

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
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AN INTERVIEW WITH BETTY J. SPARKS

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INTERVIEW BY
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KURT PIEHLER: [This begins an interview with Mrs. Betty J. Sparks] on March 8, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

LINDSEY WALLER: Lindsey Waller.

PIEHLER: And I want to ask a very broad question. I guess, let me first note—‘cause I realized I don’t do this in a lot of interviews, and people may not have the survey. You were born on February 12, 1920 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Could you tell me a little about your parents, Hazel and Guy Zeigler?

BETTY J. SPARKS: Well, they were young people. My mother was a year younger than my father, and he was only nineteen when they were married—no, he was twenty, I’m sorry, when they were married. They were married after he came back from World War I, and, of course, that was when they were ... both nineteen, I think.

PIEHLER: And he had already come back from war?

SPARKS: He had come back, but—they were married a couple of days before he left, but I was not born until a year after they got back, or he got back. So I was born in 1920, the early part of that year, and mother was one of five children who lived right in Harrisburg. Her father was a cabinetmaker and a grocer. He had a grocery store that I well remember as a child, and [I] remember going behind the candy counter. (Laughter) But he also was a beautiful cabinetmaker. He made cabinets for people, he made tables, he made chairs, he made all sorts of things like that. He was known as Ed Groce. My mother’s name was G-R-O-C-E, Hazel Groce.

My dad was an only child, and he was born of May and Conrad Zeigler. But when he was four years old, his father, who was a railroader—and that was really the basis of my father’s side of the family. The young men in that family got in on the ground floor of the railroad business. But he was working on the railroad, and was crushed between two cars. My father was only four years old, so he barely even has a remembrance of him. But when he was nine years old, his mother decided she needed some help with him—whether she decided or what, I don’t know—but she married a man by the name of Robert Steaver, S-T-E-A-V-E-R. And he had a daughter. His wife had died, and he had a daughter. So those two, almost—well, there was an age difference in them, but they grew up together as stepbrother and stepsister.... So many people asked me for my father’s background, and really, that stopped the background of his [family]. All I can remember—and, you know, on the humorous side of it, Daddy said, “I don’t want any overturning of stones. I might find some thieves in there, horse thieves in there.” (Laughter) So he would stop any genealogy that we wanted to do, even as we got older. But, I remember an Uncle Jake, and I remember an Uncle Joe, and we kept up with Uncle Joe’s family. But as far as the Zeiglers, where they went and what they did, I really don’t know.

But they were good parents. They were not educated beyond the ninth grade. My mother was told by her parents that she needed to stop and earn some money, so she worked in a stocking factory, or whatever it was, and my father went to work for—which led into the railroad—what

they called—I even have an old photograph of him—it was like a Western Union delivery boy. He was a messenger for Western Union. And that kind of led in to—just—he was very young when he went to work as a fireman on the railroad. He worked for forty-seven years, and he was trying for fifty years, but he had a series of three heart attacks, and the third one took him. And so he was very young. He was sixty-one. And he died—I guess it was '57. Anyway, for the amount of education that mother and dad had, they certainly did make the best of it with we four children, because there were three girls and one boy, and our brother was born at the height of the Depression, and he was our entertainment. (Laughter) And to this day—he's been a professor at Towson State University. He's a graduate of Penn State. But he was the baby. He really—we just idolized that kid. And I hope we didn't spoil him too much, because he's turned out pretty well. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Your brother, he ended up going into the Korean conflict.

SPARKS: Yes, he did. And he was on the USS Yorktown, and he was a parachute rigger.... He told we, his three sisters, he said, "Don't you dare tell mother what I'm doing." At this particular time, he was based out of California at ... San Jose. There was a naval base there. Before you could pass that, or go from the next rank, you had to pack and jump your own chute. He said, "I'm telling you girls, but don't you dare tell mother." (Laughter) And we didn't until after it was all over, and I think she about fainted when she knew about that. But he served—I'm not really sure how many years Bob served, but one of his chief duties on the—I don't know what he did on the Yorktown, but one thing they did was take the big brass back and forth, pick them up [in] different theaters of war and transport them.

However, we three girls grew up—we were two years apart—and mother and dad made so many things available to us that, you know, the average parent with little education would have thought of. For instance, Dad was able to get free transportation, like three times a year, on the railroad. So he would make sure that he got tickets for we children and our mother to go to different places. We went to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. We went to New York, which was one of the most fun trips I ever had as a young girl, or as a little girl. And we went to—well, different [places]. Philadelphia, we saw the Statue of Liberty, and everything. We did things on little or nothing. We've often kidded that we—Dad said we went to New York on a ten dollar bill, and I don't doubt it, because that was the day of the automats. You put a nickel in ... you pulled [food items] out, and I'm sure it's hard for people to understand now, but you could get a roll and a chicken pie, a pot pie, or something, for like fifteen cents. (Laughter) Anyway, that's how we did those things, and I thought it was wonderful that they had the forethought to do that as a part of our education, because none of us have ever forgotten it.

We have so many fun stories to tell, like my brother sitting down cross-legged in the middle of Times Square, and we missed him, and of course my mother panicked, and she said, "Bobby's not here! Bobby's not here!" And we went back, and he's sitting cross-legged, and he said, "I'm not gonna walk one more time." (Laughter) But—and the Smithsonian Institute, we remember that we girls fussed about. Now, these [trips] are all several—maybe years apart, or whatever. We would take short jaunts, like to Gettysburg battlefield. We'd go up to ... the

Pocono Mountains, and we went to Pittsburgh one time. But Dad could always get these free tickets on these trains, and we'd love the train rides. And my mother was so frugal that she would pack us a lunch before we went, and we would only have to buy one meal, and she would wait until we got home to feed us again, before she put us to bed. (Laughter) So, I had a very happy child life, except my father, who served in World War I, suffered tremendously from really bad headaches. The ... Diagnostic Center in Washington, D.C., he was in and out of that hospital just countless times. And when he was down, he was so sick that it would take him months to be straightened out. Nowadays, they would call that—what do they call it now? We called it “shell shock.” What do they call it now? Battle fatigue, or ...

PIEHLER: Now they might call [that] Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

SPARKS: Yeah, but his headaches were violent, because I watched him as a child. He would bang his head against the wall, it would hurt so bad. The doctor would come, and he'd give him a shot of morphine, and he'd say, “Just watch him, Mrs. Zeigler.” I remember nights that I sat up with my mother and she'd say, “Honey, go see if daddy's sleeping.” And I'd go in, and I'd come out, (laughs) and I'd always tell her that, yes, his belly was going up and down. But ... that was the downside of growing up with that, but we would weather those times. They would be like they would be three or four—well, usually about three months in duration, and then he would go again. And they also—they seemed to be seasonal, and I think about people talking about migraines, that they are seasonal with them, and there must be something there. He was told by the doctors at the institute in Washington, “We can go in there and clip some nerves, but we take the risk of paralyzing you.” And I remember one day, I distinctly remember, this gentlemen that went with my father on the train, and he came back, and my mother said, “Well, what did they say?” And he said, “Well, they said what I don't want to hear. That they could do surgery, but that I could be paralyzed. And I just looked at the doctor and said, ‘Well, I've got four children to think about, and I couldn't do that.’” So he lived with that pain, and it gradually got a little better as he got older, but not much. And I'm not so sure that the strain and everything wasn't what forced the heart attacks, and then they didn't know anything to do. See, his first heart attack was like ... '55 or '54, something like that. Well, they did know what to do then, because that's when my husband had his first bypass surgery. But it wasn't—have I got those dates right? That doesn't seem right.

PIEHLER: Well, your father at age fifty-four was in 1954, maybe that ...

SPARKS: No. He—well, no, no, he died in '57.

PIEHLER: Yeah ...

SPARKS: ... But he had three heart attacks before that.

PIEHLER: Was his first heart attack before World War II, or was it after the war?

SPARKS: It was after the war. It was after the war, after I was home.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. Was it in the 1940s?

SPARKS: It had to have been. It had to have been when our third child was born, and he's forty-seven. So, yeah. What's a confusing issue is ... the options we had with Dad were nothing like the options we had with my husband. Of course, even then, he had to go—you know the size of Knoxville, and the size of different places near here—he had to go to Birmingham, to the University of Alabama, to have his bypass surgery, because no one was doing it here. The only—they had just started the ... Thompson Hospital in Nashville? Oh, you probably know what I am talking about. That hospital had just started doing [them]. So, yeah, I've got them right, but it seems like we have so many more options now ... with the balloons, and the—you know, everything.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I've interviewed doctors who—in fact, I've interviewed a cardiologist, and it's night-and-day. I mean, modern heart medicine really begins after World War II.

SPARKS: No, it really did. And, of course, Dad did everything that they told him to do, and he had to quit. He was trying for fifty years on the railroad, because he would have a better pension, but they had to retire him at forty-seven. So his career was strictly with the Pennsylvania Railroad. And he loved it, he really loved it. The sound of an engine, and the sound of a whistle blowing just—and I picked up on it, because I just loved it, and I was my daddy's favorite person to go anywhere with him. Now, I don't mean favorite child or anything, but just to go anywhere with him. If it would start to rain, and you're too young to remember what the old cars had, but they had button-on shades, the Chevies. We had the neatest little gray Chevy with red wheels, and red spoke wheels. And the button on them was the forerunner of plastic, I'm sure. It was called isinglass. Daddy would say, "Betsy, I gotta button these on, are you going with me?" And I'd said, "Yes, I'd love to hear it, Daddy." And it would make a "plink-plink-plink," you know. We'd ride along in the rain. He said, "You're the only one that wants to go with me on these errands when it's raining." And I said, "Well, I just like to hear the sound of it." So I, you know, I'm real grateful that they gave us the kind of warm home life that we had, even though there were adversities. There were adversities for money, because we were right—we did much better than a lot of people that you might talk to that grew up during the Depression. And I am well aware of that when I speak to other people my age, same age group. Dad got a pension because of his injury. He got a pension, and he got that monthly, and ... anyway, we had two small incomes. But see, the railroad was at a low end, so he was laid off of the railroad. And he didn't go back until they started to electrify the trains between Philadelphia ...

PIEHLER: And New York and Harrisburg.

SPARKS: And New York and Harrisburg. Then he was put to work again.

PIEHLER: How long was he laid off for?

SPARKS: Well I don't—I don't really know. I just know that it was a real tight time, and it was—but like I said, we had a monthly income that nobody had, hardly anybody. And I distinctly remember a dear friend of mine, and I would go visit her mother. Mother always said, “I want you to keep in Girl Scouts. That's just a nickel a week, and I want you to go.” And I would stop by to get this girlfriend ... and she would be sitting at her table. I would have a warm, cooked, boiled meal with a little bit of meat and potatoes and vegetables or something, and she would be sitting there eating a bowl of Jell-O with milk on it. Her daddy worked for Kraft, and he could get a lot of Jell-O, and he could get a lot of cheese, and that's what they ate. So, you know, those things really stick out in your mind, but like I said, we were very fortunate. And then in the summer time, my dad had a big garden. He'd grow a big garden, and Mother would can the vegetables, and we would go to a farm and buy the fruit, like fresh canned peaches. That's the way people lived during those years, between '20 and '31 or '32, you know, and like I said, Bob was born in '31, so he was our entertainment. He was a surprise, but he was a real sweet surprise!

(Tape paused)

LINDSEY WALLER: ... Did your father talk about where he went in World War I, and any of his experiences there?

SPARKS: Yes, he did, but he didn't dwell on it, and my brother and I now—and I need to show you that before you leave, because that's really—I think he did a nice job, just doing it by himself. We're going to try to reproduce it.

WALLER: And that's the journal?

SPARKS: Yes. That's the journal that my brother found just a couple of years ago, or a year ago, in a trunk. Daddy talked about it, and he took a helmet off of a German, that was—(laughs) I have to laugh because we kids made—we didn't know the seriousness of any of that stuff, you know, so we just laughed at this, and we put it on, you know, and paraded around with it. And it was a huge, black shiny helmet with a big spike. You've seen them in pictures.

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

SPARKS: Big spikes sticking up. Well, we don't know what happened to that. We don't know what happened to that. We don't know what happened to a beautiful little vanity set. When there's a death in the family—my Dad went first, and then five months later—no, three months later—my Dad was buried in December, and my mother got sick in January, and we thought it was the flu.... She never got well from it, and she died in May, of cancer of the lung, which was metastatic from the breast, which, back then, you didn't do self-exams or anything else. Anyway, we don't know what happened to some things, but I often wish—and Bob said, “What do you think ever happened to that helmet?” But he has the flag that they had when they buried Daddy. He talked about the battle of the Argonne, the battle of Chateau-Thierry, where he was wounded, I think, and it's very interesting to read this log of his. It was day-by-day, and for a

man who didn't—now, my mother, I don't know. It must have been a sixth sense with her. I have her book, her composition book, where they did penmanship, and she had a beautiful handwriting. I can't find many places where there's misspelled words or anything, and it's like an eighth grade composition book. And either she was more observant—and the school systems at that particular time in Pennsylvania were pretty good. Either she was just more—well, she loved to read and she loved to write, but you couldn't hardly tell, speaking to my mother, that she only had a ninth grade education. But you could [with] Daddy, you know.... He wrote like he talked. But even so, as Bob said, "You read it," he said. "I was amazed." He would document, like, "We were at the front today. We were at the front for four days. Lost a couple buddies. Back behind the lines now." You know, and then that would be ... June, or something, and then another documentation would be what they did, how many, "Took a couple of prisoners today." It's just uncanny, the day-by-day documentation that he put in a little tiny, black leather loose leaf notebook.

PIEHLER: And you have a copy of the ...

SPARKS: And Bob found that, and he blew up the pictures, and took it and had each day-by-day done for each one of his sisters. And one of the sad things is that my sister—we've all been well except for this plaguing arthritis that a couple of us have had. But the day that I laid in the hospital with my hip last year, February in '99, is that right? (Laughter) February of 2000. My sister was killed. She was killed in automobile accident right outside of Philadelphia. A hit and run. They plowed into her. The car ended up—they had a big heavy Oldsmobile, and it was found in a snow heap off of an exit ramp, and they don't know how long it was there. Probably not too long by the bodies, and my brother-in-law was still talking, and he said, "I think my wife is alright," but he was so addled he didn't know. And she was dead on arrival. So that was sad. She was two years younger than I am. She never saw that journal, and she would have loved it, because she was—she stayed at home longer than the rest of us, and she didn't marry until she was in her thirties, and—but she had a good marriage, and they had two children. But I know that she would have loved to have seen that, and I'll show it to you. But he [her father], you know, he was only there—I guess, by standards, that was a short war, wasn't it?

PIEHLER: Well, it was a short war for Americans, though if you see ...

SPARKS: For Americans, not for the rest of the world. For Europe.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like he was in a lot of the major battles ...

SPARKS: Yes, he was in those major things, and he was with the famous—I ought to show you that, too, 'cause our nephew did that for us. He was with the 28th Division, Armored Division of—or Calvary Division ... of Pennsylvania. But the "Famous 28th" is what they called it, and he was with that.

PIEHLER: Did your father ever join the American Legion?

SPARKS: Yes. We—all three of us have joined, but my father kept his membership up. And he was proud that we joined, but we were moving from church to church, and there were some places [that] didn't have an American Legion, and so we just gradually dropped out of it. I often think today that I really would kind of like to be a member of it, but it's a little late, and it's—and you know, if you don't have any people that you're surrounding [yourself] with, that went through the same thing you did, or the same war you did, its not [the same].... But we were all members for a little short while after Lem and I were married. And my dad was a member all his life.

PIEHLER: And was he active in his posts?

SPARKS: Yes. Mm hmm. Yes, he was active. Post number 143, the William H. Knauss Post, K-N-A-U-S-S. It was named after one of the veterans that had given his life, and they named that post. It was up in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania.

PIEHLER: Now, growing up, where did you live? Did you live in Harrisburg, or did you live in a town outside of Harrisburg?

SPARKS: Well, we lived in a—I was born, and very shortly after—I was born, and my mother and father lived in an apartment, which is very much like apartments today. I went back there some twenty years ago with some friends, and I said, "I want to see where I was born." It was on 19th Street, or 18th Street, in Harrisburg. And I know where my grandfather had a store, and everything. But we found it. We found every bit of it. We found the apartment, we found the place where I used to play in front of my—they were row houses, and the pavements were brick. They were solid brick, you know, I mean brick laid on beside one another. And my grandfather's store is no longer there, but the place it was is there. We didn't live there very long, you know. They said, "That's no place to have a baby." So after I was born, we moved to a place called Progress, and that's the way they said it: "Pro-gress." P-R-O-G-R-E-S-S, and it was right on the outskirts of Harrisburg. And I'm not sure. I guess we lived there until I was about ten years old, and they rented. There was no money to buy a house, even as low as they would be, you know, and see, Daddy got that pension, but then he was a low man on totem pole, as far as fireman and engineers were concerned. And so he would have to work all three shifts, ... but he made a decent living, and he never wanted mother to work. Gosh, she went to work—she was a Bell Telephone operator, and she went to work one time, and it just angered him so that she quit. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So that was a real point of dispute?

SPARKS: That was a real thing. He said, "You need to be home here with the children. You don't need to be out there working. I'll work." And yes, it was. And even later, when he was sick and we were grown, she went to back and did a little bit—she liked it, and she had met some people that she liked, and Harrisburg had a pretty good ... telephone company, and she went back, but that didn't last very long either, because he fussed so much that ...

PIEHLER: Even after the kids were grown ...

SPARKS: Yeah, even after—we weren't all grown. Probably Bob was at home, but we girls had gone to school. Or two of us, my sister and I, went in training at the same hospital for nursing. And my other sister took a business course, and worked for the beginning of the computer age, I guess. What did they call them? Comptrollers? No, not comptrollers. They were called something, and they were huge machines ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I can't think of the name.

SPARKS: But, she operated those for ... what became the linoleum company, the Armstrong Linoleum people.

PIEHLER: Your mother going back to work, did she go back to work during the war at all?

SPARKS: Yes, she did. While she waited for Dad, that's what she did. She was an operator.

PIEHLER: No. I mean, I should specify the war. In World War II, did she work at all?

SPARKS: Oh. World War II, no.

PIEHLER: Yeah. No, I should have specified. No, it was after World War II when you ...

SPARKS: No, 'cause see, ... I was twenty-one, and that meant my sister was in training, and she was nineteen, and my other sister—no, that's wrong. The one that was killed was nineteen, if I was twenty-one. And then Jean was just coming up, and she joined what was then known as the Nurses Cadet Corps. And then she went from that and she decided, yes, she did like nursing, so she went from that, at the age of eighteen, into the same hospital I graduated from. No, mother didn't work then, at all. And by that time—well, by that time it was okay, really, for women to go back [to work], but the Bell Telephone certainly wasn't the same, you know. That had changed drastically.

And I'm not so sure that people with the education—she used to—I remember a statement she used to make. She'd see this lady—we lived in—most every house until I was ... in my teens, we always lived in rented homes.... If you've ever been up in that part of the country, they were duplexes. It was one building and two families. They had big porches, they had big back yards, they had gardens and everything, but they were two houses. And sometimes you got along with your neighbor, and sometimes you didn't. And it just amazed me at mother, who would—if I was home, and I would be home occasionally, even though I was in training, but we would get up in the morning and she'd say, "Well!" I don't know the woman's name, I can't remember. "Mrs. So and So, she has her wash out already." You know, just as if—and I said, "Well, mother, you don't need to compete!" You know. It was something that was just ingrained in them, you know. You were a housewife and a mother, and you better get out there and fill your role! (Laughter) But ... Mother ... wasn't a mean-centered person or anything, you know. That

was just the way it was.

