

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Raymond P. Konz-Krzyminski
Religious Program Specialist, US Navy
2019

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Konz-Krzyminski, Raymond P. (1954-), Oral History Interview, 2019.

Approximate length: 2 hours 31 minutes

Contact *WVM Research Center* for access to the original recording.

Summary:

In this oral history interview, Raymond Paul Konz-Krzyminski discusses his service in the United States Navy from 1976 to 1978, including deployment aboard the USS *Independence* (CV-62).

One of six children and son of a Milwaukee, Wisconsin, police detective, Konz-Krzyminski was conscious early on of a service ethic within his family. He had uncles who served in Second World War on D-Day and at Tarawa and an older brother in the Army Reserves. An extensive family roster that stretched back to a conscript ancestor in the army of the Russian czar. These stories of duty, protection, and the military filled the young Konz-Krzyminski's consciousness. Peers ridiculed him due to his weight and lack of athleticism. His Catholic schooling and service as an altar boy combined with his deep patriotism to give him a moral compass in life.

The eighteen-year-old Konz-Krzyminski felt fortunate when the draft ended. He states that he was planning to be a priest but was buffeted by confusion over his identity. A brief enrollment in a Diocesan seminary led him to stay with his retired parents in Florida. He concluded that the priesthood was not to be his calling. After a few years in Florida and a broken marriage engagement he returned to Milwaukee in 1975. At his brother-in-law's suggestion Raymond decided to pursue military service and visited a recruiting station. With the Air Force recruiter at lunch, Raymond was Navy-bound. Konz-Krzyminski recalls his confusion at a question on his enlistment papers regarding homosexuality. He tested high in typing skills and would be trained as a clerical assistant.

Konz-Krzyminski's first stop was at Orlando, Florida, for basic training. His basic training would last twenty-six weeks. He tells of being assigned to the "Fat Boy Training Company" after passing the swimming test but failing the physical. He joined a Blue Jacket choir and performed at recruit graduations. Upon completion of the "Fat Boy Training Company" and after a stay in sick bay for a surgical procedure, Konz-Krzyminski went to a medical holding company. Passing the physical he then began basic training. He found basic training to be congenial as he states that he likes rules, and structure and camaraderie prevailed there. Konz-Krzyminski covers what he learned, skills in basic training as well as terms used in the barracks. After basic training Konz-Krzyminski went to administrative training school in Meridian, Mississippi. He left yeoman school as an E-2, seaman apprentice, explaining why his attempt to become an E-4 petty officer was unsuccessful.

Konz-Krzyminski's orders leaving A School were to report to Naval Air Command in San Diego, California, but he instead volunteered as a substitute in a religious specialist training program. In Biloxi, Mississippi, at Keesler Air Force Base, he became a yeoman with a

Religious Petty Officer specialty. At that time, the Navy did not have a school for chaplain's assistant. He describes the basics learned: how to "rig" for church services, handling the chaplain's billet, filing, counseling. Konz-Krzyminski further describes his time in Biloxi as a period of greater awareness of his sexual orientation aided by a 1970's national culture that was bringing to the fore the disco group Village People.

Obedying the orders of the man he had volunteered to replace, Konz-Krzyminski arrived at the USS *Independence* docked in Norfolk, Virginia. Raymond expresses his awe at the city that was the aircraft carrier, with 5,000 people and eighty planes and his consciousness of standing out aboard ship with his Navy jeans and baseball cap. He talks of dating and of gay bars in the 70s. He explains why working in the chaplain's office was "an injection of humanity" in the world of a nuclear-armed aircraft carrier. He speaks of electric typewriters and payroll ledger books, of the Presbyterian chaplain who was a big brother to him, and of another chaplain who had a drinking problem.

Konz-Krzyminski talks of his two deployments, to the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. The Caribbean cruise lasted nine months and he witnessed a hurricane's impact. In addition to his duties as chaplain's assistant he was a hull repair technician. He talks of memorial services and the emotional reserve of the serviceman. He remembers being called to general quarters, and relates a harrowing incident between him and a Marine detachment moving a nuclear weapon aboard ship. He met his dearest friend and came out as a gay man even as another crewmember was discharged over discovered love letters. The ship visited Naples, Italy, affording Raymond his first sight of Europe and a memorable visit. Whether in Italy, Spain, or on the island of Crete, Konz-Krzyminski felt respected as a member of the United States Armed Forces. He always behaved as a representative of the armed forces and of the United States and believes such a belief well-matched his desire at the time to keep his sexual orientation a secret.

The "Indie" back in drydock at Norfolk, Raymond helped prepare the ship for it's next deployment and worked to pass an examination to advance to Petty Officer Third Class. He relays how a case of police entrapment and a night in jail led him, upon the advice of the chaplain, to report the incident to the Naval Investigative Service. Konz-Krzyminski reports that he is glad he followed the chaplain's advice. He was discharged as honorable with some code, with GI Bill eligibility and all benefits intact, however, as the Navy could not discharge a top-rated sailor, his ranking was lowered. Although recently promoted to E-4, his paperwork hadn't yet gone through, and, being administratively discharged, he had to leave the Navy as an E-3.

Konz-Krzyminski recalls his decision to let his family know the circumstances of his leaving the military. He returned to Milwaukee, entered the restaurant business, went to college, and mastered a drinking problem. He met his husband in 1983. He obtained a master's degree in social work and, following family tradition, interned at the Veterans Administration (VA) Center in Milwaukee. He speaks of his interest in working with the elderly and the addicted. Hired by the VA, he worked in alcohol and drug and related psychotherapy treatment. He shares his view of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell federal policy on military service initiated in February 1994 during the Clinton Administration's first term.

Konz-Krzyminski states that his “disempowering and shameful” discharge and his whole military experience impacted his ability to openly answer patient’s personal questions. He states that he overcame this feeling through helping to organize a mental health summit for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered veterans and through service on a VA LGBT Equal Employment Opportunity committee.

Especially helpful for him was the interest expressed by the military in his proffered query on resuming service as an officer. Due to family wishes he had to decline, but it was greatly empowering for him to go from non-acceptance as a gay man in the military in 1978 to interest in him as an officer. He spent fourteen years at the VA in psychiatric social work. While not in mental health currently he works on other matters of concern to veterans. Konz-Krzyminski mentions two programs he’s involved in at the VA to help get veterans through addictions treatments. He feels his military background makes him more empathetic with veterans than other social workers.

Konz-Krzyminski believes that society is currently more tolerant of differing sexual identity. He expresses his concern for the moral direction of young returning veterans in their twenties. He feels grateful for his military experience, having learned much. Military service fulfilled a family ethos and was a personal healing. Of all branches of the service, the Navy, the water, provided healing.

Biographical Sketch:

Raymond Konz-Krzyminski was raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in a family with a long military tradition. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1976 to 1978, including deployments aboard the USS *Independence* (CV-62). A social worker, he works for the Veterans Administration in Milwaukee.

Archivist’s notes:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. It is strongly suggested that researchers directly engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Rachelle Halaska, 2019.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2020.

Reviewed by Jeff Javid, 2020.

Abstract written by Jeff Javid, 2020

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH2179.Konz-Krzyminski_file1_access]

Halaska: Today is December 2, 2019. This is an interview with Raymond Paul Konz-Krzyminski, who served with the United States Navy aboard the USS *Independence* (CV-62) from 1976 to 1978. The interview is being conducted at his home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Rachelle Halaska and this interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veteran Museum Oral History Program. All right, Raymond. Thank you for meeting with me today.

Konz-Krzyminski: It's good to be meeting with you.

Halaska: Let's just start off the interview. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Konz-Krzyminski: I was born in Milwaukee in—October 31, 1954. I was the sixth of six children. My dad was forty-six and mother was forty-two when I was born.

Halaska: Okay. I'm just going to scoot this. And then can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in Milwaukee during that time?

Konz-Krzyminski: I grew up in the house that you're interviewing me in. [Coughs] The south side of Milwaukee. I had—my mother's family was Polish, so my grandparents were immigrants. And my father's family was German and his parents were immigrants. I—we spent most of the—most of our times at that time in life with my mother's family because they were on the south side. And at that point in my life, my—we were always ar—I went to a Catholic school just down the block. I walked to school. I was an altar boy at the church, and at the convent across the street, and the Catholic hospital. I had—was closest to two siblings. They were sisters. I was obese and not really sports minded. So I was kind of ridiculed for being a sissy and for being fat, although I had friends and I always had fun. It was kind of like the obesity, and probably the sissiness was, like, something we could ignore or go into denial over—with, because it would be like—I would be having a great time until that ugly stuff would rear its head. Otherwise, life was really good.

Halaska: Okay. And can you tell me about military service in your family?

Konz-Krzyminski: Sure. Oh, absolutely. So it was 1954. The—there wasn't much talk when I was a kid. My oldest brother was 19 years older than me. So when I first was at that age where you start getting conscious and you can remember, so, five, six, seven, he

was off in the Army. So I really don't remember much of him. It was peacetime. He was in Germany. There was some talk of him visiting German relatives, cousins and stuff. And so I s—I think I started, from that point, getting the connection about the military. My dad was a policeman and he was already on the force many years, so by the time I was a little kid, he was a detective, although I really remember some great stories of when he was a beat cop. That's how he met my mother. She worked downtown. And so I would just kind of hear these stories of service, protection, military. I wasn't too crazy about military movies. I wasn't into—we weren't allowed to play with guns because my dad was a cop and he had a gun in the house all the time, off duty, as well. So we didn't—we couldn't play with guns. It was—I think we had squirt guns, maybe, later on. But—so that whole, you know, GI Joe stuff was not part of my growing up, whereas a story about an uncle who was killed in Tarawa—that was my dad's brother Michael, who was killed in the Battle of Tarawa in 1945. I think it was '45—'43, '45, something around there. And there was a really tragic story about how the family found out on Christmas Eve. And it was just a very, very sad story.

[00:05:19]

But also, there was a photograph of my grandparents with five, six, seven of my twelve German relatives who were all in the service at the same time. My mom's family, she had three brothers who—three brothers? Eugene, Edmond [??]—no, two brothers because there were four girls. Four girls and two br—they were—one was injured in the—in—at D-Day, and the other was in the Army. Plus my grandfather was in the Czar's army in Russia. He was Polish, but when Poland—Russia took over Poland, he had to be in the Army, so he took care of the Czar's horses, so there was this, like, fabulous portrait of my grandfather in this wonderful Russian uniform on a horse or around—you know, so there was all of that kind of stuff. Plus there was a time of—you know, there were still those old movies on—about patriotic films. And then my brother went off and he joined the Army Reserves. And then my sister started dating these guys. And it was the '60s, so these were Vietnam vets who, you know, were a little into things. And it was the '60s and early '70s, and so my experience with—that was pretty much my experience with the military. We were hugely patriotic. Every holiday, the flags would go up. And we lived very near the VA medical center in Milwaukee, and the federal cemetery, and we were just always very patriotic and, you know, flag waving and, you know, learned how to treat the flag with respect, and all of that stuff. Plus, you know, growing up in the—you know, being a teenager in the '60s when, you know, people were being drafted, and wondering what that was going to be like for me when I turned eighteen, you know, what was that about? And so it was just—it was—we were hugely patriotic. It was all about respect for the flag and the country. And, you know, that was [inaudible]. It was just part of my life.

Halaska: Yeah. Do you have any specific memories about growing up and thinking about the draft and when you started to kind of realize what that meant for you?

Konz-
Krzyminski: So—

Halaska: What it could mean for you?

Konz-
Krzyminski: I think that when I would start to think about it—I was pretty avoidant, as a kid. So if I could—you know, it was kind of like the—I grew up with the—either the denial, the ability to go into denial to [laughs] preserve my emotions, or the idea of the draft was, like, I just want to kind of avoid it and not think about it. And fortunately, when I turned eighteen, I—the dr—I think the draft stopped. There wasn't any more drafting anymore, or something like that. Yeah. I mean, I did sign up with the Selective Service. I—like, I don't even remember that. And I'm not demented yet, too much. [Both laugh] Anyhow, but I don't even remember—and I remember lots of stuff, so that was one of those things that I did that I put out of my mind. Yeah. That was like, “Pff [??]. Let's get this over with [Halaska laughs] and move on.”

Halaska: Mm-hm. Which high school were you going to?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Actually, so, growing up, I was kind of groomed to be a priest. I went to this little Catholic school over here. And so I remember in first or second grade, it was like, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” And I was like, “I want to be a priest.” That's what I wanted to be. I drew a picture of—you know, everybody drew what they were going to be when they grew up, and I drew a priest at an altar, celebrating Mass. So I went to a Catholic high school, seminary high school in East Troy, Wisconsin on Lake Beulah. It was called Divine Word Seminary, the Society of the Divine Word. And it was—there was a boarding school seminary in East Troy about forty-five minutes away.

