

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Niddie Miyo

INTERVIEWER: Beth Ann Koelsch

DATE: 2019 October 2

N.B. This transcript has been edited by request of the interviewee. Access to the entire interview transcript will be restricted until January 1, 2034.

[Begin Interview]

BAK: Okay. Today is October 2, 2019. My name is Beth Ann Koelsch, and I'm here at UNC Greensboro, in Greensboro, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veteran Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Niddie, if you could state your name the way you would like it to read on your collection?

NM: Niddie Miyo.

BAK: Okay. Niddie, if you could please tell me your date of birth and where you were born.

NM: I was born [DATE REDACTED], 1980, in [unclear], Laos. I think that's it. [chuckles]

BAK: Okay. What did your parents do? Did you grow up in Laos?

NM: No, I think I was about, maybe, a year old, and then we escaped to Thailand because of the secret[?] War at that time. From there we, of course, made our way West, I think, in 1985.

BAK: Okay. Do you have memories of that?

NM: No, not at all. My sister does. Of course, my mom and dad. But that's probably the only people that might have some memories. I might have, like, a teeny-eeny-bitsy—like, maybe when we were in the Philippines, but other than that, I can't remember a thing.

BAK: Okay. So you went, you said, Thailand, and then you went to the Philippines?

NM: I think so, yeah, for the processing.

BAK: Processing.

NM: Where they hold the people.

BAK: Okay. Where did you end up in the [United] States?

NM: I think the first state was Phoenix, Arizona. We stayed there for a few months, in one tiny bedroom, and then we moved all the way to Wisconsin—Milwaukee—because, I think, my parents wanted a better life. That didn't work out. We wanted to be closer to family, so we moved to California; Fresno, California.

BAK: It's good you had family there. I'm sorry, where in California?

NM: Fresno.

BAK: Fresno, okay.

NM: Yeah, I'm glad we had family. The church sponsored my aunt, and then my aunt sponsored us.

BAK: What church?

NM: I don't remember which church, I just know some kind of Catholic church.

BAK: Catholic church, okay. What did your parents do, workwise?

NM: They're retired now, but my mom used—she was with this company for a very long time, and they make jewelries.

BAK: Okay. Did she make the jewelry, or did she have a different role in the company?

NM: Different roles, but mainly overseeing just to make sure that the jewelry looks right and—

BAK: Quality control.

NM: Very much a lot of quality control.

BAK: Right.

NM: So, definitely, if I want to know what's real, I can ask my mom. [chuckles]

BAK: Right, it's always good to draw—yeah.

NM: My dad, he changed quite a few—he used to do mechanic—mechanical work with cars—automobiles—but he's very talented with regards to electricity and stuff, but he did

welding for a while. He's one of those—what do you call it?—handyman.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Very, very, very handy, and I think I got my wits from him, in regards—not my wits, my wisdom—in regards to a lot of electronics and technology and stuff.

BAK: You work with him on any projects at home?

NM: I was "Daddy's Little Girl," so I think at that time I must have learned a lot. I like to invent or, like, whatever comes to mind, I'm just going to do it.

BAK: Right. You're one of those kids that would take clocks apart and—

NM: And redo it, yeah.

BAK: Okay. And you're the youngest sister?

NM: Youngest sister, yes.

BAK: Okay. How much older is your sister?

NM: We're all about two years apart from each other. I have one younger brother who's two years younger than me, and two older sisters who are, like I said, about two years apart from each other.

BAK: Okay. So you went to high school in Fresno?

NM: I did. I started at McLane High School in Fresno, California, I think for freshman and kind of, like, the first semester—half of my sophomore year, and then moved over here because we wanted to get out of the system, right?

BAK: What system?

NM: Like, the government welfare and stuff like that, because we didn't like that. We just needed temporary, and then we decided to move here, because there was, at that time, a program that actually helped people get—just to get out, so my mom and dad took advantage of that, and they brought us over here, and we've been here since.

BAK: Okay, so this was a federal program?

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Okay. You moved to Greensboro, or North Carolina?

NM: Greensboro.

BAK: Okay. Wow, that's a lot of moving.

NM: A lot! Oh, it's a lot of moving. Because I forgot, in between there we also moved to Kansas too.

BAK: Oh my gosh!

NM: Yeah.

BAK: You've seen more of the country than many—

NM: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I think I've seen a lot of the lower and mid-half of the U.S. I haven't yet been to, like, the north, northwest.

BAK: Okay. You have time.

NM: Well, I take it back, because I've been to the Great Lakes, but I meant to, like, Montana, [chuckles] those areas.

BAK: Okay. How old were you when you all moved to Greensboro?

NM: I was—Well, it was 1980—no, it was 1995.

BAK: So fifteen? I'm sorry, you said you were born in '80?

NM: Eighty, yeah, so fifteen, yeah.

BAK: Okay. So you just started at a new high school.

NM: Yes. It was scary.

BAK: Yeah? I mean, sure it was scary; it's scary to start any new high school. What high school did you go to?

NM: We went to Smith High School, and I wasn't one of those kids who just stick to, kind of, like—well, high school's all about cliques, right? I was never that person, I was always kind of in different groups. But I did have one particular group that I'm—it's really sad to say this, during my healing process—I'm no longer friends with them. But at that time, yeah, they were the closest friends I had, and those are the ones that I usual hang out with.

BAK: Sure.

NM: But I also hang out with the others.

BAK: Okay. What kind of subjects did you like most in high school?

NM: Math, of course. [chuckles] Math.

BAK: You and I don't have a lot in common. Math was never my friend. So that was your favorite subject. You would have graduated in '85 or something like that—I'm sorry, ninety—

NM: Close, '98.

BAK: Ninety-eight.

NM: [unclear] graduation.

BAK: Okay, so did you know what you wanted to do next, after graduation?

NM: I wanted to do everything, that was the problem, because I have so much interest in just every topic that there is, I wanted to delve into all of them.

BAK: You were very into education?

NM: Very. I was more of a bookworm. I don't think I would survive on the streets if that was the case. But now I can. I think I have a little bit of both. But now I do know what I want to do. I feel like I still need more to grow up. I want to be—I actually want to get into more of—it goes back now to what I used to do, in that I want to build things out of nothing, and that's what makes me happy.

BAK: Well, you know that, so that's good.

NM: Every time when I have an idea, I email it to myself, or I just put it in my Google Drive, because I don't want to forget.

BAK: Sure.

NM: So I have a lot on there, and some I have already done, but right now, I need to heal myself.

BAK: Sure.

NM: I think that's more important. I've got some of the students here in Greensboro, some of them are interested, and some of them already graduated, so I can't really be too pushy, but like I said, my number one goal right now is to heal myself.

BAK: Sure.

NM: And the first thing I did was call you, because I'm afraid I'm losing my memory.

BAK: Well, okay, , I do appreciate that. So you graduated, and then what did you do?

NM: I went to college, but at that time I didn't really have any guidance on where to go. My mom and dad did not want me to go out of state, and I was, like, upset at that time. I was still upset, I was like, "Oh, man, forget it, then." So I went and I got a scholarship to GTCC [Guilford Technical Community College], here in Jamestown [North Carolina], so I took advantage of that. I changed my major from Cosmetology—because I took that while in high school because I love doing hair—I majored in Biology, because I liked the chemist and the biology and all that stuff. I still am interested in it, but anyways. I took that. I did very well, but then all of a sudden, my brother and—when he graduated, he wanted to go to UNC Charlotte, and one of my close friends wanted to go there as well, so I gave up my scholarship to go with them, yeah, and I didn't do very well there because my siblings, they had marriage problems at that time—very personal—and it affected me. It effected my grades, and it affected me in general. But then I continued. I came back, picked up my grades again, like, As and stuff.

BAK: Did you do a whole year at GTCC?

NM: I did, yeah.

BAK: And then you went to Charlotte for sophomore year?

NM: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, that was the case, for a whole year.

BAK: A whole year, okay. And then you came back?

NM: Back to pick up my grades, which I still did well.

BAK: At GTCC?

NM: I want to say at A&T [North Carolina A&T State University].

BAK: A&T, okay.

NM: Yes, I went to A&T. And then my brother graduated to A&T because he also transferred back because it's too far at UNC Charlotte; far from family.

BAK: Sure.

NM: And then, of course, I followed my brother. [whispering] I don't know why.

BAK: [chuckles] Okay.

NM: But I was known as my brother's sister instead of me. Anyways. Yeah. So he graduated and I followed suit with him, but I didn't finish because I thought that I wanted to finish

my cosmetology, because I only had a few more months left. So I—And then had my baby girl, and so I had to halt my education, in regards to the university, but I did finish to the very last month for my daughter—she was born in December, I finished in November, so I was a big ball of a human being inside of me. I finished cosmetology—that's what I meant—I finished cosmetology. I took, like, a few months off before I started working.

BAK: [chuckles] That seems reasonable.

NM: I can't stay still. I have that thing where I just have to do something.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I did that. I worked, and I worked three jobs, and I still do community services, because I'm the type of person who likes to volunteer and help people out. I did that, and I was so skinny, I was eighty—close to eighty—close to ninety, eighty-something pounds.

BAK: Oh my gosh.

NM: Yeah, I was so skinny, but—I wouldn't say healthy, but still pretty healthy for eighty-something.

BAK: Were you raising your daughter by yourself?

NM: Yes, yes.

BAK: Okay, so you're raising your daughter by yourself, you're working. Are you doing anything with cosmetology in your jobs?

NM: Yes, yes, I—One of my jobs was doing hair at the mall, and then my other job was doing Heart to Heart Program. It deals with, like, the community here in Greensboro, about girls growing up in the Westernized environment, I would have dual cultures.

BAK: Okay. Okay, I got it.

NM: Yeah, I was a coordinator for them. And then had—At that time, there was some affiliation with UNCG because of Dr. [Raleigh] Bailey at that time. I don't know if you know him.

BAK: I do not. What department?

NM: Social Work.

BAK: Social Work, okay. We can look him up.

NM: Center for New North Carolinians; I was with them.

[The Center for New North Carolinians promotes access and integration for immigrants and refugees in North Carolina by bridging newcomer populations with existing communities through direct service provision, research, and training]

BAK: Okay, that was job two.

NM: Job number two. Job number three, I worked at a bank. Not a bank, I—It's called CitiBank, but it's still a bank. So I worked there, so I had, like, three jobs. And one day, I woke up and decided 100% that I was going to join the navy, and I did that. [chuckling]

BAK: Okay. That's a surprise turn. Where did that come from?

NM: Actually, I've always wanted to join the military. Not the military, no, no, the navy, because—this is the silliest reason to join any service—is because of their white angelic uniform.

BAK: That's not that unusual.

NM: I grew up watching Thai dramas with my mom, and every time I'm like, "Oh, that is so beautiful." But I didn't want to join *theirs*. Of course, I can't anyways.

BAK: Right.

NM: But I wanted to join the mili—I wanted to join the military—the U.S. military—because I felt I kind of belong there, but I wanted to join the navy because of their uniform; that white uniform that I don't wear, ever; I will not wear them ever because I was a Seabee in the navy and we don't wear that, not really.

[United States Naval Construction Battalions, better known as the Navy Seabees, form the U.S. Naval Construction Force (NCF)]

BAK: Okay.

NM: [chuckles]

BAK: So you just showed up to enlist somewhere in Greensboro?

NM: Pretty much, yeah.

BAK: Okay. So you just woke up and—

NM: I joined the navy.

BAK: —and you joined the navy. What did you do with your daughter?

NM: It was the hardest thing, because I wanted to go active duty, but I couldn't go active duty because I, personally, was under the impression that I had to give up custody to my mom, or to anyone in general, that can care for her, and I didn't want to do that.

BAK: Your recruiter didn't say anything?

NM: They said that we had to do it while we were active duty because I'm not married or whatnot, and I did do a lot of research before I joined, so it wasn't like, whoa, I woke up—no, it took several years for me to, like—oh, I'm interested, and then backed off, interested, and backed off. But that one moment, I'm like, "No, I'm just going to do it," without thinking I'm just going to walk. That's what I did, without thinking, because I already did so much research already on—

BAK: Sure.

NM: Yeah. I gave in, and instead of going active duty where I might end up losing custody of my child, I decided to do reservist, where I would still have custody when I come back from boot camp. That's what the recruiter—she kind of explained it to me as well. Even though I didn't want to do reserve, I wanted to be in it so bad that I'm like, "Okay," because that's one of my dreams. I didn't want to stop my dreams just because I have a child.

BAK: Sure. What year was that?

NM: She was born in 2013. I signed up in 2006, that's correct, because I went to boot camp in 2007.

BAK: Okay. Where did you go to boot camp?

NM: At the [Recruit Training Command] Great Lakes.

BAK: Oh, right, sure.

NM: A very windy city.

BAK: Yes.

NM: Very windy.

BAK: That would be Chicago, yes. Yeah, there's a reason it's called "The Windy City."

