

Interview with Pam Morris
Date of Interview: February 28, 2005
Interviewer: Katie Parrett
Transcriber: Katie Parrett

P: So how did you start out, what was your background in nursing?

M: I worked for the Indian Public Health Service. When I was twenty-two I decided I didn't like working for the government and a girlfriend was going to join the Army because she had some kind of arrangement where she could get a divorce if she would leave the country for a year and let this woman work at keeping her marriage intact. So Darla, that was the other nurse, joined the military and then somebody married the recruiter and he was down a nurse, so I said, Oh heck, I'll go. Just like that, Oh heck, I'll go in July of 1970. Kind of spur of the moment.

P: So you volunteered?

M: Yes, nurses were volunteers. They wanted experienced nurses and I had a couple years of experience.

P: What was your experience in?

M: In Children's Pediatrics.

P: Before you went to Vietnam, what was your perspective about the war?

M: I was against it, but I wasn't particularly involved because I was the typical kind of air-headish, you know, I was a good nurse but I didn't give any deep thought to the war. Except for the music, I listened to the music.

P: So when you decided to go it was just...

M: It was a pretty big step because my mother had already lost a son, my brother, had died a couple years, about 4 years earlier and she was very worried. I don't think I knew exactly what war really was, in fact I know I didn't.

P: How did your friends and family react, besides your mom when you decided to go?

M: They tried to talk me out of it, but then they realized, well you know, you're young, you should have an adventure.

P: So they decided to support you?

M: Yeah.

P: What was your initial reaction when you got to Vietnam?

M: Well, first I had to do basic training. Even nurses had to do six weeks of basic training and I was at Fort Sam Houston in Texas and the Australian Equestrian Team was practicing there. The Olympic team was practicing at Fort Sam. They rode horses at Fort Sam. It was where the medical training was given, so we met a lot of guys that were training to be medics. There was so much traffic on the base they had to put me, my girlfriend...a bunch of us at a hotel with a swimming pool. So we were treated really well because nurses were volunteers. They didn't pay for my schooling. We were experienced nurses and we were volunteers, so they treated us pretty well. But we did have to go to basic training and we did have to shoot guns and we had to learn about nuclear warfare. We did have to do all sorts of surgical procedures on goats. We had to camp out one night, it was awful.

P: This was all to prepare you for what it was like in Vietnam?

M: Right, we had to be soldiers even though they gave us a quick six-week basic training.

P: Do you think six weeks was adequate?

M: Yes, except it was actually some fun. So once again I was not prepared.

P: So when you got to Vietnam, was it culture shock?

M: It was culture shock because when we went to Vietnam I only packed my Army clothes because I thought that was the right thing to do. So here I was twenty-two almost twenty-three and I only packed my green Army fatigues and Army stuff and I got to Vietnam and immediately it was all oriental people in the street. I mean like Vietnamese everywhere and I hadn't even thought of the Vietnamese to be honest with you. So we were in a bus with about fifty GIs, men, and we were taken in to headquarters in Saigon and [Bien Hoa] Airbase and we got our papers and where we were going to go, and I was going to go north. So they put me on an airplane and then we landed at the airfield in Quang Tri, which was nine miles from the DMZ. Then a helicopter from the hospital came, a dustoff helicopter, they're the ones that picked up the guys in the fields who were wounded, they came to get me and it was Geoff's helicopter, my husband's helicopter, my future husband's helicopter but he thought it was stupid going across the street just to pick up a nurse so he refused to go. So just some people from the hospital came [unclear] a helicopter flight. But otherwise it was a tremendous amount of Vietnamese people supporting the Army, helping the Army probably trying to infiltrate the base too. They were all over, it was their country.

P: Did you feel welcomed in when you first got there?

M: I felt welcomed into my unit because they had a couple helicopter crashes in the previous couple weeks when they lost men and so the medical unit was really depressed, the base

was very depressed. So it was nice to be a new nurse because they really valued us. Just as people too, not just sex objects just as people. Everybody wanted to be my friend because there were so few American women. It was very welcoming, it was very warm.

P: How about your living and working conditions, like the facilities. Were they adequate?

M: Well, that's a little conflict I had with the Army. The Army had an old hospital that was originally a MASH unit and it was made out of corrugated metal and then wood strips around it, it was very hot. The Marines ten years earlier had started, 6 years earlier had started a children's hospital. I guess they started it about '64-65. That was kind of the stepchild of the Army MASH unit. I was assigned, because of my experience I was a pediatric nurse, I was assigned to that unit. There was one another American nurse, two other American nurses, one had her Master's and she was like head nurse and then there was a girl from Cuba, she was actually from Miami she was a Cuban-American, she really was from Cuba. She and I were the nurses and we were like looked down upon by the Army brass at that base because we took care of Vietnamese children.

P: That was looked down upon?

M: Yeah, unfortunately, it wasn't looked down upon by the men but by the authorities, the colonels and the majors.

P: Was it seen as not really necessary?

M: Yeah, that's right, that's exactly right. Our babies just slept on little mattresses; they didn't have any sheets or anything.

P: So did you work often on just children and not soldiers?

M: For the first six months I only worked with the babies. A few times I complained, I said I'd really like to work in the emergency room because they called it R&E receiving and emergencies and so sometimes they would let me spend [some of the] afternoon over in the emergency room which was actually right next door to the children's hospital.

P: Did you feel less pressure being in the children's hospital?

M: Yes, I worked with only Vietnamese. There were only the three of us RNs. So we all had Vietnamese student nurses and we were their teachers. And there was a language problem but they were wonderful. They loved me and they cooked for me every morning after morning [share].

P: Were you ever nervous about enemy infiltration into the bases?

