soon after we moved to North Carolina, because they were older, and fifty-seven inches of snow wasn't their thing.

TS: Right.

SK: I'm like, "I can relate. I can relate." [both chuckle] So we picked that and there was nowhere for him to go. I mean, because we were like, "If we go here, I'll have—" I have eighteen years in. I'll just have two there. We can buy our home because we'll be there. And life will be good; we're coming to that end of our life. And I said, "But you have to get—you have to be willing to—are you ready to leave, because it means just as much as to you as it does to me."

And he goes, "Ah, twenty-four years, I think so."

TS: So he retired?

SK: He retired.

TS: Okay.

SK: Yes. And that next year he could have made E-9. He just knew the people still and he would have been in that spot, but. He doesn't dwell on that too much, but every now and again he still mentions it, like that would have meant something to him, because when you're the master chief you're next to God. [chuckles]

TS: Right. Right. How many more years would he have to stay in then, though, if he made E-9?

SK: Three.

TS: Three more?

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay.

SK: And by then we had two children.

TS: Right. So you ended up moving to North Carolina, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: And you were stationed at—Oh—

SK: The reserve center's right across from North Carolina State [University].

TS: Okay.

SK: It doesn't look like any kind of military building. There's a little bit of fence that gives away any military installation.

TS: Right.

SK: That chain link fence. And it's where the Marine Corps was down the other half, and we were on the other end.

TS: What was your job there?

SK: I was the leading chief petty officer of the admin department; I was the boss then. That was my first—

TS: How was that?

SK: —first kind of boss-boss. I mean, even though I went down the hall and made chief there, I mean, they were still kind of E-6 friends because I knew them from down the hall.

TS: Right.

SK: But this was my first—nobody knows me, I can get a better foot. Because, I mean, I admit I had trouble getting to that part a little bit. Yes, I knew what it took to get there, but being a hard ass, I had to find my space and my place in that, and it didn't have a—I didn't have a good time doing it and I don't—and I don't think I did it as quickly as I

should have. But my husband's my hero in that part because I admired him as a chief, far and away.

TS: What was it you think you needed to work on to be in the place that you thought you should be?

SK: That I needed to be more hard in my orders. And I don't mean I was ordering people around, just that I would kind of like—okay—

TS: Like, more of a commanding presence, sort of?

SK: Yeah, I think that's a good way to put it. I didn't need to put the fear in anybody, which my husband always did to his people.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

SK: But I just wish I would have been a firmer—a more presence—

TS: How you just project yourself to the people that you're—I see, okay.

SK: Yes.

TS: But you have your own temperament, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: As you're going along it's hard to, like, switch gears and be somebody different.

SK: Yes.

TS: But you felt like to be able to be in this position you need to show a little bit more.

SK: I wanted that for myself; that I wanted this so bad to be in this uniform.

TS: Yeah. That's neat.

SK: And not that I did a bad job, but just what I felt.

TS: Well, and you're a little bit out of your comfort zone, right?

SK: Oh, yeah. They don't teach you that part. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay.

SK: And of course, by then our third child is on the way. And so, I get there pregnant and I'm like, "That's not a good example of a chief." And I just knew my time was winding down.

I had a lot of stuff I went through in the military. I didn't even go [unclear] the sexual harassment stuff that happened to me, just because it did, and I'd rather not get that on the record. But it was out there. It just—the women were just, if you're in here, you're in here for that reason. You want to sleep around, or you want to sleep your way to—

TS: You mean that's the perception that people have; that's why you're there.

SK: Yeah.

TS: And so, how did you overcome those kinds of obstacles yourself, personally?

SK: What? The sexual harassment?

TS: Yeah.

SK: Well, after Tailhook, the big thing was the—you had to warn them that they were stepping over the line, instead of just presume—because, I mean, even in my office, in one of my places, the Farrah Fawcett posters could still be on people's desks, and so as a woman sitting there, it's like, "Really?"

[The Tailhook scandal was a series of incidents where more than one hundred U.S. Navy and United States Marine Corps aviation officers were alleged to have sexually assaulted eighty-three women and seven men, or otherwise engaged in "improper and indecent" conduct, at the Las Vegas Hilton in Las Vegas, Nevada, during the 35th Annual Tailhook Association Symposium in September 1991]

TS: The pinups?

SK: Yeah. And down at those aviation places, those are manly men. And so—And that was just accepted. It's just they're men, and you're coming into my place so you just got to deal with it. Don't look if you don't like it. Whatever.

TS: It's a culture that—

SK: I was never used to.

TS: Right.

SK: I never had any dealings with it, and I didn't know what to do about it. But the main thing was the red, green, and yellow light theory came out of Tailhook. It's like, you have to tell somebody if they're crossing the line. You can't assume they know.

TS: Okay.

SK: Whether that was their action, their speech, or direct "this for that" kind of talk to you; like, "You do this, I'll do that." So if you didn't warn them then you couldn't bring char—not charges. Anyway. You couldn't say something about it.

TS: Make an accusation against them.

SK: Right. So when somebody comes into my space and starts talking about his night with the hooker, and I'm like, "I don't want to hear it," that's yellow. I mean, so you say, "Yellow." I became a joke after we all understood the concept with all of the men.

TS: Right.

SK: And the women really had to accept that that seemed so childish. It's like Red Rover [children's game], come over. It's like, "I have to tell you you just said something stupid"?

TS: So placing the, I guess, responsi—

SK: They're putting it on the women.

TS: —the responsibility on the women to set boundaries for men, to say, "Don't cross this line."

SK: Yes.

TS: When maybe men should have some responsibility to know where those boundaries are, do you think?

SK: Yes, exactly.

TS: Yeah.

SK: Not everybody was raised by a tribe. [both chuckling] I mean, you've got to know—you had a sister hopefully, or you had girl—I would just sit there and shake my head, I'm like, "Did you really just do that?"

TS: So if we spend so much time, I guess—because it's in the news all the time, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: So you spend a lot of time saying, "Women, don't dress this way, don't put yourself in this position," and again, putting it on the woman not to be vulnerable.

SK: Which we shouldn't have to worry about that when we're trying to do our job, just as equally as the men were, but we have to have this peripheral vision now of it's our job—[unclear] our job. That was 100% wrong in my opinion.

TS: So even though they were trying to make it a way—What was it?—yellow, green—

SK: Red, yellow, green.

TS: Red, yellow, green.

SK: Just like lights.

TS: That came in after Tailhook?

SK: Yes.

