

# **Karen Thompson Meter Oral History Interview**

November 14, 2014

Interviewed by Jerrod Howe

Howe: So, today is Friday, November 14, 2014. We're here, downtown Chicago, at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library. My name is Jerrod Howe, and I'm here today with...

Meter: Karen Meter.

Howe: And thank you for coming in today, ma'am.

Meter: Thank you.

Howe: And we're just going to jump right in.

Meter: Alright.

Howe: When and where were you born?

Meter: I was born June 4<sup>th</sup> 1946, in Crawford, Nebraska. My father was an interpreter in a prisoner of war camp in Fort Robinson, Nebraska. And he met my mother, and they married there, and had me.

Howe: What was your mother doing there?

Meter: My mother was a switchboard operator for the phone company.

Howe: And did your father...was he a contractor, or did he work for the Army?

Meter: He was Army intelligence, and he was a staff sergeant, and he basically had German prisoners of war and...they treated them extremely well. His job was to... get them enamored with the American way of life. And he had very few bona fide Nazis or people like that. They were mostly Africa corps. And... they had great love for one another, and after, long after they continued to make reciprocal trips to Germany and the United States to get together. And...I think, you know, was one of the more pleasant experiences for these guys because they said, "We'd rather wait the war out here in northwest Nebraska than in Germany." And they were teachers, and doctors, and highly educated people for the most part. And there was a lot of respect and love between them, and... that's about all.

Howe: When your parents got married...and you were born...was your father still in Army Intelligence?

Meter: No. And I didn't learn that until recently when...I asked—my brother has all of his military records—and he was actually discharged from the military by the time I was born. And he was supposed to go to school in...Gillette, Wyoming, and changed his mind and decided he wanted to go back to North Dakota, where he was from. And he had a Bachelor of Education and he taught for a few years, and decided that that was not profitable enough to raise a family and went to law school and became a lawyer, and then later a judge.

Howe: Okay. And mom...?

Meter: My mother had a high school diploma. She was 23 when she married my father...or no, I'm sorry, she was 23 when I was born... but she would alternate between Crawford – which was the nearest town—and the base. You know, the operators would switch, you know, and work one place or the other. And it was a lovely area in Pine Ridge. And ...she, you know...she dated a lot, you know. She was a very pretty lady, but married my father....next question.

Howe: Okay.

Meter: [Laughs].

Howe: Alright...Chris tells me that, and you also just confirmed you have a brother.

Meter: I do. I have two brothers, actually. My brother, Charles, who is 18 months younger than I am. He just had a birthday the day before yesterday...Very, very...as close as a brother and sister can be. He became a Corpsman after I became a Corpsman. He told me many years later he went in thinking he was going to be a Draftsman. And—like they do to all of us—they tell you one thing, and you wind up another. And my younger brother basically had a high number, so he didn't get drafted, or he would have gotten drafted. And it's always been a point of contention between the three of us—not so much now as when my father was alive—that my youngest brother didn't serve in the military. And that's a good thing because he's a very free, independent thinking and...would have questioned many things, many of the rules. They...we all get along now. Both of our parents are deceased. And...when my son and my brother, who was in the military, get together—he was a Corpsman that went to Vietnam—everybody else leaves the room because...that's...it's what we talk about. And my son, being a Marine, that's who we served with. We were their medical force. And I was stationed at Naval Hospital Beaufort, near Parris Island, and the Marine Corps Air Station, and so most of our patients were Marines. We were the only freestanding hospital base in the country. We had only one function on that base, and that was to run a hospital. And all the

housing and everything on it were support and residence for the staff at the hospital. And, interestingly enough, when I joined the military I wanted to be a musician—which was my life's dream since I was four years old. And my recruiters told me that I could be...and so I signed on the dotted line, and I got 8 weeks through basic training. When we were choosing our—they call them “dream sheets;” what you want to do for a job—and I said, “Musician.” And they said, “Women aren't musicians because they travel. And women tend to get these guys into trouble, and they consequently get into trouble, and it's just a big mess. So rather than deal with it, we don't have them.” They do now. And that was one of the hardest things for me to accept—that certain doors were closed to women in the military. Certain jobs, at that time, certain MOS's, if you will, certain schools. I was told because of my high GCTARI scores—which is an entrance exam you take when you go in the military—that I would make a wonderful Corpsman. And I didn't think that at all. I hated hospitals. I... the brief experience I'd had with them were for very sad reasons, and I didn't like the idea. And I said, “Well, I'm not going to do that.” [Laughs]. And my recruiter lied to me, and they said, “Well, what would you rather do?” And I said, “I'd rather be a personnel man, or...a dental tech.” And they said, “Well, why those two?” And I said, “Because they work a 9 - 5 days, and 5 days a week.” And I knew when I went to Corps school...it was where I belonged. It came very easy to me—all the medical terminology. I liked it a lot. We were at Great Lakes—that was the only place they trained women Corpsmen. Our companies were co-ed, but we didn't live in the same barracks like they do now. And San Diego was another place where they trained corpsmen. My brother went to San Diego. But I went to boot camp in probably one of the loveliest places in the world—which was Bainbridge, Maryland ...and...

Howe: We're gonna get to that.

Meter: Okay.

Howe: We're gonna get to that.

Meter: Okay.

Howe: Because you've unfolded so much already, I want to—before we get into the military experience, if it's alright with you, I'd like to talk a little bit more about childhood, high school...

Meter: Okay, you drive.

Howe: Okay. So, you were born in Nebraska, but you grew up in North Dakota?

Meter: Yes.

Howe: Okay. Where did you go to school?

Meter: Bismarck Public Schools: Roosevelt Elementary, and Bismarck Junior, and Bismarck High School; very good education systems. Looking back on it now, I got an excellent education, and it's lasted me all my life. And I liked school...a lot. My brothers weren't crazy about school, but I liked school.

Howe: What'd you like about it?

Meter: Well, it was a...for me, it was a social activity, and sometimes I got in trouble for that. And it was a place where I felt accepted, and where... With rare occasion, I was one of these intellectually curious children. I always spoke perfect English, and that can be an advantage or a disadvantage. And that's because of the way we were raised in our home. My father always said, "You know, if you don't speak the English language, well, you'll never get anywhere." And, for the most part, he was right. I liked the music and activities, and I hated summer because I wasn't in school. I was a very social person, but we lived in the country. We lived in... First home: south of Bismarck; I actually grew up in a log house. And we lived next to a riding club for—"The Horse Club", they called it. And I loved going out and leading trail rides, and things like that. I spent a lot of my young life around horses. And then, when my brother was about eighth grade—seventh, eighth grade—my father decided he wanted to move. He wanted a showplace house, and so we moved to North River Road in Bismarck. And I didn't like that at all. I was miles from town. And we lived in kind of a ravine. And for the most part, when I got out of there I would... Told people it was like the opera, *Escape from the Sergalio*. I had, you know, no freedom, really, except I was in girl scouts, and I was in concert choir. They saved me from a life of total loneliness. And my brothers, they went with my father hunting and things like that. I...my mother and I basically, you know, we did house work and made things comfortable for the men in our family. There's so many times I said, "There's got to be a better life than this." And I couldn't date. I couldn't do anything that remotely resembled that. I...I'm choosing my words carefully. I wasn't the most popular person in the family. I was very independent, very self-strong. If you told me no, and I don't mean no in the moral sense, but if you said that I couldn't have something or I couldn't do something, I would find a way to do it. And to this day, that has served me well. And sometimes I get burned, but my brothers were more—they wouldn't take a step without asking my father, who was a very controlling, domineering person. And...he basically told us early on, and many times after that, "Don't you ever get in trouble. You'll ruin my reputation." And that's not what a child needs to hear. And so, needless to say, I spent one year in junior college and didn't do well at all, but I didn't know what else to do. And my mother had been on my back for about three years, "Well, if I were in your shoes I'd join the military, and I almost did when I was younger, but my brothers wouldn't let me." Well, I decided one day I'd had it. And that was the only way I was gonna get out of my home. So I dressed up in a nice dress and heels and walked four miles to town. Walked. Wanted to enlist in the Marine Corps,

but, oddly enough, like now, they're never in. They're always doing something else. But the Navy was in. And I said, "What can you tell me?" And they had already signed up their quota of women for recent intake, so I signed up in Au—in July, and didn't leave 'til October. And those were three of the longest months of my life. Because, you know, you're waiting to go, waiting to go. And it involved a couple train trips to Fargo to be tested...to basically find out if I was suitable for the military. And they said...I remember the one thing. I remember John Densely, he was the first class machinist mate—I don't remember the chief's name. He'll hate me if I... But he told me, "No two days are ever the same." And I thought, "That's marvelous." That's exactly what I'm looking for. And...

Howe: Unpack that a little bit... No two dates are ever the same?

Meter: No two days are ever the same in the military. There is always something different about every day. And that's true; at least it was in my job. And one of my friends said... I played a brief stint in a rock band—Davey B. and the Sonics—and our bass player said to me, he said, "I'd do it. I'd go in the military." He said, "Then they can't hold you back anymore. You can date a different guy every week if you want. You don't have to live that sheltered life anymore." And I thank him for that, to this day, because that was an uninvolved party, but he saw my potential, and saw that I wasn't going anywhere in Bismarck. And my recruiters needed my father's permission for me to go in. I was only 19. And they went in to his office. I came home, and I told him, and he called me a liar. He said, "You didn't do that." And I said, "Yes I did." And he says, "I'll believe it when I see it." Well, he believed it when two recruiters showed up in his law office with documents for him to sign. He never saw me off at the train. I took the train from Bismarck to Minneapolis. And there we met up with some other girls who were going in at the same time. And we stayed at the Pick Nicollet hotel, and the Twins were playing in the World Series, so it was a very rowdy experience. Not me personally, but there were a lot of rabble-rousers in the hall, if you will. And the next day we went down to the MEPS station, took our oath, and we were on a flight to Washington D.C., and then a bus to Bainbridge, Maryland—which is a base that's been closed for years. Was up near Port Deposit...and...

Howe: Real quick...

Meter: Yeah.

Howe: I'm gonna...I keep edging you back 'cause I feel that it pertains... You talk a little bit about the fact that one of the reasons you wanted to join the military was to expose yourself to opportunities you wouldn't necessarily have had if you'd stayed in North Dakota... And part of that being, and what I'm understanding is a familial—the dynamic of your family environment.

Meter: Yes.

Howe: But you also mention the fact that you're very close to Charles, your young—

Meter: Yes.

Howe: You're—

Meter: Older brother.

Howe: Right.

Meter: Yes.

Howe: So, I'm curious about that dynamic.

