

**ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.**

The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Peggy Mikelonis  
Conducted by Kara Vuic  
December 22, 2003  
Transcribed by Laura Darden

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1

2 Kara Vuic: I'm here with Peggy Mikelonis; I said that right? It's December  
3 twenty first?

4 Peggy Mikelonis: Twenty second.

5 KV: Twenty second and we're in Tampa at the VA Hospital, James B. Hailey.

6 PM: James A. Hailey.

7 KV: James A. Hailey. Okay, so we'll start with where you grew up. Where were  
8 you born, where'd you grow up?

9 PM: I grew up in Des Moines, Iowa out in the Midwest. I came from a family of  
10 six. I'm the second oldest. I have one older brother, four younger siblings, two sisters  
11 and two brothers. I went to nursing school at Mercy Hospital School of Nursing and I  
12 graduated there in 1970 and I joined the Army my last year of nursing school; and they  
13 paid for my last year of school and then I was to serve two years. And my first year was  
14 stateside; I was stationed in Huntsville, Alabama at a fifty-two bed hospital where I had  
15 to work everywhere. I was brand new out of school, brand new graduate, so I worked  
16 everywhere from labor and delivery to the emergency room. We just rotated, you know,  
17 you were the lieutenant and there were some civilians that worked at the hospital, but the  
18 military, we all had to rotate everywhere. Then I actually volunteered to go to Vietnam.  
19 I had an older brother who was stationed in the Air Force who was over there and my  
20 younger brother was in the Navy and he was out on a submarine out there. I think he was

1 in the Tonkin Gulf out surrounding Vietnam, but when I volunteered, I remember my  
2 father was very much for it. My father had been a corpsman in the Navy. He thought it  
3 would be the greatest experience in the world for me. My mother, on the other hand,  
4 wasn't too happy with it, you know, her—first of all, now it was her daughter going to  
5 war, she had two sons who were still over there, so she wasn't as supportive as my father  
6 was. I actually went over on the buddy system, my friend that I had gone to nursing  
7 school with, we joined the Army together, so we were stationed in Alabama together and  
8 so we volunteered to go to Vietnam together. And when we were assigned to go to  
9 Vietnam, we were assigned to go together to the same place. However, when we got  
10 over there, they were sending her someplace else and me to another place, so we asked to  
11 have our orders changed. We said, "We were assured on the buddy system that you  
12 would send us to the same place." So, they did. They changed orders and then we were  
13 both stationed in the Mekong Delta. I was way down south in the Republic of Vietnam in  
14 Tuy, the Third Surge Army Hospital.

15 KV: And what made you decide to be a nurse? Was that something you wanted  
16 to do as a little girl or—?

17 PM: No, I don't think as a little girl. When I was in high school, my first  
18 afternoon job after school, you know to get a job to pay for your car insurance because  
19 there's a family of six, my first job was working in was at Woolworth's, I worked in the  
20 deli and then I decided that wasn't really what I wanted to do, so I became a junior  
21 nurse's aid. Once I became a junior nurse's aid, I was exposed to nursing more and  
22 more, I worked as a nurse's aid during the summer and then I decided I wanted to go to  
23 nursing school right there at the same hospital I was working at. So, it was a diploma,  
24 three year program and that's when I—

25 KV: And you went in immediately after high school?

26 PM: Immediately after high school, yes, because I had been working—my junior  
27 and senior year I worked at the hospital and then I worked during the summers all  
28 summer long as an aid and then that's when I decided I—before that, I had been a candy  
29 striper, so I had been exposed to the hospitals, but no one in my family had ever been in  
30 nursing, so I decided that's really what I wanted to do.

31 KV: Did you ever think about any other jobs or anything?

1 PM: No, and actually I never did. I think when I was in high school, that's when  
2 I finally, you know—I was taking as many science courses as I could. I focused on that  
3 and then I just decided that I liked medicine. At one point, I really wanted to become a  
4 pediatrician, but then financial constraints and I decided, "Well, I'm going to go to  
5 nursing school."

6 KV: And all this was still in Des Moines?

7 PM: Still in Des Moines. Yes, Mercy Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa.

8 KV: Was it a concern that you might get married after high school or were you  
9 single then?

10 PM: No, no I was single then, yes. Actually, I never got married until I was in  
11 my 30s, my late 30s.

12 KV: So that wasn't a concern?

13 PM: That was never a consideration. Now, I always wanted to do my career, I  
14 always wanted to have a career first and I chose nursing.

15 KV: And so you entered nursing school in 1967.

16 PM: 1967, yes, it was a three-year program, as I said, a diploma program and I  
17 worked during the summer. We could work there. Their cheap labor was to hire the  
18 student nurses so you could work after classes and on the weekends and during the  
19 summer, so I lived in the dormitory, but I was only like less than ten miles from my  
20 house, but I had four younger brothers and sisters at home, and there was no way I knew I  
21 could study. So my parents, they were all for it. So, I lived in the dormitory.

22 KV: And was nursing school expensive?

23 PM: Back then it wasn't. Now a days, it certainly is, but I had gotten a  
24 scholarship for the first year, partial support and then that was one of the factors the third  
25 year, to going in the military was that they would pay for the last year.

26 KV: And how did you hear about the student nurse program?

27 PM: Oh, the recruiter came to the school, that's what it was. The recruiter, and  
28 there were three of us actually that signed up. I wasn't the only one, there were three of  
29 us that signed up, but a recruiter came to the school and talked to us about it.

30 KV: Was the recruiter a man or a woman, do you remember?

31 PM: I believe it was a man, it wasn't a woman, it was a man.

1 KV: And what'd he tell you about?

2 PM: That join the Army, they can pay for your last year of school and you'd have  
3 two years to serve. You could pick where you wanted to go. You could get one of your  
4 top three or if you're guaranteed that you could go with your friend, go on the buddy  
5 system, which I did was the buddy system.

6 KV: So that was a spelled out program, it wasn't just kind of a—?

7 PM: No that was spelled out, yes. Actually, I think I'm hearing a beep over here.  
8 I don't know if that's my phone that I missed.

9 KV: We're talking about the recruiter.

10 PM: The recruiter.

11 KV: So he came to your school?

12 PM: Yes, came to the school. I think we also had somebody visit from the Air  
13 Force too, but I do remember. That was what it was and then you had to sign up;  
14 completely [if we were] interested. I mean, I remember going home and talking to my  
15 parents about it and saying, "Well, this will pay for my last year of school and I'll have to  
16 serve two years."

17 KV: And you already had two brothers who were in Vietnam, so you knew that  
18 was a possibility?

19 PM: Yes, when Vietnam was after I had been in the Army for a year. I had  
20 already been stationed in Alabama. Yeah, my one brother was in the Air Force and my  
21 other brother in the Navy. Yeah, that's why I volunteered. I wasn't sent, I volunteered.  
22 My friend and I, we did it together, the buddy system. We wanted to go together.

23 KV: And you were friends in nursing school?

24 PM: Right, we'd gone to nursing school together and we actually worked at the  
25 hospital together.

26 KV: Did you think of yourself as a patriotic person; was that part of it or what did  
27 you think about?

28 PM: When I think about it now, I don't think that was the real factor then. I think  
29 more my factor was that the financial assistance because of my family and so I wanted to  
30 help get my education and what's two years. It would be a good experience.

