

Mrs. Anne L. Gregory

**Served in the Army Nurse Corps during the Vietnam War
from 1969 to 1971**



Anne Gregory Interview

Counter #

5 Graham: 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. My current interview is on February 1, 1993 with Anne Gregory.

10 Graham: Can you give me your full name please?

Gregory: Yes, my name is Anne Liberatore Gregory and I 'm a nurse at the American Lake VA Medical Center. I'm the nurse manager of the Post Traumatic Stress Treatment Program.

Graham: Thank you. That's an interesting middle name.

Gregory: It's my maiden name, I'm half Italian. My father's full Italian [gives examples of correct pronunciation and explains that the name was Americanized].

Graham: That's interesting. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Gregory: August 23, 1948 in Havre de Grace, Maryland. (Laughs and explains that she has always had to spell out her name and where she was born.)

30 Graham: Can you tell me about the employment of your parents?

Gregory: Yes, my father is currently a barber in Havre de Grace, Maryland and has been a barber for many, many years. He is 72 years old and is currently working, his name is Joseph S. Liberatore. My mother's name is Helen Lois Liberatore, her maiden name is Galinsky, she is Polish and English. She is 68 years old and she is a housewife living also in Havre de Grace, Maryland.

Graham: Is it an Italian neighborhood that they live in?

Gregory: Some of the street on their side. It used to be they lived very close to what was called Little Italy, about two blocks away from the Italian neighborhood. But so many of the older Italian people have passed away that actually, probably my father and Gene Evans and my mother are the only ones left on the block.

50 Graham: Can you tell me about the economic conditions of your family?

Gregory: I would say that we were lower middle class. I was educated in the Catholic school system. I have an older brother, Joseph S. Junior who was educated through the public school system. But I went to the Catholic school system my entire life.

Graham: I was curious about the Catholic schools. Was that your choice or a family decision?

Gregory: Well, the Italian side of my family is all Catholic. My mother was raised Methodist. But, when she married my father, within a few years, she became Catholic. My father is one of eight, only seven living, and most of them sent all their children to Catholic schools. At St. Patrick's Elementary School, that was from Kindergarten to eighth grade and then we went on to a different part. We didn't have a Catholic High School in our area, so we went to Delaware or Baltimore to go to a Catholic High School.

Graham: So you were bused.

Gregory: Yes, I was bused out of the area. Right, I was seventeen miles from my high school which was Mount Aviat Academy, an all girls academy. Put together by the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales, whose original house is in south France. They are still in existence, but my elementary school, my high school and my nursing school are gone. They don't exist anymore. They have been absorbed or discontinued.

85 Graham: Could you tell me a little bit about your family relations?

Gregory: My mother has three sisters and two them lived in the area, so we were connected to their families. Plus all the seven living relatives on my father's side. ...We were mostly very Italian oriented, every holiday you'd go and see your Italian grandfather and grandmother who had Italian food and regular type of American food. You'd have Italian ravioli, some spaghetti and a turkey or ham (laughs). You'd have both, you'd have everything.

Graham: What about your mother's side of the family? Did she have no extended family there?

Gregory: Yes, she had two sisters but she was more absorbed to my father. She would see her people, but for holidays we would spend more of our time with the Italian side of the family. Because my grandfather was the focal point. Everybody would have to come up there. We were the smallest family unit, there was two children at that time. ...I had family, (in mine there was just my brother and myself, my aunts and uncles had families with six children each). My brother and I, so we were just a small family when compared to five and six children in each of the others.

Graham: Did your grandfather immigrate?

Gregory: My grandfather immigrated from the Naples area in probably the 1910's and he married my grandmother in 1918 or 19. She had been a widow and a mother. In the flu epidemic of 1917/1918 her first husband died. She was a fifteen year old widow, they married very young then, and she had one girl child. So my grandfather married her and my father was second born, but he was the first male born.

Graham: Was you're grandmother an immigrant also?

Gregory: ...She was also an Italian immigrant.

Graham: So you're third generation.

Gregory: Right, I'm third generation.

130 Graham: So I can assume that your religion's Catholic?

Gregory: You can definitely assume that my religion is Catholic (chuckles.)

