

Interview 2

Interview conducted by Nakita Pasour on November 13, 2010 at 1:00 pm. The informant has requested to remain anonymous, and for the purposes of this interview will be referred to as Mrs. M.

NP: Alright, so the first thing I'm going to ask you, what year were you born?

Mrs. M: 1953.

NP: 1953, ok which would make you...?

Mrs. M: Would make me 56.

NP: 56. Alright, where did you grow up?

Mrs. M: I grew up in Franklin, Virginia. That was the last half of my childhood. The first half was in Henderson, North Carolina. But most of my childhood was in Franklin.

NP: Ok, was that where you were born?

Mrs. M: Oh, I was born in Petersburg, Virginia.

NP: Ok, and when did you leave Virginia? Did you go to primary school there?

Mrs. M: I went to primary school in Henderson, North Carolina and the other part in Franklin, Virginia. And high school.

NP: Ok, so what was your family like? Did you have both of your parents? Did you have any siblings?

Mrs. M: I had, I have both my parents still and I had an older brother and a younger sister.

NP: Ok how old are your, your siblings?

Mrs. M: My older brother is deceased and my younger sister is 53.

NP: Ok, so what kind of work did your father do?

Mrs. M: He was a conservation forester. He worked for the paper company in Franklin, and was a forester.

NP: So what exactly did he do?

Mrs. M: Well, he, some of it was public relations and he would do tours and things like that and he would look at land and basically be the conservation person for the company. The company was a paper company so they used timber and it was his job to check it all out. But basically the last part before he retired was a lot of public relations.

NP: And what about your mother? What did she do?

Mrs. M: She taught school until we got out of high school and then she was one of the town librarians until she retired.

NP: So she was teaching when you were growing up?

Mrs. M: Yes.

NP: And what did she teach?

Mrs. M: She taught first and second grade.

NP: Ok, so what type of education did your parents have?

Mrs. M: Both of them have a college education.

NP: Do you know where they went to school?

Mrs. M: Dad went to the University of Florida and his degree was in forestry. And mother graduated, she went to, her degree is from Stetson University, in teaching, music education too I think she might have.

NP: Ok, now were there any doctors or nurses in your family?

Mrs. M: Not that I know of.

NP: Ok, do you remember any kind of serious illnesses in your family, yourself, friends, family during your childhood that stick out to you?

Mrs. M: Not really, everybody was pretty healthy in my family. After I grew up there was issues, but not really anything bad in my family.

NP: Do you remember any healthcare providers from your childhood, did you have like a family doctor, or nurse, midwife, any kind of thing like that that you remember?

Mrs. M: Well one of my friend's moms was a nurse at the hospital and I used to talk to her quite a bit. She was a really nice lady. But really, no. There's really not, I didn't have any input from other people about my decision to be a nurse.

NP: So when you were younger, when you got sick would your mother take care of you? Did you go to the doctor?

Mrs. M: She'd take me to the doctor if I needed one. We had a family doctor. And they still made house calls back then.

NP: Do you remember him or her at all? Any nurses or anything?

Mrs. M: I remember him very well. He was a very good doctor. When I went away to college he had already moved up into, went to Richmond to live and work and he kept in touch. He and his wife kept in touch with me even after they moved and I went to college.

NP: Ok, well that's neat. What kind of house calls would he make? I mean if it was like a cold or somebody got hurt?

Mrs. M: It would be more, I think if it was, we were, not really a cold, maybe if you had the flu or, I think strep throat or something like that. It wasn't really, we didn't go to the doctor for a cold, it was, it would have to be something a little more serious.

NP: Ok, so then what made you want to be a nurse?

Mrs. M: I think I just decided in college. I went to college for two years and I hadn't really made up my mind what I wanted to do. And it was just sort of an ah ha moment, I just decided one day that well, I think I would like to be a nurse. And so at that point I'd had two years of college and, in those years ago they didn't have a whole lot of four-year colleges for nurses. So I enrolled in a three year program and I think I made the right decision and been at it ever since. So I don't really have, it was just sort of a thing I decided it would be, I'd be good at it and something I would like.

NP: Now when you were, when you were at college for the first two years did you take any classes that had anything to do with nursing?