[00:10:10]

Halaska: So you went to boarding school?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Mm-hm. Freshman, sophomore, junior year. At the end of my junior year, they must've saw something in me that they felt I wasn't growing spiritually, and they suggested I go to a private school for—I mean, a non-Catholic school, or a non-seminary school for at least a year to take some time off, that I wasn't growing spiritually. And that was huge. That was a huge [sighs] shock, disappointment, rejection in my life. It was awful. And they told me the night before we were leaving. You know, it was like there was no—you know, we don't think—this was just a bomb dropped on me. And so I had to come home feeling embarrassed and all that stuff, and explain that. So I went to public high school in Milwaukee,

South Division High. And I had so many credits from school that I barely needed to even go through that semester, and that was kind of like I was—I don't know. Was I—it was 1971, so I had to be, oh, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. I was sixteen years old. Seven—yeah. Yeah, I was seventeen years old and starting to get confused about sexual identity, orientation, experiencing [*sic*] with, you know, substances. It was the '70s. So there was a lot going on [laughs] then.

Halaska: Would—

Konz-

Krzyminski: I graduated from high school in that January. And in that process, just before that, I registered for the Diocesan seminary, here in Milwaukee, for the college and—

Halaska: What was that? The—

Konz-

Krzyminski: The Diocesan seminary, here in—for college at—St. Francis de Sales Seminary on Lake Drive. And I went there for a few months and I—my parents had just retired and moved to Florida for the winter months. And so it was January I started there. And I developed mono, like, really awful mono, and I think I got it from kissing my sister's husband's niece who was, like, you know, seventeen, eighteen, too. And it was just odd. So, anyhow. But I got this mono, [Halaska laughs] and I moved to Florida. So I lived in Florida with my parents during the winter months and I got a job down there, and then they came back up here during the summer months. So I lived in Florida for a few years.

Halaska: Okay. And then when did you start thinking about joining the Navy?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Oh my god. Much later. [Laughs] I lived in Florida for a couple, a few years, worked at a hospital in inventory control. I was confused about what my goals were with priesthood. Sorry. Oh, sorry. Confused what my goals were about priesthood. Decided that that wasn't the life for me. I was having too good of a time running around. I met a girl and got engaged. Like, I was seventeen, eighteen years old, almost [??] like my parents. I don't know. In retrospect, being gay now, I think maybe they were suspicious so they were delighted that something was—you know, at that—[Halaska laughs] I don't know. Nobody's ever said anything. Anyhow, so I was engaged to this girl, and it—then things just got weird, and we broke up, and I went—came back up here in about 1975, and went back to—I was—I went into St. Camillus Monastery, studying with that order, which was a heal—a religious order that's devoted to care for the sick. They have a special vow to care for the sick. They have a huge facility here in Milwaukee.

[00:14:57]

And I couldn't decide where I was supposed to be, where life was for me at that point. Was it religious life? Was it, you know, footloose and fancy free, running around life? I really was not sure about my sexual orientation, my identity, the whole nine yards. And I left the seminary—the monastery and moved in with my sister because my parents were in Florida. So I lived with my sister and brother-in-law and I was kind of aimless. It was like I didn't know what to do at that point. You know, go to school—my brother-in-law was an ophthalmologist. He was like, “Maybe you want to go, like, to optometry school or something like that.” Or, “Maybe you want to join the Navy.” And I'm like, Navy? I don't want to go to the Navy. [Halaska laughs] I thought, “Maybe the Air Force.” I thought, “Maybe I could do the Air Force. That could be a possibility.” So this is, like, the end of 1975 and I remember the day vividly. So I was driving my nephew to preschool at Alverno College and I decided I was going to go to the Armed Forces recruiting station on the corner of 60th and National Av—where National and Greenfield Avenues intersect near West Ellis. I go in there and I did want to talk to the Air Force recruiter, but the Air Force recruiter was out to lunch, and the Navy guy said, “But you want to hear what the Navy's got to offer?” And I was like, “Yeah, sure.” So this guy was really good. He had me enlisted within five days [both laugh] in some sort of cash program, or something like that. It was a cash delay program with a delayed—it was not much of a delayed enlistment. It was, like, twenty-five days before they were picking me up with taxi cabs, and they told me I could have this school I could go to, this—one of my skills, I think, that I had was, after eighth grade, my sister said, “You're going to take a typing class.” And I was like, “Okay, whatever.” I had no idea. And I typed, like, ninety words a minute. So they thought that was delightful. And they thought, “Wow, you're really going to be good as a clerical, administrative kind of assistant. So, like, and we have—it's called being a yeoman.” And I'm like, “Oh, okay, whatever that is. Yeoman.” [Halaska laughs]

So that's what I—they promised me this school, this yeoman school, and I enlisted in the Navy, and everybody was thrilled, you know, flag waving and all excited. But—and I was actually, too. I didn't know—I had no clue what I was headed for. I was still a little bit on the heavy side, but I passed, you know, the weight requirement, and the height. I'm six—I'm tall. I was six-two then. And I kind of thought I would go to Great Lakes [Naval Training Center], but they sent me down to Orlando, Florida, where the—it was the only place where WAVES, women in the N—I don't think they go by WAVES anymore. In fact, I know they don't—women in the Navy train. So it was co-ed, basic recruit training command in Orlando, Florida. Do you want to see the picture? I'll show you later.

Halaska: Yeah. Show me later.

Konz-
Krzyminski: [Laughs] Okay. So it was—you know, I went in January and it was supposed to be nine weeks, but it ended up being twenty-six weeks. So that was quite the experience. I went in, went through the whole experience where they shave your

head, they throw your filthy clothes in a box, and they mail them to your parents, and give you the uniform. And we wore dungarees, unhemmed dungarees and tennis shoes.

Halaska: What are dungarees?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Blue jeans, kind of. Not really blue jeans, blue jeans. Not like denim blue jeans, but they were, like, a different kind of fabric-y blue jean, kind of fabric. And then we had kind of like a blue smock shirt that you wore. And then—but at this point in in-processing, the—we did our s—we did this. We got our little baseball cap and we marched around as recruit training command. And we had to do our swim test, which I had no problem with, and jumped in, swim. And then there was all these kids who—these guys from—who grew up in, really, the core of the city who've never been in a swimming pool. They were fishing them out of the water and they ended up putting them in this, like, swimming holding company, where—so, and they taught them how to swim. But I passed this test.

[00:20:03]

Then the next thing was the JFK fitness test. Well, I didn't pass that. So I was in this—we nicknamed it the fat boy holding company. Actually, it wasn't called that. But it was kind of shameful, too, because we didn't get to the point of processing where you could hem your pants, so your pants weren't hemmed, so you're walking around with unhemmed pants, with white tennis shoes, with these blue denim things. Everyone else is in black boots. And you're marching around the base with these little—you're these—you're in this fat boy holding company with unhemmed pants and white tennis shoes and being taken to the gym every day. Your job was to go to the gym and work out. And, you know, you had these recruit officers screaming at you, calling you fat pigs, and exercising, and, you know, like, slamming. It was, like, unbelievable. It was—you know, I think I learned how to become bulimic there. You'd go have breakfast and then you'd go run right after breakfast, but there was no way to keep food down after—you know, in the—you know, and this was starting to get into warmer weather in Florida. And, you know, it was awful. And then, I was like, you know what? I want out of here. I was, like, *totally* wanting to be out of here.

Halaska: Did you have any other friends in the group? Like, did you make friends with other people in the group, or—?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Well, there was—well, so anyhow, at—not at that point. It was still—it was, like, the fat boy holding company. It was awful. And so when—I had this, like, pilonidal cyst on my tailbone. So it was, like, this little cyst that developed. And it was painful. To do sit-ups was really painful. They were like, “Okay, we're going to send you to sick bay.” So they sent me to sick bay. This was it. This was my

out. I'm getting out of the Navy. Yippee. And—but I did love what was going on there. Even in this little fat boy holding company, when we would march, and I would—there was this camaraderie and this kind of—like, you were present for each—you know, it was just, I like rules. I like rules. I do really well. Tell me what—give me a structure and I work really well with rules. I don't always obey all the rules, but [both laugh] I know what they are, and it's good to know. So they put me in the—they took me to sick bay, and I thought, "This was my out." And they said, "Oh, no. We can operate on that." So I'm like, "What?" So that—they transferred me to sick bay. They did this little pilonidal cyst surgery on me, which was really much of nothing. But I—it was a healing process and I, you know, they put me in a medical holding company at this point. So pretty much the medical holding company was, you ate, you sat around and smoked cigarettes, and you talked with each other. And that's where I'd started to develop some relationships, and support, and get to know some people, and it was good. Of course, you learn how to fold your clothes really well. I mean, I was—I could still do a shirt today and a pair of pants, because you had to get them in a little, tiny locker. So that—I was—I'm good at that. [Both laugh] And so what I discovered was there was a Blue Jacket recruit training chorus at the chapel that—I mean, I had some free time and there was an opportunity to be part of this. So I was—I found out about it, I joined it, and I was in this—now, but remember, you're supposed to be at basic training nine weeks. So this is—I didn't even start basic training in the sense of classes, and practice, and marching, much before—and I'm already there almost nine weeks. And so the guys I came in with were gone. And so the—what we would do, though—so they got us our dress uniforms and it was—at this time it was really getting hot. So we—you know, we got our whites, wint—or summer whites. They were called winter whites, I think. Yeah. Well, I think it was spring already. Whatever. [Halaska laughs] And worked—and what the choir did was they sang and marched and worked with the flag company that was all part of recruits, too, for every graduation every Saturday. So this was, like—you know, talk about parade, and spectacle, [coughs] and patriotic.

[00:25:13]

I mean, I really am a patriot. I really do look at the American flag as, you know, a special symbol. I mean, if I see it tattered, or in, you know, built—and I know some people are like, "Oh, that's just a"—and I'm like, "No, it's not. It's what it represents. You know, it's a sacramental thing to me. So that—I really got into the patriotic spirit of doing it because it really is a patriotic event, those graduations. I mean, it's, like, marching in formation, and flags flying, and singing "Star Spangled Banner," and, you know, the Navy hymns, and songs, and all that. And so I started doing that. And so finally, when I—and I, you know, was part of graduations for weeks, and then I finally got out of the medical holding company, and I went back to do my first physical to pass the physical, and I passed, I mean, because it was running, and I thought that, you know what? There's no way—

Halaska: The physical assessment?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Yeah. So I did pass the JFK physical because I was in great shape at this point. I mean, I went from probably—I was down to, like, 170 pounds. And I was, you know, six-two. I probably lost thirty-some pounds in all this, the whole—twenty-some pounds in all these weeks. And I was in good shape, and I passed, and then I started my basic training. In this process with the choir, I met this girl, and we were friendly, and—but, you know, getting—in retrospect, when I enlisted, there was a question on the enlistment paper. It says, “Did you do—did you ever have homosexual tendencies?” was the question that was on your enlistment paper. And when I looked at that question, I was twenty-one, and I was like—I didn’t really understand what that meant. I mean, I clearly understand what it means today. I don’t know if it was my denial, my dishonesty, my confusion, my own acceptance or awareness of my sexual orientation at that time. And so I didn’t think tendenc—I didn’t get the tendency bit. And so I answered no at that time. Plus, you know, I thought that, you know, maybe dating a woman or a girl would make whatever that was go away. I didn’t know. That’s where I was at with that. So met this girl, and we had some fun, and we kind of dated. We kind of—but I knew things were wrong. I knew that this wasn’t the right thing to do. And—but if there was anything like—the word “gay” just started being used in the ’70s. So if there was anything like this—whatever I—it was called for me, that wasn’t going to be out there in the open. That was going to be—you know, that was a no-no and [coughs] it was—this was pre Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. So nobody would—it was—this was, don’t talk about it, period, in life, wherever. So I graduated. My grandmother came to my graduation. It was wonderful.

Halaska: Oh. Just going back to your basic training, so it was nine weeks long. What did you—tell me about that training experience, so getting to your company, and meeting your drill instructors, and what did you learn during that time?

