

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
SALLY OLSON
Nurse, U.S. Army
2013

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Olson, Sally, Oral History Interview, 2013.

Approximate length: 59 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

Sally Olson discusses her service as a WAC [Women's Army Corps] nurse from 1958 to 1961 and her life outside of the military. She describes why she joined the Army. She outlines her training, first at Fort McClellan [Alabama] for basic training and then at Fort Sam Houston [Texas] for medical training. Olson describes her service as a nurse at Fort Ord [California], and comments on her discharge in 1961. She details her career paths and family life following discharge. Olson also emphasizes her pride in being a veteran.

Biographical Sketch:

Sally Olson enlisted in the Women's Army Corps in 1958 and received training at Fort McClellan [Alabama] and Fort Sam Houston [Texas]. Olson served as a nurse at Fort Ord [California] until she was discharged in 1961.

Interviewed by Timothy Leikip, 2013.

Transcribed by the Audio Transcription Center, 2015.

Reviewed by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Abstract written by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Interview Transcript:

[Tape 1]

Leikip: Which branch did you serve in?

Olson: Army.

Leikip: Army?

Olson: Mm-hm. I brought the only picture I have left in my uniform in Fort McClellan, Alabama. I have pictures of--is it taping?

Leikip: Oh that's rolling, yeah.

Olson: I've had pictures in all my uniforms but with the moves that I had made throughout the years, that's all I have left.

Leikip: Oh my. It's the only one?

Olson: The only one.

Leikip: Oh my.

Olson: I have a bigger one in my room that's on the wall, but you don't see much more.

Leikip: Well, someday, possibly when we're in a—when we're in a safe environment and I'm not moving back and forth between rooms and buildings and things, maybe we'll see if we can't get that and scan it.

Olson: Oh.

Leikip: So we can actually possibly be a part of the record, if that'd be all right?

Olson: Oh yeah. That'd be fine.

Leikip: Now, you were in Korea? Vietnam? Both?

Olson: Um, actually I was peace-time and I believe it was the Korean Conflict.

Leikip: Okay. Very cool. And I have questions here that are just going to kind of prompt me and keep me on track.

Olson: Mm-hm.

Leikip: But it's not my interview so much as it's your interview and it's us capturing for the historical record, stories that are irreplaceable.

Olson: Oh sure.

Leikip: And I have a son that served in the Army, Tony did four and a half years with the 10th Mountain.

Olson: Oh wonderful.

Leikip: Had two all-expense paid trips to Iraq.

Olson: Wow.

Leikip: And mercifully back safely.

Olson: Excellent.

Leikip: My oldest daughter—you know, when you go in anymore they want you to recruit people.

Olson: Oh sure.

Leikip: So Tony came back to his old high school and he was all buff, and, "Dad, take me up to North. I'm gonna go. I'll be like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. They'll just follow me out." So I dropped him off and he called me at noon. "Dad, can you come pick me up?" I said yeah. I pulled up in the Jeep and he comes and I said, "What's the matter?" and he says, "They could care less." He couldn't get anybody.

Olson: Oh no.

Leikip: And then two days later his little sister, Andrea, says, "Hey Dad, can I get a copy of my birth certificate?" Sure. No, no. She says, "I need the one with the—the certified." I said, "Yeah." "I'm gonna do some contract work for the government." Her brother got her to enlist.

Olson: Wonderful.

Leikip: But she couldn't—she did all of basic and AIT and then she washed out because she couldn't run the two miles in less than eighteen minutes.

Olson: Oh.

Leikip: Came that close.

Olson: Oh my gosh.

Leikip: But it was an experience of a lifetime for her.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: And her brother got the little ribbon because he managed to recruit somebody.

Olson: Oh.

Leikip: They didn't care if it was a sister.

Olson: Sure.

Leikip: So at any rate, so Army. Very cool.

Olson: Yes it is.

Leikip: I'm going to take these kind of in order because otherwise I might miss something.

Olson: Sure.

Leikip: It says to describe yourself. I don't know if that means now or if that means back then. Tell me about back then.

Olson: Well, I lived in Cicero, Illinois, suburb of Chicago, and went to school there and I started in the medical field when I was sixteen years old and worked in the Oak Park Hospital.

Leikip: Okay I know right where that is. [both talking at once].

Olson: [inaudible] until I enlisted in the Army.

Leikip: When did you enlist?

Olson: Ninety fifty-eight, right after high school. My dad had been in the Army.

Leikip: Oh really?

Olson: A career. And he was a military policeman. And I think he had a lot to do with me going in the service, because I was always so proud of him in his uniform and all that, and that was the reason. You know, I just kept on—like I say, sixteen years old working in a hospital and doing a lot of work.

You know, nowadays you have to be older to. But I enjoyed it and went right to it.

Leikip: So right from high school into the Army. Your dad was career. What brought you to Cicero, Illinois? Did he serve there as well? Did he—.

Olson: No, I just was born there. Just was born there, my brother and I. I'm older than my brother. And lived in the same house all the time we were there. When I was in the service my folks moved to Wisconsin.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: So when I got out I was in Wisconsin. That's how I got started in Wisconsin.

Leikip: Whereabouts in Wisconsin did they move to?

Olson: They moved to—well, Pell Lake, right outside of Lake Geneva.

Leikip: Oh sure. Okay.