Meter: He got in a lot of trouble as a youngster. We lived south of Bismarck, and the nearest families to us were...it was the poor side of town, basically—even though we weren't poor. But my brothers, my youngest brother was six years younger, so it didn't affect him that much, 'cause he was just a toddler. But my older brother and I, those were the kids we played with—those were... There was a park—Kiwanis Park—that we went to frequently. There was a skating rink across the street; we hung around down there. But some of those boys, they came from abusive families. That's all I can say. They had fathers that drank and beat up on them and...where I grew up, Roman Catholics had a lot of children. Those were the days when... And so, they really didn't have good jobs to support all those children, so they were living just on a thread. And when they did discipline their kids, it was very harsh, and it made the boys very...rebellious, and they...some of them ran away from home. And to show you how poor it was, when I was in the second grade, about a third of my class got TB. And they went to place in North Dakota called Dunseith—which is a sanitarium...it's closed now. But...you know, there was a lot of...there was a public well down there where they drew water. There was no indoor plumbing, just poverty. They were our best friends though—the best friends you could ever have. But some of the boys were...they were mean. They were...they got my brother in a lot of trouble. And I remember one day when the police came to our front door, and we lived out at the city limits. And they said, "Mr. Thompson. We just picked up your son. They burned some picnic tables down out the park." And that's when my father made the decision to move us way out in the country, so that would no longer be a factor. And unfortunately for me, the church I loved—I was always a church-goer; I got that from my grandma. And...the friends I had, I never saw anymore. I'd see them in school, but we didn't walk home like we used to. We didn't share...you know, what girls do. You know, and those girls were poor too, but they were my friends, and they were the best friends. And when we moved out in the country, I lost my whole support network. And I'm just gonna clarify this, and then I

don't want to talk about it anymore: that almost every woman who joins the military as an enlisted woman, unless her parents were career military or something, is running away from something. Either...some kind of abuse, usually. When I went to basic training, all those girls, all of them had problems. And they never dealt with it. And it was sad. I remember they—just like Parris Island—they send you to basic. You get off the bus at night, and they give you a pillow and a blanket, and say, "Hit the rack." I didn't know what that meant. And then you're up at five the next morning, you know: coke bottle in the garbage can, all the lights on. And I didn't even know who were in the bunks around me. There were four bunks in my bay, you know; double bunks and four lockers. And three of the bunk mates I had were black. I had never seen black people. And it was...I thought...not a nightmare, but I thought I was in the Twilight Zone. And all this yelling and screaming, these women walking around. "Get out of that rack. You have so many minutes to do this and this." But I felt free. And when I walked out of that barracks, I felt like a yoke had been lifted from my shoulders. And I thought, "I may be in the military, and they're here telling me what to do, but basically we're on a level playing field. And I can do as well, or as badly, as I want to." And my father didn't believe in taking us to the dentist. My teeth were not great. And they said, "You need so much dental work that we're thinking of sending you home." And I literally broke down and cried. And I said, "You can't do that. Please. Please." You know, "I'll stay in. I promise I'll behave. Whatever it takes." And so they did my dental work, you know, some of it then, some of it later. And...it was...it was a close call. But I, I chose—I could've said, "Okay, send me home." And there were girls that did get homesick and left. And about half of our company either left or got set back because they couldn't keep up with the rigors of basic training. Ironically, our sister company upstairs was a Coast Guard Company of Spars, and that was only Company Two. They'd only been preceded by one company of Spars in WWII, and they were the second. And it got kind of interesting because if they got set back, they were in the Navy, not the Coast Guard. And then, later on, they would send them to wherever. I forget where it was, where their duty station was, but they only went to one duty station, whereas we got farmed out all over the place.

Howe: So, I'm gonna ask this one question, and then recruiting, basic training...you've already given us a lot of that, and we'll continue to focus on that... How did—and if you don't feel like answering...that's okay. How did Charles feel about you going away?

Meter: Well, by that time...by that time in our house, it was like...I was a deserter or something, you know, I... You know...and...I was told, you know, and my brothers followed my father's lead. And it's, "You'll never make it. You'll never graduate," and this and that. "In a few weeks, we'll see you home, dragging your tail between your legs." They made me feel awful. And when I did get to basic, I never talked to him, but when I got into corps school, in Great Lakes, I talked to my brother. And I said, "You know, you might

enjoy this, too." And he wound up in corps school in San Diego. And that's kind of by default because they needed so many corpsmen, because we're in the middle of the Vietnam War. So, I said, "Why don't you see if you can get stationed with me?" Now, I know I'm getting ahead of myself, but I had an experience that few people have—is to literally spend 6 months stationed with your brother. And when he left for Vietnam, he was a Second Class, I was Third because I was barred from taking the test for Second, because I had a run-in—which wasn't the first—with a Navy nurse. And she wrote up my proficiency report, which I never saw, never signed. And I had a bunch of three points, and they said, "Your proficiency scores are too low. You cannot take the test for promotion." And I was already sitting in the cafeteria with the paperwork in front of me. I'd studied for it. I could've made it. And I made it later—I made that rate. But my brother took it, and he made Second Class. But he worked in Security. He didn't work... he worked briefly on an orthopedic floor, but the Lieutenant security took a liking to him. He's a lot like my son. And decided that's who he wanted in his office. And so my brother—he worked like I did, you know, evenings, when we were on duty in the ER. And sometimes he worked for me because he was junior to me—even though he was the Second Class. I was the Petty Officer in Charge because of my time in, and because I was one of those people that could think on my feet, and I handled stress and trauma well. I'd go home and cry about it later and everything, but when it's going on I was your person. I thought clearly. I knew exactly what I had to do. And I got caught off a few times, but he would work with me in the ER. And...he later became an RN. And he just retired a few years ago. But, he was...a very sweet child. But he had some learning difficulties, and he failed a grade in school. And I felt badly about that because the teacher they had was just out of college and didn't know how to handle those boys from the south side. And she failed them all. And...one of those boys was Roy Wagner, and he died in Vietnam. And the AMVETS post in Bismarck is named for him. But my brother was a very nice...person. And it's funny—when he left home, those learning disabilities did not present themselves. And my father constantly made fun of him and teased him. And my younger brother was my father's favorite. And my older brother was kind of lost, and he didn't want to go to college, and he decided, "Well, I'm going to join the Navy before the draft comes and gets me." And my dad thought that was a cop-out because he was in the Army, and he thought my brother should be too. My father got drafted, too. You know, he—he tried everything. He got married. He had a child, my stepsister. But they still found him. And he had the most wonderful duty you could ever have. You know, he—he basically...my uncle went to the Pacific with the Army and suffered terribly from PTSD. He was a Master Sergeant. There was a lot of rift there between them. But my older brother, when he left for Vietnam, I got out October 8th, 1968—of Active Duty, and then I did 5 more years in the Reserves. And he left for Vietnam in November 'cause you got 30 days leave. And when he left he was in that Class A uniform—same as the Marines wear—and I just lost it because I knew my brother was in harm's way. He went to FMF School in San Diego, Camp Pendleton. And



then he went to Vietnam for a year. I wrote him every week. He didn't always write me back. And then he came back, but he had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I knew it. He would stay down in the basement with a space heater, laying on a rug with his possessions about him—reel-to-reel tape recorder and, you know, whatever—and sleep. He barely woke up even to eat. And my parents in their infinite wisdom—I'll never forgive them for it—kicked him out of the house. So he thought, well...his best friend from high school and I were down at Fargo, and so he came down there and moved in with his best friend from high school, enrolled in college and did not do well, [and] met his wife. And he was working for the highway department, but he wasn't making enough money for the state. And he took a job in a slaughter house—'cause a Hormel meatpacking plant was west of Fargo, and he worked there, and he would come at night 'cause his job, one of them was to mop the kill floor. And it...changed him. I mean, he was bad when he came back from Vietnam. He wanted to just party and drink and...like a lot of men do. But...when he got married, and the responsibility of the family just weighed on him. And...then my mother started having her problems, so they moved to Bismarck, and my father paid for a lot of their support and everything. He helped him build a house...different things, you know. Because my father, by that time, was pretty well to do. But I...went to college, got my bachelors, and taught two years in a small town in Western North Dakota. Talk about a fish out of water. It's the oil patch now. It's where all the oil is being fracked and whatever. But...I didn't belong there. I was a worldly woman in a small town. And I don't care how gothic people think small towns are; they're no place for a single woman. And I drank so much because I had PTSD too, from my trauma experience in the ER and, you know, my childhood and everything and...I didn't like my job. I liked the kids, but I didn't like the school, and I was there two years so I could get my full time certificate. And then I went to graduate school at Northwestern because I thought, "What is the most outrageous thing I can do?" And I had a friend going to grad school there. And she said, "Well, why don't you come down and join me?" And I went down, and I looked over the campus, and I said, "This is it. I'm home." And...but...Can I tell you a little bit about Beaufort Naval Hospital?

Howe: Yeah, I was actually...I was going to circle us back.

Meter: Yeah.

Howe: You mention your relationship with your brother and the closeness, and so I just wanted to bring that back to light, but I'm sure there will be more. So you...this yoke you talked about, you—you said while all this chaos is going on around you, the first day after you'd arrived in basic training you're getting a sense of relief.

Meter: Very much.

Howe: Yeah.

Meter: [...] And sometimes you get yourself—I shouldn't be talking—in compromising situations. And you know, I was lucky. I usually caught on real fast, but I was stationed with other girls who didn't. And I just feel bad because the military's not a dump for abused women; however, it is one answer. And for me...nobody was gonna pay money to send me to college. Nobody was gonna...My father just hoped I'd marry some farmer or rancher, and get out of his hair. You know, I—I sometimes, you know, look at it like, when I came home on leave and told him I was going to corps school, by that time, I'd accepted it. I was excited about it. And he said to my uncle—and they agreed, they were both very mean-spirited people—"Oh, you'll kill somebody and that'll be the end of that." It never happened. But it just...and when I came home from basic, it was so bad. I had two weeks of leave. I took three days, and went back. I got on the train and went to Great Lakes. I got off here at Union Station. And I remember running my suitcases across the street to what is now the Metra station, and taking the train to Great Lakes. And I was in uniform. And when I was on the train, some people thought I was a train attendant or a stewardess or something, and they were asking me to get them water and stuff. I said, "No. I'm in the military." And I loved Great Lakes. It was special. You know, it was exciting. The hospital was at that time was only a few years old—it is now demolished—but, you know, it was a fun place. And it was...I was there... I'd gotten there in December and left in May. So I was there during the winter. I got pneumonia, but was given antibiotics to get over it. A lot of people did—because we were so close to the lake—and particularly the women, we had to wear dresses all the time. And these little plastic overshoes, standing on D Street in formation. And the guys, they were there in their wool jumpers, and everything, with long underwear on and everything, and we were freezing, you know, and just...But I totally loved it. I liked the classes. I liked the instructors. I couldn't wait to get my orders. I had met someone within the first two weeks I was there, and because I came back too early, I couldn't be placed in a company. It was over the Christmas holidays when bases go on skeleton staff. And so they had me working for different officers, bringing them coffee and...

