WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Bridgid Kathleen MacSeóin

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 21 March 2016

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is March 21. My name is Therese Strohmer. I'm actually at [Walter Clinton] Jackson Library here in Greensboro to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. And I'm with Bridgid Mac—excuse me, Bridgid MacSeóin. Bridgid, how would you like your name to read on your collection?

BM: Bridgid Kathleen MacSeóin.

TS: Okay. Well, Bridgid, why don't we go ahead by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born.

BM: Okay. I was born on the sixteenth of December, 1957, and I was born in Riverside, California. My father at the time was stationed at March Air Force Base, which was part of Strategic Air Command, and so that was where I started my life, in California.

TS: In California. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

BM: Yes, there were five of us growing up. My oldest sister, Patsy, was actually born in London in 1939.

TS: Okay.

BM: My brother, Daniel, was born in Sheringham, Norfolk, in England. He was born in February of 1953. My sister, Colleen, was also born in Sheringham in Norfolk, in July 1955. Then I'm the only Yank [Yankee] in the family.

TS: I guess so. Well, how do you feel about that? [both chuckle]

BM: I tease my sisters and brother a lot because they were all born in England. I forgot my baby sister, Kerry, came after me, and she was born in South Ruislip, just outside of London.

TS: Okay, so you did really get—

BM: Yeah. She was born in February 1959. And so, all my family were born, and my mother was born in Ireland, and my dad and I are the only Yanks; my dad was born in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania].

TS: [chuckles] You're the only Yanks. There you go. What did your mom do while you were all growing up?

BM: My mom was a nurse, and she started out—she was born in Ireland in 1919. She was born in a town called Thurles in Tipperary. She left there—Well, actually my grandfather was a cattle drover; he'd also fought in the Irish Civil War; he was on the IRA [Irish Republican Army] side. And he then moved to a town called Charleville in County Cork and that's where my mother grew up.

TS: Okay.

BM: She left there when she was maybe fourteen—fourteen years old—just like all of her—

TS: A young girl.

BM: Yeah, all of her brothers and sisters all left Ireland because of economic reasons primarily. She moved to London, she got a job as a ladies' maid, and she worked for the Marques d'Erlanger [Baron Frédéric Alfred d'Erlanger?] and they lived in a beautiful big house. You can still see it on Google Maps.

TS: Oh, can you?

BM: Rutland Gate, in a really posh part of London. She'd lived actually on Warwick Avenue. And my Aunt Babs who I'm named after, my Aunt Babs worked for the composer Sir Lennox [Randal Francis] Berkeley, and they lived on Warwick at Sixth Avenue during the war. And so, I don't know whether that's how my mom got the job as a ladies' maid, or what the connection was.

TS: Some kind of connection?

BM: Yeah.

TS: Networking sort of thing.

BM: Right, yeah.

TS: So she was there during the Blitz and everything?

[The Blitz was the name used by the British press to describe heavy German air raids carried out over Britain in 1940 and 1941, during the Second World War]

BM: Yes, and there were quite a few bombs that fell nearby Warwick Avenue. I looked at a map—they have an online map, interactive map—where you can actually plug in an address and it shows you each individual bomb strike during the Blitz.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

BM: And it's just like a huge blotch of red. It's just amazing how much was done there. But, yeah, then she left ladies' maid service and she went into nursing—she did some nursing trainin—and there's a very long convoluted history about my mom. I don't know if you want to get into that or not.

TS: You can talk about it if you want. What do you mean by "long convoluted history?"

BM: Just that we found out many, many things that we didn't know. I was doing family research.

TS: Is your mother still alive?

BM: No, no. My mother and father both passed. But my mother originally married my sister Patsy's father and he was from northern Ireland, from Belfast, and his name was John Crilley[?]. Then shortly after that they divorced—we think—and then she married—

TS: [chuckles] Ah, okay.

BM: —and then she married an American serviceman who was in the Normandy invasion. His name was Jimmy Cooney. He was, funnily enough, also from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They married in London. They met at the Rainbow Club in London, which was one of the Red Cross areas that were set up.

[In November 1942, Rainbow Corner opened as the American Red Cross Club in London, and offered recreation, first aid, and sightseeing tours, among other things, for American servicemen in the U.K.]

TS: That used, like, the [unclear].

BM: Where the GI's could come in and just relax; dance and drink and all that kind of good stuff. And my mother was a volunteer there with the Red Cross and that's where she met Jimmy Cooney. They married in Devon [England]. He was down in Devon practicing for the Normandy invasions, although that was secret at the time.

TS: Right.

BM: We only found out afterwards. My mother took the train from Paddington Station in London, took the train down to Devon, and they married and then he left. He was killed unfortunately.

TS: Oh my goodness.

BM: Not on the original invasion. He survived the beaches of Normandy.

[The Invasion of Normandy occurred on 6 June 1944 when western allies of World War II launched the largest amphibious invasion in history in Normandy, on the northern coast of France]

TS: The landings.

BM: Yeah, he was killed in [Battle of] Saint-Lô in July of 1940—

TS: Forty-one?

BM: No, no, no.

TS: Forty-two.

BM: No, no, no.

TS: Forty-four.

BM: Forty-four. And so, he was killed in July of '44, but my mother didn't find out until December.

[The Battle of Saint-Lô is one of the three conflicts in the Battle of the Hedgerows, which took place between 9-24 July 1944. After the Invasion of Normandy, the Americans targeted the city, as it served as a strategic crossroads]

TS: Oh.

BM: And then she met my father when she went back to Pittsburgh to meet her first—her second husband's [unclear].

TS: Oh, you're kidding. Really? Did he know of this other man?

BM: Yeah.

TS: Oh, he did? Okay.

BM: Although they had met—correction—they had met in London, because my dad was also in Lon—in England. He was a tail gunner on B-17s.

TS: Okay.

BM: And he was at that time flying out with the 100th Bomb [Bombardment] Group in [Royal Air Force] Thorpe Abbotts. And so, he did some liberty in London and they had met at the—at the Rainbow Club in London as well.

TS: Your dad and your mom had.

BM: Yeah.

TS: When she was married?

BM: This would have been—Yes, this would have been before she was married.

TS: Okay. Interesting. That is very interesting. You're growing up in Riverside, but it doesn't sound like you stayed there very long.

BM: Three months.

TS: You were born in Riverside.

BM: Yeah, I was three months old when we made—for me—it was my first transcontinental journey and then a transatlantic journey. So we drove from Riverside, California—this would have been December, January, or February of 1958—drove all the way across to New York, and my mother's oldest sister, my Aunt Maisie, lived in Brooklyn, and I think we stayed a night or two with her and her eleven children.

TS: Oh my goodness.

BM: [chuckles] And then we caught a navy ship from the port in New York, and the navy ship was the USS *Butner*—the *General Butner* [USS *General H. W. Butner*]

TS: Butner?

BM: B-U-T-N-E-R. And then we took that across to Southampton [England], and we arrived at Southampton; I believe it would have been at the end of March 1958.

TS: Okay.

BM: So that was my—

TS: So you were just a baby.

BM: Yeah, just a little—but funny enough, my very first actual memory is coming from that time aboard ship.

TS: Really?

BM: For the longest time when I was a kid I always had this picture of being carried and seeing that metal frame that you see where you have to step through— the navy doorways have metal frames.

TS: Oh, right.

BM: You have to step over them and it's the same at the top.

TS: For flood control they have to close the compartments and things so you've got like a—

BM: Exactly. It's like an oval shape I think.

TS: Right.

BM: And for the longest time I would always have this vision of being carried through this type of doorway with the metal—not the one below, I saw the one above.

TS: Right.

BM: And I mentioned it to my mom maybe when I was twelve, thirteen. She says, "Well, that was probably when we were on this navy ship."

TS: Wow, that's a very early memory.

BM: It is, yeah.

TS: Your dad was in the air force, correct?

BM: He was. Yeah, he started in the Army Air Corps.

TS: Army Air Corps.

BM: Army air forces, and then when the war ended he came back in and joined the air force.

TS: He was stationed in England?

BM: He was. Well, he started off in November 1943; he was in North Africa and he was flying with the 15th Air Force, the 419th Bomb Squadron, again as a tail gunner on B-17s. And then for some reason at that period during the war they wanted to do a comparison between the bombing missions from one air force to another numbered air force, and so my father's crew was selected to transfer from the North Africa unit over to England, which was the 8th Air Force, and he ended up in the 418th Bomb Squadron in the 100th Bomb Group at Thorpe Abbotts. And then he flew a total—From what we can reckon, his total mission count, combining North Africa and England, was fifty missions.

TS: Oh my goodness.

BM: And I've got his Lucky Bastard [Club] certificate from the 100th Bomb Group.

[The Lucky Bastard Club began among American Bombardment Groups in England during World War II. Its purpose was to recognize those who had flown into enemy territory a prescribed number of times, hit their targets and managed to get back to England while being targeted by anti-aircraft fire and swarms of Luftwaffe fighters. Each Bombardment Group created their own unique certificates]

TS: Oh, yeah.

BM: He flew—They showed thirty-five missions with the 100th Bomb Group.

TS: That's a lot of missions.

BM: He flew the first daylight bombing raid over Berlin, and that would have been in March—sixth of March 1944.

TS: You've got a lot of details.

BM: Yeah.

TS: That's interesting. Now, you're a young girl. Did you stay in England for most of your time growing up?

BM: We did. My dad kind of just kept hopping back and forth. We'd do four years in England, then he'd have to go to the States. We'd spend a couple of years in the States, back to England, and that was just our pattern.

TS: To go back and forth? Well, what was that like? You didn't know any different, right?

BM: Right.

TS: What was it like? Did you enjoy moving or was it tough leaving friends?

BM: It was—When you're young—when you're very, very young—I don't think it makes as much of an impact on you. Now, once I got into my teen years it was different. But it was just—That was normal; that's what we did; that's what all of our friends did. You just know that you're going to pack up and leave in a of couple years. Some people left every two years. We were fortunate; my dad usually stayed three to four years at each assignment. And because I had brothers and sisters, you had, like, people to hang around and play with even in a new location until you made your own friends.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Right. Some of them were a lot older than you, too, though.

BM: Yeah, that's true.

TS: What are your memories of that time, like, say, when you're a young girl and you're going through grade school? Do you remember any games you played, what you liked to do?

BM: We spent a lot of time outside. We didn't—I don't remember—Well, even if we'd had television—and I don't think we did when we were very young—but even then we would have been in England, and so the television just wasn't on. There was only, at that time, maybe two or three channels and they were only on from, like, 4:00 in the afternoon until 10:00 p.m. or something. So you spent a lot of time playing outside, playing with my brother and my two sisters. My older sister had left by then. We traveled quite a bit. Actually, my oldest sister, Patsy, was also a nurse; my mother was a nurse and Patsy was a nurse. Patsy did her training in London, and she would, when we were stationed at Upper Heyford [Royal Air Force Upper Heyford, England]—this would have been in the late fifties, early sixties—she'd come up, pick us up, bring us back to London, take us on trips, go and see London Zoo, and different sights.

TS: So you got to do a lot.

BM: Yeah.

TS: Because it's a lot closer to travel in Europe, especially, than some places in the United States; you have to drive a lot further.

BM: And because we were close to Ireland my mother would take us back home, so we'd see my grandparents in Ireland as much as we could.

TS: Was there a particular place that you enjoyed going to over others?

BM: I just loved going to Ireland.

TS: Did you?

BM: And especially I loved taking the ferry; the ferry was just the most exciting thing you could imagine. And, well, there'd be a train journey, and then you'd catch the ferry. Usually we would go over from the south of Wales and into Waterford, and then another train taking us in to Charleville where my grandparents lived. And I can still remember seeing my grandfather; we were looking out the window and he's pacing up and down on the platform waiting for his American grandchildren to show up.

TS: Waiting for them to come.

BM: And he'd parade us around town because we were the Yanks.

TS: Right.

BM: He was just so proud that he had all these grandkids.

TS: Well, how nice. Now, how about schooling; did you enjoy schooling?

BM: Oh, yeah. We—Now, we went to very—primarily Department of Defense dependent schools and Catholic schools, so dependent on our location.

TS: Wherever you were?

BM: Right, yeah. So me personally, I started school in California, again, funny enough. I started school—We were then stationed at Vandenberg Air Force Base and I started in the Department of Defense school on base at Vandenberg; kindergarten. I remember vividly when [U.S. President] John F. [Fitzgerald] Kennedy was killed, because we were in school and they told us we all had to go home, and so we all went home, and I remember walking in—myself and my baby sister, Kerry—and we walked in and my mother was in front of the television just weeping. And I remember what she said, she said, "They killed him." She used that plural, "They killed him." And so, that's always stayed with me, just that—seeing my mother—it's the first time I think I'd ever seen her cry, actually.

[President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on Friday, 22 November 1963, while riding in a motorcade in Dallas' Dealey Plaza]

TS: Yeah.

BM: And seeing her crying and knowing very vaguely that we were proud of John Kennedy because he was Irish, and I remember seeing his—my grandparents in Ireland had a photo—a John Kennedy photo; it was like those obligatory photos that you have in Irish houses. Yeah, that was in California. So that was dependent school, and then we went to

Catholic school, it was La Purisima [Catholic School] [Lompoc, California], also there in Vandenberg; Lompoc-Vandenberg area.

We then moved from California. We moved to Colorado to a very tiny little bombing range in the southeast corner of Colorado, a town called La Junta, and it's close to Pueblo, but that's—We were very few military families; there were maybe—on the bombing range maybe ten to fifteen military personnel assigned. And we stayed there for about four years. So I went through Catholic school there; it was Saint Patrick's in La Junta. And then from there—let's see—we moved back to California again, and then we went back to another Catholic school in—back to Vandenberg again. And then from Vandenberg, we left in 1968, and that was when my father was assigned to Bolling Air Force Base [Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, Washington, DC].

And we—this was, again, a funny thing—we left California—we were driving—we left California on the day that Robert [Francis] Kennedy was shot.

[On 5 June 1968, presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was fatally shot shortly after winning the California presidential primaries during the 1968 elections]

TS: Oh.

BM: And we drove to Washington, D.C., and that's where we were staying in billeting [assigned], and my mother took us down Constitution Avenue—I believe we were on Constitution Avenue—for his funeral procession as it came through.

TS: Do you remember doing that?

BM: Oh, vividly remember that, yeah. And my mother had made sure we had our—back then, the Catholic church, the women still wore veils; it was starting to go out but we still wore our veils. And she just said when the funeral procession went by that we'd bowed our heads and blessed ourselves.

TS: Give the sign of the cross.

BM: Yeah.

TS: Oh my. You had some intersections of some significant moments in history for sure.

BM: Right, yeah.

TS: Let me ask you about your schooling. Did you have a favorite teacher, a favorite subject?

BM: Yes. English. I was—I loved writing, I loved reading, so just anytime that I could get a book or any time I could write. And I used to write little songs and poems and things like that. The first teacher that I remember was my third grade teacher, Mrs. Healey, and that was at the Catholic school in—that would have been La Purisima; Mrs. Healey. Then the

next teacher that I remember having a big impact was in Landover, Maryland, when we were stationed in D.C., and her name was Mrs. Warsinger, and she's the one who really encouraged me with, "You should write. You've got a way with this. You should keep it up."

And then we left Washington, D.C., Bolling Air Force Base, Landover, Andrews [Joint Base Andrews, Maryland], that area, and went to England again.

TS: Okay. Is that when you were in high school?

BM: No, this was still elementary.

TS: Still elementary.

BM: I'd just finished sixth grade.

TS: Okay.

BM: So this was 1970 and we went to RAF [Royal Air Force Base] Mildenhall [Suffolk]—my dad was stationed at Mildenhall—and I started junior high school, and we went to a junior high school at another RAF base called RAF Feltwell [Norfolk].

