

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

Yolanda L. Medina

Environmental Systems Technician, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, United States Marine Corps

2019

OH
2153

**OH
2153**

Medina, Yolanda L., (1962–). Oral History Interview, 2019.

Approximate length: 1 hour 20 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to the original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Yolanda L. Medina discusses her service as an aircraft technician in the Marine Corps from July 1981 to August 1985 including her service with the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, VMAT-203 in Cherry Point, North Carolina; the Military and Veterans Service Office at Carroll College; and her position as director of the Military and Veterans Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Medina graduated from Waukesha North High School in 1980 and received a full scholarship to Carroll College. Medina explains joining the Marine Corps with Joe Medina, her then boyfriend and using the buddy system. She discusses meeting with Marine Corps recruiters and her parents' reaction when they found out she had joined.

In 1981 she went to Paris Island, South Carolina, for basic training. She outlines her impressions of the drill instructors, the shock of the first days of training, and how she enjoyed the orderliness. Medina discusses her series leaders and how their professional Marine appearance inspired her.

She graduated on September 8, 1981, and attended Joe's graduation the next day. She describes how proud her parents were to see her graduating. Medina went to Naval Support Mid-South Air Station in Millington, Tennessee, for aircraft technician training. She discusses eloping with Joe in Tennessee and graduating second in her class.

Medina was then assigned to the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, VMAT-203 in Cherry Point, North Carolina. She describes how her command and non-commissioned officers were very welcoming and how a few enlisted Marines tried to play tricks on her and how she earned their respect. She discusses her delivery at the naval hospital and the support of one of her non-commissioned officers during her pregnancy.

Medina describes her work as an Environmental Systems Technician for the Harrier aircraft working on air conditioning, ejections seats and oxygen systems, and discusses not enjoying flying in the Harriers.

She outlines recreational activities around Cherry Point and why many of the Hispanic marines became friends with each other. Medina discusses Joe's frequent deployments, the effects the Beirut barracks bombing had on him, and their decision to leave the Marines.

Medina was discharged from the Marines in August 1985. She discusses moving to Dallas, Texas, doing administrative work and having three more children while Joe pursued becoming a pastor. In 1999, they move back to Geneseo, Wisconsin, and lived there for ten years before moving to Waukesha, Wisconsin. Joe worked as a pastor in Waukesha County and Medina worked at Carroll College for thirteen years in administration and earned her bachelor's degree in May 2016. She outlines Joe's declining health, the care he received at the VA hospital in Milwaukee, the support of her family, the veteran community, and the community at Carroll College that she received when he passed away on August 12, 2016.

Medina describes becoming involved with veterans groups in 2009, developing policies to help activated-reservist students, establishing a military and veterans service office at Carroll College in 2015 and earning her master's degree. Medina is currently the director of the Military and Veterans Resource Center (MAVRC) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Medina reflects on her feelings about leaving the Marine Corps, serving with Joe, patriotism, and recognizing the importance of her roll in a training squadron.

Biographical Sketch:

Medina served as an aircraft technician with the Marine Attack Training Squadron 203 (VMAT-203), 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, United States Marine Corps, from 1981 to 1985 in Cherry Point, North Carolina. Medina is currently the director of the Military and Veterans Resource Center (MAVRC) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript, if possible.

Interviewed by Ellen Bowers Healey, 2019.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2019.

Reviewed and edited by Luke Sprague, 2019.

Abstract written by Rachelle Halaska, 2019.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH2153.Medina_access]

Healey: All right, we're recording. Today is June 7th, 2019. And this is an interview with Yolanda Medina, who served with the MAT203, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, United States Marine Corps, Cherry Point, North Carolina. And her service was from July 19th, 1981, to August 1985. This interview is being conducted in Waukesha, Wisconsin. I am the interviewer, Ellen Bowers-Healey. This interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program, and there are no other persons present. All right, I gave your first name, and your last name, Yolanda, can you give me your full name please?

Medina: Yes, my name is Yolanda Lomeli Medina.

Healey: Okay. And Lomeli is your maiden name as well as your middle name?

Medina: Correct.

Healey: Okay. And where were you born?

Medina: I was born in Waukesha, Wisconsin, on February 14th, 1962.

Healey: Okay. And before you went into the Marine Corps, tell me a little bit about your background in terms of education, and your family, and parents.

Medina: My parents Viola and Emesio [??] Lomeli are natives of Texas. Oftentimes when people see me they say, "Oh, where are you from?" And I say, "Oh, I'm from Waukesha." "No, where are you from?" I said, "We're fourth generation Americans, my family is of Mexican descent, but from the Texas area." And my mother and father moved up here as migrant workers, and settled in Waukesha so that my dad could work as at International Harvester. And that's where all of my siblings were born, here in Waukesha. I attended elementary school locally. I went to Waukesha High School and graduated in 1980. And then I enrolled at Carroll College as a theater arts major. But my boyfriend at the time always told me he was going to join the Marine Corps, and he was a year younger than me. So, when he graduated high school he went straight to the military recruiting office and joined the Marine Corps. And I didn't want to be left behind, so without my parents knowing I dropped a full four-year scholarship at Carroll College to join the Marine Corps with my boyfriend Joe.

Healey: Wow. And did you go down to the recruiter's at the same time? Or after he did?

Medina: After he did. It took me a while to debate, do I want to do this, don't I want to do this, I'm leaving college, it's all completely paid for, no other way could I have paid for it. And at that time you didn't think you were going to go into the military to get an education. That's promoted now. Back then it wasn't. Military service was promoted as serving your country. And so, I was debating about—I had no altruistic reasons to join, I just didn't want to leave my boyfriend behind. Or he leave me behind. So, about a month later after he joined, I told my parents I'm going to go sleep overnight at a friend's house. Instead I went to Milwaukee and enlisted.

Healey: Wow. Okay. Let me do a little bit of backtracking. You described your mom, and your dad, and kind of how they came to Waukesha. Your siblings, did you have siblings?

Medina: I had six siblings.

Healey: Okay. And where do you fall in the order of siblings?

Medina: I'm the third oldest. There's three girls, Hope, Irene, and then myself, and then my brothers Martin, David, Danny, and then my baby sister Sandra.

Healey: Okay. And do they still live in Wisconsin area, or not?

Medina: All of them are in Wisconsin with the exception of my brother David, who passed away.

Healey: All right. Well, you had an interesting introduction into how you got into the Marine Corps. When you went down to the enlistment, did they ask you about your ability to do the physical fitness test?

Medina: Yes. They always do. But I had always remained physically active, and so, no one had any question about whether I could do anything physical or not. They don't really question, they more promote you can do this because they want to recruit you. So, it's more like they didn't ask, do you believe you're able, they would say, we know you're able.

Healey: Very good. Now, from the time you went down to the recruiter's station, to the time you actually signed on the dotted line, or enlisted, how much time expired between that?

Medina: Almost eight months. So, in that time frame I had to figure out how am I going to tell my parents. And it got closer, and closer, and closer to Joe getting ready to go to boot camp, and so, he came to my parents to ask if we could get married, because we wanted to get married right after he got out of boot camp. And so, he told my father, "I just want to let you know that after I get out of boot camp,

Yolanda and I are going to get married.” And my father said, “Aren’t you going to ask my permission?” And Joe said, “Whether you say yes or no, we’re still going to get married. I’m just letting you know.” And this was an eighteen-year-old kid saying that. But Joe was always very headstrong. And so, my father said, “Okay, well I guess there’s nothing else we can do.” And then Joe said, “Oh, and by the way, Yolanda’s joined as well.” And then all the tears started, and all the yelling, and all of that happened. [Laughs]

[00:05:30]

Healey: And was your mother’s reaction the same?