133 Graham: Did you have any particular beliefs?

Gregory: Actually I really went along with the Catholic philosophy until I was about 19 years old. ...It was a turning point in my life, I believed in abortion and birth control at 19 years old. Because I was in Catholic nursing school and one of the mothers I was watching was about 26 years old and she was having her fifth child. And we weren't allowed, we weren't able to say anything about birth control. At this point I was able to see she wasn't using anything, maybe Rhythm [a method of birth control based on a women temperature and the day of her monthly menstrual cycle]. I discussed with her some options of using birth control, other than Rhythm and abstinence and told her to go to John Hopkins. This is when I really started getting a rift in my belief system and in the Catholic system and religion.

Graham: So you were seeing social consequences on the job.

Gregory: Absolutely. Yes, for women, what happens when women ... the pregnancies and what they could do. When you're talking about this, we're talking about 1968.

Graham: Pretty radical.

Gregory: Well, yes.

Graham: Big split.

Gregory: Remember that the feminist movement was starting. But I wasn't really involved in that. I had been hearing about it, but I'd already made a decision, even for myself to use birth control and etc. I'd made firm decisions for myself as a woman.

Graham: Did that impact your personal relationship with the church then?

Gregory: Yes. I didn't go to church anymore. I stopped. I had no belief in them. I still have a connection to them, I still don't go to church. The organized church, but I just, I still felt ... I did not believe that any human had the right to dictate what we would do with our own bodies. I feel very strong about that.

Graham: So you had problem reconciling your personal experiences and your traditional upbringing?

Gregory: Right. Absolutely.

Graham: That's a tough issue.

Gregory: That was very tough.

Graham: At nineteen.

Gregory: At nineteen ... You had to just see it, you had to see fourteen year olds giving birth in Baltimore, and twelve year old's and eleven year old's, you just had to see.

Graham: And the area, you were nineteen, you were in nursing school.

Gregory: Yes.

Graham: The hospital, you were interning in a hospital?

Gregory: Yes, I was at Mercy Hospital school of nursing.

Graham: Is that a poor section .

Gregory: Yes, it was a very poor section [and] it juts out into a poorer section. We were about a mile away from a low, very low, low socio economic area. The nuns had started out there. Catholic nuns always start out in very low socio economic areas. They don't go into the rich part , they just go and get donations from them or get people to work for them, that are from that strata. But they do meet the needs of the transient people and the poor people that can't get health care.

Graham: Do you feel that you had a sheltered upbringing? That this experience was totally unexpected?

Gregory: This was very unexpected. I had a very sheltered upbringing. Sheltered by the family, didn't socialize very much outside of the Catholic system, so I didn't know many of the other type of people. My brother did because he attended the public school. I didn't have that much of an opportunity. I knew some of his friends and so it was quite a big shock when I went into nursing school. Because now I was connecting to women from all walks of life. And most of them were standard or typical - they weren't all Catholic. That was what was really interesting, for there were quite a few that weren't Catholic but were going to a Catholic nursing school. Which there were very many in Maryland during this time, in the 60's there were a lot. There were three or four nursing schools in Baltimore so there was just a huge amount of hospital based schools. Which means that you stayed (there), (and) they teach you in (the the hospital itself).

Graham: You lived in the compound?

Gregory: You lived in the compound, you worked in the hospital. Literally, your clinical added, saved them money. Even though said we cost them, we saved them money. ...I knew that immediately. I figured that one out early.

240 Graham: So basically you've told me all about schooling? That's a large part of your formative years that was Catholic oriented.

Gregory: Right.

Graham: Then you had more in nursing school? That was a Catholic school.

Gregory: In the city, from a small town.

Graham: The social impact changed your whole life?

Gregory: Yes, it changed ... it certainly did. It was a turning point for me in making decisions, etc. By my senior year, we weren't very well off. I'd already in my freshman year gotten a Federal grant, then (President) Johnson had in 1966 ... we were in Vietnam.

Graham: Right.

255 Gregory: He had to fluff up the Army Nurse Corp, so he got student nurses for the military and that was Army, Navy and Air Force. The Army was a big deal, they knew that they had huge hospitals in Vietnam. ... I wasn't working or anything, still going to school, and my father was giving me a loan. I found the advantage of the student Army Nurse Corp, being independent and they gave me a certain amount of money per month. You got a little card that said you were an E-3, reserve status (laughed.) So you could go to the PX. And then because we were going to be commissioned upon completion of our schooling, we could still go to the PX and get on base and do things. I lived in Havre de Grace, Aberdeen Proving Grounds was right beside me, so I could take the car over and buy stuff. And so was Bainbridge Naval area there -- it's defunct now, they closed it. It was a nuclear power school and training area for the Navy.