31 KV: And your dad had been in the Navy?

1 PM: My dad had been in the Navy.

2 KV: So, when you went home and talked to them, was your mom immediately  
3 not happy and your dad supportive?

4 PM: No, actually, when I first joined the Army you mean?

5 KV: Yes.

6 PM: Oh yes, they were supportive of that, that was not a problem. And then  
7 especially I was stationed in Alabama for my first year and they came to visit and my  
8 friend and I had an apartment off base. We'd get up and go to work and so, it wasn't  
9 anything different I think outside of working somewhere else. The hospital was small,  
10 but it was an experience—

11 KV: And wasn't your basic—?

12 PM: Oh yes, basic training at Fort Sam, Houston.

13 KV: Before you went to Huntsville?

14 PM: Right, before I went to Huntsville. Actually, I was in basic training when I  
15 found out that I had passed my nursing boards. I mean, I went into the Army and I hadn't  
16 even passed my boards yet and that was the stipulation, so we were all in basic training  
17 and a lot of us I do remember were waiting for our results from our boards.

18 KV: What was basic like?

19 PM: Basic was an experience you'll never forget. I mean, you'd have to do  
20 marching, the training, I mean, it's just all of logistics, map reading, a lot of the things  
21 that we did, I thought, "When am I ever going to use this stuff?" But that was basic  
22 training, but I remember the marching, going out into the quadrangle and we'd have to  
23 march and we'd be in our uniforms and our dress greens. People were getting blisters on  
24 their feet and then if you didn't have your bars polished right—I mean, it was something.  
25 I never think about basic training anymore, but now that I think about—but it was also a  
26 time of a lot of camaraderie and met new people. I mean, partying was one thing they did  
27 in basic training a lot; this was for the officers; see I did officer's basic training, which is  
28 entirely different from the enlisted basic training. And it was with physicians, nurses,  
29 and pilots. We were the only ones that did all the basic training together.

30 KV: And were a lot of people getting ready to go to Vietnam right after that?

1 PM: There were some, but a lot of us were just going to be stationed stateside for  
2 awhile, but there were some I remember going that were going to go right over.

3 KV: And so you went to Huntsville for a year?

4 PM: Went to Huntsville, Alabama for a year and then that's when my friend and  
5 I decided we wanted to go to Vietnam. By then, when you were in the military and I was  
6 keeping track of what was going on with the war, but you certainly don't know  
7 everything that goes on when you are sitting back here because it was entirely different  
8 getting over there, being exposed to it.

9 KV: So were you scared at all before you went?

10 PM: Before I went, no. When I got over there, yes. But no, I thought I was just,  
11 I was infallible, nothing could happen to me. I don't know, I didn't even really think  
12 about what the war was going to be. I do remember my first day getting in country and  
13 flying in there and just saying, "What have I done? Just what have I done now?" I was  
14 just, for real; I'm here now.

15 KV: And you knew that immediately.

16 PM: I knew that immediately flying into country. I mean, it was one thing when  
17 we were flying, we had to fly through Alaska and being on a plane with all these GIs and  
18 we were all going to the same place, and then it started hitting me and it's like, "Well, I  
19 am going somewhere that's not exactly safe I don't think." But then when we flew into  
20 Vietnam itself, I remember flying and looking down and the fields and seeing red flares  
21 and red sparks and I didn't know what was going on and I said to somebody, "What's all  
22 that?" And they said, "That's gunfire going on down there. The troops are firing." And  
23 I'm like, "What in the world is this?" Didn't have really a concept of what war was all  
24 about. I mean I was only twenty-one, no idea, but I wanted to go.

25 KV: What did you think the war was about?

26 PM: Well, I was only going to help. That's what I wanted to do. I said I knew I  
27 was a nurse and I wanted to take care of the wounded. I didn't support the war, but I  
28 wasn't going to be one of the protestors, so I wanted to go and help take care of those  
29 who were over there and I saw it as my opportunity to have a wonderful experience  
30 which to this day, I don't regret it, but it was an experience.

1 KV: Had your brothers written you about it? Did you hear about the war from  
2 them?

3 PM: You know, I don't think my brothers kept—they wrote to my family and so  
4 I don't know that we kept that much in contact. I mean, my family always would write to  
5 me. They'd send me cassette tapes, sent me care packages. They were constantly, you  
6 know. As my younger sisters would say, mom told them, "You will sit down today and  
7 write to your sister, write to your brothers." My mother made that there was a couple of  
8 the younger ones left at home had to do all the writing and keep those care packages  
9 coming. By the time I was over there and had been over there a few months, then I think  
10 my brother from the Air Force got to come home. Actually, I think he broke his leg and  
11 so then he was sent back and then my brother on the submarine, they relocated  
12 somewhere else out in sea, so he wasn't—but at one point in time, we were all three  
13 there. I mean, that was before they passed the law that only one could be over there.

14 KV: I bet your mom was a nervous wreck.

15 PM: She was, but my mother was a very strong woman and she was very strong  
16 in her faith, and she always believed in prayer and all three of us came home with no  
17 problems.

18 KV: And you said your mother was religious. Were you religious?

19 PM: Yes. Oh yes, I was born and raised a Catholic my whole life. I went to  
20 Catholic schools, I went to an all girls academy, I went to the Catholic hospital; Mercy  
21 was run by the nuns, so yes, I was definitely. It was part of my upbringing; Irish Catholic  
22 all the way.

23 KV: And how did the war affect that or how did your religion affect the war; did  
24 they?

25 PM: Oh, I think it was a comfort in sense, a comfort. I mean, I always could find  
26 myself. The chaplain was always available, I could go to church. I was, and to this day,  
27 my religion still is a comfort to me.

28 KV: Where did you land in Vietnam? Was it Cu Chi or—?

29 PM: No, where was that? Long Binh.

30 KV: Long Binh.

1 PM: Long Binh. They're processing us out. Long Binh was an experience in  
2 itself. That's where you come in and you do all the in-processing in-country and that's  
3 when we got our assignments from where we were supposed to go and we found that we  
4 weren't going together. She was going, I think, to Cu Chi and I was going to Third Surg,  
5 so then we got them to change so that both of us were going to Third Surg.

6 KV: And they changed it without problems? Did you have to fight for it?

7 PM: I think we had to fight, but not for a long period of time, but we had to go  
8 and negotiate and we said, "This is what you agreed to, you agreed to this when we came  
9 in on the buddy system. We're over here and we want to go together. We'll go  
10 wherever." I think that's what we said, "We'll go wherever you want to send us." So,  
11 we went to the Mekong Delta which was way down south on the Cambodian border.

