

Genevieve Bowen

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[Interview starts at 6:27]

Howe: We're here today at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. It is Tuesday, November 4, 2014. My name is Jerrod Howe, and I'm here today with miss...

Bowen: Genevieve Bowen.

Howe: Thank you, Ma'am. And thank you for coming today, and we are here to do your story of service...

Bowen: In the Marine Corps.

Howe: Yes, ma'am.

Bowen: The Women Marines--came in later. They started towards the end of '43, and disbanded the spring of '46. But it was a rare experience and something I'll never ever experience anything close to it again. What we learned being Marines does last a lifetime. You didn't think so when you were twenty-one or twenty-two. But at my age now, I'm grateful for it because all the habit that we acquired really help at my age, which is very old. So, now, where do you begin? With the enlistment? Which I had no plan...

Howe: If I can, I'd like to start even further back. When and where were you born?

Bowen: Okay. Rochester, New York.

Howe: What year?

Bowen: 1922, ninety-two years ago. And it was a wonderful time growing up, it was simple. When the war started, it was like sudden. I mean, we didn't get news the way we get news today. Apparently, the upper echelons had clues of what was going to happen, but the people in the street didn't. They were going about their lives, they were living their American Dream, whatever it was then. When

the bomb--when the attack on Pearl Harbor happened, the young men during that time--and remember, they were about anywhere from eighteen to twenty-one, there was no draft, nothing. They all joined. I mean, it was a phenomenon. The women went into defense factories, building ships, building planes, doing whatever had to be done. Rationing set in, which is very interesting. Everyone was saving fat and tinfoil. They didn't have things like Reynolds wrap, but the cigarettes were wrapped in tinfoil. All... the girls that I knew were talking about joining the service, which there were [the Women's Army Corps] and [the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] at that time. And I didn't dare because I had a Dad that I think would have frowned upon it, and I didn't want to upset the apple cart then. Anyway, I had an accident the summer that I joined. I had a severe concussion, and I happened to be in the, it was a federal building, should I repeat that?

Howe: Absolutely.

Bowen: It was a huge Woman marine, it was a cutout in her winter uniform. I looked at it and I thought, "Oh, I'm gonna get a brochure." I didn't know it was a recruiting office. I was totally naive about the whole thing. I walked in, asked for a brochure, they saw me coming, and I walked out a marine. I mean, I wasn't sworn in yet, but I was enlisted. Then, how to tell my family, how to tell the judge I worked for. I mean, everybody took a negative view except my brother, who thought it was marvelous. Then my mother wanted to join.

Howe: Your mom wanted to join afterwards?

Bowen: Oh yes, because she was in her forties then. All of us are pretty adventurous women. But we had to be sworn in Buffalo, [New York], and this Marine lieutenant, Lt. Merck--he's the one that I was corresponding with, and I have photographs of Nagasaki and letters from him--picked me up to take me to be sworn in. We got on the train, first class all the way, first class coming back all the way. For some reason, this is what I expected. And then, going from Rochester to Washington, DC, to connect with all the women who were going to [Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina,] for training, train first class all the way. So, I had everything packed like I was going on a honeymoon or something. Our clothing needs were different then, too. I had that list that tells each individual what to bring. It was very interesting: three pairs of shoes, and sneakers, not the kind of shoes we wore in the day. So, we get down, we all meet in Washington, DC. We're all lead into the train area, which was all dark because of the air raids, and what it was, was a troop train

that had hammocks. No lights. We arrived in Camp Lejeune the next morning. There wasn't a smiling face to greet us, nothing. As a matter of fact, they were carrying riding crops. It was a shock. We were all taken into a mess hall and given breakfast, and, I mean, I didn't expect that. I expected a different level of treatment. Well, from that point on, it wasn't fair. It was easy to adjust to for me. But I'd say in three weeks, about a third of the women were let go. You know, for whatever reasons they had, and I don't know of them all, but it was an adventure, it was exciting, it was different. I knew how to obey orders because of my dad.

Howe: What did your parents do for a living?

Bowen: My father and my mother were... I'm first generation, and my mother had to escape from Europe to come to this country at the age of fourteen. And my father was conscripted into the Austrian Army. They had money, so they bought him out and sent him to America with all this Polish money that wasn't worth anything here. So, he put together the Tool and Die department at Gleason Works in Rochester. When he met my mother, he never returned. I mean, they married, they made a life. I had four brothers. None... my brother closest to me was in the [United Services Organization], he did sketches of wounded... that were recuperating, mostly up near the Arctic Circle. And he did charcoal sketches that were sent to the parents of the wounded.

Howe: So, you and your siblings were born here?

Bowen: Yes, we were born here. What was interesting, looking at photos of my grandparents, after my grandmother joined my grandfather, in a couple of months they were integrated. I mean, they looked like they were always part of the scene. Maybe that's part of the... you know, for me, boot camp was easy. For a lot of girls, it wasn't. It was amazing because we had the same physical indoctrination as the men did, but we didn't have rifle range. The Marines then, if you can visualize that today, had six weeks of training--that includes the rifle range--and were sent into the Pacific with their uniforms and their M1 [Garand] rifles and their steel helmets. That's it. And the casualties were great. I still react to the boys coming back after three and a half years, for six months of [rest and relaxation]. Remember, they were young, they were in their early twenties and younger, there were a lot of seventeen year olds. Hardened combat warriors that joined... they were fraudulent, actually, and they didn't know what to do with them, but by now they were old enough.

Howe: Fraudulent how?

Bowen: Pardon?

Howe: You say fraudulent. In what regard?

Bowen: Well, they must have been about fourteen. They got somebody else's driver's license and they joined as eighteen, nineteen year olds. They were kids. But not anymore, I mean. The men were very thin, very yellow from the after burn. They were kind of ragged looking for marines. They had bits and pieces of other uniforms, like New Zealand, Australia, you know, wherever they fought. That didn't last very long. That lasted about a month before they had to deal with it and be in proper uniform. Now, the youngest looking man in the group... eventually became my husband after a couple or three years. He had on an Australian battle jacket, and I looked at his shoes and they were wingtip shoes. They were golf shoes that had the spikes taken off. I looked because I thought he was a young... but he was twenty-five. He was the oldest. What a wonderful, wonderful bunch of men. They were six to a job. And they were there for six months. So, I got to know them. And then, they were sent to Iwo Jima.

Howe: Real quick, you say there were six to a job. Can you describe what that situation was?

Bowen: Oh, I kind of jumped, I'm not on Camp Lejeune anymore; I'm on Parris Island. They would have, for instance, laundry duty, where they brought in laundry and dispense it. Instead of having one person, they would have six people sitting around. I mean, they were here to rest, not to do, and they were--it was such a brotherhood. Among that group, there was one corporal that had what is known now as [post-traumatic stress disorder]. He was severe. And the men kept him hidden. They wouldn't let him get near any of the doctors because he would have been discharged. And they took care of him. I mean, he was really, really regressed. What happened to him? I don't know. But I saw him about now and then. How they pulled that one off? I don't know.

Howe: What was your experience with him?

Bowen: With him? I only saw him about, I mean, I had very little contact with him. I was attached to a man's company, I was not with the [Women's Reserve] company. So, the office was held by a sergeant major, and this is where they did their payroll, their morning reports. And after signing about 1,500 men in from overseas, my duty then was payroll. Usually, you were sent to a school for that,

