

Anna Louise Gerac  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
The Dartmouth Vietnam War Project  
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Transcribed by Daniel Torres '21

DANIEL TORRES: So, this is Daniel Torres. I am here with Anna Louise Gerac, correct. Gerac, sorry. Today is February 13th. It is around 4:00 PM, and we are in Carson hall and this is for the Dartmouth Vietnam War Project. So, Anna Louise, thank you so much for doing this.

ANNA GERAC: You're welcome. My pleasure.

TORRES: So, let's just start with your early life. So, tell me where were you born and when?

TORRES: Okay. I was born in Port Aransas, Texas, January 21st, 1947. I believe around the age of three or four, we moved from Texas to Louisiana. When my migrant, my mother's father died and my mother inherited some property. So, we moved to Louisiana where our home was built and where I grew up from that time on until the time that I went into the army and left home. I went through elementary school at a school called Our Lady of Fatima. My parents were very Catholic, that part of Louisiana is very Catholic: Southwest Louisiana. And so, from there I, when I graduated high school in 1964, I went on to the bachelor of science degree program at the university of Southwestern Louisiana. It is now called university of Louisiana. And it was during that time that I became, I was very involved in the Student Nurses' Association. In fact, I did serve a term as the president of the Louisiana state nurses, Student Nurses' Association. And it was through that relationship in that organization that I make good, really good friends with an upperclassman. And she had joined the Navy nurse program and, I'm not sure if these programs still exist today, but in those days, probably because of the war that was going on, both the army and the Navy offered programs for, uh, you could join as a, when as a student nurse, if you joined in your beginning your junior year, they would pay for the last two years of your program. Plus, they would give you a stipend and in those days it was \$300 a month, which was quite a bit of money for me to have. [Laughter] And so anyway it was in that, that program, I joined that program as I began my junior year. There was no political reason behind it. I just joined the army to see the world. I love to travel and even though my father was quite upset that I had done this, he felt that I was doing it because I felt my parents couldn't afford to send me to college when in fact my parents could because I was an only child.

And so, as when I joined the, at the beginning of my junior year I was commissioned as a second Lieutenant. Went to New Orleans to get that commission. And, then after I finished and once I passed my state board exam, which I didn't do the first time around, and once I passed my state board exam then I went on active duty and became a first Lieutenant. And so, my first assignment really was Fort Sam, Houston, Texas. That was where we went through basic training. That's where all members of the medical Corps went and received basic training. And so I was there at Fort Sam, made some great friends, and then I received orders to Fort Ord, California, which, at that time it may still be considered like the country club of the army because it's quite a great place to be right there on the California coast. And that's where I fell in love with California.

TORRES: So, I just want to go back a bit. So, your father was a Navy veteran?

GERAC: Yes.

TORRES: And you especially mentioned in your article that your father was especially greatly affected by your decision to join the Nurse Corps. Could you tell me more about why he was mostly affected compared to your mother?

GERAC: Right, he was because I think he was disappointed that I didn't join the Navy. And my feeling at the time was that you didn't have as many opportunities for travel in the Navy as you did in the army and that was really the basis. And as I said previously, he was upset because of the fact that he thought I was doing this because I was under the impression that my parents couldn't afford to send me to college. And, when in fact as I convinced him that was not the case at all. I shared with him that not only would they pay for my college, which really didn't make that much of a difference to us as a family, but that, I would be, by the time I graduated, I would already be a first Lieutenant and, and I would have much more opportunity for travel.

TORRES: Do you have any other family members that were army veterans?

GERAC: No.

TORRES: It was only your father?

GERAC: Well, my father, I mean my, certainly all my uncles were, were, military veterans. What branch of the service they were in I don't

know, but, we never really, uh, my family was really, because I'm an only child, we never really had any political discussions or even with the, the war, sort of surfacing at that time there was, I don't recall any discussion about the war or any political issues. I never heard my parents one way or the other speak of what the president was doing or not doing but I know that I can say that all the uncles that I know, I'm not sure about my, I'm not sure about my grandparents. My grandfathers, what wars they were in or if they were in any wars, I'm sure they were, but I don't know for sure. But I know every uncle I can think of, uh, served in the military.

TORRES: You mentioned a lot that, so there was no political reason for you joining the Nurse Corps.

GERAC: Right.

Torre: And in terms of family conversation, you didn't mention much about the war or about the president. Why is that?

GERAC: I'm not really sure. I'm not, you know, when I look back, I think, I think at that time, because I was in college and, the nursing program was very, strict and very difficult. And I think that I was just in, I just engrossed myself in studying. And then I, like I said, I was very active in the Student Nurses' Association. So a lot of the discussion at that time was revolved around my activities in the Student Nurses Association because especially when I became president of the state Student Nurses' Association, I did a lot of traveling on the weekends. I would travel to other nursing programs to talk about what was going on in nursing at the time. There were a lot of major issues going on in nursing and the main issues at the time was that there was a lot of, rivalry between bachelor of science in nursing programs versus those nursing programs that took place in a hospital. And so, and there was a big push at that time for nurses to go into a bachelor's program and not do the hospital program. And so, that was a lot of the discussion at home that I was involved in and that's, that's really my best recollection of those discussions.

TORRES: Yeah. Why nursing [Laughter] and when did you know you're going to study nursing?

GERAC: I've always wanted to be a nurse, so it was never, ever, I think it's in DNA, Daniel. [Laughter] I really do. I never wanted to be anything else. My father loved to tell stories about how all my dolls had broken arms or they were sick or I was always taking care of my dolls or whatever. But there was never, ever a doubt in my, and my

mind are, no matter how difficult the nursing program was, there was never a doubt that I wanted to be a nurse at all.

TORRES: So, before you, so you started college when?

GERAC: I started college in the summer of 1964.

TORRES: And you know, this was before you even got to the opportunity of getting to the nurse Corps. What were your original plans?

GERAC: Well I, before I joined the army nurse Corps, I was dating a guy that, and we were very serious about our relationship and, and we thought that probably someday we would get married and then, when I began college and, we decided that to be really, to make the right decision, we would sort of split up for a while, date other people. And so, the plan was that, I was just going to continue my nursing and probably get a job there in my hometown Lafayette, Louisiana is where I went to college. And there are major medical centers there. And, so that was pretty much, I think what, what the plan was going to be.

TORRES: Okay. During these first two years of college was there, in campus in general, was there conversation about, you know, the war, or about Kennedy, Johnson?

GERAC: Yeah. And you know that I don't know because I'll tell you, nursing is it because the, because the, the curriculum is so, intense for nursing. At least it was in my day. The nursing students are pretty much kept away from other events because we were either always studying or where I'm doing clinical (experience) or we're just doing a lot of things that require a lot of time, whether we're doing patient histories or visiting patients or being in the hospital, getting our assignment. So, I have no idea. I have no recollection. I don't even remember any other guys that I was dating even though it was really, you know, when, when I look back on it as I was doing all of this and then graduating all of a sudden the guys I grew up with were going off to Vietnam, without even giving any thought to it, you know, it just sort of happened.