M: Yes. One night there was a fire right outside the children's hospital and we had to take all the kids and put them in these sandbagged bunkers and nobody came to help us. So the Vietnamese nurses who were quite little and the three of us we took our little children and their IV's and went into the bunker. It was just a tiny little room with sandbags all around it. But it was pretty safe and then of course the kids were crying. It was not very much fun and it was hot. Then one of the Vietnamese nurses, she was so brave. She said to me **Daiwe**, that was [the] lieutenant, she said isn't it time for their medications. And I just looked at her and went, Oh my gosh. But she was right and she was willing to go help me get them. So she and I went out there and we got our medicines and brought them back. I just thought she was so brave. But those Vietnamese girls were born into war. It was 1970, they were born in the fifties, they were born into war. They'd known nothing but war, and they were still nice people.

P: Did you learn to deal with the language barrier? Did you learn Vietnamese?

M: I learned the appropriate phrases, like I learned some swear words. Then, of course the little cajoling phrases like how to get children to eat. Because you know the food we gave them, unless the girls gave some food too, the kids got Army food. It was harder for them, it was cooked food but it wasn't what they were used to, you know it wasn't oriental food.

P: How did you feel about your living conditions?

M: We were individually housed in little 8x10 huts, raised up off the ground because it was a country that suffered typhoons like we have hurricanes here. It had corrugated metal roofs and we had iron beds. The iron beds were so hot that if we slept all day with the fan on us and we got up in the afternoon to get ready to go to work the beds were too hot to touch. It was really hot. Very, very hot...no air-conditioning. The hospital had air-conditioning but it wasn't very good.

P: So I know about the monsoon seasons with torrential rain...

M: We did have a typhoon. We did have a hurricane, but they call it a typhoons because it [unclear].

P: How was it like working it that?

M: Well, it was wet and moldy and hot and buggy. I got in trouble because I wore flip-flops across somebody's field that was like six inches of water and I got screamed at by someone who hated me because I worked with the Vietnamese. He made me go back and get my boots.

P: So you said for six months you worked with the children. Where did you go after the six months?

M: Then I went south to Phu Bai, which is right near Hue. I went to Hue many times. I worked with the intensive care, I worked in the Intensive Care Unit.

P: How was that?

M: That was totally different. Totally different, the soldiers were quite messed up. Occasionally we'd have a Vietnamese civilian that was hit by an Army vehicle and we would take care of him then. It was mostly GIs that had suffered tragic accidents and I wonder where they are today. Whenever I see a homeless person that is crippled I wonder if he was a vet.

P: So you never got to see the end result?

M: No. We kept them in intensive care for a few days and then they were taken to Japan or Guam, preparation to go back to the United States.

P: Was it hard not knowing, having that closure?

M: Very hard. I still remember this one sergeant, Sergeant **Cherry** that [his] head was burned. He talked about his kids and we taped a picture of his kids above the bed. I know that he must have died, but he was such a wonderful warm person. He just wanted to live but he was burned tremendous burns...awful burns.

P: Did it give you hope to see these people that were trying or was it discouraging...?

M: No, it was very discouraging because they were our age. It was hard for me to nurse there dealing with GIs your own age that were so horribly injured. Injuries that we

couldn't make better. See as a nurse, probably you'll find as a teacher, you want to make it all better and you can't.

P: During your typical day how long were your shifts?

M: Twelve hours, we had to work twelve-hour shifts six days a week and of course if we were busy we worked more. There wasn't anything else to do anyway. War is pretty boring if you're not working.

P: Did you ever have rush times where it was just crazy on hours for long periods of time?

M: Because I didn't work very often in the emergency room, when the helicopters came in with people I usually didn't pitch in there too often. Our Intensive Care Unit would get very busy when there was a push and the GIs were having a big front, and there'd be a battle nearby. Then we'd get a lot of people in and the surgeons would be working all night, all day and all night we'd get people in intensive care.

P: Was shrapnel typically what most of the soldiers suffered from or was it multiple things...?

M: It was worse things like bombings, like they are having in Iraq now. Bombings with limbs missing. I had one patient who had no legs below his pelvis. He was our age and one girl made a terrible mistake. She read a letter from home and the mother, this is so strange to this day it hurts me because I was there when she read it to him, the mother sent a picture of the boy in his bathing suit with her. They were from the South and she wrote how beautiful his legs were and of course, the girl started crying right away. The boy didn't know he was missing his legs because we had a metal cradle over him with a sheet over him. He may have known but we don't know. The girl, the nurse, started

crying and then of course he didn't know what was wrong. This was very tragic, all sorts of tragic, interpersonal thing like that. With a lot of loss of life too...bleeding and hemorrhaging. Medicine wasn't as advanced back then as it is now.

P: Did you feel that you had adequate supplies there?

M: Oh no, and I opened my mouth to complain. Our medicines were all out of date. Three to six months to a year out of date. The drug companies said, Ugh, that's fine, we just put stamps on them because we have to comply with government but they're fine.

P: Do you think it was because it was for the government and not customers paying for it?

M: Yes, the government made a deal and they got it for less. That happens all the time, if people want to dump stuff they sell it to the military. It was a shame. I hope it's not going on now.

P: Was it frustrating having no control over these things?

M: Well there was something else bad that would happen. In the children's hospital, I want to say Margerita...I can't quite remember the girl's name...she and I let the Army equipment get stolen because the Army chose to close that children's hospital, that's why they moved me. They were going to send all of the little pediatric stuff to Guam. A lot of it was rubber and it would just rot, so we told our Vietnamese friends they could come and take it. We told them how to do it. Nobody could prove it was us, but that's how the Army thought. They were just going to store the stuff for the next war and it was baby stuff that would rot. So we let it be given away.

P: So it would be better taken care of...

M: Oh yea, people could use it. We went to the local hospital many times and they'd have stuff from the French back from the forties and fifties.

P: Was there a lot of political agenda going on during this time?

M: Well, of course for us they didn't like, the Army brass didn't like us working with the children they just couldn't help but close that hospital down. So they transferred me, actually I was the only pediatric nurse so when they transferred me they said they had nobody to take care of the hospital, which of course wasn't true, but they closed it.

P: Did you ever feel influenced by the South Vietnamese government or have any contact with propaganda or anything like that?