but I had to learn on the job. And I'll tell you, that wasn't nice at all. For one thing, they want no typographical errors, no erasures. They wanted perfection. Well, a table of organization was like a 112 men for the service company. Now, we have over 1,500. So, a beginner, to do payroll roster, which would take maybe four by six on a usual payroll. Now, you were doing pages for each individual because of their overseas duty to Parris Island. We did two a month, and I worked day and night. I mean, it was, the mess hall boys would bring over food, I mean they were great with that. But it's all I did. I sat there twenty hours a day and typed, and figured, and this is beyond me. I can't even imagine that I did anything like that today. But I was young, and I did it. So, the first payroll I did had a lot of corrections on it, and sergeant major just threw it on my desk. He didn't say anything. He just threw it down. Well, this was like April, May. So, by August it would be perfect. If you can imagine this, everyone was paid with money, not checks. Not credit cards. Money. And a certain group of marines were special, and they were a black group. They were stewards, and they were attached to the officers. And they did the cooking, you know, they took care of the officers. So, I would go there with all this money, and in those days, it was say twenty-five to three-thousand was a lot of money. And I was a [private 1st class]. It should have been a staff. I remember they were trying to get me promoted, but I was too new. There was no way that I was going to go into staff. So, anyway, I go to the steward's quarters, and they would have this sumptuous lunch ready, waiting for me. It would be a hoot and holler, a couple of hours as I paid these. They were wonderful. Around August and September, I was given other duties, and by the time my discharge came up, I was in charge of the office, but I wasn't a sergeant major. By then, the war was over. And new eighteen year olds were coming in. And everyone knew what a spec number was. I didn't have a clue until they showed up. I knew I had one, but I forgot about it. I mean, I did what had to be done. And that's how all the women were. And then, about a month before my discharge, I did some court reporting. That was, you know, a whole different ball park. Everybody was afraid of court martial, summary or anything, among the women. I don't know about the men because the sentences would be read during the lunch hour--in the lunch room. It would be the simpler... I think it was the summary, out of uniform. I mean, it was no big deal. When I started dating Dick--the youngest looking marine--he was a golf pro. He was a member of the [Professional Golf Association] before he joined. Naturally, he taught me how to play golf. He wouldn't let me play with any of the women, I just played with the marines, and that really sharpened my game. It wasn't social hour. It was a nine-hole golf

course, and he kept after, whoever it was in charge of that area, I mean, it would have been recreation for an eighteen hole. So, when his discharge came up, he signed for two years, and he did build an eighteen-hole golf course. As a matter of fact, his ashes are in the second whole sand trap--some of them. Very interesting people that played golf. There was a general there, they had two generals, one was R and R, and Gen. Noble was the regular general. He was the Marine's general, the enlisted. He fought their battles with them. He was there for them constantly. But Gen. Howard, Samuel Howard, was a 1st marine officer to capitulate to the Japanese. He was a lieutenant colonel then. And that sat heavily on him. So, the moment, he came back for the six months, he asked for duty in China. And he left. You know, after. A wonderful, wonderful man. And he played golf every day. And I played with him. I mean, I got good enough to be able to play with the male marines then. Now, I'm just talking about my duty, but life with the women Marines was totally different. Our barracks were about two miles from the center of town. I'm sorry, it would be the administration area. And the women had their own scene. When I first came out of boot camp there were two of us. And it never occurred... I thought it was wonderful. It was a barren island. I look at some of the snapshots I have. Why I found it exciting? I'll never know because there was nothing there. There were little Palmetto trees now and then. But the women Marines that were there took us into the laundry room--had us wash our winter drawers in the washes. Well, by the time they got through with us, we looked salty, we looked like we'd been there for two years. Everything was soft and crushed and worn looking. That was... when the men started coming back from overseas... again, you have to remember, they didn't know about PTS. You witnessed a lot of it then. It was just a lot of--dismissed. There was a woman working in the... well, outside of the recruits, the training of the recruits, the women ran the rest of the island. The commissary had women. Something happened between the woman marine behind the counter and the marine on the other side as a customer, and he reached for her neck, her scarf. And pulled her across. He was going to punch her out. So, a big post order came out, there had to be a foot, two arms lengths, so, it was like two yards, between a male and a female marine because of that incident. But that was like the one and only, and it was almost... it passed. You couldn't ask for better buddies than these men. One of the things when I was signing them in, I mentioned, the reason I joined was because I wanted to wear the men's dungarees because we had our own. And before I came in, that was forbidden. Well, by the end of the week I had about eight. The men marines went in to their quartermaster, got the dungarees, and brought them. So, I had a whole

stack of them. And they wore them anyway, they discounted that. You know, we had to live according to certain rules. One of the rules was, in order to get a weekend pass you had to let them know a week ahead of time. Well, Dick, in his job, was more civilian than he was marine. So, he was able to come and go. It was during the time when Hogan, Byron Nelson, Hagan, Dick met that whole group of old golfers was around. So, they were playing like in Savannah, [Georgia,] and they, Dick said, "We're all going there this weekend." I said, "I can't go, I didn't put in." When I came back to the barracks, the Lieutenant in charge called me over, handed me my pass, and she said, "Don't let this happen again." So, I took off. And I didn't let it happen again. But there was no way I would have known before something like this happened. It was a transition for me, from military life into civilian because I lived as a civilian for two more years on Parris Island. I did court reporting then too, to a civilian. The golf thing was extremely interesting because you saw a "Field of Dreams?" About baseball. They did it for the love of the game. That's what that was all about. Hogan, and we saw that one, when he won the trifecta, the three top [golf tournaments], he only made \$2,500 a win, not a quarter of a million. And there weren't such things as sponsors. So, they were a very frugal bunch. We were married during the first masters, at Augusta, after the war. And Hogan lost it to [Jim] Ferrier by a twelve-foot putt because the cameras started rolling, and you know, shot his attention just a foot. And the price was four dollars and eighty-five cents, including the entry and parking. Do you have any idea what it is today? You can't even touch it. But again, you know, you're talking how many years? Over sixty years ago. And they're all gone. All of them. After Dick died--Dick was a golf pro here in the Chicago area--after he died, my daughter and my niece had some of his ashes, and we went to the new golf course and sprinkled them on the second hole. And he wanted to be buried with the boys, so we took him over to Bonaventure [Cemetery] and did the number there with the Marines. And the rest will go into, it's the cemetery here, in Illinois, I think it's called Lincoln. I think that pretty much covers it. I think.

Howe: That's only half an hour.

Bowen: What else?

Howe: I have a whole bunch of questions for you...

[0:39:30] short break [0:39:43]

Howe: What was it like growing up in Rochester New York in the 1920s and 1930's?

Bowen: You know, that's not fair. It was wonderful. We lived by a park. Again, everything was much simpler. We had... it was safe. You know, we were able to run and play and do whatever, and we did all day. Especially during summer vacation. And we looked forward to it all year. But it's a city that really has me puzzled because when you think major corporations started there: Eastman Kodak, Bausch and Lomb, Xerox. Wollensak was another one, it was an optical company. They're not there anymore. Everybody goes and leaves. I don't know what it is about the city. It's a good city to bring up children in, but businesses don't stay. But if you can imagine Eastman Kodak, which was huge, it's gone. There are condos in some of the buildings, some of the buildings are just torn down. It's a beautiful city. Also, it's the first city where they had the race riots. I don't know if you were aware of that. I was working for the Institute for Psychoanalysis at this time, and going to a training lab in Portland, Maine, and this is when I experienced it. When I was in high school, we had a couple of black students there. It was a merged high school because one had burned. One of them was an opera singer--he became an opera singer--and he sang every auditorium that we had. And the other person that was a visitor was Helen Keller. She would be there, and we'd never knew, you know, how famous she would become. She would be there with her dog and with Sullivan. So, you're going back to the '30s.

Howe: This is when you were in high school?

Bowen: When I was in high school...

Howe: Helen Keller visited you in high school?

Bowen: Oh, yeah. In Rochester, New York. I don't know, we just took these things for granted. I don't know why she was there that often. Unless they had a good--well, Bausch and Lomb and Wollensak were optical--so, unless it had something to do with that. I don't know. But whenever she was there she would show up at our Wednesday get together. It was a very good high school, like a pilot. You know, what is known today, in those days. When I went to college, I didn't have to do the first two years because of the high school curriculum. I knew I was never going to return, but because it was my home, I was returning for visits a lot, as many as I could get in because everyone that was dear to me lived there.

Howe: This is while you were in the Marine Corps?

Bowen: While I was in the Marine Corps and then later on when I was in school living here in Chicago. But it's a city that has always puzzled me. It's a beautiful city,

but if Eastman Kodak [Company] can fold, well, it didn't fold it just closed its doors. I think they weren't keeping up with the technology either.

Howe: What did you... what were your interests before the Marine Corps while you're in high school? Were you interested in academics, athletics, extracurricular?

Bowen: It wasn't like that. High school was fun. But now, I think it's more intense. I was a double, I had commercial background and liberal arts. The commercial art, it wasn't commercial art, it was typing shorthand and business. I tested for... I was able to do abstract thinking and visualizing. So, I was put into a shorthand class that was... and you couldn't flunk it. I hated it because that wasn't my interest. My dad kept saying, "Just stay with it. It might earn you a living," and it did. So, it was four years of Dewey versus Greg. And I don't know what the outcome of it was, because I was gone after that. But it helped me with the court reporting, it helped me with earning a living later on in life, because my schooling was kind of, I wouldn't say it was frivolous, it wasn't. I graduated from the [School of the Art Institute of Chicago], and it was a different school then it was now. And the University of Chicago and Loyola University. I did not take any practical courses like teaching, like commercial arts, none of that. I wanted to be a fine artist. The only way you become a fine artist was to do your own thing. And I had a day job to support that. Name wise, I did very well. Money wise, not too good.