The other thing that would amaze us, she would just get a little bit irked at women who had one child, and would fuss at how much work they had to do. Mother had four, and the funny story that she would tell was that she asked Mrs.—and I do remember this woman’s name. Gumphers, that was an old Dutch name wasn’t it? Or German. G-U-M-P-H-E-R, or something. She said, “You want to hear something funny girls?” [To] my three sisters. She said, “I asked Mrs. Gumphers if she was busy today, or something, and she said, ‘Oh yes. I am making vegetable soup.’” And she said, “I looked at her kind of funny and she said, ‘Well I already peeled the potatoes.’” You know, they took so long to do everything, because they didn’t have that much to do! (Laughter) And my mother thought that was funny, so she would make a big—and if you got my mother and we three girls together on a little jaunt shopping, you better be careful what you said, because we’d all get the giggles, or we would all be hilariously trying not look at each other, you know, so we made our own fun, I guess. But she was a good mother....

And just to show you, the Depression was beginning to, I suppose, wind down and take another turn by the time I graduated high school. I graduated in 1938, but the summer before, my dad got me a job, just filing checks at the capital building. He had some buddies over there that he knew. Dad became a Mason along in his life, and he really enjoyed it. He wasn’t much of—as my mother said, “I don’t know what they do for him that the church can’t do, but they do.” (Laughter) And it was a revelation for us to look at his Bible after he died, and see that he had many, many a verse underlined, and everything. But I think ... he got tired of mother urging him. He’d go to church sometimes, but he’d just didn’t—if he didn’t like the minister, you know, forget it. (Laughter) Whereas mother went cause she was a good Lutheran, and she needed to go to church.

PIEHLER: And was the Lutheran church in ...

SPARKS: The Lutheran of America, in Pennsylvania. They are full of them up there, you know. The German ...

PIEHLER: The German side of the Lutheran ...

SPARKS: Uh huh. Yeah. But one of the fun, or one of the nice things that I always remember my mother for—and I remember a lot of nice things that Dad did for us, too—but ... I said, “Now, mother, you need some of this money.” I made seventy-five dollars a month. And daddy was just now beginning to get some regular work on the railroad, so he was like—besides his pension, was pulling about seventy dollars a month. Well, believe it or not, they stretched that, you know.... But I said, “You need this, and if I’m going to be at home here, this is the time for me to do this. And if I can keep on with this job, I’ll just keep it.” She said, “No, you won’t. And I said, “Why?” And she said, “Because you are going to go in training.” I said, “I can’t do this now.” I said, “I’ll wait and do it later.” And I, like the article [her story in The Knoxville News-Sentinel by Fred Brown] said, knew very little of how Hitler was trying to take over the world. Now, I heard Dad talk a lot, and the men talked about it, but the women said very little.

So, anyway, I told her. I said, “No, no.” I said, “I’ll just keep this [job].” So I brought her home, and gave her seventy dollars every time I got paid, and I kept five dollars, and I bought a couple dollars worth of tokens, which gave me two or three rides on the bus, back across the Susquehanna [River]. See, we lived on the West Side then. We lived on—[there are] little towns there, called—well, good gracious! What are they called? They would never incorporate. Little townships. They would never incorporate, and so we lived in a place called New Cumberland, and that’s where my basic schooling was. That’s where I graduated from high school. And anyway, I worked that whole summer, and sometimes Dad would drive me to work, ‘cause he was going that way, and I would take a token and come home. And I had a good summer. I had a lot of girlfriends, and you know, we still keep in touch, some of us, and it’s interesting. There were seven of us that really bonded together. We called ourselves the “Lucky Seven.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you are in touch with those girlfriends from your summer job at the capital [in Harrisburg]?

SPARKS: Well, yes, and ... the one girl remained working for years and years and years. She went to business school, and she remained there. But see, I ended that, and all I did was file—I don’t know what they do now. I guess that’s all done on computer. But I filed personal checks, you know, according to number, or whatever. Well, at the end of the summer, about September 1, about Labor Day, I told mother that I was going to keep on working there if they needed me, and she said, “No, no, now you’re going to fill out that application.” And you know, nowadays you’d have filled it out a year before or something, but you could fill out an application like two weeks in advance, and you’d probably get an interview. So she said, “I want you to go! I want you to go this week and fill out that application.” So, I ...

PIEHLER: This is an application for ...

SPARKS: For nursing school. And see, you went to what is known as the “diploma program.” You went into training for a nurse. That was what it was called. And Mr. [Fred] Brown [The Knoxville News-Sentinel reporter who previously interviewed Mrs. Sparks] got it correctly. It was the Harrisburg Hospital Training School for Nurses, and it sat right on the Susquehanna. It was one of the biggest hospitals in the city. So I went over and applied, and I had an immediate response to interview, and I interviewed, and they said was I really interested in coming, and did I know—and they gave me all of the things that I needed to know. One of them was that I needed 200 dollars. I needed 200 dollars for basic uniforms, and a fee—I’m not sure what that was—and I distinctly remember there was a 10 dollar fee for breakage. That meant that if you broke a syringe—they were all glass—if you broke a syringe, that was deducted from your [pay]. And you did get a monthly—whatever it was called. I called it a stipend or whatever. You got a monthly—and it wasn’t more than about 10 dollars. I know it wasn’t.... I guess they thought that you needed that for spending money, you know. Well, anyway, I needed ... to have about 220 dollars, and I came home and told mother, and I said, “Now, I can’t do this, but if we wait a while, I can do it.” She said, “Do you still want to go?” I said, “I want to go very badly, but I don’t want it to be a strain on you and Dad.” And she said, “Well here. I have the money for

you.” And she had saved that. She knew it was going to be about that. She had saved that from what I had given her; she hadn’t spent it. So that was—to me, that’s parenting. That’s a real true meaning of it.

PIEHLER: I’m curious: when did you know that you wanted to become a nurse?

SPARKS: Well, when I was real little. We used to play nursing. (Laughter) We used to play nursing, and I thought it was so neat to take people’s temperatures, (laughs) and all those little things that they really don’t do anymore, because nursing’s changed so much. But I just always knew—it’s like our second son—I mean, really and truly, that child, at the age of four, was carrying a T square and a little ... fold up cardboard thing, and measuring everything, and he, today, is an architect. He’s never wanted to be anything else. And he’s registered in North Carolina and Tennessee and Virginia. [He] has a good job with Vanderbilt University. He’s on a team of long-range planning. But I don’t know why you know, or how you know. Now ...

PIEHLER: But you knew very early ...

SPARKS: But now my children, they didn’t always know what they wanted to do, and least of all our daughter, who was born in ‘56 and grew up during the ‘70s, and was a hippie and everything else. You know, so that probably shouldn’t be in there. She’ll read that! Or think about that! (Laughter) No, bless her heart, she’s a good girl, but she grew up in a time when—you know, “I don’t know what I want to do! I don’t know what I want to do!”

WALLER: What sort of classes did you take while in nursing school?

SPARKS: Well, you take the basic in high school. You’d take the basic academic—what was it called?

PIEHLER: College prep? Did you take college prep?

SPARKS: Yeah. You took that, as opposed to—you only had two options, like business and the academic, and I took the academic because it gave me the Latin, which I understood, and ... rightly so—I don’t know whether they do it now, but ... a lot of your basic medicines and everything all had derivatives in the Latin language. And I took Latin, and I took two years of French and math, ... and that’s as far as I wanted to go in that. But I knew I had to have some of it. I had good basic—what was known as a good academic course through high school. We had four years. It started with your freshmen year. You had two years of what they call middle school now, but it was called junior high then.... I was received then [into the nursing program]. I got in, and in nursing you went through so many months of what they called probation, so they called you a “probie,” and you didn’t wear a cap, and you wore black stockings and black shoes, and you wore a starched apron that came out this far. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That’s great! Several, several inches out.

SPARKS: On top of a kind of a blue jean chambray.

PIEHLER: So this was also pretty warm, it strikes me, and pretty uncomfortable ...

SPARKS: Well yes. It wasn't—you know, you got used to it. But then at the end of the three months, I think you were allowed to wear white hose and white shoes, and you got a cap. You were "capped," so they say. I have a big picture of that, of me being capped, 'cause that was the ceremony, you know.

PIEHLER: I was recently at the UT Hospital, and there was a nurse in a cap, and it was so striking because now you almost never see a cap.

SPARKS: No.... I don't know what I ever did with my navy cap, 'cause we wore caps in the navy, with the black velvet stripe on to denote your rank, and my little cap from Harrisburg, I still have it. It's a little round organdy cap, made out of real organdy, and you did them yourself. You starched them stiff, and ... if you were careful, and you starched them real good, you could wear them about three months without doing them again. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Going back just a little bit more about your parents and growing up, I guess, you owned a car.

SPARKS: Oh yes. My dad was—well, even back further than that. The men were given an opportunity to go to school after World War I. Either trade school, or—it wasn't necessary college, but they were given certain [choices]. So daddy chose—he always loved automotives, and so he chose to go and study about cars, and they sent him to—think of schools in Pittsburgh. They sent him to Carnegie.

PIEHLER: Carnegie-Mellon.

SPARKS: Yeah. It was—I don't know how many months or weeks. It may have only been—but he studied how to put an engine together and how to take it apart and do all that, you know, things. And so he loved cars, and the first car I ever remember in—of course, they could have had one before I was born, but the pictures I have of them standing in front of a car with me in their arms is a big old black car with four doors open. Must have been a Ford.

PIEHLER: Yeah. It probably ...

SPARKS: It was humongous! It would have been 1921, and then from then on ... we always had a car. And daddy liked Chevys. He liked Chevys, and that little car that I remember so much was the prettiest little car, and he was so tickled. You know, I think, like—well, I want to say it cost him 500 to 600 dollars. But it was such a pretty little car.... Red spokes, (laughs) and gray. It was gray. Most cars were black, and this was a little gray car with the button on windows.... That paid off, that course that he took, paid off because he could use that. During the Depression he would fix neighbors' cars, and he would charge them a reasonable amount, but

he would do all the things that you do, you know, like when you go for a check-up now or something. He'd rotate tires, he'd change oil, he'd redo ...

PIEHLER: So when he was laid off, this is one of the ways your family was able to make it.

SPARKS: Yeah, that's right.

PIEHLER: Actually, I just want to pause ...

(Tape paused)

SPARKS: I thought about that, when we were talking about how he got the pension, and when I said he did a little bit of railroading but there wasn't much to do, until they started to ...

PIEHLER: To electrify the ...

SPARKS: ... call the men back to electrify the engine.... I can remember, [in] every house we lived in there was always a car in the garage that didn't belong to us ...

PIEHLER: Because he was working ...

SPARKS: 'Cause it was one dad was working on.

PIEHLER: When—did you parents ever by a house? Were they ever able to buy a house?

SPARKS: Yes, yes. They bought a house. I'm trying to think. Well, I guess they bought—I'm not sure how.... When we were married, and that was 1944, when we were married, that picture that I took that has us standing in front—that was the last rented home that we had. Daddy had a chance to buy, and that was two or three blocks off the main street, and we had been used to living on the main street where we could walk to the movies, walk to the grocery store, walk to any place that we wanted to go. This was a small town, you know. Walk to church. Daddy wanted to get back there. He wanted to get back there, and he found this house ... and he said that it has a nice garage at the end.... There were alleys at home, alleys between streets that you drove your car down, so he and mother talked about buying that, and they did, and that was on Bridge Street. But it was the first—as far as I know, I don't think they owned that house on Geary Street, but you see, I was in training then, and then I went into the service. So I don't remember that home very much. I remember it, just from pictures. But I do know—and when I think about the gardens that daddy used to have, and they were great gardens, there wasn't much of a garden at that house, back there on Geary [Street]. It was G-E-A-R-Y, Geary Street. But anyway, I do remember us moving back to Bridge Street, and that was the main street, Bridge, and it had a nice porch, and I remember sitting there. You know, mother just loved to—she'd get all the dishes done after dinner, and she'd come out there, and we were laughing the other day. Mother got to be—she was a tiny person when Daddy married her, and a real petite person for long years, but she did like I did. Every child she had, she gained another ten pounds. And

by the time she was sixty, she was a neat woman, but she was robust.... You know, fleshy. Typical Pennsylvania Dutch, except she carried herself well. She threw her shoulders back. Some woman told her one time, said, "Mrs. Zeigler, you walk down the street like you own New Cumberland," and she said, "Well, I do own a part of it." (Laughter) But she was—that was the way she was, so ...

PIEHLER: Did your parents always have a telephone, in ...

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

PIEHLER: Did your parents always have a telephone in the house?

SPARKS: As far as I can remember, yeah.

PIEHLER: What about a radio? How ...

SPARKS: Oh yes, a little Philco. (Laughter) A little Philco that stood about that high. (Motions with her hands) That's what my dad was listening to on December the 7th. He was hunched over. He said, "There's some breaking news coming on here! Ya'll be quiet!" And there wasn't anybody home but me, and the only reason why I was home was because I was off, and the girls and Bob were out running around somewhere. But a man and a woman that we knew very well had stopped to say, "We were over on the west shore. Could we come by and see you?" And so mother said, "Yes, come on I'd love to see you."

When you came in mother's house, it was always, "Do you want a cup of coffee and a piece of pie?" Or "Do you want a drink of—" the Northern people didn't drink iced tea like the Southern people did, so it was a drink of lemonade and a piece of cake, or it was a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. And she would immediately—she wouldn't sit down and visit. She'd immediately go get it, and then she'd visit. So she was in the kitchen, and my daddy jumped up at the sound of President Roosevelt's announcement, "A day that shall live in infamy," and he said, "My God, we're at war! We're really at war!" And my mother came, and I can see her standing in the doorway between the dining room and the living room, and she said, "Oh, Guy, you get so excited! Calm down!" He said, "There's no calming down for this, we're really at war!" And this other man was a very quiet man, and he didn't hardly say anything. But that's my picture at that time, and see, I was in training. I was in my last legs of training, my last year.... I was just off that day. I had Sunday off. So that just started a lot of talk, and people called each other on the phone, and they said, "What do you think? What do you think?" And that night before I went back to the hospital—and I had to go back—and daddy put his arm around me and he said, "Honey, if they need nurses, I hope you'll go." My mother got so angry. She just ... kind of really said, "I can't imagine you'd sent your own child to war, when she doesn't have to go. She's a nurse! She doesn't have to go!" And Daddy said, "If she's needed, she should." That's so vivid. I just remember almost all of it. And the living room and everything, you know. And of course I'd had never been through anything like that before, but Daddy had.

PIEHLER: So he thought that it was important for you to serve?

SPARKS: Oh yeah. He said, “You know, Bobby’s too young. Bobby can’t go.” But he said, “And if you were anybody else, ... even if you were a secretary, I’d tell you to join the WAVES. If we’re in a war, we need all the help we can get.”

PIEHLER: So, its interesting. He didn’t want your mother to work, but he’s willing to send you off to war!

SPARKS: Yeah! (Laughs) I know! Look at that double standard!

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

SPARKS: That’s really funny.

PIEHLER: Had you ever thought of that before?

SPARKS: Not really, no. It’s a cultural thing isn’t it? I mean, it really ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, it’s very interesting.... I interviewed a Canadian woman who was in—she wasn’t a nurse. She was a regular—the Canadian version of the WACS. And her father was a World War I veteran, and was dead set against her serving.

SPARKS: What were they called? They were called—oh, it started with a W.

PIEHLER: I can’t [remember] ...

SPARKS: I can’t either. Well, no, it—I don’t know why that brings the emotion out of me, but some of those things are so vivid, and you wonder, at the age I am now, why they would be so vivid. But I can see the living room, I can see the house. In fact, the man and the woman that were visiting—do you mind if I get up ...

PIEHLER: Oh, no, please!

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: You have two vases on your fireplace here, and those are ...

SPARKS: I have carried them fifty-five years.

PIEHLER: And those were ... there ...

SPARKS: Well, they gave them to me as a wedding gift the next year.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. But they were there when the Pearl Harbor news came out?

SPARKS: Yeah. They were the man and woman that was sitting there. Let me get a ...

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: Going back, going back a little bit earlier ...

SPARKS: Had you stopped it [the tape]?

PIEHLER: Yeah, I had stopped it. We're back on.... I guess one thing I was curious about: we asked you, and you were very nice to fill out a pre-interview survey. The one thing—you put a question mark [next to] your parents' political affiliation. And you seem—your father had some connections, 'cause he got you what sounds like—I don't want to say—it sounds like a lot of drudgery, but a pretty kooshy government job. It paid—seventy-five dollars a week is a good salary.

SPARKS: He knew people, and now that I think about it, Dad was a Democrat. Your working class people were Democrats.

PIEHLER: So he was a—yeah.

SPARKS: And mother would always say, "I'll vote for the man, I'll vote for the man," and she did, I guess, 'til ...

PIEHLER: How did your parents ... feel about FDR?

SPARKS: Mother loved him. I don't know how Daddy felt, I really don't. But I guess he did, too. Mother loved him. She thought ... "He was the answer to America's prayer." She really did. She clipped everything she could on him, and—Mother wasn't an avid—you know. Well, just to show you, Mother would never join the American Legion Auxiliary. She said, "That's not my thing." She said, "I don't want [to]." She said, "Those women—" she'd say "Those women," and I'd say, "Mother, they're not—" (Laughter) We would have a time with her sometimes, and her beliefs, and everything. I just don't think she was that adamant about politics, but I do know, from just her speaking and everything, that she ... really thought that FDR was the answer to America's problems at the time.

WALLER: Did she listen to the fireside chats that he would put on the radio?

SPARKS: Yes, mm hmm.... You talk about those radios. That little Philco, I can see it yet. And you know, we—someone, our grandchildren just can't understand this—but we would, after supper, Mother would clean up the kitchen. When we got older we had to help, but if we were, you know. We would stretch out on our tummies on the floor, Dad in his chair, in front of this Philco.... He would listen to the news, and then he'd holler to us. He'd say, "Okay, girls, come

on. ‘Death Valley Days’ is on.” Or “‘Inter Sanctum’ is on, girls, come on!” We’d lay down there, and you know, (laughs) we envisioned those voices and those horses, and all that stuff. And my grandchildren say, “Well, how, Nana, how?” And I say, “Well, honey, if you never had anything but that—we didn’t know what television was. We didn’t know that someday they would have a picture for those things.” And I said, “If that’s all you have—Mother read to us as children, and we had books.” In fact, it was somewhat, I thought, a sign of just the—I don’t want to say stiffness, but the way mothers were in the German-Dutch country. Mother would put us—she would make us—this was when we weren’t in school. She would make us lie down in the afternoon, didn’t matter where it was. If it was on the floor with a book, or in our bed, but we had to go lie down for an hour. And when we got up, we didn’t bathe all over again, but we washed our faces and hands, and we put on another new dress. Not another new dress, but another clean dress. That poor woman, now that I think of it, she must have washed and ironed all the time, and I guess she did. But you changed. We might have worn that dress the next morning maybe, but we changed. And we weren’t allowed to go out and play in the dirt that afternoon. We could swing, and we could read our books, and we could take a walk, which you often did. You took a walk hand-in-hand with your girlfriends and whatever, you know, and walked around the block. You might walk down and get a five-cent ice cream cone. But ... there was, a definite demarcation—is that a word? (Laughs) I’m not sure if I’m using it properly—between noon and six o’clock. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like ... you ate meals pretty regularly. There was a real schedule for meals.

