

Ms. Lyn Wilhelm

**Served in the Waves during the Vietnam era
from 1970 to 1978**



LYN WILHELM INTERVIEW

My name is Crystal Graham and I am a student at the University of Washington in Tacoma. I am researching local history and interviewing people in the community about their life history, and their opinions about local issues as a means of preserving the history of this area.

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005 Graham: Would you tell me your full name please?

Wilhelm: My full name is Linda Sue Wilhelm, [but] I go by Lyn with a single n.

010 Graham: When and where were you born?

Wilhelm: I was born in Elmira, New York on December 30th, 1947.

Graham: Tell me about Mark Twain.

Wilhelm: Elmira is where Mark Twain was buried and it's where he wrote Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.

Graham: Why were you so interested in Mark Twain?

Wilhelm: It's just part of the lore you grew up with there. I grew up with New York History which is almost the same as American history and learned the Revolutionary War and all that stuff first hand, because it was all right there.

022 Graham: Can you tell me a little about your family?

Wilhelm: My parents are both alive, in their early 70s.

026 My father has held different positions, being at one point a heavy equipment operator, managed a parts department for a Chevrolet dealer. He was superintendent of building maintenance for Schuyler County, for a number of years. My mother was basically an executive secretary type, who worked in an office and ended up being the head of the office. She also, at one point, was the head of the Taxation Department of the county. She retired from the county as the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors of Schuyler County. Schuyler County is the northernmost county in Appalachia.

Graham: What's your ethnic background?

Wilhelm: My father is Dutch and Prussian, my grandfather was Prussian, his mother's side of the family is Dusenberry and Manning, those are both Dutch. My mother's mother was from Surrey, England and my grandfather was French and Swedish.

Graham: How did they get to America? Were your parents born here?

Wilhelm: My parents were born in America. I can trace part of my ancestry. My mother's mother came over with her parents and they settled in the Binghamton, New York area. My grandfather was born in Savanna, Georgia, on my mother's side. He lived in the south for many years and truly had southern thinking, he did not like blacks or negroes. He demanded to be treated like a gentleman. My father's father's family we can trace back to 1747, when Wilhelm jumped ship in Virginia and we've got over a 200 year history in Schuyler County.

My father's mother's family has lived in the county for many years and lived in the Dryden, New York area. There's a monument to them over in Dryden, New York.

086 Graham: Could you tell me what the economic conditions were growing up?

Wilhelm: As I said it was the northernmost county of Appalachia. It was a very low economy. Both my parents worked and we were almost upper middle class. But their income, when they retired, was less than \$40,000 total with both of them working for the county. We were not landed, we were not merchants, just working people.

102 Graham: Could you tell me about family relations? Did you have brothers, sisters?

Wilhelm: I have two sisters who are 10 and 12 years younger than I am. They both live near my parents in New York. I grew up in an extended family, my parents and grandparents lived together, my mother's parents, until I was eight and a half. So I had all of my aunts and uncles, plus my greataunts, who were still alive at that point, and second, third, fourth, fifth cousins around all the time.

Graham: You couldn't get away from any of them.

Wilhelm: Your right, and I was always the youngest. My next cousin was a third cousin who is one year older than I am, other than that -- all my cousins are at least eight years older than I am.

120 Graham: Would you mind me asking what your religion is?

Wilhelm: I really don't have one. I was raised Episcopalian. I went to a mission, which was serviced by a priest who came over once a month and served communion. Since then, in my early 20s I've investigated a lot of religions and at this point, I'm basically a pantheist, I see God in a little bit of everything, but have no true, higher power.

131 Graham: Do you have any particular belief?

Wilhelm: I'm a firm believer in equality for humans. I am a lesbian, I've fought for black rights, I've fought for gay rights, I've fought for women's rights. I personally don't like to see people treated differently because they are slightly differently somehow.

Graham: Does this go back to your grandfather?