Olson: They bought a motel—a big motel, a big house and whatever, and then I got a job in the hospital in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, and working in that for quite a few years. So, I've always been in the medical field and enjoyed it so well, with the babies and that part, you know.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: But I enjoyed working at the hospital in Fort Ord. Had so many nice experiences. I wouldn't trade it for the world. I would go through it again and again. I just enjoyed it.

Leikip: So you went in in '58.

Olson: Mm-hm.

Leikip: I was three at the time.

Olson: You were three?

Leikip: I was three. So, everything you learned—needed to learn about being a nurse you learned in the Army, it sounds like.

Olson: Yes, a lot of it, and when I got out that's what I continued on working in the medical field, psychiatric hospitals.

Leikip: Wow.

Olson: I've worked in every kind of emergency rooms, delivered babies, and pretty much that was what I liked to do, you know? Be with people. Even now to enjoy it.

Leikip: Tell me about growing up in Cicero. I'm somewhat familiar with the area. My brother went to college in River Forest.

Olson: Oh okay.

Leikip: So—and the first church he served at was in the Chicago suburbs.

Olson: Oh okay.

Leikip: We spent some time roaming around down there.

Olson: Well Cicero was a smaller suburb, you know. And I went to school and grammar school right in Cicero, but I'll be darned if I remember the name of the grammar school. I know the high school; Morton High School and Junior College in Berwyn, and of course graduated in '58. But I just enjoyed being with people, dealing with people, all my life. The whole family was like that.

Leikip: What did your mom do?

Olson: My mom, she was a mother, you know, but other than that—before that my mother played the accordion and her dad played the violin—.

Leikip: Oh sure.

Olson: —and they played for different places. My family was musical. My dad had his own band, he was the drummer, and we just—I just loved music, you know, so every time—yeah. It was just something I really liked to do.

Leikip: Now, there was you and your brother. Did you play instruments as well?

Olson: Accordion.

Leikip: You did?

Olson: Yeah. I was in grammar school most of the time, but once I got into high school I had to make sure I got my grades up, and you know. But I still played.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: Anytime somebody came in to visit us I'd have to take out my accordion and play for them. [laughs]

Leikip: My folks did the same thing.

Olson: Yeah?

Leikip: People would come over. "Timmy, sit and play the piano."

Olson: Yeah? Ah, I didn't mind.

Leikip: Did your brother play an instrument too?

Olson: No. No he never did.

Leikip: No? Huh.

Olson: He never got in—he was into mechanics and stuff. He raced little cars and my dad and him would build these little race cars from when he was small and when up and he would race.

Leikip: Oh wow.

Olson: And right now, he is a teacher in Orlando, Florida.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: He teaches mechanics—yep. Teaches mechanics and he goes every—yearly they send him to different places where new things are coming out on the cars like they have.

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: But he's got to make sure, you know, he can teach his students, and he's been doing that for the longest time.

Leikip: Interesting.

Olson: So he's completely different.

Leikip: Yeah. Very. Very. So tell me about basic training. Where did you have basic?

Olson: Fort McClellan, Alabama.

Leikip: All right.

Olson: Over in Alabama.

Leikip: Did you have to learn how to speak southern when you got there?
[laughter]

Olson: Y'all. That's about it. But it's beautiful. Aniston, Alabama is the town.

Leikip: Right.

Olson: And we had basic with the guys and it was fun. I enjoyed it. The first thing I remembered when I got to Fort McClellan was I had to put everything down on the bed and go scrub the back stairs. That was the very first thing we did. Each gal had a job to do. And before we could do anything—

Leikip: Scrub the stairs. Wow. Even before you stood in formation or anything?

Olson: Right. [laughter]

Leikip: Rather inauspicious start. So at that time—you said you did basic with the fellas. Was basic the same routine, the same up and out?

Olson: Pretty much the same routine out in the field.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: And building the tents, camouflaging, going to the gas chambers.

Leikip: Wow.

Olson: Guns class. I was a pretty good shooter.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: M1—I think? M1s? Somewhere in there.

Leikip: Sounds about right.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Is that right?

Olson: Mm-hm.

Leikip: So it wasn't like they just picked you up and said you're going to be a nurse, go over here. You ran through basic with everybody?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: Yeah. I enjoyed it.

Leikip: And you were able to keep up with the guys?

Olson: Oh pretty much, yeah.

Leikip: There was a couple of them—you were probably able to beat a couple of them.

Olson: [laughs]

Leikip: Did you out-shoot some of them?

Olson: Well like I said, I was pretty good.

Leikip: Cool.

Olson: I was pretty good.

Leikip: Any—

Olson: I—

Leikip: Oh, go ahead. I'm sorry.

Olson: Yeah, you go ahead.

Leikip: Any memorable instructors or buddies or friends that you made in basic?

Olson: Oh God there were so many. My—the sergeant that took care of our barracks, she had the cutest little dog running around all over. I'll never forget that doggy. She was so cute. She would just be so friendly with everybody.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: And we had a drill instructor that was pretty tough, but she knew what she was doing and she kept us--we marched everywhere we went.

Leikip: Right.

Olson: We didn't go anywhere unless we were marching.

Leikip: Mm-hm.

Olson: And then we'd be in parades every weekend and they would judge us, so what we learned during the week, you know, showed up on Sunday.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: It was fun. It was fun. I kind of miss a lot of that stuff.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: The regimentation and all of that?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: Absolutely.

Leikip: What did you do for recreation? What'd you do for fun while you were in basic, or was--.

