

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
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INTERVIEW WITH  
MRS. ELEANOR ROSE WILDONER MAZZEI  
ENSIGN, NURSE CORPS, U.S. NAVY, 1944-1945

CONDUCTED BY  
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I'm Colonel Richard Ginn with Mr. Andre Sobocinski, Medical Historian, BUMED, and we have the pleasure today of doing an oral history interview with Mrs. Eleanor Wildoner Mazzei in her home in Springfield, Virginia. With us as we talk is her son, Don Mazzei, who is one of seven siblings. We want to talk about your World War II service as a Navy nurse and how you married a Public Health Service Commissioned physician who was serving with the Navy. In addition, your father was an Army veteran from World War I.

Q: We'll start with where you were born and grew up, and your memories of those days. Did you decide early on that you wanted to be a nurse?

A: No, I did not. I was born in Plymouth, Pennsylvania in my aunt, (my mother's sister's) home, on Boston Hill. The house is still standing. I did a lot of relaxing there with my aunt later on in life. They showed me the room in which I was born, and I swore I rememberd being born. My aunt became a beautician, and she opened a beauty shop in the lower floor of her home. After high school I used to go there on weekends and work for her, and she would do my hair because she was a Marcel expert, which is cooking up hot irons on a woman's hair and making waves.<sup>1</sup> But, let's go back to where I was born. I was born in Plymouth, Pennsylvania, and my parents had me baptized in St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Plymouth.

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<sup>1</sup> French hairdresser Marcel Grateau in 1872 patented a curling iron, which was used to wave hair. His invention was a success and led to new hairstyles, including the "Marcel Wave".

My father was from Hunlock Creek, Pennsylvania. When he got out of the service he decided he wanted to go back to Hunlock Creek, mainly because my grandfather on my father's side owned a lot of property down there. He divided that property between his male children. There was my father, who was the eldest, then there was my Uncle Harvey, Uncle Oscar, who was killed in the lines, Uncle Ellis, Aunt Hilda, Aunt Letha, and Aunt Erma. They all lived their lives, basically, in Hunlock's Creek, because my grandfather gave a section of his property to each of these people.

Well, I guess through my mother's influence, she convinced my father, "I think your father should be paid for the amount of ground that he's giving you." So we lived on the side of a mountain above all the rest of the people that inherited the property, and my father paid his father for the property in which he was building his home. The creek runs through the valley between two mountains, and all the people either lived on one side or the other. We lived up on this mountain and overlooked all these people

living in the valley. Of course, they called my father the rich one.

Q: He looked down on everybody.

A: Yes, we looked down on everybody. My father was very crafty and knowledgeable about gardening. He grew a big garden, and he fed his family well. He worked hard. He was a carpenter, he was a mason, he was anything I guess you wanted him to be. And my mother was a hard worker. I can remember the day my brother was born. I was only five years old, but I still remember it. It was joy and jubilation that a little boy was born. Everybody pitched in, including my brother, Don Fredrick.

I went to school in a one-room schoolhouse for eight years, which was right there in Hunlock's, "in the valley", as we called it. I can still remember my teachers, Miss Raymond and Miss Maynard. We used to sit in rows according to your grade. If you were in kindergarten you were up front, if you were in first grade you were next up front, and on down until you left eighth grade. After eighth grade I went to high school at Harder High. I was bussed there; the bus would come and take us there. Of course, that's

where we all went who became high-schoolers, but my cousins stopped going to school when that time came.

Q: They didn't go to high school?

A: They dropped out of school. My uncle Herbie lived at the base of the hill where we lived, and to his right is where my uncle Oscar built, and to his right is where my uncle Ellis built, and beyond that was my grandmother and grandfather's home.

Q: You had all the family right there. Which house did you go to for Christmas dinner?

A: We stayed right at home.

Q: You didn't all go to one house?

A: We all stayed home. I assure you, there was a lot of competition and rivalry. My father never boasted or anything like that, but there was a rivalry between the boys. I used to go to my grandparents house, because she knew I loved sauerkraut, and they made their own sauerkraut every year.