Wilhem: Yes, it does. As I said, my grandfather was a southerner and he hated, "Niggers" and to him, all black people were "Niggers". My parents are very prejudiced, my mother used to take me to work when I was 2 and 3 years old, on Saturdays sometimes. When there wasn't a baby-sitter or something. After a while I would go off. She'd find me either riding up and down the elevator with the black elevator operator. Or down in the basement with the polish catholic cleaning lady and I'd get my butt beaten. Yes, a lot of it has to do with that, because I couldn't see where these people were bad; they were just another human being. When I was 10 years old I had a birthday party at my house, and most of my friends were either Catholic or Irish or Polish. My father ridiculed them so bad, I never took anybody home again, ever.

Graham: That hurt you a lot.

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Wilhelm: Another thing I had problems with, I was always very smart. By the time I got to kindergarten, I knew my numbers, I knew my alphabet, I could read the New York Times newspaper, I could add, subtract, multiply, divide, I could dress myself. And I couldn't understand how there were other kids that didn't know how to zip up their pants or pull up their pants, tie their dress or put on their overcoats or pull on their boots. It just made no sense to me.

184 Graham: Could you tell me a little bit more about your schooling?

Wilhelm: I went to Dundee Central School. I missed going to a one room school house by one year. I went kindergarten through 12th grade at this school. I had a lot of teachers that had been one room teachers, they believed in discipline, but also, they were outstanding teachers. My 11th grade English teacher, by the time she retired had taught school for over 50 years. My third grade school teacher, with whom I am still close, taught school with her two sisters in Panama: that's where they all met and married their husbands. Most of my schooling, through the grades, I would do my work and get into trouble a little, because I was bored, with nothing to do. I had two teachers who were very good at taking care of that, one was my third grade teacher, Rhoda Howell and the other was my fifth grade teacher, Miss Laura Price, who was just very attuned to extra smart kids. So I did a lot of projects in the library, a lot of research projects and that sort of stuff while I was in her class. In high school I was always the top of my class and way out ahead of everybody. My junior and senior year, being a member of the honor society, I took classes at Hobart William Smith College, in Geneva. I studied Greek Drama one year, I studied Biochemistry another year.

Graham: Did you ever get to go to college?

Wilhelm: I started college at the University of Michigan and ended up flunking out the end of my first semester.

Graham: Academically or socially?

Wilhelm: I had straight A's at midterms. Right after that, my fiancé was killed in Nam and another relationship that I had had also broke up. I just totally fell apart; just quit going to classes. I didn't know how to deal with things like that. And I didn't have any interest in doing them.

257 Graham: Did you feel there was anything different about you that caused you to enter the military?

Wilhelm: I enlisted in the Navy in March of 1970, my actual enlistment date was March 20th, 1970. I joined the Navy to settle down. I always seemed to be going from job to job, town to town, after I flunked out of college. Nothing seemed to hold my interest very long; I'd master the job and seemed to be ready to move on; I'd get tired of being someplace; and I'd move someplace else. I knew I just needed to settle down and I knew that if I joined the military, I'm one of those type of people, I fulfill contracts. Contracts are rather sacred to me. I knew if I joined the service, I would be, I wouldn't have to worry about a roof over my head, food in my stomach, clothes to wear and that I couldn't be moving every five minutes.

286 Graham: How did your family feel about it?

Wilhelm: My mother passed out when I told her and my father was a little upset. I was living in Kansas City at the time and I guess he was satisfied, if I was going to join any of the services, he was glad it was the Navy, he had been in the SeaBees during World War II.

Wilhelm: Most of the people from our area, who had served in the service, had served in the Navy, so it was sort of part of tradition.

300 Graham: What obstacles did you encounter during your military time?

Wilhelm: (Chuckles)

Graham: I've got subheadings of prejudice, harassment or preferential treatment, did any of those apply in your case?

Wilhelm: Yes, there's a lot of prejudicial treatment in the military, at least when I was in. We had a separate boot camp, I was in one of the last companies to go through Bainbridge, Maryland for boot camp. A couple months later, they moved it to Pensacola, Florida. I had very high scores on the ACT/GRI, which are the batteries of tests that you take when you first go in.

