

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
DARLENE BORCHARDT  
Performer, Army, Vietnam War  
2015

OH  
2005

**OH**  
**2005**

**Borchardt, Darlene** (b. 1952). Oral History Interview, 2015.

Approximate length: 1 hour 47 minutes

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

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, Darlene Borchardt, raised in Little Chute, Wisconsin, discusses her service as a performer in South Vietnam, with gigs also in Korea, Thailand, and Taiwan from June 1968 until late September 1968. She talks of growing up, and the musical influences that she was exposed to. Borchardt touches upon the formation and early gigs of the all-girl band, to be called the She Five, in 1965 when she was thirteen and the band's youngest member; a local agent obtained a booking for them to play overseas for the troops in Southeast Asia in the summer of 1968. She vividly remembers, as a fifteen-year old, the impact made upon her by the heat, humidity and smells of Vietnam upon landing in June at the base at Tan Son Nhut. Borchardt states that she was not afraid, rather citing the naivete of youth, and the general excitement of performing for the troops, as taking precedence over apprehension. The She Five played all the bases, and visited hospitals and rice paddies around the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon and Long Binh. She notes that the group, while sometimes staying in a hotel, was more familiar with the hooch and the bunker. She comments on daily conditions; the ubiquitousness of sand. She describes the typical show and relates that her future husband caught a glimpse of her at one of them. Back home for her junior year at high school, she relates how schooling was postponed and chronicles the She Five's post-Vietnam performances; the band's breakup; the formation of a new band; and the shift to a post-music career, during which she and her Vietnam GI admirer found themselves at the same workplace. Borchardt shares her assessment of her experiences overseas, and her perspective on the soldiers, the protestors at home, and the war itself. The She Five re-united at LZ Lambeau, Wisconsin's official welcoming extended to Vietnam veterans more than thirty years after the fall of Saigon. Expressing the bonding that the Vietnam experience has brought to marriage, the reclamation of old ties, and withal the knowledge of having put smiles on soldiers' faces, she accounts herself "lucky," declaring "it's hard to imagine my life with this not being a part of it."

**Biographical Sketch:**

Borchardt (b. 1952) performed in the only all-girl band playing Vietnam, from June to September 1968. After returning to Wisconsin she pursued both music and non-music careers.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, 2015.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Service, 2016.

Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2017.

## Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of Borchardt.OH2005]

Brooks: Today is Tuesday August 11, 2015. This is an interview with Darlene Reba Borchardt. Darlene was a member of an all-girl band, the She Five, which entertained troops overseas in the summer of 1968. The interview is being conducted at the Madison Public Library in Madison, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum Oral History Program. That's my mouthful. Then we'll move on to you. Let's just talk about your early life. Where and when were you born?

Borchardt: I was born in July in 1952 and raised in Little Chute, Wisconsin, which is about five miles from Appleton.

Brooks: So tell me about childhood and growing up.

Borchardt: Childhood and growing up. Pretty normal family. My dad, he was a machinist. Worked at Appleton Machine Company for thirty-some years. My mom was the typical stay-at-home mom until we were in school and then she got a job a couple blocks away. Only one vehicle back then, so she could walk back and forth to work. Childhood, a pretty normal childhood.

Brooks: Any siblings?

Borchardt: Two siblings, an older sister and a younger brother.

Brooks: And in terms of education did you do grade school, high school?

Borchardt: Grade school, high school, some tech classes. I actually quit high school after my junior year to go on the road with a band, but then I did go back and got my credits that I needed.

Brooks: Okay, great. So tell me about music. When and how did you first get interested in music?

Borchardt: Well, music has always been part of my family. My uncle, who was also my godfather, he played an accordion in a country-western band. My mom played Hawaiian guitar. My dad, he just played the radio. [laughs] So I always loved music. When I was twelve, I met a girl who went to the same school and we started talking music and guitars. She had a guitar and I said, "Well, my sister was in a band," and that's kind of how I got started. So I bought my first guitar with my babysitting money and started, about twelve years old.

Brooks: Wow, and what kind of music were you listening to?

Borchardt: Back then pretty much—I mean, it was the Beatles. The Beatles era. Top 40 rock. A lot of soul music back then, you know, the Supremes, Aretha Franklin, that kind of stuff. But the band, we more did Top 40.

Brooks: And did you teach yourself how to play guitar?

Borchardt: I taught myself how to play guitar, yup. When I bought my first guitar, I couldn't even play the F chord. [laughs]

Brooks: Wow, how did you teach yourself?

Borchardt: Just a lot of musicians at the time. We were one of the only all-girl bands in the Appleton area, so a lot of mentors that taught us some extra chords pretty much out of a book. Just kind of listening and tuning into the music and figuring out what chords to play and figuring out what song to do.

Brooks: So tell me about the formation of the band.

Borchardt: The formation of the band, okay. I started by myself meeting Pam. We both went to St. John's grade school and we were supposed to go to church every morning, but one morning we skipped out. So I was talking with her outside at church and then we got on the band subject. My sister was dating a bass player. They were actually trying to start an all-girl band. I was telling Pam that, "You know, I'd love to learn how." So anyway, it was Pam and I to start with. Then Audrey, she was the drummer, the then drummer, she had posted a note at Heid Music in Appleton looking for other female musicians. So then we got together. It was Audrey, and—it gets kind of complicated. She was playing guitar at the time, and then her friend Cheryl played keyboards, then we had a guy drummer. So we initially started out as the She Four and Him. It was myself, Pam, Audrey, Cheryl, and Jerry Ewing. He was our drummer.

[00:05:02]

Then Audrey thought, "You know it would be really cool to just have all girls." So Jerry taught Audrey how play drums, I switched from bass guitar to rhythm guitar, and then we got Patsy in as our bass player and the She Five was formed. We got our agent, Gary Van Zeeland from Little Chute, and he did all of our bookings. We played teen clubs. Back then it was eighteen-year-old beer bars and twenty-one-year-old liquor bars, so we played at mostly teen clubs, teen dances, things like that. Whenever we played at a bar, our parents had to come along or one or two of our parents because we were all underage. So we pretty much got established around the Appleton area. Played every weekend. That's kind of how the band started.