TS: What was the name of that base?

BM: RAF Feltwell.

TS: Feltwell, okay.

BM: Yes. And at Feltwell, another teacher that really, really affected me was Mr. Tavernelli, and again, he was an English—back then the teachers did a lot of different studies, but he was really strongly interested in my skills in English. I remember getting the Most Improved English Student [award] and I was just thrilled to bits about that.

TS: You enjoyed reading and writing. How about math or sciences?

BM: No.

TS: None of those?

BM: Not at all.

TS: Now, were you physically active, besides just running around playing?

BM: Yeah, we did play some sports; we played softball. But mainly it was just hanging out; I just did a whole lot of hanging out. [chuckles]

TS: Having fun?

BM: And it was a difference in culture, really, because we're American kids but we're in England, but we're on this little plot of land that's like all other Americans. And at that time, we were in the Department of Defense school; the RAF Feltwell was part of the Department of Defense school system. So we're on the—just when you think about it, we're on a RAF—an old RAF base that had been built in, like, the twenties and thirties, but we're American, but we're in England, and so—but we're also kind of—that English culture's also seeping in because many of us had mothers—at that time mostly mothers—who were either English or Irish or French or German.

TS: Oh, really?

BM: So it's all of that kind of post-World War II to early Cold War—that kind of cultural atmosphere that's going on in Europe.

TS: Interesting.

BM: Yeah.

TS: So I guess you had a different kind of world view even as a young girl because of this intermingling of cultures and continents.

BM: Yeah, definitely, and also just a lot of questions about who are you, really.

TS: Yeah.

BM: And where do you really belong.

TS: Did you have those questions as a young girl?

BM: Yeah.

TS: You did?

BM: Especially when we—I think when I got into junior high school, and then you start forming closer relationships with your friends at school, and that's when it became more difficult. You're dreading dad coming home and saying, "Hey, we got orders. We're going to such-and-such." And usually it's an exciting thing, and then it's kind of, like, "I don't want to leave."

TS: Right.

BM: So there's—We call ourselves "brats"—"military brats"—and there's a thing within the brat culture of having this longing for a sense of a real home, but that's a bit elusive, and so you don't really put down roots; you move a lot but you're not putting down roots. So I think many of us—something that I did, anyway—was I latched on to my mother's

culture and the idea of being Irish, and I did a lot of studying about Irish history and looking into our family in Ireland.

[a "military brat" is slang for a child whose parent or parents serve full time in the military]

TS: So as a way to have a sense of belonging to something and somewhere; a place.

BM: Right. And because all of our time—We spent so much time in England, and my mother's brothers and sisters had—all except for her youngest brother, Eamonn, who moved to Australia—they were all in different parts of England so we'd go and visit. My Uncle Sean and Aunt Nancy were up in Manchester, and Aunt Babs and Uncle Dick were in London, and my uncle Jimmy was originally Portsmouth, Southampton, then he moved to Peterborough, so we had family in that area and I—

TS: Was your mother an English citizen?

BM: No, she was Irish.

TS: She was Irish.

BM: She was Irish, yes.

TS: So the identity then—It's interesting because your father's American, your mother's Irish, but you've spent so much of your time in England—

BM: Exactly, yes.

TS: —and the identity's really not connected there, right?

BM: In fact, if anything, it's that belligerence. It's like Irish/English.

TS: That's right. I was wondering about that too. You said IRA for your grandfather, right?

BM: Yes, that's right. He was—Well, back in—He was in the civil war in Ireland which was after the Easter Rising, which, actually, we're coming up on the one hundredth anniversary.

[The Easter Rising, also known as the Easter Rebellion, was an armed insurrection in Ireland during Easter week, 24-29 April 1916. The Rising was launched by Irish republicans to end British rule in Ireland and establish an independent Irish Republic]

TS: Right.

BM: So it was after the Easter Rising. He was in—Let me get this right—A Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Tipperary Brigade in the Irish Volunteers, which was—then became the Irish Republican Army, and they were fighting against the Free Staters. So if you ever saw the *Michael Collins* film, it was that—the Éamon de Valera side and then the Michael Collins side.

[Free Stater, or pro-Treatyite, is a term often used by opponents to describe those in Ireland who supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 that led to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922]

TS: I have not seen that in a while. I'll have to go look it up.

BM: So whenever we'd go back to Ireland I'd hear my grandfather telling these stories and then he'd point to people as we walked through town and—like, "Oh, he was a Free Stater." And it was like—so I just instinctively knew Free Stating was bad. [both chuckle] Because my granddad was the good guy.

TS: Right. Exactly. You've got to stay with family.

BM: And, of course, I often—I wish—I really wish that I'd spent more time talking to my grandfather about those times, getting more firsthand stories. So most of my stories are what my aunts and my uncles and my mother have told me.

TS: [What they] remember from him.

BM: But I do know that he had a deep and abiding hatred of England. And we finally got him to come to England. He made one trip to England in his life and we got him to come—this would have been 1971, around there; 1971. He was born in 1886 and he made his first trip to England—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: He was much older.

BM: He made his first trip to England in 1971. And he thought there were snakes everywhere. [both chuckle]

TS: Snakes, as in real live snakes?

BM: Real snakes. Yeah, we'd walk through the woods and he'd see a stick or a tree limb down and, "Snake, snake!" [both chuckle]

TS: Well, let me ask you about your high school years. Where did you end up spending those, or were they split up at different places?

BM: We were at RAF Mildenhall from 1970 until January 1974, so I went through all of my junior high school. Back then it was junior high: seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. And then I started my high school at Lakenheath American High School, which is—There's a few bases, RAF Mildenhall, RAF Lakenheath, and RAF Feltwell, all within maybe a ten-mile range of each other. And so, Lakenheath; I spent the first six months of my high school career at RAF Lakenheath.

TS: And then where did you spend the rest of it?

BM: That was it.

TS: That was the first six months, and then what happened?

BM: Then we went to Hampton—we got the dreaded orders—and I remember just how traumatic that was because I was settling in, I had great friends, had discovered music, used to hitchhike to Cambridge. Like, almost every weekend we'd hitchhike to Cambridge, and there was a place called the Cambridge Corn Exchange [popular music and arts venue] and we'd see bands just every weekend. This was the early seventies so these were like these iconic rock bands and I was just [unclear]—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Right. But you didn't know it at the time, right?

BM: No. They were just—Who's playing? I don't care. We're just going. But, yeah, I mean, we saw bands like AC/DC and Hawkwind and Thin Lizzy and—oh, I can just go on and on.

TS: So there's the counterculture movement going on even in England at that time. Were you connected to that at all? How old would you have been then?

BM: We—Let's see. We left England when I was fifteen—yeah, late—between my fifteenth and sixteenth year we went to Hampton, Virginia; Langley Air Force Base.

TS: Okay.

BM: But during that time from when I was, like, probably fourteen to fifteen years old I really just discovered all of this stuff going on out in the world that was—partially from my

older brother; he was very interested in music and hashish. [both chuckle] So there was that whole scene that was going on.

TS: So the music and drug culture.

BM: Right, yeah.

TS: When you moved back to Virginia, what was the atmosphere like there?

BM: For me personally it was terrible. We went to Hampton High School and checked in the first day that we—we checked in the first day of school. I went to one class and I remember being teased and ridiculed about how I was dressed, because I was dressed the way we were dressing out in, kind of, like, little American England there.

TS: Right. How was it different? What was the dress like? What did you have on that was so controversial?

BM: I had on a flannel shirt—plaid flannel shirt, probably a t-shirt underneath, and patched jeans—Levi's or patched jeans—and probably some chukka boots, and that was it. I think I was also fairly androgynous looking.

TS: Okay.

BM: And I do remember hearing, "Is that a boy or a girl?" kind of thing.

TS: Really?

BM: Yeah. And so, I didn't go back.

TS: No?

BM: I think there was also this sense, too, that everybody seemed to know each other. It was a civilian high school. It wasn't a Department of Defense school, it wasn't a Catholic school, it was a big—I mean, huge. I'd never seen so many teenagers in one place at one time, and I got scared off. I was still feeling very sad about leaving all my friends in England. I don't know who convinced who, but my baby sister Kerry—one class year behind me—we both just said, "We're not doing this." So we'd catch the school bus, we'd get off the school bus, we would hitchhike to the Coliseum Mall in Hampton, and we would hang out at the mall all day bumming quarters off people, playing the pinball machines.

TS: Yeah.

BM: My sister [Colleen—BM added later] worked at the mall. We'd go in and she'd buy us, like, a donut or something, and then we'd get back to school, catch the school bus, go home.

TS: How long did you do that?

BM: The entire school year.

TS: Are you kidding me?

BM: I'm not kidding.

TS: Oh, my goodness. [both chuckle] So when the grades came, what happened then?

BM: There was—

TS: Nothing.

BM: Nothing.

TS: How the heck did you get away with it?

BM: I have—To this day I have no idea. I don't know whether my parents were just not paying attention, not interested.

TS: Right.

BM: I honestly don't know.

TS: So what was the outcome of that? You never went back to high school?

BM: No. We—Then my father retired at Langley Air Force Base in 19—January of seventy—it would have been '75. I think he retired in '75, and then he said, "None of my family is happy here; we're going back to England." So we packed up and we moved back to England. And so, we got to England and I said, "Great, now I can go back to *my* high school."

TS: Right.

BM: RAF Lakenheath High School. And then we found out, unfortunately, that you had to pay when you were retired.

TS: Oh.

BM: And we really—my parents just didn't have enough money to send my sister and I back to high school, so I was like, "That's fine."

TS: So you never finished?

BM: Never finished high school, no. In fact, I started taking college courses in England before somebody at the education center said, "You know, you really need to at least get a GED [General Education Diploma] or something."

TS: Which education center said that?

BM: At RAF Mildenhall.

TS: Did they?

BM: Yeah.

TS: Did you work on that?

BM: I did. I was working on it at the Galaxy NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] Club at RAF Mildenhall. So I started there in 1975 and I worked there from 1975 until I joined the air force in 1981. There was just one little gap when I went back to Ireland for close to a year. So I worked there as a—I started out as a busgirl, and then I moved up to being a waitress, and then I went into the cashier's cage and did barback [term for a bartender's assistant] for a little while, so yeah.

TS: Well, Bridgid, you did not strike me as someone who's going to skip school for a year. That really shocked me. And you present it in such a non-melodramatic way. [both chuckle] Are you pretty good at pinball, then?

BM: Oh, I was a wizard at pinball, I really was. Yeah, I had skills.

TS: I bet you were, you had a lot of practice. Now, your older sister knew about it too?

BM: Yeah.

TS: The one working at the mall?

BM: Yeah. She'd graduated from Lakenheath in 1973, and funny enough, she graduated with my future husband, which I didn't know at the time, but.

TS: That's interesting too.

BM: So she graduated in '73, and my brother graduated from Lakenheath in '71.

TS: Okay.

BM: But, yeah. And she knew, and she was just—I think she just kind of said, "Well, it's better, at least, I know where you're at."

TS: True, I guess. She had some control, I guess, or knowledge, is a better word. Alright, you're working at the NCO Club. Are you thinking about, "What am I going to do with my life," or any of that?

BM: Not at all.

TS: No? Of course not.

BM: [chuckles]

TS: Are you involved in the counterculture still?

BM: Oh, yeah, we were—I was so glad to get back to England, back to the music. It was Cambridge, the Corn Exchange, but then also we'd do all of the summer big music festivals. There was Reading Music Festival, Knebworth [Festival], just—We'd go down to London to, like, a big football stadium and see bands there. That's what I really thought, "That's all I'm going to do now, is just like—"

TS: Working to play?

BM: Yeah, work; earn enough money so I can go to all the concerts that I can fit in.

TS: Well, at what point did you get married, because you said you were married before you went into the air force?

BM: Yes, my husband, Bernard, also attended Lakenheath High School, although he was born in France. His parents were both French but his mother remarried an American GI. She left him in France after she married, and she went back to the States, and so he was raised by his grandmother in a town called Châteauroux, which is about, maybe, a hundred-something kilometers south of Paris in central France.

TS: Okay. And south of Paris, alright.

BM: Yes. And so, he grew up there until he was about, I think, fifteen, and then his mother's husband got orders to Vietnam, because she'd married an American GI. Got orders to Vietnam, and so his mother sent him over to her in Texas; Del Rio, Texas. And then when her husband got orders they went to a place in Salina, Kansas, which the military at that time were setting up these bases just for families of soldiers and airmen who were in Vietnam.

TS: Really? I wasn't aware of that.

BM: Yes, and so they all lived—There were no husbands; it was all just the moms and the kids all in a big housing area.

TS: Did they have to volunteer to go there, do you know?

BM: I don't know. And actually I just picked up a book that someone has written about one of the women who was there, it's called *Waiting Wives*, and so I'm going to find out what was the deal here, because Bernie doesn't remember; he's, like, not interested.

TS: Not interested or whatever. So where did you meet and decide to get married?

BM: We met in the Bird In Hand, which was a pub just off the base. I'd known—I'd kind of seen him around. He was just kind of like this exotic—and everybody's like, "He's French. He's this French guy." And he had beautiful long, curly hair, and he wore this really lovely fringe jacket, and I just thought he was wonderful. And I wasn't much of a dater in high school. I had a couple boyfriends but I was never really that much into it. But I just fell for him. And so, this was—We started dating on my sister's twenty-first birthday party—we had a big, huge party in this old house in Barton Mills[?]—so it would have been the fourth of July of 1976. That would have been the year I should have graduated from high school.

TS: Right.

BM: I still call him my high school sweetheart.

TS: Yeah, well, I guess so, in some ways, right?

BM: Yeah, we both—He went there in '73 when I was there; that one little bit of time that I was at high school he was there, too, so.

TS: So you have that connection.

BM: That's it.

TS: It's a very thin thread [both chuckle] but, okay, we'll roll with that.

BM: Yeah, make it work.

TS: Alright, so you get married. And then are you still thinking about, "Okay, I'm just in the music business here of playing?"

BM: Well, we started dating the fourth of July 1976, and then in—Guy Fawkes Day is the fifth of November, which is a big fireworks display in England where they're celebrating—Guy Fawkes had tried to blow up Parliament and all of this. So we met on the fourth of July, started dating, and then he broke up with me on the fifth of November.

TS: Oh?

BM: And then Bernie went back to France. And then a few months later I got a call from my cousin saying that our grandfather was very ill in Ireland and could I come over to Ireland

with her. And so, I talked to my parents and they said, "Yeah, go ahead." I was, like, eighteen, I guess, at that time. So my cousin, Liz, from Manchester—Liz Kavanagh—she and I took the train up to Manchester, then we got the ferry over to Ireland, and then we hitchhiked from Dublin to Charleville, and we stayed and tried to take care of my grandfather, but he had been put in hospital at this time and he never recovered. He had severe kidney failure and some other issues. He was, like, ninety-six—ninety-four—somewhere around there, yeah. So then we stayed for a little while and tried to find work. We worked at the cheese factory in Charleville. I worked for one day; I couldn't stand the smell. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, the cheese. Really? Pretty potent.

BM: Yeah. And then my mother came over for the funeral and she said, "Let's just—Why don't you just come back home." And so, I went back home. And then Bernie, at the same time, came back from France, and we met in the library on base, and of course I was sliding books out of the way to try to get a better look at him, and then he got up and moved, and I slid another book and he was right looking at me, so. And that was it. And that was October of '77.

TS: So the next year.

BM: No, we got married in 1980.

TS: No, I mean the next year of when you caught back up again.

BM: Yeah. It was about a year.

TS: So 1980 you got married. At what point did you decide to join the air force?

BM: When we ran out of money. [both chuckle]

TS: Okay.