Mrs. M: I did, because at one point I thought maybe I might be a occupational therapist or a physical therapist so I took all the anatomies and physiologies. I took chemistry, I took just about everything that was needed for all those undergraduate things.

NP: Did your family support or influence your decision to be a nurse? How did they respond to that decision?

Mrs. M: They were very supportive. They thought it was a good choice. I would say that 30 years ago, 30 some years ago opportunities for women were not the same as they are today. And I'm not sure I would still pick it. But that doesn't mean I don't like what I do. But there was just not, the choices weren't there.

NP: Right. So what kind of other choices would you have had if you didn't go into nursing?

Mrs. M: Probably veterinary school, back then that was purely a man's job. And I would probably would go, I probably would have wanted to do more, if I went into medicine it would be more advanced, I think.

NP: Alright, well so what schools did you consider attending when you were, when you made that decision?

Mrs. M: Well when I was going to, my first two years, undergraduate was at Virginia Commonwealth University. They had a nursing school at MCV, which they are the same thing, medical college of Virginia. And I don't really know, I did not really pursue outside of the state because of my parents having, they were paying for my education, plus I had a younger sister that was going to college and my brother had just finished. So that's when I looked into the three year program. There was one right there in Richmond and I didn't have to move. And I didn't really go any further.

NP: Alright, so what was the school called that you attended?

Mrs. M: Johnston Willis Hospital School of Nursing.

NP: And where, that was in Richmond, Virginia you said?

Mrs. M: Yes.

NP: What were the requirements to be accepted into the school?

Mrs. M: I think you just had to have good grades and I don't even remember what we, what I had to do. I think I had to go in for an interview but I'm not real sure about that. But I, I think it was the same type of thing that any type of entrance at that point would be. I had good grades, and I don't recall if you had to live on campus or not but I think I did have to go in for an interview. It's kind of fuzzy, I don't remember.

NP: Ok, that's fine. What year did you begin your nurse training?

Mrs. M: 1974.

NP: Ok, and it was a three-year program, you said.

Mrs. M: Yes.

NP: Alright, so talk about just your general experience during your training. Did you enjoy it?

Mrs. M: Really enjoyed it. It was a small class and we, in the 70s you did a lot of on the job training. And we would have classroom and then we would have clinical. But there was just as much clinical as there was classroom. And it would, the specialties would be

per quarter, well one quarter it was, it was divided into terms, three different semesters 'cause we went all summer as well. So we went three full years. And we lived in a little house, well they were apartments but they were right beside the hospital. You could just walk over to the hospital and the classrooms were in a building right next to the hospital. All our meals were at the hospital

NP: So do you have any like best or worst memories, anything that kind of sticks out to you?

Mrs. M: For the best memories it's just that we had a really close group and the instructors were always there as well. And the training was just really excellent. I guess the hardest or the worst was, well it really wasn't the worst, I had a good experience. But I had to spend a semester, we did our training for psychiatric nursing and we had to spend a summer in Washington D.C. at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital, which is a hospital for the mentally ill. And we had to live on campus and we really couldn't go anywhere and it was kind of weird. And that was probably the one I liked the least. But we all stayed together in a dormitory and on Friday afternoon we'd all get in our cars and come back to Richmond. But that was probably the most difficult and what I liked the least.

NP: Ok, well I might come back to that in a minute but I guess kind of back to your regular school, how many students were in your school and in your graduating class, do you know?

Mrs. M: No but I could go look for the annual real quick and show it to you if you want to pause it.

NP: It's ok, we can do that a little later.

Mrs. M: I'm not real sure exactly.

NP: Ok, that's fine. And what about your other classmates' background, do you know were they kind of similar to yours or were they from the same area?

Mrs. M: A lot of them, most of them were from Virginia and a lot of them, a lot of the ones that, probably at least a half were right from the general Richmond and Southeast Virginia area. Pretty much the place where I was from.

NP: Ok, well what about, were there men in your school or other minorities?

Mrs. M: There were minorities. There were no men.

NP: And the minorities you had, did you have Native Americans, did you have African Americans?

Mrs. M: African Americans.

NP: You said you lived in a little house, or apartments during your training. So what was that like? Did you have roommates?

