WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Elizabeth "Betsy" Sumner Blee

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 17 May 2014

[Begin Interview, Part 1]

TS: Today is May 17, 2014. My name is Therese Strohmer, and I'm at the home of Betsy Blee in Southport, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina [at Greensboro]. Betsy, could you state your name the way you'd like it to be on the collection?

BB: Elizabeth "Betsy" Sumner Blee.

TS: Okay. Okay, Betsy, why don't you start out by telling me a little but about when you were born and where you're from?

BB: I was born in London, England, [17 May] 1951, to American parents who were stationed—my father was stationed at the embassy in London as a naval officer. We were there for a total of about three years, and I had a whole life with my dad of travel, and my mother, to some very exotic, wonderful places. From England we went to Virginia—Virginia Beach, Norfolk—where my father was stationed in Norfolk. I went to elementary school in the Virginia Beach area—Norfolk. My mother's home was Virginia.

TS: Your mother's from Virginia?

BB: Yes.

TS: Where's your dad from originally?

BB: My father's from California.

TS: Okay.

BB: My mother and her family have been from Virginia since 1637, so we have roots in Virginia at the coast, as well as the coast of North Carolina. As a matter of fact, my grandfather was a lighthouse keeper—

TS: Is that right?

BB: —at Currituck [Beach] and also at Dam Neck, which no longer exists.

TS: Now, is that where your lineage goes back to William the Conqueror on your mother's side?

BB: Yes, it does.

TS: I saw that on your wall earlier.

BB: Exactly. A lot of lineage of mariners and service; many generations of naval service. So from Virginia and Norfolk we then moved to Naples, Italy, where my father was the captain of a cruiser there. That was a very interesting experience, of going to school there and living for a bit.

TS: How old were you at that time?

BB: I was probably about eight years old.

TS: Okay. Is that when you started school, then?

BB: I had already started school in Virginia, and then continued school—elementary school—in Naples at an American school. But certainly learned and lived around a lot of Italians and picked up a little bit of Italian.

But from there from father received different orders and we moved back to Norfolk for a while, and he had assignment there in the navy, and I went to school in Norfolk again. And then not too long after that we learned we had orders—my dad did—to Singapore.

TS: Oh.

BB: It was a very similar assignment to the one he had had in London, which was to be stationed at the embassy in Singapore as the consul.

TS: The consulate?

BB: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

BB: In the consulate of Singapore. Now, that was an exotic assignment as it was still under British rule in Singapore.

TS: How old were you about that time?

BB: That was when I was about fourth, fifth—third—the end of third grade, fourth, and fifth grade—elementary school—again—

TS: Around ten, eleven?

BB: Exactly.

TS: Okay.

BB: The Singapore American School; nine, ten, eleven years old. I had two younger sisters and all three of us went to the Singapore American School. And my father and mother absolutely loved living in Singapore, as did we, because it was a very interesting place to be. There was water all around, and the navy made available some wonderful opportunities with boats for us to go and enjoy the surrounding area. And so, I'm developing this little theme here of islands and water and so on.

TS: [chuckles] Yes, you are.

BB: Yes, and I probably can even still sing the school song there, from the Singapore American School. Yeah.

TS: Oh, go right ahead.

BB: In the east, in the west, SAS is always best. [both chuckle] And so on.

TS: Very nice.

BB: Yeah, it was fun.

TS: Now, did you say you had brothers and sisters?

BB: I had two younger sisters, Jane and Martha, and we just had this wonderful life as daughters of a navy captain who got some wonderful assignments. He had been serving in World War II. He married my mother right after that. Again, I was born in 1951. He also served during the time of the Korea War, and he served during the time of the Vietnam War. So it's three different wars, an interesting time in his life; an interesting guy with a lot of interesting assignments.

TS: Right.

BB: And we benefited from that from a cultural perspective. I think there's no education like it; to move and live in the places that we were. From Singapore we learned that dad was going to be assigned to the Pentagon, so we came back to the United States and lived in Alexandria, Virginia, while dad did his time in the Pentagon as a naval officer. And this time his assignment was in naval intelligence. Prior to what I've been talking about, he had been assigned to the battleship USS *North Carolina* in the combat information

center, and done a lot with the intelligence reading of enemy, and our own positions, in the Pacific specifically. And so, that was kind of the theme of his career, in addition to being a captain of some ships and so on.

So we were in Washington, D.C. I'm now in sixth grade—

TS: Okay.

BB: —and seventh grade, so that's like twelve and thirteen years old. Learned from there that we are going to be assigned now to San Francisco.

TS: How long were you there before you got that assignment?

BB: My dad was in the Pentagon for approximately two years, and Vietnam is underway and heating up and so forth. It's—Let me just think about the years of my being thirteen—[unclear]—So it'd be 1964.

TS: I was going to ask you, when you were back in Singapore, I was thinking, timewise, that was around the time when the Cuban Missile Crisis—

BB: That's right. That happened, and it really blew up the day or two after we returned.

TS: Oh, is that right?

BB: Your timing is pretty good on that. Yeah, we had returned to the United States, like, one day before it really got huge and frightening for the entire country.

TS: And your dad's in the navy—

BB: Oh yeah.

TS: —and he's high level senior officer.

BB: Yes. We didn't see him much.

TS: No?

BB: No, we did not see him much.

TS: Did he ever talk about that?

BB: I don't remember a lot of him talking about that as much as he talked about his time in World War II, in the Pacific theater, on the battle ship *North Carolina*, and how many cigars they smoked a day. He wrote the official book for the USS *North Carolina*.

TS: What's your dad's name?

BB: Ben.

TS: Ben.

BB: Ben Blee.

TS: And you said he was really part of the corps of people that brought the USS *North Carolina* here to—

BB: The USS *North Carolina* was brought to this state and installed in Wilmington in its permanent dock right now in the early 1960s.

TS: Okay.

BB: My father did not get involved again with the battleship after his service aboard that ship until later when we moved back to North Carolina, which we're not there yet, but that's when we pick up a very interesting story.

TS: Okay.

BB: But for now we're in about the 1965 or so timeframe—Pentagon; we're living in Alexandria; I'm in sixth grade and seventh grade. We get orders to San Francisco because my dad has been assigned to be the captain of the USS *General* [*W.A.*] *Mann*—M-A-N-N—which was a transport ship. It took troops to Vietnam and back. And it was a time in our country when people were demonstrating and very upset and very anxious and nervous and worried that we are sending troops to war, and we know the possibility of loss of life and so on. But that was—

TS: What was your perspective as, like, a young teenager, I guess, at this time?

BB: At this time I'm in junior high school.

TS: Okay.

BB: We are now living in San Francisco, and dad's ship actually goes in and out of Oakland specifically. But we're living in San Francisco. My perspective was, he's my father, he's in the navy, I am a child of a navy captain, and I had been schooled very well by my mother and father who are patriots—I'm a patriot—to be quite loyal and faithful, and my perspective was their perspective: this is our country; this is our job; these are our roles; it's important to us to be a part of what the country needs at this time; and these are our orders; and we joined up and took an oath. And that was early imprinting for me, and it's stayed with me.

TS: So you're in San Francisco and there's a whole lot of counter-culture stuff going on too. Were you aware of it at the time?

BB: I'm very aware of it because we went to his ship and we were very aware, but we saw it, we witnessed it. The troops that were being brought to the [USS] *General Mann* by train were frequently stopped as there were those who were lying across the train track. There were demonstrations that could get very violent and so on. We had—I wouldn't say we had guards—that's not really accurate—but we were—

TS: Escorts perhaps?

BB: We were escorted, we were advised, we were warned and told to be very careful, and there were people that watched out for my mother and for us coming to see him off, coming to greet him when he came back, because of the concern of what was happening with demonstrations and how it might take a turn. This was in approximately 1964, '65; somewhere in there is when that was happening. In 19—Yeah, 1966.

TS: As a young girl, what did you think about that? I mean, did you have any feelings about it, other than supporting what was going on with the military, because of the background and—

BB: I would say it was scary; it was disconcerting; a high level of anxiety. I wasn't sure why there was so much anger. I didn't quite have a mature, sophisticated enough perspective on it to understand why that was happening at the time.

TS: So it was a little nerve wracking for you?

BB: Of course, absolutely, because my mother was upset. She was worried, and you could feel and sense—even though she tried to keep it from us—that this was not a good time; it was really hard. And dad was gone often. He was gone for long periods of time.

TS: Now, I know this happened before you got to San Francisco, but—or probably when you were at the Pentagon maybe—I'm not sure when—but when JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] was assassinated.

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

BB: Yes, I was in Washington, D.C, on a school bus, when I learned that JFK had been assassinated, and yeah, that was a bad day for everybody, for the whole country. Yes, of course everybody remembers where they were on that day.

TS: So you were there when they had the funeral as well?

BB: Yes.

TS: Do you remember watching that?

BB: I remember watching every bit of it, yeah, that we could.

TS: Did you watch it on TV?

BB: We watched it on TV, not in person, no.

TS: Not in person.

BB: No.

TS: Because when you're talking about the Cold War and the fear of atomic bomb and nuclear war, and with the quarantine, and you're so close that you see what's going on, in the background, anyhow, of the military, how did that make you feel? Or do you even remember those things?

BB: The early part of my life, up until the Cuban Missile Crisis, was just a great big party. It was a traveling fun adventure.

TS: Okay.

BB: That's what my life was like. "Hey, where are we going now? This is cool. Make new friends." I learned how to make new friends very easily. It was not hard for me. Academics, not so much, because I never could keep up in school. That was—

TS: Right, because you're changing; you're switched around.

BB: The downside of traveling was the schooling was difficult for me. I'll just speak for myself. I don't know how others in my shoes feel about it, but I've traveled as much as anyone, and I would say that that was really hard on me to be behind in school. Because each school, while they might teach American history or they might teach English or they might—it was not always the same emphasis; it was not always—

TS: You didn't pick up in the same place when you got—right.

BB: We didn't pick up in the same place, and the curriculum may not have been the same, so it was very difficult. And now in Italy, you're learning a little bit of Italian, in Singapore you're hearing Chinese and Malayan [unclear]. In Italy we didn't have a television. In Singapore we didn't have a television. We're listening to Mitch Miller on the radio or on a record.

TS: Who's Mitch Miller?

BB: He's a band director and he had a wonderful array of songs that we sung in our car going back and forth in the country, from Virginia to California, and we knew every Mitch Miller song. We were the Blee Glee Club—

TS: [chuckles]

BB: —and it was a lot of fun; a lot of fun. That would take us way from concerns: Vietnam, the Cuban Missile Crisis. That's when I knew that life was big and life was dangerous. Prior to that, it wasn't.

TS: Prior to that, when you're having your fun time, your adventure—

BB: Yes, swimming in swimming pools at the Raffles Hotel in Singapore was pretty darn fun.

TS: What was it that you did?

BB: The Raffles Hotel in Singapore is a beautiful place, beautiful swimming pools, and there's a club for the Americans. We had the boat; we went water skiing. I mean, this was the life.

TS: Yeah, I was going to say, what kind of things did you do then?

BB: Yeah, that's what we did.

TS: Yeah? So you had to pick up with friends. Did you ever meet friends that you had made before—was it that kind of a small world—or was it like completely new every time?

BB: New. It was new every time. The only consistent thing for us was my mother's family in Virginia Beach; our cousins were like siblings. Your cousins—for me—were our first friends, and our longest enduring friends were cousins. We had cousins in California, because my father's family lives in California in the Los Angeles area; they'd been there since 1855. So a long history of California; the Blees. And my mother's Woodhouse family, a long history of Virginia and North Carolina.

But we got—I think I got my story up to San Francisco—I was telling you a little bit about that—was an interesting developmental part of my growing up and learning more about the bigger world and the possibilities, and the potential for strife in the country and around the world. So I'm starting—I've got some experience now traveling. Now I'm getting experience now with not only culture but how people can engage in warring. Even though my dad was in the navy, I'm not sure that I ever connected, well, that's part of the military service, and things happen when you're in the military that have to do with warring. But as I got older—

Now, after San Francisco's job was completed for my dad, he got orders then to Hawaii. "Oh, we're moving to Hawaii. Hey, alright! That's pretty cool! Yes!" So we move to Hawaii.

TS: How old were you at this period?

BB: I'm ninth grade.

TS: Okay. Starting high school?

BB: Yeah. So ninth grade in Honolulu. My dad was stationed at Pearl Harbor of course, and I'm going to St. Andrew's Priory [School], which was a girls' Episcopal school in Hawaii. We did not live in quarters for very long. We lived in navy quarters for a temporary period of time, and then we moved out into the economy [living off-base] and lived in Foster Village, which is still in the Honolulu area, although not downtown. It's beautiful. At the time in the sixties, it still smelled like sugar cane and pineapple. I mean, the aromatics there of Plumeria are really divine. And Peacocky[?]. If anyone knows these flowers you know what I'm talking about. It's just still with me, those—from the breezes in the Pacific of smelling those things; it's just really a wonderful conjuring up of that experience.

I also went to high school at Radford [High School], and Radford is where Bette Midler [American singer, actress] went to high school.

TS: Oh, is that right?

BB: She was a daughter of a navy man also who was stationed at [Naval Air Station] Barbers Point. We were the Radford Rams.

TS: Yeah. What year did Bette Midler go?

BB: Way before me.

TS: Okay, just checking

BB: She is much older than I am. But no, not really. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, I don't know. Let's see. I'm not sure.

BB: I think she's two years older than I am.

TS: Okay. Was she in the school when you were there?

BB: She was, yes.

TS: She was.

BB: Did I know her? No, I didn't. I just know that she went to Radford.

Now, what happened for me in Honolulu and the larger area around Pearl Harbor, going to those two schools—the one private school, which was an all-girls school, and then going to a public high school, was a major change. It was a really, really—

TS: In what way?

BB: So cloistered, and the Episcopal school had nuns. The majority of the teachers and certainly the [unclear] leadership were nuns—Episcopal nuns. And there were ministers there, and we learned a lot about religion and so forth. A lot of my classmates were Japanese. Some were Chinese. There were a lot—There was a larger population of Japanese than Chinese, which was very comfortable for me, having already lived in Singapore.

TS: Right.

BB: New friends. Well, the major thing that happened in my life in Hawaii was I picked up a little sport known as surfing when I was fourteen. My father took us out on a weekend to the Waianae Beach Club, and the Waianae Beach Club, if I remember correctly, was owned by the army. Fort DeRussy is army, Waianae is army; the best kept secrets in military are these wonderful R&R [rest and recuperation] locations.

So I rented a surfboard for the day, and I was out in the water and the sun for hours upon hours and never caught a wave the entire time, until the end of the day, and I was toast. I mean, my nose was fried. I had been out there all this time, and finally—nobody taught me; I got no lesson, no instruction. And you could see the coral reef below, and I said, "Okay, I'm going to just pass out here, but I've got to catch a wave. I'm not going in until I catch a wave." I caught a wave at the end of the day and I rode it and it just skimmed and skimmed and skimmed over that coral reef all the way in to the beach. I said, "Wow, that's for me."

TS: You were hooked?

BB: I was hooked. That was the most exhilarating experience of a lifetime; I was definitely hooked. So I went on to be a surfer for thirty years.

TS: Is that right?

BB: And I competed and was in the East Coast championships twice.

TS: Wow.

BB: Yes. So I really took it up from that day, but that's my initial experience of it.

TS: Yeah.

BB: It was really hard, I was small. I wasn't really strong, and it does take a lot of strength and arm strength to be able to paddle into a wave and get the momentum going before it picks you up and carries you.

TS: You never worried about sharks?

BB: Yeah, I did; I did worry about sharks.

TS: Did you?

BB: I worried about sharks, I worried about Portuguese man o' war.

TS: Oh, right.

BB: I worried about coral injuries. Yeah, absolutely; all that. But I still continued to do surfing.

TS: But the rush of it just overcame all that.

BB: The rush of it got me. So that three years was a wonderful time in Hawaii. The sad thing was my mother knew that she had an illness. She knew she was sick, she knew she was not well at the end of our time in Hawaii, and she told me dad, "Let's wait until we get back to the continental United States, and we'll see a doctor then." So they put it off and put it off.

Dad's orders then were to retire out of Norfolk. This was now 1967. Nineteen sixty-seven, we moved back to Virginia, he retired out of Norfolk. We stayed in Virginia Beach with my mother's parents for a bit. And before we left Virginia my dad had decided to go with United Services Life Insurance Company and we moved to Jacksonville, North Carolina, outside of Camp Lejeune. That is when my mother went and saw a physician/a surgeon and was told she had breast cancer, and by then it was terminal.

TS: It had metastasized?

BB: It had. And so, she lived another two years, but you always wonder, had it been discovered earlier would there have been a different outcome? We don't know that now.

TS: Right.

BB: And you're talking about the late sixties, so it's another reason why I don't know. Would they have had—And they were using cobalt treatments then; they were not using chemotherapy. And so, she had a radical mastectomy, and it was tough; it was very tough. My mother passed away.

TS: You were sixteen?

BB: Yeah, I was nineteen.

TS: Oh, nineteen.

BB: I was nineteen.

TS: Oh, because two years later.

BB: Jane was sixteen—my sister—my sister Martha was fourteen. So we were all three teenagers when we lost mom and my dad was just very, very distraught; he's retired; he's trying to move; he's going into a new job; I'm in high school. Actually, that's not correct. I had already gotten out of high school. I graduated from Jacksonville High School after only going there for only a year and a half.

But in spite of my mother's illness, which was very hard of all of us, I quite enjoyed my time in Jacksonville High School. It was different from Hawaii. Hawaii—

TS: Oh, Jacksonville, North Carolina.