Olson: Well they had a USO where they had shows or music or whatever, which was right across from the WACs [Women Army Corps] barracks. So—and I went to town with the girls, but that was about it, you know. We concentrated on our work and I worked for one of the barracks as—you know, each section had to work for—our barracks was a pretty tough barracks. We had a sergeant that was, “You do what you're supposed to,” you know, and you better. But that was good. That's good teaching, and you always remember that.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: And there was one experience that I will never, ever, ever forget when I worked on the barracks. And I was working the night shift at this time. Of course you know you go every hour and check on everybody, how they're sleeping or if something's going on.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: And I happened to be going down the hall and got to one room—I don't know what made me go to that one first—and I opened the door and the man was almost hanging. I caught him. Thank God. I will never, ever forget that. I caught him, saved his life. It gives you—God was looking after him and me and he made it. That was something.

Leikip: And you just happened to pick that room?

Olson: Yeah. So, things happen back stateside too.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: That's something that I'll never forget.

Leikip: Absolutely. So while you were in basic, they actually had you doing nursing type duties and responsibilities. It sounds like—.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: —you were doing rounds every hour and working shifts.

Olson: Yeah. That was at Fort Ord.

Leikip: How long were you in basic?

Olson: Basic from September to December. September, October, November—yeah.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: I'm pretty sure that's it.

Leikip: Okay. And by then they thought you were pretty well qualified to go out and be a nurse in the field, or wherever you were needed?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Any other memorable episodes from the time at Fort Ord in basic, besides the one you just shared which is just phenomenal.

Olson: Well we had—we had our medical training. We also had those with our soldiers, so you know, in classes we'd give each other shots and all the other things that go.

Leikip: Sure. [laughter]

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Any stories stick out from that, or you'd rather not share? [laughter] It's okay.

Olson: No, it was—it was very good training. Very professional. Of course even in medical training you marched everywhere. Almost everywhere. I still—you know, it don't leave you.

Leikip: Yeah?

Olson: Yep. Even up on the floor we compare stories.

Leikip: Yeah?

Olson: And the only thing—when I got discharged, the only thing that I got I could take home were my combat boots. They didn't give me any of my uniforms at that time.

Leikip: Just your boots?

Olson: Just my boots and my bitty [??] bag, that little bag, you know.

Leikip: That's it.

Olson: That's it. And my mom used my boots to work in the garden. [laughter]

Leikip: So they had a nice post-military life as well.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Do you still have them?

Olson: No.

Leikip: Why?

Olson: Well [both talking at once]. I wish I did, had a few more things.

Leikip: So tell me about your first duty station, or your first assignment after basic. Where'd you go?

Olson: Fort Ord California, Monterey.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: Yeah. Went to—went there and started right in and wore these uniforms that were so stiff you could stand them in the corner.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: Every day we'd have—the only trouble with that though is when you sat down and had a crease or a wrinkle it'd stay with you, but it was very professional and I was so proud to wear a uniform. I also got a chance—and the iron lung was still in that—so I got a chance to take care of some of our soldiers in the iron lung. And I was just—we had in our activity just last week about when they had polio and influenza and they were showing the iron lung and all that stuff and that of course rang a bell.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: You know, very nice.

Leikip: How long were you there?

Olson: In California?

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: Oh gosh, um, from—let's see—I was there almost a year—yeah that should be close enough. Almost a year. I had gotten married to a sergeant who was ready to be discharged.

Leikip: Mm-hm.

Olson: It was the worst thing I ever did because I got—after we got back you know, where he lived, I found out what he was really like and we got it annulled.

Leikip: Oh.

Olson: Otherwise I would have been in it for, you know, twenty years or more.

Leikip: Yeah. So tell me a little bit more about Ord. What was your first impression when you got out to California? Was that your first time out there?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: What'd you think of that?

Olson: Yeah, beautiful. Monterey Bay, the ocean. It was so gorgeous. I had—a lot of times that I'd ride in the ambulances with some of our patients that we had to transfer from Fort Ord to San Francisco Hospital—Veteran's Hospital and it was a nice—nice trip, you know. I enjoyed it. I got to see a lot of the state. A lot of the state, you know. Otherwise I would have never been there. But it was beautiful. And as I understand, Fort Ord is not running as fort anymore.

Leikip: I'm not certain. I think it might have been—.

Olson: I heard that.

Leikip: —a post that was closed.

Olson: Yeah I think so. It was a big one. It was nice.

Leikip: So tell me about your duties while you were there, in terms of, did you strictly work in the hospital or did you do—.

Olson: Yeah, strictly worked in a hospital.

Leikip: —work with physicians as well or—.

Olson: In this one barracks, the same one all the time I was there. We had a really good instructor and taught us a lot, and—but most of our duties were taking care of our soldiers.

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: Even women. I had—this is a funny story—a woman and she was usually pretty quiet, and she had a drinking problem but we, you know, kept an eye on her. And she was, you know, a very nice person when you talked to her. And one afternoon she decided to go out the side door, and so, one of my comrades and I had to chase after her. We got her back though.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: We got her back. Course we had to send her somewhere else where she'd be more supervised.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: But there are so many stories. I should have wrote a book. Every story is just so different and—but I liked everybody that I worked with.

Leikip: Anybody stand out as being particularly memorable?

Olson: Yeah. The first woman—the one when we first got to Aniston, Alabama.

Leikip: Yes?

