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**Interviewee: Melita McCully**

Interviewer: Marjorie Forrester

Date of Interview: November 28, 2017

Location: LGBT Center, Harrisburg, PA

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**Abstract:**

Melita McCully was born on December 11, 1952 in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. After the death of her father, Melita moved to Florida with her family and became both the breadwinner and the caretaker of her six brothers and sisters, mother and grandmother. As a teenager, Melita volunteered when she was not in school in exchange for her brothers' tuition at their Catholic school. Unable to go away for college, Melita attended St. Petersburg Junior College and the University of South Florida. While in college, Melita held 2 jobs to support her family and herself. After graduating with a 3.7 GPA and 23 extra credits, Melita enlisted in the United States Women's Army Corp at the age of 21, not retiring until 29 years later. Melita gives a well-detailed overview on her experience in the U.S. Army as a lesbian woman starting off in a gender-segregated military. Furthermore, up until 2011, after the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", LGBT people were not welcomed into the military and risked dishonorable discharge. This impacted Melita's experience and relationships greatly, but this did not stop her from achieving several ranks and overseeing hundreds of soldiers.

**Margerie Forrester:** Good evening. My name's Marjorie Forrester and I'm here with Barbara Beancome (ph) who is our videographer and we are here on behalf of the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project. Today's date is November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and we are here for an oral history interview with Melita McCully. This interview is taking place at the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania. Melita, do we have your permission to record this interview today?

**Melita McCully:** Yes, you do Marg. And if I start to speak too fast, and I also tend to speak with my hands, you can tell me.

**MF:** We have a consent form for you to read over and sign at the end of the interview. Please say and spell your full name.

**MC:** Melita, I spell M as in Mother, E as in Echo, L as in Lima, I as in India, T as in Tango, A as in Alpha. McCully – M as in Mother, C as in Charlie, big C as in Charlie, U as in Uniform, L as in Lima, L as in Lima, Y as in Yankee.

**MF:** Thank you. What is your date of birth and where were you born?

**MC:** 11, December 1952 and I was born in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

**MF:** That's out near Pittsburgh isn't it?

**MC:** I have no idea. We left there before I was – before my brother who is 24 who is much younger than me was born. So, [chuckles] so. It's out in Western PA. I know that. We left – we moved to Florida after my dad died, so.

**MF:** So tell me about your family and your early child development?

**MC:** I'm the oldest of seven children, I had five brothers, younger than me and one sister. Four brothers are still alive. I basically raised them after my father died and I did an awful lot of...childcare, while my father...'cause my mother dealt with a lot of health challenges—issues. Let's leave it at that. If you don't mind. And I was always attracted to girls, but didn't understand why. I used to think there was something wrong with me 'cause I'd hear my aunts and uncles on my dad's side talkin' about the hard life I was gonna have, so I thought I must be ugly. But I understood after, I figured out my sexuality, that what they were talking about was—it was very obviously. My mother made 30 red dresses to try and get me to wear a dress, okay. We would get hand-me-downs from our cousins and I was always wanting to wear the boys' clothes. And today, I would have probably been identified as transgender but I'm definitely not transgender. But at the time, y'know, since I had five brothers, and one sister, who was seven years younger than me, I thought it was just like, y'know...I had a reading done recently with Bill Stowman (ph), have you ever heard of him? And one of the things that came up, was my father showed up and apparently I used to ask where my penis was. Y'know? So I—I believe that just because of all the other things about my childhood. I remember the first girl I had a crush on. Her name was Maria Tiesta and I was in second grade. Beautiful girl, olive skin. But, I didn't even try to yet figure any of that stuff out. After—my father passed a week after Christmas in 1965 and my mother was pregnant with my youngest brother at the time. I was instructed by my uncles that it was my responsibility to take care of my mother and my brothers and my sister and the baby that was coming. And they were gonna move us to Florida so I could take care of my blind grandmother. So, that really became pretty much my life. I went to catholic school my whole life, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. And the way it worked back then is if your family didn't have a lot of money, they would give you tuition free. I would volunteer in exchange for my brother's tuition. I held two jobs when I got to college, I did not go away to college. My mother's brother called and reminded me that my mother needed me to stay at home. So I stayed home and my day job was working for the city of St. Petersburg in the recreation department. I was the first woman lifeguard on the beach, I was a recreation supervisor and I had about 100 men working for me and about 30 women. I could take the boys to work, my little brothers. I worked my college schedule around their preschool and kindergarten, 'cause they were 10 and 12 years younger than me. I had bought a car, and one of the nuns from my high school took me to get a license 'cause my mother didn't have a license and her car wasn't legally registered, so of course she couldn't take me. I felt really lucky to be able to take care of my brothers and my sister, and my blind grandmother and I thought that's just how life was supposed to be. What else went on in my home I will never discuss, from when my father was alive. Other than we were told to never talk about what went on in the home. And probably a lot of people were told that. So, I was – I went to an all-girls Catholic school. Y'know, I looked at a lot of the girls. But the parents didn't want their daughters associating with me. I didn't understand why. Y'know, so it's always I don't understand why I'm being treated like that. But, my security was taking care of these kids, y'know? And taking care of my mother who was... I understood after I lost my partner, probably a little bit about how it felt for her. But not completely because when our father died,

she had us remove what pictures there were and we were not allowed to talk about him in her presence. And – and, that was just how her generation dealt with grief. So, anyhow, working the day job with recreation department and then also, after I would take the kids – get the kids to bed. So I'd get the kid's homework, take the kids to bed, do laundry, blah blah blah. I had a nightjob at a grocery store and I was the head night cashier. Then I took 19 hours quarter, first at St. Petersburg Junior College and then at the University of South Florida. I couldn't tell you the name of anybody in my classes and any of my professors. But I graduated with a 3.67 GPA and 23 extra hours. And, I'd taken care of these kids and had the two jobs. Was able to take care of a lot of expenses at home. So I went--

**MF:** -- Excuse me. Your mother was still there, in the home?

**MC:** Yes. But, my mother was best with one child. So what happened – that's a good Segway into what happened. So, you keep hearing me talk about my brothers. Well, my sister was the perfect girl! [laughs] A girly girl. And she was also a world class swimmer. So, what my mother's journey began was to be involved with my sister's swimming. My sister swam and set many records, in grade school and high school. And went onto college, and swam on the United States team when we boycotted the Olympics. But she didn't go to the (\_\_\_\_?) games, her record stood for many years. And she was – and my mother, was very much a one-child person. So, like, when a grandchild would be born, it was hard for my siblings to understand whoever was the youngest grandchild was where my mother was gonna spend her attention, okay? I think you can kinda understand what my mother's illness was, okay. She spent a lot of time in her bedroom. My father would come down and say, "your mother won't be coming down today". If it's a dirty diaper... I'm three and a half years old. If it's a dirty diaper, you can leave it till I get home, at seven, seven in the morning, otherwise you and Joey, [whispers] two and a half, know how to do it. You know how to heat up the bottle, you know how to make the formula, yes. We could do all that. But, so anyhow, I lived in a boy's world and took care of my brothers and my grandmother. My grandmother was a little bit of a challenge. Like one time, one of the boys came to me and they said "Melita, Melita, Gamma just put her drink in Donald's bottle" and I had to ask him to just hold him and give him his bottle while I was cooking. So I just went and got it, took her drink, took the bottle, threw it away, y'know [chuckles]. And, y'know, 'cause I had the two year old – 'cause it was very confusing to children, what had happened to our dad. Since I could only talk to them about it outside, where our mother could not hear. Now, in her later years, she became much more talkative. So if you were to be here talking to my sister, you would hear a much different story. 'Cause my sister spent a great deal of time with our mother and had a different relationship than me. When our mother was alive, my brothers were always... you know aghast at, but she's become a saint since she died and isn't that kind of what happens. So anyhow, we moved to Florida... we had to wait 'till the baby was born, we had to wait 'till he was three months old. And, 'cause back then you couldn't fly with an infant and stuff. So, anyhow. I got to take care of these kids. So those were my children. And I got to go to a good high school, and a good college, and I got a good grade so I get a job at the bank. My uncle... I had gone to school in St. Pete 'cause that's where his parents, my grandparents, retired to. So he had a very dear friend who was vice president of the bank and back in 1970, when I graduated from high school – or '74, when I graduated from college, women couldn't get regular jobs. So I was on the clock while my male peers were going to college and getting paid. So, Mr. Credder said to me "you're really good Melita, you should move north." I was making less

