

# Gary & Victoria West Cobbett

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**Miller:** [00:00:00] All right. Today is October 27, 2021. I am Ben Miller and have the pleasure today of interviewing Sergeant Gary Cobbett and Sergeant Victoria Cobbett, both of the U.S. Marines. Gary served from 1968 to 1972 and Vicki [Victoria] from 1970 to 1973. I'm really looking forward to hearing both of your stories today in this fantastic joint interview. [Victoria inserts: "Thank you."] To start off, Gary, I want to ask you a little bit about your life growing up. So tell me about Kittanning [Pennsylvania] in the '50s and early '60s, what were some of the sights and the sounds and the smells that defined your child[hood]? [Gary asks: "What?"]

**Victoria:** [00:00:43] He wants to know about your childhood in Kittanning and then moving to Buffalo [New York].

**Gary:** [00:00:47] I lived in Kittanning 'til I was like five years old, so I don't remember that much of it, except that it was in the hills and we weren't— we didn't have that much money. We grew most of our vegetables, and like my grandfather was a farmer so he... you have to have the meat, the cattle, and before he was up in farming, he was a coal miner. My dad was a coal miner. And that was a very hard life, 'cause a lot of back then they didn't have any safeguards and a lot of 'em were dead or either dying, like from black lung and stuff like that. Like my grandfather did have black lung. So then we moved and moved up to Buffalo, and my dad got a job at Chevy working in the foundry, which was another hard job. And from there, I was in Boy Scouts and stayed in there for 'til I was eighteen, and then I joined the [U.S.] Marine Corps.

**Miller:** [00:02:03] Why did your parents decide to move to Buffalo?

**Gary:** [00:02:07] I can't hear him.

**Victoria:** [00:02:08] Why did your parents decide to move to Buffalo? Let me see if I can turn up the volume a little bit. That's actually up all the way.

**Gary:** [00:02:15] [Gary chuckles] You kick your voice Ben.

**Victoria:** [00:02:16] Sit closer.

**Miller:** [00:02:17] Yeah, I'll project as much as I can here.

**Victoria:** [00:02:20] His dad was getting black lung, so they moved to Buffalo. [Gary inserts: "No."] I thought your dad was getting black lung?

**Gary:** [00:02:26] People were dying in the coal mines because of the cave-ins. You know, didn't have any supports and whatnot that they have now. So that's why he got out.

**Miller:** [00:02:40] Tell me about Buffalo. In addition to Boy Scouts, what were some of the things that you and maybe your friends would spend time doing?

**Gary:** [00:02:49] Going to the beach.

**Victoria:** [00:02:51] He lived in the Italian neighborhood.

**Gary:** [00:02:53] [Ben inserts: "Oh."] Going to the beach. I remember going to the quarries in Canada a lot. Then going camping, with Boy Scout[s]. I always spent... Like, I spent two weeks in Altoona, Pennsylvania, with the Boy Scouts camping, and then I'd go down to Pennsylvania and I'd help on the farm. You know, going in the hay, corn, all that stuff.

**Miller:** [00:03:28] Vicki, right, you did something similar, you were in Girl Scouts, your whole childhood.

**Victoria:** [00:03:32] Yeah, I was in Girl Scouts for many, many years. Yes, I was. My mother was a Girl Scout leader. Well, I had three sisters. So, I think that's probably the way my mother kept us occupied, even though I really enjoyed it. [Miller chuckles] To this day, we always sung—

would sing around the campfire, and I think I know every Girl Scout campfire song that was ever invented. [Miller chuckling] We always swore we were gonna make a tape of us singing all those songs because they don't really sing like that anymore, the way we used to sing. And we learned almost every song in the Girl Scout song books from the '60s, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:04:04] Mhm. Gary, did they sing in Boy Scouts? I don't know, I didn't do it as a kid.

**Gary:** [00:04:11] [all chuckling] I don't remember singing.

**Miller:** [00:04:15] Yeah, it wouldn't surprise me if that was a difference between the two.

**Gary:** [00:04:18] Yeah, we tied knots. A lot of knot tying, you know, learn how to tie knots.

**Miller:** [00:04:24] Did you have siblings?

**Gary:** [00:04:27] My sister. Mhm.

**Miller:** [00:04:29] Was she older or younger than you?

**Gary:** [00:04:31] She's a year older.

**Miller:** [00:04:35] Tell me about the family dynamics, right, so if it's— I guess the four of you, right, with your mom and dad and you and your sister. Would you do things as a family together?

**Gary:** [00:04:45] Until they got divorced.

**Miller:** [00:04:48] When did that happen?

**Gary:** [00:04:51] [short pause] Trying to figure the year. It's a long time ago.

**Victoria:** [00:05:00] But they remained friends...

**Miller:** [00:05:03] That's good. [Victoria inserts: "Yeah."] Much easier than the alternative.

**Gary:** [00:05:08] You know, it was '66.

**Miller:** [00:05:11] Oh, so you were pretty old then at that point?

**Gary:** [00:05:14] I wasn't pretty old... [Gary chuckles]

**Miller:** [00:05:15] Well, yeah, for me, right? [Gary in background: "Now I'm pretty old."] Old is a term with different meaning to it. [Miller chuckling] Got it. Did either of your parents serve in the military at any point? I know your dad obviously was mining and then in the foundry, but before that?

**Gary:** [00:05:30] My dad was in the [U.S.] Army.

**Miller:** [00:05:32] During the Second World War, or before?

**Gary:** [00:05:35] Yeah, he was in the Second World War.

**Miller:** [00:05:37] What was his service experience, like? Would he talk about that at home?

**Gary:** [00:05:40] Not very much. He was sort of quiet about it, and it was like I later found out on his DD214 [record of military service] that he had the Bronze Star, and he never even mentioned it.

**Miller:** [00:05:54] Wow. Did he serve in Europe or the Pacific?

**Gary:** [00:05:59] He served all over. He served in Alaska, and then he went to— He said he was in a submarine. He was going [unsure]. Yeah. And he was, you know, he was in the Army.

**Miller:** [00:06:09] Yeah. How did that happen? [all laughing]

**Gary:** [00:06:12] He was a cook, you know? And so he needed cooks. Basically, you send them all over the place.

**Miller:** [00:06:21] Wow. And at home, would you talk about if not his experiences, then the military as an institution, as something that was a path for you to potentially follow?

**Victoria:** [00:06:35] Did you ever talk about the military with your dad?

**Gary:** [00:06:38] Hmm. No, not really, 'cause I don't know whether he had a bad experience or what, but he didn't really mention that much about it.

**Miller:** [00:06:47] Mhm. It seems like a lot of folks of that generation didn't talk much about that experience, which is interesting because it was something that I guess so many people experienced. And yet, you know, it's not something that necessarily they would talk about in the ways that we do now. Very interesting to me, at least as a historian, the dynamics with some of these things. Vicki, I forget, did either of your parents serve?

**Victoria:** [00:07:10] Yeah. My father was an FMF [Fleet Marine Force] corpsman with the 3rd Marine Division. He was over in the South Pacific. And then, now he was involved with the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] in town, so he was actually a PS [post] commander of the local VFW. I was always kind of aware of the military and proud to be an American. Full of Americanism, patriotism, whatever you wanna call it. Grateful to live in this country, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:07:39] You certainly followed in his footsteps in terms of the veteran's organization leadership positions and things like that.

**Victoria:** [00:07:45] Yeah, I guess so. Sometimes if you want a job done you have to do it yourself.

**Miller:** [00:07:51] [Miller laughing] Would he talk about his experiences in the South Pacific?

**Victoria:** [00:07:54] No, I never really heard him talk about it. In fact, I had always thought he was a Marine until they had a program down at the VFW, to memorialize past commanders.

You could buy a dog tag, oversized dog tag with their rank and their name on it. And when I got his DD214 from my mother, that's when I actually found out he was an FMF corpsman in the [U.S.] Navy, attached to the 3rd Marine Division. So prior to that, I'd always thought he was a Marine. [Miller inserts: "Interesting."] Which is probably why I joined the Marine Corps.

**Miller:** [00:08:23] Yeah, [Cohen and Miller chuckling] so maybe a bit of a bait and switch there. Who knows had he mentioned, you might be, might've served in the Navy. [Victoria responds: "Yep."] How did your home life compare with Gary's? Obviously, the Scouts seemed to be a big part, but how did Buffalo compare with the places you were growing up in?

**Victoria:** [00:08:42] Well, Lemont was a little was a small farming community about thirty miles outside of Chicago. So in a sense, I grew up in a small town. So I had a everybody-knew-everybody, doors weren't locked; you either went to the Methodist Church or the Catholic Church. A lot of the people in my town were Eastern European, so it was a very close-knit community, sometimes too close-knit. [all laughing]

**Miller:** [00:09:12] Tell me about that. What do you mean by too close-knit?

**Victoria:** [00:09:15] Everybody was related either by blood or by marriage, and like I said, they were Eastern European and Catholic, and I was Swedish-German descent and Methodist, so. We were new in town for a long time, many years. [Victoria, Cohen, and Miller laughing] Anyway, my... So we did a lot of things as a family. We always went on a vacation every summer. My father, no matter what, we went on a two-week vacation. A lot of times it was camping. Mostly it was camping to Wisconsin, to New Mexico, Colorado. We camped pretty much all over. Now, I've never really been to the far north, east and west and south corners of the United States, but every place in between, I've pretty much been. And then my father passed away when I was a sophomore in high school. I'm sorry, junior in high school. So it was kind of the end of that. And then I was old enough. I went to Northern [Illinois University] for a year and then I went to the Marine Corps.

**Miller:** [00:10:16] What did your parents do?

**Victoria:** [00:10:18] My father owned a trucking business, and my mother was a homemaker.

**Miller:** [00:10:23] When your father passed away, did your mom take over the trucking company?

**Victoria:** [00:10:28] No, it was pretty hard financially for a while there. She wasn't really skilled at anything like that, so it was difficult.

**Miller:** [00:10:38] My grandmother had the same experience. I think her dad passed away when she was fourteen, and it was the same kind of situation where he had been the sole provider. Then it was a very big, tough shift. And then for her to have to work too to help provide for the family.

**Victoria:** [00:10:52] Yeah, it was tough for a while.

**Miller:** [00:10:56] Yeah. I guess on happier themes, Gary, would you vacation with your family as well? Was that a part, a big part of your childhood?

**Gary:** [00:11:05] There wasn't very much vacation. There was going down to visit my relatives back in Pennsylvania, you know? We take trips down there.

**Miller:** [00:11:18] Would you drive down? [Gary responds: "Yeah."]

**Miller:** [00:11:22] What was that drive like, I imagine it must be pretty mountainous and interesting. Do you have memories from that?

**Gary:** [00:11:26] From Buffalo to Pennsylvania isn't that far, they're right next to each other.

**Victoria:** [00:11:32] Yeah, but when we first got married, his father took us down to a trip to visit your Aunt Gerry, and he thought it would be a good experience for me to take all those back roads. Oh my gosh, [Cohen and Miller chuckling] I was never so carsick in my whole life. [Miller chuckles] Hill after hill and curve and hill. [Cohen and Miller laughing] Ugh, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:11:52] I've driven a little around there because it's, you know, my family is in the [Washington] D.C. area, so a couple of times that I've driven between Chicago and D.C. When you get bored of the highways, there's so much fun driving in the general Pittsburgh area, but the line between fun and scary can be very, very narrow. [Cohen chuckles]

**Victoria:** [00:12:08] Yeah, well, back then that Pennsylvania Turnpike was pretty wild. So yeah, I know what you're talking about. Ok, do I get on the turnpike, or do I get off on the side roads? It was a toss-up.

**Gary:** [00:12:21] Then there was, you know you had that, always had fog on the PA [Pennsylvania] Turnpike.

**Miller:** [00:12:25] Interesting. Nowadays, I guess the GPS makes things so different too, because sometimes it will give you some crazy route and I have no idea where it's going and you just have to put your trust in the machine to lead you on, and *usually* it's fine, but there are always those times where it ends up being a little dicey.

**Victoria:** [00:12:42] Yeah, one time when we were coming back from visiting, when we were in the Marine Corps and we were coming back from Illinois to Cherry Point [Marine Corps Air Station, North Carolina]. All the roads weren't the expressways weren't completely finished and we ended up somewhere in a bear preserve. Remember on that mountain? [Miller laughing; Cohen exclaims: "Gosh!"] The road kinda ended and it became a two-track dirt road. And then there was this beautiful lake and the sign said, "Bear Preserve." So, I didn't stay; I don't know where we ended up or we had to spend the night in the car 'cause it was so late by then, and we finally got out of there. But I have no idea to this day where we were, or even what state we were in. I think we were in the Appalachian Mountains somewhere. So that's all I know. That's a pretty big area.

**Miller:** [00:13:22] Yeah, winding up in a bear preserve sounds like the start of some sort of horror thing, right? But the bear is attacking. Come for you.

**Victoria:** [00:13:28] Yeah, yeah. Well, we were where the sign outside. We weren't in it per se. I mean, I hope we weren't in it. But the sign on the fence said, "Bear Preserve." So I don't know.



**Gary:** [00:13:36] I think we're in it. [Victoria replies: "Yeah?" chuckles]

**Miller:** [00:13:39] Let me ask a little bit about school. So for you, Gary, did you enjoy school when you were a kid, either elementary school or junior high school [Victoria chuckling]? What was that I didn't hear?

**Victoria:** [00:13:53] Did you enjoy school?

**Gary:** [00:13:54] Did I enjoy it? I'm thinking [Miller exclaims: "Oh."] Some parts, you know, some parts were good. Some parts were bad.

**Miller:** [00:14:06] Were there topics that you particularly enjoyed?

**Gary:** [00:14:12] We had swimming in our, in every school I went to. Well, mostly School Thirty-eight [grade school], and I went to School Thirty-eight, second grade on. You know, and it was swimming, but it was strange because the boys would swim nude. You know, I've talked about this to other people. And why would the boys swim nude and the girls wouldn't swim nude?

**Victoria:** [00:14:43] But they didn't swim together.

**Gary:** [00:14:44] But they, yeah, we didn't swim together. But why would they make the guys swim nude, and the girls didn't swim nude?

**Victoria:** [00:14:52] I know I find it very bizarre.

**Miller:** [00:14:54] How late did that last? I can't imagine that was a post-elementary school thing right? [Gary in the background: "All the way 'til eighth grade."]

**Victoria:** [00:14:58] All the way 'til eighth grade.

**Gary:** [00:14:59] It was a grade school. So all the way.

**Miller:** [00:15:03] Wow! I can't imagine you would get away with anything like that today, anywhere near that. [Victoria inserts: "I know, I know."]

**Victoria:** [00:15:08] Yeah. When he first told me that, I'm like, "What!" Of course, they had a pool in their school.

**Gary:** [00:15:14] We also had a diving board. That even made it more difficult. [Victoria laughing] You know what I mean?

**Miller:** [00:15:23] Yeah, that's quite a lot to have in just a normal grade school. Was that a standard Buffalo thing? Did every school tend to have that, or were you...

**Gary:** [00:15:29] No, just some schools had a swimming pool, but I don't know about the [Victoria inserts: "School Thirty-eight!"] nude part.

**Cohen:** [00:15:36] But you know, in Chicago, too, I recently spoke to two acquaintances who are in their '60s. I don't know if it was elementary or high school, but part of the Chicago public system. The swimming was run in the exact same way where the girls were given bathing suits. Like, we're like, I'm [unsure] and the boys swam in the nude.

**Victoria:** [00:15:55] It must have been some kind of thing back then. I don't know. Maybe somebody came up with an idea and said, "Let's try this. We'll save money, and we'll save on bathing suits." I don't know.

**Miller:** [00:16:07] Yeah, it is cost effective, right? [Cohen and Gary laughing] The birthday suit is a pretty cheap clothing option.

**Victoria:** [00:16:13] Poor little kids.

**Gary:** [00:16:13] I just thought it was strange.

**Victoria:** [00:16:16] Can you see these shivering little boys. I just think of my grandsons and I'm like, [Miller chuckling] "It's cold in there."

**Miller:** [00:16:25] Gary, when you got to high school, how did you start imagining the way that your career might go, or the things that you might wanna do after you left school? Did you always have service in mind?

**Gary:** [00:16:36] Yes, I did. I even got it on my yearbook. [Victoria inserts: "Yeah."]

**Miller:** [00:16:39] Oh, wow. Why was that?

**Gary:** [00:16:44] I had some friends that got killed in Vietnam, so it's like I just wanted to go there and once they...

**Victoria:** [00:16:53] You wanted to kill Vietnamese.

**Gary:** [00:16:55] Act revenge on 'em, but that's part of what I wanted to do.

**Miller:** [00:16:59] When did you first hear about Vietnam? When did that become a thing that people started talking about, 'cause right you're, you graduated in '68, right? So obviously it's pretty big by then. Was that something that people talked about when you started high school?