Meter: And when I finally did get assigned to a company, we lived in a barracks which was over by a bridge that went over to main side at Great Lakes...and it was just...there were sailors everywhere. There was clubs, you know. And places we called gee-dunks. They were like canteens. You know, and where we could have a pizza, and, you know, whatever. And just...it was just fantastic. And the last 2 weeks, we spent at Naval Hospital working on the floors to prepare us for our duty stations. And because I met someone in the first two weeks I was there, I wanted to be close to him. And he had left because he was ready to graduate. And he was in Charleston. I kept putting in for Charleston. Charleston. Because I had such good grades, they looked at my dream sheet, and they said, "Aren't you gonna ask for anything else?" I said, "No." So I didn't

get Charleston; I got Beaufort. Who in the devil knew where that was? And later on, my so-called boyfriend went to Vietnam, and...but before he went he got married and failed to tell me. But when I took the bus from Charleston to Beaufort, I got out at the Marine Corps Air Station thinking, "This is it. This is the base." These Marines were there. I didn't see a sailor in sight. And they said, "Well, what are you doing here?" "Well, here's my orders." And they looked at them, and they didn't look to see where I was stationed. They said, "Well, we have no billets for women." And they didn't. They had no active duty women at that base at that time. And then, somebody took a closer look and said, "I'll get you a duty driver. You're at Naval Hospital." So I arrived at Naval Hospital, and...all I can say is: if you have to be stationed anywhere in the military, Beaufort's a wonderful duty station. Not totally from a work perspective, but it is 40 miles north of Hilton Head. 72 miles south of Charleston and Fort—about 50 miles north of S—or...north of Savannah. And Parris Island was the other base that was near us. And in my off hours, people would invite me into their homes. And I could—one man, out of gratitude for something I did for him, gave me the keys to his beach house on Fripp Island. And I would stay out there with some of my friends. It was right on the beach. It was wonderful. Whenever he wasn't there. And people were very accepting of me. I got extremely energized by the climate, and the...there were some drawbacks. Like they had the biggest bugs I'd ever seen, and at one time we did have rats in our barracks, but that was a lot of my...people's fault—that left food laying around. But...it was paradise to me. It was, you know, the old south with the Spanish moss. And yeah, there were some nights in the ER where I said, you know, I would give anything to get out of this place—because they worked us so hard. We worked...there was a time there when the war started in Israel—a seven day war. And they needed some corpsmen, so they air EVAC'd them out. And all of a sudden, we're half-staff. And we spend 16 hours on, 8 hours off. For six weeks. I almost died. I was so tired and sleep deprived...I...I just didn't care anymore. We had a lot of corpsmen that got—'cause in those days, you could get into med lockers, no problem, you know, and help yourself to just about anything—except the narcotics, and the nurses took care of those. But...I just thought, "I'm not gonna do that. I'm gonna wait this out. I'm gonna see what happens." Because obviously the 8 hours you have, you're gonna spend sleeping, but you don't get the full 8 hours. Because part of that is muster, and part of that is giving report before you go home. And I was working ER...and people think of ER...like it's all trauma. A lot of its people that didn't want to wait for clinic during the day, so you had tons of pediatric patients, and then you've got your real problems with domestic violence, car accidents, just...bar fights. You know where you have Marines, you have bar fights. [Laughs]. It's just...you know, sailors are lovers, Marines are fighters. And one night I was working ER, and they brought in a whole bunch of Marines, and they were all drunk and everything. And they were tearing the exam rooms apart and...you gotta understand, in a station the size of Beaufort Naval Hospital, your on-call physician, your on-duty physician, is often not a real doctor. They are pathologists, or radiologists or

dermatologists. They have no experience at all in trauma. We didn't have those physicians. If you were lucky, you got a medical doctor in there. The surgeons weren't on-call in the ER because if we needed them, we called them, and then took the patients up to the OR, and then they operated on them up there. So they were on a different schedule. The OB/GYNs were up in Labor and Delivery. They were...so...most of the responsibility fell on the corpsmen. And we did things that you couldn't do in a private hospital: we sutured, we started IV's, we drew blood gases, we put drains in. We... And sometimes you have to do the hard thing, and that's hold that patient that you know is gonna die. And it's the same way I feel about my pets now. The last thing I want that person or pet to see is my face. No body should die alone. And I saw many people die: old, young. I saw a child beat to death with a tablespoon...literally caved in the child's head because the child was making a fuss at dinner and her father—and when they brought her in, they said that she fell out of a swing. But there were all these oval marks all over her body. But she'd had previous encounters...with...physical abuse. Because the old x-rays showed that she'd had broken bones, and face lacerations, and... And then, you know, we had a child come in one night that had a hundred and five fever, and I said—first thing I did was take her to the back, and... What'd you do in those days? You, you put them in a deep sink full of ice, and give them some Tylenol to bring down their fever. And the pediatrician we called came in, and he was furious, and I don't blame him, you know. But this was what we did because we didn't often have someone we could call on. You just used your best judgment, and went with it. And he said, "Set up for a spinal tap." So we did. And...you know, you, you put them in fetal position, put the needle in the spine, and there's a gauge like this [gesturing]...and you can tell the pressure of the spinal fluid. And then he says, "I want some to go to lab." But I looked in the tube and it was all white—it was milk white—because there were so many white cells. The child had gotten meningitis. Her parents were on vacation, and they wouldn't go to a civilian hospital because they couldn't afford it. So they brought her back to Beaufort. And she'd been sick for four days and she died. And I felt so bad. I felt bad for them. I felt bad for us because when you live in the south you see things that are so different from up here. Girls getting married when they're 12 and 13 years old, and having babies and they don't know how to take care of them. I had to tell a young lady, at a doctor's request, "Go show this woman how to give her baby a bath." She'd had the baby home 7 weeks and never bathed it. There was mold growing in her little body folds. She didn't know anything. She was out of the back woods of somewhere. And...there were just...there were funny things that happened, too. Because I'm looking at your face right now... We had a Marine come in one night and...just totally bombed. And I always wonder, "Why do they come here? Why don't they go to the dispensaries at the base?" Well, he had a toothache. And they had no dentists on call at Parris Island, so he thought he'd come to us. We didn't either. We had one dentist on the whole base. And it was hurting him...his tooth was. So... [Laughing]...they, they told him, you know, "Wait 'til sick call in the morning, and then go see a dentist." "Well, I

can't... Give me some pain killers or something." "Well...here, let me have a look at it." And he says, "Ah, doc. I really appreciate this." And he says, "I'm sorry. I just ate a garlic pizza and didn't brush my teeth." And the corpsman says, "I just went to the bathroom and didn't wash my hands." [Laughs]. And there was another one where... Yah, I mean that—hilarious things, you know, where you just, you... Sometimes our ambulance called. We had to go out. I did that, too. And we had to go out. And if it was a female, they needed a female attendant, and...all I can say is: if you've never fought a battle in the back of an ambulance with a psychotic female in a negligee and nothing else, you haven't lived. You know, by the time I got back to the hospital, I was in worse condition than she was, you know. And it was just, you know, it...and...but the thing is, you can laugh about things like that because those are the things that get you through the trauma. You know, the woman that comes in barely standing with a groove in her head from here her husband hit her over the head with a baseball bat, and she later died. You know, or the woman who has 12 children, and doesn't want any more, and tries to give herself an abortion. You know, and you're just standing there, you know, as the woman's laying on the table, you know, and all the blood and everything. And it's just horrible. It's just horrible. And nothing prepares you for that. The car accidents; we didn't go out and get those people. The funeral homes had a hot wire to our two-way radio. And if they heard a call go out, the funeral homes would go out in the [hearses], and go out and literally pick the patients, throw them in the back of the hearse, and bring them in. And so sometimes, we were just sitting there, we were probably drinking a Coke or something, and wondering...looking at the time...and you'd hear the ambulance coming or the funeral home, you know, and we're like—you got no warning, and all of a sudden: BINGO. There, you know, there were people in there, and with broken arms, broken legs. You know, gashes. And, you—you're just like "Can't you guys give us a heads up, at least?" But by the time we authorized an ambulance to go from our base to the wait was so long—the paperwork and everything—that we were kind of happy that they did that. Because I remember going out one night, and going after a dead body. There was a boating accident in the Beaufort harbor. And we only took care of Active Duty and veterans...and they determined this person had been on Active Duty...was drinking. Ran into a dock or something, and got ejected from the boat. And was dead. And they knew that, the other guys that were with him. And it was about 10 o'clock at night, and here I am in my little light blue uniform and my little [waist] shoes and...you know, my nylons and everything, sloshing this deep in swamp water to fish this guy out of the water. Stinky because it was low tide. You know, so you had to go through all of the pluff, the mud, to get to it. And I got back to the hospital, and I said, "Can I at least go back to the barracks and change clothes because I'm a mess?" And they said, "Well, just finish out the next hour, and then you'll be off." So, next hour I was treating people with a muddy, bloody uniform on, and shoes that smelled like I'd been walking around in a cow barn or something. But like I said, there were, there were all kinds of... And of course some of the corpsmen, they have this

weird sense of humor, and they kept us entertained. You know [laughing]. They did. They...we had a... we had a...epidemic of...they call them crabs now, but they're pubic lice. And we'd had all these women and men coming in, and it was like, you know... And you get in there with the tweezers, look at it under the microscope, and they look like little crabs, you know. And they bite! And we were just like, you know, "Oh my gosh!" You know, and had the gloves on, and you're trying not to embarrass the patient, but you're like, "Okay now we need a name of every person you've been with so we can get them in. Treat them!" You know? And you know, but there were good things we did when we were off duty. A bunch of us would go to some of the outlying islands—which were inhabited by native Gullahs—who were from African—who had escaped the plantations, and still spoke, pretty much, their African language, or a variation of it. But the problem was, they were isolated. They had TB, diabetes that was never treated. And there were a group of doctors and corpsmen that loved these people, 'cause we had a few employed in the hospital. And we'd go out there and take stool samples, and things that—intestinal parasites were just horrible. And they were so kind. They were the gentlest, sweetest people I have ever met. They were...there was a kind of naivety to them...a sweetness to them. And they appreciated everything you did for them. And they all looked forward to the next time you came out, you know, because we would bring out little candy for the kids and things like that, and...and it was like going to Africa. It must be what like what these doctors are doing that are going over there to treat Ebola or something, only this wasn't as bad. But when you see so many blind people, and people who died from gangrene because of diabetes that was treatable, you know. It was a shame. And Hilton Head at that time. The real wealthy people lived on the east side of the island facing the ocean. But on the back side of the island were some of the poorest people in South Carolina. And when I left, I was so sad. I wanted to stay, but I couldn't find work. There was only one civilian hospital, and they hired one of our OR techs, but they didn't hire—'cause almost no one wanted to stay, but I was one of the weird ones. I liked it there. I've been back twice since. But...

Howe: You're... Okay, so your official rating was Hospital Corpsman, HM. Your specialty was in the ER, so...

Meter: No.

Howe: Okay.

