

That's the fan. OK. This is side two with Louise Birch, July 15, 1995 in West Park, New York. We stopped. Before, we were talking about being in Germany in April 1945. You must have gotten word there about the death of President Roosevelt.

Mm-hmm.

Do you remember anything about that?

Well, being a staunch Republican, I said, "That's too bad," which is terrible. But everyone was stunned and, you know, what's going to happen now? That, I think, was the first [? concerned ?] about everybody. What's going to happen now? Because he certainly, you know, did give us good leadership. But then we heard about this guy named Truman and went on with our work.

And shortly thereafter?

Was VE Day. And I think I told you about stealing the denatured alcohol out of the operating room, and--

No, you didn't.

Oh, didn't I?

No.

[LAUGHTER]

I think you need to.

We had what we called solution basins. They were little, oh, porcelain basins that we'd soak instruments in, in alcohol and stuff. And we swiped-- we had this denatured alcohol. It'd kill you. You know, kill you. We put that in, and we had powdered grape juice and it would turn it all purple.

(WHISPERING) We'd swish it around, swish it around. Oh! Terrible.

Horrible.

Terrible. And our whole-- [? Eckie ?] was the only one that was sober that night, and she had these-- what we called number 10 cans. You know, peanut butter and jelly came in them. She had one by each one of our bunks because we'd just roll out of bed and go, [? ah. ?] [LAUGHS] We couldn't get up. It's a wonder we didn't die.

So you had a big party?

Well, not really. You know, we just-- just among ourselves. And, ooh, you know, whoopie do. Because, at that time, we were right next to the 34th Evacuation Hospital. They had brought us in, and we were supposed to help them out or relieve them of some of their duties. They didn't like us, and we didn't like them.

And I think it was just an ego trip, you know, that maybe the nurses were afraid that we'd infringe on their officers, or whatever. But we could care less, you know? We were our own-- we were very cliquy, as you could notice-- and we were our own little establishment. And so we did what we had to do, and they did what they had to do-- until our men up and left us, and then we had to stay with the 34th because they would--

Well, what happened there? Your--

Well, that was right after VE Day, maybe two days after, three days after. I'm not sure on what date. We were used to

hearing our tents being pulled down because the hospital was always moving. And, one morning, there's tents coming down, and they came and told us we had to move out of our tents, but we weren't going with them. And they had one big tent, so all of us, 40 nurses, were in this one big tent.

We had to stay behind, and we just felt so abandoned because we'd been a family for so long. How could you do this, you know? "We're going on to Austria, and you're staying here with the 34th." And, oh, there were tears because we had some romances going on. And, you know, "We don't know. We don't know nothing. You stay here. They'll feed you. You work with them," and that's it.

And some of these girls were angry and some were sad and some were indignant. Because how could they do this to us? You know, we're part of this unit, and they're leaving us. But off they went, and we didn't know why. And so we made hay. You know, we played around and made-- ah, (LAUGHS) we did what we had to do.

You worked with the other unit?

We worked with the other unit. Not too much. They were getting rid of-- their patients were being pushed out and back to the general hospitals, too. And I can't remember except for just horsing around. Like, we found that old cart, and we used to run around the place pulling this cart.

Horse cart?

Well, it was-- I don't know what. It-- maybe it was, but it was like a push cart, but a big push cart. We'd put two of the girls in it and two would pull it, you know. And, oh, it was stupid, you know, but it was silly. And I can remember sunbathing. We-- it was getting, you know, it was May then, and it was getting warm.

And the earth, I can still smell the earth. The earth was very sour. We were set up in what might have been a pasture or something. And you don't realize, America, here, is a new country, and our earth is still new. But that's centuries-old over there, and it stunk. The earth was sour, like-- like it was moldy, but it had [? an odor. ?] So when the sun hit it, ooh!

But anyhow, one morning, down the dirt road comes our trucks trundling around and, yeah, tooting the horn. You know, "Pack your bags, girls. We're going." And you didn't see a happier bunch, you know, and in the trucks we went. One [? truck was ?] for our bedrolls and two trucks for the nurses.

And off we went, singing all the way. And the tarp was down off of the trucks because it was nice weather. And we didn't even ask. We just went and sang and drove through the roads.

And the countryside was so beautiful, Tyrolean houses with the flower boxes. And all the flowers were starting to bloom. And then we crossed the-- into Austria, and you could see these rolling Alps in the background. Some still had snow on it, and it was just ideal. We were in heaven, really in heaven.

