

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

ELIZABETH O'HARA BAEHR

A Surgical Nurse, U.S. Army, European Theater, WWII

1995

OH  
17

**Baehr, Elizabeth K. O'Hara**, (1915- ) Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 67 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 67 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **Abstract**

Baehr, a Janesville, Wis. native, relates her military career as a surgical nurse with the Army Nurse Corps, serving with the 5th Air Force at Kearns Field (Utah), her reassignment to a field hospital in France during World War II, and her return to civilian nursing. She discusses her induction into the military, and stateside care of military personnel waiting for deployment. Baehr comments on her departure from Camp Kilmer, (New Jersey) and arrival in Liverpool (England), where she witnessed events of D-Day. She describes interactions between soldiers and nurses, work in a French field hospital, care of wounded soldiers, interactions with German patients, and attitudes of the French toward Americans. Baehr also recounts caring for survivors of Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria and the measures taken to counter the psychological burden resulting from her duties as a combat nurse. She describes her discharge from service and return to Wisconsin mentioning experiences with the GI Bill and the American Legion. Baehr also recounts her post-war nursing in Janesville and reflects on the war.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Baehr (b. December 5, 1915) entered service in the Army Nurse Corps in 1943 and achieved the rank of 1st Lieutenant. She was honorably discharged in February of 1945 and returned to Janesville, Wisconsin

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, n.d.

Edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2002.

## **Interview Transcript**

- Mark: Today's date is August 29th, 1995. This is Mark VanElls, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mrs. Elizabeth O'Hara Baehr. Did I pronounce that correctly?
- Baehr: That's right.
- Mark: Of Madison, a veteran of the Second World War and the European Theatre. Good afternoon and thanks for coming in.
- Baehr: Your welcome.
- Mark: I've absolutely appreciate it. Let's start from the top and I'll have you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- Baehr: My name is Elizabeth O'Hara Baehr and my address is--let's see--I'm from Janesville, Wisconsin.
- Mark: Is that where you were born?
- Baehr: I was born--and I went through Nurse's training at Mercy Hospital in Janesville and after I finished I came to University Hospitals and worked in the surgery department there as a surgical nurse and I worked as a surgical nurse at the University Hospitals from '41 - '43. I signed up for the Army through Mrs. Middleton. Dean Middleton's wife was recruiting at the time. I was assigned to Kearns Field, Utah, the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force.
- Mark: I want to stop and touch on a few other things. First of all, I'm interested in why you chose Nursing as a profession.
- Baehr: Because I had friends that were nurses and were quite influential in speaking with me about nursing when I finished high school. Three of us in my family went into nursing and then my older sister was at the University so we--I think to go to the University would of cost my parent's quite a bit more money if we all decided to go to the University so we went into nursing which we all loved. Three of us loved it.
- Mark: At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, just for anecdotal purposes, do you recall what you were doing?

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Baehr: Very well. I remember I was in surgery at the time and this one nurse was repairing gloves and she looked up at me, it was 1:00 in the afternoon and she said, "Liz, do you know that war has started? Pearl Harbor has been bombed". So, right away it perked me up and I thought, "I'm going to sign up for the Army," because I had worked 2 years in the surgery department there. Different nurses were leaving. Some had joined the 44<sup>th</sup> General Hospital Unit, which was the University of Wisconsin Hospital Unit.

Mark: So it was on that day you decided you were going to enlist?

Baehr: It was.

Mark: Or sign up I guess you'd say.

Baehr: Yes, sign up.

Mark: So, explain the process of actually joining the military. To whom did you talk? Where did you go? Where did they ship you off?

Baehr: In fact, the first orders I got after I joined, was to go to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. I thought "Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, is that as far as I'm going to go in this Army unit?" So, I wrote into the Air Force and asked if I could possibly transfer to the Air Force. I received a letter saying they would transfer-- or assign me to the--Kearns Field, Utah and the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force. So, I was there about 11 months and then they had put up a notice on the bulletin board that anyone that was interested in going overseas, by the way I did work in surgery too there, because I had a surgical background. They all say "Oh, from the University of Wisconsin, a surgical nurse" That was terrific.