SPARKS: And, of course, Daddy doing shift work on the railroad, that intervened a little bit with that, but she always saw that he had a real hot meal before he left. He left lots of times at two o’clock in the afternoon, and he didn’t get home ‘til twelve that night. But ... we sat down to the same meal at night. And we always had a hot, good [meal]. I marvel at my [mother]. I tried to do it with my children, too, as much as I could. Not that we were good cooks or anything. It was just that we knew how to—Mother taught us how to make good, sturdy meals that nourished us. I say that we were all too well-nourished, really. (Laughter) But—and we called them, at one time, we used to call them “one-pot meals,” because she had a way of doing sauerkraut and pork, with a little pork roast, and then a big bowl of mashed potatoes, and you always had to have something. You’ve heard of the Dutch saying, “Seven sweets and seven sour,” you know. Well, you have to have some pickles on the table, or some—I don’t know. That was just one meal that we all loved. I’m trying to think of the third thing was that she’d always have with sauerkraut. Anyway, that other thing was a roast of beef with carrots and peas and everything, and she could make the cheapest kind of roast taste good, you know.

We all had our favorite meal, and when it was our birthday, she would cook it for us. Mine was roast beef, and my birthday cake was a thick, rich, wet devil’s food. (Laughs) Had to be wet. Had to be that real dark, dark devil’s food. And my sister Marian’s was ham. She loved ham and sweet potatoes. And when Jean came along, Jean would say, “I want meat loaf and macaroni and cheese,” and we’d all just [say], “Ah! We can have that any day!” So we hated it when Jean had a birthday, ‘cause we’d have to eat meat loaf and macaroni and cheese.

(Laughter) But no, and something that—you know, I've often heard a lot of people say, "Well I never ate salads until I was a grown person." Mother always had a little salad. She always had some kind of greenery there. She had different ways of doing salads. In the wintertime, we'd have molded salads, like Jell-O with fruit, or in the summer time we'd have tomatoes, and she'd often slice a hard-boiled egg on it. And I still make that, and Lem [her husband] loves it. Slice a half of a hard-boiled egg on top of two or three tomatoes, and put a good dressing on it, and that's good. But I marveled at the way she did—but I guess she was brought up like that. Grandma Gross was a good cook. Grandma, her mother, was a really good cook. So that was their mission in life, was to take care of their families, and it's not like that anymore. And we have to learn to live with it, whether we like it or not. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: When did you enter nursing school? What year?

SPARKS: Well, that fall ...

PIEHLER: Fall of 19 ...

SPARKS: I graduated from high school in June of '38.

PIEHLER: And you entered, then, in the fall?

SPARKS: In the fall, in that September. I entered with that September class.

PIEHLER: And you finished in what year?

SPARKS: December of—I mean September of '41.

PIEHLER: So, just before Pearl Harbor ...

SPARKS: Just before. And see, I had enrolled—I had made some attempt to enroll at the University of Pennsylvania, because I thought that I wanted to do work in—maybe pediatrics or obstetrics. That usually [was] kind of the way you went if you were—well, I don't guess you had to go that way, but a lot of girls did, and another girl and I were gonna enter the University of Pennsylvania. But you know, December came, and by the—if you didn't have those replies back from these places, you know, it was—and you know, in retrospect, I guess a lot of girls my age—well, see, I would have been twenty-one, and a lot of girls my age—we weren't cued in to what the political upheaval and everything that was going on in Europe. We just weren't. I heard my daddy talk a lot about it, and I soon realized what they were talking about.

PIEHLER: But really, Pearl Harbor was a big shock to you.

SPARKS: Yes, it really was. I couldn't believe that anyone would have the audacity to do that to the Americans. (Laughter) It just didn't seem to make sense.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: did your dad ever take you ... to any World War I movies, or did he ever comment ...

SPARKS: Well, you know, I can't remember. What would have been ...

PIEHLER: Well, for example, did you ever go see All Quiet on the Western Front?

SPARKS: Well, you know, I think we did ...

PIEHLER: But you don't have any strong memory of it ...

SPARKS: No, I don't have any strong memories of it. Uh uh. I really don't. You know, the late '30s and '40s were the big musicals.

PIEHLER: And so that was what you would go see.

SPARKS: Yeah, that's what we went to see. First movie my mother ever took me to was ... If You Were A Talking Picture, and it was one of the first talkies. But I think that's what it was called. If You Were A Talking Picture. And then the second one I remember was—the second one that is vivid in my mind is Three Little Women. She took us to see that. But you know, I was thirteen and fourteen, and I don't know what it cost to go. I do remember, during the Depression, that one time I said to my mother, "Ruth and I want to go to the movies tonight. May I go?" And she said, "No, honey, you can't. Not tonight." It was Friday night. And I said, "Well, why?" And she said, "Because I said so." You know, back then, that was enough of an answer. I've told my children that. That was enough of an answer. You didn't get three "whys," you know. "Why, why, why." So I didn't say anything, but I was really angry, and I cried. The next day—see, that was Friday, and this is so distinct in my memory. That night, my daddy came back. He'd had been away Monday through Friday on the electrification, going out of Baltimore to New York. And he came back that Friday night, with a paycheck. But mother was so low. She didn't mean to let herself get that low, but she was so low that Friday that she really didn't have—it taught her a lesson. She told me later, "It taught me a lesson." And you know, when she died, bless her heart, she had folded up so many dollar bills longwise, lengthwise. She said they last longer. (Laughter) She said, "Fold your dollar bills this way. They last longer." We had found—I don't know how many [dollar bills] underneath linings of drawers. Paper drawers.

PIEHLER: This was her emergency money ...

SPARKS: I said, "Poor thing." She absolutely—it embarrassed her to death to say "No" to her children when she thought it wasn't a good reason....

PIEHLER: ... So it sounds like also that your mother ran the household finances, that your dad gave her the checks, and she ...

SPARKS: Well, pretty much, but Daddy always—and it's real funny how that's carried over in our marriage! (Laughter) I can't believe that it has, but now that I look back, it has. Daddy did the house payment when we were buying the house, or the rent, and did all the cars, all the cars. Well, we only had one car, but I mean, he kept it up on the gas ...

PIEHLER: He was the one that paid those bills.

SPARKS: Mother took care of the food, and she bought what clothing that we—well, she had to buy us clothing, but she ran a charge account at one of the best department stores that Harrisburg had, and my two aunts, her sisters, worked there. Sometimes they'd get her things at a discount. It [the store] was called Bowman's. But she never let that thing—she said, "If you run a charge account, don't ever let it get where you can't pay." And it taught me a lesson.... Someone said something about [J.C.] Penney's one time, and she said, "Well I never had a Penney's card, and I don't want one." I said, "Well, I'm sorry," but I said, "I couldn't have raised my three boys without Penney's charge card." I said, "If they had a sale on boys' pants and shirts, you'd better believe I was gonna be the first one down there!" (Laughter) But I never ... let it get beyond what I couldn't take care of. And so, consequently today, Lem and I both have an excellent credit rating. We've lived on limited incomes, and every check I guess I ever got from nursing—I worked at St. Mary's for eight years, and I worked at Holston Valley Medical Center for twelve [years].... Every check, a certain portion, over half or 75% of that, went in for the University of Tennessee, you know, or Lenoir-Rhyne College. I mean, it went into the boys' funds, or we couldn't have gotten them through. We lived in on his salary, which was not meager, but it wasn't big.

PIEHLER: And you don't get bonuses in the church ...

SPARKS: Just like teachers! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Yeah. You don't get bonuses or stock options in a ...

SPARKS: No.

PIEHLER: I guess, before really talking a little bit more about nursing, what about dating? And you mentioned your girlfriends, but any dances, or ...

SPARKS: We had a wonderful class. So good, that they still get together. We are all eighty this last year. I missed the last two. Believe it or not, every five years they would have one. Now they are starting to have one every two years, and I've had to miss two of them. And we had the most wonderful class, and I dated a boy for—I guess, my junior and senior year, and he went to Penn State when I went into training. We still had a real good, you know, nice relationship, boy and girl. I remember how proud I felt when his parents told me that I could drive their Pontiac, you know. He was their only son. He had a sister, but he was their only son. And they said, "Betty Jane, we're gonna let you drive our Pontiac up there, and then Wally will drive you back, but he can't come because of classes." So you talk about an adventure for an

eighteen-year-old. This was my senior year—no, no, no. I was in training, and I got the time off. I was about nineteen. Mr. Wallace came and got me, or came, and then I dropped him off at his house. And I drove that highway—I don't know what highway it was—up to Penn State from Harrisburg, and Wally was waiting for me, and he had a room. He was in a forestry fraternity, and the little things come out at you now.

I dated another boy, too. I don't know where Harry went. He became an engineer with Bethlehem Steel, so he went to ... probably to Lehigh [University], or something ... like that. But Wally and I had a lot of good times together. I remember that he said, "I want to show you the fraternity, but we're not gonna eat there tonight." And so he took me around, and he got me a room. All these little mothers around these campuses at that time all rented their rooms out. I started to—I don't know where I started to go, and he said, "Betty Jane, you don't want to go in there, you don't want to go up there." I said, "Why? What's up there?" And he said, "Well, you wouldn't want to go up there! Come on!" So I guess there was even hanky panky back there in 1938, '39. (Laughter) Because Wally didn't want me to get anywhere near it. The sad part about that relationship, we really did like each other, and we figured that if the war was over and everything, he had asked me if I would wear his wings.... From Penn State, he went into the Naval Air Cadet Corps, and he became a naval pilot. But when the subs started to—and that's on my history of going across there [in a Knoxville News-Sentinel article], that I talked about the subs [that] started invading the Atlantic and everything. He was on what they call patrol duty, and they went out of some base on the coast—I'm not sure where—and his plane was downed with four boys. Four young men lost their lives there.

PIEHLER: So if he had lived, your life might have taken a very different direction ...

SPARKS: Yeah. I know. I know. Very different course. Very different course. And for years and years I kept his wings, and my children used to ask me where my high school ring was, and I said, "Well, I had a really pretty high school ring," but I said, "It was on—" I told them about him, and I said, "It was on ... Wally's little finger, and I guess it went down in the sea with him." But he had a sister that was seven years younger than he was, and at different times I would hear about her, you know, so I decided—oh, I don't know. I guess ten years after the war. I had never come across or had the opportunity to meet her, but somewhere along there, I'll say five to seven years [later], I decided to make it a point to look Betty up, and I said, "I have some pictures of Wally that I thought you ought to have." By that time she was married. And I said, "Surely, if you have any children, they would want their uncle's wings, and I have them." So I gave her everything that I had.

PIEHLER: What was Wally's last name?

SPARKS: Wallace. He was named for his father. His first name was Francis Howell Wallace, and he was [one of] two children, and his father was very—they were both educated people. His mother was a graduate of—is there a Saginaw College in Michigan?

PIEHLER: That sounds very familiar.

SPARKS: They were Michigan people. There is a Saginaw City.

PIEHLER: Yeah ...

SPARKS: 'Cause every summer he would go, and he would write me letters. And we would exchange the "Hit Parade." Do you remember the "Hit Parade?"

PIEHLER: I've heard of it.

SPARKS: Well, (laughs) I'm sure you don't remember! It was funny, 'cause the week before the "Hit Parade" would come out on the Saturday night, you'd guess what was going to be the hit, and how long it was going to last. (Laughs) A lot of difference in the activities today. But he came—his people were—oh, I don't want to sound—I don't know how to sound. She was ... a graduate of Goucher [College], ... which was a very ... up-class college. I don't know where his dad went, but he had a very good position in Pennsylvania, with an engineering firm of some kind. It wasn't that they thought we were—I always felt that they didn't think I was good enough to date their son. But when the war came on, and they saw that we were still seeing each other—we would call each other from the base he was at, and I'd call him from—in fact, two weeks before I met Lem, I had talked to him on the phone. And when I think about how these things clash together—my mother called me and told me, she said, "Honey, do you know that Wally's lost at sea?" I said, "No, I don't!" She said, "Well, he is, and they fear that they [the plane and crew] won't be recovered." And I know that there was only about two weeks in there, and I met Lem, and you know, everybody said, "Oh, well, Betty Jane's got ... 'rebounditis,'" or whatever you call it. But it wasn't so. It was strange. I always—now that I look back on it, Wally and I had a brother-sister relationship, and that would have never been a good marriage. And it would have never been a good marriage for his mother, because I wasn't [at] quite the educational level that she wanted her son to be, and it wasn't too hard to notice and realize. His dad was a lot more understanding, and a lot more lenient, as far as—you know. But we had a good childhood, and I am sorry he lost his life, I really am. He was a good boy, and we had a lot of fun. But I had ... just the best memories of high school. We just had the best time. And even the teachers, even the teachers that we would invite to our reunions, they said, "You were one of the best classes that left out of N.C. [New Cumberland] High."

PIEHLER: So ... it sounds like you had an active calendar of social activities.

SPARKS: Well, yeah, we did. And by today's standards, you know, I wonder at my grandchildren, what they consider fun, and everything. On a Sunday afternoon, we'd pile into one of these boys' cars, and I guess our mothers had their hearts in their mouths, (laughter) but we'd pile in, and they'd tell us when we were supposed to be home, and we better be home then. But we'd go out in the country, or we'd go to a lake somewhere. We just goofed off! Kids that age just hang out, and they've done that for years. But, what they hang out with are two different things, you know. And then we would all traipse up to a barbeque, and get a milkshake and a barbeque. If we could all afford it, you know, we'd do it. (Laughter) But I remember one time.

I do remember one time [that] I wanted to go so badly. There was the best barbeque up along the river, and it was past the time I was supposed to be home, and ... I said “You’ll have to run by so that I can tell my mother,” and she wouldn’t let me go. She wouldn’t let me go. It was getting dark, and she said, “You’ve got more kids in that car than you need, and you’re not going.” And so I had to go out and tell them that I wouldn’t go, and all it was was to go get a barbeque and a milkshake, but I don’t know....

You know, my daddy was as gentle as anybody in his era, and in his—you know, daddy was, what you call now, is a blue collar worker, I mean, definitely a laborer and everything. But if he told us to do something, we knew he meant it, because there would be a consequence if there wasn’t. And one night I was supposed to be in, and it was summer weather, and he was on the late shift. He was getting ready to go to work, work all night, and he was getting ready in the kitchen. I was about fifteen, twenty minutes late. It was after ten o’clock, and I was supposed to be home at ten o’clock, and he said, “Betts, I thought I told you ten o’clock tonight! Where have you been?” And I told him we just got—we’d play the craziest games, you know. At our age, I mean, we were teenagers and juniors and seniors in high school, and we’d play games like “Nerkey,” which was “kick the can...” You know, you didn’t hang out and smoke and drink and stuff. That just wasn’t—but anyway, I said, “Well, I’m sorry, Daddy, but we just got carried away. We had a game going, and we just kept going.” I forget what he told me. He said, “Well this is a warning, but the next time, no games,” or something. I couldn’t go anywhere the next week. And when he said that, you knew he meant it, ‘cause one time he did, and I couldn’t go to Scouts that week. There was a basketball game; I couldn’t go to that.

But you know, they made an impression, and I don’t say that all those things were—the most we ever got was a smack on our butt. That’s the most we ever—well, I take that back. There was one time—and I told my children this, and they said, “Grandma, that’s brutality!” What’s the other word? Abuse! I said, “No, it’s not.” And they said, “Well how would you like—you wouldn’t do that to us!” And I said, “No, I’ve learned a lot. I wouldn’t do that to you.” But on the other hand, I’d try to think of something that would mean the same. I talked back to my mother, and before I could get the last word out, my daddy’s hand went like this (demonstrates) across my mouth, and he said, “Betty, don’t you ever let me hear you talk to your mother like that again. Now go to your room.” Well, I never talked to her like that again, and that slap didn’t hurt me. It hurt my pride. It hurt my pride a lot, and I vowed I’d—and I never did. I never talked to her like that again, but he was bound and determined that I wouldn’t! (Laughter)

But you know, some of those things—that’s what I told our children that are raising their children now, you know. I said, “You have to be careful. I agree with you.” But at the same time, parents are so—today, I watch my children, and some of them are doing excellent jobs, but I watch some of the other ones, and I think, you know, “Don’t give your child so many choices!” You know. Tell them what you expect of them, and if they don’t—and this one son that lives in Nashville that’s with the state—he’s with the State Department of Human Services—he has two boys, and they one boy is a sophomore over here, and the other boy is coming next year. Gosh, I don’t know what I’m gonna do with those two on board! (Laughter) Anyway, they’ll both be at UT, but he wrote ... Ben the sweetest letter. It’s full of love, it’s full of compassion, and

everything. But he gave him instructions that for every act, there is a consequence, and you'd think before you act. And those kids know about that, and they are listed like "Number one, number two, number three," you know. And even today they'll be here, you know, and Ben just had a little wreck in his little pickup truck. Well, he had worked twelve hours for Kroger, and he came out here, and he said, "Grandma, do you have any sandwich stuff?" and I said, "Yes," and he ate a big sandwich, and he drank two glasses of milk, and he went in on the computer, and that was when he was pulling up some stuff [on the Internet]. I said, "Honey I'm too tired." I said, "Really, Ben, your Grandpa and I get tired quicker than you do. I am too tired to sit down on that computer tonight." I said, "Now you need to go home and get some rest!" He said, "I'm going to a little party." I said, "Ben!" He said, "Well, I gotta stop by the house." He pledged Sigma Phi Epsilon, because his uncles did. He's got two uncles that are in it. Well, he rounded that curve down at Weisgarber, coming off of Middlebrook, and it was raining, if you remember. Saturday night, it was raining like the dickens, and he was going too fast. He had to be. And he tore that front axle, and ended up like over in the grass. There's no ditch there.... You know, my son's a good father, and [Ben] called his daddy, and he said, "Well, Ben, I'll be down tomorrow." He said, "Are you okay?" [Ben] said, "Yeah, I'm alright. The AAA brought me home, and I'm fine.... I don't know if we're able to fix that or not, Dad." He said, "Well, I'll see you tomorrow. Will [Ben's brother] and I will come down with two cars." So Steve and Will came down, and Steve has this bad cold that everyone is suffering with, but like a good dad, he came down. You can bleep this out if you want to ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, we'll show you the transcript before we ...

SPARKS: But I use that as an example, because, to me, [Steve]—and his wife is a teacher, and she's got a good background. She's now a principal, assistant principal. They're doing what I wish every parent would do, you know. They laid down some guidelines for their children. And that one statement, "for every act there is a consequence," and that's right. Everything you do—and it may be a good consequence and it may be a bad one, or it may be a good act and a bad act. Anyway, I'm sorry that—and yet, that's an old eighty-year-old woman talking, I guess. I think our children—when I see young people like I saw yesterday [when visiting a class at the University of Tennessee], I said, "I'm not worried about the next generation." (Laughs) They were so—just so interested, and interested in us, and everything, so—but it's a different time. What was the question I was talking on, then? You asked me something.

PIEHLER: Well, no, you've more than answered it.... One of the things, and I have interviewed a lot of doctors, and you, I think, are—of my recalling, you are the first nurse I've interviewed.

SPARK: Oh, really?

PIEHLER: Particularly the first military [nurse].... What was it like to go to nursing school in the late '30s, early '40s? You'd mentioned the sort of fees and the uniform, but ...

SPARKS: It's an entirely different ball game. You entered training, and you were told that you

would put in a twelve-hour day. Now, that twelve-hour day consisted of so many hours on the floor, as we called it. “On the floor.” You would be on a ward or in semi-private rooms or whatever. And then you would ... have your schedule, and you might have to go to anatomy class, you might have to go to dietetic class, you might have to go to medicine. You would go off, and you would be in class for anywhere from an hour to two hours, depending on who was teaching, and on what kind of a class it was. You were taught by the doctors on the staff, and occasionally there would be a visiting [doctor], and particularly in a hospital the size of Harrisburg General, we had visiting people from Philadelphia, and different other places that would—for instance, I had the privilege—they built an addition to the hospital, and I had the privilege with working with iron lungs, which a lot of hospitals didn’t have. But they brought in ... a [specialist] in lungs.... He was a cardiopulmonary specialist. Or just a pulmonary specialist. There was no “cardio attached to it.” That was separate. But I learned how to do those iron lungs. Although that’s not anything you need to know now, but at the time ...