12 KV: What was that like? What was your hospital like?

13 PM: The hospital, well, we were low end on the totem poll, so we were stuck on  
14 the Vietnamese ward. There was a Vietnamese ward where we took care of the  
15 Vietnamese and some of the ARVNs, the Army of Republic of Vietnam as well as there  
16 were some, at one time, we did have VC (Viet Cong). We had to take care of a couple of  
17 them. They didn't last long on a ward, but I remember that initially. I was so  
18 uncomfortable working with the Vietnamese, but in time, and there was a friend of mine  
19 that became a close friend there that she just loved it on the Vietnamese ward. Well, I  
20 didn't. I asked to get transferred off as soon as possible, so then I was sent to the  
21 emergency room, so I went from the Vietnamese ward, which was, but I learned a lot  
22 from some of those people, I really did. It was different. When I went to the emergency  
23 room, it was entirely different. I was always somebody with the adrenaline. I had to see  
24 action and I wanted to see more and that's why I didn't like the Vietnamese ward. There  
25 was maintenance and not speaking the language, it was difficult. I remember the first  
26 week we'd been in country though and being on the ward and they said where the  
27 perimeter, we're being surrounded and so that's when they had, we placed us on red alert,  
28 all the sirens went off and they said incoming was coming and so we had to get all the  
29 patients out of the beds, underneath the beds, throw the mattresses on them because we  
30 thought the hospital was under attack, but that proved to be false. We may have took  
31 some outside of the perimeter, some hits out there, but the hospital itself was never hit.



1 KV: So that's your welcome to Vietnam?

2 PM: Yes, that was kind of like my welcome. Actually, my welcome to Vietnam  
3 was when they, it wasn't in Long Binh I think and they handed you the mosquito nets and  
4 told you, "You're going to need these to put over your hooch." And I thought, "What in  
5 the world, why do I need mosquito nets?" And that kind of like my reality, it was like,  
6 "What have I done? I'm going to be here for a year." Welcome to the place, but then  
7 when I got to my actual hospital, when they took us by, I think we went by jeep, went  
8 from the airfield and we flew in there on the helicopters from Long Binh and then from  
9 the airfield they said that the colonel wanted to meet us; the chief nurse. So, I do  
10 remember going over to the place called Charlie's Den; it was the officer's quarters, I  
11 mean officer's club. They called it Charlie's Den and that's where we met our chief  
12 nurse, Colonel Tardio, that was my first chief nurse and she said, "Welcome to Vietnam."  
13 Then they sent us back to our hooches and it's just this barren, not even as big as this  
14 room. It'd be about three quarters of the size of this room. You had a bed, like a bunk  
15 and that was it.

16 KV: And did you share that with your friend or were you by yourself?

17 PM: No, I was by myself. And then the thing that over in Vietnam as you  
18 became resourceful and there were people leaving to go back home who had been there a  
19 year and so people would sell their refrigerators. You would get little refrigerators.  
20 Some of the people, if you were lucky, you would try to get into their hooch where some  
21 of them had built cabinets. I mean, you have to realize, we had been war for ten, almost  
22 eight, nine years by the time I got there. I was there in '71, '72, so I had to stay in this  
23 one room and I remember I wanted to paint the walls and the only color paint I got was  
24 getting it from one of the pilots and it was this iridescent orange and it was terrible. The  
25 walls were just terrible in there and I painted one wall and I'll never forget, I could not  
26 wait to get out of that room and then there was one of the female nurses who was out-  
27 processing; she was going back to the states and then I asked to get her room and it had  
28 built in some nice cupboards, and there was a refrigerator in there, so then I felt a little bit  
29 more—oh, and an air conditioner. That was the other thing, if you could get the air  
30 conditioning units, oh yes; the thing was to get to know the people. That's how you had  
31 to be resourceful, who you knew to get things. That was survival of the fittest over there.

1 KV: How many hours did you work? Did you work six days a week?

2 PM: When I first got in country, we worked twelve-hour shifts, six days a week.  
3 Then as, right before, I think the last two months before we left because we were closing  
4 our hospital, and when I left, we were down to eight hour shifts.

5 KV: How many nurses were there? Was it a big hospital?

6 PM: It was a pretty good size hospital, yes. I'd say we had anywhere from, I  
7 think maybe twenty, twenty-five nurses because there was an emergency room, there was  
8 ward twelve which was the ICU (Intensive Care Unit), and there was ward thirteen which  
9 was the general medicine, general surgery ward and then the Vietnamese ward, so there  
10 were four wards. And then during the time that I was there, we had the amnesty program  
11 where a lot of the GIs could come through the program to get off of drugs. Many of them  
12 were on drugs and so we set up a ward, it was just the drug ward for the amnesty  
13 program.

14 KV: And did you work on that ward as well?

15 PM: No actually I didn't, but I was still in the emergency room, but that ward  
16 was set up, I do remember that.

17 KV: Do you think that was a big problem?

18 PM: Oh yes, it was. It was a significant problem. That was with the heroin,  
19 mostly is what we were seeing was the heroin.

20 KV: Were there problems like that among the medical staff as well?

21 PM: I do remember one time, while it was usually what you would see with the  
22 corpsman, some of them had been put in the medical field and not that they chose that,  
23 but some of them, yes and I do recall, we had a couple of corpsman and it was a problem.  
24 They were the 91-As. There was different levels; 91-A, B, and C. The Charlie's were  
25 your top of the notch corpsman and they were the ones we relied upon. Some of them  
26 knew more than I did and so they taught me a lot when I was over there, but the 91-A I  
27 think was the one, yes. I had vivid memories of him now. We found him asleep in the  
28 laundry hamper type thing, so that's where he had been. He was supposed to been on  
29 duty, yeah. I hadn't thought about that in a long time.

30 KV: Was there a lot of camaraderie among the medical staff?

1 PM: Oh yeah among the medical staff. I mean, we became family. I mean, you  
2 know, you had no other family there, so you best get along with the people that you're  
3 working with and yes, we socialized a lot. I mean, at my hospital, we had a swimming  
4 pool, so we used to during the down times, we'd play volleyball in the swimming pool,  
5 we'd hang out by the pool. It was just a closeness that you can't even describe because  
6 we knew we were all there, when we'd get care packages; you always shared your care  
7 packages. We'd always look to see who got the better care packages. Jennifer's mom  
8 used to make better cookies. We'd party in each other's rooms and it was just like a way  
9 to get by each day knowing that we were there. Where I was stationed, it was close to the  
10 Navy compound and we'd always go over to the Navy compound. A lot of the nurses  
11 would go—we'd walk over to the Navy compound. They always had the best food at the  
12 Navy. They could always get the lobster, they could always get the steak and they'd feed  
13 us, so we'd go there. The dust-off pilots lived in the same barracks with us, so we got to  
14 know many of the dust-off pilots. It was an entirely different era. In reality, I was there  
15 in '71, '72, the war was down phasing, but we were still getting casualties. People  
16 thought the war was over, but it wasn't. I have vivid memories of Thanksgiving Day in  
17 '71, 1971 and they had set up the mess hall to give us all a nice Thanksgiving Dinner and  
18 then the alarm went off—the incoming that they were bringing in choppers. Choppers  
19 were coming in, and so I was supposed to be off, but I got called back into duty and that's  
20 when we just got to mass calcs that came in that day. You can always remember, I can  
21 remember a face, but I never remembered names, but there was a young soldier whose  
22 half the side of his face had been blown away. And he still, you know, we had to trache  
23 him at that time in the ER, but before we trached him, he was trying to talk to us. I can  
24 just remember, that, seeing things like that and the smell of burns. You could always  
25 smell the burnt flesh; the napalm burns. Some of that, you know, if you get flashbacks,  
26 you can smell something or you can hear something. I can always hear helicopters going  
27 around. To this day, sometimes when I hear a helicopter, it just puts me right back there.