BB: North Carolina. North Carolina, yeah, not Florida. Hawaii high school experience, going from a private school to a public school, there were different concerns and issues. The private school is very academically demanding, and that was hard on me; I wasn't that good at it. So I went to a public school hoping and thinking I would do better, and I did do better academically, because now I'd been in Hawaii for two years, I felt more comfortable.

TS: Had some stability.

BB: Had some stability; got the deal of kids in the neighborhood and schools and so on. And the public school, quite frankly, was not as difficult as the private school was. So that helped a lot. And I had this wonderful love of the ocean and surfing. Wow, part of the theme. And I was out there often. I would go, before the sun came up, out to the water; get rides, drive my parent's car, which they let me use. I would end up usually at Fort DeRussy, which is right off of Waikīkī; had a wonderful break there. That break is known as "Threes" or the "Bowl," and it was just off of the Hilton [Hotel]. There was a channel there you could go and get these breaks, and again, no one taught me. I had no coach, no instruction, and there were very few Wahines [Hawaiian word for woman] out there. I'm one of the few girls out in the water, along this part of—It's not exactly Waikīkī, it's a little bit around from Waikīkī in—I don't want to say army territory because they don't own the water—

TS: Right.

BB: —but it's off the army Fort DeRussy R&R location, and it's been off the Hilton Hotel in the channel. That's where I did the vast majority of my surfing then. It was just a wonderful time to just sort of escape, and be in that ocean and that water with the sun coming up, seeing these beautiful waves, being scared to death; afraid that I'm going to be sucked under and I'm going to be eating coral. They call it, too, when you take a wave and you're going down and your nose is heading straight to the bottom, diving for pearls. You're not really diving for pearls, you're just going straight down and you're going to suck down some salt water. Okay, so I did that a lot of times.

TS: [chuckles]

BB: But I got better and better at it. And when I moved to North Carolina, to Jacksonville, upon my father's retirement—this was 1967 now—I continued surfing. It's a skill that I brought with me. So I had some cred [credentials] there at Jacksonville High School.

TS: I'll be you did.

BB: I was a little surfer girl wearing white culottes in the winter. I didn't have any winter clothes; I've been in Hawaii and Singapore; I didn't have winter clothes. And now I'm a teenager in the end of eleventh grade, and into twelfth grade.

I had some friends though, and a neighbor, that said, "Listen, if you're going to make it here with us, you're going to have to learn to dance. If you don't learn to dance, you're not going to be able to get down with us." In other words, whatever the language was the time. "You're not going to be able to join in and participate."

"Okay, well, let's be bringing it on. What are the dances? I've got no idea. We did freelance[?] and the Doors and Jimi Hendrix. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, we don't know them."

TS: Can you dance? I was going to say, how do you dance to Jimi Hendrix?

BB: "We don't even know who you're talking about."

TS: Oh, okay, because you were coming from the West Coast and now you're on the East Coast.

BB: "We like Embers, Tams, The Delfonics, the Intruders, Otis Redding."

I'm like, "Who are they?"

"Well, we don't know who Bill Brother—Big Brother and the Holding Company is. Who's Janis Joplin? We don't give a rat's tail about them."

Okay, I've got to do a whole new thing now. "What do you do with these people you're talking about?"

"Well, let's put some records on. Let's show you. We do what's called a cha-cha. We do what's called "the bop."

TS: You going to show me any of these or are you just going to talk about—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BB: "What the hell is the cha-cha and 'the bop?!' I never heard of this;" it sounds ridiculous to me, this surfer girl, listening to the records and the bands I just told you about.

"We're going to show you; it's easy."

They taught me how to dance, and I got pretty good at it. And so, that was our form of entertainment in high school and college, and it carried me through a long time.

TS: Yeah.

BB: And they were right; that was the social norm. When I was in Jacksonville in high school the—

TS: For here; for this place.

BB: Absolutely. We went to The Embers [Beach] Club in Atlantic Beach. I went to all the dances I could go to, and it didn't matter—your boyfriend, other boys and girls—we just all danced.

TS: Together?

BB: Yes. It was awesome.

TS: I'm not going to get a demonstration?

BB: Maybe.

TS: Alright.

BB: It's possible I could give you a demonstration, because I can—you're darn right I can still do it.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Yes.

TS: The cha-cha is really what I want to see.

BB: The cha-cha's a great, great, great simple dance; it really is. And the bop is a variation on the swing.

TS: Okay.

BB: And some of my classmates did the shag. I was never that good at the shag; it was very stylized. But it also is an offshoot of the swing too. We had a wonderful time; [unclear] time.

TS: When did you graduate?

BB: Nineteen sixty-nine.

TS: Nineteen sixty—

BB: Jacksonville High School, 1969, and I went to, from there, Saint Mary's School for Girls [Saint Mary's School] in Raleigh. It's an Episcopal college and high school when I went there.

TS: Before we get there—

BB: Yeah?

TS: —I want to ask you a little bit about the racial tensions that were happening in this area at that time.

BB: Yes.

TS: Were you connected at all with—I mean, were you aware, more than connected?

BB: I was very aware. There were racial incidents at Camp Lejeune as well as at Jacksonville High School. They were very high. My father came one day to take me out school, and I'm like, "Why are you coming here to take me out of school?"

"Well, there's been an incident."

"There has?"

And so, he knew more about it from the news than I did. Yeah, so it was definitely present, prominent; an issue that was inflamed from time to time. I was never personally involved in any of them. I didn't witness any of them myself. My ignorance was bliss.

TS: Well, as a person, and a young woman, who has traveled all over the world up to this point and lived in different types of cultures—

BB: Yes.

TS: —even within the United States, different cultures, did you have a political awareness of the issue of the race divide in the United States?

BB: It's an interesting question, because I have—I came in and out of the United States. People say, "Where did you grow up in the United States?" I didn't. And so, that question is a very difficult one for me to answer. The most tension that I ever experienced and saw firsthand was the Vietnam War demonstrations in California. In terms of the racial, up to that point, I was aware of them but I was never a witness to it; I never saw it. I was really more interested in dancing and surfing.

TS: Right. Well, in that group that you were in, then, was that more segregated?

BB: Very.

TS: Was it a segregated school?

BB: All white.

TS: All-white school?

BB: No, it was not all-white school, it was an all-white clique.

TS: I see. I see.

BB: We went to dances and danced all-white.

TS: Got you.

BB: Yes. It's a good question.

TS: So within that period of time, we had—[Dr.] Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and Robert Kennedy, just a few months apart there in '68.

BB: Right.

TS: Like you were imprinted with JFK, did you have any remembrance of these—

BB: A little.

TS: A little bit?

BB: Not as much. Because of where I was at the time—JFK—in the Washington area, in school, and a father in the navy at the Pentagon, very aware of that, but the others not as much.

TS: Not so much?

BB: In Hawaii, even though it is a state, it's not in the continental United States. And so, people say "back in the States;" well, that's not really an accurate reference, but there is two thousand miles difference, and it is a set of islands. And so, it's really not the experience of having grown up in the mainland.

TS: It's a different culture within itself.

BB: Very much so, yes. So by that time I'd experienced so many other cultures.

TS: How was Hawaii different, then? I mean, what made their culture so different, as far as how you experienced it?

BB: Well, because of the mix of people who are living there and make up that population, which is largely—as I said, the Asian population is very prominent there. Now, the Polynesian mix is also very prominent. I can't really say Hawaiian because there are so

few. There might be some still in Ni'ihau, but there are very Hawaiians that live in Hawaii anymore. They are a mix of—from Fiji and Samoa and other Polynesian, and there are some who have heritage and are Hawaiian by blood, but very, very few.

You think about President [Barrack Hussein] Obama, who went to Punahou High School. You're supposed to be a certain—or—and Kamehameha School—Kamehameha School specifically, you have to be a certain percentage of Hawaiian. They have to change the rules from time to time because there's so few. It's a shame.

TS: I wasn't aware of that.

BB: It's really a shame, because the Hawaiians started to die out with the Europeans coming to the islands, from illnesses they had no immunities to protect themselves from; small pox, measles, things like that.

TS: Now, as a young woman who is a world traveler, and apparently an excellent surfer—

BB: Darn right.

TS: —and a dancer of—

BB: Of note, yeah.

TS: —of note, that's right—what are you thinking about your future? At this time in your life, are you thinking about, "What am I going to do when I'm done with school?" Or, "Am I going to go on to college?" All these things. What are you thinking, and is your father's telling you or did he influence you in any way? And your mother too.

BB: I'm thinking military service is probably going to be right for me, and specifically the navy.

TS: When did you start having those—

BB: Pretty early, I would think. It just seemed like it was natural; military service; navy. And public affairs is where I was heading. Public affairs in the navy, because of my travel experience, and my father had been—not in public affairs but he'd been in public service in the navy as a diplomat, essentially. That's the role, right? In an embassy and a consulate, is diplomatic, even though that wasn't his title; he wasn't called a diplomat. But I witnessed firsthand in our homes my parents entertaining people from all over the world, in large numbers. And my dad was just an excellent host and he was a beautiful speaker and he was very suave and he was very sophisticated, and meeting and greeting and having conversations with people from India and Malaya and Hong Kong, and it was like—it was just amazing to me. And so—

TS: So he was a great role model for you for understanding that kind of world.

BB: He was a great role model. Yes. And my mother was the perfect partner for him as well. She was quite a lady.

TS: What was her name?

BB: Martha.

TS: Martha.

BB: Yes, Martha Sumner.

TS: That's right, Sumner.

BB: And her mother was Elizabeth Sumner.

TS: That's right. Oh, Elizabeth; so that's where you got your Elizabeth from.

BB: Yes.

TS: Okay. So you graduate, then, from high school, and you to—which college did you say? It was a—

BB: St. Mary's Junior College. St. Mary's School for Girls, St. Mary's Junior College, because it was—at the time—two years of high school and two years of college. Now, I went to the college.

TS: Okay.

BB: Currently it's an all high school—girls' high school; it's a boarding school high school for girls; they dropped the college.

TS: I see. So at the time it was a—

BB: Yes. My grandmother had gone there; she was the class of 1917. Elizabeth Sumner Wingate Woodhouse—my grandmother—went to St. Mary's, and 1917—she was the class of 1917.

TS: And so, was that an influence on the reason that you went?

BB: Of course. That was the only place I knew I was going. My mother always wanted me to go to St. Mary's. And my sister went also.

TS: How was it?

BB: I loved it. I'm still, again, very connected to those—my best friends are classmates; classmates from high school; classmates from St. Mary's; classmates from UNCG [The

University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. I've got these connections, but certainly my friends from St. Mary's, I just adore.

TS: It seems like you really enjoyed the connections you made at school.

BB: Yes.

TS: Not so much the academics. You made a nice face for that. [chuckles] So Betsy, tell me—

BB: That's been the hardest part of my life, is the academics.

TS: The academics?

BB: Yeah.

TS: Well, it's understandable, with you jumping around so much.

BB: Yes.

TS: At a very young age when your foundation is supposed to be set. Was there any particular subject that you did like while you were in school, or a teacher that was helpful to you?

BB: I loved geography. Geography remains fascinating to me because it includes weather, and I mean, I guess that's an odd mix but yet it's not. So geology, geography, weather remain the most interesting of subjects that I ever took.

TS: Well, with your dad's naval background, weather is pretty important.

BB: I'm a weather nut.

TS: Right.

BB: To this day I watch weather and I have apps [mobile applications] for weather I look at, I don't know how many times, every day.

TS: What kind of day are we going to have today?

BB: Well, I can tell you right now.

TS: Don't look at your phone.

BB: It's going to be approximately seventy-five degrees. We're going to have winds that are about sixteen knots out of the southwest.

TS: Excellent.

BB: Yes.

TS: A good day.

BB: Yeah. Tomorrow is going to be about the same temperature. The wind is going to be down to less than five knots, and it's going to be out of the southwest again. We're going to have cloudy skies during the morning, and it's going to be raining in the afternoon. Today, no rain; all day sunny.

TS: You and my dad need to be introduced to each other—

BB: Didn't look.

TS: —[chuckles] because he would have the same knowledge of what's going to happen during the day.

Okay, so you're going to school—you're going to St. Mary's—and you said there might have been a teacher or instructor or professor that was helpful to you?

BB: At St. Mary's? No, not necessarily.

TS: Not so much?

BB: No. No. Not so much there. The St. Mary's experience was 1969 to 1971. My mother died in 1970, the day after I came back from my freshman year. I did not know she was near death, because my dad wanted me to not worry, not concern [myself], so he made the choice to just keep that to himself and walk through it alone, which is really sad to me. And when I showed up in the hospital I didn't realize that she was going to die the next day until I saw the condition she was in. So anyway, that was that.

Again, the academics at St. Mary's were just so difficult. I really struggled at that school; high standards; expectation of a lot of study habits; taking tests and reading books; and I just wasn't up to it.

TS: Did you go through the two years there?

BB: I did. I did.

TS: And then do you get, like, an associate's degree or is that—

BB: I would have.

TS: You would have?

BB: Yes, I would have as a two year students there.

TS: Okay. If they had given those at that time.

BB: That's correct.

TS: What did you do after that?

BB: I worked for the Bank of North Carolina in Jacksonville.

TS: Okay.

BB: I really had to collect myself after my mother's death, and my academics got even worse the second year. It was just really—where I found my escape was at the beach surfing. That's when I was in the East Coast Championships; it was during that time where I was really at my peak.

TS: How'd you do?

BB: Well, I won a lot. You saw my trophies. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

BB: I won a lot of surfing competitions at several different levels.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Yeah.

TS: Now, were you competing against men and women or just—

BB: No.

TS: Just women?

BB: No, only women. I was in the East Coast Surfing Association and I competed at four different levels with only women.

TS: Now, this is a period when the women's movement is happening as well.

BB: Yes.

TS: Were you influenced at all by that?

BB: No.

TS: No?

BB: I was never aware really. Honestly.

TS: Really?

BB: For a world traveler and somebody with the education and the business experience that I have now, I was very unsophisticated then. I was immature and not really that sophisticated. I was just here and present now with where are we going next.

TS: Right. You were in the moment.

BB: I was in the moment, doing what I was doing, dancing and surfing. That was my life, baby, because the academics weren't. [both chuckle] Or the political environment around me. There are far more people that I'm sure that you've talked to that are really looking up and out and paying attention, and what's going on and what's happening. I would say that was not how I was.

TS: Well, I would say that—

BB: I've become that way, but I wasn't then.

TS: But there are many women that I've talked to who say the same thing, though—that even in World War II they weren't aware of that big picture, they were aware of what was happening, the dances they were going to.

BB: That's right.

TS: Things like that. So it was like, "We were in our twenties."

BB: I think it's protective.

TS: Yeah? Maybe so.

BB: I think it's a way to shut out, be protective, escape, not worry about it; my dad will take care of it. He will protect us; we will be okay; we'll move somewhere if we have to.

TS: Would you consider yourself kind of an optimist, then?

BB: Oh, definitely.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I'm definitely an optimist.

TS: Well, tell me how you got, then, as you're grieving over the loss of your mother, and then you eventually end up in the service.

BB: Yeah.

TS: Tell me the trajectory for that.

BB: That's really a major turning point in my life, and it's—to me it is striking the way it happened. One of my best friends in high school—Billy—his dad had been in prison, and his dad got out of prison, and I just happened to meet him on a chance one day. And I don't know why this impacted me the way that it did, but we were—

TS: You mean Billy or his dad?

BB: His dad.

TS: Okay.

BB: Because Billy and I were great friends in high school; dancing buddies and so on. I was telling his dad a little—he was asking me, "What are you doing?"

"Well, I left St. Mary's. I'm working at the bank. I'm going to go back to school."

And for some reason he said, "You're not going to go back to school. You're not—You're never going back to school." He kind of threw it down. I don't know if it was intentional on his part or if he really believed that I wouldn't, but it got me.

It was like the catalyst; it was like the thing that—"I'm going to show you. What do you know? You don't know anything."

That really motivated me to get myself collected and go back, first of all, to the Wilmington College, which is now UNCW [University of North Carolina at Wilmington].

TS: Okay.

BB: And go to Coastal Carolina Community College in Jacksonville, and to East Carolina [University] and take subjects—anatomy, physiology, kinesiology.

TS: [unclear] subjects.

BB: Yes, and get myself back with an academic record that would put me in position to go to a proper university, because that was like day school; a couple—a course here, a course there, while I was working at the Bank of North Carolina. And I started to build up my academic portfolio that was showing that I had the potential.

And so, I decided I wanted to get a degree in phys ed [physical education]; I knew that was what I wanted to do at that point; it seemed like the right thing for me. So I found that UNCG had a very, very outstanding program; that that was really the school with the record, the credibility, and fantastic professors. I said, "Well, that's where I want to go." And I worked really hard, and I even got in touch with admissions and I talked to them; I said, "What do I have to do?" They told me what I had to do and I worked toward it.

They said, "You have to make an A in this, a B in that," and so on, "or we're not going to be able to accept," me.

"Okay." So I went after it, and I got in just barely because what I had before was really not helping me.

But I had okay—the SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] was okay, and it was just a matter of bringing those grades up in order for UNCG to accept me, and they did, and I'm eternally grateful I went—started in 1973, finished my second two years, and did well, and enjoyed the class, the schools, the professors, my classmates, the content. It was a great program; it was a really great program. And you gained confidence; I did. I gained more maturity, more confidence; I fit in; I enjoyed the dorm life. I just had—I wouldn't say I had a blast at UNCG—that's not really accurate—but it was developmentally critical for me.

TS: Maturing process.

BB: Absolutely; definitely. I didn't get off the campus that much. Of course, "The Yum"—Yum Yum [Better Ice Cream].

TS: Yeah, Yum Yum's is still there, yeah.

BB: It's mandatory. That was—

TS: Did you like the hot dogs or the ice cream?

BB: Hot dogs.

TS: Okay.

BB: Absolutely; choice number one, hot dogs, yeah.