**Gary:** [00:17:12] Yeah, 'cause you're gonna, you know, you're gonna be drafted as soon as you got out of high school.

**Miller:** [00:17:21] Would you talk about the war with your parents? Did they have opinions about it?

**Gary:** [00:17:26] No, they just didn't they didn't want me to go, you know, 'cause they [were] afraid I was gonna get killed.

**Miller:** [00:17:32] Guess that's a universal worry of parents, right? I mean, I guess you both know this now, right, having two children serve. Would your friends talk about, were they worried about getting drafted or were they kind of eager to serve the country?

**Gary:** [00:17:48] Some were and some weren't. You know, the same way it is today.

**Miller:** [00:17:53] Interesting. And did you have a particular kind of opinion about the U.S. being in Vietnam or was it more of a personal dynamic with your friends who lost their lives there?

**Gary:** [00:18:07] I really didn't know why we were in Vietnam; I just know that some people, some of my friends got killed.

**Miller:** [00:18:17] Vicki, how did this compare to your experiences? Would you talk about the war with your family or your friend group in high school?

**Victoria:** [00:18:25] Not in high school, but after I graduated. Like I said, I went a year to Northern, and one of the girls on our floor was a refugee from Vietnam. I found her behavior very strange and the girl across the hall, her brother had gotten killed in Vietnam. So naturally, at a university, there's more interest in political events and the government and things and I found it... I was conflicted in that I couldn't quite understand why we were there, but I also couldn't quite understand why people didn't support the government and what they were trying to do because we didn't have all the facts. And I know, you don't always know what's going on. It seemed like they were trying to help the people over there, even though the way they were doing it wasn't exactly the best. Does that make sense? And we— [Miller inserts: "Yeah."]— they had riots on campus, and it seemed to me like they just wanted to get a pass or fail grade. Not necessarily that they cared either way about the people, the human beings that were over there getting killed in the name of our country. They just didn't wanna, they wanted to get— use it to get a pass or a fail. It wasn't so much about the war in Vietnam or maybe as it was about the government. I don't know if that makes sense, but...

**Miller:** [00:19:42] Yeah, it definitely seems like it was a big part of what you experienced in your year at Northern?

**Victoria:** [00:19:47] It was. Yeah, yeah, it was.

**Miller:** [00:19:48] I guess you would have started if you enlisted in '70, right? Did you start in '69 at Northern?

**Victoria:** [00:19:54] Yeah, yeah. I graduated early, so.

**Miller:** [00:19:58] Yeah, so that's I guess the peak of this sort of historical moment that you're kind of dumped in. [Victoria inserts: "Yeah, so."] So I know you joined the Marines, right? Because of the connection with your dad. Gary, why did you settle on the Marines as opposed to any other branch of the service?

**Gary:** [00:20:15] Because they're the best.

**Victoria:** [00:20:17] That's right. [Miller chuckling] Everybody wants to be a Marine. [Cohen and Miller laughing] Of all the branches of service, four out of five people who claim to be Marines are not Marines. [Miller inserts: "Mm, interesting."] Yeah. We've had people in my detachment fill out the form and pretend to be a Marine, and they weren't even in the military, or they were, they joined and got kicked out of boot camp. They didn't make it through boot camp. They were never Marines, but they so hard wanna pretend to be a Marine. Everyone, everybody wants to be a Marine.

**Miller:** [00:20:50] What was your recruitment experience like, Gary, did you walk into a recruiting station and go from there?

**Gary:** [00:20:55] I... First thing I think, we got off the bus, stood on yellow footprints.

**Victoria:** [00:21:01] No. He's talking about recruiting. Your recruiter. Your recruiter. Did you get recruited or did you just walk in and en[list]?

**Gary:** [00:21:10] I just walked in. I enlisted.

**Miller:** [00:21:14] How did people react? Was that something that a lot of folks did? Or were you unique and kind of just being so gung-ho in signing up like that?

**Gary:** [00:21:23] I really didn't pay no attention to what other people did.

**Victoria:** [00:21:26] Didn't you join with a buddy? Steve Kischel?

**Gary:** [00:21:29] I did join with Steve.

**Miller:** [00:21:30] Was he coming from a similar perspective as you of wanting to join? Kind of out of duty to the friends who lost their lives there [Vietnam]? What was his perspective?

**Victoria:** [00:21:41] He got drafted.

**Miller:** [00:21:43] Oh, interesting. I guess the end result is the same.

**Gary:** [00:21:48] He joined for two years and I joined for four.

**Miller:** [00:21:52] Was that the typical way that it worked as a draftee versus enlisting?

**Gary:** [00:21:56] Yeah. If you join, [you probably] joined for four years, you could for two, but...

**Victoria:** [00:22:02] Usually only if you were drafted, though.

**Miller:** [00:22:07] So tell me about, I guess, your thoughts going in. So between when you enlist and when you arrive at Parris Island [South Carolina], what did you think you were getting into?

**Victoria:** [00:22:18] I didn't have a clue. [Gary concurs: "Yeah."] I had absolutely no clue.

**Gary:** [00:22:24] I heard that, first thing I heard was they're gonna cut your hair off. That's the only thing I knew. [Victoria and Gary laughing]

**Miller:** [00:22:29] And I guess that was true, right? That is the first thing, often.

**Gary:** [00:22:33] Well, get on the yellow footprints. As soon as you get off the bus, you're told to get on these painted footprints that are on...

**Victoria:** [00:22:42] That was unique to Parris Island, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:22:47] So, did you take a bus from Buffalo straight to Parris Island? What was that travel journey like?

**Gary:** [00:22:52] I took a plane to Washington, D.C., and then took a bus from Washington to Parris Island.

**Miller:** [00:22:59] What were the other kinds of people like that you were on the plane or on the bus with? Were they similar to you, or were they from different areas?

**Gary:** [00:23:06] Yep. It was mostly the service members that were going to Parris Island.

**Miller:** [00:23:13] So tell me about the boot camp experience from the yellow footprints on to the end. What were some of the memories that you recall from that experience? I imagine it's the kind of thing that sticks in your head.

**Gary:** [00:23:25] I remember one DI [drill instructor] sticking a bayonet in his hand.

**Miller:** [00:23:30] *Intentionally*, or wow!

**Gary:** [00:23:33] They got rid of him. That was it.

**Victoria:** [00:23:37] What about the whisk [detergent]?

**Gary:** [00:23:39] Oh. [Victoria chuckling] You know, I was going to the head [bathroom], and this was nighttime, the fire watch [person] was out.

**Victoria:** [00:23:48] Do you know what fire watch is? [Miller responds: "No."] Well tell him what fire watch is.

**Gary:** [00:23:52] Person on guard they, [Victoria inserts: "Guard the barracks." ]— put people on guard duty to guard the barracks.

**Miller:** [00:23:56] Oh, makes sense.

**Victoria:** [00:23:57] Like the first big thing you do when you're a recruit is fire watch.

**Gary:** [00:24:01] So they put two people, they had fire watch, and so they like, gotta guard the barracks.

**Victoria:** [00:24:07] Check and make sure the windows are locked. You check and make sure doors are locked. You feel important.

**Gary:** [00:24:14] Yeah, I had to go to the bathrooms and someone's smoking, I could smell it. Well, the DI comes in and he wants to know who's smoking and nobody's saying anything. I didn't know who was smoking, and this guy didn't know who was smoking. The fire watch didn't know who was smoking. Well, they asked the next morning, they stuck like five cigarettes in my mouth along with this other guy that they thought was smoking and put a bucket over our head, you know, and they make us drink a shot of whisk [detergent]. [Victoria chuckling]

**Miller:** [00:24:50] Wow!

**Victoria:** [00:24:50] With the cigarette.

**Gary:** [00:24:52] They made you smoke, and then they made you drink whisk.

**Cohen:** [00:24:55] Oh my God!

**Miller:** [00:24:57] Wow, that's... must not have been a pleasant experience.

**Gary:** [00:25:02] It wasn't [unsure]. I remember coughing a lot.

**Miller:** [00:25:04] Yeah, God, my lungs hurt just hearing about that. [Cohen and Miller laughing]



**Victoria:** [00:25:10] Your eyes burn and your nose.

**Miller:** [00:25:12] Ugh. [Victoria inserts: "Yeah."] Was that just the way that things tended to operate? Like that? It sounds very— what's the term— *Full Metal Jacket*, right? I think it's pretty...

**Victoria:** [00:25:21] Yeah, that's why Marines like that movie 'cause it's pretty, well, real. [Miller laughing]

**Miller:** [00:25:27] Did you? I know Vicki, when I was listening to your interview, for you, you said it was—

**Gary:** [00:25:32] Yeah, I didn't even tell him who was smoking. [all laughing]

**Victoria:** [00:25:36] That stayed their secret.

**Gary:** [00:25:40] Kept that secret.

**Miller:** [00:25:40] Oh, did you know who it was smoking? [Gary replies: "Mhm."; Victoria chuckling] Oh wow. How early in that experience? How early in your time at boot camp did that experience come? 'Cause it's a lot of camaraderie to show for folks that you had just met.

**Victoria:** [00:25:55] Well, usually you don't start fire watch 'til about four weeks in, so.

**Miller:** [00:25:59] So I guess after a month, yeah, there's enough of a esprit de corps [feeling of fellowship] there. But that's a, it's a lot of punishment to take in defense of your fellow Marine there. [Victoria inserts: "Yeah."] Was that the way that people tended to operate, did you look out for one another in those sorts of circumstances?

**Gary:** [00:26:16] Most of the time. But there was one time they gave a guy, a blanket party, and it was like a guy that was kept on coming from motivation platoon. Do you know what motivation platoons?

**Miller:** [00:26:31] That's kind of, you know, they need to up your motivation, right, through something harder...

**Victoria:** [00:26:35] Yeah, it would be like, you want to take this hole and move it to another place.

**Miller:** [00:26:39] Yeah.

**Victoria:** [00:26:40] So you have to dig it—

**Gary:** [00:26:41] A mountain of sand and then they give you a bucket. Tell you to move this mountain of sand, you know, and it's for guys that weren't... [Victoria finishes: "Up to snuff."] Or out of shape and stuff like that. And he was like holding down our platoon. So these guys at night took, I guess they take... I wasn't involved with I think I was underneath this guy, but I could hear them beating on him. And I think they took towels with soap in it. You know, they beat him. [Miller exclaims: "Wow!"] That was more, you know, to motivate him. So they gave him a blanket party.

**Miller:** [00:27:26] Hmm. That's exactly like what happens in the movie, I think if I recall *Full Metal Jacket*, right? That's very interesting that wow, the connection there.

**Victoria:** [00:27:35] Well, that's a real thing, and you know R. Lee Ermey [Ronald] was the Marine. That's the gunner, the DI in that movie. He's the only Marine that got promoted after he was out of the Marine Corps. [Miller and Cohen laughing] I think he was a staff sergeant when he was in, and then he got promoted later on to gunnery sergeant, but he was already out of the Marine Corps when he was an actor, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:27:56] Interesting, but wow, that's— [Cohen starts] Go ahead, Leah [Cohen].

**Cohen:** [00:27:59] Sorry. Gary, how did you react to this kind of this style of discipline?

**Gary:** [00:28:04] I didn't get involved in it, so it's like, you know, it's something that I wouldn't do, you know.

**Victoria:** [00:28:11] It is what it is.

**Miller:** [00:28:15] Did you ever wind up in a motivation platoon or were you always able to keep your...

**Gary:** [00:28:19] I never went to [a] motivation platoon.

**Victoria:** [00:28:21] You were a good Marine.

**Miller:** [00:28:26] [Miller and Cohen chuckling] Vicki, I know when you were talking about boot camp, you said it was, I think, the hardest one of the hardest things you ever did in life. Really a wonderful experience for you. Gary, did you feel the same way? Did you think about it as positively transforming you in the same way that Vicki did?

**Victoria:** [00:28:45] Yes, it transformed you!

**Gary:** [00:28:49] [Gary and Victoria chuckling] I would say it did. Made me a better person.

**Miller:** [00:28:55] In what ways?

**Gary:** [00:29:00] [short pause] Oh, got me to get my HV[?], I got hit by a car before I joined the Marine Corps. I was like doing my final exams on my, think my English exam, and I got hit by a car and I got something like seven stitches in my knee. And so I didn't graduate because I didn't take my English test and I wasn't too good at English. So I didn't graduate from high school 'cause I failed my English. Well, I joined when I joined the Marine Corps, I did get my GED when I was in the Marine Corps, so that was good. And plus it gave me— [Victoria inserts: "A profession."]— a profession, right? Did for forty years.

**Miller:** [00:29:38] Let's talk about that. How did you acquire your MOS [military occupational specialty]?

**Gary:** [00:29:43] They gave it to me. [Miller chuckles]

**Miller:** [00:29:45] Did you have any input? [Victoria and Gary talking in background, unclear]

**Victoria:** [00:29:48] You don't acquire anything.

**Gary:** [00:29:49] They tell you what you have. [Miller chuckles]

**Victoria:** [00:29:51] You take the tests and they say, "You're this, you're this, you're this, you're this."

**Miller:** [00:29:56] But why do you think the test that you took suggested refrigeration and repair for you?

**Gary:** [00:30:02] I was very high, mechanically inclined.

**Victoria:** [00:30:05] Still is. He's fixed furnaces over the phone; he's fixed air conditioners over the phone to help people out. They call up and they go, "Gary, what do I do about this?" Think he can just fixed my brother-in-law's furnace up in Minnesota last winter. [Miller exclaims: "Wow;"] Leah exclaims: "Wow."] Over the phone.

**Miller:** [00:30:23] Had you done things like that before joining the Marine Corps? Would you work on things mechanically?

**Gary:** [00:30:29] I don't know, I just, you know, I enjoyed working with things and you know, I worked on all my vehicles. I worked on electronics. All that.

**Miller:** [00:30:44] Was that, that was before joining?

**Gary:** [00:30:49] No, not really, because I didn't...

**Miller:** [00:30:53] I was gonna say it would be impressive to have electronics before 1968 there, but I guess it's great that they kind of uncovered that talent in you and really put you to work on something you're so good at.

**Victoria:** [00:31:05] I guess it proves the aptitude tests they give you really do work because they seem to, you know, your MOS, your military occupational specialty, pretty much coincides with your skills and abilities, so, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:31:19] One thing I should ask because I know Vicki, you talked about it. I found it very interesting. The uniforms that you were given. Gary, how did you feel about your uniform when you first received it during boot camp?

**Gary:** [00:31:31] I thought it looked good.

**Victoria:** [00:31:34] He did look good.

**Gary:** [00:31:37] [Miller and Cohen chuckling] Boot camp you get your utility, so they donate those green work uniforms. [Miller inserts: "Yeah"] They don't look that good. But you know, the rest of your uniforms [look good.]

**Miller:** [00:31:48] Did you feel proud wearing it? Was it kinda, was there an emotional connection there?

**Gary:** [00:31:53] Yes, I did.

**Victoria:** [00:31:53] Well, you don't really get to wear the real uniform until you're close to graduation day or for pictures. [Miller inserts: "Right."] Otherwise, you wear the utilities, you know, and we had PT skirts. They at least have PT clothes. Everyone laughs about this, even other women Marines. I have to get out my yearbook and show 'em that we had these skirts that buttoned over shorts because it was way different back then.

**Miller:** [00:32:13] Yeah, [Miller and Cohen chuckling] it seems so. Yeah, I guess in today's day and age, so different and strange to think about that. But I guess in the '60s, that makes a lot

more sense more in keeping with the way that probably you were expected to operate as a female Marine.

**Victoria:** [00:32:29] Right? They got to shoot .45s and M14s, and I got to learn how to serve tea with gloves on.

**Miller:** [00:32:36] I was stunned that they never trained you, at least to use some basic small arms, you'd think it would be the Marines if anyone. [Victoria starts: "We got to watch..."]

**Victoria:** [00:32:42] Yeah, we get to watch the men shoot. It was a trip one day. I think it was after the gas mask chamber, gas chamber. Then we got to go and watch the men shoot. That was our military weapon experience.

**Gary:** [00:32:55] See, with us we were we were trained with the M14. And then we got to Vietnam, they gave us an M16.

**Miller:** [00:33:05] Was that a tough adjustment to make? Not to skip too far ahead in the time or anything.

**Gary:** [00:33:10] Was that, what? Hard to adjust to? [Victoria inserts: "A tough adjustment;" Miller replies: "Yeah."] It was a completely different rifle.