Mrs. M: We had roommates and the apartments were really cool because it was an old building, and so we had real big rooms, wasn't like a little tiny college dormitory rooms they have now. But we had a house mother and we had to sign in and out any time we went anywhere and curfews, whole nine yards.

NP: Alright, so talk about those rules and the curfews and about socializing.

Mrs. M: Well, we could sign in and out and go anywhere we wanted to as long as we got back at the right time and we just had to tell them what we were going to do. If we had dates they couldn't go to the room, they'd have to hang out with the, in the little parlor.

NP: Ok, so you kind of had like a common area where the guys could come in?

Mrs. M: Had a common area.

NP: Ok, and what about, were you allowed to get married during training?

Mrs. M: Yes. I got married my, before my senior year. Then my senior year I did not live, of course I lived away from campus. But yes, there were several married couples, married girls there.

NP: And so you could live separately off of campus?

Mrs. M: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Did they provide any kind of like married housing or anything or were you just kind of on your own?

Mrs. M: No.

NP: Alright, what about uniforms? Were you required to wear those, what do they look like?

Mrs. M: The uniforms, yes we had to wear, they were light blue, stripes and then they had a white apron. And then our caps looked like little handkerchiefs and pill box shape that sat on the top of your head like that. And we had to wear white nurse's shoes and white stockings, the whole thing.

NP: Did the uniforms change from like your freshman and senior year or did you wear the same thing?

Mrs. M: Wore the same thing but we got different ribbons on our caps.

NP: For every year?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: And the uniforms, did you wear those during your classes or just when you were working at the hospital?

Mrs. M: Just when we were in clinicals.

NP: Ok, now your classes, did you have, were your classes actually at the hospital or were they in a separate building?

Mrs. M: They were in a separate building right next to the hospital.

NP: Right next to the hospital, and was that specifically used for the training program?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: Alright, what about tuition? You said that your parents paid for that?

Mrs. M: I don't remember what the tuition was but I do remember our freshman year tuition was free. Everybody's tuition is free freshman year. The hospital I guess at the time paid for that. But I honestly don't remember what it was for the other two years. But it was very much less than University would be.

NP: And did you have any, have to pay any kind of like room and board for the apartments or was everything kind of included in that tuition?

Mrs. M: Room and board was separate.

NP: What about your meals? Did that, did you have to pay for any of those?

Mrs. M: Well, they were included if we got, if we had room and board we could go to the, it was out of the hospital cafeteria is where we went and ate. But we had some kitchen privileges too, a lot of us got tired of the other.

NP: Alright, so what was healthcare like during your training? Did that have any effect on your experience in school?

Mrs. M: You mean with, who was in the hospital and who we took care of and that kind of thing? I would say that it was the norm during that time. I think people were hospitalized for less things. I think now people are a lot sicker when they're in the hospital than they were when I was training. There were some really sick people but there was light, lightweight stuff too.

NP: So more people were coming to the hospital for smaller things?

Mrs. M: I would think so.

NP: And what about if one of the students got sick, was her healthcare taken care of if you needed to be in the hospital?

Mrs. J: They had a doctor that was on staff at the hospital and he would be the one we would see if we got sick.

NP: Ok, so in your classes, who taught the students?

Mrs. M: The instructors were nurses, they were all nurses. And I don't know what kind of education they had, I know they had, but they were all RNs.

NP: And did they all work at the hospital as well as teach or is that all they did?

Mrs. M: No, that's all they did was taught.

NP: That's all they did. Ok, did you like your teachers? Do you remember there was a certain one having an influence on you?

Mrs. M: Pretty much I liked all of them. They were very, very, very good of course. And I really didn't have a favorite. Just enjoyed all of them.

NP: What kind of classes did you take? What were you taught in those classes?

Mrs. M: Well our first, we'd have like a semester of notes, medical, surgical. We'd have a semester of OB-GYN, psychiatry, pediatrics, we had like... can't really remember.

NP: That's alright. Were they like split up into different areas and you would have classes on those?

Mrs. M: Each different kind of nursing.

NP: Ok so did you have any kind of, your first year, any kind of general classes on like diseases or biology, anatomy, any of that kind of thing?