TS: What did you get on it?

BB: Mustard and ketchup, yeah.

TS: No coleslaw?

BB: No, definitely not.

TS: Okay.

BB: So there you go.

TS: The physical education program there—I have talked to other women there—and they say it was a very rigorous program.

BB: It was.

TS: And it's hard to get accepted into it as well.

BB: I know.

TS: So you had to work for that.

BB: The gauntlet had been thrown down; the catalyst was in motion; I had been given a challenge; and I just took it as very, very motivational, and a reason to really propel myself forward and to making myself better; getting somewhere. I'm just grateful for that chance encounter. And sometimes that's what it takes, is a chance encounter.

TS: Were there any professors at UNCG that you admired?

BB: All of them.

TS: Would you like to name any of them?

BB: [Dr. Marie I.] Riley was one. Our counselor—the class counselor—Pat.

TS: Counselor Pat, okay. It's okay if you don't remember their last names.

BB: I don't, but I'm going to remember them.

TS: Yeah. We can add that to the transcript.

BB: Ulrich[?], Umstead[?].

TS: What was it that made an impression on you?

BB: There are about half a dozen or seven—Pat Helshire[?] was our counselor. Our class president, Kathy.

TS: What was it that you were impressed by?

BB: They took a particular interest in us as students and people; they really did. To me, it's the way a private school should behave, with staff and professors and students, where you have a small ratio.

TS: So it's like a more intimate relationship?

BB: It was. They were interested in us; they talked to us; they spent time with us.

TS: Did they challenge you?

BB: Challenged?

TS: In an academic sort of way. Or build confidence.

BB: They were affirming.

TS: Affirming.

BB: Yes, the classes were not easy. There were certain requirements of course that you had to meet, and you wouldn't expect—I mean, people were unschooled in what was called phys ed—I'm sure it's called kinesiology or something now, right? That you would have such rigor and science in that kind of program, but it was the best; it was just awesome.

Barrett; definitely [Dr.] Kate [R.] Barrett. [Dr.] Marie [I.] Riley. I think that they were—in their peer group, I came to understand their writing, their research; their credibility in the field was very high; and I think we all benefited from them. We benefited from their background, their experience, their expertise, their teaching methods, and we benefited from the interest they personally took in us. And the way in which they encouraged and affirmed us. So that was a very, very positive experience; my two years there.

TS: What did you think you were going to do with that education?

BB: Well, we were set up to be teachers, because it's a teaching degree that I was getting, but I don't think that I ever really thought I was going to be a teacher in a classroom.

TS: No?

BB: No. I was proud—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Too confining you think?

BB: I was proud to be thinking I was going to get a degree.

TS: Right.

BB: Let me just say that. "Yeah, I'm going to get a degree. I'm going to get a degree. I have a degree in life, but I'm going to get a degree from a college?" But I wasn't going to use it in the classroom; I knew I wasn't.

TS: Did you think it was going to confine you into—

BB: I don't know. It just didn't seem like a fit for me, yeah.

TS: So what did you think you—

BB: I thought I was going in the military.

TS: You still thought you were going in the military.

BB: Oh, definitely. It was even a stronger thought now.

TS: Still the navy?

BB: Yes. Can we take a timeout?

TS: Oh, yes. Yes, absolutely.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, Betsy. When you're thinking about joining the military, what's your trajectory of what got you from college into the service?

BB: Well, at UNC Greensboro, I think I mentioned that I was mostly a campus student.

TS: Right, that's right.

BB: I lived in Cone Dorm [Residence Hall], and I enjoyed dorm life; it was very comfortable for me. I felt safer there, and living on that campus mostly, and not leaving it very much at all, even though I did have a car. And I had a sister who was going to college in Chapel Hill at UNC. That wasn't too far away.

But for the most part I was spending my time with my classmates in my college, but many of my friends were in the nursing school, and so I became acquainted with the nursing students as well as the physical education students, and staff and professors and so on, and was learning in my second year more and more about their plans; what were they going to be doing? Well, clearly the nursing students were going to end up in nursing careers because that's what they were getting their education for. Talk about a rigorous program. I was very impressed with the work that they put into their program; really amazing.

And many of my classmates—not all of them—many of them were setting themselves up for a career in education. That's why they came to UNCG. They were dedicated and committed to the development of children at all ages, and their progress, specific to physical education and so on. I just couldn't see myself fitting into it. It just, for some reason, never—I was proud of the degree, I was proud of the work, I was proud of now being a good student, because I was a good student. I was finally a good student.

TS: Well, you found a niche that you really seemed to love.

BB: I did. I did. It was a good program, good professors, good classmates. The whole gestalt of it was very positive. It just really came together so well.

TS: What happened when you graduated?

BB: Funny you should ask that.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

BB: During my senior year I thought this military thing is feeling more and more right to me, so I'm going to go visit a friend up in the Washington, D.C. area, and her husband was a marine, and they had become very close and very influential and significant in my life, because by now my mother had been gone. This was a couple that was older. They could have been—not quite—my parents. And I thought, "Well, while I'm up there I'll just march on into the Baltimore recruiting station and see what's up there."

So I went to the Baltimore recruiting station more than once, and I took the test for the army, took the test for the navy, and I did okay, and I was talking to them. And the navy told me, after I passed the test and I really wanted to join, that they had a quota for three women. This was 1974, going into 1975, and at that time Vietnam was almost entirely over. As a matter of fact, it was formally and officially over in March of 1975. So the navy said, "We're downsizing, and our quota out of this recruiting station is only for three women, and they have been filled."

"What?" I said, "What? What do you mean? You don't understand. I'm going in the navy."

"We can't help you."

So that's when I started talking to the army, and then I started talking to the Marine Corps. I didn't go too far with the army because I just had no real connection to the army, and we, as a family, lived right outside of Camp Lejeune. My friend and her husband were a marine family.

TS: No interest in the air force?

BB: No. Sorry to say. And interestingly, no interest in the Coast Guard, which surprises me now thinking back on it. No interest in the air force. And little interest in the army. Really it was the navy first and foremost. I wanted to be in public affairs in the navy because public affairs officers, to me, were doing the kinds of things that my parents did, that I thought was really going to be a great fit for me. And that nice, snappy blue uniform with all kinds of regalia, et cetera. Traveling around and being in fun, fun entertainment and parties and diplomatic this, that, and the other. I don't know what I envisioned.

TS: Your plan is thwarted.

BB: My plan was like—just came to a screeching halt; they were raining on my parade [idiom for spoiling someone's plans] totally. So I just marched myself down to the Marine Corps and took their tests, and they had a quota for one woman; one. They could not tell me at the time whether I would be accepted or not, but they took all of my papers, I filled out everything I needed to fill out, and they gave me the oath of office, where you raise your

right hand and swear all due faith and allegiance, in March of 1975. But they couldn't tell me if I'd been accepted for a class or not.

TS: So you were commissioned as a—

BB: I wasn't commissioned.

TS: Was it—

BB: No, I'm in the queue for a possible slot at Women Officer Candidate School, perhaps.

TS: I see. But you're a college graduate?

BB: Not yet.

TS: Oh, I see; not when you took the oath?

BB: Not yet. I have not graduated yet. I'm still a senior in college; 1975; I'm still a senior.

TS: I see, okay.

BB: I'm just talking with them, filling out the papers, doing all of the initial steps that are required in the process, which takes months and months, and I'm thinking, "Well, am I going to be in or not?" Because they don't really confirm it for you until things line up, and the United States Senate—Congress—has to determine, "We're going to have numbers of these and numbers of those;" of certain genders, of certain billets; types of specialties and locations, et cetera. Everybody's drawing down. So where they might have had doubles and triples of those quotas, now there are fewer and fewer of them.

I didn't really appreciate that at the time. I didn't quite get it. But what I did get—On the day that I was leaving Cone dormitory, because I had graduated and I was leaving—packing my stuff up, going home—the phone rang. I'm actually—honestly—closing the door to my dorm room and the phone rings. Now, of course, this was pre-cell phone. We didn't have mobile phones. It was a phone hanging on a wall.

TS: Right.

BB: It rings. It's the recruiter in Baltimore, Maryland. "Ms. Blee, do you think that you can be in Quantico in three weeks?"

"What?"

"Yes, you have been accepted, we're happy to inform you. Congratulations. You have been assigned to Officer Candidate School, Quantico, Virginia, beginning June 20, 1975."

"Really?" No idea; out of the blue. "Yes. Yes, sir. I can be there." Walking out of the dorm. I still can't believe it. Again, a chance—if I had just ten seconds later I would have walked down the hall and not heard it. I don't know how they would have found me.

TS: They wouldn't have sent you a letter or anything?

BB: Probably. But I got it that day. Then I would have had two weeks to get ready, right? Instead of three weeks; or something like that.

TS: Were you excited?

BB: I was very excited. I was really excited about it.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I was just thrilled. I mean, that was cool to me; really cool.

TS: How was your dad; what did he think about it?

BB: He was—

TS: I don't know what that means, Betsy. [both chuckling] She's shaking her head and putting her head in her hands.

BB: He had to take a deep breath.

TS: Did he?

BB: He just was like, "You did what?"

TS: Now, did he know you had an interest?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BB: "You joined the Marine Corps?"

TS: Okay. He was okay—

BB: "Why'd you do that?!" [chuckles]

TS: So he was okay with the navy, if it had been the navy?

BB: Oh, he'd have been great with the navy.

TS: But the Marine Corps—

BB: Oh, yeah, he was all about me joining the navy, 100%.

TS: Yeah, so you threw him a little twist here.

BB: Threw him a twist; a little curveball, yeah. The Marine Corps—Because he knew every joke that could be told about the Marine Corps.

TS: Right, of course he did.

BB: Yes.

TS: Did he come around finally?

BB: He did.

TS: Did he?

BB: He did. As a matter of fact, he came and commissioned me in Quantico in August of that year.

TS: Oh, did he?

BB: Yeah. He wore his navy uniform. This is funny to me. He wore his navy uniform; dress white, the whole thing; he looked great. Of course, the [U.S.] Navy has a different kind of salute than the [U.S.] Marine Corps does; it's not quite as snappy, shall we say; if you know what I mean. And it's a big deal, everybody's up there on the stage, and here's this four [O-4 Lieutenant Commander?], and he's going to give me oath of office. And he's offered a copy of it as he goes up on the stage. "No, young man, I don't need that."

So he starts giving me and reading me from memory actually—he's not reading, let me correct that—he's saying from memory, which he's done many, many, many times for other young officers, and he forgets it, because—

TS: Because it's his daughter.

BB: It's his daughter, it's a big stage, people are watching, and he forgets it. He got it mostly right.

TS: Close.

BB: Now, I'm supposed to say what he says.

TS: Right.

BB: It didn't quite go the way that I remembered it, reading it myself ahead of time. I'm thinking, "This doesn't quite—"

And at the very end he says to me, "And I promise to be the best damn marine I can be."

And I said exactly what he said: "And I promise to be the best damn marine I can be, so help me God." [both chuckle]

He wrote that to *Reader's Digest* "Humor in Uniform." It was published.

TS: Funny.

BB: It had actually happened. "Dad, you should have taken the card."

TS: Yeah, that's right.

BB: "Take the card."

TS: But it wouldn't have made it into *Reader's Digest* then.

BB: That's a funny little story. Yeah, he was real proud of me. He used to write for the *Raleigh News & Observer* [daily newspaper based in Raleigh, North Carolina]—a lot of editorials—and he wrote one about people in time of need, for public service, for the country, you need everyone; everyone; all people who are willing and interested in serving. And so, he took up the cause of—the Marine Corps, we need "a few good men," we need a few good people, we need everyone, who will stand up and serve. Yeah, it's [unclear].

TS: So even as a World War II vet he felt women in service were a positive thing?

BB: He came around.

TS: Did he? Did you being in uniform help that coming around?

BB: Absolutely; you see us together.

TS: Yes. Yes, a lot of pictures of you and your dad.

BB: Yes.

TS: That's really great. So you went to OCS first, or basic first?

BB: You go to Officer Candidate School in the Marine Corps in Quantico for several months. You finish that forming[?], and then you go to the basic school, which is another several months, for additional training in history and the way the Marine Corps is organized and formed; and leadership; our mission, our purpose; how we fit in to the overall country's—

TS: Was there anything in those two training schools that were particularly difficult for you at all?

BB: I did okay at OCS. Was I a star? No. But it wasn't that hard to me. I was pretty comfortable with it. There were seventy-some of us that started, forty-some of us that graduated, so the attrition was quite high.

TS: Pretty high.

BB: Yes. And at the time that I went into the Marine Corps we were still separated. We were not really integrated into the men's Marine Corps. We were 2%; 2%.

TS: That was a cap. I don't think you actually reach the 2% for—

BB: Women.

TS: Yes.

BB: We only had two classes a year, where the men were rolling through.

TS: Right.

BB: Whether it was boot camp or Officer Candidate School, the men's groups were one after another after another, and there were two of my classes a year; that's it. And I trained the next class of women.

TS: That's right, you said when you got done you went back and did some training.

BB: Yes, that's right.

TS: Why do you think you were selected for that?

BB: Well, because I was around.

TS: Okay. [chuckles] That makes a difference.

BB: And because I did pretty well, and I think I was probably—I think I was a good role model.

TS: You knew all the lingo probably.

BB: I did. I knew the lingo and—In forming is where you would learn how to march; it's where you would learn to put your uniform together; it would be learning all the pieces and parts of what you have to have. Yeah, saluting. It's the basics. It's the basics of being a marine.

Now, it's—this is a funny story too. Marine Corps women at the time, in 1975, were still required to bring three girdles to training. Ha! I said, "Seriously?"

"Yes. Hose, girdles."

And I remember being in formation one day and being inspected, and this inspection officer leaned into me and said, "Are you wearing your girdle?"

"Yes, sir."

Those went away very soon after that. But there was an allowance for hose. We also had gloves and little purses and so forth, and we were taught how to apply makeup, and we were taught how to stand with our feet crossed and our hands together to form a T in the feet and one hand clasped over the other. And that went away also very shortly.

TS: Did you do any weapons training?

BB: Yes, we did. Actually I learned how to fire a pistol and a rifle, and we did go to the range, and they taught us how to shoot a LAW [Light Anti-tank Weapon], which sits on your soldier and it sounds like this, "[makes popping noise]!" Takes out tanks.

TS: Was that fun?

BB: No. Throwing grenades; I didn't like that at all.

TS: You didn't like it?

BB: No, I don't think throwing grenades is fun at all; I just don't think it's a good idea. [both chuckle] But I actually did like firing pistols.

TS: Did you?

BB: I really did. I liked firing pistols. I can fire a .38, a .45, and a 9 millimeter; I'm qualified in all three. And rifles were okay, but they're heavy. You're lying on the ground at 4:00 and 5:00 in the morning, not so much, but I'm qualified at firing a rifle also.

TS: When you raised your hand there in Baltimore, Maryland, not knowing what was going to happen, what did you think about for a time, being in the military? Did you think, "This is going to be my career. I'm going to try this out"?

BB: Yeah, I pretty much thought I would stay.

TS: Yeah?

BB: I thought I would go in and it would be my career. That's really what I did think.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Yes. They ask us what are our three specialties that'd we'd like, because that's what we learned in the basic school, was about the different specialties. From engineering to motor transport to administration. We could not choose—We could not go into flight ops [operations], but we could be air traffic controllers. We could not go on ships, but we

could do support kinds of things. There were just certain specialties that were not open to women at the time that are open now.

TS: Was there something you wanted to do that wasn't open to you?

BB: Well, not really.

TS: It's that you knew the limitations at the time.

BB: For me, I would not have wanted to be in the infantry, personally. That was not something that I would have thought to do myself.

TS: Do you think it's okay for women that want to go into the infantry?

BB: If she has the strength and the desire, and can lift a certain amount of weight, and meet certain rigorous standards, then why not?

TS: Do you think that today there's anything women should not be able to do in the military?

BB: No, I think they should be able to do everything that's available, if they, again, have the capabilities and the strength. If they can demonstrate the standard, then I don't see the problem, really.

TS: You went through the training, and then they immediately make you an officer training instructor? Is that what you would call it?

BB: I was a platoon commander for women officer candidates.

TS: Did you enjoy that?

BB: Loved it. It was a blast.

TS: What was the best part about it?

BB: Well, it's interesting, it's a teaching role.

TS: Oh, that's true. [chuckles] Yes.

BB: Hey! I had some background now.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I had some great training myself in teaching. That was the beginning of me actually being a professional teacher later in my life, which we haven't got to.

TS: Right.

BB: But I just was never in a classroom from grades one through twelve.

TS: Right. But what was it that you enjoyed about doing the teaching?

BB: Well, it's a responsibility, and it's seeing people develop in front of you. It's seeing people do things well after trying and applying. Maybe they mix it up or they don't get it right the first time but there's progress being made, and that's what we're working for, is progress towards goals. Is seeing that development happen, where people get it. They may struggle at first, they may have problems and so on, but they're going in the right direction, and I just thought that was awesome.

TS: So this is Officer Candidate School?

BB: Yeah.

TS: Was there still a high dropout rate?

BB: Yes.

TS: What were women dropping out for? Was there, like, a main thing that was an obstacle?

BB: That's a good question, and I think that partly for medical reasons. There may have been injuries.

TS: Physical injuries?

BB: There may have been injuries that were happening, which was not uncommon. Because we ran—a lot of the things the men did, we just did them separately. We did physical training every day, multiple times a day, and we would run obstacle courses; we would leap and jump and climb and do all that stuff also. So there were injuries; that would be one thing. There might have been family issues at home; would have been another thing. At the time they didn't want women to be pregnant or to get tattoos—we were banned—and if that happened there would be an administrative discharge. That wasn't—

TS: Even for a tattoo?