Graham: How old were you now?

340 Wilhelm: I was 22. We also had an older company. The average age for my group was 22, so we weren't all a bunch of young kids in there. But, after I took these tests I was told that I could apply for anything I wanted to. At that time there were only 26 fields open to women. I chose the one of the more difficult ones, the more technical ones, which was Tradevman, which is training devices technician [Tradevman is the common use name of this career field in the Navy]. I went to school in Memphis, I went to Basic Aircraft Indoctrination, then I went through Avionics Class "A" school. I didn't want to go on another seven weeks of school to become a Tradevman, so I started asking, why couldn't I just stop and become an aviation electronics electrician, I'd already had the schooling, why not? It was closed to women, so I fought, I wrote to all my Congressmen, I initially went up the chain of command, then I wrote letters to all my Congressmen. I fought this for several months, it didn't do my any good, because I had to go on and complete Tradevman A school. But it did help the women behind me.

Graham: You were an E-1/E-2. [There are nine enlisted pay grades, from E-1 to E-9. They are the same in all branches of the armed services. The ranks, however, are called by different names. Some branches, the Army and Navy for example, also have Warrant Officer grades from W-1/W-4 that an enlisted person can be promoted to. Officers, however, are appointed or Commissioned, by the President of the United States and require a bachelor's degree, minimum, hence the difference between enlisting and being commissioned.]

Wilhelm: I graduated from boot camp as an E-2. It was three months later that I made E-3. When I graduated from Tradevman's school, I took E-4. That was an option I had as being top of my class. I had put in for the West Coast, and of course, I got the East Coast.

371 Graham: Where were you assigned?

Wilhelm: I was assigned to the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. One of the interesting things there, they gave scores ... your periodic review scores

Graham: Performance appraisals?

Wilhelm: Yes, performance reviews, were based at that command on rank. It was illegal as the devil, but that's how they did it.

Graham: They had a percentage?

Wilhelm: No, if you were an E-3 you got a 3.2, if you were an E-4 you got a 3.4, if you were an E-5 you'd get a 3.6, if you were a First Class, you could get a 3.8, if you were a Chief or above, you'd get 4.0s. That was just one little prejudice thing there. At the time when I first got there, there was one First Class Tradevman female there, who had been in for 24 years, and this had been her first assignment, actual assignment, as a Tradevman. Her initial assignments had been as hostesses on aircraft, she'd done boot camp duty a number of times, recruiting duty, but she had never worked in her rating (this is the Navy term for career field). This was her first time at that. After she retired, I became the only woman for a while on staff at the Naval Electronic Warfare Simulator (NEWS). The NEWS was used by senior officers for training in tactics and logistics, for major war efforts. Before World War II, at the War College, they had played every single scenario for what would happen in World War II, except for the Kamikaze attacks. They never dreamed of that. But every other scenario had been played out on a black and white tile floor, before they went to the electronic warfare simulator. And shortly after I left, that simulator which had been built in 1947 and was an analog training device, electro-mechanical, very ancient and in frequent need of repair, it was replaced by a more modern, computer driven system.

Graham: Where else were you assigned?

Wilhelm: There's more in Newport. While I was there, there was a senior woman in charge of all the Waves, in the Navy. We ended up with a couple of test cases in Newport, and the head of the Navy Waves came to Newport. The test cases involved, one was an active duty Navy woman, who was also a Navy wife, who had gone to Boston, the Naval Hospital there, and had had an abortion. That was legal to do as a wife, but was not legal to do as a Wave. At that point, if Waves got pregnant, they were automatically discharged. If a Wave got married, she had the right to be stationed with her husband. If she could not be with her husband, she could be discharged, an administrative discharge. All of the women at Newport -- this included the women at the Officers Candidate School, the Nursing Command School, all of the women at the Naval Station and in the other commands, including the Naval War College attended these meetings, with this senior Wave. And we helped change the policy. We were asked questions, we spent a full day at this. Debating back and forth, whether Waves should be given this opportunity to change. To stay in if you were pregnant, to stay in if you had children, to stay in if you were married and could not be stationed within 50 miles or less of your husband. All of these were things we discussed in this one day and helped to change Naval history.