Meter: We were just all general duty corpsmen, and...I was just telling my son...I wanted to go to pharmacy B school because I was good at it. And they said, "No. You'll just get pregnant and waste the Navy some money." [Laughs]. So they wouldn't send me. And so I—I, they were just—we were general duty corpsmen. And then if you went to Vietnam, you went to FMF school, and then you were an FMF corpsman. But we were just general duty. And during the day, during the week, I worked in clinics. I worked in

pediatrics, OB/GYN. I worked in walk-in clinic, which is a nightmare. But I found my niche in a general medical clinic with dermatology, you know, with the dermatologist. And that was my space. That was...I cared for that space. I made sure everything was just so. And I took great pride in my work. And we had drafted doctors, for the most part. And some of them were pretty good looking, but all of them were married. And on the Plan of the Day—I don't know if you're familiar with that—which goes on the bulletin boards around the hospital. It would say what the movie was that was showing, what the uniform of the day was, Officer of the Day, Medical Officer of the Day. And these women [laughs] would be there for something else, and they'd check out the Plan of the Day to see who the Officer was. And if it was a good-looking doctor, we would get swamped! And all of a sudden, a sore throat turned into a pelvic exam. And these doctors were so naive, and I said, "These women are giving you the business." And I remember our pathologist—who was this big, fat 350 pound guy—and he walked into the ER one night, 'cause he switched with one of our good-looking medical doctors. And he walked into the ER, and he says, "We will be giving no social pelvics tonight." And what they tried to do was drive as many patients out of there as they could without seeing them. So he'd go, "I want you to know, you're the first live patients I've seen all month." Or the radiologist, he'd walk in and he'd say, "I've been reading x-rays all month, so this is the first time I'll get to see a real person." And that'd clear them out, too. You know, unless there was something seriously wrong. And we always had a rule: if somebody came in with children, you always saw them. I don't care if it was a pimple, or what it was, because you never want a parent to think that they can't bring their children in to see the doctor. Because that child cannot make their own decision or get there by themselves, so we always treated the children, no matter how small, how insignificant. You know, and we did a lot of suturing. You know, they fall out of swings, and run into things, and fall down. A lot of sutures to the scalp, and, you know. It was just...it was kind of a cool place. We were all very close. We were like family. And...we had a rule about fraternization with doctors or officers and enlisted... [Laughs]. Ha! You know, I babysat for officer's kids, you know. And we went out, played golf with doctors, and...chaplains and whatever... That's another thing, too. I was a chaplain...chapel organist at both Beaufort Naval Hospital and Weapons Battalion Parris Island. And the duty driver would come over from PI and pick me up, take me over there. I'd be the only woman in a room with I don't know how many DI's, and three-thousand recruits because they were gettin' ready to go to Vietnam. And all these little bald headed boys, you know, and you wonder in your mind, "How many of you are gonna come back?" You know, it's—it's food for thought. But I kept pretty grounded, you know. But I wrote in my...in the paperwork you sent me. I didn't get along real well with most of the women I worked with because I was raised around men and brothers. And our hospital was the place where old nurses went to retire. So we had a lot—they called it Menopause manor. And we did have a few younger nurses, but we also had women that were homosexuals, and most of them didn't bother us, you know. But you

had the occasional ones who would start hitting on you, and making your life miserable. And the only time I got NJP'd in the military was: I'd come home from working in the ER, and when you did that you were on-call the rest of the night 'til 7 am the next morning. So you had to sleep in the duty room, so if they needed you back there you could answer the phone in the duty room and call. And I walked into the duty room, and here was one of these—how can I say it politely?—one of these butchy-type women waiting for me. And she says, "Get your clothes off and get into bed." And I said, "No." I said I was tired, I said—and her room is right across the hall. There's no reason for her to be in there. And she said, "Just do what I tell you." I said, "I'd rather die first." And so I went out on the quarter deck in the barracks, called the master-at-arms, and I said, "If you need me, ring the phone on the Quarter Deck. I'm a light sleeper. I'll keep my door open. I'll hear you." Well, I got written up. I had to wash walls for 2 weeks. I had to muster in uniform every 4 hours, unless I was on duty or at work. And...I didn't get a good conduct medal because it was so close to my date of discharge.

Howe: So, NJP is Non-Judicial Punishment.

Meter: Mmm Hm.

Howe: And you...what was the—what was the infraction?

Meter: The infraction was failure to obey a lawful order.

Howe: What was the order that—?

Meter: That I had to sleep in the duty room.

Howe: Oh.

Meter: And I—I refused because, you know, there was only one bed.

Howe: Right.

Meter: And I wasn't gettin' into bed with that woman. It was just—

Howe: So, did she write you up?

Meter: Oh yeah. And she said that—and the way she wrote it up...she said I didn't sleep in the duty room that night when I should have. She never told them what really happened. And she and the WAVE rep, who was an officer, and another second class—I was a third class at the time—kind of all hung around together, and, you know. And...I was so angry, and so were the rest of the women I worked with over this, that we went to the head nurse, and we said, "Unless you get rid of her, we're leaving. We're either goin' AWOL, or we're gonna get pregnant, or we're gonna do something. But we're not working with her anymore." She had orders in 10 days. She went to New Orleans. But I



still got nailed, you know, and that was on my permanent record. And I said, you know, "Okay. That's okay." You know, because when I, I worked for the state for 10 years as Veteran Service Officer, and they used to always ask me in Springfield, "What, no good conduct medal?" And I said, "Oh," I said, "There were so many people getting out they just forgot to put it on my DD-214." But I knew why, and that was why. And...

Howe: I just—I just have to note...you had every right to say something, and you didn't.

Meter: What do you mean? Then or now?

Howe: Then.

Meter: Who would I go to? The only person that I could've gone to was the WAVE rep—they called us WAVES. And she was a Lieutenant, and she was best friends with these women. She signed the document. I told her what happened. And she didn't care. And...so, I—I just—I just thought, well, "Chalk one up." When you get in the military, sometimes you have to pick your battles, and with her...eh. But I thought, you know, "There's a way I'm gonna get even." And I did. I got that woman transferred out of there. And...nobody liked her. She, she...I had...I volunteered to take a patient I'd known since I'd gotten there to the hospital in Charleston for an EEG because she was dy—in end stage cirrhosis of the liver from alcoholism, and...but...we loved her. And I volunteered to be the attendant in the ambulance. Took her up to Charleston for an EEG, 'cause she had fallen out of bed in our ICU. Someone didn't put the side rail up, and she rolled out on the floor and got a concussion. And because of her medical condition, the doctors wouldn't see her because she was very jaundiced and everything, and... So they said, "Well, take her back where you got her." And I—I felt so bad for her. I was crying. I said, "I can't believe they wouldn't even admit her." So we took her back in the ambulance. I clipped the gurney to the back of the ambulance, and it was pouring rain like it does down there. The roads were slippery, and there were two corpsmen in the front of the ambulance: the driver and another attendant. And they were both just reported from Vietnam. And I was glad they were with me because I knew if she started dying, you know, I had limitations because we didn't carry meds, or IV's, or...anything, you know, like we have now. And sure enough this...[laughing]...guys driving—he had these huge feet. They were about 15—size 15 shoes—and he got them caught between the box in the ambulance where the ambulance was and the accelerator. And all of a sudden, we're driving down the road—like 80 miles an hour—on this 2 lane road. And he hit a spot, and they have soft shoulders there because there's swamps all around. And the ambulance did one of these. And we finally got the ambulance stopped, and I remember he opened the glass, and he said, "Are you okay back there?" And I said, "No...I think my patient has expired." And she had. It was kind of a blessing in a way, but I got back to the hospital, and this woman, she was working the ER that night. She said, "You let that woman die... We send her up there, she was in perfectly good health." I

said, "One thing—she wasn't, wasn't in perfectly good health." And I said, "I loved that woman." And I said, "Her daughters were my friends." And I said, "I feel awful." And she said, she...I was walking out of the ER 'cause I wasn't on duty. I was in uniform. She says, "There's our killer." She said, "She killed a patient tonight." I was just—and I went into the stairwell around the corner, and I just sat and cried. I was so upset, you know. We'd been away from the hospital maybe 4 or 5 hours, and her brain wave was dead—I later found out—which is why they didn't admit her. But...nobody liked her. And the day she left was a Saturday, and all these people lined up on the hospital steps, and they just..."Get outta here!" "We hate you! We hope they like you better your next duty station." You know, and she drove away in her little Chevy, and we were rid of her. My brother was one of those that stood there and cheered.

Howe: One second... I'm noticing that your...your sweater keeps drifting...There you go.

Meter: There we go.

Howe: Six months...with Charles. First of all, just as a quick reference, when did you get to Beaufort?

Meter: May of 1966.

Howe: Okay.

Meter: I don't remember the exact date, 'cause you graduate. They put you on a plane to your duty station.

Howe: So...when did...when did Charles get stationed there?

Meter: Well, let's see. I'll have to count backwards. He came in April of '68 and we had been on leave together. And the reason—I had leave coming out of corps school, but I didn't take it. I just got on a plane, went to see my boyfriend in Charleston, and then got on the bus and went to Beaufort. And when I found out, you know, that my brother was coming, 'cause he applied for orders there—which is very rare because San Diego corpsmen don't go to East Coast duty stations, as a rule. And...I was just so happy he was there, and he worked on SOQ. And, ironically, I wound up as a patient there. I got the measles working in ped's clinic.

Howe: SOQ is what?

Meter: Sick Officer's Quarters, and was also where the women were patients. And I remember him coming in with the thermometer—holding it like this—to take my temperature. He was such a clown, you know. And then, after he finished his duty on the wards, and then he went down worked on orthopedic. And he had knee surgery, 'cause he—high school football player that wrecked his knees. Familiar story. And he had both knees

operated on, and after that, they didn't want him on the wards anymore, 'cause it was too hard on his knees... So they sent him [laughs] later on to Vietnam, but he went to work with the Security Officer. And Lieutenant Greene just loved him. He hated me, but he loved my brother. [Laughs]. And one time, somebody got—climbed the water tower, and painted, "The Navy Sucks" on the water tower. And I got called into the office and I said, "I'm afraid of heights. Why are you calling me?" And they said, "Because you know everything. Everybody confides in you. Who did it?" I didn't know. I didn't know. And I said, "Well..." "It's gonna cost us \$800 dollars to get somebody up there to repaint that." And then they yelled at a bunch of officers that were out there taking pictures of it. [Laughs]. Ha. Doctors. They were like MASH doctors. They were so funny. You know, they were about as military as hell and all...but...you know. But my brother worked in Security, and then he got his orders for Vietnam. And that was...I—by the time he left, I was already out of the military. Saddest day of my life. One of them. And then my second saddest is when my son went overseas. You know, I left in the same identical uniform—that classic khaki green. But...what else do you wanna know?

Howe: Where were you the day that the Apollo 11 landed on the moon?

Meter: I was working in the ER. I was on a TAD actually, and I was working ER at Great Lakes. Because summers, I could either go to summer school or go home. Going home was not an option. And so I'd signed up for the reserves, so I decided, you know, I'd take two—my two active duties back to back for each year because I came in right on the cusp of 19...I forget what year that was. '70? No, 69. And...[laughs]...I was working in the ER, and we were taking in wounded in choppers from Vietnam, and also ambulatory wounded on buses. They'd land at Glenview, and then bring them in by helicopter to Naval Hospital Great Lakes. That whole area now, which is a big loading dock, or used to be—I keep forgetting they tore it down—was a landing heli-pad. And...I wasn't supposed to be there, in the ER. I was supposed to be working on the wards. And I said, "No." I hadn't worked wards in years. I said, "Either send me to a clinic or something like that, or..." I said, you know, "I'll do anything, but I'm not going to the wards." So they sa—I—they said, "Where do you want to work?" I said, "I wanna work ER. It's what I know." They said, "Well, nobody works in the ER except FMF corpsmen." And I said, "Well, then I'll be a first." Because I said, "In Beaufort, we all worked ER." I was the first enlisted woman to work in that ER. And I had to have the 'okay' from all the other corpsmen that worked in there to make sure it was okay. And they all said, "Oh, yes. Not a problem." And so I did four weeks. And when the Apollo landed on the moon, we were picking people off choppers, and they were landing on the moon. They were watching it in the Nursing Station there. But we were sucking out trachs and, you know, getting people ready to go to the OR. It was a big operation. We'd s—I'd be with the doctors and the chaplains running out to meet the helicopters as they landed because