TORRES: And you say that people started to get sent to Vietnam. Did you ever then wonder what is going on here or what's going on outside? Or where'd you just so busy with your work?

GERAC: I was just so, yeah, I was just so busy in getting past my nursing program and wanting to of course take my state board exams. That's always heavy on a nurse's mind. Once they get close to that

finish line it's passing state boards. I don't remember discussing anything political with any of my friends.

TORRES: So, then we go to 1966 that's when you, that's when you joined the army. You were 19 years old. So how did the opportunity come up?

GERAC: Well, this friend of mine that I was close to, the upperclassman. She had joined the Navy nurse student nurse program and she kept telling me how great it was and that they pay for your college, they give you a stipend. And I thought, wow, this is great. An extra \$300 a month. Wow. In 1966 that's a lot of money. So just on a whim, I went into the Army Nurse Corps, the army office, and told them that I wanted to join the Army Nurse Corps. And then I went home and told my parents and my parents were like, "You did what?" [Laughter] I mean, there was no discussion. I didn't even discuss it with them. I just said, well, look how great this is. I can do this. They can do this. By the time I finished school, I'll be a first Lieutenant, I can travel. So that's pretty much how it happened. I mean, I just did it because my good friend was saying great things about the Navy and I thought, well, I want to travel more than the Navy. So that's why I joined the army.

TORRES: So then after you joined the Corps did you then start keeping up with events, read about, everything that was happening or did you basically enter?

GERAC: I just entered, I kept my nose to the ground and my studies and all I focused on was just, it was just getting out of, you know, finishing nursing school, passing my state board exam and then, and then traveling. And I really, I mean it seems really naive and when I look back on it, I was very naive about what was going on and it wasn't until I was immersed in it that I realized what was going on but up until that time, I really had, I didn't think about it. I didn't think about it.

TORRES: So, if you knew about everything that was going on in Vietnam, would you have then changed your decision on joining the Corps? Would you have not done it in the first place? Or would it have not changed your decision?

GERAC: Well, that's a very good question. If I knew then what I know now about what was going on, I have to say because I'm basically a risk taker and I enjoy challenges, I probably would have joined.

TORRES: Okay. So, then you go to Fort Sam, Houston, Texas for basic training. So, take me to that day when you arrived. Your father said

that it was one of the loneliest days ever. So just take me back. How did it feel? How was the atmosphere?

GERAC: So, my parents drove me to San Antonio and we stayed at a very nice hotel and my father told me later, he didn't tell me then, my father was not one to really share his emotions very quickly. But he did tell me then that it was the loneliest day of his life because he realized that, I was leaving home and he began to have a lot of regrets about how he should have, could have participated in a lot more of my activities than he did. And so, he was very, despondent about that. But see, it's interesting because for me, I've never had any problem making friends even, I mean, as an only child, my father says that I never really met a stranger and so all of a sudden now I'm going from living at home and being the only child to now I'm in a barracks of a dormitory set up with a lot of other women. But I didn't have any problem because I think it's because we were all there for the same purpose. We were nurses. We wanted to be good nurses and we were, on a mission to do the best job we could and so, a lot of us had the same goal. And I, and I think that contributed a lot to the friends that I made while I was there in Fort Sam.

TORRES: So, tell me how was, what was basic training?

GERAC: Well, you started, you usually had a lot of classroom teaching, a military protocol, the do's and don'ts, military protocol. And then of course, being in the medical profession, we, since we were already registered nurses, obviously we didn't have to go through any nursing training, but what we had to go through was setting up field hospitals, learning how to function with maybe some bare essentials, bare equipment and also, they took us out, you know, they put in these, different trucks and took us out into wherever and gave us a compass and said "Find your way back to base". And so we had to learn how to do those things, how to, and they broke us up into groups and it was, it was primarily, really learning the military protocol. I don't, and of course we learned how to shoot a gun case. We needed to shoot a gun. I don't remember any automatic rifles at that time, but pistols, I remember shooting a pistol and I do recall that there was one train out in the woods where we sat and bleachers and they had a mock of Vietnam village set up. And so, they would show us some of the traps that were set and, and the kind of wounds that would come out of there and how they were being treated. And, that was primarily, and of course we always had our time in the quadrangle where we had to march, learn how to march and all that good stuff. [Laughter] But yeah, that was, that was pretty much what basically I think it was

six weeks basic training. And then from there everybody started getting their orders and, that's when we dispersed and went all our separate ways.

TORRES: So, going to that specific example you've told me about the mock village, you said that you were basically, they give you examples of wounds that you encounter, traps. Were there moments where you would look at it and say, you know, did you feel any regret on what you were joining? Or did you just push on?

GERAC: Push on. There is no regret. No, no. And the wounds they showed us didn't even come close to the wounds I witnessed in Japan.

TORRES: Mm. So, I'm reading through some narratives from nurses that were also going through basic training. There was a common point that was basically the whole notion of being a woman in military training and I just want to tell you about a particular experience. So, I quote it says "Because this was 1963 and women in the military were frowned upon by men, so many times, they would walk across the street so that they wouldn't have to salute you because you were superior in rank to them." So, did you experience any moment where your gender or your identity basically created barriers in the training?

GERAC: I never, ever experienced that. I never experienced it with the corpsmen that I worked with who were incredible. They could have been doctors themselves. They were mostly privates or I don't remember, I don't know the other ranks, but they were not officers. But, I never, ever experienced any disrespect. There was never any sexual trauma. What's interesting, and I'll just share this at while we're on this topic: the VA in White River Junction here recently, maybe it's been several years now, opened a separate women's comprehensive care center and before it opened, they, I don't know how many people they called, but they called and they asked me how I felt about because up to that time when I had an appointment at the VA, you go into one major waiting area, men, women, old, young, whatever. And they asked me how I felt about that and I said I have no problem at all being in a waiting room with them and they said, well, the reason why the women's comprehensive center was being put together, and I don't know if this is state nationwide or not, but a lot of the younger women coming back from wherever in the military who are experiencing sexual trauma or having difficulty being in a confined area with the men. Now, I never, ever experienced, there was never, ever a time, and I partied with I even party with some of my corpsmen, which you really weren't supposed to do because that was called fraternization but, I never,

ever experienced any disrespect. I never felt like they thought it. I, and maybe, I don't know. I don't know. Maybe it's because it was our, I was a nurse or I don't know what it was, but never, never experienced that.