Graham: What time are you talking about?

Wilhelm: 1971 and 1972. ... After Newport, I went back to "B" School in Memphis, Tennessee. One other thing in Newport, I was living in a women's Petty Officer barracks, and there were only 12 of us living in the barracks in June of 1972. They had a number of male chiefs, sleeping in barracks, in the dayrooms, on bunks in the dayrooms. So we (the women) were directed to abandon the barracks, and were given ten days to find a place. This was the beginning of tourist season; apartments had been rented for the summer, because its a tourist resort area. It was very difficult, we weren't given any assistance from anyone on base, we weren't given any money up front to help make deposits or anything. There was only room for one woman over in the enlisted quarters, the rest of us moved off base. That was a true case of prejudice or preferential treatment. Move the women out so the men can have room.

Graham: Now, they did give you quarters allowance, right?

Wilhelm: After we had moved off.

Graham: Did the quarters allowance cover all your expenses?

Wilhelm: No, it didn't.

Graham: So you had to make the difference up out of your pocket.

Wilhelm: We had to.

Graham: Rather than making the guys move off when they didn't have enough barracks rooms.

Wilhelm: It wasn't just the lower level enlisted men, these were chiefs and above.

Graham: Who could afford it better than you could.

Wilhelm: Right. Anyhow, from there I went to Memphis, Tennessee to the Naval Air Technical Training Center for Trademan "B" School. I was the only woman in the entire school at that point. There were usually about 12 to 14 men to a class. And there were usually 3 to 5 classes going through at a time. I was the only woman until the very last class that came in before I left, another woman came in.

Graham: What's your rank at this time?

Wilhelm: I was an E-5 and when I got there I had furniture and stuff from Newport. This was a six month school and at that point, male petty officers were allowed to live off base, if they had lived off base previously. They were allowed BAQ (Basic Allowance for Quarters) and ComRats (a subsistence allowance for food). For a woman, the rules were different. I had to fight to get my BAQ and ComRats and to live off base (because of the furniture accrued from living off base at Newport). Actually, there wasn't room in the barracks for me anyhow, and they were having trouble having too many women in the barracks. After they changed that regulation, so that E-4s and above could live off base, if they wanted to. It made a huge difference in the number of women there.

Graham: Did you have a pretty good population? This was all the women attending school in Memphis at the time?

Wilhelm: There were probably 60 beds in the barracks, there were three floors and half the bottom floor was occupied by Marines.

Graham: Women Marines?

Wilhelm: Women Marines. The rest of the first floor was administrative offices, to do with the barracks. There ended up with about 20 of us living off base. ... I rented a trailer off base, and I stood duty at the barracks like once every three weeks or so.

Graham: How long did you stay there?

Wilhelm: I was there for six months, then I transferred to Naval Air Station (NAS) North Island, San Diego, California. I was assigned to a command called FASO TRAGRU PAC, which is Fleet Aviation Specialized Organizational Training Group Pacific Fleet. ... When I got to San Diego, being a female E-5 with furniture and having lived off base at

previous commands, I was allowed to live off base. I did not have to stand duty at the barracks, because I didn't live at the barracks and I did not stand duty at the Command, because women did not stand duty at the command at that point. However, to me this was reverse discrimination. I was used to standing four or five section watches, at Memphis and at Newport and I felt that women belonged on the watch bill. So I fought to get women on the watch bill for my command. At that time, there was only one other woman and she was a little upset with me, that I wanted to get on the watch bill, but that was only fair. I ended up pulling it about every eight days, which wasn't bad, it was a very small command. Basically, what we had was an Officer of the Day, who was a second class or above petty officer and there was a Duty Officer who never showed up unless there was a major emergency.

