VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

LaVergne R. Novak

Conducted by Mr. Kevin Haney

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This is an interview conducted on Saturday, July 22, 2006, at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. This is an interview of LaVergne Novak. My name is Kevin Haney. I am serving as the interviewer. LaVergne and I are the only two participants in this interview.

LaVergne, could you start us off with what your branch in the military was, why you decided to enlist, and that sort of information, and your years of service.

I was in the Marine Corps. I enlisted August 3, 1943. I enlisted because the entire country was at war, in the middle of World War II. Everybody did something, either in defense plants or even saving grease for the armaments. And so, I chose to join the Marine Corps.

Why did you decide on the Marines?

They were the last ones to take women into them, and it was the one I waited for. The Marines had always made an impression on me. In grade school we sang the Marines Hymn, and I thought that was wonderful. So, it was the Marine Corps. They organized them in February of 1943, and I wasn't old enough at that time – I had to wait until my 20th birthday, which was in May. I believe it was summertime. I decided I would wait until I enjoyed summer a little bit, and then I actually enlisted in August and was called to boot camp in October.

Where did you go to boot camp?

At Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

What was that like for you on the first day? How did you arrive there?

Well, as I said, women were new to the Marine Corps. They didn't want us in the first place.

So you were the wave of women Marines, literally.

Not the very first. I was in the 17th training battalion, so I guess there were 16 battalions ahead of me. They didn't have many facilities for women at Camp Lejeune. In fact they didn't even have any uniforms for us. The first week or so that we were there we wore civilian clothes. They told us to bring clothes along with us and they would ship them home for us. So we were Marines, but we were in civilian clothes for at least a week before boot camp started. Boot camp consisted of learning to close order drill – learning to take orders, mostly. And just becoming familiar with the Marine Corps. We studied Marine Corp history.

Were the instructors male or female at that time?

Our drill sergeant was a female. She was like our shepherdess. She got us from one place to another. Our drill instructor was actually male. And he wasn't too fond of his job! (chuckles) But we brought him around. We were all friends by the end of time there.

So he sort of got used to it.

Oh, yeah. All the men Marines were kind of – they didn't know any more about the Marine Corps than we did, most of them down there. But they were men and that made a difference. But, anyway, it was a lot of fun – a lot of hard work and a lot of fun.

Was there much association between the male and the female?

No, but as our training progressed – I think our boot camp was six weeks – as we got to the last couple of weeks, we had a dance. We mixed. We had to walk guard duty every night, and they always had a male and a female guard together, and a dog usually accompanied us – not an official dog, just more like to tag along. He was a big collie, and he was very nice company.

What was the mood in boot camp at that time in 1943?

Oh! We were eager to do what we could. I was 20 years old, and I was just starting out. I had just graduated from high school a couple of years before. We were all eager to be Marines, and we thought that was great. We were very proud of the fact that when we graduated boot camp they finally gave us emblems to put on our lapels, and that was big deal to get those emblems. Then we knew we were Marines.

Was the training a little different for the male and the female recruits?

Oh, sure. At that time the Marines – all through World War II – the Marines did not send their women overseas. We got to watch the men in their training. We watched them with the armaments that they used, and we went to see the war dogs.

War games.

No, the war dogs – the canines. They called them Marine war dogs, I think. And we watched them in action and their training. But, otherwise we went to classes most of the time, and did drilling, exercising – physical exercise. They kept us busy.

You were selected for advance training of some type, and how was that selection done – everybody was given the same thing, or different women were given different roles?

In boot camp we all did the same thing. After that we all went in different directions. When I was interviewed – when I enlisted – they asked what you knew, what was your background like. I had been in an organization that sent us to radio school, so I knew

Morse Code. I asked for radio school, and believe it or not, I got it! Usually it didn't work that way. You might ask for radio school – and this actually happened – some of them got to be cooks and bakers, and they were mad at us who were waiting to go to radio school. (chuckles)

Where did you go to radio school?