NM: You know what they made the little people do, like myself? They made us—They put us

in the front line of the march, and I had to hold the flag, and there's a certain way you have to hold the flag.

BAK: Oh my gosh, you were blown away.

NM: Yeah. You had to hold it like, your hand—you have to hold it like this and it needs to be straight, and you know that wind is very—[chuckles]

BAK: Right.

NM: Yes, they made fun of me.

BAK: Did you ever actually almost blow away?

NM: oh, Many times.

BAK: Oh gosh.

NM: And they would yell at me, and I'm like, "God, I'm not even a hundred pounds." I was probably, like, ninety-five maybe.

BAK: Wow.

NM: Yeah, so I couldn't give blood when the [America] Red Cross came because I was underweight.

BAK: Okay.

NM: [chuckles]

BAK: So that wasn't a problem when you were signing up? They just waived you in?

NM: Yeah, yeah, they waived me in.

BAK: Okay. How did you end up a Seabee?

NM: I've always wanted to know how to build houses.

BAK: Okay, build houses, alright.

NM: Yeah. Not just build them, a handy-person. I wanted to know how to build houses.

BAK: Alright.

NM: But I wanted to do something that's still close to engineering, because I liked the math.

BAK: Sure. Sure.

NM: So I decided—They gave me the option of either Aviation IT [Information Technology], which I still liked them both, but then I wanted to know how to build a house more, so I chose that.

BAK: Actually, before we get there, how did your family and friends react when you joined? I'm guessing they didn't see this coming.

NM: No, my mom, she didn't even know anything about it when I signed the paperwork. My dad freaked out when—I forgot to tell them, maybe?

BAK: [laughs]

NM: The recruiter came to our parent's house, and she walked in with a uniform, asked my dad about where I was in regards to—because she wanted me to go back to the office to do some paperwork. No, no, not paperwork, it was already done.

BAK: Right.

NM: To go to Charlotte for the MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station].

BAK: Right, okay.

NM: Yeah, so he was just stunned, he was shocked, and he doesn't know what to say, maybe.

BAK: Right, it sounds like quite a surprise.

NM: "I'll tell you later." [chuckles] That's what happened; I told him *later* when I came back.

BAK: What about your siblings?

NM: No, I don't think it was the MEPS. I think it was we went back to the office to do more paperwork, or the testing or something I know it was—I already did most of the paperwork.

BAK: Right.

NM: As regards to—I still want to make sure my stories are straight because I'm losing my memory.

BAK: No, no, take your time.

NM: We said my siblings, right?

BAK: Yes.

NM: My siblings, my brother was over in [Washington] D.C. He works for the FTC [Federal Trade Commission]. My other sister lives in Utah. And this one lives here.

BAK: Okay.

NM: She lived here as well, at that time. But I'm the first of my family to join the military.

BAK: Wow.

NM: So it's like a shock to [unclear].

BAK: Yes, I can imagine.

NM: I think after escaping from war ourselves, it's just the last thing they probably want their youngest daughter to do.

BAK: Right, right. They experienced—Wow, okay. Okay, they're in shock. What about friends? Did they have reactions?

NM: Some of them weren't as supportive. Some of them were like, "Why would you join?" So that was probably the end of that friendship. I didn't have to explain why.

BAK: Right.

NM: And if they were negative, I just didn't want to be around negativity and stuff. But the other friends, I guess they didn't really have a say, I mean—Yeah, because I already did the paperwork without telling anyone.

BAK: Alright, so you flew up, I guess, to the Great Lakes.

NM: Yes.

BAK: What do you remember about your first days there; what your experience was like?

NM: It was tiring. They kept us awake and it just—Yeah, that was it. We didn't really sleep—I didn't even know there was going to be a lack of sleep. Do you know how much I love sleep?

BAK: A lot, okay.

NM: A lot, and that was one thing—

BAK: So you went in and had no idea?

NM: No idea. I didn't even know what a Seabee was.

BAK: Wow.

NM: I didn't even know the name of the Seabee, I just knew I was going to do something with building. So I knew that I wanted to do something with building when I got there. I didn't know that I was going to lack sleep.

BAK: People would yell at you.

NM: Or people would yell at me, or so many tests, or so many—oh, God, the march—the march—with a sea—like, a heavy sea bag on my back. I did not know we had to do that too. Oh, so many things. I did not prepare myself for it. But I did over-prepare myself on stuff that I had to throw away, because I didn't know. They said, "Yeah, you can bring this, you can bring that," I brought it, and it ended up in a trash bin.

BAK: Oh gosh.

NM: Yeah, because everything they provide—a lot of things.

BAK: Right.

NM: Thank goodness I was a hair stylist, so I kind of knew what hair to have and still look good.

BAK: Okay. Did that make you popular with your other—

NM: Oh, the girls came to me and they were asking me for help, in regards to, like, the hair, because you know you get less than a five minute haircut there, so everyone—all their hair was crooked.

BAK: Wow, okay.

NM: So I ended up using nail clippers—

BAK: Nail clippers? Wow!

NM: I used nail clippers to fix their hair; to clip—

BAK: To make it straight, at least.

NM: At least, yeah.

BAK: Wow. Okay, so that's a good way to make instant friends.

NM: Oh, yeah.

BAK: It sounds like everything was very hard. How did you get through?

NM: The willpower. I think willpower—

BAK: Willpower. Because you were like, "I'm not dropping out."

NM: I'm not dropping out, and I cannot swim. [chuckles]

BAK: Oh [chuckling], sorry. Does the navy make you show them—

NM: You have to pass—Lucky, I know how to float, and I remember back in high school, a long—I don't know how many years ago—like, ten years ago—I remember they taught us how to swim, but I did kind of drown a little bit, so.

BAK: You drowned a little bit, okay.

NM: "I need help!"

BAK: That's a scary boot camp.

NM: No, I know the basics, but I can't—I don't last long.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Thank goodness that—like I said, willpower; it's that, "I'm not going back there." And it was cold, windy, and snowy when they led us to the test.

BAK: Were you in Lake Michigan or are you in a pool?

NM: We were in a pool.

BAK: Well, you got that.

NM: The doors—the double doors—to the outside was wide open, so we could feel the breeze. And before we actually jumped into the pool, they made us—some wearing warm clothes, marching to the gym, and then they told us to strip it all off—and of course we have our bathing suits underneath—strip it all off, "Alright, everybody," run through the hot shower—warm—super warm—the shower, and then they made us sit on the bleachers, with the cold air blowing on us, and we're like [makes teeth-chattering noise] for thirty minutes of them just talking about whatever.

BAK: Wow.

NM: It was pure torture. And then—Yeah, and then slowly we—each of us, we had different stations that we had to pass, and the last one that I passed—well, failed, then passed—I failed on doggy paddle. [unclear] doggy paddle? I don't know how I passed, I just know it

was willpower, and I did the doggy paddle. I don't know how. It was just willpower. And I taught others to—who couldn't swim, I taught them how to pass as well.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I don't know how.

BAK: Okay. What time of year was this?

NM: Two thousand [and] seven.

BAK: Was it winter, summer?

NM: March, April.

BAK: March, so it was still pretty cold.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Any other fitness issues that you had? I'm assuming you had to do running and stuff like that.

NM: Oh, yes, I don't like running, but we had to do the running test. But yeah, I passed. But one of the things that I'm really proud of was the sit-ups, because before I joined the service, I barely did, maybe, five sit-ups and I'm tired. [chuckles]

BAK: Okay, wow. You really went in it for the uniform.

NM: [chuckling] I sure did; I was that determined. But we had a competition, it's called The Captain's Cup? I think that's what they call it. I can't remember.

["Captain's Cup is the culmination of the recruit training at boot camp," says Captain John Dye, commanding officer of Recruit Training Command. "It allows the recruits an opportunity to come together and demonstrate the teamwork and cooperation that is instilled in them throughout their training"]

BAK: Sounds good.

NM: Yeah. And I did, roughly, about a hundred and thirty. Yeah! [119—NM corrected later.]

BAK: You went from five to one [hundred] thirty.

NM: Yeah!

BAK: Wow, you have some willpower.

NM: I won!

BAK: You won?

NM: I won for the girl's sit-ups, so I'm very proud of myself.

BAK: And you got through, first time, all the fitness stuff?

NM: I did; I did not fail; I made sure I passed everything.

BAK: Okay.

NM: The only thing I failed was the swimming—the doggy paddle.

BAK: Okay. And then the classes were okay?

NM: The classes were okay. I think majority of us was kind of sleeping throughout, just because we don't get sleep.

BAK: Right.

NM: We don't get *enough* sleep. Maybe, at most, four hours, maybe. But my—The one thing—I don't know if I should say this, but I'll say it just in case—One thing I remember about the class, it was—I don't remember anything that was taught, but I do remember how many of the girls—mainly guys—girls were suffering because some of them would not use the restroom, and so they'd get sick.

BAK: Why would they not use the restroom?

NM: Because it's open.

BAK: Oh. Yeah, yeah, yeah, okay.

NM: So a lot of them got sick. I'm trying to figure out why they were sick. But then the rumors went around saying that there's quite a few people that would not use the bathroom, so then that's—

BAK: For bowel movements?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Got it.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: So even the toilet stalls were open?

NM: Curtains.

BAK: Curtains, yeah.

NM: There were open showers, everything, but they would not do it because there's no time.

BAK: Oh, wow. It's a time, not an embarrassment, factor.

NM: Yeah. I mean, they could have woke up in the middle of the night, but still not enough time. Long story short, some people would not use a public restroom, maybe?

BAK: Okay.

NM: Yeah, so there was quite a few—that's what I remember about the classroom, because there was a bunch of girls that were just—Ugh—everyone was just sick.

BAK: Oh, gosh.

NM: I didn't care, because I knew that was healthy.

BAK: Alright. How long did boot camp last?

NM: I think two months.

BAK: Two months, okay. Let's see. I'm not that familiar with how Reserves works. After that, where did you go?

NM: They sent—Oh, they laughed at me first because I joined the Seabees. After they laughed at me [unclear].

BAK: Who laughed at you?

NM: The trainers.

BAK: Okay. Why were they laughing at you?

NM: Because I joined the Seabees. Not because it's the Seabees, it's because of *me*, because I look—I'm very small, I don't look the part of a construction worker. So they laughed at me, they showed me a video, and then they shipped me off to Gulfport, Mississippi.

BAK: Okay. The navy doesn't call it AIT [Advanced Individual Training]. What does the navy call it?

NM: A School.

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

BAK: A School, that's right.

NM: A School, yes.

BAK: Okay, so you show up at A School. How long is that? Four weeks? No.

NM: I think it's—Yeah, it's roughly about two-ish. Again, I think—

BAK: Two-ish months?

NM: Months. I'm sorry, I'm trying to do my math. I think we got there in July, and I think boot camp was, roughly, about eight weeks. So it's March, April, May, so May to July, so about two months.

BAK: Oh, you got to go south in the hot.

NM: The cold and hot, yes. I became sick. I had a drainage issue, coughed a lot because it was cold, blizzard, and then, boom, five minutes out in the weather and you're, like, sweating. So I was really sick at that time but I still had to push forward because I did not want to stay behind.

BAK: Wow, okay, that's some willpower.

NM: [chuckles]

BAK: Okay. Actually, I don't think I've ever interviewed a Seabee before. What did they teach you?

NM: They taught us how to build houses, bridges, mainly. Just the basics; staircase, putting shingles on the roof, build the four walls.

BAK: Why housing?

NM: In general; just in general.

BAK: I guess I just always assumed bridges and things, but it's housing.

NM: Yeah, housing and bridges. They taught us—I think bridges was after—no, it was like continue education kind of course where you had to go back to training. No, no, no, I

think it was just the houses at that time; just trying to build four walls and a staircase and put the roof on the building, and stuff like that. And then the bridge came after, when we were already in.

BAK: Was it mostly male?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Yeah.

NM: There's more females now, but at the time—Oh, I'll have to tell you this one. I was a top three, because when I first joined the class, my teacher was so worried, he even told me straight up that I was going to fail.

BAK: Wow, that's not helpful.

NM: [chuckles] Yeah, definitely not helpful. But it's very interesting. I actually loved my class because we graduated a week before the class that was ahead of us.

BAK: Wow.

NM: Yeah, we finished, and I graduated top three, so I was third place.

BAK: Wow. And the other people in the training class, did you all get along?

NM: Oh, we got along; yeah, we got along. I—For some reason, something about myself is, I feel like I'm the centerpiece of—kind of like the person that brings people together, and I set the mood, so if I'm happy, then everyone is happy. And then if someone—Basically, if I'm upset, then maybe somebody might get upset, too [chuckles], but majority of the time I'm always a happy person and I make everyone else happy. And I bring people together. That's what I think would happen with my—just in general, that's wherever I go.

BAK: Okay. Sure. Did you have any challenges? Is this very physical? Are you supposed to lift a lot of stuff?

NM: Yes, I think it's very physical, because we had to carry the "blocks;" we don't call them "bricks" because I think that's they get pissed off if you call them "bricks."