money than when I was working the two jobs but just trying to...y'know and I'm like, "I gotta support my family better". So I'd apply for a job with the bureau of Indian Affairs. 'Cause with my GPA...I just needed to quit taking care of the kids. My mother needed to meet these boys. They were really good boys, and I was very proud. My mother did tell me – one time – y'know, we went through different phases. She says "you did a better job with them than I think I did with you and your brothers". I don't think she did a job, I don't think any of us did a job. We turned out the way we're supposed to, I think. In spite of, or because of. So, anyhow I applied for this job with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the process...apparently, when I was in college I'd taken some exams, that showed I'd had a high propensity for stuff men normally can do. Mechanical, that kind of stuff. So an army recruiter kept calling me. And...there's a few brilliant moments for my mother to stand out in my life. And, this army recruiter is calling and I'm like, "no way I wanna join the army! I know nothing about the army!" So my mother says "what are you talking about?" I said, "Some recruiters calling" and she says, "Tell them you're only interested if you can be an officer." That means nothing to me, but her father had been on Eisenhower's staff and so she knew what an officer was. And he—and my mother came from a good family. So, so anyhow I told him that and about five months later, I get this phone call. "Hi, this is so and so, Lt. Woolf, I'm with U.S. Army, Women's Army Corp. And we're gonna double the number of women from 1% to 2% in the U.S. Army. I'm like "yeah". We [Army] understand you wanna be an officer. I said "well, I don't know". And she said "well, let me tell you a little bit about it 'cause you may not be interested. So I said okay. So then she says, "Well this is how it works. You can submit your paperwork, I'll send you the paperwork, and should your application be accepted, you have a 10% chance of being selected to go before this board in Jacksonville to see if you can get one of the slots for Florida because we're doubling the number of women and so we need a 160 women..." Well, now you're talking a challenge. And I'm a very competitive person at this point in my life – I'm not anymore. So, "oh okay." She says, "But that only gets you to Florida. Then you gotta get to Southeastern region." I subsequently learned after I came in the army that each region had a different level of competition. Florida was highly competitive. I guess a lot of women wanted to get out of Florida. So, anyhow. I filled out the paperwork, sent it off, didn't think anything of it. Took four days to go hiking with my fellow Boy Scout leader. I had a Boy Scout troop, back when women couldn't have Boy Scout troops. So, his father and he were legally the leaders but he and I were the leaders so my brothers could be boy scouts. So—so

**MF:** You had – you had your fingers all over the place raising those kids.

**MC:** I did this volunteer work at school in exchange for their tuition. And I was in a carpool so – anyhow, I got to raise kids. So anyhow, I fill out the paperwork. And the way the army works you don't hear anything and then suddenly you get a phone call. "Ms. McCully we're very interested in having you come up to Jacksonville and then board..." So I make arrangements and it's a big deal, as a woman, to get a day off from work y'know. This isn't like the guys who get to take a tour on a lunch break at the bank, doing the exact same work. And so, I arranged to get the day off from work, which is money for my family for feeding and stuff like that. I get the day off from work and I take the bus and I go out there. I get there, and it gets to be about 10:30 or 11 in the morning. And there's like 30 women there, and I'm like "this is such a waste of time". And they all have Master's degrees. I'm 21 ½, 22 years old. Very, very young. Most of them – I think the average age was 28 with this group of women. And they had masters and PhD's. Most

of them don't have the work experience, many of them aren't even employed. I had these jobs where I've had 150 people working for me, I'm running a city district, raising kids, all this stuff. So anyhow the Lieutenant comes and I said, "excuse me Lieutenant, I am not gonna be able to stay, I cannot afford to miss two days of work and I – I made arrangements with someone at the daycare with the kids but I gotta get back home, the neighbors are taking care of my brothers." She says "you'll be the next one to go in, Ms. McCully and you won't be in over 15 minutes. Nobody's been over 15 minutes and we'll get you on the bus back to St. Pete" And that's like a 6-hour bus drive. I said okay. So I go in, and there's this board of three officers. A Colonel, and...I have no idea. I remember the Colonel because the Lieutenant who is my recruiter is just sitting off the sideline, like you are Marg. And they're presenting all these – it was the silliest thing I'd ever been through. 'Cause they're giving me these different scenarios. "I went to catholic school", "I had all these men working for me", "I have these brothers", "I'm used to them running around in just their skinnies". And all these silly situations. What would you do? Well, as a matter of fact I've had a situation like that when I was running this pool, one of my men turned the gas on and we had to evacuate the whole neighborhood. Y'know, as so, you know, these are just, I'm just used to responsibility. So, so anyhow we're talking – y'know, and he says, well I was off hiking the Appalachian Trail. Y'know so he's just going on and on with all these situations. And I'm just sitting there being myself like I am with you. So anyhow, an hour and a half had gone by. He says "thank you so much for your time. This is my personal business card Ms. McCully, if you do not get a call, because you're exactly what we want in the U.S. Army, I want you to call me collect in Atlanta". This is back when we phones booths and all that stuff. I said sure, thank you. Thinking it's just blowing smoke up my butt, you know? Because nobody's ever said anything that complimentary to me other than my supervisors with the city who were very impressed. Y'know and I had to go through the normal hazing there, also, as a woman. So anyhow, I come out and the Lieutenant says "oh my god, you just blew it away". And I'm just looking at her like, "I need my bus ticket, I gotta get home". And I just let it go. So I get on the bus, I come home, go to work, go see Mr. Crayer and tell him how it went. And he says "Melita I think you really did well" and I'm like "Mr. Crayer, I don't know but—I've gotta find another job. Because I'm not making enough money to help my family out and support them." 'Cause my mother was pretty irresponsible with her money, and so, anyhow. A few months pass and I get a letter – or a call, and I'm off hiking again for a couple days. Anyhow, bottom line is I've been offered a commission in the United States Women Army Corps to report in February, I think it was. Well, I don't see the letter...my mother has a way of just bringing the mail and just kind of stuffing it. So, I don't see the letter until after that February date. But I call 'em. "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, no problem. We'll take you for the one May class. Will that work? You gotta be there when May class starts." I said sure. He said "you need to go down and get commission". Means nothing to me, y'know. People start saluting me. I don't come from a military family. So, y'know okay. I introduce my mother. I tell my brothers, "I want you to take really good care of mom". They even take turns taking their day off from school to spend time with our mother. Y'know, I was really really proud of my brothers. At that time. And I'm still proud of them. We just don't have much contact. Which is not relevant, I don't think. It is kind of relevant, but it's not. So, 'cause I think the more significant story is what I did in the U.S. Army. And this is the first time I've even talked a little bit about it. So, I get there – oh and by the way, I had to get a waiver when I put in my application because I exceed the maximum height for women in the army at the time which was 6 feet. And it was only because I was applying to be an officer that they would allow me to come in. Because I signed a thing saying I

would pay to have all my uniforms made and you don't even wanna know how much I spent on uniforms. Because they didn't make uniforms to fit me, at 6'2. So, so...but that was okay.