Mark: That was big time?

Baehr: That was big time. So then I--I was there 11 months and I signed up for overseas and was assigned to the 59<sup>th</sup> Field Hospital at Camp Carson, Colorado. I was transferred there. From there I went to Camp Kilmer for a short time. From Kilmer, we went on the Louis Pasteur ship to Liverpool, England and--do you have any other questions.

Mark: Yeah, I want to go back on a couple of other things. As I mentioned I think, I went into the service and I went through basic training, a lot of screaming and yelling and four letter words and all sorts of things. I don't think that was your experience?

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Baehr: Well, in Kearns Field, Utah, we had physical therapy everyday, we were out exercising, and we--it was a station hospital so we took care of all the surgical patients and I worked in surgery and I kept busy there for those 11 months. We did go skiing out in--I remember in Alta which I enjoyed. We used to go into Salt Lake. We were just 12 miles from Salt Lake City and we had the "Aviation Cup," which we were invited to go to quite often and had a wonderful time. Also went on the historical tours around Salt Lake, so it was an interesting city.

Mark: I'm sure it was. I've never been there myself. One of these days I will make my western trip. So, in terms of your actual work in Kearns Field, what sort of patients are seeing there at the time. Are they people coming from overseas? Or young guys getting--

Baehr: At first there were plenty of appendectomies and hernias were being done there. Then I think the last 6 months we had washed out pilots that were not--either refused to go overseas or they were not capable. I don't know how many, a few thousand of those out there. I didn't know that-- I thought everybody that went in the army would be going overseas or be with the different, let's see know--either with the ground forces or pilots or something.

Mark: They were all going overseas.

Baehr: Right. They all had--many of them had excuses as to why they didn't want to go or they had medical problems. So, we took care of them.

Mark: Of course, you're in the Army now.

Baehr: Air Force.

Mark: Air Force, I'm sorry. In the military. I'm interested to know what sort of discipline there was and how well you adapted to it.

Baehr: Well see, I worked days because I was a surgical nurse, however I used to have to fill in once in awhile on the wards and help take care of the patients. But that was on call. Then when--after 11 months I was getting a little bit bored. I thought to go overseas would be exciting. To go to another country. I could do work over there as a nurse. So I kept up the surgery all through my Army training in the military.

Mark: You eventually did go overseas.

Baehr: Yes.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Mark: 19--was it '43? Yes, according to this.

Baehr: No, from '41 to '43 I was--

Mark: I'm sorry, Kearns Field--April '44

Baehr: In May of '44 I went overseas.

Mark: OK.

Baehr: I came back, let's see, in May of '44 I departed for overseas.

Mark: You left from Camp Kilmer to Liverpool.

Baehr: That's right.

Mark: Could you describe your voyage overseas? I assume it was on a ship.

Baehr: There were 18 nurses and a field hospital and we had a little tiny room where we were billeted. All of our luggage was squeezed into a room about this size. We had--we were like queens. The GIs were absolutely wonderful. You'd think we were movie stars. Of course, we were young. What was I, 23? We were treated very, very nicely with great respect and dignity to the nurses. We arrived in Liverpool and we were completely exhausted when we arrived there I remember. But they put us on a train and took us to Eavshun, England, a little town and the nurses were all billeted in private homes. I was the only--"Bobbies" as they called them would go up and down the streets in Eavshun and they would say "You're taking 2 American nurses here and 2 there" until the 18 had a place to stay. That was for about 6 weeks, I think that we were there. Six weeks to 2 months. I lived on 86 Badsey Lane in a lovely home there with a lady whose husband was in the service in Canada. I also rented a bicycle and bicycled all around the area. I wasn't used to the hand brakes so I went over one time and almost ruined my knees because of those hand brakes.

Mark: But, you learned, right.

Baehr: Yeah, we did. Well--it was--we also had--we used to go out on the pistol range and learn how to shoot a pistol. That was really--as I look back, they frowned on that.