they were the most critically wounded. And some of these guys, they'd look up at me and they'd say, "Round eyes." I said, you know, the first time, I asked, "What's that mean?" They said, "All we've seen is oriental women since we left country." And they said, "Round eyes. I know I'm home." And it was sad because some of those guys...the... Now I'm gonna cry. They said, "Well, we're gonna set it up so you can see your family and everything." They tried to move you to the hospital closest to your family. And some of them didn't want to see their family. They didn't want to see—their girlfriends to see them shot up and mangled. I have a friend, Rick Eilert, who wrote a book *For Self And Country*, about that experience at Great Lakes; what it's like to be a patient there. And if he's still alive you guys should have him here someday. He's a wonderful human being. I met him once. He brought me his book. I learned about him, actually, from Al Lynch. But...these...and some of these women—the wives or girlfriends—walking the floor, and they'd see these guys and they'd say, "I can't put up with this. I can't do this. I can't take care of a cripple the rest of my life. I didn't know it was this bad." And other people would go home and they'd be together for a while. And I don't know whose fault it was. Sometimes it was the guy's fault because they were just so defensive and angry and everything that they drove those women away. But a lot of those women...no. They're like, "We're gettin' a divorce," as they walked out the door to the ward. And I...felt that..."Don't do this now...Wait 'til that person gets...on their feet. Give them something to live for." You know, "Don't do this to them." And we loved those patients. They were like our babies, you know, we knew them so well. And...some of those guys were burned. You know, they, they were amputees. There was a Medal of Honor recipient not too long ago, Kyle Carpenter, who was a Marine. And I saw that guy, and I thought, "You remind me so much of those Vietnam veterans that came back...that either, they got hit by white phosphorous, or they got hit by a landmine, or stepped on a land—Blew their face up. You know, burned them. And I agree, some of those guys look grotesque, but, my God, there's still a human being inside of that mangled body, you know, and how can you do that? And you know, it's funny how they all help each other out. You know, they'd be passing trays on the floor, and, you know, you get an idiot in there once in a while—like we did one night at Beaufort yell, "Incoming!" on an ortho ward, and everybody bailed out of bed on the floor and spend the rest of the night in surgery, and hooking them back up to their traction and everything...and...you know. The guy said he didn't mean to do it, but I'm pretty sure he did. But, these poor...I—I sometimes, and I swear to God, there are worse things than dying. Much worse things. You know, and...we saw it all. You know, and these, these sweet, young, you know, most of them were Marines that just...I don't—Some of them never had any visitors. Either because they didn't want them to, or their families lived too far away, or they didn't want to see them. Or they had not made peace with the family before they left for country. And...you had your protestors outside the base. They were out there with their signs and everything, and that's before the base was as secure as it is now. You know...

Howe: You had that up at Great Lakes?

Meter: Yes. And, we'd try to...you know, the MP's or SP's would try to drive them out of there. They'd be right back. They'd say, you know—and that's when Sheridan Road got moved. [Laughs]. It used to pass right in front of the base, and now it doesn't. It's—there's like a loop or a bypass...and...they don't do that anymore because there's really no place for them to congregate like there used to be. And I don't think anybody's protesting now...but, yeah. We had that to deal with, too. You know...

Howe: What was it like for you going to work everyday in that environment?

Meter: I never really thought about it because I loved the people I worked with. And we were so tight and so close, and everything was a team effort. And you loved being part of the team. And you knew when you left, you didn't have your team any more. It was just you all by yourself again. And I'd go back to college, and I'd think about it. And in the summer of 1971, I did an Active Duty all summer. Boy that was some—I... [Laughs]. And this is an amusing anecdote. I had received my degree by then. I had my Bachelors. So they assigned me to a Naval Reserve Captain in Head Quarters at Great Lakes, and basically I was a clerk typist. I was angry. Very angry. I wanted to work in a hospital. I wanted to be on the hospital side. And he treated me like his personal property. He was the biggest jerk I'd ever worked for. And...it just...you think "Head Quarters. Great Lakes. Wow! Ninth Naval District." And finally, I was walking—I was going down the hall one day and I ran into the district dental officer for the 9th Naval District, a captain. And he put his arm around me and he said, "Honey, you don't have to work for him anymore. You're comin' to work for me." And he said, "Not only will you not have to do any work," but he said, "You can study your correspondence courses—" 'Cause I was trying to get an officer rating at that time. And he said, "You get a half day off a week," and he said, "You probably will still be on the duty schedule." I think I had duty twice while I was there. And he said, "But you're mine now." And the picture, I don't know if you have my pictures, the one of me in the light blue uniform, it's taken in his office. He took that picture. And the mate to that picture is in the Women's Memorial in Washington. And while I was there, I was on duty one night, and there was this, I think he was a commander, and he was just awful. Absolutely awful. He, he just—he had no respect for enlisted people. This was during the Zumwalt era. And one of the interesting things that happened was: I was over there one Saturday, and all these lawyers—they were up on the 2nd floor, JAG attorneys—were lined up. And the Executive Officer of the base told them they had to shave their beards, and mustaches, and sideburns—which Zumwalt said you could have. And they said, "We're not doin' it." And they said, "You had no legal precedence for this." Well, this XO was just...all hardcore and everything. And it was absolutely amusing. You know, well, that was the only time he yelled at muster...of all those attorneys. But I was down at duty one night with this commander. And some of the things we had to do was turn down the chimes

on the bell tower so they wouldn't wake up people in the neighboring residential areas. And...we also had colors, you know. We'd put the recording on for colors. And what—I was just sitting there. I was making an entry in the log. And all of a sudden this janitor, this black janitor, came down the stairs from the admiral's office down to the Quarter Deck. And he saw me, and he goes, "Miss Thompson. Miss Thompson. We got a problem!" And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "There's a door open up here." Now I'd worked in this building all this time, and I'd never been upstairs in that area. And I said, "What do you mean, we have a problem. Close the door and lock it." "Oh, Miss Thompson. You gotta come up here. This is bad." Well, I went up. We walked through the admiral's office. Admiral at the time happened to be on medical leave, so he wasn't even around. But the civil service workers that worked there had forgotten to close the vault for all the secrets in it for the 9th Naval District [laughs]. So, we had to call the XO, plus a bunch of intelligence personnel, and they had to inventory the entire contents of that vault. Took them the entire night. You know, that's, that's just one of the goofy things that happens, you know. You think, "Oooh. Head Quarters." And I'm like, "Yeah, I worked there." You know. And everybody tells you—"Oh, everybody that worked for the admiral, you know, is only because they were good looking or something." I said, "Please..." You know, but...no, it was, it was something. And I saw 2 officers get into an argument one day. There was a—the big seal of the 9th Naval District with these 50 cal shells and the ropes around it. [Laughs]. They got in an argument about something—I don't remember what. But I thought they were gonna come to fisticuffs right there, until somebody called the Shore Patrol, said, "Separate these guys and get them back to their corners because this is awful." You know, and fortunately, there were no visitors around there. But after I got out...and many years later...I was missing it. And...I—somebody said, "You should become a veteran's service officer." And I said, "Okay." And I applied for the job and I didn't get it. They gave it to a disabled vet in Woodstock. Well, the senator, the state senator that recommended me for it said, "She's good. She's knowledgeable, and you're gonna hire her." You don't get away with that these days. And he's deceased, unfortunately. He was a good person. But, I didn't like it in Woodstock. I couldn't get along with my co-worker. You know, he was always making fun of sailors, and this and that. And I said, "If it weren't for Navy corpsmen, I wouldn't be puttin' up with you right now." Because he got wounded in Viet Nam. Most Marines have tremendous respect for the corpsmen. So I got a transfer temporarily to North Chicago VA—which is where I always wanted to work, even though it was a great drive. And I was there for over 10 years, and I loved it. I loved every day of it. But there was a problem. I was in a federal facility, and I worked in a state job. And I was the only state employee there. And there some memorandums came down that governor Blagojevich wanted his campaign posters in our offices and his literature. I said, "You can't do that." That's against the law. You know, and I told my supervisor that. And all the other people did it any way, you know, just to keep peace in the family. I went upstairs, and I talked to their lawyer, and he said, "No. You're not

allowed to do that." He later denied he said that, but needless to say, one of the deputy directors came in one day and said, "Where are those posters?" And I said, "I can't put those up here. This is a federal facility. You can't put them up in a state facility." She didn't say anything. And then about...December...I got a UPS package. I always took three Fridays off in December to get ready for Christmas, and I thought it was an early Christmas present. [Laughs]. It was anything but. It was charges. And they said, "You have a meeting at the Thompson Center on Monday morning at 10 o'clock am." Here it is, it's 2 o'clock on a Friday afternoon. Where am I gonna get a union rep, 'cause we were union. And...I found one, and he said, "I've heard there are some problems in your agency." So, he came. And he met me at the Thompson Center, and we went over our game plan there. I hadn't eaten all weekend. I was so...I was so devastated by this. I had never been written up. I had never been late. I had never done anything wrong. And...anyway, we had our little hearing. And he said, "I think you're good." He said, "I don't think anything's gonna come of this." And sure enough, they waited to the 89th day, and I'm sitting in my office in North Chicago. My supervisor calls me, he says—it's a Wednesday—he says, "What are you doing in the office?" I said, "What do you mean? I didn't call in sick." He says, "You've been suspended for 2 weeks." And they didn't even run it by the union. They just fired it off to me via UPS, except UPS didn't deliver that day. And, he said, "Lock the door behind you. And I will see you a week from next Monday." I cried the whole way home. I was so devastated. I just—I mean, this had... nothing like this had ever happened to me. So I went, I went back that Monday, and the following day, my supervisor called me. I worked 'til 4. He called me at 5 minutes after 4, 'cause I looked at the clock and I thought, "I'm still in the office, somebody needs me. I'll answer the phone." And it was him. And I said, "What are you doing? Checking up to see am I still here?" I said, "I could have gone home 5 minutes ago." And he said something to me, and I said, "Fine. I'm giving you my 90 days notice." 'Cause I wanted—it takes a lot of time to replace a service officer because of all the training and everything. And he said, "I have no paperwork to that effect." And I said, "You helped me decide that right now." And...I was devastated. And even to this day, I miss the job. I miss helping veterans. I miss doing what I do very, very well. I got people millions of dollars in benefits and payouts and, and...things that people thought were basically a done deal. And I figured out a way to get around 'em. See? That, that childhood thing. You know, don't tell me it can't be done. There's a way to do this. Now, granted I had people coming in that, that were, you know, wannabe's or fakers or whatever. You just kind of figure out who that is, and spend your required amount of time with them, and say, "Nice to see ya." But some of the other people—and there are a lot of grateful people walking around. And I still get phone calls once in a while at home. And I said, "I don't do that job anymore. And I can't advise you because you have to be bonded to be a service officer." But I miss it every single day. And I'm glad I don't have to drive all that way anymore. But my son, he was so mad when it happened. And he said, "But mom. You can look at yourself in the mirror everyday, and say 'I did the noble, right

thing.” And he said, “None of them can do that.” And it wasn’t that long after that, that the governor went to prison. And I told people. I called the state board of elections. I said, “There are things going on here that aren’t right.” What they tell me, “Oh, I’ve only got two years to retirement. I don’t wanna rock the boat.” I said, “That’s your job.” I don’t know if you wanna put that in there or not, but it’s different. But like I said, I worked for three different governors, and one of them I like a lot. Two of them, I didn’t like so much. But...I, basically, you do your job, and you do it well. And I did. And I said, “No matter what they say, my clients always know they got the best out of me.” They always knew that. And...you know, even when I go over there, I still see doctors over there. I’ll run in every once in a while to someone, and they’ll say, “Boy do we miss you.” And I said, “I miss you guys, too.”