**MF:** You had to pay for them?

**MC:** Yes.

**MF:** Oh.

**MC:** But I'm an officer. Okay, so officers normally pay but the stuff in the clothing sales store is pretty inexpensive. But – so what they did when I went through basic is they sewed on the fabric to the end of the skirt, they sewed on the fabric to the end of the sleeves – of course I'm failing inspections and doing a lot of pushups. And then for the women's fatigues we ran making tape from here [points to specific spot on leg] down. And the only pair of tied shoes I owned, because I wear a men's size 12, which is a pretty big shoe for even a woman, even a man. I think my dad wore a 10 ½. So, so anyhow they didn't have any combats to fit me because I'd gone to the W.A.C center (Women's Army Corps) in Fort McClone. I was told I wasn't gonna be allowed to graduate, which of course I was gonna graduate, if I didn't get shoes and boots. So my classmates helped me out 'cause a lot of them had more a military background. We got some boots from Ft. Benin. Anyhow, I did get to graduate, obviously. But the way I chose to the way I was gonna go in the Army... 'cause what was happening is, this was May 1976 and the Women's Army Corps was being disestablished in 1978 two years later. So, we were being detailed to a branch for formal integration into the army when the Women's Army Corps. was disestablished. So, the guys from the different branches in the Army – you have infantry, you've probably heard of an armor, an artillery, and y'know. So you have a combat and arms branches, then we have what are called the Combat Support Arms branches. Which is like, military intelligence, signal, core engineers, chemical cor, military police. And then you have the combat service report, which was personnel, finance, AJ, that kind of stuff, supply, which is quarter master, ordinance which is maintenance. So, at that time women couldn't go into the combat arms and they could only serve in the typographic part of the combat engineers, which is maps. So they couldn't do anything so there wouldn't really be a future in your... So the guy gets up in the stage to tell us about the Signal Corp and he shows up this video of these guys and they're clomping through mud above their knees and they're climbing these poles in blizzard-like snow. It was clear he didn't want any women. And, y'know, he's just making it out to be a god awful thing. And I'm sittin' there, and I'm like, any of the other 160 women. I said...I didn't think that's what I wanted to do. I thought, y'know, I'd probably fit into the personnel, you know. But I need to do that because what if I decide I like it and 10 years later I end up in that, and it's not really for me. So, I click out of Signal CORPS as my first choice. And everybody is like, I can't believe you'd do that Melita, you don't wanna be signal? So I did, and I got it. So, in my class, there were a 160 women. I was commissioned as a second Lieutenant, based on my physical chronological age of 23. But I had the work experience in the city to be commissioned as a captain. I'm glad I wasn't and that I was commissioned as the second Lieutenant. The average age of the women in my class was 26 and a half. And the average educational level was a masters and nine of the women had PhD's. I just had my little bachelor's degree at the time. When you fast forward to the time I retired I was the only one still in active duty. But, by the time I had ten years in service, there were only five of us left. I subsequently did command. I was first woman in the

army to command a tactical combat signal brigade. Women had command signal brigades and military but not combat tactical.

**MF:** And where was that?

**MC:** My brigade was stationed in Germany and I was the one who deployed my soldiers in the coast of Macedonia and a couple of other places I can't tell you about. But, so – I could tell you about it now but it's not really relevant because I'm not sure I can really tell you. So we'll just leave it at that. I was a Battalion Commander in the first cavalry division. But anyhow, so let's get back to getting to the army and everything. I signed up for airborne school but then I twisted – broke my ankle playing football but...they kept re-xraying it because they couldn't understand why bones hadn't ossified and it was because I hadn't finished growing and I could've told them that but...so anyhow, couldn't go to airborne school but I already had orders to the home of the airborne which was Fort Bragg, which had just opened to women. So I arrive at Fort Bragg and they'd had a few rapes in the bachelor officer's quarter so they didn't want to put me in the bachelor's officer's quarter, they wouldn't let me go off post (ph). So I got them to give me a room in the bachelor officer's quarters and I reported to the Brigade Commander and he was so pissed. How did I get this woman? Oh my god. So, he tells me about the four battalions in his brigade and he says "then, there's the 25<sup>th</sup> signal battalion, and it's on the other side"...because remember, I'm a leg. Which doesn't mean anything to you two ladies, but in the army if you're air – if you're in an airborne post, you need to be airborne. You don't need to be a leg without wings so that you can jump out of an airplane. So here I was, because of my broken ankle, even though it had to heal without a cast, which is a whole 'nother story...again, going back a little bit to being a woman in a world that doesn't really—isn't really ready to welcome much. 'Cause I'm—my classmates are the first—are West Pointers. I outrank the west pointers because the way they commissioned us is they did battlefield commissions. So, we don't take the – there's a law that nobody who graduates from ROTC can have a date of rank senior to west pointer, if they are commissioned within 45 or 60 days. But battlefield commissions don't count. So, I outranked all my West Point classmates. So, I was in charge of them in school. So, anyhow I get to my Brigade Commander and he says – so there's like eight of us reporting, seven guys and me. They immediately get their assignments. Then he offers me this job as the assistant public affairs officer – there is no such position. And says – y'know, goes on and on. I said, no I wanna be a platoon leader. Because again, suppose I like being in the army then I need to do what you need to do to become a successful army officer. So he says, well we have one unit and it's called the 25<sup>th</sup> signal battalion and it has the highest crime rate in Ft. Bragg, we have eight walking 82<sup>nd</sup> division MP's to patrol it. It takes all the Court Marshalls east to the Mississippi. Remember, this is 1977 now. January 1977, so we're still dealing with end of the draft, even though the draft had ended several years ago. So, y'know – I'm interviewing the soldiers in my platoon and I finally get – so anyhow, he sends me to lunch, tells me to come back. I come back. And he says, "So, how was your lunch?" Great. "How about that public [affairs officer]?" No, I wanna be a platoon leader. "Okay, I'm gonna send you to the 25<sup>th</sup>". I rehashed to him his whole speech about it being on the other side [mumbles incoherently]. So, I go down there and the battalion Commander and the (\_\_\_?) are like "oh my god, where did she come from?" Y, know, how did we end up with her? Because that unit took – only had officers who are west point, airborne, rangers, except for one person who might've been OCS because of remember – it's the high crime, it's got all the guys who've been court marshalled. So, anyhow. It's like, so what am



I gonna do with her? He says, “Look, I’ve got this job as the assistant personnel officer.” No, I wanna be a platoon leader. So what he tells me to do – and this is really relevant to our whole story, I think. He says “I want you to go home and when you come back in the morning we’ll talk”. So I come back in the morning and, “No, I want to be a platoon leader,” he says “okay you’re going down to Trolley Company [ph] and they’re going down to the field this afternoon”. So, remember I got in that room with the BOQ. So I go to the field without any field gear, okay. And I’m in the field for like five days. And my platoon’s heard and is pissed like, what the F did I do to end up with this female Lieutenant. So anyhow, he won the prize. And everybody’s making fun of my company Commander ‘cause he got stuck with the female y’know. So it’s like the big talk in the whole battalion. So, let’s – I come back and my stuff has been put in a storage locker because I wasn’t in my room and they’ve rented it out to somebody else and all that. But – you remember that Brigade Commander that I told you about. Five months – six months later it’s June, and we’re out on this major exercise and the Core Commander is telling everybody in the Corps. that they need to go down to the 25<sup>th</sup> signal battalion, it’s side ex [ph?] and such, at this grade coordinate and see this female Lieutenant in action. “You’ve gotta go see her!” So the joke in the battalion – we had 1,300 soldiers in our battalion – was if we charged a quarter for everyone who came to see Lieutenant McCully, we could’ve had a steak and beer, remember we still drank back then, dinner for every soldier in the battalion. That—that was the parade that came through. And that’s relevant to another story I’m gonna tell you. So then, a couple weeks later, my battalion Commander calls me into the office and says, “Colonel Nelson” who himself became General Nelson, “His son is an ROTC cadet and he wants his son to shadow you for his two weeks of AT.” Oh okay.

**MF:** You’re the prime example of what people should be doing.

**MC:** And we’re probably running out of time right now but that’s what... [truck engines in back] Aren’t you out of time? I don’t even know what time it is.