In the Marine Corps, you mean? First I went to Cherry Point to await transfer to radio school, because new classes wouldn't start until after the first of the year and our boot camp was over in November. So they sent me to Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station, at Cherry Point, North Carolina – just a short bus ride from Camp Lejeune. I was there for about six weeks. While there, mostly I did nothing. We were supposed to fall out for drill every morning. I discovered they didn't take roll, so I quit doing that after a while (chuckles). To pass the time I went to a bible class, which was worthwhile. And then they gave me mess duty. And I was on mess duty from the day before Thanksgiving until the day after New Years. So that kept me very busy – I got up at 4:00 in the morning to get things ready. That was not the best time of my life in the Marine Corps – after a while I thought, "What am I doing here?"

Then you went on to radio school.

I went on to radio school at Miami University. It was a United States Naval Station radio at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. I was there until May when I graduated as a radio operator. We studied Morse Code and typing. I had had three years of typing in high school, and they gave us each a goal to reach at this school. I told them that after three years of typing in high school I could type about 55 words a minute fairly accurately. They said, "Okay, we'll set your goal at 75." I said, "75?" They said, yes. Well, at the end of the training I was typing 90. They had a wonderful way of teaching it. Anyway, after our graduation a group of us were sent to radio material school in Omaha, Nebraska, where we lived in the Fontanelle Hotel. We took our meals in the hotel dining room and went to work at a little lab a few blocks away. We marched close order down there – down the streets – in our dungarees. And that lasted until September or October, I think. Our mission was to learn to repair and maintain radios. Our group of women was a small group, and there were a lot of men in our class – some of whom had been in combat already and were back, and they had to do something with them. They were getting treatments. So they sent them to radio school. These men mostly slept through the class, and the women were all eager, taking notes. And the men got all better grades than we did, because they were more inclined to be good with their hands and making things, and doing mechanical things than we were. But we all managed to get through it. One of the things we had to do was learn to solder in the dark, like field conditions. They had a closet where you had to go in and solder. I still have a scar on my finger from where I soldered my finger by accident (chuckles).

Did anybody talk about what was going on in the Pacific? I mean, you were actually with people who were back from combat.

Oh, yes. They did. You mean the men who were back from combat. Although we didn't get a lot of time to associate with the men. In class we didn't get the chance to talk, and they lived in a different facility. I mean, they didn't live in the same hotel we did. I think they lived in the YMCA. So we didn't see a lot of them. In the evenings we had to study and get our clothes ready, shine our shoes – which was an every night deal. We had to have our shoes shined. For graduation our project was to make a radio from scratch. They furnished all the resistors, screws, wires, switches and everything we needed. But we had to put them together into a radio. It was a vacuum tube era then, there were no transistors. So we had, I don't remember how many vacuum tubes we had in it. And our radio had to play when it was finished. When I first turned mine on I was amazed that it actually worked! (chuckles) There was music coming out of it!

And this was an individual project.

Every single one of us had to make a radio. Yes. Then, when they checked all our radios, and they all worked, they said we could either tear our radio apart and give the parts back so the next class could use them. Or, we could keep them, and I think it would cost us $7 or something like that to pay for them. There was a carpenter in the area who would build a cabinet – just a little square box – and put cloth on them for the speakers, if you wanted to keep it. Well, of course we all did. As far as I know everybody did. And so I had a radio to take with me to San Francisco.

Okay. Now how much advance notice would you get on a transfer? You went across country now to San Francisco.

Yes. I spent the rest of the war in San Francisco at that job. We traveled by train. They didn't put you on airplanes then – you traveled by train. And I was there until December of 1945. I actually could have gotten out – I had enough points; they gave points for your time in the service. And I had enough points to get out at the end of the war in September; actually, September 2 was the end of the war. But in our warehouse, equipment started to come back from the Pacific. Somebody had to be there to receive it and record it, and do the opposite of when we sent it out. So I was kept there – most of us were – until December. Then they had a change of heart and let us go home for Christmas.

So, what were your duties during the war?