The war was over.

Yeah, the war was over. And this was beautiful and serene and happy. And what more could you ask for? And there's the Danube, and we crossed the Danube at Linz. And I remember going across the bridge at Linz and the Danube, and someone mentioned, "This is the city Hitler was born in. Linz, Austria, he was born here."

So? [LAUGHS] He ain't around anymore. We don't care. And we drove out, just through a corner of Linz itself, and off we went. All alongside the river, we were driving, just beautiful, singing away, having a ball.

How long did you travel? Just one day?

Oh, yeah. Not even a whole day. It wasn't that long. I think we were not too far from the Austrian border. And, all of the sudden, the singing stopped. One by one, we stopped singing. (WHISPERING) Something's wrong. Something's wrong. What's wrong? I don't know. What's wrong?

[SNIFFING]

Something's the matter with the air. We didn't even see the place, and we could smell it. And the truck came down around a corner, and there she was-- this big gray granite wall with guard houses every so often, barbed wire on the tent.

And we just-- first, your mouth would open, and then your hand went over your mouth. And we drove up in front of these huge gates.

[CLATTERING]

Watch your microphone. Yeah.

Drove up in front of these huge gates. And, usually, the enlisted men got right out of the trucks and opened the tailgate for us so we could get down. This time, they didn't. The gates were shut. And we just sat there, all with our hands over our mouth, eyes as big as saucers.

At that time, we didn't see any bodies. There were a few-- I like to call them stick figures. You know how you draw a stick figure? Their hips stuck out. Their legs came down, and this little ball on top for a head. A couple of them were walking around.

Outside of the gates?

No, inside, because we were inside the-- the wall came around, and then big gate was in here, on the blockhouse. And some had striped uniforms on. Some had just a blanket on them, stark naked. Some had the blanket wrapped around their heads so you wouldn't know who they were. They were afraid of being recognized. That's how-- and, you know, (WHISPERING) what? What is this?

And the other girls may have told you the same thing. Our Colonel came out, and the first words out of his mouth were, "There no Americans here," which would-- (SIGHING) because you didn't know what you were looking at. There was no identification on them.

You were afraid it could have been an American POW camp?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

You didn't know.

Yeah. We didn't know. You couldn't tell. [? Was ?] just a-- hmm. So then he started his little spiel about, "You girls were not sent over here to do this work. You girls were not trained to do this work. You girls were not-- are not equipped to do this work, and I will not order any one of you in this camp." He was visibly upset.

And I personally think that he had grandiose plans of, for himself, being in some nice hospital doing some great deeds. I don't know. That's my personal thing.

This was your Commanding Officer?

Commanding Officer. What was his name.

Colonel Dale Friend, who was quite a researcher at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston. But so, after he gave his spiel, the GIs let down those tailgates, and we jumped out to a one, every one of them. And I think he was shocked that we all responded in that way because he just stood there.

"Now, wait a minute," he says. "There's going to be rules and regulations," or words to that effect. "You can't be here

after dark. You can't be here by yourself. At all times, you're with another person, even in the wards. You have to be completely covered. I don't want them to even know you're a female." We had-- we're supposed to wear our the turbans, masks over our face, our dungarees that we had, little puttees around our ankles and our boots.

What are those? I'm sorry.

Puttees are actually left over from World War I. They're canvas, like a ski sock, and they buckle across, so they keep your pants into your boots. Because, of course, typhus was such a rage there. Anything get up your pants, and you had it. So-- although we'd all been inoculated.

So, with that, you know, they took us to our nurses quarters because we didn't go right into the camp itself then, and which was nice. It was the first time we had nice-- and we had three nice houses. I think that were three. Yeah, three nice houses up on top of a hill overlooking the Danube. Couldn't have been better.

And these German girls, oh, ooh, you know, "I do. I do. Can I do? Can I do?" You know, they [? couldn't ?] do it. Like, one of the girls was saying, today, "You remember, you put down your panties, and they's snatch them up and go wash them?" You'd put them-- take them out to put them on, and they're gone. She's out there washing them. They could--

They were from the local?

Yeah.

From Linz?

Yeah. Yeah, they couldn't do enough for you. And I-- still having this hatred in me-- hey. You know? Who are you trying to kid, you know? Which side were you on, you know? Now, you turn turncoat? I didn't trust anybody that was like that. I really couldn't.