Brooks: And what year was that?

Borchardt: That would have been 1965.

Brooks: Okay, '65. So you were thirteen?

Borchardt: I was thirteen. Yeah.

Brooks: Wow, that's young.

Borchardt: Very young, yes.

Brooks: Did you play mostly covers then or did you play your own music?

Borchardt: We did not write our own music. Did all covers. And Pam, she was our lead singer, she's got a real gruff voice so she could do the Aretha Franklin and just all the guy songs, you know? With this rough voice. So that was kind of her signature.

Brooks: You said your parents had to take you, what did they think about you and your band?

Borchardt: Well, my mom—because she played guitar and she loved it. My dad from the old school, he was in the Navy, you know? He probably heard us play twice and that was about it. But the moms formed this friendship, all the moms, because it was mostly the moms that came along and chaperoned us. So they established their own friendship, you know? Well, geez. Cheryl's mom is going, my mom is going, and they'd, you know, listen to us. Very enthusiastic for us.

Brooks: So how did you guys end up going overseas? Tell me how that happened.

Borchardt: Gary Van Zeeland, our agent, he booked through the USO even though we weren't part of the USO tour, but that's where he got his connections from. So he brought it up that potentially we could go on this tour to Southeast Asia entertaining the troops and we're all like, "Yes! Wow! This is like big time stuff!" Parents were a little apprehensive, of course. My dad, being in the Navy, probably knew what Navy guys could do, [laughs] you know, off base or whatever, but, in the end they all agreed and Gary assured our parents that we would be very well taken care of, chaperoned. When we left Wisconsin, we actually flew out to L.A. That was the first time I was ever on an airplane and actually the first time I ever left the state of Wisconsin and I'm on my way to Vietnam. So it was a huge deal, you know? The kids in school too—in fact, I should have brought my yearbook along. Things were in there, "Oh, have fun in Vietnam! Bring back a couple of good-looking GIs for us!" You know? So that all came about. We had to—starting in March already, we went down to Milwaukee to the base down there and that's where we got all our shots. It was shots for everything. Malaria, cholera, yellow fever, typhoid, I got my shot record in my stuff there. I think we went down two

or three times for shots before we could go.

Brooks: What was the age range at that time of the girls?

Borchardt: I was fifteen at the time and then Pam would have just turned sixteen and then the other three girls were like eighteen. So they were like three years ahead of the two younger ones.

Brooks: Okay, what were you guys feeling and talking about when you were getting ready to go over there?

[00:09:58]

Borchardt: Just excitement. We weren't afraid at all. Fifteen, you're too naive to be afraid but I still remember stepping off the plane at Tan Son Nhut base where we landed and the doors opened up and it was like, I can still close my eyes and smell. It's just got a certain smell to it over there. And the heat, and the humidity, it was, like, not Kansas anymore! It was a little overwhelming to start with, but our roadie over there—his name was Joe. Don't even know what his last name was. He was from Australia and he more or less—Gary Van Zeeland, our agent, through the USO that Joe was like a roadie there and took care of us. But then the GIs too, they just kind of took us under their wings like we were their little sisters. Never once ever did I feel threatened or afraid. There was one instance though that Audrey—and this is how naive we were. When we first got there and we stayed in Saigon, we only stayed in hotels in Saigon and Da Nang. Other than that, we stayed in bunkers in the hooches. And Audrey—and I don't recall this—but she said, "Remember when we first got there?" and she said, "I couldn't figure out—we couldn't figure out why all this thundering was going on and it never rained." Well, it was the mortars, you know? [laughs] We had never been in a war-torn country, so we had no clue. Then there was one other time, everywhere we went we had to travel by convoy. So we stayed in Saigon, but then played all the bases around the Saigon area. Long Binh, Bien Hoa, and then we'd travel in a convoy back to Saigon. There was one instance where the South Vietnamese got suspicious and they started firing on the convoy. Well, that lasted about a half an hour and somehow it all worked out, but I remember being in this Jeep from Long Binh back to Saigon and you're getting shot at, you know, they're coming, but it's like, where do you hide in a Jeep, you know? [laughs] So, you know, I remember that specifically, but it was more just exciting. It was fabulous, and standing on a stage playing for thousands of GIs who—we were labeled "round eyes from the world." There were a lot of Australian bands over there, a lot of Korean and Filipino bands, but we were *the* only all-girl American band that had ever played in Vietnam. So they were like, "Round eyes from the world!" So it was just exciting; and the older I get, the more I realize how important this was and just be able to make a difference, you know? A little taste of home for the guys, so it's cool.

Brooks: When you were there, tell me how the typical show would go.

Borchardt: We'd do two shows, like I said, Top 40 stuff. The guys out there are like—one song I remember, we did by the Bee Gees, it was called “Massachusetts.” Well, as soon as you'd have that “Massachusetts” out of your mouth, here was a little group over there, “Yeah!” and screaming and hollering. Every show we ended with, “We Gotta Get Out of This Place,” that was *the* song over there. Then the words we changed to, the one verse says, “Work, work, work,” that was short. We changed it to “short,” which we learned after the first couple of shows and all the guys were out there, “Short! Short!” Like this, that means they were short timers. They didn't have too much longer to go in Vietnam and then they got to go home. We played in rice paddies on the back of a semi-truck. The clubs. Officer's clubs. Do you want me to go on? Like the story with Mike and I?

Brooks: Sure. Yeah, go for it. We can always backtrack.