Konz-

Krzyminski: W—oh my gosh, everything. You learned about rank, rating, you learned Navy history, you learned how to tie rope. You know, you learned all about ships drills. You learned—you practiced ships drills. You know, you had to do fire training. You marched. I was truly a redneck. I mean, it was—I think I graduated—what, it was—I went in in January and I graduated six months later. So that’s February, March, April, May, June. It was Florida. It was Orlando, Florida in June. Let me tell you. Redneck. I had a red—and no—I mean, there was, like, no s—no hair on my neck, and I was—we were all rednecks.

[00:30:00]

Learned Navy history, learned, you know, following command, learned what it’s like being on a boat, learned how to floss my teeth. [Both laugh] I remember one of the most powerful experiences was, “Okay, guys. Floss your teeth.” Flossed my teeth. And then, “Okay, now, brush your teeth.” Brushed my teeth. And then

they had you bite on this, like, red thing that, once you bit on it, it would show any kind of residue of tartar or stuff left on your teeth. And I opened my mouth, and I just—I can still see it. I'm [??] gross. So I usually spend about ten minutes flossing and brushing my teeth [laughs] every morning since 1976. I have—take care of my teeth very well. I'm—I learned the importance of the military. I thank my patriots. I learned about my patriotism. We—it was a peace time. So it was 1976, so there wasn't really a threat of, you know, war. I mean, there was stuff al—there was always some rumblings going on during basis training, you know, during that period. So, I mean, it was such a period of self-transformation that I l—and I didn't realize that I learned so much about myself. Anyhow, is that good enough? (Laughs)

Halaska: Yeah.

Konz-
Krzyminski: What more do you want?

Halaska: What were living conditions like?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Oh, it w—they—you were in a barrack, you know? Bunk beds, gang shower, you had a little bit of a locker you had to fold all your clothes in. You had to have perfect inspection with how you made your rack. You learned the term. The bathroom was a head. Your bed was a rack. You learned cadence. I remember one. [Sings] "If your yeoman is a fag, let me hear your left foot drag." [Both laugh] [whispers; inaudible] stuff like that. So, you know, you learned—I learned if there was anything—that that wasn't something I would talk about. And if there were any kind of—you just didn't look at anybody as a sexual being. Everybody was, you know—you just were in there trying to get through it, do a good job, get a good grade, get the hell out of there.

Halaska: A good grade?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Mm-hm.

Halaska: So did you take tests as you—?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Yeah.

Halaska: Okay.

Konz-
Krzyminski: Oh, yeah. There were some opportunities for, like, accelerated advancements. I had that once in an A school from there—because I knew I was going to a

yeoman school. That was promised. And I was going to Meridian, Mississippi from basic training. So that was a promise to do that, so that was part of my enlistment. And I knew a lot of recruiters were shysters—or I heard stories of recruiters being shysters and people who were promised things. And I was like, “Well, I’ve already got this,” because I knew I could type, you know? That was, like, my big forte.

Halaska: Did you make any friends while you were there? Did you have any—

Konz-
Krzyminski: I did.

Halaska: –buddies?

Konz-
Krzyminski: They were friends but, you know, I remember—because for liberty we went to Disney World. And so I remember going with—we took—I took this girl—she was graduating—and then a fr—somebody I made as a friend took a girl, and so the four of us went to Disney World together. But—you know, and then this one girl that was—it wasn’t the same girl because she wasn’t graduating at the same time. She graduated a week before me. Pam Best [sp??]. I remember her name. I’d like to look her up, see how she’s doing. But, you know, there’s still this—you know, now being an out, gay person, there’s still this kind of like, uh, how would she be—how would she react to that? Maybe I better not. You know, that kind of stuff. So, yeah, but nothing from basic training. I didn’t keep any friendships. I was there twenty-six weeks. I met a lot of people. I was—and then I was in the choir for a long time and, so, yeah, no.

[00:35:02]

Halaska: Okay. And then a lot of people kind of describe the shock of being kind of in that group living environment. Do you think your time at the seminary boarding school kind of prepped you for that?

Konz-
Krzyminski: I was the sixth of six kids.

Halaska: Oh, yeah. [Laughs]

Konz-
Krzyminski: In this house. [Both laugh] Well, there was an upper—my aunt and uncle lived upstairs, and then there was an attic bedroom. So we had two bathrooms, you know, one in the basement with a shower, and so that—and then growing up—and very good observation on your part, Rachelle. Living in the seminary with the boarding school, and then going to the mil—I mean, that was just normal for me. You know, it’s—I’m kind of like a community rant. You know, I’m sort of like—

[Both laugh] I fit in well with a group. In fact, I sing in a choir today and I'm a good chorus boy. I don't do solo well.

Halaska: [Laughs] Are there any other, like, memories from basic training or, like, specific events, or anything like that, that kind of stick out to you that you want to talk about before we move on?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Patriotism was huge for me then. I mean, it was like—it was this perf—I was—it was probably the time in my life I was the most fit, twenty-six weeks of exercise. It was like going to a spa for six months. [Halaska laughs] I mean, not a pleasant spa, but—I mean, it wasn't awful, awful. But, you know, it was awful enough. And—but just the sights and sounds of the military. And looking at the—you know, all that's represented, and respect, and order, you know, and commitment, and loyalty, and all that stuff really—it was—you know, I think it was something—stuff I grew up with. My dad was a cop. My—you know, his message was always, you know, we're on earth to, you know, help and serve each other. I mean, our goal here is—of course, it's to know, and love, and serve God and to help each other to get to Heaven, was the bottom line my parents taught me. And, you know, service to others is just part of my priesthood beliefs, I think, is part of that, and I'm a social worker today. Who knew? [Laughs] Plus I was a waiter for twenty years. Talk about the s—a job of service. So, yeah. That whole patriotism and loyalty and those things, I mean, basic training and my extended stay there really instilled in me.

Halaska: Okay. All right. So now we're moving on to Mississippi, right?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Meridian, Mississippi.

Halaska: All right.

Konz-

Krzyminski: Hee-haw.

Halaska: How did you get there?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Okay, so I came home from my par—my—I went to my parents in Florida. My grandmother was there, and had a nice visit with them. And then I flew to Milwaukee where all my siblings were. And my sister was, like—she was, like, eight and a half, nine months pregnant. She arrives at the—she and her girlfriend are—and these are like forty or—thirty-year-old? Forty or thirty—yeah, probably thirty-ish. Thirty-some-year-old women. And they're in sailor suits. My sister's, like, this really pregnant lady meeting me at the airport in sailor suits. [Halaska laughs] It was just v—it was all very fun, and patriotic, and warm, and

welcoming, and it was wonderful. And I spent time with my family up here. And then I was supposed to go off to Meridian, Mississippi. So I flew there, and I'm going to a yeoman school. And I'm in a barracks where—four guys in a barracks in sort of a quad. And it was administrative training school.

[00:39:35]

So I just did everything I was supposed to, and they were trying to do some accelerated placement. And I would've passed the placement, accelerated placement, but I think they told me later the question I blew was, like—there was like, well, you know, so you go to your first assignment and you're this new, third class petty officer, and you've got these E-1, 2, and 3s, working for you that had been there five years. How are you going to handle if you give them an order to do something and they give you some lip about it? Or I s—my response to that was, "Well, we'll talk about it. We'll reason it out." And that was the wrong response. The correct response was, "I'm senior in rank and you do what I tell you to do," was the correct response. And then I thought, "Oh, okay. I appreciate that." I learned. I didn't get advanced. I really thought I was going to be hot to trot and I was going to get an E-3 out of—an E-4 out of yeoman school. But I left there as an E-2. I had—I remember having some fun roommates. I recognized that I was not interested in girls at this point. Truly, truly not. However, I wasn't talking about it and I certainly wasn't going to let anybody know about that, nor was I going to do anything to cause a problem with my service about that.

So that was my [coughs]—that was mine and mine alone, and I wasn't telling anybody. I had some great roommates. We had a lot of fun. We did some crazy things together. Of course, I could never f—I can't remember their names. I don't have anything written down about them. I would certainly love to look them up. Plus, there's always this kind of like, if they really knew who I was—I mean, I'm a grandpa today and I have, you know, two children with my husband. That's part of who I am, and that would be, like, some of the first stuff I would talk about. And then it would be, like, rejection, and I don't want to—I wouldn't want to bother. So, I don't. I don't look up friends from back then.

Halaska: What were—if you would like to talk about it, what were some of the fun things that you guys did?

Konz-

Krzyminski: We got drunk [Halaska laughs] and we, you know, did crazy things, and we played games, and we went swimming, and, you know, we just had fun. It was just nice to be—to have fun, you know, after work, you know, after school, and it was—we swam and—my room—I think he was married, and so—really young guy, one of them. And I think the other guy might have been gay but, you know, we certainly didn't talk about it. And then there was this other guy who was sort of nondescript. He didn't hang around. We just—it was a good experience. I don't know how—I can't remember how long A School was, but then, just before

graduating from A School, I was—I had orders to go to Naval Air Command in San Diego. I was like, “California.” I mean, I’m from the south side of Milwaukee. I was the furthest—I mean, I went to Canada. We drove there. I—you know, I went to Florida to visit my parents, and lived there for a while. [Coughs] But that was pretty much it. You know, didn’t go to Illinois. Michigan, maybe. Minnesota. I didn’t—yeah, I think I went to Minnesota once. And this was California, you know? And I’m like, “Wow.”

So I got my shots to go to California. I was all excited about going there. And just before graduation, they—somebody came in and says, “Anybody in this class graduating this Friday want to go to a chapel management, a chaplain’s assistant training program?” And I’m like, “Yeah, I do.” [Halaska laughs] I was all excited about that. So I thought—“Yeah, it’s going to be in Biloxi, Mississippi, at an Air Force base.” And I’m like, “Sure, I’ll go.” And so they took me. And so after Meridian, Mississippi, I went down to Biloxi, Mississippi at Keesler Air Force Base. I was kind of attached to Gulfport, but I was really on Keesler Air Force Base. And it was a chaplain—it was a religious program specialist. At that point in the Navy, the Navy didn’t have a chaplain’s assistant program. So they tried to upgrade the quality of that. I’m going to go to the head.

Halaska: Okay.

Konz-
Krzyminski: Okay. Excuse me. Do—

pause in recording

[00:45:02]

Halaska: All right. So you’re talking about going to the chaplain assistant—

Konz-
Krzyminski: Chaplain’s assistant school. So the Navy did not have his—what I learned was, historically, the bad boys were usually assigned to be chaplain’s assistants. And so, somehow, working with the chaplains, it was supposed to help the good bad boys become better. [Halaska laughs] And the Navy was wanting to upgrade that billet. So—but they didn’t have a school yet, so they sent—the Air Force had a religious program specialist type school, chaplain’s assistant school. So they sent us, some of us, to this Air Force base. And this was really odd because our work uniform was this blue dungaree, black boots, this blue kind of short-sleeved shirt, kind of dungaree-ish shirt, and a baseball cap, whereas you get to this Air Force base, these folks are dressed really slick. I mean, it’s a nice crisp, clean shirt—light-colored shirt, and we’re flopping around in these, looking like gardeners, [Halaska laughs] you know, with these baseball caps on. The Navy uniform changed. I did not have the Dixie cap at all. When I enlisted, it had just changed. I think one of the presidents—might’ve been Reagan—wanted to upgrade the Navy

[coughs] status, and so they switched over to an NCO uniform for enlisted f—and [??] officers cover.

So instead of the typical, old bell bottoms, and Dixie cap, and kind of like blouse shirt with a tie, we went to the, you know, suits or crisp shirts, and there was still a little bit with [??]—I—because when I put on my basic training pants [laughs], my white pants, years later, like, in the mid '80s or something [laughs], my niece just screamed. She just was hollering. She says I look like Gene Kelly from the '40s or something. It was very funny. [Halaska laughs] Anyhow, but it was significantly different during this period. [inaudible] — shortly after I was discharged, they certainly—they went back to the Dixie caps, so, which—where they're still at today. Anyhow, so—but it's interesting. If you look at my uncle's picture from the Navy, that's a whole different cover. And this was in the '40s. So, anyhow, [coughs] so I go to this—I get in, and it's different. It's not like—I didn't know who to salute. I mean, I kind of did. I mean, you learned, you know, who you were supposed to salute, all the protocol, and that was all basic training. And, you know, do I salute our Air Force, you know, people? And it was all a little different. But then, you know, getting into the training and the s—and, you know, what you do to work, and what the chaplain's function is on a command, and [coughs] how you assist with that.