BM: Because I was still working at the Galaxy Club and Bernie was working at the bowling alley over at RAF Lakenheath, and we had mortgaged—got a mortgage on this tiny little—they call them caravans in England, mobile homes over here. It's just a tiny little single-wide little caravan, and it was seventy-five pounds a month for the mortgage, but we couldn't afford that and food and keeping it heated and all that. So Bernie went to see if he could join up—he was a French citizen still, French passport—and they told him he couldn't join in a foreign country, he would have to travel to the United States before he could join up. And then I said, "Well, why don't I give it a try?"

And so, I wandered into the recruiter's office and he said, "Okay, what do you know? What do you want to do?" And there was—We talked about this a few days ago.

TS: But pretend like we didn't because the transcriber and anybody listening doesn't know what we talked about. [both chuckle]

BM: So also at that time I had met a lot of linguists who were stationed there at Mildenhall and I was really interested in the work that they were doing, and so the recruiter says, "Is there anything that you're interested in?"

I said, "Well, I think I'd like to be a Russian linguist."

And he said, "Okay," and he said, "Those jobs are open," and so I signed up to be a Russian linguist. I did delayed enlistment program, so it was six months between the time that I signed up until I actually went.

That's another funny story because we decided to go back to France one time before we were leaving, and so we got on the plane, flew over to Charles De Gaulle Airport, and I had a bad habit of never carrying a purse, and all we had was cash; we didn't have credit cards back then. So all my cash was in a pocket of my sweater, and we got off the plane and I realized that somebody had taken all of our cash; I mean, every penny. [chuckles] So we're at this big airport in Paris, and I sold a little canister of film—I was a photographer—I sold a little canister of film and got a few francs, and Bernie made a phone call to his grandmother, and she said she could send somebody up, like, the next day on a train with some money or some things. I said, "That's not going to work."

So Bernie said, "Well, aren't you—You've enlisted now, right? Could we—The American Embassy could help."

I said, "Well, maybe." So we called the American Embassy, something got very, like mis—

TS: Misunderstood.

BM: —misconstrued, right. A marine colonel drove out to Charles De Gaulle and picked us up from the airport, and when he started calling me "airman" I was like, "Oh, okay." He had already booked us a hotel room in Paris, and then I remember we were in the hotel room and I got a phone call and they're saying, "We're having trouble tracking down your records at RAF Mildenhall. Who's your supervisor?"

I actually worked for a tech sergeant at the NCO [non-commissioned officer] Club, he was my supervisor, so I said, "Tech Sergeant So-and-so."

They said, "Okay."

And then I think it was about, maybe 1:00 in the morning, somewhere around there—1:00 or 2:00 in the morning—when the colonel called and said, "Do not leave the hotel. I'm coming to pick you up in the morning. Do not leave the hotel." And so, he came and he said, "You're not actually in the military, are you?"

And I said, "Well, technically [chuckles] it's not—" So he took me to the embassy, Bernie had to stay in the hotel as collateral—he couldn't leave [chuckles]—and we were very fortunate that my tech sergeant supervisor said, "I can send an advance on her paycheck and we'll just wire the money over." And it was maybe a hundred-something dollars but it was enough to get us out of Paris and down to Châteauroux.

TS: Very interesting. It's also interesting that they were willing to go through all that if you had been an airman.

BM: Yes.

TS: That's very interesting too.

BM: Yes. He was the military attaché; I wish I could remember his name. But he was a full bird colonel [military slang for the rank of colonel, O-6] in the Marine Corps and he was attached to the military attaché office in Paris.

TS: I'm going to go back a second to remember this point, but I want to ask you a question about services. When you decided to join, did you just consider only the air force?

BM: Yeah.

TS: That's it? You didn't even look at anything else because of your father's experience and what you knew about it.

BM: Yeah. And there was only—If I remember correctly, there was an air force recruiter, his name was Wild Bill Stolte—I remember his card; he had a card on his desk, Wild Bill Stolte—and he was in the air force—obviously an air force recruiter—and he had, like, maybe one or two brochures about the other branches, like, way over here somewhere.

TS: Pushed on to the side.

BM: Yeah. So I joined up right there in Mildenhall and it didn't even—I think even if I'd been aware of the other services in a deeper way I still think I probably would have picked air force.

TS: Why do you think that?

BM: Because of my dad.

TS: Yeah. You had a history and everything.

BM: Yeah.

TS: And your father did retire. What did he retire as?

BM: He did. He retired as a—Well, he made senior master sergeant but he didn't have enough time to put it on, so he technically retired as a master sergeant.

TS: Okay. So you out-ranked him when you retired?

BM: Yeah. [both chuckle]

TS: I see. Well, alright, so then you worked things out, apparently, with the air force to let you stay in the delayed enlisted program, I'm sure, right?

BM: Yeah.

TS: Was that any trouble?

BM: The recruiter actually left a message for me at—because I still worked at the Galaxy Club—to stop by and see him and he said, "Here's the deal."

TS: Right.

BM: "Here's what you are and here's what you're not; you haven't taken the oath," or whatever, "and you're not enlisted, you're not in the military yet. You're on—"

TS: [unclear] sign these papers.

BM: "We've got a contract with you but that's still—things can happen and the contract can be broken."

TS: Right.

BM: He said, "You're not an airman yet. You've got to get through basic training before you call yourself an airman."

TS: Well, then, I remember from our conversation earlier, when you were in basic training—Well, we'll get to that, I guess; what happened with your French husband.

BM: [chuckles]

TS: And how that worked out. So you were December of '81?

BM: December of 1981, got the call that there was a slot open, and so we got a—we took a Space Available hop, although I think we actually had—we had orders.

[Space Available Flight, more commonly referred to as Space-A travel or military hops, is a privilege afforded to military service members, their families, and service retirees, The system accommodates these passengers by letting them fill seats on Air Force air transport flights that would otherwise be left empty]

TS: Right. I'm sure.

BM: We had orders to go from Mildenhall, but we flew on a military aircraft; I think it was a 141 [Lockheed C-141 Starlifter]. Got on the 141 that flew from Mildenhall to McGuire [Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey], and then from McGuire we went on a commercial flight to Lackland [Air Force Base, Texas]

TS: Okay.

BM: Just a handful of us. I think it was, like, three or four of us who were all going to basic. I was the only woman. There was three guys and me, if I remember correctly.

TS: Tell me about basic training. How was that? How did you handle that?

BM: Fortunately, because I knew so many GIs on base I got a clue about what was the purpose of basic training, so I think I had an advantage there. Because they said, "What they're trying to do is teach you to—discipline and teaching you that you're now joining this other culture and these are the norms within our culture." And I was also familiar with rank, so I understood the uniforms, the rank, and so I had a little bit of a leg up there, but it was still a little bit of a shock, too, because I was not the most disciplined person. So it was a little bit of a shock to go from being pretty laid back and relaxed to regimented. Now, I was also older, so most of the women in my flight, some of them were seventeen, eighteen years old, nineteen, and I had my—let me do the math here—I celebrated my twenty-third birthday in basic. I was the old lady.

TS: Yeah, you were; twenty-three, sure.

BM: I think there was one air force reservist who was maybe a bit older than me, but I was the old lady.

TS: What part about going through the process of basic training was the most difficult, most challenging?

BM: I found it really easy. Now, we had a lot of—We had some issues within our flight. Our TI [training instructor] had chosen a certain person as a dorm chief, and unfortunately that person was not suited at all to be a dorm chief. And so, then she picked somebody else and that person also was not suited. And so, then she said, "Okay, we'll give you a try." So I became the dorm chief, like, after the third week. And I fit in. I understood, kind of, the role and actually enjoyed it. And I realized then how much I just liked people.

TS: Yeah.

BM: I think that's when I really became aware because I'd been—Sure, I had Irish family and American family and lived in England and—but we were still all fairly homogenous—a homogenous group—and that's when I realized in basic training we had people from all over the country, from all different backgrounds, and I just really liked them. I enjoyed being with them and talking and listening. I guess that's why I made a good dorm chief.

But I also learned that I had a really good skill for marching.

TS: Marching?

BM: Yes. [chuckles] Who knew?

TS: And apparently marksman, too, right?

BM: Yes.

TS: So even though it was a different culture for you to be in as far as regimented—

BM: Right.

TS: —the other part of the culture was really welcoming for you, right?

BM: Yes.

TS: So you got through basic. Now, you said there was a point in basic training where they came to you and said—Was it after you graduated or before you graduated, about your job?

BM: It was within the last week of basic training—I'm thinking a couple of days before maybe—within the last week anyway—and you get these notes and the technical instructor, the TI, had said, "You've got to go over to the CBPO—" I can't remember the name that they used for the one at Lackland but—"You have to go over to—" I think it was Consolidated Base Personnel Office. "You have to go over there, there's a problem with your job; the job that you're supposed to get." And several people had come in guaranteed—they were getting a guaranteed career field—other people would come in open—general or something.

TS: No selected particular occupations that they were going to do, right?

BM: Right, right. Yeah, they'd find out; during basic training they'd find out what they were qualified for.

TS: But you had signed up to be the—

BM: To be a Russian linguist, right, and then when we got to CB—there was actually me and another airman and she was supposed to go into air traffic control and there was some issue with her—with her career field as well, so the both of us went over there, and I was told, "We've broken our contract with you so you can get out. It's done. Or you can have one of these—these are the jobs that are open during this cycle while you're here at Lackland." And the two jobs were food service, which I'd been doing since I was fifteen years old, or small arms instructor. And I latched on to the instructor part.

I said, "I think I'd like to be a teacher."

TS: Okay.

BM: So that's how I chose it.

TS: Can you explain why your contract was broken?

BM: Right. What I was told is, because my husband wasn't an American citizen, that I wouldn't qualify. I couldn't get the Top Secret clearance. Now, I found out from other linguists afterwards that if you're—How do they say it?—if you get married after you've already been a linguist and you marry someone of foreign—foreign national—you can get the—

TS: Like a waiver of some sort?

BM: Right. But they—At that time they weren't letting people come in already married to a foreign national for a—

TS: They saw that as a risk.

BM: I guess, yeah.

TS: Because you're a spy, after all.

BM: Right, right. Exactly.

TS: You might have to spy on him. [chuckles]

BM: Yeah, yeah. So I didn't understand any of that. All I knew about the job was it sounded wonderful; learning another language and getting paid for it. And they told me all about Monterey, these other linguists, and "Oh, you're going to—You get to go to Monterey. You're going to love it." That's what I was—

TS: So instead of going to Monterey—

BM: I went to Lackland.

TS: You went to Lackland. You stayed in Lackland.

BM: I was a small arms instructor at—Lackland Air Force Base was where our basic training was, and I remember that too. It was the last day of basic, everybody's getting on their bus, and they're heading all over the United States for their training, and there was me and another airman who had become security forces—security police at the time—and we were the two; we were just left standing there with our bags. [both chuckle]

TS: Waiting for the taxi across base or something.

BM: Yeah, that's what it was; it was like a little taxi car, yeah.

TS: I had not asked you this before, but what did your mom and your dad think about you joining the air force? Even though you're already married and on your own. And your siblings as well.

BM: Yeah, my parents were still in England so I was still living at home before I got married. My brother had stayed in the United States when we were at Hampton; he never came back to England with us. My sister, Colleen, had left and gotten married, my sister Kerry had left and got married, and so I was still enjoying having my own room for the first time in years. And my parents actually—Bernie and I planned to get married in October of 1980, and my parents said, "Bridgid, we're leaving." [both chuckle] So they decided to go back to the States. And so it was like, "You need to either get married now or come back with us. What are you going to do?" So we moved our wedding date up and we got married on June 26 of 1980.

TS: So your parents were supportive of the idea of going into the air force.

BM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they were. I think my dad especially; he was very proud.

TS: How was the training to become a small arms instructor in 1982; probably that's when it was, right?

BM: Yes. Early '82.

TS: It seems like the women were probably a minority in that group.

BM: There were—Let's see. There was myself, Sye, there was a female lieutenant, Rosalyn Simmons[?]; there were four of us in the class.

TS: Out of how many?

BM: Maybe sixteen?

TS: So a quarter of you. How did you feel the training went for that?

BM: Oh, I loved it.

TS: Did you?

BM: Yeah, I did. I had never—I'd seen weapons, because the security forces carried them on base and you'd just see them, but I had never been associated—I'd never touched a weapon. Basic training—That ridiculous training they give you in basic.

TS: Why was it so ridiculous?

BM: Well, for me, I was the only left-handed person in my flight and they said, "Okay, here are all the positions," and they're showing all the right-handed positions.

And I raised my hand and said, "I'm left-handed."

The instructor, the red hat, said, "Okay, just go stand over there, we'll get to you in a minute." They never got to me.

So I'm trying to figure out what [chuckles]— [unclear] left-handed and copying— So I think I maybe hit the target four or five times through the whole course of fire. But then when I got into the training it was very, very good training; good instructors. They really cared and took a lot of time, and obviously knew if you were left or right-handed and showed you the right positions.

TS: Okay.

BM: And it was a lot more classroom than I'd expected.

TS: Was it?

BM: We did a lot of firing, but there was a lot of emphasis on instructing and how to be an instructor, how to present material. And I hadn't done any public speaking so it was a little bit stressful but it was also fun. It was a good bunch of—a good crew.

TS: What kind of weapons did you get to fire?

BM: We—At that time we fired everything that was in the inventory for small arms, so we did—There was a .38 revolver, we did the M16 [rifle] obviously, we did the [Remington] M870 shotgun, the M79 grenade launcher, and the M60 machine gun.

TS: And in all of that you enjoyed—

BM: I loved the machine gun.

TS: The machine gun.

BM: Oh, my goodness, yes. [both chuckle]

TS: Where was your first duty station as a small arms instructor?

BM: Howard Air Force Base in Panama.

TS: Okay. Are firearms instructors all throughout the country, then? Are they on every base?

BM: Yeah.

TS: They are? Okay.

BM: There should be—There's usually a range on every base. It was—I think at that time it was based on population. If it was, like, a small satellite unit they probably wouldn't have a small arms range, but every—

TS: Okay, so you ran the annual training and all that.

BM: Yes.

TS: Okay. And certification.

BM: Yeah.

TS: I see. Alright. So you're in Panama. They send you overseas right away, of course. How did you enjoy that assignment?

BM: It was a great assignment. I honestly wish that I had received that assignment later in my career so I could have appreciated how wonderful it was. [chuckles]

TS: Really?

BM: Because your first assignment in the air force kind of colors the way that you think about what the service is. Panama was very laid back. At that time we were one of the first group—I think they had a rank restriction in, like, the sixties and seventies. You had to be a sergeant or above to get orders to Panama, and so they—

TS: Why was that?

BM: I don't know, I just remember some—

TS: It was, like, a cush [cushy] job.

BM: Yeah, and I can't remember exactly, but I remember being told that they had—that previously there had been a restriction on what rank you were to get an assignment there. It was paradise; it was just beautiful. I mean, warm, warm weather.

TS: You didn't need to go to Monterey, then. [both chuckle]

BM: That was my payback.

TS: There you go. That's right.

BM: That was my consolation prize.

TS: So it was paradise. When you say your first base does an implant on you, or something along those lines, what did it plant on you then?

BM: Small career field; very small shop that we worked in. There was one—Let's see. When I got there it was Daddy Don [Technical Sergeant Don Perry—BM added later], Tony Blougouras. I think there was three or four of us; that was it.

TS: Just three or four.

BM: Four was our—Four was like—That was a big shock, when we had four people. So there was four of us there, yeah.

TS: What kind of shifts did you have to work?

BM: Just day shift.

TS: Day shift.

BM: Yeah, unless there was a large push for training or if we were doing, like, the machine gun training over at Empire Range; the army range. But normally, 7:00 [a.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.]; standard training day.

TS: So you had a lot of free time.