I also fought to get the men BAQ and ComRats. In the men's situation, if they were single, they weren't allowed to get BAQ and ComRats, it didn't matter if they were E-4 or E-9. You either had to live in the barracks or be married or if you chose to live off base (you did so at your own expense). I fought to get these guys BAQ and ComRats, it was another reverse discrimination fight.

Also, I was assigned to the initial cadre of the S-3A aircraft, which is a anti-submarine aircraft plane. It was the first of its type, and I went to a school on the aircraft systems themselves, at Lockheed in Burbank, California. I was the only woman in 1,200 men. The initial group to receive these planes were training squadrons from both the East and West coast, went through this. There were no women assigned to any of the fleet organizations and I was the only one assigned to the training command. Basically, I had 13 brothers and fathers. My classmates were always there watching out for me, taking care of me and making sure that I was OK. I made the centerfold of the Lockheed Star, it was the newspaper for Lockheed. It was double fold size paper, and there were various shots of me working on equipment, or using equipment, studying and that sort of stuff, and a write up. And everybody who knows me from that time period, still kids me about being the centerfold. When I first met my boss, on this project, I had been in the command for some four months already. He had been in school, back in Washington D.C., at ComNavAir, he'd been at Singer Air at Silver Springs, New York. And the first thing that he said to me was, "They shrunk your skivvy shirt, didn't they." It's a good thing there was about 60 feet of trailer between me and him. Later on, we became the best of friends, but initially he did not want a woman working for him. He had retired as an E-9 Chief himself, never had to work with a woman. He believed women belonged home, barefoot and pregnant, and he was damned if he was going to have one work for him.

Graham: Were you the only female in the shop?

Wilhelm: Yes, I was one of two in the entire command at that point, enlisted. There was one woman officer, a personnel director.

Graham: What about harassment from your co-workers?

Wilhelm: There was some, but I always took that with a grain of salt. I grew up around men, I swore like a sailor before I even joined the Navy. I didn't find it especially intimidating or embarrassing. And personally, I think it helped ease the way for other women to come in. ...The men had changed their talking some and had become more gentle, they were starting to adapt, by the time more women got there. ... I was the type of woman, I wanted to get in there and prove that women could do the work.

Side 2

Wilhelm: I spent five and a half years at San Diego.

Graham: Why so long in just two different places, were those the only places your career field could be used?

Wilhelm: My career field was limited in the first place, in fact we were the only rating, at the time I was in the Navy, that did not have sea duty. There were 1200 Trademan in the entire Navy. And when I first went in on my first enlistment, we were limited to only 2000 women in the Navy. There were limited assignments and I was due for rotation about six months before I got out. I had been chosen for E-7 and I was offered Officer in Charge (OIC) of our detachment in Guam. And they offered me boot camp in Orlando, Florida.

Graham: As an instructor?

Wilhelm: As an instructor. Then they offered me teaching "A" School in Memphis, Tennessee. I said no, I would rather stay in the S-3A's. I was also offered an assignment to Bangor, Washington to the sub base, another brand new simulator, the Trident simulator. Having been on one brand new simulator, and working out all the kinks, I wasn't ready to do it again.

Graham: We're talking 1976 or 77?

Wilhelm: 1977 or 78, actually I got out December 29th, 1978. So basically I started the end of '77 when you're talking different assignments. They offered me Keflavik, Iceland, there was one Trademen stationed there, doing all the films and training aids. They suggested Guantonomo Bay, Cuba, which was the same deal and I said no. If you can't transfer me in the San Diego or California area, I think I'll get out. They finally did offer me an assignment up near Fresno, in Hancock, California at NAS Lemoore. By that point I had decided, I was just going to have to get out.

And there were several reasons to get out. One is that there was only one program, that was open for advancement, from where I was. I had been chosen for E-7, that would have left E-8 and E-9 as an enlisted person. They made one Warrant Officer out of the Trademan rating every three to five years; they had never had a woman. And the only officer program open to a person of my age, was the Limited Duty Officer, LDO, and that was closed to women. I was a little over 30. There were no other training schools available to me for advancement to the officer ranks. ... I didn't particularly care for the assignments I was being offered. And I had settled down, which I had joined the Navy to do. And I was tired of being investigated because I was gay. I was initially investigated when I was in Memphis and I had been again at Newport when I had been in about 18 months.