**MF:** No, we’re good.

**MC:** Okay, so anyhow, did you remember the story about the Court Commander? Okay so that’s relevant. Because remember how I told you how I was taking my uniform. So, a few months pass and the big Commander of the Women’s Army Corp. is coming to Fort Bragg and she wants to meet all the women. And Fort Bragg is one of the two largest posts in the US Army. And the world, as far as military posts. You know there’s Fort Hood where I was Battalion Commander. And so all the women are over in the corps support area in the other side of the highway. Fort Bragg has a major high way that goes through it. So anyhow, the Brigade Commander and Battalion Commander tell me I have to go to this thing in the theatre so I go to the quarry [ph] and I go to this. And so, she gives her little spiel and she asks if we had any questions and I said “yes, second Lieutenant Melita McCully ma’am” and I don’t know my brigade commander is in the audience, “and I think these fatigues that you’ve given the women to wear should be sent to Africa. They’re totally non-utilitarian and the oil and grease in the motor pool just gets absorbed into the uniform just like the men uniform, they don’t fit us right. They’re not...they don’t protect us. They’re supposed to be protective – our fatigue uniform and now we were about desert camis.” They’re supposed to protective us. In fact, my uniform had radar screening in them believe it or not. So, y’know this is a totally unacceptable uniform. So she says to me

“Lieutenant, be at ease and take your seat”. Okay, I guess I shouldn’t have said that. But you know I’m just a second Lieutenant, right? [chuckles]. So anyhow, I’m walking out of the theatre and I see my Brigade Commander and I’m like [grabs face] Oh, fuck. I’m really in trouble now. I’m supposed to go have dinner with this General. So I get in my car and race over to my battalion before going home to change my clothes to tell my – but my Battalion Commander’s gone for the day. So I go home, nervous as shit, get myself changed to go to the dinner, I get to the dinner and there’s like 20 women officers. I don’t know any of them because they’re all the other end – y’know the part of the post where women are not where I am. Which, remember the highest crime rate and all that stuff. And she looks at me and says “I don’t want to hear a word out of you Lieutenant”. I say okay, fine. So the next morning, I’m waiting at the battalion headquarters from a Battalion Commander to show up before physical training. It’s still dark, it’s like 5:30 in the morning. Y’know, we do more before 9’o clock than the rest of the world. So, so anyhow I tell my Battalion Commander, “sorry I gotta talk to you, I did something really bad yesterday”. He says “oh, Colonel Nelson called and General Emmerson asked if we could have you on standby”. General Emmerson is the court Commander, remember he had everybody pra—because he’s gonna be meeting with General Clarke and he’s gonna address your concern about the utility uniform. Because you’re absolutely right. He wants you on standby in case General Emmerson has any questions for you or needs you to come up there to further explain this to General Clarke. General Clarke being the woman in charge of all that. Okay, so I’m on standby, never hear anything. Several months later, my platoon officer, my platoon sergeant comes to me and he says “ma’am, there’s some major on the phone from the pentagon that wants to talk to you”. When you’re at that level in the army you’re like “the pentagon’s calling?” [chuckles]. “Yes, this is major so-and-so, General Clarke’s gonna be traveling and she’ll be about four hours from you but if you have any other suggestions for her she’d be happy to come to Fort Bragg and meet with you, Lieutenant McCully”. No, I don’t have anything else. Because what had...and the next morning after, you know, she met with General Emmerson – I forgot to tell you that. And a message came out from the department of the army announcing that the women could wear men’s fatigues. And so, I was like [makes explosion sound as celebration]. So I did that.

**MF:** Quite an achievement.

**MC:** So, throughout that whole assignment I was cat called. My very first time on staff duty, they put me on staff duty. This is relevant because this went on ‘till when I retired, believe it or not. I’m on staff duty and they gave me pay day night. And pay day night’s pretty rough because those guys like to – you know, we’re going back to the 70s it’s not the all new volunteer army where we have much more mature kids, like I was a battalion Commander or a brigade Commander. And, y’know so I’m busting kids for smoking pot and for, you know busting a rape and somebody spray paints my car and puts sugar in my gas tank. And you know – all this. And then I walk into this one barracks. Remember – this is the highest crime rank. There’s these guys all pacing, it’s an open bay barracks – you’ve probably seen stuff like that in the movies. There’s this one guy, pacing back and forth. I’ve been assigned two body guards, two great big burly NCO’s y’know, to protect me. Of course we have the eight MP’s that are patrolling. Well, I tell everybody to get in their bunks and I tell this guy who’s acting like a crazy guy that he needs to get in his bunk. So he calls off and hits me and knocks me on the ground. My body guards run away, they leave. I bounce up instinctively – remember I’ve grown up with five younger

brothers, I had all these men working for me – and I just instinctively (the guy's bigger than me) and I back up and hit him. Y'know? And just push him back. And everybody's like what the shit? Did you see what that Lieutenant --? 'Cause no Lieutenant would do that. But you know, I'm kind of a little bit street smart I guess but I'm very naïve. I still hadn't figured out my sexuality, you notice I'm not mentioning anything about that. So anyhow, nothing...I had to go file an MP report and stuff. Nothing happened to this guy for assaulting me and I always felt it was because I was a woman. I was told don't worry, we're putting him out in the army, he got into a fight in the mess hall, he hit a couple guys with a meat cleaver and he got hit in the head...and y'know. This is the 1970s. This is not the army of the 1980's, 90's or 2000's. You know. Because I retired in January of 2005 so I'd been retired just about 13 years. I haven't worked since Labor Day of 2004. 'Cause I had a lot of what we call terminal leave and stuff. A lot of leave I lost too 'cause of ... but anyhow, so anyhow, but guys would cat call me and stuff like that. And when I moved here, it was my 23<sup>rd</sup> move of over six – where I was gonna live over six months. Now I lived here longer, as of like a couple weeks ago then any place in my entire life. It's a whole nother story how I ended up here other than spirit brought me here. It had nothing to do with a person. 'Cause I was trying to re find myself after losing my partner. But, I...what would happen to me is like about a year and a half later, they needed some women to send to Europe to expose men to women. And because I'd been working in this unit I was sent to Europe. So, I moved around a lot more than my male contemporaries just so that guys could have the experience of being assigned with a woman. You know, like a little chemistry experiment I guess or something like that.

**MF:** Sensitivity.

**MC:** But...but in each case I was not welcomed. But in the end I earned their respect. So I don't – there's many stories I could tell my time in the army and I would prefer that you say. Y'know, to tell you that despite all of it, I'm very proud of all that we accomplished. And...you know my unit had no deficiencies every time we deployed unlike any other unit. My men – we won all army awards for retention and they – the number one place they wanted to re-enlist to stay was with my unit. We won the best maintenance in the army award at every level I served. But in the beginning I was given the worst units to command. For battalion and brigade command. A General officer came to me when I was selected for battalion command – 'cause I was going to the unit he had commanded – and he was very, very upset that I was going to that unit. Because it was unspoken that I was a lesbian and so they – it was really was very disturbing. So, I guess I should – how I figured out that I was a lesbian? You wanna know – I mean do you wanna know more?

**MF:** Sure.

**MC:** It was my soldiers. There were a few female soldiers. And as... wherever I served, I was always the senior woman except for a few months at the end of my brigade command tour when a woman General came in to take over the command that I – that my higher headquarters. But then when I went to be the deputy Commander for a signal in the army, again I was working for men. So – you know, it was my soldiers who realized who I was but I did not realize who I was.

**MF:** So did they talk to you about it?

**MC:** No, they just said c'mon, we're taking you Lieutenant, you need to learn how to go out and have fun. I never partied in high school, I never partied in college. Remember what did I tell you I was doing?