BAK: Is that a navy thing?

NM: Maybe it's the navy, maybe it's a Seabee thing.

BAK: Okay, because the navy has different names for everything.

NM: Yeah. It's very physical, especially because it's construction, so a lot of things that I do is lifting, bending, stretching.

BAK: Did you get hurt at all?

NM: No, not there, no. I got hurt in Iraq, but not at the school.

BAK: Okay, so you become a Seabee, and what rank do you get when you finish A School?

NM: It was E-3.

BAK: E-3.

NM: I was still an E-3, because I got in as an E-3 because of the stuff that I accumulated, maybe, before I joined the service.

BAK: Okay. Wow. Alright. You came in pretty high. Okay, so A School's done. What happens next?

NM: So they shipped me off—not shipped me off, excuse me—they assigned me to Raleigh, North Carolina, and at that time, it was time for me to get promoted. I was supposed to take the test or some paperwork, but I was kind of on my own, so I had no idea what to do. Long story short, I don't talk bad stuff about different units, so long story short, I end up getting contacted by a recruiter in Greensboro again to try to recruit me. [chuckles]

BAK: Wow.

NM: Which is really weird because now I realize it's the same person who's trying to help me out with the VA [Veterans Administration]. But no, he contacted me and is like, "Hey, do you want to join the—" blah, blah, blah, blah?
And I'm like, "I'm already—"

BAK: See, I didn't know they could do that.

NM: I'm like, "I'm already in."

BAK: Right.

NM: He found out later, "Oh, why don't you just drill here in Greensboro?"
"There's a Greensboro one?" So he helped—

BAK: Were you living in Greensboro and driving to Raleigh.

NM: Yeah, for, like, a month, and then he helped me—transferred me over to the Greensboro NOSC [Navy Operational Support Center]. So that was very helpful. I'm like, you would think they would have done that in the first place.
So they moved me over to the Greensboro NOSC, but I just didn't—

BAK: That's NAS, right?

NM: N-O-S-C.

BAK: N-O-S-C, so Naval—What does that stand for?

NM: [Navy] Operational Support Center.

BAK: Thank you. Did you live with your family again when you were—

NM: I was in and out; I was constantly in and out. Because my goal was to always be independent, of me taking care of my own daughter and stuff, so I think at the time—I can't remember. I'm constantly in and out of my parents' house. Like, right now, I moved back in just because, and my husband is in Missouri. He makes fun of me, the way I talk. In "Mijori"—because I say "Mijori" and he doesn't—

BAK: Oh, Missouri?

NM: Yeah, he doesn't pronounce it like that, he pronounces it differently. But I'm sorry.

BAK: Oh, no, it's fine, and we know—

NM: English is my third language, that's my excuse. [chuckles]

BAK: Okay. Wow. What are your first two?

NM: Lao [Laotian] would be my first two.

BAK: French?

NM: No. Close though. I did try. The second would be Thai. I don't speak a lot of Thai, but I understand a lot of it.

BAK: Okay. That's just a side question. We haven't met the husband yet. You and your daughter are moving in and out of your parent's. So you drill, like, once a month?

NM: Yes, once a month, and two weeks out of the year, and we go on an annual training.

BAK: Right. Okay. How long did you do that for?

NM: Well, the whole entire time of the eight years, but I deployed twice.

BAK: Okay. Alright. For eight years. What do you do during the training; the two weeks of training?

NM: We go to places Fort Hunter Liggett.

BAK: I'm sorry, where?

NM: Fort Hunter Liggett [Monterey County, California], or [Camp] Pendleton [San Diego County, California]. I think it's more like—Annual trainings, they call it FTX—some people spell it differently—but it's Field Training Exercise, and so, basically, they get us prepared for deployment, basically.

BAK: You build stuff, or is it all different types of—

NM: It's very [unclear].

BAK: Okay, so you're not just Seabees, you're with a bunch of other types of—

NM: It's with a bunch of Seabees.

BAK: Oh, there are Seabees. So it's an all-Seabee training.

NM: Training, yes.

BAK: That makes sense.

NM: Yeah, sometimes you can count your end of training as schools—like, you can go to school—I guess it just depends on what is more important and what you can get into. So you can use your annual training for, like, continuing education for building, or whatever job that you have in military, or majority of time is FTX, because that's a requirement.

BAK: Which is, like, running around?

NM: We're running around, playing like we're back in Vietnam again.

BAK: Oh, wow.

NM: Yeah. The training is very much like Vietnam. People complain about—"Oh my God, we're going to the Middle East not Vietnam," stuff like that, but it's not that. To me, I look at it as it's just—you just need that basic training, and that's what it's there for, so you know—Yeah, but that's what they complain about—"We should have more training than we're going to use"—and then they—I think that's when they started doing more, kind of, like, the Middle Eastern—they call it the "SWA Huts [South West Asia Huts]," and they—

BAK: I'm sorry, they call it the what?

NM: SWA Huts. But there are Sea Huts[?], SWA Huts, which means South West [Asia] Hut, which is basically a building; a building with four walls and a roof on top.

BAK: But you're building that?

NM: We're building that, yeah.

BAK: Okay. And how do you spell that?

NM: S-W-A H-U-T.

BAK: Okay. You started doing this—You start Reserve—Let's see. When?

NM: Two thousand [and] seven.

BAK: Two thousand [and] seven, okay. So 2007. Your first deployment, did you know that was happening?

NM: The first thing I did was, "How often do people die?" [chuckles] I really did that; yes, yes, yes, I did; I researched. And there was very few people that do pass away. I mean, there are Seabees that do pass away, but compared to the others, it was very little, so I was a little more confident, because that's the first thing that people are always afraid of when they join the service. But I already did that.

BAK: That is a legitimate fear.

NM: Yes, so before I give my life away, I want to know, okay, so—

BAK: How did they tell you you were going to deploy? How do they tell you that?

NM: That's a great question. Let me think back. Some people do volunteer, and some people that just get picked out.

BAK: You just get a letter?

NM: Yes, you get a letter, or the people—or your name's put on a list—on their list.

BAK: Were you surprised when you were going to be deployed?

NM: I was actually excited.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I was actually excited. I don't know why, but I guess it's something I've always wanted to do, right?

BAK: Right. Your daughter is staying with your parents while you're deployed?

NM: Yes.

BAK: So this is 2009. Were you demoted? You were E-3 and then you were E-4, E-5?

NM: It moves up, the number.

BAK: The number moves up, sorry. You're right; that's embarrassing. Yeah, okay, so you got promoted. Tell me about the whole procedure of getting to Iraq.

NM: How did I end up there? I'm trying to remember. I'm trying not to confuse it with my Afghanistan tour.

BAK: Sure.

NM: I remember I was just excited I was going, so I made sure I was—I'm the type of person who likes to over-prepare than under-prepare, so I already did a lot of my research already, I—you just don't know how much I'm the type of person who likes to over-prepare things. I've done a lot of reading, a lot of research, a lot of online, maybe talking to people, and stuff like that. That's how I prepared for Iraq; do a lot of trainings. I took advantage of anything that I could get.

BAK: Like, language?

NM: They taught us the languages, but then I realized that the culture was very similar, because I ran into people that worked there, the locals, that I can speak the same language with. Yeah, so I got a lot of inside help from them.

BAK: What do they speak in Iraq?

NM: The people that work there, they came from all the countries as well; like, the Nepal people—Nepalians [Nepalese], is that how you say it? They were there to cook.

BAK: Oh, okay.

NM: They were cooks, and we ate similar food, and so it kind of—

BAK: The Nepalese, I think they say.

NM: Yes, the Nepalese; I couldn't remember what they are. The Nepalese. Yeah, but they ate so much food, it was very—but we didn't really talk because of language barriers, but somehow, we managed to communicate. And then I went to the beauty salon and they spoke Thai. Yeah, so I ended up talking to some of them about what's going on.

BAK: Oh, so you got the inside—

NM: And it's really sad—I don't know if I can say it—It's really sad, and I want to help them, but I can't help them.

BAK: They're civilian; they're contract workers?

NM: Yes, contract workers.

BAK: And they weren't treated very well, do you think?

NM: What happened was, a lot of them leave their families behind, just like myself. We went over and they have their jobs, I have my job, and they're there to do beauty, but a lot of times, I remember she told me that they wake up, like, at four in the morning and they didn't get home till 10:00, and sometimes they don't get paid because—whatever issues they got. But they still work; they still have to work.

BAK: Where do they live while they're there.

NM: All there, the local areas. It's, like, an hour bus ride, I think.

BAK: So you were on a ship. Where were you stationed? I actually don't know much about—

NM: Seabees don't really go on a ship, but we have the underwater construction team, which I have no clue about because I was never a part of them, but they're Seabees that dive underwater to build, I guess. As far as myself, I will never be on a ship; besides, I get motion sickness and seasick and stuff like that, thank goodness I don't go on a ship.

BAK: Right.

NM: But we are based in—

BAK: Where did you live? Or where was your base?

NM: Our base—The [Gulf War Mississippi?] is like right along the coast. It's not like right there, but it's still a five-minute drive to get to the beach. And Port Hueneme [California] as well; it's very close to the ocean.

BAK: Port what?

NM: Port Hueneme, California. It's, like, an hour from LA [Los Angeles].

BAK: How do you spell that?

NM: I can write it for you.

BAK: Okay, let's do that.

NM: [chuckles]

BAK: When were you there?

NM: We can put it right there.

BAK: Alright.

NM: I was there quite a few times because we go there for our annual training.

BAK: Okay. So that's where you would go for the two weeks sometimes?

NM: Yes. But then they ship us out to other bases, like, the Marine base or [U.S.] Army base to do our real training.

BAK: You just fly on a commercial aircraft to get there?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Okay. I'm learning so much about Seabees today.

NM: It's some very cool people to know when you're overseas.

BAK: Yeah, I guess.

NM: They build everything for you. They closed—I think they closed that down already.

BAK: Okay. In Iraq, what base were you at?

NM: Balad [Air Base], I can say that much, because we were—I guess I can say this, too, as long as I don't say exactly what we do—we support Special Ops [Operations], so we were—I was in Balad, Iraq, at that time.

BAK: You were living on an army base?

NM: Air Force.

BAK: Air Force. Okay, Air Force, Special Forces. Can you tell me where in Iraq, or not?

NM: I can say Balad.

BAK: Balad, that's the name? And that's B-A-L-A-N?

NM: B-A-L-A-D.

BAK: Oh, Balad, okay, got it.

NM: Oh, oh, oh, one thing about me is, I always forget to pronounce the last—[chuckles]

BAK: Okay, I was just checking on that. Did you know what you'd be doing, or you just show up and they told you what was—

NM: I remember I was the type of person where if everyone is—I do exactly what everyone's doing, like, trainings, and going to school and getting the courses done, but one thing about me is, I always ended up working longer than everybody else; I'd take extra work. One day, they were like, "We need some help with the Charlie Company," blah, blah, blah. That's all I heard, was "Charlie Company, they need help." And I wasn't really interested in going to the movies or the clubs or—because for me, I'm there to work, that's what I signed up for. So I volunteered because nobody else would volunteer. I hate that awkward silence.

BAK: [chuckles] Okay. I know what the awkward silence is.

NM: That's what gets me, is when people don't volunteer, and I'm like, "Okay, I'll just do it," because I'm trying to be a good sport.

BAK: But you don't even know what you're volunteering for.

NM: I have no clue. [chuckles]

BAK: Okay, alright.

NM: So I did that, yes.

BAK: Did you go outside the wire?

NM: Yes. The reason why I had to go outside the wire was because I had to dumpster dive.

BAK: Did not see that coming. What does that mean?

NM: It means that people do die [in the camp?] because it's too hot, and because the A/C [air conditioning] is not working maybe, or they don't have A/C, so my job at that time was—they gave me that job because they knew that I was a hard worker, and so I was an E-3 maybe doing, like, an E-6, E-5 job.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Yeah, so I had—99.9% I did not know anything about what tools and stuff was called, so I had the internet, thank God. But I had to figure out—and they have different screws for every A/C, or for everything, and of course, it takes over six months to get things shipped over there. So what happened was, number one, I had to Google [Internet search engine] what screws they were, because they had to fit rings and different threads for—I think that's what it's called, threads.

BAK: Each branch has their own screws, you think?

NM: Yeah, each branch had their own screws, and different sizes, and different—

BAK: Air Force screws, [U.S.] Navy screws, okay, wow.

NM: [chuckling]

BAK: That's overly complicated.

NM: Yeah, maybe they found the right person for this, because I'm very detailed in regards to—Anyway, long story short, they were like, Hey, Niddie—" well, they called, "Miyo, do you have—" blah, blah, blah?

I'm like, "No, but there's a bunch of A/C that's out there. Let's go check it out."

BAK: You mean, literally, in dumpsters?

NM: In dumpsters. I can't believe this happened. They actually threw a whole box of nails inside a dumpster that we could still use, so what did I do? I dive in and just take it all out and reuse them on—Yeah.