PIEHLER: Well, that was state of the art.

SPARKS: Yes, and it gave me—it was very much—you know, even when I filled out my application for the Navy and everything, the fact that I could put that on there, that I worked a year in the pulmonary section and ran the iron lung machines. I had a good training. I had a good basic training, but it was still a long day, and it was interspersed.... You got two hours off. In that twelve-hour period, you worked like four hours on the floor, four hours—that wouldn’t come out to twelve, would it? (Laughs) Four hours in the classroom and two hours off. You had two hours off every day. And when you got those hours off was up to your supervisor, and oh, buddy, you just would pray from one to the other that you would have decent hours. ‘Cause if you got a ten to twelve, ... you went on duty around seven o’clock and you hardly got your work done until it was ten o’clock and it was time to go off, and the only thing you could do was study then, which was good, but you couldn’t go run an errand or anything [in] two hours. Then the other shift that you would get would be twelve to two, and that was okay, because you worked your lunch hour in with that, so it made it actually ... eleven-thirty to two, and you ... took your lunch in there. The one you liked to get the best was four-thirty. When you saw a four-thirty after your name, you could ... eat your supper, you could go somewhere if you had to. I could go home. I’d call my dad and I’d say, “Daddy I got a four-thirty today.” [He’d say], “Okay. I’ll be there at the door to pick you up.” And by the time I got off, got out of my uniform and into something else, a skirt or something—you know, that’s another thing, the slacks and things. The Navy nurses, I don’t know how we did the things we did without—now the Army outfitted the girls with ... pants from the very beginning. The Navy didn’t. They did later.

PIEHLER: But not initially.

SPARKS: No, not initially. But anyway, Dad would come pick me up and, see, I’d take a bundle of laundry home. Mother would do that, and I’d eat supper with them.... See, that meant that four-thirty—you got off duty at seven anyway, so you were supposed to study, and you were supposed to go to chapel. No, it wasn’t chapel. This one supervisor started what she called

“music appreciation,” but I love her to this day for it. I learned classical music under her—just learned to listen—that I would never have learned any other time.... I was introduced to Peter Gynt, and The Nutcracker Suite, and all that stuff. She was a graduate of Columbia University in New York. I don’t know where she trained as a nurse, but she had several degrees in back of her name. But she was a wonderful person, and became a good friend later, as I graduated. Those were the things you did in the evening, but if you had a four-thirty, see, that stretched out good. If you just had a regular—if you had already had your time off, you usually went home and stretched across the bunk for a while.... But that was—the World War II brought the eight-hour day to the nursing profession.

PIEHLER: Really? Before that, it was—‘cause it’s funny. When I’ve interviewed doctors, what’s struck me is when they started talking about residency. You know. “We didn’t get paid.” And “We put in long hours,” and ...

SPARKS: Oh, yes, they did. And you know, when I said something about the fee that was charged. You know, when you are first dealing with these shots, and these glass syringes and everything, it wasn’t anything to break two or three of them in a given month. (Laughs) Well, I think they were like two dollars, or a dollar apiece. I’ll say they were a dollar apiece. But to have that deducted from your little spending money—course, Mother and Daddy saw that I had spending money if I needed it, you know. That wasn’t a real issue with me, but it was with some of the girls. But if you’d have that ten dollars credited to you, and then all of a sudden they’d deducted five from it because you broke this—and we used to have to irrigate NG tubes, or ... in the beginning they were called Levine tubes—but nasal gastric tubes down into the stomach. You would have to keep them open, so we’d irrigate them with warm saline, or just plain warm water. And they were the darnedest tubes to hang on to, and your hands would get slippery, and I don’t know how many of those things I broke! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: It also sounds like your training, compared to ... nurses today, was very much practical. That you were in a sense thrown in right away. Which now, if you go through a B.A. [Bachelor of Arts degree] nursing program, you spend initially very much the traditional college curriculum, and you take a number of courses, and the practical part comes way later ...

SPARKS: Yeah, see, those girls will admit it today. They’ll admit it today. And a good example of that was that in 1960, I turned forty, and Janie was four years old. I said to my husband, I said, “Honey, if I’m ever gonna go back and do any full-time nursing, I’ve gotta go now, because I’m not so sure that I could do the refresher course that they want. So I went over to St. Mary’s and talked to Sister Annunciata over here. She said she’d get back in touch with—now, I filled out an application, and I said, “Now, I’m willing to be trained on my own time, you know, because I’m not up on medicines, and I’m not up on some procedures that they’re doing now.” And she said, “Well, that’s okay.” She said, “You fill this out.” Well, she came right back at me the next week, and she said, “Mrs. Sparks,” she said, “We’d like to hire you. Are you sure you don’t want to work full-time?” I said, “No Sister, I can’t.” I said, “My husband’s a minister. He’s got a full-time parish here. I have four children. I’d like to get back into nursing, but I can’t work full-time.” She said, “Well, alright. We have a place for you, anyway.” She

said, “By the way, you don’t need to be ashamed of the hospital that you graduated from.” She said, “it has a very good reputation.” She used to stop me in the hall, and she’d say, “Let me see that pretty pin again.” I have a beautiful pin with the seal of Pennsylvania on it. But I consider that I got as good and rich—and granted, I don’t know a lot of theory, but I learned it, though, from the doctors.

PIEHLER: Well it’s interesting. Having interviewed doctors, it’s interesting—I’ve gotten a very interesting perspective [on] how doctors learn how to be doctors. In fact, there’s an element of it still, that you have to actually do it.

SPARKS: Yes, that’s right. And you know, two things happened in the early days when I went back to nursing. One was ... [when] I was selected out of—well, for instance, one of the sisters ... became ill, and they wanted a nurse to—what we called “special” them. You stayed with them for an eight-hour shift, and another nurse took over, or you stayed with them a twelve-hour shift, and another nurse took over. Sister Annunciata called me to her office and she said, “Mrs. Sparks, we have a sister that’s quite ill, and we want her to have round-the-clock care. You might think that we would choose a Roman Catholic nurse, but we’d like you to do it, if you will.” And I never knew why, except that that sister and I just got along great! She recovered, and ... she bonded with me, and I bonded with her. She was an easy person to take care of. I’m not sure which one it was. I want to say Annunciata. They named that wing after her. But you know, when I first went in and when I first bathed her—and ... she didn’t have a habit on or anything. She had on what they normally sleep in. And I said—I don’t know what to her, and she said, “Well let’s just pull this whole thing off.” She said, “You need to wash my head!” (Laughter) That was a shock to me, because ... I had never seen one of them without their habit on, and especially a bald head. But that started our relationship.... It was just a warm, loving ...

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

PIEHLER: That’s—but you were saying—I’m sorry to have to ...

SPARKS: No, that’s okay.... Another instance—and I don’t want to say this in a ... braggartly way or anything, but it reinforced me as to what good training I had. I never regretted doing what I did, and not going on to school, ‘cause I could have gone on to school. They gave you the equivalent of about two years, if you wanted to. But I didn’t. By that time ... I was married, and I wanted to have children and you can’t do everything, and so I didn’t. I always regretted it, in a way, but on the other hand I had so many experiences that taught me that the training I had was very good. They chose me, one day, to—well, this was before the war, come to think of it. See, I was waiting for state boards before I went into Navy. I had to have state boards, and I was waiting.... There were certain things that I was just doing, just on a temporary basis. But one of them was—the man that was head of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, either he had developed it, or he was the ... general manager of Turnpike. Anyway, he had a very bad stroke. They asked me if I’d be willing to go to Washington by ambulance with him, and another girl was to follow me, and ... I was to do the night shift and she was to do the day shift. She was older, and I was low on the totem pole, ‘cause I just graduated. But I thought that was—you know, they trusted me.

They trusted me to go down there. I lived down there in one of those big brownstones with his wife, and took care of him, and they chose not to put him in the hospital. So this other girl and I ...

PIEHLER: You were really in charge ...

SPARKS: Shared—I was in charge during the night. I would do everything to do with him. I'd bathe him and I'd turn him, and I'd give him his medicines, and I'd feed him by a tube, and all that stuff. But that was the first time that I ... slept on satin sheets! (Laughter) Their maid would have a hot bath drawn for me by the time I got off duty at seven o'clock in the morning, and I had a bed with satin sheets, and I fell out more times than I stayed in. (Laughter) But that was an experience.... I used to remember that man's name, and I can't now. I don't think he survived very long. We were sent home. But that was interesting. It was a big old brownstone [house], one of those tree-lined streets in Washington, D.C., and I was so young. (Laughs) But like I said, all those things taught me, you know.

PIEHLER: What about your initial—both as sort of in nursing school, and then as an early practitioner of nursing, what was the relationship from your end? Because ... I have gotten a range of different opinions from doctors about nurses, but what's your take on the nurse/doctor relationship, particularly at the very beginning, when you were a nurse, in your career?

SPARKS: I didn't have any problem with it. When we first started out, you see, all I did—my husband changed churches. Within ten years, he changed twice. These were mission churches, more or less. Well, Lutheran Memorial in Blacksburg, [Virginia] wasn't, and then he chose to go over there to George Washington University, and that was a pretty big church. But the only thing I did at those times when ... my two boys were little, was to work on the campus of different places, with blood banks, and I would do a little private duty, you know. If I got to know one of the doctors in the town, and you know, Blacksburg ... is not a small town anymore, but it was. I knew several of the doctors. Dr. Woolwine would call me often, and he'd say, "Mrs. Sparks, if you have any time at all, I need your help." And I'd be glad to go, and Lem would be glad to let me go, because he could manage the children and do what had to be done. But for the first ten years of our married life, I didn't do any kind of full-time—I did volunteer work. I did volunteer nursing. And I never had any trouble with doctors. I really never did.

PIEHLER: Even in the very beginning as a nursing student, or ...

SPARKS: With doctors?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: No, I didn't. And maybe it was my personality, that I didn't latch on to different things. Oh, we had doctors we didn't like, and we had doctors we got cross at ...

PIEHLER: Well, let me give you—what kind of doctors did you like, and why, and what

doctors would you not like, and what would be the reason?

SPARKS: Well, just to give you an idea, one of our top surgeons at Harrisburg Hospital was—oh, what was his name?

PIEHLER: Oh, you don't have to name names. You can—yeah ...

SPARKS: Anyway, he was big, tall, very much in charge, you know. Blustery and everything. One day, out of sheer conversation, one of the girls said to him, "Is your wife a nurse, Doctor so-and-so?" He said, "No, I married a lady." (Laughter) And none of us would even—for a long time, we just didn't—just said, "Just give him a wide berth. Don't talk to him." (Laughter) But he meant it! He really meant it, because it wasn't too long ... before [that] nursing had looked down on as a menial task, and it certainly was menial, but it was beginning to come into its own, through even World War I, and then certainly in World War II. But I had a good association. In fact, if it hadn't been for that—and I still remember that man's name, Dr. Flanagan—if it hadn't been for him advising us—and I asked him, I said, "Why do you advise us to go into the Navy?" And he said, "You're young enough to pass the exam." He said, "You won't have any trouble. You're good, healthy girls, and if you'll go into the Navy, you'll be taken care of, whereas if you go in the Army, you're gonna set up field hospitals, you're gonna be much more in harm's way than you'd be in the Navy." And, see, there was no way—even though I was in harm's way to a degree in Normandy, the only thing that could have happened was that our hospital was blown up a couple of times, or something. But to be out into the field and to be directly in contact, just miles apart from actual action, you know, you didn't do that in the Navy! And I asked for a hospital ship twice, and I never got it. That's the old story: you don't ask for what you want. You ask for the opposite. (Laughter) I learned that later.

WALLER: Were your instructors in nursing school mostly men, or women, or were any of the doctors women?

SPARKS: They were women, they were women. Well, they were women, except overseas there. A lot of those [were] men. But see, we had to go on what we learned before we entered the Navy. When we were there at Netley, [England], and the hospital at—what was it called? SNAG [Special Navy Advance Group] 56? You know, we had to pretty much know what we were doing with the doctors. They didn't have time to teach us. They would instruct us as we went along, and like I said, that picture, you know, when you talk about ... what has happened in medicine, it just boggles your mind. If you ... looked at that picture in there, can you imagine holding an open flask of plasma and pouring it into an open flask? I mean, in rubber tubing that had been autoclaved who knows how many times? I mean, I don't know how some of those boys survived.

PIEHLER: Well the other issue is ... you started medicine, or nursing, before there was penicillin.

SPARKS: That's right, that's right.

PIEHLER: I mean, could you—I mean, the fear of infection ...

SPARKS: Did you see in there? There was plasma, blood, and sulfa.

PIEHLER: 'Cause you remember, I guess, sulfa drugs as the great miracle.

SPARKS: Yes, it was. That's all we had. That's all we had. That's uncanny. And dear knows where it's gonna go in another fifty years!

PIEHLER: It's interesting. I interviewed a doctor who started out in the '20s, and he said he vividly remembers sort of being in charge of the T.B. ward, and there had been an outbreak in the city, and he ... had a death rate about 10%. And he had lowered it. I forget what the amount was, but he said he got a commendation from the city. And he said ... that now if you had a death rate like that, they would lock you up! I mean, you would have really—but he said, "Given what we had to work with ..."

SPARKS: Well, you know, I still show a scar on one of my lungs, and it always kind of gets the doctors to alert another x-ray, until they look at my back x-rays, and see that the same scar has been there. And one doctor said—he had an answer for it. He said, "She had the T.B. bacillus at one time or another, whether if it was while she was working, or what." But he said that it just left a scar. "She had enough of a body—" well, anyway, I combated it.

PIEHLER: Immunity ...

SPARKS: With immune—of my own, that—but that scar's still there. Everyone wants to latch onto it, you know, and it never changes! (Laughter) It's just never changed.

PIEHLER: ... You enlisted August 4, 1942, so where were you working in between? You mentioned the board. Did you stay at Harrisburg ...

SPARKS: Harrisburg Hospital. I worked in that pediatric ward.... That was another thing that made me know that I was at least singled out by the teachers that taught us, several women and several doctors, that I at least, you know, was capable of doing—I was chosen. I had the highest grade in what was called "Nursing Arts." Now, that meant the bathing, and the making beds, and ... all the things that went to making the patient comfortable. That was called "Nursing Arts." There was a book on it, but I had the highest average, and the nursing director came to me and she said, "While you're waiting to be called in the service, will you assist Ms. Hess with that?" And I said, "Yes, I'd be glad to." So I helped teach the "probies" [new students] that were coming in.... I have a picture of that, too. I helped ... the class that was ongoing, you know. But to this day, I guess, if she were living, my mother would say, "Well, get Betty to make the bed. She bandages them like an arm." (Laughter) "You can't get out."

WALLER: Did you do any work with the Red Cross, the American Red Cross?

SPARKS: Well, just on a volunteer basis, like I told you. And everywhere that my husband [went], if the Red Cross was doing the blood banks, which they often did, sometimes earlier. Yes, I would work with them, and I have a Red Cross number. I still have it. I still have a card, and I think it's 9-0-something-2-8. (Laughter) But I never hear from them, or anything. Once you joined the Red Cross, you were a member, I guess, until you chose not to be. And actually, that's the letter that I got, asking me if I would serve in the armed forces. I got it from the American Red Cross. It sounds in the article [in the Knoxville News-Sentinel] like I worked for the Red Cross, if you read it closely, but I didn't. I didn't. I just simply joined it. We all did. And some of the girls went Army, and some of us went Navy.... But you actually went in through the American Red Cross.

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier that your father, after Pearl Harbor, almost immediately said you should go, but you don't go until August ...

SPARKS: Well, there was a story to that. I applied. I had to go to Philadelphia to do it.

PIEHLER: So you applied pretty much right after Pearl Harbor?

SPARKS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

SPARKS: Yeah. And I waited and waited, and I got a letter, and it said, "We're sorry to inform you that you have not passed the physical, and the reason being—" and this was all clipped and [marked] "stat," one, two, three, four, down the line. "The reason being you have an *otitis media* scar in your left ear. That would mean that you could sue the Navy for injury of noise, or in combat." I don't know. It was worded crazy. I took it to my family doctor, Dr. Brooks. I said, "This doesn't make sense to me. They need nurses. Why are they being so picky? Do you think I have a hearing problem? Or do you think I would ever be the kind that would come back for a simple [injury]?" And he said, "No, Betty, let me write them a letter." So he wrote them a letter. It must have made a little indent, because they sent me a letter immediately, and said, "We wish to reexamine you." So when they took me again—I went down to Philadelphia a second time—and when they took me again, I passed. I explained to them that I would never—and I signed a waiver. We both signed waivers! We were both volunteers! He [Lem] signed a waiver on his eyesight—he's color-blind—and I signed a waiver on my ear. And I hear, to this day, as good as anybody! In fact, he'll tell you that I can hear a drop of water over there in that bathroom. I'll get up and he'll say, "What's the matter?" And I'll say, "There's water running somewhere." (Laughter) And he is still color-blind! But he signed a waiver, because if he were ever in the position of reading signals or anything, he could never do that. And I certainly was not going to be in any—it didn't bother me to me to sign a waiver. Where would I be that I'd have to be bombed or anything, [where] the noise would injure my ears? I wouldn't be that close to any bombing. I wouldn't think so. Anyway, I don't believe in that. I'm not a person that sues, and I wouldn't be the kind of person who would go after—it would have to be very serious for me to

go after the government for any—you know. So that was the break in there....

PIEHLER: So you went immediately to sort of an induction center, and you had a physical, and then they said, “No, we can’t take you.”

SPARKS: And then the second time around they said, “Yes, we’ll take you. You sign a waiver.”

PIEHLER: While this was going on, your mother was not too happy with this, as you have said.

SPARKS: No. She reconciled to it.

PIEHLER: She did. Yeah.

SPARKS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Now, what about your younger sister?

SPARKS: Well, Marian was—I told you she was in a business course, and then Jean had decided that she would go into that—they were pushing that a lot. That was the ... nurses’ cadet. She wore a little kind of—it would look like denim now. You know, a little off-blue uniform, and I don’t really know—I’d have to talk to her. But she liked it so much. She went just to see if she’d like nursing. But it was ... preliminary. They used these girls. They used them in the local scenes. They used them in the clinics and different—but she decided, she said, “I think I want to go, Betty.” I said, “Well go ahead.” I said, “Go ahead and go. I think you’ll like it, and I think you’ll make a good nurse.” And she did. I don’t know what class she graduated in.

PIEHLER: Did she also go into the military?

SPARKS: No. See, it [the war] was over by the time she ...

PIEHLER: By the time. But she—in many ways, if the war had continued ...

SPARKS: Yes, she would have been pulled in there through the nurse cadet corps.

PIEHLER: And this was the Army nurse cadet corps, or the ...

SPARKS: Well, I don’t know what that would have been. I think that cadet corps—I think you could go either way.

PIEHLER: Either way. But she was on the track, in a sense, to go into the military, too. And your brother, how old was your brother when he ...

SPARKS: Well, see, he’s eleven years younger than I am, so he was born in ‘31.

PIEHLER: So, he was really—yeah. It was not going to be his war.

SPARKS: No. Mm mm. No.

PIEHLER: It's interesting. He saw one sister go off to war, quite literally.