And I was going in as a religious—I was a yeoman with an RPO [Religious Petty Officer?] specialty. So I didn't get the E-4, third class petty officer because I was going to reason things out with my colleagues, as opposed to tell like I'm boss. But I had this, you know, specialty billet attached to my rating, so when I was there in Biloxi, Mississippi, I was starting to get more in identifying with my sexual orientation and I met somebody while I was in training. He was a ship builder in the shipyards outside of Biloxi. He was former Navy. [Coughs] I think he might've been in for quite some time. And really liked each other. Plus, you know, I was—it was the '70s. We were running around. The Village People just came out with “In the Navy.” I mean—and then it was like—it was bizarre, everybody's like all hot to trot about the Village People. And I'm like, those guys are gay, [both laugh] you know? And nobody's talking about that. And it was sort of like parallel for me. I'm like—you know what? I'm probably like that, too.

[00:50:10]

And it was just a bizarre time in my life because it was like, there it was on the screen. You know, a bunch of Village People singing “In the Navy” and here I am at an Air Force base, and it was just a trip with self identity. Plus, I wanted to do a good job. I had pride in what I was doing and I knew I was—I wanted to be excellent, you know? And I was. I did a good dr—I did a great job. And anyhow, so, but this relationship that—I knew it was wrong, and I couldn't—I mean, I had some really positive, strong feelings there, but I couldn't go anywhere with this. Nobody knew about this. Nobody in my world knew about this. Nobody. Me,

alone. That was it. I wasn't talking to anybody about it. It was all about me. And nobody was going to know about it.

Halaska: Where did you meet him?

Konz-
Krzyminski: At a discotheque on the ocean in the Gulf of Mexico. Anyhow—

Halaska: What was—what were you learning in the religious program, or in your chaplain assistant program?

Konz-
Krzyminski: How to rig for church services, how to handle—learning what the chaplain billet is, how to hand [??] the chaplain—you know, there [coughs]—the chaplain was the nonclinical psychotherapist, religious program, spiritual representative of—you know, I don't remember what the actual description was. It was the—and you learned about how chaplains were interdenominational. A Catholic chaplain was just as good as a Jewish chaplain and a Jewish chaplain was just as good as a Protestant chaplain and—you know, so it was the s—you know, later on, in practice, when I was, you know, working on the ship, I learned a lot more, but I learned, you know, basically that this is—this was a chaplain's office, so, you know, you did church services, and you, you know, did counseling and, you know, you filed things. Plus, I underst—I learned that the library came under the chaplain's orders in the Navy. So—

Halaska: Interesting.

Konz-
Krzyminski: We learned—and—but I already knew Dewey Decimal System stuff and library stuff. So—and that was, like, basic stuff I'd had in high school. So, I mean, it was, like, a perfect fit for me. It really was. I was studying to be a priest, I typed ninety words a minute, I was a patriot. [Laughs] It was—and the Village People were singing "In the Navy." [Both laugh] So it was a perfect fit. [Phone rings] Oh, I'm sorry about that.

Halaska: Do you need to get it, or —?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Should we wait? No.

Halaska: Okay. No, we can just keep going on. So do you remember how long that school was?

Konz-

Krzyminski: That was not—I mean, those schools were, like, you know, months. They weren't—you know, my basic training was my five, six months. These were months, maybe three months, tops.

Halaska: And was there any kind of graduation or anything like that?

Konz-

Krzyminski: You completed it. It certainly wasn't the fanfare from basic training. It was—you know, you—the graduation was, "Give me my travel orders. Give me my ticket. I want to go home and see my family for a little bit before I got to get to my next duty assignment." Anyhow, the thing with taking these orders, this person's orders for the chap—the guy who wasn't graduating by Friday that I volunteered to take, I thought I was going to take this guy's orders, or whoever's orders, and go to chaplain management school and then go to the Air Force squadron in California. Well, no. This guy's orders were go to chaplain management school, and then go to the USS *Independence* (CV-62), five thousand people, eighty planes, in Norfolk, Virginia, as—and I'm like, "Holy camoly." I mean, I had my shots for California, everything. And now I'm going to Norfolk, Virginia on an aircraft carrier? Like, okay. What does that mean? [Halaska laughs]

[00:54:52]

"And you're going to be, like, the lead chaplain's assistant to"—I found—I mean, I knew about this in advance and there were two—there was a guy who was an E-3, so he was a seaman. Maybe it's Seaman Recruit, Seaman Apprentice, Seaman, Third Class Petty Officer. E-1, E-2, E-3, E-4. So I was a Seaman Apprentice. The guy that was there already was a Seaman, and who had been there for a while, but he didn't have the specialty. He didn't go to religious program. He was just appointed. He was a yeoman who was appointed to work in the chaplain's office, and I had this, like, specialty training, like I went to graduate school or something in three months. [Halaska laughs] Anyhow, so I was supposed to take over this space, and I remembered that question that I didn't get advance rank—rating—rank increase from, was that, you know, here's this guy who knew more stuff at this base than I did, had been there longer than me, was ahead of me in rank, and I'm coming in and I'm going to be telling him what to do, you know, what I learned at this fancy school that he didn't go to. So I had—I f—I needed to be able to do that, I thought, diplomatically, and it ended up being that way.

He never really liked me, [both laugh] but it was—it—he ended up taking care of the library and I took care of the chaplain's office. You know, that was fine by me. So—but I remember that first day going on that boat. Oh my god. It was—so at this point, it's now autumn of '76. So it's cool, and I'm carrying my duffel bag. I don't know. Do you get duffel bags at other branches? Okay, so carrying my duffel bag to see this boat, this huge, huge—have you ever seen an aircraft carrier?

Halaska: I have not.

Konz-

Krzyminski: They're huge. Five thousand people. Eighty planes. Forty-foot high building. It's huge. And here I am in a little duffel bag, walking down Pier 12 in Norfolk, Virginia, going up the plank, or whatever they—we used to call—I can't remember what it was. It wasn't the plank. The plank is what you jump off of for pirates. [Halaska laughs] Going up the ladder. [inaudible] ladder. Anyhow, and then, you know, "Reporting for duty, sir," and then trying to fit in with this city that's in motion and—wow, that was wild. That was just amazing. And [coughs] there were two chaplains at the time. You know, and office quarters were small. We had this—right off the Officers' Mess below the hangar deck was the chaplain's office. And the chaplain had sort of a private office. You'd walk in and you were in this reception office half the size of this living room. This is a t—I don't even know how big this living room is, but—so this big. Not even this big. You know, filing cabinets, typewriter, telephone, stuff, you know, vents, and God knows—gas, and diesel, and things. And then this chaplain's office, which was on the inside for private, you know, [cuckoo clock sounds] conversations and work. And so it began. You know, I was—we were home ported in Norfolk. USS *Independence* was home ported in Norfolk. Our—we were FPO, Fleet Post Office. We had a special post office where the mail would go to, and then it would come to the ship or flow into the ship when we were overseas. And that was the beginning of my duty. I skipped over something. A big piece. And that was at religious program specialty school. So — and I'm introducing about my understanding about my sexual orientation. This is a big piece of that. Is this okay to add now?

Halaska: Yeah. Yeah. That's fine.

[00:59:50]

Konz-

Krzyminski: Okay. So in this sort of unorthodox world I was living in, being a sailor on an Air Force base in my blue jeans and baseball cap, [coughs] I met this really [laughs] sweet, little southern boy who was in school with me. And I was like, "Oh my gosh. He's got to be queer." [Both laugh] And it was like, he was wearing a cute, little sweater and he was just this dear, little kind of sassy personality. He was just this kind of funny guy. And I thought, "I want to hang with him." I—this is somebody I—and he was Navy. He was Navy, too. And he was from Texas or somewhere. He has a really southern accent. And he was funny. And he was just fun. So I thought to myself—and he was really comfortable with being who he was. He was just—there was no—I mean, he didn't scream that he was gay, or we didn't even say gay back then. Maybe we did. I don't know. But he was different. But—so we talked about going out to a club after work, you know, after school someday. And so we did. And I thought, "I'm going to tell him I have a brother

who's like him. And I'm very comfortable with people like him. And I would be interested to go—does he go to any”—and so I was, like, fishing to find out if [Halaska laughs] this is—because this is where I met Chuck. And so he's like—ends up taking me to a gay club in Biloxi, Mississippi, which is where I met Chuck—not the first date because there was enough going on [laughs] with talking about my brother and going with this guy. I can't even remember his name, but he was really a nice guy. I think about him and pray for him sometimes. Anyhow, so we get to the club and I am just—after a couple of drinks, I'm twirling around the dance floor, having a great time. And he says to me, “Yeah, a brother. You got a brother.” [Halaska laughs] “My ass, you got a brother.” So we had—we became good friends, but it was like—I said, “I can't”—we didn't—we just didn't talk about, you know, different sexual orientation. It just was not talked about. However, this was the starting of me being more aware of who I was at that point. I didn't dig women after that. But, you know, I was in—you didn't—I was in the Navy, so it was not talked about. So that was that. So now, at this point, I'm going to my—I'm more—knowing who I am, found some clubs in Milwaukee, had a great time here, knowing who I am but, you know, still not—I had—

Halaska: What were the clubs in Milwaukee, just for—?

Konz-

Krzyminski: The clubs? Oh my god. The Factory, and I went by Robert—I didn't have the same—I didn't go by Raymond. I had a different name. Certainly didn't talk about being in the military, but [inaudible] my haircut at that time. It was like— [Halaska laughs] but it was the disco era. So it was all, you know, Circus Circus, Club 219. [Coughs] It was the disco era. It was the Village People and Donna Summer. So—and I, you know, had had a quick education on the—I think it was pretty much called—use—the word “gay” was pretty much used then. Yeah. Or I knew it was, or in that circle, at least.

[01:05:09]

But I had to go back to the—I had to go to the ship, and I was on board my ship, and I had to do my job, and I had to be nonsexual and, you know, I mean, I couldn't even joke about women. You know what? When I was in basic training, I had my sister's best friend's daughter's picture, a really pretty picture of her, that I used to tell the guys she was my girlfriend. She—because I needed to have a girlfriend, you know, because everybody else had their girlfriends, and I didn't. Anyhow, so I'm on the ship. I'm doing my job on the ship. And that was an amazing experience for me when I realized that this was a military vessel and when I realized the importance of what it was. And, you know, we had nuclear weapons on board. Those were bombs. And I think the reality of what I had gotten myself into really was present when I got on that boat. That just all really entered into me. But there was this humanity of working in the chaplain's office that I had. I learned—our function was, you know, the chaplain would get the news, you know, and when we were deployed to—from the American Red Cross.

And, you know, if somebody died, or if somebody had a baby, or somebody was sick, or they didn't hear from anybody, or if there was some bad news from home—I mean, you remember, this was the '70s. There were no cell phones. There was no internet. There was—you know, I had an electric typewriter. Lots of stuff was done by, you know, book ledgers and, I think, payroll was done by book ledgers a little bit.

Halaska: What kind of chaplain did you work for? What was—?

Konz-

Krzyminski: There was a Catholic chaplain and a Presbyterian chaplain. And the Presbyterian chaplain was wonderful. He ended up being like a big brother to me. He was just this really, really wonderful man. We've stayed in touch. I think he developed dementia and I haven't gotten a Christmas card from the last couple of years. I don't know what really happened to him. The Catholic chaplain was an alcoholic. He was able to keep that under curtail but, you know, couple of years after, he was leaving, and there was a change of chaplaincies, and he said, "Oh, Raymond, there's some stuff in my office that you need to deep six." Throw out. Or no, "In my state room that you,"—you know, and I'm like, "When did I become your maid? I mean, I type." You know, so I go in there and there's, like, twenty empty gallon bottles of booze, you know, so that he had—I mean, he had this stuff on board from deployment after deployment. He was able to hold it together all the time, but we—you know, [coughs] we really didn't have much of a relationship [inaudible], whereas the chaplain, the—JJ, Joseph Thompson—he was a commander. In fact, he was senior to the XO [executive officer]. So it—as far as rank and time—length in service. There was the commanding officer, which was interesting, and the XO, which was interesting—and that's another story—and then my boss. So that was—he was a wonderful man—and developed kinship with my family, and we were deployed. We had two deployments. We had a Caribex [??], a Caribbean deployment, and a Mediterranean deployment together. The Mediterranean was nine months we were gone.

Halaska: Okay. When did you, I guess, learn that you'd be shipping out, like, going? Either—was the Caribbean one first?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Yeah. Oh, yeah. The whole idea was—because this is what we did. You know, you either were on the ship, getting ready to go protect the waters, or you were in dry dock, getting cleaned up, and then you were—yeah. So, I mean, I learned that day one that this was—you were going to go—

[01:10:03]

Halaska: Somewhere.