I figured, last week, you were doing that for the Germans. But, anyhow. They were good to us.

And what-- had they been working for the German officers?

I don't know. I don't know.

You don't know?

I wouldn't be surprised. You know? And, there again, it's survival, a sense of survival, just like the poor inmates in the camp. Why did this one live, and thousands other die? They had a survival.

And I'm sure a lot of them must have had a guilty complex going home, especially if their whole family died. Why did he live? That's-- you know, I would have no idea what that feeling is like, but I imagine there must be a lot but that had that feeling.

So you would have your quarters, and then they would come and get you? And you would go down to the can?

Yeah, the trucks would always take-- we couldn't walk. We weren't supposed to be walking outside the areas because you didn't know what was out there. The trucks would bring us down to the camp, and we would work and eat. And they'd take us back to quarters, and we stayed there.

And the name of the camp?

It was Camp Gusen, and which was a satellite of Mauthausen. Mauthausen was up on the hill, and they brought down-- well, Gusen, had enough of its own patients, but some of the patients from Mauthausen because there was no medical facilities up there.

And our wards were set up-- they must have told you-- in the former SS barracks. But we used the same, I guess you'd call it-- the same three-tiered bunks for the inmates, except there was only one and each bunk instead of three or four. And they had beds of straw. Because I-- you know, I never questioned, when I was there, where did all these blankets come from? Where'd these pajamas come from? And evidently, they must have flown them in.

And it wasn't-- this Mike [? Warber, ?] who I'd wanted to come, he told me, and I didn't realize it at the time, there were two units that were sent in which were called delousing units. That's all they did. And they were behind the walls because these guys all-- inmates, patients, whatever you want to call them-- had to be completely deloused before they were brought out to us.

So that had been going on before you arrived?

Yeah. Yeah, before we arrived. And then, and while we were there because, as we would have, say, eight deaths a night, we'd have eight empty beds they'd bring out. But they were doing this behind the wall, washing them down and delousing them and giving them either a blanket or pajamas, whatever was flown in. And I didn't know about that, and I didn't even question. Where's this all coming? I should have said, how come? You know?

And what did you do, then? You would come every day--

We'd come--

--into the same ward?

Into the same ward, yeah.

And how many people would be in there? Do you know?

(SIGHING) Whew. I would say at least a hundred, but I am not sure. 120? 140? I'm not sure. There were rooms on both sides, and they were big, big rooms, and--

And the hallway in the middle?

Big hallway, and there were open door here and an open door at the other end, so you could-- the hallway itself was very dark, but you could see light at the end of the tunnel. And I like to think of that. Yes, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

One of-- and I think I told you that we were not allowed to have any physical contact with the patients. We could not-- inmates, whatever you want to call them-- we were not allowed to give them nursing care. And they brought in either prisoners of war, German prisoners of war, or people from the community, went out in trucks and rounded them up. And they stayed there for the day, fed, washed, and cleaned these guys, did what they could.

So you didn't touch them?

We didn't touch them. We weren't allowed to touch them. The only thing we did was give them medication.

Every day?

Every day. Those that need it. We learned the word "diarrhea" in three languages, and I'm not sure that I can even say the names today, and I'm sure they were true. Because one was Russian, one was Polish, and one was, I guess, French because we had a very sweet Frenchman who spoke beautiful English. And whatever we were saying, he says, "Sister," because they call the nurses Sister, "don't say."

And I think we were-- I forget the word we were saying. But, excuse me, but we were saying "shits."

[LAUGHTER]

And he wanted-- he said, "It's diarrhea."

"That's not nice," he said. Because we'd stand at the [? hall-- ?] at the door and yell out these three words, and those who had diarrhea would raise their little old hand up, you know. And we'd go over and we'd give them the medicine.

And that's how you cared for them? What was--

That's the only-- well, I don't think we kept any records, maybe number-wise. And things like that, I don't remember. I know we didn't keep records because we didn't know their names.

Towards the end of our stay there, things seemed to ease, maybe because we'd been there long enough to not be so tense, that we were able to talk to some of the patients through an interpreter. And I got a couple of names that I wrote to their-- one was a sister back in the States and one was some other kind of a relative-- to tell them. They're begging, "Tell America I'm here," you know. And, at that time, you couldn't say exactly where they were, just "someplace in Austria" was the term you had to use, and you couldn't say exactly what their condition was.