BM: We had a lot of free time, but we tended to just come in anyway because we enjoyed each other's company, and it was a good atmosphere. Now, when I first got the assignment it was a bit of a shock because we were expecting to be stationed in the States—because our original plan was that we'd get an assignment in the State—and Bernie had come over and he'd get his citizenship and then he'd join the military, and then I'd probably get out and he'd stay in.

TS: Oh, really? Was that the plan?

BM: That was the plan and then we ended up in Panama. So again he—

TS: He still couldn't join.

BM: —he can't join. We had a nice little—I say nice—We had an apartment on via Argentina in Panama City. Took me about six months to find a place to live, so Bernie was staying in England at that time and then he came over. I do—I think the biggest shock for me, apart from the weather—but it was just beautiful weather, just warm; there's rainy season, dry season—the other shock was just how many cockroaches there were.

TS: [chuckles]

BM: I was just dumbfounded by the number of cockroaches that could fit in one kitchen. It was just horrendous, really.

TS: Are those the ones that when they rub their wings together you can smell them?

BM: I don't remember smell, I just remember quantity; there was just so many of them. They'd be up on the top of your kitchen cabinets and you'd just see all these antennae just

waiting, and if you came in in the night and it had been dark and you hit the light switch the whole wall was just covered with cockroaches and they would just all scatter. It was just [unclear]. And they were in everything; vending machines, there'd be cockroaches running in and out.

TS: You're like, "I don't want that. Never mind."

BM: Yeah. Even your stereo unit. Back then it was the old stereo unit with the dial, and you'd see them running across the dial. And lots of weird bugs, not just cockroaches.

TS: So a trade-off to being to being in paradise was the cockroaches.

BM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: Interesting. You were there from '82 to '85, and so you really were there four years before we had the issue with the Panama Invasion later and stuff like that.

[The Invasion of Panama occurred between December 1989 and January 1990. The United States broke both international law and its own government policies by invading Panama in order to bring its president, Manuel Noriega, to justice for drug trafficking, as well threatening the lives of 35,000 U.S. civilians living in the Panama area.]

BM: That's right. Although things were pretty dicey. There were times when we were told, "Don't go downtown; there's protests, there's different things going on."

I wasn't deeply politically aware at that time. However, Bernie was working as a store detective for AAFES—Army-Air Force Exchange System—and so he'd do these little undercover things where they were trying to find people who were, like, stealing checks and things like that, and he had a coworker who was Panamanian but his family were from somewhere in the Middle East, I can't remember where, but his name was Abdul, and they became good friends. And then another—I met another linguist down there named Dave Bonomo, and Dave, Bernie and I became close with Abdul.

Abdul invited us out to his house, and he lived way on the other side of the city going towards Torrijos Airport. Torrijos was the previous president of Panama who died in a questionable plane crash before [Manuel] Noriega took over. So we went out to Abdul's house and his parents—lovely people—his parents had both been Olympic weapons judges for the—

TS: Really.

BM: Yeah. And so, I was—I just thought that was the greatest thing. And then his dad showed me—They had all these beautiful weapons, mostly pistols and revolvers. But then he said, "Now, I'm going to show you something," and he's, like, looking to see who's watching, and then he opens up one door and he had—It was like a little armory, and he had—I mean, he had rifles and he had shotguns and lots and lots of ammunition.

And I was, like, "What is all this for?"

He says, "We know there's revolution; there's going to be something happening here and we're just prepared for it." So, yeah.

TS: Oh. So when the protests and everything came and they did the invasion and all that.

BM: Yeah. And I never—I've tried to find them; I've never been able to.

TS: No.

BM: Even on Facebook [social networking website] I can't.

TS: You've always wondered what happened to them.

BM: I've always wondered, yeah. Because there was also all the things that we were doing then in Central America—in Nicaragua and El Salvador—and we had the 2nd Air Division helicopters were flying out of Howard and they were doing a lot of the covert missions—missions up north, so. We knew it but we were on the periphery; we weren't, like, in the middle of it but we kind of knew.

TS: There were things going on but you don't know what's happening. Do you mind if I pause it for a second?

[Recording paused]

TS: Alright, we took a short little break there, an adventure, but we're back. Okay, so you spent three years in Panama. Are you enjoying the air force?

BM: I was enjoying it, and, again, Panama was such a good assignment.

TS: Yeah.

BM: But as much as I loved small arms, which I didn't think I would—I hadn't had any history and my family weren't gun owners, it was not—culturally it wasn't something that I was familiar with—but I found that I really, really enjoyed teaching people how to shoot, and I had developed a pretty good skill especially with some of the cops who would try to strong arm the revolver. They'd have trouble because they'd just be jerking on the trigger and they just couldn't get that right, and I developed a good system of just placing—they'd put their finger on the trigger, then I would place my finger on top of theirs, just to indicate to them this is how much pressure you need, so they had this tactile reinforcement. Now, I think it worked because I was a woman, and I think that they might not have felt as comfortable if a male instructor had had that contact with them.

TS: A physical contact in that way.

BM: Sure. Yeah, so—and I enjoyed it, and the cops, primarily those were our largest customers; security forces. And the machine gun I just loved.

TS: [chuckles] Apparently.

BM: I had no idea and I just loved it. I just—To me it was just a beautiful piece of machinery; it was enjoyable to fire. Got a chance—I said we worked a little bit with 2nd Division. They'd come down and they had modified M60s on their helicopters; they were flying the Hueys, the UH-1s. And Kim Jordan—There were two female instructors assigned, which was unusual because this is—not that many women yet in the all-volunteer force. And so, to have two female instructors was a bit unusual in a four-person shop. But Kim was amazingly talented with machine guns. She was—She had worked at Camp Bullis [near San Antonio, Texas], she had worked on machine guns back in Lackland, and she was just really, really good, and she knew the weapon inside and out. And so, the guys from the helicopter crews would come over and ask her, "Hey, we've got this problem with our modified M60. What do you think we can try?" And she'd be able to figure it out and fix it for them.

TS: Really?

BM: Yeah. So they—As a—kind of like a thank you, they offered a flight on one of their training missions, and they took Kim and I both up and we just had a blast. Just with flying over the beautiful country of Panama, the doors open, standing there with your feet right on the edge of the platform, the machine gun just hanging out the door. It was just—

TS: Were you nervous?

BM: Not at all.

TS: No?

BM: I was just—We were just so excited, and it was just wonderful. And then I didn't realize until years and years later—that's what my dad did; he was a tail gunner. He was flying—He was shooting a fifty-caliber machine gun out of the back end of a B-17, and it just did—It never clicked.

TS: It didn't click at that time. Did he know that you had done that; that you had taken that flight?

BM: Yeah. My parents came down to Panama and visited and they fell in love with it too. My mother especially, she loved it.

TS: I'll bet. I think you had said that you're thinking about staying in the air force for a career, even at this early point, right?

BM: Yeah. And what I did—What I realized is, as much as I loved the weapons and training, I didn't see myself making a career in that particular job, and I had met a couple of disaster preparedness folks who were assigned there and they kind of told me about what they did. And I should have realized they're in Panama, so it's a little bit different threat environment in Panama compared with Europe and Asia and other parts of the world. So all they did was they just hung out and did a little bit of training, did major accident exercises, and then they'd go off in the jungle and look for downed aircraft from World War II and things like that, so I said, "That sounds good."

So I retrained; I went into disaster preparedness. So we—When we left Panama we were supposed to be assigned to Aviano Air Base in Italy and that got changed; we ended up going to RAF Bentwaters [England]. But I went to technical training in Lowry Air Force Base [Denver, Colorado], as a disaster preparedness technician. And in the air force at that time, disaster preparedness was primarily what everybody else on base knew us as; we're the people who put your chem [chemical] warfare gear, and you'd go through the gas chamber with them and that was about it. But it was actually quite a lot of things going on in that one career field, and I realized during bas—during our technical training, I said, "I could do this. I could do this. I could make a living out at this."

TS: You weren't so sure until you went through the training?

BM: Yeah.

TS: Well that's good. When you were in Panama, I can't remember exactly when it was, but the Beirut bombings, did they happen before you got there?

BM: That happened, I think—Let me think—1985, I believe? I'm trying to—

TS: Eighty-three.

[The 23 October 1983 Beirut barracks bombing were terrorist attacks that took place in Beirut, Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War. Two bombs simultaneously stuck separate buildings that were housing Multinational Force in Lebanon peacekeepers. The attack specifically targeted American and French service workers, and resulted in the deaths of two hundred and forty-one American and fifty-eight French peacekeepers, six civilians, and the two suicide bombers]

BM: Eighty-three, okay. Yeah, and there was a—I do have a small connection to that, because I mentioned Rosalyn Simmons[?], who I went through small arms tech school with. She was assigned to Rhein-Main [Air Base], so out of tech school she went to Rhein-Main in Germany,

TS: In Germany?

BM: And we kept in touch, we wrote back and forth. Rosalyn was from the Bronx; she had this wonderful Bronx accent and just as—just that city attitude. And I had lots of cousins from New York, and Rosalyn was African-American but I just felt this connection with—my cousins talk like that. Some of them do. So we kept in touch, and she wrote me a letter—and I'll have to find it, I know I still have it—because after the Beirut bombing—I think we lost over two hundred and forty marines in Beirut; it was a suicide truck that drove up to their compound.

I remember reading in the newspaper—we got *Stars and Stripes* down in Panama and then we had American Forces Network—Southern Command Network, actually, they called it down there—and so we were following the news story, and then Rosalyn wrote to me and said that she'd been tasked to help with—they brought all of the bodies and body parts back to Rhein-Main, and Frankfurt International Airport was—shared a runway with Rhein-Main, and they had tasked security forces and other people to help just identify different body parts and put them in bags. And she said that everybody's complaining how long it's taking to get these bodies back, and she said this is part of the reason why.

And I wasn't aware of all of these other things that could happen in the military. That's the other thing, it's kind of funny, I was very naïve and take things kind of at face value. I hadn't—Even while I was a small arms instructor teaching people how to shoot bullets, I still hadn't made the connection about how inherently violent the military is, and that that's actually what its purpose is, is to inflict violence on—as need be, inflict violence on other people. So that kind of clicked with me, is that these are other probably young privates and lance corporals in the Marine Corps who just were going to Lebanon for TDY [temporary duty assignment], just like I've gone TDY to Nellis [Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada] and other places, and you didn't—you don't expect to be killed.

TS: Right.

BM: So it was a little—just like a little chink there that first made me realize this could be a dangerous—a dangerous life.

TS: And then Grenada happened in that same conjunction of time, or immediately after.

[The Invasion of Grenada was a 1983 U.S.-led invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada]

BM: And that was—That's right. And we actually went on alert at Howard.

TS: I was wondering about—

BM: Tony Blougouras—one of our other instructors—Tony was an augmentee with the security forces, and so they put him out on the fence line, and we would have occasional exercises but never anything like this. This was, like, "We're handing you real bullets and

you're going out on the fence line and you're going to patrol and report," and all that. But it was short-lived; I think maybe a week at the most.

TS: Did you do any of the patrols?

BM: No, we were—Kim and I were doing—We had to go in the security forces armory and augment them with weapons check in/check out, inspections, and things like that, but Tony actually went out on the fence line.

TS: Okay. After your retraining, you ended up back in England.

BM: Yes.

TS: Were you happy to be going back to England?

BM: I was.

TS: Were you?

BM: I was. And funny enough, at the—not only was I going back to England, but my sister, Colleen, her husband was in the air force, he had just got assigned to RAF Upper Heyford, and my baby sister, Kerry, her husband was in the air force and he was assigned at RAF Lakenheath, and so my parents also said, "We're going back to England." So my parents came back over.

TS: All at the same time.

BM: Yeah.

TS: That's interesting.

BM: My older sister Patsy was in California, she didn't come back, and my brother Dan had joined the navy.

TS: Okay.

BM: But otherwise there were—my other two sisters [unclear]—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The majority of your family was back in England.

BM: Was back in England, yeah.

TS: Now, you're doing a different job. After having grown up in England and then coming back and you're part of the air force, how was it different?

BM: It felt like home.

TS: Did it?

BM: It real—I felt so comfortable to be back in England. I—Everything clicked for me, it just did. It felt good; it felt comfortable. And I guess because I'd grown up as a brat, I have a lot of friends who were active duty in the military, so I didn't feel like a huge shift between being a brat and being active duty.

TS: So there were a lot of similarities.

BM: Yes.

TS: Your husband had been in England, too, so it was somewhat familiar to him as well, right?

BM: Yeah, that's right.

TS: How did he like being a dependent husband?

BM: That was tough.

TS: A husband that was a dependent; I know they call them something different now.

BM: No, it's still dependent. It was tough. And not only were there not as many women—There's a lot more women in the military now than when I first came in. I think when we went all volunteer in '77, I think—'73? Okay, '73—but there was something where women were still—where it was not a—you weren't a WAF anymore, you were part of the full military.

So in 1980—let's see—there were—I was the second woman in my unit at RAF Bentwaters. We were in the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing, it was all six squadrons of A-10s, and then we were in the combat support group and disaster preparedness and airbase operability; actually, airbase survivability, at that time, it was called. And there was myself and one other female tech sergeant, Doris Napoleon. So again, more women but not like an abundance, a large number. Another career field that wasn't—that didn't have a large number of women.

TS: Hadn't integrated that many women into that field yet?

BM: Yeah.

TS: Did you feel any sort of harassment or anything like that in this field, or just in the air force in general? Did it change over time?

BM: I did in Panama, funny enough, and nothing like—nothing that would stray into the sexual harassment/assault level, but more kind of like questioning about your skills and your abilities and your competence as a woman. So I do remember I was teaching an M16 class and a chief master sergeant—and his name was Love, don't remember his first name, Chief Love—what we used to call the crusty old chief with the buzz cut—and I seem to recall he had a cigar in his mouth that he put out as he walked in the door—but he walked in and the rest of the class had already been seated, and I was just getting ready to hand out weapons, and he said, "Who's teaching this class?"

I said, "I'm the instructor."

And he says, "No woman is going to teach me how to shoot. Go and get another instructor." He's, like, a chief master sergeant and I got, I think, two stripes at that time. And funny enough, Ed Corley, who was our supervisor, and Tony Blougouras were both TDY, so it was only me and Kim, the other female instructor, so. [both chuckle]

TS: Right.

BM: I did what the chief said and I went and I got another instructor.

TS: And it was her?

BM: He walked out.

TS: He did? He wouldn't be taught?

BM: No. And when I first arrived, Tech Sergeant Perry—Don Perry—was our supervisor, and I remember he brought me in and he sat me down and they had these gun metal gray desks with the kind of like plastic top, and it was just a little tiny desk maybe two feet wide and one drawer, and he had put the file plan there for the office file plan and pens and paper and he says, "Well, you'll just kind take care of all the stuff here in the office for us." [chuckles] And I wasn't sure if that's what I was supposed to be doing. It was my first duty assignment, I was pretty sure I was supposed to be teaching people how to shoot guns, but okay.

And within maybe a week Ed Corley arrived, and Ed says, "No, that's not happening. You don't have, like, your own secretary." And he got me back in the classroom and teaching and everything. Those are two incidents that were more, I think, not, like, about hostility, but more about not believing that a woman could be as competent, as capable, as an airman—a male airman.

TS: Right. I suppose there's different layers of harassment.

BM: Sure. Yes.

TS: I actually think that those do fit into those levels because you're not being allowed to do your job. Or in the one case he left and there's no repercussions for that, right?

BM: That's right.

TS: But he's not in your chain of command.

BM: Exactly.

TS: If he had been in your chain of command, the one that walked out, the chief, do you think that would have been a lot harder to handle?

BM: I think it would have. I think if what Sergeant Perry started doing—

TS: Oh, to have you at the desk?

BM: Right. I think if somebody hadn't intervened quickly that that could have probably—my story would have ended up differently.

TS: Undermined what you were doing.