In San Francisco? They were maintaining … We received requisitions from the field. We didn't know where they came from, because every installation overseas had a code name. They didn't tell you this came from Okinawa, or this is going to Guam. They usually had four-letter code names. We would get requisitions in and then we'd have to check our records, which were all maintained on file cards because there were no computers back then. And we would check them off and write in which unit the item went to on such-and-such a date. And when we'd get a list of things all going to that one code name we would send it out to the warehouse. They would gather the things from

the warehouse and get them off to the ships. That was about what I did for most of World War II.

Okay. So what was the mood when the war finally ended, at the camp?

It was strange. When the war was over in Europe, it was just another work day for us. We heard it on the radio and thought that was great, it was wonderful. But our war was still going great guns out in the Pacific, so we just went right back to work. But when the bombs fell on ... (interview stops momentarily).

You were just discussing the end of the war.

I heard on the radio that I had next to my desk that we had dropped an atom bomb equal to 10,000 tons of TNT on Hiroshima. So I went out of the office and told people that, and they all thought I was fooling. They said there was no such bomb. Then they came in and listened to the radio and realized that it was true. And I guess a few days later we dropped another bomb on Nagasaki. They said they expected the war to be over in a day or two. And it was. (Interview stops momentarily.)

I should have mentioned earlier that the Marine Corps did not have any barracks in San Francisco for either the men or the women Marines. We all – thousands of us – lived in the city wherever we could find a place to live. I managed to find a fairly nice room with my roommate in a boarding house. We lived on the third floor and looked out – we were up on a hill, it's called – I don't remember the name of it – but we were looking toward the Golden Gate Bridge. And we could see that there were submarine nets underwater that would close off the bay so no submarines could get into San Francisco Bay. If one of our ships was coming in, they would open the submarine nets and the ship would come in, and the nets would close again. And there were blimps flying overhead all the time watching for any foreign ships. So we were very close to the war. We didn't know how close it was going to get to us. And I was there for almost a year and a half. So that was our war in the Pacific. And the day it ended, the Colonel called our office and all the other offices at the Depot of Supplies at Islais Creek and said, "Get your people home. Let them all go home right now." They said they didn't know what was going to happen in San Francisco. Of course, everybody was out celebrating – you've seen the pictures in newspapers. I went home, and my roommate said, "I'm going to stay home." I said I was going to go downtown and see what was going on, because I could walk downtown from where we lived. And they had taken all the cable cars off the streets because they were a treasure to San Francisco, and they didn't want any of them damaged. But one somehow got left on the turntable at the end of Market Street – it was a turntable that the cable car would roll onto, and everybody would get off the cable car and they would switch it around so it could go back the way it came. Well, all of the servicemen commandeered this – they were on the top of it, and the sides of it, and it was going round and round like a merry-go-round. But I don't think it got damaged at all. But everybody was in such a good mood – there was no looting, no damage, no vandalism. They were just happy. So, it was a great time. That was on the first of September – the

day was in the middle of August, but the actual treaty was signed on September 2 aboard the Missouri.

Did you actually see that in news reports at the time, or soon after – the signing of the treaty?

Well, we didn't see it because there was no television then. We heard it on the radio all the time. Yes.

How was that for everybody?

That was great. We were all counting our points to see if we had enough to go home. But they didn't let us go home right away. Anyway, the shooting had stopped.

After the war you decided to remain in the Marine Corps – after World War II.

There was no place for me to remain. I was discharged, and there was no reserve unit for any women, so there was a two year period when I wasn't connected with the Marine Corps. But they never lost my address. So pretty soon I got a letter from them that said they were starting a women's platoon that was attached the Ninth Infantry Battalion at Navy Pier in Chicago. So I decided to enlist again. It had become so much a part of my life that I didn't feel right without it. I wanted to get back into a place where I could meet some of my old friends and compare notes on what we were doing. And so I did join. We met once a week at Navy Pier. I got a whole new supply of uniforms. And went once a week to Navy Pier where we'd do close-order drill. My job there was in the payroll – I would keep the time cards for everybody who reported for drill. Then I'd send them in to headquarters and they'd make up the checks – the paychecks – and send them back to me, and I would distribute them. So I was very popular – I had the paychecks!