Q: Her name was Wildoner?

A: Her name was Wildoner, yes; her name before marriage was Dewalt, I think. They would grow their own vegetables and do their own canning. My grandfather had cows and pigs, and my father, at one time, had some pigs. We never had a cow. Grandpa had a cow that we got some milk from, but not much.

Q: Did you have any favorite courses in high school?

A: Yes, "finish, get out". I had no intentions of doing anything other than finishing high school, so I did not take a business course or anything like that. I did have an aunt who lived in Philadelphia and was married to Mr. Bill Thatcher, who was secretary to the mayor of Philadelphia at the time. They never had any children, but she was a favorite aunt, and as I told you, my Aunt Mary was married to Tom Watkins. I was the only girl on that side of my mother's family, and there were two boys: Thomas and Arthur-my two favorite cousins. They used to tease me terribly, but that's getting ahead of the story.

My uncle Harvey married a girl from around the community someplace, and they had two daughters, Leah and Mildred, and a son, Robert. Mildred and I became very fast friends. My uncle Oscar had Betty and -- well, quite a few

children -- but the reason I say Betty is because Betty and I became quite close. My Uncle Ellis has a cousin who's living in Pennsylvania, and I see her periodically. She also takes care of the cemetery for me up in Hunlock's called **Swerver Town Hill**. Of course, it doesn't have any caretakers or anything like that. It's up to you to take care of it. So, I graduated high school.

Q: That was in 1940?

A: Yes, and my mother said to me, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I don't know." Mom wanted me to stay at home, because it was a traditional thing that a thousand jars of prepared food would be in the basement. She would start canning from the time anything appeared on the market. My father had this tremendous garden, and each year he put ten bushels of potatoes in the cellar that had to be done. My mother felt that I should stay home and help her, but I wasn't about to.

She said, "Well, what are you going to do?" My aunt Winney said, "Why don't you go into nursing?"

I said, "I didn't take any courses for nursing."

"Well, apply." My other cousin Leah, Mildred's sister, was already in nursing school, but my mother and father said they did not have the income to send me there. So I said, "Well, I'll go to work somewhere."

In Hunlock's valley there was a family called Croop, and he was wealthy. He owned this amusement park, **Croop's Glen**, which was their property.<sup>2</sup> One brother had a general store, and this was where everybody went and got their groceries, medicine, whatever. Another brother, Stanley, was an MD and he lived in Kingston, and my dad and Stanley were very good friends. When we went down to the general store, it was like you had a community of everybody talking. That's where the gossip formed, and got passed.

My father said, "Stanley, Eleanor wants to go into nursing but we don't have the money and she needs to have some work. Do you know where she can go to work?"

Stanley said, "Yes, I do. My brother Harry needs help in his house." My Aunt Mary didn't live too far. There was Plymouth, and here's Kingston, like that. So he said, "Dr. Croop's housekeeper needs help. Maybe she could go there

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<sup>2</sup> Croop's Glen, in Hunlock Creek, PA, opened by B. Frank Croop in 1908. By 1928 it had a number of attractions and advertised parking for 2,000 cars. Little remains of the attractions now, and is now Croops Glen Park.

and work for her." So I went there, and my mother and my aunt Mary were with me. The first thing Mrs. Croop said to me was, "I want you to dust the living room," so I dusted the living room.

Mrs. Croop asked, "You cook?" I knew how to cook, even though I didn't cook; but I said, "Well, yes."

So she said, "You can start tomorrow." My wages were to be \$1 a day. I worked seven days a week, and I had a half a day off on Wednesday and a half a day on Sunday. I was to work from 6:00 until I was done at night.

I go to work the next day and she said, "We'll have pumpkin pie for supper." Well, telephones had just come in, and I was scared to death of a telephone. I thought, what am I going to do? I called my aunt up. "Aunt Mary, she wants me to make pumpkin pie for supper. What do I do?"