BM: Right, and not being—And I can se—Because the power structure within the military, when you have one or two stripes, you look at somebody with three or four stripes and you think that they're just, like, omnipotent. And then Tech Sergeant Perry had five, six stripes, and so it's—I can see that I would've been—how do you say it?—because it was short-lived and because it was my first assignment and I wasn't quite sure, I think I would have recognized pretty quickly that this is not what should be happening; I should be doing the same job as Senior Airman Blougouras —Tony Blougouras. But fortunately, Ed Corley[?] came in, saw what was going on right away, and put a stop to it. But, yeah, I can see there probably were some female airmen who were in that position who didn't have somebody intervene, or who didn't intervene on their own part.

TS: Right.

BM: And just said, "What do I do? He outranks me. This is the way it is."

TS: Right. In disaster preparedness, did you have any similar kind of experiences?

BM: Not early in my disaster preparedness career. Actually, that last deployment that I was on was—

TS: Really? Much later?

BM: —some interesting things happened on my last deployment. But going through tech school there was no issues. Maybe I was fortunate to always have fairly good, straightforward people around me. I mean, sometimes it's the luck of the draw. You might end up working with a good bunch of folks and you might end up working with somebody who's a jerk.

TS: Do you think the leadership of the squadron had anything to do with how you were treated, whether you were male or female, for that matter.

BM: I think part of both small arms and disaster preparedness is that they're small career fields, so I think there's more a sense of, "There's not that many of us so we've just got to all get along and stick together." I do know I had friends who were in, like, maintenance career fields, and in security forces especially, that their experience was a lot different, that they were more—I think more easily relegated to the worst assignments. I did have some friends who had been sexually harassed, and one young airman in security forces actually ended up going all the way to Congress to testify about what had happened to her.

TS: Do you think being married protected you from some of that to some degree?

BM: Probably. Because, yes, there's a different culture, the barracks culture versus when you're living in—whether it's on base or off base, when you're living in a family versus the young women who were in a barrack situation, and the barracks were pretty much coed at that time.

TS: Could you describe a typical day when you're not deployed, in your field as a disaster preparedness? How would you go about describing that?

BM: The thing that I loved about disaster preparedness is how wide the scope of what we did was. We did major accident response, training and exercises, natural disasters, and then we had nuclear, chemical, biological warfare, so we had, like, the wartime duties. And again, this is Cold War. We were actually worried about the Soviet Union at that time coming over the Fulda Gap and an all-out land and air war in Europe. So we had the wartime duties and then we had our peacetime duties. We also did nuclear weapons accident training, and then we did just general preparedness.

We had different functions. We had training operations and equipment. And so, depending on what unit you were in within the division, that's how your day went. If you were in training, which I started out in training, then you did a lot of teaching. We taught chemical warfare defense, initial training and refresher training. We taught shelter management training, we taught decontamination operations, major accident response, disaster control group. We taught the wing commander the procedures for responding and what the wing commander duties were on the scene. So it was just a lot. I mean, that's what fascinated me. It was, like, you've got your finger in so many different pies here and you could end up either trying to specialize in one or just really trying to figure out everything that's going on.

TS: Did you get your fingers in the other parts besides instruction?

BM: Yes.

TS: Of those, which one was your favorite?

BM: My favorite was operations.

TS: Why was that?

BM: Because we got to, first of all, go out and meet all of the other additional duty people who were running the programs at the unit level. We did staff assistance visits with them. But we also got to do a lot of planning, which I found out that I had a knack for and that I really enjoyed writing disaster plans.

TS: Getting back to your writing.

BM: Yeah, yeah. Doing the research, trying to figure out what are the threats for this location, for this weapon system, for this particular population, what are the geographic threats, and I just really—I sunk my teeth into it and really, really enjoyed that aspect of it.

TS: Except for that experience in Panama, do you think you're being treated fairly and promoted at a level that you thought you should be?

BM: Yeah. I made Senior Airman Below the Zone in Panama and I made staff sergeant on my first attempt, although technically back then they had the carryover. There were two cycles, so you tested once and then if you got on the first one, great, but if not, your scores carried over for the next cycle. So I made staff sergeant and I felt—I felt respected and I felt that people appreciated the level of work and effort that I put into things.

[Below the Zone (BTZ) is a competitive early promotion program offered to enlisted U.S. Air Force personnel in the grade of Airman First Class/E-3. This early promotion opportunity is restricted to elite Airmen who stand out from their peers and perform duties at a level above their current rank]

TS: Now, what are you doing for fun?

BM: Music again.

TS: Yeah.

BM: Oh, yeah.

TS: Different scene though, I'm sure.

BM: Yeah. This time it's in Ipswich, and we'd go down to the Gaumont Theater in Ipswich, and again, it was my husband and I because we—our son hadn't been born yet, and we would just go to Gaumont and we'd see—I saw Van Morrison [Northern Irish singer-songwriter] there and The Cult and The Cure [British rock bands], and just so many of those bands that were doing well in England at that time.

We took a ferry across, went back to Ireland, and saw a big, huge concert in Ireland called Self Aid; it was in 1985 [correction: 1986]. And so, yeah, it was just music, work, music, work. My husband was working at that time, because you'd asked about him being a dependent spouse.

[Self Aid was a benefit concert for unemployment held in Dublin, Ireland on 17 May 1986]

TS: Right.

BM: He had to find work wherever we were, so in Panama he worked at the army and air force exchange as a store detective. And I also had another job in Panama; I worked as a projectionist at the base theater part-time. But then we got to Bentwaters and Bernie started working for Fender. It was actually—it was called Rhodes [Fender-Rhodes, Inc.] and they were an importer, so he would—

TS: The guitar?

BM: Yeah, Fender guitars, and he's a guitarist and keyboardist. So he would go down to London, pick up stock and inventory, bring it up to the base. Because you remember GIs would just eat up things like stereo systems and musical instruments and things like that. And then he went into—He did another part-time job with the slot machines.

TS: Oh, yeah, those came on.

BM: Oh, yeah.

TS: That's right. Those were pretty popular.

BM: Those were huge in all the different clubs.

TS: Yeah, that's right. I remember the nickel slots. [both chuckle] You were at Bentwaters for about four years.

BM: Yes.

TS: But then you stayed in England and you went to Mildenhall. Oh, my goodness, you were there till '98?

BM: Yes.

TS: So thirteen years in England.

BM: Yes.

TS: Okay. Tell me what kind of changes you saw over that time, either just within your field, because you did a couple different things there. Why don't we start with that?

BM: Well, as I had said, when I first got over there we were in that Cold War threat, and lots and lots and lots of exercises. In England they were called Local Salty Nation exercises and those were full wartime exercises. But also back then, NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] had a system of what they called NATO tactical evaluations—NATO TACEVALs—and back then they were no notice. So you could literally be sitting at your desk minding your own business and then [snaps fingers] boom. We're going in to—the inspectors have arrived, they would walk into the command post, they would hand the note or the letter or whatever it was and say, "You've got X number of hours and up and running." And that was exciting. We worked in—both in Bentwaters, Mildenhall, but at Bentwaters the survival recovery center was inside the command post. It was a hardened, filtered facility. Actually, right now they've turned Bentwaters command post into a museum. I just got a message for some information about that.

But, I mean, we would also be exercising in full MOPP [Mission Oriented Protective Posture] gear. We would be in full MOPP gear for sometimes eight hours, a full shift. You would come in and you'd have the full MOPP 4, and then you'd check out, and that's when you'd have to take your mask off, but—I mean, it was hardcore. It was the—at that time, the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing was the largest fighter wing in the air force. We had six squadrons of A-10s—[unclear] A-10s; we had four detachments that we supported: Leiphem, Norvenich, Alhorn, and Sembach [Air Bases West Germany]. So our flights—our planes were deployed all over central Germany.

[MOPP, Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear, is protective gear used by U.S. military personnel in a toxic environment. MOPP Level 4 is the highest level of protection and signifies that all protective gear must be worn]

It was exciting, and predictable also. That was the other thing about it, is that because we knew the order of battle, we thought we knew what the Soviet Union—what their tactics were, so we were training to a particular threat that was identifiable, measurable. The chemical side of it was quite interesting; preparing for a chemical warfare environment, teaching people about decontamination operations, preparing for nuclear—I mean, thinking about—we'd have giant maps all over the wall and we would be exercising, that this particular location has had a—let's say—a twenty kiloton detonation, how far is the radiation going to flow? We'd have to plot it and then we'd have inspectors checking our work to see if we got it right.

[The order of battle of an armed force participating in a military operation or campaign shows the hierarchical organization, command structure, strength, disposition of personnel, and equipment of units and formations of the armed force.]

TS: Well, Chernobyl had happened in '86 when you were—

[The Chernobyl disaster was a catastrophic nuclear accident which occurred on 26 April 1986 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in what was then the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic of the Soviet Union]

BM: Yes, at Mildenhall.

TS: Yeah, you would have been there.

BM: We—They sent over one of the—I don't know the actual name for it, it was most recently used over Fukushima—I don't know how you say it.

TS: Fukushima.

[The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster occurred at the Fukushima I Nuclear Power Plant in Fukushima, Japan. It was initiated by the tsunami that followed the Tōhoku earthquake on 11 March 2011]

BM: Yeah. In Japan where they just had the meltdown of the reactor a few years ago. But there's an aircraft equipped with sensors that flies at high altitude, but it's picking up signs of contamination, radiation, and that aircraft was at Mildenhall and it was flying over Chernobyl, so we got to work with the crew a little bit. But what they were doing was—it's kind of like what we were doing on the land, looking for contamination within an airfield on the land, they were doing up in the air.

TS: In the air. Was that the Tier 1 or any of those high-flying ones?

BM: No, no, it was kind of like an AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System] type of aircraft but it was fitted with these sensors.

TS: Interesting.

BM: It's got a name because a friend just told me that it had landed in Japan for the Fukushima.

TS: I wonder which ones they used for that. That was kind of a scare, though, at that time.

BM: Yeah. And there were some problems. If I remember correctly, dairy—consumption of dairy and other things in the U.K., and because of the wind pattern where the—where the radiation had settled.

TS: Later you had mad cow [disease].

BM: Oh, yeah, I still can't give blood.

TS: I can't either.

BM: I know, it's—

TS: [chuckles] And you were there much longer than I was. That's interesting too. You had a deployment to Norway when you were at Mildenhall. You want to talk about that at all?

BM: Yeah, it was—It wasn't just a deployment. In 1992 they opened up a unit called the Regional Logistics. So the idea was that we have co-located operating bases in countries all over Europe and they get spun up during the wartime, so we would then send our aircraft into these co-located operating bases that routinely, day to day, are operated by Norwegians, or German, or whichever country. So they decided that for all of the co-located operating bases in Europe they would have one central command element which would be called Regional Logistics, and that central command element would figure out how much was needed at each location depending on the weapon system that was going to deploy in there. So a lot of loggie [logistics] work, a lot of what the—it was an actual career field, I can't remember what their designator was, but we called them loggies, and they were the ones who would plan loads for aircraft and if you're deploying with—

TS: A lot of data?

BM: Yeah, lots—and just lots of weights and measures and figuring and how much you need of each thing. But another part of the Regional Logistics was actually going to each of the locations and doing a survey—what they called a joint support survey—and then we'd write joint support plans and we would negotiate. We went into various different locations in Norway; I've gone to Gardermoen [Air Station] near Oslo; Bergen [Flesland Air Station, Bergen, Norway]; Andøya [Air Station], which is up—way, way up in the Arctic on a tiny little island just off the west coast of Norway; Stavanger [426th Air Base Squadron Stavanger] way down south; Evenes [Air Base]. So just all over the place.

And we'd go for—every month we were in Norway. We'd be home for three weeks, we'd go to Norway for a week, we'd come back home. "Okay, now you're going over to this place." It was a lot of short bursts of travel, but just so interesting and so informative.

TS: What year were you doing that?

BM: That was from '92 until '94.

TS: That was actually after the Gulf War.

BM: Yes.

TS: You want to talk about your very interesting deployment during the Gulf War? Go ahead.

BM: Well, that was the interesting thing, is that Regional Logistics was an idea that came too late.

TS: Was it?

BM: Yeah. And that was partially after the wall came down.

[The Berlin Wall was a guarded concrete barrier that physically and ideologically divided Berlin, Germany from 1961 to 1989]

TS: Why would you say it came too late?

BM: Because of the changes in Europe after that time, and not as much emphasis on the co-located operating bases and—

TS: Because you didn't need them as much anymore.

BM: Right. And then centralizing and building up forces in one location.

TS: Oh, interesting point, yeah.

BM: Yeah. I mean, we were so good at what we did and it was just a shame we got dismantled after a couple years, but.

TS: But before you did, were you a part of that Regional Logistics when you went—

BM: No, that was when I was still in disaster preparedness.

TS: You were in disaster preparedness.

BM: Right. So things are building up. I think August of 1990 was when Saddam [Hussein] invades Kuwait, and then we're starting to gear up and starting to move forces into Saudi Arabia, and our career field was pretty much in demand. They wanted at least one disaster preparedness technician at each of these deployed locations, and usually a lot more than one, so most of my friends in the career field were heading somewhere, over into the theater.

And I was sitting at Mildenhall like many other people, and we finally got the set of orders down, and myself and another staff sergeant, Rick Alridge, we were going to

Riyadh [Saudi Arabia], and so we were pretty excited about that. I remember our senior master sergeant came over—Carlos Alfonso came over to say—knocked on my door, because I lived very close to work—and it was a Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. That's [unclear]. So I was there with my son—I'd had my son by this time—and he said, "You and Rick got your orders. You need to come in and get prepared."

And I remember kind of this funny feeling of both excitement and then—because I'm standing in the doorway, and Sergeant Rodriguez Alfonso is here, and my toddler son is behind me, he's playing on the floor, and I just remember it was kind of like, "That's where you're at. You're right between these two worlds. You're getting pulled this way to be—to finally get to do what you've been training to do. and then—but you're a mom, you're a mother, and your child is right behind you." And I actually remember that moment. It was—It doesn't happen very often where you're physically in that same space, where you're physically between—I'm in the doorway; I'm between the two worlds.

TS: That's a great point.

BM: Yeah, and then—but funny enough, Sergeant Rodriguez Alphonso—Senior Master Sergeant—he called over to the headquarters in Saudi Arabia and he traded himself for the two staffs[staff sergeants], so Rick and I got told that night that Sergeant Rodriguez was going and we weren't.

TS: Instead of you?

BM: Yeah. I understand it. It's kind of one of those things where he's at the end of his career and he's kind of been wanting to do this—do a proper full wartime deployment as well.

So what ended up happening is that Rick and I, and I think one other person, were left in our shop, and we got a call from 3rd Air Force, and 3rd Air Force said there's this merchant marine vessel that is off the coast of England and it's picking up all of the munitions; we had a large munitions location at RAF Welford and that's what stocked all the munitions for the fighter weapons. And so, this vessel was on its way from England, after it picked up all of its munitions, and then it was heading over to the Gulf; it was going to—actually it was going through the Red Sea—I can't remember exactly where, but it was going over that way. And the captain—his name was Captain [Bruce] Elfast—he had assembled a crew of merchant marines and they were not properly trained. He had one first officer who had just graduated from the Coast Guard Academy, I believe—correction: Merchant Marine Academy—and then just took a crew of general merchant marine people, and he said he was not going to go any further until somebody came onboard and gave him and his crew some proper training about chemical warfare and nuclear and biological and all of this stuff, because there was a lot of worry about that.

TS: Right, there sure was.

BM: And so, we got a call from 3rd Air Force and they said, "You need to drive down to—" It was down Sheerness, way off the coast—the southern coast of England, and it was in February, and it was freezing cold. And so, and it was all supposed to be really quiet; don't let anybody know.