[00:15:00]

Borchardt: When we got there, we were playing mostly around the Saigon area and Long Binh. So we found this out years later. My husband Mike, he went to Vietnam in '68, the end of June, his plane got hijacked on his way to Vietnam. There were 214 guys aboard the Seaboard World Airlines, it was. They flew out of Tacoma, Washington. In route, the Russians said that they invaded their air space and Mike still remembers sitting—he had a window seat—and he could see the MiGs on the side flying and motioning for them to go down. Anyway, they ended up landing on, they were called the Iturup Islands [Iturup, one of the large southernmost Kuril Islands] and the US and Russia negotiated for three days until they were released. So for them three days, they sat on that plane. They were allowed to get off in like groups of three with a Russian, you know, a big machine gun following them out so they could go to the bathroom and then it was back on the plane. So anyway, after they were able to leave—and he was stationed in Long Binh—and because of his ordeal, they just put him on light duty for a couple weeks, three weeks, so his job was to escort the officers around. This officer wanted to go to the club where we actually were playing and Mike couldn't get in because he was just a E4, I think, whatever. He couldn't get in the officer's club, but he remembers standing at the door watching us and it was like three or four years later after I got off the road, came back to my hometown. I just wanted a normal job. We ended up working at the same place. He said to his supervisor, he said, “I've seen her somewhere before. She looks so familiar,” and the supervisor said, “Well, she was in the all-girl band the She Five.” He said, “That's where I saw her!”

Brooks: Wow, that's amazing!

Borchardt: So he remembered and then we started going out and it was like and everything clicked.

Brooks: Wow, what are the odds?

Borchardt: Really! [laughs]

Brooks: Speaking of which, do you have any idea of how many shows you played while you were there?

Borchardt: Oh my goodness.

Brooks: A guess.

Borchardt: At least two a day, sometimes more. Sometimes we'd have a couple of days in between when we'd have to travel to another base. But pretty much one for sure a day with maybe a day off. A couple per day. We did a special show for security police who, I mean, they're security police. They couldn't make it to our show, so we did like a special show for them designated for all the ones that couldn't get to our first show. We were definitely kept busy over there.

Brooks: And how did you know how to get from place to place or where you playing next?

Borchardt: I have no idea. [laughs]

Brooks: You didn't have to worry about it.

Borchardt: Didn't worry about it. I'm assuming that Joe, the guy that was kind of our road manager over there, he knew where and he arranged all the transportation, but at fifteen? You know, those—

Brooks: You're not a logistics—[Borchardt laughs]

Borchardt: Exactly.

Brooks: So were there any really memorable shows? Are there any shows that kind of stand out in your head?

Borchardt: They were all memorable. The enthusiasm. God, just feeling so welcomed and I mean all the guys out there, the smile on their face. So they were all memorable. I can't think of any one in particular, they were all good. [laughs]

Brooks: Okay, so you said you kind of stayed everywhere and anywhere, you stayed in hooches. Can you tell me a little bit more about daily life and the conditions that you encountered?

[00:19:59]



Borchardt: Pretty much everything was sand. Sandy sheets. I got some pictures there too. We stayed in the back of a storeroom or a little warehouse building with a little corner sectioned off that they had five cots. That was pretty much where we stayed at all times other than Da Nang and Saigon. When we played at Phu Bai, and that was the furthest north that they would let us go, north of that was the DMZ, the Demilitarized Zone, and they wouldn't let us go any further north than that. But Phu Bai we had this little hooch that we stayed in and our bathroom was just a makeshift toilet, a little sink hanging off the wall, the showers were—it was a big—I don't even know what they were—tents [laughs] that you go in. One regret that I have is that I did not keep a daily journal because there's so many little things like that, oh yeah. The older you get, the details just kind of fade away.

Brooks: What about food? What did you guys eat?

Borchardt: Food, we mostly ate at the mess halls on base. When we were in Saigon, because we were staying in Saigon at a hotel, there were a couple of restaurants that were recommended to us by GIs like, "Don't go here where they, you know, like, raw fish. Don't eat any of that," but some of them were known for their American menu. So them were the only two, just in Da Nang and Saigon, that we ate at restaurants there. Other than that it was all mess halls and right on base with the guys.

Brooks: What did you think about that food?

Borchardt: I thought it was good. Of course, I didn't have to live on it for a year. The C-rations, you know it was so cool. You open up this thing and the butane thing to heat up your food. We thought they were awesome! [laughs] The guys probably not so much because it was their daily breakfast, lunch, and supper, you know, whatever.

Brooks: What about were you able to communicate with your parents or anybody back home?

Borchardt: We did letter writing, of course, and there was—at one point we were able to call home via radio and because of the time difference I think for us it was like five o'clock at night, my mom and dad were just getting up for work at five, six o'clock the next morning. So yeah, there was only the once that there was an actual voice communication back home. But other than that, you know, letters.

Brooks: What were the letters from home like to you?

Borchardt: You know, I don't remember. [laughs] I saved a couple of 'em. I have one that my aunt wrote me and just thanking me for what we were doing and she recalled my uncle, when he was in the service, he actually got to meet Ann-Margret. So you know, just thanking me for what we were doing and be safe.

Brooks: Did you ever meet any other performers or entertainers?

Borchardt: Yes, Filipino groups over there. Some Australian bands. Nobody from the States though. Didn't meet any stateside bands.

Brooks: And you didn't get to go to any of the, like, Bob Hope USO shows or anything like that?

Borchardt: No, in fact I don't even know when—because we were there in the summer. I think he mostly went during Christmastime for their big Christmas shows.

Brooks: What about interacting with civilians over there? Did you get to meet and interact with any?

Borchardt: The Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese. You know, we learned a few words like “*đi đi mau*” was “go away” and “*đi đi mau dien-cai-dao*” was “go away crazy person,” or you know, these were taught to us by the GIs.

[00:24:49]

The Vietnamese children. And they were “babysans,” little, and “mamasan,” was mama, and then “papasan” for the dad. But the little children—Audrey has blonde hair—they were just mesmerized. They had never seen blonde hair before. So I don't know if they were thinking she was like a goddess or some strange, from another planet, but I remember her blonde hair that they were just—and they just wanted to touch it. But yeah, I thought they were all really cute, but the sanitary conditions over there. I mean, granted I had never been out of Wisconsin before and the—yeah, sanitary conditions. You know, if they have to go to the bathroom, they just squat on the street and go. It's like, oh my god! [laughs] After a while you get used to it.