She said, "You cook the pumpkin and you do this and that." Well, here sits the pumpkin on the back porch and I had to go from scratch. I had to peel it, and cook it, but when I walked into the kitchen that morning the sink was loaded with dishes. I had to do all that first. Then I prepared the dinner and I did those dishes for the

housekeeper, her husband and three kids, plus Dr. Croop had two kids at home, but he had more kids that were at college.

I had to prepare those meals, serve them, and clean the house. The only thing I didn't have to do was the laundry. They had a laundress, praise the Lord. Well, okay. I worked and worked and worked. Fortunately, Dr. Croop was on staff at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital come time that I was to take my entrance examination to nursing.

I took my examination, and passed everything, but they said, "We can't allow you to come in and be a student."

"Why?"

"You have infected tonsils so you'll have to have a tonsillectomy before you can come in."

I told my parents and they said, "Well, I guess you can't go, because we do not have the money to send you." Fortunately, my mother had taken out an insurance policy which was originally five cents, but by the time I was 17 or 18, that policy had an amount of \$300, and they said I could have that money. They would give me that money to go to nursing school, but it wasn't enough for the surgery.

Dr. Croop came into the kitchen and said, "How'd you make out?" (Because the office was connected to the house. I also took care of that office too.) I said, "I can't go into nursing."

He said, "Why?"

I said, "Because they said I had infected tonsils, and I have them out before I can come in."

"Don't you worry. You're going to go. I'll do it." Here's an OB GYN who hadn't done a tonsillectomy in ages, and he put me in the hospital and took my tonsils out; but I had to stay three days. He had cut me so deep that I had stitches on both sides of my throat and I started to hemorrhage on the table. But, that's not the end of the story. After three days I went home. I used to hate ham and cabbage cooked together, but it was a staple in our families; ham and cabbage and boiled potatoes all together, and I used to hate it. I walked into my aunt's house and she was making ham and cabbage. I never smelled anything so good in all my life. I ate ham and cabbage. I loved it and I still love it. Well, to make a long story short, I went through nursing school from to 1943. After I graduated

there was a call out for nurses to work, so my friends Bruce Sherman, Vera Lasawski, and I decided to apply for a job at Margaret Hague Maternity Hospital in Jersey City.<sup>3</sup> We did and we were accepted. I can still see us going on the Greyhound bus out of Wilkes-Barre Square.

Q: Would that have been in 1943 when you finished nursing school?

A: Yes. We got on the Greyhound bus, and I wish we had film of it. I remember always reading about the skyscrapers in New York City. I had these bags, got off the bus, and stood there in Jersey City's square looking up. I must have looked like a typical yokel. I got over to the nursing center where they maintained their own building for nursing school residents. I had a room on the eighth floor and we used to go back and forth to duty underground in a tunnel. I went there and loved it, and had a lot of fun. The nurses welcomed me and I welcomed them. We had lots of fun, but afterward we all dispersed; we never stayed together.

Q: By the way, in your nursing training, what was the most challenging part?

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<sup>3</sup> In 1931 the Margaret Hague Maternity Hospital was added to the Jersey City Hospital, and the combined facility was dedicated as the Jersey City Medical Center in 1936, the title it holds today.

A: Learning Materia Medica,<sup>4</sup> I guess we would call it dosage: how to decipher and evaluate medications because if you had to give an intravenous, you had to know what to put in there. I learned how to make saline solutions. The method of choice at that time (and I could never quite understand it) was what we called a hypodermic lyses. The needle was given directly into the leg and the water was absorbed through that -- not an IV, but hypodermic lyses.

Q: ...into the muscle?

A: Yes, into the muscle. If they needed fluids that was the choice of administration. In the meantime, while I was in training, my cousin Mildred became involved with her eventual husband. She wasn't in training yet, but my cousin Leah was already in there, and there was competition. There was a lot of dissention between the three of us, but she and I were very close. I was on duty in isolation when Mildred came in as a patient, and she was in the next ward.