BAK: Wow.

NM: I mean, we're Seabees, we don't ever throw anything away; we always use it for something; at least for something. But I had to go out the wire to help get the screws for the A/C, because if it's not the right screws, it's not going to stay, and it's dangerous. I had to go out a few times to get those screws, and then we used that A/C to give to—

BAK: Were you ever afraid of IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices] or anything?

NM: Yes, because I actually, accidentally, did one thing I should not have done. Nothing bad; nothing bad. But this is Afghanistan. But they say if there was, like, a water bottle on the ground, don't pick it up, and I have this bad habit of not littering.

BAK: Oh. [both chuckle]

NM: And so, I saw a water bottle and I picked it up, I'm like, "Oh, shit! I should not do that!" Yeah, it's stuff like that. It's tricky, because they trick you.

BAK: Sure.

NM: And the scary part is that you don't know if the locals are on your side or not.
One time, when I was there—

BAK: Were you in Afghanistan or Iraq?

NM: Iraq. We're back in Iraq now. I remember a guy I had to work with, we had to go outside as well, and so we we'd go outside we have our weapons on. So Seabees do carry weapons, because we build, we fight. And one of the guys, he's overly trusting, and so the guy that I work with, he was driving and I was the passenger, and then we had to get one of the locals to get his stuff—I don't know it is, but he's got materials for us—I'm like, "There's no way I'm going to let this guy sit behind me, because I don't know what he is or who he is." That was one of the scary stuff, so I had him sit in the passenger seat, and then I sat in the back, just—to me, I felt safer.

BAK: Sure.

NM: If he pulls up anything, I'm going to pull my stuff out. Yeah, so.

BAK: Wow.

NM: That was scary for me because I don't know, even though he—we kind of look alike, but I don't know him.

BAK: Right, right, right. What kind of weapons did you have to carry?

NM: The M16. Thank goodness, I was—jumping to Afghanistan—they got me the M9, which is lighter. Because the M16 is, like, my height. [chuckles]

BAK: That's kind of [?]. Alright, so pretty much in this deployment to Iraq you were scavenging and fixing air conditioners.

NM: Uh—

BAK: Okay. That's huge.

NM: More than that—more than that—because I don't fix air conditioners, I was like the manager of Lowe's and Home Depot [home improvement stores], if you want to consider that.

BAK: Okay, got it.

NM: They put—But they—I asked for help, but they didn't want that, they want me—just little me—me, myself, and I—to be in a huge, giant facility, have 99.9% don't even know what these items are, materials and tools.

BAK: Wow. Just random boxes and stuff?

NM: Random boxes, because they have—the person that put me there, he had confidence that I could do the job well, that's why.

BAK: Sounds like you don't give up.

NM: I did, because I didn't. Because what happened was, I knew where everything was. I knew exactly where everything was located, and the people that they replaced me with didn't know where they were.

BAK: Right. I like that, the Home Depot. How long was your deployment for?

NM: I think that one was, I think, four to six months. I can't remember.

BAK: What was your experience being in Iraq?

NM: Oh, I cried every single night.

BAK: Really? Because you were scared or missed home?

NM: The people.

BAK: They were not nice?

NM: They were at the beginning, and then when we got to Iraq, when they actually had to work out in the hot heat, a lot of the people—a lot of my peers in my department just, kind of, like, turned their backs on me, because I had a job where I can—I had the choice if I wanted to be in an A/C or not.

BAK: Oh, and they didn't.

NM: And they didn't. And that's the only reason why they did that, and I cried every single night because I didn't have any friends afterwards. Yeah, and they did bad stuff—horrible stuff—to me because of that.

BAK: Do you want to share anything?

NM: Well, if anybody else is listening, I think one of the things, a lot of people didn't really have a good time either, because if you're a female, you're automatically labeled as something.

BAK: That would be slut, whore, or bitch?

NM: Yeah, [chuckles] you could say it like that.

BAK: That is my understanding, you can pick one or two of those roles .

NM: Pick either one, yeah. And I work really hard; I really did. I don't get enough sleep while we were over in Port Hueneme. That's where we were set up—we call it stationed—at that time.

BAK: Or based, maybe.

NM: Or based, yeah We were just pre-trained to come out to—

BAK: Got it. Okay.

NM: Yeah, yeah. I worked really hard. I barely—I'd get two to four hours to sleep while everybody else was out partying, and I'm constantly putting people in classes, organizing people. We're talking about over, maybe—Am I allowed to say this?—eight hundred people. I mean, because I'm not just looking at my company, I'm also helping the others as well; helping them out.

BAK: Did you just take on that role or did they assign you there?

NM: It's the one that you volun—The eight hundred is the whole battalion. Sorry, I mixed it up with something else again. No, just my company. There's a lot, like—over a hundred.

BAK: Okay, wow. And they, kind of, put you in charge of that?

NM: Yeah, yeah, because no one—

BAK: Is volunteering. Okay. [chuckles]

NM: I'm very organized for the most part.

BAK: And you're still an E-3 here?

NM: E-3, yeah.

BAK: Wow, okay.

NM: No, I take it back, E-4; I was E-4.

BAK: You moved up to E-4, okay.

NM: E-3, E-4, let's stick to E-4, because I forgot.

BAK: Okay, we'll stick with four.

NM: Stick with E-4 because—I'm sorry, I get all my memories—

BAK: No, it's fine.

NM: Yeah, so probably E-4, and I know a lot of things that the guys do compliment us on, is that girls are sometimes more organized, and so that's one of the reasons why they also put me there, because—I don't know—because they know I work hard, and I don't mind

because that's what I'm there for.

BAK: Okay.

NM: And yes, so that's how I ended up working there.

BAK: But you said some of the guys didn't treat you well?

NM: No, no, not at all.

BAK: Were you harassed?

NM: I wouldn't say—I don't know where to start. I just know that—Some of the civilian contractors there are too friendly, so I had to deal with that friendliness.

BAK: Oh. Are these Americans, or are they from different—Okay, so the American—Yeah, okay, got it.

NM: But they—I don't know if I should say this. Like, they know—I talked to them for, maybe, less than five minutes and, all of a sudden, now they want a real relationship with me, and I'm like, "No."

BAK: Right.

NM: So that's one of the things I have to deal with, is trying to distinguish are they just friendly, or friendly.

BAK: Right. That's exhausting.

NM: Yeah. And they're also my clients, because I service them. We have to build stuff for them if they need stuff, and stuff, so—

BAK: Right.

NM: And then I also have to deal with my own peers in my department. I call it "department" so that way it's easier for people to understand.

BAK: Sure.

NM: So I had to deal with my own peers.

BAK: Were they also trying to be very friendly?

NM: No.

BAK: No, they were not, they were resenting you.

NM: They were friends who became—I felt like they just went against me, because they wanted the same job, they wanted to be in the A/C, and they're being told what to do, while I'm the one that's telling people what to do. So it's like two different—

BAK: And you're all the same rank?

NM: All the same rank, yeah.

BAK: Okay.

NM: And I'm a girl. "Who is she? She doesn't—"

BAK: It's mostly guys over there?

NM: Girls and guys. Mainly guys. Like, maybe I would say girls would be less than 10% girls.

BAK: That is hard.

NM: But in my department, probably, like, 5%, 2%.

BAK: Oh gosh.

NM: That's a good—how many girls there are.

BAK: Right.

NM: Yeah. Even friends—like I said, friends turned their backs against me, and that's what made me sad because that's the first time I actually experienced anything like that.

BAK: Wow.

NM: Every single night I would cry and pray, and just survive every single day. ~~And I think I have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] over that,~~ because a lot of betrayals and a lot—like I said, they tried to get me in trouble several times.

BAK: Wow.

NM: I got demoted because of them, and for me not doing much, I got—this is the thing that's funny, the irony of it—They tried to demote me from that job, so I went to a different department, which is even deeper into their department, and I ended up doing a lot of things that they did not want to do, which is cleaning and organizing, so they got me organizing the tool room, and instead of going out to projects that they're so proud of, I ended up staying behind, like, just cleaning, checking up on the machines, and I ended up getting promoted. [chuckles]

BAK: Oh!

NM: And they hated me some more.

BAK: How was your relationship with your commanding officer?

NM: Good, good, good, good. They're pretty good. I had no issues with people in other departments or anyone above me.

BAK: Did your CO know how you were being treated? No? Okay. Did you room with anyone or did you live in—

NM: Oh, they hate me even more for this. Okay, so we have—it's not like barracks, we call it SWA-Huts, because we explain—because it's in the Southwest Asian—hut is a hut; it's just a hut.

[A Southwest Asia Hut, or SWA Hut, is a wooden structure used by the U.S. Marine Corps as supplemental office space, living quarters, or briefing rooms]

BAK: Okay.

NM: And it's basically, kind of, like a building right here and, of course, rooms divided. Some people, they have to roommate with each, but because they got me into so much trouble that I had to be with the executives, the VIP [Very Important Person] rooms, because they—so they can keep an eye on me. But—So my room—

BAK: To protect you or just to see what—

NM: Probably a little bit of both. Keep an eye on me, in other words; just to keep an eye on me like that. I don't know. Maybe—

BAK: Because that can mean either someone's protecting you or someone doesn't trust you.

NM: Right.

BAK: A little of both?

NM: I think it's more, like, to keep an eye on me from these people.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Okay. You're in the VI—Wow. [chuckles]

NM: I was in—Even they didn't get the VIP room, because my room was so big, it's got a cable TV, A/C that worked, I had my own room. I'm close to the bathroom, too, it's was like—and they had to walk all the way—

BAK: Outside.

NM: Yeah, just to use the bathroom. So they hated me even more, and so if I wanted to go to my room, it was, like, right there, so they if have to—anybody who has to go to their room, they have to pass my room. So, I guess, in other words, like I said, because I'm a girl, whatever the rumors are, I don't even care.

BAK: Were they thinking that you were sleeping with—

NM: Probably, yeah; that's how I got the job, right?

BAK: Right. Of course, that's how the—Yeah, that's pretty common, if you were a woman, then they must be—Yeah.

NM: "I'm an E-3, why does she have this job?"

BAK: Right.

NM: I can see that happening.

BAK: That happens a lot.

NM: I got that front row, and I was not complaining, I didn't care, because I was close to the bathroom; that's what I cared about. I didn't really watch TV like they do, because they're all into watching TVs, but for me, all about work. I'm trying to work and work out, and the gym was, like, right over here, so it's not far for me to get to.

BAK: Did you run? What did you do in the gym?

NM: Stretching.

BAK: A lot of stretching.

NM: That's—You would call it, kind of, my modification of yoga.

BAK: Okay. You just, kind of, made it up?

NM: I made it up, yeah.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Anything that would help me, just, not feel tension in my body.

BAK: Okay, that's smart.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: How long was this God-awful deployment?

NM: Oh, it was an awful four to six months. I did not find this out, why they hate me so much, until two weeks before we left.

BAK: How did you find out?

NM: A fellow friend from a different department told me that, "Hey, you need to watch out for your friend because she's the one that's talking about you."

BAK: Oh, wow.

NM: And nobody knows about my personal life, and she doesn't know, but she's still talking. I found out later—

BAK: She's making up stuff?

NM: Yes. I found out later that when I came back—when we—you know, like, demo—when we demob [demobilized] we go through a certain stage—I ran into an old friend from A School—the AIT [Advanced Individual Training] School—and he told me about her, that she was already pre-talking about me before we'd got to Iraq.

BAK: Wow.

NM: That made me cry because I thought she was my friend.

BAK: Do you have any idea what motivated her to do that?

NM: I think I know, because she was the only person when we had all-hands—I'm assuming you're military, so you understand—

BAK: Actually, no, I'm not.

NM: Oh, really?

BAK: No. I've just been doing this a long time.

NM: That's really cool. At least you kind of know somewhat, something else.

BAK: Right.

NM: We had an all-hands meeting, and she was the only person that did not show up for this all-hands meeting before Iraq, where they talk about, "Here's what you have to look forward to in Iraq," blah, blah, blah, blah. She was the only person who didn't go there because she was over four hundred miles away, which you're not supposed to be, but you need the permission from the CO, and I think maybe she's got the permission, but she didn't tell anybody else. You have to tell your squad leader, everybody on your team. So no one knew where she was at, and I was the only person who had her phone number, so I called her, I was like, "Hey, you need to show up," blah, blah, blah. I mean, that's how friends talk. I guess I wasn't that much close to her because I think she took that personally.

BAK: Oh, wow.

NM: Yeah, and that's when it all started. So she—That's how I can only think of why would she do that, because she probably took that very offensive.

BAK: Okay. After the four to six months, you all went back where, to California?

NM: From Iraq, we—No, Afghanistan was better because we went to Germany. This one, I think we went to—they call it the Seabee—it's like a Seabee camp, and—it's a country. Oh, it's on the tip of my tongue. It's before you go into Iraq, you have to go to this country to get situated.

BAK: Now I'm having a sense of what it is, but I can't remember.