Olson: The sergeant that taught us everything that we needed to know and the gal that taught us the marching and all the different things that we had to do.

Leikip: Yes?

Olson: Those two people—the first two people I had gotten, you know, acquainted with when I got there.

Leikip: Sure. What impressed you most about them?

Olson: They would—they were—you did what they told you to do because that's the way they approached, you know, how—you know, you do this and it worked out well. I—you know, that's a good kind of training. So you might have been a little bit scared or—I wasn't. I enjoyed it.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: You know a couple of hours when you had to stand at attention when they go through the lines?

Leikip: Mm-hm.

Olson: I made it. [laughter] I didn't faint. You had to be kind of tough.

Leikip: Good deal. Yeah?

Olson: There were quite a few that couldn't stay and they just couldn't, you know, handle it, and I think that might have to do with how they were brought up, you know, and how your mom and dad taught you things to do and all that.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: So.

Leikip: Any other assignments or duty stations besides basic and then Fort Ord, or was that the entire—you spent your entire career at those two locations?

Olson: Yeah. Alabama and Fort Sam Houston and Fort Ord. Those three places.

Leikip: Tell me about Fort Sam Houston.

Olson: That was—that's where I went—did the medical training with the guys, and big beautiful hospital there. And we still had—went to school but we still had time to do things.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: Beautiful down in Fort Sam Houston with that—you know that— what do they call it? That canal?

Leikip: The River Walk.

Olson: The River Walk, yeah.

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: That was beautiful. Just beautiful. Took a lot of pictures.

Leikip: It still is.

Olson: Yeah? You've been there?

Leikip: We're going this fall for a Bombrook reunion with my—we refer to him as my uncle; he's my baptismal sponsor. He and my mom were cousins.

Olson: Oh, sure.

Leikip: He's ninety, ninety-one.

Olson: Oh.

Leikip: So, when they have Bombrook reunions we drive them.

Olson: Oh, nice.

Leikip: And this year the reunions will be in San Antonio, and I forget where the other one is. But yeah, I've been there often and it's very picturesque.

Olson: It's just so beautiful down there.

Leikip: Sounds like that was one of your favorite places to visit when you were there.

Olson: Yeah. It was—it rained, it seemed like, when we were there. In reveille, it was always raining early in the morning.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: Yeah, it seemed like it was. But the rest of the day seemed okay. But if I remember right, there was rain.

Leikip: And that's where you did your medical training then?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Most of it?

Olson: Most of it, yeah.

Leikip: Any instructors stand out there, or any significant experiences that really stand out?

Olson: Yeah. It pretty much stood out because I was learning a whole lot from there, and you know you don't forget good people and how they trained you.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: They might have been a little rough, but they got the point across—.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: —and you wanted to be a good nurse and they made sure we were. Good people.

Leikip: Was the training specialized at all in terms of—when you think of nursing anymore today, there's so many different specializations.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Even just in terms of infant care.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: There's this whole array of different specialties.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Was the training like that at Fort Sam Houston—.

Olson: No, it was—.

Leikip: —or was it more generic and more straight forward.

Olson: Just mainly we would take care of our soldiers just like we would in a regular hospital. No, we never did—I never did any work in OB or surgery or whatever. It was mainly taking care of our soldiers.

Leikip: Yes. Any other thing stand out from scenic San Antonio, besides River Walk and great medical training?

Olson: Well, one of my fellas that lived across from me in Cicero, he was in the Army too, and apparently he got the address where I was and happened to show up one day.

Leikip: I'll be darn.

Olson: I was so shocked. So we had a nice time, spent a couple of days. He was still in the service too.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: So we had a nice time by the water.

Leikip: Even though you didn't see combat per se, you saw a lot of what combat did.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: How'd you make it through all of that? What kept you going?

Olson: Well the man upstairs and my—like I say, I like dealing with people, making them feel good as much as I can, and I was just there for them and had no two ways about it. I was there. I just love making people feel good, in anything I do.

Leikip: So it's just kind of—kind of your fabric, part of your upbringing?

Olson: Yeah. Even here, I, you know, help once in a while with the people pushing them and all this and that, and I'm talking to them just like I was still, you know, doing nursing.

Leikip: Yeah. It's part of your fabric.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: To what do you attribute that? Was it your upbringing? Was it your mom and your dad?

Olson: Yeah. My dad. My mom.

Leikip: Your living situation?

Olson: They brought us up good.

Leikip: When I asked what helps get you through you said, “The man upstairs.” When you were growing up in Cicero, did you guys attend a church?

Olson: Yeah. Yeah. I sang in the choir and went to church. Our Lady of Fatima Church.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: Never—went to school also at the church.

Leikip: Okay, so it was a parochial school.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: I got it. Okay. I see you at Lutheran Worship. Was that a Lutheran Church?

Olson: Yeah. That’s when I got—yeah. My husband was Lutheran.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: So I got changed for Lutheran.

Leikip: I got you.

Olson: Pastor Dwayne.

Leikip: Because Lady Fatima didn’t sound like a Lutheran church.

Olson: No. [laughter]

Leikip: I’m not real bright but I got that. So you converted back when you got married?

Olson: Mm-hm. Pastor Dwayne is so nice. He sure thinks highly of you. I like the way you play. Yeah.

Leikip: Oh thank you so much.

Olson: That just, gosh, makes my heart—you know you're really into what you do.

Leikip: Yeah, I've been blessed. I've been blessed to be able to use that gift here.