Howe: Yeah, this is the way it goes in fine art.

Bowen: But I couldn't be talked out of it. But I wouldn't have changed it. A very interesting life.

Howe: In high school, you said you hated shorthand?

Bowen: I did it because... alright, I'm in it, I agreed to it for four years. I liked the... I did swimming. That was my major involvement. Oh, talking about swimming. During lunch hour, on Parris Island, they had this big training pool. So, I'd go there. I'd swim. I would use the diving board. Well, the Marines would love to go at that. They had this tower, that they practiced, you know, in case the ship came down. So, they finally talked me into using it, diving from it and all that. I was scared. But I did it. I kept doing it. Boy, when I was discharged, I was so happy I didn't have to do it again. But dealing with Marines, you can't be any other way. You can't wimp out on anything. I mean, you know that.

Howe: Certainly have been there.

Bowen: I had a high school friend that I met in the chow line, she was giving the food out. We were both in our dungarees, and, "Vera, that's me!" "Yes." So, there she was in her WAVE uniform and there I am, a marine. That was it. I didn't see her until I was back in Rochester. I mean, we were that, and I don't know how they did it. How they brainwashed us about the Navy because you were essential. I mean, there's no getting around it. Our whole barracks, there was one barrack that was WAVES. The whole hospital was Navy. I mean, why? Did you ever have a clue about that? Why the division between the Marine Corps and the Navy existed?

Howe: You're talking about a cultural divide between the two services?

Bowen: Right. Did you get that when you were in training?

Howe: So, as a tangent, the naval history that I'm privy to going through school, the Marines came out of the naval tradition. They were the sharpshooters that were stationed in the crow's nest aboard sail ships. So, they were the ones essential that would provide cover fire. They also would be long range eye sight from the tall ship and would also provide order aboard the ship. The only person allowed to have weapons would be them. Whereas a lot of deck seamen, a lot of the grunt work was being done by Navy folk, who often times they didn't volunteer. So, they might have been a little less orderly. So, I can see where an animosity might have begun.

Bowen: Yeah, I can see that, too. But for it to continue, it's really humorous because it's-- I'm sure the Navy could get along without the Marines today. I mean, when you really think about it because of the structure but...

Howe: Perhaps, but the rest of us can't.

Bowen: Yeah. But, you know, I'm so impressed with the women marines today. There's a little jealousy between what's left of the World War II because they're pretty much gone. I mean, their training, their... Jennifer, could you hand me my purse? I think I did bring some photos of how the women are dressed today. They wear their Kevlar vests, they do rifle range, I mean, the whole... you know, there's one thing I didn't tell you. During this time, when I was in the Marine Corps... here, that's their uniform...

[Pause: 53:27 to 53:42]

Howe: So, explain this to me real quick.

Bowen: She's wearing what's considered fatigues, but in World War II, it was a uniform... we didn't... we didn't fight in fatigues. They wore their shirts, their ties, and they didn't have Kevlar vests. That's a Kevlar vest. This is not a... this is a mock up rifle because it was during a convention. Their Stihl helmets are incredible. And these are goggles, you can see both at night and during the day time, and their heavy boots. So, that's the woman marine today. We wore skirts, jackets, shirts, blouses, hats. But we never, I mean, I'm very impressed with them.

Howe: So, you said that maybe you were a little jealous?

Bowen: Oh, no. No, oh, no. I'm impressed. I wish I were younger, that's what I'd be doing. I sense, I belong to Women Marines. The Women Marines have an organization in Washington and then there are chapters throughout the country. And I belong to both, to that organization and a chapter here. When I first joined, there must have been sixty women, and I don't think there's a dozen left now. And you're talking, maybe six to eight years ago. It's really... yeah. That's the vibe that I picked up.

Howe: Which is what?

Bowen: They weren't totally assimilated. They are now by the older marines. Why? I don't know, I never got into that, but it's something I noticed. Their training is rigorous, a lot more, well, a lot more than the men were in those days. After all, they only did six weeks. Now, I think it is three months. It's a long time. And women are staying in. They have generals. A general died recently. So, you know, it's, they discontinued the Women Marines in '46. And then within a year they decided to bring them back in. I'm glad that happened because I liked it well enough that... if they didn't discontinue it I think I would have continued, for a while, anyway because I had to go back to school.

Howe: Now, do you know when they reactivated?

Bowen: Yeah, the following year.

Howe: Was it a reserve component like the WR that you were a part of?

Bowen: You know, I think it was a regular then because we were reserves, even the men were. But what I want to tell you was that during... when I'd come home on furlough... my brother was a portrait painter. And he did a portrait of me in winter uniform and one in summer uniform, and they're in the Women's

Museum now. So, I have... this is the summer. This is taken at an angle. And this is the winter.

Howe: He certainly did you justice.

Bowen: Remember, I was twenty then. That was a whole different... the way we looked was a big factor. Our uniforms had to be up to snuff, our shoes, everything. But... I imagine if that was, well, the uniform has changed because their uniform now is not the hunter green. It's the blue jacket with the red stripe on the... the white hat. It's not, I'm not fond of that uniform. I'm glad we didn't have to have it. During World War II, it was not allowed. I think the men in Washington, you know, at the [Tomb of the Unknown Soldier], had it. But that was about it. Do you have any questions?

Howe: Absolutely! We talked a little bit about high school, we talked about some of your interests, swimming; you hated shorthand.

Bowen: I hated shorthand, but I liked the liberal part, the reading and the history. I was very good in history. I was very political then, since I was a little, since Al Smith ran, so, I must have been about five through, well, of course, [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt was the first president that everyone voted for, one of the reasons was the war. And when [Harry] Truman came in, everybody was not sure... because everyone had such faith in FDR. But Truman, I think, was one of our greatest presidents. He was an incredible man. It didn't happen while he was serving because it started with the A-bomb. And when that bomb was dropped, it changed everything. I was leaving on furlough. So, I got up, it was this silence in a room full of women. And they said, "The atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima." And it was the closest thing to God at that time. And by the time I got to Rochester, victory was declared because Nagasaki got it. And for the rest of the week--like three or four days--the celebration was unbelievable. Downtown was filled with people 24/7. And in my letter to Lt. Merck, his response to me about that was, "It was just another day." They had to keep on with their duties because they were in the Pacific. And then whenever he could get in, whenever they were allowed to get into Hiroshima or Nagasaki, which was like a month, they had to start the cleanup. I visited Hiroshima in the '80s. It's a modern city. But today, it's much more than it was in the '80s. They have skyscrapers. It was a very emotional visit. I was there with my brother, who was an engineer, and built factories in Hiroshima. He took me to the [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum], and he said, "You go in there, I've been in their several times." So, I go in there, I look, the first four rooms were dioramas, with

a talkie, and the man who was giving the tour was Japanese with an Oxfordian accent, very polite. They were working on the bomb, we were neck and neck on that, and he said, "If we got it, you would have still been digging out of the rubble." They wouldn't have reclaimed us. So, that caught my attention. I started going through and seeing all these artifacts from after the bomb. Children's clothing, door steps, you know, everything that had any kind of marking. But the thing that kept striking me, was that everything looked new. Nothing looked like it was demolished. So, when I came out, my brother said, "Well, what do you think?" I said, "Everything looked too new," he said, "It is. All that was put together when they decided to build this museum. The Japanese are very clean people, and the moment they were able to get back in there, they cleaned it all up so there was nothing left." So, yes. Some of the things like door steps with the possibly a part of a body, the shadow of it. That could have been, it could have been just a doorstep. But the eye is a building, and that has a... what would that be called? Because it's Japanese and it goes every hour. It's not a bell, it doesn't ring like, bong. So, it's... I don't know what that would be.

Howe: Not a gong?

Bowen: It would be a gong, more than a bell. It's very somber and serious sounding because it's loud and it's... but that... I'm glad I did it. I'm glad we were visiting in Japan. My brother and I took a trip around--backpacked around the world. That was quite an experience. But he... we were heading for Japan because he did a lot of work for the Japanese after the war. You know, rebuilding factories.