NM: They've already shut it down, and they've already cleaned out the place. I think you know where it's at. It's like everyone has to go through this port.

BAK: Okay. We can look it up. I enjoy research challenges like that.

NM: Yeah, we were there for about two weeks, which, it was nothing comparable to Germany, of course, but I think that's where we had to kind of demob out there.

BAK: Would that be R&R [rest and recuperation (or recreation)] or more official stuff?

NM: It's not really R&R because we still had to be in our uniform, and we still had to wake up at a certain time, and it's still a desert. [chuckles]

BAK: Right. Do Seabees wear different uniforms than—

NM: The rest of the navy? Yes. Now, no; before, yes.

BAK: Okay. So you never got whites?

NM: No. The only time I actually wore white [was] when we had to take pictures. Yeah.

[chuckles]

BAK: Alright, so I'm trying to get my head—like, what is that country? But we'll move on. Did you ever have R&R?

NM: No.

BAK: Wow. Okay. Did you know when you were going over there, how long you would be stationed there?

NM: They gave us in our orders how long you're going to be, but you can always leave beforehand, but if it's more, then they have to tweak the orders.

BAK: Okay.

NM: They give us roughly about, I think at most, six months.

BAK: Okay. So you left. Did that woman come back with you? Is she in your company?

NM: Uh, Afghanistan. If she hears about this, I'm sorry, but. [chuckles]

BAK: Well, you're not naming names, so.

NM: Yeah. It's—I was disappointed when I had to go to Afghanistan, because when I found out that she was coming along, like, oh! I did everything I could to stay away, just to keep my distance.

BAK: Right, but when you went back to the U.S., she was still in your group, company?

NM: I think she left first.

BAK: Okay.

NM: We had to go out on different [unclear]—they call them [unclear]—like, different—

KH [A slang term used in the military, “pull chocks” means to leave] ?

BAK: Chalks[?]?.

NM: They call it [unclear]. Like, Group One, Group Two, Group Three. We left [in] different groups.

BAK: Can you spell [unclear]?

NM: I have no idea.

BAK: Okay. Alright, [unclear].

NM: [unclear]; maybe you can find it on Google.

BAK: With a C or an S, you think?

NM: I think it's C-C-C—

BAK: Well, okay, look at all the research I get to do now.

NM: [chuckles] Sorry.

BAK: No, I actually like this. Were you able to communicate with your family or friends at home?

NM: Yes. There was, like, one or two phones that they limit. They'd give us five minutes per person—or is it ten minutes? If there's no one using it, it's as long as you want, but if there are lines, then you're only limited to between five to ten minutes, I think.

BAK: Okay, so it's phones. It's not email or anything?

NM: Phones, yes. Email, for me, I'm okay, because I get the computer, but my family don't really email.

BAK: Okay.

NM: The others, I think they're limited to only phone calls.

BAK: Okay. You intimated earlier that this was kind of a security—because you're with Special Forces. Okay.

NM: Yes.

BAK: Qatar, Oman?

NM: No, no, Ballad; just Ballad.

BAK: No, I'm now I'm back to the country you were demobed [demobilized] from.

NM: Qatar. No, not Qatar; I know Qatar; I don't think it's Qatar. It's another place.

BAK: Okay, any other Middle Eastern countries that pop up in my head. Okay. Challenges. You never had off-time.

NM: No.

BAK: You didn't date then?

NM: No.

BAK: Okay. Did you receive any recognitions, awards, for your time in Iraq?

NM: Oh, another hateful situation.

BAK: [chuckles] They made you admiral.

NM: They made me admiral. Oh, the things that I said to the admiral too. Okay. Back to, one, about the hateful stuff, when we had to do our evals—the evaluations that they had to do to get us ready promoted—

BAK: Your [unclear] does this, right?

NM: No, just our commanding general, like our—Yeah, Yeah, so anybody can do our evals for us. And I remember my chief was going to do my evals, and I remember hearing—I wasn't trying to eavesdrop, but I heard people talking. I think they made it loud enough for me to hear. And they were hating me because my eval looks great. It's not because it looks great, it's because I know how to word them, and I know what they were looking for; they look, like, numbers, right? You've got to—[unclear] like a resume.

BAK: Right, right, right.

NM: They did so many more projects than I did, but for some reason they couldn't write it right, and so now they're hating on me because they were complaining, "Oh, well, her evals are better than mine," blah, blah, blah. But this is like you got to—I—He was my friend. He was a friend that also turned his back on me, so that made me feel sad.

BAK: Oh, gosh. Wow.

NM: Yeah. But yeah, that was the case; I felt like—

BAK: I can see why you were crying every night.

NM: Oh, every night; every single night; there's no doubt about that one. And then they added one, that was funny because I asked—Oh, things that I did not want to do that people put me in the front of. We get to sit with admirals. Like, they pick the good Seabee, to go sit, eat lunch with the admirals.

BAK: Oh, in Iraq?

NM: In Iraq, yes.

BAK: [chuckles] Sorry.

NM: I vol—Yes, just go. You're not—Because they—In front of me, some of them try to be nice, but behind my back, I know they're talking about me. So I did care, so just go, I don't want to, but they still choose me to go eat with the admiral, and I know that—I'm like, "Great, there's more hatred coming towards me." So I sat with the admiral—

BAK: What admiral? Can you tell, or not?

NM: I cannot remember his name to save my life.

BAK: Okay. That's alright.

NM: I would sit way over there because we would assume the admiral would sit in the middle, right?

BAK: Right. Just for the people that are listening, so you went to the end of the table thinking he was going to sit in the middle?

NM: He's going to sit in the middle, I'm going to sit way over there where he's not going to talk to me.

BAK: In the corner. Right. Okay.

NM: And I had burgers, I made sure it was all that hand food and sloppy food, because that's what I'd want—that's what makes me enjoy my time.

BAK: So you organized what you were going to eat?

NM: Yeah, I had my burgers, I got my fries, because they were—and I made my—I love saucy burgers, so I'd put a lot of sauce, and I knew I was going to get really messy. [both chuckle]

BAK: It's because you weren't wearing whites, right?

NM: Yeah, because I wasn't wearing white. I knew I could eat however I want. But I didn't enjoy my time there the way I wanted to, so the only time I enjoyed was my food. I wanted to enjoy my food, so I got a burger, and I sat at the end of the table, I was going to ignore the admiral. No, that didn't happen. He came and sat next to me. [makes groaning noise] [both laughing]

BAK: Did you eat your messy, sloppy burger?

NM: I did, actually.

BAK: You did, okay.

NM: In the most proper way I can.

BAK: Right. Well, it's not easy. The admiral was chatting with you?

NM: Chatting with me and—I forgot—I must have said something—

BAK: Did you get a challenge coin too while you were—

NM: [chuckles] Actually, I got a challenge coin from somebody who put me there in the first place, but it was a secret handshake, so that's how I ended up getting his coin.

BAK: Okay.

NM: But not to him. I spoke to the admiral. I think I said something to the admiral that hopefully he didn't find offensive, because I said something along the lines of, but not verbatim, "How did you get lucky? How did you end up there?"

BAK: End up—

NM: Being the admiral.

BAK: Oh, got it.

NM: Yeah. I think I must have said it in a way where it's not as offensive since it's coming out of my mouth.

BAK: Right.

NM: Because I don't look the part. [chuckles] But he paused for a good three seconds. I think he was probably stunned just the way I said it.

BAK: "Who'd you sleep with, admiral?" [both laugh]

NM: [Good thing?] I didn't ask that one.

BAK: Okay.

NM: But he did say it was luck, and when you get to a certain, I guess, phase, or sort of level—certain level—he was like, "It's just luck. Knowing the right people; being there at the right time," etc.

I was like, "Oh. Okay."

Yeah, so that was what I asked him, and we had small talks, but that was one thing I remember, because I know it was something that may have offended him, but he didn't really take it personally.

BAK: Okay. Any other memorable things that happened in Iraq, before we leave?

NM: After we leave Iraq, I'm not sure. Like I said, there's a lot of crying at night times, and a lot of crying during the day because I didn't know what to do. It's just a lot of crying in Iraq. ~~PTSD~~.

BAK: Okay. Let's see. Alright, so you go back to California. What year are we?

NM: Many years in California.

BAK: Okay. You were still active duty? I mean, they called you up once you go back to—

NM: Yes.

BAK: Alright, so 2010, you're back in California. You're just living. What were you doing in California when you in training?

NM: Once we—Iraq, we were there for, maybe, a couple weeks, and then we come back home to Greensboro. But if you're talking about Afghanistan.

BAK: No, I'm just saying, so from Iraq you came back to Greensboro?

NM: Greensboro, yeah, pretty much.

BAK: Okay. And then you—

NM: Did the same training basically; get paperwork done ready, medical leave ready, stuff like that.

BAK: What did you do, besides sleep for a little bit—

NM: [chuckles]

BAK: What did you do when you weren't training?

NM: In Greensboro?

BAK: Yeah.

NM: Are you talking about my civilian life, or just getting ready for—

BAK: No, your civilian life.

NM: My civilian life, okay. What did I do at that time, from 2010 to 2013?

BAK: Yes.

NM: Oh, that was tough. Oh, oh, oh, that was very tough. That's when I found out a lot about betrayals. I would not like to say this, but I'll say it anyways just because it's something that I might forget. I feel a lot of betrayals from my own group of friends; the one I was telling you about. I've heard that they'd been talking about me, because when you're a hair stylist—I have the same clients, and it comes—eventually that rumor, that grapevine, comes to me—it came to me. And why did I believe in it? Because no one would know about it, and why would that person I work with—she's such a sweet person, she would not lie—and it came to me somehow, so my own group of friends who I still called "best friends," are talking about me.

BAK: What are they implying?

NM: Not a good friend, and I'm this and that, and blah, blah, blah. It hurts me because I'm the type of person who would go the miles for anyone. So it's just not one [unclear] that they said. It's kind of like over the years it adds up.

BAK: That you're just not a good friend?

NM: Right. Yeah, or something; it's just something along the lines, and then they will stop talking about me. I've also started—I opened up a salon at that time as well, because I felt at that time the jobs here weren't really available, so I'm the type of person, if I can't find a job, I'm going to create a job, so that's what I did.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I ended up creating a lot of my own self-employ—I was just self-employed.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Opened up a salon. [Phom Potion Hair Bar]

BAK: In Greensboro?

NM: In Greensboro. That didn't go well. It started well, but the problem was, when I'm gone on military training, the people that I asked to look after, didn't really look after my clients, so I had a lot of bad reviews because of that, and I think I'm still like, hurt by it, but I don't take it personally anymore.

Also family, I felt betrayed by my own family, betrayed by my own group of friends that I called best friends.

BAK: What did your family do?

NM: Same thing; it was the same thing. Like I said, things—

BAK: That you weren't a good daughter?

NM: No, I wouldn't say that. It's just that words would come back to me and I'd hear about it. But it's just that everything happened to me all at once, about the same thing, friends—best friends—family, they're all coming back—it comes back to me and I hear about it, and for someone just came back from Iraq, with going through all that, I don't think I can handle that. ~~So what I did, like everybody else that's going through PTSD, we shelter ourselves in.~~

BAK: Right.

NM: I caved in. I caved. I think I disappeared from people. The business didn't go well because of the reviews, and I just didn't have the heart for it. And then I'm trying to find the money to pay for the rent, and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera; you know how that goes. It's very tough because at that time we went through that recession, and it's still trying to recover. So that's very tough on me. That's why I created my own job. And then I—of course, I hide from everybody, but I continued school.

BAK: Okay.

NM: No, that was Afghanistan. I continued school.

BAK: Okay.

NM: But I was hiding.

BAK: You were hiding out.

NM: I was hiding.

BAK: Was your daughter living with you?

NM: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

BAK: Okay. You had an apartment or something in Greensboro?

NM: Yes, I had an apartment in Greensboro.

BAK: How old is she?

NM: Right now, she is fifteen. She'll be sixteen in December.

BAK: But back then, in 2010?

NM: She was born in 2003, so.

BAK: Seven.

NM: Seven; yeah, she's seven. We lived together, have businesses, and I'm still trying to be a good mom to her. You know sometimes people are so busy they don't have time for their child?

BAK: Sure.

NM: I give her time; I give her sufficient time. I help her out with homework and stuff like that. But it's still tough being a single mom.

BAK: How did she deal with your deployments?

NM: She didn't really, like, take it, "I'm going to miss you." No, no, no, no. My parents took good care of her. They did, yeah.

BAK: Okay. One thing that I never asked, way back, when you signed up, how long did you sign up for?

NM: I did the eight years.

BAK: Eight years. Okay, thank you. Anything else in 2010, 2013, you want to talk about?

NM: No, just the whole recession. I mean, it was hard for me to find a job, so I had the salon. The salon didn't go well because I felt like they didn't take care of my clients the way they should.

BAK: Right.

NM: But that's still my responsibility. Long story short, I ended up moving to [Washington] D.C., and that's when I heard that I'm going on another deployment.