So we get to the hotel that we're staying in in the town at Sheerness, and of course we're Americans, we have American accents, and the guy at the counter says, "Oh, are you here to help the Yanks who are putting all the bombs on the ship?" [both laugh] So it was funny.

TS: Hard to keep a secret when you've got Yanks around, right?

BM: Yeah, yeah. But what was interesting is that we would—we'd be in the hotel, then at, like, maybe 5:00 in the morning we would have to go out to the harbor, and in the harbor we would get onto a launch with—I guess they were longshoremen—I don't know if they're called that anymore as well—and these were the guys who were going to be working on the ship securing the load as it came in every day. It was—the U.K. had specified that the ship could not be within ten nautical miles of the coast, so we had to get on this launch—

TS: Because it's filled with munitions, right?

BM: Yes. So we had to get on the launch and we had to ride the launch out to the ship every day and then we'd do our training on the ship every day. Wonderful crew, they were just—and just middle America all on this ship—different, and actually quite old, which surprised me. Captain Elfast, he actually said—he says, "This is kind of like a floating retirement home right now." [both chuckle]

TS: No wonder he wanted somebody to come in and train everyone.

BM: Yeah, because the first officer was the youngest person onboard and he was maybe twenty-five at the most. And then everybody else was fifties and some in their sixties. I remember when we first pulled up to the side of the vessel, I'm like, "How are going to get up this huge—How are we going to get up there?" And there was actually a ladder—like a little wooden ladder—that comes down and you climbed up.

TS: Climbed up?

BM: Yes, right up to the top.

TS: No little escalator ride.

BM: No. I would have preferred to have a helicopter just drop us. Yeah, so.

TS: That's probably a long climb.

BM: Yeah.

TS: Were you ever afraid of falling off?

BM: I was. I was actually—I was worried because it's cold and it's windy.

TS: Oh, right.

BM: And it is, it's just a—I'm not exaggerating a thing.

TS: Narrow ladder?

BM: Yeah, maybe—What is that?—two feet at the most?

TS: Yeah, maybe not even.

BM: Foot and a half? So, yeah. But the ship hadn't been properly prepared and the captain—fair play to him; he did the right thing; he's, like, "I'm not going until I get some understanding and some training."

And so, they had—the navy had just thrown the whole bunch of different assorted boxes of chemical defense gear, so nothing was sized and it hadn't—The crew hadn't been fitted, they hadn't been trained on how to use the gas masks. They had—We used to also do "self aid" buddy care in case—if you were exposed to nerve agent you're supposed to hit yourself with the atropine and the 2-PAM chloride, and ours, we had small pen type of injectors, and you pop it in and the needle goes into your leg. Well, I asked them, "Do you have any atropine and 2-PAM chloride?"

And he says, "Oh, yeah," and he pulls out a box, and it's the vials of medication rather than the individual injectors.

I'm, like, "Oh, okay, " so we managed to get some of that swapped out.

But they also needed some small arms training so I did some small arms training with them. And they—it's kind of like that funny thing where you're used to being on an airfield, how you do things on an airfield, so I'm saying, "Well, do you have a clearing barrel?" And the boatswain's mate points to the ocean. [both chuckle]

[A clearing barrel is a barrel filled with sand and topped with a hole in its center. By placing their weapon inside the clearing barrel and clearing their weapon, soldiers can make sure that there are no rounds hidden inside]

TS: That's our clearing barrel.

BM: He says, "There's your clearing barrel." Yeah, but it was interesting and I felt good that we had at least given some sense of comfort to this crew that you're going to be all right.

TS: Now, you went out every day? For like a month?

BM: Yes.

TS: To climb that ladder?

BM: Yes. Yes.

TS: Your legs and arms probably got a workout.

BM: Oh, yeah.

TS: Oh my goodness.

BM: But the best food.

TS: Oh, yeah?

BM: They had really, really good food. And they had—I don't know what they're called, but this was the gentleman who took care of the captain and that's all he did, he just took care of the captain.

TS: Like some sort of aide.

BM: Yeah, and he did all the—prepared the captain's room and made sure everything was right for the captain, and he was the spitting image of Sammy Davis, Jr [American singer, dancer, actor, and comedian], he really was, and he was from Haiti. And he had all the garlic and onion things to keep vampires away or whatever. It was great; a good bunch of folks and I learned a lot about what's involved, what's going on behind the scenes.

TS: Right.

BM: Because you see on television all these forces building up and then here's a piece of it. We pulled in these civilian vessels, and it's a civilian vessel that's putting all of our munitions onboard.

And I remember Rick and I went down into the hold and we wrote on a couple of the big five hundred pound bombs, and Rick wrote something like, "To Saddam, with love," and then he wrote something—"This one's personal," but he spelled it "personnel." And again, there's—I had something change in my life further on down the road, but at this time I remember what I was upset about was not—was not that we were writing on these weapons that were going to destroy people. I was upset that he'd spelled the word "personal" wrong. It's just funny, things that you realize about yourself.

TS: Sure.

BM: Who you were, where you were at, at that time.

TS: Well, you're not reflecting at that time; you're in the moment, right?

BM: That's right. Yeah, yeah. And still not realizing that bigger picture.

TS: Right. You told me earlier that you got a nice commendation from the navy.

BM: Right. We found out afterwards from—at that time it was now the Military Personnel Flight instead of CBPO [Consolidated Base Personnel Office]—that we were eligible for the Navy Unit Commendation medal after the Gulf War ended. The entire merchant marine force was awarded the medal and the requirement was that you were aboard ship for a period of thirty days during—between this day and that day. And then we did the math and said, "Hey."

The Military Personnel Flight (MPF), formerly Consolidated Base Personnel Office (CPBO), serves Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, and Retired personnel across the installations, by assisting all airmen in managing their military careers, and ensuring eligibility of entitlements]

TS: You're qualified for it.

BM: Yes.

TS: That's pretty neat.

BM: As far as I know, Rick and I are the only two in our career field with a Navy Unit Commendation.

TS: Very nice.

BM: Yeah.

TS: You're in until '98. You also went after the Khobar Towers bombing to Saudi Arabia?

[The Khobar Towers bombing occurred on 25 June 1996. It was a terrorist attack on a housing complex in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, that was being used as quarters for coalition forces assigned to Operation Southern Watch, a no-fly zone operation in southern Iraq]

BM: Right.

TS: You want to talk about that?

BM: Yeah. So the Gulf War ends, I get assigned to Regional Logistics. At Regional Logistics, actually what we did—one interesting assignment that I had is, Sarajevo was going on at that time. The Balkans were just splitting up into pieces and it was horrible. I mean, it really was horrible to watch it on your television every night; the bombardments into the center of these beautiful cities and just people being killed as they were just trying to grab supplies at the market.

And so, NATO decided to do some humanitarian supply missions into Sarajevo, so we opened up—We went into the south of France, funny enough, to a small airfield called Istres, and that's spelled I-S-T-R-E-S, and it's just a little bit west—a little bit west of Marseille. And so, I went in, myself, a transporter, a logistics captain, and a contractor, and we went in to set up operations at Istres to bring a tanker—basically a squadron of tanker aircraft—refueling aircraft—into Istres, and the reason was that they had been moved from Italy's—location in Italy shut down and said we can't fly here anymore so they had to find another location. And I think because France, although it was not part of NATO military operations, they wanted to be part of this humanitarian effort.

And so, we went in, and it was interesting because I could speak a little bit of French—a little bit [chuckles]—and they said, "Well, you're going until we get some interpreters to come in afterwards." And so, I had to go with the contracting guy, and we went to every hotel and every bed and breakfast and every little place we could find along the coast, and primarily focused on Istres, and we said, "We want to contract with you for some rooms."

Now, this is a very popular spot in the south of France and they're, like, "Well, for how long?"

We said, "We don't know." So it was kind of like open-ended.

Some of them said, "No, we have a strong business here for tourists and everything," Other ones said, "Yes." And I mean, that was still going on for years afterwards.

Then we contracted all kinds of vehicles to support the tanker crews and everything there, so that was interesting work.

TS: Yeah, I bet.

BM: It was really, really interesting and we had to—I had to go with the contracting guy. I was very fortunate that most of the people spoke English [chuckles] so my limited French skills were not taxed too much. Then afterwards they did bring in a couple of actual French linguists—although they were not air force linguists, they were people in the air force who had registered and said that they spoke French fluently. They were both French-Canadian and so there was actually some trouble with—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: A little bit of difference.

BM: Yeah, with the accents.

TS: The dialects and everything.

BM: But, yeah, that was an interesting event. And I felt good that we were doing something with the efforts in Sarajevo.

TS: Humanitarian effort.

BM: Yeah.

TS: And you said while you were there you got another call, right?

BM: No, that was '92—that was '93, '94. Then RELOG [Regional Logistics Support Centers]—Regional Logistics—disbanded and I went back to the civil engineering unit at Mildenhall where readiness—disaster preparedness had now moved into civil engineers.

TS: Okay.

BM: I had been trained as a NATO tactical evaluation inspector, and I'd gone to Oberammergau in Germany a couple times, taking different courses down there and I was qualified. And so, I was over in The Netherlands doing NATO TACEVAL inspection at a base in The Netherlands. And we had just finished, it was our last night and we were sitting at the bar at the hotel, there was a television up on the—up above the bar, and it was just all of us mostly from different bases in Europe and next to me was a major who I'd been working with, and he was stationed at Landstuhl [Regional Medical Center, Germany], he was a surgeon, and we're just sitting at a bar and the screen—whatever the Dutch equivalent of "breaking news" comes across the screen and all we can see is this building that's had its face blown off, and then just lots of people running around. Somebody's like, "Hey, what's going on?" And then the bartender was telling us what they were saying, and the major said, "I've got to get back," because Landstuhl is one of those [Level IV facility—BM corrected later] medical locations where—injured people are brought back to Landstuhl before they get to the U.S. And I didn't think in those terms at all, I just thought, "This looks pretty horrible."

TS: And this is the bombing of the Khobar Towers?

BM: Yeah, and what had happened was, left over from the Gulf War, we had still kept forces in different locations, and in Dhahran we had several fighter squadrons that were flying out of Dhahran [Saudi Arabia]. Remember Operation Southern Watch was still in effect, and that's where we were keeping Iraq boxed in between those different—

[Operation Southern Watch was an air-centric military operation conducted by the U.S. Department of Defense from Summer 1992 to Spring 2003]

TS: The fly zone?

BM: The fly zones—the no-fly zones. There was Turkey in the north—they were flying in no-fly zones so that was Operation Northern Watch, and then down in Saudi Arabia it was Operation Southern Watch.

TS: Okay.

BM: And so, there had previously—back in November of '95, there had been a bombing at a training area in Riyadh, and it had kind of got the antenna raised a little bit about that, but this one just came out of nowhere. It was a suicide—correction—It was not a suicide bombing, what happened is that the terrorists took a large truck filled with tons and tons of explosives and they parked it just outside the fence line on a tarmac parking lot, and then they abandoned the truck and drove off in, like, a getaway car. And it detonated and it blew the face off Building 131 where primarily most of the fighter crews were billeted, mostly out of Eglin [Air Force Base, Florida] if I remember correctly; some out of Patrick [Air Force Base, Florida]. It was just—Nineteen airmen were killed all together; eighteen airmen died in Building 131 and one, a civil engineer, was killed in the building right next to it, which was the civil engineering building.

So I'm watching this on the screen, not really knowing all of these details yet, and then we're leaving the next day. And then my husband calls and says, "Your boss wants you to call him."

So I called my boss, Sergeant Paul [BM corrected later] Bower, and he said, "They need somebody to go to Khobar Towers," and so he said, "Come back, check in, grab your stuff, and then go."

So I went over just a couple of days afterwards and it was still—most of the—in fact, all of the injured had already been medevaced [evacuation of casualties to the hospital in a helicopter or airplane] into Landstuhl, but there were still a lot of people who had been there during the blast who were kind of like walking wounded, in my sense.

TS: Shocked.

BM: They had—Shocked, but also some cuts, bruises, abrasions; things like that. I remember we arrived and the guy who picked me up at the airfield took me straight to the building, and it's early morning—maybe, like, 6:00 in the morning—very hot—and I'm just staring at this building that had just been completely blown apart and there's this huge crater right in front of it—a massive crater—and people digging through and—digging through all of the debris. So I did work a little bit—volunteer work—with the FBI, so during the evenings we would go out—we'd do our work during the day then during the evenings a lot of people would volunteer to go out with the FBI and just sift through the debris and try to find bits of metal or anything else that might be important.

TS: To the investigation.

BM: Yeah. And I was very impressed with the FBI; the way that they deployed very quickly, they were on scene and they were doing—they had things under control. The director of the FBI [Louis Freeh] actually came to Dhahran while I was there. They had taken over the Desert Rose, which was the eating/dining facility and they had, like, one large corner of the Desert Rose that the FBI were working out of, among other places.

TS: What were you doing, readiness tech?

BM: Yeah, we were doing recovery operations, so it was—first of all, we were—There were some problems with communications; people were not notified within the building. There was one—there was a security forces staff sergeant who was up on the top of the roof at the time with another security forces airman and he—his name was Al Guerrero—he realized that something didn't look right. He saw the truck and he saw the car and he said, "Something's not right here." And he immediately said—he radioed back and said, "Something's wrong; something's going on." And because there were no alarm systems, where they could just notify everybody at once, they had to knock on doors. And so, he's frantically running through this building knocking on every door that he could. Obviously, it was within seconds and the thing explodes.

So we were then trying to say, "Okay, what can we do better? How do we—How do we fix this? First of all, short-term interim fixes; how do we notify people?" We were using things like air horns and various other kind of, like, make-do methods. How do we reinforce the windows, for example, because the windows had been shattered throughout. I remember standing in one room and it was just hot; I mean, it was almost a hundred and twenty degrees; you're just drenched in sweat. And I'd leaned up against the wall and I was about to sip some water and I had cut my back because there was imbedded glass. And this was—this was a building that was maybe three buildings behind 131, which was right there on the perimeter.

The civil engineer building. I walked through the CE building with one of the survivors, he was Tech Sergeant Dave Cook, and he walked me through the building and showed me what had happened, and he took me to his room. Now, this building was devastated. It was right next door, everything was blown apart, and his room was, like, pristine, and it was one of those odd feelings of, like, you walk outside his room, it's just devastation, everything is just blown apart. You walk in his room, his clothes are still hanging up in his closet and everything's intact, including his window, and then you walked on the other side of his room and the toilet has been blown to pieces, the tub—everything—and then his—it's just a matter of architecturally where he was located.

TS: The physics of whatever protected him.

BM: Right. But you still get that feeling of—I remember there was a little paperclip sculpture on his desk—just this really minute, very fragile paperclip sculpture—and it was just there, hadn't been moved

TS: Jostled or anything.

BM: Yeah, yeah.

TS: What did you take away personally from that experience?

BM: Funny enough, it troubled me. It really, really troubled me. And part of it, I think, was my realization of how ignorant I was about world affairs; about what were we actually doing politically and militarily in different parts of the world and why we're doing it. And it made me think again about terrorism and coming from the background of an Irish

Nationalist family. And I didn't know at the time, but I found out afterwards through the VA [Veterans Administration]—I had some meetings with clinical psychologists and things—that I probably had a mild form of PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] that I dealt with in my own way.

And I remember I got back to England, still in very—very aware. I went to a pizza place in Cambridge with my son Nick, and Nick would have been nine years old at that time, and we're just trying to have fun—Mom's home, we're going to go and eat some pizza—and I just remember that hypervigilance. And I'm looking at everybody, and "What are they doing?" and "Why is he carrying that?" and "Who's coming in the door?" and just—but I didn't think of it at that time as abnormal, I just recognized, "Oh, that's what I'm doing[?]"

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Well, there had been some bombings in England while you were there too.