Howe: How do you think that trip changed your perspective?

Bowen: Pardon? Does what to my perspective?

Howe: Changed.

Bowen: Oh, changed! About Hiroshima? Because there was a lot of animosity after the war, towards the Japanese. I mean, there was nothing forgiving, especially from the Marines. But by the '80s, because we're good at that, we'll bomb something and come back and fix it all up. We rebuilt Japan and, you know, you see high rises there and the way they live. Of course, there was a lot of input from them, too. They were very friendly towards us. They loved my brother, so, we were their guests at that point. Except going to Hiroshima, that was a side trip. Japan is a beautiful country, it's artistically--it's phenomenal. Anything you picked up is beautifully designed. Night time in Tokyo was like a fairy land, it was all lit up, and now, remember, this was in the 80's. It's farther along now. But everything

was all lit up with neon lights, and one man, one of Ted's friends, left his briefcase at a bar. They had bars inside office buildings. He left his case there, and he had to wait until the next evening because he couldn't recognize it during the day time. He could tell only at night because of the neon lighting. If I took another, you know, that's not possible anymore, but I would go back to Japan. It was a beautiful... country. And it's, the bomb had to be dropped because the last, I think it was at Okinawa or Iwo, one of the two. They were out to kill Americans. They were out to maim them. And this is where the basket cases were coming back from. It was... it wasn't pretty. For Truman, to be able to so quickly, because he was only in office a few months... to call that shot, and get it over with. That was pretty heroic. I mean, it was quite a... Otherwise it would have dragged on because the Japanese... oh. During this time, this is interesting, it was [Japanese Emperor] Hirohito's eighty-first birthday. So, where were we? We were on the Paris Lawn, celebrating his eighty-first. And I, I mean, I couldn't wrap my brain around that one. So, there were thousands and thousands of people there, and the older women were all in their Japanese garb. They were very beautiful, with the obi and the kimono. Now, I understand, because I could never understand why Hirohito was never assassinated. His security was phenomenal. There was this huge edifice built, and I'd say maybe ten to twelve feet was wood, and the rest was glass. And you knew it was bullet proof glass. And his whole family, not only him, his cousins and his children and whatever, the whole family was there, celebrating with him. But you knew, behind that wood was an army. Nobody would have dared to even come. And you couldn't get close. There was a distance.

Howe: This is when you visited in the 1980's?

Bowen: In '81, something like that. And he was eighty one. There was a little group of men in white suits, and they were what was left over from the pilots. I forgot what they were called.

Howe: Kamikaze pilots?

Bowen: Kamikaze. And everybody shunned them. They were off by themselves because by then, I think the... the Japanese and the Americans there... they became more of a blend then I can imagine anything happening today.

Howe: Say that one more time.

Bowen: I think the Americans and the Japanese, you know, after the war and after rebuilding, became a better blend than anything that's happened since, say,

Desert Storm. Well, Vietnam. I mean, that was a time we're still getting over, you know, in terms of our servicemen. Everything was, we saw in Japan, like the handicap curbs, we started seeing them in America later on, but Japan was pretty advanced. Their food was a problem because everything was imported in. A half a cup of coffee would be five dollars American money, it was expensive. Small living quarters. They were all into golf. You saw golf net all over the roofs of tall buildings. Design, again, was unbelievable, and their ceramics, but anyway. And Mt. Fuji, was a very interesting phenomenon. My brother Teddy was back and forth between Hiroshima and Tokyo. And he said, "You don't always see that mountain. You go by it on the train," it was a bullet train, "You go by it, sometimes you see it, sometimes you don't." The first time, heading towards Hiroshima, I saw it, so did Teddy. Coming back, I saw it. My brother didn't. And we were standing next to each other. He said, "It's apparently a spiritual phenomenon. But why? We don't know." Have you been to Japan?

Howe: Not yet.

Bowen: Oh, well, are you going?

Howe: I would love to continue traveling, out of uniform. It's a very different experience.

Bowen: Oh, very different experience. Very different. We started out in Italy, we went into Egypt. We couldn't get into Israel because then, if we went to Israel first and then Egypt we could have done it, but the other way around we couldn't. We went into the Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, and then into... India. From India we went into Nepal and other little countries up there. And then we went into... what's that other country that China took over? Oh, we were in China; that was an experience. And then, we went to Japan. But if you can do it, do it. It's a... I don't know how safe it is travelling now.

Howe: I think it depends on where you go. It all depends.

Bowen: I like the third-world countries, travelling through the third-world countries. It's, you know, we can see it all here. Oh, Italy, that's--especially Florence, it's like one big museum. I think they're thinking of doing that, of making Florence, you'd have to pay an entry fee to get in because there's art everywhere. They just started thinking in terms of really salvaging it. There's [Luca della Robbia] in a farmers market! I mean, a huge one. Like this. It's... quite a place. So getting back to the uniform...

Howe: I'm curious, growing up, had anyone in your family or your friends served in the military prior to you joining?

Bowen: None of the girls went, I was the only one of the girls that left. But how that happened was a fluke.

Howe: Your parents? Aunts? Uncles?

Bowen: My father was in the Austrian, but not for very long. They got him out. My godfather was--he looked like Harold Flynn, very dashing man. He was in the cavalry during World War I, and he was, got mustard gassed. And that left him pretty, I wouldn't say disabled, but he couldn't... I don't remember what he did because whoever hired him would let him go. You know, he couldn't stay in one place, he had to keep moving. Then, towards... maybe towards his forties, he briefly settled down.

Howe: Which service did he fight for?

Bowen: He was Army, they had the cavalry... but you know, I was too young. Now, I know a lot more about World War I, and I'm very much interested in it. I had no idea, you don't know how close World War II was to that time in terms of armament. I mean, all that happened after the war started, we started getting our act together.

Howe: What do you think was the biggest influence on your decision to want to join the military at that time?

Bowen: Oh, I didn't have any, no. I had no clue. I mean, the thing that would go through my mind, "Boy, I wish I were a man. I would be in the Marine Corps." This is how I would think... because this is what we saw in the news once, in the movie news, once a week. All my friends were talking about joining the WACs or the WAVEs. They had all kinds of literature on it. It didn't occur to me, oh, I was really a fraudulent lying john anyway because of the concussion. That was one of things you couldn't have had, you had to have been out of it for a year. When I mentioned that to the boys that were signing me up, he said, "Well, don't worry about that, we'll take care of it here as long as you can take care of it down there." But I only had one episode and that was like two months after the accident. I never had another one. I didn't have to worry about it during training or anything.

Howe: Did you ever bring it up to someone in the military?

Bowen: No, no because that would have gotten me out. They didn't put it down either. I was a, what, a number for them. They were supposed to recruit so many and I was one of them.

Howe: Sure.

Bowen: It just, it happened so quickly. But once it happened, it felt right. I'm very glad I did it. I think that was, the Art Institute and that experience, were two of my best in my lifetime. The bachelor degree program was six-and-half years then at the Art Institute. And then I came back again for another ten years working in their sculpture department. In the meantime, I went from painting into sculpture, and I did about twenty-five years of welding. And I really could have earned a living on the Alaska pipeline, I was a good welder. Direct metal, sculpture. Now, I'm doing painting and ceramics. But it still has occupational hazards to it.

Howe: Looking back, why was it so important for you to serve your country at that time?

Bowen: Oh, because we were in trouble, and I think patriotism was very strong. I mean, there was no doubt, whether you were a Republican or a Democrat, you were patriotic. That was the glue. I think for a little while in my last year of high school I was banding with the socialists because it was a different kind of philosophy and a different kind of... they were more casual. But that didn't last long. I became, I vote, you know... FDR was a... but there was the patriotism... you don't see that today. You're almost ashamed to say it.

Howe: For you, then, where do you think that came from? How did you learn that growing up?

Bowen: At home and in school. Remember, my parents fled tyranny. When my mother, Poland was under Russian rule then, and my Grandfather escaped first. Then, he sent for my mother. My mother was fourteen. I mean, I couldn't see my daughter doing what she did at the age of fourteen. She came here along, to Rochester. And waited until he picked her up. And he wasn't able to get her until seven o'clock at night. She waited there almost all afternoon into the night. I asked her, "Weren't you afraid?" she said, "No, I knew he'd show up." They were very, you know, like on the 4th of July, they were very patriotic. They weren't American Polish, they were American. That's the way it was then. The flag was always flown. In school, we pledged allegiance every day. Also, you couldn't graduate without taking American history. I still have one of my

notebooks, and I'm really floored by it because I think I knew more about it then than I do now. So, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, everybody, I mean, all the men joined. I mean, kids in my last year of high school, the [Royal Air Force] from Canada came in and recruited. So, a lot of the boys that would've joined with the Americans were already signed up with the RAF. Then, they were able to switch when the war got going, but they were all in England. Did you know that?