Konz-

Krzyminski: —be part of a fleet. And you were going to go do your job. And, I mean, I knew all the—everything I was doing was in preparation for that, but I knew that from day one. So—and I was really fortunate because I worked for this senior officer. I learned lots of stuff about, you know, details of what was going on, much of my service, my career. In fact, really grateful for all of that. [Coughs] So our first cruise was a Caribbean cruise, which was really much of nothing. It was along the coast of the Caribbean and we had one liberty. [Coughs] and [Halaska coughs] I remember reading that the ship was going to leave at, like, six in the morning the next day, so I was out on liberty after, you know, we were on boat—on the boat for thirty-some days on deployment. And then we were on liberty in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Well, everything you can imagine why sailors are drunken sailors is true because, you know, you're on a boat for all that time and, you know, so I was out the night, and I knew the ship was going at six in the morning, so I thought, you know—and plus you don't pull up to a dock with an aircraft carrier. You anchor and you take liberty boats in. You know, that's how you get to and from shore.

So I—my sister's best friend was in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands the day we pulled in, and she's waiting at the pier, or at the—at Fleet Landing for me with all the officers around her. She—because she's, like, thirties-ish. This is the one who met me who was with my pregnant sister. And she's in some pink sarong. She's single. And she—it was just kind of obscene, actually. So—and she was, like, telling him, “Oh, he's the chaplain on this ship.” I'm like, you know, “No I'm not.” [Both laugh] Chaplain's assistant. So they were on a cruise ship, so I ended up partying with them all night on their cruise ship till the cruise ship left at midnight, and then I hit the town and had a great time, and I knew I had to be back, that the ship was leaving at six. To me, the ship was leaving at six. So if I was there by five, I had plenty of time. No. No. [Halaska laughs] Like, you were supposed to be on the last liberty boat, like, by midnight, or 11:30, or something like that. I don't know. I don't [inaudible]. [Halaska laughs] It was my first liberty leave. So, you know, I'm sort of like—half pulled it together at, you know, 4:30, and I get to fleet landing, and it's like, there's nothing there. And I'm like—and there's this one little boat. And I'm like, are you going to the *Independence*?

And I get on this little boat. Apparently it's the last little boat. It's not a liberty boat anymore. It's the last little boat that's out there, that's going to the ship for whatever reason. And I get on this, like, probably 5:30 in the morning. The ship's movement was, like, six o'clock in the morning. And I get on board, and I go past the—we come in from the stern, up. And then you go right past the Master at Arms. So the stern is the back of the boat, and then you go past the Master at Arms, where the cops are. And there's this guy. He said, “Give me your identification.” And I said, “I will not.” I said, “I'm supposed to give that to my commanding officer. And the only person I'm supposed to give that too is my commanding officer.” And he said, “I am your commanding officer.” [Both laugh] And I was like, “Oh my god. Give him it.” I went right to the chaplain's

office. Or, no. I think I went to—I went back down to my berth, got in my uniform, and then went to the chaplain’s office. And I’m like, “Oh my god.” The chaplain had already heard about this. He said, “Oh, boy. You really pulled one here.” So I’m like, “Uh.” [Halaska laughs] So, I mean, I think the next time there was liberty, I wasn’t allowed to go ashore, [laughs] so I had—and then I had some extra watch I had to do. So we would have to do watches on the hangar deck and, you know, stand watch, walk around, making sure everything’s safe and sound and in order for six hours or something like that. Or three hours? Whatever [inaudible] it was. So it’s an extra watch is what’s my punishment.

[01:15:18]

Halaska: Okay. Was that something that you had to do, like, by yourself, or were you, like, in a team, or—

Konz-
Krzyminski: By myself.

Halaska: By yourself?

Konz-
Krzyminski: That was—oh, yeah.

Halaska: Just walk around the—was it top of the ship?

Konz-
Krzyminski: With a little flashlight. No, it was—I had mostly—you had sections of it. It was—the ship was huge.

Halaska: Okay. Yeah, it’s huge.

Konz-
Krzyminski: I had part of the hangar deck or the—hangar deck, and some of the deck that I worked on.

Halaska: Okay. And that was—

Konz-Krzyminski: There were escalators on this thing.

Halaska: Hm. Wow.

Konz-
Krzyminski: There are escalators. And then you had to climb steps, ladders, up to the communications desk. So every time a telegram would come to the ship and my office was notified, I had to go—I was kind of forward on the boat, all the way aft, up the escalator, up this—this is quite a trip.

Halaska: [Laughs] [inaudible].

Konz-

Krzyminski: Mm-hm. We stayed in shape. I have marks on my knees, or my shins, from running up those steps there. Nice, little reminders.

Halaska: So when you were out on that first, like, Caribbean deployment, what was your kind of normal day like?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Work. It was a workday, so correspondence. The chaplain had letters he wanted typed, things done. Sundays are religious holidays. You would rig services either in the library [coughs] lounge or—actually they were just—they were rigged in the library lounge. When we were deployed, when we were at sea, I learned that we would rig under the fo’c’sle [forecastle]. So the—

Halaska: What’s a fo’c’sle?

Konz-

Krzyminski: The fo’c’sle—well, actually, the fo’c’sle is just below the flight deck, and it’s all the way forward, so it’s just a—so, like, if you look at a aircraft carrier, where the flight deck is, there are these—like, these two huge holes here. And then the anchors come through both sides. So this is the area just below the flight deck all the way forward. And so it’s a large open space covered by the flight deck. And then—so we would rig up chairs and an altar for Sunday services there. That was my job to set that up, or—and then whoever I had working with me. And then all the things that you need to do with that, bulletins, orders of worship, hymnals, other things. You know, if there were special guests or anything like that.

Halaska: Did you have to type all those up, too?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Halaska: Yeah?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Yeah. That was work. That was what we did.

Halaska: Did they have—do you—?

Konz-

Krzyminski: And then, when the messages would come in—I mean, remember, there were five thousand people on this boat. So, you know, somebody had a baby, somebody died, somebody was sick, they’d come to the Red Cross. I had to call the area this

person worked in. I had to, like, make sure that we would get them received at the office. I would greet them at the office. I would tell the chaplain they were there. The chaplain would give them the information. And if there were things that needed to be arranged for that person—I didn't necessarily do the arrangement. Their off—their commanding person did the arrangement, but I would help kind of bridge the gap to make that occur, just—and authenticate that this was going down for—you know, that they were aware that, you know, I would—after that person was notified that, you know, his father passed away or, you know, what was going on, he was needing to leave the ship, or that kind of information.

Halaska: Were there any, I guess, notable instances or interactions that you had with other sailors during your work that you [inaudible]?

[01:19:34]

Konz-
Krzyminski: Oh my gosh, all the time. Every—you know, I—like, so with cli—these would be my shipmates who were—yeah, sure. But was still very—it was very—there was kind of this demeanor with business and friendships. So my office was kind of a cool space because it was like, I had all this space. Plus I had another office space that was the Catholic chaplain's space that nobody was ever in. So you could basically hang out there and read a book or—and which was probably the size of this room, aboard this aircraft carrier where, you know, our sleeping quarters were three people high. One, two, three. Yeah. So—and so my bunk was right off the lounge. If you pulled up my curtain—because it was, like, a little—it was the length of my body. It was about this much higher than—and it had a locker that pulled out this way, and that was it. But as a chaplain's assistant, I had the library storage space, I had the Catholic chaplain's storage space, and I had my office storage space. So I was, like, this really popular guy. Plus I had access to altar wine. [Halaska laughs] So—[coughs] was another story. It was like, "Oh, we ran out of altar wine. We had twelve cases when we deployed." "Oh, I think I dropped one," or something like that. Anyhow, that's a whole 'nother story. So I would get these guys who would like hanging around. I had one guy who worked on religious—on the—do you want me to turn this light on?

Halaska: Oh, no. We're fine.

Konz-
Krzyminski: Okay. I had this one guy who would—who was a musician, so he played the organ, Scott. His name was Scott. That just came to me. Anyhow, so he played the organ, and he would hang around the office, and we would talk a lot. And then we had a piano in the library lounge, and there was this one guy—well, this wasn't until we were deployed to the Mediterranean. He started hanging around because he liked access to the piano because he loved playing the piano. He was a great pianist. He could play anything by ear. It was just—he was wonderful and he was from New York. His name was Gene Malaspina [sp??], Eugene

Malaspina. He lived in Staten Island and he became my dearest friend. He—and we could smoke in my office, you know, smoking and typing. And so—and we had coffee because the Officers' Mess was just next to my office, and I was always getting coffee for the chaplains, so one cup for the chaplain and a cup for Gene and me. You know, so it was—there was always just—never washed the coffee cup because there was no sink, so you—[coughs] you drank what you had. The coffee cup was, like, layers of dried out coffee. [Halaska laughs] [coughs] And you didn't have cream. You had that powdered stuff. Anyhow, so when we first got deployed, it must've been around—it was early spring of '77. I was deployed for the Mediterranean and that took, like, thirty-some days to go across, and there was a horrible hurricane. And instead of going around the hurricane, we went through it. It was like, why?

Halaska: Tell me about that.

Konz-

Krzyminski: Oh. So I got motion sickness—I—it was awful. And then I remember the Catholic chaplain saying, "Raymond, just eat crackers and go to your bed. Go to your bunk. Just lay there and eat c—you know, just eat crackers." And it was horrible. It was like—I mean, this was a huge ship and we were going through a hurricane. And then it stopped. And I was like—I thought it was over but we were in the eye. So then we had to go through it again.

Halaska: How did everyone else kind of deal with it, too? Was everyone else—?

Konz-

Krzyminski: We didn't talk about it. So if you don't talk about something, it's not there.

Halaska: Yeah. [Both laugh]

Konz-

Krzyminski: You know, denial's great. You just got through it. Unfortunately, that was such a bad thing that once the—we went up to the fo'c'sle, the organ was destroyed. Yeah. It was—there were these keys floating in water. The whole thing was trashed from that. We lost a couple of planes. We lost a sailor. He was lost at sea. You know, so—

[01:25:00]

Halaska: Did—?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Boats in Spain [??].

Halaska: Yeah. Did you guys have a service?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Oh, god. Yes. Yes. Absolutely. We also lost a couple of pilots during training and—because there was always flight ops. You know, you had to be ready to—you know, to be war ready all the time, you know? We had general quarters, so there were ti—at any time, you could be called to general quarters. My job was to be a hull technician’s assistant. So if part of the hull got blown up in the area I was in, I’m—my job was to work with this hull technician to assist in repairing the hull. I’m like, “I don’t know how to repair a hull.” But that was my job. And I want to learn fast. So, yeah. I mean, we—I knew I was on a war vessel. I knew that. And I knew that, you know, I knew we weren’t at war, but I knew there was some rumblings going on.

Halaska: What were the rumblings?

Konz-

Krzyminski: You know, I really—I never really—there was some political unrest, you know, going on in Morocco and, you know, the Middle—a little bit of the Middle East in the ’70s, and some stuff that I’d never really [coughs] studied. I’m getting a little hoarse. So the—

Halaska: Cold War tensions?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Yeah. That stuff was going on. I don’t even know if it was Cold—I think it was, like, later.

Halaska: Pre-Cold War? Okay. Yeah.

Konz-

Krzyminski: Yeah. No, it was more prewar because Cold War was before that.

Halaska: Oh, okay. Yeah. All right.

Konz-

Krzyminski: So what were we talking about?

Halaska: [Laughs] You guys were going through the hurricane. You lost some people.

Konz-

Krzyminski: Oh, yeah. The planes.

Halaska: The planes and—

Konz-

Krzyminski: That was—yeah. I think we already got to our first—so it took thirty days to get across, and a lot of rigmarole we went through, and there were refuelings. And

with the chaplain, we would go up to—we would go watch the f—he would take me up to the top and we would watch—showed me where to go. And it was, like, a little opening. You'd go out a door and you could stand and watch the flight operations. You know, of course, you'd have to have huge earphones, covers up your ear, protecting your ear and stuff. But that was very cool. And enjoyed that a lot. However there was some general quarters alarm that went on that a couple of planes came in and they had lost their landing gear. They came in too low and they hit the landing gear along the flight deck. And they were up there. And so there was this alert that they were trying to save these planes. And they put this huge netting across the flight deck. And now this was on TV. You could watch this. This was—we were watching this on the flight TV. So we saw the planes come in and it went right through this netting like cream cheese because it apparently lost part of its hydraulic flaps, and so it was supposed to slow down; it didn't. So we lost two pilots then. That was a huge ceremony.

Halaska: And what was the role of the chaplain and the chaplain's assistant in that kind of—?