Medina: My mother was a little stunned. And she didn’t say anything for about two days. I mean, she literally did not talk to me for about two days because I was the first of my siblings to graduate high school in the proper time, let alone go to college. So, she was a little upset, disappointed, scared, as all parents would be.

Healey: And had your husband, or your future husband at that time, had he already enlisted while he was still in high school?

Medina: Yes. He enlisted at seventeen years old.

Healey: Now, in your contact information you indicated you came in the buddy system with your then boyfriend, was that difficult or not to get into—

Medina: No, the recruiter was elated, you know? And because it is a man and a woman, I thought it would be difficult, I thought a man had to, you know, buddy with a man or a woman with a woman, but no, you just had to buddy into the same boot camp. And from then on they’re not responsible for you. So, the recruiter said no problem. I only remember his first name. His name was Randy. I didn’t—and he was a sergeant at the time. And he said, “No, you guys can do it. Sign on the dotted line right here. Joe’s your buddy. Joe you’re instant PFC now because you brought—.” Well, he brought another young man in as well. I can’t remember who that was. And he said we’ll make a waiver for you to go to Parris Island [South Carolina], and somebody signed off on it somewhere, and we were good to go. He left in June of that year, and then I left in July, because male boot camp is twelve weeks, and female boot camp is eight weeks.

Healey: And that was in 1981?

Medina: Correct.

Healey: Did you see your future husband off to boot camp when he left?

Medina: I did. We went to the airport. And at that time you could still go to the gate. So, it was a whole big family thing. His parents, my parents, some aunts, some cousins, some of my siblings, big crowd all at the gate, you know, hugging, kissing, crying, you know? Thinking he'd be gone to us forever. But it was our first separation, we were just teenagers. So, it was a very emotional time.

Healey: Okay. Had you gone to high school together?

Medina: No, he went to Kettle Moraine High School, and I went to Waukesha North.

Healey: How did you happen to meet him?

Medina: We met at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, just one block up the street at a dance, a parish dance.

Healey: Okay. And how long did you date before you got married?

Medina: We met when we were fourteen and fifteen years old. So, it was about four years from the time we met until the time we married.

Healey: Now, by the time your husband went off to boot camp, how was your family reacting to the prospect of you going four weeks later?

Medina: My mother was still angry, but my father started to become—my father was always a huge military buff. He could not go into the military because of health concerns, so he then became very, very proud, and very, very excited for the fact that I was going to be going into the Marine Corps.

Healey: Okay, all right. Tell me about your leaving for the Marine Corps. Did your family go with you?

Medina: My immediate family went with me, but I didn't want the big show that Joe had because I was really, really nervous. I had never flown in an aircraft before, I had never been away from home before, and I was really scared, and I didn't want people to see the fear. So, I asked that just my parents come with me. And that was it.

Healey: So, you had never flown before. Had you ever been out of the state of Wisconsin and Illinois?

Medina: Only to Illinois and Ohio where family were. But outside of there, I'd never been anywhere else.

Healey: Right. Well, tell me about when you arrived at Parris Island for boot camp?

Medina: Well, there was a stop in Atlanta, Georgia, to pick up all of the rest of the other women who were coming from the east side of the country. And that's when the first culture shock came. We started off in the aircraft kind of chatting with each other, talking, but then the Dis [drill instructors] showed up in Atlanta, Georgia. And as a woman, you're not used to being yelled at, or bossed around kind of in that way. And so, I wasn't used to people just brusquely yelling orders at me. I mean, a mom is different. She's yelling all the time. But this was different. This was men telling us, you know, in a very rude way I felt, you know, get over here, go over there, shut up, you know, those type of things that people normally didn't say to me. So, I was—it was very, it was very strange, very frightening. And so, we had to be very, very quiet in the aircraft. We weren't allowed to talk. And so, that when we arrived in South Carolina, that's when all of the traditional, you know, get out, get out, get out, move, move, move, get on the feet, you know, the yellow feet that the Marine Corps has. And then my whole world imploded from there. I thought, what did I do.

[00:10:41]

Healey: Were all the DIs that you had, were they all male or not?

Medina: The ones in Atlanta were male because they were meeting all of the females and all of the males. But once we got off into Parris Island, and separated off the bus, the women went in one direction, the men went of course in another, and that's when I encountered the female drill instructors. And they were still just as rude as the men. [Laughter]

Healey: All right. What do you recall of your first and second day of being at boot camp?

Medina: They always bring you in at night. I don't know if it's to disorient you or what. But everything felt cold and clammy even though it was July. It just felt very cold to me. Everybody was—some people were like real gung-ho, other people were like crying. I was more in a daze, and trying to figure out mentally how am I going to work this out to be successful. Because my end goal was not to become a Marine, it was to see Joe again.

Healey: Okay. Had the recruiter, your recruiter, prepared you at all for the Parris Island experience?

Medina: He tried to prepare me in the way that what a man would expect. I don't think he knew anything about what a woman was going to expect. And he tried to introduce me to a few female Marines who had come through, you know, the city to visit family or whatever. But they really didn't have a whole lot of information to share as well. I don't know if they were able to articulate the experience, or if they just wanted me to, you know, get culture shock and just jump right in.

Healey: Okay. So, your training was how long at Parris Island?

Medina: Boot camp was eight weeks.

Healey: And do you recall who your series leader were? Or what ser—

Medina: I do.

Healey: Oh, okay.

Medina: I have a picture of them. And I don't recall it off the top of my head, but when I go back to the pictures I say oh, yes, there they are. So, I was in Platoon 11A at the WM Recruit Battalion on Parris Island. And my first lieutenant was Lt. Bishop, the head DI was Sergeant Moore, and then the two additional DIs were Sergeant Young, and Sergeant Pruitt. And we graduated on September eighth of 1981.

Healey: Just out of curiosity I'm going to take a look at that picture, and this is Lt. Bishop?

Medina: Yes.

Healey: And this is?

Medina: Moore. And this is Young, and that's Pruitt.

Healey: Okay. Later on did you come across any of them?

Medina: I did not. I've never encountered them after boot camp.

Healey: And what was your impression of them as leaders, or mentors?

Medina: I—what I loved about seeing them was how crisp, and how sharp, and how clean their appearance was. It looked like they took time to be a Marine. And that's actually in boot camp what won me over. That's what made me think, I want to be her, is their appearance of just professionalism, and pride in how they looked in uniform.

Healey: So, by the time you finished boot camp, you decided you really wanted to be a Marine, not just to see your boyfriend?

Medina: Exactly.

Healey: [Laughs] Okay. While you were boot camp, did anybody in your platoon or any of the Marines know that you had a boyfriend in boot camp?

Medina: I think someone told them, because as soon as I got there, somebody got into my face and said, “Don’t think you’re going to see your—.” And they used a word that was—I can’t use on tape. And said, “Don’t think you’re going to see him. We’re going to keep you as far away as possible from him.” And so, when I got my letters from him, they were already opened. So, I believe they were censored.

Healey: And was that true that you didn’t see your boyfriend when you were—?

Medina: That was correct.

Healey: For that eight weeks.

Medina: I looked for his flag because I knew—I got letter from him, so I knew what his unit was, and so I looked for—and when other groups passed by, platoons passed by, they had their unit flag with them, and I always looked for his flag, and I could never find it.

[00:15:02]

Healey: Okay. How did you do in terms of—well, like explain what you did on a daily basis.