M: We did because of course we had people do our laundry for us, they did it in a river. The Vietnamese people would get little jobs with the Army and taking care of the Army support people. So I'd give stuff to them sometimes too like laundry soap just little things I could give to the Vietnamese like food and [cokes] and stuff. Well, I didn't deal too much with the Army brass of the military in South Vietnam but one time I went to a club in Saigon. Is this okay to talk about? Strange club. I had just gone to Saigon to see it because it is a very beautiful, old French city and it was beautiful. Even in war it was beautiful. Even the buildings were beautiful, huge boulevards like you would think of in France. I met this guy that worked for the CIA at the Army CID and we went to a club. All the Army and military presidential people were in this club that we went. It was behind a little food place. You went through a velvet curtain and there were a lot of military people and they were all dressed in tuxedos, just like you would think of back in America. It was the general and the president of South Vietnam. It was like, they

weren't suffering. They were dressed up. The women...oh my gosh the women were full of jewels and gowns and everything, [in the middle of the war]. Their entertainment was a Korean stripper. That was the entertainment.

P: It must have been frustrating seeing the constant hypocrisy.

M: Oh, it was. I was really upset but he just laughed it off because he was working in Saigon, so he had seen it before.

P: So was it completely different being out on the front lines in Phu Bai...?

M: Yes and then you go and see the way their own country, their own leaders are living. It was sickening and I'm sure that happens everywhere. Then in our country, we had companies that made a tremendous amount of money. There used to be a company called Fort Philco. They got the concessions for feeding the Army or doing the water or the sewer systems or something. Anyway, millions of dollars was made by American companies in that war, just like what is happening now.

P: I've read about the amenities they sometimes had like ice cream available or Thanksgiving dinners. Did you experience that?

M: Yep. They did treat us...sometimes we had to eat B rations, which were like K rations only it was for a group. Usually the food wasn't really good. The Army had little meals called SOS..., which is shit on shingles. It was creamed something over pieces of bread and they gave us that a lot. But they did try to have a Thanksgiving and a Christmas meal. It wasn't anything special, but it was special to us back then.

P: Did it make you think that the people back home were thinking of you?

M: Yeah. They didn't make as big of a thing over it as they are doing now and they should have.

P: For helping morale?

M: Yes, that's right...it was a strange war.

P: Did you feel safe while you were there?

M: I think when you are in a bad situation you get used to it. You can get used to almost anything. And we heard gunshots all the time. We heard artillery all the time. We just felt that our GIs would take care of us the best that they could.

P: It was kind of out of your control so you didn't have the need to worry about it because there was nothing you could have done anyway?

M: We had so many GIs to protect us. That was about all we could hope for. I did some odd things like hitchhiking to Hue, and I didn't feel scared. Like I said, I was a gutsy kid. I'd be petrified now.

P: Was that how people got around was hitchhiking?

M: Yeah, hitchhiking on Army vehicles and stuff.

P: Were helicopters prevalent a lot?

M: Oh yes, helicopter rides went everywhere. One time I heard a pop pop [from gunfire]. And they told me to listen to the music. There were four guys in the helicopter and they said, Oh just listen to the music. I thought, Well what is that? They wouldn't tell me. As soon as they landed they told the hospital staff and somebody said to me, Oh my gosh thank god you didn't get hit. I said, What do you mean. They had protected me by turning

the music up in my helmet so that I wouldn't know what was happening. That's how the GIs were. They were great, they were wonderful.

P: So there was security knowing that they were there and trying to cover you from as much of the things as they could.

M: That's right.

P: Were you nervous, were you worried afterwards after finding out?

M: Oh yes, very worried. He said, well weren't you happy not knowing, and I said you know, I think I was.

P: Were you sad to change locations from the children's hospital?

M: Yeah, I liked the people up in Quang Tri. I liked the Vietnamese. We had a doctor with us from Haiti, he was the best pediatrician I ever worked with. He was actually a pediatrician and that's another thing the Army hated. They hated having the children's hospital actually having a doctor and the people were not nice to him. So hardly anybody in the GI hospital was nice to him but he made friends easily with the Vietnamese. And he invited us with him...we went to restaurants in town; we went out in town with the Vietnamese. So our experience was very different, we liked the Vietnamese. We were welcomed by them whereas regular GIs in the Army wasn't. It was hard to have an occupying army, people don't like it.

P: But they appreciated you because you were helping their own?

M: Yes.

P: But American GIs didn't mind you helping the Vietnamese children or did they have a problem with it?

M: Not usually. Not generally. Some of them did, but not generally. The Americans have big hearts. The engineers would put new roofs on for us and build little buildings because the hospital was just these crumby little buildings.

P: Do you think you guys made a big impact on the Vietnamese and made life better for them?

M: Well, we think we gave them better medical care. But the horrors of a country being at war for like thirty years is very defeating because I don't think they had a lot of hope.

P: It must be hard to have hope when you are at war for thirty years.

M: That's right. Families were broken up and kids would die alone without any families there but us. It was very sad, very sad.

P: Did you have much contact with your family and friends back home?

M: No, but I could call on radio if I waited hours. They had a very primitive communications, not what they have today. We would have to wait and call at night and it would be patched from land mass to land mass and then eventually the phone would reach my mother and I could talk to her.

P: To Japan and Hawaii...?

M: Yes, it wasn't a regular phone system.

P: Did you find that when people actually got mail that it was extremely delayed?

M: Mail was special. I met my husband there and Geoff liked to go get the mail. He would take an ambulance and drive and get the mail. Sometimes I would deliver the mail in my civilian clothes and the GI patients just loved that. American women were so appreciated over there. Friends and being an American woman, mail was very special. We all had

our little cubbies, our little mail slots in our place of work. Mail was special and Geoff liked to deliver it to people.

P: To give them that [hospitable] moment?

M: Yes, people loved mail. And you could get food. When Geoff went home he would send me cans of chicken noodle soup, that's what I loved.

P: Did he go home before you went home?

M: Yes, he went home about six months earlier.

P: Did you meet anyone there that strongly changed your experience?

M: Well, all of the Vietnamese people I worked with, I only have very warm feelings for them, so I'm glad their country is doing well now. I met my husband, which is the most special thing. I think the main thing between meeting my husband and just seeing the goodness of the American GIs because they didn't have to do anything for us in the children's hospital but they did.