Mrs. M: We had to have all of those. The classes that I took at under, at VCU, as a freshman going in had to be taken. So I had already taken those classes so I kind of was, I really was fortunate 'cause then I just concentrated on the nursing classes.

NP: But they did offer those, a lot of those general things?

Mrs. M: Oh yes, you had to take anatomy, physiology, you had to take chemistry. You had to take a lot of different kinds of, you had to take math, you had to take all the basic stuff.

NP: So what were your classes like? Were they kind of hands-on, were they lecture?

Mrs. M: Lecture and hands-on 'cause we'd have lecture, we'd have, I'm trying to remember if we had two weeks of lecture and then two weeks of clinical, or one and one and then we'd keep going back and forth, I can't remember actually. But we would have classroom and then we would concentrate on clinicals. And we would be in the hospital and we'd have assigned things to do and the instructor would be in the hospital with us.

NP: Alright, so were there any new technologies that you had to learn, anything that had kind of come out recently that was new that you remember? Any kind of machines?

Mrs. M: Probably most of that I didn't learn until after I was out of school. We didn't have, a lot of it wasn't technology back then, we didn't do the IVs, the IVs were done by hand and you counted the drips and you knew how much you were giving the patient. The intensive care unit was the only place that had any monitors at all. But it was pretty much, you did it.

NP: Talk a little bit more about your clinical rotations. What kind of jobs would you do while you were, while you were in the hospital?

Mrs. M: Well most of the time we were assigned a patient or two and we were responsible for their care, with the instructor watching what we did, and that included everything. That included everything from taking care of their basic needs, medication, IVs, dressing changes, everything.

NP: Now did you, did you start doing that your first year?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: Your first year, so you got put right out there with the patient the first thing?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: Ok, now maybe by your third year did you still have your instructors watching everything, did you ever get any kind of independence with, maybe when you were a senior?

Mrs. M: Well there was some independence, more independence as you got closer. And some of us got jobs as nursing assistants but that, that was separate. But it was, we did have a little more leeway then but the instructor was always on the floor working with us.

NP: Ok, so they would allow you to, to get a job in the hospital while you were doing your training, as like an NA, a nursing assistant?

Mrs. M: Yes.

NP: And you would be, I assume you would be paid for that?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: And that would be separate from your clinical rotations?

Mrs. M: Right. Yeah, 'cause you don't get paid for that.

NP: Right. So how many, how many hours would you say, would you be doing your clinical rotation?

Mrs. M: Well if we were doing clinicals, it was all day just like our, just like when we were having lecture. So it would be at least, I would say at least 20 or 30 hours a week we would do clinicals. That might be a, that might be a little much. But it was, it as always either all clinical or all lecture.

NP: Ok, so did you kind of have one day doing clinical, one day doing lecture or how would that be set up?

Mrs. M: No, usually it was all clinical or all, if I'm remembering correctly, we did all of our book and lectures and then we would do our clinicals. It was not, they were not on the same week. I can't remember if we did two and then two or one and one but there were always, and I'm trying to think back, we did all the lecture and then all the clinical, that might have been how it went. How we did it.

NP: So how long when you were taking the class, how long would the class be? Would it be an entire year, an entire semester when you were doing it?

Mrs. M: It would be an entire semester. So we'd have a semester and then our summer semester and then our fall semester.

NP: Ok, so would you, would that semester be split up into like half lecture, half clinical?

Mrs. M: Yes, yes.

NP: Ok so after your training, were there any like bachelor or masters degree programs available kind of in that area?

Mrs. M: I know there was at least one that had a bachelor degree program at the Medical College of Virginia. And I'm not sure that there were any more, there may have been. But not many.

NP: Ok, did you, did you consider doing another degree after you graduated?

Mrs. M: When I first graduated, no because I just wanted to do clinical nursing. I have never been interested in doing administrative, I've always been in clinical. And then the older I got and had a family and never did.

NP: Ok, so the bachelor degree program was more like a, a management...

Mrs. M: If I wanted to, if I wanted to go into education or administrative nursing, anything like that, it would probably require a degree. A bachelor's degree. ✓

NP: Did you have any, any friends or anybody that was in the program with you that you knew of that went on to do a bachelor's degree?

Mrs. M: Well, I'm sure there have been, I only kept up with a couple of the ones that I was the closest to in college, and they did not.