BAK: Why did you move to D.C.

NM: Job.

BAK: Okay. So there's another salon or something? Another type of job.

NM: I wanted to start a new life.

BAK: Okay. I understand. That makes sense.

NM: All the things that has happened, I want to start a new life. And I lived with my brother.

BAK: Oh, okay, that makes sense.

NM: Yeah. And then my daughter stayed down here.

BAK: Okay. Did you work when you were up in D.C.? How long were you in D.C.?

NM: I was there for a few months; very few months; I can't remember how long—before I found out about the orders.

BAK: Okay. One other question: You had—I call it—PTS, because it's not necessarily a disorder.

NM: Yes. [unclear] there's something that I don't call a disorder too.

BAK: Right, because it's a reasonable response.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Okay. You said that you col—I don't know if you used the word "collapsed"—but you're just so depressed, and you don't talk to anyone? Okay.

NM: I had to self-heal. I didn't want to get help. I think at that time it started my anxiety and the PTS, you call it. I think it started back then, but I didn't know it at that time.

BAK: Right. You were having anxiety attacks?

NM: I did. A lot of—That's when it first started, the anxiety, just [breathes out heavily], my heart just dropped.

BAK: Wow.

NM: I didn't even know what it was; I had to ask a doctor what it was.

BAK: Right. Sure.

NM: Oh, now I remember, it didn't even start in Afghanistan, it started there. I remember now, thank you. Yeah.

BAK: Were you on any medication or therapy? No? You just dealt with it?

NM: Because at that time, I didn't know.

BAK: Right.

NM: I didn't know, yeah.

BAK: Okay. That must have been scary.

NM: Very, very, very scary. It was very lonely; very lonely and just frightening. But I still moved on.

BAK: Okay. You were just sitting on the couch a lot or—

NM: No, no, no, no. Active.

BAK: You've got to stay active.

NM: I stayed active because of my daughter. I had to take care of her.

BAK: Sure. Sure. So 2013, you're living in D.C. Were you expecting to be deployed again, or you didn't?

NM: When I moved there, no.

BAK: Okay.

NM: When I got there for a couple months, that's when my orders came in, like, "Hey, you're going."
"Okay."

BAK: Oh gosh. Okay.

NM: Just came back, and haven't healed yet, but at the same time, I want to do this. This is what I signed up for. I want to finish what I signed up for.

BAK: Okay. You got on a plane. Where did you go to get ready for deployment?

NM: I moved back here, then we go—we went on training; I think this one's Fort Hueneme again. I think we came back here for the field training.

BAK: Okay, from Greensboro to California?

NM: Yes.

BAK: And then from California you flew to Afghanistan?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Okay. Where were you stationed in Afghanistan?

NM: Kandahar.

BAK: Kandahar. Wow. That's pretty big, right?

NM: Yes. That's where we got kicked out. [chuckles]

BAK: Okay. Wow. Okay.

NM: When the military downsized. No, you cannot be here anymore.

BAK: Did they at least give you a ticket, or you got to make your own way home?

NM: No. This is interesting. Can I say this? I wonder if I can say this. I can say this. Because I work at the COC[?], which is—I work where the CO's located, the headquarters.

BAK: Did they tell you what you are going to do before you get there, or you get there and they're like—

NM: Well, when we got there, we were supposed to complete it—I think it was at least four—four to six months maybe—I can't remember—but when we got there, it changed. It came up from, I think—I want to say—I don't want to misstate—like, say the wrong thing—but I want to say it because it's—from what I was told, since I worked where the headquarters are—I work right there in the middle of everything—we cannot come back to the U.S. because—it's coming from up there—we cannot come back to the U.S., but we're getting kicked out of Kandahar; we cannot stay on base anymore. So that was—

BAK: Because they wanted the room for somebody else?

NM: We were downsizing.

BAK: Downsizing, okay.

NM: They were shutting down the—Kandahar.

BAK: Okay. Wow.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Where were you supposed to go?

NM: We don't know! [laughs] That was the big headache. What happened was, I didn't want to question too much, but since I'm central to everybody, they were just fighting everywhere. They were trying to look for places for people to go. Things is, Kandahar is closing down, but the U.S. doesn't want us to come back, so now we're trying to figure out—

BAK: Do you know why?

NM: Without getting political maybe, it's not our—it's not part of the agreement. The agreement that we come back—

BAK: With Afghanistan? Who's the agreement with?

NM: It's on the orders—on the orders. That's all I remember because I don't want to question too much. But the orders said that we don't get back until—what time was it? Later; whatever that said.

BAK: So they didn't want to change your orders?

NM: Right. Yeah. I mean—

BAK: But we're not sure why.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Too much paperwork.

NM: Yeah. It's around that time where it just—the U.S. will not—up there— say that we cannot go back because it's not part of the orders. The orders say you come—for example, if it says August 2014, then you come back 2014. Not now.

BAK: [chuckles]

NM: Yeah, that was the issue that we had to go through, and my officer, he was very concerned because, so what do we do? We can't go back home, but we can't live here.

BAK: Right.

NM: So they called up every country, or base, that there existed, just because we have to sent our eight-hundred-something people somewhere.

BAK: Right.

NM: They decided—And I think it went over a few weeks or a month trying to figure out where to put people.

BAK: These were all Seabees?

NM: Seabees, yes.

BAK: Okay.

NM: So they sent people—some people to—Oh, why did I forget this? It's one of the richest countries over in the Middle East. They sent people there. Bah—

BAK: Saudi—Oh, Bahrain!

NM: Bahrain! Yeah, they sent people to Bahrain, they sent some people to a different base in Afghanistan, they sent—they sent me to California, back to here, to do all the paperwork.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Just to bring the rest of the people over. So they sent me here for a good—a few months.

BAK: Okay. So you were in Afghanistan for how long? I think we jumped ahead a little bit.

NM: Yeah, we did, we did, we did. I think for about—between two to three months.

BAK: Late 2009?

NM: This one right here. No, 2000—

BAK: Afghanistan. So late 2013.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: What were you doing? And you were with the same people?

NM: I was with different people, different battalion.

BAK: Oh.

NM: This was one group, this is another one.

BAK: Did you get along with the second group?

NM: Well, this one was not hard. This was easy. It's a different stress. I do like them. I get along with everyone there.

BAK: What was your job over there?

NM: I was—If I had to interpret it for the civilian side, it would be kind of like an officer manager for the operations department. So we handled anything operational, and I was the central person. I made sure I did the calendar, pick up phones, made sure the office is all good to go, people have drinks and—I just did a lot.

BAK: Okay, you did administrative work.

NM: Yes.

BAK: For the Seabees.

NM: Right.

BAK: Okay. Alright. And you got a long better?

NM: Oh yeah. The bad person came to that platoon. [chuckles]

BAK: Really? This is the mean girl, I'll call her, from Iraq—

NM: The mean girl.

BAK: —is now in Afghanistan.

NM: I begged them, "Keep her away from me," I really did. But she did the same thing, she did the same tricks, not towards me, but—to not work.

BAK: She didn't want to work?

NM: To keep her work to the minimum.

BAK: Yeah. Okay. Got it. Alright.

NM: They kept her in a place where it's close to me, but not—where she won't affect me.

BAK: Anything else? Did you ever go outside the wire? Did you meet Aghanis? Did you learn Farsi?

NM: I've learned there is—Oh, what is that country called? Kardasan? Kurgastan [Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia?]?]

BAK: Yeah, Kurda—

NM: Yes.

BAK: The Kurds. No, the Kurds are not a country.

NM: We went to this salon, barber shop, whatever, and then I'm like, "Huh, they look like me, but they're not speaking Asian." They spoke Russian. I thought that was pretty interesting; they spoke Russian.

BAK: Wow.

NM: Yeah, yes. I was like, "Wow, they're so beautiful. I think that's beautiful."

BAK: Where in Russia are they from? Like, towards Asia?

NM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think it's Russia's here, and their country's here, and so they speak a little bit of Russian. Not a little bit, a lot.

BAK: So their country is—

NM: They have their own language, but they speak Russian. Kind of like how us, we speak more English than Hispanic—or Mexi—Spanish.

BAK: I guess my question is, was it a different country than Russia?

NM: Yeah, yeah, it was.

BAK: Czechnia?

NM: No, no, no, it's Kargistan? Is it Kargistan? It's something like that. With a K—

BAK: Yeah, okay, I think we can figure this out. All this fun research I get to do.

NM: Yeah, it's really interesting, I—they looked like me!

BAK: Right.

NM: But they speak Russian. I'm like, "That is so beautiful."

BAK: Wow.

NM: That's one thing I remember from there.

BAK: So you always would go to the salons to get the dish [gossip]?

NM: The juice[?] on everything, yeah.

BAK: That's great.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Salon intel; I like that.

NM: Yes, exactly. There's a lot of stuff that goes on, but they're not like Iraq where it stresses me and it makes me cry. There was a lot of this though. Every time when there is the siren that comes on, it was constant. We were constantly, like, having to wear our flak jacket and our helmet, or covering, whatever you want to call it, and then we had to go into our—oh, why did I forget it?—our T-walls—protection.

[A Bremer wall, or T-wall, is a twelve-foot-high (3.7 m) portable, steel-reinforced concrete blast wall of the type used for blast protection throughout Iraq and Afghanistan. The name is believed to have originated from L. Paul Bremer of the Coalition Provisional

Authority, who was the Director of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance for post-war Iraq, following the Iraq War of 2003]

BAK: Okay.

NM: Why do I forget? I don't know. I'm losing my memory again. But anyways, in the middle of the night, we still have to do it, and I would just dive onto the ground every single time.

BAK: Sure.

NM: And even if it's during the daytime. Always.

BAK: Were you getting incoming?

NM: A lot of incomings.

BAK: Okay.

NM: And it's a lot—I cannot remember how many times I have breathed that ground; it's a lot.

BAK: That's very stressful.

NM: Very. It's stressful, but not too stressful. The stressful part is knowing that I had to get down next to someone I don't know, like the locals, because I don't know who they are.

BAK: Right. How long did you have to stay down?

NM: I can remember—It could be as long as thirty minutes, as long as they clear; it has to be clear.

BAK: Right. Right.

NM: And—Oh, this is interesting, too, because I end up knowing a lot of people; for some reason they come to me for everything. They said that if I want—if you know all your troublemakers, you come to me. They all surround me, but—no. We have—

BAK: You're a troublemaker magnet, okay.

NM: Yeah, exactly, I was the radar. There—We sent people all over Afghanistan, and so every time when that happened—

BAK: To build stuff?

NM: To build stuff, yes, to support other units. So when that siren comes on, we have to do accountability, we have to make sure it's 100%. You're talking about contacting people from all over the country to make sure you have 100% accountability on all your people. And so, what happen—

BAK: Which means you have to know who everyone is.

NM: Who everyone is, if they're safe, and where they're at. And the question is, how? So we have emails that we can use, we have cell phones, that's not even private—I mean, not even secure because any—but we have no choice, we need to know where our people's at.

BAK: Right.

NM: So yes. And I happen to know people somehow; I don't know, people want to know me. So I ended up making a lot of these calls to make sure everyone is safe. And sometimes the cell phone does not work because it's—doesn't want to work; the service. So it's hard, it's tough, but we still try to get 100%, as much as we can.

BAK: Okay. What time of year was this? Was it cold, was it hot?

NM: Hot.

BAK: Hot. So did you have A/C again?

NM: Yes, we have A/C; yes, thank God.

BAK: Did you have any off-time during—

NM: No, no, no off-time. We worked seven days a week.

BAK: Wow. Okay, so I'm not going to ask you about your off-time. You got along with your superiors?

NM: Oh yes, yes, yes.

BAK: Okay. And your peers, better in this one?

NM: Oh yes.

BAK: Okay.

NM: More than that; we became good friends.

BAK: Good. Good. Did you date at all there?

NM: That's when I met—I met my husband when I moved up to D.C.

BAK: Okay, so you met him. Is he civilian?

NM: Two thousand [and] twelve.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I met him in 2012.

BAK: Is he a civilian, or is he military?

NM: Military; active duty marine.

BAK: Oh. How did you meet a marine?

NM: At the [unclear]—the Greensboro [unclear]. Because our unit was trying to get ready for deployment, so we did a lot of practice runs, and so we wanted to rent[?]—not rent[?], but borrow their vehicles, so we asked the marine side, because they're also—their office is also at the [unclear].

BAK: Okay.

NM: So we—Through me, I ended up being friends with one of the people.

BAK: One of the marines?

NM: One of the marines, and then that's how I met my husband, through there.

BAK: Okay. You all were dating before you deployed?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Okay. Were you married?

NM: No, no, no.

BAK: Okay, so you were dating. Where was he while you were deployed?

NM: He was here in Greensboro, finishing his time here.

BAK: Okay. That's hard to be separated.

NM: Oh, it's hard. We're separated again because he's in Missouri.