TORRES: So, then you moved to Fort Ord, California after your training and like you mentioned, they called it the country club of the army. Tell me a little bit about what you did in Fort Ord.

GERAC: Well Fort Ord was, I was assigned to a cardiac care unit. It was at that time, Fort Ord now I believe is a relatively huge, nice hospital, whereas in those days it was like almost like barracks set up like a hospital and I was a staff nurse on a medical unit taking care of the GIs who were there for whatever reason, whether they were having a heart attack or had cardiac symptoms, but, it was primarily basic nursing care.

TORRES: Okay. Yeah and then you moved to San Francisco and several of your friends and you went to San Francisco 1969, correct.

GERAC: For the New Year's Eve celebration. Yeah.

TORRES: So, then it was a few days after that New Year's Eve celebration that you get your, I believe it was your friend Ruthie that told you that you were going to Japan. So, take me to that day when everyone got their assignments.

GERAC: Yes, that's an interesting period of time. I just, I didn't share this in the story, but, so my friend Ruthie, who I'm still friends with, she lives in New Hampshire as a matter of fact. She got orders to Vietnam. Vietnam was a one-year assignment and she was in the process of what we call clearing post. And by that I'm, I don't know if you know what that means, Daniel, but-

TORRES: Could you just define it?

GERAC: Sure. So, when you have waters to leave where you are and go someplace else, you're given a list of departments and you have to go to each department and clear it. Like they say, the person in charge of that department has to sign you off so that you clear the whole area where you've been and then move on to a new area. So, Ruthie was in the process of clearing posts and she happened to be in Human Resources and, and she happened to see on the desk my name and orders for Japan. Now this is February and the orders read that I was to report to Japan in March. She comes screaming down the hall to tell me that I had orders to go to Japan



next month. And I said that's impossible because when you get an overseas assignment you are automatically given 30 days leave. So here we are in February and she's seeing that I have orders for March and then at the same time I'm saying I don't want to go to Japan want to go to Vietnam with you. But the caveat there was that my obligation to the army was they paid for two years of my college so I owed them an extra year. I owed them three years of active duty. Ruthie only owed them one year or two years of active duty. So now Ruthie is taking me in and I'm clearing posts but at the same time I'm thinking in my mind this is not right. I have to have 30 days leave and so I go to Human Resources. I was a Lieutenant then. [They said] "No Lieutenant, that's what you orders say. That's what you have to abide by." My head nurse, [I] went to her [and she said] "No Lieutenant, that's what your orders say. That's what you have to abide by." So, one of patients that I had taken care of on the unit I was in charge of was the inspector general and I don't know what you know about the inspector general. You probably have heard a lot about the IG in the news these days.

TORRES: Could you just elaborate a bit for the sake of context??

GERAC: Yeah. The inspector general is a high, usually a high-ranking Sergeant who oversees essentially the ethics of the area that he's assigned to, the post essentially. He, I guess you could have a she [female] inspector general, but I only have had he's [male] and so they want to make sure that everything is upfront. Everything is done according to policy procedure and if you have any problems with anything, he's usually the one who looks to see yes, you're right or no, you're wrong. But now, you know, the chain of command is the golden rule in the military. You have to make sure that you tell your boss what you're doing and you have to let them know so that when you go to the IG they know that you're going to the IG. So, when I told my head nurse that I was going to the IG, she was not happy with me at all and here I am a young first Lieutenant. This is my first assignment in the army but I go to the IG because he was one of my patients and he had said to me, if I can ever help you with anything, make sure you come to see me. And so, I did and I went to him and I said "Sarge, look, supposedly my orders read March and I'm supposed to have 30 days leave." And he called Washington D C where the orders originated from and found out that it was a typographical error. Instead of March, it should have been May and so that was solving my problem and at the same time my head nurse was not happy with me at all. I don't remember her being vindictive in any way but that sort of proved my point. So anyway, I had order for May instead of March.

- TORRES: Did you tell your parents immediately about your assignment to Japan?
- GERAC: I don't remember how soon I told my parents. How soon [did I] tell them? Hmm. Well that's a very good question, Daniel. I don't remember how soon I told them. I just remember telling them that, because I had bought a new car. So, I said, you know, you're going to have to fly out and then we'll drive back and you'll keep my car while I'm in Japan but I don't remember how soon I told them.
- TORRES: When you told them what was their first reaction?
- GERAC: They seem to be fine with it. I don't remember them having any qualms about it at all. They seem to be fine. I mean, again, I think it was, I don't know if it's because they we're not so politically oriented that to them, so, you're going to Japan. I don't know if they realize at the time me and I did the patients I'd be taking care of are the boys coming out of Japan, out of Vietnam. So, they seem fine with it. They were kind of, they were excited about it.
- TORRES: So, then you take your 30 days at least.
- GERAC: Yes.
- TORRES: Just tell me a little bit about what was going on. [Laughter] You said it was a lot of farewell parties.
- GERAC: Oh yeah it was partying drinking, you name it. [Laughter] I mean, because I was now, a lot of our guys were already in Vietnam and I look back on it and it was just a lot of parties. It was fine tuning everything, making sure that, the insurances on my car were okay and just, you know, just saying goodbye to people and, and my best friend from college was getting married so I had to go to New Orleans for her wedding. So it was just all these last minute events and partying and drinking.
- TORRES: Yeah. So, as you're, for example, going through these farewell parties, and saying goodbye to everyone, did you ever have the mentality of, you know, maybe I won't come back, or did you say, kind of a see you later or see you soon?
- GERAC: Yeah. No, I never gave one thought about not coming back. Nope. Never. And actually it's really interesting, but it kind of comes, it wasn't until just, let's see, I was home in Louisiana last year or two years ago, and it wasn't until then that one of my very, very close

friends from school days, from elementary to high school at finally asked me, what was it really like for you in the army? Yeah. Yeah.

TORRES: So, then when exactly, if you remember, did you fly to Tokyo more or less?

GERAC: So, the orders were from May, so it must have been sometime in May. Cause I had to report there in May. Yeah.

TORRES: May of what year?

GERAC: May of '69-'70.

TORRES: Okay. Yeah. So, you arrived to Tokyo? Yeah. Take me back to that day.

GERAC: That day is fuzzy. The only thing I remember about that period of time, I have no recollection of how I got from Tokyo to the base, which is about maybe half an hour from Tokyo, to the 249th general hospital which is not there anymore but being assigned into a barracks on the hospital base, a bachelor officer's quarters, they call and BOQ.

TORRES: And you mentioned that in Camp Drake, it was a facility of 23 buildings. There were originally 2000 beds. But then it functioned at as a 1000 bed facility. Do you know why?

GERAC: No, I don't know. I don't know if they decided because of the, I don't know they had to designate the beds for certain injuries or whatever, but I have no idea because when I got there it was a thousand bed hospital and most of the time we were operating at 1,000 bed capacity.