**MF:** Taking care of kids.

**MC:** Taking care of kids. So I had had no social life. My friends joke that y'know since I retired I've been doing the playing I never got to do as a kid. And...that's a whole 'nother story 'cause what I do now is I volunteer with my dogs and we – they're certified therapy pets, all months of at least 12 months of age. And we work with the veterans with PTSD and in the hospice at the VA [ph]. And with special needs kids and with kids at the Hershey Children's Pediac Rehab Center. That's become my passion, and how I've redefined my life. Since I retired. But, so anyhow, they (her soldiers) tried to help me see that. When I was visiting one of my soldiers – and this where my central Pennsylvania connection comes in – so I'm visiting one of my soldiers in the psych ward, and what happens sometimes with soldiers when my send them overseas on their initial assignment, is some of them are just...although they're mentally stable if we'd have left them in United States, sometimes it's just too much to send them overseas. So I'm visiting him up in the psych ward of 97<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, and this psychiatric tech, who isn't a listed soldier, verboten in front of an officer, makes a pass at me and I fall in love with her, y'know. And she's from Loysville, Perry County. And her name is Rachelle Brogan. And we recently reconnected, this year. As a matter of fact. So, we had a relationship of sorts – it wasn't, y'know, we had to be very discreet because she was enlisted living in the barracks living up in Frankfurt and I'm in a company Commander with 330 soldiers. 360 soldiers. We had to be very, very careful. But she was pretty loose girl, she'll tell ya that. And so she got – you know, I made friends with – at this point, I'd come out enough that I'd connected with the other lesbian officers. But, unlike them I'm not doing some of the things. Because remember I'd been pretty much a buttoned kid, so I'm not going out the bars and doing stupid things and gettin' caught. So I'm never under investigation. So, Rachelle, I catch her in bed with one of my friends and y'know it's just—it's just a bad situation. But, I'm still in love with her 'cause she's my first love and y'know how your first love...so, I end up coming back—I finish my company command tour, I come back to school in Ft. Gordon. She's gotten involved with my best friend at the time that I'd been sharing a partner with. And so that's just a crazy situation. So y'know...that took...I'm like I don't wanna deal with any more of this lesbian stuff. So my next assignment, after I finish all my schools in Georgia and Virginia is to go to Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey. So I go to Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey, I've sworn off ever getting involved with anybody 'cause I don't like the drama in the lesbian community. And maybe I'm just supposed to be single, right? So I'm pretty close to one of my male peers and he – this other male peer, in another unit...So he is dating a woman named Jo Carole Terry. Who, later, becomes my partner. And I have a friend Michael who is good friends with Sharon, my best friend who had cheated on me with Rachelle. So Michael and I go to the military ball and JC and Skippio go to the military ball. JC had quite an alcohol problem at that time 'cause she hadn't figured out who she wants. And in the army, if we came out, we would've been kicked out, not even with an honorable discharge back then. I mean this was really, -- and a lot of our peers were being investigated. So I've got all this drama behind me and I just wanna tell ya'll a little bit about her 'cause she was the greatest thing that ever happened to me in my life. She helped me become comfortable in my skin as a woman, and

she really helped my family a great deal. And it was very traumatic on all of them when she got sick and subsequently died. But especially on me, of course. So she made a couple passes at me, and she asked me... she was getting promoted to Major. She was about five years older than me, and so she was a little bit senior to me [chuckles] to say the least. And, so technically, once she got promoted Major we weren't supposed to be hangin' out either. But at least we were in the same unit. So, anyhow...we were...so she invites me back to her house, she invites me to her promotion ceremony, and of course Skip. And she invites us both to her promotion party. So I tell Skip, yeah let's just go. So Skip and I go to this ceremony and it's real nice and I said, I'll meet you at the party. At this point he's pretty much given up on dating her but he still cares about her. And he knows her very well. Well, I get to the party earlier than him and she and her unit have been partying for hours probably. For several hours. So everybody's pretty... and her sister's there, her mother's there, and I'm walking and she puts her arm around me and she's introducing everybody to me as her lady. And I'm like, I gotta get out of here because she's in the military intelligence unit, her brigade Commander's there, her battalion Commander's there. But she'd slept with so many guys that nobody took her seriously, thank god. If she'd been a Debutant, she was not even – she should've had a waiver for being a little too short. She stood on her tippy toes to be five feet so she could get in. So you imagine what we looked like walkin' around. 'Cause she was barely five feet tall and I'm 6'2. I was kind of a goofy girl at the time, she really polished me off. So, so anyhow, I'm like I gotta get outta here. I don't belong at this party. So I tell her I've gotta leave. So she wants to walk me out and she kisses me. You know? In the parking lot. And Skip's coming in and he say, "What's goin' on?" and I say I gotta go. And he can tell I had a look on my face, somethin' bad has happened. He says I'll meet you at 5:30 tomorrow morning before any of the guys get in. So I spill my guts to him and tell him what has happened. Because, in the army we're like brothers. They don't see me as a girl. Once they get to know me, they can see me as another one of the guys. He says Melina, "you gotta stay away from her she's just bad news. She's got an alcohol problem, I went to take her out, she was passed out" blah blah blah. So anyhow she calls me up and asks me to come over and long story short, I end up y'know spending the night with her and she says "don't expect this to ever happen again" and we were together for the rest of her life. So, and because she was so good at what she did, with getting back to the army, and I was so good at what I did and she had slept with so many men before I came into her life...and she was such a fufu girl, nobody believed that there was anything going on other than what we would tell people. That we shared a place. 'Cause she had pretty-- pretty more administrative type assignments in the Intelligence Corps and I had muddy boots so she could watch my cats 'cause I always had animals. I could take care of her stuff while she would be on travel using suitcases and airplanes and stuff like that. And she did do some muddy boots but not quite like me and she didn't wanna do it like me. So anyhow, because we were so good we were always able to get stationed together. It was – we did better than people in the married army.

**MF:** At this point you were just roommates to everybody?

**MC:** Yes –

**MF:** So how did you manage to get stationed together?

**MC:** Okay, so the first time...I—I was really pretty good with what I did. And so we had our first assignment together when we met. And then, I'd been there like 18 months and I was handpicked to go to this special assignment in D.C. I was just like, devastated 'cause I was gonna have to leave this love of my life and everything. But she was selected to this higher school. Neither of us had ever felt we had any future in the army so we—we had done a course for a school out in Kansas by correspondence. So, we arranged for her through my assignment officer who, y'know it was unspoken, and because I wasn't blatant like the other women. So he arranged for her to go to the school in Norfolk, I was based in Washington, D.C. living in Springfield. Because her grandmother was elderly, she was taking care of her grandmother. We worked a deal with his help and he subsequently retired as a two-starred General.

**MF:** He still thinks you're roommates?

**MC:** No, but he knew the truth. He knew the truth. So that's the thing you gotta know – as long as you didn't put it in their face, like a lot of the other women, and you, you would put on the dress...so example – one time, I'm at this fair. And I'm in a skirt, been in suit, all dolled up. I don't even own any skirts anymore. And one of my majors looks at me with his wife and he says “man, you clean up right nice”. And his wife slaps his face. Y'know, “don't talk to the Colonel like that!” And they'd all look at me like “ma'am you have legs!” And JC is talking about my legs. Because I'm a fairly attractive woman. I don't try to be attractive but...anyhow. She said I was. And that's really all that mattered at the time. But, so...what we did. Because we played the game. And because we would have them into our home, and we were so open about living together instead of hiding the fact that we were living together. And we were both great chefs and we loved to entertain. We were always having people over, just like I did for Thanksgiving. It was okay. I was never really accepted by my peers...what was interesting it was two grades above whatever I was, accepted me for whatever I was. My female peers had a real problem with me. My male peers, their wives had a problem with me. That was because I spent more time with their husbands and I saw their husbands in situations you would not normally see a man in. Because – because I spent most of my time in the muddy boots army...and it was the same muddy boots army as a lot of these other women were in, sufficed to say we even did gang shower at times, y'know. But I couldn't tell you what a penis looked like, no I couldn't other than a picture. Because I had three minutes to get that shower, I had my clothes, I wanted to get my shower and I wanted to get out of there, if that makes sense. 'Cause that's just how it was. So I never really thought about it, okay. Because I had no interest. I believe there was a continuum, and I believe I'm only continuum where I've just never even looked at a man like that. Where I have lesbian friends who have been married, who took a while to come out, and who were able to be comfortable with a man but are more drawn and attracted to women. I have some very close male friends. I have a lot of -- Unlike my lesbian friends I have here, I have more straight friends than I have lesbian friends just because I can get along with just about anybody. 'Cause I identify the happiest thing about being retired is being able to acknowledge who I am. Don't Ask, Don't Tell is great for us because at least nobody could ask us any longer. But the hardest thing sometimes was with my soldiers when one of my Commanders wanted to kick somebody out for being gay and I – as the Court Marshall Convening Authority had that approval authority – and it was a moral dilemma for me y'know. Because you know at that point of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, they could get an honorable discharge. And so I would have to be very careful how I

questioned them because I couldn't expose myself even though it was pretty obvious that the Colonel had "L" tattooed on her forehead. You know.