BAK: That's right. Oh gosh. Okay. Did you have any training for what you were going to be doing in Afghanistan, which is different?

NM: The paperwork, no.

BAL: No? Okay.

NM: That was like second nature to me.

BAK: Alright. Was there another job you wished you were able to do, or that's kind of pointless in the military; you do what you're told to do?

NM: I wasn't picky. I wasn't picky.

BAK: Okay. Did you supervise anyone there; were you in charge of anyone?

NM: No. I was in charge of a lot of programs and projects.

BAK: Okay. Were you harassed again, kind of feel, or discriminated against?

NM: No, thank goodness, not this time; not this time. I had a lot of good time—I had a good time there. I was not harassed.

BAK: Did you meet any locals?

NM: Yes. I kind of felt bad for them in a way. I don't know why, I just felt—They were always there cleaning up the restrooms, to keep our restroom clean, and I want to thank them. I like to thank people who do good things. Even here; not just there, here. But they helped me out, in regards to throwing my trash away, because it's high, so they would help me out.

BAK: Oh, got it.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Did you go outside the wire at all?

NM: No, no, no, because they need me there.

BAK: Okay, right, that's what I figured, but I just thought I'd ask.

NM: Paperwork, yeah.

BAK: Alright, Kandahar, it was hot. Let's see. Did you feel that there was any change in the service while you were there? Did you notice when you joined either how women were treated, or the military was run or anything?

NM: I was also part of the climate change survey.

BAK: What?

NM: It's a climate change, where they talk about—you know the different surveys of what your battalion?

BAK: Yes.

NM: I kind of get the gist of it. I don't—

BAK: You were kind of compiling—You were reading—

NM: I was reading, yeah.

BAK: Okay. What was your impression of that?

NM: Because it was so different from my first one, according to them—I'm not going to speak for me, because for me, I can understand both sides, from the leadership and also from the subordinate side, but speaking from the subordinate side, there's a lot going on, in regards to—it could be —some of them—I think they talk about racial stuff, how the—

BAK: I'm sorry, the what?

NM: Racial.

BAK: Right, but I had stepped on your next word.

NM: I can't remember.

BAK: Okay. They felt they were being discriminated against?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Black and white, kind of a situation?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Okay.

NM: And also different—I think that was one of the issues. There was so many issues. Some of them felt like they were nothing but a number, and they felt bad that—Does that make sense?

BAK: Yes.

NM: They felt like they're noth—not racial, but in general, everyone, you don't have to be—

BAK: Like they're a widget, they're not—

NM: Yeah, that's it. They're just there; they're disposable and that's it. Oh gosh, it was so many issues. I remember reading it. It's great to tell me secrets because I will forget it. [both chuckle]

BAK: I'm glad we're doing this for others and for you, so win-win.

NM: I did the climate survey. There was a lot of issues going on. Oh, harassment; there was a lot of harassment going on there as well.

BAK: Was there assault?

NM: I would not say.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Because I did not go deep.

BAK: Alright, there was definitely harassment, but male-female or subordinate—

NM: Probably eith—all ways—all the ways.

BAK: Females would also harass males?

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Just because their rank, or just because they felt like it? You don't know, okay.

NM: I know that was going on, but I tried to—yeah.

BAK: You were just compiling statistics, got it. Okay. Did you feel that attitudes towards women changed while you were in there, or more opportunities, especially in the Seabees?

NM: I think they respect women in uniform.

BAK: More now than—What do you attribute that to?

NM: Well, we have to contribute. For me—

BAK: They've seen what you can do?

NM: Right, yeah. Well, it depends on my attitude, or our attitude, as well. For me, I didn't feel any of the surveys. I didn't feel like that, at least for Afghanistan. And for me, I—that's all I did, was work and try to get along with everyone, and et cetera, et cetera. I think that they respect me as so, but for the others, maybe it's just the way your attitude is, and that's why you perceive things a certain way.

BAK: Sure. Sure.

NM: But for me—I could speak for me—I say that there's a different change in attitude.

BAK: Okay. Your deployment there was how long?

NM: My deployment there was for, at most, three months, I think, because—yeah, the whole thing came back.

BAK: Okay. You mentioned Germany in there somewhere?

NM: Yes.

BAK: Is that after? Is that later, or did you get—

NM: After.

BAK: Okay, so you're back to California in 2014.

NM: Yes.

BAK: Then what happens?

NM: I come home. I came home and—

BAK: To Greensboro, okay.

NM: To Greensboro, and then—I think it was tough. I had to step away to—I stepped away again to heal. I'm not sure it's the same type of healing, but it's still a healing.

BAK: Sure, I mean, you're in a combat zone, working twenty-four hours a day. Now you're sitting in Greensboro where people complain of—

NM: Yeah. I need to heal. I just—I need to heal, but that's when I finished my associate's degree at GTCC.

BAK: This is cosme—No, biology.

NM: Nope, just the general at first.

BAK: General ed.

NM: I was like, "Three more. I just need three more, that's it. Okay, done."

BAK: Okay, so you have an associate's degree in what?

NM: Just general arts [Associate of Arts].

BAK: Arts. Okay.

NM: Yeah. I was like, "Oh, it has very mini—I don't care." I said, "I'm finished." It's my goal to finish.

BAK: Right. Okay. So you were working and going to school and taking care—

NM: No, no working.

BAK: No working. You were taking care of your daughter.

NM: Taking care of my daughter. I had to heal; I just know I had to heal.

BAK: Sure. Sure.

NM: And I don't think that going to work right away was the best option for me. But at that time I might have looked for a job, I don't remember.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I think I have, but it was still no luck, maybe, because Greensboro is just not that—it doesn't have a lot of availability compared to other cities.

BAK: Right.

NM: Anyways, long story short, I just know I was healing for a long time, and I went to school to finish that off.

BAK: You went back to dating your future husband?

NM: Yes, and I think that's when we married. Afterward he came back from his time in Japan; Okinawa.

BAK: Okay.

NM: He came back, and then we got married in December.

BAK: December of?

NM: Please don't ask me.

BAK: Okay, sorry. [chuckles]

NM: Of two thousand—He's going to hate me for this!—2015, I think.

BAK: That sounds good. I like it.

NM: [chuckles] Anyways. And then, I think he moved on lot, too, because—not just me alone, but he also moves around because he's active duty, so we're more—we're apart more than we are together.

BAK: Right.

NM: Yeah. But—Yes. I did not come to UNCG until 2016, maybe.

BAK: Okay. I also don't have much of a memory. You got out—

NM: I left in 2014.

BAK: Two thousand [and] fourteen.

NM: The last time was that November.

BAK: Alright, so you certainly didn't want to sign up again.

NM: I wanted to, but I did—I wanted to, but I knew I had to be here for my daughter first.

BAK: Right.

NM: And that was the plan, to make sure I'm here for my daughter, and after she's done and she's settled, then I want to come back. That didn't turn out the way it should because this kicked in.

BAK: Okay. Before we get to that, you came here in 2015, '16, you said?

NM: Two thousand [and] fourteen; November 2014.

BAK: You started here [UNCG]?

NM: Sorry, sorry, sorry, I'm thinking about something else. I came here in 2016 because I finished around '15—Two thou—yeah that's right—I should have come here in 2016. I wanted my four-year [degree], that was another goal, because—

BAK: What did you want your degree in?

NM: I stuck to Finance.

BAK: Finance. Business school?

NM: Yes, Summer of 2015.

BAK: And what would you graduate with, a BS [Bachelor of Science]?

NM: A BS, yeah.

BAK: Okay. Alright, what kind of finance did you want to do?

NM: Right now, I feel like I want to get to the Federal Reserve, into the Consumer and Community Division [Community and Consumer Affairs], because I feel like that fits me. [I doubt I can get into the Federal Reserve as a career choice, but I do know I want to work with businesses and still help communities out –NM added later.]

[The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System is responsible for implementing various federal laws intended to protect and inform consumers in credit and other financial service transactions. The Board's Division of Consumer and Community Affairs conducts research not only to inform the Board's regulatory and policy development functions, but also to support its consumer outreach and community development functions]

BAK: Okay. Why does it fit you? I don't know what that is.

NM: I like to start businesses, I like to help people out with theirs, as well.

BAK: Okay, so you would be assisting entrepreneurs?

NM: Yeah.

BAK: Okay.

NM: And I like to be out there with the community. That's the reason why I feel like I understand the people, I can do whatever. I'm not sure—I've read a little bit about that division, but I feel like it suits me the most.

BAK: Alright, so you came in Spring 2016?

NM: Summer 2015, '16, I forgot. Two thousand [and] sixteen, yeah. So Summer 2016, I think, and then [unclear], and I add on an economics major and a minor in IT [Information Technology], so it extended another year.

BAK: In the best world, before the memory thing started, you would have graduated next year?

NM: I would have finished, like, last semester.

BAK: Sure. Wow. Okay.

NM: Which I don't want to drop because I want to finish.

BAK: No, you should. You definitely have grit.

NM: Oh, did I tell you about my time with Team Rubicon?

[Team Rubicon is an International non-government organization (NGO) founded by U.S. Marines William McNulty and Jacob "Jake" Wood. Team Rubicon identifies itself as a veteran service organization that uses disaster response to help reintegrate veterans back into civilian life]

BAK: Time at what?

NM: Team Rubicon.

BAK: No.

NM: Oh, [unclear] talk about. While I was—2016—trying to stay active, I needed—

BAK: Physically active?

NM: —physically active—I needed something to help me out ment—not mentally—but in my heart, I like to help the community, so I wanted something that's more veteran-based because it's something I can relate to, so I looked up on the Internet, I pulled up Team Rubicon, and Team Rubicon, they're a disaster relief organization, and I was like, "Perfect!"

BAK: Right.

NM: So I signed up. I signed up, but I wasn't really active, so—but I—I think I signed up with them in 2014. I did not become active until 2016 when the hurricane start—it hit South

Carolina at that time. Was it Matthews? Not Matthews. I can't remember. I signed up to deploy with them. When I say "deploy" it means just to—

BAK: Sure, they're veterans so they usually deploy.

NM: Yes, exactly, yeah.

BAK: Got it. Okay.

NM: I was with them the whole entire time, and it helped me out emotionally, as well as spiritually, mentally, and so—

BAK: Sure, sure. That's the point of it.

NM: Exactly. I'm with them now, and to keep my time active I also do—they're working on, like, different communities, not just during disaster relief, but also during non-disaster relief times.

BAK: That's great. Are you still active with them?

NM: I had to take time off because it—stuff started acting up.

BAK: Okay. What was the hardest thing physically that you had to do in the service, and emotionally?

NM: Emotionally? It's the dealing with other people.

BAK: Right.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: And so, physically, basic training, but were there other—

NM: Physically, it's knowing my limits.

BAK: Like, accepting your limits?

NM: Accepting my limits, but sometimes I'm stubborn, so I think I'm paying the price now.
[chuckles]

BAK: Okay. What was most rewarding?

NM: I think the camaradering [camaraderie]. They were like my family.

BAK: Sure. Sure. Right. Right. And then we're going to do a little personal views, and then we're going to come back to—Who were your heroes or heroines at the time, either in the military, who did you admire in the culture, politically or—

NM: I always looked up to my mom and dad.

BAK: Okay. That makes sense.

NM: As much as sometimes I feel like my mom aggravates me, but I have something that she gave me, and that—like you said—grit.

BAK: Yes.

NM: I would not do a lot of these things if it wasn't for that, so—and they—my dad, he gives me that engineering, math; my mom gives me that caring, loving personality of mine; and I combine the two and I'm constantly out there helping people out, so I think that's—

BAK: They accept your military service; they came to terms with it?

NM: Actually, they're very proud now, so yeah. [chuckles]

BAK: Alright. What was your impression of the political and military leadership at the time?

NM: At the time, I didn't complain. I know things happen for a reason, and I'm not there at the roundtable to make that decision. So politically, no, I'm—I like to stay down the middle, and I like to understand why that person said that, why that person said that, and sometimes we're so 100% confident in something, then you don't realize it that there's something else that's influencing that decision. So I don't—

BAK: You don't judge.

NM: I don't judge.

BAK: Okay. Do you have memories of 9/11?

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

NM: Yes. I was in—at GTCC with friends of mine, and—at the break room, and my friend came in and she's like, "Guess what happened? A plane just hit the tower—the Twin Tower."

I'm like—I thought she was joking.

BAK: Sure.

NM: I was like—I just brushed it off because I didn't know, but then all of a sudden, about, like, a minute later, it was on the news or something, and I'm like—I had no comments after that; I just didn't talk.

BAK: Wow.

NM: That was my—That's what happened, at that time when that happened.

BAK: Okay. This is embarrassing, I should know this. Was "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" still a policy, or they'd gotten rid of that?

NM: Good question. Actually, when I recently left, they said it—

BAK: Right.

NM: —you're open, just say it all you want. But now, I don't know.

BAK: Do you have any views? Did you work with people who were openly gay or lesbian?