**Miller:** [00:33:17] Interesting that they would change things up on you like that.

**Victoria:** [00:33:20] That's government bureaucracy. That's exactly, that's what it is in real life, yep.

**Miller:** [00:33:26] Vicki, let me ask, what was the gas chamber experience there?

**Victoria:** [00:33:31] That's when you got exposed to so you would be experienced if you ever got exposed to any kind of gas, like tear gas or, God forbid, mustard gas. So you had to be able to mask, check, and clear so you knew how to put on a gas mask properly. And then we had to walk around in the room, and we only had to, we had to take off our masks then and sing one

verse of the Marine Corps Hymn. And then we got to go outside, and you had to hold your arms out. You had to let the wind blow the gas residue off of you 'cause if you touched yourself, it would blister and scar, [Miller exclaims: "Oh."] and it wasn't even real tear gas, whereas the men, they had to sing all three verses in the gas chamber. We only had to sing one, and you take that first breath in and if you try to get through that whole first verse without breathing again because it's burning your nose, you have snot run out of your nose, your eyes are watering, your ears burn, your skin burns.

**Gary:** [00:34:23] You run out of there and you got snot attached to your knees down from your nose, if you know what I mean. It's how much snot is coming out of you.

**Victoria:** [00:34:32] All this mucus it just, your body has a— and that's not even like real tear gas. It was just mild, whatever. Maybe it was just tear gas. It was mild whatever it was. They said, "This isn't the real thing." They could have been lying. It could have been the real thing. I don't know. Felt real. [Gary inserts: "Oh, yeah. We had tear gas."] So, but we were all excited because the women you either had to have short hair, it could touch your collar but not cover it, or you had to wear a wig. They would not let us do like they do nowadays, where they can wear it up in a bun or anything. 'Cause that's what I thought I was gonna do. And at the last minute, my mother had stuck a wig in my and she says, "Oh, bring this wig with in case you don't have time to do your hair." Ha! Anyway, so I it was the one day that nobody had to wear a wig. It was we all felt like real women again 'cause we didn't have these wigs and these hats on, 'cause you can't put your gas mask on with a wig on. It's gotta fit tight. So we all got to not have the wig on, but then we all looked all bedraggled when we went and actually got to see some men shooting at the rifle range. C'mon we're eighteen, nineteen years old. What do you think?

**Gary:** [00:35:33] You could definitely tell that they had a wig on, I'll tell you that. [Miller and Victoria chuckling]

**Miller:** [00:35:38] Gary, when you were doing basic [training], did you were there women Marines there at the same time?

**Gary:** [00:35:44] Yeah. [Victoria asks: "Oh, yeah?"] Yeah. They weren't in my barracks. [Victoria inserts: "Oh, yeah."] They were there on Parris Island.

**Victoria:** [00:35:52] Yeah, but we were separate.

**Miller:** [00:35:54] Did you have any chance to interact with them?

**Gary:** [00:35:57] No.

**Miller:** [00:35:59] Yeah, I know, Vicki, you mentioned some of the like not so great interactions that would happen with people shouting or things like that. But Gary, do you remember things like that—

**Victoria:** [00:36:08] That was after boot camp. That wasn't at boot camp.

**Miller:** [00:36:09] But that was after?

**Victoria:** [00:36:09] Yeah. Boot camp, we were completely separate space at Parris Island. The only time, like I said, we saw men was after the gas chamber. And then if you went to church, we'd be on one side of the church and they'd be on the other side of the church. But, yeah, no. There was no speaking. There was no interaction. No, there was nothing like that. [Miller inserts: "Yeah."] Nope.

**Miller:** [00:36:32] Gary, once you finished boot camp, right, you went to Camp Le-jeune... Jeune, right, is how it's pronounced?

**Victoria:** [00:36:38] [Camp] Lejeune [North Carolina]? Well, the family wants it pronounced "Le-journ" now.

**Miller:** [00:36:41] Oh, interesting.

**Victoria:** [00:36:43] Le-journ. It was always Camp Lejeune, forever and ever. But now it's gotta be Camp Lejourn.

**Miller:** [00:36:49] Was that space like? How did that compare to Parris Island?



**Victoria:** [00:36:54] Well, you were a real Marine, then.

**Gary:** [00:36:55] It was ITR [infantry training regiment], so it was mostly going like forced marches for like twenty miles and setting up tents and shooting, and I mean, we shot like everything from machine guns to bazookas to mortars. Threw grenades.

**Victoria:** [00:37:15] ITR is infantry training regiment.

**Miller:** [00:37:18] Right. Was that something you enjoyed doing? The shooting elements of that? Was that fun?

**Gary:** [00:37:24] Yeah. It wasn't bad. It was cold. It was wintertime there.

**Miller:** [00:37:29] Oh, right, right. 'Cause you, yeah at this point...

**Gary:** [00:37:31] North Carolina, it's still sometimes still snowing, and that froze. It's like it rained one time, and we were in tents, and we like we were supposed to put up the dirt so the rain won't go underneath the tent 'cause there's no bottom. One guy stuck his arm out. It's like his arm froze. And so they brought an ambulance in to take him out. And it's like they didn't care. You know, they didn't care that... They still made us stay out there. You know, they took this guy away and even though his arm was frozen.

**Victoria:** [00:38:16] So accidentally when he was sleeping, his arm went out underneath the tent is what you're saying? He didn't deliberately put his arm out. He put it out while he was sleeping.

**Gary:** [00:38:25] Like a puddle was formed but then it froze. You know, it was raining when we went.

**Miller:** [00:38:29] Oh, so it just freezes his whole arm.

**Victoria:** [00:38:32] As he was sleeping.

**Gary:** [00:38:32] It was snowing. While we're sleeping it started snowing. Yeah, then it froze. You know, it got real cold. But then it, his arm was out there. It like froze. Got frostbite.

**Miller:** [00:38:47] Yeah. Well, hopefully he could keep the arm, right?

**Gary:** [00:38:50] I don't know but they took him away, but we never saw him again.

**Miller:** [00:38:54] Wow. What was it like to be in the South, right? 'Cause Parris Island is obviously in the Carolinas, so is [Camp] Lejeune, right? It must have been a little bit different than your kind of Yankee upbringing in New York and Pennsylvania.

**Victoria:** [00:39:09] Yeah, but you're so isolated, you're on that island that you really don't interact with the community at large. It's just Marines, and your drill instructor is the center of your universe, so. Anything else... And when once you graduate, everybody's given leave. Well, they [male Marines] had to go to ITR for four more weeks. But then you get leave to go home and visit and then you go to your duty station. So, you really don't have a chance to interact anywhere until you're on your duty station.

**Miller:** [00:39:34] When you two were back in the Carolinas in the early '70s, would you get off base much and interact? Did you feel like you had a connection to those communities then? Not to skip too far ahead?

**Victoria:** [00:39:46] Oh yeah, we would get off. I mean, that's where you'd go on a day [pass]. You'd go out into town or 'cause the beach was thirty miles away, the Atlantic Ocean, so you would go out. And [of] course, you usually would be out with other Marines, so. I worked with civilians 'cause I worked in the Navy supply building with the computers, so I probably had more interactions with local Carolinians than he did.

**Gary:** [00:40:11] I was brown bagging.

**Victoria:** [00:40:13] Oh, yeah, brown bagging. I forgot about that.

**Gary:** [00:40:15] You used to go—

**Victoria:** [00:40:16] They had clubs ‘cause it was a dry county on Sundays.

**Gary:** [00:40:20] [Miller exclaims: “Oh!”] They didn’t have no booze, so. If you wanted booze, you could bring it into the restaurant, but you had to have it in a— [Victoria inserts: “In a brown bag.”]— brown bag. [Miller and Cohen laughing]

**Victoria:** [00:40:31] ‘Cause there were a lot of dry restaurants.

**Gary:** [00:40:33] So that’s why they call it brown bagging.

**Miller:** [00:40:33] Interesting.

**Victoria:** [00:40:35] Or they call them clubs, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:40:37] I think there are some communities in places like the Carolinas that still have that. Not as many, probably as there were in the ‘70s, but a couple here and there. It’s very different, right, than a place like certainly Illinois or Chicago. Where it’s a— [Victoria starts: “But I remember when they called it—”] different kind of tradition.

**Victoria:** [00:40:49] When I was a freshman at Northern, [Gary inserts: “A lot of bootleggers there.”] Northern was in a dry county and you had to go across to Sycamore to cross the county line to get liquor on Sundays, I think it was. So whatever county NIU [Northern Illinois University] was in was a dry county in 1969 and then you had to cross by Sycamore. You go to Sycamore and that’s where you get, they called it “teenage liquors.” I don’t know what it was. [Cohen chuckling] Yeah. So, it was even up here back then. In the ‘60s, [Miller inserts: “Interesting.”] There were a lot of dry counties. Yeah.

**Miller:** [00:41:23] So Gary, once you’ve kind of finished the training components there, I know you wound up briefly in California, but then in Okinawa [Japan]. I was wondering, what did it feel like to go so far away? How did California feel, and then how did Okinawa, or even farther feel, kind of as a different space for you?

**Gary:** [00:41:42] They spoke a different language. [Victoria laughing]

**Miller:** [00:41:49] How did it feel to be outside the country? I guess you'd gone to Canada right before, but. [Victoria to Gary: "Outside the country."]

**Gary:** [00:41:56] I didn't feel any difference. You know.

**Victoria:** [00:42:00] You're with Marines again, you're with a bunch of Marines, so even in Okinawa, that's there's huge Marine bases there.

**Gary:** [00:42:08] There's a bunch of 'em.

**Cohen:** [00:42:10] Gary what was your impression of the climate and the vegetation in Okinawa?

**Gary:** [00:42:15] Earthquake. It's the first place I ever had an earthquake, there was an earthquake in Okinawa and then... It's like, I went in the explored in most of the old, World War II tunnels they had. They're like caves, you know, and you'd like crawl underneath and into the water and you didn't know what was up on the other side.

**Victoria:** [00:42:39] The snakes in the water.

**Gary:** [00:42:41] Ah the, yeah swimming. Told us about the poisonous snakes. Well, I went swimming, was snorkeling and I went out there, man, and I didn't think there was gonna be that many snakes. You know, there was hundreds, you know, and it's like these, if they bit you, you're dead. There's no cure.

**Victoria:** [00:43:04] No anti-[venom]. [Gary inserts: "Yeah."]

**Miller:** [00:43:07] Did you do that more than once, or was that a one-time thing?

**Gary:** [00:43:11] I took a picture of it. When I was, I had an underwater camera, and I couldn't believe there were snakes. [Gary chuckling]

**Victoria:** [00:43:19] [Cohen exclaims: "God!"] Lord, help you did it more than one time.

**Gary:** [00:43:21] Oh, no. Just that once was enough.

**Miller:** [00:43:22] Yeah, [Cohen chuckling] I think if it was me, I would have learned my lesson pretty fast and been scrambling for sure the first opportunity I had.

**Victoria:** [00:43:31] Just you don't think of Japan and poisonous water snakes, but yeah.

**Miller:** [00:43:35] Yeah. What were your main duties when you were on Okinawa? I think it was like prep[aration], right, for Vietnam?

**Gary:** [00:43:41] Guard duty. A lot of guard duty. I really didn't do it on my MOS.

**Miller:** [00:43:47] Did you meet indigenous Okinawans, people who spoke Japanese who just lived there? [Victoria chuckling]

**Gary:** [00:43:54] They had a riot there once too, 'cause they wanted the Americans to like leave the island. So, they did have an uprising.

**Miller:** [00:44:05] Was that when you were there?

**Gary:** [00:44:06] Yeah, they made us— [Miller exclaims: "Oh!"]— they made us stay on base and like across the road was a restaurant that we always ate at and we always got yakisoba. It was like a noodle and beef. [Miller exclaims: "Yeah!"] Well, we used to yell, "YAKI-SOBA!" And they used to come and bring us, you know, the food and then we paid. Even during the riot. [Miller and Cohen laughing]

**Victoria:** [00:44:34] 'Cause they couldn't leave base, yeah.

**Miller:** [00:44:34] Yeah. Well, I guess this is his business too, right? If you're the restaurant, right? How did you feel about seeing those people riot? Did it make you question why you were there or did everyone just kind of brush it off?

**Victoria:** [00:44:46] Did the riot make you question why you were there or did everyone just brush it off?

**Gary:** [00:44:50] Oh, yeah. We just mostly brushed it off. 'Cause a lot of 'em, they need the money, you know?

**Miller:** [00:44:57] Yeah, I bet the yakisoba restaurant was not rioting, right. They're probably doing pretty well off your business.

**Gary:** [00:45:04] No, they need the support 'cause a lot of 'em, they worked with us too.

**Miller:** [00:45:10] Yeah. So tell me about arriving in Vietnam. What were your first impressions when you got there, I guess? Did you fly in straight from Okinawa?

**Gary:** [00:45:20] I flew in from Okinawa, and the first thing I got there, they taught us how to skin a rabbit. [Unsure], and they taught us how to skin a rabbit in case we gotta—

**Victoria:** [00:45:34] Out in the bush<sup>1</sup>.

**Gary:** [00:45:38] So we could fend for ourself, I guess.

**Miller:** [00:45:40] Yeah, just like I don't think of snakes in Japan, I don't think of rabbits in Vietnam, I guess. [Victoria starts: "How about it, yeah."] Yeah.

**Victoria:** [00:45:46] In Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup>"Bush" is an infantry term for the field in Vietnam.

**Gary:** [00:45:47] I don't, I never saw a rabbit there. Saw a lot of rats. Maybe that's what they were referring to.

**Miller:** [00:45:53] Oh, yeah. [Miller chuckling] Maybe you don't wanna send the message of, "skin the rat" to start with.

**Gary:** [00:45:59] We had a lot of rats.

**Victoria:** [00:46:00] When you're lost in Vietnam, there's plenty of rats.

**Miller:** [00:46:04] Did the climate feel different than Okinawa?

**Gary:** [00:46:08] Oh, it was hot... [Victoria inserts: "And humid."] and humid, [Victoria inserts: "And mosquitoes."] A lot of mosquitoes.

**Victoria:** [00:46:14] Lot of mosquitoes.

**Miller:** [00:46:17] Would you take pills or things to ward off malaria and things like that? I know a lot of people mention—

**Gary:** [00:46:24] They put the pills in our food, you didn't have to take your pills. They gave you pills without, you know, we didn't even know it.

**Miller:** [00:46:31] So like, would they grind things up and put it in the meals? Is that how that worked?

**Gary:** [00:46:37] I don't know how they put it in there. [Miller inserts: "Interesting."] You know, I found out later that they used to put it in our food. I mean, I used to go to sleep. And it's like my blood used to feel the, you know, like buzz my body used to buzz much because of all the mosquitoes, and I'd roll over and I have thousands of dead mosquitoes down on the bed. I mean, they were bad.

**Victoria:** [00:47:08] That was a hot commodity, apparently in Vietnam, to have a fan because the fan would blow on you all night.

**Gary:** [00:47:13] Yeah, [Victoria continues: “It would help keep the mosquitoes off you.”] You had to go buy a fan because you had to keep those mosquitoes off you.

**Miller:** [00:47:18] Did they have any sort of mosquito netting or things like that? I know that that’s a common thing,

**Gary:** [00:47:22] They didn’t issue us none.

**Miller:** [00:47:25] Hmm. Interesting. What was the sleeping situation like you were on the Đà Nẵng base right to begin with? Were you just...

**Gary:** [00:47:35] We were in like little huts, they probably had about four men in... [Victoria inserts: “Hooches.”]— hooches.

**Miller:** [00:47:45] [Miller chuckling] Tell me more about what Đà Nẵng was like, I was reading a little bit about it, it seems like it was such a hub for so much activity, so many planes moving in and out, so many people moving in and out.

**Gary:** [00:47:54] Well, we used to watch the planes crash. [Victoria chuckles; Miller exclaims: “Oh!”] ‘Cause you could hear ‘em coming in, they’d be sputtering and...

**Victoria:** [00:48:03] Make your plane noise. [Gary replies: “Nah.”] Go ahead.

**Gary:** [00:48:07] They’d be sputtering, you know, [Victoria imitates plane noise] we had a World War II bomber, a single prop jet. They were still using it to drop napalm. And it came in, it was sputtering, and we got up on our hooches and it came in and it crashed. And the guy got out and ran, you know, he’s running running running. Then boom! The napalm went up and, goodbye. So, he didn’t make it.



**Miller:** [00:48:36] Wow. Was that something that would stick with you, if you saw one of these crashes?

**Gary:** [00:48:42] We had a there was a spy plane too that hit... It hit the... [Victoria inserts: "That mountain?"] The barracks, nah, hit the [U.S.] Air Force barracks. And what happened was we were getting rocketed. And so the jets were taking off. So they wouldn't get hit. So they got the airstrip full of the jets taking off one after another, while this... There was a spy plane that we weren't even supposed to be having. You know, it wasn't supposed to be there. It's that one with the big bubble on the top. [Miller inserts: "Oh, right, right."] Well, it came in and it tried to land on the road next to the airstrip. And it, the one wing clipped that, a hangar and it spun it, and it went into the Air Force barracks and it killed some people on the ground and killed all the people in a plane and... I had pictures of that plane, and they sorta confiscated it.