P: So what you experienced was a positive experience?

M: Well, yes, but I didn't tell you about all the drug using in the intensive care unit. When I went down there to Phu Bai, which is outside Hue. I didn't like what I saw, there was a lot of drugs. They had a huge drug problem with patients. One nurse told me it was so disgusting, you would give someone a shot and immediately turn around and five guys crawling on the floor trying to get that syringe. I didn't experience that working in intensive care. We did have [druggies], but they were pretty well gone. We had one guy code [die] on us, where his heart stopped, thirty-some times. One of the doctors said I

just don't know if I should keep trying to bring him back, so eventually the kid did die.

He sniffed cocaine and part of his nose was actually eaten away.

P: I know in Vietnam with opium and with the drugs like marijuana they had a lot of readily available drugs...

M: Plus worse, like heroin and cocaine.

P: Plus the medical supplies like morphine and Darvon...

M: In intensive care I didn't have that problem because they couldn't get out of bed. We did get the consequences of people that had taken too much heroin.

P: Was it frustrating seeing kids come in there like that when their compatriots were out there fighting?

M: That's right. They were only there a year and they would succumb to these evils. But I was from a middle class area and I had no experience with drugs before I went to Vietnam. Girls would line up against the fences, talking to GIs, selling their sisters and selling drugs. They all sold drugs.

P: Is that what the Vietnamese people had come to, for women to get money?

M: I guess so.

P: I know R&R was available every six months...

M: Well, maybe that's how it was worded, but you got two weeks together out of the year.

P: Did you travel?

M: Yes, I went to Hong Kong and it was so much fun. I went with a girlfriend and of course we made friends right away because the Army had a deal with the hotel so all the people on R&R were at that hotel. It was a wonderful experience.

P: Was it good to recuperate there and revive you allowing you to...?

M: Yes, it was nice to see the decadence, we had sheets. We had sandals made for us, shirts made for us. Hong Kong tailors are brilliant. They'll measure you, bunches of different measurements memorize them, write it down and make you your clothes in a couple days.

P: It must have been so nice to feel like you're back home again.

M: Oh and to go on dates, actually date. The GIs would take us on a date and we'd go out to eat and walk around and look... It was wonderful to go to Hong Kong, I wouldn't mind going back.

P: So it was a good thing the Army did provide for you guys, R&R?

M: Oh, I think it was very...spouses they would meet in Hawaii or Australia; I think it was a wonderful thing.

P: To give people a chance to see people from back home, to get a chance to get away from the front lines?

M: Yes, because the tour of duty in Vietnam was only twelve months, which was fair.

P: Do you know many people that re-enlisted?

M: Yes, they were usually the odd ones. Usually something was wrong with them. Why would a young man want to sign up for three tours in Vietnam? He'd say, oh because I could kill gooks...when you heard people had been there two and three times, you just knew something was off with them.

P: So it was normal for kids wanting to go home and you knew someone was a little bit off when they were excited to come back?

M: Right, that's just not normal. It was not a good situation. There was danger and then there was downtime where drugs were so prevalent. There was nothing to do. There was nothing to do.

P: Do you think the Army could have better, what could have been done to make it better?

M: You know I don't know because now [they're] in a war with a Muslim country. I don't know because we did have beers. We could go to our little Officer's Club or I would go to the Enlisted Men's Club. There was opportunities to socialize. In a war there's just a lot of down time. It's like working in an emergency room, there are some very exciting moments but a lot of it is just waiting around. And that is not a real healthy thing for people without the resources, I read books.

P: You were probably one of the tamer ones.

M: Well, yes. There is a lot of ways you can get in trouble. I went out with one guy one night and we decided to steal a jeep. Of course I thought it was kind of funny, I knew nothing would happen to me. But if he was caught he would have been in big trouble.

P: But you weren't caught?

M: No, we weren't. I guess we should be proud of our resourceful GIs (laughing). Another time I went out and somebody and we stole a helicopter. Well, it was his helicopter but we just took it off in the middle of the night, which of course wasted fuel. It was a really stupid thing to do. That's the kind of stuff that people do because they're so bored.

P: Now did the military brass mind, were there strict controls over the nurses and soldiers?

M: Pretty much and I was not supposed to be with enlisted people. Of course I was in love with my husband, my future husband and so most of my friends were enlisted. I'm in touch with some of them today, a few of them today.

P: How would you describe the morale of the soldiers? I know that this was during the end of the war.

M: Well, yes it was. We knew we hadn't accomplished anything. The morale wasn't that good.

P: Because by this point we had been in for six years...

M: Yes, it was just pointless. It was really stupid.

P: You guys didn't know it was the end of the war...

M: Right, but the resources weren't...we didn't go to work with everything that we could have. You shouldn't mess with people's lives like that.

P: Did you have a particularly significant moment that changed your experience?

M: Well, I always think of this young NVA soldier I had. He was from China, he walked down from China through all the tunnels and stuff and he was very badly hurt. I looked at his wallet and he had one of those little family pictures and I had determined that I was going to treat him with decency because he was only fifteen. I got in a lot of trouble over that. No one would help me until a day or two later one GI medic came to help me. This kid was big, the Chinese are bigger than the Vietnamese, so it was very hard for me to take care of this boy who was severely wounded and without anybody helping me move him around [the] bed but nobody would. This one kid who was only about twenty, I still remember him. Brian, he was really good looking kid. He was just a kid from Georgia.

He said, You know, Lieutenant I'll help you. And so from then on it was a lot easier.

When the interrogators came I wouldn't let them interrogate him until I had taken care of him for the morning, like change his dressings and give him his medications. I got in a lot of trouble over that. I'll never forget that. The kindness of the one Georgia medic versus the educated Army officers who came to interrogate him. They just were brutal to him. And then I found out that he was probably killed before he even left the base. That the Vietnamese military probably killed him before he was even out of the base. All that care I had given him for two weeks and I stood up to him and I got yelled at and rank pulled on me and everything.