Brooks: Was there anything else that was very surprising to you about being over there?

Borchardt: I've got some pictures too. Like a truck would pull up to a restaurant and all of the beef is just in an open truck and the flies and stuff. And going through the markets and all these fish, dried, and I was like, “Ugh! [laughs] No! Where is some Wisconsin cheese?” [laughs] You know, whatever. So that, it's like no. Wouldn't touch any of that. Not going to try that. So I think that was like an awakening. You're definitely not in Wisconsin anymore. [laughs]

Brooks: Was there anything else unexpected about the experience?

Borchardt: Unexpected. Not really unexpected, it's just we were so caught up in the excitement. And five of us, best friends, we all stuck together of course. Nothing really unexpected other than not really knowing what we were going to. It's like,

we had no clue. What is Vietnam like? Didn't know.

Brooks: And did you travel outside of Vietnam as well?

Borchardt: We did. We spent—we arrived the end of June through I think it was the second or the third week in August. Then we went to Bangkok, Thailand, and that was like, boy. Talk about an upgrade. Because we stayed in this really nice hotel. It was called the Victorian, or Victoria something, and we were so grubby after coming from Vietnam. No laundromats, you know? We washed all of our clothes by hand. Well, by the time we got to our next gig outside of Vietnam—I mean, our boots. Our go-go boots to match our outfits, we had pink, yellow, white, black. They were—everything was getting to be so dry rotted just from the heat, the humidity. So we spent a couple weeks in Bangkok and that was just playing on the bases around there. Then we went to Seoul, [South] Korea. Played in bases around the Seoul area and then Taipei, Taiwan, but they were all on bases that we played.

Brooks: Did you have a favorite place that you visited?

Borchardt: They were all good. Vietnam was actually my favorite place just because of the reception, and the GIs, and the enthusiasm. It's like we were stars but we really weren't. It's like, wow. This is so cool! Vietnam definitely, definitely my favorite. Because once we got to Korea and Bangkok, then we stayed in hotels in the city. So yeah, we traveled to the bases but it wasn't like living on a base in the hooches and stuff.

Brooks: When you traveled or just in general when you were on the base, did you have a bodyguard or any type of—was anybody responsible for you?

[00:29:51]

Borchardt: I know there was somebody with us all the time. When we traveled from base to base in Saigon, if it was too far for a convoy, we flew on Huey helicopter, we flew in the back of C-130s. We were on the back of big military trucks going to our gigs. So that was our main means of transportation in Vietnam. I don't even know how we got out of the country. It must have been on a commercial something. [laughs] Truthfully, I don't even recall the details of flying from, say, Vietnam, leaving Vietnam, which was really sad for us in a way because you know, we had met so many people and a lot of good friends. Then we're leaving Vietnam and I don't even remember which airline we flew. I think I have the ticket stubs in there. Like I said, that was how many years ago? Quite a few. [laughs]

Brooks: So you mentioned your go-go boots. I'm wondering what else your wardrobe consisted of.

Borchardt: All mini. Miniskirts, mini dresses. Our moms actually sewed a lot of our outfits,

so we had these little red fake velvet miniskirts, we had gold miniskirts. Dresses. The mini dresses, I guess, but that was our main—then the fishnet stockings to go with the go-go boots.

Brooks: And what did you wear when you were not on stage, assuming you wore something different?

Borchardt: Then it was just pretty much T-shirts. It wasn't even jeans because it was too hot for jeans over there. Just shorts, T-shirts, stuff like that.

Brooks: Okay, I'm just wondering how you packed for Vietnam when you don't know what you're getting into.

Borchardt: Well, it was a huge suitcase that I had. Yeah, you pack for three months! Your feminine hygiene things also, but we were able to shop on the PXs—on the bases—to buy any other stuff that we needed. So I brought home some souvenirs. Yes, try packing for three, four months in a suitcase and no laundromat to wash your clothes out. [laughs]

Brooks: Wow, that sounds like a challenge. So you brought home some souvenirs? What did you bring?

Borchardt: Yes. Bangkok, actually some wooden carved—they look like, what do I want to say? Almost like Buddhist statues, you know, just typical trinket stuff. I didn't actually bring home a lot of stuff. Just some gifts for my parents.

Brooks: So how long were you overseas then?

Borchardt: From June until, it was like the middle part of September, middle to the end of September. So then when we got back, because we were all in high school because I was a sophomore—it was the summer of my sophomore year, or after my sophomore year—so we got back and school had already been in session for a month. So it was catch up time. Basically, the teachers said all I had to do was a term paper on my experience and do a couple of presentations for the classes and they pretty much excused me of all my homework that didn't get done prior to that. So it was towards the end of September. I remember getting back and because of the whole experience, just being totally exhausted. I still remember what it was like. It was like the first night that I crawled into my own bed, clean sheets. Of course, Bangkok, that wasn't so bad, but it's like yeah, you're in a different world over there. Then you get back in the groove.

Brooks: When you agreed to go, did you have set dates? Did you know you were coming back in the middle of September?

Borchardt: We knew we were leaving on a set date, but I don't recall if there was a—there must have been, as soon as we finished out the tour, you know? But all the little

details are just gone, unfortunately.

[00:35:01]

Brooks: That will happen. It was a while ago.

Borchardt: Yes, it was.

Brooks: You've had to put a lot in there.

Borchardt: And being so young too. I think had I been in my twenties, yeah, I probably would have kept a daily journal. You get a little bit more responsible when you get in your twenties, not when you're fifteen. In fact, I turned sixteen in Vietnam. The guys—we had played a gig. We got back to the hooch. I was just so tired. I remember, I recall this so well, “No, come on. Let's go over to the mess hall and just,” I was like, “Okay.” Well, a couple of guys on the base, they had made me this huge birthday cake. “Happy birthday Dar,” the frosting was like this thick. So I've got pictures of me cutting my birthday cake. So I turned sixteen in Dong Tam, Vietnam.