Mark: I was going to say--this wasn't really required.

Baehr: It was just to keep us busy.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Mark: Yeah.

Baehr: But we used to go out on the pistol range and exercise, walk--

Mark: So, in terms of the medical duties, were you doing much at all at this time?

Baehr: No. We were just kind of sitting around waiting to go over to France. Then we got orders to go to France.

Mark: Now, you were in England when the invasion of Normandy actually occurred. Do you recall--

Baehr: We arrived D-Day.

Mark: You arrived at your--

Baehr: In Liverpool, D-Day.

Mark: On June 6<sup>th</sup>. So you learned what was going on.

Baehr: We saw the bombings, you know it was a whole different environment, getting adjusted to all of this and hearing all of these rumors about when we'd be going and where were going to--to stay within limits. I think we were in 50-mile limits. We couldn't go into London, it was too far. But we did get to Oxford and to Stratford-on-Avon. So we saw some places in between. They tried to entertain us in a way and yet prepare us for our trip to France.

Mark: You arrived in France then, July was it?

Baehr: Yes.

Mark: I lose track of time. If you would, just describe going over to France, where did you--what did you see?

Baehr: Oh, we were on this ship; I don't know the English ship--with all these troops. I tell you, the nurses got so much attention always. They would give us--the bakery would send special food to us, desserts, bakery goods--we were very much--treated very nicely. When I arrived there in France, I think it was Utah Beach we arrived and we saw all these armored Divisions and tanks and what have you and you know it kind of scared me. I thought 'boy, I'm really in it now.' There were Turkish soldiers, and there were French soldiers and lots of bombing and shooting going on all the time.

Mark: You could see it and hear it.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Baehr: I remember visiting a cemetery. Their cemeteries in France were rather interesting. They have, instead of flowers, they have beaded, beautiful beaded bouquets on the monuments. I remember, our Commanding Officer saying "Listen, you nurses, do not go to the cemetery". Because it had probably been--what do I want to say--

Mark: Vandalized or robbed?

Baehr: No, they put--we shouldn't be walking around there fearing that we'd be bombed or shelled.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Baehr: I remember that there was convent across the street from the cemetery and I being a catholic, I would bless myself and they were scared to death of American women. They didn't know what we were going to do. They were in their convent but every now and then they had to come out and get water or get something. That was kind of--I mean I was brought up in an area in Janesville where I lived around the corner from the church and school. So to see these nuns showing such fear of us, that was unusual. But, I think the word got around after I blessed myself that I was one of them.

Mark: That you were OK.

Baehr: I was OK and I wasn't going to shoot them.

Mark: When you got there in July of '44, you were as you mentioned very close to the combat. The breakout was just occurring at this time.

Baehr: Yes, bombed and shelled and we moved every 7 to 10 days to take in casualties.

Mark: I was going to ask. What your relationship was to the actual fighting. How soon after you arrived did you see casualties? How often? Etc. etc.

Baehr: Oh, we saw them right away. In fact, the first set-up in the Third--I was the head nurse of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon and I remember, we were the first ones to leave to go into combat or take the casualties. I thought, 'Oh dear, if this is what it's going to be like, I don't know if I can handle it.' We were up 24 hours and they were bringing in all these German soldiers, half of them were dead and they were coming by ambulance and they would just put them out in the fields and I was trying to help the doctors in surgery and we're trying to set-up generators and the--I was in charge of all the supplies for surgery, the GIs were used to scrubbing and we had to kind of wash them although they had



**Interview Transcript (continued)**

been instructed somewhat. I was so tired, so exhausted after 24 hours I went over and just laid down on a cot and then I remember Captain Stensis came over and he said, "Miss O'Hara, you get back, we need you." I just thought that if this is what a field hospital is like, I'm not going to last long. I was completely exhausted. I went back and then afterwards we got to know our place and surgery and then we're taking belly and chest cases. And we had shock teams come in that gave the blood and surgical teams that came in that did the surgery, as I said we did abdominal and chest cases. If there was an amputation they would go onto VAC hospital. They were in back of us. So, for a while there I just was pretty well shaken, a few days.