When I got back to the States, and I must have given my address back in the States, I got a letter from one woman in Evanston, Illinois. And she had gotten my letter and sent me a check for \$50 to do something for her brother. It was her brother. And so, by this time, I'm back in the United States, so I wrote back to her exactly where he was, exactly his condition, and sent her back the \$50. Hopefully, he was still alive. And I said, "Contact your Red Cross. Now you know exactly where he was. Whether he's still there now, I don't know."

I never heard from the other one that I wrote to. So I, sometimes, I think, I wonder how he made out. Did he make it out of there? Did he make it to America? So.

So you did-- you were, after a while, able to have some communication with some of the people.

Some of them. Not very many. Our corpsman happened to be a great guy. He was-- I think he was Mexican, and he spoke Spanish fluently. And he could speak a few words of German or Polish, whatever it was, and he was able to-- well, this. You know, and then you could do with hand signals, too. And there wasn't much you could talk to them about. They were too weak, for one thing.

I don't know if I told you that. And [? Eckie ?] knows I will tell you the story where we weren't supposed to look like women. And, like I told you, we used to give out these medicines together. And she'd give the pills, and I'd be behind her with a bottle of whatever it was I had to pour out and give it to them.

And I'm waiting for her. She's bending over, giving this guy his pills. And out from the other bunk comes this little bony hand, and pats her on the fanny. And I'm standing there, not laughing out loud, but saying, there's hope for them after all. There's still life in them. You know, really.

And, of course, she didn't even feel it. It was so weak. And when she stood up, and I'm-- and I says, "Who are we kidding? They know who we are." And she-- why? And I get tears. But I can still see him, now, doing that. It was cute.

Yeah.

It was pathetic, but it was cute.

Did you know who these people were? Were they-- I mean, some, they were from different countries. Were there-- there were some Jewish people?

Oh.

Mostly Jewish people?

I think there were--

Do you know?

I couldn't swear, but I would say I thought most of them were Jewish.

At the time, you did.

Yeah.

Yeah.

But we had Frenchmen. We had one Spanish guy who worked on the ward. He was another one I didn't trust because he was a trusty for the Germans. And he was-- looked well-preserved. And he had been in the Spanish Revolution and had gotten caught, somehow and, you know, when the Germans helped them out. Roberto, his name was. But he helped us out.

But these people, no, we didn't know who they were. Had no idea, [? any. ?] There was even Russians there too, I think.

At the time, did you feel that what you were doing for them was helpful?

It must have helped a little bit, but it was like swimming upstream. You made a little progress, but not much. You know? You nourished them, but you have to start out with thin, thin soup because you couldn't give them food, per se. And just the thought that they were free, you know, it must have been something.

And I'm sure-- you know, I see pictures of these survivors now in the Holocaust. And, God, they look great. So they-- you know, life does-- the body does improve.

Oh, you mean survivors today?

Yeah. Yeah, that they interview on TV. And you would say, looking at them, you couldn't have been in a concentration camp. But you know, yourself, if someone's really sick and loses a lot of weight and gets better, they do come back. But the body is a wonderful machine. So. It's too bad it gets abused.

How long were you at Gusen?

I think, about five weeks, we were there because we left to go home, either it was either on my birthday or the day after. It was either June 21st or 22nd. I remember my birthday.

And were you informed suddenly that you were going to leave? And--

I think probably a week's notice. You know?

And did you, by the end of that period, did you feel as if some of the people that you were caring for had made progress? Or was the situation better when you left than when you came?

Well, the attitude was better. It was a lot more relaxed because we went in there with so tight and so tense, and you were all-- literally afraid of them because they were so riddled with disease. And, hey, you know, you're protected. And--

Did any of the nurses get sick? Well, as far as we-- now, they're talking about the DDT, which you heard about, that several of our nurses have developed breast cancer. But with the ratio of breast cancer today, I can't see blaming it on

the DDT that we had.

You didn't tell me this. You were sprayed with DDT every day?

Every day, yeah, down our pants, up our arms, and in the back of our necks. She had an old flint gun. I don't know if you know what a flint gun is. It's a canister on the end of, sh-sh-sh, pump thing.

And I think flint, they used to use for flies or mosquitoes or something. You'd fill this canister with whatever. And that was filled with DDT powder, and we'd stay in front of our chief nurse and pull our pants out. How degrading, when you think of it. But that's how we had to go on.