28 KV: And do you think working in the ER, it kind of gave you more experience  
29 with trauma?

30 PM: Oh yes, I mean, the ER did, yes, and we dealt more with the, what was  
31 called the graves registry when the DOAs (Dead On Arrival) would come in. The graves

1 registry was right behind the ER; I mean those guys back there, so you had to tag the  
2 bodies. There was a lot that went on and so you got to know the people back there, get to  
3 know the guys that had to do all that work. But in the ER, we never knew what was  
4 coming in. We always had to be prepared and this was over thirty years ago. When I see  
5 and today now, even what they use over in Iraq, the MASH (Mobile Army Surgical  
6 Hospitals) units, I've been in some of the tents that are set up and the stuff that this  
7 availability in the military now is just phenomenal compared to what we had. For chest  
8 tubes, we'd have to set up the bottles and we'd have to set up the three-bottle system and  
9 we'd have our IVs hanging. They brought them in on the gurneys and just laid them  
10 there.

11 KV: Are they improvising?

12 PM: Oh yeah. We improvised exactly. I remember going to the Vietnamese  
13 hospital. We would go out on MEDCAPs (Medical Civil Action Program), we'd do that.  
14 We'd go down and then you would really see deplorable conditions and going to the  
15 orphanages, we'd do that. Those are the things that we did sometimes when there was a  
16 downtime and we weren't taking any incoming and maybe on a weekend or something,  
17 we'd all go out. There'd be a group that would go some physicians, some nurses, and  
18 some pilots and go to the orphanages. That was tough going to the orphanages and  
19 seeing all the Amerasian kids that were left there. And sometimes, we would bring; there  
20 was one child that we brought back. This child had been burned so bad that he had  
21 contractors and all this scarring of his neck and our orthopedic surgeon, we brought him  
22 back and did surgery on him and he became like our mascot at the hospital because this  
23 kid underwent numerous surgeries to actually, so he wasn't so contracted because he  
24 could never even get his head up off and then when he finished with the surgery, he was  
25 able to. So, there were different things that we did even though it wasn't constant  
26 berragement of casualties as some of my colleagues who were over there in the sixties,  
27 but we were still seeing the injured in the seventies.

28 KV: Did you work in the ER the whole time you were there? Did you ever go to  
29 another ward?

30 PM: Just the first couple of months, I said I worked in the Vietnamese ward; the  
31 rest of the time was the ER.

1 KV: At the same hospital; the Third Surg?

2 PM: Same hospital, Third Surg, yes, I stayed there.

3 KV: Did you request to stay there or did they even bring up that they might send  
4 you?

5 PM: No, they didn't even bring up about going to move anywhere else now; it  
6 was just there.

7 KV: And did you have an R&R (Rest and Relaxation)? Did you go somewhere?

8 PM: Actually I did. I went to Hong Kong and that was quite an experience  
9 because I'll never forget, my friend and I when we got to Hong Kong, get in a hotel to  
10 see a bathtub, hot running water. I mean, that was the first thing we did was sit in the  
11 bathtub and then went to restaurants and then went out and bought clothes and just went  
12 crazy with buying clothes which I had been working in fatigues and maybe I had some  
13 jeans and t-shirts, but nothing—so that was fun. That was really a good time.

14 KV: And what were relations with the doctors like? Was that different than with  
15 other nurses or the corpsman or the pilots?

16 PM: No, actually I have some very fond memories of working with the surgeons.  
17 I learned a lot and the nurses, I remember we were, most of us were right out of nursing  
18 school, had been out of school maybe a about a year, and it was basically OJT (On-the-  
19 Job Training). We learned on the job. I learned how to put in chest tubes, I learned how  
20 to suture, I learned how to start intercalves, threading them up, you know the brachial  
21 artery. I did a lot and it was things that I would not do back in the civilian world, but  
22 those things that we had to do. But no, the surgeons were great and the physicians that I  
23 worked with, like I said, I learned a lot from them.

24 KV: Did you ever have to, did some people have to go to officer's parties or did  
25 you have functions that you were kind of required to go to, or was it all kind of relaxed?

26 PM: Ours was all relaxed. I don't think that we had anything that—and we used  
27 to get in groups. You never went off the compound by yourself. We would go in groups;  
28 we'd go downtown and go to one of them local restaurants or do something like that, but  
29 we always went in groups. We had fun. I do remember we took care of the province  
30 chief's mother; one of the Vietnamese province chief's mother had been a patient. This  
31 was back when I think I was on the Vietnamese ward, and so they had invited the surgeon

1 and a couple other, some of the nurses to the house for dinner. I'll never forget this  
2 surgeon, they wanted us to taste all this food and I mean, it was like raw eel is what it was  
3 and I didn't want it. But the surgeon, I'll never forget, Dr. Gary, Art Gary, he said, "Oh  
4 yes." He was going to do it, so he just went and took this big mouthful and then  
5 promptly you know, got sick from it. But they were so appreciative, the people were  
6 appreciative for what we were doing for them, so that was their one way of  
7 acknowledging that we had done a good job; in taking care of this guy's mother, I  
8 remember that.

9 KV: Did all of that experience with the Vietnamese affect the way you thought  
10 about the war?

11 PM: You know, I really can't even remember exactly how I felt so much about  
12 the war. I didn't understand what we were doing over there, and when my mother  
13 sometimes would send me the paper or something and we would not know what was  
14 happening somewhere else. We didn't get a lot of the information, and it's not like today  
15 where they can email, they get on the internet; we didn't get a whole lot of information  
16 what was being told back to the public. They were being told basically the war was over  
17 and I would say, "Mom, but we're still over here fighting." So, we were allowed to,  
18 maybe once a week if even that, sometimes you couldn't get once a week, we could call  
19 home. We could use the phone and call home, but yeah, it was entirely a different time.

20 KV: Did you have any problems with women getting pregnant who were nurses  
21 or did you have problems of along those lines?

22 PM: Actually, one of my closest friends and I just saw her last week when I went  
23 to the dedication and she had been there, yes, she had to come back, she was sent back to  
24 the states because she did get pregnant.

25 KV: And there was no kind of messing around, it's just, you're pregnant, go  
26 home.

27 PM: That's right, they'd just ship them back; they just shipped her back.  
28 Actually, she kept it secret for a while until it got to the point where, you know, she was  
29 pretty obvious so then she was sent back because she really didn't want to go back. She  
30 wanted to stay because I think they did get married at one time and he was still stationed

1 there. She was sent home, but he was stationed there. He was a corpsman. That's the  
2 only one I ever recall.