BB: Yes, tattoos were not permitted for women. What else would be a reason? It wasn't for—It wasn't for some; it wasn't what they thought it was going to be. It was too hard, they didn't like it.

TS: Could you recognize that in the women when you were training them; that maybe the military wasn't a fit for them?

BB: I'm thinking, as a member of a class that was three months of Officer Candidate School, you could see it among your peer group; where they would struggle and it was frustrating

for them, and it wasn't working, and it was hard; it wasn't what they thought. And there's a lot of public humiliation that happens, which is design—it's part of the design; is for people to be, kind of, made fun of and humiliated in such a way that they're kind of broken down a little bit. To then be open to a different way of being and thinking, behaving, and so on. It's very effective; very effective. But if you're not okay with being talked to like that, not only in private but in public, then some are like, "I'm not going to take that. I'm not going to stand for that. I think that this is not for me."

TS: So then they would be out.

BB: Yeah, they would be out. So that's three or four different reasons right there.

TS: When you first went in—'75—

BB: Oh, there's another reason.

TS: Okay.

BB: There would be another reason. You have physical standards. There was a requirement at the time for women to complete three different events. One would be a mile and a half run, timed. Another would be what's called a flexed-arm hang, timed. Another would be a certain amount of sit ups, timed. That's another reason for women not to make it. If they cannot—

TS: Not to qualify.

BB: If they cannot qualify in each of those three physical requirements—

TS: Whatever the minimum standards were.

BB: Exactly. That's another reason. One that's related to that is weight.

TS: Okay.

BB: The weight standards for your height are minimum to maximum, depending on your height. So I'm five [feet], five [inches]. At five, five, I could—should not be under—let's just say for example, I'm just taking this—a hundred and fifteen [pounds], and I should not be over a hundred and thirty-nine. That was the range. For someone five, six and five, seven it moves a little bit. But that's another reason that women and men—

TS: For weight.

BB: Right.

TS: Were you enjoying it, then. I mean, were you like, "This is a cool gig. I'm glad I'm here?"

BB: Some of it, yeah, I would say that, and some of it I would say, "This sucks. I haven't gotten everything done. It's now ten o'clock, and we're going to be up a 0525 [5:25 a.m.], and somebody's going to be crashing trash cans and yelling at us to get up." I hated that. The Taps [bugle call] at night was very moving, very touching, when everybody would line up and you would hear Taps.

TS: How about when you put your uniform on for the first time? How was that?

BB: That was not as moving as Taps.

TS: The Taps was—

BB: Was the most moving.

TS: Well, you heard Taps on base.

BB: Yeah.

TS: At post.

BB: Every night.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Every night.

TS: But I mean, before you joined.

BB: Yeah, that's right. You'd hear Reveille [bugle call]. You'd hear the flag going up.

TS: And now you were a part of that.

BB: Now I'm part of it. The uniform, though, came over time, though. It wasn't just overnight. It was like you would be issued this kind of uniform and that—and it would come together kind of slowly, and then you'd be given a different type of uniform. The first uniform was a working uniform.

TS: Utility.

BB: At the time, the utility uniforms for women were very much women's uniforms.

TS: Skirt-like?

BB: Pants.

TS: They had pants?

BB: Blue. Yeah, so you would wear those around, learning, coming along and so on, and then the fatigues—the utilities—were different; they came later and they evolved later. But to say, "How was it for the uniform?" I think when we started to wear the serge green skirts and/or pants, and the khaki blouse, and that started to come together, and we put a little bit of whatever we had on it. Some of the women had been prior enlisted, they had good conduct [medals] and so on; that was pretty cool to see that come together. And then to get that beautiful looking hat, which is the green with the scarlet crossed—

TS: Beautiful.

BB: —and then with the Marine Corps emblem. Yeah, it's very cool. Yeah, but it wasn't like suddenly we're wearing it. We learned how to iron them. We learned how to press them and iron them, and I still love a nice crease. There's nothing like some good-looking creases on any clothes; all clothes. A true marine gets their clothes back from the dry cleaner and then re-irons them.

TS: [chuckles] That's right.

BB: It's a little nutty, yeah.

TS: Where did you go after that; after you did the training for the women? Oh, and you were talking earlier about selecting the MOS [military occupational specialty] for women. What were your three choices for yourself?

BB: In the basic school you start to develop an interest in either motor transport, again, or engineering or supply or administration personnel, et cetera, et cetera, and you decide, "What are the three that sound kind of interesting to me," and then you decide three places you'd like to go. Do you want to go to California; do you want to go to North Carolina; do you want to go to Hawaii; do you want to go to Japan. Put down your three MOS and your three places that you want to live, and that was not that easy because I didn't really have strong feelings. I'd been a lot of places already so what the hell. I said, "I'll just put down Hawaii—" knowing I won't get it, I've already been there—"but let's see. Let's see what happens. I'll put down Hawaii." That was my first choice. I don't even remember my second and third. And what did I want in terms of specialty? I didn't think that through very well either. I didn't really care that much. [unclear] Supply was in there. Okay. I got Hawaii and I got supply. [chuckles]

TS: Oh, there you go. You got what you asked for.

BB: Yeah.

TS: Then you went to supply school?

BB: I went to supply school at Camp Lejeune [North Carolina] first.

TS: How was that?

BB: Three months. It was boring.

TS: Boring?

BB: Yeah, totally boring. But I loved being there.

TS: Yeah? Why?

BB: Because my dad lived there. My dad lived in Jacksonville, and so—and I got a place on the beach at Topsail [Island], Surf City; go figure, I found a place on the beach. I think that's strange; that's strange, yeah, that I would go find a place—

TS: Unlike you to be close to the water.

BB: Unlike me to be close to the water, on the beach, yeah, for three months.

TS: Slash sarcasm [unclear].

BB: Yeah, exactly. So got a new car, and I drove from that place on the beach to Camp Johnson, which is a part of Camp Lejeune, and went to school every day in supply school, which did I say it was boring? It was boring.

TS: Who were your instructors? Men or women?

BB: There were people who knew—It was all men.

TS: Okay. All men?

BB: Yeah. People who knew a lot about the field of supply within the Marine Corps.

TS: Were there very many other women with you?

BB: There were two.

TS: Two?

BB: Yes, two other women.

TS: How were you treated, as far as a woman?

BB: Fine, in that school.

TS: In that school?

BB: Yeah, no problem; that wasn't an issue. It was basically classroom setting, eight hours a day, five days a week, for three months. You follow me?

TS: Boring; you were bored. [both chuckling]

BB: OCS and basic school are far more interesting.

TS: Were they?

BB: They really were. They were motivating, exciting. I mean, I was there at a time when the Marine Corps—we were founded in 1775. What year was I there?

TS: Nineteen seventy-five.

BB: I was there for a major milestone birthday of the United States Marine Corps, in Quantico, Virginia.

TS: You guys pretty much celebrate your birthday pretty big.

BB: It's a big deal. It's a huge deal. And they took us up to Washington, D.C. to 8th and I Streets, which is the headquarters of the commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps Drum and Bugle Corps, the Marine Corps Band, and all things Marine Corps pomp and circumstance, where you watch this fantastic parade on Friday nights. It's amazing. For the hundredth—two hundredth year of the United States Marine Corps being there was a thrilling, thrilling experience. You're hearing me, right?

TS: I am hearing you.

BB: Okay.

TS: Well, let's get to Hawaii.

BB: Yes.

TS: So you went to Camp Smith, Hawaii in 1976/

BB: Yes, I did.

TS: How was that different from when you were there as a young girl, going to school and surfing?

BB: It still smelled good.

TS: Did it still have the smell of the plumeria—

BB: Yes.

TS: —and I forget the other flowers.

BB: Peacockey.

TS: That's right.

BB: Yes. The bird of paradise, the pineapples.

TS: Were you still surfing?

BB: I don't still surf; I've changed over to boating now.

TS: Okay.

BB: Yeah. But then I lived on the base in the BOQ—the Bachelor Officers Quarters is where I lived—and I was the assistant supply officer for the base supply. And the types of things that we kept in that supply outfit, because I reported to a major—there was a major and I was a lieutenant—and we had troops and we had warehouses and so forth, and we kept the weapons, we kept the bullets, and everything. So we did that sort of training for people to check that out, if needed, to go keep their rifle, pistol, up to date, and so on. And we had stuff for the field, so if officers and troops had to be deployed to the field, we kept all of that gear; tents; everything and anything that would be needed.

The most interesting thing to me, though, in doing inventories of that supply stuff were, because Camp Smith was the Headquarters of the Pacific, it was a very senior base.

TS: Okay.

BB: Lots of star, meaning admirals and generals everywhere. Colonels everywhere. Lieutenants not so much. Captains, young lance corporals, corporals, not so much. It was senior enlisted, senior officers, lots of admirals and generals. So the types of things that were in the field kits for the senior officers were china, silverware—yeah—crystal, linens, calling cards with flags. I'm like, "Really? This is what they have to take in the field with them was china?" I was amazed by that.

TS: I thought that was just the British that did that.

BB: Well, it was at Camp Smith, Hawaii too. Can we take a break?

[Recording Paused]

TS: I'm starting it up again. Okay, so we had to take a break and we're actually going to have to split up this interview. So we are in Hawaii, I think. You arrived. You were telling me

about all the lovely field items, like crystal and things like that. We're going to stop here. Is that okay, Betsy?

BB: Yes, that's fine.

TS: And I will come back and we will finish this interview.

BB: To be continued.

TS: To be continued.

BB: We're stopping now but we're going to continue another time.

TS: That's right. Okay, so I'll go ahead and stop.

[End of Interview, Part 1]

INTERVIEWEE: Betsy Sumner Blee

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 28 June 2014

[Begin Interview, Part 2]

TS: Today is June 28, 2014. This is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Betsy Blee again in Southport, North Carolina, to conduct the second part of the oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. This is a continuation of the interview we started on May 17 of this year. Betsy, could you state your name the way you want it to read on your collection?

BB: Yes. Elizabeth—nickname—"Betsy"—middle name—Sumner—Blee.

TS: Okay, excellent. Okay, Betsy, so when we last left off you'd gone through your supply training, and that was at Camp Lejeune?

BB: It was at Fort Johnson, Camp Lejeune.

TS: Okay. And then your first duty station after that was in Hawaii at Camp Smith?

BB: Yeah. After several months of ground supply occupational specialty training, I went to my first active duty station at the Fleet Headquarters of the Pacific at Camp Smith,

Hawaii.

TS: What was it like in Hawaii at that time, to be stationed there? This was 1976?

BB: Very calm, peaceful, non-threatening. Vietnam was totally over, and so there was a drawdown of forces. America was not at war. We were definitely recovering, though, still, from Vietnam. There were a lot of men—especially in the Marine Corps—who had the battle scars.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Yes.

TS: How did you notice them?

BB: Well, they wore purple hearts, or they would describe their injuries; they would talk amongst marines about what it was like, and how they were injured and the circumstances. They may not have talked to many others, because it's hard for them to answer so many questions that may be peppered at them. But in the Marine Corps community it was much easier; there's an immediate understanding.

TS: Like a family sort of environment?

BB: Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Even closer than their regular family because maybe they didn't talk about that too.

BB: Plus, where I was stationed at Camp Lejeune, sort of two hills over was the Tripler Army Hospital [Tripler Army Medical Center], and so a lot of marines and army were treated there for their wounds from Vietnam.

TS: Okay. Did you have any thoughts at that point about the Vietnam War?

BB: I was glad it was over.

TS: Yeah?

BB: I really was. And of course we know now there wasn't a lot of appreciation for those that served or were injured over there, except in our community.

TS: Right.

BB: Yes.

TS: So you were in Hawaii, and could you describe a typical day at work? Did you have a typical day?

BB: Yeah, well, the first year that I was at Camp Smith assigned to a headquarters battalion supply office, as the assistant supply officer it was fairly routine in terms of learning inventory and learning what was in that specific inventory, which was very unusual. I think I described it in our first session, where the—there was the standard kind of armaments—weapons, rifles, pistols, and all of the bullets that went to each of those. That was an interesting part of the job. But there was also field mess units.

TS: That's right.

BB: And the field mess units to me were the most interesting of all of the inventory, because it was the most beautiful china. If I—I think I can remember it was Lenox china, with gorgeous gold and stars on it, because it was for flag officers only. We had all the tents and everything, but then we had crystal, we had silverware, we had linens, we had embroidered, embossed stationary for flag officers, because it was the Headquarters of the Pacific for all the services.

And so, it was a Western Pacific area headquarters command for the navy, the army, the air force, and the marines, and our particular headquarters organization held all the things in case the officers and their staff, and all the members of each of the companies and platoons, had to be deployed somewhere. Whether it was on a ship or a shore, once landed they had all these accoutrements. And they probably—If it were a real big field exercise where—for example, they would have had to go ashore in Korea—I'm just making this up—or Malaya or somewhere, they would have probably gone to the Marine Corps Air Station over Kaneohe to get the more typical types of troop things that you would expect for them to have. Or they would have drawn supplies from Okinawa, Japan, where we had major representation there of all the services after the Second World War.

TS: What was your rank when you were in Hawaii?

BB: Lieutenant; I was a second lieutenant.

TS: Yeah.

BB: And at that moment I was just a "butter bar," is what we're called.

TS: Right.

BB: The major was the officer in charge of the supply organization, and I was the second. And so, all we did basically was make sure we had what we were responsible for. There was a list of things that were relevant and specific and assigned to those units of marines at Camp Smith, and we were responsible to make sure we had them, that they were operational, and if they were give out for use—for example on the rifle range or the pistol range—that we got everything back and in functioning order, and if it was not in functioning order we would send them out for maintenance and repair.

TS: So not only taking care of the equipment, but you had paperwork to track where everything is.

BB: A lot of paperwork, a lot of administrative duties. At that time it wasn't really like we're accustomed to today with computers and lists that just pop up that are created by programmers and so on. It was a lot of pen and pencil. There were a lot of cards that were kept; one of these, ten of those, a hundred of the other—and you would mark them off: Gave them to Private So-and-so, Lance Corporal So-and-so. They'd leave their ID cards, they'd take these things out for the exercises of the day, and they'd bring them back. Or if they had to go for a week, they'd bring them back. Because, again, this was a peacetime scenario.

TS: Right.

BB: They weren't deploying with them to go to battle, combat, or even on a ship. It was very much a shoreside headquarters functioning outfit, where people don't go very far for very long, and if they did, they were what's called a FAP—a Fleet Assistance Program—assigned to another unit to go somewhere, and that's when they would get the gear, if they were going on the ship. They wouldn't get it from us.

TS: Oh, okay. The environment that you worked in, were there very many women that you worked with at that time?

BB: There were women in the officer ranks, as well as in the enlisted ranks, because the marines provide the security for the base. We were housed at the base. I lived in the Bachelor Officers' Quarters myself. And the enlisted women also had quarters, and they served the typical kinds of administrative functions you would imagine in the seventies: personnel, administration, communications, perhaps motor transport but probably not.

TS: And then you didn't have medical in the Marine Corps because that was done by the navy, right?

BB: We did not have medical, no. And other women would be in the supply outfit as well, in the warehouses, responsible for storing and keeping and inventorying and ordering all the things that we were supposed to keep on the list.

TS: Had you personally faced anything you would consider discriminatory today, as a woman, up to this point or even later?

BB: If I did it would have been subtle. The things that were obvious to me were limited assignments.

TS: Okay. Can you explain that?

BB: Women at the time, in the seventies, could not go into certain occupational specialties. Of course, they were not infantrymen, they were not called warriors[?]. We were not

assigned to airplanes. We were not assigned to ships. We could not fly at the time. And I already mentioned the part about women bringing girdles to wear with their uniforms, which is—was shortly thereafter disbanded as a practice. And for a while we had our own companies; women commanded women's companies. We were not integrated. We didn't—We were not integrated in the Officer Candidate Schools or the basic school at Quantico, after that. It was probably approximately—I'm going to just say approximately—later, not the seventies—that we were integrated and were a part of the platoons and the companies that were commanded by a commander, not necessarily a man or a woman. It was a slow process. And we were still less than 5% of the corps; was the women's representation.

TS: Right. It's hard to get a feel for living in that era and that time when there were these restrictions, and how women, themselves, felt about it. Because it's the norm, it's the status quo.

BB: Yes.

TS: Did you feel in yourself that these restrictions—did you even think about them?

BB: Not really, no. I was proud to be a marine. I really appreciated the opportunity to be in a very highly decorated, proud organization. That sense of belonging was very strong—very strong—to be one of "the few, the proud, the marines" [recruiting slogan]. That's how I looked at it. I did.

TS: What were you getting out of the Marine Corps at this point, in the early—mid-seventies, when you're at your first duty—what are you feeling about it?

BB: I'm feeling confident. I'm feeling like I have some leadership skills now that I didn't necessarily know I had. I was much more disciplined. I have a sense of timing, of duty, of responsibility. Because—I probably mentioned in the previous talk that you and I had that I was a surfer. I loved the beach. I loved going to the beach every day, any day, and spending six, eight hours at a time on the shore, in the water, on the beach, on a board, and that was my whole life. I just thought that was the end all and the be all. Now I'm in the Marine Corps, what a contrast, where you don't get up at 0525 and 5:30 [a.m.] to go to the beach. You get up to put your uniform on and be a part of a uniform organization that had expectations of showing up for duty and being ready, dependable, reliable, and capable of doing one's job. And that you can multitask the best of your ability, and handle a lot of incoming things that are all occurring at once. Be a member of a unit and be cohesive. Which was kind of interesting, thinking about how we were separated at first.

TS: Yeah. Well, it's interesting how you're describing that. It almost sounds like you feel like you found a good fit, because I remember as you were talking before, you found different groups that you fit into and did things with, like the dancing.

BB: Yeah.

TS: And then the surfing.