The first couple of days that we worked at the camp, we felt so bad, so dirty, so contaminated that we would come back to our nurse's quarters and literally strip outside the door and just drop our drawers right there. And these nice German girls would grab them and wash them for us. Because we didn't want to go in the house with this aroma around us, you know. And it-- that odor clung to you. Your clothes, after a while, too. So. And, after a while, you didn't notice it. So.

What other kinds of things that you know of were going on at the camp? In addition to the care that you were giving, what else was happening there? Do you know?

[SIGHING]

Well, I know they got musical instruments for some of the inmates that were musically inclined. I don't know where they came from. I imagine they just walked into somebody's house and took them. That's what they usually did. This Jeanie [? Striker, ?] that I gave you her papers, she worked with the women. Now, I never saw the women. I know they were there, but I never saw them.

Some of the men went in town and got bolts of material and brought it out to the women. And she said they practically clawed at the material. They couldn't wait to get a piece of it to make themselves a top or muumuu-type dress or shorts or something, something to put on their bodies. And but that's the only story I ever heard from her, from the women.

Do you know if there were children around?

I never saw a child, no. Thank God.

So there were survivors there who were well enough to play musical instruments?

Yeah, but, you know, [? there ?] were all grades of [? degradation ?] or something. I don't know what you want to call it. There were some that could not move at all and some that walked around. And, yes, they could play a violin, maybe not as well as they did in days gone by. And the spirit was always there, I guess, if you're a musician. I'm not. But--

Was Gusen, by that time, being called a DP camp?

Mm-mm.

Never was?

Mm-mm, not as far as I know. It wasn't at that time, anyhow. We were the 131st Evacuation Hospital at Gusen.

Mm-hmm. Were there people arriving there from other places?

Mm-mm.

I know that happened in some other--



Mm-mm. We had more than we could take care of.

Do you have any sense of how many?

Oh, someone, at one time, told me we had 4,000-- we were a 400-bed hospital originally, this little tent hospital-- and that we had 4,000 patients. But there were, according to that confession, there were, what, 60,000 inmates there? So that's just a drop in the bucket.

Did you have a chance to walk around the camp at all? Or did you go up to Mauthausen, the main camp ever?

I never got up there. And you had to have-- you had to know somebody to get up there because that was off-limits, as far as I know. I did get in-- behind the camp, there was this nice rolling hill, and I did get back there. And inside that hill was a complete factory, railroad tracks and everything. And I was told that they were making Messerschmitts, planes in there.

In fact, I brought home a piece of-- I still have it-- a piece of balsa wood that was painted like a, oh, dark, dark olive green. And you can just about see a swastika on it. And someone else told me it was a new ammunition place. And this Mike that I talked to on the phone who didn't make it here, that was our interpreter, he claims that they were making parts for the V-2 bombs there. But it was a complete factory, back there, all underground in a big cavern.

And when I went back to Germany and Austria, years later, with my daughters, and we were in Strasbourg. That was as far as we were going to go. And I said, hey, we have enough time to go to Linz. And my daughter, at this time, she was doing all the driving. "Oh, [? Ma, ?] you're crazy." And I said, oh, and like just by my nose, crossed the bridge, turned right, followed the river.

And she said, "Do you where you're going?" I said, "No, but it's in this direction." Oh, and she was getting so upset with me. It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. And I said, slow down. And over on the horizon, I saw that same hill. I says, we're coming there. I know we're coming there, and there it was.

The camp?

The camp.

TV antennas out of what was our ward's little lace curtains, flower boxes.

People were living in those buildings?

Oh, painted white and beautiful. Hey. I have pictures downstairs I'll have to show you. They had, just before you got to the camp, there was a Memorial to the camp built and it was like a maze, and you went around and there were all pictures and sayings all around this cement wall. And right in the center were the ovens. But it was locked. You couldn't get in.

So I went-- there was a little, like, I call it a 7-Eleven store next door. By this time, my daughter's really mad at me. So I went next door and I wanted the key to get in there.

Oh. [SPEAKING GERMAN]

He couldn't speak English. I couldn't speak German. And he was very upset that I wanted to get in there.

In where?

Into this little maze, see, that was locked. There was a padlock on it. And I said, I want to get--

[? [MUMBLING] ?]

And he was upset. He was visibly upset, [? woo woo, ?] and I didn't know what he was saying. He didn't know what I was saying. So, finally, I'm going because we all wore the Red Cross on our sleeve.