Graham: So the reason that you got involved with the military was economic then?

370 Gregory: It was really economic, yes. And independence. ... At nineteen I really didn't want to feel that I was taking any more resources from my family. They were doing OK, but it had been really difficult years, which taught me a lot, made me thrifty.

Graham: So you set your priorities then?

Gregory: I set my priorities, right.

Graham: Did you feel there was anything different about you that caused you to actually enter the military, other than economics and independence?

Gregory: ...My father and brother were both, my brother served in Vietnam in '68 and my father was a World War II veteran. So to me it was a natural occurrence, I mean I never went out searching to go into the military. They came searching for us, they came into the school, and we all said, "Hm!"

Graham: They actually sent recruiters down to the nursing school?

Gregory: Oh, absolutely. And they recruited from previous classes and Linda Vandevanter, who was the author of Home before Morning, she was a Vietnam nurse, she was in the class ahead of me. She helped recruit the rest of us. She was the propaganda artist. I don't regret that I had two years in the service, no, I got a lot of miles out of it. I had a lot of training.

Graham: How much of your tuition did they pay? The entire amount?

Gregory: Oh yes, but nursing school in the 1960's was only \$1,200 for three years and for uniforms.

Graham: It was a bargain.

Gregory: But you had to come up with \$700 for the first year, which was really massive, but I got a loan for it, so it was OK. And then ... \$600, \$500 and \$100, by the time you get to your senior year, it was 36 months, you were a Freshman, ... they made you a Junior, then a Senior. Kind of like skip the Sophomore.

Graham: Right.

Gregory: If you got to your Senior, it only cost you a hundred bucks to graduate and get your ring and all that.

Graham: What a system.

Gregory: It was a very interesting system... it only cost \$1,200, but to get that kind of money was not easy. ...When people were only making \$50 a week to come up with \$700, there was no way I could have made it, at the time. I thought my father was going to help me pay for it, but he said "Sorry, I don't have any money." It was a real big economic problem, but I still figured out a way...I wasn't the only one. You wouldn't believe, just about every one of us, in that nursing school were on Federal grants. ... Very few people had their parents paying the freight.

Graham: Do you think it was just the time frame?

Gregory: Yes, and I also think it was an opportunity, see if you didn't go to the University, which cost quite a bit of money. About \$2,000 a year at that time. I could never have afforded \$2,000 a year when normal salaries were just like \$4,700 a year. Just to go to your own state school it was expensive. You had to have so much more. Nursing school was an economical way of getting educated. They didn't have the two year schools like we have now. The two year community colleges ... now the hospital school is absorbed into the two year college.

Graham: What actual degree did you end up graduating with?

Gregory: I had a diploma.

Graham: A diploma?

Gregory: That's right, a three year nursing diploma. My initial nursing, see it's not a degree, its a diploma.

Graham: So that was enough to get you commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army?

Gregory: Absolutely.

Graham: Was this considered to be Army ROTC then that you were going to?

Gregory: No.

Graham: It was a special program?

Gregory: A special program, the Army Student Nurse Program.

Graham: So the actual decision to enter the military all fit into the school program.

Gregory: Right, economic.

Graham: And because it was sort of a family tradition?

Gregory: Right, it would have been. You know parochial people, and I noticed even after I got out and found out who were in these programs. A lot of Catholic kids, economically who did that, needed help at that time. They really dipped into that system, believe me, and universities, people trying to get into universities, if they couldn't figure out how to pay for it they had to decide. [After] the university, they had to pay three years back, I only had to pay two years back.

Graham: So it was pretty shrewd of the Federal Government in order to get people cheap.

Gregory: In some areas, it was very cheap. They had the Walter Reed Army nurse program, and those people really made out. They went there as Junior's and Senior's, getting not rank, but time in rank. So by the time they were commissioned second lieutenants in their senior year, they were Captains within a year of getting out of nursing school. So they really made a lot of rank there quickly. There were all these levels, but I didn't know that until later. I only knew about my level and I was OK with that.