Brooks: Wow, that's not something most sixteen-year-olds can say!

Borchardt: Most kids are—I didn't even have my driver's license. I think I worked on that the following year, whatever. But yeah, most sixteen-year-olds are out practicing driving. I was over there playing and having fun. [laughs]

Brooks: That's great. So when you got back, was there any type of homecoming?

Borchardt: Oh yeah, just family and then go back to school and then everybody, “Oh! How was it?” The pictures, they were just, “Wow, you are so lucky!” Which I am. I consider myself extremely lucky to have had this experience and do it, you know? So I think a lot of them were really jealous, you know? Especially the girls. Oh my god. you know, standing on stage playing for a thousand GIs who just think you're the world up there, which we were, round eyes from the world.

Brooks: Wow, and did the band—what happened to the band?

Borchardt: The band. We kept playing after that summer and of course that was huge because then the advertising. The She Five just returned home from their Southeast Asia tour. That drew in lots of people. Then in 1969, we were actually scheduled to go back to Vietnam. At that point, one of the girls had gotten pregnant and we could only find—and she was our bass player. So the only way we could get two other females, we found twins from the Chicago area to join the group and then we let our keyboard player go. So then it was still the She Five and we played Vegas for like two to three weeks. Then we went to Hawaii and we played at Schofield Air Base in Hawaii. We stayed there about a month and then were to continue on to

Vietnam. Actually, the group split up then in Hawaii. Just personality differences with these two new girls in the group and it just didn't work out. Then the fighting was getting so bad in Vietnam, so we ended up then coming back to the States. We regrouped. There were four of us. We called ourselves Four in the Attic. Myself, there was Audrey, Pam, our lead singer, we actually got a bass player from Madison, Debbie Hastings, who actually went on to play with Bo Diddley group for twenty-some years, and then we had a male keyboard player, Roger. We went on the road then as Four in the Attic and then actually I quit school after my junior year to go on the road with Four in the Attic. Did the southern states, hotel chains, the house band. Then it was getting to the point, for me, like this just isn't fun anymore. It's a grind out there and I admire any musician who can keep this up for years and years because we had a big '63 passenger bus, you know? You get done playing a stint at a hotel for, say, two weeks. You were in the bus driving to the next state for your next gig the following night. That's when I decided I don't want the road anymore.

[00:39:51]

So I came back to Appleton and got in a little group. There was myself, Audrey the drummer, and Patsy who was our bass player, and another guy. We just did little gigs around Appleton, just like, you know, little short-term gigs. Then it was—after that that there was one group. It was Audrey, Roger from Four in the Attic, and myself. The two of them didn't hit it off too well. Again, it's like, this isn't fun anymore. So that's when I left the group totally. I can't do this anymore. So I got a normal job and actually that's where I met Mike at. But still continued to play, you know, in groups here or there. Once I moved to Wittenberg, I was in a four-piece group. We called ourselves Chambray and did folk music, acoustic music. I still have my guitar. I still play, you know? Here and there, sit in a little bit.

Brooks: And when you—what was your normal job?

Borchardt: My normal job was actually at a factory in Little Chute called Crystal Print. We made plastic bags for Charmin and for the paper towels, you know the plastic that gets wrapped around them or whatever? So I stayed there for—I was there for a couple years. I met Mike and we ended up getting married. I quit then Crystal Print because we were both at the same place and it's like, no. So I worked at a shoe store. Eventually once we moved to Wittenberg, I worked at Associated Bank for nine years and then I worked at Lutheran Social Services for thirteen and a half years and then actually retired from Aspirus clinic as a receptionist and referral coordinator.

Brooks: You've been in quite a few places.

Borchardt: A few. [laughs]

Brooks: And what year was it that you started at Crystal Print?

Borchardt: That would have been 1971.

Brooks: Okay, so I always find it interesting to chitchat with folks about public opinion and the media and just in general the mood about the Vietnam War and especially people who were there and involved. So can you tell me about your experience with all that and your reflections on it?

Borchardt: My experience was all positive because I was over there entertaining. I wasn't over there fighting a war, but our GIs that came back from Vietnam and basically got spit on for fighting a war that, in my personal view, we should have never been involved with to begin with. My second opinion is that we had the power at any time to go in there and blow North Vietnam off the face of the map, but it was all the political war, as they turn out, you know? Or fighting a war that the politicians get us into basically. Yeah, I feel bad for the GIs that they spent years over there in hell, Vietnam, and then come back to no respect. It's finally getting there. We learn. The government learns. The people learn as you go. I was like, you know what? Our GIs, they didn't say, "Yeah! I want to go to Vietnam!" So the whole perspective. You got one side and the other side and I understand where the protesters were coming from. Yeah, we should have never been there to begin with and that's just my own personal view and reflection. So I'm glad the Vietnam veterans are finally getting the thank-you's that they deserve.

Brooks: Well, speaking of which, can we talk a little bit about LZ Lambeau? Tell me about—that was 2010?

Borchardt: Two thousand ten, yes.

Brooks: And I've heard a bit about it, but I wasn't out there so if you could just tell me about it.

Borchardt: Okay, sure. LZ Lambeau and the way it started, it was the Wisconsin—and it was put on partnership Wisconsin Public Television. They were one of the main, what do I want to say? Fundraisers for the event. It was welcoming home Vietnam veterans. So when I heard about this, I was online searching something and I thought, "Wow, that looks interesting," and this was like in September 2009.

[00:45:04]

So I emailed them about the She Five, our experience over there, and I said, "We'd love to do anything. Volunteer, if you want to set up a table, whatever, that we could participate in," and one thing led to another and it turned out awesome. Audrey, our drummer from the She Five, she still plays with a band called Beaker Street, excellent group. So we ended up actually getting the gig to play at LZ Lambeau. Beaker Street actually backed us up because I still played, Audrey still

played, Pam still played, but Patsy and Cheryl—Cheryl hadn't touched a keyboard for forty years, so Beaker Street backed us up even though there were three of us that were really playing yet. And the response to that, it was good!