Mark: But, you did eventually--

Baehr: We adjusted and everything started to work. Our tents were set up, we knew what our job was and we really were able to handle our situation as we moved along every 7 day to 10 days to 2 weeks and we'd have a rest period maybe for a week and another field hospital would come and take over. They might leave and we'd take over theirs or--the same with us.

Mark: I was going to have you describe your place in the medical evacuation system. It was obviously, the medic with the combat soldiers and then they get back to a field hospital and then evacuation hospital. Is that the way it works?

Baehr: Yes, I remember some times, the guns--

Mark: The M1?

Baehr: No, the--oh, gosh--

Mark: That's OK.

Baehr: I get all--the Army would take off in the woods with their gun--

Mark: The patrols?

Baehr: The patrols--they would be limping along. Some of the fellows, I remember standing there looking at them. They'd be waving to the nurses because there were so few nurses up in the front lines they showed great respect and appreciated us so much. We wanted to help them as much as possible to make them comfortable if they were in the hospital. The GIs were terrific. We had terrific teamwork. After about the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, we got terrific teamwork going.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Mark: As the battle--as the war progressed then, I would imagine you had to move fairly quickly. I mean, after about August, the American soldiers were almost to the border of Germany.

Baehr: That's right.

Mark: As the war changed, did your work change? I mean, was there more travel time? Did the casualties change? Was it hard to keep up with the front?

Baehr: Well because we were a field hospital, they did give us leaves. I had 4 leaves to Paris, which was delightful. They'd arrange a plane and they had a nurse's hotel and that was such a treat just for a week and then we'd go back to our field hospital. They felt we were working so hard and we needed to psychologically get away from it for a little while. So that was kind of enjoyable. I visited and went on tours. I saw a ballet. I wanted to see an opera in Paris, but I saw a ballet, "White Swan" I think it was. Then we'd go back to our outfit and get back into it again.

Mark: So, what was wartime Paris like?

Baehr: Oh, they--after the liberation of Paris, the people were wonderful to us. Everywhere we went, they would throw kisses. They would just be so proud of these American women. We felt so great. I mean there was a good and bad times. We had it rough at times, but then there was great happiness and joy with the people. They were trying to express themselves and they would just come out wherever we were and throw kisses. It was the liberation of Paris. Then some of our doctors--they wouldn't allow us to go into Paris. Of course, we had heard about Chanel No. 5. That was big stuff. Scaparelli, all these famous designers and perfume companies there. So our doctors all went in and they brought us back Chanel No.5. So, we, in our GI uniforms, we were all decked out and smelled beautiful with Chanel No. 5. I'll never forget, they still advertise Chanel.

Mark: Yeah, I see it.

Baehr: And we went to the House of Scaparelli and visited all these different places when we did have leave.

Mark: Did you go anywhere else? While we're on the subject, did you travel elsewhere in France. Did you have other sort of relations with the French natives?

Baehr: Oh, yeah. Of course, I went to mass there and they would see Americans. They'd still stay their distance in a way but they'd watch us all the time.

### Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: These would be the French villagers.