**Miller:** [00:49:43] Wow. It seems like a kind of thing that would really cast a shadow over all your time there when something like this happened, seemingly so often. So tell me about what some of your day-to-day duties would be like. What was a typical day in Đà Nẵng for you?

**Gary:** [00:50:04] You had guard duty, *sometimes*. Guard duty at night, or I'd... During the day I'd, sometimes I'd go through embarkation boxes; and those are boxes for, say, like they were shipping a truck back to the United States, and they'd build a box for it. Otherwise, I'd do nothing. You know, sometimes I'd electrocute rats, you know, [Victoria and Miller laughing] put a little box. We have different ways of catching these rats. We'd build a trap out of chicken wire and we used to catch these rats in there two at a time. You know, this is a very small trap. [Gary chuckling] We'd catch 'em in there two at a time. And as I said, the rats were bad. We used to, Mama-san [housemaid] used to wash the clothes, and then she'd lay 'em out on the ground to dry. And at night you watch these clothes move. That's how many rats; I mean, they'd just be moving because the rats be crawling underneath the grass underneath them. We had a shitter, and we used to take a crap in, and they were, it was like a little building. They had cut up fifty-five-gallon drums and they used to fill 'em up, put a little bit of kerosene in 'em. And you'd be goin' in a bathroom and the rats would be in these barrels, and, you know, I mean these, I met a lot of rats.

**Miller:** [00:51:39] If only you trained the rats to eat the mosquitoes, that would have worked out better.

**Gary:** [00:51:44] They end up, they used, the Vietnamese... I don't know if I'm getting ahead of myself or not, but these— [Miller inserts: "Go for it."]— rats are in my mind that's... it's like the Vietnamese used these rats. They put chicken wire around people's heads and they put the rat inside and they tie 'em to the trees. And that's another story I was... I got pissed off about that one.

**Miller:** [00:52:14] How did you hear about that?

**Gary:** [00:52:16] I... we got rocketed and it blew down our telephone pole. You know, electric poles and it just for some reason it took a direct hit, so it, [imitating explosion] blew it to sh—. Wasn't there no more. [Victoria inserts: "You can say blew it to shit."] Yeah. So we had to put up a new electric line and a new pole. Well, the new pole went up fine. It's stretching the line because there was a sniper out there that was trained to shoot us in the head. And it was like three, I think three guys tried to do it and it was getting dark out, and they said, "We ain't going up there. We ain't doing this." And I never was on a pole before, and I said, "Let me try it." Well, it ended up good because when I was up there, I was, 'cause you had them gaffs, them tree gaffs that you climbed. [Victoria inserts: "Wood."] I was so unbalanced for not doing it, I was moving all over the place. [Miller laughs and inserts: "Hard to shoot."] If you were me, I could, even I got to be you can hear the bullet, you know? [Miller exclaims: "Wow."] Coming past you. And it's like, [Gary chuckling] the line pulled up. Well, that's where it ended up. So I was pissed off that we, I wanted to get a fire team together and go out there and get this guy that was shooting at us. And we went to our camp, our lieutenant, and he said, "No."

**Miller:** [00:53:43] Lieutenant Daniel Boone?

**Gary:** [00:53:45] Yeah, Lieutenant Daniel Boone.

**Victoria:** [00:53:46] That was his, Lieutenant Daniel Boone.

**Gary:** [00:53:48] He was a relative of Daniel Boone, and he said no. Well, it ended up right before we were ready. We pulled out of Vietnam. And right before we were ready to leave, they found a prisoner of war camp out there and they found like three Vietnamese, like two Americans that were tied to the tree with these rat things on their heads. And I was really upset about that 'cause I feel maybe these guys were alive. And if we went out there, maybe we could have saved their life. [Victoria inserts: "Yeah."] They didn't have to have a rat eating their face and then go inside of 'em. [Leah inserts: "Yeah."]

**Miller:** [00:54:29] Yeah, I guess, too just seeing so much sort of death like that and then not being like, whether it's a plane crash or something like that, not being able to do anything about it must have been frustrating.

**Gary:** [00:54:40] Yep. And getting rocketed all the time.

**Miller:** [00:54:44] Yeah. Tell me about that experience 'cause it seems like [unsure] it's something that people talk about all the time with Đà Nẵng of just like constantly being under fire.

**Gary:** [00:54:52] To me, it's strange that they knew about it that day I got there. You know, they told us. After we skinned a rabbit, they told us that [Victoria laughing] the recon [reconnaissance] saw a lot of Vietnamese humping rockets. Well, to me, why didn't they stop them from humping these rockets? But they said this, and they told us the exact day these rockets we're gonna start coming. And sure enough, you know, I mean, for thirty days, we got rocketed. [imitating rocket fire] And it's got to be I ran out my first— I was a newbie there. So, we had a bunker next to our hooch. Everybody in a bunker next to their hooch. So I figured, well, get rocketed. Boom, boom. I go out, run outside and get in the bunker. I got out there, man, and as soon as a rocket hit, and it looked like a giant sparkler because it was all this white shrapnel just flying everywhere, and that's the last time I ever went out that door. Let me tell you that. I couldn't hear no more. My ears were like they're, to me they should have been bleeding and... So from then on, I did what everybody else did, you know. I had my helmet underneath of my rack, and I roll off the rack and put the helmet over my head and just put my hand over my ears and. Instead of running out there and...

**Miller:** [00:56:32] Would that happen mostly during the day or at night?

**Gary:** [00:56:35] Mostly at night.

**Miller:** [00:56:37] Yeah, that must have been tough to try to sleep through, right? You're fighting the mosquitoes on one side; you're having to roll over and cover your head.

**Gary:** [00:56:44] You got to hear the when they were coming, you know, 'cause usually the siren went off after they already hit. But then once you're there for a while, you could hear 'em coming.

**Miller:** [00:56:58] You could recognize the sound. [Gary concurs: "Yeah;" Miller exclaims: "Wow."]

**Gary:** [00:57:01] Before, you know, before they explode, you could hear the, shh-shh-shh-shh. [Miller starts: "With the rockets— Oh, go ahead, Leah."]

**Cohen:** [00:57:10] Did you suffer any long-term hearing loss as a result of the proximity to the rockets?

**Gary:** [00:57:16] I think I did. A lot of mortars too.

**Victoria:** [00:57:20] He's not been able to hear since I first met him. He's always had hearing problems.

**Gary:** [00:57:24] Yeah, we got rocketed and also— [Victoria inserts: "From Vietnam."]  
—mortars. You know, they rocketed us, they mortar us. They rocketed us, they mortar us. Sometimes they rocketed and mortars at the same time. The bad part is, I find pieces of the rockets and they had, "Made in the United States" on the tail section. That's what got me. There's another one. They used to take and capture our rockets and shoot it at us.

**Miller:** [00:57:56] How were they acquiring those? Were those just things that they were, you just grabbed from bases and things like that?

**Victoria:** [00:58:02] They captured 'em like from, just probably transportation convoys, I guess?

**Gary:** [00:58:08] Yeah, from convoys mostly.

**Miller:** [00:58:09] Yeah, that's gotta make it seem even worse, right? [Gary and Victoria insert: "Yeah."] 'Cause, you know, that's somewhere someone's making that rocket and saying, "Well, this is great. Here's my contribution to the effort, right?" Here's the rocket and then it's being shot right back at other men in the service. Wow.

**Gary:** [00:58:23] Yes and that one. The one when I ran out, that looked like a sparkler, it hit a guy. The guy was in pieces. It's like on his flak jacket, you know? And it was like there wasn't even anything in it. It was just his arms were over there. His body was over here. His legs were here.

**Victoria:** [00:58:42] You're gonna nail me with all this Italian speaking [hand gestures while speaking]. [Gary inserts: "Yep."]

**Miller:** [00:58:47] How often was it that that there would be casualties as a result of the rocket attacks?

**Gary:** [00:58:51] Not that many. Not that many. One guy got, was taking a leak and got hit with a piece of shrapnel. Like took off his head, but... I think the only two times that I know of.

**Miller:** [00:59:07] I guess just knowing it's a possibility and it being constant, I mean, I know that would weigh on me like crazy. Just the stress of that.

**Gary:** [00:59:14] Well, you didn't sleep that good anymore because, you could hear 'em coming in even when you're asleep. So it's like.

**Victoria:** [00:59:23] You know, I think part of your Marine training, too, is to expect things. I mean, even though it's like anything else, you can be told about something, and you have to

experience it before you really understand. But that's what a part of what makes Marines so tough and what makes Marines so resilient.

**Miller:** [00:59:42] Yeah, Gary tell me about some of the other people that you served with, did you build connections that have lasted with some of your fellow Marines from Đà Nẵng or from, I guess, other points too?

**Gary:** [00:59:52] I have one that I keep in contact with. [Victoria asks: "Mike Yohn?"] Yep, Mike.

**Miller:** [01:00:01] What was the culture like on the base? Was it like what you might see in, something like *Full Metal Jacket* in terms of the way that the people— [Victoria to Gary: "On the base."]- congregated together?

**Victoria:** [01:00:12] Đà Nẵng probably.

**Gary:** [01:00:13] Of the culture. Well...

**Victoria:** [01:00:16] You had like cliques. Oh, you mean, are you talking about like racial divisions and things like that?

**Miller:** [01:00:21] Well, that could be part of it, too. Just how did people interact with one another? Did it seem like just kind of one big Marine Corps where everyone was trying to kind of grit through it? Or were there kind of different dynamics at play there?

**Gary:** [01:00:32] It's like sometimes we go out on guard duty, like they say this base was gonna be taken over. It's like the airstrip was gonna be taken over. And so we'd go out and guard, lay out on the airstrip. Had 'em shoot rockets at us. Okay. And so then we'd be coming in after guard duty, like early in the morning. And we'd greet each other coming in was like, I knew this other guy was somewhere else and I'd be waiting for him. It was like other people doing the same thing. We come in. And one guy took a .45 and he went to his buddy and said, "Bang, you're dead." Well, he went bang, and he hit him right in the heart. He didn't, from my understanding, he didn't think the gun was loaded and he ended up throwing it. They couldn't find it, and it's like I said, I was right next to the guy, he threw it over here. But it was still dark

out and the MPs [military police] came and they still couldn't find it. I had to show 'em where the gun, where the .45 was that morning. And it was like, I told 'em where it was. But, had that. We had one guy that shot himself in the foot and they medevac'd him, and they fixed up his foot and he came back.

**Victoria:** [01:01:52] He shot himself in the foot to get out.

**Miller:** [01:01:54] Oh yeah.

**Gary:** [01:01:55] Yeah, to get out of Vietnam.

**Victoria:** [01:01:56] But there was a closeness, and I don't think it mattered your race or ethnicity, whatever. They were in it together. Marines are like that.

**Gary:** [01:02:03] And he ended up coming back and he loaded his M16 and opened fire in the whole barracks. [Cohen and Miller exclaim: "Oh."] And he ended up hitting one guy in the back, and he's paralyzed.

**Miller:** [01:02:16] So in the first case, was that guy shot right in front of you? Was that as you were? Wow.

**Gary:** [01:02:23] Both cases were, was in my hooch when the other guy came in with the M16 and sprayed the whole barracks.

**Miller:** [01:02:34] Wow. How did that second one get resolved, did someone shoot him and put a stop to it?

**Gary:** [01:02:39] No, no. He ran out the door and we wanted to get a search party. We wanted to hunt him down. But again, our lieutenant said no. And so he went out to the, dogpatch, the village that was out there. It was a bunch of shacks; it was like it was squalor. [phone ringing] If you ask me. It's like you see Mama-san with her baby, and she'd be eating betel nut it was a hallucinogen, brown stuff[?]. And she'd have a kid on her tit, you know, and it's like. I don't know how these people lived out there.

**Miller:** [01:03:21] Yeah, a very different kind of world, certainly than anything I've ever seen. Did you have a chance to meet a lot of Vietnamese people or encounter them off base?

**Gary:** [01:03:32] No, I, they work on our base.

**Miller:** [01:03:36] That would've been like ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] folks. Like the South Vietnamese Army?

**Gary:** [01:03:42] Yeah, we they guarded our base with us. It was like a joint Americans with an ARVN [soldier].

**Miller:** [01:03:53] What were your impressions of them? Did they seem grateful that you were over here? Did you work well with them?

**Gary:** [01:04:02] The ARVN or the people?

**Miller:** [01:04:05] Well, we'll start with the ARVN.

**Gary:** [01:04:07] The ARVN appreciated us, you know. [Miller inserts: "Yeah."] Wanna ask me about the people? [Miller replies: "Yeah, like people then."] They didn't actually know what was going on. If you ask me, you know, they to me, they didn't care.

**Cohen:** [01:04:26] Were there a lot of local Vietnamese that worked on the base such as cleaning?

**Gary:** [01:04:32] Yeah, they clean, they wash clothes, they swept floors, they raked the sand. And they'd eat fish heads, fish heads and rice. I remember that.

**Miller:** [01:04:48] Did they speak any English? Would you be able to kind of communicate?



**Gary:** [01:04:54] They spoke pidgin<sup>2</sup> English, but then you learn a lot of Vietnamese.

**Miller:** [01:04:59] Are there any Vietnamese words or phrases that you still remember today?

**Gary:** [01:05:04] Yeah, they're not good ones. [Miller laughing] *Dừng lại* is stop, like halt.

**Miller:** [01:05:13] Interesting. Yeah, it's funny. I remember talking with someone who had served in the Gulf War, first Gulf War, for a project, and he said, "Oh, I learned a lot of phrases in Arabic," and I said, "Oh, like what?" And he said, "I can't say any of them." [Miller and Cohen laughing] The things that stick with you are often fun, but not necessarily for mixed company or things like that. Seems to be a somewhat universal military experience.

**Gary:** [01:05:39] Yeah, it's like, bookoo, you know, big, but...

**Miller:** [01:05:44] Yeah. Were you exposed, I guess, back to less fun things. Were you exposed to Agent Orange during your time in Vietnam?

**Gary:** [01:05:52] I was sprayed directly with Agent Orange.

**Miller:** [01:05:55] Oh wow. How did that happen?

**Gary:** [01:05:57] I was on a back of a six-by-[six]. I was going over; we were going over to Charlie<sup>3</sup> company and this was an uncovered six-by. We were bringing something that's like, we couldn't go on "liberty" [authorized leave pass]. Marines... they didn't have no "liberty" for Marines. You couldn't go from one base to a next base. And so for some reason, we were bringing something over to Charlie company, it was a recon company. And a plane, well, first I gotta get this right. There was a bunch of explosions going off and we were on the ride, we were going to Hồ Chí Minh Road, and we didn't know what it was, and we didn't know whether they were being attacked in front of us or what. So we got out, we were crawling in the woods, and it ended up being our... there were cannons, or I don't know what you call 'em, but they're

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<sup>2</sup> A simplified or broken form of a language used for communication between speakers of different languages.

<sup>3</sup> The phonetic alphabet, widely used in the military, denotes corresponding names such as "Charlie" to the standard alphabet letters.

some big guns. It was like six of 'em in a row and they were firing somewhere that way. We didn't pay no attention to it. So we went back to the vehicle that was parked on the road and jumped back in. There's two guys in front, I was sitting in the back. And all of a sudden this plane comes by. [imitating plane flight] And this stuff is just spraying spring on its wings, and I didn't know what it was. It's flopping down, and now it's getting on me and I'm getting wet. So it's a, you know, we just kept going. So we ended up going to Charlie company. What happened was those guns were firing at Charlie company. We didn't know until the two guys that were in the front, they got out of the vehicle. They ran into the bunker and I'm saying, "What the hell is going on here?" You know, and I'm looking around and I don't see nothin', you know, and they're not saying anything from that bunker. At least I can't hear because the exhaust pipe to the six-by... [Victoria inserts: "Loud."] Loud. So I gotta, jumped off the back and I walk up to almost in front of the six-by. And even with the bunker is about ten yards away. I say, "Hey, what's going on?" And all of a sudden, this lieutenant sticks out his head to me, there was no sound that came out of his mouth, but he gave the signal like he... "We're surrounded," and I'm saying, and I turn around and I look. I don't see anybody. You know, and next thing you know, they pop up and they're opened fire and there sand everywhere around. I turn around and I dive underneath the truck. Now I'm stuck underneath this six-by, while we're surrounded and I could tell there was one guy that was underneath the hooch, but they had their hooch up on stilts, and we didn't have our hooch up on stilts. But there was a radio operator, and he was directing the fire, and this is where the incoming was coming that we didn't know about. So anyway, I was about maybe an hour underneath that truck while they're trying to kill me and I was going from wheel well to wheel well, 'cause they were changing positions. Okay. Long story short. They sent out... well, first I saw one Phantom [F-4 air fighter] come in, and it was to me it was like flying in slow motion, it was flying real low [imitating plane flight] and then swept up. Then another one came in and he dropped napalm, then the other one spun around and he dropped his napalm, so. Then the surroundment, they burnt, they fried 'em. So that's how we got out of that one, but that was a surprise, I didn't expect that to happen.