Okay. So this was about 1947 to about 1949?

Yes.

And were you in the reserves when the Korean War broke out?

Yes. Even before the Korean War broke out – in fact, a couple of months before that – we were put on two weeks active duty, just for training. We spent one or two days up at Great Lakes Naval Training Station just north of Chicago to observe the WAVES at work. We traded comments with them about what we did and what they were doing, and they showed us their quarters and the jobs they had there.

Now the WAVES were the female Navy personnel.

Yes. And we also went to take a tour aboard the Silversides, which was a submarine anchored, I think at Monroe Harbor – permanently anchored. The accouterments of the submarine were explained to us. Very crowded conditions – you wondered how anybody

could subsists in a place like that and not kill each other. They worked on ships. You slept in one bed for such-and-such a time, then somebody else came and slept in the same bed for the next few hours. But it was fascinating. Everything was stainless steel. It was a beautiful ship. And Chicago let it get away. I think it's up in Wisconsin someplace now.

And then in the summer of 1950 the Korean War broke out. And what kind of orders did you get for that?

Everyday it seemed we got something in the mail from headquarters saying that we should notify our civilian employer that we would be leaving, that we expected to be called to active duty. And we should get our affairs in order. And about a week after we got this last one telling us to get our affairs in order because we would be leaving. We were leaving! The women got their orders first. We had to meet at Navy Pier. We had our sea bags full of uniforms and whatever we could take. We could not take cars. We had to travel together in a group by train. And I think there were 15 or 16 of us. A bus came to Navy Pier to take us to Union Station. As we filed aboard the bus, one of the hit songs on the Hit Parade at that time was "Goodnight Irene," so the men were all singing goodbye Irene instead of goodnight Irene. They were promising to roll bandages and donate blood for us and everything (chuckles). But they followed us in about a week, so their joy didn't last long.

So then you were sent to where?

Back to San Francisco. At that time the trains ended in Oakland. You had to take a ferry across San Francisco Bay to get to San Francisco. And so we got to San Francisco. A group of us were walking down the corridor in headquarters with our orders in hand, and the first person I ran into was the Captain I had to sit next to in his office all the time. I was between him and the Lieutenant. And, of course, he greeted me like a long lost friend. He said, "Where are you working now?" I said I wasn't working anywhere, I just got off the ferry boat and have my orders here. He said, "Do you want to work with me again at Islais Creek?" I said, "Absolutely!" So he took my orders and disappeared into an office and came out in about five minutes and said, "Here's your orders. Report to work tomorrow morning." So I had a job already. Almost the same job that I had in World War II. Except now it wasn't called 'Signal Supply' anymore, it was called 'Electronics Supply,' because there had been so many changes in the electronics. And I enjoyed working there again. I found an apartment with one of my friends this time. We had a very nice apartment in which we were happy. We took a cable car and a street car to work every morning. Then at 4:30 we came home and we were free for the evening. Since the Korean War was not a war – it was a police action – we were not required to wear uniforms, except while on duty. So we could wear civilian clothes. So people in San Francisco didn't realize there were this many service people back there again, because even the men wore civilian clothes a great deal of the time.

How were things different in Korea? I mean, here you are in the same city five years later – you're doing sort of the same job. What were some of the differences?