Medina: Well, it was standard boot camp fare. You got up early in the morning, you did your PT, or your physical training, you went to the mess hall and ate. I—I thought it was unusual you had to sit straight up in the chair and bring your spoon up, or fork, at a ninety-degree angle, and kind of eat like this. All of course to break you down, and to train you to take orders. But, I mean, I love order, I’m an ordered person, so I was a square peg in a square hole, you know. But I also wasn’t there—you could tell some girls were there to prove that they were going to be number one. There were other girls there that were just trying to get through. And for me, I don’t know if it was because of my family, and the large unit I came from, I felt like I needed to be a sister, or a helper, or take the hand of somebody who was struggling. So, even though I might have been able to run faster than some people, I would lag behind so I could help the ones that were falling back.

Healey: So, the physical fitness, the running, was no problem for you.

Medina: Correct. I had no problem physically with swimming, running, rifle. And I didn’t even know I could shoot a rifle. Turns out I can. So, I wasn’t expert, fell a few points below expert, but I was a sharpshooter.

Healey: All right. And in high school had you done some of the physical training, the running, the swimming?

Medina: No.

Healey: No? Okay.

Medina: Actually my major when I entered Carroll University was a theater arts major.

Healey: [Laughs] Okay. Did you complete a year at Carroll?

Medina: I completed one year, yes.

Healey: Okay. Did you make any friends from boot camp that you kept in contact with?

Medina: I did. I kept one friend that throughout our entire life, even now, we had our children at the same time, we wrote letters. It wasn't until Facebook that I was able to come in contact with many, many more. So now, I would say from this picture, there's about thirty percent that I make contact with online. Mm-hm.

Healey: Well, great. Okay. Anything else that you—well, did you get any time off when you were in boot camp? When you went to boot camp, what was the routine? Did you get Sundays off, or just nothing off for eight weeks?

Medina: No, you got hours off. Hours of time to make a phone call, write letters, you know, relax. But that was on a Sunday afternoon after church. And church was required. You went somewhere, and then you came back for a few hours in the afternoon, and then you just went back to training. And you didn't get leave until the final week of boot camp when your parents came, cause they knew you were going to be graduating. And that was actually the last two or three days I believe.

Healey: You mentioned in your intake information that you and your future husband both graduated one day apart. Who graduated first?

Medina: He did.

Healey: Okay. Was he—

Medina: Oh, I apologize, I did.

Healey: You did?

Medina: Mm-hm.

Healey: Okay.

Medina: I'm trying—because I attended his graduation.

Healey: Okay, that was—that was going to be my next question. Who attended who's graduation? And I take it he was not able to attend yours?

Medina: Correct.

Healey: Okay.

Medina: Mm-hm. But both his—my parents and his parents were there.

Healey: Great, okay. And at that time what was the attitude of your parents when they saw you graduate?

Medina: So, so proud. My dad was beaming from ear to ear. This is him picking me up at my barracks. And he kept photobombing all the pictures, cause he was just so, so proud.

Healey: Okay, great. Okay. So, while you were in boot camp, did you know what your future military occupational specialty was going to be?

Medina: I did. Because when I took the test at AFQTs for, you know, math, English, whatever all those things were, I aced the mechanical test. I don't know, I guess that's my brain. And they would show you a toggle switch and say—and then there's this huge schematic on the page, and say, if this flipped here, what happens at the end of the page. And I guess I answered correctly on all of those things. I've got a little mathematical mind. So, Randy, the recruiter said, "Do you want to be a mechanic?" I was like, what? He goes, "I can get you on this really cool aircraft that the Marine Corps has called a Harrier." He goes, "Would you like to do that?" I didn't know any better. I said, "Sure, let's do it." He goes, "Yeah, you don't want to be a grunt." That's the best thing about Randy is that he tried to get us into specialized fields, he didn't try to just recruit us, and then just let us go into infantry and what—and women would go into transportation. He tried to get us into a field where someday we might be able to do something. And so, Joe actually was a unit diary clerk, which you would consider now to be administration field. And he ended up in S-2, which is intelligence in his unit. So, I knew I was going to be an aircraft technician.

[00:20:23]

Healey: Great. Now going back to your boot camp experience, of the women that you started with, how many of them would you say graduated, and how many would you say fell out by attrition or on their own desire?

Medina: We only had one person fall out. The whole rest of the group stayed intact. And I—I see not that that was to the—that was based on the drill instructors. I think

they were really, really good people, and that they knew what they were doing, and that they knew how to keep the unit intact.

Healey: That's an incredible rate for graduation I think.

Medina: It is. Mm-hm.

Healey: Yes. I don't know how the other—if you had an idea how the other series were doing, or platoons were doing?

Medina: Well, I know that you can only bring in as many as drop out, so we had one other person join us who had fallen out from another unit before us. But she did well when she was with us. So, I think they had a nice cohesive unit there.

Healey: How much time did you have between your boot camp graduation and going to your follow on school?

Medina: Once again our recruiter did a lot of pre-planning. So, he was able to get us the thirty days liberty in order to come back and recruit. And you had to be able to bring in at least three people in order to stay the entire thirty days. So, Joe went around to high schools and stuff and as I did, to the various high schools, trying to bring in women to the military.

Healey: And were you able to do that?

Medina: Yes. Mm-hm. So, we had thirty days leave before we went to our duty stations.

Healey: And when did you get married?

Medina: It wasn't until we were in our training stations. And Joe was being trained in Parris Island, South Carolina, and I was being trained at the Naval Air Station in Millington, Tennessee. And he called me and he said, "We need to get married." But back home, our parents were planning a wedding. And it was running along the lines of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* where they were planning all of this elaborate weirdness that I wasn't being consulted on. And I'm calling him and saying, "Do you know that your mom's doing this, or my mom's doing that, or whatever?" And he said, "Let's just elope. Find a minister there in Tennessee, and let's just get married." So, that's what we did. He flew over to Millington, we got married in somebody's house. I don't know whose it was. All I know was it was in Tipton County, Tennessee. And then we called home and told our parents, "We just got married." And more firestorms 'cause we just weren't following the path that they wanted for us. But my mom said that they stayed at my in-laws' house and drank all night.

Healey: Oh my. [Laughter] Okay.

Medina: Crying that we robbed them of the opportunity to celebrate our marriage. But we saw it as necessary so we could be assigned to the same duty station. Because at that time we still weren't assigned to a duty station, but once we got married, we were both going to be placed in the same location.

Healey: And how long was your training at Millington?

Medina: It—I got there—you know what, I don't know. Let's see. We got out of boot camp in August, September, October, it had to have been three months. It had to have been three months of aircraft training. I know there was additional training once I got to my duty station because I have all kinds of certificates on corrosion, and welding, and liquid oxygen training, and, you know, driving the carts. I've got all those certificates, so I know there was additional training after I got to my station, but I think the immediate aircraft training was about three months.

Healey: And how long was your husband's training?

Medina: About the same—only about two months, because he was at Cherry Point before me, and he came to pick me up at the airport.

Healey: And by that time you were married?

Medina: Yes. Mm-hm.

Healey: So, any—before I go on to Cherry Point, any other comments, or experiences, or comments concerning your instruction at Millington that sticks out to you?

Medina: Well, I know—I knew that the Marine Corps is a department of the Navy, I just didn't know that we trained with the Navy. So, when I went to my duty station at Millington, I was surprised that the Marines were the minority, and that the sailors were the majority. [Laughs] So, this is my aircraft training school group, 'cause we went in cohorts. And he—this guy, I'll never forget his name, his name was Painter. And he was in first place; I was in second place graduating.

[00:25:11]

Healey: And why do you—why does the first-place name, Painter, stick out to you?

Medina: Because I was trying to beat him.

Healey: [Laughs] Okay, all right.