Boom boom, [? Kranksvester. ?] And that's what I thought was nurse in German. Boom boom. All of the sudden, he got the message. And his wife comes out with wine and cheese, and they're hugging me and kissing me. And (WHISPERING) my daughter's standing there like this. She was so mad.

He come over and opened up the gate. [? Oh, ?] [? no?. ?] Couldn't do enough for me. So, you know, I walked all the way around and inside with the ovens, that they had. I've got pictures downstairs in my album. I'll have to show you.

So that was the crematorium there?

Well, it--

Is that what you mean by albums?

They had taken the ovens out of where the crematorium was. And behind-- that's another story-- where, I'm telling you, the barracks were made up like nice houses with TV antennas. And then there's the big block house, which had the big gates in it, and those-- that was all boarded over. The gates had been removed to someplace. Maybe, they were in the maze. I forget.

But we drove up on top of the quarry, which is famous for those last steps, and looked down into what was the big compound. Of course, all those barracks were blown up and burnt down. Guess what they were using it for? They made tombstones there.

From the stone in the quarry?

All these beautiful carved, yeah.

Tell me about the quarry. What do you know about that whole--

Oh, my nose is running.

Do you want a-- let me.

I just saw--

I understand there was a quarry at this Mauthausen Gusen complex, where people were forced to carry stones. Did you hear about that? Did you see evidence of that?

Well, we have the pictures that our chaplain gave us of the steps. They call them Steps of Death. And--

What were they? They were?

They were just granite. Everything that Mauthausen and Gusen was built of were huge blocks of granite. And it all came from that quarry. And they're still using the quarry to make tombstones.

But I drove down there once. I must have had a date with somebody that had a Jeep. And it was weird, these-- you're like in a-- almost in the Grand Canyon, these walls and walls of rock. And I saw the steps, and that was all and I wanted to get out of there because it was eerie.

And these were steps that went up to the quarry? Or?

No, they came out of the quarry. And they must have built these steps because they were also of these big black blocks of granite. And then there's a big wall to one side, in fact, on the side of the steps, that they must have built as they went up. And when they got to the very top, I don't know what was up there more for maybe trucks or something to take these blocks of quarries, Granite someplace else. But it was eerie.

And then to drive up there 20 years-- was it 28 years later? Hmm, it must have been more than that-- but to look down and see all of these tombstones down there in that compound. And I thought, you son of a gun. So somebody is making a good business.

So even the roadblocks, there was a roadblock between our quarters and Gusen that, of course, had been discombobulated for us to go through. But that was built of big blocks of this quarry.

We got to middle late July, when you left Gusen.

June.

June?

June.

July. I thought you said--

Middle of June, we left Gusen.

Uh huh.

Yeah.

And where did you go?

We went back to France. This time, we went by train. The nurses and the officers were in first class cars, and the men were in horse cattles. Again, segregation. And, every so often, the train would stop, and they would say, nurses, we were not to look out to the side because the men were all having their relief break.

[LAUGHS]

And the train would stop and start because the tracks were in repair, or it was a-- it seemed to me a long ride to where we got. And then there were trucks that took us, first, to-- I think they took us, first, to what we call Camp 20 Grand. They had all these little like repo depots, which were replacement depots for different units, and they were named after cigarettes.

First we went to Camp 20 Grand. Then we went to Camp Lucky Strike, which was great. It was up on top of a hill overlooking the Seine, in France. Except this was just a huge rock pile. I mean, there again, we had to live in tents again. They were pitched on these rocks. And we had to wash our hair out of tin cans.

And we had a good mess hall which was run by the German POWs. And they would be quite fresh to us, but sometimes they would say, "No sugar today for your coffee. No sugar today. No sugar today for your coffee." Well, I don't take sugar in my coffee. It didn't bother me. They [? had to ?] go.

That night, they'd have sugar cookies they'd make for us. You know, they tried to make up-- they would do this on purpose to make something nice for us. So they were also trying to be nice. See, I'm still had this distrust of the people. And I didn't like anyone that got too familiar.

And we finally found out they had a ship. We were going home. We had our foot lockers all packed, and away they

went. And they went down to the harbor, and somebody's packing the-- and they, because they're all stenciled with our names. Who's this Mary? Females, no way! Unload. Unload. And the poor GIs, just because we were females, our men couldn't go either.

Huh. So they--

Why? Why?