SPARKS: Yes, he did, and then he was of the age—either he enlisted—I think he enlisted, because he saw then that if he was gonna go to college, he needed to have some help, and that might be a good way to get it, through the G.I. [Bill]. I had nephews who did that on purpose, you know, and got an education through the government like that. And I guess that's what sent Bob into—that was the Korean conflict. He served different places. He served on the West Coast in California. That's where he was in [a] parachute rigging class, or course. And then he was put on the U.S.S. Yorktown, the second U.S.S. Yorktown, and served on that for a while. I'm not sure when Bob got out. He got married while he was in there, and he married a nurse from Harrisburg Hospital. (Laughter) We're well covered! (Laughter) And he and Lenore—she was a Pennsylvanian, she was from middle Pennsylvania—and they have four sons, and he went to Westchester State Teachers' College when he left the Navy, and then he did graduate study at Penn State.... From Penn State, he went into the teaching profession in some high schools, and coaching. That led to—he worked on a Ph.D. in education, and that led to—I'm not sure how long he was at Towson, but a long time. Towson State University. He was in charge of that department. He's been commended by the governor of Maryland for his work with senior adult Olympics, and he's a real nut on exercise. He was a jogger and a walker, but don't you know that last year he had to have a hip done! And I said, "Ha ha!" (Laughter) I didn't really. He just had a hip go bad, but he's fine. He just visited me not too long ago. We have a real good relationship. He wrote me the sweetest letter when he got home. He said, "Betts—" he has always called me "Betts." And he said, "Betts, the time we spend together gets more precious every year."

PIEHLER: ... Where did you report to be inducted?

SPARKS: Philadelphia.

PIEHLER: In Philadelphia. And what happened after induction?

SPARKS: Well, see, they trained you not—you're supposed to have a state board exam and everything, but they have to train you in Navy regs. And you didn't hear me say this yesterday, but I said this once or twice, and I know Lindsey heard me. You know, it's the "Navy way," or ...

PIEHLER: It's no good.

SPARKS: No good. (Laughter) We had to learn the "Navy way."

PIEHLER: So where did you learn the “Navy way?”

SPARKS: Right there in Philadelphia. We worked on those wards.

PIEHLER: So where did you stay, in the—where did you live?

SPARKS: In the hospital there, the Naval Hospital. Well, I take that back. They ... billeted as many as they could. But the group that—see, they drew these nurses from different locations, you know. I was interested in that book [[The Story of SNAG 56](#)]. There is not a word in there about the Philadelphia group. There is the Bainbridge group, and there’s another group. They would pull these nurses from these different training bases, and there is not one picture of the Philadelphia group. There were several of us that came from Philadelphia Naval Base, that got into the SNAG 56. We marched, we had to take classes on Navy regs and everything.... I’m not so sure on the length of time, but I want to say at least six months, maybe longer. What did you ask me just prior to that?

PIEHLER: Well, I asked where ... you, in a sense, trained in the “Navy way....”

SPARKS: That’s what it was. That’s what you had to do. You had to learn how to do it their way. It was a little different.

PIEHLER: Well, I’ve interviewed the civilian side of women in the Navy, and they, in a sense, go through what the men do, a modified version. For example, what leaves an impression on both male and female recruits in the Navy is firefighting, in the Navy training schools for enlisted. How do you, in a sense, learn the “Navy way” on the nursing side?

SPARKS: I don’t remember that we were required to do much, and I was scared to death that they were going to require a full swimming test. You know, Navy, swimming. I passed the Girl Scout badge on doing the sidestroke, and that was all I could do. But all they required us—and I got by on the sidestroke. (Laughs) I just swam from one end of the pool to the other on the sidestroke!

PIEHLER: Well let me ask you some questions about your Navy training.... How much marching would you do as a nurse?

SPARKS: Not a lot.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so, much like doctors.

SPARKS: Well, I don’t guess so. But we ... had to line up and count off, and all that stuff, you know. We marched in the morning, and we marched at night. We marched at the beginning of our shift, and the end of our shift.

PIEHLER: But that was it. You wouldn’t do close order drill.

SPARKS: No. Uh uh. Not that I remember. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What about—which Navy regs would you learn?

SPARKS: Oh, I know what I was going to tell you, though. Well, the people that they couldn't put in the hospital there, and give them a place to stay, took us down to the Ben Franklin Hotel. Now, if you know what the Ben Franklin Hotel is, it's a beautiful, old, old hospital, and it had a real fine reputation. We just lived it up down there! The Navy bus took us in the morning at six o'clock. We'd sing the whole way out. "She's a grand old flag...." (Laughter) We'd sing the whole way out to the hospital, and at night we were almost too pooped to sing. (Laughs) But we would sing going back. And then when we got to the hotel, you know, there we were! We were surrounded by movies and everything, and we could go have ... a nice supper. We didn't have to worry about eating the hospital food and stuff, so ...

PIEHLER: So you liked living at the hotel. That ...

SPARKS: Everybody said, "Well, you know, that's tough duty!" (Laughter) But they didn't have any room for us out there at the hospital.

PIEHLER: So you were living in center city Philadelphia?

SPARKS: Yeah. Right there in the center. Ben Franklin [Hotel].

PIEHLER: So you really didn't have to march. And what type of Navy regs would you learn? Or was it really strictly nursing?

SPARKS: I think it was strictly nursing. I never remember having to climb a rope ladder, or ...

PIEHLER: Or firefighting drill.

SPARKS: No, and yet I had to do that. I had to climb a rope ladder to get home! (Laughs) On that ship that was taking us home. It was sitting back there in the—I don't know what bay that was. It was out from Bournemouth. And they took us out there in a dingy, and I said, "How are we going to get on this?" And they said, "You'll see." We had to climb up a rope ladder. But I don't remember ever having any instruction in that. Now, we could have. It's funny how certain things pop out and stay in your memory, and other things get further and further away. They just fade into the distance. I just can't—I marvel at my husband. I mean, I never saw anybody recall things like he can. And my only answer to that is: I was raising our children, and I had a lot more on my mind than trying to recall all that stuff. (Laughter) But ... that might be that I just don't have a good recall.

PIEHLER: Well, you've recalled quite a bit, so I wouldn't—what about nursing, the "Navy way?" Does anything stick out, particularly in your initial training?

SPARKS: Well, you know, there wasn't the—the doctors were good to you. They were very nice. They really were. And a lot of those men, you see, were middle aged.... When I say "middle aged men," I mean they have been through medical school, and ... most of them were married and had families. Someone said, "How many doctors per nurse?" or something like that.... Well, I'm sure there were some ... people, you know. That's uncanny, to think you had that many people together. There were ninety-some nurses and that many doctors, I guess.... But I never got into any of those things, and if they were, they were very secretive about it. But the majority of those men had families. And the majority of them, you know, they were the ones before D-Day and after D-Day, who thought up the ball games and thought up the extracurricular things that would be fun, you know, for the people. As far as working with them, the Navy, you know, if you were working with—say I was an ensign, and a lieutenant commander told me to do something, there was no way, even if I didn't think it was right, that I was going to question him. That wasn't always good, but at the same time, ... in the Navy you go according to your rank. You do....

It's a little different now. I think it's gotten better. See, I have two nieces that went in the Navy nurse corps. They wanted to go in where Aunt Betty was, and they are very sweet girls, and they are married and have families.... Well, the one isn't, but the one girl is. She just recently ... retired after twenty years. She went in well after I was out. She never served in a war. She served in Guam, and her husband-to-be was on the [U.S.S.] Kitty Hawk. And he's a flyer, and now he's doing recruiting, or did do recruiting. Now they are both full-time retired, and live up in northern California, and they raised avocados, and two children. Anyway, Barbara was telling me the other day that she—well, her mother, my sister, said, "Guess what? Barbara's back working!" And I said, "I knew she couldn't stay away too long. She's too young...." Well, she's fifty, I guess. But that's young. Very young. And I said, "What's she doing?" And she said, "Well, you know, there is a little hospital real close to them," and she said she found out they were needing nurses just like everyone else, so she called and said she was a surgical nurse, and could they use her. They said, "Could we use you? Come down for an interview." So she did. Well, her first day at work, this doctor comes in. Now, this is not a Navy hospital. This is a civilian hospital, and she's a retired Navy nurse. So this doctor comes in, and he's scrubbing, and she says, "Sir, let me put your cap on." He said, "I don't wear a cap." She said, "Well, sir, I'm new here, but if I'm going to be in charge of surgery, you wear a cap." He said, "Oh, well, okay." When he was repeating this to me, I said, "I can see this whole scenario!" (Laughter) But see, you ... wouldn't have done that in the Navy.

PIEHLER: So you really had a sense of chain of command?

SPARKS: "The Navy officer said he didn't want to wear a cap. Okay, you don't wear a cap."

PIEHLER: But you were also an officer. You were an ensign.

SPARKS: That's right. I was an ensign, and just about to become a Lieutenant JG. You didn't move in rank very fast in the nurse corps. You might have as a line officer, which is on board

ships, and stuff. You didn't move very fast, but I ... had received some papers, and of course, it was at the time that I ... tore the card upside-down and asked for a release to get married. They weren't about to give me a discharge on a Lieutenant JG's pay, so I stayed an ensign. The girls just kidded me, up one end and down the other. They said, "Oh, well, Betty got the real thing." Because at that time he [Lem] was a JG. He soon went up to a senior ...

PIEHLER: Lieutenant commander.

SPARKS: Well, no.... A JG, and then a full lieutenant.... He got out of the Navy as a lieutenant commander. So I never did get that. (Laughs) I got a better deal. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Though I find it interesting that as an officer ... that you have orderlies under you.

SPARKS: Yes. They were called corpsmen in the Navy.

PIEHLER: ... and they may be men, but you outrank them.

SPARKS: Yes, you outrank them.

PIEHLER: And how did that go, in terms of ...

SPARKS: It went very well. It did, and I was a very naïve little gal, to a degree, when I entered the Navy. You know, I relied on these boys who were older than I was, and who knew more about taking care of these, who had been in the Navy, maybe more than I was. You know, longer. A year or two, and that was a lot. Some of them may have seen action on ships, and everything. I got along with all of them, and in fact, against Navy regulations, I even dated one or two! (Laughter) We didn't do much. We went for a walk and had dinner on a Sunday.... There were just two nice boys that I distinctly remember, and I did date them.

PIEHLER: But you weren't supposed to date them because they were enlisted.

SPARKS: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: But you could date other officers.

SPARKS: Oh, yeah. (Laughs) I didn't meet one until Lem, that I liked. (Laughter) I take that back. I met a boy from my hometown that I—oh, and, well, I did tell you about Wally, though. That was him. That was early in the war. But just to show you ... the crazy things, and what fun we had, to a degree, you had this big long hall full of boys. And they had everything from battle fatigue to—this was Philadelphia—and you had everything from broken limbs, to battle fatigue, to maybe surgery of some kind. Appendectomies, anything, you know.... Before you closed your shift, which might be 10 o'clock at night or something, ... you went down and you checked everybody and made sure there wasn't anything they had to have done. And your corpsmen went with you, and if they had to have anything done, they corpsmen did it. You didn't have to

worry about it. But you would go back to your desk, which was just a little desk about half as big as this table, and the lights had to be out at a certain time, and so you would—(Laughs) I would stand there and wait—this is so vivid—I was so dumb! I would stand there and wait until my corpsman came back, and say there wasn't anything else to be done, you know, and that we could put lights out. So I'd stand there and I would say, "Okay, boys, last call. Is there anything else I can do for you?" Well, they would just go into a hoot and a holler, you know. "Yeah! Yeah!" (Laughter) The corpsmen would very nicely say to me, "Miss Zeigler, you oughtn't to say that." (Laughter) And I'd say, "Oh! Well, okay." I really was very naïve.

PIEHLER: So, in other words, I get the sense that—I had a nurse who said [that] "In World War II, ... in many ways, you became much more of a supervisor than a nurse, as you've been trained where it was very hands on ...

SPARKS: Well, that's right. That's right. You gave a lot of that up. However, the fact that we were with this advanced group for Normandy, that gave us the opportunity for more hands-on [training], because we had a good complement of corpsmen, but we also had ... patients of various things, and we did things like dressings and tests and, well, just what I told you. You know, like you'd be irrigating wounds, or you'd be irrigating stomachs, or something. And there weren't always enough corpsmen to go around, depending on how they were assigned. You know. You might have two or three in your ward, and everybody did as much as they could handle. But we did a little bit more hands-on nursing, when the actual time came for us to go, then we did in Philadelphia Hospital or the Norfolk, [Virginia] Hospital. See, I was at Norfolk for a while.

PIEHLER: How long were you in Philadelphia for?

SPARKS: Well, I'm trying to think. If I went down there in August—what was that? August of '42. See, I was down in Norfolk Naval Base until '43. Which would have been—yes. A year, probably August of '43 ...

PIEHLER: That you went to Norfolk?

SPARKS: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And why the move from Philadelphia to Norfolk?

SPARKS: Well, they were gearing us up, and we didn't know it.

PIEHLER: Oh, but this is part of ...

SPARKS: You mean from Norfolk to ...

PIEHLER: No, from Philadelphia to Norfolk.

SPARKS: Well, that was just the way they moved you around. They figured you knew Navy regs, and all these things you learned later, they were so planned. Oh, gosh. And I saw something the other day that—you know, they say that everybody knew that Pearl Harbor was gonna happen, and all that. I hate to hear things like that, because I want to think that my country was smarter than they were, and I don't know what to believe. But you know, there are a lot of these things that were in the works when I was just—who knows? I don't know whether SNAG 56 was being planned in '42 or '41. I have no idea. And if people who do know that and want to criticize, that's okay. I don't know. And people have ... asked me, "Why would you go if it was a volunteer thing?" I say, "Well, I can't necessarily tell you that, except that I have lived long enough and I have been—as a tourist and everything—in Europe, I've been to the Holy Land, I've watched somebody bomb the Jappa Gate. I've seen all of that, and I don't know, except that we live in one of the best democracies there is. And it's not perfect. But it is—and further than that, it's my country. I was born here, and I would fight for it any time. I would fight to preserve it, I would fight to learn more about it. I don't for any minute think that we are faultless. They [the Normandy Scholars class] asked my husband yesterday about the atomic bomb. I don't think in my heart that that was right, but I don't know that there was any other way. And as he explained it, ... the purpose of war is to destroy the enemy. However you do it, with one shotgun or a bomb, it's still destruction. We both feel this way, and I can't—I try to understand the young people's viewpoint, but look at what we did to the American Indian. Look at what we have done to the Negro. You know, none of these things were right, but I defy anybody to go anywhere and live, that they can live any more free than they can live in the United States.

PIEHLER: Do you think—in thinking about why you went into the Navy, do you think that if your father hadn't urged you, do you think you would have gone?

SPARKS: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: You still think that that ...

SPARKS: I would have gone.

PIEHLER: Yeah ...

WALLER: Well, in speaking about Norfolk, Virginia, that was a special place, because that's where you met your husband. Could you talk a little bit about how you met him?

SPARKS: Well, he—do you remember anything—did he say anything about that yesterday, or did I? I was in the Norfolk Hospital, and I was assigned to what was known as a "dependent unit." And that meant that I was taking care of children or wives of Navy men. At that time, the Battle of Italy was going on.... Anyway, their husbands were there. I was a little bit irked. I had been sent there from Philadelphia. I thought, "Am I gonna fight the war this way all the time? I could go home and take care of—" but that was just the young girl talking, anyway. I was doing my duty there. I was second in command, I think, on that unit. And at the time, we

had delivered a little *spina bifida* baby, and if any of you are familiar with that, that's where the little—where the spine is outside the body. Nowadays, they do a lot of things with it, but then they didn't know an awful lot to do. We were going to ship this baby home to Ohio, where it could be with its mother. Well, the mother was with it, but where it could be with its grandparents, and where they could get better care, and take care of it. But the Navy wasn't equipped to take ... long-range care of any dependent. As soon as they got the dependent well, it went back to await their husbands, or whatever.

So, anyway, I was really busy. This chaplain and I were working to get the Red Cross to get this baby back. So I was in the nursery, and this chaplain comes along, and he had Lem on one side of him, and he motioned for me to come out. I recognized him, and I said, "Chaplain Gray, how are you?" And he said, "I'm fine. I want you to meet our chaplain aboard now. He's here for two weeks. He's learning the Navy regulations, and he will be a chaplain somewhere in the Navy." So I introduced myself, and I said, "Well, it's nice to have you. Welcome aboard." I said, "If you'll come back at a different time, I'll be glad to show you around the unit, but I don't have time now. I really don't." And I explained to him what I was doing. So he said goodbye, and I said goodbye to him. About two nights later, or two days later—when you got off duty, there was no place to go. We lived in these Quonset huts made up for hospitals, back in the—way out, on what they called "Hampton Roads" in Norfolk. That's where all the docks were, and they had a naval air station out there, and we were way out. And the only thing to do, unless you were gonna go out to eat somewhere, was to just crash on your bunk. So I was half asleep, and someone called down the hall, and they said, "Zeigler, you're wanted on the phone." I said, "The phone? I already talked to my mother this week. Who could that be?" 'Cause I called Mom every week. They said, "Well, you're wanted on the phone." So I got up sleepily, and answered that phone. I said, "This is Miss Zeigler." He said, "Well hello, this is Chaplain Sparks." I said, "Who?" (Laughter) And the account of our meeting that Fred Brown did said, "Lemuel was very disappointed that she didn't remember him." (Laughs) But I really didn't! He said, "Remember, I met you yesterday with Chaplain Grey." I said, "Oh yes.... Now I remember." I said, "How are you? How is your tour with us going?" [He said], "Fine, fine. I was wondering if you'd like to go out to dinner with me." I was kind of taken aback, and I said, "Oh, well, are we going alone?" (Laughter) He said, "You certainly were skittish!" And he said, "Well we don't have to. I can bring another chaplain." He said, "I can invite another chaplain to go with us." And I said, "Well why don't you do that?" (Laughter)

So then I had to go up and down the hall, and talk one of my Navy gals into going to dinner. Well, you never heard such comments in all your life. "What do you want to date a chaplain for? Who wants to date a chaplain? Zeigler, you're crazy! No, I don't want to go!" So I had a dickens of a time. I finally got a little girl to say, "Oh, I'll go with you." So we met them in the—they came into the lobby, these two chaplains. And you could hear anything in those Quonset huts. There was a lobby set—you know, part of one of them was a lobby, and you could hear back through the halls. These girls, they were so mean. They said, "Don't forget your flask, Zeigler!" "Have you got that pretty underwear on you just got?" (Laughter) And they just kept it up, and kept it up. By the time I got to the lobby, Lem said, "You were as red as a beet." And [he said], "I told you not to worry. That was okay. I was used to things like that."

And I said, “Yes you were used to things like that, in seminary!” (Laughs) But that was our first date.