**Miller:** [01:09:52] Were there any casualties in that experience? Just Vietnamese?

**Gary:** [01:09:58] The Việt-Cộng [Communist Vietnamese soldiers], yep.

**Miller:** [01:10:01] In terms of the Agent Orange, I guess quite the rough day, from that perspective, when that becomes a little footnote, but did you all know that that was kind of dangerous thing in the moment?

**Gary:** [01:10:12] Nope!

**Victoria:** [01:10:14] No, but to this day, I well, even back in 1980, when he threw all those blood clots and respiratory arrested in the hospital, I said that was from his Agent Orange exposure. Couldn't be anything else. A normal, healthy person doesn't just start throwing all these blood clots. I went to the VA [United States Department of Veterans Affairs], so that was 1980, probably 1982, about it, but they only had three specific illnesses or problems directly related to Agent Orange back then. So I need to go back again because since that time he's throwing blood clots everywhere and he's had blood clots everywhere in his whole body. I mean, you name the vessel, he's had a clot in it. So I firmly believe that's from Agent Orange exposure. There's nothing else that could have caused it. And there are other bleeding problems related to Agent Orange exposure. Well, with the clotting cascade, you change one factor and you bleed, you change another factor and you clot. So, you can't say that it's not related. I don't buy it, and I'm sure one day they're gonna find out it is.

**Gary:** [01:11:12] Yeah, they say it's arteries, it's not veins.

**Miller:** [01:11:16] Yeah, I think it seems like over the last forty years, it's just kind of been adding one more thing after another that Agent Orange can do to you. Just really horrible stuff.

**Victoria:** [01:11:24] He has diabetes now. He was a healthy person his whole life, and he has no history of diabetes.

**Gary:** [01:11:30] Of course they got that Camp Lejeune water, too.

**Victoria:** [01:11:33] Oh yeah, he was drinking that. The Camp Lejeune water. It's Le-journ. [Gary repeats: "Le-journ."] Le-journ.

**Miller:** [01:11:38] What was wrong with the water at Camp Lejeune?

**Gary:** [01:11:39] It's the cleaners.

**Victoria:** [01:11:43] It was contaminated with chemicals.

**Gary:** [01:11:46] From the cleaners they used to dump it in, I guess, the water supply.

**Victoria:** [01:11:50] And it got down into the water table, and of course, you know, the Marines just drink what's put in front of you. "Drink this." [Victoria chuckles]

**Miller:** [01:12:01] Is the VA, and not to get ahead of ourselves, but is the VA kind of forthright about some of these things now? Or do you have to kind of deal with it on your own?

**Victoria:** [01:12:09] They are so much better now than they were back in the '70s. I can't begin to tell you it's night and day. In fact, when we retired and we decided that we would incorporate the VA into our health care, I, that's what I was nervous about, was actually using the VA because it was like a zoo. I mean, veterinary animals got treated better than veterans did back in the '70s. When I had to go for my ablation, I wasn't worried about the actual procedure. I was worried about going to the VA, but they've really, really, really changed. So I mean, there's still things that could be improved, but it's a bureaucracy. You're always gonna be dealing with that. But it's night and day compared to what it used to be.

**Miller:** [01:12:50] Well, that's good, especially for folks of your generation, right? Now that you really need VA services, it's good that you know... And people love—

**Victoria:** [01:12:57] Well, it's for all the veterans. Think about the young guys that have been dismembered from Iraq and Afghanistan. All the prostheses they provide for 'em now. I can remember back in the '70s, this one poor guy was a bilateral amputee, and they put him on a cart and he used he have two canes. He used to just push himself around all over the VA. He received no therapy, no counseling, no anything. His urine drainage bag was hooked on the side of his bed there. The man... well, after I became an RN [Registered Nurse], and I recognize now that this man needed psychiatric counseling. He needed physical therapy. He needed all kinds of rehabilitation that was never provided. They just put him in the hospital and kept him there

the rest of his life. I mean, it was barbaric and that's just one person. I'm sure there's dozens and dozens of stories; that just happens to be anecdotal that I witnessed this person any time I would go there, which I finally stopped going to the VA. It was just horrible.

**Miller:** [01:13:56] Yeah, it's terrible, too, that we talk a lot about Vietnam veterans facing attacks from the public, right. But then with not even the government kind of providing the services, holding up their end of the bargain. It's just, you know, I'd like to think that with our more recent generation, it has gotten better, and I'm glad that obviously, you know more than I would about this, but it's very tough to think about.

**Victoria:** [01:14:16] It is, it is. I mean, some of the advances they've made in prosthesis for these young people, it's really wonderful because in the old days in Vietnam, they would have just died. Now they're able to keep them alive. But then you keep someone alive and then what are you gonna do? Well, fortunately now they've developed so many wonderful things: artificial limbs and legs and everything else that makes a huge difference so they can have a quality life. Yeah, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:14:43] For your own health would the two of you have to advocate for the VA, like to really persist or make a fight, to get the health and medical services that were needed?

**Victoria:** [01:14:56] Today, no, I honestly can say we don't. Although being that I was in the medical profession for many, many years, I expect more sometimes than they provide, and I know what to say and who to ask to be sure that my husband gets the best care that's available. I still don't like the fact that there's kind of a revolving door with physicians. Although some of them stay for a while, a lot of them stay till they get experience and they move out to private practice. And it's nice to have continuity with the same physician for many years as opposed to a different one every six months. That's still a bit of a problem. It's much better than it was, but it's still there. They're working on it, though, it seems.

**Miller:** [01:15:43] Let's wrap up a little bit on Gary, your experiences in Vietnam. So I did want to ask, how would you keep in touch with your family while you were overseas?

**Gary:** [01:15:52] My mom would send me care packages, but I would send letters when I had... well, I actually had a lot of time, but I never really wrote that much. And one day she contacted, I guess, the CO [commanding officer] or somebody, wanted to know whether I was alive or dead. That's like I had to go to a field phone that was pretty far away and talking to my 'ma on a field phone. You know, you gotta say "Over" every time you know you talk and you gotta say "Over" when you're done, and then she's gotta say "Talk" and then say "Over." Well, she wouldn't say "Over." So they wouldn't switch... [all laughing] A pretty typical conversation at the time.

**Victoria:** [01:16:40] So he got yelled at for not calling his mom for the whole time he was over there is what it boils down to. Call your mother! [Gary inserts: "I didn't call my mother."] Write her a letter.

**Gary:** [01:16:48] She was watching too much news and reading the paper 'cause of all the rockets we were getting, and she was worried about it.

**Miller:** [01:16:58] What would she include in the care packages?

**Gary:** [01:17:01] Cookies. [Victoria chuckling].

**Miller:** [01:17:04] Nice. Yeah, that would certainly perk me up. I mean, it wouldn't compensate for rocket fire, but it would help a little bit. [Cohen and Gary laughing]

**Victoria:** [01:17:13] Yeah, but you gotta remember you feel pretty invincible at that age.

**Miller:** [01:17:17] Yeah, I guess, you know, folks of my generation and you know, I guess it's hard to see, but I'm a very small person. I'm like five-five [five foot, five inches], five-six. I feel like it's a different sort of dynamic where we're exposed these days to all the things that can hurt you, can kill you, can poison you. That I guess I would have liked a little more of my youthful invincibility phase, but... [Miller chuckling]

**Victoria:** [01:17:37] Yeah, yeah, you know, it's true. I mean, when we rode bikes [motorcycles] we didn't wear helmets. I remember I was in high school when they finally introduced seatbelts

into cars. When I learned to drive a car, there weren't seatbelts in the car. You didn't learn to drive a vehicle 'til you were in the Marine Corps, right? That's when you learned to drive? [Gary responds: "Twenty-two."] Yeah, he was twenty-two before he had a license. I don't know that he didn't drive before then.

**Gary:** [01:17:58] I had a Marine Corps license.

**Victoria:** [01:18:01] Yeah. So there were a lot of things, there are so many safety features now. I still don't even wear a bicycle helmet. I probably should. But I don't think about it, and I know what would happen, but I think there was less fear, I think they're instilling too much fear in kids today. You can't be afraid of everything or you'll never go out your door. And that's what we're finding. Everybody's communicating virtually as opposed to going out there and experiencing life.

**Gary:** [01:18:26] Kids are getting afraid of the bugs outside.

**Victoria:** [01:18:30] You know, the COVID not to get off topic, but my one grandson, he's terrified. He doesn't wanna leave his house without his mask on, and he's worried. He says, "Grandma, put your mask on." The whole COVID thing has got him terrified about getting sick. My other grandson, you know, he's... gotta tell him to put the mask on, or you gotta wipe the boogers away. You know, kids with the masks.

**Gary:** [01:18:50] He's a super spreader. [Miller and Cohen laughing]

**Victoria:** [01:18:53] Well, that whole thing of kids in masks, I personally think it's doing more harm than it is good. Kids have much more of a immunity system stronger than we do and, like I said, that's a fifty-fifty; one child is fine with it, and the other one is terrified by it. So, I don't know. I think they make kids too afraid of everything. Sometimes that's you need to protect 'em, give them their childhood. They don't need to know everything. They need to find it out gradually. But it's so easy to access everything with the internet that even if you try not to throw the whole world at your children or grandchildren, they're smart. Kids like to play on the computer and they're bound to wander off here and there. You can't watch everything they do. I don't care how many controls you put on your computer; they'll figure a way around it.

**Miller:** [01:19:43] Very different than the era that you two grew up in, where you can watch the nightly news, and that's pretty tame, especially before Vietnam. You can look at the paper, but otherwise you can kind of shut the world off in a way that's very difficult to do now. Whether you want to or not, it finds a way.

**Victoria:** [01:19:58] Exactly. Yeah, I mean, it was black and white TV. So what you want to watch it for anyway? Although I did like *Star Trek* that was one of my favorite shows. I know you probably don't even know what that is.

**Miller:** [01:20:09] No, I recognize the name. I think they might be doing a reboot or something.

**Victoria:** [01:20:13] Yeah, I think they are. Yeah, yeah.

**Miller:** [01:20:15] Yeah. So Gary, let me ask you, how did you feel when time came to leave Iwakuni Vietnam? Were you ready to go?

**Gary:** [01:20:24] I extended the stay over in Vietnam and like our unit pulled out. And I volunteered to stay to tear down all the buildings and destroy everything that would have been usable to the Vietnamese. [Victoria inserts: "Việt-Cộng."] To the North Vietnamese and I think I had ten days left before my duty was up, so I went to Iwakuni [Japan] for ten days.

**Miller:** [01:20:59] Where's that?

**Gary:** [01:21:01] Iwakuni, Japan.

**Miller:** [01:21:02] Oh, interesting. Why didn't you choose to stay and help dismantle?

**Gary:** [01:21:09] Oh, my. [phone ringing] Because... Boy, how can I put this?

**Victoria:** [01:21:19] You always told me that you liked Vietnam because everything was fair there. There was no because the ranks didn't matter.



**Gary:** [01:21:27] Well that's what I was trying to say.

**Victoria:** [01:21:30] I know, that's what I was trying to get out of it.

**Gary:** [01:21:33] Yeah, I felt like... You know, I was treated like a human being. I must say.

**Miller:** [01:21:42] Yeah, I guess when the rockets are falling, you don't have time to salute or play games with rank, right? [all chuckling]

**Gary:** [01:21:48] We didn't wanna be saluted. [all chuckling]

**Miller:** [01:21:53] How did it feel to return to the States? Did you fly directly from Vietnam back?

**Gary:** [01:21:59] I flew to Iwakuni.

**Miller:** [01:22:02] Oh, right, right, right and then wrapped up there.

**Gary:** [01:22:04] Well, I actually flew to Okinawa, then from Okinawa to Iwakuni. And then from Iwakuni I went to California.

**Miller:** [01:22:15] I was working with Leah on processing an interview from a couple weeks ago where someone had mentioned coming back into California. And when they got off the plane someone said, "Make sure you don't come out in your uniform, put on civilian clothes." Did you get that same message when you arrived back in California?

**Gary:** [01:22:31] I had people yelling at me, but... I wore my uniform out of that plane.

**Miller:** [01:22:41] Were you expecting that when you returned, is that something you kind of knew was going to be something you would have to deal with getting home?

**Gary:** [01:22:46] Well, I knew there was people for the war, people against the war, you know, so. But it wouldn't bother me, taking the... as long as they don't put a hand on me, they're okay.

**Miller:** [01:22:58] Got it. Did you have a chance to see your family when you got back before you went then to Cherry Point, or [unsure]? [Gary replies: "Yeah."] What was it like to see them?

**Gary:** [01:23:12] Welcome home, the welcome home signs. [Miller inserts: "Yeah."] Banners, they were the only ones, but besides that...

**Miller:** [01:23:25] So tell me about then, I guess, the exciting experience of meeting the lovely Vicki West, right? I heard your perspective on that, Vicki. But what was your, what are your memories there, Gary?

**Gary:** [01:23:36] She's a wild thing. [all laughing]

**Miller:** [01:23:43] Tell me, how did you? I heard one side of the story, but what do you remember of the moment you met and that whirlwind courtship that brought you two together so quickly?

**Gary:** [01:23:53] [Victoria and Gary chuckling] I remember... [Victoria inserts: "Be nice."] Wanted to get into the parachute club, or...

**Victoria:** [01:24:04] Yeah, oh yeah. I don't think I ever mentioned it. Did I mention the parachute club?

**Miller:** [01:24:07] I think so, right. You both came to learn how to jump.

**Gary:** [01:24:10] Yeah, we were gonna go to the parachute club to learn how to jump out of planes and something happened it's like never...

**Victoria:** [01:24:19] Yeah, we never went back again. [Victoria and Miller laughing]

**Gary:** [01:24:22] But they didn't have it.

**Victoria:** [01:24:23] Is that what it was? Yeah, I don't know.

**Gary:** [01:24:25] It's like it was postponed or something and... [short pause] Was there an accident?

**Victoria:** [01:24:33] No, I don't remember, I remember. I don't remember, I remember we met at that, 'cause I got talked into going. I didn't even wanna go. I had no interest in it. And then I met you and we left, and that was it.

**Gary:** [01:24:46] Yep, and she liked my motorcycle.

**Victoria:** [01:24:48] I did. I liked his motorcycle. [Cohen and Miller laughing] And as a footnote, he got in trouble with his CO, so he lost his license to drive on-base. So after we were married, I had to drive on-base every morning 'cause muster [soldier headcount] was at six o'clock. So he had to leave the house at five when it's dark to get on-base. And you know what it's like to drive a motorcycle with your brand-new husband to be telling you how to drive?

**Gary:** [01:25:09] And her goofing off doing wheelies.

**Victoria:** [01:25:10] One time!

**Gary:** [01:25:13] We were in the back.

**Victoria:** [01:25:15] Yeah, yeah. He makes it sound like I was a bad driver, but I knew how to drive a motorcycle before I knew how to drive a car, so. I knew what I was doing, and I had a license. [Miller laughing]

**Miller:** [01:25:28] Now, if you don't want to get into this Gary, we don't have to, you know, I just wanted to preface it. But Vicki, you had mentioned that Gary had just gotten out of the

brig, unfairly when you met. [Gary starts: "I wasn't, I wasn't;" Victoria laughing] Do you wanna tell me what happened there?

**Gary:** [01:25:42] I wasn't in the brig.

**Victoria:** [01:25:43] You were in the brig! No, his sister had a baby and he was celebrating that his sister had a baby, and his the duty NCO [Noncommissioned Officer] in the barracks was being a jerk about it. And they got in a disagreement.

**Gary:** [01:25:58] No, someone came in. I was sleeping. And, what, the assistant NCO came and woke me up and told me I had a telephone call. I go and answer the phone. It's my mom, she says my sister just had a baby. I get the NCO come down, he says, "Get off that phone or I'm gonna punch your face in." This is what he said to me. I hung up the phone. I stood there, he swung at me, and no matter, I don't care. Whoever makes, says they're gonna punch your face in. They usually don't do shit because you end up beatin' their ass. You know, and then after you beat their ass, you know, then it's your fault. But that's how it happened.

**Victoria:** [01:26:44] So, the MPs got involved. It really wasn't...

**Gary:** [01:26:51] He called the MP.

**Miller:** [01:26:53] Yeah, it's always that the people who bluster the most then cry the most on the other end, right? It seems like those correlate pretty strongly.

**Victoria:** [01:27:00] And then it all went away because of course, he didn't start it.

**Miller:** [01:27:04] Yeah, I guess I should ask at this point, were you had you already made sergeant? [Gary replies: "Yeah."] When you met. Yeah, it seemed like that was a, speaking of whirlwinds, right? To be promoted that quickly. How did that happen?

**Gary:** [01:27:18] I was a E-5 [military rank] under two years, which is unheard of. I mostly got all my rank in Vietnam.