BM: Yeah. Oh, the IRA [Irish Republican Army] had been bombing England since the sixties and seventies.

TS: Right.

BM: That was just a fact of life. But, again, you can compartmentalize; they're the good guys.

TS: Who were the good guys?

BM: The IRA, in my mind. The IRA, they're the good guys.

TS: Yeah.

BM: I remember going to a play at the—I was a huge theater fanatic and I discovered [William] Shakespeare and I just went all the time to plays.

TS: That replaced some of your music.

BM: Exactly, yeah. And so, I was at the Shakespeare's Globe and I'd gotten a groundling ticket where you get to stand—for five quid [five pounds sterling] you get to stand in front of the stage, and so I'm standing in front of the stage. Mark Rylance [English actor] was onstage; he was a fantastic actor. But I'm just suddenly aware that there's a man standing to my right with a briefcase, and of course he happens to be Middle Eastern. And that's it; the play's over for me. I am just—I can't stop focusing on this gentleman. Well, that's what people would do. You'd come in after work and you'd catch a play; it's absolutely normal. But again, I had that hypervigilance still going on.

Then I decided I wanted to go back to Ireland, and the University of Maryland were doing a field study in Dublin and so I signed up for it. I took some leave; I went to

Ireland for two weeks, did a field study course. One of the things that we did—it was the history and literature of Ireland—obviously compacted into two weeks—but one of the things we did is we went to Kilmainham, which is a jail in Dublin, and these were names that I was familiar with growing up. I mean, we—as kids, my mother sang us Irish rebel songs and all the grandfathers, aunts and uncles, everybody knew the Irish songs.

So we went to Kilmainham and we walked through the prison. Kilmainham was where, after the Easter Rising, the rebels were brought, they were imprisoned, and then they were shot; they were executed at Kilmainham. I remember standing—I'd leaned up against the wall and I just suddenly realized that this—that this terrorism, it runs through all these different cultures; they're like blood brothers. The terrorism that was going on in the Middle East, terrorism in Ireland and England, it's—they're all connected, and it just suddenly made me much more aware of—now my relationship with my air force also shifted. I started questioning things about, "Should we do this? Why are we doing this?" I just became much more politically aware about—We are an instrument of national power and here's what it means. It's not just in your PFE [Professional Fitness Examination], your professional education, it's actually—This is what it looks like on the ground when you implement one of the Instruments [of National Power].

[A United States Department of Defense term that defines the instruments of national power to include diplomacy, information, military, and economy.]

TS: You had more visceral feelings about the actions that the United States took with this violence towards other countries?

BM: Yeah. Right. Yes. And that we weren't particularly innocent bystanders. It was—Because that's—A lot of people feel legitimately that that's what it is, but we were actually in Saudi Arabia and we were there for a particular reason, and there were other people who would—who were upset about the reasons that we were there. I'm not saying whether their actions are legitimate or not, but I got a different understanding when I compared it to—"Okay, well, here's what my grandfather thought about in his country, and foreign forces—English forces on his soil—and here's what—here's what the IRA chose to do because they thought they were fighting for their freedom and for their country," so it was just—

TS: So it complicated everything.

BM: Yeah. Much more complicated, much more complex. A bit of an epiphany. And I did lose a lot of naiveté, and then I said, "Well, okay, if this is what it is then I want to explore it a little bit more." And that's when I decided to just do a lot more reading and research and study on my own.

TS: Yeah. Somewhere around here you end up overseas, as you say; back in the United States. [both chuckle] You had told me that.

BM: I got my first stateside assignment in 1998, so that was my very first time being stationed in the States and I went to Bolling Air Force Base. And I was at—By this time I'd made master sergeant when I got to Bolling and I became the superintendent of the readiness flight. And because of our location we got invited over to the Pentagon, we got an opportunity to work on different special projects, and one of the projects I worked on was a joint weapons of mass destruction training curriculum, and so we worked with a private contractor and developed training on CDs [compact discs] that could be sent out to all the different bases. I left after two years; my mother got very ill and there's lots of other things happened in that time. But then I went back to Mildenhall in 2000, and then the Iraq War ki—well, September 11 happened, obviously, before then.

[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: Right.

BM: Funny enough, on that day I was the superintendent of wing exercises and I was doing some of the preliminary work because we were planning a joint anti-terrorism exercise with our British counterparts. And so, I was doing some of the groundwork for that on that day, and my boss was over at the hospital and he called and he said, "Get to a television. Turn on the television." So I turned on the television, it was late afternoon in England, and just saw—as we turned on the television we went into our conference room and we saw what was going on. And it was just surreal. It was just—it's happening right here on the screen but it just felt surreal. And it also—funny enough, I looked out the window and wing headquarters was right next to us, and the—one of the admin[istrative] troops from wing headquarters was running around the wing headquarters building. She had on a helmet and she had on a webbed belt—no weapon, just the webbed belt with a canteen—and a checklist. And she was running through the checklist, and she was covering up the sign that said this is where wing headquarters is. And it just like—it hit me, like, we're not in that world anymore. It was—I—Boom; we're not in that world anymore. That was our Cold War Soviet Union response and we're not there anymore. This literally had changed—it changed everything.

TS: How do you think it changed it?

BM: Because that's an asymmetric threat. It's not—We were still in the traditional conventional warfare mode. That's what the checklist that she was using—

TS: A linear war and certain drawn lines.

BM: Exactly. Order of battle. Here's what they've got; here's how they deploy it; here's how they use it; here are their tactics. No, it's all changed.

TS: Yeah. You felt it even as you saw it.

BM: I did. And it was funny, and I don't know what it is about—maybe it's just the way my brain is wired, but this—it does seem like certain moments just are captured like that and you just kind of recognize it.

TS: Like when you stood in the doorway.

BM: Right. Yeah, yeah.

TS: Taking into account how you talked about your reflection of the United States response, and maybe not being so innocent in all areas, what was your thinking in that regard about what happened on 9/11? I mean, at that time; not now, but right then.

BM: Right then, when I finished my shift, I went home. My son was home from school, television's on, he's—"What's going on?" I told him what had happened, and all I remember—

TS: He's, like, eleven or something?

BM: Let's see, this would have been—No, 2001?

TS: Twenty-one.

BM: No, no, 2001, so he would have been fourteen, fifteen.

TS: Okay. I forgot what year he was born in.

BM: Eighty-seven.

TS: Oh, '87. Okay.

BM: Yeah. I just remember saying, "I hope we just don't do something rash;" that's what I remember saying, is, "Let's not do something rash." And that was it. Then we go back to work and we're trying to figure out what—how does this change things? What do we do now? Well, one of the major things that had changed was just the posture of the base. Mildenhall was a fairly open base, very relaxed atmosphere; kind of like a college campus more than an airfield. You've visited so you know. And then suddenly we've got gates up and we've got guards.

TS: The concrete barriers.

BM: Yeah, yeah. All of the revetments going up all over the place. And British neighbors—I do remember so many of the British neighbors came on to the base and laid flowers at the gate. So it was just—You're realizing that the world is changing and this is just one small manifestation of how your world is changing. And I think everybody knew that it was a

huge change. This wasn't just a little blip. That this really was—It's like before 9/11, after 9/11, and there's no going back. The world has changed so much in just that one instant.

TS: You got some pretty quick orders for deployment, didn't you?

BM: Yeah. We had in the Combined Air Operations Center—We were routinely deployed there. I mean, that was where Operation Southern Watch was run out of. So we always had someone—We always had at least one disaster preparedness readiness person sitting in the Combined Air Operations Center. And funny enough, it happened to be a friend of mine who—we had been stationed together before, he was an ex-firefighter, Bill Vaughn, and Bill was new to the career field. He had retrained from being a firefighter into readiness emergency management and he needed help, and so he had called the headquarters to see if somebody else—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Because so much more was going on then, right?

BM: Oh, it had gone from very laid back and quiet to just complete chaos. So they had sent out a request for additional people to come down and fill up some slots in the CAOC and I volunteered right away. I said, "Put my name down, I want to go." And I ended up coordinating with Air Mobility Command to take one of their positions, and so I went down in November and stayed until March.

TS: How was that for you?

BM: Another world.

TS: Yeah.

BM: I just—

TS: Completely different from—

BM: Yeah. We're in the—First of all, we're in the—to get a picture, if you've seen—If you can imagine a two-story building with nothing but screens of varying, different bits of information, the majority of it classified information, from the floor to the ceiling. And then that's all around three sides of the facility, just screens everywhere; screens with information. And then in front of those screens, consoles, and different people with different expertise sitting at the consoles. And so, it's combined air operations so it's not just [U.S.] Air Force; there is [U.S] Navy and there is [U.S] Army and there is Marine Corps representatives. And then it's also multi-national because this is Operation Southern Watch, so we have—the French are in there and the British are in there and we're just—My particular career field, with just tiny, infinitesimal little screen of

information, with all of this massive stuff going on. So it was overwhelming. And then just trying—

TS: Sounds like you finally got a clearance.

BM: Yes. [both laugh] Thank you. So it was; it was overwhelming. It was also a little bit surreal. I'd never been—I'd been in command posts before, kind of like on a smaller scale where you're just controlling the operations of your wing, but this was like—We had fourteen—I think fourteen different locations spread over eight different countries that were being controlled from this one—from this one building. And one thing that struck me, they had at the front a thing called the pit—and that's the pit—the officer in the pit is really—He's running everything here. The generals are up behind on the back wall and they're looking out and they're just kind of seeing everything that's going on here, but the person who's orchestrating everything on the floor is in the pit.

TS: Kind of like that *War Games* [1983 American Cold War science fiction film] movie that they had, right?

BM: Yeah, exactly.

TS: Where there's a pit and the guys with all the bars or stars are up on the top.

BM: Yeah, exactly.

TS: Interesting.

BM: And then to his left there was one screen maybe the size of maybe a fifty inch television, maybe a bit bigger, and that was a live feed for the Predators [remotely piloted air craft] that were flying over Afghanistan. So everybody would gather around when something was going on, and we called it Predator Pay-Per-View because it was just—everybody kind of gravitated towards it even if they had nothing whatsoever to do with what was going on. And I went a couple of times and I looked just to see, "What is this?" And it's obviously grainy image, but it's also clear that you can see through the Predator's lens—

TS: The viewfinder.

BM: —you can see what's happening. And again, it struck me that, like, we're orchestrating this war but we're far removed from Afghanistan; and this was all Afghanistan at the time. But on that screen there, all of those pixels, those were actual human beings. And I think they've actually done some studies now for the drone pilots, that they're experiencing that same feeling of, like, "I'm there, but I'm not there," and a different kind of PTSD that they developed from that.

TS: That they're not just necessarily just removed from—

BM: Right, yeah. Because you could see—I mean, not fine detail, but you could see that, okay, the Predator just launched a missile and this building is blown up, or this vehicle is blown up, and you can see bits flying around, and then you kind of say, "Oh, wait a minute, that's a human being that just got blown up on that screen."

TS: And how different technology changed from the time your dad was a gunner on the B-17, right?

BM: Oh, my goodness, yeah. Right. Exactly.

TS: Things he saw from a distance.

BM: Right, yeah.

TS: But he didn't necessarily see the outcome of that damage.

BM: That's right, yeah. And it is interesting, too, I thought about that, that my mother is in London during the Blitz on the receiving end of the German bombs, and then a couple years later her future husband is flying over Germany and dropping bombs on Berlin and various other German countries. It's probably something I'm working through and thinking about, about that whole family history and how it's all wrapped up in national violence against other countries. But it's just—It's just your family.

TS: Right.

BM: It's just like your friend's dad is a fighter pilot, so what?

TS: Intersections of violence.

BM: Yeah.

TS: Was there anything more you'd like to say about 9/11 or the war in Afghanistan or Iraq?

BM: I had mentioned that I hadn't experienced any real sexual harassment or anything like that.

TS: Oh, right.

BM: And I still, for my own reasons, wouldn't call it sexual harassment, I would still call it being challenged about your capabilities. So we were working—it was—Our cell[?] there, we were working with our French and British counterparts.

TS: This is in the Combined Air Command [correction—Operations] Center?

BM: Right, in the CAOC. But primarily we worked with our British counterparts in the RAF regiment, and they did the equivalent of what we do in the air force with NBC [Nuclear,

Biological and Chemical Regiment], and there was a major who was Welsh and he was in charge. He wouldn't speak with me; he wanted to speak to one of the male members even though I was the ranking airman at that time.

TS: What was your rank at that time?

BM: I was a master sergeant.

TS: Okay.

BM: So he was very dismissive. He also always made a point to make sexual jokes and innuendos, not directed at me but in my presence. And I just felt like it was a challenge, like, "Can you take this?" or, "What are you going to do about this?" And he—a senior master sergeant—funny enough, a guy I deployed with to the merchant marine vessel—he was on Masirah Island and he came up from Masirah; he was with special operations down there. He came up to the CAOC for a week or two and he dealt with the major, and he didn't deal very well with the major and he left. And then the major came to me after I had worked very well with his enlisted folks and got them all trained up on the system, and then he actually came to me after and apologized and said, "I'm sorry I underestimated you. I thought certain things and you're qualified, competent, capable." He actually wrote me a letter of reference at the end which I—but I think it could have gone a different way. I don't know how much of it was that I bristled, but more not at like the sexual innuendo stuff because I just worked around military people and some military people were very rude and obnoxious. I think I bristled more at just the challenge. Once again, I'm getting to the end of my career and once again, somebody doesn't think I'm capable because I'm a woman, and for no other reason.

TS: So that chafed you a whole lot more.

BM: Yeah.

TS: Because it's having to prove yourself.

BM: Once again.

TS: Like, you say, again, and at the end of your career, too.

BM: Yes, yes.

TS: That's interesting. In '03 you had your second overseas to the United States assignment, right?

BM: [chuckles] That's right. I got back to Mildenhall, tested for senior master sergeant, I got promoted. Before I found out that I was promoted I had orders to Grand Forks [Air Base]. And just, "North Dakota?" I was, like, "Okay." I wasn't that excited, but alright, that's where we're going. And then I—the senior master sergeant was released and I got

notified that I couldn't be used at Grand Forks, they didn't have a billet for a senior master sergeant, so kind of stand fast, figure out where you're going. And I ended up going to Scott Air Force Base [Illinois] to the headquarters at Air Mobility Command and that's where I finished out my career.

TS: You were there three years?

BM: Three years, yes.

TS: How did you like your assignment there?

BM: I enjoyed it. I liked—Again, I'm a little bit of a policy wonk, planning kind of person. I enjoy the mechanism of how things get accomplished; how the airman at the end of the line ends up with the widget that he or she needs. How does it get there, and how do you know it's the right widget, and all of the processes in between.

So Air Mobility Command is a huge logistics machine, and it was also co-located with Transportation Command so it was a joint command, so you saw the marines and navy and army all working together; they're moving in different various bits and pieces. Of course, we're still in Afghanistan, and by now Iraq has been invaded, and [Hurricane] Katrina happens at that time so we're also deploying for natural disasters.

TS: Did you deploy, yourself?

BM: I didn't. Unfortunately, when I—right before I left England I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, and so when I arrived at Scott it was partially new environment, working at the headquarters, and "Oh, you have cancer. Now we've got to figure out how bad it is," and all that. So I was kind of split between a couple of worlds there. I was diagnosed, I had surgery in June 2003 on base; did damage to my vocal cords a little bit during the surgery, but everything was going okay. And then in 2005 I had a recurrence and so I had to have a second surgery, and I went into surgery on the day that Katrina hit New Orleans. So they put me under, and we'd been prepping at work, getting ready for this—and the first thing I said when I woke up is, "Did it hit New Orleans?"

TS: Really? [both chuckle]

BM: My husband's like, "Are you serious?"

TS: While you were in your sleep mode you were probably wondering. Well, how are you today?