Baehr: Yes. I've got all this...I've got dates here like on the 26<sup>th</sup>, we bivouacked near Belair of Melun. August 27<sup>th</sup>, we crossed the Seine at Fontainebleau which is a beautiful city with the 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. We bivouacked outside of Melun. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, we went to Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, 20 south of Chateau-Theiry. We worked 3 days there in the operating room I did. From there, on September 6<sup>th</sup>, we went to Verdun which was... there was great...it was quite an army place in Verdun. We worked 2 days there. The 90<sup>th</sup> Division we were with at the time. Assigned to the 90<sup>th</sup> Division. Then we went to Wayville and we worked 18 days there in surgery and with patients. Then on October 29<sup>th</sup>, we went to Noray Lasek. My pronunciation isn't too good. We bivouacked in the Chateau 8 miles west of Briey. I remember particularly on November 8<sup>th</sup>, we went to Hitan-Grange in Thionville. We lived in a private home there 4 miles south of the Moselle [River]. We set up in a school building, received patients from the 90<sup>th</sup> Division and we worked 14 days there. We received patients for 7 days then on November 18<sup>th</sup>, we moved to Niederschwartz, Thionville, where we bivouacked in another school building and November 30<sup>th</sup>, we went to Vickery, 12 miles east of Thionville, set up in an old military barracks, supported the 90<sup>th</sup> Division, worked 4 days. The Division was lining up for the West bank of the Saar [River]. We had 3 patients and on December 5<sup>th</sup>, we moved to Bosenfield. We set up in tents, a part of the 90<sup>th</sup> Division, we were with the 90<sup>th</sup> Division by then making Saar Bridgehead Division. Worked 9 days and moved because of the shelling. On December 15<sup>th</sup> we moved to Rimmelflangen, 3 miles southwest of Bougainville and bivouacked in French homes. That was kind of interesting there. On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, at Christmas time, we moved to Bilay, set up in buildings to support the 95<sup>th</sup> Division which was holding in Saarlauten during German counter-offensive in first army sector. On January 28<sup>th</sup>, we were still in Bilay, supporting the 26<sup>th</sup> Division. These are just some of the dates I had down.

Mark: As you drove across Europe, did your work change at all? Did you keep working with the belly wounds for example? Were there--could you tell from the kinds of wounds you were seeing, the different types of weapons they were using?

Baehr: Lots of shrapnel, so many shrapnel.

Mark: In the beginning?

Baehr: Yeah, well, all the way through. Shrapnel had affected so many that had been hit.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Mark: That was probably the worst?

Baehr: Yeah, to see them coming in with shrapnel. But they were so glad and appreciative of American nurses; it was just such a delight to take care of any American soldier.

Mark: Now, you mentioned you saw German soldiers occasionally.

Baehr: Yes, that was the first set up. I was overwhelmed with the number of German soldiers. Some of them we helped, we operated on and some came in that had died or were killed. So we had to have ambulances come and take the bodies out. You could step over them.

Mark: I imagine it would be very different working on the German soldiers than the American soldiers. Was it?

Baehr: Well, they're still human beings. We reach out to any human being. We're just so glad to help anyone. I remember this one time when we moved into a hospital and the doctors took all the instruments. So this one German doctor came over and spoke German and he gave me 4 aquamarine stones. He said "I want you to have these, I do not want to give them to the American soldier." Well this Major that was standing next to me said "Why don't you throw them in his face." I said "Well, you took their instruments." So I took those 4 stones. And I still have them. I was going to have rings made for my daughters and earrings. But I haven't.

Mark: Maybe someday.

Baehr: Yeah, someday. They might appreciate them. They're good. Let's see, what else? I've got this all written down and I--

Mark: That's OK. In these interviews we try to get into some of the things that aren't written down. Conversations you've had with people, your thoughts and feelings at the time, that sort of thing. For example, after New Years or so, you started going into Germany.

Baehr: Yes.

Mark: How was that different than campaigning through France?

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Baehr: We went into Austria. That was--then we went into--we were in France most of the time and the war ended and then we got orders to Mauthausen Concentration camp. The VAC hospital had taken over first after May 6<sup>th</sup>, liberation. Let's see, I get so excited. Lawrence, Austria, then to Mauthausen which was the concentration camp in Goosen. And it was so funny after the second day I think it was, I was going through to see the patients. We had to take care of illegitimate babies, which we called them then and the mothers and the prisoners.

Mark: These babies were--

Baehr: We had to feed them.

Mark: Illegitimate, but they were the children of the Jewish women and the officers?

Baehr: SS officers, yes.