NP: Do you remember any kind of, any kind of laws that had come out or regulations that had been made during your training that had any kind of effect?

Mrs. M: I don't remember anything like that. I didn't pay any attention to that actually though.

NP: What about since you were at, trained at the hospital, were there job opportunities for you after you graduated?

Mrs. M: Yes, I graduated and stayed at the hospital and worked for the hospital for, because my husband was there and he was going to school, I stayed at Johnston-Willis for a while. And worked, I worked med-surg for about a year and a half and then I went to the ICU. And pretty much worked intensive care and critical care my whole career.

NP: Ok, did you, now what is med-surg?

Mrs. M: That's a general floor where, some surgeries, I guess smaller surgeries were done, like gallbladder surgery or, they didn't have knee replacement surgery and joint replacements and all those kinds of things in the 70s.

NP: Do you remember during your training, a particular part of your training where you said this is the kind of nursing I want to do, like ICU or pediatric or anything like that?

Mrs. M: I learned real fast that I wanted to do ICU nursing and the reason was because I felt like I had more control over my environment doing ICU nursing with two or three really sick patients versus, and when I first got out of school it wasn't unusual for me to have 30 or more patients with one assistant at night. And 'course they don't do that now but back, but in the 70s that was not unusual. And but that's what I mean there weren't, I don't think the people were as sick as they are now. And we did, we would get stroke patient and we would get light surgical patients and pneumonia and things like that, but

*Interesting!*

'course you could never take care of that many patients if they were as sick as they were now.

NP: So in the ICU you just had, you just had maybe one or two?

Mrs. M: It was about, you would usually not have more than two.

NP: Well I guess real quick I do want to go back and talk about the psychiatric hospital that you went to. So you traveled to D.C. to do that and you stayed in a, was it a dormitory, an apartment building?

Mrs. M: It was a dormitory on the hospital grounds.

NP: And is that what they used that for, is for the nurses?

Mrs. M: Yes. And the classes were taught there.

NP: So you had classes there as well while you were doing your rotations?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: Talk a little about, how were the rotations in the psychiatric hospital different from the rotations at your training hospital?

Mrs. M: Well, I'm not, I think that being in the hospital, being there for the one thing, I think we did both classroom and clinical the whole time. We'd have a day or two or a morning of classroom and then maybe an afternoon of clinical or one day of one and then one day of the other. I can't recall really. But we would be, 'course we wouldn't be put up with the dangerous ones but we were assigned a patient or two and there in the summer we would just keep up with, 'cause mostly these patients were there to stay. And we had them the whole summer.

NP: What exactly would you, would you do with the patients when you were taking care of them?

Mrs. M: Well we would just have one-on-one, kind of therapy talks and we would do things with them on the grounds, with activities. It was pretty bizarre, it really was.

NP: Alright, do you remember anything specific, any kind of specific patient?

Mrs. M: Well, there were a lot of very mentally ill patients there and the one that I had was, at that time diagnosed with schizophrenia, and she was one of those people that wore lots and lots of layers of clothes, and lots and lots of jewelry and would carry everything around in her bag. She had a lot of issues about, she thought she was married to Muhammad. The Muhammad. It was just very, it was just a very bizarre experience for me.

NP: Was it, was it difficult for you or the other nurses to be in that environment?

Mrs. M: Well I think it was because we really could, we were really kind of, not able to go anywhere. We had to be in our dormitories at a certain time. It was on the grounds beside the hospital and surrounded by Washington, D.C. and we didn't really know how to get around the area safely.

NP: Now this was your senior year?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: And were you married when you went to...

Mrs. M: No, it was the summer before I was married. The summer I was married, it was the beginning of the summer and I was married in August, it was the summer of 1976.

NP: Did you feel prepared to go into work after your training?

Mrs. M: Yes.

NP: Ok, and you started working immediately after graduating at the hospital?

Mrs. M: I did. We, you would go in as an RN graduate 'cause you hadn't taken your boards, and then when you passed your boards.

NP: When did you take that examination?

Mrs. M: I graduated in May. I think June was when we took them. And at that point it wasn't done online, you had to go to, we had to go to the, a coliseum area is where we went. Lots and lots of nursing people, a paper test that we had to, it took two days.