P: The compassion that you felt from the soldier from Georgia and then to have that turned around...

M: My husband said, Oh he didn't even make it to [leave the base], probably. I just hoped that somebody in North Vietnam who had a prisoner and dealing with a prisoner, would maybe would show them a tiny bit of kindness. I now have a good friend that was a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He doesn't bear any hate. He was with John McCain [Vietnam POW, U.S. Senator, R-Arizona], he doesn't bear any hate and he's gone back to Vietnam. So I hope that somebody...I just couldn't mistreat a fifteen year-old kid, he was just a kid.

P: You were hoping they were treating Americans the same way?

M: I just kept hoping that if I could give compassion that maybe somebody else could too.

P: Were you a rarity to see no difference between Vietnamese and Americans, you treated them the same or tried to?

M: Well, my friends of the nurses were like me. Wherever you go there are cliques, which you'll find that when you start teaching. There are cliques and if you are willing to care about somebody that's not cool, then you'll only have friends like you. It won't be easy to find friends not like you. One time we had an emergency in the Intensive Care Unit. It was a Saturday night and the doctors of course managed to always have whiskey and had parties with girls. We called over to the doctor's huts and we said, You know, this man has to have surgery, he's bleeding...please come over. They said, No, no, no...there's incoming. There was incoming into the base, but he could have come over and he refused to come. So the patient died. I vaguely remember that it was a Vietnamese patient that had been in a car accident with an American tank. That was common. That was the first time I had worked with a doctor like that.

P: So it wasn't prevalent thing to have...?

M: No, doctors might have made some remarks but they still did their medical obligation. Then this guy had more good luck. He was drunk and fell off his sandbagged hooch, and he broke his arm and he got to go home. He's probably a multi-billionaire now; just slinging through life you know, no dirt sticks to him.

P: So it seems like you had a positive experience it seems like you have done a lot of good.

M: I don't know that I would say that it was positive. I feel like it was good because nurses had the opportunity to do good all the time. I met some wonderful people but I'm still worried about the people whose lives were so changed. Without a good support group, I mean if you don't have an arm or a leg, without a good support group how do you

recover? That's why I don't like to see all the homeless because I wonder with a lot of them if they're Vietnam vets.

P: Were there a lot of problems with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

M: Yes and they used self-medication with drugs and alcohol [as soon as they learned their country had turned their back on them].

P: Vietnam was...not the forgotten war but the war [where U.S. Citizens] that had its back turned on them [veterans]. Did you guys know while you were in Vietnam about the reaction back home?

M: I think we did. It's a defense mechanism to not be haunted by it. We didn't have the internet or TV like the guys have today so it was easy for us to just believe whatever we were told. We had a newspaper but the newspaper was the Army's *Stars and Stripes* so what was written there had to have been approved by the Army.

P: So it was censored?

M: So maybe that was better.

P: Would you have rather not known. Was it more uplifting to think that people were supporting you rather than knowing that they weren't?

M: Well, yeah, we would get angry. There was anger that we were in a situation like that. Of course I was volunteer so I didn't suffer the anger but the young men that were drafted they were taken out of their lives and put into a war that they realized didn't have any purpose. You could see by 1970 that we weren't taking ground. There were still some big pushes where they would push into trying to take more territory and clean it up. It was obvious it wasn't very successful.

P: Now did you guys have good communications within Vietnam? Did you know about the air strikes that were happening and the kinds of moves that were happening in other...?

M: Only in our part of the country, the northern part of the country. But that was right near North Vietnam so it was a very significant area. We'd meet people all the time, we'd meet helicopter and Air Force people. There was an airbase near us and they would tell us about other parts of the country.

P: What type of person do you think was most affected by the war. Was it the infantrymen, the medics?

M: Well, the infantry men said they liked being on the ground, they wouldn't fly in those machines and the medics said God you guys have it rough, I wouldn't stay one night on the ground. I think the infantry did. They would actually have to walk over land mines and fields where people were shooting at them. I can't imagine how they would feel. I mean, I heard them talking and they would take some terrible injuries.

P: I know about the land mines with the Bouncing Betty's and the punji sticks. Did you see a lot of casualties from those?

M: That's right. Yes, of course I hated giving outdated antibiotics. For us, we only saw the guys for a few days and then they were airvaced out so we don't really know the result of what we did.

P: You did the best you could with what you had...

M: We would pump the regular Army nurses that worked at Walter Reed because eventually for rehab they would probably end up at Walter Reed in Washington. This one guy wrote our head nurse he said, Oh they do wonderful things there. Don't worry, these guys are

going to be skiing. I know that it's not really true but back then I tried to think it was. I told the guys, they're going to take care of you, you're going to get a prosthetic, you're going to be fine.

P: It must have been nice for them to have someone that...

M: ...To give them hope because they were suffering. To lose a limb, it's just really... These boys were in their late teens to early twenties.

P: Was it frustrating to see such young men in there that hadn't really lived yet?

M: Yes. The general came through one day and he asked me to help him give out the Purple Hearts. You know, I wasn't regular Army so I kissed them. I kissed the guys and they're supposed to salute you and they're standing there in their little hospital gowns and their pillows and I gave them a kiss. The general liked that, he thought it was very good.

P: It must have been nice for them to see someone actually caring about them.

M: It was. They loved the nurses. We were just treated like princesses because there wasn't very many of us.

P: That's reassuring to hear that.

M: There was a lot of good in probably all people but I couldn't really communicate with the Vietnamese so I saw a lot of good in our American GIs too.

P: That's awesome because you do hear negative things more than positive things about this war.

M: Well, there are negative things. Like if they wanted, the tankers, they would stick their hands up out of the hatchet. I guess you just didn't know what the point of the war was, there didn't seem to be any reason to be there.

P: You made the best of what you had...

M: Yes, but some kids can't. Everybody is not created equal. Some people didn't have the fortitude to stay [focused].

P: Were there people who purposely injured themselves to go home?

M: There were and there was prejudice against them. There would almost have to be or the discipline would break down. They shouldn't have done it.