Mark: I guess I had heard of that, but it still--

Baehr: So we had to feed the babies there and then--there's so many stories I can think of. We were just busy all of the time. Then also, there was--the Army started digging the graves. Let's see--this is where I was at. The crematoriums and where they hung them. There's so much history here I can't begin to tell you all--

Mark: I understand. Let's try and go through some of this a little bit. When you first got Mauthausen, the war had been over right?

Baehr: Yes.

Mark: And you were stationed somewhere else. So, you got orders to go there. Did you have any idea what you were going to be seeing?

Baehr: No, no.

Mark: I mean, you knew it was a prison camp, but did you have any--?

Baehr: No, I had no idea. It was set up on a hill near Lentz, Austria, where Hitler was born. We took care of those patients for about 6 weeks. When we came there, these people were crawling around just like animals. Their hair had all fallen out. There was just a little fuzz on the top. They loved the Americans, because we liberated them. Many of them begged to go with us. They'd do anything to go back or to go to the United States. I remember, there was a table, a dining room table or like a picnic table and all these men were sitting

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

there. They had been liberated and I had a big can of malted milk balls. They hadn't had any sweets. We were starting to feed them a little bit. Well, then I put a few out here. Well one would tell me that I gave him more and that I was to give the same number to each one. It was a big can you know. They watched everything, the amount of food we gave them. This one Czechoslovakian said to me "I've been here--" I don't know--he was there for 6 months "and one day I walked out and I had no food and I saw something brown, I thought that's a potato or a piece of bread, I grabbed it and it was a rock." I remember him shaking his fist at me. One was a tennis player. A German tennis player. Look at me and they were--we had lots of TB in the barracks where they stayed. They were laying on hay and they all had--if they spoke English they wanted to tell us their story. The first 4 days I was there I thought I just can't stay here, it's terrible to see these human beings they way they're being treated. They all had stories to tell. It was very depressing.

Mark: Now were they mostly Jewish or German political--?

Baehr: Political, American, not American, some American prisoners but you hear there's 6 million Jews but I can show you like a cemetery--

Mark: Oh, they bombed other people other than just the Jews.

Baehr: Political prisoners, deformed people, here's a cemetery there and the Star of David were the Jewish people, the crosses--

Mark: These were photographs taken by you?

Baehr: No, by one of our soldiers.

Mark: There's crosses all on this one here.

Baehr: These are all Christian. These are all political prisoners from either Poland, Felicia, we had quite a few young boys from Felicia that came and talked to us. They were liberated. And there were French, there were German Lutheran Pastors, Catholic Priests, Nuns, that didn't go along with Hitler. You didn't hear a lot about that.

Mark: There were many who didn't resist. As you're in Mauthausen. Did you view your participation in the war differently after that?

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Baehr: I just thought, "What is this world coming to?" I just couldn't imagine treating human beings in such a violent way and of course I remember this one nurse said, she was from Philadelphia, I was the only one from Wisconsin. All the nurses were from Massachusetts, Philadelphia, Maine.

Mark: The East Coast.

Baehr: Yeah, the East Coast. I was a fill in. This one nurse dropped out. She didn't want to go overseas. Sometimes I just get wandering--anyway we took care of them and then we got orders to go to Czechoslovakia. The war had ended and we went up there.

**[Tape - Side B]**

Baehr: The town was Marybod. The Czech name was Marychezenlazne. It was resort. We played golf, we played tennis we had the panorama where we had an orchestra and we danced. It gave us a big lift before we came home.

Mark: Sounds nice.

Baehr: I went to Paris, from Paris then I take the H B Alexander home. I went over on the Louis Pasteur ship and came back on the H B Alexander. Then I was discharged from the service in February of 1946.

Mark: Where at?

Baehr: In Des Moines, Iowa.

Mark: In Des Moines.

Baehr: My husband had been overseas with the General Hospital. He was a doctor with the General Hospital doing anesthesia, but he was German and he was... German background and spoke German fluently, so he also did a lot of interpreting in Germany.

Mark: I should have asked. Were you married during the war.

Baehr: He wanted to get married overseas but I didn't till we got back.