Olson: Yeah, and I'm glad you do. I'm glad you're here, you and your wife.

Leikip: We enjoy it. We really do. I never served myself and could always kick myself for not doing so. Way back when I was in high school, one of the first radio interviews I did was with the local Army recruiter—this is at the end of Vietnam.

Olson: Yeah?

Leikip: When the Army went from being drafted to being all volunteer.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: So that was a big deal so we went and interviewed the local recruiter. And of course, they had all kinds of incentives to join. I went back and said to my folks, "I think I want to do that."

Olson: Yeah?

Leikip: You know they'll whip me into shape. They'll do stuff for me that I can't get here.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: And they'll pay for my education and give me a pile of money. My folks just [inaudible] said "no."

Olson: They said, "No?"

Leikip: They said no.

Olson: But you definitely wanted to?

Leikip: Absolutely. But you know what? Like my physician says, "You want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." Now I have a way to serve veterans here—

Olson: Right.

Leikip: —in a way that I probably wouldn't be able to—.

Olson: Yeah. Right.

Leikip: —had I been a veteran at this point in my life.

Olson: It would have been all—.

Leikip: Because I have a different perspective. So, how did being in the military change your perspective?

Olson: As far as?

Leikip: As far as anything. Were you different coming out than you were going in?

Olson: Yeah. I think I was different as far as being—taking care of these soldiers and—just taking care of the people just made me want to do more. I had been in every—when I got out—in every field as you could want to be because of the fact that I had took care of people in the service, and just continued doing—doing that.

Leikip: I've got to believe that at the time that you served, and the locations you served, you were probably the ultimate general practitioner when it came to nursing in terms of seeing everything and dealing with all different kinds of issues.

Olson: Yeah. I think I've seen just about everything; delivering babies and the—I like the psychiatric part of doing—taking care of people. All together a different type of nursing person. You work one-to-one. Yeah, it's different but I liked it too.

Leikip: On that subject—and I mentioned my son had spent four and a half years and had two all-expense-paid trips to Iraq, and I got to know his buddies because I'd go out and hang with them out at Fort Drummond when they were—when they state-side.

Olson: Oh. Uh-huh.

Leikip: They always took real good care of Mr. L when he came out to New York.

Olson: [laughs]

Leikip: And there's a fair amount—there's a lot of PTSD and psychological and mental health issues that are emerging now. And I guess my question, Sally, is we know so much more about this stuff than we did then.

Olson: Mm-hm.

Leikip: Did you see a lot of that back then in terms of the medical and psychological issues? Did we just not call it the same thing?

Olson: Yeah. I don't think we did at that time. Not like what's coming back now.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: Our soldiers—what they've been through all these years, it wasn't quite so bad at the time I was in. I'm sure there was, you know, issues.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: But like I say, our soldiers, and you wish you could do much more for them; get them working and housing. I just pray for those soldiers all the time.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: I can't be more proud of them.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: I really—.

Leikip: Tell me about your average day. Tell me about your average day at Fort Sam Houston when you were learning how to be a nurse.

Olson: My average day?

Leikip: Your average day.

Olson: I never had an average day. [laughter]

Leikip: I knew that was kind of a bad question. As soon as I said it, ah, that wasn't real good.

Olson: Course you didn't have too much play as far as doing things once you're in medical. You know, you're always busy doing that.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: One average day. One of the—the gal that was supposed to take us back to the barracks after we had been in—this was at the time we were learning how to give shots and a few other things.

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: And she never showed up, and we had to march. No doubt about it, you marched. The guys, too.

Leikip: Yep.

Olson: She never showed up. So one of the gals took it upon herself to get us back to our barracks by marching. [laughter] We did.

Leikip: Uh-huh.

Olson: You know, once you do it once—time, you know, it just—so hard to march. We have on our ward, Dean. He's been in the service, and been para— you know. I just love the stories he tells.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: Yeah. So interesting. You know him?

Leikip: I don't.

Olson: Oh. He's the CNA on four.

Leikip: All right.

Olson: Super guy. Super guy. And he's always got some stories, and medals, and all kind of different things.

Leikip: I'll be darned.

Olson: And he tells everybody. It's interesting to listen to him. And I talk to him about comparing my stories, too.

Leikip: Sure. Yeah. So, besides marching home when your ride didn't show up, anything else stand out from your time at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio? Any off-post episodes or escapades?

Olson: No.

Leikip: No?

Olson: I was a good girl.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: Yeah. [laughter]

Leikip: I wasn't going there.

Olson: No, we just enjoyed ourselves, you know.

Leikip: Any pranksters or clownsters or jokesters amongst your ranks?

Olson: No.

Leikip: I suppose in the medical business you don't get a lot of that, huh?

Olson: No, not too many. We had some—we had fun. But we had fun, but nothing serious or.

Leikip: Your fun was in working.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: You drew your energy from that.

Olson: Right. Exactly.

Leikip: Tell me about the food.

Olson: I don't think the food was bad.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: Of course SOS, you hear about that all the time.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: Yeah. [laughter]

Leikip: I'm sure it's not the first time those guys have heard it.

Olson: Of course we have it here every Friday—no, Sunday.

Leikip: Is it Sundays?

Olson: Yeah. But it ain't too bad. [laughter] Anyway, it wasn't too bad. While I was in basic training I only had to pull KP once.

Leikip: Is that right?

Olson: Yeah. The rest of the time you police the areas, you know, walk around and all that stuff. Just once. That was—but it wasn't bad.