Medina: He outdid me in formulas because like, they'd give us an empty aircraft, and they would go in and tell us, what's missing, you know, what's wrong, what happened

to this aircraft. So, you have to go look if there's an indentation. Well a manufacturer never makes something without a reason, so, you're like there's an indentation here, something's missing here. Or, you know, there's a wear and tear right here, something's been constantly going up and down against here that shouldn't be, let's see what's the next connecting part. So, on those things I was top of the class, top of the class, but then you would have to go okay, the aircraft was going at this speed, it arched here, and landed here, so where did it, where did it fail in the sky. So, you have to do those calculations. And those—that's where he always beat me by one or two points in the math.

Healey: Okay. Did you ever have contact with him after training?

Medina: No.

Healey: No? This was before Facebook and email.

Medina: Correct.

Healey: All right. So, did you go straight from Millington to Cherry Point?

Medina: Yes.

Healey: Or did you have some leave time?

Medina: No. I didn't have any leave time, I went directly. I could have requested it, but I didn't want to. I wanted to go see Joe. I didn't want to go home.

Healey: Okay, when you got to Cherry Point, before we get into your work, what was your living situation since you were married? Did you live in the barracks for a while?

Medina: Yes, we did.

Healey: Or did you live off base?

Medina: We had to live in the barracks for about a month before they could find—we wanted to decide if we wanted base housing, or if we just wanted to do BAH [basic allowance for housing]. So, our—to get an allotted amount of money to live off-base. And so, we decided to live off-base in a trailer. And there were trailer parks all around the base. So, it wasn't hard to find a place to live.

Healey: And I take it you did that because of economic reasons.

Medina: Yes. We made more money that way.

Healey: Right, okay. And it was close—and it was in Cherry Point, or Havelock, or where?

Medina: Havelock.

Healey: Havelock?

Medina: Mm-hm.

Healey: Okay. And where did your husband work? What unit was he assigned to? The same—different unit?

Medina: A different unit but on the same strip because all of the harriers were on the same road. So, mine was actually the first. VMA-203 was a training squadron, and then the very next squadron next to mine was VMA-231, and that was my husband.

Healey: So, you were both with the Air Wing?

Medina: Correct.

Healey: Okay. And what do you recall about your first week or two at work with 203?

Medina: There were always men who tried to decide if you were worth being a Marine. So, they would do—they would try to trick you like saying—they'd wrap up something in bubble wrap and say, "I need you to go to the squadron up the road and ask for another ASH receiver." And I'm like, that's an ASH, what's an ASH receiver, what's the ASH stand for. And they're like, "You don't need to know, Marine." And I'd say, "Well, yes I do if I'm going to get the right component." I'd say, "Let me open this up." And I'd see that it was an ashtray. So, they were trying to make me the butt of a joke so I'd go over and say, "I need an ASH receiver." But I have just too logical of a mind, so they couldn't try to fool me in that way. And then they'd—you'd have to check out your toolkit in order to work on your component parts for the aircraft, and they would try to sneak up and take some so that something would be missing. But once again, I know where my things are, and I'm a very organized person when I'm laying things out. And I'm like, okay, I'm missing this, I'm missing that, and I could tell somebody was, you know, trying to trick me. So, I'd close it up, I'd go in, and I'd just start swearing up a blue streak. "Whoever took this blankety blank tool better give it back to me now, 'cause I know how to shoot a rifle just as well as you do." And then somebody would give me my tool back. So, I kind of earned my respect within the first couple of weeks of being there.

Healey: That was fellow enlisted personnel?

Medina: Correct.

Healey: Or NCOs [Noncommissioned Officers], TAC-NCOs?

Medina: NCOs were outstanding, the officers were really good, everybody was really accepting and very kind, and tried to, you know, welcome me. And they were too were proud to have women. I was the third woman in my squadron. One was in supply, and the other one was in avionics. So, the commanding officer was very happy to have me there. It was the enlisted, my fellow enlisted that tried to see, okay, let's see if we can break her down.

[00:30:02]

Healey: Do you remember who your commanding officer was?

Medina: I don't.

Healey: Okay. Is there any particular enlisted NCOs or staff NCOs that stand out to you?

Medina: Halfway through my time in 203 I got a new NC—staff officer for my—we were called the seat mechs, I was an ejection seat technician. So, there was a Staff Sergeant Dewitt, and he was very, very helpful because I had my first two children in the Marine Corps, so, I didn't know what to do, how to be. I didn't have maternity camouflage uniforms, you just bought a bigger, you know, top, so it would accommodate your belly. And you're walking around a flight line with this—you know, waddling along with this big belly. And Staff Sergeant Dewitt was very, very helpful in making sure that nobody tried to give me a hard time. Or when I wasn't feeling well, he would accommodate me. So, he always stands out in my mind.

Healey: And in relationship to when you started work at your unit—actually, I should ask you, you had boot camp, and then you had follow-on training, plus the thirty days of leave, by the time you got to Cherry Point, was it 1982 already? Or when did you get to Cherry Point?

Medina: Yes, it was 1982 by the time I got to Cherry Point. Well, it was the Christmas of '81, I remember spending Christmas with Joe.

Healey: And in relationship to when you arrived at your unit, when did you give birth to your first child?

Medina: Amanda was born in December of '82, so a year. A year.

Healey: A year, okay.

Medina: Mm-hm.

Healey: And you delivered at Cherry Point?

Medina: Yes. [Clears throat] Excuse me. I delivered at the naval hospital in Cherry Point. And the thing that stands out to me the most about my delivery is that the nurses were young corpsmen, probably about nineteen, twenty years old, and then of course, a Navy officer. But I remember those young men standing against the wall looking petrified. Absolutely petrified that they were doing a delivery. I don't know if that was in their training or not, but they looked like they did not want to be there. And I remember the lieutenant, or the captain, yelling at them orders about doing whatever, and that I was called by my rank the entire time. So, they were like, "Okay, Lance Corporal Medina, I need you to do this. Okay, Lance Corporal Medina, now push. Okay, Lance Corporal, it's time to do this." So, I just remember distinctly being called by rank while I was delivering my babies.

Healey: And that was the Corpsmen?

Medina: No, the—

Healey: Everybody?

Medina: —the doctor. Mm-hm.

Healey: All righty. Did you know you were going to have a daughter at that time?

Medina: I did not. We didn't—I did not have an ultrasound.

Healey: How long were you in the hospital?

Medina: One day.

Healey: And how long were you on maternity leave?

Medina: Four weeks. And then I went back to light duty. I think we were allowed six weeks, or eight weeks, but I wanted to get back as soon as possible because I knew Joe was deploying in February, and so, I wanted to be up to speed before he deployed. So, it was my choice to go back to work early.

Healey: And you said your husband was going to be deploying, was this his first deployment?

Medina: I believe it was his second deployment. VMA-231 was of course an attack squadron, so they were always out and about everywhere. And at this time he deployed to Puerto Rico. And it was just for—no, I apologize. He had already

done Puerto Rico. This was going to be the long one. This was when he was going to do a whole WESTPAC, so it was going to be a six-month tour.

Healey: And during the course of your time at Cherry Point, did you deploy or not?

Medina: No, because I was in a training squadron. So, I would occasionally go to a location where there was an aircraft where no one else was around who could fix that particular component because everybody else was deployed and this aircraft was stuck in a certain place. But never more than a few hours, and then I was flown back.

Healey: And where did you go?

Medina: Just in the States. I never went—I had options to go overseas to a couple of locations, but I didn't want to leave Amanda. I didn't have family around, I didn't want to fly her home, and it was too much, to me, moving parts, so I just chose short trips.

Healey: What did you do for childcare?

Medina: At first I used the base daycare. But I was not comfortable, it was huge, and I did not like it. So, then—but I had friends that I worked with whose wives were not in the military, and their—those women were my babysitters. And then, of course, we found a church. So, church is always helpful when it comes to networking and support.

[00:35:00]

Healey: Okay. Can you give me more detail about the type of work you did when you were at the squadron?