TS: And so, did you think that was, like, detrimental to women, to put that in—

SK: Tailhook brought all of how women were being treated to light, and very publicly.

TS: Okay.

SK: We had no way of covering that up. [unclear] navy, because I still love the navy.

TS: Right.

SK: I mean, women being manhandled going down a hall is ridiculously stupid, and they were drunk, and alcohol—just—And then it's the whole, "Well, they dressed like that," or they drank five gallons of beer. Maybe they—They tended that to happen. So it was still always trying to be put on the woman that, "You asked for it," kind of thing, which makes me sick.

TS: Victim shaming, is what they call that.

SK: Is it?

TS: Victim shaming.

SK: I think it was a cultural that needed to happen. It shouldn't have taken that, but I think the [unclear] being watched more closely now, because it was so public, and it went on and on and on.

TS: That was in '91, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: And so, then, now, ten years later, you're chief. So you're in a position where people can come to you, right? Of course, you probably were all along the way.

SK: Yes.

TS: You're in supervisory positions. Are you getting women coming to you complaining about issues of sexual harassment and things like that?

SK: Not at that time, because it worked, and then I think men just got it.

TS: Okay.

SK: It just took—Maybe it took ten years. I don't know when the light came on, but the first five years after Tailhook there was all these training classes and all this awareness, and there was the touchy-feely kind of thing. And then it became a joke; "Oh, you can't say that in front of her." It was just the whole realm of culture change that had been in its place for years and years and years and years and years because it was a man's navy.

TS: Right.

SK: The acceptance came slower than I would have liked, because I'm the commonsense kind of thinker of, "How can you not just shut up and do your job? Why do you got to—Why do you got to go that route? Just—" Anyway. [chuckles]

TS: Right. Well, it's interesting because you were married to a guy in the navy, who was in the man's navy.

SK: Yes.

TS: Aviation, too, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: Probably even a side that's even more—

SK: Yeah, kind of. Yeah.

TS: Did you guys ever have conversations about it? I mean, like, he's in his world, you're in your world, and—

SK: No, because he's a gentleman, and he always was, and I don't think he would have fell into the crowd—he would not have—he's not a go-alonger, he's a lead—he's a [unclear].

TS: I don't mean that he was doing sexual harassment, I just meant that in the—talking about the culture of the navy at that time.

SK: I don't know that we had deep conversations about it, and I don't think it needed to come through our door.

TS: Right. Keep that outside, at the workplace.

SK: Yeah, because he was at his command and—Yeah.

TS: That's interesting.

SK: But we could have—we had each other to work through—"I've really got this person—" which is what you—the brotherhood's all about, but I had a spouse brother.

TS: Right. Right.

SK: So I had two pluses.

TS: Yeah.

SK: Because you don't want to make rash decisions and—I'm jumping around on your topics—but you just—

TS: No, it doesn't matter. It's just a conversation, right?

SK: Yeah. So you just have that extra person to bounce something off before you do something wrong or you think could have been handled better.

TS: You were promoted pretty quickly in the navy, right? Did you feel like you were treated fairly for those kind of things; promotions, awards, assignments?

SK: Yes. I think I was—Maybe because of that I couldn't put myself in the other position that some women were going through. Like, when women started getting to supply ships. Granted, the mission wasn't anything exciting, but they were allowed to go on supply ships. And then that was a culture change. And now, gosh, we just had the first Blue Angel woman become a pilot, and I think that's awesome. We've come a long way from the Tailhook days, but—I mean, but I think they've gone too far right. I think—I mean, submarines, now women can go on. Well, who wants that? How do you grow up a woman and go, "I want to be on a submarine"? I mean, I'm not knocking it. I don't mean to knock it, it's just I think it's sometimes the "I can do what a man can do" gets too far. So now they can go everywhere. There's no restrictions. Maybe combat still. I don't keep up with it as much as I used to.

TS: Do you think there should be restrictions, then?

SK: I do, and not a—a lot of people are focused on the—"She can't carry a forty-five gallon bucket of water" or whatever. I think it's that aspect.

TS: That they're not capable?

SK: Yes.

TS: But if they are capable and they do qualify and they meet all the standards, should they have the opportunity to—

SK: Oh, most definitely. Like, the first one into—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Yeah. Like, regardless of the culture, regardless of if it's on a submarine?

SK: If that's what they want to do. I just don't—Having been on a submarine for fourteen hours, I'm a pro. [both chuckle]

TS: Right.

SK: But it's tight, confined quarters, and you just have to think about—I don't know. I guess there are people out there who just—they don't want to be—they want to do that for whatever reason.

TS: Right.

SK: Is it something they're looking at for advancement, like I did things for advancement, I don't know, but they can now and I guess that's what's important, is they have the option to. I mean, from West Point [The United States Military Academy] having their first female cadet. Naval Academy.

TS: Right, 1980. The year before you joined, right? That was the first time.

SK: I mean, I'm not going to be against my sex on any of that, I just sometimes think you have to—I look at it and go, "Really? Just why? Okay, we have permission to go there, and life is good, but—" This is going to sound really stupid—"It's just—You're just going to portray what they're tell—what they think you are." You know what I'm saying? You're going to go that route. Perhaps you'll fail. Men fail so women could fail, but then that's going to be the thing that's going to stick in somebody's head is, "Well, see? Women can't hack."

TS: So when a woman fails it's a reflection on all women, but when a man fails it's just a reflection on him?

SK: I believe that's a good perception. Even in my time in the navy I don't think it got much better than that.

TS: No?

SK: No.

TS: Do you think women had to work any harder to be successful?

SK: I believe they did, whether self-imposed or needed to be, for whatever reason. Because there were still those crotchety [ill-tempered] old master chiefs out there who would be sexist and would still say stupid stuff. I mean, you—because I follow a lot of navy Facebook [social media website] things. There are still officers—commanding officers and commanders of ships and squadrons—getting in trouble for stuff like this, and it's like, "What else does it take? You've been around long. This has been—Tailhook. You know how to be." So it just amazes me that they're still stupid. And there's master chiefs out there too—I'm not sticking it to just officers—that are making very poor choices and I don't understand.

TS: But you love the navy too.

SK: I love the navy. I love the navy.

TS: So it's kind of complicated to see ways that it could be better for women, and maybe just better for all seaman. But you would do it again, right?

SK: I would, in a heartbeat. And I wouldn't get out the first time.

TS: [chuckles]

SK: Maybe not. Then I might not have met my husband.

TS: Right. Right. And you might not have known that you wanted to stay.