Leikip: Did you have to do KP for penance? Did you do something where they said--?

Olson: Yeah. The only one thing that happened that I had to—me and this other girl.

Leikip: Yeah?

Olson: We were marching and getting ready for Sunday and the gal behind me—I can't remember her name though—she kept stepping on my heel, you know, grabbing—you know, and I kept going and I didn't want to say nothing because I know—I said, "Stop it!" Everybody halt, you know. [laughter] Her and I had to police the area the next couple of days. That was it.

Leikip: That was it.

Olson: I shut my mouth after that, but it didn't generally happen.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: All the girls were professional. After we got through with the marching and all the other stuff, we were all pretty professional and proud of it.

Leikip: Yeah. When—I assume you got leave just like they do now.

Olson: Mm-hm.

Leikip: Did you—did you come home on leave at all?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: What kind of stories, what kind of things, any special treatment—

Olson: Well I came home for Christmas, you know.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: And had a Christmas and went back again. Flew back to Fort Sam Houston, and then one other time I had a leave—my uncle had passed away. He was living in the house. Kind of helps—I looked up to him too. He was a policeman. He had passed away. But then they sold the house

and that's—that's when they moved to Wisconsin. That was the last time I seen the house.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: And I think about it a lot. I think about it a lot.

Leikip: What do you think about the house?

Olson: It was just some—just a warm house. I would sit in the kitchen. We had a wood—you know, the wood burning stoves, and I would sit in front of the stove just warming up. And we had one of those coffee makers that you could see, and I'd watch people, like when they went to move. It was silly, you know, but it was a very warm house. We just never missed church. The whole neighborhood. The whole neighborhood.

Leikip: It sounds like that warmth and that whole aura is something that you carry with you when you executed your duties—

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: —as an Army nurse.

Olson: Yeah. I still—in fact I still, even on our floor I'm doing things—you know, not—something that won't hurt anybody.

Leikip: Right.

Olson: I enjoy it and they—I think they enjoy me when I come around and talk to them.

Leikip: Once you're in that mode, you're in that mode.

Olson: Yeah. Always will be.

Leikip: So after you got discharged—and when was that? When was your—

Olson: 1961, somewhere in there.

Leikip: So three years or so?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: And by then your family had moved to Wisconsin?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: And back to Elkhorn. Did you go right back into nursing as soon as you got home?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: You had a—.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: You were able to find a job right away and everything?

Olson: Yeah. Found one at Elkhorn Lakeland Hospital.

Leikip: Mm-hm.

Olson: Started in there, and I worked in—like I say, the OB and all different types of care that people needed. Each floor was different. So, I got a chance to be with different kind of people. Always had something—every person I worked with always left a mark with me, or—you know what I mean.

Leikip: Anybody stand out particularly?

Olson: Um, quite a bit of them.

Leikip: Yeah?

Olson: Quite a bit. I can't think of all the names—it's been so long ago, you know, but just about everybody left a mark on me—with me.

Leikip: When you left the military and I understand that was as a part of the annulment of the marriage?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Did you—.

Unknown: I'm sorry. We'll be right out.

Leikip: No worries. Thanks. So, as part of that whole experience— [pause]. I understand that, had you not been married, you would have stayed?

Olson: I would have stayed. Absolutely.

Leikip: So you enjoyed it?

Olson: Oh yeah.

Leikip: Any thoughts of going back in? I mean, not now.

Olson: Oh yeah. Yeah. I guess I had thought about it, but I really got myself adjusted to this hospital and I worked there quite a few years. Yeah. I wish I had stayed in. I couldn't be more proud and proud of every—every veteran here for serving.

Leikip: Um—.

Olson: They're special.

Leikip: They are, indeed. As are you.

Olson: Very special.

Leikip: As are you.

Olson: Thank you.

Leikip: So after returning to Elkhorn, did you just then finish your professional career there and come right here from there?

Olson: No. I'd gotten married again and I was still working at the Elkhorn Hospital.

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: And a few years after that I adopted two boys.

Leikip: Oh wow.

Olson: Yeah. Two boys and we lived in Delavan, which is just—.

Leikip: Right down the block.

Olson: Yeah. And I worked in Willowfield Nursing Home; it was a brand new facility. So I started working in there, built myself up. They sent me to school for physical therapy. So I got in on that, then I actually was training the new gals that came into work. That was another nice experience for me. I always felt good when I could teach somebody something and they thank you for it and it's just—it's just something special.

Leikip: It's part of that nurturing.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Passing it along.

Olson: My whole life has been. I just enjoy life, enjoy people.

Leikip: Tell me, when you got out of the military—and I understand it was peace time—but anything special when you came home after serving for three years? Any special treatment, any special homecoming or anything like that?

Olson: Oh yeah. Wait a minute—every time Veteran’s Day came around and so forth, these are—I was managing properties in Verona, Wisconsin—.

Leikip: I know where Verona is.

Olson: Oh my gosh! Sugar Creek Apartments.

Leikip: Really?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: I’ll be darn.

Olson: You know it?

Leikip: I know right where it is.

Olson: Two blocks away from Miller’s. Yeah, my husband and I managed that property for the longest time.

Leikip: Is that right?

Olson: And we—that came—that was in the paper. They know that there were three other veterans along with me—.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: —and so they made—you know. Then after that we were always given a plaque for serving—thanks for serving. You know, very—Tommy Thompson signed one of them.