Howe: I almost don’t wanna say anything.

Meter: What?

Howe: I almost don’t want to say anything after that.

Meter: Go ahead, I mean it’s...

Howe: Yeah. You’ve dealt with a lot of conflict... In the military, what was the greatest challenge that you faced?

Meter: The greatest challenge I faced was: somebody told me once, “Somebody’s gonna ask you someday to do something you know isn’t right, that you don’t wanna do, on moral grounds, but you’re gonna do it anyway because if you don’t do it, you’re gonna get into trouble.” And that was the hardest thing. Somebody would, you know—it didn’t happen often. But if somebody told me to do something I knew was either medically or morally wrong, I agonized over it. And sometimes they’d test me. You know, and I’d say, “I just...” Like the Marines say, “You just suck it up.” And you do it. And then, you complain. So they can’t accuse you of disobeying an order. And another conflict was: I took the test for Independent Duty on a ship—it was—I wasn’t supposed to. But the education chief at our hospital said, “Oh, let’s see how you do. Just for kicks.” I passed with flying colors. And he said, “Do you know, with the right training, you could be the only medical person on a destroyer or something?” I said, “I would like nothing better.” But that never came to fruition. And like I said, those kinds of doors were closed. And in a way, I was glad. I wouldn’t wanna be the only woman on a ship full of men. But...but like I said, it was the moral thing. And in my life, as a civilian, it’s the same thing. You know, and now I have the luxury of saying that’s morally wrong, and I won’t do it. But then I didn’t. And...I saw the, the effects of that. For instance, one day at Parris Island, one of the...they were flying the black flag—which means no heavy physical activity. No PT. Nothing. Because it’s so hot and so humid that there’s a risk of putting people’s lives in danger. And sure enough, this DI comes out there, and he’s got



these guys running, and all I can think is, “I—I don’t want to be here. I really don’t want to be here.” ‘Cause I was a corpsman out there, and sometimes, worked on the range. Sometimes, you know, we’d work out, you know, in different places. If there—if they thought there was gonna be problem, we’d be standing by in an ambulance. And the irony was that, yeah a few Marines went down, but the guy that got heat stroke was the DI. And we tried to revive him five times and we did, but that man had no brain left. And his wife came in to see him—imagine seeing your husband leave the house that morning, visiting him at the Naval Hospital that evening—he’s got the mind of a 5 year old, or worse. And we tried and tried to tell them. We told these guys, you know, at the air station—they had their rules, you know. You don’t change a tire on an aircraft while you’re smoking because it’s extremely hazardous. Sure enough, one night, get an ambulance in from the air station. Bring this guy in and his two severed hands. He was smoking, changing—and the tire blew up and took his hands off. And they had two OR teams: one for this arm, one for this arm. And I don’t know if he ever got the use of those arms back because once they leave the ER, we didn’t see them anymore, really—unless you saw them in the, in the galley or something. You know, but, no. But some of the great stuff too, was that we had plastic surgeons—one in particular that was so good—Doctor Lehman. Doctor Ross Lehman. I admired him so much. And he, he did not only our active military that’d been wounded, but he did cleft pallets on children and harelips and stuff, and took great pride. And one day I was working in surgical clinic, and we had a woman come in, and he asked me for this woman’s x-rays. And I put them up in the view box, and there were all of these little twisted wires. She’d been in a car accident, and literally smashed her face in. He went and put her face back together, and looking at her, you would never know it. He took a guy...lost his ear in a fire, and he, he put—took this piece of skin like this, sewed it to his stomach, and then later on when that piece of skin died, or near death of skin, he cut it off, and made an ear lobe for that man. I mean, this guy was amazing. I saw him, you know, perform miracles, and that’s how I got into doing needlecraft and things, because we started having contests. You know, who could suture the best. Who could get those stitches so close together there wouldn’t be a scar afterwards. And he was the best. He was the best. We had an ortho guy that was just the best, too. And a general surgeon, doctor Flynn, who was an admiral later on, and came—retired out of the Navy. But we had some fine doctors, and when people get upset, and they talk about socialized medicine or something—not in favor or opposed—but they say, “Oh, you want us to look like military hospitals—the VA?” And I said, “Let me tell you something, in a military hospital, our standards were so high that we did not have carpet anywhere in that building, because you couldn’t see the dirt.” Those floors were spotless all the time. There was no dust. No dirt. You know, unless somebody brought it in with them. But we gave good care. We took, you know, like you measure twice and cut once. Well, we draw up twice, and then give the injection. Because we wanted to make sure it was exactly right. And you had two people that delivered the meds, you know: one to make

sure it was the right patient, one to give them the medicine. You know, I said, and when I was up at the VA, where they now have Active Duty corpsmen in North Chicago last December—I had outpatient surgery—it was actually a very pleasant experience. I felt like I was home again, seeing all of these people in Navy blue walking around me, and taking all of those extra steps to make you feel at home. And to, to make this—you knew nothing was going to go wrong. And I can't say I feel that safe in the average hospital. I worked in civilian hospitals where they don't take those precautions; where I see nurses do things that just make me angry. You know, draw up a whole syringe full of liquid, and then, then spray it all over the med room, or spill a bed pan and not have it shampooed—the carpet—where it was spilled, or something like that. That stuff drives me nuts. You know, but in a military hospital, your care is about as good as it's ever gonna get. Those people have the best training, or they don't advance. If you're no good, you don't make rate or rank. And they're good, and I said, "It was so wonderful to be up there." When I woke up in recovery, I saw all those Navy corpsmen around me, walking around lookin' at charts, and I thought, "I'm safe." It's a proud tradition. It's a very proud tradition. And I don't know if Army has that, or Air Force, or what—but the Navy corpsmen are special. They are very special, and they're very proud people, you know. And our Marines love us. Like Chris, I said, "Whatever you do don't, don't pick on the corpsmen. 'Cause they can either save your life or make you miserable." And, you know, he learned that early on from me. So...he's a good guy anyway. He wouldn't do that. [Chuckles].

Howe: So, this might be a challenging question in light of what you just said: What's been your proudest moment?

Meter: As a corpsman? Or as a person? As a corpsman, my proudest moment was when I, I saved a life. And I saved many, but this one was someone that was—had been already triaged to die. And I saved that person's life. And I knew I shouldn't be taking that much time with them because when you have triage, that means your sickest patients kind of go off to the side, and the ones you can treat, and then the ones that aren't so bad. And if, if that patient's gonna die, you essentially leave them alone, which is the way it has to be. But if there are enough personnel, you know, I will go that last mile. As a civilian...as a service officer, I am so proud of my work there. And I have a cousin who is a service officer in Nebraska. And any service officers you talk to, whether they work for VFW or DAV or something, they are passionate about their jobs. And...the other one is walking around out there. He has surpassed everything I ever expected of him.

Howe: For those people who don't understand the context you're referring to...

Meter: My son, Chris; he had a little struggle in school and things like that. He, he was kind of mouthy and, you know. He was also like me, and independent, and did things his way,

you know. But when he got in the Marine Corps, yeah, there was a change in him. Some good, some bad. But after he found his niche in life—which is military history, and this job and everything—I haven't worried about him a day since. And I had many days [laughs] before that, because I was afraid he would never find his passion in life. You know, and he called me up one day, and he said, "I found it, mom." And some teacher over at Northeastern deserves beaucoup credit for that because they steered him in the right direction. He has been interested in this since he was 5 or 6 years old because of my veteran organization affiliations. He's been to more meetings, and trips, and stuff with me, you know, because he was too little. He wasn't in school. I had to take him with me. And he went to Washington, D.C. with me for the dedication of the Vietnam Women's memorial. And...I could see this coming, but public schools aren't always supportive of students like that. And part of me makes...it makes me angry because I wanted them...and I talked to the Marine Corps recruiters about starting a ROTC at the high school he went to. Because I said, "There are kids that don't want the traditional life," you know, they, they... And I said, "Even if they don't stay career, they need...they need that structure. They need that...feeling of belonging." Not every kid's an athlete or a cheerleader or something like that. Mine wasn't. And when I'd be, you know, home and doin' stuff, he'd be reading all these books on the military...the day he came home, he was a junior in high school. Last week of school, he says, "Mom, I wanna join the Marine Corps." And I mean, I almost died on the spot because I was in the old Parris Island, and I knew what they did to those guys. Full Metal Jacket is pretty explicit. It is exactly like that. And my, my child was not going through that, but it's all he ever wanted to do. And I said—he said, "If you don't do it, I'll wait 'til I'm old enough, and then I'll just go on my own." "Fine." So he did a year as a Poolie; he was a previously en—you know, enlisted, and that counted towards his reserve time when he got out. And...he went in. He had some hardships. But we always—he and I—stuck together. He and I are extremely close because of our shared experience, and because we have a mutual respect for one another. And I couldn't be prouder of him because he is the young man I envisioned, you know, all those years ago. He is the polite, most – [laughs] – well behaved, focused person. And he's focusing on this. And he loves this job, and I'm not trying to, you know, get him hired here permanently or something. No. But this, this has been the love of his life. When he was showing me around this morning, he was showing me what he did, and...and the Rare book room and everything. I worked at Northwestern. I know all about this stuff, you know, I worked in the Music Library. And he is essentially following in my footsteps in many ways. I used to sing in Symphony Chorus, and I used to go to rehearsals just down the street here. And eat at Miller's Pub. He told me he did that a few times. I did that all the time. And so it's...it's kind of like a carbon copy, but not. And I'm so proud of him. He is...I always asked that he be a good citizen. I never expected much more than that because I think you don't wanna lead your child somewhere where they don't wanna go. I said, "As long as you're a good citizen, you've made me happy." And he's lived up to that.

Howe: There's never really a good way to ask this question. I think it's based on the person. How do you feel about your service to your country?