BB: I felt like I definitely fit in. I found folks that I had some common things with. And I loved being in Hawaii, where I'd gone to high school. I was stationed there again, so I knew the place very well. Just a high level of comfort for me. The military was comfortable, Hawaii was comfortable. And I'd gone to private schools when I grew up and wore uniforms, so the uniform thing was also comfortable. I learned how to look pretty darn good. I struck quite a nice pose in those uniforms, and opted to wear the skirt almost all the time, as opposed to wearing the pants. Which is interesting, because today I can't stand them, so I don't even have one.

TS: [chuckles] Was it just more comfortable?

BB: I just liked the look.

TS: You liked the look?

BB: I liked the look of women wearing a woman's uniform, and I loved all of the different types of uniforms we had. We had a utility uniform that was cut for women at the time, it was blue in training—it was blue—which is interesting. We also had a green and white serge uniform, which was—I don't know how else to describe it—it looked like a pinstripe of light green and white, and it had a beautiful green cover, and that was very unique and very different from all the other services. And of course, it was unique from what the men wore. Then we grew into the khaki and brown sort of look which was a different kind of serge material; it was a dark green, kind of, skirt and then a khaki brown blouse that was more now looking like the women's version of the men's uniform, day to day.

TS: Right.

BB: The summer service look had us all more uniform, so when you saw us marching in a column or in the mess hall or around offices we looked very, very similar.

There still were some differences though. Women could always wear their covers indoors, and men never could; they had to take them off, unless they were under arms. But for some reason women had different regulations and policies that were holdovers from the days in church; when women wore hats in church and men did not. Same thing in the Marine Corps. Women wore hats indoors and outdoors, and they carried a purse or umbrella. The men did none of that.

TS: Right.

BB: They didn't carry a purse, they did not carry an umbrella. They were not authorized to carry an umbrella, and they could not wear their covers inside, meaning their hat; unless they were carrying a flag and a weapon.

TS: Yeah. Right. So those kind of little gender differences.

BB: Little gender differences, yeah.

TS: So you enjoyed your tour in Hawaii.

BB: Loved my tour in Hawaii. The first year, as I said, was as an assistant supply officer, learning about the business of taking care of assets—as in equipment—taking care of money, with a budget, and taking care of people. To me, that's business training.

TS: Which was the most difficult of those three?

BB: Oh, I think the people issues are always a very interesting mix of joy and frustration. We bring the human condition. And so, people have issues that are all over the place, from financial issues to marriage issues—you name it—to illness of all types; to the fact that they just work themselves to death for the Corps, for their own sense of pride, for the unit, for the leader. There are all kinds of motivations for them to just not only come to work and do the job, but give discretionary effort.

TS: Right.

BB: All of us are motivated differently, so it's just a joy and a pleasure to write those folks up for some kind of commendation; some kind of award; the Navy Achievement Award, or a letter of appreciation of commendation. And that's the joy of leadership in the Marine Corps, because of the things that they can do when their morale is high and when they're feeling productive and are highly performing, is awesome. And we get sick sometimes, or we get upset about things, or there might be an abusive situation. A child could—It's all over the place; it's that mix.

TS: You're a young officer when you're here.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BB: Very young. Yeah, I'm twenty-five. Just a minute. I'll be right back.

TS: So you're a young officer, and you're kind of learning the ropes. You said that you learned that you had these skills as a leader. Was there someone who you looked to as a mentor or as a role model to help you—guide you—when you're making these decisions about whether it's the business side or the personnel side.

BB: Yeah. My father certainly was a role model.

TS: Right.

BB: And Colonel Milton Jones was a role model that I had come to know very well. He had

been a colonel in the Marine Corps, was part of the chosen few of the Korean War. He's now buried in Arlington [National Cemetery]. He was a major influence in my life.

TS: What was it about their particular skills that you drew from; that you thought, "Okay, I can use this"?

BB: Confidence and courage come to mind. Very strong, very determined. Achievement oriented. Goal oriented. Always busy; always having something to do. And very clear in decision making. Also good citizens. Patriotic. We could go on, but those are models to me of citizenship and patriotism that were quite strong.

TS: Now, did you also see people—and you certainly don't have to mention anybody—but like, "Okay, I'm not going to follow that person's leadership style"? Did you see anybody like that in the Marine Corps?

BB: Once or twice I did, but not very often really. Nobody comes to mind right now that is that kind of poor example as a leader. I'm sure there are plenty, but I had more good examples than weak and poor examples.

TS: Do you think that helps a person who's trying to get through the military, when they do have good leadership; that the experience is that much more enriched than when they're under someone who—maybe they're under their thumb and they're not getting that positive enforcement.

BB: I think of the Marine Corps as a mentoring model, where you have certain leaders who will just take it upon themselves, without even really thinking about it—it's like intuitive—taking on coaching. Counseling, guiding, of the younger generation coming along, and helping them to get better, and setting a standard of leadership for them. And that certainly was true for me.

TS: Was there anything particularly challenging at the site in Hawaii that you were at?

BB: As a supply officer, once I generally understood the practices I actually got bored.

TS: Did you?

BB: Yeah, and I told the colonel that I was bored. He said, "Well, okay. We're going to send you to mess management school, and you're going to run the Officers' Club."

"Really?"

"Yes."

TS: Tell me about that.

BB: After one year in the supply job I was sent off to Patuxant River, Maryland, to the United States Navy/Marine Corps Mess Management School. So that became my secondary specialty.

TS: Okay.

BB: And mess management has multiple roles. It certainly means running a mess, which is a cafeteria or dining room, but it also was a euphemism for Officers' Club management, and that's specifically what I was training for.

TS: For the Officers' Club?

BB: Yes.

TS: Not a mess hall.

BB: Not a mess hall, no.

TS: Okay.

BB: I didn't—I never ran a mess hall. I only ran the Officers' Club at Camp Smith for the remaining two years that I was in Hawaii, because I had the training, and I then had the specialty, and that was the colonel's determination that that's what I was going to do.

TS: Yeah.

BB: He thought I was well suited to it.

TS: He thought you'd be a good fit for it.

BB: He did. He did.

TS: Did you think, "Okay, I can do this," or were you like, "Oh, I'm not so sure?"

BB: I said, "Aye, aye," is what I said.

TS: But on the inside what did you say?

BB: "Okay." I was ready for a change.

TS: How was it?

BB: It was more challenging to me than the supply job.

TS: In what way?

BB: It was a faster pace.

TS: Okay.

BB: And there were a lot of dignitaries that came in and out of that Officers' Club, because it was quite beautiful. It was an open air club that looked all the way from Diamond Head to Pearl Harbor.

TS: Nice.

BB: And so, people wanted to have their functions there. We would have promotion parties there; we would have engagement parties there; we would have Friday night dinners; we would have bands with music; we would have luaus; we would have Mongolian barbecues. The women would play Bridge [card game] there. The men would have happy hour there. And so, as a club officer I had to be there all the time. We did not serve breakfast but we served lunch Monday through Friday, and we had a bar open Monday through Friday, and then we had these evening events that would go throughout the week; it could have been on Saturday or a Sunday. And I did that for two years. Honestly, it's the hardest job I've ever had.

TS: Really?

BB: Yes. It was the most difficult—

TS: The hours were grueling?

BB: The club officer had to be there all the time because it becomes like a civilian business. Even though it's subsidized with military support in the kitchen and in the staff, and you hire civilians—so now I'm hiring people—

TS: Okay.

BB: Now I've gone from 100% military environment with the supply assets, and a budget that's an approved Marine Corps budget, and all—people wearing uniforms and military item that were taken care of, to a hybrid model. It's an overlay hybrid model of military staffing, and civilian staffing, to do service; like, to be waiters and waitresses.

TS: Right.

BB: To do kitchen clean-up. But the assistant club manager was a senior staff officer; like a gunnery sergeant or a master sergeant. Then there might have been another troop who would go between the Bachelor's Officers' Quarters and help with that, as well as help with the Officers' Club, which were in the same building.

TS: Okay.

BB: So I lived in the BOQ, I worked at the Officers' Club, it was the same building. Pretty soon I figured I needed to move out.

TS: Okay; get way—

BB: I needed to get my own apartment. Yeah.

TS: —and have some separation from it.

BB: Because there was a time—and this sticks in my memory—when, on a weekend, I thought I would go to the beach and go surfing at Barber's Point, and they found me—they'd called Barbers Point. Somebody—a senior leader—I forget now—Colonel Somebody—found out where I was, which was no big secret, that's where they could find me.

TS: [chuckles] Right.

BB: At Barber's Point, on the beach, the manager of the snack bar came down and got me and said I was needed back at the club.

TS: What did you do after that?

BB: I went back to the club.

TS: Now, I mean, after that you thought, "I need to—"you needed to move?

BB: No.

TS: No?

BB: I might have already moved by then, but it was just—

TS: They could find you.

BB: Yeah, they could find me.

TS: Well, they knew you'd be at the beach probably.

BB: That's correct; "I'll be at the beach."

TS: What kind of place did you get?

BB: It was just a condominium.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Yeah, in the Pearl City area, that overlooked Pearl Harbor also.

TS: You had just a little bit of a separation there.

BB: Yeah, that's my little bit of separation. But it was a full time job, it really was. It was 24/7 almost.

TS: Oh, I'm sure.

BB: And there was no bullets flying, let's be clear on that. Nobody's fighting in the club. It's really not a rough place at all; it was beautiful.

TS: It's more like a status place.

BB: Oh, it was gorgeous. And the functions we had there were really memorable. I have a lot of pictures of them. I have a lot of letters that I just read this week recently.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Letter after letter after letter of commendation and appreciation. People—There was a senior flag officer that had known my father very well and wrote him a letter, and wrote me a letter, and it's just amazing. And then General [Victor H.] Krulack, had had a very lovely party there before—he's passed away since, and his son became commandant; he was President Kennedy's selection to be commandant. He never quite made it because President Kennedy was shot and it was just—the timing didn't work out. But he was known as "Brute"—Brute Krulack—and he stood about—I don't know—five foot four [inches] or something.

TS: He was short?

BB: Yeah. He said he wanted everybody to sit down.

TS: [chuckles]

BB: So that was—It was just amazing because people came from all over the Pacific area through Hawaii; to go to the mainland or to go back to the far east, and they would stop over and they would come to that club. And the senior Marine Corps general was a three star—he would always call it "Betsy's Bar." He called me a saloon keeper, and he would tell his staff, "If you need me after hours, I will be at Betsy's," and I had that plaque—"Betsy's"—for years and years and years I kept it.

TS: I bet.

BB: Because it was so memorable to have people come in, they'd sit in the same seats, they'd have the same drinks, they'd play the same dice games—they'd didn't play cards, they rolled dice, called Ship Captain Crew—they played dice—and it was a very genteel club, I would say, in terms of comparing it with the rough and tumble of a junior enlisted club, where they would throw things and have fights and so on. Not that often, but that didn't happen in the club where I was. We would have costume parties, theme parties, every

kind of party you could think of.

TS: I remember seeing some of the pictures you showed me last time I was here; some of those.

BB: Yes.

TS: Well, even though it's, like you said, the hardest work you've ever done, did you put in to be stationed somewhere else or did you get assigned—

BB: In the natural course of events I was stationed after three years to go to Okinawa [Japan].

TS: Okay.

BB: That's the way it normally turned out.

TS: Like, did you say, "Here's some places I'd like to go"?

BB: Oh, no, no.

TS: They just, "Betsy, you're going here next."

BB: Yes, that's correct. Nobody gets out of Okinawa.

TS: Oh, is that right?

BB: Yeah, no, we're going to Okinawa. Yeah.

TS: Why is that?

BB: That's how it goes.

TS: But why? Why does everybody go—

BB: Because that's the way the Marine Corps makes assignments in the west.

TS: Okay.

BB: We don't go to Europe.

TS: You go to Okinawa.

BB: Exactly.

TS: What did you do in Okinawa? That was about 1979.

BB: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

BB: In Okinawa I was—I went back to my first training, which was ground supply because that's what was needed in the battalion I was assigned to. They needed a battalion supply officer, and as a first lieutenant, soon to be a captain, that is basically what I did. That was a year's assignment at the FSSG, or the Fleet Service Support Group, and that was, of course, more business. To me, I now had the third assignment as a business leader.

TS: Okay.

BB: Talking about even more stuff that was now for serious field, cold weather field. I had dogsleds. I had Quonset huts. I had stoves that you use in Quonset huts. It was really some amazing stuff. White gear for snow. Gloves, masks; the things to keep people warm if they went to Korea in the snow, because that's where a lot of marines did training. And everything else you could think of that a unit of marines would need to mount out with—what they would need to deploy with—either on a ship or a shore, usually—in Korea. And I had a big warehouse of all this, and I had a compound where we would keep—where we would pull our cars into, which was surrounded by fencing.

TS: Now, are you back in just a military-only environment?

BB: Military only; 100% military.

TS: Okay. And how was living in Okinawa different from, even just say, Hawaii?

BB: Well, when I was the officer in charge of the Officers' Club and the BOQ—I had both of them I was responsible for—so I ran a little inn. I didn't mention that.

TS: At Okinawa?

BB: No, in Hawaii.

TS: You ran an inn?

BB: The Officers' Club and the BOQ were in the same building.

TS: Okay.

BB: I ended up running both of them.

TS: How was that?

BB: Well, it was two businesses. Again, one was like a little tiny inn, because you had people sleeping there and living there, either temporarily or permanently, for their whole

assignment, and I [ran] this club that was food, beverage, and entertainment. So I'm in civilian—

TS: Like a bed and breakfast. [chuckles] Okay.

BB: Yes. So I did that for two years in civilian clothes.

TS: Oh, okay.

BB: I didn't wear the uniform.

TS: You didn't?

BB: No.

TS: Not in Hawaii?

BB: No. Not for the two years.

TS: Not for the last two years.

BB: No. The club manager's not a civilian but is basically providing civilian-like offerings.

TS: I see.

BB: Does that make sense?

TS: Yeah. No, I understand.

BB: And going to Okinawa, I'm back into the uniform, back in 100% military environment.

TS: Did you have any transitioning in and out of that? Did you have any feelings about that? Like, when you were just wearing civilian clothes was that more difficult to—

BB: The hours became different.

TS: Right.

BB: The hours in the club were all over the place. I was there frequently 11:00, midnight, late at night.

TS: Right.

BB: I was there at 7:30 in the morning, and not infrequently—I don't mean every day—late at night also.

TS: Right.

BB: In Okinawa we worked six days a week, in a regular schedule of six days a week, but no late nights.

TS: Okay. So a better stability for your work hours.

BB: It was more consistent. It was more a routine that was expected, in terms of how it went for that year.

TS: Now, what about the management aspect of that, because I would think that when you're doing the part with the club and you're dealing with scheduling and trying to get everybody on the right time schedule for events and things like that—getting caterers in and out, I'm sure, to bring food in and out—it's like, I wouldn't say, chaos, because I can't imagine you being in chaos [chuckles], just being around you, but it's a swirl of activity, and then you go to Okinawa and it's much more, like, step one, step two, step three. Which environment did you prefer?

BB: I'd have to say I preferred Hawaii, and not for the reason you might think. I mean, Hawaii's a tropical place, it's very beautiful, and there's beaches to swim and go surfing and so on. Okinawa was drudgery.

TS: In what way?

BB: It was oppressive heat.

TS: Okay.

BB: There were typhoons there. It was only a year but it wasn't a light and lively sort of place. There was nothing uplifting about it.

TS: What did you do on your off time?

BB: I played racquetball.

TS: Yeah?

BB: I learned to play racquetball very well. I played it a lot. I was on the Marine Corps racquetball team there, and I was also on the Marine Corps volleyball team in Hawaii. I wasn't that good at either one of them, but I did participate as a marine, and we traveled actually.

TS: Where did you travel to?

BB: To the mainland.

TS: Oh, you did?

BB: Yeah, we played other services—we played the air force, the navy, the army—in both racquetball and in volleyball.

TS: Where was the mainland?

BB: Mainland meaning Texas.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Yeah.

TS: So the year you were in Japan you traveled back to the States?

BB: No, mainly it was in Hawaii.

TS: Oh, when you were in Hawaii.

BB: Yes. In Okinawa we had all services represented on that island.

TS: I see.

BB: And so, that's where we played the other services.

TS: So interservices.

BB: Interservices in Okinawa, no travel.

TS: Okay.

BB: But volleyball traveled back from Hawaii to the mainland.

TS: I see, okay. So that was one of the activities you enjoyed doing with the sports. You like to stay active in the sports.

BB: Yeah.

TS: Whether it was surfing or—

BB: Yeah. Surfing was my true joy; it was a passion.

TS: Can you surf in Okinawa?

BB: No.

TS: No?

BB: No, it was mostly diving, and I'm not a diver.

TS: Okay. What did you think of the culture there? Did you get out into the culture?

BB: A little bit I did. One thing that I really remember about the culture of Okinawa is how wonderful there Kobe beef is.

[Kobe beef refers to beef from the Tajima strain of Wagyu cattle, raised in Japan's Hyogo Prefecture. The meat is a delicacy renowned for its flavor, tenderness, and fatty, well-marbled texture]

TS: Yeah?

BB: Loved, loved, loved having dinner out on the town from time to time with friends. And that's where I was first exposed to karaoke music.

TS: Oh, is that right?

BB: Was in 19—late 1970s.

TS: Yeah?

BB: There were karaoke bars in Japan.

TS: Did you participate?

BB: A little bit, not a lot, but it was fun. It was a lot of fun. And Kobe beef is divine. That is the best steak I have ever—It's like butter really; you can just cut it with your fork easily.

TS: Yeah?

BB: It's fabulous, and I've never had it here in the United States mainland ever. I really enjoyed that. I didn't get to know Okinawans very well—I didn't—because so much of my time, really, was spent on the base six days a week.

TS: Right.