Graham: Now, you had to have a TS (Top Secret) clearance for your job?

Wilhelm: I always had at least a Secret if not a TS. So I always had background investigations for my security clearance. And there was a witch hunt, when I was in about 18 months in Newport and my name got put on the list then. And anytime there was an investigation anywhere in the country, I got investigated, along with everybody else. Now that President Clinton has raised that issue, they're starting to try and break down that barrier; which I feel is one of the last barriers in the military, other than women in combat. It's something I feel freer to talk about. I had a number of friends who were basically kicked out of the Navy for being gay or lesbians, given less than honorable discharges. It made a major impression on me.

Graham: So you saw the handwriting on the wall and decided to make the move on your own?

Wilhelm: Yes. Anyhow, they let me finish out my last six months in San Diego, instead of moving me for six months.

124 Graham: What do you remember most about serving in the military? I mean you were a ground breaker in a lot of areas.

Wilhelm: That's what I remember most, being out there on the forefront. Not only for women's rights and for enlisted women's rights, but for equal rights. Like helping the men get BAQ and getting women on the watch bill. When I was stationed on the S-3A trainer, I was the only woman. When I left there were 12 women assigned to the trainer. I taught classes in oceanography, acoustics, aviation systems, and I set up the supply system for the S-3A trainers, and the trainer library. I wrote the technical hands-on training books, I wrote 62 of the 72 lesson guides for it before I got out. The reason I didn't write the rest of them was time constraints. I knew the trainers upside down, inside out and backwards, and most of the time I worked the mid- shift and I oversaw the maintenance aspect.

Graham: Rather than working with the students?

Wilhelm: The students were usually Lieutenants or Lieutenant JGs (Junior Grade). I had worked with senior officers in Newport and got along real well. Junior officers and I didn't see eye to eye a good share of the time.

221 Graham: What about any friendships that you made?

Wilhelm: I still have contact with a couple of the friends that I made. One of the women is in Charleston, South Carolina and another one is in the Flint, Michigan region.

Graham: Are they still in the military?

Wilhelm: No, they have both retired. I also have a friend that I made after I got out of the military who is due to retire the 31st of March, and she will have 26 years in, a Navy nurse.

234 Graham: Has serving in the military affected your relationships with family and friends? That fact that you stayed in San Diego and your family was back in New York was bound to have some impact.

Wilhelm: That I think was inevitable. Basically, I left home when I was 18 and my sisters are of a different family than I am. As I said, I was raised by my grandparents and parents combined until I was eight. My sisters were born when I was 10 and 12 and I sort of became a mother to them, washed the diapers, fixed the formulas, baby-sat most of the time. So when I was 18 I left home, I didn't have a lot left. I never really got close to my parents, because just when I should have been getting close to them after my grandparents moved away, my sisters were born. And I just never developed a closeness to them. ... My parents are also non-accepting of my life style, my being gay. So its not in their face. I still maintain contact with a couple of my high school friends, the odd balls in our class. The five of us always hung out together and they were the four that I took home to my tenth birthday.

Graham: So your saying it wasn't the military service that made a difference, it was your particular life style that affected your relationship with you family?

Wilhelm: It was more my life style than being military.

281 Graham: What led to your being here at the American Lake VA Medical Center?

Wilhelm: I'm in the Domiciliary at American Lake VA. I did not come in because I was absolutely homeless, which the Domiciliary is primarily for homeless vets. I was at the point in a relationship, that I had been in a depression for probably four years. I had moved up here with my lover, 2 and a half years ago and had not been able to find a job. Got extremely depressed and I was having a lot of medical problems. I came in here for medical and mental issues.

Graham: Did you know about the Domiciliary being here, I had never heard about it until I started this project.

Wilhelm: I had heard of the Domiciliary about a year before. A doctor that I see had mentioned it to me.