Well, there were no facilities on that ship for females. And why they kept the men behind, because we couldn't get on. I don't know.

What does that mean, no facilities for females?

Well, they would have to have a place that was closed-off, where the men couldn't, we couldn't--

Mingle.

No one could communicate.

So they couldn't segregate you, so you couldn't go.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

No, so we couldn't. So because we couldn't go, our men couldn't go, which I thought was so wrong. And, here, these guys have been sitting waiting to go home, too, just as much as we had. And then we finally got the General Bliss, which had an area that they could, you know, cordon. You know? Yeah.

Cordon off.

Cordon off.

That was a big ship, the General Bliss.

It was big, but it that-- it wasn't as big as the Queen Elizabeth, that's for sure.

And where did you leave from, what port?

We left from Le Havre in France, and we wound up in Boston. And it was great. You know, the boats were out there and welcoming, and bands were in the boats. And, from there, we went to-- in fact, we-- I remember it was the Fish Pier in Boston, which is still there. And we got on trains that were right there at the Fish Pier, and they took us down to Camp Myles Standish on the Cape, not quite too far down on the Cape, but some part of the Cape. It's now a big campground, I guess.

And they were great. They had Welcome Home, and we slept in like it was a huge ward, so we were all together. But there were sheets. That's the first time we'd had sheets in-- oh, months and months and months, we haven't had a sheet, and it was great.

I remember calling my mother because you could call whoever you wanted to call. And they had the-- papers had a habit of printing what units were landing when and where. And she had seen in the paper that the 131st was coming into New York Harbor at such and such a date. Well, that must have been the first boat that they were loading our stuff on. So she says, "Where are you?" I said, "Up in Massachusetts someplace, Camp Myles Standish." "You get right home, here!" I said, "Ma, I can't. I'm still in the Army, you know." Well, you were supposed to ra pa pa pa pa. I said, "No, Mother."

So we finally went to Camp Dix and got our leave papers. We had 30-day leave, and we were able to go to CBI, China Burma India area. And we knew it, and we figured but while we were on leave, VJ was declared, so.

Do you remember the dropping of the bomb?

Yes, I do. Yes. And I'm sorry to say I was all for it, and still am. Not now, I wouldn't want it dropped today, and what they're making today is 10 times bigger than that. But I just felt that it saved our men a lot. And, to me, it was, they're the ones that started it.

Woody and I are going over to Hawaii for the VJ ceremonies in August, yeah.

Huh.

The end of August, so.

So you knew, right away, then, that you wouldn't be going over?

Well, we didn't. But, you know, we didn't know whether we'd be made to go in the Army of Occupation or what, so we had to report back to Camp Polk. Now, Woody was in the service longer than I. Girls that had longer service, they had points, and you got out by a certain point system. If you were married, not a widow, but if you were married, if you'd been in the service so long, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, you could be discharged. And we had several discharged from Camp Polk.

Another gal and I got orders to go to San Antonio, Texas, Fort Sam Houston, which is a huge hospital. When I got down there, hadn't worked on a ward, didn't know what to do. Didn't know how to do anything, actually. Hadn't worked how to make a bed, even.

And this young whippersnapper had just gotten in the Army, and I'm saying, "Well, how do you do this? And how do you do that?" And she thinks, well, I must have just got into the Army before-- you know, after she did. And so she's giving me this [? whole. ?] She says, "Well, where were you, last month?" I said, I was over in Germany. You know?

Or, "Where were you when VE Day?" That was it, I could remember her saying to me I said, I was in Germany." "Germany? What were you doing there?" So she thought I had just joined the Army, acting so dumb. Well, how do you do this, and how do you do that?

And so I met my present-- my ex-husband there. He was in the Air Corps, and we got married. And life starts new.

Yeah. How long did you stay in the service?

Well, I got out just before Christmas then. So it was about 18 months total I was in.

What a year!

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. In fact, I was embarrassed because, when I met my husband-to-be, he was very shy and didn't say boo. And I went, oh, what a dud you are. You know? And so I'm telling him how I-- because you got \$300 when you were mustered out. In other words, when you're discharged, they gave you \$300 to survive on. And I told him how I was putting up a notice on the ward, I'd pay anybody on the ward my mustering-out pay who would marry me to get me out of the service (LAUGHS).

You did that?

I did that. And he, in the meanwhile, we had had a date, and he had this little brown bag. And he--