I don’t know what it was. I like to think that it was the hand of God. It’s the only thing I can answer all this stuff to. But we just hit it off. There was a bond there, for some reason or another. We talked, and we talked, and we talked. He said, “Well, I’d like to see you again.” And we don’t know what happened to that girl and that guy, that other chaplain. I think they took the bus back to the base. We walked around the city of Norfolk, just talking and talking. And finally got a trolley car back to the base, and he said that he would like to see me again. I said, “Well, okay. You call me.” So he called me, and that Sunday, we went out again. I don’t know what day of the week [the first date] was. We went out again that Sunday, and we did the same thing. We walked all over Norfolk talking and talking. The next week, one of our girls got sick on the floor I was on, and I had to, as they say, “bump up.” They said that in the railroad. I don’t know whether they say it in the Navy. My daddy used to say, “Oh I got bumped,” which meant he had to go on another shift. But I had to go on the three-to-eleven shift. So I said, “I’m sorry, you know, but I don’t get off until eleven, eleven-thirty.” It’s usually—I’ll tell you one thing about the Navy. I mean, you worked hour to hour. You didn’t do overtime. You didn’t get off early. You didn’t do anything. So if they said your shift was three to eleven, you were done at eleven, cause the girl to replace you was there. You know, that’s not so in private nursing, or in nursing today. I’ve worked so many overtimes up at Holston Valley Hospital, I could—I don’t know, when I think of how many I did. (Laughs)

Anyway, I would get off, and they would say, “Miss Zeigler, you’ve got a guest in the lounge.” And I’d say, “Okay.” So that started a whole week long. He’d be there every night with a couple of Coca-Colas and a couple of crackers, and we’d sit and listen to some music, or we’d talk. As the article says, we talked about the future, we talked about us, we talked about how it was uncanny that we were from different parts of the United States and met. We just talked, and I don’t know how it was. I really don’t. It’s a miracle to both of us that, for some reason or another, we just knew that, above anything else, we would go through this war, but that we wanted to be together for the rest of our lives, if it was possible, and so we did. He went one way and I went another way. And for me to get married, at the stage in the game—see, 1943, the war was at its peak, and I would have had—at that time, you could not be married and be a part of the women’s corps.

PIEHLER: So might you have gotten married if you could stay in the nursing corps?

SPARKS: Yes, I think we might have, because, you know, you would get transferred to different places, and I could have been of use and help in any hospital base. It’s hard to say ...

PIEHLER: But you knew if you did get married, that was it for your Navy nursing days ...

SPARKS: Yeah. Yeah. I knew that.

-----END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE-----

SPARKS: So he went one way. He was transferred to the Naval air station—not the Naval air station. Great Lakes Naval Station, where all those boys were shipped out

PIEHLER: Oh, okay, yeah. With the recruits ...

SPARKS: Yeah, all those recruits. He was up there—I don't know for how long, and see, ... we got orders after that. That was in November. We even remember the date, even. November 22 was the first day we met. And that ... week was before Thanksgiving, and I remember that he asked me to spend Thanksgiving with him if I was off, and I wasn't off.... I said that I couldn't see him that evening, but I didn't, because this ... boy that was the son of my parents' people [friends], called and said they had a nice Thanksgiving dinner and that his dad, who was my dad's buddy, called and said, "You ask Betty. You call Betty Zeigler and tell her that you're gonna feed her Thanksgiving dinner. That would make her mother and dad feel good." And I hated to say no to him, and I didn't really want to ask Lem to go. I just told him, I said, "I really can't meet you tonight. I won't be here. I'm gonna go have dinner with some friends from home." But, it was that—we still laugh—not this past November. We were both so sick. He was sick, and I was sick. And I remember, I said, "Do you know what today is?" He said, "What?" I said, "Its the 22nd of November." He said, "Gosh, a long time ago, Betsy." But I have no answer for it. I really don't. I think it's wonderful if it happens to you. I don't think it happens to everybody like that. But I think it's wonderful if it does.

PIEHLER: Well, actually, I have to pause ...

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: ... You were in Norfolk, and it was very fateful, because you met your husband.... Did you work ... dependents the whole time, in terms of nursing, or did you ...

SPARKS: No, no. I did other—I don't know how long I was over there. Long enough to meet him, I guess.

PIEHLER: When did you—how long were you at Norfolk?

SPARKS: I think—see, I left there ... [in] the fall. I left there right after I met him.

PIEHLER: Which was the fall ...

SPARKS: Fall of '43. November.

PIEHLER: November. And that's when you shipped out to ...

SPARKS: We shipped out in January, which was then the early part of '44.

PIEHLER: '44. And when did you know you were shipping out?

SPARKS: Well, we didn't. We just knew that anybody who went to Long Island—you know, what do you go to Long Island for? A boat, a ship.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) So you knew first that you were going to Long Island.

SPARKS: Yeah, we knew that. Lido Beach.

PIEHLER: And how long were you at Lido Beach for?

SPARKS: I don't know. Several weeks. It would drone on, you know, and we'd go through these—we lived in a hotel there.

PIEHLER: Were you doing nursing duties?

SPARKS: No, no.

PIEHLER: So you were just—hurry up and wait.

SPARKS: Yeah we went in—we were allowed—you had to get permission for everything. So we were allowed to go into New York on a pass, and see a show or something. And I was so tickled—and I don't know how he arranged it, but Lem arranged to have—he was going to Great Lakes Naval Base. So he got a room in the same hotel! And this Helen Olseski, we called her "Ski," she said, "B.J., how did Lem do that?" 'Cause she called him Lem. I said, "Well, I don't know, but he's here." She said, "Well, you be careful." She said, "One of you are going to get in trouble." And so the same thing happened. We'd meet at night in his room. And, you know, I look at the promiscuity and the mores of today with some young people, and I just can't understand it. I really can't. But we would meet, have a couple Cokes, some snacks and stuff, and I kid you not, I sat in a great big leather chair on his lap, and we opened the windows of this hotel, and you could look straight out into the ocean. We talked about everything we wanted life to be, but—you know, what were we doing? The only thing we could say was that we would pray to God. That we both were Christians, we both believed that what would be, would be what was supposed to be. If one of us ... was gone, there would be something else. I believe to this day that if God closes a door on you, he'll open another one. But you know, to tell that—in fact, I snuck in. See, we girls were—oh, we were jammed up into bunks and stuff on another floor. And I snuck down there that one night, and Ski lifted her head up and said, "Where have you been?" I said, "I've been up at Lem's room." She said, "You're gonna get in trouble." I said, "Ski, we have—I don't know whether he's not supposed to be here or not, but I don't think anybody knows he's here." I said, "He's on his way to Great Lakes," and I said, "We just were talking, and had a couple of cokes together." And that was really what we had together! We didn't have any alcohol or anything, 'cause I don't think you could bring it into a place like that. If you did, you snuck it in.

PIEHLER: Were there any of the nurses—without naming names—who did get in trouble?

SPARKS: Mm hmm. Well, and got married, secretly.

PIEHLER: Secretly. So you had some secret marriages?

SPARKS: Yeah, and I just wasn't brought up that way. Now that I look back at it—well, you know, here's the thing again. This is where Steve [her son] got, "For every act there is a consequence." Suppose we had married secretly, and I had gotten over to England, and found myself two months pregnant. I would have been shipped back, and not honorably, you know. If you follow your thoughts through, and you look at those things, you know the answer. It's just that some of our young people don't do it, don't follow the right track. So we talked about it. We talked about it a lot. We just didn't feel like it was right. And he himself, ... he said, "I feel like I got a job to do. I just feel like I have to follow this line of duty wherever it leads." And I said, "Well, I do too. So let's pray that we will get back together." So we vowed when we parted that the next time that we were both in the states—'cause by going to Great Lakes, he knew he was headed somewhere else, too. He didn't know how long he'd be out there. We vowed that when we did get back together, that we would talk seriously about marriage. So, that didn't happen until the October of that year, and in the meantime, D-Day occurred. He was in two or three battles. (To Lem) I need you to verify dates. (Laughter)

WALLER: Just backtracking a moment, you were talking ... yesterday about your journey from Norfolk to Long Island. And you went by train, is that correct?

SPARKS: Yes, that's the way they transported everybody.

WALLER: And they sent you around in various directions ...

SPARKS: Well, now, that was when we knew we were really shipping out. That was not when we first went up there. When we first went up there, we were in that little town. I think that it was called Lido Beach. We had full run of that little town. We'd go out to little places to eat, and we just shopped around ... and everything. But then we were told, "No leaves, no calling home, no nothing." I mean, you were put on—I think they called it alert. I couldn't call my mother.... We couldn't go anywhere. And then we knew. So that was when they got us all on a troop [train], and took us all over creation. From about dusk until three o'clock in the morning. I know that we were on that train eight hours. They fed us a packaged supper.

WALLER: And that was to avoid spies, right?

SPARKS: Yeah. It was to avoid any kind of somebody getting wind that there were troops leaving. Because, see, there was a lot of Army on there. In fact, that one thing that I called up, SNAG 56, got it up off the Internet. I'm all discombobulated now. I've got to get this stuff in order. But there were like 700—no, 7000—Army people on that troop ship, on that Aquitania.

PIEHLER: And how many nurses?

SPARKS: Oh, see, that book [The Story of SNAG 56] says ninety-six. We were told that there were 180 doctors, 180 nurses, 300 Navy corpsmen.... Anyway, total Navy people was less than 700. As compared to a whole ship full of Army people. So they didn't want that ship tampered with, if they could help it. Like I told the group yesterday, we did—we, one day, noticed a real change in temperature. We soon got word that we were to stay in our clothes, take anything we wanted on our person, and—sleeping. We could sleep, but we had to sleep in our coats, and our uniforms, and stuff. So we did, and I think that covered like a twenty-four to thirty-six-hour period. I told a girl—and I thought the girls [in the Normandy Scholars class] would appreciate the fact that I took my Testament, and what money I had. You didn't carry a lot of cash with you, but what money I had, and a lipstick. (Laughter) Bound and determined [that] if we were shot out of the water, I was gonna have a lipstick. Which is—I wasn't the only one. (Laughter)

WALLER: The Aquitania was also the same ship [on which] your father went over in World War I.

SPARKS: Yeah. It really was. He didn't know that 'til later, and I made some remark to him. I said, "Well, Daddy, no wonder it creaked!" He said, "Well honey, it had better creaked, or you wouldn't be here today." He said, "That's the way they make ships.... It creaked for me too!" (Laughter) Yes, he went over on that. I don't know what he came back on, and I don't know what we came back on. That's a—nobody seems to have finished what they were writing in that little book there. They didn't bring it to a real close, I thought. That captain, he must have taught that to somebody, who wrote it down. Or maybe he wrote it down. It's not a very good account. It's an accurate account, but it ought to be a little more lengthy, I think.... There's much more to tell. But he was Captain Hudson, I think was his name.

PIEHLER: How long did your journey take? Do you remember roughly?

SPARKS: Eleven days.

PIEHLER: Eleven days.

SPARKS: Mm hmm. I celebrated my twenty-fourth birthday in London.... See, we left in January, like the 29th or the 31st of January. We docked in Gourock, Scotland, like the 6th of February, or something.

PIEHLER: Did you get seasick at all?

SPARKS: Only one time. You know, they told you to chew dry crackers and things, and we did, and I don't remember ever throwing up. I just remember getting really ...

PIEHLER: Queasy.

SPARKS: Oh yes, and I just wanted to cover my head and have nobody talk to me, or anything. But it left, and it especially left if you could go topside and get some air. There were times when we weren't allowed to do that, but then when we could, why, we did it.... We had—it tells you this somewhere. I guess it's in that account.... How much better quarters the nurses had than the enlisted men. They were way down! We were like the second deck from the top, you know, and we had good bunk beds, and there were like eight of us to a room, but we had bunk beds. And I don't know what we did, except read and walk the deck, get some fresh air. And they ... must have had things for us to do. I'm sure they did, especially the smaller groups like the nurses and the doctors. I guess we did. I don't remember doing much. I really don't. Maybe we didn't. I do remember that—and my husband laughs at this—before you sail, ... your captain throws a party, and you're commanded to go. You don't just go at your own free will, but you're commanded to go. So Helen—that's the girl that I was such good friends with—Helen said, "B.J., we've got to go up there. That's the captain's party, and we're supposed to meet the commanding officer of the hospital that we're going to be at, and we're going to meet some people, so we have to go." I said, "Well, okay. I don't feel much like it, because they'll probably be drinking." Ski and I both admitted—I think the strongest drink I had before I went into the Navy was what was very typical of that day and age, was a rum and Coke. They even wrote a song about it. And I never had much of that. We didn't have it in our home, except for medicinal purposes, and I mean medicinal purposes. My daddy poured rye over rock, which was hard rock candy-like, and he poured rye over that to drink for a cold. He wasn't against it at all. Beer made him sick. He couldn't drink beer. We just never had it around our home, and Mother would always tell Daddy to get some brandy or something when she made mince pies. Then the first piece of mince pie she would take, she'd say, "You put too much in there! I'm getting dizzy!" (Laughter) But anyway, I wasn't accustomed to having a lot of alcohol around.

PIEHLER: The services in that era—there was a lot of booze around.

SPARKS: Sure there was. I learned that, after I met my husband, (laughs) because he had a lot of friends, you know. He could tell you some tales about how he covered his crosses on his uniforms, because two of the ... officers were drunk, and he was going to try to get them back to the ship without anyone knowing he was the chaplain! I said, "Well, that was silly!" (Laughter) But no, I didn't have that much access to it. Didn't really care. Didn't really want it. But what was I saying?

PIEHLER: Did you—as a nurse, and as an officer, did you have access to the liquor ration?

SPARKS: Mm hmm. Oh, yeah, and I took some home to my dad occasionally. Yeah, I did, but not much. Not like some people did.

PIEHLER: Did some of the nurses take full advantage of their liquor?

SPARKS: Yeah, I guess they did.... I didn't run with that group.

PIEHLER: But there was a group that ran.

SPARKS: Yeah, there was a group that was out to date anybody.... And I got stuck a couple of times on blind dates, and I averred, “Never again.” Never again would I do that. (Laughter) I fought off two officers one time in Norfolk, and I said, “Don’t ever, don’t ever ask me to do this again for you!” ‘Cause I liked the girl, you know, and she ... wanted me to go. She said, “It’s just a blind date. He’s fine.” Well, you know, I think all those things are learning experiences for you, and ... you get through them. However your background and however you’re taught, you get through those things. And fortunately, I’ve been blessed.

WALLER: You had an interesting story yesterday about keeping warm on the ship. Some advice that you received.

SPARKS: Oh. Well, that was interesting, and that involved alcohol, because one of these Navy doctors—we knew we were going to the south of England to get a hospital ready. We didn’t really know how long we had, because nobody really knew the definite date, except the hierarchy of D-Day. But several of these doctors said, “If you girls want to stay warm—” and oh, it was so cold.... I’ve never had the desire to go to Scotland. Everybody loves to go, but all I could remember was how cold it was, and it was a penetrating cold. It was so cold. This was a troop train without any heat, and ... two of the doctors said, “Girls, if you want to stay warm, take those gray coats off, and ... sit on your feet, and wrap your coat around your shoulders. You’ll be a lot warmer. Get a small pint of brandy and sip it, and by the time you get to London, you’ll be warm.” And we were. (Laughter) So we got warmed up, ... and our feet stayed warm. Well, that’s true today.... If I take a jacket off, or something, I can stay a lot warmer just by putting it around my shoulders.... Of course, we don’t have cold like that anymore. That was a cold trip. I don’t remember how many hours it took us, but we were going from Gourock, Scotland to London. Then they put us in a hotel down there, and that’s where I celebrated my twenty-fourth birthday. It was the 12th of February, so that was the time line, from the time we left New York, which was the 29th of January. That’s how long it took. That hotel that we were in was literally bombed the next week. But see, those people—there were no lives lost, at least that I know of, and certainly no Navy lives lost, ‘cause we were on our way down to Southampton.

PIEHLER: So you had already left ...

SPARKS: We had already evacuated, but you know, they had so many blackouts. Boy, those people—as soon as those sirens sounded, they were gone. They were down under—I stumbled over people, and they’d say, “Hurry! Hurry!” People would absolutely evacuate the streets, you know, when they heard those sirens. They had a lot of underground places to go. But we were only there ... a total of maybe three or four days. And then they put us on a train and took us down to Southampton, and we rode big old Army trucks from South Hampton down to Netley, which was just a little short distance. This was a little small town, Netley Hants, where Queen Victoria had her say about that hospital.

PIEHLER: I read that in the article, that ... it was a beautiful building.

SPARKS: Oh yes, but absolutely non-functional. Not according to their times. They thought that if patients who were sick breathed fresh air, that that wasn't good for them. So they put them on the insides of the hospital, and worked their corridors around the outside. So you could walk around that whole hospital.... You could walk around the whole outside of it, and look outside. But your wards were without light, except artificial—and that wasn't very good—and without heat. There was a fireplace for each ward, and each ward carried about thirty beds. They kept that stoked with coal and wood. I don't know what she [Queen Victoria] was thinking of. Someone once said that she just wanted a monument to herself. But even the people that were building it—and that was a long time ago—said, "This is ridiculous." It was crazy. But they kept it, and it was the headquarters for the British Medical ... Academy, or something. It served several purposes after the war. Then in 1966, it was demolished and torn down, and only the chapel was left. I'd like to see that, but I won't now. Lem and I both thought about going over there—he has never been on that side of the world—in the fiftieth anniversary [of D-Day], which would have been in 1994. But we didn't have any money, and ... not only that, we heard that [it] was so hard to get rooms, and ... it took weeks and weeks. You should have started back in 1992 to reserve places. And so we just gave that up. I knew a lot of people that did [go], and that girl that I'm talking about [Ski], she and her husband went. She said, "B.J., the hospital's not there anymore." She wrote me—she was a good Catholic girl. She had a visit with the Pope.... (Laughs) She's done all those crazy things, I guess, that ...

PIEHLER: You mentioned in the service, for example, getting to know a lot of Roman Catholics. In your high school and growing up, what were the different faiths that you hung out with? For example, did you know a lot of Roman Catholics, growing up?

SPARKS: No, and that's a little interesting story too. See, my schooling was across the river. Like I said, this Harrisburg Hospital, in Harrisburg, sits right on the Susquehanna, if you look at the maps. We moved across the river to a little town called New Cumberland. My daddy liked the looks of it, and he said it [was] not far ... for him to go to work. He worked on the West Shore. He worked on what was called the Enola Yards, and that was a big, big complex of rail exchange, you know, just huge. Something like you'd see in Chicago, or anything like that.... We only had one black family in New Cumberland. They were very well-liked, and very nice people. The day that a little girl was introduced in my junior high class, my ... eighth grade, I came running home to my mother, and I said, "Momma, we have a new girl, and because her name starts with 'A,' they didn't have any room in the front of the room, so she's sitting with me." I was "Z," you know, and she said, "Oh, that's nice. What's her name?" I told her. Her name was Marie. I said, "Guess what? She's Catholic, but she looks just like us." (Laughter) Now that, coming from an eighth grader, you know.... We sure weren't exposed, were we? We had a Catholic church in New Cumberland, and they had a Catholic parochial school, but there were just not many families.

PIEHLER: Well, they went to public school, it sounds like.

SPARKS: Well she did. There were some that didn't.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: But she did. And she moved here.... She moved from some place. I don't know where it was. But she's still living today. We've seen her at the reunions. Her name is Marie, and I told her the last time—which was several years ago, because I hadn't been to the last two—I ... said, "Marie, do you remember the time that I told you that you looked like everybody else, even though you were Catholic?" She said, "Oh, Betty Jane, you were always coming up with something like that." And even in Harrisburg—see, what was my birthplace out on the Hill, they called it, and had the apartment that I was born in—that's all a black neighborhood now. All of it. That was kind of the outskirts of Harrisburg. Very nice homes, very nice business district, or small business district, and now that's all engulfed in black schools and everything. Of course, it's all integration. I used to tell Lem that we didn't have any problems with the Negroes, that they were integrated in schools. He said, "Yeah, but you had as much trouble with the treatment of them as we did." He didn't grow up with them, either, in Newport, you know. Newport, Tennessee. He didn't grow up with real problems with the black race. But I—it's hard ... for me to understand.... I was just sheltered. Let's face it, I was sheltered. I lived in a small little town, and we just had a great time. We had parades and picnics, you know. You could walk to the movies for a quarter, if you had the quarter. (Laughter) And I was a Girl Scout. I got fairly high in it, and enjoyed it. Went to camp. I just had a really good ... childhood. I wasn't privileged in any way. We didn't have a lot of money to do some special things that people did. Some of the people—for instance, like Wally's folks, they went to Michigan every summer, to a house on the lake that his grandparents owned ...