TORRES: Tell me about your first assignment, which was I believe in the surgical unit, right?

GERAC: Well, that was during orientation. Yeah. During orientation. When I was taken around that's the most graphic [memory] that I remember is the wounds that I saw, that special care unit where the wounds were pretty graphic. I mean, just bodies that were just riddled and shot to hell and I mean there was nothing that could prepare us for these types of injuries and the kind of dressing changes and bandages that we had to put onto these different wounds and whatever.

TORRES: And what went through your mind as you saw these rather graphic memories or images?

GERAC: Well, I tried because what was horrible about this was that as riddled and dehumanizing their bodies were, the guys never complained. I mean the morale was unbelievable so I tried to keep up my morale and I didn't want to show any disgust or any "Oh my God, I can't believe I got to do this" type thing. I just, and we tried to, as I'm doing their dressing changes, talk to them about whatever they wanted to talk about. Most of the time it was home and family and friends and never talked about the war. They never showed any, discussed or they never relayed any feelings of sorrow or regret that they had. It was all their morale was really always up, always up.

TORRES: So, you communicated with one of your best friends that I believe you sent a letter. Can you tell me a bit about what you said in that letter?

GERAC: Well, in that letter I described to her my living conditions, which weren't bad, but it was the fact that I was living right there on the post and so, we heard those choppers coming in routinely with the casualties, but that particular day was the day that I had witnessed the relatively large man being lifted up on like a meat hook type situation and from his testicles a down, it was nothing but dangling flesh, nothing, just that. And that was pretty gruesome. And that's what I wrote home about and I said, "I don't know if I'm going to be able to finish this tour because my God, this is just awful to witness and to bear." That's when she wrote back and, and said, uh, "You asked for it." and that was it. I said, well, okay, that's it. No more letters back home.

TORRES: So how did you get through this moment of doubt?

GERAC: Well, I think right around that same time, my friend Cathy [Catherine Reynolds] had moved out to this area. She had moved off of posts and was living out and Tokorozawa and so around right about this time is when she alerted me to the fact that one of the apartments had become available and she said we've got to get you off posts, get you away from that constant helicopter coming in and whatever. And so, I think, I think it was being friends with her and being able to move away from it all and really start, I mean partying a lot and making a lot of good friends. I think that really being in Japan then, and so we just, I know another friend that I had before I met at Cathy, she and I would take off on our days off, but yet being right there on the post, you were always subject to

last minute assignments or whatever and so I think the other thing that helped too, Daniel was us being able to travel out in the country and see Japan. That helped a lot.

TORRES: Yeah. So, you would move a lot in between are you were in Tokorozawa you weren't Osaka.

GERAC: I was never in Osaka.

TORRES: Oh, so you were never in Osaka.

GERAC: No, Asaka is where the hospital was.

TORRES: Ah, okay. That is good to remember. Yeah, so tell me about the difference between, you know, being in Asaka and being in Tokorozawa.

GERAC: Tokorozawa, it was like out in the country. And those are the slides that I have for you that I would and I just thought of something else I was going to bring today and that's the actual life journal that I quote in that article about, the July, 1970 issue of LOOK magazine that was banned from Japan. So, Tokorozawa was out in the country and it was filled with cherry blossom trees. So, in cherry blossom season it was like open to the public so the public could come on posts to see the cherry blossom tree. So, it was out in the country. It was beautiful. It was away from the hospital, whereas the hospital grounds was like one big, huge area with a hospital and in barracks and whatever. I don't remember many trees around the hospital so, you couldn't escape it. You couldn't escape work being right there.

TORRES: So, take me to through a typical day in the hospital.

GERAC: Well, we were on 12 hour shifts and so the typical day and the days that I mostly remember [are] the days that I was in intensive care, and so those days were spent, just making sure that the boys got their medications, that they got their dressings changed, the corpsmen were always up and full of life and trying to keep the humor going when in fact most of the guys in that room were dying, but they tried to keep their hopes up. And then we had lots of families, girlfriends, you name it, visiting the red cross was really good about making sure of that family members or whoever wanted to come over, whether it was a relative or, a girlfriend, or a fiancé, whoever. The red cross was really good about bringing people over.

TORRES: So, you often talk about how in the ICU you would have, conversations with patients. Could you just go into a little more detail of what these soldiers often talked about?

GERAC: Well, they often talked about home, how much they missed home and their friends back home and some of them, were with their friends who may have been killed in Vietnam and they witnessed they're killed at their death. And that was the only time they really showed any kind of, anger you might say, or "I'm not really sure how to deal with that" but most of the time it was, it was about their home and what their homes were liking, what they missed about home, you know, whether it was the food they liked or how they liked to drink or what kind of drink they liked. That was pretty much the discussion. It was never, I don't remember it ever being around their wound care or am I going to die or it was never, I don't remember that at all.

TORRES: Is there a particular patient that you, you know, out of all the ones that you've seen, you particularly remember about?

GERAC: Well, it's the guy that I write about. The guy that was in a private room. He was, riddled with gunshot wound to his abdomen and he had a horrible infection. He had big Brown eyes. His fiancé was flown over and, he just kinda laid in that bed and just stared at you with these big brown eyes and that's when there was really nothing more that we could do for him and that's when the surgeon came in. We had piped in music that the guys could listen to by headphone and so we put headphones on him and the surgeon delivered what could have been a lethal dose. I'm not sure if it was or not but the guy gently went off to sleep and to the beyond and he's the one. He and this other young guy, that I remember had been shot in the back and he had a hole in his spine probably about three inches in diameter, clean hole, and he was on a striker frame bed. So, he was constantly laying on his stomach, staring at the ground, because you wanted to keep any weight or anything off that open wound and what the surgeon did, that he was hoping would help the guy is that he actually broke his leg and swung his leg over and then grafted the skin from his thigh onto that big gaping hole. The guy didn't make it, but what was awful about that was that the rest of his body was pristine. There were no other cuts, scratches or anything. His mind was intact but he was another one who just talked about home and I don't remember any of his relatives coming over, but that was a pretty dramatic wound.

TORRES: So, what was your mind thinking as you talked with these patients, especially with these, that you know died in the ICU?