3 KV: Was it the chief nurse that dealt with that or who dealt with that? Who kind  
4 of made the decision?

5 PM: I think it was the chief nurse that did, yes. The decision was she was sent  
6 back.

7 KV: Was the chief nurse strict or?

8 PM: I had two chief nurses when I was over there. Colonel Tardio was the first  
9 one and she was, I'd say strict and the second one was Colonel Metcalf, and Colonel  
10 Metcalf was a little bit more easy going and we were a fun-loving group of nurses. We  
11 weren't, I'd say, rowdy; we weren't obstructionists or anything, but we were hard  
12 workers and we liked to have our fun too. We would do things like we'd sit in the  
13 officer's, what is that, officer's quarters, I mean in the Charlie's Den and we would write  
14 songs. We wrote songs, that's all we did. We'd write songs about what we were doing.  
15 I mean, that's how we passed our time away. We would just try and do fun things.  
16 Another thing I remember one time was when Sammy Davis Jr. came and he was making  
17 a visit. I don't know how I drew the low straw, but I had to stay back and be on duty. I  
18 didn't get to go, so my friends got to go, and so they brought me home pictures, but I had  
19 to stay. Another memory that I had in Vietnam was when one time I was in a helicopter  
20 that took fire because that was the only way we got around country was if you wanted to  
21 go to Saigon and Saigon was where your finance records were kept. And one of my  
22 dearest friends, Jennifer, they always got her finances messed up. She was not getting  
23 paid while she was in Vietnam and all her checks were messed up, so we'd have to go  
24 into Saigon to take care of it, but anytime you went anywhere from one hospital maybe to  
25 another, you had to go by helicopter. So, we flew helicopters a lot. You'd sit out on the  
26 helo-pad to get a ride. Well, I think it was the time we were coming back from, I had  
27 been in Saigon and I hitched a ride and I can't even remember who it was with, the Black  
28 Ponies or something, but it was not with the dust-off. Normally, we were supposed to  
29 only ride in the helicopters that had the Red Cross on it. Well, this time I didn't ride in  
30 that helicopter because I was running late and I had to get back, and so these guys said,  
31 "Well we're going by your hospital. We can drop you off." As I remember flying in that

1 helicopter and all of a sudden, the helicopter just went straight up and I couldn't figure  
2 out what was going on and I had the headset on, the guy offered me the headset and the  
3 pilot said, "We just took a fire, that's why I had to go up." And he said, "I promise you,  
4 I'll get you back to your hospital." And then I remember getting back and going over to  
5 Charlie's Den and telling my friends and they didn't believe me. Nobody believed me  
6 until the next night, the pilot came in, the pilot who had brought me home and he said,  
7 "Yes, she was in that." And then I went out and saw his helicopter where the bullets had  
8 hit. So, that was my closest call.

9 KV: Were there other times when you felt in danger or scared?

10 PM: No, I mean, I think the longer I had been over there, I just became numb to  
11 it. You didn't think that nothing was going to happen to you, but yeah, it was a reality, it  
12 could happen at anytime.

13 KV: Did you date in Vietnam or how did nurses date; you or your friends?

14 PM: Yeah, you just don't know, a lot of times it was a group thing. You all go  
15 out in groups and then sometimes, we did fraternize with the enlisted men. I did date a  
16 few of the enlisted men, which in Vietnam, they aren't going to tell you, "No, you can't  
17 do it." And they were close to our barracks, and like I said, we were all such a family,  
18 that yes, we did. No, I never met anybody over there that I kept up with. My friend  
19 Mary did and Patty of course, the one who got pregnant, and then Jennifer. But almost  
20 all of the men were married and that was hard to find one who wasn't married that wants  
21 to have a lasting relationship. So, it was a different era, it definitely was.

22 KV: And you knew they were married; they didn't lose their rings once they got  
23 off the plane?

24 PM: No. Most of them were honest. You know, you'd ask them and they'd tell  
25 you.

26 KV: So, you worked at the same hospital and then you came home in '72?

27 PM: Came home in 1972.

28 KV: And you had been there the full 12 months?

29 PM: Actually, we got an early out. We came home, about, was a month in half  
30 early. They closed it. Yes, and they were closing our hospital, they were turning it over  
31 to the Vietnamese hospital way down south, so the Vietnamese were going to come and



1 take that over. When my plane left, there were very few nurses and they were going to be  
2 leaving within the next three to four weeks themselves because I remember when I went  
3 back for the dedication ten years ago, the original dedication, I saw a couple of the nurses  
4 that I hadn't seen since I left Vietnam. One was the operating room nurse and she said  
5 she was the last nurse to leave our hospital.

6 KV: And what did you think about going home? When it got time to go home,  
7 were you ready or were you—?

8 PM: You know, it was a mixed feeling. I was ready to go home, but it was like,  
9 you were leaving another part of your family. I mean, we were leaving all these people  
10 we had lived together and they became your family, and so there was mixed feelings, but  
11 in a sense, I think I was really ready to go home, but wasn't ready for the welcome that  
12 we got. We didn't get much of a welcome; we didn't get any. I had to out process in  
13 Fort Louis.

14 KV: Is that in California?

15 PM: No, where was that? I'm trying to remember where it was. I can't even  
16 remember.

17 KV: That's a new one for me.

18 PM: Yeah, I think it was Fort Louis, but it wasn't California. And then getting  
19 on the plane and we were in our uniforms and people just sneered at us and I remember  
20 hearing them calling us baby killers and it was just like, I thought, "Wow, these people  
21 don't even understand what we did." I was just glad to get back home. I remember  
22 getting home and it was in April and I believe there was snow in Iowa when I got home  
23 in April. It was quite something.

24 KV: And did you go to your parent's home?

25 PM: I went to my parents and I stayed with my parents and none of my friends  
26 back there never asked me about the war, never wanted to talk about it. It was not  
27 anything. I didn't feel like I could talk to anybody except my family and when I first got  
28 home, I remember I found myself under the bed a couple of nights when I would swear  
29 I'd hear helicopters. I would wake up in the middle of the night and I was underneath the  
30 bed. That lasted for just a short while when I initially came home. I remember my father  
31 telling me, "You need to go draw unemployment." I didn't go back to work for three

1 months, so he said, "You need some time, you have to readjust." I thought, I'm a nurse, I  
2 need to go back to work, and no I didn't, so I did, I drew unemployment and then I  
3 moved to Florida after that and I've been here ever since.

4 KV: And so you were out of the Army immediately?

5 PM: Immediately, I got out. I got out, I didn't stay and I had served my two  
6 years. I don't know, they didn't do a whole lot in out processing with us, didn't tell us a  
7 lot about our benefits, didn't tell us we were entitled for anything. It was just a different  
8 time; it really was in the world.

9 KV: So then you moved to Florida. What brought you to Florida from Iowa?

10 PM: My older brother who had been in the Air Force was stationed at MacDill,  
11 so he was still in the Air Force, he was stationed at MacDill because he served four years,  
12 where I only served two and he served four. So, he had got me to come down here, so  
13 my friend and I moved here to Florida. We drove.

14 KV: The same one you'd went?

15 PM: The same one I've been in the Army. So, we moved down here and we  
16 came to work here at the VA (Department of Veteran Affairs) and I've been here ever  
17 since now, thirty-two years.