Meter: Very good. But I differ from a lot of people in that, I did my time in Veterans Service Organizations. I was a Legion Service Commander. I was in a group that's in a group that's pretty much defunct now. I was a national director, but I don't—it's not the only thing I've done in my life. And sometimes I find veteran's gatherings and—where they're honoring veterans—if they're honoring me, I'm embarrassed. I don't know if you understand that, but I feel like I'm not going to stand out there and wait for the cheers and the applause and everything. That's not why I did it. And...one day I was going home from Beaufort, I was in my dress blues, and I was in O'Hare Airport, and some kid came up to me. I'd been in the ER all night, and I was very tired. Some kid came up to me and said, "Service trash. Service trash." Me. First thing I did was look over and see...there's a parent back there puttin' that kid up to that. Because there are people that feel that women in the military are either lesbians or whores. Yes. If you served in the military, you were less of a person than another one—woman. And ironically, a lot of people I served with felt the same way. They wouldn't marry us, but they'd go home and marry some bimbo from home, you know. But [laughs]—that's another story. But I've always been very proud of my military service, and I feel that if you can't do something for your country, what kind of person are you? And my son said one time, we were at church, and all these kids were sitting around—his age—"Oh I'm going to college here." "I'm going to college here." And one of the parents said to Chris, "And where are you going to college?" Knowing full well my son wasn't even vaguely interested. He says, "I'm gonna spend four years serving my country." End of discussion. And that's exactly what it is. And people that puff up their military service with medals, and promotions, and all these things, "I did this," and "I did that," when they didn't really do it. I said, "There's no reason to do that." If you served, you gave up that part of your life to your country. I may not be the greatest patriot in the world. I don't fly a flag on my front porch or anything. I don't have to. I lived that. I've done that. I—I'm perfectly content to, to be a civilian, to be a veteran. I don't need to wear all the hats, and the pins, and the stuff and the—and...I go to the VA sometimes, and I wonder if I'm in the Twilight Zone, you know, 'cause I'm never... And I'm not saying I don't own that stuff, but I don't wear it because I don't want anybody compromising, saying "Oh, thank you for your service." I don't like that. I don't like that at all. Because I'm embarrassed, and I think of the 58,000 men and women that died in Vietnam that never came back. I think of all the people in this war that never came back. I never got wounded. I never got...you know. I made a choice, a conscious choice, and it wasn't because I was a patriot. I was trying to get out of a bad situation. But as time wore on, you know. Yes, I'm very proud of my military service, and it's hard when I'm around other women that don't understand women like me. You know, I think because of my military service, I've a lot more on my mind than whether or not my son is in soccer, or

tee-ball, or...whatever it is—I am always out there looking to serve—do service for somebody—whether as a service officer, working at the food pantry. It gives me great satisfaction, and maybe that’s selfish, but I really enjoy it. I enjoy...Chris was with me one time we worked in a soup kitchen on the near north side and—with a Methodist Church from Crystal Lake—and that was special. You know, I love doing things like that. I don’t care if you remember who I am tomorrow. We go out to South Dakota. We build Habitat for Humanity homes and teach vacation bible school. And those people may forget we were there tomorrow. I don’t care. It makes me feel good to do it. It gets me out of the rat race here. And...be out there in another culture, and be around other warriors, and they are, for the most part—they enlist in the military. Being around them, and sometimes, you know, having them put their arm around me and say, “Well, doc, how you doin’ today?” or something, that’s okay. But I don’t go in for all that—Veterans Day: I stay home. I don’t do anything. Because I don’t wanna do anything. I—it’s embarrassing, and I know people that eat that up. And I don’t mind the people that go out and eat the free meals and everything like that. That’s your thing. It’s not my thing. And you know, I know who I am. I know what I’ve done. I don’t have to be out there bragging about it, putting it up all the time, you know...I’m sorry...

Howe: That’s okay.

Meter: No, I just...what time have we got here. Oh, my gosh...

Howe: It just flies by.

Meter: Later than I thought.

Howe: It just flies by. Having said that, why, why is it important for you to share your story?

Meter: Well, Chris told me I would be the first woman to do it. I don’t know if that’s true. But the other thing is: there are a lot of women out there who, for one reason or another, don’t get the respect they deserve, who don’t get the thanks that I think is in order, who are raising children by themselves as single mothers...who...other women veterans who are so needy—don’t—not knowing that when they came out of the military that—and I didn’t know it either—that if they had a disability, they could apply for disability, and get assistance with schooling and everything else. They kinda walk away like they didn’t deserve it or something. And in Lake County where I worked—mostly—they said that there were over—I don’t know how many thousands of female veterans in Illinois—but that only a few of them had actually signed up for treatment at the VA, or you know... I remember the VA when there were no women’s bathrooms. There were no women’s wards; there were staff bathrooms for the nurses, but women veterans—and I can’t—I will always be their advocate. Because I survived. I did very well. I got an education. I have a kind, loving husband. I have a wonderful home and family. I just—my heart aches for these women that are out there homeless, trying to find their way, but I don’t

care what anybody—and this a real point of frustration with me—because people think that veterans are all about men. I have been to meetings of the American Legion, where they put on a program honoring veterans, and they get right up and say it, “This is for all the men that sacrificed for us.” And I went, I was at a DAR state meeting—I [laughing] haven’t been in that for a long time—Daughters of the American Revolution—down in Springfield once. And, all they honored was the women from World War II...and what about the women from Vietnam, and Iraq, and Korea? What are we? You know? And they said, “Oh, these women. They did all this, and they did all that.” And there, there’s a problem with our society. There’s a problem with people saying “The Greatest Generation” because—not that they weren’t—but there, we were great, too. And we went over there—a lot of draftees and everything and fought that unholy war—and most of these guys and gals won’t even talk about it because they’re so embarrassed, because we’re called losers. You know, World War II were winners; we’re losers. And ...it always gripes me because I said, “We did what you as a society said was our beholden duty,” was to serve. We didn’t start the draft, you know. And women didn’t have to serve. But they did. And I have seen women that were so courageous that just...I mean, they did—they just blew my mind. You know, because they were—I’m not saying they were better than men—but sometimes in medicine, women have more of a passionate way of dealing with the issues, because of our nature. And women veterans, you know, they just haven’t been given the credit they’re due. That all stopped when World War II ended. And all of the women that have come after them have just...I, I got so mad at USAA because in their commercials, they didn’t feature any women for a long time. And I had one of their credit cards. I said, “I’m cutting it up because you don’t think women are worthy of recognition, because all of your ads show fathers returning home, or brothers, or...men. And no women.” And I said, “When I was a service officer, and we’d see people off at Fort Sheridan,”—and you talk about a hard thing to do...I had to give those people the information they needed in case their spouse was killed overseas, or maimed, or disabled. I had to tell them what they were entitled to: a grave marker, this, that. That is very hard to do in a room full of people who are facing that. And then, I’ve also been on the other end. I was up at Weapons Battalion—the Marine Corps battalion used to be in Waukegan. Their first deployment to Iraq, they lost 13 people. It was horrible. And I’ve never seen a more discouraged group of people in my life. They were beat, you could tell. They lost a lot of friends. But when I was at Fort Sheridan, there were all these women—and I did few at Great Lakes—all these women—‘cause a lot of women have a hard time finding a good job with good pay, and they enlist in the military. And a lot of them either don’t think about going or they have something lined up—you know, like their parents or somebody—to take care of their kids while they’re deployed. Because if you can’t, then they ask you to leave. And those women went over there, and left their children and their families to fight a war for this country, and they deserve something for that. And that’s why I like your logo here. The first thing I see is a woman on that logo. And I am so proud of you for that. And you can

tell the colonel that, because that means a lot, because generally when it comes to veteran events and everything, except for the recent two wars—Iraq and Afghanistan—women are cut out. They—and in fact, I got in a little tiff with Pat Sullivan up at North Chicago because their sign says something...a quote from Abraham Lincoln to the widow who has born, and something and for her orphan. And I said, “What about the women who served?” I said, “That’s not an appropriate statement.” “But it was said by Abraham Lincoln.” I said, “150 years ago.” And I said, “I think you need to be more inclusive of women.” And right now, we’re fighting a battle, trying to get special f—a special area for women patients at North Chicago, wherever. Because women who have been in the military, and have been assaulted or something, don’t feel safe in that environment, and that’s a lot of the reason they choose not to receive care there. And I have discussed this with many people. We had a group from Washington; we did a TV interview—Skype interview—and I said, “These women, a lot of them are really hurting.” And I said, “PTSD is not just the battlefield.” PTSD is other things, too. And in my case, it was seeing so much trauma, coupled with the trauma from my childhood, but... A lot of it was: I can’t get those people out of my mind [chuckling]...you know, I know their names. I remember them. But, I said, “These women are hurting, and you have to go out and try to include them.” And I said, “The best way for you to do it is to show them that you care about them. And don’t put them in a bed at the end of a ward with 50 males on it, where they can be assaulted or attacked or something.” You know, they’re miles away from the nursing station. Put them in a room right next to here. Put ‘em somewhere. Build ‘em a floor of their own. You know, I said, “It isn’t that difficult.” You know, but I don’t think women veterans get nearly enough credit, and I’m not talking about myself. When I go out and do veteran things, I do it for other people. Not for me. Me, I, I’ve done well. I...I’m a survivor. But a lot of people out there aren’t doing well. And they need this. And they need support and comfort. And...they’re just not getting it. And when I went to the dedication of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial, I didn’t know ‘til I got there—it was only for the nurses in Vietnam. It was for none of the rest of us. And then later on, I forget what her name is—Wilma something—she got the idea to build the Women’s Memorial, the big one. And my picture is in there. I’m a charter member, but I said, “You had all this hoopla for this statue,” and they paid over \$2 million dollars for it. And they said, “Well, what were you expecting?” I said, “Something inclusive of all of us.” I said, “They were special. They did something above and beyond the call of duty.” China beach taught me that. But I said, “There were those of us here on the home front picking these up when they came home, and taking care of them...and holding them when they cried,” ‘cause a lot of them did. And when they get those letters that said, “I’m dumping you.” You know, you just—you feel so bad, but you figure, you may not be their girlfriend, but you can be there for them. And that’s a lot of what we do. That’s a lot of what we do: talking to people, getting them to calm down. You know, and...we go this... Chris does this all the time, ‘cause I’ve had some medical issues, and he’d go, “Mom you got this.” You know, this—you know, he’s

wonderful that way. And I think that women veterans, too. We need to be the first people to do it, is go out and recognize our own people. Because we're not gonna get it from Congress or anybody else. It's not gonna happen. And...I love Chuck Hagel. You know, he's from Nebraska, and he's Secretary of Defense and everything, but that poor man, he's a Vietnam vet, and you can look at his face and see that, I mean, the tire tracks are there of everything he's been and gone through. You know, I have so much respect for him. You know, and I just like a lot of Vietnam vets—Al Lynch is a friend of mine—and you look at his eyes, and you can tell. You know, there are a lot of people that—and then there, you know, don't get a medal of honor or something, but they were special. And...I just think that where it comes to women veterans, and doing this interview, if it gets some more women down here, that's great. You know...I, I've been a first in a lot of things. I was our first Legion commander in Crystal Lake—first female. And I still get grief 'cause we sold the building. [Laughs]. We were running out of money, and it worked out real well for us. But...there are other things they are trying to get—the VFW and some of the other service organizations—to be more open to female membership and... Interesting aside, here is my favorite service organization of all: is the DAV. They probably do more for veterans than anybody. They have the best trained service officers. I'll say that on tape, even though I worked for other people. They did my claim. They did my son's claim. They are the best. They're over at Jesse Brown. The ones here. They usually work out of the regional offices.

Howe: DAV?

Meter: Disabled American Veterans. And they put every dollar, I believe, goes to good use. And I worked so closely with them when I was a VSO at North Chicago. I learned so much from them because they sit, and they're in the trenches. I wasn't in the trenches. I sent them the paperwork and stuff after I filled it out and gave it to them, and they went in the trenches with the paperwork. But they have a lot of women working in their office that are women veterans, and you might want to talk to one of them one day and see how they're doing. You know, but they're special. If you ever, anybody ever needs help with benefits or anything...it'd be the first place I'd send them. And they've offices all over the country. And you know, it's...there's just certain things, you know, certain passions that people have...and right now, I mean, I'm an old lady. I'm doing quilts and things like that, and knitting, and crocheting, and trying to stay healthy, and watching my son grow and succeed. I can't ask for anything else. So, do I get one of those books like that? [Laughs]. I looked at that like, "Oh, my gosh..."