- GERAC: Yeah. Well my mind was always just trying to stay upbeat. Don't look melancholy. Don't feel sorry for them because they're not feeling sorry for themselves so don't you feel sorry for them. Keep your head up. keep your mind clear on what you have to do, what medications you have to give them, what dressings and so it was such fast-paced cause making sure that the Corpsmen knew what they were doing, which they always did. I mean, like I said earlier, they themselves could have been doctors, that's for sure because they were always giving really top-notch care to these guys.
- TORRES: And then when you finish those shifts, was there any difference in how you felt because you know you had to maintain this image of trying to stay positive in the hospital, but what about outside the hospital?
- GERAC: So, after the shift, because we were usually on 12-hour shifts and so after the 12-hour shifts were over, it was time to just go to just go crash and get ready for the next day for the next shift or whatever. So, there was really not much it's time to do anything once you got off your shift to go and do anything else. I mean I certainly didn't. There may have been other people who after their shift did whatever but I certainly didn't.
- TORRES: You mentioned a particular surgeon. He's Captain Bill. You said that it was your favorite surgeon. Could you tell me more about him in particular?
- GERAC: Well, Captain Bill was your clean cut, American guy. Soft spoken, good heart, fantastic doctor. I mean, he really knew his medicine and his surgery and he had impeccable bedside manner. I mean he could sit by the bedside and hold the hand of a GI. He never seemed rushed. He never acted like anyone was taking up too much of his time. He was just a good all-around guy. Doctor. Yeah.
- TORRES: Was there any particular patient that you kept in contact with afterwards?
- GERAC: No.
- TORRES: Because I know you mentioned that most of them did not survive the ICU, but what did happen to those who did manage to make through the ICU?
- GERAC: I don't know. Uh you know, that's that article I handed you today, when I went to see the "[Born on the] 4th of July" movie, which was like 18 years after I'd been discharged, I didn't realize that the boys

who came home got such terrible reception when they came home. I can only imagine that some of those boys that I took care of in Japan had terrible reunions when they came home. I can go to the wall. I don't remember, I don't remember her name. I remember faces some faces, but I have absolutely no recollection of a name.

TORRES: Okay. So now tell me about your typical day when you're in Tokorozawa.

GERAC: Mm. So, a typical day in Tokorozawa on my off days, what was really big in those days was, everyone in just about invested money in buying reel to reel tape recorders. And then wherever we could buy vinyls, we would buy vinyls and then we would make tapes of those vinyls and so we were always constantly exchanging vinyls. That was a big deal then and that I spent a lot of my time, in fact, I had a collection of 63 reel to reel tapes and it was all music that I really enjoyed and popular music. That was usually a typical day. We'd have breakfast and the officer's club, there was an office club right there, Tokorozawa because most of us, in fact, I think all of us who were at Tokorozawa were officers. So, we would have breakfast and then we'd either fix lunch in our, in our own room or at night we would either have, a barbecue. Tare on the grounds. We would all get together and have and barbecue shish kabobs and drink a lot and just party right there on the grounds. If there was something going on in Tokyo, we would go to Tokyo. There was a popular little place in Tokorozawa where we used to go and eat different noodle dishes. This Japanese guy really liked us a lot. I forget what his name was, but he liked us a lot. It was a tiny place and we would go in there, drink a lot of beer or whatever, and eat noodles and that was kind of, that was fun to do.

TORRES: So, tell me about the date that you were promoted to captain. [Laughter] You were, in a cookout, you drank a little bit too much and you had a little injury and you mentioned that in the picture when you received your promotion, you had a bunch of bandages and gauze over.

GERAC: My knees were bandaged. In those days nursing uniform, we didn't wear pants in those days. We wore a dress that was kind of at the knees and so that night we had all been drinking and we started chasing each other. I jumped over a Bush, lost my balance and slid on my knees. So, someone, I forget who had to, I mean, little tiny bits of gravel in my knees, take those out and then pour betadine, it burned like hell, and then put gauze with them. And so there I was in the car and the commander's office with my knees bandaged. He never, I don't remember him ever asking me what happened to my



knees or I guess it was the fact that I was in good condition that morning. I wasn't hung over. I don't know how it wasn't hung over, but anyway, it wasn't hung over. but yeah, that was, uh, I mean the picture is hysterical. I don't even know where that picture is, but it's pretty hysterical.

TORRES: So, during your time in Japan, what was communication back home like?

GERAC: My parents would communicate via the little cassette tapes. They would go and visit different relatives and whatever and they would get them to say something in the tape and they would mail me the tape and I'd play the tape and then I'd make a tape back to them. I would primarily tell them what we were doing in Japan and I never really talked about the war with them. I didn't want them to know what was going on, essentially what I was seeing, I didn't need to tell them that. But and my father wrote letters. I don't remember my mother writing. My mother talked on the tapes a lot. My father wrote letters, just talking about things back home and that was of course, way before the internet and all of the good stuff we have today. So that was how we communicated.

TORRES: Did they ever ask about the war?

GERAC: I don't remember them asking about the war, no, and I mentioned that in the article you have there that we had a very dear friend. In fact, I considered her my second mother. She came on tour with a tour group to Japan and so I took some days off to be with them and not once during those days. Did they ask about the war? Did they ask about the boys? I found that incredibly interesting how they didn't seem to really care.

TORRES: And why did you never have the urge to tell them about your experiences?

GERAC: That's a very good question. I don't know why I didn't just come out and say, "Hey, you want to know what's really going on?" I think I just wanted to observe the politeness of the group. They were there to tour Japan. They weren't there to learn about the war. So, I think that that was probably the driving force, Daniel, that kept me from, from saying to them, "Hey, you want to know what's going on here?" I think it was just out of respect for their tour group.

TORRES: Besides your parents, who else did you, constantly communicate with if anyone else?

- GERAC: No, there was no one else. There were no one.
- TORRES: And what about nurses that were with you in basic training?
- GERAC: My friend Ruthie was in Vietnam and she would call me on her shortwave radio and I could hear the gunfire or the bombs or whatever going off in the background. But Ruthie was really the only one that I remember communicating with during that time.
- TORRES: Mmm. Okay so now we moved to your first fall in Japan, which you talk about when you were with Cathy and that was basically that moment where you really felt that you were in love. How did it feel basically knowing that you were with someone that you loved very much, especially in this setting of, you know, constant war in a place where you're technically in danger and you never know what could happen? So how did that feel?
- GERAC: Well, it felt very comforting to have to be in love with someone and to be feeling a different sensation than I had felt with the men in my life and so it was different and yet it felt meaningful and it was comforting because of what we were going through together. At the same time, we were very closeted because there was just no way, especially being in the military in those days, that you would even give any hint of homosexuality. So, at the same time it was comforting and yet at the same time it was being on guard.
- TORRES: And during your time in Japan, did anyone know about this relationship?
- GERAC: We never spoke of it. They could have surmised whatever they wanted. I think the story I tell in the article, I think the head nurse surmised that Cathy and I are couple and that's why she chose not to give me the one day of leave that I asked for but people knew that we were good friends just like there were, a couple of guys that we were very good friends with. I mean they; they were just friends. No one I'm sure in that day and time and because of the situation that people decided on their own "Oh God, they must be a couple because they are spending a lot of time together." I mean, we spend a lot of time together because we were in situations where we had to spend a lot of time together. I have no idea. We were not treated any differently than anybody else. I mean, we did a lot of things together. We hung out together, we were with other people a lot but we were never treated differently.
- TORRES: Would it have been different if people knew that you both were a couple?