The wards had 16 beds on one side and 16 on the other; 32 patients on a ward and one nurse to take care of all of them. That was awesome when you stop to think about it

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<sup>4</sup> Materia Medica: the body of collected knowledge about the therapeutic properties of any substance used in healing.

today. Part of my duty, if I was not busy on isolation was to walk down the hall and help the nurse on duty in the Medical/Surgical ward. I remember the evening I said, "I'm going down to see how Mildred is." She was on the right hand side and she was barely audible. I felt her cold and clammy, and I said, "Hey, how are you?"

She said, "I don't feel good." I took her pulse and it was rapid. I didn't say anything to anybody, but I came out of that ward, out into the hall, and I told an intern walking by, "Come in here. I think my cousin is dying. She's in shock."

He came in, looked at her, and boy, did things begin to fly. She was in the OR before you could know what happened to her. She had an ectopic pregnancy rupture, but she lived.

Q: Good thing you came over.

A: Well, I was sent there. I'm a firm believer (Don't think I'm kind of loony.) but I'm a firm believer of the Almighty. He saved me from an awful lot of trouble. Anyhow, Mildred lived, but I got blamed by Leah who said that I

spread the rumor and so forth, but I never did. I never even told anyone, but that's okay.

Q: Spread what rumor?

A: That she had an ectopic pregnancy and she was not married, God forbid at that time.

Q: Well, you finished the rest of your training.

A: Yes, I finished fine. I was invited to go out by one of the nurses. She said, "Would you go out with her boyfriend Julian's roommate?"

I said, "Nope, I don't like that person. I hate him."

She said, "Ah, it's too early in the morning." It was 6:00 AM and we were walking through the tunnel." She said, "I'll call you at 10:00 and you'll feel better." So she called me at 10:00. "Will you go out with Julian's roommate?" This was a doctor who was doing a residency in pediatrics where my future husband was in training.

I said, "I will go if you promise me that I will be back by midnight."

She said, "Alright, I promise you will be back by midnight." So I went on this blind date. He didn't know his goose was cooked.

Q: Where were you living at this point? At Margaret Hague, and because of my maternity history that's why my first duty was a St. Agnes.<sup>5</sup>

Well, Arm [Armand] and I went together for about a year and a half before he went in the service, and I was left on Main Street. I said the heck with that, I'm going to go too.

Q: So how did he end up in the Public Health Service?

A: He joined.

Q: So he voluntarily joined the Public Health Service?

A: Yes, and then me too; I joined the Navy. I don't think they had a female contingency at that time in the Public Health Service.

Q: So how did you find out about the Navy?

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<sup>55</sup> St. Agnes Hospital, founded in 1862 by the Sisters of St. Francis; today is the St. Agnes Medical Center, Philadelphia, PA.

A: My brother Don was in the Navy. I didn't want to go in the Army because my cousin Leah went in the Army, and there was rivalry there; believe me, family rivalry. Leah was terrible. While I was in nursing training, she was in training too, but she got to graduate before I did, and everybody knew that we were first cousins. She'd come into my closets to take my clothes, and wear them. People would see me wearing them and they'd ask, "What'd you do? Borrow from her?" And I'd say, "No." My Aunt Mary and my Aunt Winney saw that I had everything that I wanted and needed as a young lady. They were very, very generous to me.

And then as the story goes, Arm and I corresponded, and talked by telephone. I had other male friends, but it just wasn't there. It took getting...what shall I say? We were engaged before he went onboard ship, but after he went onboard and they were bombed, he decided, "I don't know if I'm going to get back or not, so I guess I'd better go ahead and do it." It was a great time.

Q: Do you remember the day you joined the Navy?

A: I joined the Navy to see the world and what did I see? "I saw the sea." That's what they used to say. After we were

married I was piped aboard. I was actually stationed on the **USS Hyman (DD-732)**.<sup>6</sup> He was the medical officer there, and he was also the chaplain. After we were married, the whole crew gave us a dinner aboard the ship. I was piped aboard, and I was scared to death. I couldn't remember when I came aboard, was I supposed to salute the flag first and then the captain, or the captain first?

Q: You were already in the Navy at that point?

A: Oh yes.

Q: How about the day you came into the Navy, what was that like? How did you join up? Did you go to a recruiting office?