Medina: Yes. Like I said, I was an environmental systems technician, so that was air conditioning, ejection seats, and oxygen systems. So, ejection seats of course is in the front of the aircraft, on the Harrier the air conditioning unit is right immediately behind the cockpit, and then the liquid oxygen is in the far back. And then, [clears throat] I'm sorry, air conditioning, ejection seats, oxygen system, okay, yes, oxygen in the back, air conditioning here, ejection seats here. So, these were actually promotional pictures being taken, and I'm sorry that I never kept the recruiting pamphlets. You know, you don't think about those things at the time. But I was an excellent fit for the Harrier because it was a small aircraft, and I'm a small person, so other off—other offices, I'm still thinking back to my academia. Other units within the squadron would say, "Hey Medina, could you come in and try to find this piece." And so, I'd put my hand in and try to find the cotter pin that was lost, or a stud that dropped down, because it was such a tiny, tiny space, that they would call me and ask me, "Hey, can you go dig around in there?" So,

despite my having one job in there, I was always the scout, so to speak, for all the missing pieces in the aircraft with all those big men who couldn't fit in there.

Healey: Did you ever get to go up in a Harrier?

Medina: I did. Twice. And because—normally only one person can fly this, but a training aircraft has two seats, and it doesn't show it here in this picture, but it's a double-seater in the training aircraft. So, I went in the back seat of one, because it was a very—there was a very bad whirring sound with the fan, but yet when we ran the fan when it was down, it didn't make that sound. So, it had to go up in the air so we could figure out what it was. And it was actually something else that was loose that the ram air, or the blowing air from the movement, was moving this additional piece, but I was hearing the clanking. And it's really strange that I have really, really good hearing, and I could hear that clink. I don't know if it was a mom's ear where you can hear those additional noises that sometimes men can't hear. But I said, "There's a clink, there's a really light clink, something's moving." So, once we got in, once it was back on the ground, we found it. And then there was another time when it was actually he felt like there was a burning in the seat, and that it was true.

Healey: Who's the he?

Medina: Oh, I'm sorry, the pilot. The training pilot. He felt like there was a burning in the seat. And he said I'm always smelling kind of like a smoke. He goes, "I'm not going up in that aircraft." Well, the ejection seat has cartridges in it, and one of the—you know, that it has to have an explosive in order to, you know, shoot it up in the air. One of the cartridges was malfunctioning, and it was heating up. And the next person who went up, it probably would have exploded on them. And we don't know if something hit it, if somebody had a tool in there and just, you know, knocked it. Like if you take a round and you bang it, and you throw it, it can act like a grenade. So, that's what was happening to that cartridge. And so, we had to go in, we had to smell, we had to put our noses down, we had to feel, and then we found, you know. It's little things like that, you know, investigation. Forensics investigation that we had to do.

Healey: So, when you went up in the airplane it was just around the Cherry Point area, I take it.

Medina: Correct. Not far.

Healey: And you were there for purposes of making—finding what needed to be repaired?

Medina: Correct. One hop was only an hour, the other was maybe an hour and a half. I hated both of them.

Healey: Why so?

Medina: It was scary.

Healey: It was scary. [Laughter] [Phone ringing] I'm sorry.

Medina: You're fine. I thought that was me. Better turn mine off. I don't know where my phone is, I'll find it. Oh, here it is. Yeah, I'm a ground person. I like to be safe and on the ground. So.

Healey: Do you not like even commercial flying?

Medina: No, I'm okay with commercial flying because I have a destination to go to. That—I don't know if it was because my little girl was so small, and I just felt like if anything happens and I just drop out of the sky, you know, I'm never going to see that little girl again. So, I didn't like it. I knew I had a job to do, and I had to go up because I was one of the only people for whatever reason, you know. But most of the guys wanted to go up all the time anyway. So, I let them have the chance. But the two times that I went up it was because no one else was available.

Healey: Okay. Now, Cherry Point slash the Havelock area, I'm about to ask you what did you do with—for—on your relaxation time? You've already indicated that you joined a church, and you lived off base. And you had a husband. So, what did you do? How often did you go home? What did you do for liberty and relaxation around that area?

[00:40:13]

Medina: Well, we made a lot of friends. And when you're away from home, even though while you're in uniform, you're all Marines. When you come out of uniform you feel out of place as a Hispanic in North Carolina. So, it seemed like all of the Hispanics from the units collected together. So, we made friends with fellow Hispanics. They came to my house because I would cook. And I made friends with their wives, although it was hard to be close friends because I was a Marine, but I was also a wife, and so I kind of didn't fit into anybody's, you know. And I didn't have any—a whole lot of fellow—female Marine friends 'cause I was the only one who was married to another Marine. And so, it was a weird limbo to be in. But we hung out with each other, we went, you know, to the coast, and swam in the water. And we'd drive to friends' houses that were close. Like we went to New Jersey, and to Virginia, for people who lived close. We spent most of our liberty with them. And we only went home twice that I know of while we were in the military.

Healey: Back to Wisconsin.

Medina: Mm-hm. To visit. And the one time so that we could baptize Amanda. And then the second time was to see a family member who was sick.

Healey: Okay. If you had to say what were some of the biggest challenges that you faced when you were in the service? If there were particular challenges for you?

Medina: It was the amount of time Joe deployed because when other units deployed the wives went home. And when Joe deployed I stayed on base by myself. So, I couldn't go home to do, you know, to stay—to be with somebody while he was gone. I had to be working. And so, I got information faster, knowing where he was at. Because it was not the internet age. It was still when you talked on the phone they had a—you had to say, "Over." You know, "How are you doing, honey? Over." And the operator would hit the toggle switch, and then the other person could talk. That was still in those days. So, but because I was on base I could go over to his unit and say, "Hey, where's the squadron now, how are they doing?" And I could get information faster that way. But it was the amount of deploying that he did, and leaving me alone.

Healey: During the four years that you were in the service how often did he deploy?

Medina: I think he was gone two and a half years of that time.

Healey: And you said he started out in—in admin?

Medina: Yes, as a unit diary clerk. But Joe's always been a compassionate spirit. And anybody who came in new, he would say come to my house and stay, rather than making them go to the barracks. He gave away food, he gave away money, he gave away clothes. But he had this ability to learn things about people. And I think his commanders noticed that in his personality, so they moved him—when he deployed they moved him into S-2, which was intelligence. And what he did there I don't know. But they felt he was a better fit there.

Healey: Did he go for training for intelligence? Or was it on-the-job training?

Medina: It was on-the-job training.

Healey: Okay. After he got out of the service, I'm jumping ahead a little bit, after he got out of the service, how did he use any of his Marine Corps experience, if he did, in terms of the follow on job?

Medina: He did a few odd jobs. Nothing Marine Corps related. It wasn't until we left North Carolina and moved to Texas that he went to seminary to become a minister.

Healey: Okay. That gives me something to ask you about later on. But I want to see if there's anything else you would like to talk about your Marine Corps experience, and then of course, we'll go ahead.

Medina: I think the only other thing that stands out is when Joe ended up going on that WESTPAC to—and it was a standard deployment. They went to Japan, to Taiwan, to Singapore, but Beirut was in the middle of another civil war. And he ended up off the coast of Beirut/Lebanon. And the various ships that were out there threw a few bombs, you know, they went on their merry way. But as Joe's ship was leaving, that's when the barracks was bombed, and the 241 service members were killed. So, his LHA [amphibious assault ship] turned back around, went to Beirut. And because of what he did in S-1, he ended up tagging and identifying remains of those who were killed. And that affected him severely for the rest of his life.

[00:45:28]

And at the time, you know, you're young, you're just happy he's home, you don't know what he's going through. So—but I knew that it was—he was a different person.