400 Graham: What did your family feel about your decision to enter the military?

Gregory: They were very good about it. My father was positive, my mother was OK with it. They were most supportive and liked that showing of independence and taking care of myself. Economically it was very good for them too, they no longer had to worry about me. Even the decision to go to nursing school was a plus to them.

Graham: What about the war going on? Weren't they afraid you would have to go?

Gregory: ... That was real interesting. Nobody really talked about that at that time.

Graham: They didn't connect the two? ... Did you connect the two?

Gregory: I didn't connect it, because I wasn't watching TV and when my brother went to Vietnam, it was a real low key type of thing. We were worried, but he would write letters and we didn't realize until he came back that he had been out in the field for eight of his twelve months.

Graham: Was he in the Army?

Gregory: Yes, in the Army and he was drafted. What was real interesting was when he found out I was going to Vietnam, he went nuts. And I said, "I don't know why your so worried, I'm going to be in a hospital." (Laughter) Yes, that's what I really thought, youth does that to you. And where did I get that information? Obviously I made it up.

Graham: So the invincible syndrome was going on?

Gregory: An immortality type of thing, we all have that, we just never feel that we are going to die or get injured, etc. You know I was going to school in Baltimore and saw all types of strange behavior, transients, the hookers and stuff like that. And really realized that I had never seen anything like that in my life. I started getting information though, the Army was the best learning ground ever.

Graham: When you went into the military you were 21 or 22?

Gregory: I was 21.

Graham: You had just turned 21.

Gregory: Right, in August of '69, remember we were supposed to go in June, but they had recruited so many people, all of the classes were filled. I just went to work ... and wait until November. I went to Europe, my girlfriend was over there with her family, we went to Italy and Germany and then flew back home. That was quite an experience too.

455 Graham: What obstacles did you encounter during your military career? Was there anything in particular?

Gregory: What do you mean by obstacles?

Graham: Any prejudice or harassment?

Gregory: I really didn't feel any prejudice toward me as a female, but unfortunately when I look back -- there was some harassment and expectation of sexual favors.

Graham: Within the nurse corp or outside of it?

Gregory: Outside the nurse corp -- especially in Vietnam. I did not have any sexual assaults, -- when I look back, it was a typical type of male/female [thing] -- being an American female was an all time priority, I mean you were like gold.

Graham: We're talking in a dating scenario?

Gregory: A dating scenario, lots of men to date. That's how I would screen them out. And people that you worked with, I found that my commander and second in command, executive officer, one was a little more open about it.

Graham: Was this toward you in particular or all the nurses?

Gregory: All the nurses.

Graham: Anybody who was available?

Gregory: I suspect, with the commander especially. I did not see the executive officer do anything out of the ordinary... he did do something out of the ordinary toward me and it was all innuendo, etc. ... He expected ... I had a boyfriend who was flying a helicopter, he would fly in and pick me up and we would go to out on the coast for the weekend. Army nurses were not allowed to fly in helicopters.

Graham: On duty -- off duty?

Gregory: It made no difference. No they had a ban on them, which I ignored. My friends would come in and pick me up, and he literally was going to try to use this against me. And he was alluding to sexual favors -- I had enough ego and identity, that I told him to go ahead. He was saying that he could get me courtmartialed or whatever, but do it. Go for it, I knew I had bluffed him, he was bluffing me and I was bluffing him. He could have done that.

Graham: How long a tour were you there?

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Gregory: I was there eleven months, from June 15th to May 23rd, I got about a three week drop, so it would be eleven months, one week. That was at two separate hospitals. Anyway, I was never sexually assaulted but there was one other person that expected sexual favors for a ride.

Graham: A lift?

Gregory: A lift in a jeep-- and I was like, you really have to be stupid.

Graham: Stiff payment for a lift.

Gregory: Stiff payment, and I just laughed. He was angry.

Graham: He was serious?

Gregory: He was serious, he felt it was his right.

Graham: Were you in a difficult situation where you had to get this ride or was it just a casual lift?

Gregory: No I had it all planned out and somebody got him to help me out. I said I need to go over to the PX and get some things. -- He was just an opportunist -- I had a smile on my face and people just misunderstand that sometimes. -- He had domestic violence tendencies -- this man was an officer.