NP: Wow. Ok, and after that, that was scored, and you were allowed to work before you finished your exams?

Mrs. M: Mm-hmm.

NP: And after that you were registered.

Mrs. M: Right.

NP: Alright, so did you expect to have a life-long career or a short term job when you were, when you started working?

Mrs. M: I pretty much figured it would be a life-long career. But I knew that there were opportunities within nursing that you could change what you wanted to do. I knew when I

went as a med-surg nurse, which a lot of times they wanted you to do that first to get some experience, that that's not what I wanted to do forever.

NP: And so you were an ICU nurse at the hospital for how long?

Mrs. M: Not sure how much longer I stayed there. I ended up moving to another hospital in Richmond under the same, a lot of times we'd change for our hours too. And I didn't really like working, I had to work every other weekend, four nights, and then back then you had to work all three shifts, it was terrible really. But a lot of times it had to do with that, or the money was better.

NP: How long, you do have children, so how long was it before you had children?

Mrs. M: It was a long time. I was married ten years before we got pregnant with James, about ten years.

NP: Did you keep working after that? Did you take time off?

Mrs. M: I took some time off but I ended up getting some part time evening jobs. Wasn't, didn't go back full time for a while.

NP: So how do you think your training compares to the training that nurses are getting now? Do you think it's a lot different?

Mrs. M: Well it's a lot more technology based I think now and a lot more classroom. I don't think they have as much clinical as they did back then. I would still tell anyone who wanted to go into nursing though to get a bachelor's, I think they have more opportunity that way. But I think a lot more is classroom now.

NP: Ok, well that's all of my questions but do you have anything else, you know any kind of stories, any memories, anything special that you remember that you would want to talk about?

Mrs. M: I did have a really, really good head nurse my first, when I first got out of college, out of school. She was in the med-surg where I first started and I have a lot of good memories about her, she was a good, she was a good head nurse and she was also somebody that helped you and mentored you and wore the starched white uniform and the cap. Then we all did for a while, I was really glad when we got to ditch the hats.

NP: When did you get to get rid of the hats, do you remember?

Mrs. M: I don't remember exactly.

NP: But it was after your training?

Mrs. M: When we went into ICU you didn't have to wear your hat. A lot of us 'course, a lot of places you had to wear scrubs. Like now all nurses wear scrubs. But in ICU as you did that more, you didn't have to wear you hat.

NP: You said that there were a couple of nurses that you kept up with, so did you have a lot of real close friends in the program?

Mrs. M: Well we were all so, we were all close because it was just small. Only because when you graduate and you go on your separate ways do you start losing, but we were all close, we really were.

NP: So would you go out and do things together? What kind of things would you do?

Mrs. M: We would just go to the movies or go out to eat some, we didn't go out to eat as much as you do now, 'cause the money was kind of pulled tighter. But a lot of times we would stay in the dorm and you know have fun there.

NP: Well about money, since you didn't get paid while you were in training unless you took an actual job, how would you, how did most of the girls kind of handle money and expenses?

Mrs. M: I don't know, I think mainly their parents probably took care of them. I would venture a good guess that most of them, parents took care of them. And I think the hospital had some scholarships too, for ones that couldn't afford it.

NP: Right. Now did you have, were you allowed to have your own car when you were, do you know if any of the girls had cars? Would you drive anywhere, or just kind of stayed around, were there things walking distance?

Mrs. M: Everything was in walking distance. And it was hard, there was not, it was an in-town hospital so parking was at a premium. You know I can't remember if they wouldn't let us have one the first year or not. And we didn't all have cars then, most people didn't have a car. But when we were married, when I was married, and the ones that were married, they had to have a car to get to, get there. I'm sure some of them had them. But it wasn't like it is now.

NP: So when you got married and were living in a house, separately, was that in walking distance of the hospital?

Mrs. M: No, that wasn't. I'd have to drive.

NP: Ok, so that was your...

Mrs. M: That was my senior year.

NP: Senior year, right before you graduated. Alright, well is there anything else that you can...

Mrs. M: I can't think of anything. If I do think of anything really good I'll let you know. But sometimes I think of better things after the fact.

NP: Alright, well that sounds good. Thank you!