Healey: Did he actually go to identify the remains, did he go into Lebanon, or were the remains brought out to the ship? Do you know?

Medina: He said that he was out on a helicopter that circled the area. He didn't give me specifics. That's really all I know that he did. And even when he went to counseling later, and the doctors at the VA [Veterans Administration] and stuff said, "You know, you can bring your wife at any time." I said, "If he doesn't want to share with me the things that he experienced, then I don't feel I belong in that room." You know, if these are still too—if they're just too private and painful for him to speak about, even to me who's the closest person to him, then I don't believe I'm the one to share it with. So, I never knew the exact details of what he did.

Healey: Was that his late deployment or no?

Medina: Yes. After that he said, "We're done, we're out." And I thought we were going to reenlist. But after he came back from Beirut he said, "We're out of here." And of course he had just gotten back, so I got pregnant the second time. So, we were in long enough for me to have my second child. And then we got out.

Healey: Okay. So, it was really more of your husband's decision or—

Medina: Correct.

Healey: —or were you involved in the decision making at all to get out of the service?

Medina: I pretty much just agreed only because I noticed the change in him, and I knew that he wasn't the same. So, I didn't want him to continue to be angry. And that's what he was. He was angry. Just so, so angry for years.

Healey: And did you get out of the service on the same day, or what?

Medina: Within a few, within a few months of each other. I got out in August, the end of August, I believe, and he didn't get out until December.

Healey: Did he have a longer contract? Or was he extended?

Medina: He was on a forced extension.

Healey: A forced extension?

Medina: Mm-hm. Because of the Beirut thing and then, you know, they close everything up, and you know, do all of the after-action reports from the deployment. And so, that was the end of his contract in December.

Healey: How about you? Did you get out at the end of your anticipated service, or were you forced to stay too?

Medina: No, I apologize. While he was deployed—remember I said I thought we were going to reenlist? So, I had reenlisted while he was deployed. I have the pictures of my reenlistment in just raising my hand and saying, “Yep, I'm here for another four years.” So, when he came back and said, “We're out, we're done.” And I got pregnant, I was able to waiver out because of maternity.

Healey: Okay. But you were—you did deliver your second child when you were still on active duty?

Medina: Correct, mm-hm.

Healey: So, how much time do you have between the time he came back, and between the time you go out? How much lead time did you have, so to speak, between when you knew you were getting out and—

Medina: Maybe about a month or so. And Joe was, you know, turn of the dime kind of person. When he made the decision, that was the decision, he ruled the roost. And so, I grew up with him, this is how our relationship worked, this was the dynamics, he was always Hispanic male head of the household, and I was the accommodating wife.

Healey: And when you both separated what were your ranks?

Medina: Corporals.

Healey: You were both corporals.

Medina: Mm-hm. He was in line to become sergeant, but he would have had to stay in for a few more months, and he did not want to say one minute longer than he had to. He was that angry. And he said no, thank you, and he got out as a corporal. And the day after he got out, he brought in a pickup truck, we threw all our uniforms in the back of the pickup truck, and it drove away. We have no original uniforms from the time we served.

[00:50:03]

Healey: Oh, he drove the uniforms away.

Medina: Yes. He got rid of them. He wanted nothing else to do with them.

Healey: And when you left the Cherry Point/Havelock area, where did you go from there?

Medina: We went to Texas. We moved to San Antonio, Texas. Because, I like I said, we were part of a church group. And when Joe was at a conference he met a Hispanic pastor that told him, "You need to be in ministry." So, he said, "I'll sponsor you to come to Texas to work in my church as an assistant pastor." And Joe was only twenty-five years old. And he said, "We're moving to Texas." So, I was like, okay. I packed up our little family and we drove from North Carolina to San Antonio, Texas.

Healey: San Antonio, Texas.

Medina: Mm-hm.

Healey: And how long did you and your husband stay in San Antonio?

Medina: We stayed in San Antonio for another year. And then we moved to Dallas. Maybe a year and a half.

Healey: And your husband worked in ministry?

Medina: Mm-hm. As a pastor.

Healey: And what kind of a church was it that you belonged to?

Medina: It was a Baptist Church. Mm-hm. But they were English speaking Hispanic churches. So, that was—like I said, we kind of collected up as a Hispanic group on base, but we were all English speakers. And so, that's what we gravitated to when we went to Texas.

Healey: So, your first time in Texas?

Medina: Yes, it was. So, it was exciting. We have family all over, so we just started calling people, and they would just invite us into their homes, and say, hey, cousin, everybody's a cousin. And it was, it was nice. I really enjoyed being around extended family. And by that time, by the time we left San Antonio for Dallas we already have five children. So, the babies just kept coming. [Laughs]

Healey: Okay. And how long did you stay in Texas?

Medina: A total of eleven years. So, we were in Dallas for a number of years, Joe started more churches, completed seminary. But it—when our children were starting to get older, and actually my father had passed away in '99, and I said, "I want to come home." You know, I want our children to grow up with their immediate family. So, in '99 we moved back home.

Healey: And your husband was okay with that also?

Medina: Yes. Because it was very rarely that I put my foot down about something, but when I did he knew I meant business. So, he said, "Yes, we will go home."

Healey: So, in approximately 1999 you came back to Wisconsin.

Medina: Mm-hm.

Healey: And what were you doing while you were in Texas?

Medina: I always worked because in ministry, and in those small independent churches, you don't make a lot of money. So, I did what I could in the evenings, in the afternoons, mostly administrative work. You know, as a clerical whatever, just so that we could always have insurance, and that we had stable income coming in. 'Cause as you move from church, to church, to church, you know, your income goes up. I remember Joe's first check in San Antonio was \$154. And I said, there's no way on god's green earth we're going to be able to support a family of five, you know, or with five children, family of seven, on \$154, so I got a job. And I've been working ever since.

Healey: And when you came back to Wisconsin, you settled in Waukesha?

Medina: Yes—no, I'm sorry, we settled in Genesee, which is where Joe grew up in a little country farmhouse. And we lived there for several years. And that—I wasn't a fan of that. But that Joe wanted the kids to grow up in a rural area.

Healey: How far is Genesee to Waukesha?

Medina: It's about seven miles west of here. And in the Kettle-Moraine area where he grew up. But after a while I said, "Okay, I'm done. We need to come back to the city." So, it was about, we lived there about ten years.

Healey: How old were your children when you came back to the city of Waukesha?

Medina: All of them were almost adults. It was only the youngest two that were still at home. And so, there wasn't a great consideration as far as school was concerned. Actually, the youngest one, we were driving back and forth to the Kettle-Moraine School District for her last year of school, and then she came to the Waukesha School District. I'm sorry, I need some water.

Healey: No problem.

Medina: Do you want any water?

Healey: No, thank you. I appreciate it. I guess you've been doing a lot of talking, which is good, but I know you need a water break. So, when you came to Waukesha, what did you do, you and your husband?

[00:55:16]

Medina: Well, Joe came back with the intention of starting another church in Pewaukee, which he did. And I went back to administrative work. I worked for GE [General Electric] for a time, I worked for a small IT [Information Technology] company in Hartland for a while, and then I found a job back at Carroll as administrative assistant. And it was perfect. I loved it, I was home, I was with people I knew again, and I stayed there for thirteen years.

Healey: And that's Carroll College?

Medina: Mm-hm. Which became Carroll University later.

Healey: So, you changed jobs after thirteen years. What did you do after Carroll College?

Medina: I didn't leave Carroll willingly. While I was at Carroll, this is when Joe started to become sick. He would drop things, his legs would buckle, he would get dizzy. He couldn't speak, we thought he was getting something like Parkinson's disease, or along those lines. We already knew he was diabetic, so we thought maybe it

was something along those lines. And so, he was in and out of the hospital constantly. And Joe, I don't know if he sensed it or what, but he said, "You need to go back to school. You work at Carroll, you can take classes for free." He said, "Finish your degree." So, I was like sure, Joe was always directing me. And I loved education anyway. So, I started taking classes.