**MF:** So, if they acknowledged themselves as being gay—

**MC:** Discharged.

**MF:** -- Then the crime was acknowledging.

**MC:** After Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Prior to that the crime was being caught. Or anybody reporting and then they would do an investigation. So they were always investigating the lesbians and gays. But, I will tell you. So an interesting story about my uncle. So, my uncle, a wonderful man. He says to me at one of my brother's weddings, "Melita, you're still in the army". Yes sir. "I guess we have nothing else to talk about". I guess not sir. Because, for him, he served in Korea, my dad served in World War II. Women that went into the army were one of two things – they were lesbians or prostitutes. Y'know. When I came into the army, a woman who got pregnant was automatically discharged. With an honorable discharge, we paid all her pregnancy stuff. Shortly after that, she had the option of staying or not but she had to have a family care plan and it—it was not easy to stay in if you had a child. When I went through training at Ft. Maclalan, the men that were there were instructors to teach us orienteering and all the ranger stuff which of course I got into and none of the other women really did. I think it's just how I'm wired to be honest. It was hardship assignment because it was such a – you know 'cause of all the women that were there and most of them were lesbians even though, y'know. That's—that's...it was just an unspoken thing but there were all these investigations going on. What's very interesting is all our friends get investigated. Ask me if JC or I were ever investigated. And I will tell you we never were. And yet, y'know we both had security clearances that gave us access to presidential stuff, okay, we'll leave it at that. 'Cause there's all kinds of security clearances. And it's based on what you have a need to know. So, you know in there security clearances, it came out. But, there's this rule – I don't if it's a rule or law, if JC were alive she could answer it for you because she was in the intelligence cor – where they can't ask lifestyle questions. Okay, so they can't ask. Even if it comes out, they might interview all of our neighbors, you know. But if our neighbors have never witnessed us kissing, or holding hands...now, what was very interesting is you know. Like, my male superiors would say. And even our neighbors, wherever we lived, would say, "You two are better friends than any married couple".

**MF:** [chuckles]

**MC:** When she [JC] got sick, she had a disease called Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis, which is not related to smoking, it does the opposite to your lungs of empesema. So you basically suffocate and there's no treatment for it other than a transplant. So she ended up being medically retired and the army paid for the lung transplant. So, at the same time, while all of that was happening I'm a brigade Commander in Germany. We're seeing each other more than married couple even though she's living in the states and flying back and forth and I'm flying back and forth because of my position. I'm also flying all around the combat theatre because I had soldiers in like, 31 different locations. Because the way we deploy in combat communications is

anywhere from teams to platoons to companies. But, we don't form a brigade formation like an infantry division. Anyhow, she went down really really fast. So, I'm finishing up my brigade command tour and I've been selected for this position out at Ft. Huachuca, which is a mile high, which is a very hard place to breathe. As you can well imagine.

**MF:** In Colorado?

**MC:** No, Arizona. Bout five miles from the Mexican border. 85 miles southwest of Tucson. And she'd been there for intelligence center school and she just loved it and it was her dream to go back there. So isn't it kinda neat that I'm getting assigned there. Anyhow, we were able to – explain to General Rush... 'cause when I got to be Senior, like as a Brigade Commander I was entitled to family quarters. Well I couldn't live in those family quarters because she wouldn't be able to visit me more than 30 days a year. Because she's not a blood relative, okay. So I forget – y'know, it's not really relevant to tell the stories I would tell to be allowed to live off post but when General Rose said he wanted me to be his deputy out in Ft. Huachuca, there's also a set of quarters for that. I mean, if you were to drive into Ft. Huachuca, even on 9/11, my picture was in the MP guard ship—in the guard ship gate shaft [ph]. You know – you know, the who. I'll tell ya a funny 9/11 story if we have time, even if I don't, it doesn't matter we don't need to hear the story. But, so anyhow, he said to me, Melita you need to live off post. He says, no problem. I said you know...and he was the one who had gotten us assigned together in the very beginning. I said "JC's very sick sir". He said, "when you get the phone call, you just go". He would work my TUI...and my Aunt, who's my mom's sister was also very sick, got sick about the same time. She had a son who had a drug problem, and so I was responsible for both of them. Time to finish?

**MF:** No, no, would you like to drink?

**MC:** Oh, I'm allowed to? [chuckles and picks up bottle, opens cap] So anyhow, I was running back and forth taking care of both of them.

**MF:** Now, at this point, where was your partner?

**MC:** Okay so, when I return to Germany, I got her medically retired and everything like that.

**MF:** Oh, okay.

**MC:** And at that point, she needed to go on oxygen. We flew out to Arizona, found a place, got her on oxygen and she got shingles in her esophagus. And I thought she was gonna die. She thought she was going to, too. So I took her to, what's it called, Walter Reed, and I talked to her palynologist and he says "Melita, you know I know the diagnosis, you have a year or two years after diagnosis, I don't know if she'll make it to the spring." And so one of the things that she'd have the presence of mind to do – she had a buddy who had been diagnosed with prostate cancer who had worked where she worked. He had suggested that she call Johns Hopkins to get a second opinion. So she calls John's Hopkins, and...and...what ha—well, so, go backwards a little bit. Go to May of 2000, I'm in command and she's had pneumonia four times that year. We



decided that it's better for her to have the biopsy without me and have me there for the results. So I'm there for the results and we get the second opinion, only John Hopkins says you need to go another Fairfax, which is was like 15 minutes from her house. There's a doctor there doing a study on IPF. We go to see him, but unfortunately Walter Reed had done the biopsy and so she couldn't get into the study, 'cause the hadn't done the biopsy. You know how that stuff goes. But he said you know, I can also do transplant on you. But she didn't wanna talk about that 'cause that meant she really didn't have much time. So now, that's now July. So we fast forward to the end of November and I'm home from Germany. I say we gotta go over to see Dr. Nathan. So we went over to see Dr. Nathan and undenounced to me, Dr. Nathan had a gay brother. So he knew not to ask me the question about my relationship. But he knew that I would take care of her. So the normal process—So I said I would really wanna see if she can qualify—but he says you know it takes about six months to go through the whole process. I said I gotta head to Arizona on the second of January, you know, Thanksgiving is next week. He says “we'll see what we can do”. He scheduled us for—it was after Thanksgiving, yeah, 'cause she had organized a family reunion for my family. So, so this is the first week of December. The second week of December, we go over to – I know Fairfax so we go through this whole battery of interviews. I go in to see the psychiatrist and you'll laugh because of the study. They said “so what is your relationship to her because we need to make sure she has someone who can be her medical advocate, make her decisions, keep track of her medications”... and I managed a spreadsheet that had 28 meds at a high point, with 6 different administration times. Because, when you get a transplant, you're trading a terminal illness for a managed medical condition. And at that time, in 2001, the life expectancy for somebody with a lung transplant, the most exposed organ of the body, was about a year to five years. Okay. I know that Fairfax had better survival rates and so we followed all the rules. All the rules. And everything. Anyhow, we go through the whole interview process and then I make arrangements to get oxygen to take in the car and she wants to go see her family and explain to them that I'm going to be making all the decisions. 'Cause her family didn't accept me, 'cause they thought I had corrupted her and she had been the one that made all the passes at me as you can kind of figure out. And that they were going to have to tolerate me if they were going to get to see her because I was gonna be the one that made all these decisions. So, five days we go through this whole battery of tests and I explain to the psychiatrist, Don't Ask, Don't Tell. I say “I will take care of it, but we can't discuss it”. Because if I had acknowledged to them, that we had a lesbian relationship, I would've been kicked out of the army, she would've been kicked out 'cause she was gettin' ready to—we would've lost all of our pension and everything, you know? Which just isn't right. So, so anyhow, it's the 20<sup>th</sup> of December and she's had several other medical scares as you can well imagine. We've had to switch to a different oxygen company. She's now on four liters per minute, home oxygen can't go above six liters. I don't know how much you know about medical stuff, I learned so much. But and so, she wanted me to have these signs on the side of the car 'cause nobody – 'cause of all the oxygen I was carrying. I was carrying portable oxygen, I was carrying frozen oxygen, and I was carrying – so I could regenerate tanks for her—and I was carrying a concentrator, which is something you can plug into the wall to generate oxygen. It's the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, snow, ice and we've gotta leave 'cause I wanna get her to her family to at least see them on Christmas. 'Cause I don't think she – I know her diagnosis. The 23<sup>rd</sup>, I wake up and they call. She's been approved for a transplant. I'm like [sighs, smiles] God is with us, y'know? They said, but it'll take Tri-Care – that's our medical that we have in the army –

**MF:** Mhm.

**MC:** -- to approve it. And the average is 13 months. We don't have 13 months. But God is with us. Remember, how small I told you she was. I get the oxygen, I get everything. I pile it in the car and we leave the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>. With the good news that she's going to get a transplant. There's a blizzard coming and I'm driving in front of the storm. We stop at her family's to visit them, and of course, we can't even stay at hotel in town 'cause you know I would've been shot [chuckles]. She visits them and they're very cordial to me and everything. Fast forward today and I am so close to her great nephews, you know. I have a better relationship with her great nephews than I do with my own siblings. They don't care, because they get it. But it's their generation I guess.