NM: Oh, yes, yes, I have friends who are. I have no comments. They're humans; they're like me. I support them. But one thing, if I have to speak about something, I feel like—that—I feel like if they want to do something to their bodies, it's up to them. But sometimes I feel like we could use money—certain monies—on something else that's more important. So I support them, but at the same time, I feel like I want to use money on something else.

BAK: Well, there's a statistic I read that all the money that's been spent for any treatment or—

NM: But I'm not against it.

BAK: I know. I'm just—

NM: Yeah, yeah.

BAK: —No, no, that's fine—for working with transitioning people, is just a very small percentage of what the military spends on Viagra [medication used to treat erectile dysfunction].

[A 2016 Department of Defense-commissioned study published by the Rand Corp. concluded "the implication is that even in the most extreme scenario that we were able to identify...we expect only a 0.13% (8.4 million out of \$6.2 billion) increase in healthcare spending." According to an analysis by the Military Times: By contrast, total military spending on erectile dysfunction medicines amounts to \$84 million annually — 10 times the cost of annual transition-related medical care for active duty transgender

servicemembers. The military spends \$41.6 million annually on Viagra alone, according to the Military Times analysis — roughly five times the estimated spending on transition-related medical care for transgender troops]

NM: That's what I was thinking, it's—I don't know the [unclear], I don't know the budget, because that's not my thing, but if you want to cover everyone, like I said, if it's the smallest percentage, okay. But like I said, I'm not there to make decisions, and I respect my friends, they're like my family to me, and that's their decision, and I support them. So I really don't have much.

BAK: Well, while you were in, everything became open for women, including infantry and things like that, and being on submarines. Do you have any thoughts on that. I mean, I would imagine there would be some discussions.

NM: Yeah. I actually think it was pretty cool. Like, in the seventies when they opened up for the females, for us Seabees, I mean, that's pretty cool. I know that there's something that there might be in conflict, like—I want to say this, but then this also—Team Rubicon proved it wrong, but then everyone's maturity—For example, when people mess, or where people go—was it mess, is that one where people sleep? No, berthing; mess is eating. Berthing's where people sleep.

BAK: Yes.

NM: Right now, they still have, so called, segregation. I say segregation, but it's true; males sleep with males, and females with females.

BAK: It is segregation.

NM: Yes. But you expect them to be mature, but some of them are not; some people do things that they shouldn't do while on duty. But Team Rubicon has taught me that it takes the right people to sleep in the same room together without going through that. And maybe one day the military can look up to the Team Rubicon [unclear]. Because Team Rubicon, that's what we do, one big open bay, female and female, next to each other, but they don't do anything that they shouldn't.

BAK: Okay.

NM: That's one thing that I still see the military doing, is males stay with males, females stay with females.

BAK: Alright. A lot of former military have an adjustment period to civilian world, and also veterans who are going to college. What are your thoughts around that? Did you have an adjustment period, and do you feel—

NM: I did.

BAK: You did?

NM: I did. I remember when I first started coming to UNCG, I didn't really have much thought about GTCC. No, I think I kind of did, because you can tell the difference between the study habits, or the work ethics, of the younger ones. [chuckles]

BAK: Yes.

NM: Oh, group projects are like the worst thing for me. Oh!

BAK: I can imagine.

NM: But I see it, I don't want to complain, but I do complain. Yes, when you hear it on the news, and then you actually experience it yourself firsthand, and you're—

BAK: You mean going to war?

NM: No, like, "These young kids are—" blah, blah, blah.

BAK: Yes, yes, got it.

NM: Yeah. [chuckles] At that time, you've got to understand they're going through a rough time, blah, blah, blah, but when you're experiencing it, I'm like—I don't want to judge, but it's so true.

BAK: Right.

NM: But—Let me get a drink of water.

BAK: Oh, yeah, sure. Sorry.

NM: No, it's okay.

BAK: I can go on for awhile.

NM: That's okay.

BAK: We are getting close to the end.

NM: [unclear] When I—I don't want to judge them, because when I start doing group projects with them and I realize that they are delaying it—not all, but a lot of them do—and I'm like, "You guys, I am doing most of the project myself. Why is that happening?" But thanks to a X-Culture—the program here called X-Culture—we were put together as a group from all over the world, and we had to collaborate with each other, and try to solve this world business problem, and—

[The X-Culture project is an innovative modern form of experiential learning predominantly in International Management and International Business, aimed at students of International Business college courses and training programs with the task of writing a business report or consulting propositions by offering business solutions for a hypothetical client]

BAK: This is in the Business School [UNCG Bryan School of Business and Economics]?

NM: Yes, yes, yes.

BAK: Okay.

NM: At first, I'm like, "Uh!" But I've learned something over the years, through all the group projects, that I am very straightforward. The very first time when I am put on a team, I'm like—I know how many minutes—how many hours a week of time do you want to spend on this?

BAK: Good.

NM: I'm very straightforward. I was like, "What do you want? Do you want a A or do you want an F?" I asked them, "What do you want?" So that way I'm not mad at them if they're not doing the work.

BAK: Is that a skill you learned in the military, or is that just the way you think?

NM: Here. Being straightforward, the military, but with the group projects here, yeah, I've learned so much of asking from Day 1, lay everything down on the table, lay the rules down, be like, "Don't feel offensive [offended] if I make all the decision when you failed to make it at this deadline."

BAK: Right.

NM: "And I'm not going to stop for you, because I'm going to keep moving forward, because there's a deadline that's—"

BAK: Yeah.

NM: Yeah. So I've learned so much, so right now I don't really complain a lot about the younger kids because I've already laid down the rules, and they don't mind as long as the work is done too.

BAK: Yeah. You're kind of taking a leadership role.

NM: Pretty much, yeah.

BAK: Okay. You're using your VA benefits for education, certainly, but for anything else? Mortgages?

NM: No, no, no, just school.

BAK: Okay. How do you think—this is kind of a big question—your life has been different because of your time in the military?

NM: Oh, yes.

BAK: How? Is there something—

NM: How is it different?

BAK: Yes.

NM: My personality, my views on the world, my views on people. I used to be one of those happy, joy, joy, la, la, la. [unclear] gets very emotional, like, happy about everything. I allowed people to step over me and stuff like that. But now it's—everyone sees that I'm different. I feel more calm. I don't go up and approach people like before.

BAK: Approach them in what way?

NM: "Hey, how are you doing?" blah, blah, blah, la, la, la.

BAK: Got it. Okay.

NM: [chuckles]

BAK: Why do you think that is? What do you do instead?

NM: I have done that when I tried to come back, but I've noticed that I—they're the wrong people.

BAK: Okay.

NM: A lot of times it's the wrong people, so I don't even do that anymore. Or sometimes—I don't know. It's just different.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I think people change too.

BAK: Sure. Do you get any services, or do you hang out at the Veterans Center?

NM: I know—Because—

BAK: Some—I'm sorry, go ahead.

NM: I feel like I'm in denial, like, at the time, but now I'm—I want to meet all the veterans I can meet, like, going out there to different organizations. But for right now I feel like, at the time, I just want to be left alone.

BAK: Sure.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: That's certainly a very common response too. Would you recommend the service to your daughter?

NM: If she wants to be. I don't forbid it or anything.

BAK: Okay. Would you recommend the service to other younger people?

NM: I would. I would. If it's for the right people. [chuckles]

BAK: If it's the right people, right. You don't want—Yeah. You've dealt with that. Alright, what does the word "patriotism" mean to you?

NM: Just be proud of who you are. Be thankful. Just be grateful for our country.

BAK: Yes.

NM: I know that our country is however you want to look at it, it could be a mess from any different viewpoints, but just be grateful, because we're beautiful—and I said this at Team Rubicon too—We're like a melting pot of all sorts of people, and that's beautiful.

BAK: Right.

NM: But it's not beautiful when all sorts of people are fighting each other.

BAK: Right, that is less beautiful.

NM: [chuckles] Yeah. But at the same time, we won't be America if it wasn't for all these conflicts too. And so, we're now evolving into a different America, and just be proud of who we are, regardless of our conflict—what do they call it, a dysfunctional family?

BAK: Yes.

NM: That's what we are; we're just a dysfunctional family.

BAK: Right.

NM: But we love each other.

BAK: We're still a family.

NM: Yeah, we're still a family.

BAK: Okay. You said last December you noticed you were having memories problems? Short term, long term?

NM: I started December when I started to be more curious about my future life goals. I mean, I already knew, but I wanted to delve more into it, and I started reading more about, like, doing—what do you call it?—the personality test, doing—just knowing who I am so I can fit.

BAK: Sure. Sure. Sure.

NM: I want to fit into the world that I—because this is the decision I want to do for the rest of my life. I don't want any more changes—like, constant changes.

BAK: You've had a lot now.

NM: A lot, yeah. I want to make sure that I retire in one field, not ten million fields.

BAK: Right.

NM: And it started in December, and then slowly, I think about a couple months, to three months ago, is when it started kicking in; the memories started dwindling.

BAK: You mean you were just [unclear] on certain memories? Is that what you mean?

NM: I'm forgetting.

BAK: You're forgetting short term, long term?

NM: Both.

BAK: Both.

NM: I had to do—The only way I would remember things is by my feelings; that's how I'd remember it.

BAK: Can you give me an example?

NM: Like, "Oh, this phone[?] feels good. I want—Oh, it's from my—" blah, blah, blah.

BAK: Alright, okay, so a body memory, kind of thing.

NM: Yeah. It's like the emotion; that emotion is the thing that helps keep me from remembering things. Right now it's like—I've just recently been diagnosed for a lot—not a lot—they don't even know what it is so they're guessing now, so I'm getting help through the VA now, and I'm scared that I might lose everything, because I recently realized I am forgetting [snaps fingers] like that. And I write everything now—

BAK: So it's gotten worse?

NM: It's gotten worse. I fought for it for about two months. Right now I want to say it's getting better, but I have to keep fighting it.

BAK: They have no idea what it is?

NM: They—Yes and no. They wrote something down on my paper, but when they told me, they were like, "We couldn't really narrow it down to something, so we think you have this."

BAK: Are you getting treatment for it?

NM: Right now, I am trying to find the right therapist, or right doctor.

BAK: Okay.

NM: Without going broke. [chuckles]

BAK: Right.

NM: One them didn't really accept my insurance, so that would be very expensive over time. I found another one, which I think will—I can stick with. I will see her this weekend. And then the VA, of course, I'm still doing the paperwork. It hasn't really been approved yet; I'm still waiting on their approval. Once that comes through, I can go to them as well.

BAK: Okay. Are you applying for disability?

NM: I am now.

BAK: But that hasn't come down the pike yet?

NM: Not yet.

BAK: Okay.

NM: I just started, like, last—a few weeks ago.

BAK: Okay. That's great that you're doing that.

NM: Yeah, I'm finally taking care of myself, because my self-denial was since—it's not helping now.

BAK: How is your husband and daughter dealing with it?

NM: We're keeping it away from my daughter. Hopefully, I do heal. My husband wants me to see a doctor, so that's what I'm doing now.

BAK: Okay. That's great.

NM: Yeah.

BAK: The last formal question is, is there anything in particular you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it is like to serve in the military that they may not understand or appreciate?

NM: It's very structured. Everyone knows it's structured, but it's very structured. They have a [unclear]—at almost eight o'clock, that's sunrise, you've got to stand on salute. Once you're on base, boom, just that environment changes. Your viewpoint on the world might be a little different. You might change as a person. Your—You might not have the same family and friends anymore. And you might get disabilities, or you might not come home.

BAK: Right. I don't have any other—believe it or not—formal questions. Actually, no, I have one more. Do you know the Seabee song?

NM: If I remember—I do remember.

BAK: So they still teach you all the songs?

NM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The way I sing it is different from the way they sing it, but it's so—it goes like—well, I—the way I sing it, they want it real hard-charging and stuff, but I don't sing it like that.

BAK: So you sing it more of a lullaby.

NM: More like a lullaby. It's like, [sings beginning of song] "We're the Seabees of the Navy. We can build and we can fight." Obviously, it doesn't go like that, but it's something like that. But it's been, like, how many years? But it's something like that.

BAK: That's just a random question; that's not official. I just like the Seabee song. Alright, anything else you want to add?

NM: I miss my Seabee friends. I think after this, I'm going to go reconsiliate [reconcile?] with them. [chuckles]

BAK: That's good.

NM: It's—We all have our separate lives, and we're all—we're everywhere. I want to unite with them, because it's been a while.

BAK: That's great. Okay.

NM: Thank you.

BAK: Sure. Thank you.

NM: And I'll send you the emails of the photos and stuff.

BAK: That would be wonderful.

NM: Yes, I will.

BAK: Okay, so I'll give you a CD, and then in a few months or so we'll have it transcribed, I'll send you the document, you can look it over, you can make any corrections—spellings or names—and if you decide, "Oh, I hate this—or hate this part"—I hope you don't hate the whole thing—just let me know and we'll work through it.

NM: Okay.

BAK: Alright, well, thank you very much.

[End of Interview]