Healey: Was that for your bachelor's degree?

Medina: Yes. And since he was a minister, and this is what we were doing, my degree was in religious studies with a minor in communication. And I graduated cum laude, and it was wonderful. He was there at my graduation. But by the time I graduated in May of 2016, he was already in a wheelchair, or walking with braces. We still didn't know what was wrong neurologically, but we also knew he had severe heart disease. And so, he was at the VA in and out, in and out. Actually the day of my graduation party, we had to cancel it because he was hospitalized again. And the doctor said we can't wait any longer, he needs a quadruple bypass and a valve replacement. So, he went in in July, stayed almost the entire month of July, was out for a few days in August, went back into the emergency room August 8, and on August 12th he passed away. So, I was left in limbo, I didn't know what to do.

Healey: That was 2016?

Medina: Correct. And I was still at Carroll. So supportive. They did so much for me. My veterans there that I was working with, they were all just gathered around me. They were just—my children, my family, was wonderful. And so, I wanted to stay there because of the community I created there, but it wasn't enough money. But I had created a community in the whole southwest area with veterans groups, and that's when UW Milwaukee approached me and said, "You know what, we think you're a good fit here in our military and veteran's services, come and apply." And I did, and that's when I got the job in August of 2018.

Healey: How long have you been working with veteran's services groups?

Medina: That was accidental as well. And that was about 2010 maybe, 2009. We had a young Marine coming through campus, and he was always angry. Marines are always angry. Because he was deploying in and out, and he was losing credits, he was losing money. He couldn't figure out how to get in and out of the school with his deployments. And he saw my Marine Corps stickers, and things, and the various things I had around my desk, and he said, "You need to tell me as a fellow Marine, how I can navigate this school without losing so much money." And I said, "Those are good questions." And so, we went in and out of various offices and things, and they said, "Well, we've never had this problem before, we don't have that many military at Carroll University." And so, they started to create policy.

Healey: And this Marine was a reserve?

Medina: Yes. He was with Fox Company in Milwaukee. And so, they said, “Okay, you young man, and the administrators, let’s figure out how to create policy.” “Well, we don’t understand this.” I said, “Let me call my friends at UWM [University of Wisconsin Madison], let me call my friends in Madison, let me call my friends in Whitewater.” And so, everybody was developing policy because it was, you know, Iran, Iraq, and all of those things, they were all having the same problems. So, we kind of—somebody called this person, somebody called that person. And it started through him that I began to create this little network of people. And then post-9/11 GI Bill benefits came out and everybody was like how do we do this.

[01:00:33]

So, I met with the Registrar’s Office, I met with, again, my friends at other schools, and we said we’ve got to do more for veterans in this area. And so, they created a consortium out of UW Milwaukee, and we just started sharing best practices. And so, I would say between about 2007, and ’08, and ’09, is when I said we need to do more. And I was still administrative assistant. But I just did it because I wanted to help my fellow—my fellow veterans. And I was able to develop an actual office in 2015.

Healey: At Carroll?

Medina: At Carroll University. The Office of Military and Veteran Services.

Healey: And Carroll College has how many?

Medina: Less than one hundred.

Healey: Less than one hundred.

Medina: Yes.

Healey: Okay. And they can come in and—when you were at Carroll College come in and ask you about benefits, how to get benefits?

Medina: Right. We had a—we had a certifying official, and she would do all of the technical work. I would be more of a pseudo-advisor and say, okay, you know that you can’t drop, or do an incomplete, at this point in time, and a regular student could and walk away, you can’t because then you will have to pay back your benefits to the government. So, you need to tough it out, and take as best a grade as you can, or you’ve got to figure out how to pay back all this money. So, just know—so, those were the little nuances that advisors and the registrars just didn’t get. You know, where the—and then there was the reservists getting a

whole different kind of a benefit, and then people like me who were Cold War, who didn't qualify for post-9/11, but there were some Wisconsin GI Bill benefits they could get through state schools, that they couldn't get in a private school. So, there was all kinds of little things that other people wouldn't be able to figure out, and we just kind of piecemealed it together.

Healey: And do you do the same thing now at UW in Milwaukee, or not?

Medina: Yes. But on a larger scale. But the same type of thing. And they're much more organized. They do have a whole office of Military and Veterans Benefits. But that gentleman works with us at the Military and Veterans Resource Center, so that we can make sure that we get the whole picture for the student, academically, and non-academically.

Healey: Is the resource center that you're referring to, is that part of UW?

Medina: That's where I work. I'm the director of that office.

Healey: Okay. Now you mentioned that you got your bachelor's degree before your husband passed away. Let me go back to your husband passing. Did the doctors ever figure what his neurological problems were?

Medina: No, my—like I said, I had always worked to have insurance, so I had good private health insurance, but they were always concentrating on the diabetes. The diabetes to them was the main thing. Truly they thought that the neurological things were a response to his PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. So, they always said, "This is psychological. This is something that whenever you're stressed or upset, your body just responds to it. It's part of your PTSD." And Joe would accept that. So, finally he said, "I've got to go to the VA." And so, when we got to the VA they're the ones that diagnosed the heart disease immediately, and said, "There might be something with the diabetes, the heart disease, and the neurological issues that are all interconnected." But they said, "We've got to get to the most severe case first, and that's your heart disease." But he never recovered from that, so they couldn't investigate anything further.

Healey: And his final days were at the VA Hospital?

Medina: Mm-hm.

Healey: Okay. How did you—from the standpoint of a spouse, how did you feel the VA treatment was for your husband?

Medina: I thought it was excellent. I know a lot of people have trouble with how long it takes to see somebody, or all of the paperwork that goes through, but it's just the nature of the government, you know? If you just have the attitude of I know I'm

going to be helped here, I just have to understand the timing that it takes. Now, I wasn't angry that we found it late, because it was Joe's decision to go to the VA late. It wasn't the VA's delay that made this happen. So, I thought they did a good job. They were very caring, they were very hands on, they explained everything. And it just wasn't enough. It was too little, too late because of our decision to delay going there.

[01:05:20]

Healey: And what age was your husband when he passed?

Medina: Fifty-three.

Healey: Now you mentioned that you—your husband encouraged you to start working on your bachelor's degree, and finish it. And I think you've indicated to me that you've since continued on with your education?

Medina: Yes. Well, I was at a point in my life where I wasn't doing anything. I was just working and coming home, working and coming home, after Joe's death. And then I realized that I wasn't, I wasn't functioning in society. I wasn't present for anything. I avoided everyone. And so, I remember Joe always saying, "You're so smart, but you don't have any common sense." [laughs] So, I said, you know, Carroll pays for a bachelor's and a master's for employees. So, I said it's paid for, I'm going to go. And so, I decided to go into the education field. So, I got my master's degree in Adult, Community, and Professional Education.

Healey: Did you ever work in that field?

Medina: You do in my field because I do programming, and that's a lot of what that educational component was. It adult information for programming and continuing ed. And I'm hoping to able be a teaching assistant at UW Milwaukee, or an adjunct professor at Carroll University. As soon as I can figure out how to put together a curriculum. But I know what I want. I know what the subject is, I'm just working on the curriculum.

Healey: And what are you thinking about?