SK: That's right.

TS: Right? So you were in North Carolina for a little while.

SK: That was supposed to be my last assignment.

TS: It was supposed to be, okay. And that's—

SK: 9/11.

TS: Oh, right, 9/11 happened.

[The September 11, 2001 attacks, or 9/11, was a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on the morning of 11 September 2001. The attacks killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others]

SK: 9/11 happens there.

TS: Okay.

SK: Again, we're in a very un—and you don't—all America didn't think safety until that happened, for obvious reasons, and the military was, no less, on their shore[?] commands. You just—You got—And I think it was used in the precedence[?], and we just got lax. We, the whole country, got lax, and I think the military got lax, and if you—like, these isolated stations have no protection, but you don't think about that when you're there. Like, I never went there going—looking around going, "Hmm. How safe is this?" I'm like, "Great. We're going to buy a home—" I'm focused on the end of my time—and like it says in my notes—all of America wasn't prepared for 9/11.

We had a break room that I was—that we have right off the side of my office, and somebody was passing by and saw the towers and, of course, sounded the alarm to all of us, and we all go in—mouths are hanging open.

TS: To watch it on TV?

SK: Yeah. And so my—one of my first class petty officers says, "Chief, should we do anything?"

I'm like, "Oh, my gosh. This is the hell I went through, and I have to make this decision, and this is more than I expected."

So it was just lock every door. We didn't have a lot to do, but I just thought go lock things. We didn't even have a gate that would lock, but we're right across from N.C. State. But in the big picture of things, minorities are everywhere—all minorities—how many were over there? Of course, because all of America, not just the military, started that trend of—"Oh, we've got to watch those people." And that's sad but it happened, and it's still happening.

So his thinking was, "We don't know who's over there. [unclear] see them. Get excited, and start running. Oh, there's a military base right across the street. Why don't we go get them?"

You just—Your brain just starts going, "How chaotic is it going to be on the home front; the day to day stuff?"

TS: What else is going to happen, right?

SK: We did the best we could. We locked down and waited for the captain to come in because he hadn't—he wasn't in yet. And marines were all being marines. [chuckles] I love the marines. It's just so cool.

TS: What does being a marine mean; what does that mean?

SK: Well, they get guns. [chuckling]

TS: Oh, they get guns, right.

SK: They get guns. Me and the—The gunny and I were pretty good friends because we're the same—he's one rank up but we're the same leader-type thing, and so him and I were always chatting about stuff. And he's got his firearm, and he's coming out, making sure we're okay. I don't remember the whole day of it. Like, did we all assemble together? I don't remember.

TS: Right.

SK: Did we all go home? I can't remember the first hour of it.

TS: Right. But you knew something had changed.

SK: Yes.

TS: There was a change.

SK: And so, then all the—we just came to work the next day, because we had to, and of course, we all called, it's like, "Do we come in? What do we do? Are we being—" But knowing that we were a reserve center, that had the reservists that would be more than likely going to start getting recalled. We all had to learn how to recall, because short of a draft we didn't have anything like that before.

TS: Right.

SK: One or two Z[?] people going over to Africa to—What's that place in Africa?

TS: I'm not sure.

SK: I love to say it. Now I can't even say it.

TS: You can put it on the transcript.

SK: Anyway. Djibouti. But they were maybe the computer geeks or something so they volunteered to go and things like that, but now it was involuntary mobilizations happening. And so, we all had to learn, and we had to learn quick, and—because we had, like, twelve units—twelve or fourteen units—we had a supply unit, we had an IT [information technology]—the techy people, we had seat[?] of commands. So all those missions in those—

TS: You have to start to mobilize for that?

SK: Yes.

TS: That's maybe not an expectation.

SK: No, I don't want to go out like—I don't want to go out like that. But again, that's why we were in that particular program. To see it actually happen was not what I wanted to do, but it works; our process works.

TS: So you started to mobilize. I remember one of the first women that I talked to for an interview, she had told me there was before 9/11 and then there was after 9/11, and something changed in the military mindset that was different. Did you feel that too?

SK: Yes. Because I started seeing message traffic, because one of my jobs in the morning was to pull the messages off of whatever they came across anymore, and start reading—they weren't—we didn't have classified anything there. But just start seeing the whole thinking—I couldn't imagine if I was in the Pentagon then. Not for the plane, but they all—

TS: The activity?

SK: They must have went to red alert times [multiplied by] fifty. I mean, I bet they never went home, because they're the hub of everything. And then here I am, just a little reserve center; didn't feel like I mattered much in the big picture of things.

TS: And then all of a sudden you do.

SK: Yeah.

TS: Okay, so you were going to get out here but you didn't. Why didn't you?

SK: It wasn't because of that, because once we got in the groove our job was fine. Anybody who stepped into my place was fine because the process was fixed. We knew how to bring them in, we knew how to bring them back, and how to be the ombudsman for the wives and whatever.

[An ombudsman is an official who is charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints of maladministration or a violation of rights]

They did away with my job. They did away with the chief billet there. Because the reserve centers and reserve units are all run by pieces of paper that have every job and how many people need to be in that job in a certain building—or in a certain unit, and in our unit at the reserve center, the chief petty officer, for whatever reason, they didn't feel that billet needed to be there. I don't remember if they were thinking—I'm E-6—I don't remember how—I don't remember following [unclear].

TS: They were changing the bureaucracy of it, right?

SK: Yeah. The whole thing is called a RUAD [Reserve Unit Assignment Document] in the billets, and I noticed mine went away, so I talked to the captain. I said, "What do you think this means?" I said, "I have eighteen months to go. I'm not going to move somewhere for eighteen months. And I can't stay—" What that meant in the big picture of things was—and I said a lot of this already—I had—I wasn't supposed to be there. I was an asset that could be used however they wanted to use me.

TS: Okay.

SK: I'm a paper pusher, and in light of everything going on, where could they have taken me without me having a say? Anywhere they wanted to, because I didn't have a legit place to stay.

TS: Right.

SK: I didn't like that, with two kids and another one on the way.

TS: Right. You wanted to have some say.

SK: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

SK: So Dan and I talked and—"What should we do?" And just—"I don't want to live every month going, 'Are they going to [pull me?]?'"

TS: Right.

SK: And I could have stayed the—I don't know. I could have stayed the whole time and been fine, because they don't like to move you when you're so far out of a potential twenty year because if you get out it's not cost effective.

TS: Right.

SK: If you've paid for the family to move.

TS: And then come all the way back, yeah.