Konz-

Krzyminski: It was to set up the whole thing. I'm—I've got pictures of that. And they had planes out, and we had—and it was on the flight deck. We had the service on the flight deck. Yeah. There was—

Halaska: How was mor—oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Konz-

Krzyminski: What were you going to say?

Halaska: I was going to ask, how was morale after that?

Konz-

Krzyminski: It was a time you didn't talk about stuff. [Laughs] You know, you would—you remember them in prayer and this is what happens. I realize in describing this to you, I sound very matter-of-fact. But I think that's what it was. You didn't have emotion, you know? It was—this is what you did, you know? Okay. This is where bombs are. I mean, there was one time I was, like, rigging for Mass and I was carrying the stuff for Mass down past a chow line, and they were moving a nuclear weapon, so the Marine Detachment was—you know, you couldn't go near this weapon because the Marine Detachment was there. And I'm walking by with this—like, I had this box full of, you know, posts and stuff, you know, from the Catholic service. And the Marines just—I mean, they just flipped out on me. They were—they had me up against a wall down in the MARDET [Marine Detachment] and they were screaming and yelling at me. And then I broke the l—it was awful and, you know, I mean, saying some awful stuff about me, saying some awful stuff. You know, gay slurs.

[01:30:30]

I don't think they knew I was gay, but they were gay slurs just because I was a chaplain's assistant and I was sucking up to the chaplain and all this other kind of stuff. [Coughs] I was—I thought I was going to die. I really thought I was going to die. I thought this was death. I thought they were going to shoot me and throw me overboard. I thought—it was awful. And then they finally let me go, and I went down to my office, and the Protestant chaplain was there, and I told him, and I told him everything. He was furious. He said, "Odd." [??] So after that, I had no problem with the Marines. [Both laugh] But it was like, whoa. That was scary. You just did stuff. You realize that you were in the military and this was—you had to be prepared to do whatever you had to do to protect your country. It was just matter-of-fact. So, yep. You lose some people. And yep, the guy fell off the boat, and yep, we lost him. And it's sad, and it was a horrible thing, and we did have that service, and we had pictures, and it was powerful. And it was, like, wow. That happened. But you moved on and—you just moved on, you know?

Halaska: Okay. What was it like seeing Europe for the first time?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Oh my god. I'm—the best part was coming back here after seeing Europe. I mean, my eyes were just—I just saw everything differently. Our first port was Naples, Italy. Holy baloney. [Coughs] Anyhow—

Halaska: That'll take you [??] through that.

Konz-

Krzyminski: So I got to backtrack a little bit. My friend Gene Malaspina, who was this great piano player, so he comes in the office, and we're hanging out, and it's Palm Sunday, and I'm like—so I find out he's Catholic. And I'm like, "Hey, you know what I got to do? When we get off we got all these palms that we're supposed to go decorate the alter, and do you want to help me with this?" And he's like, "Sure. Sure." So here we are with two big boxes of palms going all the way aft, up the escalator to, like, the f—up four decks, and then we still have to climb from there, or wherever, to get to the fo'c'sle. And as we're on the escalator—and I really like this Gene. He's a nice guy. He plays the piano. He smokes cigarettes. We're—and we developed this relationship over this thirty—getting sick together and [coughs] over this thirty-day deployment—thirty-day crossing. And as we're on the escalator he says to me, he said, "Oh my gosh. I feel like we're Laverne and Shirley." [Halaska laughs] And I thought to myself, "This is not"—I didn't even know the words at the time, but I'm thinking, "This is not a straight guy. No straight guy would say, 'I feel like we're Laverne and Shirley.'" [Both laugh]

You know, it just—I thought, "I think he might be like me," you know? And I can remember that to this day. That was, like, my—so I thought, "I'm going to come out to him. I'm going to come out to this guy." And there was so sexual attraction.

This was, like, this was friend [??]. This was really buddy, friend, like, brother. He was a good guy. Anyhow, so I did. And he came out to me, too. And—but he was, like, East Coast Italian, and his p—you know, like, nobody knew, and he said his sister knew. His sister knew. But I said, “In my family, nobody knows.” I’m like, “This is—we’re not going to talk about this anywhere.”

[01:35:00]

And so we’re th—and he’s Italian. So he’s like, “We’re going to Naples, Italy.” [inaudible]—this is his country. So he’s telling me all about this stuff and [coughs] [laughs] we have friends who work in the laundry, so we’re down there pressing our leisure suits. [Both laugh] I had a plaid leisure suit and he had a baby blue denim leisure suit. Anyhow, to go to shore to liberty. And, well, going ashore to liberty meant being able to get off the boat and away from naval people, and find a place where we could have fun and be comfortable, and we—you know, it was still the ’70s. So you’d find these clandestine gay haunts in Europe, you know? And I think the, like, one of my first very nights there, I met this man, Antonio Angiolilo [??] who was a Berlitz teacher, who lived in Naples and fell hard. I really fell hard. This guy Chuck wanted to come up to—Chuck from Biloxi wanted to come up to Norfolk. And I’m like, there’s no way you’re coming around here. I’m not having a relationship. There’s no way I can do this. You know, I have feelings for you. And it was really very sad. It was sad. It was really sad. I had feelings for that person, but there was like—I had to deny that, and I had to kind of be unkind and disrespectful.

It was the same thing when I broke up with that girl. It was like, you know, I loved her and I cared about her, but not in that way, you know? I had to tell her I didn’t love her, which was not true. And I have since made amends with her. But this was with Chuck. You know, I really wanted to be with him, from Biloxi, and I couldn’t. There was, like, no way this was going to happen. You know, I—it was—I—this did not fit in with me in the military. So—plus I wasn’t out to my family, so I wasn’t really out to myself. I didn’t, what the hell. So, anyhow, I fell hard for this guy, Tony, and we had this sort of extended relationship while I was deployed. I had since also discovered that my friend Scott, who was the organist, who was married—and I spent time with his wife and his little kid—he said to me, “I want you to know we’re probably more alike than we’re different.” And I’m like, “What the heck does that mean?” Right?

Halaska: Had you come out to him at all?

Konz-
Krzyminski: No.

Halaska: No? Oh, okay. So he was—

Konz-
Krzyminski: So—

Halaska: —just inferring. [Laughs]

Konz-
Krzyminski: Well, he was—no, he saw Gene and me together as being—you know, we were camping it up. I mean, we were just having fun, as much as we could. And it was okay with the chaplain, too, because we were just good buddies. We were good buddies, you know? And we were good buddies. Anyhow, so Scott ultimately came out to me, but then, partially through the deployment, I discovered that he was being discharged. He was, like, an E-5. And I'm like, what's up? And he said he had a boyfriend who was in the Air Force, stationed in Naples, and they had found some love letters that they wrote in his drawer from him. And that was an immediate discharge. And I think it had something to do with his involvement with being with another member of the Armed Forces. It was like, psh, he was gone. Scott was gone. And I was like, "Whoa." And I told that to Gene, and we were like, "Whoa." It was like, "Whoa. That's not happening to us." And so, you know, we just did our stuff. When we were at liberty, we were our footloose fancy free, and on board the ship, we did our duties.

Halaska: Did you—you said you had the relationship with Tony going on in Naples. So how long were you in Naples, and then did you—?

Konz-
Krzyminski: You'd be out, go back in. You'd be out, go back in. You'd go to Roto, Spain, you'd go back in. You'd go to Brindisi, you'd come back in. You'd go to Bari, Italy, go around, come back in. You'd go to Crete. Can't go ashore. Then you'd have his huge picnic on the flight deck. You'd jump off the boat. You'd go swimming.

[01:40:12]

Halaska: Sounds like fun.

Konz-
Krzyminski: It was fun. It was great—I mean, it was great stuff. I mean, it was my life. You know, I was a sailor. It was what I did. But there was—you know, I'd still—and I'd—it was—[coughs] I was twenty-two, twenty-one or twenty-two. I mean, I was certainly not mature as a human being. I was really stunted in many ways. I was drinking heavy. So did everybody. [Both laugh] But, I mean, I was—I had my issues. [Coughs] So I remember another younger guy who I saw in the clubs, you know, when we'd be out—and the clubs were, like, really Italian or—I mean, they weren't, like, mainstream clubs today. This was just like—they were pretty much dance clubs or bars, and they were pretty much separate. I mean, we went to Palma de Mallorca, Spain. I remember that was a stunning—I went to this

stunning club and it was—like, I totally didn't fit in there. These were, you know, affluent, together, artistic—it was a different culture in Palma de Mallorca. And it was just one of the haunts or spaces—places I went to. And—but I—there was this one guy. I know he was with communications. And he really got high or something. I don't know what happened. But when they brought him on board the ship, I mean, he was just screaming, “Gay, gay, gay.” And they got rid of him. He was gone, like, in a heartbeat. So when—nine months later, after my deployment—Europe was amazing. The chaplain was wonderful because he really—he helped me know about Europe in ways I never knew. And—

Halaska: Like what?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Oh, just, you know, “We're going to Spain. If you want to buy something nice for your mother, you buy some Lladro's porcelain.” Or, you know, and we still have a nativity set that I have to this day that I got for twenty-five bucks. It's like \$375 now, and I got the whole, you know, thing that I bought in Torremolinos and— [coughs] and I learned about history, and culture, and buildings, and politics, and stuff that I just—I really had no interest or cared about. It just became part of my experience. And, you know, going past the rock of Gibraltar and, you know, finding out—you know, knowing we were near Morocco, and actually getting to a northern point in Italy which was, like, on the border of Germany. And I'm like, “Jeez, Germany? That's my dad's family.” You know, that whole thing. Getting to Rome. I mean, I was studying to be a priest. Being in Rome is, like, you know, pretty significant.

Halaska: Tell me about Rome.

Konz-

Krzyminski: [Gasps]

Halaska: What was it, like, being there, getting there?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Tony lived in Rome. [Both laughs] And his mother worked at the Vatican gift shop. And we stayed at her house. And she was amazed that I took so many baths. Like, because they, like [??] take a bath once a week back then. And, you know, I was like, “I want to take one every day.” [Halaska laughs] I think I was always respected as a s—as an American service member. I don't think there was any kind of issue. And I was always, you know, as polite as I could be, as a representative of the Armed Forces and of the United States. I realized that when I enlisted, I r—I learned that I really didn't belong to myself. I belonged to the military. And so my function was to behave in accordance to the military, that that's what I was supposed to do. And that kind of—that fit in with my secret. You know, and it kind of felt safe because I didn't have to talk to my family, either. I didn't have to tell my family about stuff. You know, I can—I found some

old letters. “My friend Tony,” you know, I would write about, or places we would go in, you know, the countryside of Italy. Or—I mean, I got to see parts of Europe with a native that I wouldn’t have seen.

[01:45:09]

And, you know, I’m generally an outgoing kind of guy, so, you know, when I met people in other ports, too, and Spain or—we—you know, other Italian ports, I was fine. And Gene was, like, you know, always a blast. We just had a good time, always, together. So, you know, plus there were some public events that we had to do when we were—I remember being in Olassu [??], Italy. We had this day where we had, you know, people come on board the ship, and we had to do dress programs and, you know, for that. And I was studying to be a fourth class petty officer, a third class petty officer. I was doing the exams for it. In fact, passed the exams. No, I didn’t. That was when we came back. Because that was a big issue with my discharge. So when we were supposed to leave, now, and head back to the United States, [coughs] after our deployment and our runs over there, I didn’t think I could leave Tony. I thought, “I don’t know if I can do this. I don’t know if I can leave.” And my friend Gene was like, “Oh, knock it off, Raymond.” You know, and—you know, there was—because there was an—I had gone through separations from going from port to port, but I knew I was always going to see him again. But this was, like, the one coming back to the United States, and I actually considered going AWOL to stay in Italy because—it was crazy. It was a crazy, crazy, crazy—I mean, I didn’t even think of the ramifications of going AWOL.

But it was so safe to actually kind of be who I was, really, with someone I enjoyed being with. And so, I mean, I really thought about that. But my friend Gene snapped me out of it, you know? It was pretty much drama. We were listening to Italian operas on the way back. [Both laugh] pretty tragic stuff. Anyhow, [coughs] but I got over that. And then we came back thirty-some days later and my parents met the ship as we pulled in. It was a pretty dramatic arrival because everybody gets in their dress uniform [coughs] on the ship’s company around the flight deck, and you come into port. And my mom and dad were there and I was really excited about them coming there. And, oh, I forgot about this guy. So there’s this guy. He—before we started coming back—now, I started to understand why they didn’t want gays in the military. And the bottom line was supposed to be because of blackmail. Like, what the hell is that? Well, anyhow, there was this guy who, unless I did what he wanted me to do, was—discovered that I was gay because he saw me out. I’m like, “If you saw me out at the gay bars, what were you doing at the gay bars?” you know? [Both laugh] But he was a married guy. And then, so, like, it was just pretty awful. So I understood the idea of this kind of blackmail thing. So, I mean, but I was already in it, and I didn’t know how to get out of it, and I certainly had nobody to talk to about it. And I didn’t even talk to Gene about this. So that was a whole separate piece that was—anyhow, came back.