Brooks: That's okay, I've got tissues.

Borchardt: I remember sitting there at a picnic table and this was Friday afternoon. Mike and I had got there early and we're just sitting there having a beer. This guy comes up to me and I had a vest on, a jean vest, and I had a patch made, "The She Five, Vietnam." He came up to me and he says, "Are you with the She Five or is that just a patch?" I said, "No, I'm with the She Five and we're playing tonight, I hope." He said, "Just a minute," so he went back and got his brother who had seen us and it just was awesome. Just awesome. He remembered seeing us in Da Nang and he said, "Thank you!"

Brooks: That's so great.

Borchardt: Yeah, so it really meant a lot to us and the response, oh my god. Kids that I went to high school with, they came to see us and it was huge. Then of course, we ended with *We Got To Get Out Of This Place*.

Brooks: I was going to say, you did your regular set?

Borchardt: Yeah, but it was just incredible.

Brooks: How long did you play?

Borchardt: We played one set, so about an hour. Thank you. Thank you.

Brooks: Yeah, of course.

Borchardt: About an hour. And did all the stuff that we did in Vietnam. *Chain of Fools*, you know, because Pam with this gruff voice. We threw in some Janis Joplin stuff. So it was awesome.

Brooks: That's great. Have you guys played at all since then?

Borchardt: Nope. No, we haven't.

Brooks: And I saw that you have some of the video from that on YouTube?

Borchardt: Yes.

Brooks: That's great.

Borchardt: So I worked with, who is it? His last name was Derks, from Wisconsin Public—



Brooks: Oh, Mik Dirks?

Borchardt: Mik Dirks, yeah. There you go. He was my main contact person and after he said, “Yeah, this would really be cool if we could do this.” Then I kind of turned it over to Audrey because she was with Beaker Street and then they hired them actually as a band for hire before the She Five got up there to play. So they did a set or two and then just stayed up there and then the rest of us got on there.

Brooks: That’s great. Tell me a little bit more about the event in general. How did it go off?

Borchardt: Oh, the turnout was just incredible and especially the museum that was there. Just to look at all of the gear that was used in Vietnam, like the radios that were like this big and now they’re that big. I’ve heard from several Vietnam vets, their statement was, “You know, it’s a little late.” Yeah, but it’s better than none, you know? Yeah, a little late in coming but the turnout was just incredible.

Brooks: Great, and you managed you get the band together without any conflict or drama?

Borchardt: Yes, well, the only drama was there’s four of us that lives in Wisconsin and Pam, our lead singer, she lives in North Carolina. We could not have pulled this off without Pam, our lead singer. So Wisconsin Public Television, they agreed to fly Pam home. So they actually paid for her ticket to come because she was coming home in July and she said she couldn’t do two trips expense-wise, so they paid for her flight to come home for this.

[00:50:20]

And I think other states—I believe Michigan has had a welcoming home. There was talk for a while that we would maybe get hired to do one of those out-of-state welcoming home for Vietnam vets, so I don’t know if that ever transpired but I believe Wisconsin was the first one that did it and I hope a lot of states kind of pick up and do it now before they’re gone.

Brooks: Well, it was great that you guys were there. How exciting.

Borchardt: Yeah, it was awesome. One real memorable experience—this was just recently, actually. I had this helmet. It was blue. I wasn’t sure if it was Air Force, Army, whatever, but it had a this SP on the front and the name on the back was Korneliusen [sp??]. And I brought it back as a gift from a GI over there. Had it for years and years. My kids played with it when they were kids. They played cops and robbers with it. So the last five years or so, we had this Vietnam memorial out in front of our house with the flag and the POW flag and then the silhouette of the GI kneeling with his gun and the helmet. So I had been putting it out there, the helmet, as part of the memorial. So this year I put it out. I took a picture of it and

put it on Facebook and I said, “I’m trying to find this guy.” So one of our friends, John Porter, who actually found a buddy for Mike too, he sent me three names with the last name Korneliusen [??]. He said, “I think this one, the date is maybe right.” He’s a historian. He’s got records like you wouldn’t believe. So the second person that I called actually turned out to be this Jim Korneliusen’s [??] sister-in-law. So I told her the story and she said, “Oh my god, I know Jim was in Vietnam but I’m not sure of the year.” So anyway, he had an unlisted phone number and I said, “Nope, I totally understand that.” I said, “Could you call him and give him my number?” So we touched base and the first thing he said was, “How did you get my helmet?” I said, “Well, I’m assuming it came from you!” Well, that wasn’t the case. He left the end of July and he said, he thought, “I know I turned all my stuff in.” Well, this helmet is actually a liner because I mean it wouldn’t deflect anything that’s coming at you, so it was actually the helmet liner. Evidently because he left Nam the end of July and we were there until the second or third week in August and one of his comrades evidently gave me the helmet. So the week before—it was like the third week in July—I went out to Pennsylvania to see my niece in Pittsburgh. So Jim and his wife, he lives in Rochester, they drove down from Rochester and we met in Pittsburgh so I could give him his helmet back.

Brooks: That’s so great. How did he—does he know how he lost the liner?

Borchardt: No, he just recalls turning it in but then one of his comrades evidently—and I didn’t remember specifically getting it from a person, you know? I would have I think made that connection, but one of his comrades must have given it to me.

Brooks: That’s so great. What was that meeting like when you returned it?

Borchardt: I have videos of that too. Yeah, it was awesome. He thanked me up and down for our services over there and I said, “No, no. I was having fun. I don’t need to be thanked for this,” but he took the helmet and he said, “Oh my god,” and he turned it and he said, “The lining is still in there,” and he put it on.

[00:55:09]

Then he had sent me pictures of him in Vietnam with the helmet on. And then I made him a lap quilt too, red, white, and blue, with—I appliqued the helmet on the front and then on the back of the quilt. You know? I think some of them things might be closure for him. He hadn’t even thought of his helmet for all of these years. Because when his sister-in-law, Gail, called him and said, “Jim, I just got this strange phone call. Some gal says she has your helmet,” and told him the story and he’s like, what? So I have a couple more hats that I’m going to reach out and see if I can find the guys.