**Miller:** [01:27:30] Was there a particular reason why you were able to move so quickly?

**Gary:** [01:27:35] I guess I knew everything.

**Victoria:** [01:27:36] I think it's because he was a good Marine and they'd say, "Do this," and he not only did it, he did it well. And I think that's why you get promoted. That's just my opinion. He was a good Marine. You should have seen him in his uniform. Man-oh-man. [Cohen and Miller chuckling]

**Miller:** [01:27:50] I would love to see some pictures and I know when we share this with the world, it'll be great to put up a picture of you in the dazzling uniform. [Gary chuckles] I ask, Vicki, the same question to you. Do you think the same thing for how you were able to make sergeant so quickly as well? Was it just a matter of being very good at your job and doing it diligently?

**Victoria:** [01:28:10] I think it was. I loved being in the Marine Corps, and so I think I was a good Marine and I got promoted because I did do my job and I did it well. And I don't know that I'm a born leader, but it seems like I always end up in leadership positions. And I did what I said I was going to do, and I did what I was asked to do. And I think that makes a difference, and I did with my best to my ability. I didn't do it half-heartedly. I did it best as I could.

**Miller:** [01:28:39] Yeah, simple things. But I think as even my comparatively limited life experience has taught me, it's not a universal thing. A lot of people don't say what they're gonna do. A lot of people don't go out and give it their all. People who do you know it's good to reward.

**Victoria:** [01:28:53] Yeah, they don't do what they say they're gonna do. It was a very fair system, for the most part. There were a couple instances where men— women were pushed to a second-class position for promotion. The first time I was put up for meritori[ous] sergeant, I was up against a man who was going to Vietnam and my record was actually better than his. But he got the promotion because he was a man going to Vietnam. And it actually it really didn't bother me 'cause I thought, well, he could possibly get killed. So it didn't bother me. I just

thought, 'Well, I'll do better next time.' And in fact, I did get put up again for it, and then I was promoted, so. What difference does a month make?

**Miller:** [01:29:33] I think it's a good perspective to have. [Victoria concurs: "Yeah."] So thinking to jump back a little bit to the romance element. So tell me about that, I guess courtship, right? How did you two spend time together? Because I imagine your duties kept you pretty busy on base, right?

**Victoria:** [01:29:48] Right. But he well, you worked day shift and I worked night shift, midnights, so. So there was afternoons. So, you know, with the Atlantic Ocean being that close, a lot of time is spent on the Atlantic Ocean at the beach. We were going for a motorcycle ride and we both liked the woods. We'd go hiking in the woods. We didn't really hang out at the NCO club that much. No.

**Gary:** [01:30:11] I think once.

**Victoria:** [01:30:12] Yeah. So we were both kind of outdoors people, so we did a lot of outdoor activities. I don't know if they were formal dates or not, but that's what we would do. There wasn't as much dining as there was wining. [Victoria, Cohen, and Miller chuckling] Gary liked to fish, so and I liked to read so we'd go to there's a little lake or pond or whatever you want to call it on-base. He'd go out fishing and I'd read a book and we'd have a bottle of wine and...

**Gary:** [01:30:39] And a brown bag.

**Victoria:** [01:30:41] Yeah.

**Miller:** [01:30:42] And this was still, this was wintertime, right? 'Cause you met in December.

**Victoria:** [01:30:47] Yeah, we met in December. But it was still, you know, North Carolina wasn't really that bad. I think 1971 or '72 was the first time they had snow at Cherry Point in something like eighty years. [Cohen exclaims: "Oh!"] So, yeah, it didn't really get cold-cold per se, cold to them would be like forty-nine degrees. [Miller inserts: "Oh yeah."] So yeah, that didn't bother us.

**Miller:** [01:31:11] I guess, Gary, you paid your dues with the cold when you were in ITR and then the Carolina climate came in handy the other time when you were there.

**Victoria:** [01:31:20] Being so close to the ocean, you get the ocean breeze, you get that ocean climate. Whereas if you go inland more, it's colder, but Cherry Point— [Miller inserts: "It gets mountainy fast. Yeah."] Yeah, it's it was very nice there. It was beautiful. I think about it.

**Miller:** [01:31:35] Why did you two decide to get married so quickly?

**Gary:** [01:31:40] Soon.

**Victoria:** [01:31:40] Why did we decide to get married so quickly? We were in love.

**Gary:** [01:31:43] Yeah. [Gary and Cohen laughing]

**Victoria:** [01:31:48] Do it. Remember that thing about being invincible?

**Miller:** [01:31:54] Well, evidently it's worked out pretty well, right? It's been... [Victoria inserts: "Fifty years."] Well, you must have celebrated fifty years this year, right?

**Victoria:** [01:32:01] Yeah. Yeah, we couldn't... We didn't really have a celebration per se because of COVID or anything, but we bought a megalodon [extinct shark] tooth on an online auction.

**Miller:** [01:32:11] Oh, cool. That's an interesting celebration.

**Victoria:** [01:32:14] While you're talking to him, I'm gonna go get it and show it to you 'cause it's...

**Miller:** [01:32:17] Yeah, I wanna see it. [Miller and Gary chuckle] Gary, did you know you were going to be shipping off to Europe when you two got married?

**Gary:** [01:32:24] Nope.

**Miller:** [01:32:27] Well, that must have come as a bit of a surprise, right? 'Cause it was only a week later.

**Gary:** [01:32:32] That was shorter than a week. Well, we were in a field operation before then, and then they sent me on... Well, what happened was a sergeant he was supposed to go— Another sergeant was supposed to go. He just had twins born and one of 'em died. [Miller inserts: "Oh."] And so they said, "Sorry, we know you just got married, but we gotta send you."

**Miller:** [01:32:56] Wow. Did you have any expectation you would be— Woooo, that is huge!

**Victoria:** [01:33:01] I know, isn't it? Look at the size of that thing. [Gary chuckling; Cohen exclaims: "Wow!"] And so apparently in researching, I found out there's two different kinds of megalodon teeth when they about once a year they dredge the Mississippi River and they put all that sludge on the side and people go through and sift it and they find hundreds of these megalodon teeth. And this is a five and three-quarters-inch tooth. When it gets to six inches, those are the really hard ones to find. So those go for thousands of dollars, whereas from four inch to five [inch] and seven eighths or whatever it is that's in a spaced group. And then from under four inch, I believe it is, or three and a half inches then it you can get it for like a hundred bucks or something. But if you get one that's gray with the white dentin, that means they found it in the Atlantic Ocean, and it hasn't gone through that sludge of the Mississippi River. But yeah, this is about 3.2 million years old. [Miller and Cohen exclaim: "Wow."] I know it commemorates our fifty years together. A megalodon tooth. I wonder if there's anything subconscious in that. [Cohen, Victoria, and Miller chuckling]

**Miller:** [01:34:10] Fifty down, 3,100,950 to go. However you wanted to do that? Yeah.

**Victoria:** [01:34:20] Yeah. So we got married on a Sunday, and it was the first day of spring, March 21 and then by Wednesday you were down to Beaufort [South Carolina] was it? Yeah, getting ready to go on his Med cruise [Mediterranean cruise] to Turkey, Greece, or Spain. Yeah. Yeah.



**Miller:** [01:34:34] So tell me a little bit about that trip. Vicki, in your interview, you made it sound pretty harrowing that crossing. So Gary, what was that like on the LST [Landing Ship, Tank]?

**Gary:** [01:34:43] They had to leave because we were being hit with a hurricane, Hurricane Ginger, even though it was a mild hurricane, and I think it was a category one, but it's still being out on a ship— [Victoria inserts: "In the ocean."]— especially having a flat bottom.

**Victoria:** [01:34:58] The typhoon or the what was it? What did they call it?

**Gary:** [01:35:01] We had a gale storm after. [Victoria inserts: "Gale storm."] And it's like it followed us for like ten days or fourteen days. And it's like we couldn't avoid it, you know, he was going all over, trying to plot a course to try to get out of this gale storm and like the swells are huge and they were taking the ship was taking more degree rolls than what it was built for. Then when it'd go with the waves, then the ship would go airborne, flying in the air and then crash, boooooom, just make a big boom noise. So they were afraid the ship was gonna break up. And then we had a tanker, a gasoline tanker break loose on top, and it was going back and forth, smashing everything. The only thing was holding it on the ship was the beach landing mats that they had attached to the side of the ship. Otherwise it would have went over, but... [Victoria inserts: "So it knocked out the radar in the..."] It didn't from going all over the place. He didn't know where we were. He didn't know where we were here or we were there. So they had to send out a spider plane to give us our coordinates exactly where we were, and we even had an S.O.S. from a Greek shipping or fishing vessel. And to get close to that vessel took us almost a whole day because we'd get close to it and then the squall would come and it'd, goodbye. You know, it'd go and was getting us with our swells, you know, getting close. And we were going all bobbing like a giant bobber in there. And just it was huge.

**Victoria:** [01:36:48] I know you told me once that the sea bags were going at ninety degrees in the racks, you know, like the sea bag... on the rack, and they would sling out at ninety degrees. Back down again.

**Gary:** [01:37:00] I forget what that ship was made— the rows for LST, but we were taking it over, I mean, the ship was going like this and you just hang on it just like we go to the mess hall.

That's the only, like they made us go to general quarters, and there was an opening from the like a little hatch way that was open to where you get down in the mess hall. And you stand there, and you'd be there and it's like you'd be holdin' on, it was like being on a roller coaster, the ship would just go [imitating ship noises] just go down, you know. And it'd go the other way. It kept on doing that. As I said, if we went with the waves and then we'd go airborne. [Cohen comments: "Oh my God;" Victoria comments: "Yeah."]

**Miller:** [01:37:45] Did you think you were ever in mortal danger there?

**Gary:** [01:37:50] Oh yeah. I think that the captain was a little worried there.

**Miller:** [01:37:55] Yeah, 'cause I guess with something like rockets or bullets, you can feel invincible in a way that when the whole of nature seems to be targeting you, it's harder to avoid.

**Victoria:** [01:38:06] Well, I don't know if you've ever been on any kind of a boat in rough seas, but let me tell you, that's a scary feeling. I can't imagine being trapped on a ship like that in the Atlantic Ocean.

**Miller:** [01:38:15] Yeah, I was on something in the Finger Lakes [New York] once and a storm hit, but it's a small little lake, relatively speaking compared to just the vastness of the ocean. I can see land. I was like, "Well, worse case I swim it."

**Victoria:** [01:38:28] Yeah, it's still frightening,

**Gary:** [01:38:30] Especially when you got waves bigger than your ship.

**Miller:** [01:38:34] Yeah! So were you initially intended to land in Spain or was that just a, 'we need to land at the closest spot available,' kinda option? [Gary inserts: "Turkey."] Turkey? Yeah, Turkey was the original destination.

**Victoria:** [01:38:46] They called it a Turkey, Greece, and Spain NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] operation. It was a joint NATO-USMC [United States Marine Corps] operation. We've never been able to find out the name of it, though. We should look it up.

**Gary:** [01:38:56] There's a name. Turkey our original port of where we were [sup]posed land was in Turkey, okay. And then we, our engines, we only we had like two engines going over there when I think we had six. We only had to work— These are old World War II flat bottom ships, you know. And they were a piece of junk.

**Miller:** [01:39:26] [Victoria chuckling] So the Marine Corps had 'em. [Victoria and Miller chuckle]

**Gary:** [01:39:28] So it's like they have fixed the engines, so we had two engines instead of one. Imagine being in this storm and not having even the power to fight. But anyhow, we only had one engine.

**Victoria:** [01:39:45] He was brave, he's always been brave.

**Gary:** [01:39:47] We went to Greece, a dry dock and they had to fix one engine, another engine. So we stayed there for I think, ten days and then—

**Victoria:** [01:39:58] Wait, is that where you met that Dr., in Greece? [Gary responds: "Yeah."] Yeah, because I didn't— you know back then they didn't have iPhones or computers or anything like that. So all I knew was there was a hurricane out in the Atlantic Ocean and they were in it. And I didn't hear anything for what, two weeks, three weeks. And then I got this phone call from this man who said he was a Greek doctor. Well, I don't know about you, but I don't have many people that can't speak English, calling me up and saying, "I'm calling you from Greece." You know, [unsure] America by then I can't remember. It was strange. But anyway, he finally said that, "I met your husband, and he said to tell you, 'He's okay'." It's like it was a very strange phone call, but it was a relief because the Marine Corps doesn't tell you anything.

**Miller:** [01:40:39] Were you expecting to not have contact for multiple weeks?

**Victoria:** [01:40:43] Yes. Maybe a letter would come from the ship. Yeah, I wasn't getting any contact at all, and then with that storm going on because it did hit land too, it hit Cherry Point.

**Gary:** [01:40:53] Getting mail from the ship.

**Victoria:** [01:40:55] Yeah, ship mail.

**Gary:** [01:40:58] Yeah, ship mail. Wonder how that is, huh?

**Miller:** [01:41:00] Well, I guess at least in some ways, it's good that you didn't expect to hear from him three days later, because that would have been terrifying those three weeks. If you had already kind of baked in that there's gonna be a little while, but still. Yeah, it seems, harrowing on both of your ends.

**Victoria:** [01:41:14] Well, yeah. Because of the storm, so. We knew about the storm because when it hit land, and then you want to check it out and they said, "Yeah, they're [still] out in the Atlantic."

**Gary:** [01:41:22] I did send her one letter and that was...

**Victoria:** [01:41:24] But I don't think it got out to me until after you got home.

**Gary:** [01:41:26] Right. And there's a giant passenger ship, huge ship came next to us, okay. And he shot that they shot this gun with a rope over to our ship. I ain't kidding ya. Then he packs the mail the bags to it, and they pulled the mail bags back over to the passenger ship. And that's how they sent our mail. [Miller exclaims: "Wow!"] Only happened one time.

**Miller:** [01:41:54] What were you doing when you were in Greece? And then I guess in Turkey, what were your duties like?

**Gary:** [01:41:59] I had to wire up the whole base. I gave the whole base electricity, yeah.

**Miller:** [01:42:06] Was that enjoyable?

**Gary:** [01:42:09] Yeah, it was okay.

**Miller:** [01:42:11] And I guess it's easier to do when no one's shooting at you, like in Đà Nẵng. Makes the job a lot more straightforward.

**Gary:** [01:42:16] Nobody was.

**Miller:** [01:42:18] Did you have a chance to experience any of the culture and sights from that region? I guess there's more to do than there might have been in central Vietnam.

**Gary:** [01:42:28] You know, they were coming out of the woods yelling, "Shot up! Cognac! And Ouzo!" You know what that is?

**Miller:** [01:42:38] Ouzo, it's like a like some kind of liquor, right?

**Victoria:** [01:42:41] Yeah. Shot up. Cognac. Yeah, it's all booze.

**Gary:** [01:42:43] "Shot up! Shot up! Cognac. And Ouzo!"

**Victoria:** [01:42:47] Well, you bought me that little Parthenon from Greece, yeah. And the pitcher and the cups you brought home. Did you— got those in Greece, right? [Gary replies: "Yeah."] Or did you get the other ones from Turkey? [Gary responds: "Greece."] Greece, yeah.

**Gary:** [01:43:01] Turkey, I got the booze.

**Victoria:** [01:43:01] So he was able to go shopping, apparently.

**Gary:** [01:43:03] No, Turkey they came out of the woods, burlap bags with booze. Yelling, I can't, not yelling. We didn't know what the heck they were saying.

**Victoria:** [01:43:11] Yeah, shot up, it sounds like shut up. [Cohen inserts: "Yeah;" chuckles]

**Miller:** [01:43:14] Yeah... [Miller chuckles] Did you... I guess they seem like very different experiences, obviously Vietnam and the Mediterranean, but it seems like they were somewhat back-to-back. So did they seem what were elements that were maybe similar between the two? Or did it seem like a completely different place?

**Victoria:** [01:43:33] What was similar between the two and what was different, between Vietnam and your Med cruise?

**Gary:** [01:43:36] You couldn't wave to the people. You couldn't go like this because this means shit in your face, 'cause they wipe with their hand.

**Miller:** [01:43:44] Right, right.

**Gary:** [01:43:46] Like this, you know? That's about what... we graded some dirt for their, a school. Got one of our graders and graded the... [short pause] I think it was a road to the school. Huh. The roads were dirt.

**Victoria:** [01:44:10] Yeah, it was a peacekeeping mission, so whatever you would do to keep the peace or maintain the peace or start the peace.

**Miller:** [01:44:18] Yeah, it seems like a very, very different sort of dynamic than you had otherwise experienced.

**Gary:** [01:44:25] It was pretty big way. I think we had two aircraft carriers out there. [Miller inserts: "Wow."] It was a joint operation, too. It was Turkish Marines, there were British Marines, and the Greek Marines.

**Miller:** [01:44:37] So the overall goal was just kinda peacekeeping and helping out. There wasn't kind of any acute sort of crisis.