Halaska: What was he blackmailing you for, if you don't mind me asking [??]?

[01:49:37]

Konz-

Krzyminski: He just wanted me to get into some stuff that I didn't want to do, you know? And it was just—ugh. Anyhow, so we get back to Norfolk, and now Gene has to leave, because Gene was part of a squadron from Jacksonville, Florida. So they're all gone. So when you're dep—when you're back in port, all the squadrons, and the ship, and the planes are gone. And so you're back to ship's company [all officers, non-commissioned officers and personnel aboard a naval ship], which I was part of. And it was back to being in port. And the plan was that the *Indie* was going to go into dry dock at that point. So we still worked on the boat. We would go to the ship in dry dock to work on it. But we lived in barracks in Portsmouth [Virginia]. Anyhow, so continued to do that and work, take care of responsibilities on board the ship. It was pretty much getting ready to get the ship fixed up again and ready for another deployment was the plan. At this point, I'm taking tests and exams for advancement in rank to third class petty officer. I pass those tests and I have a promotion to third class petty officer. They had a ceremony on the flight deck. You know, I shook hands with the captain and, "Congratulations." Blah, blah, blah. "You're promoted to third class petty officer." And that was all pretty thrilling. However, at this time, in one of my liber—my leave times, running around Norfolk, I was entrapped by a police officer in the Norfolk Police Department. I asked him for a ride home at one of the gay haunts and he said, "Sure." And I was going with him to his car and he handcuffed me and said I was under arrest for sexual solicitation.

Halaska: Oh, wow.

Konz-

Krzyminski: And I'm like, "You know I asked you for a ride." You know, I don't think I was above sexual solicitation at that point in my life. However, in this particular incident [Halaska laughs] I needed a ride from Norfolk back to Portsmouth because I had to work the next day, and that's what I asked for, and he arrested me. So I was in jail that night. And I got out of jail the next day and I was freaked, and I didn't know what to do about it. So my Presbyterian chaplain had since left. He moved on and we got a new chaplain, Episcopal chaplain. Nice guy. The Catholic chaplain was gone and we got another nice guy. He got to meet my parents and spend some time with him. In fact, we still exchange Christmas cards. He's a retired—I don't know. He wasn't an admiral, but he was at least a captain or commander. So I get into the office the next day and I, like—I went to the Episcopal chaplain, who was the chief, and I said, "I got to tell you something." I said, "This is what happened yesterday." And he said to me, "Are you"—you know, "Are you homosexual?" And I said, "I believe so." And, "Yes." And he suggested that instead of anybody investigating me from the community—so the

community police would let the military police know. If that should happen—he said there’s no guarantee it’s going to happen but there’s no guarantee it’s not going to happen. He said, “The best thing for you to do,” me, as far as career or anything is concerned, is to report myself to the Naval Investigative Service, to turn myself in. He told me this because he also said that his son, who was a lieutenant, was being dis—being not—being uncommissioned for being gay, and he wrote a book called *Not on My Ship* about this whole process and this has [??] gone down for him. He said, “It’ll be better for you if you turn”—and so I trusted him. He was a good man and I’m glad I did what he told me to do. So I fou—I tracked down the Naval Investigative Service officer and started to tell him the story, and it got creepy because he didn’t want to know—I mean, the whole thing was about being gay and gay sexual activity.

[01:55:02]

And so it was just about sexual activity, period. And so you couldn’t use slang or clinical terms. You had to get into, like, behavior-specific—and it was—I—this was really uncomfortable. And he asked questions like, “Did you have any kind of activities with members of the Armed Forces?” And I was like, “No.” I mean, I wasn’t looking for dog tags—everybody looked like they were in the Armed Forces. I don’t know. No. I didn’t acknowledge that at all. And I think that was my saving grace because my friend who had the relationship with the guy in the Air Force in Naples, I don’t think he had a good discharge. I got a good discharge. But the uncomfortable part of that whole thing was, like, you know, sharing, disclosing this to another person. I said, “You know what? I type ninety words a minute. Do you mind if I type up my own report?” And this Naval Investigative Service officer told me, “No problem. You do that.” So I wrote this, like, sordid novel about my relationships. And it was very uncomfortable but, you know, I hope somebody’s making some money on it somewhere. [Halaska laughs] Anyhow, so apparently, at this point in the military, in the history of the military regarding h—LGBT persons, there was stuff going down, and some of this was as a result of this chaplain’s son who was a lieutenant. And I can’t think of his name, but I can look it up easily. Anyhow, so this process for me was hugely delayed, you know, this kind of like discharge process. Apparently the word got out somewhere amongst shipmates that I got busted by a cop. So I was k—being harassed and taunted by some of the sailors, you know?

Halaska: What kind of stuff?

Konz-
Krzyszowski: Like, you know, disgusting taunts about picking up cops, or getting picked up by cops, and, you know, just some disgusting sexual stuff. And it was just—it was awful. I had since made some other friends in the company and, you know, I did have some support of some—like, maybe two people. My family didn’t know I was gay. I’m being—now being told I’m being discharged. Part of the process was you get rated. You have to go through reviews, quarterly or something like

that. I was a 4 O sailor. So, you know, 4 O is top score. Four is an A. [Laughs] I was a 4 O sailor. When the Catholic chaplain came into the office, he said, “We got to pull your rating. We have to pull your most recent review. They can’t discharge a 4 O sailor.” So they changed my review, like my last review, months before, that I was 4 O. And they had to give me a lower than, you know 4 O. I was like—but I could do nothing about this. There was like—okay. You know, I had to, like, “Okay. All right.” I—they came in and told me that I had to change my uniform, that I couldn’t wear the uniform of an E-4, that they could not promote—apparently, my rank, the official paperwork for my rank didn’t go through yet, and that they couldn’t promote someone who was being discharged administratively to an E-4 while they’re being administratively discharged. So they pulled that. They pulled my promotion. And I still—I was discharged as an E-3 but, I mean, I left wearing E-4 rank. I was like, “Bullshit. I earned this. The captain shook my hand.”

[01:20:00]

So they told me I was getting an honorable discharge with some code on it. I was eligible for GI Bill. I had all the benefits that I [coughs]—because I did my—but I was being discharged early. Well, my big dilemma was, what do I tell my family? I have five brothers and sisters, and two parents living in Florida, and nieces and nephews. You know, what do I tell them? I did not want them to think I was un-American, that I was getting discharged early. I thought, “I’m coming out to them. I’m telling them what’s going on.” So I wrote each of my five brothers and sisters a letter, saying, “Guys, I’m being discharged from the military for being gay. I want you to know this is not because I’m un-American or have done anything un-American. It’s just that it was discovered and I can’t be in the military any longer. Please don’t tell Mom and Dad. I want to tell them myself. I’m going to let them think I’m coming home on leave.” And I mailed those five letters off, told my parents I was coming home on leave. I had mixed responses from my siblings. I had one sister call me immediately, like, “I love you.” Whatever. “Track me down and find me.” I had another sister who was like, “No big surprise.”

Oh. On Easter break, before I was busted by this cop, entrapped by this cop, I came out to my oldest sister, who was in Florida. So she was in Florida with my nieces and nephews. So it’s my sister who’s fifteen years older than me, and my nieces and nephews were, like, ten, twelve, eight, six. They were all down in Florida. We were there for Easter. And I had—I told my sister. I was like, “You know, Maribel [??], I got to tell you something. I’m gay. This is who I am.” And she was like, “You know what? Let’s just keep this our secret. We don’t have to tell Mom and Dad.” I was like, “Okay, fine.” I said, “You know, because I really can’t be gay in the military but, you know, they don’t know about it and I behave myself,” and all that other kind of stuff. So that was Easter time. And then this other stuff fell down after I came back. And an interesting thing was she—we were at Universal Studios or something. It was a picture of me with Wonder

Woman. And on the back of the picture of Wonder Woman, at this time, she writes, “All you need is a Wonder Woman.” [Both laugh] She’s since evolved, now that she’s eighty. [Halaska laughs] But—thank God. [Laughs] It was like—but that’s how things were—it was. It was 1978. It was a different world. There was no Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. This was before Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. So I went to see my parents. They thought I was coming home on leave. Came out to them and told them otherwise. And [sighs] they’re my parents. They seemed to be okay with that. I mean, I had a lifetime of different—my dad was a cop. So, you know, I was really more concerned about him than my mom. But my mom was more of the tougher one, you know? So that kind of changed things. I came home and got a job a dis—

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[Beginning of OH2179.Konz-Krzyminski_file1_access]

Konz-

Krzyminski: —cotheque and—

Halaska: In Milwaukee?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Yeah, I did. Yeah. I liked doing the—I worked in a restaurant and did some kind of restaurant work before that. So I got a job as a cocktail waiter at a gay disco. I was in heaven. It wasn’t super, but I needed to make some money. I wasn’t making any money there. So I found out about this great hotel in Downtown Milwaukee and I did, like, an apprenticeship there got into the restaurant business and that just bloomed for me. I did really well with that.

Halaska: What was the restaurant downtown?

Konz-

Krzyminski: It was the English Room at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee, which was, like, one of the finest dining rooms. You had to wear a dinner jacket there. We did tableside cooking and all that. But—and I actually worked for that business for almost twenty-five years. In about 1983, I met my now husband and tried to start settling down and realizing I couldn’t settle down because I had a drinking problem. So I went for treatment and r—discovered I needed to abstain from drinking because I had an allergy to it, a spiritual and psychological allergy, obsession, and got into recovery in 1983, ’84, ’85, and have pretty much—and not pretty much. I have been sober since 1985. I haven’t used, and drank alcohol, eng—used any other kind of addictive substances, because I’m—I got this allergy. I use and I can’t stop. So I don’t start. However, the restaurant business wasn’t a good game for me to be in. [Halaska laughs] And although I loved it, I really loved service industry, and I love to be of service. So I discovered that I had the GI Bill, and that it was good, and that I could use it. And so what I did was I went to school and decided—I thought I wanted to get into addic—alcohol and

drug addictions work. And as I was going through school, I was still in the restaurant business because I needed to support myself, but I was, you know, in a program to change my life. And so [coughs] my boyfriend had two children. He was married before. And he had a one-year-old son and a five-year-old daughter that I helped raise. We've been together since 1983 and lived together since then. And so when I was getting ready to graduate from college, I had discovered to make any money in this business, I had to get a master's degree. So I got a master's degree. And when I was looking for internships and placements, the only paid internship was at the VA medical center in Milwaukee. So I was like, "That's where I'm going." And I did. I interned there. I told that to the social work director. When she asked what was my interest, why I would want to intern at the VA, everybody was like, "Oh, you're my military connection." And, you know, that was just a fact for me. The VA is, like, seven minutes from my house.

That was part of my life. I had two aunts that worked there: an aunt who was a social worker there and another aunt who was a nursing director there. My uncle died at the VA. You know, it was—we'd run through the cemetery. The VA was the VA. It was part of my life. And what a coincidence. I was a veteran. So isn't that odd? So I interned there, and part of—well, I got the internship, I found out, because I was honest. The director was like, "Well, why do you want an internship here?" I said, "It's the only paid internship in the graduate program at the university." [Both laugh] And she was like—she told me this later. She didn't [??]—you know, and I, of course, did the other things, that I'm interested in working with elderly and addicted population, and all the stuff that I was interested in. But she told me later she took me on as a placement because I was honest with her. And I'm like, "You know, honesty is the best policy." [Laughs] It works, you know? It works in this whole sexual orientation. It just works in life in general, you know? You may sway away from it but, you know, if you get back to honesty, you're okay.