Mark: I see. So you got married once you got home.

Baehr: I got home in February and he got home in July and we were married the following November.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Mark: I see.

Baehr: He died 6 years later from a coronary.

Mark: Oh, is that right.

Baehr: He was a surgical resident at University Hospitals. He died in his fourth year, shoveling the car out of a snow bank. He wasn't feeling good the night before as I recall.

Mark: So, you're back, it's 1946 and I suppose we can go onto some of the postwar... Did you have something to add?

Baehr: Well, he did general practice in Janesville for 2 years and then I had my daughter, Sr. Barbara who's now a Dominican Nun and had her in Janesville, then when he signed up for his surgical residency, which was 4 years, he came here to University Hospitals. We lived here for 4 years and he had 3 months left of his 4 years when in the winter time, March 4<sup>th</sup>, he was shoveling the car out to get into the hospital at 6:30 in the morning because he was allowed to do a lot of surgery in his last year, last few months. He came in perspiring profusely and died just like that. So I went back to nursing forever.

Mark: So, after the war, you went to Janesville.

Baehr: Right. Practiced two years.

Mark: And set up house basically.

Baehr: I had my first daughter.

Mark: Did you work?

Baehr: No.

Mark: Did you want to work?

Baehr: No, because I had my first child there. After he got his news that he was accepted at University Hospital to take a surgical residency under Dr. Schmidt and so we moved up here to Madison and stayed the 4 years and then he died. I stayed on and went back to nursing because I had worked in surgery. The nursing supervisors they had been with the 44<sup>th</sup> General Hospital and they said "Come back, we have a job for you." At that time, I think my husband was paid like \$50 a month with the GI Bill and \$75 for the second and \$100 for the third and fourth year. So it was kind of rough going there for a while.



**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Mark: I was going to ask if you used the GI Bill. But your husband did to finance his medical training.

Baehr: Yes he did.

Mark: Was it--from your perspective--

Baehr: But, he had practiced for 2 years which helped in Janesville, at a clinic there. But they got paid so little in 1948. That was before you were born probably.

Mark: Oh, it sure was.

Baehr: No, in '52 he died. '48 to '52 was his residency.

Mark: From your perspective as a spouse, did the GI Bill help?

Baehr: I took a couple classes, English 1A at the University and then I had to have housekeepers come and then it got to be difficult because I had 2 different housekeepers. One was very good with the children--they were 2 and 4 when my husband died so I had them for a few years. The other one liked to cook but she didn't have much patience with the children. So I decided, I'll do this later. I put it on the back burner and thought I'd get back to it. I didn't go back then but I--then I worked in surgery with Dr. McIntosh. Then there was an opening at Children's Hospital for a social worker. They were using nurses in social work. So I worked there about 20 years and then I went to the Bureau for Handicapped Children for 7 years, because I worked with them... Some of the children came in with scoliosis, curvature of the spine and some of them had cancer and I'd have to work through the bureau to pay for braces, or to go to the clinics. I liked my work very much.

Mark: Yah, it sounds like a very rewarding career.

Baehr: It was.

Mark: Did your war experiences affect your--your future work at all? I don't get the impression that it hurt you finding work--

Baehr: No.