P: Did you see incidences of fragging and people taking over?

M: There was a couple deaths on our base from fragging.

P: Was that treated severely when that was found out?

M: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Discipline is very important in the Army. People complain about it. Actually, when you want people do to the unthinkable there has to be discipline. There has to be real strong discipline. The Army has since relaxed some of its ways of dealing with young people. Its relaxed some of their...basic training is a little bit easier now. It's a little more humane.

P: Do you think that they trained you adequately for this war psychologically, mentally, physically?

M: Perhaps not psychologically. There wasn't a lot of psychological help. I was surprised at that. It wasn't easy to get a counselor or a psychologist.

P: Was it looked down upon?

M: Yeah, it would be looked down upon. The Army is very macho, you know when you think about it has to be kind of macho because how could you do those things if you

didn't think you were pretty superior? The Marines, of course, were the worst. They were the most superior.

P: Did you have lots of conflicts between...

M: No, as a woman I hardly had any conflicts. I was always treated with respect.

P: Were there complications between Marines and the Army GIs?

M: Not that I saw. They usually worked in different areas. I met some Marine guys who worked with the Australians and the Australians were a real fun-loving group. The ones I met were just like you pictured them, cocky and funny. Bigger than life. There were some Australians working in our town, our base.

P: So did you have people from all over the place?

M: I met quite a few people. There were people from South Korea. I met some Europeans that were there. I met some Quakers, Quaker volunteers from Sweden. I believe they were from Sweden. They were working in a leprosy unit as volunteers, they working in a leprosy hospital in Vietnam.

P: Do you regret your decision to volunteer and go?

M: No, it didn't destroy my life. I didn't suffer Post-Traumatic Stress like a lot of guys. But I think women are stronger anyway. I really think women can handle more. Being a nurse, I was not used to it but I was more comfortable with damaged bodies.

P: Because you guys got the after-product of it and you didn't actually see the shooting and the killing, but it must have been hard to do that everyday?

M: Very hard. The injuries were just horrendous. It was just unbelievable what those guns and bombs will do...and what the land mines will do. It was just unbelievable how [it

would tear up] a human body. I saw a doctor cut open the heart and pull the heart out and try to massage it and try to give the boy life, but it didn't work.

P: What was the hardest obstacle you had to overcome while in Vietnam?

M: Probably working with the Vietnamese for the first six months, that was kind of a little hard. There was kind of a little black mark over me because I worked with the Vietnamese. It wasn't so traumatic that it would ruin the experience for me. I didn't like the Army rules, I thought they were really stupid. I'd get in trouble for all sorts of things like not wearing my hat, not remembering to salute. Then I would try to complain about stuff like the medicines being out of date and nobody seemed to care, but they sure cared about their rules.

P: So when you enlisted, you were a volunteer. You were a civilian not a...

M: Yes I was a civilian. They didn't pay for my education, I just volunteered as a lark. Just said, Oh I'll go.

P: But you still had to adhere to their dress code and things like that?

M: Yes, we still had to do that for discipline. I guess it would be hard if you had a bunch of people and a certain select few didn't have to follow the rules. I look at that now as an adult but when I was in my twenties I just hated it. I thought it was so stupid.

P: But you also volunteered for it...

M: Katie...

P: No, you volunteered you should have been given that freedom.

M: That's exactly what we thought. We thought we should be treated a little bit different by the Army. The guys treated us great but the Army brass and the Army system did not treat us any differently.

P: They considered you just another GI?

M: Yes.

P: Did you want to go home?

M: Yes. I even told them. I said I'm mentally unfit to serve. That's when Geoff went home. They said, Well you can go down to Saigon and work. In Saigon the nurses wore white uniforms and stockings and looked very professional. I said, Oh, heck no. I'll just stay.

P: So you stayed?

M: Yes.

P: Were you glad?

M: Yes, I'm glad I did my commitment.

P: So when you were finally able to go back home were people sad to see you go?

M: Yes, there was a little party...I had a little party. They took my picture and they gave me this little plaque. They had a regular wooden plaque, they would give each other wooden plaques somebody made. It was just very nice. We had a little going away party like you would here but it was very primitive. We didn't have anything to eat. Might have a beer. There were no goodies, no snacks or anything like that.

P: If you wanted something like that would you have to go to a PX and buy it?

M: They never had the stuff so your family would have to send it to you. Of course, a lot of it would get stolen or it would be rotten.

P: So the PX didn't have anything available?

M: No, the PX actually did have tampax, which is actually was very important thing if you think about it. The GIs would clean their M-16s with tampax so it was very hard to get. Geoff, my husband, because he had four sisters he used to go buy tampax for everybody when it came in because we didn't always have it. It was in short supply and the Army didn't really prepare adequately for that. They weren't used to deploying women very much to places like that. Even in Europe I guess the supply lines were a little easier. It was a little harder to supply Vietnam.

P: Do you think that the military has learned from the Vietnam War and the mistakes they made and tried to correct those?

M: I think they've learned a lot about trying to make the soldiers feel respected. The President went to Thanksgiving dinner last year and I think he should have gone. I think they have. I think they did learn a lot. Bob Hope was the one that treated us with respect by coming. He gave us a performance there that I went to. It was nice to see the President go visit the troops. I think they're fed better, McDonalds is feeding them. I don't know if that's better (laughing). They are realizing because some things you have to adapt, even though you can make these people go and serve you still have to treat them with some respect. Where they didn't realize that in Vietnam.

P: When Bob Hope came and people like that came did it make you sad remembering home, that you weren't in America or did it give you renewed sense?

M: We felt very patriotic and it was fun. It was a fun day. It was an exciting time. Miss America came and her makeup was dripping. You know how beautiful they are and they

wear so much makeup. I remember making some snide remarks about her makeup but she actually was a kind girl. She cried in between visits, she wasn't prepared. She was a college girl from the middle of America. She was not prepared for just being landed in Vietnam and having to put on a pretty face and visit all these people. I realize how hard it was for those people.

P: Do you think that when you came back, when you got back to America, how were you treated when you first came home?