SK: Yes. So he said, "Just start looking. We'll start looking at what they have open." So once a month—They came out every two weeks, and this Hawaii job popped up, and I told him about it. I go, "What do you think?" This is a joint command; this is a big deal. This is more than I wanted to finish. I wanted to be nice and calm reserve center.

TS: No high anxiety kind of job.

SK: Really. I'm twenty minutes from my home, and you come home, take your uniform off and be a normal person. There's no stress. But this is a high—There's a four star—all commands were there, all services were there. It was run by a four stars.

TS: This was U.S. Pacific—

SK: U.S. Pacific Command. Its missions was—Like, 40% of the Earth's surface was under them, and they ran the Balkan[?] exercises with all the different countries and stuff. It sounded cool, and it's Hawaii.

TS: Yeah.

SK: So I started talking to—after he said, "Yeah, well, let's just see where that goes." And I talked to the person—it's a five hour difference, so I had to plan when to talk to him. "What do you do there?" Blah, blah, blah. So we took them, and I'd already had them when my mother suddenly died, and I still had to go.

TS: Right.

SK: We got there January.

TS: Yeah. I think you put February on here.

SK: February?

TS: February 2003?

SK: Yeah, the whole transition took a while because we had to set up—our cars had to be shipped and our stuff had to be shipped.

TS: Do you want to take a drink of your water?

SK: Yeah. And we were in base housing. I've never had base housing before.

TS: Oh, when you were in Hawaii?

SK: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

SK: Oh, my God, a one apartment studio was, like, a thousand dollars, fifteen hundred dollars or something.

TS: [unclear] we're going to live on base.

SK: Yeah. "Let's give up all this free money we have and we'll live in our concrete—" I mean, it's all con—it's all concrete.

TS: That was a different experience for you both, then.

SK: Yes. I think he might have had housing in his first life, when he was stationed up in Massachusetts. I never had the privilege after I left my family. My dad was—we had military housing a lot, but as an adult in the navy I never got to do it.

TS: Right. So that was not so great?

SK: It was free. I mean, it was okay. I mean, over half our stuff had to go back in storage because it was so small.

TS: Now, did you sell your house in—

SK: No, we found renters, because we know this was going to end.

TS: You're going to come back to live.

SK: Yes.

TS: Okay.

SK: Thank God we had good renters because for the whole two years our house was still standing. There was only one issue and it was the sewer, which the piping—which was nothing they did. And we moved right back in and picked up where we were.

TS: Yeah. Well, how was your tour in Hawaii?

SK: I had to apply for a Top Secret clearance, which I'd only—

TS: At the very end of your career?

SK: At the very end of my career.

TS: Oh my goodness. Okay.

SK: I know, it's like I wasn't—I didn't want that level going out. I wanted a smooth ride like my husband had. Yeah, so I needed a Top Secret clearance, with secret compartmented—whatever.

TS: Right, SCI [sensitive compartmented information].

SK: Yes.

TS: TS—TSI.

SK: And I thought, "What's that going to mean?" But I—But the mission of this place, I didn't really—that meant—to me it meant long hours, and I didn't plan on advancing anymore, but maybe it would be a shot if that's where it goes. So that—Long hours. I was 8:00 [a.m.] to 4:30 [p.m.] [unclear]. [chuckles]

TS: And so, you worked some really long hours. But you said you'd just lost your mom.

SK: Yeah, and being that we lived there before, we were all talking—

TS: [unclear]

SK: —Yeah, as a family, a little family.

TS: Oh, right.

SK: What I was going to go see and tell Dad about, and what mom wanted me to look back at, and it put a whole different look on it.

TS: Yeah. So mostly you just wanted to finish out and get back home?

SK: Yeah. I mean, we did what we could do, and we still have leave. My husband was a househusband because—I like to tell this to some people, which they go, "Wow, Hawaii is just the best place ever."

I said, "Well, it's two and half hours around the whole island. Mostly one lane roads; dirt roads. Two thirds of it is people who don't like white people," and that's a true statement, they really don't. Three main arteries that get you nowhere fast. There's three highways, and when you got to the windward side, which [unclear] marine Kaneohe Bay [Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, renamed Marine Corps Base Hawaii]—

TS: Which island were you on?

SK: Oahu.

TS: Okay, Oahu.

SK: Pearl Harbor was right on our door. And so, that was cool. I mean, if you can—We went by and saw the [USS] *Missouri*.

TS: You're in a really isolated place.

SK: Yes.

TS: Small.

SK: Yes. No friends or family.

TS: Like being in a little village [unclear], right?

SK: [chuckles] And just like with—when my dad was in Fort Meade, you get to know your little neighbors that are connected to your unit, but you know that they're not going to be there for long. So I got to see that side of my parents when he was in the navy, and it's like—I didn't like it. I mean, they're nice—all of them were nice people, and because Trevor—Trevor was born in July of 2000 and we left—so he was almost two.

TS: Okay. Going on three?

SK: Yeah, going on three. So we had to do the whole sitter thing, and—because I'm like, "Dan, what are you going to do for a job?"

And he goes, "I don't know. Maybe I'll see if I can work at the exchange."

So we go to the school to register him. They start at, like, 9:15 or 9:30, they have a recess, they have lunch, they have a recess, they're out at 2:30. My husband couldn't get a job with having to be home—with those kind of hours. I don't know what they learned. They weren't there long enough.

TS: Right.

SK: And Sierra started kindergarten there, and that was pretty cool. Pearl Harbor Kai [Elementary] was the elementary school. Trevor—Aaron was in the fourth grade. We had some pretty bad experiences with some of his teachers.

TS: Yeah, you were saying [unclear] later your kids—the public school experience was not great for your kids. I think you said that at the beginning of the interview.

SK: It really wasn't. I mean, I—and they're all dependent children. I mean, most of that elementary school was military children. But we had an incident actually go all the way up to the school board and was unsatisfactorily resolved, so it's like—

TS: I see. So that puts a sour taste in your mouth, then?

SK: Yeah, because I know you can't be ruined at fourth grade or kindergarten, but—

TS: [chuckles]

SK: —you're a mom and you don't want that for your children because you can't do anything, and they're telling you, "Oh, you can go to the school board. They're not going to do anything about it."

So it's like, "Fine."

TS: Yeah.

SK: And then my dad passed, so. And then I had a real bad foot injury. [chuckles] It was just not a good time. I fell down some stairs leaving work and—

TS: Oh no!