The differences were that the city hardly knew there was a war going on. They didn't know that all this military activity was taking place among them, because we wore civilian clothes most of the time. And so the whole city wasn't at war like it was in World War II. Everybody just went about their business. There was no defense plants for them to get into. It was supposed to be a small operation that would be over soon. Well, it wasn't that way. In fact, my brother got drafted right after I left – not drafted, he was called back in. And he was in for a year longer than I. But he went to Korea and was actually in combat conditions and earned a bronze star eventually. So he had a worse part of it than I did. And he was out in the winter – they have very cold winters in Korea. And he was stringing wires – he was in signal, too – this happened that way. So, it was a different feeling because the people didn't have the war on their mind all the time. In World War II, everything we did – everything was rationed or unavailable; there were no cars made during those four years; you couldn't buy tires, you had to have your tires recapped or stop driving; you couldn't buy gasoline, everybody had a ration card for gasoline. We had ration cards even in the service. We had ration cards for cigarettes. I didn't smoke, and my brother didn't smoke, but my father did, so we'd always get cigarettes and mail them home to my father. My mother would send us, since I had an apartment, she would send us ration stamps for little goodies that we could buy with the ration stamps. But, anyway, in the Korean War there was no such thing – there was no rationing.

So life was pretty standard stateside.

Yes. Until I got transferred to Camp Pendleton. And I knew Camp Pendleton – Camp Pendleton is in Oceanside, California, down the coastline from San Francisco, about 35 miles north of San Diego – and I knew it was a very big camp. So I decided I'd fly home and get my car and drive it back to Camp Pendleton, so I wouldn't be stuck without a car there. And I did that. I flew home and had a couple days leave, and then started driving back to Camp Pendleton. And I got there, and they wouldn't let me in because my driver's license had expired! I had sent for a new one, but with my traveling and everything, it hadn't caught up with me yet. And I had a hard time convincing them I had one on the way. But they finally let me in. And I got my car in a week later when my driver's license caught up with me. And that was the first time in all the years I was in the Marine Corps that I was actually working on a Marine Corps base. I was always living in a boarding house or someplace – I didn't really want to live on one. But this time I loved it at Camp Pendleton. I was there in the summer time when it was warm, and it was just great. There were a lot of Marines around me, finally! And I hoped I would stay there until I was discharged. Well, the Marine Corps doesn't work that way. Some of the girls who had been in our platoon at Navy Pier were 18 years old. They changed the age limit – they dropped it down to 18. So some of the girls were 18 years old, and here they were turned loose in a city like San Francisco, and not doing all that well. So they sent them to Camp Pendleton and the San Diego training base, and they needed some women with rank to look after them. So, I was one of them selected for Camp Pendleton. And there I also ran into people I had known in World War II, so it was fun. And when I walked into the office in Camp Pendleton – in Signal Supply –

there was a Staff Sergeant, which was my rank now, sitting at a desk. And when I walked in he said, "What's your MOS," which is a military occupational specialty. And I said I was an electronics supply chief. He threw his papers up in the air and said, "I'm out of here!" He'd been trying to get into a staging area to get ready to go overseas, and they said he could leave if his replacement came. Well, he was delighted to see me, and so I had a job again. And I was in charge of a small office of women and men who did the same thing – we received requisitions for electronic supplies and would – still no computers, we did it all on file cards again.

Did they still use the same coding system, or did you know where you were shipping stuff now?

Usually we knew where it was going. We didn't have all the various islands they were going to. In fact, sometimes, there was one pilot who would come in close to quitting time and want to get his stuff immediately. So we'd have to work overtime to get the stuff on his plane, and we'd get mad thinking why couldn't he come earlier. We discovered that he was in a group – I don't know where he was stationed – but they would tell him what they needed immediately, and he would take the requisition and fly it back to us instead of sending it through teletype and all those usual ways. And we would get it back to him, load it on at Alameda Air Station, and load it on his plane, and he'd take off and have it back to his unit the next day. Instead of going through channels.

Where was his unit?

I don't know. I don't remember where it was. I don't know if we ever knew. But it was someplace – it might have been in Korea. I don't know. I don't think it was that far away. He could have been stationed on Guam or someplace like that. But then we didn't mind working overtime – when we knew what he was doing. He was working overtime, too!

All right. So how did things progress after the Korean War?