Graham: So it was pretty dangerous?

Gregory: It was more dangerous than I probably thought, but I never, I always tried to stay out of any harms way. I had three duty stations, one was at Letterman, one was Vietnam and the last was in El Paso. My most dangerous assignments were San Francisco and Vietnam.

Graham: Physically dangerous?

Gregory: Physically dangerous ... when I look back and see how people could have set people up, course they would have had to take the consequences, but I could have been hurt. It was very scary, but I never had any type of sexual harassment at the other duty sites.

586 Graham: What about any type of preferential treatment that you might have received because of being a female?

Gregory: Yes, I think that women can use that to get extra benefits. There was a special store I went to in Vietnam because I found out about it. It was a Commissary -- I didn't even know it existed -- try to find Dove [soap].

Graham: What was your duty station?

Gregory: Lon Binh. There wasn't a Commissary, you ate in the mess hall and you could go to the restaurant. You could either go to Saigon or there was one Chinese restaurant, but usually you ate in the mess hall, or the O Club, or something like that to get food. But I found out about this one place, ... you couldn't buy Dove soap, I had to have it mailed in from the States. [To be able to shop there and buy all this stuff] was a very elite thing.

Graham: So it was word of mouth?

Gregory: It was word of mouth, I found out about it and went in. I only needed it one time because we were shipped out, but we got all the things we needed, in fact we ran out of money and had to go get more money (Laughter).

646 Graham: What do you remember most about serving in the military?

Gregory: I remember I had good duty stations, Letterman was excellent, I worked in cardiovascular.

Graham: Was this before or after Vietnam?

Gregory: ... It was my first duty station and I worked in cardiovascular, a unit that did heart valve replacement when they had mitral stenosis, it was a small unit, fairly elite ... reasonable tours, met a lot of people. San Francisco was a really nice duty station. We lived off base because somebody had gotten into the nurses quarters and raped one of the nurses. So the chief nurse allowed people to go off and get their own (quarters), she figured they were just as safe in the dog gone city as they were on, probably safer, and we were. Not really, but as much as could be expected.

Graham: So you actually lived on the Presidio up until that point?

Gregory: Literally only a couple of weeks.

Graham: Then you moved into San Francisco?

Gregory: Yes, and we had buses that were very good, my girlfriend and I got a two bedroom apartment for \$265 a month. We only got \$85 a month, so we had to split the rest of the bill ... it was worth it. We had a ball ... learned a lot.

691 Gregory: There was no extra training other than continuing education that was normal for a hospital. There was no continuing education in Vietnam, believe me, when you're working 12 hour shifts.

Graham: But you learned a lot on duty?

Gregory: Absolutely, you had excellent people with you -- Captains. The highest ranking was a Captain and she was the head nurse and there were second lieutenants and lieutenants, and we had really good ward clerks. Our ward clerk was Sgt DeJesus and he was from Puerto Rico, he had been in Vietnam for four years, he was sharp. He was a really good 91B, he was excellent, we learned a lot from him. He knew emergency stuff, there were plenty of 91B's (medical/surgical technician). I did more work when I went up to Chu Li, which was the 27th Surgical Hospital. All the medics were fabulous in Vietnam if they were on the hospital. Everybody taught everybody else.

734 Graham: So your assignments then, you only had three direct in the military.

Gregory: Two years, yes.

Graham: You were stationed in Letterman, San Francisco, went to Vietnam and came back to William Beaumont Army Hospital at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Gregory: Correct.

Graham: Did you do anything in particular there?

Gregory: I was a surgical intensive care nurse at Fort Bliss and at Chu Li, at Lon Binh I was medical/surgical, most surgical post op type of stuff -- I was there for nine months and they closed it out in March '69. I transferred to Chu Li, way up north -- for six weeks, I was due to go R&R. They should never have sent me up there, they should have sent me to the 24th Evac or down to Saigon.

Graham: How did that affect you, did you see a difference in the casualties you were treating?

Gregory: Sure, triple amputations, head injuries, gut wounds, we had a lot of Vietnamese.

Graham: The hospital that you worked in first, was that a second stage hospital?