**Victoria:** [01:44:43] Yeah, no.

**Gary:** [01:44:44] It probably defend against Russia at the time. Mhm.

**Victoria:** [01:44:48] Oh yeah, the Cold War was going on. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:44:51] One thing that you mentioned [in] the phone call was that you, I think you, Gary, had done a lot of different kind of work related to utilities and generators; and was that only in Vietnam, or in Europe as well, or in-state [United States]?

**Victoria:** [01:45:06] Oh, yeah, when he was at Cherry Point that he did that. I mean, I think you did everything but what you were supposed to do while at Cherry Point, right?

**Gary:** [01:45:13] Yeah, I got— I never even went to school for ‘em. You know, they just gave me the operator’s license ‘cause I was so good at doing it, you know. I got cards for operating generators; got [unsure] cards for operating flood lights; I got cards for motor transport.  
[Victoria grabbing papers]

**Miller:** [01:45:31] Oh, wow. [Cohen inserts: “Wow!”] That’s quite the collection.

**Victoria:** [01:45:38] You did all those different jobs. He fixed my top’s [first sergeant] air conditioner one time, so then I always had it good with my first sergeant. Extra air conditioner.

**Miller:** [01:45:51] How long were you in Europe and Turkey before you were able to get back to Cherry Point?

**Victoria:** [01:45:58] Was it like November?

**Gary:** [01:45:59] I think it was two weeks.

**Victoria:** [01:46:00] No, no, it was more than that. No, because I had to pick you up in South Carolina.

**Gary:** [01:46:07] Oh, how long did the whole trip take?

**Victoria:** [01:46:09] Yeah, yeah. No, I thought...

**Gary:** [01:46:11] It was over thirty days.

**Victoria:** [01:46:13] Yeah, it was I think it was like sixty days. This I'm trying to think... I think I didn't pick you up until 'cause you went to staging for a while, you didn't leave right away, you left us right away, but then you went to staging. I thought it was like September, October when you came back. Yeah. So even though we were married, he didn't leave right away. He left on that Wednesday to go wherever he went before they went on the Med cruise, so that was...

**Gary:** [01:46:41] We had to set up a fake field, like we were doing in Turkey.

**Victoria:** [01:46:44] He went to South Carolina before he left to go there. So he was gone until from the Wednesday after we got married 'til probably September or October of that year. The cruise itself, I don't know that was like what you said two weeks, but he was gone a long time.

**Gary:** [01:47:00] It was longer than two weeks.

**Miller:** [01:47:03] So when you did finally get back and you could be a married couple on base. What was that life like? Was it that unusual for two Marines to be married on base?

**Victoria:** [01:47:14] Yeah.

**Gary:** [01:47:15] Yeah, she came...

**Victoria:** [01:47:17] We lived at we got NCO housing.

**Gary:** [01:47:18] Yeah. But she, you came on my return trip like I pulled up on the ship— [Victoria inserts: "I came to South Carolina."]— when it landed, and she came to South Carolina.

**Victoria:** [01:47:27] To pick him up.



**Gary:** [01:47:28] Think, “We got a surprise for you.” They had me get on the plane, everybody while they said, “Mrs. Cobbett’s here.” [Cohen inserts: “Oh;” Miller inserts: “So cute.”] She get to fly and she flew back in a C-130 with me back to Cherry Point.

**Victoria:** [01:47:46] That was fun.

**Miller:** [01:47:47] Did people look askance at you two being married? Was it like something that people thought was strange, or was it just a kind of ordinary fact of life?

**Victoria:** [01:47:57] On-base you mean? Yeah, it was ordinary. A lot of the WMs [woman Marines] were married to other Marines. [Miller inserts: “Got it.”]

**Gary:** [01:48:07] Just so you... then you can’t get pregnant.

**Victoria:** [01:48:07] Yeah, back then, if you got pregnant, you’d receive an honorable discharge and you were discharged. Nowadays, they can stay in but back then, that wasn’t allowed.

**Miller:** [01:48:17] And what was the NCO housing like? Did you have kind of your own apartment space or was it?

**Victoria:** [01:48:23] It was, yeah, it wasn’t really an apartment.

**Gary:** [01:48:27] It was like one floor condos.

**Victoria:** [01:48:28] It reminded me of like tract housing or Section 8 housing. [Miller inserts: “Oh yeah.”] The house, it wasn’t really duplexes. It was a triplex. There was house, house, house, house, and they were all the same design other than like the two end ones were one floor units with two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a screened in back porch. They were actually pretty nice. And then there [were] two of those and the two in the middle had a second floor. And then the two at the end were the same as the two on the other side and there was a space. Then there was two and two and two and then a space. So, it was like in a little court, you know, I thought it was pretty nice. They were furnished. You had to just bring, you know, with the... I’m trying to think was, yeah, they had a bed, they had the no, they

didn't... Yeah, they had a bed, living room furniture. We had to do our own kitchen, though. [Gary inserts: "Stove."] No, yeah, their own stove. I had my own washer and dryer.

**Miller:** [01:49:20] Wow, that's a nice amenity there. Certainly seems like it beats a hooch in Đà Nẵng or a barracks bunk, right?

**Victoria:** [01:49:28] Yeah, we didn't have to mow the grass or anything that was all taken care of. We just had to, you know, keep it clean. I still had to keep a rack, though, in the barracks, that's what was always funny. So even though I lived, I was married and had my own place on base. I had to maintain my room and rack in the barracks [Cohen chuckles] because that's where I gotta go for mustered inspections. Then I'd dust it, you know, because it wasn't like I slept there. I slept in the—

**Miller:** [01:49:54] Easy to keep it pretty clean.

**Victoria:** [01:49:56] Now he didn't have to maintain a rack in the barracks.

**Miller:** [01:50:00] I guess that then ties into the issue that you faced, right when Gary, when you left the service and your NCO status did not count, right for the housing.

**Victoria:** [01:50:09] Right, it didn't count. So we had to get out of NCO housing, yeah.

**Miller:** [01:50:12] Yeah. Did you—

**Victoria:** [01:50:14] We had to leave in two weeks.

**Miller:** [01:50:17] Were you able to challenge that? I remember there were some—

**Victoria:** [01:50:19] Yeah, no. I didn't challenge it but up here— Well, I mean, I argued about it at the time, but I didn't do any kind of a legal challenge. But after I got out of the Marine Corps, someone brought a class action lawsuit about it and then I received compensation. I can't even remember what it was, and it wasn't the amount as much as it was that they recognized that

that was just blatant, blatant prejudice. You know, second class citizen status. Yeah. I mean, I was an NCO, for Pete's sake.

**Miller:** [01:50:46] Yeah, the stripes mean something, right? They should at least.

**Victoria:** [01:50:49] I believe so, yeah, so that was that.

**Miller:** [01:50:54] How did you each feel about leaving the service? I guess you did it a little bit apart in time, but were you I guess looking back on the time that you spent, were you happy with the way that things had gone? Was it about what you expected?

**Victoria:** [01:51:08] Well, me personally, I wanted to ship over, but as usual, the Marine Corps and their bureaucracy, you finally say, that's it. I've had enough of this. If it could have just been plain, ordinary, regular Marine Corps, a lot of people would stay in. But everybody I've talked to, the women in particular, it's the same thing. They do some bureaucratic rule that they won't budge on, and it's like, 'I'm not gonna put up with this anymore. I've had enough of it. I'll go to school and do something else.' I was gonna ship over. I was gonna get staff sergeant and go to Japan, but I couldn't bring my husband. No matter what. They said, "Oh yeah, you can bring him, but he can't come on base. You have to keep him off base and then off base housing." "Well, do I get BAQ?" Bachelor allowance for quarter. "Oh, no." They wouldn't budge on it. So it's like, forget it. I'm out of here.

**Miller:** [01:51:54] Yeah, [Victoria starts: "They just—"] To say you can't bring him on base is crazy. That's like, something you would say if you have a pet dog or something like that. Not a husband and former Marine.

**Victoria:** [01:52:04] He could visit me on-base with a pass, but we couldn't live in on-base housing. I would have to be paying a complete residence for him off-base, and he would be like a visitor coming on every once in a while. I mean it was stupid. He's my husband for Pete's sake. So I'm outta here.

**Miller:** [01:52:19] But though it ended on a sour-ish sort of note, did you feel good about the overall three-year experience? Obviously, getting a fantastic husband out of it's a pretty good prize.

**Victoria:** [01:52:29] I loved it. I love being a Marine. I still love being a Marine. Yeah, I even actually tried to go back in the reserves a couple of years after I got out, the active reserves. And as usual, the Marine Corps. "Oh yeah, you can come back in, but we want to send you to electronic school in Texas for six months." I said, "But I have a baby. What am I supposed to do with my baby?" "Oh, no. You can't bring your baby." Forget it, forget it. Well, how could I possibly think it would be any different, now? Let me tell you about, like the mid-80s. It finally started to change a little bit, but it was still pretty backwards, even back in the late '70s, early '80s. Yeah.

**Miller:** [01:53:10] Gary, how did you feel ending your four years in the service? How did that moment of no longer being an active-duty Marine feel when it finally came?

**Gary:** [01:53:16] I felt good about getting out, but you know, it took me a while to think about it because I didn't. Think my separation date was September 10, and like I got out October, took they let me stay in, even though—

**Victoria:** [01:53:34] I think it was like September 29, yeah or something like that.

**Gary:** [01:53:37] They let me stay in like two weeks after my discharge and 'cause I was undecided, I didn't know whether I was gonna stay in or get out. But, as Vicki said, the bullshit you gotta put up with, sometimes, it's not worth it and...

**Cohen:** [01:53:58] One thing that surprises me is that on the one hand, the Marines seem to promote what it would be like traditional values, the women had to be women, the men had to be men. But yet when it comes to the couple staying together and encouraging family life for married life, they were nowhere to be found. And I guess, what do you make of that?

**Victoria:** [01:54:18] I think a good Marine isn't supposed to be married, is what I think. It's like an underlying current. Yeah. I don't know. They certainly didn't support it. They didn't actively

work against it, although sometimes it seemed like they did, but they didn't, definitely didn't support it or promote it. That's for sure. I mean, there were other stories I could tell you about girls and the things they went through, just even trying to get married, and they would deliberately like ship their husband to another base just to do it on purpose. Yeah.

**Miller:** [01:54:53] Wow.

**Gary:** [01:54:53] You weren't even supposed to fraternize with a lower rank person. And Vicki was.

**Victoria:** [01:54:58] Yeah, I was. When we met, he was a sergeant. I was a private, yeah.

**Gary:** [01:55:02] I wasn't even supposed to be talking to her.

**Victoria:** [01:55:04] He was fraternizing. [Gary inserts: "Yeah."]

**Miller:** [01:55:09] So let me ask a little bit about your post-service paths and life. So, Gary, why did you choose to stick with refrigeration and some of the MOS training that you had received there as opposed to pursuing something different?

**Gary:** [01:55:22] It was good pay.

**Victoria:** [01:55:24] He was good at it.

**Gary:** [01:55:25] And I knew it.

**Victoria:** [01:55:28] In spite of doing everything else but in the service, he was really good at it.

**Miller:** [01:55:33] Yeah, I guess it's the kind of thing, too, that you always know there'll be work for, right? There's no downturn for people needing things fixed, that really consistent.

**Victoria:** [01:55:43] There's a big push today, go to school, everybody needs to go to college, go to college. We need tradesmen. In fact, I'm in charge of the scholarship program for my Marine

Corps League and the Department of Illinois Marine Corps League. And I have a whole big couple of sentences, a paragraph about if you're going to a trade school or a technical school, please apply for this scholarship because we need our electricians, we need our plumbers, we need our HVAC people. They're the ones that keep everything running. You know, a degree is nice if that's what you're skilled at in the university, or a bachelor's or a master's or a doctorate. But we need those trained tradesmen, those craftsmen, some of those people are so skilled. Well, like him being able to fix things over the phone, or a good electrician, you know, come and telling you. 'This is what needs to be fixed or your house is gonna burn down.' When you see folks[?] being on the fire board and talking to my Fire Prevention Bureau and you see how some of these houses are put together thinking, who did the plumbing on this or who did the electric on this? It's terrible. It's dangerous. Well, that's why we need our skilled craftsmen.

**Miller:** [01:56:45] Yeah, and you get paid pretty well to do it too.

**Victoria:** [01:56:50] Right, they should. [Cohen inserts: "Mhm, mhm."]

**Miller:** [01:56:52] And Vicki, why did you choose to go into nursing?

**Victoria:** [01:56:56] Because I was, I got out and I took some programming classes, but back then computer work was still secretarial work, and that has never been my forte. I'm just not a secretary. So then I was studying to be a chemical engineer. I was getting I was taking chemistry classes and math at a local junior college. And then that's when Gary first started throwing all those blood clots, and I saw him in the hospital and he was, he had been intubated and they had him sedated so he wouldn't move. And I felt so helpless and I didn't know what was going on. And I didn't know if he was gonna live or die, and I thought, I need to get a job where I can take care of my family if something happens to him and I have good benefits and things. And so I thought, 'Oh, I'll be a nurse, that'll be easy.' And it was the best thing I ever did in my life. I love being an RN. I can't imagine not being an RN. Was just it was another giving profession, you know, another service profession, and I just loved it. And then I ended up in the ER for all those years. And so it was great. I love it.

**Miller:** [01:57:58] You used GI Bill funding to get your RN degree.

**Victoria:** [01:58:01] Yes, I did.

**Miller:** [01:58:02] That works out well.

**Victoria:** [01:58:03] It did. That was a wonderful advantage of being in the military, I know people say today, now that's why they join, one of the reasons they join is for the educational benefits. I also like to think it was because of patriotism, yeah.

**Miller:** [01:58:19] It's nice that those things can go hand in hand. It's not an either or.

**Victoria:** [01:58:23] Right, exactly.

**Gary:** [01:58:24] I joined for patriotism. No school.

**Victoria:** [01:58:29] No school? He still got his Pennsylvania accent after all these years. I don't know if you noticed it, "scool."

**Miller:** [01:58:33] Yeah, a little bit. Yeah. With your nice Midwestern pairing there. So I know we've passed the two-hour mark, which is always a good sign. And I know I talked your ear off. But I would love to ask just a couple more questions if we still have time. Otherwise, we can wrap it up. I don't want—

**Victoria:** [01:58:52] Yeah, no I don't think we pick up the boys till 2:30. And in fact, I think Benj has— My grandson, Benj, Benjamin, has band today, so I gotta pick 'em up at two different times. One gets out at 2:30 and one doesn't get out 'til 3:40. So, we're good.

**Miller:** [01:59:05] Good, and it's nice to hear another Ben too, right? [Victoria inserts: "I know."] Good people with good names. [Miller chuckling]

**Victoria:** [01:59:10] My son's name is, our son's name is Benjamin.

**Miller:** [01:59:13] Yeah, right. I'm actually Bennett, incidentally. [Victoria inserts: "Oh, Bennett?"] Yeah. My great-grandparents named my grandfather, Bennett, because I think

they're cousins already had, claimed Benjamin. So they didn't wanna overlap. But they liked the name, but the Bens of this world do good things. Yeah.

**Victoria:** [01:59:30] I love family names, too. That's pretty cool. So you're named after your grandfather.

**Miller:** [01:59:34] Yeah, absolutely. So I guess one thing I wanted to ask is, you know, you had seen a lot of different parts of the United States and the world between your two tours of service. Why did you choose Lemont as the place to build your life?

**Gary:** [01:59:49] Uh, I used to like to go hunting and fishing and whatnot, and there's a lot of quarries here in Lemont, and at the time there was a lot of farmland here, so you could hunt pheasant. And so I chose this. And Buffalo doesn't, Buffalo's got buildings, you know, they don't have much farmland.

**Miller:** [02:00:13] The pheasants are fewer and farther between in Buffalo. What about you, Vicki, why? How did you feel about going home?

**Victoria:** [02:00:24] Well, my family's here, I have, like I mentioned before, three sisters, and then I also have two stepsisters. And so I don't know. I guess I never really thought about going anywhere else, he didn't wanna live in Buffalo, and I didn't really mind Lemont. I mean, I kind of got, I kinda got accepted after I lived here about fifteen years, so. I had friends here. I had family here, and it's a nice little community. So, we just kinda stayed.

**Miller:** [02:00:54] Yeah. And tell me about some of the veterans' organizations that you both participated in. 'Cause it seems like that was a priority for you, to participate and to kind of help and meet and support other veterans.

**Victoria:** [02:01:05] Well, I joined the VFW auxiliary 'cause Gary joined the VFW, so I wanted to show support there. And then when our kids were younger and we were both working, it was hard to be active in any other organization 'cause we were active in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and church and things. So then as the kids got older, then we joined the Marine Corps League.



We joined the American Legion. We joined the Devil Dogs. Am I missing anybody... Trying to think. That's all of them, right?