Well, I'm not finished with the Korean War yet. I loved Camp Pendleton. I finally felt like a Marine, working on a Marine Corps base. And my joy lasted for about two and a half months when they decided I should go to recruiter's school. And I didn't want to go. And I talked to the Captain in our division. He sent a teletype to Washington saying I was necessary in the job I had, and that I would like to stay there. They wrote back and said Staff Sergeant Novak would report to recruiter's school. So I was off again. Recruiter's school was at Paris Island, South Carolina. So I turned around and drove back to South Carolina. I stopped in Augusta, Georgia to visit my brother, who had also been recalled to active duty, and then went on a day or two later to Paris Island. Recruiter's school was four or six weeks – I don't remember which. And I think there were 75 in my class – about ten women. And I was lucky enough to end up as Number One in my class. And, even though I didn't want to be there and tried to get myself out of going, I still did my best and managed to be first in my class. They asked us if we had a choice of stations – they gave us a list of all the recruiting stations in the United States –

and I thought West Virginia was close to home, so I'd take that because I had never been there. Well, I requested West Virginia. And I got Milwaukee! So, I turned around and drove up to Milwaukee and spent the rest of the war recruiting there. It was interesting, but, again, I'm the only woman in the whole state of Wisconsin – only woman in the whole state of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. And I was in an office with a lot of men Marines. But there I am again! You had to have some rank to go to recruiter's school, so they all had rank. And many of them were married and had families. And, again, there were no barracks, of course, so I had a little one room apartment and very lonely duty. And I thought: This is it, I'm going to get out. By that time was 35 years old and figured I had done my duty with the Marine Corps. I loved it. I wouldn't give it up for anything in the world. But my civilian job at that time wouldn't allow me to stay on – no, I'm getting ahead of myself. I did get out. I was released from active duty – I wasn't discharged. I was discharged in 1951, and I think my enlistment was up in 1952 or 1953, I'm not sure. At that time I was promoted to Technical Sergeant before I left. And I was released from active duty in 1951 and my enlistment was up in April of 1953. So I took my discharge and enlisted again. In 1953 I took two weeks active duty with our group from Navy Pier – I think it was Navy Pier – and went out to El Toro Air Base, which is a Marine Corps air station in Santa Ana, California. And I spent two weeks there and was a liaison in public information. I wrote newspaper articles about the people who were doing active duty at that time – who had taken the two weeks active duty. And that was kind of interesting. I met friends who I had known.

What sort of duties did you have when you were in the recruiting section?

Oh. When I was a recruiter I would be someplace every day. Usually one of the men and I would drive – we had a pick-up. The Army and the Navy had little vans, but we had a pick-up truck. And we'd go to various towns around Milwaukee. And everyplace we went there was a Post Office or a government building of some kind. We'd have a desk that we would use. We could leave information there with our telephone numbers on it. And if somebody picked up our information before we were there, they'd know we were coming, and they might meet us there and get more information. And we'd recruit some of them that way. And some of them would leave their addresses there and we would go visit them. So mostly I was going with this man around to look up for more men. And one time we had to climb up a hayloft in a barn to talk to this guy because he was up there busy doing something! And it was fun to a point. But I had decided by that time I was going to get released from active duty in May, and I wasn't too worried about how many women I was recruiting. Although I did go to high schools and talk at their career day meetings. There would be a WAC and a WAVE, and a Marine there each to give our little 'schpeel.' And it was fun doing that. When I did that I traveled by myself, usually by train. Wisconsin is a dairy state. If I didn't go too far I'd have to sit up all night on the train to come back, and we'd stop at every station to pick up milk on the way down to Milwaukee! When I went up on the edge of Lake Superior – those cities up there – and then Upper Michigan, they would give me a Pullman car. I had a sleeper car. It was much more comfortable!

What were the recruits like who were thinking of enlisting at the time – the questions you got?

There weren't too many girls looking to enlist because they didn't know about the war. In fact the war was over – no, the war wasn't over yet. But it wasn't on everybody's mind like World War II was, so there weren't that many who were eager to join. But they were all good candidates, the ones that I did find. I had more to do. In one office in Waukesha, we had a desk in a morgue!

County Morgue or Coroner's Office?