SK: But broke a toe, and it's just never been the same. But, anyway. It all just—It's probably because I was so unfocused.

TS: Right. Well, you're experiencing grief, and the end of your career.

SK: Yeah. School—Not being able to help my children with the school.

TS: Right. So you decided to get out.

SK: I did.

TS: Okay. It's time.

SK: Yeah. And they let me lea—I didn't know when—how—the minimum tour of overseas is supposed to be two years.

TS: Yeah.

SK: To get the money out of me. [both chuckles]

TS: Right. So that's what you put in?

SK: I think that's about—Yeah. But it didn't start getting that way until maybe about a year and a half into it. Even Dan was like, "Yeah, this is fun. Fun's over. What can you do in a two and a half hour trip around an island?"

When we were there the millionth car tag was issued. It was a million cars on an island that's two and half hours around. It is crowded.

TS: Yeah.

SK: Yeah, island fever does exist. [both chuckle]

TS: Yeah, so I've heard. Well, how was the transition then for you from having a career in the navy, then now you're back—you went back to North Carolina, right?

SK: Yes.

TS: What was the transition like to be a civilian?

SK: Let me just step back real quick.

TS: Oh, sure.

SK: To my duty—my job at Hawaii.

TS: Oh, yeah.

SK: I got my Top Secret clearance in, like, record time, because they said you're supposed to go back and talk to neighbors and family.

TS: Right.

SK: And I got mine in, like, two months. I don't know if that's because my dad had one. I don't—My nose was clean, I had no—

TS: Well, they knew where you were the whole time, I think, Shelley.

SK: Yeah. But once I got that, I got to sneak in to the big COM center. Do you watch *NCIS* [American action police procedural television series]?

TS: I have seen it, yes.

SK: Do you know where they go into that secret place and they talk to people?

TS: I'm not sure, but okay.

SK: Anyway—

TS: But it was like that?

SK: Yeah, and I actually—I don't know if I should say this—I actually saw missions—I mean, I saw soldiers jumping—

TS: Like, live missions?

SK: Yeah. In Afghanistan, jumping off the plane and—with all their gear and stuff. I want to say that was cool. I hate that that's why they were—I hate that they were there.

TS: Right.

SK: But back to the Pentagon, it's like, "This is pretty cool." It just—And so, every time I was in the hub of something I'm going, like, "This is pretty great." I guess because I'm not nosy, but it just—you're a bigger part of it. Because when you're just out there, like, in Raleigh Reserve Center [Naval Operational Support Center Raleigh?]—

TS: Right. Right.

SK: —you don't know what those people are doing over there, but to be a part of it is pretty cool.

TS: Did it make you feel like here you're part of something bigger?

SK: There, yeah. I mean, because I was in charge of a reserve budget of millions [of dollars], of bringing reservists over there for training for two weeks or two months, whatever we needed them for. And just a lot of responsibility on the side that—I mean, I did that at the reserve center. I brought people in and out of mobilization, but there it was—it seemed more life—more real life, more realistic maybe, because I could put that to—I could put that to—their mission was more vital, based on what we were going through as America, I guess, or something.

TS: Right. It was more direct action things happening that you could visibly see?

SK: Yeah. When you say, "I was in the navy," you expect stuff like that, or, "I was on a ship," not, "I was in a little brown building across from North Carolina State University working 8:00 to 5:00." [chuckles]

TS: Right.

SK: I mean, I just—I guess that whole—I guess I need to sum up that my whole time in the navy was—you were in a different community, and you all knew what you needed to do, and you all came together, and you all were on the same cause. And then I got out into the civilian [chuckling]—to the civilian world, whew, let me tell you. That was—It was hard, to your question.

TS: Yeah.

SK: It was hard because—Well, as my husband would say, "These people today," he said, "they're the, 'Why do I have to do that?'" You never question in the navy. We're told to do something by somebody senior to you, you did it. And just the difference of—"I don't care. Whatever." They're not doing their job and management's not doing anything about it.

I was fortunate that the very first job I interviewed for I got hired, so I didn't have to deal with the whole, "What am I looking for? What are they looking for?"

TS: Right.

SK: "Where do I want to find my niche?" Because we come out of a Top Secret clearance place where you're watching boots on the ground—and I hate that term, but anyway—to just ringing up gro—I mean, just ringing up groceries. It's like, "Wow. How could things be so night and day?"

But you're ready for the norm and you're ready to find it. It doesn't mean it's easy. All my focus was—is in my time in the navy it took me ten years but I got my bachelors

degree, part time. Everywhere we were I'd take another class or two, and I finally got my bachelors, so that was another check in the advancement block.

TS: Right.

SK: And I have, like, twelve hours towards my masters. But anyway. I didn't want to go to school anymore, but I was seeing how important a piece of paper was, before I got my first job. But I was applying, of course, everywhere. And I was trying to stick to the government jobs like most people do when they come out. It's like, "Wow. You've got Top Secret clearance. You're a yeoman." Had I—Had we stayed in D.C. I would have found, I think, a pretty good job, but coming here I just—my focus was—"This is the minimum I need to make. [chuckles] That's all. Just find me something. I need to make this amount of money," which was thousands and thousands less than what I was making.

TS: Right. Right.

SK: But anyway. So it—I mean, I don't know that I'm 100% now, and I've been out since 2005.

TS: Hundred percent—

SK: Adjusted to civilian world.

TS: Okay. Well, do you think part of it is the sense that now, in the work that you're doing, you're not the same as being part of something bigger than yourself, or greater than yourself?

SK: I feel I don't matter. Yeah. I'm not in the big cog of anything. I mean, that department or that com—or that company. But it's not the same. But that's what got me hired, was—and a lot of people think that is like, "Well, they've got the—they're not going to be mouthy. They've got the training. They've been brought up right."

TS: One of my friends once told me that the hardest thing for his transition was that there was no sense of urgency about getting things done—

SK: No.

TS: —in the civilian world compared to any job in the military.

SK: No pride in their job either.

TS: No?

SK: No.

TS: I'm sure there are a lot of civilians who do have pride in their job.

SK: Yes.

TS: I think the pace of what's happening is just a little different than—that sense of teamwork and—like you were talking about—is—

SK: Oh yeah, there's no—I mean, I can't—I'm speaking only when I say there's no this or that in the civilian world, I'm only going my small experiences.

TS: Right.