GERAC: I think in that day and age you would have been very different. We would have probably have been kicked out of the army, the military. I think in fact, later on in the story I talk about when I was in Louisiana and one of the nurses on the unit where I worked, came to my apartment one day to tell me that she was attracted to me and I told her that I felt honored about that, but that it was not right for us to act on that. At the same time, I was being loyal to Cathy. The next morning, I get a call that she's in the emergency room with attempted suicide and so I knew immediately that if the nursing supervisor had any hint that the suicide was because she was a lesbian who had been turned down that her career would be disastrous and so that's why I immediately, luckily, I was good friends with the psychiatrist on post. Of course, in those days they, they thought you were not of right mind to be a homosexual and so I knew immediately that she had to be she had to be flown off that base, get off that base soon. Then he did, he made sure that she was flown to San Antonio and I was questioned a lot by the nursing supervisor about what was the reason for that lieutenant's departure and blah, blah, blah. I just stood firm and said it was confidential

TORRES: During your shifts, was it difficult when you had this relationship with Cathy? Was it then difficult to, you know, did you have moments where your kind of did not want to make it obvious? Was it very challenging to basically conceal this relationship?

GERAC: No. See Cathy worked, this was in Japan, in the neurosurgery unit, which was a big unit, like a 60-bed unit. I worked across the street in the intensive care unit and we were very professional. There was never, ever any discussion about relationship. We never felt like we had to watch our behavior. We were just natural, just normal. We didn't make it an issue.

TORRES: So now we move on to when General [William Childs] Westmoreland visited the 249th. Tell me about that day.

GERAC: That day you had to make sure that, the general was coming so they had set aside these charts of statistics: how many patients had been received, how many patients died, how many patients went back to duty and it was in this private room where we would normally have a boy who was dying with family instead of being what I would consider in the commander's office, all this stuff, why they chose that unit to do this I'll never understand that as long as I live. But anyway, so you had to be on your best behavior and to make sure that, of course my shoes were always polished, but you had to make sure that you uniform was starched and no wrinkles

and you were there at the general's. I don't remember him making any specific requests. He just came in and looked at the charts. I was out continuing my patient care, doing what needed to be done. So, it was brief. It wasn't long lasting, but yet it was, to me, it was so inappropriate.

TORRES: Did you ever talk to him or interacted with him?

GERAC: No

TORRES: And before the visit, what did you know about Westmoreland?

GERAC: Didn't know anything about him.

TORRES: And what was your, throughout your tour of duty, opinion about him?

GERAC: Well I never heard anything said against him. I mean, I just heard that he was a general doing his job and that whatever was going on he was in charge of or whatever, but I never really heard much or cared much. He didn't interfere with my care so it was just a name. I didn't really pay much attention to what he was doing.

TORRES: In fact, how much communication or how much, how many news were you receiving about what was going on in Vietnam, especially that this was a time during Tet offensive. So how much were you hearing about what was going on?

GERAC: We didn't hear much. We just saw it. We just saw the patients. We just saw the casualties and we received them up. Obviously, the hospital was bursting at the seams, a thousand bed hospital with a thousand patients. Little by little, we started hearing about this article that had been written by one of the neurosurgeons that appeared in LOOK magazine that was banned from Japan, but I don't remember having any radio or hearing any news or discussing anything with anybody about what was going on. We just saw the casualties.

TORRES: Speaking of that LOOK magazine article, take me to the day that you basically heard about the article.

GERAC: Oh boy. I don't remember the day. I think it was like at our, whether it was at a dinner or we were sitting around and someone from home had asked if we had seen the article because the fact that the article was written by a neurosurgeon from that hospital. They felt that, obviously we knew this surgeon. The pictures that was sent

were pretty graphic and they wanted to know where these pictures for real and of course we didn't see the article. I don't think I saw the article until I got home at some point in time or someone may have mailed me a copy of the article and it's all in tattered pages now. But anyway, that was just what was circulating around: the article that was written by this neurosurgeon that we worked with.

TORRES: What happened to [inaudible, the surgeon].

GERAC: I don't know what happened to him. He was a great doctor and I hope that he went on for a very prosperous career because was a great doctor. I should Google him one of these days. [Laughter]

TORRES: Do you know of any other either nurse or doctor that basically had the same mindset of "I want the United States to know what is happening here and they need to know"?

GERAC: No. In fact, we were shocked that [the surgeon] had written this article because I guess, see again, Daniel, it all goes back to just being so immersed in nursing and nursing care that I wasn't thinking about the political aspects of it all, you know, get the hell out of here and get what's going, do you really understand what's going on here and whatever. I don't know what the other doctors thought amongst themselves, they may have talked about feeling the same way [the surgeon] did, but I don't know because they certainly never talked about it in front of us. Even when we were together, whether we were having dinner or at a social function, you never heard any of them say anything derogatory about the war or what was going on or never heard any of that.

TORRES: So, Cathy was scheduled to basically end her tour earlier than you.

GERAC: Right.

TORRES: And you were trying to see if you could get your date to be on the more or less at the same time. So, could you take me back to that entire ordeal?

GERAC: Okay. Yeah, so because Cathy had been there a year before me, she obviously left a year before me, I decided at that time that it would be a great time, to send my parents over where we'd meet my parents in Hawaii would spend some time with my parents and that would be a fun thing to do. And so, all of that was arranged: Cathy to fly out, I would fly on a certain day and then I got a call from the guy in charge of flights. So, we used to fly out of the air force base, Tachikawa Air Force Base. He called me and he said

"There is a seat available for you on the same flight Captain Reynolds is going to be on when she leaves. Would you like that seat?" Well, of course I wanted that seat. So, it meant that I would now would start my leave a day early, so I went to my head nurse, he said that was fine. And that's when he said "But you have to go talk to the chief nurse." Because because it was Tet and because we were busy working 12-hour shifts. He didn't have the authority. It had to come through the chief nurse. So, I spent three days, I worked seven P to seven a after I got off my shift, I went to her office. I spent, I did that for three days before she finally saw me and I asked her if I could have an extra day leave because it would mean that not only was I on the same flight as Captain Reynolds, but I would also have an extra day with my parents. And that's when she said to me pretty much in quotes, "Captain Gerac, I went six years before seeing my parents," and that was the day I decided I would not give the army another day of my life and so I went back to my head nurse. I told him what she had told me, and I told him "Don't expect me to give this army another day of my life after my tour is up. I'm done with the army." And so, Cathy flew out, I flew out, we met my parents, they flew into Hawaii and then we spent time with them. It was a lovely time and then shortly thereafter, my mother was diagnosed with a brain tumor. So, the red car I had always, I told my parents, luckily, I had told my parents this: "If I need to come home, you need to call the American Red Cross right away and tell them I've got to come home." And they must have, because next thing I knew the American Red Cross was getting me out and I was going back home so the Catholic priest there, that was a friend of ours we called him and he was my power of attorney. He took care of packing up all my stuff when I left. So, I came home and my compassionate reassignment was in was Fort Polk, Louisiana, which is Leesville, the armpit or the army they call it. I finished my tour of duty there and there was an excellent chief nurse there. Lieutenant Colonel Connor, I think her name was, I can't remember now, Lieutenant Colonel Conner. Anyway, she called me to her office, begged me to stay in the army and I told her why I wasn't going to stay. She was very sorry to hear my story and so that was it. When it was time for me to get out, I got out.