18 KV: And did you start out as a nurse here?

19 PM: I started out as a staff nurse and I remember, I probably was somewhat  
20 obstinate. I remember they wanted me to, they said, "You have to start an IV on a rubber  
21 arm to be certified to start IVs." And I said, "I have to do what?" I said, "I just spent a  
22 year in Vietnam, you're asking me to start an IV?" I did and everything that they asked  
23 me to do and I'd say, "But I've been doing this." And they said, "But you can't do that,"  
24 and number of certain things. And then, I just had to accept that I wasn't going to be able  
25 to do them as a nurse within the VA or as any nurse, you know, back stateside, these  
26 were things we had to do during the wartime and they're outside of my scope, so that's  
27 why I wasn't allowed to do them. I had to be certified to put an NG tube down, had to be  
28 certified to do a lot of things. I was somewhat rowdy I think when I first came back. My  
29 friend and I used to have parties so we were just happy to be back; we just were in a  
30 different mode. Then I had to conform. So then over the years, then I decided I needed

1 to go back to school, so I used my GI Bill before it was up and I went back to USF  
2 (University of South Florida) and got my bachelor's degree.

3 KV: And what in?

4 PM: In nursing.

5 KV: In nursing, okay.

6 PM: Nursing yes, because I had had a diploma, I didn't have a degree, so I went  
7 back and got my bachelor's degree in nursing and that was in '79. So I graduated in '79  
8 with my bachelor's degree. And then I decided—then I got married in '83 and then I had  
9 two kids, I've worked here all the time and then I decided to go back to school in, I think  
10 it was back in '90, I started back to school to get my master's. The VA was paying for  
11 my school then, so then I got my master's degree and I graduated in 1994. It's been ten  
12 years almost, yes. And now here I am and when I got into the women's program, it was  
13 back in '83 actually when they first started having the Women's Advisory Committee,  
14 they'd asked me to be a member because they knew I was a veteran and I didn't want  
15 anything to do with it at first and I guess it was in the late seventies when they first  
16 started, early eighties. I don't want anything to do with this committee so then they kept  
17 after me and then I said, "Okay, I'll join." So, I became a member and then before I  
18 knew it, they had me, I became the chair person and then before I knew it, I was the  
19 Women Veterans Coordinator and then I was doing that in addition to being the evening  
20 supervisor at that time. And then ten years ago, we got funding to set up this  
21 comprehensive center and then I had to interview for the job I had been doing, but now  
22 they made the position full time, so I had to interview for it. So, I interviewed for the  
23 position and I became the full time Women Veterans Coordinator. That was in 1993  
24 when we started that year and then I graduated in '94 and then I started seeing patients as  
25 a nurse practitioner in addition to running the program. And so now I'm kind of like part  
26 time Women Veterans Coordinator and part time, actually we call ourselves program  
27 managers now. They've changed the title we're Women Veterans Program Managers  
28 and then part time nurse practitioner. But what I find is very rewarding is to listen to  
29 some of the women veteran stories of what they did in the military. I always ask them  
30 when I do a history or physical, you know, "What did you do in the military?" Some of  
31 the women who are in their eighties, their seventies, you know, the ones who were in

1 World War II, they're just fascinating to listen to what they did and they didn't think they  
2 did anything. A lot of them didn't even call themselves veterans back then because when  
3 I used to go out and do a lot of outreach in the very beginning, we were trying to bring  
4 women into the program, now we don't have to do it. They knew of, that the VA is there  
5 for women, but we used to go out and do outreach. And a lot of them didn't consider  
6 themselves to be a veteran, they had just thought they had just served and then what had  
7 happened in World War II is then they just dismissed them after they didn't need them  
8 anymore; they just get them out of the military. Where the majority of women I think  
9 who served in Vietnam were nurses. We don't know exactly how many of us there were  
10 because they didn't think it was important to keep track of how many women there were.

11 KV: Right.

12 PM: Isn't that mind boggling, still to this day, it boggles me because there were  
13 quite a few of us, but when you consider for a ten year span.

14 KV: Forgotten.

15 PM: Exactly.

16 KV: So what exactly do you do in this position?

17 PM: I manage the women's program for Tampa which includes three satellite  
18 clinics; Orlando, Brevard, Port Richey, and seven CBOCs (Community Based Outpatient  
19 Clinics). So I'm in charge of ensuring that the woman's healthcare needs are being met  
20 at all these facilities. I'm looking to—for the provision of safety and privacy; look for  
21 those types of things and customer satisfaction and ensuring that our performance  
22 measures like providing mammography and pap smears are being done and then I also,  
23 like I said, function as a nurse practitioner. I maintain a panel of patients and see patients  
24 too, so—

25 KV: Do you think it helped to stay in nursing, was it something that's helped  
26 you? Would've you have gone into something totally different after the war or why did  
27 you stay in nursing?

28 PM: Actually, I had a positive experience in Vietnam, so it wasn't anything that  
29 was going to make me get out of nursing and that's when I found—I guess by coming to  
30 the VA, I still had a sense of the military in me and it's kind of like, the VA is not the  
31 military, but it's like an extension of the military somewhat because I mean, we are very

1   bureaucratic; we have to follow rules and regulations. There's a lot of the things that I  
2   are very similar within the military and the VA. I just stayed in.

3           KV: Did you ever have, you said you had nightmares when you came home, did  
4   those go away or did they come back later?

5           PM: Actually, mine went away. I mean, it was just initially when I first came  
6   home and then I remember going to the vet center and wanting to see if I could hook up  
7   with the vet center. My first initial is that they weren't doing anything for women. They  
8   turned me off and I never went back because I remember going in there and they said,  
9   "Well, who's your husband? What's your husband?" And I said, "No, I'm the veteran."  
10   To this day, that still bothers me. Sometimes I get things in the mail laying out because I  
11   have a VA loan on my home and it said the veteran this and that, I will stand there and  
12   get so angry and I said, "No, I'm the veteran. Why can't they accept this?" This is the  
13   hardest thing for them to realize that women are veterans too. I guess I've been able to  
14   advocate more for women veterans in what I do now than what I've done for the last, I  
15   think fifteen years that I've been at the women's program.

16          KV: With your friend?

17          PM: Actually it's more like twenty years; yeah, twenty years.

18          KV: (Laughing) And you moved down with your friend.

19          PM: Yes.

20          KV: Did you guys; you had an apartment.

21          PM: Yes, and we both worked here at the VA and then my friend, then she  
22   eventually, she got married and she left the VA, and then she went back to Iowa for a  
23   while and then now she's back here. Actually, both my friends are, we were all three in  
24   Vietnam together because we met Jennifer in Vietnam and we've become very close to  
25   this day. I mean, I just had Christmas with them last week; we always get together.