SK: But I also have my husband's. He's tried to have different jobs along the way, because unfortunately his job in the navy would have only moved over to working at an airport, maybe. Not baggage claim, but records of some sort or whatever. So for whatever reason he chose not to go to Raleigh-Durham [International] Airport and see if there was anything he could do, so he just kind of hung out, and now he's ended up at retail—Sam's [Club], Kroger grocery store—and he sees the lot that take their time, do a half-butt job, and still have their job because this particular place has a union. You just—It's different.

And then people have different reactions to you being in the military. Like, a lot of people want me—and I think this all ties into because I was a woman. When I tell people, "Oh yeah, I'm a—" I got—for the first few months I got—maybe longer than that—"Was your husband in the—"

I mention, "Do you have a military discount?"

"Was your husband in the navy?"

"*I* was in the navy and I'm proud of it."

TS: Right.

SK: So that just shows you the concept hasn't totally gotten out there to the civilian world that we're just as equal; [chuckles] that we want to be in the military too.

TS: Right. Because the perception of the norm is that if you're in the military you're probably male, right?

SK: Yes. And then they say, "What ship were you in?"

I'm like, "Nothing. I don't like water."

TS: Not all sailors are on ships either, so. Well, let me ask you a little bit about some other general questions that I ask some of the women. And you've actually answered some of them along the way. We talked about how attitudes towards women changed, and didn't change, during your time in. And you left like you were treated fairly, and we talked about sexual harassment. What would you say was the most rewarding part about your military experience, for you personally?

SK: In terms of?

TS: In terms of any way you want to frame it. What was most rewarding to you?

SK: That if we did our job right as a chief, we trained the next chiefs. That was rewarding.

TS: Yeah. So there was a willingness to, like, bring people up?

SK: Yeah, we mat—I use that term—we mattered or we didn't matter, but we were looked up to and, like I said, if we did our job right we made them who they were going to be, and that's a good sailor for the rest of their time.

TS: Yeah.

SK: It's just kind of trickles down, hopefully.

TS: [chuckles] Yeah. Okay, so you went in '81 originally. They didn't have "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." So if there was a homosexual—You talked about that, being at the recruiting station, right?

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is 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 people from military service. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed 20 September 2011]

SK: Yes, Great Lakes.

TS: That they got out. So they were kicked out, and then "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" became implemented while you were in.

SK: [President William "Bill" Jefferson] Clinton, Yes.

TS: And then it was repealed, actually, after you got out. What do you think about that whole controversy about gays in the military?

SK: I haven't had to talk about that forever. I think I can do this to what we were just talking about with if they can go on a submarine, they're qualified, go. How does that matter if you've got a woman, straight, if you will, in a submarine, butt to butt with a guy, doing their job, and they hotrack because they've got to stay and watch, and then somebody sleeps in your bed? You have to have that mindset, it's a person.

[Hot racking is the sanctioned practice within military organizations of assigning more than one crew member to a bed or "rack" to reduce berthing (sleeping) space]

Now, with the whole red, green, yellow, it affects that, I would think. If you use that same theory, who cares? Now it is—it's open. It's open about it and people—you can't be prosecuted, or you can't be treated differently now. But I just think if you're doing your job, and you're not hitting on the girl next to you, or the guy's not hitting on the—if you're not interrupting the job that needs to be done, or possibly detrimental to the mission, whatever. More power to you.

TS: So it's more a matter of if you can do the job, fine. As far as your behavior goes, whether you're straight or gay, just check your behavior appropriately.

SK: Yes.

TS: So you think that's the way to go?

SK: Yes.

TS: You think, then, the military's on the right track with the changes they've made for that?

SK: I think so. But again, as I've mentioned before, and it probably came across that way, I was reluctant to agree on the—"Why do they need to go on submarines? Why do they need to go on aircraft carriers?"

TS: Sure.

SK: Because I—Like I talked about not being, just had that moment of—"Why do you want to—Are you doing it for the right reason? Why is everybody up in arms about, 'Well, I want to do this because women can'?" So everything's equal. Well, at some point equal's okay, but then at some point it's not. Is it conducive, is it—I guess the reason—I've said a lot tonight—it's the reason they're doing it. Is it just that it's there for the opportunity? They're paving the way for the rest of the women, who might or might not want it? Or it's just a fact that it shouldn't be a difference across the board? And I think that's where it's come, and I think that's how I finally have come to, "Do your job if you can do it, whatever you do. That's fine. Just—"

TS: That's fine?

SK: Yeah, and just defend yourself that way. Don't let anybody else tell you any different, or that's why you're there. Or you're their because you're a woman, or you're trying to prove something. Which I heard a lot.

TS: So this is a position that you've thought about a lot?

SK: Yes.

TS: Like, coming to what expectations there are and what opportunities there are for women.

SK: Yes.

TS: It's something that's kind—I guess they use the word evolve now—evolved over time.

SK: Yes.

TS: Yeah. That's interesting how you think about that.

SK: I don't know if I could be in the navy now. And that [unclear] what we just talked about. It's not because of that, it's just because—you've gone from you knew your place, you knew the rules, you followed them, blah, blah, blah. And now you're in a place where everything is so wide open, because you don't want to step on anybody's toes, you don't want to say the wrong thing, to where, are they really leading effectively? Because they're—they don't want that one person to cry wolf, and then the whole woman population's killed again.

TS: What do you mean by that, the whole woman's population's killed?

SK: Because one or two stupid people like—

TS: Oh, you mean it drags all the women down.

SK: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

SK: Because you think you're getting somewhere and then you've got the—like I said, [unclear], master chiefs are doing it, commanding officers are doing it, and you can't help but look at why. They've been—You know how long they've been—I know how long they've been in because I know how long it takes—even on the officers side—to be where he is as a rank, and you know better. [chuckles] So I guess I just don't get the—You're still the—You need to be the example, but now I just feel like you don't—they don't want to hurt anybody's feel—you have to be so touchy-feely to where it's not a mission oriented kind of thing. That's my two cents. And I kind of follow—When I go to the Greensboro Reserve Center I kind of follow how they are, kind of watch them. And everything's perfect and working fine there, but again, as the reserve center they're a smaller piece of the big military pie.

TS: Right.

SK: I just think it has to be—I don't know—swung left and right. They still have to come into the middle. I thought we were in the middle once, but I think we're swinging back out, just from what I've seen.

TS: Maybe too easy or not having—

SK: Yeah, they can do whatever they want because they're afraid to be told, "Well, you discriminated against me in some obtuse way—" they find a way to use that word—And then leadership is going, "Okay, you're right." It's like, "Don't tell me no," or whatever.

TS: So you think maybe we seesaw a little bit on each side too much and there's not a happy medium?