TORRES: And how did it feel basically ending your tour of duty in the army?

GERAC: Well, because I was so angry at the army, because there was no way I wanted to become what I had seen. I had a bitch of a supervisor in Japan. I had a bitch of a supervisor in Louisiana and then the chief nurse in Japan who I thought was vindictive and I knew even though I would have probably loved to have made the military a career from benefits and whatever, although I haven't

been benefits down that, worried about that, because I'm not one to sit by and not speak my mind, I probably would've never gone further than captain. [Laughter] I probably would've never gotten a good O E R like they say, Officer Efficiency Rating because I like to speak my mind and if things aren't right, I say things aren't right and you just don't do that in the military.

TORRES: So, when you left the army and you told your parents about it did they already know about your relationship with Cathy?

GERAC: Well, they knew Cathy was a good friend. You know, there was never, and like I said, in those days, you were just good friends. And so, Cathy and I had talked about, and I see now my mother now had a malignant brain tumor and so I had a very difficult decision to make. Very difficult. Do I continue with my dream to move to California or do I stay home until my mother dies? Luckily, I had a wonderful head nurse at Fort Polk and she said to me, she said, "You know, your mother has always been happy when you're happy." And my mother knew, always knew that I wanted to go to California and live. So, I said, okay and I was home for a while. My mother did very, very well. She had radiation treatment, which made her sick as hell. But other than that, she normally in those days with a glioblastoma that's the same tumor that Ted Kennedy had. So, in those days it was six months prognosis. My mother lived 18 months after her surgery, so she had a very good life and then one day my mother, my father called me and said "We were church this morning and your mother all of a sudden became paralyzed." She couldn't walk. I knew then that was a sign for me to go home and be with her. I was working at Stanford university hospital in Palo Alto at the time. I told my supervisor what was going on and she said, "Go home and your position will be here when you get back." So, I went home, I was with my mother until she died and then I went back to Stanford for 11 years.

TORRES: When you're in Stafford where you still a nurse or where you doing yet? You were, and how different was it compared to being in Japan?

GERAC: God, well, it was certainly, I mean, even though we were doing some really experimental cardiac surgery, the wounds and whatever were nothing compared to what we had seen in Japan. I'd also had some time to kind of decompress. You might say I was at Fort Polk for a while and I was assigned to a medical unit. So, I had sort of decompressed at Fort Polk from Japan and then went on to Stanford.

- TORRES: I just want to go back a little bit because you know, you talk a lot about your supervisors and well, your experiences with them, but you do talk about the chief nurse who was in Japan who was a little different and she'd begged
- GERAC: Oh, you mean the one in Louisiana
- TORRES: Yeah, Louisiana, basically begged you to stay in the army. With all the anger that you were showing, did you still ever consider at that time staying at the army?
- GERAC: No.
- TORRES: Or was it very adamant?
- GERAC: It was adamant because I guess I'm just that kind of person, Daniel. When I make a decision for myself, I'm going to hold true to that decision and I just decided that I would not do well in the army. I would not do well.
- TORRES: And you said that today that you still, you are currently, I'm still part of the army, right?
- GERAC: No, I'm not.
- TORRES: Oh, you're not, okay.
- GERAC: When I left on October of 71, when my tour was up, that was it for me, for the army. That was it. I became a civilian nurse.
- TORRES: And take me through the day where you were honorably discharged from the army.
- GERAC: I just knew that it was my last day. Of course, you know? My mother was ill and I was there. Well, there were other thoughts going through my mind at the time. I really didn't give much thought about, "Oh yeah, this is my last day in the army." But at the same time, my mother had a malignant brain tumor. I don't know how much longer she has to live, but I think that that took, that was first and foremost in my mind. I don't even remember my last day of the army, to be honest. [Laughter]
- TORRES: So, a speeding to the end of the war, the end of the Vietnam war. Do you remember more or less that day when basically U.S. troops withdrew from South Vietnam, evacuated and Saigon fell?



- GERAC: What year are we talking there? '75?
- TORRES: If I remember correctly, that was '75.
- GERAC: 1975. I was in graduate school in San Francisco again in studies, I don't even, I don't even think I realized what day that was, to be honest with you.
- TORRES: Yeah. If I remember it till it was spring of 1975. April.
- GERAC: April. Yes.
- TORRES: Right. Yeah. So let's just talk about basically the general legacy of the war. Looking back now, you retold your entire experience as a nurse. Is there something that you ever regretted doing? Do you regret ever joining the Nurse Corps even today?
- GERAC: No, not at all.
- TORRES: And why?
- GERAC: Well, I think because, first of all, the friends that I made, who, other nurses, some of them are still around, primarily Ruthie, I would say. Mary Jane unfortunately died of a brain tumor a couple of years ago. But I think it was a really good growing experience and it was certainly a great nursing experience. Being able to make a difference. I do think making a difference in a soldier's life and the dedication of the women's Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC that day was profound. We marched, and when I say we, I mean nurse female nurses from all over who had any part in the Vietnam war, marched along, and not just nurses, red cross workers. We marched along Pennsylvania Avenue and the Avenue was lined, Daniel, with ex male veterans. I mean there were some in wheelchairs. There were some on crutches. I have a picture; I have a picture of the sign holding up. Oh yeah. These pictures here. Now this is, this is one nurse that I know that was killed in Vietnam, uh, while on duty.
- TORRES: So, Sharon Lane? Yes. What do you know about her?
- GERAC: What I know about her? This is very interesting. At the time another friend of mine, Lieutenant Carr, C-A-R-R who was in Vietnam and she was supposed to be on duty and for some reason they switched whatever and she was killed.

TORRES: And during that day, that March in Pennsylvania Avenue, you know, how did you guys honor the fallen nurses?