M: Well, the joke was that you had to take your uniforms off, you didn't fly across country. Even though the Army sent you home and paid for your way home, you didn't get sick day pay for our way home. We took our uniforms off. They took us back when we left the Army in the Seattle area, Tacoma Air Force area and then we had to change our clothes because the feeling about the war was so strong that we couldn't wear our uniforms home on the plane. Coming home from Seattle to Chicago I had to wear civilian clothes, and all the guys did too. It was a culture shock.

P: When you came back home was it hard to adapt back?

M: It was very hard. It was very hard, of course I thought most people were clueless and they hadn't done any suffering. I kind of have a bad feeling about this war that we haven't done any suffering except for the families who sent soldiers to war. It seems like when you go to war there should be some suffering at home, there should be some deprivation and there isn't any and there wasn't then. They were calling the GIs names. Of course the drug problem became pretty bad but I think the Army probably could have

done more with counselors and more psychologists. Perhaps had some better entertainment for the troops. There was lots of down time in Vietnam.

P: Did you feel that you were appreciated for the sacrifices you made?

M: No.

P: You felt under appreciated?

M: Yes.

P: Did people just not realize what you had given up going there?

M: Yes. They looked at you like you were a criminal. It was very sad. People don't do that now but they did back then. They did, they looked at you like you did something wrong.

P: Do you feel that they grouped the bad instances that had happened and they parlayed that into everybody?

M: Yeah, it might be a normal human thing, I don't know. But yes they did. They thought that all the GIs did bad stuff. Well, in war there are a lot of bad things that happen and a lot of mistakes made. I think some of those things like the My Lai massacre; that meanness that was shown was probably not very common. People just make mistakes but mistakes aren't deliberate. A lot of them are out of fear, [you have to] protect yourself.

P: Because [in] this war the people that you were fighting for [and against] looked the same.

M: Yes, that's right.

P: It was hard to tell the enemy...

M: That's true. There were strict rules about what you could give the Vietnamese on the base because they could make bombs out of it, just like the terrorists today. They could

do something with Tide laundry soap, I don't know what it was but they could do something with Tide laundry soap. So we weren't supposed to give them laundry soap. You know, I think back and there were some aberrations of meanness but they were aberrations. I know one soldier emptied his Cobra helicopter 102-millimeter guns or something into hillsides and I got some children patients out of it when he did that. On the way back they had to empty their guns, they didn't land with them. He just did it into a hillside without even thinking. But I'm not sure that was mean, it's probably just stupid. I mean these kids were all in their early twenties [using weapons].

P: Do you think they were ready for things of such a serious magnitude?

M: No.

P: Do you think it would have been a different war if it was fought with older soldiers?

M: Yeah, and that's what's happening now in fighting now and perhaps they are making better relations with the populace as much as they can in Iraq now. There was not any effort to be friends with the Vietnamese, we there in their country to do what was our agenda. It was our agenda not the Vietnamese. So the Vietnamese hated the North Vietnamese too but ultimately they would be reunited. They were the same culture, the same people.

P: Do you think the South Vietnamese wanted the reunification?

M: I'll bet they did, but when I was there, no, they hated their northern cousins. But when you talked to them privately they all had family up there. It was a bizarre situation and we shouldn't have been there.

P: Do you think we were there because of the government of South Vietnam wanted distance so they might have coerced their followers into hating the North Vietnamese?

M: Perhaps. Perhaps. We had some domino theory that we had to save the world from Communism, which is such a strange system and it eats away at itself anyway. Terrible mistakes.

P: Do you think any good came out of that war?

M: Well, the medical care improved and in war it seems that the medical care becomes more efficient and it translates over into the civilians. There are better prosthetics now. There's better helicopters taking car accident victims to hospitals. There are better systems with massive trauma. A lot of that stuff comes out of a war. Much more efficient. A lot of advances come from war; medical and science advances come from war. But it ruined a lot of lives too. A lot of GIs suffered Post-Traumatic Stress and it's not recognized.

P: I know during Vietnam it was just coming out that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was prevalent with soldiers. I know at the end of World War II...

M: In World War I.

P: They didn't even realize it back then.

M: Some people did but no, it didn't catch on that idea that such an intense experience could damage your psyche permanently. My own husband takes anti-depressants. He didn't take them until he'd been out home almost twenty-five years.

P: It's hard to shut off being in that situation after coming home.

M: It's such a momentous event in your life that there's no way to prepare for it unless maybe you grew up in war.

P: Do you think the shock of coming back home is what triggered it sometimes in soldiers?

M: I don't know, I don't know. I think it was the shock of the war and seeing other people with such horrible wounds. You can't even imagine seeing inside people's bodies like that.

P: Did you ever get used to it, seeing the mutilation?

M: Yes, you get used to it. You can get used to almost anything. After a particularly bad case we would actually take a hose and wash the floor in the emergency room down, a lot of blood down the drain. The helicopters would have to be washed out.

P: Stuff that had to be done...

M: I don't think used to it is the word [it doesn't shock you so much].

P: Kind of desensitized towards it?

M: You do become desensitized towards violence, blood, anything. You get used to it.

P: Do you think that's what might have caused some of the meanness to come out because they had become desensitized?

M: Perhaps, perhaps. It's a good point Katie, I hadn't thought of that. Yes, perhaps. But then there's always rotten people everywhere. Yes, that's very true.

P: When you came home, how did your friends and family react?

M: Well, they were happy to have me home but they weren't particularly proud of me. There wasn't anybody to really talk to except people that had been there. To this day, people who have been to Vietnam are a different group of people for me. We look at

people like, were you in Vietnam and we can always tell. We have a lot of friends who were in Vietnam, my husband and I do.

P: Was it frustrating to not have your family and friends proud of you?

M: Well, my family was proud of me just because you know how families are but the population and my other young acquaintances were not impressed. They thought it was something bad.

P: Did you ever feel that you had to lie about being in Vietnam?

M: No, but I don't... Well, yes I guess you're right. I guess I do because I don't tell everybody. For years I didn't tell people I went to Vietnam.