A: You know, that's elusive to me. I might have applied in Jersey City, and then after I knew I was accepted I went back home for a week or two; and from there I went into the Navy.

Q: You said you went to Portsmouth for Boots? Any memories of Boots?

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<sup>6</sup> USS *Hyman* (DD-732): commissioned 16 June 1944, de-commissioned c. 1966; arrived at Iwo Jima 19 February 1944 to support USMC landings; arrived Okinawa 1 April 1944 to support landings.

A: Essie Young and I had the same room, and we had bunk beds. I couldn't sleep on the top, so she slept on the top and I slept on the bottom. She came from a small town near Wilkes Barre, and we shared that background together.

Q: Were the barracks you were in for nurses or any women in the Navy?

A: This was a Navy nurses' quarters. All the girls from the Navy were there.

Q: Was that officially a part of the Portsmouth Naval Hospital?

A: That was part of Portsmouth. I told you how "the locker moved".

Q: Yes, describe that locker.

A: It was an ordinary, dark green locker where you took your clothes off and hung them up. I opened it up and I said, "This thing is moving." Cockroaches that big were all the way up on the walls in there.

Q: Why were they in there?

A: Infected. Now, whether the South was a good atmosphere for them or what, I don't know, but after I sent my clothes

home to my mother in my footlocker, I said, "Don't take them in the house for at least a month. Leave everything outside and open on the porch," because my mother was fastidious about bugs and cleanliness.

I got the scabies<sup>7</sup> one time when I was in grade school. Of course, the whole community was like an epidemic. Every day you would go up to the teacher and spread your hands like this, and she could tell by what was in-between your fingers if you were infected. Well, it was weeks before I was diagnosed. My mother would take every inch of my clothes and bedding every day, put them in a boiler on the stove, boil all these clothes, hang them out, and they'd freeze. I don't know how the woman did it all, but we didn't spread the scabies anywhere.

Q: I'd like to go back to the nurses' quarters. You shared a room with Essie Young, was there anybody else?

A: Lots of girls, all my friends.

Q: So there were two nurses per room?

A: Yes. We shared the one room.

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<sup>7</sup> Scabies, also called the Seven-Year Itch; a common skin infection in children caused by mites.

Q: I've got to ask you, what did you do for recreation? You were engaged to be married at that point.

A: We'd go shopping. We'd go out and have a drink at the bar. Essie didn't participate as much, but we'd all go out and have some fun with some music and dance.

Q: What were your first impressions of the Navy?

A: I thought it was darn good food. We went to a common dining room. Everybody went and sat down and you had a place. The food was put on the table, but God forbid if you were the last one. We had biscuits, sausage, eggs, anything you wanted for breakfast. We had the cream of the crop. It wasn't like the Army. The Navy had good vittles.

Q: At that point you're also doing Boots; you're doing your basic training. What was that like?

A: It was fun. It was a whole new thing.

Q: You had classes?

A: Yes, what you can do and what you can't do, and that's where you learned about nine counts. Define?? You stayed far away, and you had to learn how. If you were crossing

the compound going from, say, duty to nurse's quarters and the flag was being hoisted or taken down, you knew you had to stay there and give the mandatory salute until it was all done. And you learned how to behave; shall we say that? I think that's the most important thing. A lot of manners.

Q: You got to do some drilling, some marching?

A: Oh yes, I told you we had a Marine sergeant. He was strict. "Rear march, hump, hump." And then you had to do it like he taught you.

Q: And this went on for several weeks, I guess?

A: Yes, I would say I was there about a month.

Q: Did anybody quit while you were there?

A: Not that we were aware of, no.

Q: So you had a pretty good impression of the Navy?

A: Oh yes, I was in seventh heaven. I thought it was great.

Q: Was the best part the food or was it the people?

A: The boys were fine. The Navy people.

Q: How did the medical officers treat you?