Howe: How is that possible? How were they able to recruit on US soil?

Bowen: They did. They were in our high school. Rochester, they were here. And I imagine in other schools. I mean, we only knew about ours. The boy that sat behind me, in high school, he was six foot four [inches], Sam La Ferrero, he was so tall, and he liked sitting behind me because I let him put his feet around my chair. He joined the RAF. But he never made, I mean, he was killed. Most of my graduating class didn't make it. We never had a reunion... because they were the first contingent over. That was the sad part. But then, once the war started, all the boys just, they were. If you weren't in the service, you were 4F. 4F meant you couldn't pass the physical. That's what it meant then. So, when you saw a male, you wondered what was wrong with him.

Howe: It seems to me that there's a certain set of standards that applied only to men at this time.

Bowen: Right, of course.

Howe: Then this opportunity opens up for women, but not everyone looks at that opportunity with the same sense of obligation.

Bowen: Then? Oh, no. You'd better repeat that because I'm looking at it a little differently.

Howe: Well, I'm trying to get a perspective here. So, you said, that your friends went with you to the recruiter, but none of them joined?

Bowen: Oh, no, they didn't go with me. It was during my lunch hour on a job, I had to go into a federal building. So, I was alone, I mean they weren't with me. When I went in there to ask for a brochure, I was ripe for the picking. By the time I left, I was in the Marine Corps.

Howe: So, in your peer group, do you feel like you are unique in that regard?

Bowen: Oh, yeah, I mean nobody else, I mean, once I did that, it kind of, I think the women, my friends at that time liked talking about it. I didn't talk about it because I didn't think my father would approve. I mean, I was their only daughter. There was a different... anyway, when I joined... there were women from Rochester that did go to training. I think about, I think there were only about two of us that made it. The others were returned. I think they... if you can't make it within three weeks, they don't have any record. If they took you all the way to the end there would be a service record. But you can tell almost immediately, within the first week, whether they can make it or not. That's the way it was then, I don't think it's like that now. I think the women... because it is voluntary, well, it was voluntary then...

Howe: How did the men react to you being there?

Bowen: You mean civilian men or...?

Howe: The other marines.

Bowen: Oh. I gave you an example. At the beginning, they were a little conflicted, some of them. But most of them reacted in a very positive way. You know, they really... that weekend when I was gone--with that golfing thing--the group of men that would see me going to work every day didn't see me, and immediately there was an alert out, "What's happened to her?" That's the kind of men they were. They were wonderful men. I have a few shots because cameras weren't big in those days. I have one taken with the clerk who taught me payroll. He was a Texan, and to me, he was very alien. I'd never heard that drawl, or even that walk. It was a different walk. There were... I have a picture of that PTS guy, I have a photo of some of the other marines. But they all look so old, but they weren't. They were in their early twenties. They look like older men in their thirties.

Howe: Did any of them ever share their experiences with you? Talk about it.

Bowen: Not even my husband. But I saw him react a few times, when they were showing the World War II series on television. I mean, I can't watch that because I saw a lot of their training films. And from that point on, and I'd see his reaction. He was with a tank company. On the museum on Parris Island, they have the tank where the lieutenant, you know, wherever they were, it would have been Guam, whatever they were taking, it was silent. So, the lieutenant opened up the hatch and came out, and was shot, and didn't pull the hatch back down, you know, the body was there. I don't know how they got that shot, as blown up and one in the

museums. Someone like Dick was lucky to be in a tank, and they didn't have anything like they have, you know the bombs that, the IUDs?

Howe: IEDs.

Bowen: Yeah, there wasn't time for that, on either side. So, that was one worry they didn't have. They just had each other.

Howe: What else, during that, those initial phases, those first few days those first few weeks, what came to you as a culture shock?

Bowen: Oh, immediately... I didn't expect that troop train with hammocks. You know, why would they tell you? I mean, you join. This is how it's going to be. And then, the attitude of your drill sergeants and all the marine's around you. They weren't friendly. There wasn't a shoulder to cry on. So, you know, we kind of banded together. There was an incident, one of the men, one of the Marines, who was the head of the service company, was a captain. Captain Briggie. And he had the--he led the band. He was the bandmaster. But he was also the head of this company. Very friendly little guy. We're walking down the street one day and here comes a recruit, and the recruits were so pathetic! Here comes a recruit. I think he might have been in the sick bay or something, and he's walking, and he sees the captain, and he salutes. The captain salutes him back and he says, "Good morning son." And the marine followed with his gaping mouth, probably the first kind word he'd heard in six weeks. And every once in a while, there'd be a suicide. That was, you know, because the island isn't very big. When the cortège would go by, for the train, they would play Chopin's funeral march--would be played along with it.

Howe: Back up for a quick second, what's a cortège?

Bowen: The funeral, the coffin, the equipment it was on, and the marines that were with it. It was the same thing every time, anybody, if there was an accident. Mostly it was a suicide. Sometimes there were severe accidents. In building of the golf course there were four marines that were killed. The truck overturned. So, they had this little ceremony, and the... are you familiar with Chopin's? It's a beautiful dirge. So, you'd hear it, all over the island. And then, there were the hurricanes. We were right in the midst of the hurricane. And that was exciting because living up north I never saw one. Even the marines had fun with that one. They got their canoes and waited for the water to come in and cover the island and then they'd go canoeing, right down the main drag. We had to... we had to make sure

everything was up off the floor. Our locker and footlockers because of the possibility of the water getting into the...

Howe: All of the flooding.

Bowen: Yeah, that was quite an experience. So, we had that every, what was it, every fall? It was nothing, it wasn't a big deal, actually, but it was for people who've never experienced it. What other exciting things happened down there?

Howe: Was your training integrated? Did you go through basic training with males?

Bowen: No. No, that came, that's recent. No, we were a separate unit. We did the same calisthenics, we did the same marching. We didn't do the bid... the rifle range or the... because the conditions were similar to the Pacific. So, the men got that training there, but we didn't do that. We did the physical, the calisthenics, the marching.

Howe: Why do you think there was that difference? Why do you think that difference existed? Why weren't you afforded that training?

Bowen: Because we were female, we were a different unit. Remember, this was new! This was a new concept. They had it--the Marines had it during World War I. There were woman marines then. And they did office work. But we went a step further. We did everything. We did maintenance of the island, we ran the island. There were course trainers, training pilots. Not in the plane, but in the simulated plane. Mortar transports. Now, we weren't supposed to drive anything bigger than a half-ton pickup. We drove those huge busses, and during this time, the woman must have been about five foot three [inches], and she was hysterical. She lost her, she took a turn and that whole huge cab came off. And she was personally responsible. I don't know what, that's all I knew.

Howe: Who was this?

Bowen: She was one of the marines who lost, she was driving one of these huge... They were either transport busses or huge trucks. You know, those eight wheelers or whatever. They drove them all. It came off. So, evidently, there was something that she didn't do right on the attachment. But that's all I remember. I don't remember what happened or whether she was transferred. But that was a big story. But it was quite a female operation. But we were separate. I was attached to a man's company, but I lived with the women. I was only attached through their office. My rank was a part of the reason they couldn't get me. If I was a

man they could have because then I would be part of their USMC table for organization. But before then, no.

Howe: So, the WR was a separate table of organization from the regular USMC?

Bowen: Yeah, so were the others. We weren't, but, we were attached to them through duties.

Howe: So, in terms of promotions and ranks, it was a whole different ball of wax?

Bowen: Well, yeah. If I were just doing the female stuff, like the maintenance of the island, then I would be on their table of organization. But I was attached to a man's unit. So, I was part of theirs. You know what... that never, that wasn't even... I never even thought about it. The people that it bothered were the heads of the company because somehow, I was putting them in jeopardy by being a PFC, carrying all of this money around. You know, they had a point, but I did what I had to do and I did it. Let them worry about it. That was always an issue with them. There was nothing I could do.

Howe: Either during basic training or after training, you mentioned, it's a little bit different from what you expected. Were there certain traditions or experiences, normal things that you might have done, that you missed out on as a result of your commitment? Like birthdays, holidays, Christmas?