BB: And when we played racquetball it was on the base.

TS: Right.

BB: But I did have a car and I did get out. But my quarters, where I lived, were on the base.

TS: Okay, I was going to ask you where you—

BB: I was on [unclear] Manado[?], which had been a different service base, it had belonged to the army and they had turned it over to the Marine Corps, and it was essentially a supply area.

TS: Okay.

BB: It was all different kinds of supply, motor transport, because the marines were also in other locations on Okinawa. The air force definitely was very well represented there, as was the navy.

TS: So when you were in the club environment and getting into mess for your training—let's talk about the food in the Marine Corps. What was it like, for the different places you were at? How would you describe it, because as an officer you eat at the club usually, right?

BB: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

BB: There's an Officer's Club on most every Marine Corps installation, as there is on the navy, and then there are enlisted clubs as well, and then there is a mess hall for the troops, not for the officers.

TS: Right.

BB: Sometimes we can go eat if you had—if you were the officer of the day you could go to the mess hall and eat, but if you're not the officer of the day it's usually discouraged for you to do that because it's not for you. You can go to a snack shop, you can go to the Officers' Club and get something to eat, or you can go home if you lived close by in quarters or just—because normally our lunch hour was an hour and a half. That's for physical training. PT is supposed to be run during that timeframe, and so because it's an hour and a half you can get just outside to a McDonald's or whatever and come back.

TS: Right. Did you do running; did you do your PT?

BB: Yeah, because I had to.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I hated it; I never liked it.

TS: Yeah? [chuckles]

BB: Yeah. The Marine Corps requirement for women was you run a mile and a half in a certain period of time based on your age.

TS: Right.

BB: You do as many pullups as you can—sorry, let me say again—you do as many sit ups as you can in two minute, up to eighty, and you do a flexed arm hang for seventy seconds if at all possible. And you have a first level, second level, and third level, fail.

TS: Right.

BB: If you get first, second, or third you pass, but if you don't get so many points from those three events you fail and you have to do it again, go into remedial training, and so on. So in order to stay in a passing level we had to run. Nobody made us run, it wasn't a demand or mandated.

TS: Oh, you didn't have formation?

BB: We had to run. The formation running was done in training.

TS: Okay.

BB: In Officer Candidate School and Basic School we ran in formations as trainees, but once we got into the fleet, so to speak, we're on our own. There was no formation running for officers.

TS: What was the hardest part about that for you?

BB: About what?

TS: The training; the physical—like, any of the—

BB: I don't like to run.

TS: But was the arm hang okay, because I've heard that—

BB: I got seventy every time.

TS: Did you? Because I heard that's one of the hardest ones.

BB: It's very difficult and men can't do it. We're built differently. It's a weird thing. I mean, we watched them do pullups.

TS: Are your arms bent or are they straight?

BB: It's a flexed arm hang.

TS: [chuckles] Just show me how you do it.

BB: If we had a bar here I would show you. You just—You get yourself up there and you stay with your chin above that bar—

TS: You're holding yourself—

BB: —for up to seventy seconds.

TS: I see.

BB: As soon as your chin passes that bar you are no longer on the flexed arm hang.

TS: Okay. I got it.

BB: And there are plenty of women who can't do it for very long, but you have to do it for so many seconds of the seventy. If you get seventy you maxed it.

TS: And then you're good. It's like riding the rodeo, right when the bell rings you can jump off the horse, right? Okay. So it was the running that was difficult.

BB: Yeah, I just don't like it.

TS: You didn't like it.

BB: No. Do you?

TS: I do not like running.

BB: So there we go. I've never enjoyed running.

TS: Got that on tape, Betsy, good job.

BB: Yeah. No problem.

TS: Alright. You never talked about the food. How was the food?

BB: Which food, though?

TS: Well, I'm sure that it was exquisite when you were in Hawaii running the club.

BB: Of course it was.

TS: How was it in Okinawa? I mean, you went and told me how good the Kobe beef was.

BB: I would go to my little—There were two of us that shared a facility apartment because there had been American teachers there on this base, and the American teachers who taught English and other subjects to children of Americans stationed in Okinawa, we shared those quarters. So you would have a common kitchen, a common living room, and, sort of, your room and bathroom, and the other person had a room and bathroom. And those—there were a lot of those little—I would go home, so I'm not really eating in a facility. If you really want to know about the eating experience you have to ask the troops, honestly, because I'm not sure that I'm qualified to say that, other than when I was managing the Officers' Club and we made the food and provided the food.

TS: Right. Because you get your allowance to eat wherever you want pretty much.

BB: Yeah, there's a part of a subsistence that's provided that you go to some—it ends up being, honestly, fast food for a lot of people. That's why you find McDonald's on a lot of base areas, or Burger King or Wednesday's [correction: Wendy's], or something from all over the world.

TS: Something quick to just to—

BB: When I went and did work with the navy in Italy, Subway [sandwiches] was there, so it's real common now that fast food is was people are opting for. But for me, in my experience, even if there wasn't fast food around in those times, I made my own. I didn't do a lot in a mess hall because that wasn't available for us.

TS: Right. Okay.

BB: And the club—the clubs would vary in what they would offer.

TS: Depended on where you were and how good they were and stuff.

BB: Yeah. So you would have to ask a corporal—seriously, lance corporal sergeant—what their dining—

TS: How their mess was.

BB: Yes.

TS: Okay. Well, now, are you anxious to get out of Okinawa and go on to your next assignment?

BB: Very.

TS: Very anxious.

BB: I'm very anxious to get out of Okinawa.

TS: Did you say, "Hey, can somebody get me assigned somewhere?"

BB: I felt more isolated on that island—

TS: Did you?

BB: —than I felt isolated on Hawaii, which is an island too. But the Okinawan experience was very monochromatic. There were bunkers that we lived in, honestly, because of typhoons. So in the July, August, September timeframe where the typhoon season is at its worst, is why people live in these very concrete bunker-like places. You couldn't live in a house like this because the windows would be destroyed.

TS: Blown in?

BB: Absolutely.

TS: Did you go through a typhoon?

BB: Oh yeah.

TS: What was that like?

BB: It's the strangest thing I've ever seen because of the eye.

TS: Okay.

BB: A hurricane is one thing. You don't notice the eye on shore while it's going overhead. What happens in a typhoon in the Far East is you have this very active, busy, windy, loud, rainy experience that we're familiar with with hurricanes, and then it's just as calm and as beautiful as the sky is right now—gorgeous blue, sunny sky—and then it hits you from the backside. It's weird, because the eye is open. Think of it as being in a dome with no complete ceiling in the middle. You have the front end that comes through, it's rough enough, the eye comes over you and it's gorgeous blue, calm, and the back comes and it's just even worse.

TS: Yeah.

BB: It's frightening.

TS: It is frightening?

BB: And you cannot leave where you are.

TS: So wherever you're hunkered down you have to stay.

BB: You just stay.

TS: Okay.

BB: So oppressive heat, and while out of—

TS: So the physical environment—the weather—was—

BB: I think the natural environment is pretty; the environment itself of the topography, which is not as interesting as the Hawaiian Islands, but still it's green, it's lush. And the water around it is very shallow, because it didn't spring from volcanoes, so it's shallow, and there's a lot of good diving there for shells and so on, which I never participated in. But other than that it's just not very—there's no aesthetic beauty to the architecture for example.

TS: Right.

BB: You can go into places and see some really gorgeous, imaginative and innovative designs of style and architecture. That is not happening in Okinawa.

TS: I see.

BB: Unfortunately for the residents, that island was essentially taken over by the Americans after World War II. And it is a source of great pain and frustration and resentment for the Japanese on the mainland of Japan because of that, and so we kind of tried to coexist there.

TS: But there's a little tension.

BB: Of course. Yeah, there's a little tension there.

TS: Where did you get sent next?

BB: Next I went to the Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro, California, which is in Orange County.

TS: Did you want to go there?

BB: Sure, yeah, I did. I was excited about going to California, I thought it was pretty cool, and being in Southern California, south of Los Angeles, north of Camp Pendleton, right next to Santa Ana area.

TS: What was that assignment? Were you still in the supply?

BB: I was assigned as the station supply officer. So I was still now, and never returned to club management, a ground supply officer there responsible for all the stations assets, and it was a very active air station at El Toro. And so, my office was on the runway—right on

the runway of the jets. [chuckles] And the difference between what I was doing there and what I was doing in Okinawa was, we had the clothing store. I was responsible for all the military clothing that the troops needed to get new trousers or shirts or boots or whatever they needed: buckles and belts and so on, hats, the covers; we had all of that.

TS: I have to ask you about being the supply officer, essentially, right?

BB: Yes.

TS: So at a couple different places you get all the good stuff.

BB: Yeah, we got all the good stuff.

TS: No, I mean you personally had access to all that stuff.

BB: Yeah, that's correct.

TS: [chuckles]

BB: I had warehouses now, more people and more stuff. Yeah, that's right. More assets, more budget, more people.

TS: But you knew the good things coming in through the Marine Corps. I mean, like, when something new was happening—

BB: Yeah.

TS: —could you order it and say, "Hey—" or did they just say, "This is what you're getting?"

BB: We had an authorization of a table of contents that we could have, and that's what we had.

TS: Okay.

BB: Now, if I wanted something cool and different it would be unlikely that I could go to the colonel and say, "I want to try that out." It just doesn't work that way.

TS: Yeah?

BB: No. Not unless there's a war.

TS: Okay.

BB: If there was a really emergent situation where we had to have whatever you would think would be required to go to that place, that site, for that situation, that's different. That's when the supply chain opens up and miracles happen. But if it's standard fare and it's

peacetime and we're not doing anything exciting, unique, and different, and there's no fire anywhere, we have a table—an authorized table of things we keep on hand.

TS: That you can get.

BB: In a mission change—

TS: How does it change?

BB: —any kind of mission change—that's when you pick up other things to add.

TS: To what you can get?

BB: Yeah.

TS: Okay. How was this assignment different from the other ones you've had?

BB: Well, first of all, it was in Southern California, and the weather's always beautiful in Southern California.

TS: I was going to say, and I know you're outside doing something somewhere.

BB: And the Blee Family is from Southern California. My wonderful Grandmother Blee was still living, and she lived approximately—I would say less than five miles from the Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro.

TS: Oh, really?

BB: Yes, and I had an uncle and an aunt there in the Los Angeles area, I had an aunt in the San Diego area, and I had first cousins all over Southern California. And I was very comfortable now. I was a captain, I was in charge of the station's assets, and I was living large.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Yeah, it was fun.

TS: What are you thinking about the Marine Corps at this time? Because when you joined up, what did you initially think? You were going to have a career or try it out?

BB: At this point—So now we're in 1980 and I've been in the Marine Corps for five years now, and I say, "I think I'll go to graduate school."

TS: Okay.

BB: Because Webster University had offerings at El Toro on the base at night, and they were

drawing from local professors from UC [University of California] Irvine and so on, and I thought I probably should get into a master's program in business because I felt like [unclear] was doing already.

TS: Right.

BB: And that's what I did. And so, I was really enjoying being back in the Continental United States, very close to the Blee family, extended, and my grandmother Blee, which was really awesome because she was just an amazing woman. I had friends I was establishing in the area, and I was—I wouldn't say that—it was actually a little tricky to be on active duty and to go to graduate school, so that was a bit of a challenge, but as you've heard I was—that was typical for me to be busy like that.

TS: Right; you take on a lot at once.

BB: Yes. And I started to think maybe this is a good time for me to transition into private industry; that started to enter my head.

TS: Why did you start thinking in that way?

BB: Going to school, going to college, now being amongst other folks who were either professors, or in that program because they too were transitioning, and thinking about what other options might be for me to leave the Marine Corps, be in private industry, earn more money. I have a good solid foundation as a leader now. I'm very confident.

TS: So it's like the timing is just right; where you were at, what you're doing.

BB: The timing's right. That's correct.

TS: The experiences that you've brought with you.

BB: Yes, I feel like I'm marketable.

TS: Okay.

BB: And it turns out that then, as now, that there are plenty of firms in the country that are more than willing to represent you as a junior officer to private industry, in many different sectors in private industry, and essentially help you with your résumé, and crafting how you represent yourself to them in interviews.

TS: What were you looking for? What was the ideal job for you?

BB: I wasn't sure.

TS: No?

BB: No. I don't know that I could answer that because I'm sure that I wasn't that smart to—

TS: [chuckles]

BB: I wasn't. I wasn't really thinking about—Here, I'm an old surfer, and now I'm a marine; I'm a surfer gone marine. Now, how can that be any different?

TS: Right.

BB: Marines are really team play; surfing's individual. It's—You would consider it non-discipline, but you do have to have some discipline to be able to manage being in competition as long as I was.

TS: Right. Was there anything about the Marine Corps that was making you think, "I don't want to stay on active duty"?

BB: Yes.

TS: What was it?

BB: I think the personnel difficulties really got to me.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Yes.

TS: Anything in particular?

BB: I—There was one incident—This wasn't an incident so much as a sequence of things that happened on my watch at El Toro with some of the troops in my command and in my organization that really got to me. There was one in particular that became very abusive with his spouse and it became battery, and it just really got me—not like it doesn't happen elsewhere, but it was very personal to me that this woman was being beat up at the hands of a marine. And so—

TS: Was he being held accountable for that?

BB: He was held accountable.

TS: But just the fact that it happened and you knew the person?

BB: Yeah. So I experienced that. And then, of course, there was alcoholism.

TS: Within the Corps?

BB: Alcohol, I would say, is specific—now I'm talking about as the officer in charge of the air

station, there were a couple of guys that were dealing with serious alcohol issues in that unit. And then there's the one who was beating up his wife. It just got to me.

TS: How did that effect you personally? I mean, why did those things make you—

BB: I didn't think that this was now only in this unit.

TS: I see.

BB: I realized it was—

TS: Widespread?

BB: Because we were post-Vietnam, just by a few years.

TS: Right.

BB: We still had this feeling of "nobody appreciates us," especially those who had been there, and there wasn't a countrywide swell, yet, of love and—

TS: Right.

BB: And so, it didn't always feel that great. Even though I personally was not in during the Vietnam time, I did not have any personal experience with fire—meaning being fired at—or any kind of combat. I was never close to it, so I wasn't in the trenches anywhere. But I think it was the right time for me to transition out. I'd had a good run; I enjoyed it and I was very proud of it; I still am. There were a lot of good things that happened, and there were the typical kinds of things that happen in any organization that are not exactly stellar.

TS: Right. Like what?

BB: What I just described.

TS: But those are personnel issues.

BB: Yes, and you asked me first, a little while ago, "What was the hardest part?" That was always the hardest part.

TS: The personnel?

BB: Yes. It wasn't the stuff.

TS: The actually job that you had to do, check, got it done.

BB: Right.

TS: But the minutia—

BB: The budget, the stuff, the equipment.

TS: Because that's, like, a tangible thing that you can fix and maneuver, but people are a lot more difficult to manipulate [chuckling] into the way that you want them to be. Right. Yeah.

BB: There is a lot of discussion among management ranks, in private industry and in the military, about the 80%, the 20%; the 90%, the 10%. Whatever the percentage comes down to, you have a majority who really are there to do well and to do right. They want to contribute.

TS: What percentage is that?

BB: They want to do—And there is a percentage—whether it's five, ten, fifteen, or twenty—in that range—who are problematic; who are difficult either because they have—they carry their own baggage or they undermine. And so, I might have felt I was leaving that behind me, but it occurs elsewhere also. But at the time, when I was still in my twenties, and then maybe thirty at the oldest when I left, I thought, "Well, that's this unit." I found out that's not true. I went in to business of course, and private industry, and found out that's not true. It happens everywhere.

TS: It's interesting that you say that, too, because when you read about news—military news—that has to do with women today, a lot of it focuses on things like sexual assault and rape, and what are your thoughts on that issue in the military?

BB: Well, I never had a sexual assault, I was never raped, but I could see how that easily could happen, and it's very distressing, very upsetting, of course, at every level. The closest I ever got to that—the men in the Marine Corps and the [U.S.] Navy that I had experience with were pretty forward; they were pretty clear in their intentions. It was real common for them to let you know that they would like to have a—

TS: Experience with you?

BB: Yes. And so, a strong person—a woman—would be able to say, "No, we're not going to do that," or, "I'm not going to go there with you," or, "Leave me alone," or, "Don't touch me," and that would just kind of end. But for some, especially if the guy is senior, and now you have the relationship of a senior person with a junior person, it becomes much more complicated and difficult.

TS: Like if there's that sort of—a sexual harassment type behavior or something and then they're writing their evaluation, that dynamic makes it very difficult?

BB: That familiarity is challenging for a junior women to know how to handle in a military

environment, especially a Marine Corps environment.

TS: Well, what do you think about the idea of—I forget the two women senators who had proposals to change the chain of command for things like assault; to take it out of the commander's hands and put it in a more criminal justice hands. [Senator Kirsten Gillibran, D-N.Y. and Senator Claire McCaskill, D-Mo]

BB: Yeah.

TS: Instead of head[?] of a commander, just non-judicial punishment, or to keep it out of the news basically.

BB: Well, it's unfortunate it's come to that.

TS: Yeah.

BB: But we didn't—now that we're on this topic—when I was in Hawaii there was a ward officer—a woman—who was a very good friend, and there was, at the same time, a colonel—male—who stalked her; he harassed her, he stalked her. She would hide in my BOQ room, lock the door, and he would stand out in the hallway and say, "I know you're in there." And it went on; I could just keep going.

TS: Right.

BB: It was just terrifying for me, and especially for her, but this guy just wouldn't quit, and he was—I went to the commanding officer of the base to say, "This is what's happening. You've got to stop him." And he spoke—the commanding officer spoke to the senior male more than once and told him to stop and quit, and he didn't.

TS: And that was it; there wasn't any other accountability?