A: With respect. In fact I had one man who was being treated for a wound and he was on penicillin. This was when I was in Norfolk in the officers' quarters. The doctor had ordered a penicillin solution to wash out the wound, and I kept looking at this guy and he's allergic. I kept telling the doctor, and finally the patient had a real bad reaction to the penicillin; but I didn't say "I told you so". You didn't do that; he was higher rank than I was. But I continually informed him of the patient's condition, because the patient started breaking out all over his body. Of course, penicillin had not been in use very long, and it was a panacea.

Q: After that, you go to your first assignment, which was in Philadelphia?

A: After Boots I was in Philadelphia.

Q: They called it "Boots"?

A: Yes, it was called Boots. I loved Philadelphia, because I had an aunt that lived there. She lived in West Philadelphia, and I saw her often. I used to go right outside the hotel, get on a trolley, and it was great. We had a lot of nice stores. That's where you learned about

the Horn and Hardat<sup>8</sup> store that was right next door to the Ben Franklin.<sup>9</sup>

Q: How did you come to be staying in the Ben Franklin Hotel?

Apparently, the Navy must have taken over the hotel.

Was it all women in the Navy living there? Or was it co-ed?

A: That's a good question. I didn't pay attention, but I know there were a lot of Navy nurses there. I had girlfriends in Philadelphia in the hotel, but none that were memorable.

Essie Young was a roommate when I went down to Norfolk.

Q: We'd gone to war during the time from when you graduated high school and went to nursing school. Pearl Harbor had been bombed and now we're engaged around the world. During that time you joined the Navy. What do you remember about those days?

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Horn and Frank Hardart opened a small lunchroom in Philadelphia in 1888, and in 1902 they opened in Philadelphia the first automated restaurant in the United States. By 1947 they had 147 shops and restaurants in Philadelphia and New York.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Franklin Hotel, opened in 1928 as the last great hotel built in Philadelphia before the Great Depression. Has been converted to upscale apartments.

A: I remember when war was declared. I was passing meds in one of the little wards in nursing training, and I had quite a few men as patients. I was thinking, "What now? What's going to be next?"

Q: Nobody knew what the outcome would be.

A: No, but I remember having this tray of medications in my hand and somebody had a radio on when Roosevelt said, "We're at war," I thought, "Oh boy. I wonder what's next." But, I knew life was going to go on. I was more interested in graduating back them.

Q: At some point did you have the thought of joining the Navy?

A: Never entered my mind, not until after I went down to Jersey City. I met Arm's family. They were very nice to me. I became entwined with them, and I did a lot of circulating to their home and back. I'd take the train from Philly to Newark and they'd pick me up. They were very nice, because I think they knew his goose was cooked (laughs).

Q: How were you communicating with your fiancé then?

A: Telephone.

Q: You were calling and sending letters?

A: Yes.

Q: How long did it take to get a letter from him?

A: I never timed it. If it would be too long it would be a telephone call. It didn't take too long. Letters were pretty quick.

Q: Go back to St. Agnes. Could you take us through a typical working day at the hospital?

A: It would be just like when I was in training. You'd report to duty. You'd have a chief nurse, and she'd give you the report from the evening. You'd be assigned X amount of patients. You were responsible for their care and their medications, and responsible to the chief nurse.

Q: These were eight-hour shifts?

A: Yes, I don't think I had a twelve-hour then, but I did do twelve in training.

Q: Was it twelve-on twelve-off?

A: No, it was twelve hours, and if you had a class you went to that and then you'd come back and finish. As I told you, in training I had a half a day off each week and one Sunday a month.

Q: So your average day was a twelve-hour day one way or the other?

A: Yes, average nursing school was a twelve-hour day, and you also did a night duty that day too.

Q: Did any of the gals that you were with in training quit while you were there?

A: No. After we graduated one of my friends committed suicide, but nobody knew that she was suffering.

Q: Did you find your Navy experience agreeable?

A: I had a ball. I would tell anybody to go. I've said this many times, "Go in the Service. You'll never be treated any better and it's the best of everything." I had the best of everything, I felt. I'm sure that maybe there were some girls in there that were from a higher echelon than I came

from, but I came from the lower class and I felt the Navy put me in the upper class.