Medina: At Carroll, because it's a religious school, I want to be—it's Presbyterian based, I want to go into the religious studies/philosophies. They have a class called Sorrow and Hope. And I want to incorporate moral injury, moral trauma, which is what I believe Joe had. He did have some PTSD, but he had more of a—his moral base was offended by the actions of the military, and his part in Beirut that really, really affected his spirit, and actually caused him shame. It was in 19—oh gosh, I don't know what year. But when we were in Dallas, Texas he worked at Firestone. And a young lady came in, and she was in a hijab. But she was—had

severe burns. You could see it on her hands, and her face. And Joe said, do you mind—and like I said, he always had a compassionate spirit, and he had a way of talking to people. And he said, “Do you mind me asking how you got so severely burned?” And she said, “Yes, when I was a young girl in Lebanon, the Marines bombed my village. And my house was burned, some of my family were lost, and I was burned over eighty-percent of my body.” And that was the next trigger for Joe.

And this is when he became—he went from angry, to depressed. Because you go into the military thinking you’re going to save the world. You’re going to bring democracy to everyone on the globe, and do right for everybody. And he realized that the ships that he was on had bombed villages, killed people, and severely marred this young lady for the rest of her life. And he was already a minister, he was bi-vocational. And so, he didn’t know how to justify being a religious, spiritual person trying to do right, knowing that he caused so much harm to other people. And he fought, and fought with this in his mind for the rest of his life. And this is where the moral trauma came in, and this is why I’m—this is where my research is, and this is where I want to teach. In how service members not only suffer with the fear base of what they’ve experienced, but also the moral base of what they’ve experienced or perpetuated through their military service.

Healey: And you’ve already got your master’s degree?

Medina: Correct.

Healey: Okay. And you’re looking at working on a doctors degree.

Medina: Correct.

Healey: And you indicated that Carroll College funded your bachelor’s, and also your master’s degree. Do you have VA benefits? Or if you pursue your—are you working in your doctorate or not yet?

[01:10:00]

Medina: I have not started yet. I am still in the enrollment process. But because I’m in a state school not I can use Wisconsin GI Bill benefits in order to pay for the PhD. If not all of it, most of it.

Healey: And so far you’ve not used any of your Wisconsin GI benefits?

Medina: I have not. Because I’ve had the privilege of using Carroll University.

Healey: Now obviously you work with veterans through your job, and you've done that for almost ten years or so. Any other contacts you have with organizations, veterans' organizations?

Medina: Yes, now. When we moved back to Wisconsin in '99 Joe saw the need for connection back to the military community, so we joined the Marine Corps League. He joined the VFW. We also joined a group called the American GI Forum, which is a group of Hispanic veterans that started in WWII because of discrimination. Hispanics weren't given burial privileges, VA privileges, so that group started as a social awareness group. So, we joined that. And then we created the Latino Veterans Legacy of Valor Project through them. So, we became very, very active in military organizations once we moved back to Wisconsin.

Healey: And how did you hear about the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum Oral History Program?

Medina: When we were with the American GI Forum, we put together a pictorial, the Latino Veterans Pictorial Project. And that came out of Ken Burns's documentary on WWII. I don't know if you heard the controversy on that, but Ken Burns completely left out Hispanic veterans, Native American veterans. And so, the various groups kind of went across the nation and said, start your own oral histories, start your own pictorial projects. And so, when we developed ours here in Wisconsin, the Madison museum actually displayed it for us at one time.

Healey: Okay. I wasn't aware of that. So, thank you. So, that's how you heard about it?

Medina: Correct. Mm-hm.

Healey: Outside of Wisconsin and Texas have you ever gotten together or had reunions with anyone that you met?

Medina: Yes, my friend from boot camp. I've traveled to see her when she lived in Alabama, when she lived in California. She'd come to see me here in Wisconsin.

Healey: And who is that?

Medina: Her name is Emma—well, in boot camp her last name was Layva [??]. I only know her by military. I know she's married. She has a married name. But it's weird, we still call each other by our last names. I don't call her Emma, I call her Layva. There's some things you just can't break.

Healey: And where does she live now?

Medina: California.

Healey: Okay. And you've also indicated that you now because of social media are able to get in contact with some of the folks that you met in the military.

Medina: Yes. And we were going to get together for the 100th anniversary of women in the Marine Corps, but it was not long after Joe had passed away, and I wasn't ready to be out. So, I missed that opportunity to see a lot of those women.

Healey: Okay. You've talked a lot about your experience in the military, and expressed your feelings, and well as your husband's feelings, and some of the impact that service in the Marine Corps had. If you had to summarize, how do you feel about your experience in the military, in the United States Marine Corps?

Medina: Today, I feel very, very proud.

Healey: And you said, today, so—

Medina: Right after we got out, I wasn't angry the way Joe was, I was just sad. I was sad that it didn't turn out the way I thought. Because I was then also proud to be a Marine, but Joe wanted to wipe it off the face of the earth. He didn't want to be called a Marine anymore. He was just—he was just too angry. And then when we moved back to Wisconsin and we saw the veteran community here was so vibrant, and active, and supportive, that I think he finally felt a place to be. And then that's when I understood the magnitude of serving with my spouse, that I never really understood before. When I was younger I just saw it as we both had a job as Marines. But it wasn't until later that I saw we served our country together as a couple. And that's very, very rare. And it was very, very special.

[01:15:22]

Healey: You talked about some of the things in boot camp that kind of surprised you. Overall, kind of what surprised you about your military experience, and what didn't you expect about your military experience that you came to either realized what is everyday routine, or not routine?

Medina: Right. I was too young and ignorant to know that there was a difference. I had never had an actual job out of high school. What surprised me most being in the military was how much I realized I was an American. Because you're in the military and they're always saying we're doing this for country, God, country, corps, God, country, corps, it was constantly repeated over and over again. And I thought, I'm—this is for my country, this is for people I've never known, you know? My husband is deployed overseas for people he doesn't know in Kansas, or you know, Illinois and Wisconsin, he's out there for those people. So, I was really surprised at how patriotic I became. I didn't realize the love of country that I developed. I wish I would have understood more the magnitude of the

importance of my actual work. Because I was in a training squadron I didn't deploy, I didn't go any place of danger, but I still had a very important role in the men and women that did go out. I just minimized what I did. It was like, oh, I just go to base and back. But now that I'm older, I see that there was an importance to what I did.

Healey: How did that experience, your four years in the service, impact on the path of your life, or on your character? You already touched on some of that, but is there anything—did it change your path at all?

Medina: Yes. It made me more service-oriented. Every job I've had since, and every volunteer community thing I've done, is always to serve people. We've got to help. We've got to see our part in the community. And if they need help, we need to offer it in some way. And the Marine Corps has been just an indelible stamp on there. You know, order, rank, respect, honor, structure, all of that has fed into what we did ever since we served. We still use language. When we come home from vacation bible school, I told my husband one time, now we need an after-action report. And he's like, what? Well, let's debrief. And he's like, you mean talk about what happened, you know? I was like yes, yes, we've got to figure out what to do. But there's certain things that just don't leave you because they just were that important.

Healey: Why was it important for you to decide to do this oral history?

Medina: Like I said before, I minimized what I did, thinking I didn't do as much as someone else. But I want people to know that there is no minimum role in the military, and that if I could just say I was an aircraft technician on a training squadron and didn't go anywhere for four years, but I made a difference, than maybe somebody else will believe as well they made a difference as well.

Healey: Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

Medina: I can't think of anything.

Healey: Okay.

Medina: I'll probably think about it later and say, "Oh, I should have told her this or that."

Healey: Well, you've covered a lot of territory—

Medina: Yes.

Healey: —in less than an hour and a half. And provided a lot about your military experience, as well as your life. So, I thank you for service.

Medina: And yours.

Healey: And for providing—

Medina: Is your story in there?

Healey: Yes. Just recently.

Medina: Excellent.

Healey: Okay, well thank you, Yolanda.

Medina: Thank you.

[End of OH2153.Medina access]

[End of interview]