26          KV: Do you think that helped you kind of adjust?

27          PM: Oh yes, definitely, absolutely.

28          KV: Did you guys talk about it a lot afterwards?

29          PM: Yeah, we did because nobody else would talk to us. Mary and I, when we  
30   were back in Iowa, we'd get together and then that's when we moved to Florida, but  
31   Jennifer was still in the Army; she still had time to serve, so she didn't get out, but Mary

1 and I had gotten out and that's when we decided to come work for the VA. I'm glad I  
2 stayed in, Mary got out, but now I have thirty, I'll be able to retire from the VA. It's been  
3 good to me. There are days when I say, "Well how soon can I retire?" But I'll look  
4 forward to that. No, I have no regrets, none whatsoever.

5 KV: Would you let your daughter go to war you think?

6 PM: Yes I would. I would, I would. I mean, a lot of people say nowadays, "Oh,  
7 how would you do it now?" We hear more now about the sexual harassments, the sexual  
8 trauma, I mean I screen women for it everyday, but I think it's still, if that's what she  
9 wanted to do, it's certainly not anything that I push. I mean, if anything, I encourage my  
10 son because I think for the discipline that he would get. It's really up to them whether  
11 they want to go. They always ask me questions and they know that I was in Vietnam, but  
12 it's an entirely different system and it's an entirely different war now that we're fighting  
13 than we fought thirty years ago. The concept of terror is—I mean, we knew who our  
14 enemy was in Vietnam, we knew who we were fighting. What we were for, we didn't  
15 know, but we knew who it was. Now we don't even know who—so that's the way I feel  
16 about the war.

17 KV: So you never really problems with PTSD like some vets have had?

18 PM: No, actually I didn't, I didn't. I don't think that I did, no.

19 KV: Did you ever have fertility problems, some women who had fertility  
20 problems?

21 PM: No, I didn't have any of that; I had my two kids. The only thing I did, I did,  
22 I did Amniocentesis with both my kids, but when I tried to get the VA to pay for it, they  
23 didn't. I mean now I think they recognize that Agent Orange can be a factor in birth  
24 defects, but then they didn't. I mean, had it done anyway.

25 KV: Is that what you were thinking, that maybe?

26 PM: Absolutely, it could've been. Plus, I mean I was over thirty too when I had.  
27 Maternal age is what they put for the reason for my Amniocentesis, but I'm on Agent  
28 Orange registry and especially now that we're seeing more and more of the illnesses  
29 coming out of the Agent Orange registry, we don't know the after effects from years ago.  
30 I worked in the emergency room; these guys came in with this stuff all over their  
31 fatigues. We cut off fatigues, that's what we did. That's the first thing we do when they

1 came in is we cut them off them. You know, back then, we didn't have—we did  
2 everything, we weren't gowned and gloved, we didn't have gloves readily. Nowadays,  
3 you don't see anybody in the emergency room that's not gloved and double gloved, but  
4 we didn't.

5 KV: What do you think you remember most about Vietnam?

6 PM: I remember most—you know one thing I do remember that is that you could  
7 not even trust the children. Kids could be used sometimes as decoys or even they became  
8 part of the negative part. I remember once when we were in Saigon, my friend having  
9 her, the pants out of her fatigues sliced by a kid who came up and just and stole all her  
10 money. Her money was in her pockets, so you learned to not to put things where they  
11 can—I mean they jump you and these were kids that did it. It was kids. And that and  
12 then the other part I think I remember probably the most was the camaraderie. Living  
13 with people that you can work and live in an environment with that close proximity with  
14 people and become very close and I had some very lasting friendships that made an  
15 impact on me. Then I valued life a lot more; look at it differently.

16 KV: And how did you hear about the Women's Memorial; when it was being  
17 planned or money was being raised and all that?

18 PM: They had contacted me through the sister search and I had sent my name in  
19 and I sent my colleagues in. See, having worked for the VA, I think there was somehow,  
20 it infiltrated that way, so that's why I had—and I was very excited to go back for the  
21 dedication. Actually my friend went; we all went, so we were all back there. That was  
22 probably one of the most memorable experiences I would ever have because it finally felt  
23 like yes, we were welcomed home and we had not been welcomed home. And I never  
24 realized how much that affected me until I remember the Persian Gulf War when they  
25 were having all the parades and welcoming them home and I was working as evening  
26 supervisor and it was one evening I was down on one of the wards and the TV came on  
27 and it was showing the parade and I just was consumed with such anger. I didn't realize  
28 that how it affected me, and I said, "I think that's terrible." When a war was only 365  
29 days and we were there for ten years and we never got a parade, we never got anything.  
30 So then when we finally had the Women's Memorial that really was our parade.

31 KV: What do you think about the Memorial; this one did you like it?

1 PM: Yes, it definitely captures the essence of the different levels of women, the  
2 different types, because it wasn't all women that were nurses there. There were women  
3 that were in administrative positions and so, yes, it's moving. Every time I go there, I'm  
4 still moved and I've taken my kids there. One year I had my kids there and there was a  
5 group of elementary kids or middle aged middle school kids and they were asking  
6 questions or something and so I find myself saying some things because then my kids  
7 said, "Mom, you're just giving a history lesson." (Laughing)

8 KV: (Laughing)

9 PM: I said, "Well, it just became part of me." I mean I wish I could. I have gone  
10 and talked to some high schools about it. I've gone and talked. During Veterans week, I  
11 used to go out and I was on the speaker's bureau for Hillsboro County. I'd go and talk  
12 about veterans, specifically women veterans and what it was like to have been in the war.  
13 I think it's important that our kids understand. Nowadays, it's a given that women are in  
14 the military, but it didn't used to be; what women could bring to the—

15 KV: Did you find a lot of stigma in 1970, '71 when you joined the military  
16 because you're a woman? Did people think that was odd?

17 PM: I don't think they did as much because I was a nurse, so that was  
18 understandable. Had I gone in and I was not a nurse, I mean, they were different; there  
19 were different attachments to it and what you were supposed to be and yes. But no, I  
20 think being a nurse; it was entirely different. It was kind of more like I was somewhat set  
21 off there; you were a little different.

22 KV: Were there male nurses that you worked with?

23 PM: There were a few, not too many. I do remember we had one in the OR,  
24 there was a major and there was one other one, but there was not a very—mostly all the  
25 nurses were mostly female.

26 KV: And did you know those guys very well?

27 PM: Actually, I remember the major. Like I said, he wasn't there but only a  
28 couple of months, but then he left after I got in country. He was a very nice guy. He  
29 worked in the operating room, not the emergency room, the operating room, so I didn't  
30 see as much of them as they were. There were always people behind the mask so you  
31 didn't see them.



1 KV: And did the chief nurse give you or anybody I guess in the military, were  
2 there certain things you were not to do because you were women or were there certain  
3 things you were kind of expected to do?

4 PM: Colonel Tardio, I remember, our first chief nurse, she used to tell us one  
5 time we were out, we had either gone to the Navy or somewhere, there was a group of us.  
6 There was like four or five of us and we had gone to a party and so of course, we flew by  
7 helicopter to go to the next compound over and so that's where we were and it was red  
8 alert. We all of a sudden went on red alert and so we came back during red alert in the  
9 helicopter and landed on the helo-pad and she was furious with us. She just said,  
10 "Whatever you do," she said, "when it is red alert, you do not get in the helicopter, you  
11 stay where you are, you are not to be flying out." And then she said telling us we were  
12 supposed to be back in by curfew time anyway which we didn't know we had a curfew,  
13 but I remember her telling us that we were supposed to be in. That was the only time I  
14 remember however and then Colonel Metcalf, there was never anything. Except, we  
15 weren't a real rowdy bunch, we were very much controlled, worked hard. We just  
16 usually stayed around our compound.