Q: Lower class but living higher on the hill.

A: Yes.

Q: Are there any patients that stand out in your mind?

A: Yes, there was one, and I often wonder how he's doing. He was from out west, Minneapolis, Minnesota, I believe, and he was a youngster. His last name was Flad. He had a girlfriend, and he was a young officer. He might have been part of Iwo Jima -- that's a long time for me to remember.

Q: You mentioned Iwo Jima. That occurred when you were stationed at the hospital in Norfolk?

A: Yes.

Q: You were the chief nurse for the officer ward?

A: For that one particular section.

Q: And these were returnees from Iwo Jima?

A: Yes.

Q: How was their condition?

A: Their skin was bad. There were a lot of infections of various types. A lot of them had to be deloused.

Q: They actually got to the States, all the way back, and they were lousy?

A: Yes.

Q: So what did you do for these patients?

A: They were isolated. We took all their clothes off of them, and they had a certain treatment that we had to give them.

Q: Did you have to wear a mask?

A: No, not that type of isolation. It wasn't infectious.

Q: Did they powder them with DDT to delouse them?

A: Frankly I can't remember what they did, but they were put in a room by themselves and all the clothes they had on were taken off. But they didn't necessarily get infected in Iwo Jima, they could have gotten infected on their way back. I just don't remember that much. I only know that I was married when I went to Norfolk Naval Base, and I was

then a Mrs. and they all knew that. Prior to that, I was in Philly and in Portsmouth.

Q: Flad was one of your patients at Norfolk?

A: Yes.

Q: And do you remember what he suffered from?

A: I don't remember why he was there, but he was a gentleman and interesting. I know that he was anxious to go home to his wife. He shared a lot of his feelings with me, maybe because I might have reminded him of his mother. Who knows? But he was young, a really young man, and he was an officer. As I said, I only took care of officers.

Q: Where was Armand while you're there at. Was he at sea?

A: Yes. After we were married he had a ten-day leave and he came to Norfolk. I told the boys all about Armand and that he was coming, and they said, "Oh, he'll need to rest, so we'll give him this bed." And they did. They would check to see how he was doing, and they locked the door on the way out. Needless to say, they did not have good thoughts. We rented a room in someone's house, because a lot of people could make money this way during the war...

Q: ...by renting rooms to the military.

A: Yes, did you have anything like that when you were a young man, where you would go to a base and outside the base there were people renting out rooms?

Q: Oh yes. Did Armand talk about his duties as a medical officer?

A: Yes, he did.

Q: What were some of the stories?

A: He had to do an appendectomy onboard, and he did a couple circumcisions. He also ran church services.

Q: That's right, he was a dual duty medical officer and chaplain.

A: He was on a destroyer escort, and he described how they went from Murmansk, Iceland to Bermuda. It was off of Bermuda that they were bombed and lost their fantail and 22 men. That was enough to give him diarrhea. That was before we were married. I think, he might have become a confirmed bachelor, but we did okay because we had five children and two pregnancies I lost. He was a good provider, and we had

a good life together. I don't regret any one thing about it.

Q: What was his specialty?

A: Pediatrician. He loved his kids, and he was a good diagnostician.

Q: Where did you all go after the war?

A: After I got out, Armand was still in the service, and he was in the service two years after that. I went to live with my sister-in-laws.

Q: In Pennsylvania?

A: No, New Jersey. Armand was born and raised in Newark (they always say in "the Italian ward"). He was a graduate of the University of Rome and the University of Bologna<sup>10</sup> in Italy. When he came back, he had to declare himself a specialist in those areas. You had to have so many years of practice as a pediatric resident. You had to have so many years as a resident under your belt before you could say, "I am a specialist in pediatrics."

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<sup>10</sup> University of Bologna, founded c. 1088; thought to be the oldest continuously operating university in the world.

Q: So he did his residency in this country?

A: Oh yes.

Q: ...and he was a graduate of the University of Bologna School of Medicine?

A: Yes.

Q: That is one of the oldest medical schools in the world.