PIEHLER: Mackinaw Islands, it sounds like.

SPARKS: Well, no, it wasn't Mackinaw. Well, I don't think it was, 'cause it was outside of Saginaw.... That's when we used to write each other and ... see who could name the "Hit Parade." (Laughter) Oh me. Our wants and desires were less.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: in the service, how often did you go to USO shows, or the USO in general? The USO clubs?

SPARKS: Well, we went several times, and they do nice things for—I'll tell you, the USO runs together, to me, with the Red Cross, 'cause the Red Cross did a lot of that ...

PIEHLER: The canteens ...

SPARKS: Maybe that's not mentioned. Yeah. They would transport us. For instance, over in England, we were always being ... asked to go to a party. The 8th Air Force was billeted right above us, and they would have parties. We sometimes reciprocated with a party, and we would invite those boys down. There'd be dancing, and music, and lots to eat, snacks, and stuff. One time, I fell—it was really blackout, so you almost had to—they would have one little door open, and the buses would pull up to this door, and you might go into this big Quonset hut, and it

would be all decorated with balloons and everything. But ... it looked like another world. I fell. Leave it to me, I fell in a hole, and I broke my ankle.

PIEHLER: When was [this]?

SPARKS: Well, it was before D-Day, because I had to wear a walking cast for about several weeks there.... I wasn't taken off duty, ... but you know, you'd have to do all these dumb little chores, like mixing breakfast with powdered milk, and powdered eggs. And get up and make the coffee in the morning, and everything. They hired local help to do the big meals, but the nurses prepared their breakfasts, and things like that, and the snacks that they had. We could go down to the kitchen they had any time, and get hot tea and hot scones, and stuff like that.

PIEHLER: But you would prepare your own breakfasts?

SPARKS: Yes.... Well, yes, we did, because I remember standing there, and that was one thing I could do with this walking cast. You know. And stirring that crazy powdered milk, and when it first came out, you know, you couldn't get the lumps out for anything. Then the girls would get after me, and they'd say, "Who stirred the milk today?" Or "Who put the bead in margarine?" You don't remember that, but when margarine first came out, it was a little tiny pebble, a little plastic pebble full of orange dye. You put that in this block of what looked like lard, and you crushed that, and then you had to break that, and smooth it all down 'til it got a pretty yellow. Well, if you didn't do it right, you had these huge streaks of orange. Did you ever hear any of your family talk about that?

PIEHLER: No, but I've heard others ...

SPARKS: That was the first oleomargarine.

PIEHLER: I've heard the—we had ... this Professor give us this sort of butter oleo, and ... in some states the dairy industry would fight oleo, and they wouldn't allow the yellow stuff. He said it's like the equivalent of spreading lard on your—you know, in terms of look.

SPARKS: It just looked like butter.

PIEHLER: Before talking more about nursing, what did you think of the English in England? Because you mentioned the hospital and you thought how antiquated this was.

SPARKS: Well, I liked them, and they're still antiquated. I hope we never go that route of socialized medicine. I dread the day, if I'm living. But they were years behind us, as far as treatments, as far as equipment. We brought our own equipment with us. But they were ... just so backwards, almost medieval.

PIEHLER: And this was in 19 ...

SPARKS: Yeah. This is '44. I don't know what they are now, except my son—his mother-in-law took them all to England about two years ago, when her husband died. My daughter-in-law's father. He never wanted to travel, and so Maureen said, "Before I can't travel, I'm taking you all to Europe." So they had a wonderful time, and my son was the only male in the group, and his two sons who were teenagers. Anyway, wouldn't you know that they weren't hardly in London until Maureen fell and really broke—I'm not really sure what she broke now.... I think she broke her kneecap, or something. Anyway, Steve sat up with her. He sent Mary Anne back to the hotel with the two boys, and he said, "I'll stay with your mother." And he said, "Boy, Mom, I don't know what it was like in '44," but he said, "I got a good look at what socialized medicine might be," and he said, "we don't want it." He said that they just seem so backward, and in the treatment of her—the doctor immediately wanted to send her home to be with her family. She said, "I'm with my family. My family is right here with me." He said, "Well, you certainly—I don't know what you are going to do on a body frame," and that's the way he said it. He said it in a very thick, English accent, "On a body frame, I don't know what you are going to do." She said, "Sir?" He said, "On a body frame, I don't know where you could go." What he meant was a walker. (Laughter) He called it a body frame. But, no, we got along fine with the people we got in contact with. The Netley people ... liked us. They would go to any lengths to bring us fresh vegetables or fresh fruits, or anything. They helped us buy our bikes. They had the neatest little gardens. You see pictures of things like that, and it'll say, "An English garden," well, that's exactly what it looks like. They could take a plot of ground that was half as big as this table and make it look beautiful....

And see, those women that came and cooked, they taught us how to drink real good English tea, and they had good English tea. I really did like it. I gained weight on it. They would bring us a loaf of what was their unrefined bread, and we'd spread it with peanut butter from the PX, and drink their tea. (Laughter) So we all gained weight. But I liked the English people. Once or twice before D-Day, some of the doctor's invited us to go—one doctor had a relative there, and he invited us to his home. I thought that was very nice, because we got to see what I assumed was an old English mansion. Big open areas. Cold, but beautiful woodwork, and great big fireplaces. You'd enter every room through a door, and then it was cozy inside, but when you got into the house, you thought you were in some castle or something, you know. He happened to be ... an English doctor there, and he was a cousin to this doctor that was on our group. We did that once or twice, and then sometimes the doctors would invite us to go eat. If you went to go eat in a hotel, it just amazed me—it didn't matter what you ordered, you got three cold boiled potatoes beside it. (Laughter) That was their thing. I mean, you know, like we would get—well, down south here, we would get grits, you know, whether you ordered them or not. Well, we didn't order those potatoes, but they came. And they doctored up a lot of lamb, and they had access to a lot of mutton, I guess, and lamb. I don't to this day like the English food. It's bland, it's very bland, I think. I like some of the scones and things they make, and that kind of thing ...

PIEHLER: Did you ever go to the pubs at all?

SPARKS: Well, yes, and one thing we used to do, we went to the pubs, but we wouldn't—I don't like beer in general. I mean, on a real hot summer day down at our cabin on the lake, I can

sit on the porch and drink a beer, and that's like once a year. (Laughter) But they had a dark beer, you know, and I didn't like that. But yes, I've been in a pub. I don't know ... what the occasion was, or anything. I do know that when we were on night duty, we would get one of the corpsmen to take his bike and go to the nearest pub and get what they called "fish and chips." And nobody makes fish and chips like the English do. That was the best stuff. They'd wrap it up in a big newspaper and send it back to us, and we'd sit there. That would be our midnight snack, or our meal, for if you were on the midnight shift. We'd do that often, and they made the best deep fried fish, and these great long fries, and that's what it was called ...

PIEHLER: So fish and chips, you did like?

SPARKS: Yeah, I did like the fish and chips. I didn't much like the beer going with them. And of course, you couldn't have the beer at work, ... but we'd send those corpsmen in. They got used to us doing that, and they'd come in and say, "Do you want any fish and chips tonight?" (Laughter)

WALLER: Yesterday, you spoke fondly about ... finding a peach.

SPARKS: Yes, yes, I did. See, when the complement of patients—and we ... took care of 9,000 patients in that given time, between D-Day and—eight months and eleven days. And in that time, we took 9,000 patients and treated them, but some of those were Army. But the hospital census and everything dropped visibly, and by reason of the boys being sent home and everything. So they started to give us all leaves, anywhere we wanted to go, within a given range.... So that friend and I—it sounds like that was the only friend I made over there! I had other friends, but Ski and I just were ... bonded. (Laughs) We just had such a good time together. And she said, "B.J., let's go up to Stratford-Upon-Avon and see some Shakespeare plays," and I said, "That would be great." So we went up there, and we were in such a quaint little—some little woman rented these rooms, you know, and we had a little room in there with two little beds in it, two twin beds in it, and she just went out of her way to do for us. She'd have flowers in the room and everything. We spent two days up there, and we saw several plays, went up the Avon. We toured around, just walking, you know, and I have snapshots for that. I saw this vendor, and I said, "Ski, look at that! That's a peach!" So we went up to him and asked him how much those peaches were, and he said, "Seventy-five cents, ma'am." He said it in English [currency], but it amounted to seventy-five cents. She said, "Oh, you're not gonna buy one, are you?" And you know, back then, if you thought about seventy-five cents in 1944 ...

PIEHLER: You could get a dinner for ...

SPARKS: Yeah! It wasn't little. It wasn't a little bit of change.... I said, "Well, I'm gonna buy one." (Laughs) I enjoyed that thing to the nth degree, and I saved the seed, and brought it home and showed it to my mother. (Laughter)

WALLER: What sort of plays do you remember seeing, of the Shakespeare plays?

SPARKS: You know, I don't remember what we went to see. I think I have it written down somewhere. I really do. They ... did a good job. They had that big theater there. It was very modern.... To this day—I know people that have been there—and I'm not sure what we saw, I swear. I do know that a couple of years ago, when we were on the German tour, my husband and I, he had a speech to give the next day, so he couldn't go with me. But I went to see The Merry Widow, and I remember that, but that was only about ten years ago.

PIEHLER: Well, we—I have to meet my wife, but I guess ...

SPARKS: I'll look it up. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Yeah! Well, is there any thought at the tip of your mind that you would like to end with for today's interview?

SPARKS: Well, gosh, I don't know ...

PIEHLER: ... but we will definitely continue our questions, I guess, in April.

SPARKS: No, I appreciate you doing this.... It's just good for history. Our children are trying to do some of this; how it's going to come out, I don't know. But not in any detail. They don't really know what questions to ask us. But we're willing to talk about it, 'cause it ought to be written down.

PIEHLER: ... Well, thank you very much for today, and this concludes today's session, but we hope to come back soon to continue. We'll sort of take up the story, particularly what was it was like to treat the patients from D-Day.

-----END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO-----

PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Betty Sparks on May 3, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

WALLER: Lindsey Waller.

PIEHLER: ... This is ... resuming an interview that first began with Kurt Piehler and Lindsey Waller on [March] 8, 2001. In our last interview, ... unfortunately the clock caught up to us. We had just gotten to the point where you had seen ... your first battle casualties, and in fact, your first battle casualties was D-Day. Could you talk a little bit about what happened on D-Day, June 6, 1944?

SPARKS: Well, we ... did get a good many, almost immediately. Then there was a lull, and then we got several more hundred. We also got a mixture of Navy personnel who were the men on the LST boats, the landing craft that landed the men on Omaha and Utah Beach. We got a mixture of Air Force who were taken behind the lines by planes. We got some casualties from

crashed planes. It was such a—the way I remember it, it was such a mixed up group of people. It was Air Force, which was Army ... Air Force, because there was no real Air Force then. It was Army, and a lot of them were parachute troopers, and then the LST men. So we had a lot of—the ones that were truly, truly wounded badly were gone before they got to us, so we ended up with a lot of shrapnel, and a lot of broken bones.... I think I told you about the story about the little young fellow that was all strung up the next day and everything, from a pulley on his hands and arms and everything. I asked him, “What happened?” He said, “I’m not gonna tell you.” I said, “Well, I’ll find out when I look at your chart.” He said, “Well, I wish you wouldn’t.” He said, “I landed behind the lines okay, but I landed on a cow.” And he didn’t like that a bit. He said, “What am I gonna tell my [family]?” I said, “Don’t worry, soldier, you’re gonna be home in a couple of weeks.” He said, “Yes, but what am I gonna tell my grandchildren?” (Laughter) He was eighteen years old, and he was worried about his grandchildren. But I assured him that he would be thankful that he would—hopefully—have grandchildren. When I look back on it now, for some reason or another, some of the little things ... leap out at me, but the overall picture doesn’t. I remember working the late shift, and how dark it had to be, because you couldn’t have any lights showing. They were still going overhead to London, to bomb London. It was so eerie, and we had so little to do with. We had plenty of bandages, we had penicillin, and we had sulfa. There was such a little bit that the surgeons could do. They did the best they could, and then you just had to wait and see if Mother Nature and the good Lord [would] help you get through. Some of them [did], and some of them didn’t.

Some of the saddest cases were the boys who ... had limbs blown off, which were very difficult, and very difficult mentally, for them. They began the whole process of dealing with that.... I remember—and this probably would not have lasted, but I never knew—at the moment, this boy was blinded by either a bomb or shell, but anyway, he was blinded, and he wouldn’t eat for us. He said, “If I’m gonna be blind, I just want to die.” And we had to—we did a lot of encouragement on these boys, because ... you had to tell them that this wasn’t exactly the end, that they should be glad that they still had life, and that there were a lot of things that might be able to be done, especially back in the States with better medical help and everything.

But we had good doctors. We had excellent doctors. We had orthopedic doctors, we had medical doctors, we had ... dentists, and let’s see. We had a well rounded group, so that they got the care that was available.... They really did. But it was very—the hospital, as I’ve told you before, was so antiquated and so mis-planned that we had to make our own sections of where to do things.... Dressing rooms, and medicine chests, and closets, and things. When I think back I still remember some of those old closets, and how we were used to—not that we were—well, we had the best that we could have back in the States. But it was—if you look back at any of the old TV shows, you’ll see operating rooms and everything, with these big white metal cabinets.... Well, believe it or not, we missed them. (Laughs) We missed them, because we were dealing with some old wooden doors and things that—but anyway, ... just little things pop out.

PIEHLER: ... It seems like an obvious question, but how different was June 6, in terms of routine? Did you work a longer shift? Were there more patients than you normally would deal with?

SPARKS: Not on actually June 6 ...

PIEHLER: So it was more on June 7?

SPARKS: It came about three or four days later.

PIEHLER: So ... it was more—the real peak is ...

SPARKS: ... It was several days later before we got the impact. One of the things that we said to the doctors, “Why are we not getting more patients?” You know, like twenty-four, forty-eight hours after. And they said because there were so many casualties. There were so many deaths on Omaha, especially. Utah wasn’t as bad, but Omaha, you know. They came in waves and ... they came maybe six, seven, eight hours apart.... Omaha Beach was so badly affected, and those people were just mowed down like flies, those men. [That’s] one of the reasons that we didn’t get many those first couple of days. But then they started coming in, in a regular fashion, more or less. Like I said, they ... were a mixed group of people, because we were just dealing with mixed services, because everybody was a part of it, D-Day. A lot of people don’t realize that. In fact, when you say D-Day, most people think of ground troops, which were Army. But they don’t think of the Navy that had to get them there, and the ... Army Air, but it was still a small Air Force.... A group of downed planes, pilots, and that sort of thing, so that they were ... kind of a mixed group of patients. You never knew exactly what you were going to get. You might get all three. With an admission load, you might have all three represented, or you might just have all [from one service].

Then when we started to take prisoners—as they got inland and over the beachhead and everything, they started taking some German prisoners, and we ended up with some German prisoners. And of course, we couldn’t [speak German]. They saw that my name was Zeigler, and they thought I could speak [German], and I couldn’t speak a word! (Laughs) But we got along with sign language, with most of those patients. And you know, what amazed me was that there those young boys were, they were fighting for what they thought was right. Maybe they didn’t, and they weren’t intelligent enough to know that that maniac was leading them, you know, in the form of Hitler. But it kind of made you take a different look at the enemy, because they were nice boys. They were good kids. They weren’t ugly and mean, like you would think they were pictured, I’m sure, in the news and everything.... Two German flyers gave me their wings, and they’re German. You can see that they are. Luftwaffe.... I brought them on home with me, just to show my dad, ‘cause my dad, in World War I, had taken a German helmet off of a dead prisoner, or dead person. We had that for years and years and years, and to this day my brother and I don’t know what happened to it. It was one of those with a big spike on the top, a big heavy thing.

WALLER: Were these German prisoners separated in a different wing from the other American soldiers, or were they ...

SPARKS: Yes, yes they were. If you remember in reading in that book, each ward was about thirty-five beds and everything, but there would be a designated ward, and there would be MPs that would be close at hand.... But there again, they weren't unruly or anything. They were sick. They were maimed and they were sick, so they—I think they were glad that we were treating them as well as we were. But they would be closely guarded, and they would be in another ward. There would be like two or three of us assigned to it. We had a compliment of almost a hundred Navy nurses, ninety-six, to be exact, and we did fairly well with the three shifts, manning the three shifts with those girls, with that number. Because things began to move fairly rapidly. You know, you're talking about—by July and August, things were beginning to die down. I mean, they were well into the inland of France and Germany, and the people, the boys that we had, were gradually being shipped home to either have better care or be ... rehabilitated, or whatever was necessary. In fact, it was the month of August that they began to give us all leave, like in four-day increments. We would be able to leave the little hospital there and take a little tour somewhere, wherever we chose.... We had to tell everyone where we were. We had to tell our commandant and our nurse. What was she called? She was Captain Heck. She had to know exactly where we were, and they had to know where they could get us, and everything. This friend of mine—we chose to go up to Stratford-on-Avon, and see a couple of Shakespeare plays, and that's where I got my seventy-five-cent peach. (Laughter) We had a quaint little room up there, but you know, it was almost like out of a storybook. I mean, that's what it looked like from the outside. Little urns of flowers all over the place, and we walked up a winding stairway to this bedroom. (Laughs) It was so cute! Little lace curtains at the window, and everything. Anyway, see, that was August, and then we still had—there was as much to do about closing up that place, and all the red tape that had to go with it, as there was about opening it.... In fact, it wasn't completed until after the nurses and most of the doctors were sent home. It was done by another crew. I don't know what they were called, but engineers, probably, and maintenance people and everything. I came home in October.... The 10th of October, ... 1944.

PIEHLER: Would you have liked to have stayed longer? Would you have liked to have, say, gone to France?

SPARKS: Well, yes, that would have been—you know, but at that point in time, you ... had no idea when this was going to be over. None whatsoever. I knew about the Pacific, because I was writing to my soon-to-be husband every day, and I was getting letters from him. He couldn't tell me much, but I knew that it was bad, and we knew it was bad from the London newspapers. And I don't know.... Now, I think, "Gosh, that would have been so nice," because I've never been back. And had I known that I would never be back, (laughter) I would really have loved to. We talked about it a lot of times, but on a minister's salary and everything, we just could never save that much money to make trips like that. And I always kept hoping that maybe I would get back some day. Several of my friends that I knew went back, and a couple of them arranged to go back on D-Day. And I know that a lot of the men of Army and Navy went back there on that—let's see. When was that? 19 ...

PIEHLER: 1994.

SPARKS: '94. That's right. On the fiftieth anniversary. But when we even talked about it, somebody said, "Well, you're a little late. You should have been planning a year ago." Because the dynamics of the whole thing were just outrageous. You had to have rooms, and you couldn't get airfares.... I think if you knew, maybe, a few top-notch people, you might have gotten in on that. I don't know. I didn't have any close friends that went, but I knew of some people who did go. And then I had this good girlfriend of mine. I've talked a lot about her. She's out in California. She is four or five years older than I am, but she is still just doing fine. But she is Roman Catholic, and when she went to Rome, she made it a point to get back to London, but she still didn't get to France to see the battlefield.... She's been back to where we were, and ... when she wrote me, she said, "The hospital's gone." She said, "Only the grounds are left, and they are keeping the grounds," but she didn't know who they belonged to.... Probably the state, you know. But the small chapel that was kind of separate from the hospital is still standing, and they have kept that almost like a memorial. But the big old hospital, that great big huge monstrosity of a thing, they had to tear down. I guess there was no repair of any kind, and no bringing it up to ... today's standards or anything. But I told my husband the other day: "Why is it?" He has a ... really keen sense of time and memory, and everything, and in that newspaper article, it amazes me that he can recall those battles in the very sequence in which they occurred. I said, "How come I can't even think of specific things there at the hospital that I would [do]?" Just a few things dart out at me. I have a real answer to that. I have a—it's not an excuse—but I think what happens with women—I'm convinced that the majority of nurturing and history making falls on the woman, the mother. And if she is lucky enough to be a mother, and if she has been through what we had gone through for three or four years, that's her main concern. I was so wrapped up. We were married two years before our first child was born, which, to me, was just nice. It was time to get to know one another, and it worked out very well. But from then on, you know, my concerns were my family, whereas my husband—it's not that it wasn't his concern. I don't know how to say that. He just remembers a whole different packet of things than I do. And to this day he does. And he'll say, "How could you forget that?" Well, I just did. (Laughs) I not sure why. I just did.