P: Were you afraid of their reaction?

M: Yes. I didn't want to answer questions about the drugs and My Lai and all that stuff.

P: People automatically go to the bad.

M: That's right. Now with our wars in the Middle East there's more respect for the military so I'm more open now about it. That's right that was a good question. I hadn't thought about that. But you're right; I didn't tell people for years.

P: I can understand why because of the reaction back home, people weren't impressed by it and they should have been.

M: It should have been because people's lives were disrupted. We thought we were helping our country stop the spread of Communism. But then when you go over there you see all the war profiteers. That's happening here too right now in Iraq. Certain companies are making a fortune.

P: Do you feel like Vietnam was the wrong war, wrong time, wrong reasons?

M: Yes, I don't see any purpose to it and the 55,000 people that died I just feel that it was not a good thing. Except that perhaps it had brought dignity to the armed forces again. I hope it has. Because we have people now in a very hostile situation, but we are supporting the war. I hope it helps.

P: Do you feel like that Vietnam was a good lesson to learn towards future wars about how not to act?

M: Well, I'm more worried that we didn't learn it because we've already been in Iraq almost two years now. I don't know if we learned it, if our have leaders learned it. There's a saying that you get the leaders that you deserve.

P: It's kind of scary to think about that. If you could have made any changes to your duty to make it more fulfilling for you, what would you have liked to see done whether it be the Army, the government, the civilians?

M: I think more support from the people. They should have sold the war in a better way and made it a proud thing to serve, not an embarrassment.

P: Do you think the draft caused that because people were gone that were unwilling...

M: It was unwilling, yes. Probably that had a lot to do with it. It was not the war that our parents fought. Our parents fought in a war that [was] by an attack upon our country. This war was just manipulating the truth. Some companies made a lot of money over there. I don't know what the purpose of that war was.

P: Were most of the soldiers that [went] drafted?

M: I think they were. I imagine they were. A lot of kids, I met a lot of kids that were from parts of the country that I never experienced like, Nebraska. Rural country counties out

where there is nothing for the kids to look forward to except staying in a small town all their lives. A lot of them will join the Army.

P: Do you think it was because they weren't going on to college and just didn't have the finances to get out of going and being drafted?

M: No, their parents weren't influential to get them out.

P: Was it frustrating knowing that the boys that were going to war were typically rural, poor...?

M: Yes, because we all knew things about what people said about people like our current president. That if you were influential enough you could get out of going. [unclear]. I think in war it's better if people from all classes, I hate the word class, but all segments of society, like World War II, can participate in war. Very few of our leaders' sons were in the war, none of them are now I don't think. In World War II it was cool to be in the service.

P: I know that during Vietnam if you were married and had children or if you were in college all of those were exempt.

M: That's right. People would go to great lengths and doctors too that were paid had to come had to do public health work. It's almost like the doctors that went, what did they do wrong that they couldn't get out of going?

P: The doctors that did go, do you feel that they were qualified?

M: Yes. Some of them went to improve their, like I met some vascular surgeons went to because they thought it would be good to improve their skills. That was the right reason to do it. I mean because they paid to learn these things.

P: It's amazing that people volunteered. Do you consider yourself brave now?

M: I consider myself a little bit of a risk taker back then but now I'm real cautious.

P: Do you feel that it affected you a lot, being there?

M: I feel it affected me and made me a probably a stronger and better person, because I could see people from all segments of society in Vietnamese and Americans, and other countries too. I think I learned a lot and respect of kinds of people in situations.

P: Would you like to go back to Vietnam?

M: I would love to go back to Vietnam. I remember being at China Beach and saying how beautiful it was, it will be a resort someday and I hear that it's not taken off yet but it's really nice now. I'd love to go back to Vietnam but my husband won't go. Yes, I would like to go back.

P: When you were there, when you got to travel around was it like night and day seeing the front lines and then seeing more rural country, was it hard to believe that the war was going on?

M: Yes, there are front lines. I've got some pictures for you to flip through real quick. There's a lot of jungle. The front lines were kind of mixed. It wasn't like in World War II where people would try to take a town. It was just all mixed up. There are some very beautiful and historic things in Vietnam. I'm sure we bombed the heck out of them. We did a lot of napalming.

P: Were you guys worried about, did you know about the side effects of napalm and Agent Orange?

M: No, and I didn't know about chlordane, which was the Army's bug spray and we used to spray it on our beds. It's banned now so any medical problem I ever develop I think it's got to be the chlordane that we sprayed. It was in the water. It was in little brown cans and as a nurse I could get all I wanted and I'd give it out to my friends. Here's a hooch.

P: I've heard about the hooches. So were they individual hooches?

M: Well, that looks like a group one but the Army nurses had individuals. It's a very beautiful country actually. It's a great place to go as a tourist, I have friends that have gone.

P: When you were there was it a lonesome time, with the down time and everything?

M: No, I think young people can make friends anywhere. Young people just get together and make fun and plus I read. If you didn't read you probably were pretty miserable. The guys had the USO girls that brought pornography. They would sneak it in and sometimes they would show a little bit of pornography. The guys would love that. I never went to any.

P: It boosts the morale...

M: Yes. The USO girls, the Donut Dollies, they would fly in and sing and have little hootenannies. They were little fun evenings for the guys. It's still pretty lonely being away from home. A lot of people didn't have the resources to amuse themselves on their own.

P: When you were traveling around did you wear your Army uniform, did you have to?

M: Yes.

P: Did you ever experience and backlash because of that?

M: No, I think we were pretty respected by the Vietnamese. Well, I don't know if respected is the right word but no, I never had any troubles. They liked our white skin. My friends who were blonde had a real interesting time because people want to touch it because they had never seen that before.

P: Was it difficult knowing that you were not invading someone's country but fighting a war on someone else's soil?

M: Well, we thought we were there to help them. My perceptions as a twenty-three year-old were probably a lot different than they would be now. We thought we were there to help them. We hoped that in theory we were there to help them but we just prolonged their misery their war and now look what happened. But they're doing better now.

P: Well I really appreciate you talking to me.