Mark: --after the war.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

- Baehr: No, no, not at all. I knew--University Hospitals was my second home really. I had good housekeepers taking care of my children. So many of the older nurses had been in the service so we had a lot in common. Many good friends.
- Mark: In terms of other readjustment issues, some veterans will come back with some nightmares, emotional problems. Now you were in these concentration camps. Did this experience among others come back?
- Baehr: Not so much then but as I got older and got thinking about it, or when people asked about it, or I'd read something in the paper. I have some articles I picked up from the papers. I'd start thinking about it and I thought, 'Oh, that was so horrible. That Hitler, what he did to human beings'. And those beautiful countries. I couldn't get over how beautiful they were. Beautiful buildings and the Autobahn. I thought, gee, Hitler was way ahead of us, we didn't have Autobahns. But they did there. We traveled by ambulance so we were on the autobahns quite a bit moving from place to place.
- Mark: In the immediate post war years, you didn't give much thought to your--
- Baehr: I really didn't. Because I had gotten married and I had the children. I was busy with them. We were all set to go back to Janesville. He was going in with a clinic there all set, when he died so suddenly. Then I needed to get back to work and you either sink or swim. You swim hard.
- Mark: I think we've covered the readjustment problems. You didn't seem to have too many.
- Baehr: Except when you bring it up now and I go over it and I think of this and that, I think you'll find this--if you want you can have these.
- Mark: OK.
- Baehr: Then I thought, I don't know whether you wanted any for your museum. You know like I had all these letters.
- Mark: Oh, sure. Let's talk about that when we're done here.
- Baehr: Oh, OK.
- Mark: I just got one last area I want to cover and it may or may not apply to you. That involves veteran's organizations and reunions and that sort of thing.
- Baehr: No there wasn't any--we've never had a reunion.

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

Mark: Never once.

Baehr: But I hear--I think most of my friends have passed away. I heard from them at Christmas... we all wrote to each other but we never had a reunion. No one asked you to join the Legion, the American Legion or anything like that. Nurses weren't given much--

Mark: After the war.

Baehr: Yeah, we were never asked or contacted in any way.

Mark: Did you--at the time, think that might be nice to join the Legion? Or didn't you give it much thought.

Baehr: I thought about it but they didn't really want women. They didn't encourage it.

Mark: Did that change over time?

Baehr: I think so now. I think there's some nurses that have joined.

Mark: But you never have.

Baehr: No, I haven't with any of the--military. No one has contacted me or--except I did get a letter from--about this new women's monument that's going on.

Mark: In Virginia?

Baehr: Yeah, I sent money towards that.

Mark: As for Europe, have you been back? In the post war years?

Baehr: Many times, many times. Three years ago I went back to Mounthausen.

Mark: I noticed the pamphlet here that's why I asked. That's obviously a post war--

Baehr: That's right. I got it over there. When I was in Mounthausen, it's the funniest thing, I think the second day I was there, we were looking at the patients, getting orientated to the camp and I heard someone say "Liz O'Hara." I looked up and here was Bill Garbit from Janesville. He lived a half a block from me in Janesville. I used to baby-sit for him. Here he was the cook at the--at Goosen, at the concentration camp there. Everyday he'd bring over a

**Interview Transcript (continued)**

candy bar, a snickers, oh, the nurses would say "maybe he'll come over today with some more treats".

Mark: It is a small world sometimes, isn't it?

Baehr: It is. There's one picture here I wanted to show you that I--the steps in Mounthausen that I went down many times. Here--I have this picture of it too, which I was—here--so when I went back there 3 years ago, I went down those steps. They were all crumbling and everything but I walked down and walked back up because I just remember seeing those people dropping over, lying dead here and there and they just picked them up and buried them. We saw all of this when they buried them in the trenches like that.

Mark: A difficult scene, I'm sure. As you traveled back, I mean--I suppose I should ask you first of all, aside from a vacation, why did you decide to go back to these locations?

Baehr: Because my brother and my sister and I were in Austria and I said "I'd like to back there once more." So I went back. We took a taxi and went there for the day. I think it was in Munich.

Mark: Was it a difficult experience?

Baehr: Yes, it was. I just--I remember--they had modernized it a little bit and improved it. We lived in some of the SS Officer's houses. It just brought back a lot of memories. But I said some prayers for those people. It's sad. You never knew you were going to go through life and see this horrible war situation.

Mark: Those are all my questions. Is there anything you would like to add? Anything I missed? Skipped over?

Baehr: No, I could--I think you'll find these interesting especially about the camp. These are all camps that are right nearby, Goosen, Pasau. All the different concentration camps. I'm going to leave this for you.

Mark: That's great.

Baehr: Then I had--do you want me to show you--

Mark: Yeah, let me shut this off.

Baehr: OK.

**[End of Interview]**