**Gary:** [02:01:34] We had PTA [Parent-teacher association] for a while.

**Victoria:** [02:01:36] Yeah, oh yeah. PTA, so that was before that. So but I felt like the camaraderie was there, but also the service to help the veterans of today or the people that were going to be the veterans of today. I didn't want anyone to be treated the way the Vietnam veterans were treated. Korean War veterans are forgotten veterans, but Vietnam veterans were despised veterans for many, many years. And even though they were drafted, they were just as patriotic as anybody else. All the veterans before that were drafted. You can be drafted and still volunteer, and you can be drafted and still do a good job. But society as a whole kind of looked down on Vietnam veterans, and I didn't want another veteran to ever have to feel that way or go through that.

**Miller:** [02:02:19] Did you two have to deal with that in your post-service period in the '70s?

**Victoria:** [02:02:25] I personally didn't. I don't know other... I remember when we were in the service, like at Cherry Point, they would tell us, don't wear your uniform off-base. It'd cause trouble. I've always been proud to be a Marine, so everyone's always known that I was in the Marine Corps. Nobody would ever make me unproud to be a Marine.

**Gary:** [02:02:45] There was hippie movements going on.

**Victoria:** [02:02:48] Yeah, he probably would have faced it more than I did, because again, we'll go to Welcome Homes, Honor Flight Welcome Homes<sup>4</sup> and we both have our covers on. Mine would say pass commandant or commandant. They'd have the eagle, globe, and anchor. They go to, "Thank you for your service." They'd go around me and go to Gary. "Thank you for your service." So women are still semi-invisible. So, yeah, I didn't notice. Hence, I didn't notice any good or bad.

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<sup>4</sup> Honor Flights are a non-profit covered, travel for veterans to a memorial of the respective war they fought in.

**Miller:** [02:03:15] Yeah, I mean, I guess you miss out on some of the bad, but obviously it's it doesn't feel good to be excluded from that. [Victoria concurs: "Yeah, yeah."] Hopefully it's something I think with my generation where the, obviously there's still more men than women in service. But as that's getting closer, hopefully that kind of notion of military service being a man's activity will fade away.

**Victoria:** [02:03:35] Yeah, I hope so. I hope so. Because while I don't understand why women would wanna go into some of the professions they do if they choose to, the opportunity should be there if they are able to perform it equally well. I don't think special advantages should be given or special dispensations or changing the rules. But if you really want to do something and you can do it, you should be able to do it. Your sex shouldn't barre you from doing that job.

**Cohen:** [02:04:04] Do you think that the Women's War Memorial or the Women's Honor Flight helps redress this imbalance?

**Victoria:** [02:04:17] I don't know if it redressed it, but it's certainly made you feel like you were actually a real veteran. The people that greeted us and took us around, we were treated as though we were real veterans. We weren't second-class citizens for that day. And it was a nice feeling and I'm actually still euphoric over it. I'm still carrying it with me because it was really an amazingly well thought and organized day. And so, yeah, I never, I guess I never really carried a grudge about it other than sometimes I get mad that, "Wait, I'm a veteran too. I shouldn't have to announce it," but I've been dealing with that for so many years that, you know, if you carry a chip on your shoulder that long, maybe you oughta look at your shoulder and see what's going on. [Miller chuckling] Sometimes you just have to get over it and deal with it and find another way to make people realize, "Hey, I'm a veteran, too." Everybody knows I'm a veteran.

**Miller:** [02:05:14] Gary, have you done an Honor Flight or something like that?

**Gary:** [02:05:17] No, I was asked to. And I'm handicapped and I don't get around to good. And I am sore all the time, it's like, so I refused it, but I will accept it one day.

**Victoria:** [02:05:31] Yeah. Since he saw it when I went on it and he could see how nice it was and they really had a lot of accommodations for people with disability. So I think he'll do it now. So I'm gonna put his name back in.

**Miller:** [02:05:42] Nice. Have you had a chance to visit the memorial in D.C.?

**Gary:** [02:05:47] I saw the Moving Wall [traveling Vietnam War Memorial]. I even guarded it once.

**Victoria:** [02:05:52] Yeah, when they had the Moving Wall in Blue Island, he and I did guard duty together. That was about ten-fifteen years ago. Yeah, yeah, that was really emotional.

**Miller:** [02:06:04] Yeah. Are you interested in going to see the physical space?

**Gary:** [02:06:08] Oh, definitely. I got some names I want to read on it, even though I read it on the Moving Wall, but...

**Miller:** [02:06:15] Yeah. You know, I grew up in D.C., so it's always a very special place, and to some degree, you know, it doesn't feel all that special 'cause I've been there thirty or forty times, but every time you go and you see just the enormous power that it has for people. And I think it's not to say that people aren't moved at World War II or things like that, but it's just the emotional weight of it. You see people leaving things that just every time it like, I'm feeling it kind of right now, like you feel just a huge emotional weight of that.

**Victoria:** [02:06:45] Well, it's such a unique memorial. I mean, it's so different from any other memorial that's there. And it really it's a powerful and I don't know what makes it, so. I don't know if it's that slant or the blackness of the granite, but it's a very powerful memorial. In fact, I was noticing after the Honor Flight, that's the only memorial I didn't take any pictures of, and I don't know why I didn't. I just I didn't. Isn't that weird?

**Miller:** [02:07:13] Yeah, I guess other things come first to mind than to snap a photo.

**Victoria:** [02:07:17] Yeah, it was to touch it. And yeah, I don't know. I just found I got home. I go, "Oh, I don't have any pictures of it." I was thinking about other things, I guess. Yeah.

**Miller:** [02:07:29] So I want to ask a little bit, too in the moments we have left, about your children, right. Following in your footsteps, so to speak. Had you talked a lot with them about your time in the service, is that something that you would often share with them?

**Victoria:** [02:07:44] Not really, they know we were in Marines, and because of the VFW, Gary, we'd be active in some of the VFW activities, but I don't know that we talked-talked about it. Did we?

**Miller:** [02:07:58] No, I didn't say anything about it.

**Victoria:** [02:07:59] Yeah, I think he's talked more about Vietnam today than he's ever talked about it in all the years we've been married. Come to think of it. But no, we didn't really. I mean, we always had our flag out. I always made sure for the decoration holidays that the kids were aware of what they were. Then we'd try to attend the events, at least on Memorial Day, if not Veterans Day. So they grew up with knowing that we were patriots and grateful to be able to live in this country. I don't think we directly influenced them. In fact, I remember being surprised when my son said he wanted to join the Marines. It was wonderful, and then my daughter, she wanted to join the Marines too. But unfortunately, she had a tattoo that would show, and they had a rule back then that if you had tattoos that showed on your uniform before you went in, they wouldn't let you go in. But she didn't give up. She joined the Army and in a way it's good because her husband is a wonderful man and he's a career Army person. So you know it was for the best, God willing.

**Miller:** [02:09:03] Yeah. Did it make you think differently about your time in the service when you were on the parent side? Were you worried about your your kids? [Victoria answers: "Yes."] I mean I assume, right? Yeah.

**Victoria:** [02:09:14] Definitely, yes. Yeah, 'cause my daughter's MOS was a combat medic. [Miller exclaims: "Oh, wow."] Yeah, yeah. And she was all set to be sent over to Afghanistan. And then I can't remember, her unit got... The [US] Military does this. They just they get you all

ready, it's hurry up and wait. They get you all ready for one thing, and then they change your mind and they send you somewhere else. And that's exactly what happened with my daughter. And with my son. He was Operation Desert Storm, Desert Shield, I can't remember which is the second one. His gunny [gunnery] sergeant kept changing his orders so he wouldn't have to go because he was such a good diesel mechanic. He's like my husband. [Cohen laughing] And so every time he got orders, then they would get transitioned into something else, so he never had to end up going. But I had mixed feelings about it. I wanted him to go for the experience, but I didn't want him to go to get shot at. I am a mom. He's my baby boy.

**Miller:** [02:10:18] It'll be interesting too, I guess with your grandsons if they choose to keep up the tradition. I guess it's quite a number of generations too, with both of your fathers having served, too. Well, I think I will ask the my last question here, which is something that we ask a lot and I think we asked this of you, Vicki, but obviously you can continue. But maybe specifically for Gary. What does the term citizen soldier mean for you? Right. That's kind of the fundamental idea behind the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. So what does that term hold weight for you?

**Victoria:** [02:10:55] Well, for one thing, it needs to be changed to Citizen Marine but that aside, [Miller and Cohen laugh] I think it means that an ordinary regular American citizen can serve their country in the Military, and you don't have to be a glorious four-star general or some famous person. You can do it just to show your gratitude and appreciation for living in this wonderful country. Anyone can be a Citizen Soldier.

**Cohen:** [02:11:24] Yeah, I've got just two questions of opinion for both of you, and if it's not relevant, please let me know. So one of them is really actually more for Gary. Did you agree with the closing, the dismantling of the base in Vietnam? In other words, what was your opinion of the lessening US involvement in the Vietnam War at the time?

**Gary:** [02:11:48] Did I agree in the dismantling of the base?

**Victoria:** [02:11:52] What was your opinion of the whole removal of the United States in Vietnam? You know, leaving that.

**Gary:** [02:12:02] I think, as I said, that the people themselves didn't know what the hell was going on. You know, the civilians. The only ones that appreciated us there was the ARVN, the [ARVN] Army. And most of the time it's like, when the village got a short rocket, which was not very often, they complained that they said the VC [Việt-Cộng] was number ten, but every time we got rocketed they didn't say anything. They didn't say the VC was number ten, you know, because they didn't the rocket.

**Victoria:** [02:12:35] Did you tell him number ten is bad? [Gary responds: "Yeah."] You wanna be number one. You don't wanna be number ten. [Gary chuckling: "Anyway."] So if you wanna insult someone, you can say you're number ten.

**Gary:** [02:12:47] Like, the only time they complained about it was when they got one rocket and otherwise they were okay. They didn't understand anything of what was going on. And as I said, it's only the ARVN. We did have one of the guys that worked what, his name was Tuấn and when he was young, he was like eight years old. The Việt-Cộng came in and they killed his family. And he watched him, then they went and broke every bone in this kid's body. And I mean, when we had him, he was like forty years old, and he was so deformed from having all of his bones broken. But he understood how bad these Vietnamese were. But I think if you had direct contact with the Việt-Cộng, then they knew they were bad. But if you didn't have any contact with 'em, then nobody was good and nobody was bad, you know?

**Victoria:** [02:13:59] And so many people there were so primitive and so isolated, almost tribal that that makes sense.

**Gary:** [02:14:06] You know the people, they lived in shacks, they grew their rice. They had water buffaloes just running. There was no fences, they got their own—

**Victoria:** [02:14:14] They chewed betel nuts.

**Gary:** [02:14:14] Chewed their betel nut. And it's like they didn't care as long as their life, they had food. If you had something against them, like I said, being in the Army and having your own set of rules in your own mind, then you had a conflict. I can't see anybody taking all my life like another country like... As a matter of fact, what's going on right now? It's like, you know,

there's one Democratic Party, one Republican Party, but they shouldn't force everything on you.

**Cohen:** [02:14:56] The other thing that I found interesting is you both mentioned that you're active in church. So I do wonder to what extent your faith, I don't know what to say. Affected your patriotism. Affected your ability to be resilient under difficult things that you witnessed or if at all.

**Victoria:** [02:15:17] I think it probably did. And I think the older I get, the more I realize it did. Maybe it wasn't as obvious when I was younger, but clearly it must have been there. But I'm a true believer, so. What about you. [Gary asks: "Faith?"] Yeah. Did your faith help, do you think that affected why we survived and no PTSD and we were able to adjust...

**Gary:** [02:15:43] Although I walked through the shallow valley of death, I never found no evil because I'm the baddest mother[fucker] in the valley. That's... [all laughing]

**Victoria:** [02:15:55] I told you he was brave.

**Gary:** [02:15:58] At that age, you didn't care.

**Victoria:** [02:16:02] But when you get older, I think you realize the influence that it had on you. There are a lot of people of faith in the military, career military, a lot. And I think that's one of the reasons is their strong faith helps them identify sometimes there is a big difference between right and wrong. It is black and white. It's not gray. There's a lot of areas where it's gray, but there's some places where it's black and white and you have to take a stand.

**Miller:** [02:16:28] I think this is a great ending point. But before we totally wrap up, is there anything else that either of you would like to share to include within the interview.

**Victoria:** [02:16:38] Thank you for this wonderful opportunity. I never dreamed anything like this would ever happen to us, and I really appreciate the dual interview. I think it'll be an interesting contrast compared to what I went through in the Marine Corps as to what he went through in the Marine Corps. I basically had a nine to five job with a uniform on.

**Miller:** [02:16:57] Yeah, it'll be great to have these. I mean, the two together in this file and then the one that you already did, Vicki, you know, as a great, kind of testament to your service and as a great artifact too for, you know, obviously people in the future to understand, but also just for your kids and grandkids too to be able to hear a lot of these stories, too when they're interested.

**Victoria:** [02:17:16] Yeah. Will you be able to use my interview, though? Didn't we laugh through the whole thing, Leah?

**Cohen:** [02:17:22] I think it was, I think there's something of value.

**Victoria:** [02:17:25] I kept thinking, 'Oh my gosh, I blew that interview. All we did was laugh.'

**Miller:** [02:17:30] It's, I listened to it. It sounded great. And the energy too is very good. Very lively.

**Victoria:** [02:17:36] Are you gonna blend the two of them together to make one? Or how are you gonna do that? You're gonna have two separate interviews or?

**Cohen:** [02:17:43] Well, that's funny. I was thinking about that, too. I was wondering if on the page, we have a biography of the two of you and then specify that there's, there was both a joint interview and the interview with you specifically and then have a link to both transcripts and just identify each one.

**Victoria:** [02:18:02] How do you do the editing on it?

**Cohen:** [02:18:06] Well, we have this very nice software that does the basic transcription and then another person listens, and you make sure that it's correct and add explanations of military terms as needed and acronyms. We kind of try to edit lightly, although I don't fight it when the veterans say, "No, no, no. I want to rewrite that." I would just put a proviso saying it's been edited for style and not for content. I think the idea is that you hope the transcription will represent what was being spoken. And, you know, but again, I respect people's wishes on this



one ultimately. Then someone will someone write up both your bios [biographies], which are again, be more a reflection of the interviews themselves. We'll try to figure out a way to work it together.

**Victoria:** [02:19:01] Well, thank you for this opportunity again. This was lovely.

**Gary:** [02:19:06] Thank you for listening to my fifty words and Vicki's two thousand.

**Cohen:** [02:19:12] Well, thank you both very much. I think it was a wonderful and although I think there's you express a bit of hesitation that you wouldn't have what to say, I thought you explained things really vividly. And I also really wanna thank you, Ben, for being such an excellent interviewer.

**Miller:** [02:19:27] Happy to do my best and it's, you know, I enjoy doing these from a research perspective, but it's also just fun to meet different people, especially for me. You know, with all the COVID things, right. It was like a year and a half of not really meeting new people or learning kind of about different experiences. So it's just it's such a delight to be able to step into your world a little bit and to meet you and just it's a lot of fun on its own terms.

**Victoria:** [02:19:50] Yeah, that has to be really hard on young people. I mean, especially unmarried young people. You can't really go out at night. You can't even really well, I guess now you can take a walk in the park. But even before they didn't know what was going on, they put so many restrictions on you. That has to be really hard.

**Miller:** [02:20:05] Yeah, but at least the skies are opening a little bit, so to speak. You know, I feel like we're not back to normal yet, but I got my shots, so I'm not gonna get too sick even if I got it. And I can just kind of exhale a little bit. And I have classes that are in person again and can go out sit in a restaurant. So it's not like the way it was before, but at least it feels like something close to the life that I had before, which is good.

**Gary:** [02:20:31] Sky's not falling in.

**Victoria:** [02:20:31] Good to know, well, it was nice meeting you too, Ben yes. I was actually saying thank you to you both, so.

**Gary:** [02:20:43] Yep, I thank you both.

**Cohen:** [02:20:43] Thank you.

**Miller:** [02:20:46] And I think Leah wants to show the coin, too. This is just a little token that the museum and library gives to those that we interview, and normally we could just give it in person, but we'll make sure we get it you with a note of our own appreciation, along with all the kind of final polished materials that will come from this.

**Gary:** [02:21:04] Thank you.

**Victoria:** [02:21:05] All right. Well, thank you for listening to us.

**Miller:** [02:21:08] Happy to do it. We'll be in touch.

**Victoria:** [02:21:10] All right. Happy Halloween.

**Miller:** [02:21:12] You too.

**Gary:** [02:21:13] Bye-bye.

**Cohen:** [02:21:14] Thank you all very much.

**Victoria:** [02:21:15] Oh, you're welcome. Bye-bye.

**Cohen:** [02:21:17] Bye-bye.

**Gary:** [02:21:18] I get to sit in my chair. [all laughing]