[00:04:58]

Anyhow, so I interned there, then I got hired, and got into placement, and the years progressed, and the world got more—you know, when I first started working there, I was—I—as I said before that I was very—I didn't tell anybody I was gay. [Coughs] That was nobody's business. Even though I was in a relationship with Gregson [??] almost nine years, living together, but it was still progressively a different time. I was not comfortable with being out. And then, having patients wanting to know if I was, I was like, "Why do you need to know? What's this about for you about my—?" You know, I was doing alcohol and drug treatments. I was psychotherapy. And it was like, it's none of their business what my personal life was because you weren't there for me; you were there for you. So that was kind of helpful at that time. And then at this time, this was also when Don't Ask Don't Tell—you know, Clinton tried to do something to make it better for LGBTs in the military. And the Don't Ask Don't Tell went into effect, which had, you know, looked as an awful thing, but it was his attempt to make it better,

and it was. It was a little bit better in that sense. And, you know, and of course with other movements about—in the LGBT community, it helped translate to the military. Plus my own personal development was being able to be okay with who I am and, you know, ultimately with marriage equality and, you know, being able to marry my husband, and LGBT—in fact, [coughs] this was interesting. Somebody came up to me once, some years later, not—you know, not so recent, but asking me if I wanted to start an LGB—a lesbian, gay, bisexual group for veterans. And I'm like, "Well, why are you asking me? Why don't you ask Tom, Dick, or Harry?" You know, like, with—it was very important to me that I was the one who was to disclose my sexual orientation to another person, rather than somebody else asking me about it or assuming it.

You know, I'm—as I said, I was never a GI Joe kind of guy. And you could assume all you want, but unless I tell you—it's—it was very important to me. I think it was about the whole military experience and the type of discharge I had. That was really disempowering and shameful. However, I had my healing moment with the military. And [coughs] that was ultimately this other really fabulous psychologist started support groups for lesbian, gay, bisexual—it actually started for transgender veterans which, amazingly, transgender persons are at a higher rate in the military than in the community, so—which is interesting. She started the transgender group, and then the LGB group, and then there be—started an EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] committee at the VA. Here we have them for disabled persons, and blacks, and pan-Americans—pan-Asians, and disabled persons, and women, and—so they started an LGBT EEO committee. And I'm like, at this point, I'm ready to go for it. You know, we also had a mental health summit for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered veterans. And I was, like, you know, one of the ringleaders for that.

There was a huge, wonderful event at the university. And it was just—it just—all very good things that have gone down and been supportive and good. Anyhow, so on this LGB committee, I'm at a recruitment fair for persons with disabilities. And there's these [coughs] Navy recruiters there. And I was, you know, talking to this guy and—so I'm going to—I'll be at the VA thirty years when I retire in a year and a half. And I'm talking to this guy there. This is—I'm sixty-five now. I was about fifty-six or fifty-seven at the time. And I said to him, I said, "Hey, listen. You know, I got discharged for being gay in '78," I says, "But you've dropped—you know, now it's okay to be gay and be in the military. I have my master's degree and I've been working at the VA. Would you be interested in me as an officer in the military?" And he's like, "Oh my god. When are you going to be fifty-eight?" And I said, "About three years." "We could get an age waiver for you. We really need psychiatric social workers right now." And I said, "Terrific."

[00:10:24]

So I called my husband. I'm like, "Greg, they're going to commission me, like, maybe a lieutenant commander or even a commander rank. They're going to do a

age waiver. Is it okay with you if I take a commission in the Navy?" And he's like, "Yeah, okay." And I'm like, "Wow. Extra money. This is going to be cool. I can't believe it. They didn't want me. Now they're hot to trot for me. They're gonna, like, take me at a drop of a hat." And I'm like, "Okay, terrific." So I'm, like, going to Zumba classes, getting in shape, and all this other kind of stuff. And so I actually meet with him, and we sit down, and we talk about it, and he says—well, I'm, like, you know, thinking Germany, maybe Italy. And he said, "No, you'll go to Afghanistan." And I'm like, "Uh, let me think about that." So I didn't have to think about it long because when I started talking to my loved ones, they're like, "No, you're not going there." And I decided I wasn't, either. But the healing part of that was it didn't matter anymore and they wanted me. And I could say no, I don't want to. That was hugely empowering. I kind of wish I would've gone, though, and there's a little part of me that was like, "Yeah, I would've been okay with Afghanistan." I got buddies. You know, I got a social work buddy who did this and she was in Afghanistan and, you know, she did the right thing. I mean, I'd be okay with doing that, you know? You—between you and me, I'd be okay with going to Afghanistan because I know I'd be doing the right thing. You know, so—

Halaska: Good. So with your work at the VA as—what kind of social worker did you say?

Konz-

Krzyminski: I did psychiatric social work for fourteen years. So I did predominantly alcohol and drug treatment. Then I did other addictions treatment, gambling, other kind of stuff. Then I did some psychotherapeutic work. And then I moved over to primary care. So I am currently in primary care. We are a unusual discipline. In fact, we don't—social work does not exist in primary care in the public sector. Our purpose, social work, in primary care at the Veterans Administration is solely to service the veterans. So we become this special layer of a resource for all sorts of issues that can arise for veteran-specific population. Not only veterans but, you know, we sort of become the cure-all kind of guy for primary care issues for vets. We have since established primary care mental health integration. So I really don't do mental health work anymore. But, you know, providing support, assessing, those kinds of things are, at some level, psychotherapeutic, you know? I think being validated, resolving issues, which may be financial, or familial, or access to benefits, veterans' benefits or, you know, dealing with a demented, elderly veteran father or uncle, or those kinds of legalities that come up with all of that. That's stuff I do.

Halaska: During your time there, what do you think are some of the best strides in, like, programs and treatment, like, the best changes that you've seen, or most impactful?

[00:14:47]

Konz-

Krzyminski: Well, I've been in two huge programs. Two—you know, I've been in addictions treatment. I've been in all levels of an addictions treatment from detox to—from intake, to detox, to inpatient. We don't even have an inpatient program anymore. We have a residential, which is different to inpatient hospitalization. We have acute hospitalization for psychiatric, but there's really no inpatient alcoholic drug treatment. That doesn't—that's non-existent. In fact, I was part of a research project with the University of Wisconsin where we recruited subjects for what's the best approach to alcohol treatment—alcoholism treatment. And [laughs] part of the project was not helpful for alcohol treatment because it—we study between twelve-step groups, like AA [Alcoholics Anonymous], therapy, different types of therapy, and found out there was no difference. And so when the insurance companies got ahold of this, they were like, "Send these people to Alcoholics Anonymous, you know? It's a lot cheaper than eight thousand dollars and an inpatient hospital bed, or something like that." So that is some of the strides, you know, with the recognition of the power of Alcoholics Anonymous as a tool to help people who are chemically-dependent alcoholic, or any of the other twelve-step programs, and recognizing that, along with clinical interventions. That's huge.

Working with veterans population and understanding the military to the sense where, like, hello, I lived it, you know? That has been extremely helpful. I work very hard in not necessarily using my veteran status as—that I'm better than anybody else. My colleagues, social work colleagues who are also, you know, MSWs, who didn't serve in the military, you know, that there's—you know, we both have the same degree. I am more—I don't know if I'm more empathic. I just—you know, I just—I get it. I understand, you know, being in the military, you know, that kind of stuff, I suppose, and then the identity of, you know, somebody's a Navy vet or they're—you know, the teasing with—you know, if somebody's in the Marine Corps. "Oh, you're in the Army." Or that kind of stuff is—it's like, it helps break the ice with my patients. That's huge. I mean, I got a huge flag in my office with [??] "Don't give up the ship" on it. I have my—and that has progressed for me over the years about being more out about my military service.

Also, you know, I still don't necessarily disclose my sexual orientation, but I do have a picture of my granddaughter in my office and my husband. That was huge. That was a huge piece from being on that LGBT EEO committee. I remember being at one of our first open-table things, where we invited employees to come in. And this woman comes to my table with tears in her eyes and she said, "I'm so glad you are here." And I was thinking she was going to tell me she's a lesbian. No. Her daughter is lesbian and she is able to have a picture of her daughter going to prom with her girlfriend in her office, whereas that was never possible before. All of their colleagues were showing their daughters' stuff, but she couldn't do her daughters. And she felt that—fact that we were there, she felt the strength to be able to share her joy about her daughter. That's kept—that alone has kept me

participating in that EEO committee, which can be a pain the—[Halaska laughs] same old thing all the time. But it is the same old thing, and it is about educating, you know, and it's about—you know, somehow—you know, and when the whole transgenders thing came through with the military, and there—I can't think of her name, but she wrote a book called *The Warrior Princess* and she was in a documentary, and she was a UDT SEAL [Underwater Demolition Team, Sea, Air, Land]. You know, this is, like, the most macho of the machos. And she still, you know, shoots, and she's a pretty girl, you know?

[00:20:05]

It's just so—it's so good to be able to educate and have people be open and accepting. And even if not accepting, not critical, or not taunting, you know, not tolerating that. There are laws against not doing that. And being part of that, that is a huge trend, and that is amazing, amazing. One of the other trends, though—it's kind of interesting—is, like, we would get a lot of the young veterans coming back and we'd do an assessment. It's, like, a social assessment. It's part of the intake coming into health—the V—this is not your father's VA or even your grandfather's VA. I'm proud to work where I am. I work at an excellent medical center. And if somebody's schluffing up, we call them on it. That's baloney. Get your act together. Do the right thing. But the interesting thing to me is, you know, when we do—part of the assessment talks about, like, a religion or a spiritual background. These are twenty-ish-year-old people. They have nothing. They have no identification. I'm—it just amazes me. It just amazes me. It's like, how do you have your runner in the water? How do you know where you're going? I don't know what that is. So that's a twenty-ish-year-old population, which are children of people who were probably born in the '60s. I just don't get it. That's just an interesting piece. It's like, I don't know how people have any moral direction. That amazes me.

Halaska: The lack of religious affiliation, among [??]?

Konz-

Krzyminski: Not only that because I'll ask about—okay, so how about, you know, what gets you motivated, gets you going every day and, you know, like morals, and —? Maybe you don't—you know, like, maybe like me, I didn't really develop those things until I was in my later twenties or thirties. Maybe that's part of human development. I don't know. [Halaska laughs] But it—I don't consider myself a standard, you know, so it's interesting. I find that interesting. So—

Halaska: Is there anything else that you want to add about your military service or your time or experience working at the VA? Or are you a part of any other veterans organizations that you wanted to talk about? Or have you ever attended a reunion? Anything like that?

Konz-
Krzyminski: Ok. So my dear friend Gene Malaspina committed suicide.

Halaska: I'm sorry.

Konz-
Krzyminski: He's my only—he was my only connection with my military past. I—

Halaska: When was that? I'm sorry.

Konz-
Krzyminski: Greg, and I, and the kids stopped to visit him and his partner in St. Augustine, Florida probably around 1985, and then I learned from his partner that he killed himself in 19—about 1986. And it was really about sexual identity and orientation. More about sexual orientation rather than identity. Forgive me. So—and disclosure with his family, I think. That was a huge piece. In many ways, I'm grateful for the way things went down for me. I'm grateful for my military experience. I learned so much from it. I'm grateful for the healing, of the changes in the military and that, you know, I was no longer unacceptable and that I was welcomed and, you know, interested in a commission as an officer. That was huge for me. My experience working—I—my Aunt Amy, the one that I took care of here [??] that joined the Marine Corps was working at the VA when I started working there. She was still there. She had forty-two years of—she had a master's degree in nursing from Marquette University in 1954. No woman got a master's degree in—that was—you know, or the women who did were few and far between and were trailblazers, and she was.

[00:25:16]

And she took me under her wing, and I—my whole experience has all been—talk about spiritual—has been just doing the next right thing, and it has been that the whole time. I think I talked about honesty earlier being—you know, ultimately coming back to the truth and what's the right thing to do is that. And it was the right thing for me to do to go into the military at that point in my life. It was kind of like a way to f—help me by helping others. And that's just who I am. You know, my dad was a cop. His role was to help others be safe. And, you know, the other relatives in my family who were in the service, their role was to help others be safe in the world. And that's just how I see myself as a social worker at the VA as a veteran and it's something I'm very proud of. And I'm really proud of that experience. And I think it's thrilling and exciting and I'm certainly glad I've had that experience. And I'm really glad I ended up in the Navy because it was just—there's—you know, Army's nice, Air Force is nice, Marine Corps is nice. But it's like, there's something about the sea and, you know, the water, and—that just seemed so healing and so—I mean, the world is mostly water, the earth, you know. And it's like—so it—that's pretty much it.

Halaska: All right.

Konz-
Krzyminski: Yeah.

Halaska: Well, thank you very much.

Konz-
Krzyminski: Thank you very much. It was a good experience.

Halaska: Oh, excellent.

Konz-
Krzyminski: I c—

[End of OH2179.Konz-Krzyminski_file1_access]

[End of interview]