Leikip: Is that right?

Olson: Yeah. [laughs]

Leikip: How about that?

Olson: I've got it upstairs.

Leikip: You know, we may stop at the volunteer office on the way back and just make copies of these if we may?

Olson: Yeah. Sure.

Leikip: I know right where that is in Verona.

Olson: Yeah, we were there a long time. We—it just—isn't that amazing? You know where Verona is?

Leikip: Yeah, I spent ten of the best years of my life in Madison.

Olson: Did you? I'll be darn.

Leikip: It was my undergrad career. Oh yeah, I went to school a long time. I ended up living there for a while too. But yeah, I know right where Verona is.

Olson: So then you did know Sugar Creek Apartments?

Leikip: Indeed. I was selling insurance back in the late '70s; I took care of a lot of policyholders around Verona. I worked for a company that was based in Madison called National Mutual Benefit.

Olson: Oh okay.

Leikip: Which is a bad name because it wasn't national; they were only in six states. It wasn't a mutual; it was a fraternal and marginal benefits. But I had a lot of orphan policy holders that hadn't been seen for years down in that part of the state, around Verona and points southwest of there and south. Yeah.

Olson: Oh a cute little town.

Leikip: It is.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: It's grown a lot.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: A lot of new stuff down there.

Olson: I haven't been there.

Leikip: Oh, it's stunning.

Olson: But that's—yeah, I bet.

Leikip: It's stunning.

Olson: I bet. Our place was so pretty.

Leikip: So you did nursing and then you managed apartments. What else did you do when you got out?

Olson: Um, had fun here and there. Raised my kids and so forth and just stuck with—I had to keep myself busy, you know, most of the time. I'd take some time off to be, you know, with the kids, but I always either ended up managing property—and at one time I moved to Colorado.

Leikip: Is that right? When did you do that?

Olson: Oh gosh, years—years ago. Years and years ago. I can't remember the right time, but that's where I first got into my husband and I managing the properties at Colorado. We managed one big property at first and several of them down by the foothills, and that—.

Leikip: Whereabouts were you?

Olson: Well the first place was in—outside of Denver there. Not Aurora but—
.Littleton.

Leikip: Okay, yeah.

Olson: Littleton. Chateaux Linwood was the first property that we managed for this company and we manned that for about four years, then they transferred us to another property to get that one straightened out. It seemed that—they think we did a good job getting things together. The one—one job that was challenging was in—what town was that? Parker. Parker, Colorado. Outside of—as you're going into Colorado Springs.

Leikip: Okay yeah.

Olson: Well there happened to be a fire in the Parker complex that was there, and we were working still in Denver. And there was a fire and the husband of the manager started it and the wife got killed.

Leikip: Oh.

Olson: So, before a few days come up we were already there trying to keep—get things together.

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: So, we started with a whole new group of people and tried to comfort them and say, “We’re here for you now. Anything going—you know, let us know.” And we did, by golly. It was Victorian Village and it was shaped—the roofs were shaped like, you know, Victorian stuff?

Leikip: Mm-hm, yeah.

Olson: That was a great place, too. Little town.

Leikip: It sounds like you did very well—it sounds like you’ve done very well with everything you’ve done.

Olson: Well, I tried. We tried. It’s just something I liked to do.

Leikip: To what extent, to what degree do you attribute your ability to do all these different things do well—to what extent do you attribute that to your military experience?

Olson: A lot of it. A lot of it. Just being—I don’t know the word for it, but it was just a very, very—experience I would do over because I did learn a lot of it. A lot of it ‘course came from my upbringing.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: And I just kept going up and up with it, and just dealing with people. After I got into nursing and still dealing with people, so it’s always been my—my thing.

Leikip: Sure. Now when you went out to Colorado and you did the apartment management thing, did you also do nursing while you were out there, too? Or did you step away from it at that point?

Olson: No, I stepped away. Kind of took care—you’re always watching out for your—your people that you have in your complex and doing things for them and helping them out. It’s just something—this is one story. When we were in Chateaux Linwood there?

Leikip: Mm-hm?

Olson: It was a big property. It had a party room, pool and all that. I was—I happened to run into Gary Coleman.

Leikip: Okay, yeah.

Olson: That little guy?

Leikip: Yeah.

Olson: He had a girlfriend that lived in our complex.

Leikip: I'll be darn.

Olson: So I got to be good friends with him. We all did, all the people there.

Leikip: Sure.

Olson: We gave him his twenty-first birthday in our party room.

Leikip: I'll be darn.

Olson: And he was something else [inaudible]. [laughter] He was—had a big, beautiful house not too far from our complex. But he would once in a while come in with this here—he was in trains and he'd have an engineer cap and you know, he'd come in with that once in a while when he was visiting her.

Leikip: Nice. Nice.

Olson: Oh yeah, he was something else.

Leikip: Any further involvement with the military after you—after you were discharged?

Olson: No.

Leikip: In terms of veterans' organizations or VSOs or stuff like that?

Olson: No. No.

Leikip: No? Pretty much just stepped away from it and—

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: —got on with civilian life.

Olson: Kept myself going and busy. Never forgot all my experiences. Never forgot.

Leikip: You've got a whole book there, and I've got to believe there are other stories in there that I should have asked you about, that I didn't ask the right question to get the right story.

Olson: Well the one I gave—.

Leikip: Oh.

Olson: You want that—copies?