Coroner's Office. One time we were there and they were doing an autopsy in the next room. The door was closed, thank goodness! (chuckles) It was all interesting. Looking back on it, it was a wonderful experience. I wouldn't be who I am if it weren't for the Marines! Or if I hadn't had all that experience. Before I joined I was rather shy. And, boy, I learned I had to speak up for myself! It made a big difference.

And then you decided – sort of catch up on the timeline here – so it was about 1958.

Yes. I had a civilian job at the time, and if I wanted to take two weeks active duty – I was the only woman in this company, it was an electrical construction company – and when I went on vacation, even, it was hard on the people in the office and in the company, because nobody really knew what I did all the time or how to do it. So it was hard on the company when I left. So I decided I would take a vacation for a change instead of going to work someplace else. So that was the end of it.

How has your experience affected the way you view things now? Obviously it's been quite a number of years since you left the Marine Corps and a lot of things have happened in the country – various wars: Vietnam and that sort of thing. Can you just reflect on that for a moment – your thoughts about everything since and your experiences in the Marine Corps?

One thing that struck me. I had young cousins at the time I went into the Marine Corps. And as they grew up, one of them – I think she was in high school – she came up and said, "LaVergne, was Hitler in World War I or World War II?" And I thought, oh, boy!

When was that question at?

When? After the Korean War some time.

Sometime in the late '50's then.

Yes. And you realize that it meant so much to me, but to her it was just a name in the history books. It didn't register. But, as I say, I wouldn't give up my experiences in the Marine Corps for anything in the world. Because, as tough as it was, moving around all

the time, and having to meet new friends every place I went, and driving myself all over the country, it was worthwhile. It was certainly worthwhile.

And you stayed active with various volunteer organizations since then?

Yes. Actually, my father was a veteran of World War I. So I joined the junior auxiliary of the Berwyn Post of the American Legion – the Berwyn, Illinois post – when I was twelve years old, and stayed there until I was old enough, when I was 18, to join the auxiliary itself. And then, when I came back from the Marine Corps, after the end of World War II, I joined the Berwyn Post itself – not the auxiliary any longer. And so my father, who was a member of the Cyrus R. McCormick Post at McCormick Works, decided he would switch his membership. So he and I joined the Berwyn Post together! I think it earned a little space in the Berwyn Life newspaper. And I stayed in the American Legion – I'm still in the American Legion. I think I have 62 years now – 62 or 63 years. But I can't say I'm active in it anymore. But that's the story of my life.

Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered in the interview?

Yes. I'm a lifetime member of the Women Marines Association – the Blanche Osborne Chapter, Illinois, #2. We have members who are still in the service now. Any Marine who served at any time can join. It's a national organization with several thousand – I think over 3,000 members – nationally. We all get together and talk over old times. And the young ones now, we have some members in our chapter who have come back from Iraq already. And they have better stories to tell. We don't have uniforms in the Women Marines Association – we have caps that show our affiliation, our chapter affiliation. Ours is the Blanche Osborne Chapter, named for Blanche Osborne, who was a reporter on a newspaper during World War II. I can't remember which – I think it was an evening newspaper, maybe the Daily News or the Sun Times, I'm not sure. Or there was a Chicago Herald Examiner at that time. It was one of the newspapers at that time. And her column was all about the service people. She encouraged people to write to them, to send them things, to think of them, to pray for them. Every day she had a column about that. So she's our honorary member, I think, not just of our chapter, but nationally. We meet at restaurants. I think we have four regular meetings a year. And we have a Christmas Party where we collect Toys for Tots, which is part of the Marine Corps Reserve project. And in the summertime we have a picnic. But mostly it's fun. On special holidays some of us get in the parades downtown. I'm trying to think what I went downtown for once. But anyway, we had a ceremony outside of the Daley Plaza. And we had a little ceremony around the perpetual flame there. Every incident like that brings back a lot of memories – good ones and bad ones. And so I'm a lifetime member. I'll keep going as long as I can.