Brooks: So was that a common thing? People would just hand you stuff on stage?

Borchardt: Oh, I've got a whole page in there of guys—they'd rip their patches off their jackets to give us their patches. Yeah, hats. This was the only helmet that I came home with.

Brooks: Was there anybody that you met over there that you stayed in touch with when you came back?

Borchardt: There was one. John Garth. Now, I haven't been in touch with him for quite a few years now. When we were in Da Nang, he must have been assigned the duty of driving us around. So he was kind of our roadie protector, knew where we had to be, and he lives out in Colorado now. I talked to him about eight years ago. He used to come up to Wisconsin and visit Pam every now and then. But no one else specifically from then. Other than Mike, my husband.

Brooks: Right, yes! You see quite a bit of him I would imagine. Speaking of Mike, tell me a little bit about what it's been like to be married to a Vietnam veteran.

Borchardt: For us, it's a bonding thing because we were both there. We both know the sense of being there; you know, in obviously different levels, but I think for him just having a spouse who can relate to that. And him, too, with me seeing us over there, he's very proud of me. Even if I play for a church picnic or whatever, you know, he's proud. There was just that bond, you know, of both being there. He's very quiet. He doesn't—he actually didn't really talk a lot about it until LZ Lambeau and then recently he had been trying to find a buddy of his and John Porter, the same one who came up Korneliusen's [??] name for me, he located this James Heflin [sp??], Jim Heflin [??], and Mike always says there were two kinds of guys over there. There were the juicers and the potheads [laughs], and him and Heflin [??]—Heflin [??] grew up in Oklahoma, so they would drink their Schlitz beer and eat jars of olives, whatever. So anyway, we found Jim Heflin[??] and Mike and him met up two years ago. We went to the Gathering, which is a yearly reunion of guys from the 597<sup>th</sup> Transportation and the—I forget the number on the other one. It was anybody who was involved with transportation, so Jim Heflin [??] and his grandson drove to Indiana for the reunion and then we were there. So Mike and him got to hook up after forty-two years. Now, we're going actually in September to Springfield, Illinois. Jim and his wife are driving up from Oklahoma and that's like a halfway point, so we're going to meet up with him again.

[01:00:12]

Brooks: Wow, that's great.

Borchardt: Yeah, as far as being married to a Vietnam vet, you know, a lot of them, they don't talk about it. With us, maybe Mike is a little more open just because I get it—to a point, I guess.

Brooks: Well, yeah. One of the reasons I ask about that is because we—I don't know if

you have had a chance to walk around in the museum, but we do have a new exhibit and it's based on art therapy basically. So it's veterans and a lot of them are Vietnam vets who have started doing art therapy. So it's an art exhibit of their artwork. Some of their artwork and then some who are actual artists who are also veterans whose work is inspired by their experiences. So I feel like in my interviews I start to talk a lot more about PTSD and the aftereffects. So this is only the second interview I've ever done with a spouse so it's interesting to talk about your experience but then also to talk about your experience as a partner to someone.

Borchardt: There was one scary experience and this was shortly after we were married. He says, "Don't ever tell anybody," but I think it was traumatic. It's like one day I couldn't find him anywhere. I mean, I looked. Okay, is he out in the woods or whatever? And I found him out in the shed and he was just sitting there like he was in another world. He said, "I was so afraid I was going to hurt you." So if that was like a flashback moment, but he said, "I don't want to ever talk about this again." I was like "Okay, but I think you need to." So what that moment was—but that was pretty scary for me. I didn't know what was going on there, you know? He was a driver on the King Cobra, which is a gun truck over there. He had been involved with one of the ambushes on the An Khe, the Mang Yang Pass. An Khe. And they were going—hit Mike's convoy, they were going either to the base, the other convoy was coming back with the gun truck Brutus on there. They got a mile up the road and they got radioed for help that the convoy that Brutus was in got hit. So they came around, turned around, and went back to assist. So that was pretty traumatic for him too. The driver of Brutus was killed. And that Mang Yang Pass—that was one of the main passes for supplies—so it got hit a lot. But this Jim Heflin then, he was on the same truck with Mike when they were in this convoy. So I think that helps and I think veterans now are realizing the time—the clock is ticking, so they're reaching out more to find guys that they served with, which I think is wonderful. Yeah, they need that connection.

Brooks: Yeah, do either of you talk to your children about your experiences?

Borchardt: Oh yes. In fact, our son and daughter-in-law, they were the ones that actually, for Christmas last year, gave us money for a hotel here, and in the envelope was all the information for the museum, for the oral interview, and our daughter-in-law especially. Troy and Todd and are our two boys. They grew up with us, so maybe it's like not a big deal because it was part of who we are, but the older we get I think the more they're realizing this was pretty important stuff. So they were the ones that actually, "Yeah, you need to get down there and tell you stories before it's lost in history."

Brooks: That's great.

[01:04:46]

Borchardt: And even now. If I had a sixteen-year-old daughter, would I let her go to Afghanistan or Iraq to play over there? Hell no! [laughs] But it's a total different environment. We were—our enemies over there were the South Vietnamese. Half the time you don't even know who your enemies are over in Iraq, Afghanistan, but some of that holds true actually in Vietnam. You'd get these little babysans that come—yeah they're so cute and innocent—maybe they've got a grenade in the back of their pocket. Yeah, a lot of them, you couldn't trust them there either. But, yeah, different era. Would I let my daughter go now? No [laughs], I don't think so.

Brooks: I think that is one of the most amazing parts about your story is that your parents let you go and you were safe and didn't experience—you had a couple relatively close calls, but generally safe.