Leikip: Well we'll take—we'll take—we'll make a copy of this when we get back upstairs.

Olson: Oh okay. No these are some—okay. This is what I was thinking. I was writing down things that I might have not remembered.

Leikip: Yep.

Olson: [Reading] And the time I served in the Army I will always remember the great times in basic training, medical training and finally working in a hospital at Fort Ord taking care of our veterans. Very rewarding to me even as we speak. I am very proud to be a veteran. I still consider myself a veteran. Satisfaction of helping our veterans and also serving the life—saving the life of one of our veterans. That's something I'll never forget.

Leikip: Yeah. Did you keep in touch with him after that?

Olson: No. No I didn't.

Leikip: I had to ask.

Olson: Hmm?

Leikip: I had to ask.

Olson: Oh sure. Sure.

Leikip: Anybody from your military life that you still are in contact with?

Olson: No.

Leikip: Or that you still associate with?

Olson: I wish I was. We kind of all went, you know, our ways. I had a—used to have a big album we got when we were in basic training and I was in several pictures, one was in rifle training, and I was in that pictures and several others in there. I lost that, too. That got lost.

Leikip: Aw.

Olson: So many things.

Leikip: This and the photograph you showed me, that's it?

Olson: That's it.

Leikip: Wow. We're going to want to make sure we get—we get—.

Olson: And those uniforms that are in there are in a museum, you know, we wore khaki at the time.

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: Yeah. So there—I go down and look at them, too.

Leikip: Yeah. Now, again, you didn't actually serve in conflict but you saw a lot of what conflict does to us—does to our fellow man.

Olson: Yes.

Leikip: What would you tell someone who doesn't know anything about the military or war?

Olson: What would I tell them? I would tell them, if you join any of the services, be very proud that you're going in to serve our country and save a lot of lives, and many more things that make a career. There's lots of things you can do to help our people. Veterans are so—I'm so proud of our veterans here. Every one of them. Even the ones that are very old but they have some good stories to tell.

Leikip: They do indeed.

Olson: Yeah. I like listening to them.

Leikip: You had a pretty good idea, I suspect, of what to expect in military life since your father had served as a career guy.

Olson: Yeah, kind of. Yeah.

Leikip: Anything surprise you? Anything that, once you got in, you went, “Whoa!” ?

Olson: You know, we made—we were able to make phone calls once we got there and I called my folks, and—what did I say—I want to come home. I don’t like it. I want to come home. You know that kind of thing. Crying.

Leikip: You were homesick.

Olson: And then put the phone down and after that I was fine. [laughter] I had to let that out, I guess. But I think the other girls, you know, it’s such a strange thing, you know, but that was the last time.

Leikip: Yeah. Was that the first time you had ever spent any time away from home?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Is that right?

Olson: That’s right.

Leikip: So your first night away from home without mom and dad was to basic training?

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: Holy crow.

Olson: Took a train.

Leikip: Yeah?

Olson: Enjoyed the train ride. But as soon as I heard mother and dad’s voice I wanted to come home. It’s in there—yeah. It says what I said. [laughter]

Leikip:: Well, as I shared with you, we’ve got a little document here that we’re going to get your autograph, just saying—.

Olson: Sure.

Leikip: —it’s okay. There will be a lot of other people, and one of the reasons I’m doing this is getting these stories on the record—.

Olson: Oh sure.

Leikip: —so that other people can know the experience and share in what all of you veterans have shared, and learn and really understand from you folks what it really is to be part of—not the greatest generation necessarily, but part of the greatest cross-section of our society and culture, I think. So just kind of on final approach here, for folks that will listen to this tomorrow or next week, next month, next year, next decade, next century, what would you like to share with them about your military experience? Either in general or specifically?

Olson: I would do it over again. There would not be a time that I wouldn't. It's always up here for my people. For my people I would do it again. I have never been so proud in my whole life, and so—.

Leikip: Absolutely. One last question and then—that's not true. One question that's here and then I have one more. Why was it important for you to agree to do this with me?

Olson: I thought it'd be interesting. I was looking forward to it.

Leikip: Me too.

Olson: And knowing you, I think you're a very fine person, you and your wife, and I would do it. Yes. And that I'd learn something. I had—I didn't know what to expect, but I enjoyed this. I mean, it brought out some things.
[laughs]

Leikip: Good. But now you can share with your colleagues—.

Olson: Yeah.

Leikip: —up in Olson Hall about—you know, we will be doing this a lot because we want to—we want to make sure we get these stories on the record.

Olson: Oh sure.

Leikip: Because they're that important.

Olson: Certainly.

Leikip: So are there any stories that I should—that you should have told me that I didn't ask the right questions to get?

Olson: At the moment, I think I hit them pretty much.

Leikip: Okay.

Olson: You know. I think so. I've—I rode in Appleton Parade with the King Veteran's Home.

Leikip: Yes.

Olson: I rode in that each year.

Leikip: Cool.

Olson: Three times I think. Once was in a—no, two times. Once was in an Army truck—an old Army truck. The other one was in a big truck. They had a red truck first, white and blue—red, white and blue?

Leikip: Oh nice.

Olson: Big, huge—I was in the middle one, the white one, in the cab, just waving my hand.

Leikip: Very cool.

Olson: It said "Sally" on the side of the—and they were saying, "Hi Sally!"
[laughter]

Leikip: That's great!

Olson: Oh that was—that was just great. That was great.

Leikip: That's cool.

[end of interview]