Gregory: That was an evac hospital, the 93rd Evac. The 93rd and the 24th Evac took casualties in and this is where they were stabilized, operate, etc., -- send them out to a larger hospital. The surgical hospitals were smaller.

Graham: Like a M.A.S.H. unit?

Gregory: Not exactly -- there were certain things we couldn't take, head injuries, we couldn't do burns, all it did was surgical stuff. If you were an amputation or had gut wounds, anything other than neurological, we didn't have a neurosurgeon, we had to triage them and send them to the right spot so they could get the care they needed.

Graham: You said that you saw Vietnamese, were these civilians?

Gregory: Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, because they were given hospital rights and usually if they were injured -- we brought them in and evacuated them.

Graham: Anybody that needed it?

Gregory: Yes, remember we were doing Vietnamization in '70 - '71, we were starting to turn over some of the places for them to take care of themselves.

Graham: So, did you have local national medical staff in the hospital with you?

Gregory: Only nursing staff, there were no doctors or registered nurses.

Graham: How were you supposed to turn it over to the locals if there weren't any doctors or nurses?

Gregory: It wasn't a local concept, believe me. It wasn't really turned over and a whole staff would kind of take over, what they would do was turn it back over to the Vietnamese government and they just --

Graham: Dump it on them and leave.

Gregory: Right, and they left everything

Graham: All the equipment.

Gregory: Right, they weren't going to transfer all that stuff back, so it kind of went on the black market and everything got torn down to nothing, because it wasn't going to be a hospital, but it would be absorbed somewhere.

836 Graham: Has serving in the military affected your relationships with friends and family?

Gregory: I still have my best relationship with my school chum, back in Catholic school, she lives in Delaware. We've always connected from the second grade on to eleventh we've been really best friends, for years and have maintained that relationship.

Graham: Did she go in the military also?

Gregory: She did not go in the military, I did, but we've always kept in touch and seen each other. -- maybe not seen each other for long periods of time. But we've called and sent letters, a minimum of once a year. I don't have many of the friendships I made in Vietnam -- we did like people do, promise to stay in touch, but nobody did. I know of some people that do, my best girlfriend's cousin came to Vietnam and he got injured in Vietnam and is a quadriplegic and we still maintain the same type of relationship. Fairly close, I mean that we write Christmas cards and stuff. But if I needed something from him or he needed to call me, we would do that, no problem to connect with each other. He was injured while I was there and I helped him and his family out quite a lot with support. One of my other girlfriends, I went to school with was on that unit, so he got special care and they're very good friends too. Even though we don't have any special connection from Vietnam, because she was at another hospital. -- So I wouldn't say I have any life long experiences from the military.

Graham: What about the anti-Vietnam sentiment, did you get any of that having been in the military and Vietnam as a woman?

Gregory: When I look back, years later when I flew in April of 1970 to go to my brothers, you know when they used to have the 75% discount fare -- you had to wear your class A's and I got some very bad treatment from a United Airlines stewardess. I've never forgotten, it was very subtle ... she didn't like me, for instance when we were asked if we wanted steak or chicken, she said since I was in the military, only chicken was available for me. I asked for a mint, they had these wonderful mints on the airline, and I asked for an extra one and she totally denied that I could have it. It was really inappropriate behavior, I could not figure out what was going on, I suspect she'd had a husband or brother or boyfriend or something hurt in Vietnam and she was very anti-war. She was so hostile towards me .

Graham: What was the time frame?

Gregory: It was 1970.

Graham: So the war was still going on.

Gregory: Of course -- there was still a lot of stuff going on. I wouldn't fly United Airlines for a decade -- from that one experience. She had to be reacting to my uniform, and nobody else treated me poorly while in uniform.

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

Gregory: I got married in 1974 and my husband was stationed at Fort Lewis, so I started out at Madigan, on the coronary intensive care unit -- as a civilian nurse, I had been out since 1971. I transferred over here because I was having a burnout situation, but I spent a year there. I'd heard people talk about the VA, so I decided I was going to be a psychiatric nurse, I was tired of being a coronary intensive care nurse, I need an easier type of job. I was going to school simultaneously -- I came over here in 1976 and started working in Bldg 6 which was an acute, chronic unit. I started learning a lot about psychiatry, actually psychiatric nursing.

Graham: Your background in Vietnam, how does that impact what you do here?