Graham: And you knew that you were eligible to be seen by the Veterans Administration?

Wilhelm: Yes, I have a 10% disability.

Graham: I find that a lot of women don't know that they are eligible for VA benefits.

Wilhelm: I've also found that to be true, I've found a lot of that. ...

335 Graham: Do you feel that you are being adequately treated by the VA?

Wilhelm: I have been fairly well treated by the VA. There are still some areas of discrimination and I keep running into those. There are six women in the Dom right now, which is the most they've ever had. But I run into things that are automatically done or thought of for the men, but they're not done for the women.

Graham: Can you give me an instance?

Wilhelm: There's clothing available for men, especially things like underwear, that are not available for women.

Graham: Donated clothing?

Wilhelm: Donated clothing and brand new underwear, that's donated for the men. I have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). And since I'm not combat related, did not serve time in country, in Nam, even though I was in during the Vietnam era, there are no groups available for women. I have been in on the initial group for women here at American Lake. That started in November and part of that again was due to my pushing. But again, what's available to women is not near what's available to men. There's only one woman doing OB/Gyn work here, she died in September. It's taken a while to get a replacement for her. So trying to get an annual exam has been out of the question this year. I had chest pains last spring: on a man they would have had almost immediately done a treadmill test. It took me almost two months to get a treadmill test. They are still more keyed to men, I understand that.

408 Graham: Are you aware of any areas particular to female vets that should be addressed by the VA? That you haven't already talked about?

Wilhelm: There are support groups for men that aren't available for women with PTSD. The other thing is, being a woman, I have had to find a lot of my own treatment here. To find out who gives the type of treatment that I believe I am needing. Then I have to tell the doctor or whomever so I can get a referral there, where if I had been a man, they would have been doing that for me. ... The Domiciliary is set up to service a particular variety of patients, and problems. And I and other women don't fall into those categories.

495 Graham: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Wilhelm: I think that there are a lot more services needed for female vets.

Graham: What kind of services? Medical services?

Wilhelm: Medical services, more awareness of women's problems ... There's no rape counseling, there's no major trauma counseling for women.

Graham: What about harassment?

Wilhelm: There is tremendous harassment here in the dorm. I just roll it off, because I've been doing that all my life. I'm so used to being the only single female, and being an old Trademan, I don't think much of it. But there is harassment, both for being gay. I was told by one man that he didn't want no man touching him. And I truly resented that.

Graham: What did that have to do with anything?

Wilhelm: That I was a lesbian and that I was competing for women against them, quote, unquote. (We both laugh) But I haven't been interested in any of the women I've seen here. But that was his thinking.

Graham: What about on the part of the staff, are you seeing that they are just over worked? That they don't care about what the women's problems are? Is it a top down or is it local?

Wilhelm: It's more of a lateral problem. The social workers, the health techs, they just don't think about women's problems. They don't see that there are additional needs, or slightly different needs.

Graham: So it's not that they don't care, you just don't fit the pigeon hole.

Wilhelm: Yes, we're the square peg and we don't go through that round hole too easily. We are given preferential treatment here at the Domiciliary and I believe women are given that treatment nationwide.

Graham: To get you off the street?

Wilhelm: I believe there is a directive from central office in D.C. to give women preference in the Domiciliary: to get us off the street, in particular, yes. Here we aren't subjected to the same pressure to get out, find a job and become self-sufficient as drastically as the men are.

Graham: So you really can look at it as a safe haven?

Wilhelm: It truly can be a safe haven, in that respect. ... The normal stay at the Dom is six months, max. It can be extended beyond that for extenuating circumstances, such as

waiting for medical problems to be taken care of, waiting for Social Security to come through, waiting for Chapter 31 to come through, that sort of stuff. We have one women, at this point, who has lived here for over a year, just a few days over, but over a year. There's another women who's been here for over six months, I've been here for five months. And I'm not under any pressure to leave. Whereas they do try to pressure men that went through the same orientation group with me to leave.

(END OF INTERVIEW)