BB: He didn't stop; he didn't stop. The only thing that was going to make a difference was for one or both of them to be removed and sent somewhere else apart from each other in the world.

TS: Is that what happened?

BB: Not the same state.

TS: Right.

BB: Really, like, thousands of miles away. But even then, he probably would have got on a plane.

TS: Yeah?

BB: He was just—

TS: What happened eventually?

BB: I'm trying to think how it resolved itself, and what I'm remembering now is she actually ended up finding a safe haven with another guy, who was a major, who was very strong and sort of, literally and figuratively, wrapped his arms around her and protected her from the "nutcase."

TS: So they dated and then he became—

BB: They ended up marrying.

TS: Okay.

BB: So it had a good ending.

TS: Right.

BB: They were married for a long time. And I was just so happy, and finally the guy who was older, and he was ready to retire, he just sort of faded away. But while it was going on it was just simply awful. That is a case for a civilian intervention, to me.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Because what was happening on the base was not stopping it.

TS: There wasn't anything being—

BB: Unless he'd been put in the brig [military prison] he was not going to stop.

TS: So just having a talking to didn't change anything?

BB: Hell, no.

TS: Okay, so when you were in it wasn't even before "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," right?

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

BB: Way before.

TS: It was, like, you can't be gay or lesbian and be in the military.

BB: Yes.

TS: And then we had the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" put in during the nineties and then it was repealed several years ago. What do you think about that whole issue of homosexuality in the service?

BB: I think what I witnessed in the service before "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" were, what I could call, witch hunts.

TS: Witch hunts. What would happen?

BB: The [United States] Naval [Criminal] Investigative Service and other parts of the Marine Corps would go after anybody who was presumed to be homosexual, especially men, and they would find themselves the subject of a blanket party first. You know what I mean by blanket party?

TS: You can explain it for whoever's reading the transcript.

BB: It means that that person would be beat up, if not killed. Their life was in danger.

[A blanket party is a form of corporal punishment or hazing conducted within a peer group, most frequently within the military or military academies. The victim is restrained by having a blanket flung over him/her and held down, while other members of the group strike the victim repeatedly]

TS: Were these things that you were aware of at the time?

BB: Absolutely.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Especially for the men. The women would not be treated that way, but—meaning they were not the subject of being beat up.

TS: Right.

BB: The men were.

TS: They were still being investigated?

BB: If the men were discovered as being gay, faggots—whatever they were called—all the

things that you know that they are referred to by a group of manly men.

TS: Right.

BB: They were at risk; they were at great risk. First of all, for physically harm, to include death. And they were at risk for losing whatever they had earned at that point, whether they were a sergeant or a captain, to lose and be administratively discharged immediately.

TS: What did you think about all that?

BB: I think it was awful.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I think it was terrible. I couldn't understand why that was happening, really. It just was—It was awful. It was probably the worst part of my whole experience, is witnessing that and knowing that it happened to the men in the way that it did.

TS: Right.

BB: And the women who were not typically subject to physical danger were subject to discharge quickly.

TS: Right.

BB: They might have spent twenty years of their life in the [U.S.] Navy or the Marine Corps, because that's who I had the most experience with. I was not as familiar with the army and the air force so I can't speak to how it was handled there. They would be called into the commanding officer, and they may or may not have had an attorney; they may or may not have had to speak to the naval investigative service; but they would be exited just like that. They could have had a chest full of ribbons, all kinds of commendations and awards. They might have even served in Vietnam. But if it was discovered that they were in fact homosexual or practicing, they're out within days.

TS: Right.

BB: Not weeks, not months, days.

TS: Well, Margarethe Cammermeyer is an example of that in the army; went to Vietnam as a nurse.

[Margarethe Cammermeyer served as a colonel in the Washington National Guard. In 1989, during a routine security clearance, she disclosed that she was a lesbian. The National Guard began military discharge proceedings against her, and she was honorably discharged on 11 June 1992. Cammermeyer filed a lawsuit against the decision, and in

June 1994 a judge ruled that her discharge and the ban on gays and lesbians serving in the military was unconstitutional]

BB: I'm just scratching my head going, "Really?" That disappointed me the most of everything.

TS: Really?

BB: Yeah, of any of my experiences.

TS: What do you think about the new policy, then?

BB: What policy?

TS: Well, first they had "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." What'd you think about that one?

BB: Worthless.

TS: Worthless?

BB: Yeah, I think stupid.

TS: Not even, like, a transitionary period?

BB: Maybe.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Maybe.

TS: And now that's repealed.

BB: I'm all for, "Get over it. Let it be."

TS: Yeah.

BB: You've got patriots who want to serve. And what in the hell is it causing as a problem? I just don't get it. It's dumb.

TS: One of the other controversial issues for women had to do—actually, when you got in—the issue of pregnancy—

BB: Or a tattoo.

TS: Oh, or a tattoo?

BB: Yes. Women pregnant, women tattoos.

TS: Are we putting them together? [chuckles]

BB: Out.

TS: If you had a tattoo you were out?

BB: So a homosexual, pregnant, tattoo, you're out.

TS: Yeah. Did it matter how you did your job?

BB: No, apparently not.

TS: No? Those things were qualifiers. Well, so, what do you think about that issue of pregnancy, because that's still a hot button issue, especially when women deploy and they're mothers.

BB: What about it?

TS: Do you think that mothers should be able to be in the military [unclear]?

BB: Yes, absolutely.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Private industry handles it. Why can't we handle it in the service? It's part of life.

TS: So you left active duty in 1981?

BB: Yes.

TS: But you stayed in the reserve?

BB: I did. I was in the reserve automatically.

TS: Okay.

BB: But in terms of being an active reservist, it was approximately a year before I became an active reservist at El Toro.

TS: Where you're training?

BB: Yes.

TS: Okay. Tell me what the difference was for you between being on active duty Marine Corps and being in the reserve duty, training once a month, or however often you were doing it, in the Marine Corps. What was different about it?

BB: Well, the daily work of being a marine, where there are expectations of standards and practices, and being in meetings, working with your peers and colleagues, and your commanding officer, and your troops on a regular basis; and writing fitness reports and receiving fitness reports; and having formations every day; showing up for duty and having goals to meet; and all that sort of thing; and compressing that into a weekend, it's just—it's not the same. You can't really get a whole lot of things done in a weekend a month. And people are used to coming from a civilian environment, where they're doing whatever it is they're doing, to a weekend where now we're going to be wearing a uniform and we're going to try to get something accomplished over forty-eight hours, is just an odd experience, really. I mean, I don't regret doing it, I'm glad I did, it was interesting, but it wasn't—

TS: You did it for, like, sixteen years.

BB: I did.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I was in a maintenance unit for a number of years for [McDonnell Douglas] F-4 [Phantom II] jets; that was at El Toro. Then I was in a public affairs unit in New York. And then I was with a mobilization unit in Utah. So it was very interesting.

TS: Well, during the Gulf War was anybody activated in your—

BB: Well, yeah, because in 1991, which was the First Gulf War, I was still in Salt Lake City and we were a mobilization unit. So we did bring people into activate them, but not—

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

TS: How did that work, then? I mean, was it smooth, did it work well; as a mobilization unit, that's right.

BB: We didn't bring that many people in from Utah.

TS: Okay.

BB: And so, my particular station, my unit themselves, the active ones, were not necessarily activated, but it was a regional unit, so there were people who were called depending on their specialty, depending on their age, depending on their gender, and their rank; would determine whether they were then mobilized.

TS: So you basically had a chart you had to fill out, and you had to stick people in those slots depending on the parameters of the job, and like you say, the rank, and did they fit this slot.

BB: All the services would say what was needed.

TS: Okay.

BB: They would look to the active forces first, then they would look to the reserve forces. If what was needed by the [U.S.] Army or the Marine Corps fell into A, B, and C categories of infantrymen or engineers or pilots or doctors, and they filled those first from the active duty, and like I said, they would then go to the reserve forces, which is an important backup, and a very inexpensive backup by the way. If they didn't need certain specialties then they didn't come to the units that were all around the country, but if they did they might draw on them from the Camp Lejeune area, they might [unclear] Camp Pendleton area, first, and then they would go to the interior and see, "We don't have this kind of special communications filled; we don't have a radio person." But remember you needed a certain age group, you needed a certain rank, you needed a certain gender. In the First Gulf War very few women went.

TS: But more than had gone anywhere else to a war zone.

BB: That's correct. Still, it was—

TS: Like, forty-eight thousand?

BB: Still a small number compared to the total number that went.

TS: Right.

BB: And at that point—I can't remember if I was already a lieutenant colonel, I might have been a major, somewhere in there. Wrong rank, wrong gender.

TS: Did you want to go?

BB: Every marine wanted to go. No marine wanted to be left out. We wanted to participate. Did I want to go to the Middle East? I would have to say probably not. Did I want to be involved? Yes, I did.

TS: Did you feel like you were involved, though, with the work that you were doing?

BB: No.

TS: You didn't?

BB: Not close enough.

TS: No?

BB: No. [chuckles] No, Salt Lake City wasn't close enough. I like to be where the action is. I didn't feel like that's where the action was.

TS: Well, I remember some of the mobilization during that time, one of the criticisms was that those units really hadn't trained and weren't prepared for what they faced, or what they were going to face. When they went into that training period before they deployed actually, that there were complications because of the standard of training that was done before then. And that then changed after that war, maybe not for higher standards, but for accountability for those standards. What do you think about that?

BB: Yeah, I think that's—Yeah. Like I said, it's hard to get things done like that in forty-eight hours for reserve units, unless you have particular specific training that occurs in the summertime over the two weeks of what you give as a reservist. It's a possibility you can go as an engineer to a specialty school for engineering and spend those two weeks learning how to lay down a temporary landing site; a temporary bridge, for example.

TS: Right.

BB: Yeah.

TS: Well, during your time in the Marine Corps did you ever receive an award that was especially memorable to you?

BB: I received some commendations, but because I was never in any kind of fast-paced, rough and tumble—no, I didn't.

TS: But these letters that you got from your service—

BB: The letters and commendations and the recognition I got was mostly running that club.

TS: Yeah.

BB: That's what I did really well.

TS: Was that like a highlight for you?

BB: I think it was a very, very memorable two years.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Yes. I didn't get a lot of awards running inventory stuff.

TS: No?

BB: I didn't. [chuckles] There were no letters—There's not a whole thick thing of letters like I was reading this past week from my time at the club.

TS: Well, that's expected, right? You only get noticed if you mess that up, probably, a lot of times.

BB: What I do remember is I never messed up the supply stuff. As a matter of fact, it went pretty smoothly because it was orderly. It wasn't wartime. It was orderly in peacetime, so all the stuff I was supposed to have I had and it worked, and if it went somewhere it came back, because I said I'm going to come find you. [chuckles]

TS: Well, some people say that the military has its own humor, and the Marine Corps has its own type of humor as well. Are there any stories you have where you can maybe share with us Marine Corps humor or military humor?

BB: I used to use more colorful language than I use now, it was more fluent, and I don't use that language anymore, but I think that it was very clever in its use, actually, in the Marine Corps. People said, "Well, sailors talk like they're salty," and everything. I know that from my dad's language. And so, my first impressions and learning of colorful fluent language was definitely from my father, who was an old navy salt [sailor], and I certainly peppered it around myself. But I think that—I can't really remember the kinds of expressions that Marine Corps troops used to describe things, but it was pretty clever and pretty funny at the time. Now I would be, like, appalled if I heard it again.

I mean, one of the captains that I work with now went off on a rant this week about something and I thought, "Were you in the [U.S.] Navy or the Marine Corps—" because he was talking just like that, in a string of a rant. I just don't—Once I went in to private industry it just kind of went away and it wasn't really considered appropriate.

TS: There was a cultural difference, right, between the civilian and the military.

BB: Big cultural difference, yeah.

TS: Well, one of the things that I hear some of the women talk about is, like, when they're going away ceremony or they're PCS [permanent change of station] or they're changing stations, people would do drawings or things that were very humorous.

BB: I have some of those.

TS: Yeah? Do you?

BB: Yeah. I have some.

TS: We'll have to look at some of those.

BB: Where they would draw palm trees or beaches or surfers, and say things on them and so on. I was never involved in a pinning. I was never involved in—the pinning has two meanings to me. One is pinning on your wings when you join and you're a pilot, and you get your wings pinned on, and it's actually a blood—

TS: Punched on.

BB: Punched on. The other is a promotion where you're hit in the arm, in the shoulder area, for a new stripe that you get. So I personally was never subject to any of that because I wasn't a troop and I wasn't a pilot. But I don't have really good memories of knowing about it, because of the blood pinning. I just think that's a terrible practice; very, very upsetting. And the other thing is, the punching in the arm was—could be pretty rough also and leave people quite bruised.

TS: You didn't personally experience it but you knew of people who went through it.

BB: Yeah.

TS: That's definitely a violent, cultural—

BB: I think so. I think it was unnecessary.

TS: Well, in general, how do you think you would describe your relations with your supervisors and your peers?

BB: Very good.

TS: Very good?

BB: Very good. I usually got along pretty well with just about everyone. There are some exceptions of course where it just wasn't going to work out, but isn't that true of most of us? I figured a way to work it out. I figured a way to create some kind of harmony and [unclear], which is something that we learn early.

TS: Right. Well, did you see attitudes towards women changing at all in the Marine Corps while you were in?

BB: Yeah, it certainly evolved. It definitely evolved from my early days to my later time.

TS: Can you give me an example how the evolution happened?

BB: There was more expectation of equal kind of participation; an equality in assignment; that

we would not be excluded from doing certain things that we could.

TS: So even though, at the time—when we were talking about this earlier you said really whatever you enjoyed being in the service and you didn't really think about those exclusions yourself personally, but upon reflection—

BB: Well, I would have like to have the opportunity to go to the [United States] Naval Academy.

TS: Oh, you would have?

BB: I would have loved to have gone to the Naval Academy. It was not an option.

TS: At that time.

BB: No.

TS: Right, because your dad—

BB: He did not go to the Naval Academy, he was an instructor at one point.

TS: But I mean the relationship with the navy.

BB: He didn't go to the Naval Academy. He—As a Second World War joinee, when the fighting was already ongoing, folks of his era went quickly to Michigan and were trained very rapidly to then get out into the fleet.

TS: Why did you want to go to the Naval Academy?

BB: It—Why did I? Well, I—later, I thought I would have liked to have had it as an option.

TS: I see.

BB: But it wasn't even something on the horizon or the screen because it wasn't available. We couldn't—Women couldn't go. And I couldn't be a pilot either and that bugged me.

TS: Yeah?

BB: Really bothered me.

TS: What kind of pilot?

BB: Any kind of pilot. Helicopters, fixed wing, who cares? I wanted—We can fly, we can drive boats.

TS: You haven't raised your voice very much, Betsy, but you raised it there. [chuckles]

BB: Well, yeah. To be excluded from that, again, stupid.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Just like the treatment we were talking about, of people who want to serve.

TS: Right.

BB: Stupid, and it makes no sense to me at all.

TS: Right. Well, when you think about your overall treatment during the time you were in the Marine Corps, for pay, promotions, those kinds of things, did you feel like you were treated fairly?

BB: Yes. I was never roughed up. I never felt I was treated unfairly. I never thought that I was passed over because I was a woman. I don't feel like that happened to me. I feel like I was always given a fair shake. Except for the congressional quotas and assignments of being excluded to certain jobs.

TS: Right.

BB: Okay, so I didn't feel like that was personal to me.

TS: Right.

BB: If that makes any sense.

TS: No, it does.

BB: I'm not sure if I'm characterizing that correctly, but it seemed like it was an organizational, national, at the Congress level—

TS: Institutional discrimination against the gender for specific assignments.

BB: Well said, thank you. Yes.

TS: So you did recognize it at the time, then, too?

BB: Yes.

TS: Okay. Did you have any heroes or heroines growing up during this time, as a twenty year old—twentyish?

BB: I was always fascinated by the women ahead of me who were—when I was a lieutenant—lieutenant colonels, majors, colonels. I was aware of the fact there were no

women generals. That actually really stays in my mind as something—"Why don't we have any women generals?" We can't fly, we can't go to the academy.

TS: The Marine Corps was the last to get a woman general.

BB: You're telling me.

TS: That's right, I was reading about that the other day.

BB: That is correct.

TS: So specifically in the Marine Corps, you were wondering why there wasn't one?

BB: Yes.

TS: Because there were a couple in other services.

BB: Yes. It's not that they weren't capable or they should not be—it's just they should not have been excluded from senior flag officer positions. Just—I just didn't get it.

TS: Well, what about the whole idea of the women's movement during this time. I mean, because when you went in it was, well, the seventies—1970, '72—maybe it was more volatile, and when you went in in '75 it was still pretty in the news.

BB: You think? Jane Fonda, Gloria Steinem.

[Jane Fonda is an American actress, writer, political activist, former fashion model and fitness guru]

[Gloria Steinem is an American feminist, journalist, and social and political activist recognized as a leader and spokeswoman for the feminist movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's]

TS: Yeah.

BB: And others, yeah.

TS: Well, what were your thoughts about this whole—

BB: I wasn't that evolved. I wasn't.

TS: You weren't evolved?

BB: Evolved.

TS: Evolved.

BB: I was not that evolved at that time. It really didn't connect for me that much.

TS: Well, some of the women that I've talked to, too, who actually have a lot of independence and feelings about the rights women should have, but don't see themselves as feminists, even still. Would you see yourself as a feminist?

BB: Now I would.

TS: Now?

BB: I'm very much about gender equality now, but years ago I wouldn't even know what you're talking about.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I was from a very conservative family.

TS: Rights.

BB: Father's a captain in the navy. He had very pejorative things to say about feminists, and I was in the Marine Corps, and so I just—it didn't really—other than what I've said I was aware of women being excluded from, from the institutional—I felt like I was—

TS: Not personally.