BM: I've been much, much better, under control; I had my entire thyroid removed. The thyroid cancer was not very aggressive but it did end my career, so I'm a little bit—a little bit kind of sad about that. I had hoped to—

TS: Well, you've got twenty-five.

BM: I've got twenty-five years in but my dad had thirty-one.

TS: Oh.

BM: [chuckles]

TS: Well, you outranked him.

BM: But I was kind of, like, wanting to be that chief master sergeant and getting the thing[?], but things happen for a reason and this happened, so.

TS: Well, E-8, right?

BM: E-8. Nothing to sneeze at.

TS: No, no. It certainly isn't. Can I ask you some general questions? You've actually answered some of these things about discrimination in the service. Did you have any mentors that you would like to note that helped you in any way?

BM: Yeah. The first person that I think of was a female, Chief Master Sergeant Romain—R-O-M-A-I-N—and I was still working at the Galaxy Club, and at this time I was working at a little sandwich line so I'd see her every lunchtime. And I just—She never, like, tried to get me to enlist or anything like that, but she would just talk about, "I really enjoy being in the air force." And so, that stuck with me, that she was this really, really—first of all, very friendly, very competent, she looked so good in her uniform. You could just tell she was so professional. But she was interested in me and she'd talked with me every day. And so, when I went on my delayed enlistment program I ran into Chief Romain at the post office on base and I told her and she just gave me a big hug. I wish—I wish I'd kept in touch with her but I didn't.

There was another female, Senior Master Sergeant Fran Parr[?], who had done NATO TACEVALs and I met her in England, and I was impressed with her because she had gotten to the rank of senior master sergeant in our career field, and there weren't that many at that time; not that many women had stayed in and went up in the ranks.

And when I got to Scott Air Force Base I worked with Chief Master Sergeant Eric Brooks[?], and Eric actually went into the CAOC after me, so he filled the seat after I did, and he made chief when he arrived at Scott Air Force Base so I got to do his promotion ceremony and everything. And he just deeply impressed me, again, with his professionalism. And he really cared about his airmen and you could see that so clearly; how much he cared about his airmen and took a real interest. We had all of the Air Mobility Command bases that were assigned under us and we'd have to visit them quite a bit and he would always make a point of just, "I'm going to sit down with the airmen for a couple hours and we're just going to talk and find out what's going on with them."

TS: Yeah.

BM: He really, really impressed me.

TS: When you had supervision over airmen, did you have a particular style that you used?

BM: I'm a bit of a softie.

TS: Are you?

BM: So I'm—I think that most of them—most of the airmen that worked for me knew that they could talk to me, and they connected with me [unclear], and I did connect with them much more personally. But I nev—I don't know why, I just never saw myself as—I wasn't able to see myself in that position. I still just felt like, "I'm just one of them."

TS: Did you ever have to use disciplinary measures?

BM: Yeah, I did.

TS: But you hated it, it sounds like.

BM: Yeah, yeah. I didn't enjoy it. And in fact, at one point I kind of toyed with the idea of being a first sergeant because I kind of liked the chance of just meeting with all of the people in your squadron, and then I thought of the discipline side and I'm like, "No, I don't—" [chuckles]

TS: You knew it wasn't for you?

BM: No. But I'm still in touch with, funny enough, a lot of the—a lot of the airmen that I knew in my career field, I just got notified that a couple of them have made senior master sergeant and I'm, like, "Oh, my goodness. They're all grown up."

TS: That's right. How long have you been out now?

BM: About ten years now.

TS: About ten years. Yeah, they're growing. You've talked about sexual harassment and PTSD and changes over your career and [unclear] towards others. Was there anything that you had hoped that you could do, besides being a Russian linguist, that you didn't get a chance to do.

BM: No, actually. And I remember when another chief at AMC, Frank Lieth—again, a small career field so I'd been stationed with Frank before when we were both techs and master sergeants—but Frank was going over, "You have to do your biography and all this for your retirement ceremony," and he just said, "You've had a really interesting career." And it's not until you kind of look back on everything and you realize that just because you happened to be at this location you got to do this, and if you'd been somewhere else maybe it would have been something equally interesting. But there were just those little points in my career where I was doing something out of the ordinary that other people in

my career field haven't had a chance to do. So I felt satisfied at the end of twenty-five years; I felt satisfied. I do—One regret, not being able to do—I wish I'd been able to get over to Pacific Command, and I actually had two assignments to Korea and they both got cancelled. But I would have enjoyed—I think I would have enjoyed a tour in Korea, maybe in Japan; Okinawa.

TS: What do you think you missed by not being there?

BM: Just that exposure to another culture. I'd been in central South America with Panama, and obviously in Europe—all over Europe—and the Middle East, and the United States, a few places. But I kind of wanted to—that opportunity to go further east.

TS: Just never came up or you didn't get selected.

BM: Well, I had the two assignments to Korea and they both got cancelled.

TS: When was that?

BM: The first one was in 1999, 2000, from Bolling Air Force Base. I was supposed to go to Kunsan [Air Base, South Korea] and that got cancelled; I ended up going back to Mildenhall. And then when I was at Air Mobility Command I had orders for 7th Air Force in Seoul, and because I was on a medical evaluation board waiting results, so that got canceled.

TS: They didn't want to move you?

BM: Yes.

TS: I see. Let's see, you started in '81, you got out in 2006, so you were in before "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was put in place, and then it was put in place, and it wasn't removed yet by the time you got out. Do you have thoughts on the circumstances with homosexuals in the military; do you have some thoughts on that?

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

BM: Everybody knew that some of your fellow airmen were either gay or lesbian; everybody knew that. To me it never—It was never an issue with me; I never even thought or concentrated on it. But when it did—it's funny, too, I think that something changed—in my opinion, something changed in the military from the eighties to the nineties. There was a shift, and I hadn't experienced this firsthand because I'd been overseas the whole

time, but something happened back here in the States, politically, that began to seep into the military that I had not experienced during the eighties, and that's where people were beginning to speak openly about the politics, and also to speak disparagingly about their presidents. I had—That was new to me.

So when I got back to Bolling Air Force Base and President [William Jefferson] Clinton was being impeached, I was absolutely mortified at emails that I would receive from fellow airmen saying horrible things about their president. Now, I hadn't actually voted for Clinton, but I hadn't even thought that that was a factor because he's our Commander in Chief.

So I think that the issue about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" also became much more of a political issue in the nineties. Maybe—I don't know, probably officers in the military, you might have been more aware of their politics but it didn't have—it didn't seem to impact the enlisted field. But I did notice it in the nineties, that it began to impact. And I became more politically aware, and then definitely after 9/11 I became more vocal in my—in my politics, of saying—I wouldn't do it on duty, but I'd talk to my husband and friends and voice my concerns: "I'm very, very concerned about where we were heading after 9/11."

But to get back to the thing about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the first female chief master sergeant in our career field was gay—was lesbian—and she had to go through—I realized she had to go through her entire career operating under that system, and it wasn't until the day she retired that she could openly come out and say, "Here's who I am." And so, not while I was in the service, but afterwards, now I'm reflecting on it, what must that have been like to have to live your entire active duty not being able to let people know who you were and who you loved and what—And so, I had much admiration for her to begin with, but now—we're still in touch on Facebook [social networking website]—but now to realize—it's kind of bringing tears to my eyes because it's just so—it's just—it was so wrong and we were so blind to it; that we were denying so many of our fellow airmen, fellow military members a chance to be themselves. Just be who you are. Do your job, be professional, but be who you are. That's just—It's kind of getting me worked up here.

TS: Yeah, I see you are. You're a little red-eyed.

BM: I think because I do know many—I have many friends who are gay and lesbian, I have some family members who are gay and lesbian, and so it's just realizing—you don't think about oppression until you realize how close to home it hits. And that was a form of government oppression against a certain group of people and it's just wrong. So I'm glad that my particular friend made it to chief master sergeant and she won; she got through it. She's very—And she's still well-respected and loved in the career field and—but she had to retire in order to marry and to be who she wanted to be.

TS: Right. So you're glad that it was all removed and now it's completely open.

BM: Oh, absolutely. Way, way overdue. I didn't understand—at the time, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," in fact it was usually just a joke and people would just use the term as a belittlement and tease, but it impacted so many lives. It was actually not a good thing

because now you're asking people to lie and go through it. "You take an oath, you promise to do certain things, but we want you to actually—in this particular area of your life we want you to lie purposefully." It was unsustainable, obviously. And thank goodness that the country's moved in a certain direction. And some people criticize and say that the military is like this social engineering thing. Sometimes that's a good thing. We were the first to integrate and that was a good thing; it was the right thing to do. And I'm glad that we finally removed those restrictions on our gay and lesbian citizens. And obviously the things that have happened in the civilian world as well have all been good.

TS: How about the idea of women in combat?

BM: That's a tough one. I have—one of my nephews is infantry and another nephew is artillery. I watched with a lot of excitement as the first group of female candidates went through Ranger School. I think that women have been in combat, it just hasn't been official; that women have always been victims of war; they've been on the receiving end of so much of the violence of war. Women in other countries and cultures have served in combat positions. I think if you're capable and competent, then why not? It should be a matter of can you do it. If you can do it, then we need you to do it.

TS: So it's based on individual merit.

BM: Yes.

TS: Instead of gender.

BM: Right, yes.

TS: How was your transition out of the air force into the civilian world?

BM: Yeah, that was—that was tough, because first of all I was born in the air force.

TS: Yeah. [chuckles]

BM: My dad was in so I started off life in the air force, and I went through not just twenty-five years of active duty but twenty-two years as a dependent. And so, then in Aug—in October of 2006 we moved to North Carolina, and we moved up here to Greensboro so we're not next to a base.

TS: Not directly, right.

BM: My sisters are near air force bases so they still have that connection. So we don't have the commissary to go shopping, so I had to learn, like, okay is Harris Teeter better than the Food Lion or should I do Walmart? [both chuckle] So trying to—It used to be that that was where you went; you went to the commissary.

TS: Right. You got everything on base.

BM: Yeah. So that was different. This is the first time that I have not been physically located on or near an air force base my whole adult life.

TS: You go over to Pope [Field, Fayetteville, North Carolina] every once in a while just to—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BM: Yeah, I go down there to Fort Bragg.

TS: Do you? Take trips?

BM: But when I got out I did some contract work with the air force as a—editing and writing on a series of manuals for the career field. But I just realized that my heart wasn't in it anymore. That kind of, like, drew a line under it and—"What's next? What are you going to do next?"

So I started looking around and I found the Documentary Studies Program over at Duke [University], and so I started working on a certificate in documentary studies, and then I got into that world of oral histories and documentary work. And then somebody mentioned the Master of Liberal Studies that Duke offers and I said—and at that time they had done the post 9/11 GI Bill, because I had gotten, unfortunately, in that world where you didn't get any benefits. The old GI Bill—VEAP [Veterans Educational Assistance Program]—Yeah, the old GI Bill had ended and here's what you got. So I was able to convert and go into the new GI Bill and I did the three years at Duke in the master of liberal studies and loved it.

TS: Yeah. Did you?

BM: Yes.

TS: How did you end up here? I don't know what your actual job is.

BM: I'm just volunteering.

TS: You're volunteering. Are you a volunteer?

BM: Yeah, with Beth Ann [Koelsch—Curator of the Women Veterans Historical Project], and just volunteering.

TS: What do you do?

BM: I've been editing transcripts and now she's got me actually listening to the interviews and actually doing the transcription.

TS: Oh, I didn't know that, okay. Alright, well, transcriber, be very kind. [both chuckle] How do you think your life has been different, because not only were you a brat in the air force, but when you made that decision to join the air force and be an airman. How do you think your life would have been different if you hadn't made that decision?

BM: Yeah. I can't—I just can't imagine what I would have done because I think at some point—I had started taking college classes in, like, 1977. Before I got my GED I'd actually started taking college classes, so I think I probably would have developed a desire to do something more than what I was doing at the time had I continued doing my college as a civilian. So I think that what happened is when I went into the air force I got a different type of education, and then later on I picked back up into the academic education. So I think I—I think in a way the air force both delayed some of my growth, but it also moved me in a different direction where maybe the things that I learned had more value and more weight to them than if I had just been discovering these things just purely academically.

TS: Right.

BM: Yes. I had taken a course on terrorism, for example, at George Washington University and it was—There's academic knowledge and then there's firsthand, your own personal, experience, and the trick is to be able to marry the two of them together with—and still try to maintain that certain amount of skepticism, I guess. But, I don't know, it's just—it's a different kind of understanding of how things work and the impact that they have on that one individual at the end.

TS: Yeah. You have a son, and goodness, how old is he now?

BM: He's twenty-eight.

TS: Twenty-eight, okay. Has he considered the military at all?

BM: No. [chuckles]

TS: She's laughing. Her face is turning red.

BM: Yeah. He has no interest whatsoever. No, he's got several cousins who have had—Let me see, Robert and Ryan are my sister Kerry's twins, and Robert went in the infantry, Ryan was in the artillery, and they both deployed; Robert went to Iraq and Afghanistan and Ryan went to Afghanistan twice. They have three Purple Hearts between them. In fact, General [David] Petraeus presented the Purple Heart to Ryan in Afghanistan. My niece married an artilleryman, Kevin Haslip, and he was deployed to Afghanistan. My nephew Danny went to Iraq as a contractor; he went over twice. My nephew Mike is active duty air force and he was in Afghanistan and in Qatar and in Germany.

TS: So I guess it's a different world to join now than it would have been back in 1981.

BM: Oh, yeah. I mean, I was in Operation Enduring Freedom at the start of the Afghanistan war. I would not in a million years have made a bet with you that my nephews, who were then in middle school, would be fighting that same war a decade later. I mean, it just boggles the mind. And they went in wide open, knowing this was what was going on. [chuckles]

TS: Well, we have to kind of close it out. I have two questions. Is there anything in particular you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they may not understand or appreciate?

BM: That's a difficult question because there's so many aspects of it. But what I do think one of the big issues in this country right now is that gap between civilian and military because we don't have a draft anymore. It's all volunteer force and it's a smaller force. And so, I think it's about 1% of the nation that puts on a uniform and volunteers, and we have demanded so much from that 1% over the past ten years—fifteen years, really, now—that it's just—it's unfathomable, and I think that sometimes it's easy for civilians to just look at a military person as just a symbol and not as another human being, and not realize the complexity of the lives that these people live. And also of the families. And that saying, "Thank for your service," is good—it's a good step, but sometimes it's like a—it's just like a placebo. More like a, "Okay, now I've bought myself—"

TS: It's just the veneer of—

BM: Right. It's a bumper sticker. And military people come out of communities—they come out of civilian communities—but then they're separated for their service, and then at some point they integrate back into the civilian communities, and I think there's just maybe—there needs to be more sense of awareness of the complexity of military life, and don't always just buy into the symbolism, try to recognize the other things that are going on underneath, the lives that are being lived.

TS: Right. One last question because we have to go, otherwise we'd probably sit here all day; what does patriotism mean to you?

BM: That's a very good question because I didn't grow up here in the United States. We just came here to visit, really. And so, as an adult I spent most of my life wearing a United States military uniform but not actually being in the United States or even feeling part of this culture. I always felt myself to be Irish; that's what I'd latched onto for my identity. But funny enough, after I have left the service I've developed a greater sense of patriotism, and to me it's more about—it's much broader than just—we've narrowed it down to the military service, but that is the only thing that you attach the label of patriotism to, but it should be about a love of your land and a love of your community, and wanting the best for that land, and for that community over all; over all of politics and ethnicity and anything else that gets in the way. If you truly want to be enlisted as a patriot you have to love your land and your community.

TS: Okay. Well, thank you so much. We've got to go because we've got to give up the room, but I really appreciated it, Bridgid.

BM: Thank you, Therese.

[End of Interview]