17 KV: It seems like you never or I guess when you came back, you kind of had the  
18 right outlets; people to talk to?

19 PM: I did and that's probably why I had my family and then I came to the VA  
20 and I guess even though I didn't want to acknowledge that I was a veteran, I was  
21 surrounded by veterans; so I knew that that was there and I found myself sometimes that  
22 there would be an angry male patient saying something about, "Well, I'm a veteran and I  
23 deserve this." At one time, I found myself saying, "Well, I'm a veteran too." And they  
24 all just looked at me and I said, "Well, you know, I was over there, too." It served me  
25 well, so my VA career has been profitable and I have no regrets.

26 KV: Good.

27 PM: And I'm probably different than a lot of the other nurses that you may  
28 interview because as I said, we were all at a different time. It depends upon the time that  
29 you were over there. I wasn't there during the worst time, like the Tet Offensive in the  
30 sixties and that, but I did see the damages of war. I did live in an environment that was in

1 a wartime and unfortunately I came back to a society that didn't acknowledge; they were  
2 still protesting it.

3 KV: What did you think of the protests?

4 PM: I didn't support the war even when I went over; I was not for the war, but I  
5 guess that the only reason I went over was to take care and I remember people kept  
6 asking me, "Why are you going then?" I said, "I'm going over to take care of the ones  
7 that are over there and I just felt that I needed to do." I never really stopped to think  
8 about the war and I think that was because I was just so young and so impressionable and  
9 sometimes, you know, that's when we have, the youngest ones are the ones that do go to  
10 war because they don't, you're at that age where you're not yet, things are not sinking in  
11 and it's just not real. Excuse me. So, to me, it wasn't that real. It wasn't that it was so  
12 much of a danger and didn't really stop to think about it. You know, and I've talked to  
13 some of my colleagues when we've been at the dedication and we say the same thing,  
14 "Well, that's just the way we felt." We were young and we didn't stop to think about it.

15 KV: Do you read much about the war or books or do you watch a lot of movies  
16 or do you avoid them all together?

17 PM: No, I read some, but I don't read a whole lot. I don't know, avoidance is  
18 easier, I think is the best way because I never understood—but I think when it comes to  
19 war, that the average public understands everything and that was the one thing I think that  
20 hit me the most is that what I saw was going on over there, they didn't know what was  
21 going on back here in the states. Nowadays, today, it's entirely different, but thirty years  
22 ago, you saw little clips and that was all you saw. Now we know they're riding right out  
23 there with the troops, but we weren't doing that in Vietnam; we didn't have.

24 KV: Did you ever see "China Beach?"

25 PM: I loved "China Beach." I loved that show and "M\*A\*S\*H," but "China  
26 Beach" really kind of depicted what was happening. I mean a lot of the stories that was  
27 the closeness of the group, the people in the hospital and some of the stories of some of  
28 the soldiers. I do recall, but you know, it's like after thirty years, you don't recall a lot of  
29 names anymore, but I can see some faces and remember some of their problems. I never  
30 really remembered names, just all faces.

1 KV: And do you get in contact with a lot of the women at the reunions or things  
2 like that? Do you do any of that?

3 PM: Like I said, I still had my two friends, Jennifer and Mary, I see them. Then  
4 when I was back at the dedication just this last year, then I saw another friend of mine  
5 who I hadn't seen since ten years ago, but I don't keep up with that many of them  
6 anymore. We're all just kind of—but we all got together, at ten years ago, it was really  
7 impressive because there was about, I'd say a good ten of us that had been stationed  
8 together. So, we really had a great time and we remembered that, but I think if we got  
9 together again today, we could go right back to where we were, we'd remember that.  
10 Our lives move on and we all move in different directions. As far as I know, none of us  
11 that were stationed together ever had any lasting effects, negative effects on the war. We  
12 did actually, I take it back, we did lose one of our colleagues. She died of Non-Hodgkins  
13 Lymphoma, so they pretty much attributed it to her service at Vietnam, so that's one of  
14 the disease processes with Agent Orange, but she was a captain over there with us. Other  
15 than that, the rest of us came back and I think most of us stayed in nursing, but some are  
16 doing nursing, but not clinical nursing; nursing like on the perimeter administrative type  
17 stuff. QA [[Quality Assurance](#)] that kind of thing.

18 KV: So, it was a good experience?

19 PM: Yeah, all and all, I have no regrets. It's amazing, if you sit and talk to  
20 somebody who's been in Vietnam, you just get an entirely different feeling about you and  
21 you can relate to that person. There was a closeness there that you can't describe. If  
22 you've been there, nobody else can relate to it unless you've been there. It's different  
23 entirely.

24 KV: Can you relate to the men who were there the same way?

25 PM: Oh yes, usually I can. There will be something that can spark. I mean, I  
26 remember when I was a staff nurse working in the hospital, some of the guys would talk  
27 about some of their experiences. Actually, there's a nursing assistant that I worked with  
28 on nights when I first came back and him and I would sit there and just tell war stories  
29 together and things that he had done. He would tell me what it was like to be out there on  
30 the front lines. And then I remember when I first was in-country working on some of the

1   wards, is talking to the soldiers and listening to what happened when they've been out  
2   there.

3           KV: And was nursing very different when you came back than it was when you  
4   were in the war or even before you went to the war? Did you find it very different?

5           PM: The only thing I found, like I said earlier, is when I came back here. I felt  
6   like I was limited in what I could do and it wasn't so much nursing. I felt like I had  
7   learned new skills, I had done things, but then I realized I was doing them because out of  
8   need and I had to do them, and so then I go back and start the learning whys and  
9   wherefore, why was I doing what I did; put the theory behind it. So, that was mostly  
10   when I went back and got theory-based.

11          KV: Interesting.

12          PM: Yes.

13          KV: Do you talk to your kids much about the war? Do they ask?

14          PM: When they're studying in school, they will talk about it, but they don't get  
15   into it that much. I have some pictures at home and I have pictures on the wall, so they  
16   know. I guess someday, they'll want to know more about it, but I don't push it out on  
17   them, they do know that mom was there.

18          KV: And did you talk to your dad much about that, with him, or your brothers  
19   even? Do you guys talk about it?

20          PM: My brothers and I don't talk about it now. I mean, theirs was a different  
21   experience and so I guess we never—that's one thing we never did talk about was the  
22   war. Then my father, he just knew that I had gained a lot of experience and like I said, he  
23   had been a corpsman and then he became a pharmacy tech after that, so he just knew it  
24   was a good experience.

25          KV: Anything that you remember or anything we didn't talk about that you think  
26   about?

27          PM: No, actually because like I said, mine was a good experience, one that I have  
28   no regrets. I grew up, that's what I did over there, I grew up very quickly.

29          KV: I imagine. (Laughing)

30          PM: Yes.

31          KV: Great.