SK: Yes, I do.

TS: Yeah.

SK: And then you downsize and so everybody's out, so they have to be picky about who goes in the military. And then it comes open again, it's like, "Oh, you don't even have to have a GED [General Educational Development test]." Or, "You have to have a high school diploma." So they're trying to find factors that they think is going to be important in who they bring into the military, but if you come into that kind of—I just don't know if I could be in it today.

TS: [chuckles] Right.

SK: I just don't.

TS: Well, while you were in were there any special awards or achievements that you—besides making chief—that you are especially proud of?

SK: No, because a lot of the ribbons I have listed—and medals—good conduct means I've kept my nose clean for four years; I didn't get in trouble.

TS: Well, you've got a Sharpshooter here. You said you never had been around a weapon before. You got Sharpshooter, huh?

SK: Well, that—We all—In Great Lakes there was very little to do when you're not old enough to drink.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

SK: All of us got together, said, "Let's go to the range and see if we can qualify." It was just something to do. It wasn't a goal; "I want to be—" Because I would have tried for Expert, and Sharpshooter's in the middle.

TS: It's something you did to get the—

SK: Yeah, one more thing to kill the time or whatever.

TS: Yeah.

SK: The top three or four are obviously the personal awards.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Defense, meritorious service.

SK: Yes.

TS: The MSM [Meritorious Service Medal] with Defense.

SK: Yeah. Those are the ones where you don't just get them because you've kept your nose clean.

TS: Navy commendation, navy achievement.

SK: Yes.

TS: Those ones, yeah. And then some of your units got meritorious.

SK: Right.

TS: I was trying to see if we've covered some of the things you had written down. I think we've talked about pretty much all these. The types of uniforms changed. I think you talked about that.

SK: Oh, my God.

TS: Do you want to add anything about the way the uniforms changed? Did they get better or worse or—[chuckles]

SK: If you talk to my husband he'll say, "She don't like change," and I don't like change.

TS: [chuckles]

SK: It takes me a while.

TS: Okay.

SK: And right out of boot camp we had the white shirt and the black pants or the black skirt, which I thought was the sharpest thing I'd ever—

TS: They looked nice.

SK: They're called our salt and peppers. And then all of a sudden you're all white; the salt and pepper went away. The black and black was your dress uniform. So that was my first experience. I'm like, "Ah, that's not so bad I guess, but white, like the Good Humor man? Why are we all—white gets dirty. Polyester, hot."

TS: Yeah, not the greatest [unclear].

SK: Yeah. [chuckles]

TS: But you say here, you did like the dungarees?

SK: I did, and not a lot of people did. But they—They're the ugliest thing ever on a woman's body.

TS: [chuckles] Right.

SK: But of course, the whole purpose was if your—[unclear] ship—you need to bail out of your ship your pants can be—put air in the legs and they're your float device.

TS: Is that why they're like that?

SK: Yeah.

TS: I never knew that.

SK: Yeah, they're your floating device.

TS: Okay.

SK: You learn how to put air in them and that's how you stay alive in the water. So they all had a pur—they had a purpose.

TS: How about that?

SK: I didn't know that either, probably till a few good years into my career.

TS: [chuckling]

SK: "Who made these? It wasn't a woman."

TS: That's right.

SK: But you didn't have to worry about dirt or whatever, because in an office people think you're not going to get dirty. Well, you can. You can get dirty. But then that went and the women had to be in crackerjacks like the guys. That's what I'm talking about, the swinging—All of a sudden they put the women in the—The poster boy of the navy is a

man in his crackerjack—his little flap and his little stars—and now there's a woman next to him, in her crackerjacks—all white—and I'm like, "Why?" Did it matter—I think that was just, again, somebody up there going, "We got to make sure we take care of them. Make sure they're not being left out." Or, "Why do they get the crappy white uniforms and the guys have these cool looking things?"

TS: [chuckles] They spend a lot of time on uniforms, don't they?

SK: And wasted money, yes.

TS: I'm going to have to say, you talk a lot about uniforms, and you see a lot of those changes and stuff.

SK: And one of the ones that happened after I got out of the navy—that's another reason why I probably wouldn't be a good candidate for the navy—I've talked about at length what it means to be a chief.

TS: Right.

SK: Our uniform went from the blue dungarees to the khaki work uniform. It was polyester, but still you had the shirt.

TS: Right.

SK: You had that sight of division.

TS: Visual, right.

SK: Some yahoo along the way, a few years ago, put enlisted people E-6 and below into our khaki shirt and black pants. So they could walk by you and you might not see that little chevron, you think it's a chief walking by you. I drew the line there. Like, how can anybody—what drug were they on?

TS: Right.

SK: Because that meant tradition, navy, it goes hand in hand. And you took our shirt and you put it on E-6 and below, so where's the visual now? I was very disappointed.

TS: That was a tradition that you didn't want to see change at all?

SK: I didn't see a purpose. I mean, it made—And I'm one person—it makes sense to me. You've got that line of sight and you've just got that purpose. "Hey, I want to be a chief because I hate this dungaree uniform. I want that cool looking one."

TS: [chuckles] There you go.

SK: Now you've got that cool looking one as a seaman.

TS: Right. It makes it a [big change?].

SK: It takes it away, I think.

TS: Well, do you think there's anything that maybe a civilian might not understand or might have a misconception about being in the military, a person who's in the military?

SK: I would like to know who vets [meaning "to check"] this out when they make those kinds of sweeping changes. I really would. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah?

SK: Because you just have to—Even from our hat. Our hat changed five times when I was in the navy, and now I see it—the chief's cover [hat] that is, so again, the visual of the navy.

TS: Distinctive.

SK: The women's now look just like that[?].

TS: So there's no[?] change there. But, I mean, besides the uniform, is there something you think maybe civilians don't really get about people who are in the military, or military life?

SK: I think their first reaction is, "Why? Why did you go into the military?" But in today's generation of the "me, me, me" and the technology and—I just think all that makes a person—they can't envision—Well, like you said, the civilian world, they don't have a purpose, they don't seem to be in a hurry. I don't know that they see the military—not different, but I don't think they see them as the rigid people they need to see them as. They like being there, they like that form and that—the traditions and the structure. And when you come out they're like, "Yeah, we'll hire you because you're a veteran and you know structure," and whatever. I just don't think civilians—the comraderie is the first word that comes to mind, and the—a mission.