BB: Right.

TS: It wasn't personally against Betsy.

BB: Yeah.

TS: Right.

BB: The people around me gave me opportunity.

TS: Right. Do you think that they pushed you to levels even higher than you, at the time, thought possible?

BB: I'll give you a very specific example of how I was given an opportunity but almost refused an opportunity.

TS: Okay.

BB: When I was a reservist at El Toro, I was in a unit of approximately a hundred marines. I was one of two women, honestly. There was a staff sergeant and me in this unit.

TS: Okay. So the only female officer.

BB: The only female officer. She was one staff officer in this unit that took care of the F-4 jet maintenance. The commanding officer was getting ready to move on to something else; he was departing; the job was open.

TS: What was your rank at that time?

BB: It was captain.

TS: Okay.

BB: And so, the billet was for a major. I went to—I said, "I think I'll apply for that, because I'm one of the few officers here and I think I—" other than the commanding officer I was the next senior person. I went to the executive officer of the wing, because I was in a squadron, and I said, "I'd like to apply for that."

And the executive officer pretty much dismissed me. He was very—like, "I don't think so, and it's too late," and so never mind. It was that sort of conversation.

I said, "Well, I'd like to speak to the colonel anyway if you don't mind." He was a lieutenant colonel. "I want to speak to the colonel anyway."

"Okay, if you insist," kind of thing.

TS: Right.

BB: So I got in to see the colonel and I said, "Colonel, I'd really like to apply for the job." It was the commanding officer of the squadron, because I have a lot of supply experience, and it was a ninety-nine billet. It's a generalist leader, but very related to supply, in the maintenance of jets.

TS: Right.

BB: Even though I don't know anything about airplanes, as we've said, not because I didn't want to. And the colonel was very open to it, really.

He says, "Really, no kidding? Well, that's interesting. Fill out this form, put your application in, let's see what your qualifications are. I've got a couple of other applicants," and he thanked me, we shook hands. The next thing you know I had the job. I was now the commanding officer of that unit because the colonel was more open to it.

TS: So he had this executive officer gatekeeper that if you hadn't had—as strong-willed as you are, perhaps—

BB: Yes, right.

TS: —someone might have just walked away then.

BB: Exactly. And that's how it works.

TS: So if you keep pushing through those barriers, even though maybe you don't even know how strong those barriers are.

BB: I didn't accept the "No." I didn't accept the dismissal. Because I knew I was in the right place for the job, and I was the right person for the job. And that got a nice little write up in the paper.

TS: Did it? Did you enjoy that?

BB: Yeah, I did, I did. That was a good assignment for me. That was pretty cool; it was a little bit of history.

TS: How long did you do that?

BB: Two years.

TS: Did you ever see that lieutenant colonel again?

BB: Sure, sure, because he was there at El Toro. There were a thousand people in that reserve unit because there were several squadrons.

TS: Did he support you, then, after—

BB: No, not really.

TS: Not really?

BB: But he didn't undermine me either.

TS: Were you undermined ever? No? But you saw other people be undermined; you mentioned that.

BB: Yeah. He had just pretty much—just stood down essentially.

TS: What did you actually do when you left active duty? What job did you end up with?

BB: When I left active duty I went to Pfizer Pharmaceuticals as a sales rep—pharmaceutical sales rep—in Southern California, and that was a very, very interesting transition from real Marine Corps environment, where I tell, you do, to being a sales person where you're influencing physicians, through communication, through telling information and setting up products for this illness or that infection for the right patient profile; describing the

pathologies, the competitors, and so forth—the features, the benefits—in a highly personal way, with what you would hope would be good selling skills and interpersonal skills, which I didn't have.

TS: You didn't?

BB: No. They were never developed in the Marine Corps. It was a whole different thing that was developed for me; it was a different kind of—

TS: So it was a new challenge for you?

BB: Very.

TS: How did you do with it?

BB: Not well at first, no.

TS: No?

BB: Because I didn't have the soft skills; they were underdeveloped; underutilized and underdeveloped. But Pfizer is a major pharmaceutical firm, gave us exceptional training, and I had some friends in my district who took me aside—they were actually from the army—and talked to me about the way in which I might be more successful and better at speaking with doctors rather than boring holes in them and demanding—

TS: [chuckles]

BB: Just sort of—

TS: The soft shoe sell.

BB: I didn't know what that meant though. I had to hear it and see it and understand it, and so over time I got much better at it.

TS: Yeah. How long did you stay with them?

BB: Twenty-six years.

TS: I guess they liked you.

BB: I was actually a sales representative in the California area in two different roles for six years, and so developed the skills of influence by having a conversation and learning that listening is more important than the talking. And finding out what people really wanted to know or hear, or didn't want to know or hear. It helped to have good products, it helped to be with a good company.

TS: That's interesting, too, though, how you explain that the guys in the army—I don't know if it was women or men—

BB: Men; two guys.

TS: —in the army actually were the ones that helped you.

BB: They did; they helped me. We had formed a real good friendship. They were—

[Recording Paused]

TS: So Betsy, you were kind of describing your adjustment to civilian life.

BB: Yeah.

TS: And so, can you talk a little bit about what happened after 9/11; what you decided to do?

[The September 11 attacks, or 9/11, were 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 six thousand others]

BB: By the time 9/11 occurred I had retired from the Marine Corps as a reserve lieutenant colonel. I'd retired in 1997. But I was now working for Pfizer, since 1981, and in 2001—I'd been with them twenty years—I was in New York. I was living in New York, working in New York at the Pfizer world headquarters, and I was responsible for leadership development for the company.

TS: So you're in New York.

BB: I'm in New York.

TS: Okay. New York City?

BB: Yes. No, well, I was in New York City for two years and then I moved out later to Utah and then I came back to New York City, lived in the suburbs.

TS: Okay. And so, then what happened?

BB: I bought a boat.

TS: What kind of a boat?

BB: Just a pleasure craft. I was no longer surfing, so I transitioned to boating. Boating was my new surfing. And I thought when 9/11 happened, and I was forty miles away from New York City, it made sense for me to participate as a member of some sort of agency of the country, and in this case Homeland Security.

TS: Okay.

BB: Coast Guard. Coast Guard to—

[extraneous comments about cell phone redacted]

TS: Go ahead though.

BB: I was trying to figure out how to get involved and contribute, like everyone else was. What can I do to be a contributor? And the Coast Guard made the most sense to me because now I had a boat and I had a military background.

TS: Right.

BB: So I offered my boat into service as a facility for the Coast Guard, and from there just kept at it and kept at it, and learned more and more and more about how to handle boats and provide some sort of assistance around New York, because that was considered a key target. It still is.

TS: Right.

BB: Wall Street is there, it's the financial capital of the country, and so many iconic things that we were at risk for additional attack. We didn't know how much more—how worse could it get. Were we going to be hit again? So there were a lot of us that did that. We had huge signups into the Coast Guard of people wanting to come back into service and so on. But I thought I'm really not at an age when I can go back in to the Marine Corps, but I can participate in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, so I did.

TS: And so, what did you do?

BB: Well, I became a crewmember and then I became a coxswain, which is a small boat operator. I had to meet all the standards required; it took me a while to do it. Then I became a flotilla commander, then I became the division commander; that's how it went. And I held a lot of other roles in the Coast Guard.

TS: Are you still in the Coast Guard?

BB: I'm still a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I am. It's an all-volunteer organization, but when we're serving in a role, like I just described, as either a crewmember on a facility or a coxswain on a facility, we are actually in uniform and we report to the commandant of the Coast Guard. And that's different from what the air force does. They don't wear the uniform and they don't report to the commanding officer or commanding general of the air force.

TS: So you came full circle, not the navy, but with that experience with the water and your dad and all that.

BB: Yeah. I've had seven boats since that first one.

TS: Have you?

BB: And they've all been a little bit different, depending on how I use them and what the requirements were for crew use or for pleasure craft, et cetera, and I'm now a hundred ton master licensed, credentialed, captain.

TS: Do you enjoy it?

BB: I love it. I love being a captain. You kidding me?

TS: [chuckles]

BB: I just like being on the water on a boat. I'm a small boat handler, but a hundred tons is a little bigger than a small boat.

TS: Yeah, I think so. Well, the time that you went in, and the time you were in the Marine Corps in the seventies, there weren't very many women in the Marine Corps at that time. Did you consider yourself a trailblazer at that time, or even upon reflection?

BB: I felt myself as a trailblazer when I was the commanding officer of that unit in El Toro.

TS: El Toro?

BB: That's when I really felt the most unique about my experience in the Marine Corps; that I was in charge of a hundred people, one other being a woman, and taking care of F-4 jets; that was a little, tiny piece of trailblazing.

TS: How were you received by the men that you were commanding?

BB: Fine, because I'd already been with them, and I had very good relationships with the other ward officers and the senior staff. I didn't have as much exposure to, at that time, the junior troops, but it was a very positive experience.

TS: So this was, like, up till '87; approximately in that timeframe, '85, '87?

BB: That's right.

TS: So the number of women in the military are increasing, too, at that time.

BB: A little bit, yeah. More in the other services.

TS: Would you recommend the military to women [unclear]?

BB: Definitely, 100%, but after I would speak to a parent, or a youngster thinking about it. It wouldn't necessarily be all Marine Corps, it would be, "Have you thought about the Coast Guard?" It would depend on what their real—you talk to them and you find out what do they really like; what are they interested in; what are the things that are important to them; where do they see themselves going; what do they have an aptitude for; and then I wouldn't—I might necessarily—"The service may not be right for you; it's not right for everybody." Or I would say, "Have you thought about the navy?" or something—I don't—

TS: So it's not like there's just a military fit, there's, like, a fit in a particular service, maybe a particular job.

BB: I have learned—I have learned from private industry and my years in—let's see—my Pfizer years were just awesome, and [with] the Marine Corps experience that fit is exceptionally important. Fit is important, because it makes such a difference in morale, and the strengthening and development of capabilities where there is the most sense of fulfillment. People hardly ever achieve that. They hardly ever get to a place where, "This is what I want to do, this is what I like to do, this is what I'm good at." It just doesn't happen. Just ask the Gallup [Inc.] organization, and they're the biggest, baddest of all the entire organizations of the country, that I know of, that do these sorts of surveys to find out if people really are in a fit.

[Gallup, Inc. is an American research-based, global performance-management consulting company]

TS: Now, have you ever used your veterans benefits, either GI Bill or for buying a home or any of the uses?

BB: My master's degree.

TS: Your master's degree?

BB: Yes.

TS: What did you end up getting your master's in?

BB: Business. I have a master's degree in Business Administration, with an emphasis on management.

TS: [chuckles] Now, how about, like, for purchasing a home?

BB: No.

TS: Never?

BB: No.

TS: Anything like that?

BB: No.

TS: How about the VA [Veterans Administration]?

BB: No.

TS: Nothing through the VA?

BB: Not really, no.

TS: How do you think your life has been different because of your time in the service, your connection to the service; not just for growing up with your father but your time spent in the Marine Corps?

BB: I don't see another life that I would have had that it would have been more appropriate, than to have started off with a very strong imprinting and foundation in the service.

TS: Why?

BB: It just feels like exactly what I was supposed to do.

TS: Yeah. Do you think it's been different at all, though? If you hadn't joined it, do you think that your paths might have been taken in a different direction?

BB: I don't think I would have been as grounded. I would not have had such a strong sense of who I am, with the confidence that I have, and believing that I can move through things. And it's not always an easy move through, it's just I think I can, as opposed to I can't.

TS: Confidence.

BB: I have this mindset that it can be done, I can make that work, and I think the Marine

Corps had a lot to do with that, because up until then I would say I was just pretty much rudderless.

TS: It's interesting when you were describing how when you went to Pfizer and in that you said those skills hadn't been developed yet.

BB: No.

TS: Do you think that whatever you're in—business [as a?] military vet—there's certain things about you that good people will bring out; good leadership will bring out?

BB: Yes.

TS: You're nodding your head "yes".

BB: That's the value of good leadership, because a good leader, more than evaluate, will develop. They will take raw material in individuals and see potential there that the individual doesn't see in themselves and they will develop it, and that's what happened with me. I've just benefited from some great leaders that did that for me, and so I've always felt that I should do that for others. That's how I—personally believe I ended up in leadership development, and responsible as the practice leader for that with Pfizer Inc.

TS: With Pfizer. Well, that's what I was going to say. So did you carry that on and pass on that to others that you [unclear]?

BB: A hundred percent yes.

TS: Yeah.

BB: Absolutely. The most wonderful, fantastic experience of my entire business, professional life was leading leadership development at Pfizer, with an entire department of folks that loved doing what I'm talking about, which is professional development in the soft skill area. Not in technical skills. In things like just understanding how to be a leader of people.

TS: So in the end you said some of the most frustrating parts were the personnel issues.

BB: Yes.

TS: And so, in the end that's what you're, like, deeply into in your civilian job.

BB: I'm way deep into it now as a professional in the practice area of leadership development. Not organizational effectiveness, not organization development, leadership development; that is my profession now, and I grew into it, because of the help and lifting up from other people ahead of me. And so, I brought many, many others along, and we had an award winning —award winning—group at Pfizer in this area, and I'm really proud of

that. But my Marine Corps experience contributed to it. Even though I know I was underdeveloped in the communications skills area, it became something that I really saw and came to understand how powerful it could be in business and everyday life; to be able to do a better job of listening, reading people, reading group dynamics, understanding how to influence. And so, people that report to me, in the past, have their skills and talents, it's important to find a fit for them so that they're happy doing what they're doing, and they're skilled at it, they like it, they're fulfilled at it. [dog barking]

TS: You want to stop for just a second? I have two questions left.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay, go ahead.

BB: After I left Pfizer I joined The Ken Blanchard Companies and I was consulting partner with The Ken Blanchard Companies, which is a professional leadership development organization. And what I learned is, if you have folks that you have to counsel all the time, because they're really not enjoying what they're doing, or it's just really problematic in their personal lives, and they're undermining and so forth, that's not who I'm talking about that I work with.

TS: Right.

BB: Those who are open to coaching and development, and who want to be here and do a good job but just can't figure out what the skills are that it's going to take to do it, that's who you can work with and shape to really find a way to be their best self, and to go from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

TS: But that took a while for you to develop those skills. Yes. She's nodding "yes".

BB: Yes, definitely, it did, and to have a greater understand of how it all works. I still dabble in a little bit of professional development; small companies here in Southport that—they want me to come in and do workshops and sessions and so on that have to do with either leadership or trust wielding or listening or giving feedback. They're all kinds of categories that are related, three-sixty degree feedback, things like that, and it's just—it's really fun to do it.

TS: Well, there's just one question I've been waiting to ask you, pretty much since I met you: What does patriotism mean to you?

BB: It's an honoring to me. It's a matter of loyalty to one's country and what I feel we stand for in terms of a democracy. There are a lot of symbols, of course, of patriotism; you see the flags around because it's close to the Fourth of July. I live in a town that is the destination for North Carolinians for the Fourth of July.

TS: For the Fourth of July?

BB: And I'm clearly represented with banners and such. But it's what's in the heart about being loyal to the principles, and I wrote about it when I was in the Amphibious Warfare College at Quantico, and also in the Command and Staff War College [College of Naval Command and Staff], about the objectives, the missions, the purposes of the United States—the President of the United States—and the citizens of the United States. This very week we're having naturalization ceremonies here in Southport, and it's a huge deal for people to come here and take that oath and so forth, and that means something to me. I just remember my father and mother as embassy—my father was the embassy in London [England], the embassy in Singapore, talking about how important it was in terms of standing by your president and your country, whether you're speaking to folks here in the U.S. or whether you're abroad, you just don't—that's the part of being a patriot. I am a United States citizen, so I represent the country, and if I'm over in another place, I'm the person that is now the United States.

TS: So your behavior reflects.

BB: Behavior, yeah. Of course, I have opinions, feelings, but yeah, behavior speaks louder. I don't say things against our president or congress, I just don't. That's very ingrained in me. I know that sounds very—I don't know—it's not common is it?

TS: It doesn't seem to be.

BB: No.

TS: Yeah.

BB: I don't see what it helps.

TS: Right. It's not lifting up.

BB: No.

TS: Well, is there anything in particular that you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military, or in the Coast Guard, in the auxiliary, that they may not understand or appreciate?

BB: Well, like any job that you'd have there are times when it's not fun, and it's late at night and you're going, "What in the world am I doing here?" But overall, the experience of it is well worth while and extremely gratifying to know that you're a part of the country that's important, that's significant, certainly now and in our history, to help the country be what it is, and I'm really glad I did that. The more I've been on the planet the more I run into people who say they wish they had and they didn't.

TS: Is that right?

BB: Yes. It happens all the time.

TS: Well, is there anything that you'd like to add that we haven't talked about at all? Because I don't have any more formal questions.

BB: Well, I wish more women had served, and I wish more women would serve, actually, in some capacity, because there is plenty of opportunity now, more opportunity to do different things than when I joined. And that they wouldn't dismiss it as something only for guys, or, "I don't like authority," which I hear all the time.

TS: You hear that a lot? Women say they don't like authority?

BB: I do. "I don't think I can take orders. I don't like authority."

TS: Is that just women, though? [chuckles]

BB: No, it's not just women. No, it's not. Because it's something to be really proud of. It's just a great part of a life that could be two years or four years or thirty years, and to serve is to honor and respect and contribute to something larger than one's self, and I think really that's the final thought I have, is it's beyond just you, the individual; it's for the greater good, I feel.

TS: Well, that's probably a great spot to end it, then.

BB: Yes.

TS: Well, thank you. I really enjoyed our conversation, Betsy.

BB: Thank you for taking the time to do this. It's a great way to look after women's history.

TS: Thank you.

[End of Interview]