A: Yes.

Q: Interesting. So he was born in this country, and then went to Italy for university training,

A: Yes. He had a very dear friend, Dr. Anthony Stigliano, who was our best man and also a pediatrician. They met during Armand's pediatric residency at **New York Foundling**.<sup>11</sup>

Q: Did you raise your family in Newark?

A: No. Armand's father had died when he was 29, at the time of the stock market crash. They say he died of a heart attack.

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<sup>11</sup> New York Foundling, a New York charity founded in 1869 by the Catholic Sisters of Charity, is one of New York City's oldest and largest welfare agencies. As it undertook healthcare services in addition to social services it changed its name to New York Foundling Hospital. One of the medical programs was St Agnes Hospital, which opened in 1880.

Who knows what he died from? I know that they had acquired quite a bit of property, and at the time it was hard to live. They rented to families, but the times were so bad that people couldn't pay their rent. His mother-in-law wouldn't demand that they pay, and they lost the property after his father died. So, his sister, the one I went to live with, took in his mother and two sisters. My brother-in-law was a pharmacist. I also had a brother-in-law who owned a mill, and I had a brother-in-law who was in the insurance business. My sister-in-law was a pharmacist, and another sister-in-law was a medical chemistry lab tech who worked in the lab of Newark City Hospital.

Q: Now, in your case, once you got out of the Navy and the babies started coming...

A: No, I did not have any children right away. I helped Armand get his office started, and we didn't have any children for awhile.

Q: Where were you living?

A: In Long Branch, New Jersey. It's a town outside of Asbury Park, near Fort Monmouth. I lived right behind Fort Monmouth. You know it's closed now.

Q: Oh yes. Did you help him out in the office?

A: Not really, I did not want to. I didn't want to become familiarized with the patients. I thought it was better that I didn't. If he had to examine a mother he would call me, but otherwise he had a secretary. We had a nice home there, a beautiful home.

Q: Did you ever work as a nurse after that?

A: After my oldest son went to college I became a nurse's assistant at a rehab center in Long Branch, and I became friends with another nurse there.

Q: You were a registered nurse?

A: Oh yes. You couldn't go into the Navy if you weren't. She was a smoker, and I made very many friends in Long Branch and the surrounding communities. One thing about doctors and doctors' wives is they become very snotty. You know, there's competition. Of course, I'd be right up in the upper echelon with them; otherwise, you didn't click. The hospital, has become the massive Monmouth Medical Center. I still go visit my friend. She was an Italian war bride, and she married Tom, who was in the Army. **My son** which one? and her son became good friends.

Q: I take it your time in the Navy was a special time for you?

A: Definitely. I'll never forget it.

Q: Was it one of the highlights of your life?

A: Definitely. I tell any nurse I meet, "Join the Navy."

Q: We need a recruiting poster. Well, we're going to talk ourselves out, aren't we? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask yourself?

A: No, I don't have any questions. I believe I'm led and directed in the way I am to go, and that's the way it's going to be. So, I want you to know I have the most wonderful children in the world. I couldn't ask for better kids in my life.

Q: I work closely with Don and certainly appreciate him.

A: Don's the model of my husband. Looks like him, acts like him. He's really a good fellow. I can't say anything bad about any of them because they're all wonderful. Armand is in California. Right now he's on vacation visiting his

friend Barry in Mexico. Armand and his wife left yesterday morning. Barry's mother and father became our friends because Barry and Armand were in college together. He now lives in Mexico; he has dual citizenship.

Q: Is Armand in business?

A: Not now. He's retired.

Q: What kind of business was he in?

A: Lumber. He sold lumber to cabinet makers. Ask him about a piece of wood and he'll tell you what it is. As I said, he left after he got out of college because we thought he was going to go to medical school, but he didn't. He took off for greener pastures, I guess, but he's doing what he wants to do. He's a self-made musician, has a band, and is married to a girl who is doing work with the elderly. He and has put a lot of feathers in my hat to tell me what to do and where to go.

Q: Well, those are all our questions. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