Bowen: Oh, yes! I mean, we had our own, but that didn't occur to me until years later. For some reason, I thought everything stopped after I left. And then I'm looking at a photo album and there were all these Christmases, baptisms, all these family activities that I was not a part of. I wasn't even aware of it because the communication wasn't there. I would be able call, maybe, once every couple of weeks, but we never discussed that. We just made it a short. Communicating was totally different. A very interesting article, it must have been this past year, the Women Marines, and this was quite a furor. It was also on Facebook. There was certain part of their training; they didn't feel they had to go through. It had to do with combat. You know, at the front line in combat. They didn't want to take that training. You should have heard the reaction of all the marines on this, "Then they shouldn't be there. If they can't do that training, they should be back." You know, I don't know whether we could have done that training, but we were never exposed to that, but these women are. And they have to be able to be every bit as well trained as a male. There shouldn't be any reservation about, oh, we can't we shouldn't do this. None. They should have the same training. And they're capable of it. You know, I think the reason they're capable of it is

because they're young. There's energy and strength there, that gets depleted later on. But on the whole, I think they've done very well. I don't know, I mean, I wasn't for, and the Marines weren't either the male marines, a female in combat, in actual combat because they were afraid of their reaction. Say if, instead of going forward towards the enemy, if a woman was in trouble, they would go and try to rescue the woman or take care of the woman, instead of doing what they had to. Whether that still is an issue, I don't know. But it was at the beginning. But they make excellent pilots. If... and it hasn't happened in the Marine Corps that I know of, in terms of harassment, it's happened in the Navy it's happened in the Air Corps... I'm sorry, deal with it. I mean, I'm probably I'm from that school. It could be dealt with, by the woman. They don't have to make a big issue about it. I may be wrong. But, you have to look at the whole picture, you can't just yell harassment when... I've never, I've never had that experience, my friends have never had that experience. But again, it was a different time. You can't even compare the two.

Howe: Did you and your friends, the WAVES and the WACs that you were barracked with, how did you all get along?

Bowen: Well, we were not barracked with the WAVES. They had their own unit. Oh, I imagine they did, but I told you that incident about a friend of mine, who turns out to be a WAVE and we just let it go for the rest of the... but there was a WAC that came in for a court martial. She was a witness. So, she was barracked with us. You should have seen these women marines, I mean they're a bunch of snobs. They were spitting polish all the way, and this poor WAC looked like Raggedy Ann in this group with her uniform that didn't fit well, her hair was too long. We were just all over her, I mean, yeah. So, there was that better-than-thou-art feeling, among the women marines, which isn't bad, I mean, it really lasted me a whole lifetime. I mean, I don't go running around in my gym shoes and sweats like you see a lot of the ninety year olds.

Howe: Could it also be you had a cultivated experience across the street, when you came back to Chicago, at the School of the Art Institute?

Bowen: At the Art Institute, it's different. You didn't see Goths, you didn't see Levis, you didn't... because everybody had a job after school... it was so cheap... the cost of tuition, was so low, and we had incredible instructors from Europe. I mean, it's amazing. It's not the same caliber today. It was like a Renaissance in those days because all the people that were back from World War II knew exactly what they wanted to do. The artwork, the caliber, was unbelievable. You never saw it, it

was a period of about ten years; it was just unbelievable. Then it started going down. Now it's totally different. Now they don't even have fine art. It's all computers. They have a classroom, and whatever work you do you have to take home with you, you can't leave it. These were like big studios, we did our work and we left our work. But... I'm still in school. That was the other thing. I love being a student--I love it. The professional life, not so much. It's too political. I don't mean Democrat or Republican, I mean, among, you know, what happens. Truman College has an incredible program for seniors, and I'm able to do pottery there, I don't have to attend class, I can just go there and smile in the studio. And the painting class, the same way. And both instructors are excellent, if you need any help. And this is how I am able to be productive because I no longer have a studio. It's been quite a number of years since I've had the welding studio that was the end of that. But I'm able to be productive. I'm around other creative people. It's... I don't have time for TV.

Howe: So, that leads me to another question. How do you feel your time in the military prepared you for civilian life? And I would say career, but sometimes there are so many different experiences it's better just to say civilian life?

Bowen: Yeah, civilian life. I really... one of the things they kept reminding you is this discipline is going to last you the rest of your life. And I'd go do the eye roll, but you know, it has. I mean, well, I was disciplined before I went in. I became more disciplined after being in there. The fact that I could sit and do my work for twenty hours at a stretch; well, what do you do for welding? You watch that little dot go. And you can stand there for hours waiting for something finished. I don't know that I could have done that. Maybe. But I had, you know, there's an attitude you develop. You may have had it before but you weren't aware of it. But being in the Marine Corps, and being exposed to male marines, there was nothing you couldn't do. I mean, you almost had to have that or you couldn't have continued... like that. Thousand page... first time out there, the payroll roster that I had to do... that had mistakes on it. You'd have to be a fool to have even taken that on because I didn't know the repercussions on any of this. I was told to do it and I did it. Finally, it was perfect. But, it wasn't that long either. It was a challenge, and you excelled at it. And that's how I think I've approached my whole life. Not that I haven't made mistakes, not that I haven't had setbacks—I've had big ones, and we won't go into that—but I persevered. I went right on. I think that that attitude, I got it from my dad and my mother, but not on that level. Diving off that tower. Oh, if my daughter thought about that now, no way! But I did it

Howe: Your time in service, during that period, what do you think was your most challenging experience?

Bowen: In the service? Oh, I think the most challenging, I mean everything, but was that first experience I had with signing the men in from overseas. It was really traumatic. And I couldn't show it, I had to be, to see hundreds of men come in.

Howe: What was particularly difficult about that experience?

Bowen: The fact that they looked, that they were young, that they were in their early twenties--some twenty, some of those fraudulent enlistments that were seventy--the fact that they looked like older men. They were very thin. They were ragged looking. They were yellow, from the atabrine because they had to take that so they wouldn't get malaria. I don't know how much good that did but they had to take it. And they lived through three-and-a-half years of hell that we don't know about. We can't even imagine. When my husband finished with Guam, they were sent to New Zealand for a short rest. While he was there he built a six-hole golf course. For a few months, this is what they did, they played golf. For his enjoyment and the rest of the men.

Howe: But sitting in that office, they're coming in...

Bowe: Yeah, they filed in.

Howe: Yeah, what was that like for you?

Bowen: It was traumatic! But I couldn't react. I had to be very cool, calm, cordial. They didn't have to tell you that, you just knew it. And this is kind of an aside, maybe I shouldn't even say this. But out of all those service books that I collected, because they were in our file, there was one pink slip. You know what that means? The pink slip meant that he had a sexual disease of some kind that he had contracted wherever. One. And anybody who saw that said... well, you know, it was a big deal. Now, it's nothing. I don't think it's even considered

Howe: But you were able to control your reactions?

Bowen: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, you had to. You couldn't look traumatized. You had to look accepting. And inject some kind of humor into all of this. Like with the dungarees, there was always kidding going on. Among the men, you know, those were not the type of men that I dated at home. These were hardened, combat warriors. They saw it. I mean, it wasn't... Guam was a horrible incident...

Howe: It sounds like a pretty, not pretty, but largely somber atmosphere. What could and what did you do to show some compassion to these men?

Bowen: Oh, it wasn't somber. That's what you tried to, you tried to lighten it up. You were funny with them, you were greeting them. But how you really felt was not part of the game then. But very quickly, they looked better. They had a staff and CO club, they would dance and play music and have beer and stuff like that. Very, within a couple of weeks, they started filling out, their skin was becoming lighter, they looked neater, and they looked like marines instead of... And you know what? They were not pressured. There was no pressure by the officers to, you know... towards the end of the six months there was. They had to start pulling their act together. But at the beginning, they could do whatever they wanted to do, look, however. It was interesting, those wingtip shoes I told you about? I was in the chief of staff's office, and this is towards the end of the six months, and that's when everybody had to be in uniform. That was post order and that's how it was. So, I'm talking to the chief of staff, and he looks out the window and here comes this guy, this Marine, with a green hat on, with an Australian battle jacket on, and the brown and white like a saddle shoe. And he's walking towards the post office. He says, "Bring that guy in." And I looked, it was Dick. He was a golf pro, and he had to get to the post office and back again; so, he wasn't going to go through the whole uniform change, he put whatever he had on and did it. They brought him in, I went back to my office, and all of a sudden the two of them are walking out. That was the end of that, it never got beyond that. They went to the golf course. But that was Dick. He did whatever had to be done. So, if he had to get to the post office, he'd say, "Oh, I'm not in uniform I'll just put on this jacket."