**MF:** Yeah, it's their generation.

**MC:** So, I drove to Arizona in four days which was record breaking time 'cause there were different people she wanted to see. She wanted to see her Uncle Jo and Katy in Texas. I didn't know if she was ever gonna get to see these people again, you know? Then we arranged, my boss and I, for me to fly back and made arrangements with some friends for her to stay with them because she couldn't stay by herself. I flew back to do an inspection on something that we have that's here in Pennsylvania that you may have read about – but it's a special facility for the President and among other things my soldiers were responsible for that. So you know when you would see the pictures photos “courtesy of the U.S. Army” with the green border, those were my combat camera soldiers. You know – everything to do with communications, my soldiers did that. [truck passes in background] Be in Bosnia, Afghanistan, all over the place. I had 18,000 of them working for me in my last assignment and a budget of a billion dollars. Who would've thought this mixed up girl would've got to that point. I had 23 full Colonels working for me, and although I was a full Colonel I had been serving a General Officer position. The reason I didn't get promoted, a four star General that I worked for flew out to Arizona to tell me that he had fought my case and I said I understand why. And it had to do with me – there are lesbian Generals but Melita didn't care what people thought. I just am gonna be my genuine self. And that's just who I am. And quite frankly, I had all the privileges of a General Officer but I didn't have to make the meet the plane with all the bodies coming back from Iraq...I was in the interbrief, why we shouldn't go to war, I saluted and came back and told the soldiers why we're going to war... but I remembered...what I've been taught as a second Lieutenant by these guys had been in Vietnam and that was to vote with your feet. We were put up a stop loss when the war began, 9/11 and although we told them we needed to go to Afghanistan, and George W. Bush – and this is now unclassified—only wanted to go to Iraq to avenge some stuff to his father. I was locked down for about five days when 9/11 happened. And JC needed all her medications and it was my Admin assistant who took them to her 'cause she wasn't allowed to come home from the fort, even though she was a retired full Colonel. So, how many people ever become full Colonel in the United States Army, how do you work with the personal headquarters, I can tell you. Out of every 100 Lieutenants we commission, in the regular Army, not nurses, doctors and chaplains and lawyers...about 45-50 in peacetime, and war depending on the combat situation, will become majors. That is a successful career for an officer. The Army runs on private soldiers. We don't run on officers. Of that 45 in that 100, 23 will become Lieutenant Colonels. Out of those 23 who become Lieutenant Colonels, about 8% to 10% will

become Battalion Commanders. JC was a Battalion Commander. Of that, same 100, same 23, same 45, 5-6 closer to 4-5, for non-combat arms, closer to six for infantry and armor, will become full Colonels. And of that, six percent – I mean, three percent will become Brigade Commanders but the bulk of the brigades are in the combat arms. But there are few brigades in the non-combat arms which was I fortunate enough to command. Of that .08% will become Brigadier Generals. So I feel like I had more than a successful career and she did too. You just don't find many women that get promoted as far as we do.

**MF:** So, just to clarify, you got her back to Arizona –

**MC:** Yes and—

**MF:** She did not have the lung transplant.

**MC:** She – oh, she did.

**MF:** [chuckles]

**MC:** [chuckles] So what happens is we get to, we got there on the second of Jan—around the 28<sup>th</sup> of December something like that, I report to work. My sister-in-law and brother flew in from Hawaii to help watch over her and help with her and help get us unpacked 'cause I had to go to work. And my sister-in-law stayed for a couple of weeks, 'cause she couldn't be alone. Around the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, Tricare had said they would approve her transplant around the first of February, and this a really phenomenal story. We made an entrance for me to come back and inspect that unit. We put her on a different commercial plane, we both flew commercial but the cheapest fair wasn't the one I was flying on. My friends met her with the oxygen that we'd left at the house, at their house. I had the oxygen that she'd been using at our house. She flew with oxygen provided by the airlines, it's really complicated. And she went in and saw Dr. Nathan, and we rented a car for her and everything. 57 days after going on the list, she got the call. A boy had been in a car accident, probably – we believe it was a boy, based on what people saw on the news. Because she was so small and her blood type was AB positive so she was a universal recipient because we don't try and cross-match like we do with kidneys and hearts. The lung being the most exposed organ of the body is frequently non-viable when we can harvest many other organs. She only needed one lung – unlike somebody with cystic fibrosis so two people could be helped by those lungs. She was in very good physical condition. We realized after her diagnosis that she'd probably fought this disease for several years and it was probably what had killed her father. And it was probably genetic. But so that was the fourth of April. She got her transplant. I immediately made arrangements to fly back but I didn't get back for like twenty-three hours. I took the red eye, but you know it's not like there's a lot of planes leaving out of Tucson. And put one of my guys in charge. And did not get to see her before her transplant. They wheeled her back maybe 15 minutes before I walked into the hospital. But I was there in recovery room...when she came out...again, we couldn't acknowledge so we had to have a group of friends there of course. And even in her obituary, I just listed that she had several special friends and several of my friends—several of her friends agreed to be listed alphabetically with me. So I was just listed alphabetically as one of her friends. I was the...So, that was April 4<sup>th</sup> and on April 11<sup>th</sup>, she was discharged. We'd began the journey of getting her

adjusted for on her anti-rejection and other drugs so that she could move to Arizona. And that's a whole chemistry, and it really gets into the art of the medicine. And so by the summer...I would fly back every other weekend to visit. I would work a 9-day stretch and then take a three-day weekend. But I would have my phone and anybody who saw me in this assignment, I had carried two phones on my person. I had classified capability and I preempted all the communications in the United States in the case of a natural because of my responsibilities. The doctor even said to me, "we've had navy people who've been in the hospital, I never seen anybody associated with the military field". I lived in the ICU when she was on life support the last 27 days of her life and they brought me the classified that I could not do otherwise. So the army was very supportive but unspoken. So, what happened? So she came out for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, which is our anniversary, her independence day is what I called it [chuckles]. That went well. So she went back, and so she moved out, this is 2001. Remember what happens in 2001. She moved out Labor Day of 2001, okay. So we drove her car out and 9/11 happened several days later as you may remember. We had a house off post and stuff like that. Because of my responsibilities, I could not go home. I had to recover the Pentagon, I had to get soldiers into Afghanistan, there was a lot of stuff going on that I don't know if I'll ever be allowed to talk about. But I had folks involved in the World Trade Center. I mean it was – people were—generals were calling from all over the world asking me if General so-and-so was alive. Because what was really neat is that I had some soldiers on the field extra in Virginia that I was able to send up to the Pentagon to start recovering all the classified computers and telephones and stuff like that. And all the classified media. And I had my combat camera guys that we sent in to document what had happened there. Then I had my red phone guys, you know you've heard of the guys with the special phones y'know... and all that was going on. For the first time, we were activating this facility underground that had been set up for – in case of a nuclear attack. So I had those soldiers. We were going into Afghanistan and so I needed to send soldiers there and because all the aircrafts...so this is a funny story, so...so anyhow, JC's stuck at home and she needs meds, so Mr. Crutchfield, my XO, that's the first time I ever had civilians working for me. He went and got her I.D. card, he went and got her meds and he took her meds to her. Since she couldn't go to the pharmacy and I couldn't leave the post. So, so anyhow. The other side of Ft. Huachuca was the military intelligence center. So 9/11 happens and I have this intuitive gift where I know that this kind of stuff is gonna happen. And so just like when we've gone into a mission in Israel one time and a couple other things, I knew something was gonna happen and so I put all my civilians through all these drills. So when 9/11 happened, they had all the right equipment, which they would not have had a month before. Or six months before. So this 4-star General who's in charge of training in the army, shows up and wanted to know what had happened. He didn't have the need to know. So he went to see the General, and I come down and he was pissed. So he calls my four-star General and my four-star General says to leave her alone 'cause she's got a real misson. I'm like [laughs] you asshole! Y'know eventually, what had happened was...that was Labor Day, and then on the fourth of December. She got her transplant the fourth of April. The fourth of December, she had an idio...I had just gotten home from work I was sitting on the couch next to her. And she had an idiopathic subarachnoid brain hemorrhage, and we don't know what caused it. So fortunately I was there and I immediately called the transplant line like I was supposed to and they said that I need to call 911. So I called 911 and they were there right away. I follow them to the local little hospital. I mean, this is like a little village hospital where we are. But there was this E.R. doc on that recognized exactly what happened, got a helicopter to air vac – stabilized her and got her air vac'd up to Tucson. I had a great big folder that I carried with her powers of attorney and my