Gregory: It makes me a lot better because I know more and I'm the most medically savvy person, except for some of my older nurses. The others training is just mostly psychiatric and not enough medical background. The older more traditional nurses have medical, surgical, pediatric, recovery room or nursing care units, they had a better varied background. Now I work with patients who have some medical problems and you have to be kind of sharp, not that they're going to croak, but you have to get your symptomatology down. Some people just don't pay enough attention to it.

Graham: So you feel that your medical background is to your benefit. What about your having actually served in Vietnam, does it make you more empathetic with what's going on?

Gregory: I feels its to my advantage because it --

Graham: Legitimizes?

Gregory: Yes, it does, mostly being a Vietnam veteran, even though I'm not a combat veteran, which women are, but very few. It just says I'm one of you ... it's not exactly the brotherhood, but all the people who went to Vietnam are part of that. It does help when I can say I know what you're talking about or you don't know what you're talking about, this is my experience. It legitimizes, it gives me credibility and I don't have to go through all the song and dance routine that most people have to do, I don't have anything to prove, I already proved it.

Side Two of tape

005 Graham: Are you aware of any areas particular to female veterans that should be addressed by the VA?

Gregory: I think that women veterans population is the most misunderstood population in the VA due to the numbers. I am the women veterans coordinator, one of two, and we've been doing some surveys. Over the years we've noticed that ... originally the VA was built just like the military, long rooms and

Graham: Open bay?

Gregory: Open bays and they had to transform all those into private rooms, they had to decrease the number of people because now they can have no more than four or five people in a room. But it used to be open bay where you could have thirty... no privacy, you were lucky to have three feet for themselves, now its improved. But, women haven't been given, because you have that special area for women, because you need to protect them from the large amount of people here. Privacy and safety are the biggest issue.

Graham: So really an alteration in the facilities available for women veterans is one issue.

Gregory: And it is being addressed over the years.

Graham: Why do you feel they need to be protected, do you mean psychologically protected or physically protected from the population here at the center?

Gregory: Both. When I go back to the harassment issue, that stuff still goes on.

Graham: Staff, patients, age groups make a difference?

Gregory: Yes, women are still prime targets.

Graham: Are we in the "Honey" and "Dear" syndrome?

Gregory: More than that.

Graham: Touchee - feelie.

Gregory: There's some of that too, psychiatric patients that come here often have boundary issues, over the years that I've been here, since '76 we've seen an increase in women veterans coming here. Why that has happened we really don't know.

Graham: But there's been an increase of the number on active duty.

Gregory: Absolutely, that's one of the issues, but has there been an increase in the number of psychiatric disorders, or what's happened during their military tour. Did it affect them or are they bringing in some other psychiatric problem. There's some long term research that has to be done, but the woman veteran has been most under served because of numbers and people not used to serving women veterans. Some women veterans don't know they're a veteran, that's a big issue -- should a woman come to the VA, is she eligible, many people are eligible for treatment and don't know that they are eligible, so they don't understand and come because of that. -- there are probably large numbers of women veterans in this area, that we know of or don't know of. The state has some numbers like, for all war zones, going back to World War I, there are over 31,000 women veterans in the area.

Graham: This area?

Gregory: Absolutely, that's a large number and there are under 450 women veterans on the case load at American Lake.

Graham: That's psychiatric and medical?

Gregory: Yes.

Graham: I'd say we were under represented.

Gregory: I would say we were under served, for what ever reason, and I don't blame the VA or anyone for it. If you don't have the population to be served, how a person get their just reward out of that, it's a complicated issue that we're all dealing with right now.

96 Graham: Is there anything you would like to add?

Gregory: I think we've been pretty thorough. I would like for female veterans to get more of their share of medical health care and psychiatric health care. And I see in 1992 forward we're going to see some changes, both through Congress, government changes and dictates. We have a new Cabinet secretary who is a Vietnam veteran, hopefully from what I have heard through the scuttlebutt, there's going to be a new division. A VA minority division ... including women veterans, there'll be somebody in charge of that.

Graham: So we are officially now a minority?

Gregory: (Laughter) Absolutely, in the VA system, even though we are probably still the majority still in the census. Kind of pathetic isn't it?

Graham: Thank you so much for the interview.

(END OF INTERVIEW)