I mean, a military—A lot of people of course, with Afghanistan taking so long—eleven, twelve, thirteen years—I think when something would happen like the Gulf War, we went over there seven months, we did what we needed to do, we came back. Something like this, they lose sight of what the military is supposed to go do, I think. I mean, now I feel like we're just social workers over there, and the fact that we're trying to keep peace everywhere. And then our people are getting killed; men and women. And I don't know that they see—I don't think they can put that in their mind of why they're over there, because so many years have passed. You can't go do that strike and come back, and oh yeah, they can be proud of the military, because look what they did. I just think it's so routine, so mundane. Every day in the news it's like, oh, ten more people were killed, and they'll go, "aw," maybe, and they'll cry and whatever, but—and then they're right back to—we're not that [unclear], we're not that [unclear] anymore. I don't think that—I mean,

people still—if you walk by in uniform, people, I think, would still go, "Wow, that's sharp."

TS: Right.

SK: I mean, I see people [unclear] in uniform and I think—I see people's heads. They respect it I think, but I don't think they'll get the whole—

TS: They don't get quite—

SK: No.

TS: Alright. Well, if one of your children wanted to join the military, what would your—

SK: I have one.

TS: Oh, you do?

SK: Trevor. He's my fifteen year old. He's already—He's going to take his ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Test] here soon; see what he qualifies for. I'm trying to talk him into the air force because they got cooler uniforms. [both chuckle] They don't change every six months. And it's less boot camp. And we've asked him why; "Why do you—" And he doesn't have—he doesn't want to share it, or he doesn't have one, except maybe—

TS: Maybe he doesn't know.

SK: Yeah, like I didn't know. I know from his first two siblings—well, my one, who's twenty-one today, still at home, part time job that he grunts about leaving and going to everyday. And we don't make him pay a lot, we don't make it hard on him, is what somebody told me—"You need to make it hard on him"—

TS: [chuckles]

SK: So he's comfy.

TS: You don't make it hard enough on him to leave, you mean?

SK: Yeah.

TS: I got you.

SK: But that's just generation. I mean, my best friend in my first job has a thirty-four year old at home. I mean, he went to school, got his four or five degrees, came home with student debt, and that's why he's there. And so, he just has no life—

TS: Trajectory right now?

SK: Anything. I mean, he's tried going to school—I mean, Wake Tech, and he tried this and tried that, and when your first two years are just like high school—you've got to take the Englishes, you've got to take the maths—I don't blame him. Why would you go?

TS: Right. Right.

SK: How exciting is that, because you've just left high school. And then my—And those two children, school is not their friend. Everything has been a struggle.

TS: Yeah.

SK: And, I mean, they try their best. They both have ADHD [attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder] really bad. Their focus—Teachers are great and they've gotten them—they got—Aaron graduated. Sierra has been—"You going to make it this semester? You going to make it this semester?" [both chuckle] They're just not good students so—

She, even now, doesn't—"I don't know want I want to do, mom." She's gone from communications to psychology.

I'm like, "Well, you've got to find a passion for something. Or at least go try it and then if that doesn't work try something else, instead of just, 'Oh, I don't know.'"

And then Trevor, who's an awesome student who could—whatever he would want to be he could—not that my other two wouldn't be good at it—but he's the only one—maybe he's using those two, but he's like, "Just because—"Why not? It was good enough for you guys."

TS: Okay. Would you support it if he wanted to go?

SK: Oh, I'd go sign him up at seventeen [both chuckle], like my dad did; proudly took me down to that center, "Sure."

TS: Well, how do you think your life has been different because you joined the navy? Has it been, do you think?

SK: I'm who I am, obviously, because of that. Values, morals, integrity; I think all of that came from the navy. I might have got there. I might have had some from my parents. But it's all I knew, and it makes me the person I am.

TS: Yeah. Well, what does patriotism mean to you?

SK: At one point I believed everybody should be in the military, like—Is it Russia that does the first two years you have to go? Or the British? Britain you have to go, like a conscript, is that the word?

TS: Some places I think, yeah.

SK: Just give to your country, and then come back and support your country. To me patriotism is—true patriotism is enlisting, whatever that would be for somebody. Do your time for your country. And then if you don't want to, fine, but find a way to support them in any fashion you can, I guess. Whether that's don't badmouth the military because, gosh, we've just been in Afghanistan too long, or that president made a poor decision in not sending the troops over. We all do decisions when we see that and it's, like, we don't have the whole picture. I think they should not knock it. I hear a lot of negative stuff lately, and I don't know if that's because, like I said, our vision to America and other people is Afghanistan for eleven years, twelve years. We're not that go, kick ass, come back, life is good, we're patriots, and we got the support behind us from the country. And I've even noticed establishments not doing much for veterans anymore.

TS: What's not?

SK: Establishments; like, discounts.

TS: Oh, okay.

SK: Something little like that.

TS: Yeah.

SK: But, like, Harris Teeter, which is a grocery store, okay?

TS: Sure.

SK: They actually have a spot—first spot where they usually have pregnant moms' spots, and it's for veterans. That says a lot, that they support them.

TS: Well, have you had to use any veterans administrative—

SK: I've not had to fight that battle, and I follow it in the news, and I'm ashamed of how it—how it's—how they're treating our people.

TS: But you haven't personally had any—

SK: No. I am fortunate that because I got a second job—or a job coming out of the military that has benefits. And we have TRICARE, which a lot of people still badmouth TRICARE, but—

[TRICARE, formerly known as the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS), was a health care program of the United States Department of Defense Military Health System. It was disestablished on 1 October 2013]

TS: That's a health insurance?

SK: Yeah. It's—

TS: Because you're retired you're able to get that?

SK: Yes.

TS: Would you do it all again?

SK: Yeah, I would.

TS: Yeah?

SK: Yes.

TS: Oh, you did answer that before.

SK: I did.

TS: Except for maybe not get out.

SK: Unless you were trying to catch me on something. [chuckles]

TS: No, I'm not, I'm not. I just forgot I asked you.

SK: I mean, again, just the big thing of, I'm who I am I think because of that, and I met good people.

TS: Yeah. Well, I don't have any more formal questions, but is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to mention, or sum up something you'd like to say?

SK: We covered a lot. I'm going hoarse. [chuckling]

TS: Yeah, I know, you talked a lot.

SK: I probably can't. This went better than I thought. It was fun. It was good. Good information.

TS: It was fun. I enjoyed it.

SK: Yeah. And I hope people read it.

TS: Yeah, I do too. Well, thank you, Shelley. I'll go ahead and shut off the tape.

SK: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]