Howe: That was one of my questions. When and how did you meet your husband?

Bowen: Then, at the... I signed him in. And I thought he was the youngest looking one of the bunch. He had, when he was all together, he had blond hair from the sun because he was always outdoors. And he had very nice, there was, George Peppard, did you know him? That kind of look about him. He was always suntanned. Big blue eyes. But then, he was nowhere near that. He had deep circles under his eyes. He was very yellow. His hair was shaved very closely. His uniform just hung on him, and it wasn't a whole uniform, it was that Australian jacket and those wingtip shoes. But he was a wreck. I looked at his birthdate, and he was twenty-five, so, he was older than anybody. He had a lot of experience, he was already a PGA golfer. But you know, I didn't know that at

that time. All I saw was his birth data, and signed him in. And we'd see each other, we'd say hello and all that. Then we were at the NCO club one night, and he was there. He was... what did he do, as we were leaving he comes up to me he takes off his cap, you don't do this, it was that overseas cap, he takes the overseas hat off and he hands it to me and he says, "Hang on to it. I'll pick it up later." And then he's gone. What a line. So, I kept it. And then he called for a date. Well, date night, it was pouring. And our lavatory, where all the sinks and showers were, looked out on the golf course at a distance. And there was a foursome playing out there with umbrellas, and I thought that was very strange. Now, I'm waiting for him to show up, and he's like fifteen minutes late, all muddy. He was out there, he'd just got back and didn't have time to change. So, anyway we went to the NCO club, and that was about the time of my first furlough. And he said, "Would you like me to wash, get your uniforms washed, your summer uniforms?" And I said, "Oh, that'd be great. That'd be wonderful." So, I gave him all my summer uniforms. Hung around in my dungarees. And then I didn't see Dick again. No Dick. I started getting concerned because my time for the furlough was coming up, and no uniforms. So, I got one of his friends and I said, "This is what's happened. Have you seen Dick?" He said, "No. He's gone!" I said, "Gone?" He says, "Yeah, apparently, he left on furlough," So, we started going through all the laundry all the packages, we finally found them. Right then, he was a big negative where I was concerned. I came back from furlough, still no Dick. But his company moved on to Iwo. So, about three weeks later, Dick shows up. I said, "What happened?" He said, "I was playing golf with colonel so-and-so and I said, 'Yeah, its sixty days.' and he said, 'I'm giving you a pass leave tomorrow.'" And he was gone. You know why? That was his golfing buddy. He wasn't going to let him go to Iwo. Dick didn't know that. But when he came back, his company was three weeks gone. That--you know--there was nothing he could do about it. But that did save him. I mean, anything could have happened then. The casualties were horrendous there. That kind of brought a close to the war. He... after we got married, and we were married twice. We were married in church after the civil ceremony at Augusta, [Georgia]. I lived on the island. That was an experience. It was very nice, you know, especially during hurricane season. This wasn't your property, so, you could be under water for a while and you didn't have that concern. I had a woman, who did my housework for me, Sarah... Sadie! She was born a slave. She was very old, almost a hundred years old. Very marvelous woman. And then, I couldn't do it now, she showed me how to do a real southern pecan pie... it's very...

because they would bring the people that lived off the island to work, to do the work.

Howe: So, Sadie and others didn't live on the island?

Bowen: No. they didn't live on the island, they just came in for the day. It was a kind of beautiful time in the morning. When they would bring them in, they would all be singing spirituals, and it was beautiful. They would drive them in and drop them off, and then pick them up at night. But they wouldn't sing at night, just in the morning. It was good living there, it was... you know, being on the golf course. Where our women's barracks were, there wasn't any grass, but where the golf course was it was all grass. It was more desert where we were. I had a chance to go back there, I think it was in the '90s. The first time, with my third husband and I went back there for nostalgic reasons. And the place is different, I mean it totally changed. The ad building was still there. So, I go in the ad building, and I went into the entrance to the chief of staff, open up the door, and there were all these marines in casual clothes sitting around. And I looked and I went, "Wow!" Now, they did a misreading. They must have thought I was an officer. So, they jumped to attention right away. You know, immediately, this one guy sitting on the windowsill with his running shorts on. I mean, I don't know how it is today but this is what was going on. I said, "I only want to know one thing. Where the women barracks were?" This one young one woman said, "Women barracks? It's all, you know, this is where they train women now, on Parris Island. They're all on the recruit side." I said "No, about a mile or two in, there were women barracks." "There aren't no women barracks here." I said, "I'm talking World War II". They said, "We're the first women marines here." They have no history of it. They didn't know that this happened. And I told them. They said, "Well, that's probably where all the homes are now." This is the '80s and that was in the '40s. They said, "Listen, there's a museum here, you might be able to get some information there." And they had uniforms and these big blow up war scenes, but nothing... it's like we never existed. It was very strange. You know there is a history of it, but not on Parris Island.

Howe: It's interesting because in my preparation for this interview I contacted that museum...

Bowen: Oh! On Parris Island? What did you find?

Howe: The same answer.

Bowen: Isn't that... no kidding. Did you, what did you ask?

Howe: I explained that I was going to be interviewing a woman who had served from '44 to '46, and that her husband helped build the golf course on Parris Island, had been a USMCWR. And the response was, "Well, we don't have any record of anything pertaining to the base in that regard. We don't have any record of WRs, but contact the Historical Society. The Marine Corps Historical Society."

Bowen: Oh, there's several, there's more than one because the portraits I have, that my brother did, they're in Quantico, but they're going to end up in Colorado when they finish that museum. It might be finished now. This is interesting because... and I was a part of it, I should have known that. When we were finished, and we had to empty all the barracks, and there were eight of us that were in charge of burning all the records. Not the service records, those went to Washington. But anything else, any printed material or anything, had to be shredded—not shredded, burned. We were burning them in our barbeque pits. That's what happens every time that... Well, do you remember that business with Oliver North? When he was on trial, but before he went on trial and they were trying to get him with this and they couldn't? Because it was part of the routine, it was protocol. When you close up an office, you send all the, like service ... I don't know what else you would send, to Washington. Everything else gets, now, gets shredded, then it got burned. That's why there's no record of anything. So, even when the men moved out, everything got destroyed. So, it's as current as whoever is there now.

Howe: What's the point of having a museum?

Bowen: What's the point of having everything so perfect? Because all that got destroyed because they... everything they had to know was in the service record book. So, it was an exercise in perfection that was it. Is that interesting? Now, see when we were there with Dick's ashes, I talked to the pro and the pro said he knew about this. He was a Marine and he knew about it. So, he let us have a cart and let us go around and do whatever we had to do. And this was like... it was after '96, Dick died in '96. That happens in the Navy too, in every armed service.

Howe: Histories are weird that way. You'll have a ship that is entirely documented in the Navy—from when it was commissioned to the decommissioning—and then, it will be scrapped, yet the crew continues to stay in contact and they'll have reunions and they talk about the different engagements and there's a whole social atmosphere behind that. Then you'll have ships that come and go without a mention. So, it's inconsistent.

Bowen: It's inconsistent. Yeah, that's, oh, you know, I have one photograph of the eight of us marching from barbeque pit to barbeque pit, burning all of the records. Than was...

Howe: Do you mind talking about your experience on KP duty?

Bowen: Oh, man. I didn't think I'd ever have to experience that. And I didn't at the beginning. I went from Camp Lejeune to Parris Island without experiencing KP. So, I thought I was free. Well, right before my discharge, I had to do KP duty. And one of the women said, "Oh, you have to do the kettles, the washing, of the equipment, the things they cooked in." They were in kettles and vats, and she says, "Then you have a day off," Well, the reason you have a day off is because it was such hard work. It was grueling. You had to be there real early and you didn't finish until everything was done. I mean, it was a month. So, I didn't have a pleasant KP duty because I picked the wrong thing. And it was at the end of it, it was after the fact.

Howe: In your estimation, what was the point of that? If you're already ...