Howe: We're a little bit more modern nowadays. We try and make it...accessible on many shelves by putting it online...putting it out into the ether because it's a little bit more accessible, as opposed to a physical shelf in a library.



Meter: That's true. That's true. And even though I personally believe there's nothing as good as an...a good old book, leafing through it, you know. I would rather watch the facial expressions and interact, you know, in a way, personally with that person. And I'm glad you're doing this. And like I said, I would never have known if Chris hadn't come to work here. I never even heard of this place. I didn't. And I realize you haven't been around that long. But I don't think it was here when I was going down to Fine Arts Building, you know. But when he showed me some of the things you had, I said, "Oh, priceless. Absolutely priceless treasures." You know, and place where veterans can feel like they are honored. And I think one of the best is not only your museum, but your library. I've done your inner library loan. I've checked out four books on—I'm a big Soviet Union buff, so I check out, and Chris says you have a lot of that, so... but...

Howe: Hopefully he returns them for you.

Meter: No. He's seldom home. No, I get 'em through the Crystal Lake Library, and then I send them back through them. And whoever your person is that does inner library loan, he's very good about it. And when I heard you didn't have any return dates, or any—I said, "Boy, are you asking for it." [Laughs]. I would never do that. I would never do that. And, what's his name, Anthoni Beevor. I saw him. I bought three or four of his books. And Chris is gonna get me a signed copy of the World War II book that he wrote. And I, I like reading his stuff, too. So...but like I said, my interest is towards Russia. I've read so many things on Russian history. And I've read Solzhenitsyn. I've read most of his books. And Chris got interested in it. He took a class, and he says, "I have to read something on Russian history." And I said, "Well, I got a nice, simple little book for you. It's called *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*." And he goes, "Wow." And I said, "They actually made a movie out of that." And I said, "I had to leave half way through it because I just got totally...freaked out." [Laughs].

Howe: Have you read *Gulag Archipelago*?

Meter: Oh yeah. Both volumes. *August*, well there's three, yeah...

Howe: Yeah.

Meter: And *August*—what is it: 1916, 1918? I can't remember—and his speeches at...where? Harvard? I sometimes get confused there. I read a lot. And...I just, I just love Russian history. And another good one if you haven't read it is Rutherford's *Russia*. Even though it's written kind of like a James Mitchner book, you learn a lot, but it's very, it's not fact fact fact fact fact. It's a narrative. And it's very easy to read. I gave Chris a copy of that. I had two, somehow. But...I was delighted to hear you have a Russia—and he said, "Well, you want them in Russian?" I went, "No." [Laughs]. But someday, you know, I had a bucket list at one time, and I wanted to go to Russia. But first, I want to go to Cornwall, so...

Howe: That'd be a good trip.

Meter: And Chris said he'll go with me. My husband has absolutely no interest. Chris has been to Europe four times since he's got out of the Marine Corps. He's been to England, and he went to Scotland, and saw the museum, up in the castle in Edinburgh. I get jealous, I just, you know...and I, you know, those old churches and everything. I just. I can't wait. I can't wait. You know. It's kind of, in a way, a wonderful world we live in. And even though change comes quickly to many of us, particularly as we get older...there's still good people in the world. You gotta always remember that. And when things really start looking down or something, you just start saying "There's good people in the world." And on my way down here today I thought, "The last time I came down here was when I had my disciplinary hearing." [Laughs]. And I was gettin' all upset about that, and then I thought, "No, but look what you've done since then." You know, it's great. You know, and...you know, things happen for a reason. I tell Chris that all the time. Something doesn't work out, there's a reason it didn't. And in my life, that's always been the case. I didn't get to be a personnel man or a dental tech, but I got a rate I truly loved, and really, it was, it was right for me.

Howe: Yeah, we can't always know what direction we're supposed to head in, but if we can focus on the opportunities, the things we have control over, we spend a lot more time in the positive.

Meter: Absolutely.

Howe: Rather than letting the negative things affect us.

Meter: That was kinda what happened to my parents. They, they dwelled so much on the negative that their end of their lives were miserable. They made all of us miserable, too. But...my brothers and I have a very positive outlook. You know, my one brother, my older brother has grandchildren, and that's very special. And...you know, it's like, life is what you make it. And if you're gonna let certain things get you down and make you angry, you dwell on it all the time, you're going to be a very miserable person. And it's not good for your health either.

Howe: Curious if there's studies on that.

Meter: Actually, there are. There are studies that say that if you have a positive attitude, your life will reflect that, and basically, it makes it easier for other people to be around you. You know, if you're a deadbeat, you know, you know...gloomy-gus, as they used to say, people are going to avoid you like the plague. They don't wanna be around people that are gonna bring them down, and even though you may have a legitimate reason... And...I think that's where a lot of healing and mental health probably comes from...is it's in the way you perceive things. And as one of our counselors said at the VA, he said,

“You’ll never forget it, but you can live with it, and you can benefit from it. And learn from it.” And he said, “If you’re any kind of a person, you will take that experience and help others, too. And help them out of the...whatever slump they’re in.” And I think that’s why I became a service officer was, you know, I like helping people. I like, you know, what can I do for you? And, you know, it’s not a hard thing for me. And you know, if you ask the impossible, you’re gonna get nothing. But [laughs], you know, if I can help you, tell me. You know, but you gotta—this is partly your burden, too. And, you know, if you need to come up with the paperwork, I can help you with that. But if you just sit back there and say, “Get me all this money and 100% disability...” I can’t do that. I said, “I can only help you first of all, as much as you’ll let me, and secondly, as much as the VA is willing to go along with it.” You know, and I said, “There’s nothing wrong with that.” You know, I...personally, you know, I just—I don’t know. I put on my Facebook page, I said, “Life is an adventure. And it’s worth living. I’m happy to be alive.” I coulda died so many times in my life. Seriously. I came, you know, very close. I’m not talking about illness—well, couple cases, yeah. But you know...car accidents, things like that. And...I’m just lucky to be here. And, things like, “Oh, I wasn’t on that plane. Good thing, ‘cause that plane crashed. And I didn’t.” You know, and I feel sorry, but, you know, there is, you know, there is a higher power that says, “You’re not ready to leave yet.” And, we’re very—my husband and I—very active in our Episcopal Church, and, you know, a lot of positive things, you know, that we’re doing now. The Catholic Church down here is getting a new bishop on Tuesday. That’s very exciting. You know, I, I’m so happy for them, too, because...you know, all this stuff, you know, as the world changes—our new Pope. You know, things are just kind of moving in a nice direction right now. And...I’m kinda happy to see the way it plays out. But... I see you’ve got the ink, too. [Laughs].

Howe: Yeah.

Meter: Don’t ask my son to roll up his sleeves. [Laughs]. I shouldn’t say that.

Howe: I think we’ve shared stories...

Meter: [Laughs].

Howe: I think we’ve talked about it a little bit. Mine was...I didn’t want a job where I’d have to be ashamed of rolling it down. So...

Meter: And you were an officer?

Howe: I was.

Meter: Yeah. You know, I think of it now and, you know, it’s—I don’t think...unless it’s education-wise. You know, there are a lot of people I served with that were enlisted

that were, you know, officer material...you know, some of the OR techs, and this...but they hadn't finished before the draft na—you know, nailed them, or something, you know. And then, you have the others, you know, that just...you know, it's kinda...go along with everything. And then you have your lifers, you know, and I, you know, I have nothing against them at all. You know, and I think if you find a career that's right for you, stay with it. I always said that—what is the name? Calypso, the...you know, the guy that did the...marine guy that did all the marine expeditions for fish and stuff. Jacques Cустeau. I said, "Do you know how wonderful that would be, is to be doing what you love every day of your life, you know, with a crew that loves you and understands you." Or Jane Goodall, you know, with a group of chimps, you know, and...wow! You know, just...those people amaze me. I just, I just look at them and I think, "Oh," you know, "You are—here you are out in the middle of the jungle, out in the middle of nowhere eatin' beans, and yet, these chimps look at you like a mom." You know, and what can they teach us, they could teach us that, you know, all life is precious. I truly believe that. And...you know, I get upset, you know, when I—I get upset when I see a dead squirrel in the street. I mean, [laughs] I just...or even a skunk or something. You know, I'm like, "Oh you poor baby!" [Laughs]. And the other night, I went out, took our dog out, and heard an owl in the trees. You know, just hooting up there. And I thought, "That is so neat," but then I think back to Native American spirituality, and if you hear an owl that means somebody's gonna die. [Laughs]. It's an omen. And I hope it's not me. But, you know, I was thinking of all the little Chihuahuas that we have in our neighborhood and everything. I thought, "You better go in the house! That guys keeping a vigil out here." But you know, it's just—you know... You wake up and, you know, the nature and, you know. I live in town, but, you know, I love goin' out, too, and seeing...get out in the forest and see things. You know. I'm a tree-hugger, as my son would say. He's not.

Howe: Well...it's the simple things.

Meter: Well, that and...everything has a purpose. Even the most disgusting things you probably think of, like a komodo dragon or something. They have a reason for being here. And we find that out. You know, it's just now we're getting on to the bumble bees, and how important they are. Honey bees, to our very existence. Without them, we have no food. And...you know, like I said, I'm a tree-hugger, but anyway...

Howe: There's nothing wrong with that. I also, even though I work here, and dress this way, I like being outside.

Meter: Oh, I do, too. I do, too. And even when I worked on LaSalle and Wacker, going down in that cave, you know. In the summer time, it'd be all dark and cool and everything... there, there's even something about the city to love, you know, and...I do. I told someone the other day, they said, "Oh you're going down to Chicago. How can you...?" And I said, "It's the city I fell in love with all those years ago." And I said, "The

lakefront.” You know, I learned to drive down on that lake front down there. I took— went to Sears driving school, and they had us down at Montrose harbor and everything. And...just, it’s a wonderful city. And some of my closest friends from North Dakota have settled here. They’re architects. You know, simply because of what it is. It’s better than any city I’ve ever lived in, as far as opportunity, artwork, restaurants...you know, and people that truly enjoy living. And I think this is a special place. You know, I always thought that. But...see what junior’s doin’...

Howe: Well, it—was

Meter: Or do you have anything else...?

Howe: I was just going to ask if there’s anything else that you thought we ought to talk about that you didn’t get a chance to discuss.

Meter: Not really...

Howe: Okay...alright...

Meter: I, like I said, you need to get some more women in here and...

Howe: Hm.

Meter: Tell their stories because they...now, make up a large part of our military. Not the majority, but I’d like to see you interview some, like, Viet Nam nurses or something. If I run across one, I’ll tell them to give you a call. Like I said, I’m not in that loop anymore, but...the—it’d be great.

Howe: It’d appreciated... We end the interview with—

Meter: Oh, a challenge coin!

Howe: There you go. It’s to say thank you for your time today.

Meter: Oh, thank you so much.

Howe: And for sharing your story with us. So...

Meter: It’s very special. Like I said, putting her in the front meant something to me the first time I saw it. And you can tell the colonel I said that because women veterans don’t often get the recognition...and putting her out front like that means something... Oh, that’s cool. The building you’re in!

Howe: Yeah.

Meter: Yeah. Cool. Thank you.

Howe: Thank you.

Meter: Pleasure.

Howe: It was my pleasure...as always. Talking with veterans is...it's not something that you get to do every day. And with that I will shut off the mic.