Aunt's. So I followed them up there and they were putting her in Neurology. And I said no she needs to go to Cardiopulmonary – this was the University of Medical Center – because she's a transplant patient because we've gotta make sure we don't screw up her...but long story short what happened was, she went into a little bit of rejection as a result of what they were doing to stabilize that. So she gets discharged the 11th of December but I gotta be in court so several of my wives of my officers go and pick her up, and one of my wives ran the pharmacy. And we had a snow storm, because remember I told you I'm a mile high even though I'm next to the Mexican border. So we didn't have the meds she needed. The pharmacist drove a couple hours to get the meds that we needed for her. They picked her up from the hospital while I was in court. Things got really crazy after 9/11 and my Aunt deteriorated really rapidly. I was flying back and forth, taking care of my Aunt, taking care of JC. I felt that JC needed to be seen by her doctor because the guy at UMC just didn't understand her situation. My General didn't like being at the Pentagon and it wasn't that I liked it, but my Aunt lived in D.C. And JC's transplant team was in D.C. Because things had changed after 9/11 we needed a General officer and I was the closest one to be there with the vice chief of staff and chief of the staff in the army. So, we moved back to D.C. in December of 2002...because I was concerned about where I was gonna get some support as far as friends go. 'Cause I couldn't get it from the army, 'cause I know she wasn't gonna live forever. I knew we were walking a very, very fine line. We moved back over the Christmas holidays of 2002 to 2003 and we went into Iraq, in I think it was April 2003. I was orchestrating something that we've never done before, which was a combat action that was actually done in the United States. So I did that while I was taking care of them. Which really helped us get Saddam Hussain ultimately. She knew because of her last real job in the Army had been working at the Defense Intelligent Agency, you've heard a lot about that because of Michael Flynn. She was responsible for Current World Intelligence. Just like any married couple, y'know we did talk about some things. When I'd finally go home she'd go, "he's sending us into Iraq not Afghanistan isn't he?" I can't say, but you know your partner can read your body language and stuff. So you know I really lived a lot of history throughout the Cold War and throughout each of the Gulf Wars and all the other operations from Grenada to New Finland [ph] or whatever and I felt really privileged.

**MF:** Well, thank you for sharing all this with us now. So when you then retired, then were you...the first time you were really open and out, but by this time...your partner—

**MC:** -- So what happened was she died that year. In 2003. We went on various trips, wherever she wanted to go. The army was very forgiving and then...we knew there was something wrong but they couldn't...anyhow—she – she – she just – she got very...she had Aspergillus, which is...in 2003, you do remember all the snow and then you had a lot of rain in 2003 and you probably don't but it was very humid, very moist. And Aspergillus is a fungus that grows in the air that you and I have no problem with. But somebody who's immune system – so she contracted it and it's very hard to diagnose and by the time we diagnosed it it's not really treatable. But we tried to treat it, so we put her on life support and then I went through the battle of taking her off life support. I put her on life support, she went to the hospital the last time on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, put her on life support the 3<sup>rd</sup> October, took her off life support on 25<sup>th</sup> October. Then I took my Aunt and told her and stuff. And so, I stayed on active duty another year. I just – y'know I could only do so much of my grieving. If that makes sense. Nothing mattered anymore, when she got sick. That's why these Generals didn't understand – they're

feeling really bad I can't get promoted. They didn't understand that life has taken on a whole different meaning for me. So then I just had to figure out how to put my life back together again if that makes sense. I had some friends that I'd meant through Rachelle, my very first love. Who had really stood by me... a lot of people – you find out who your real friends are. Some people just can't deal with someone who's dying and some people can't deal with someone who's grieving. And I get it. I really get it. I couldn't go to a support group or anything so I put myself in counseling, which she'd made me promise I would do. Ultimately, I got myself a couple dogs. They're not with me anymore, they've passed on, which happens with dogs. That's the only thing wrong with them [chuckles]. I was looking for...we had a four story townhouse it was about five minutes from the Pentagon, I was looking for a place with land. So I was living here, 'cause my friends they would joke. I didn't expect it to be here [Pennsylvania]. And I was looking here, near my siblings, who I had a pretty good relationship with when I was in the depths of grief. And then, I found this piece of land and built a house.

**MF:** And where are you, what county are you in? What county are you in?

**MC:** I'm in West Hanover Township up near the truck stop. I got a couple acres.

**MF:** You're near a lot of dog training out there too.

**MC:** But I don't...I went there one time and I didn't like how they do it so. I am a dog trainer but I don't go to that center.

**MF:** Well, now you're retired and you can be free and out. Are you doing...are you connected in any way to any advocacy?

**MC:** I came here for a while, that's how Pat knows me. I tried many different ways and what ended up speaking to me as my spiritual world – what I call my ministry. Two of these veterans. Y'know, it's hard because none of them accept who...y'know if I were to tell them I was a lesbian and a supporter of somebody other than Donald Trump, it would probably be pretty tragic for these guys. But the gifts I give them and their families through my dogs. Ministry. You might say why do. I have so many...it takes a lot out of the dog to do what I have them do. I counterbalance it working with these special needs kids. I tried many different things, after I retired...tried getting involved in various LGBT stuff when I was down in D.C. with the center that's done there and y'know just...none of it...and everybody here that comes is just so much younger than me or so much older than me. I tried different dating sites so it's not like, I'm like, y'know the people I've dated have all been crazy. You know. Because I think the ones that aren't crazy have given up on dating. I wouldn't rule it out but...

**MF:** Isn't there a women's group here and a bookroom here?

**MC:** Yes, and I came to it for awhile but they're probably a good 10-15 years younger than me. I'm gonna be 65 in two weeks. And it's not that I have any...so, it's just – you know, I just kinda do my volunteer thing and I have a lot of kids that follow me around like a little pied piper and I mentor some young men and I just kinda find different things 'cause that's just who I am.

**MF:** Okay. Anything you'd like to ask? No, I think we're good...

**MC:** You can Google me for all kinds of stuff I did in the Army. But I wouldn't waste your time.

**MF:** Is there anything else you'd like to share?

**MC:** No, I didn't even know what I was gonna say. But I know you needed to have a lesbian twist. So, you got it.

**MF:** If there's any memorabilia from the military, you know they're always looking for the archives additional thing such as documents, photos, artifacts, related to the LGBT community.

**MC:** It wouldn't be LGBT it would be military. I offered all of my stuff to the Army Museum when I retired, they came to my house and took a lot of stuff 'cause I'd been the first for a lot of things. I have a lot of stuff still, but not...y'know like my uniform and (\_\_\_?) but again it doesn't identify me as LGBT, it just identifies me as a woman who served in the military. So I don't think...

**MF:** You might wanna talk to Pat about that.

**MC:** Since Pat will watch this, if she's interested, y'know Pat, you can contact me, you can come by and see what I have and if you want some of the stuff I have I'd be happy to donate it.

**MF:** And finally, is there anyone else that you think should be interviewed? Maybe they're already on the list but if there's anyone else...

**MC:** Y'know I can give you the names of my friends who'd been in these areas all their lives.

**MF:** Okay, you can give them to me.