GERAC: Well, I think later that night there was a Memorial, a candle memorial for any of the fallen. This is Cathy and I in front of the statue. So, this is the statue of the Memorial, Women's Memorial in Washington DC

TORRES: And when was this?

GERAC: It was, uh, November 11th, 1993.

TORRES: How many people attended this event?

GERAC: Oh, we're talking thousands. Thousands, thousands. It was unbelievable. I mean, I get goosebumps just thinking about it. I want to show this picture. [Laughter]

TORRES: So, this was you. This is when you're in Japan, right?

GERAC: Yes. Yeah, I was Japan then.

TORRES: So, tell me about that day. What did you feel as you were marching this?

GERAC: God, it was overwhelming. I mean, I think we were brought to tears, especially seeing the guys in wheelchairs. I mean, you know, signs like this. There were hundreds of signs like that from guys in wheelchairs on crutches. That's my friend Ruthie there on the end also.

TORRES: This is Ruthie. She was, she was the nurse in Vietnam.

GERAC: She was, yes. Yeah.

TORRES: You said you were welcomed with the signs.

GERAC: Oh my god, yes! "We love our women!" "Thank you, ladies!" That's the Memorial. That's all sorts of memorabilia that was left at the base of the Memorial. I mean, pajamas, flags, you name it.

TORRES: Did you leave something?

GERAC: You know, I didn't have anything to leave. I wish I had had something. That article that I gave you today describes what the

Memorial is like and who made it and all that. And when you're in Washington, D.C. you really should see it.

TORRES: Tell me about the Memorial. What is it from what you remember?

GERAC: Where's the article I gave you today? That's how I best describe it. So, "The wall is mesmerizing and it is hard to walk away without being drawn to the mementos that are left as tributes. As we move along and veer off to the right, we come to the Vietnam Women's Memorial. I was in Washington for the dedication of that Memorial in 1993. Walking down Pennsylvania Avenue, there were guys in those fatigues' jungle days. There seem to be hundreds of them, some able to stand alone, some with crutches, some in wheelchairs, the signs they held, relayed the same message: Thank you ladies for caring for us. I still get choked up recalling that day when Glenna Goodacre, the sculptor, spoke. She said that her desire was to create a lasting tribute to the many American women who served in Vietnam and that feeling is founded deep in the respect for each of them and that her heartfelt prayer is for their healing and hope. When I look at the sculpture in the round portraying three Vietnam Era women, one of whom is caring for a wounded male soldier, another in thoughtful contemplation. You can see all the pictures that the thoughtful contemplation. But I am fixated on the woman looking up toward the sky. I know what she is hearing: those choppers coming in with more casualties. Yeah. So that pretty much describes the memorial. So it's got three, she's looking up waiting. This one of them is holding a soldier. Another one is praying, I think.

TORRES: Yeah. And when you saw this memorial for the first time, what was going through your mind?

GERAC: God. Oh, well, we were all, especially, so this woman. I mean, Cathy and I could certainly relate to her looking up.

TORRES: So, this is the one looking up.

GERAC: And hearing the sound of the helicopter just coming in. And it's a beautiful, I mean, it's a beautiful monument and so adequately portrayed. Looking up to the sky for more casualties, holding a wounded soldier, praying, meditating, whatever. It's pretty, it's very powerful. And then of course the people, I mean the memorabilia that was left there, there were, there were pajamas, there were dog tags, there were flags, there were flowers, there were notes, there was, you name it. I mean it was just, it was really an event to behold.

TORRES: Speaking about the general audiences, did you, when you returned to United States, did you ever encounter any anti-war activists that basically, you know, you hear about these stories of people spitting at the returning veterans? Did you ever encounter such scrutiny from activists?

GERAC: I don't think I did because I was a nurse, I think for some reason we were shielded from [these activists]. Now there's one nurse and I have read her book a long time ago. I have to read it again. It's called "Home Before Morning" and I think she writes about what she encountered. You know I don't think I had what we call today PTSD, but what triggers me and what triggered me in the movie "Born on the 4th of July." As I'm sitting there and watching this movie, and I feel this anxiety building up in me and I have no idea what is going on. And then I'll walk out of this theater and now I am crying, inconsolably crying because all of a sudden, I realize that the boys who made it home were treated like shit. I hadn't, I had no idea. I had never even given it any thought that that had gone on, but I never experienced that and I think it's because I was a nurse. I wasn't a soldier in the battle. You know, like the saying goes, I forget now how it goes. Something about, you know, we can be angry at the war, but let's not be angry at the warrior. I mean, goodness gracious, these guys gave their lives for what they did so no, I never experienced any of that. Then again, the first time I realized that I may have some issues was, I was living in California and we were invaded by the fruit fly. To take care of the fruit fly, they were spraying at night. Helicopters were buzzing around at night and the first time I heard these helicopters; they sound just like choppers coming into the hospital. I just about freaked. And up to this day when I hear a helicopter, I mean, I don't freak out like I did initially, but it sometimes it sends me back to that post that I was living on where constantly I've heard the choppers coming in.

TORRES: So just to basically wrap this story up, you know, I look at all these pictures, I remember everything that you've told me. You know, even today, say that after this interview, you go back to this statue, to this memorial, with all of these pictures with you. I mean, what would you feel at that time?

GERAC: I think I would feel very, I feel very proud. I have been back to, to the memorial since the day it was, it was first dedicated. I feel very proud to have been a part of that community: a woman who was I am able to say, I was part of that era and I was a nurse and I took care of the casualties.

TORRES: And to anybody listening to this interview that would say “Hmm, what was a woman doing in the military at this time?” What would you say to those people that would say it's rare to see a woman in an army, especially at this era? What would you say to that?

GERAC: Well first of all, it's not rare at all. In that era and the Vietnam era, I was a nurse and we didn't have boundaries. You're a nurse, whether you are a male or female. I had a head nurse in Japan who was male. Bruce Swanson was his name. And we were nurses. We were nurses doing a job wanting to take care of the wounded. There was no line drawn: you can only do that if you're a man or you can only do that if you're a woman. We were nurses. That was the bottom line.

TORRES: Is there anything that you would change even today at all?

GERAC: No, I think that, I think everything that I did everything I was exposed to, I certainly did. in my opinion, the best nursing care that I could give. There was nothing I would change. No.

TORRES: Is there any advice right now that you would tell you right here in this picture where you were a nurse in Japan? [Laughter] Is there anything you would tell her?

GERAC: I would tell her: don't expect much out of, out of your superiors because they may disappoint you. They may not be what you want them to be. Just do your job, just do the best job you can do. Be true to your Hippocratic Oath that you will care for the wounded and do the best and treat them the best way and give them the best care that you can give.

TORRES: Well Anna Louise, thank you so much for telling your incredible experience. Thank you.

GERAC: Thank you. It's my pleasure.

[End of interview.]