Borchardt: You know, and our moms being that they were basically part of the group because they'd come along, they'd chaperone, you know? They knew how important this was to us and how much we wanted to go. Had something happened over there, I look back now, at least I was doing something that I thoroughly loved to do and making a difference, you know? But it all turned out. And the teachers in school too, because my mom had talked to the teachers because I was going to miss so much school, and they promoted it to us like, "You know what? She will never learn out of a book what she is going to gain over there," and it's true. You cannot replace a life experience with something on a piece of paper that you read. It just don't happen, so they actually encouraged it.

Brooks: That's great, and then you came back and gave reports to your class.

Borchardt: Yup.

Brooks: That's great. They could kind of live vicariously through you a little bit.

Borchardt: Yes. Right, and even now I go back for class reunions and I've got quite a few classmates as Facebook friends, and even with the helmet deal and returning that to Jim and one of my classmates responded. She said, "I feel so honored just to have been in school with you," like, this was so awesome that you did this. Thank you, you know? So yeah, they still, "I'm so lucky just to have been in school with you." It's like, you know, I'm not a star. The opportunity was there and we got to run with it.

Brooks: That reminds me, I wanted to ask. Did any of you see or meet anybody that you had known stateside when you were in Vietnam?

Borchardt: Actually, I'm glad you brought that up because I actually ran into, it was a neighbor of my dad's when my dad was growing up. I forget if he was a chaplain over there, but anyway I met him. And Little Chute is a very small town, he probably lived five blocks from where I grew up. So I did meet him and then

Audrey also met—it was like a neighbor a couple miles away or whatever, and he had seen the sign of “The She Five—Direct from the World,” so he made it a point—he was at that show. Yeah, she met him, but other than that, those were the only two encounters that met somebody that knew of us back here.

Brooks: Wow, great. Let me—I have just some wrapping up questions and if they bring up anything else—they’re kind of general. So if you feel like we’ve covered them, but generally speaking, what do you think the experience meant to your life as a whole and how has it kind of changed who you turned out to be?

Borchardt: Oh my. I mean, obviously it made me who I am today. Very compassionate for our Vietnam vets. I said, some of these stories I can’t talk about. You know, just what it meant to me. Yeah, I felt like—Mike always kids me with the LZ Lambeau deal, he says, “Geez, going to have to get the chainsaw.” I said, “What do you mean the chainsaw?” “Cut the doorways a little bit bigger so your head fits in.” [laughter] So a lot of the things we can really laugh about.

[01:10:14]

But you know, it’s hard to imagine my life with this not being a part of it. You know? I would have just been a normal schoolgirl, finished up high school, maybe went to college. I don’t know, but definitely, I feel so lucky. It’s like “God, wow. You made this happen for a reason. I think the older I get, the more I understand what the reason is. The more you—the older you get, you just reflect back on things so different than, “Yeah, I was over there. I was having fun.” Now I see, wow. This was incredible! Why do I deserve to have this awesome experience? One-of-a-kind. We were the only all-girl, American band over there. It’s like, why us? I think just the more compassionate side, the being able to just relate to the Vietnam vets in a smaller scale. Because obviously I wasn’t out there in the fields doing grunt work and infantry. I can’t imagine that. All the lives that were lost over there. Just so sad. What did the United States really gain out of it? Not much. That’s my personal opinion, but I think a lot of people do feel that way. Mike said at any time, “I think we could have gone in there and just blown North Vietnam off the face of the map.” We had the power to do it, but it was political. It was a political war and I don’t feel that we should have ever been there in the first place. I’m glad I was there to help out, but, you know?

Brooks: How much of that, if any, did you understand before you went over there?

Borchardt: Probably not too much. Fifteen? Yeah, I knew there was a war. I couldn’t even envision in my mind what this really was until you’re there. Yeah, the war was going on and every night on the news Walter Cronkite, how many more GIs were killed over there and it’s like wow. You know? It’s sad. Every year we had been going to—up by us they have, it’s called Summer Twister, and the Vietnam vet motorcycle group actually puts it on up until now this year. They’re turning it over to another group because they’re disabled, they can’t get around like they

used to. So every year we had been going to that too. That's just a Vietnam vet thing.

Brooks: Yeah, together. So your father was in the Navy. Was he in World War II?

Borchardt: He was in World War II.

Brooks: So did he have any warnings for you?

Borchardt: No, I think just—I mean, he never said. Dad's from the old school. [laughs] Never really talked too much about it. He was actually on an LST [Landing Ship, Tank] ship. I don't remember the number, 323 or something like that. I had seen pictures of him and his Navy buddies on shore leave. Looked like they were staggering back to the ship with glassy eyes or whatever. In the back of his mind, he probably knew, but he was a man of few words. They knew the danger, but at the same time like I said, you can't—I feel very fortunate that they didn't hold me back, that they let me go because any one of the parents could have said no way. No way. But they agreed as a whole and I am thankful that they did.

[01:15:10]

Brooks: Why do you think it was important for you to do this interview with us or why did you agree to do it?

Borchardt: It's a part of history that can't be lost. For me, it was such a unique experience. You know? Like if you go, "Geez, I was in Vietnam and played for the troops." Really? Yeah, it's important to share this. The whole Vietnam War, that there was another side of it which, I guess, was us trying to bring some smiles to the faces, you know? We did visit a couple hospitals over there and that was awesome. Just going around and talking to the GIs and the fact that it meant so much to them too. So it's part of history and it needs to be shared, not that I would encourage any parent to let their fifteen-year-old daughter go play in a war-torn country, but it's a whole different age. But it was such a unique, one-of-a-kind experience for us and it was so important. It was so important to bring some of that over there.

Brooks: Well, that kind of wraps up all my questions, but is there anything else you think we should cover? Any question I haven't asked?

Borchardt: Not that I can think—I'm sure I'll maybe think, "Oh, I should have—"

Brooks: That usually happens. What we can do is stop this recording and then maybe we can go through some of—

Borchardt: Some pictures.

Brooks: —your things and I can start a new recording. That way in case anything pops up,

we'll have the recorder rolling. So does that sound all right?

Borchardt: That sounds fine.

Brooks: I'll end this now

[End of Borchardt.OH2005] [End of interview]