Bowen: Well, because they were discharging, they weren't bringing in new people anymore. And what happened, that was right before they started training the men, before they started turning the mess hall over to the men. So, now we have men cooks, and they really went overboard. We had the best food. We made every meal, ate every big meal. And then a post order came out. A general noticed the women marines were getting fat, putting on weight. We had to fall out at 5:45 every morning for an hour and a half of calisthenics. We did. But we did. But we shot up in weight, I think, I went from 120 to 140—very quickly. But the general took care of that. I think that they did use the barracks for a little while, but they had to reconfigure it all because it was done for women. How long? It couldn't have been there very long, because nobody remembered it. The thing that surprised me was to see the fast food places there... you know, like McDonalds. You never saw anything like that. They didn't have it then anyway.

Howe: When were you discharged?

Bowen: 1946. May. The first part of May.

Howe: I understand you didn't have a very abrupt transition, it was very gradual?

Bowen: For me it was because... I don't know why they kept me on, but they kept me on right 'til the end. It was okay because by then I was married and living on the island so it was fine with me... As they discharged, they would close the barracks. They would keep consolidating. But the records and everything were still there that had to be taken care of. And we always thought we'd see each other again, but it didn't happen. I kept in touch with one person then lost touch with that one. I couldn't connect with anybody through the association, but it's sad to see the women that were sixty at the beginning of our chapter down to about half a dozen to eight. They do a lot. They do a lot, did a lot for students, Toys for Tots--that was a good one. Now, I think they just write a check, instead of bringing in the toys. It's a real end because it is different. I mean, I've lived through... a lot of changes. I mean, in the ninety years, and this is exciting as it was when I was twenty because the computers, the smart phones. I won't give up my twenty-year-old car, though. You wonder what the next forty years are going to bring. It's going to be much faster than coming up to it because I think the cycles get shorter. Do you miss the service?

Howe: Sometimes.

Bowen: Sometimes, yeah.

Howe: Sometimes... What has been your proudest moment?

Bowen: Proudest? Proudest... I don't know about proudest. I can tell you about my most joyful. It's when I had Jennifer. Man, that was something I thought I was gonna miss. And I never expected anything so incredible in my life. That I think was the most joyful. And she's still around. I mean, we live together. I can't, proud...?

Howe: In terms of what you've experienced in the military, is there anything that's particularly memorable?

Bowen: You mean civilian life?

Howe: In the military.

Bowen: Well, one of the things that we did in boot camp, we stood in review for FDR. And that was quite an experience... Let's see. Again, the most memorable was the dropping of the atom bomb. That is... but you know, again, how simple it was back then. We knew who the enemy was. We don't, now. But it was so, I mean everything was black and white, almost. So, when the bomb was dropped on the enemy, and the war ended... the feeling of victory. You know. We won. At the

beginning it didn't look like that. It was pretty dicey. And we'll never know how dicey it was because we weren't prepared. But then, you had a whole country behind it. Now, everything is so divided. It's the way it is now. It's not a... Maybe again one time it might be but not at this point.

Howe: Why is it important? Why do you feel it's important to share your story?

Bowen: Oh, Muriel Underwood, past president of the chapter of the Women Marines Association, I think she did hers a long time ago. I think when it first started, quite a while ago. And she kept after me to do it. And I kept telling her, I have nothing too really, I mean, other than the story, I don't have anything big to say like doing something real. It's just another person's story. It's not a big deal. But she kept on, "You've got to, you've got to." So, I'm cleaning up my piles at home, I'm trying to get rid of stuff. And I came across this Pritzker thing. And I call Tom, and he says, "Yeah, fill out, we'll send you a questionnaire, and fill it out." And it's probably different from a lot of other women because they all had pretty, you know like Muriel did duty on the West Coast and she was in the city, so her Marine experience was limited. I mean, it wasn't with military men who served, you know that kind of thing. That part, is very, I'm glad I had it... you know, you sometimes wonder, what if the combat marine or army or whatever, had the same equipment that we had today? Then, I wonder how, I think a lot of lives would have been saved... because there they are in their uniform, with their field scarf on, their M1 rifle, their hats, that's it! And their boots. I mean, I find that horrifying. But it wasn't then. It was the way it was.

Howe: And you're talking in terms of personal protection? The helmets? The flak jackets?

Bowen: Yeah, yeah.

Howe: Reinforced boots?

Bowen: I mean, it would have saved a lot of lives. But it was like the difference between World War I, which was even unbelievable compared to two. To them, it would have seemed advanced.

Howe: Well, even in World War I, that's when we started seeing the development of the helmet, and that was a slow transition.

Bowen: And you know, their medical care on the field was almost not there. And Vietnam brought around a very... it... with the helicopters and...

Howe: Being able to address things in the battlefield?

Bowen: You know what, let me ask you another thing. When is all this going to change?

Howe: In terms of what?

Bowen: In terms of all this warfare! I mean, it hasn't changed. I mean, it's like every ten years we have to bring down the population somehow. I think that the military is great and we should have it and all that, but the, killing off the, our young men is not... I couldn't watch Desert Storm for that reason. And that was only a month. It's all it took. And I think they lost one pilot during that time. It's... the casualties are too great. You wonder, I have a step son who's consulate general in Ghana. Now, that's right on the fringe of Ebola, right? His family is going to go there and visit for the holidays, his wife and two children. I wouldn't take that risk now.

Howe: What's he doing down there?

Bowen: He's the consulate general. For three years.

Howe: Well, I mean, depending on the level of security and quarantine and...

Bowen: I don't hear anything about that. Maybe he's not allowed to discuss it. But his wife is going to find out. They're thinking if its okay, they're going to move there with him. Their son's twelve, and it's time that he should be with his father... but, anyway... I'll probably think of a lot of things when I get home that were important and not this chatter.

Howe: No, that's okay, it's okay. We skipped around a little bit, but it was more important to me that you spoke naturally and I tried not to interrupt as much as possible. And I came back around to things I wanted to try to highlight, thing's I'd read in your biography. I think the one thing I'm curious about, and of course if you go home and have one of those: Aha, moments. Definitely write it down, email Tom. By all means, when you get the transcript we can sit back down again. We can schedule another afternoon and you can come and reminisce a little bit more. The one last thing I wanted to ask, what would you like people to know or to take away from your story, if they were sitting, viewing this?

Bowen: You want me to be serious?

Howe: Absolutely.

Bowen: The sense of adventure, that's what life is. Like every ten years my life has been changing. I mean, it's been a tapestry of incredible memories now... Luckily, my time in the Marine Corps just happened. I mean, it wasn't a plan or anything like that. It just happened. And I played it as it lay. Then I found that most of my life was like this. You know, you make a plan... I spent so many years at the Art Institute, and then my daughter... What a beautiful thing a life can be. Again, I'm telling you, it hasn't been all uphill, but it's still, you know, my life. And I did it my way. But yeah, I don't have a real serious message. Oh, although, I don't think it would hurt people to do a year or two in service, you know, young people. I think it would be excellent. Like the Israelis. But it wasn't like that then. It was so nice talking to you and meeting you.

Howe: Thank you, thank you. Like I said, if you think back on it and there is something that you wanted to add again, please, let us know. I would like to give this to you as a token of our appreciation.

Bowen: Oh, what is that?

Howe: It's called a challenge coin.

Bowen: You're kidding.

Howe: I'm not. This is a relatively recent development, I think.

Bowen: A challenge coin?

Howe: A challenge coin.

Bowen: I love it.

Howe: A lot of military commands across the services have adopted that particular size coin, that weight and then they paint their insignia on it with their emblem... and it's very specific to that place and that command. So, this is a Pritzker Military Museum & Library's coin and we're presenting it in thanks for your time today.

Bowen: But you know what? This is so appropriate because that's what it's all about. I mean you can sit back and watch TV and then that's it. But to go out and live it and do it...

Howe: Go do.

Bowen: The one thing we never discussed, and that would have been another story, is the art career.

Howe: Well...

Bowen: Oh, it has nothing to do with this. It's a whole separate... I just had an exhibit in February. I painted with an artist by the name of [Tristin] Meinecke. And he got me from classical training and to nonobjective and abstract. That was... Having an exhibit with him was, it was like this.

Howe: What was the nature of your collaboration?

Bowen: When I got out of school, I didn't have any money. So I didn't have a studio. He let me paint in his studio. He kept... He was a great guy, boy, I'll tell you. I wonder if I've got any of his work here.

Unknown: He started the surrealist movement

Bowen: What?

Unknown: He started the Surrealist Movement.

Bowen: Right. Wonder if I've got any of his work here.