PIEHLER: ... Any specific examples of how you remember things differently? Both from the military, but also in the many years you were together in different churches?

SPARKS: Well, ... there again, it sounds so gender oriented, in a way, but I remember the things that the women were involved in, and I've watched ministers' wives come from—the little lady in the parsonage that welcomed everybody, and had tea for the women when they came. Now, that's a little bit before my time but still, it was—I still remember that, and it still had an impact on me. Now, I had a profession, and I wanted to resume it someday.... But when we first got married, ... we lived in parsonages, because you couldn't buy your own home. That wasn't in the cards. What your packet of income was, or your salary, involved having a place to live, and ... probably a partial gas allowance. Is that ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. That sounds very familiar.

SPARKS: And even—see, I am a product of the other generation, like my mother. I remember

the women would come to see her, and we only lived only a couple of blocks from the Lutheran Church, in this small town.... Mother had four children, and she was devoted to us.... We didn't have a lot of money—and I think I told you all that in another time—but mother thought that those women that came from the church just didn't have a thing to do except go around and bother everybody else. (Laughter) Well, of course, I was determined to have a different attitude about the ministry, but I was teased by ... people that I grew up with, you know, about being a minister's wife. "Are you sure you want to do that?" I said, "Whether I want to do that or not, I'm doing it. I'm stuck!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: No assumptions you'd learn how to play the organ? (Laughter)

SPARKS: Would you believe—now, see, of course, that is fifty-six years ago.... We'll be married fifty-seven, and believe it or not, I was asked if I could play the organ, or if I could play the piano, and I said, "Well, I play the piano a little bit." And I did, and I played, like for the children's openings and stuff like that, but I couldn't play the organ if I'd have had to. I remember this was 1954, down here, on our first time we came to Knoxville, to St. John's. About two Sundays after we were here, and he had been installed by the—then they were called Presidents, not Bishops, but now they're called Bishops. He was installed, and we had a lovely service that morning, and when I came out of church, there was a line outside, of three or four of the older men. And they said, "Mrs. Sparks, may we talk to you for a few minutes?" I said, "Oh, sure." Walked over to them and they said, "We wanted to know if you would be willing—we would like to invite you to teach the men's Bible class." Well, I about did a double take. I looked at them and I said, "Well, thank you gentlemen very much, but I'm not a teacher and I would not presume to be able to teach you gentlemen the Bible class." They looked at me kind of funny and said, "Well, you know, the preceding minister's wife, she had a degree." Where was that degree? I don't know. Anyway, she was excellent with elocution and everything. She gave wonderful book ... reviews here for the YMCA. She was very good at that, and she taught their Bible class.

So I told them that I knew Evelyn very well, and she was a fine woman, and I'm glad that she could do that, but I can't do that. So they soon learned that I was—and then the other funny thing came about three or four years later, when our baby girl went to kindergarten, and I told my husband that I was going over to the hospital and see if they would employ part-time, that if I didn't get back into it then, I would never get back. I would lose what I already knew, completely. So they hired me without any qualms at all. Sister Annunciata at St. Mary's hired me, and said they would pay me [for] two weeks of indoctrination. They would pay me a salary. I said, "Well, that's fine." I told her that once I did that two weeks, though, I wanted to be on staff as a part-time RN, and I would fill in for people on vacation.... And they said, "That's fine. We'll hire you that way, too." So for like eight years, that's how I worked at St. Mary's. Anyway, that Sunday, after I was hired and word got around that I was working at St. Mary's, that Sunday that same group—only maybe a few added to it—this one gentlemen came up and he said, "Mrs. Sparks, somebody told us that you went to work at St. Mary's." I said, "Yes, I have, isn't that nice?" He said, "Well, don't we pay pastor enough?" And if I had been smart, I'd have said, "No!" (Laughter) But I wasn't that smart. (Laughter) Because, you know, that's

just the way the ministry has evolved. Now our young seminarians come out, and they have in their head a package that they want, and “You take me or you leave me,” you know. There’s so many vacant churches and everything, and it’s ...

PIEHLER: Which is a real shift, ‘cause even as late as the ‘70s and ‘80s there was actually a surplus.

SPARKS: Yeah. And it bothers my husband terrible. When he gets on a soapbox he says, “The act of a call has faded.” Men do not—you know, there is such a thing. You obviously have a call to teach. If you don’t, I feel sorry for you. You know. I think people—I wanted to be a nurse from the time I was about ten years old. I didn’t know what it involved or anything. I just knew that was the thing I wanted to do. I wanted to try to help people, and I thought it would be great to learn all that there was to learn. From the time Lem was about seventeen years old, and he was public speaking—because he did have, until this illness, had a wonderful booming voice—he ... wanted to speak. He didn’t know that he could go to seminary until somebody in the church made it possible. He didn’t know that ... there were any options, because it was about at the end of the Depression, and he didn’t think there was any money available, but it soon turned out that it was.... But anyway, it is amazing, absolutely amazing to me, what has taken place in the last fifty years in all these fronts, you know.... Economic, social, the whole thing has just changed. I try real hard to understand where our young people are coming from. They don’t know anything about how it was. They just don’t. I mean, my grandchildren, you know. They love to hear us tell it, but it amazes them. I guess that’s normal. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, that’s, in part—one of the reasons we’re doing this is in fact—what people take for granted, for example. I’m sure a lot of people now think that women always could be pastors, or that—a minister’s wife, of course they’re gonna have their own careers.

SPARKS: Yeah! I mean, it’s just ridiculous. And I’m so interested, and I don’t know what denomination that you profess, either one of you, and it really doesn’t matter, because I speak what I have in my mind and heart. I am interested in what the Presbyterian Church in America, PCA, is going to do, because I have a nephew who is a minister in that denomination, but they do not, as far as I am concerned—they will tell you differently—but they do not revere women. They won’t let them hold any kind of office, they won’t let them speak from the pulpit, they won’t let them be chairman.... Well, they can be chairman of things, I think, but they can’t hold any kind of position in the church. And this big Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church out here is fighting tooth and nail, now, because they don’t want to lose their minister. But if they don’t give him leeway there, he’s going to go. And it’s just sad. That’s not biblical. That is not biblical. If anyone elevated women, it was Christ. So even today, now—here it is, 2001—we’re still dealing with subordination of sexes, and color, and everything else. So, I guess we’re getting there slowly, but I’m not sure how long it’s going to take. (Laughter)

WALLER: I guess we could back up a little bit and ask you: what it was like coming back to America, and also reuniting with Mr. Sparks? Could you talk a little about maybe the reaction of seeing your family again, and ...

SPARKS: Oh, it's a feeling that, if you've never experienced it, ... it's total elation. And when we came past—all of us that were up on deck, we came back into Boston, so we were denied coming past the Statue of Liberty.... For some reason or other, we had to come into Boston, but we were all so excited and so glad to be back, we didn't know what to do, and we were put up in several hotels, and we were given so many hours to ... do what we wanted to do, within reason. We could call home, and we could stay within the bounds that they set there. I don't even know the name of the hotel. Now these are the kind of the silly things I remember, and I think it's so silly that I do remember them. We went to have dinner in the hotel, and a gentleman came over and found out who we were—and this was just a small group of our big group—but he came over and asked us, and we told him. He said, "Great!" He was congratulating us all, and said what a wonderful job was done, all this stuff. I don't know who he was, but he ordered drinks for everybody, and food for everybody. "Whatever these girls want, you give them." And I think he did a double-take when he sat there in his chair, and about of half—now, I'm talking about a small group of about ten girls—half of us wanted to know if we could get a chocolate milkshake. (Laughter) But you know, we were only twenty-two years old, and we weren't used to—and if people thought we were drinking a lot, they were misinformed, because we didn't have—I don't know. I guess there was alcohol on the base. I'm sure there was. But you know, if you were an eighteen or nineteen—well, I was twenty-one—but I never drank. Yes, I take that back.... When I went to a college up there at Penn State University, I remember that the first drink I had was a rum and Coca-Cola, and you know, there was a song about that. I can still hear it in my brain, and I've hated rum ever since. I like the flavor of it in cakes, but that's all. (Laughter) But it was later that I enjoyed a mixed drink, or wine, or anything. Anyway, that man was just delighted that he could do something for us, but he was a little taken aback when we all wanted a chocolate milkshake! (Laughter) I'm sure if he'd had another group there, they might have chosen something else, but I was with that group.

But now, let's see. What was your other question? Well, it was delightful. I called my mother, and all she could say through her tears was, "Thank God. Thank God you're home." And then I had to tell her that I'd get back to her and tell her when—'cause we went to all our homes by way of train travel, and we were given like two weeks to be back to a base. My home base was Fort Eustis, which was in Virginia. Actually, it was an Army base, but we needed more room. I don't know whether we had more Navy people coming back in at that particular time, but you know, you have to remember there's thousands and thousands of service people coming in on the East Coast. The concentration was in the West Coast, but all these people that were either coming back through being maimed and hit, or being released ...

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: So you were saying, about coming home after Boston, and talking to your mother and how happy she was to hear from you ...

SPARKS: Yes, and then it was several days [later] that I could call her and tell her I was coming in by train.... I lived in New Cumberland, which was a small—what we called "West Shore." It

was on the West Shore of the Susquehanna, but the ... big Harrisburg train station. And I remember the train got in just a little bit before Mother and Daddy got there, and we just flew into each other's arms. (Laughter) We just flew into each other's arms, and even Daddy had tears in his eyes. You know, he was just—they were just so elated, I and was too. I was just so thankful and so glad that, you know, that whole thing I was a part of—and I didn't think it was so great at the moment. It only took ten months. Well, it took longer than that, but I was only involved in it ten months. So I was concerned about what else might—and I had no idea. We would always be asked to put a preference of duty down, and if you know anybody that's in the service, that doesn't work. (Laughter) But we did it, and I put "hospital ship," or West Coast. I just wanted to see California, and I knew there were bases out there. So I didn't get either one of them. (Laughter) My girlfriend did. She got Treasure Island, which is out there opposite San Francisco, isn't it, somewhere? I never knew anyone who served on a hospital ship. I know they were out there, but there weren't many. I never knew anyone who served on one.

PIEHLER: You would have liked to, though.

SPARKS: Yes, I would have, I would have.... And yet, I'm not that much of a water person, and I don't know why. I think it was glamorous. I think I thought it was glamorous at the time. But I never did.... I got sent to Fort Eustis, which was an Army base. They had overflow, and they needed nurses, so I got sent to Fort Eustis, and stayed there 'til ... I got out. That was really sad, in a way. I may have told you this before.... By the time the end of October came—I'm not sure of these dates, but—my husband got home on the West Coast, and he called me, and said [that] they had to go out again. They were hit, and he would have to go out again, but he thought we ought to get married, that the war seemed like it was endless. He said, "If you're willing, I just think we ought to get married. If you want to stay in, that's all right with me." I said, "I don't think they'll allow me to," and they didn't.... Under any circumstances, they wouldn't allow me to stay in and be a part of the Navy, which I said I could easily do. And there again, look at the difference in that. I have two nieces who have gone all through—well, first they graduated from accredited hospitals. Their state boards are registered, and everything. But they went in the Navy, and the Navy has paid for them to get their master's degrees in nursing. They've paid maternity leave for my oldest niece. She's had two children, all within the bounds of her rank of ensign, or lieutenant JG. She retired just a couple years ago, on the pay of a lieutenant commander.

PIEHLER: It's a very different Navy.

SPARKS: I mean, it's so different! I went before the commandant of that base, and I went ... before the director of nurses, ... and she sent me before the commandant, and he said, "It's Navy regs, Ms. Zeigler. You can't stay within the bounds of your commission and everything, and be married." So I said, "Well, then, I would like to have an honorable discharge." And it took me all those years, until about six or seven years ago, to get that discharge paper sent to me. All I had was what they sent me, which was a folded sheet, a tri-fold, and it said, "Removed from active duty to inactive duty on such-and-such a date." That's all I had. And everybody said, "You ... certainly ought to get more than that." So I wrote, and I did.

PIEHLER: Well, it sounds like you were still on the Navy books.

SPARKS: Oh, I was. I was. And I would have stood a chance of actually being forced to be called up. I mean, that's what they would—but—and then see, that was October. No, we were married in December.

PIEHLER: December of '44.

SPARKS: Yeah, December of 1944. But then, see, January, February, and March, all that heavy stuff was going on in the Pacific, real heavy. Leyte Gulf, Guadalcanal—well, Guadalcanal was before that. Anyway, all that, that Lem was going through, and I didn't hear from him for three months. And then they were hit with a *kamikaze* on May 4. We were talking about it the other day. It would be tomorrow. They were really damaged, and they had to limp back through the canal, and the ship was decommissioned and junked. But then that August, the war was over. You know. So it would have been a total of less than a year that I could have continued to serve....

WALLER: Where did your marriage ceremony take place?

SPARKS: At ... Zion Lutheran Church, in Harrisburg.... I just came across a picture that was in the newspaper, and I was so mad that they put it in there. Steelton, which was a steel town on the West Coast, and that was the name of it, S-T-E-E-L-T-O-N, Steelton. It said, "Steelton Navy Nurse, Married." And nobody wanted to be from Steelton. (Laughter) It was a ... hamlet down there on the ... East Side of Harrisburg, and there was more crime committed down there than there was in the whole city of Harrisburg. I mean, that little one hamlet, they talked about, going back to Prohibition days and everything.... I'm serious. Nobody wanted ... to tell anybody they were from Steelton. It didn't matter how good they were, or what a nice house they lived in, or what they did, or anything. So I was so angry when that appeared in the paper. "Steelton Nurse Weds." (Laughs) I never lived in Steelton, ever! But no, we were married in December, and he had to go back out. He had to go back out that very month.... When we got married was when they were hit the first time, and they came into ... Seattle, and he went back out, and that's when—January, February, March, that's when the heavy battles were out there.... And then, ... just before the war was over, he was assigned to a battleship, and he only went out in the Atlantic for about—oh, they just went out there to—what did he call that? ... They would have to go out and come back in. They did that two or three times, and then the war was over.

WALLER: ... How did you hear ... that the war was over? By radio, or word of mouth?

SPARKS: Radio.... I was trying to think where I was. I guess I was at home, because they limped from Panama back to Norfolk, and somehow or other he got word to me, and I met him down in Norfolk. Yeah, I remember that day, too. I remember that day. I was so thankful he was home that I didn't know what to do. You cry and then you laugh.... It's a whole realm, or a whole flood of different emotions that ... go through [you]. Tom Brokaw has really got it down

pat, I mean, the different things he's written about, you know, the different emotions that occurred with people. The end of our article in the paper, they quote me as saying—and I did say it—“We were probably just meant to be together, or how else could you explain it?” There is no way to explain all the different things we went through, from one side of ... the sea to the other side of the sea. No way to explain it, except that it was just supposed to be.... Those pictures that they show—and they show them frequently now—of homecomings, and especially on the History Channel, if you get looking at some of those battles or anything, they'll end up with some of those, you know, and they were. I am sure there was a ticker tape parade and everything. I never read about it or went to New York.... I think the first time when he came back, he flew into Harrisburg. [It] wasn't a huge airport, but it was comparable to the capital of a state. Harrisburg still isn't a great big city. But I remember that my sister drove us out to the airport, and I was standing there, you know, almost dumbfounded. She said, “Well, Betty!” And she gave me a push, because he was coming down the steps of the plane! (Laughs) She gave me a push, and I went forward! It's a wonder I didn't fall and break my neck! She was so afraid I wouldn't go out—she thought I should be running out to the plane, you know, and everything. I was just waiting for it to stop.

PIEHLER: So you lived in Harrisburg ...

SPARKS: Well, see, I went home. My mother—you know, that's another thing. I tell you, the things that have happened in our life have been so miraculously—I don't want to say—well, I do want to say planned, but not by me. Mother fell off of a bus.... It was a bad fall. It really was.

-----END OF TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE-----

PIEHLER: And you were saying your mother fell off ...

SPARKS: ... There were no broken bones, unless it was the coccyx bone. I don't remember. But he ordered her bed rest, and flat on a hard surface. So the only thing we could do was to—we lived in a ... three-story house, so the only thing we could do was make her a bed downstairs. So we made her one in the dining room. But it was a good thing that I was home, 'cause my dad was working, and my young brother was there.... So it was just a real blessing that I was able to be there with her. So that's why I was there. And that was the address that I got delivered those ninety letters that came after the fact. I got ninety letters at one time at that address. They said, “We have the Zeiglers living at this address, and this says ‘Sparks.’” And I said, “Well, you're right.... I was a Zeigler.” So he dumped ninety letters on my mother's porch that morning. But I did stay and take care [of her], and see, when the war was over, then he had to—there are certain regulations that you have to go through and fulfill, as far as the Lutheran Church, you know, and so he had to report to the synod ... after he was dismissed from the Navy, and he chose to get out. He stayed in the Reserves for quite a number of years, but he chose to leave active duty. Then the synod bishop has to take over, and either assign you, or help you to find a place. And the Lutherans are very—in their polity, ... it's up to congregations. You don't ...

PIEHLER: Congregations have a lot of power, actually.

SPARKS: Yes, they do. And you don't really get assigned—well, some churches, you know, if you're familiar with the Methodist Church at all, they move you around at will.

PIEHLER: Yeah, the bishop can do whatever he wants with you. (Laughs)

SPARKS: ... But we have the right and the privilege in our church to decline, or—but anyway, that took a little doing. That took a while to get all that. So we went home, and stayed with my mother, and then later, he went into that mission church in Virginia for a while.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of using ... your G.I. Bill at all?

SPARKS: I thought about it, and in retrospect, I am really sorry I didn't. That's one thing—there's two things that, in all of our marriage here, that we're a little bit sorry that we didn't do, and the first one is so typical of everybody. I'm sorry we didn't try harder to save, even on our meager salary. I'm sorry we didn't try a little bit harder to save.

PIEHLER: Although pastors' salaries were pretty meager.

SPARKS: They really were. I mean, when you think of being handed \$200 a month—now, you had your house ...

PIEHLER: But you weren't building any equity.

SPARKS: Oh, no! Not a bit! But anyway, later on, I'm sorry we didn't make a little more effort to save. But we did save, in the form of college, and to put four children through college is no mean thing anymore. And even though they all worked toward a master's degree, except Janie, and got it—they did that on their own, but with a little help from us. But they all have master's degrees ... in their chosen fields. But anyway, I really regretted it later, because there ... may have been opportunities.... We lived in Kingsport for almost twenty years. East Tennessee State was available to me within twenty to twenty-five miles. When we lived here, UT was available to me. I just do regret that I didn't do that. Now I did a lot of—nursing is a little bit different profession in a way than—when I graduated, you didn't go to college for nursing. Now, you could be college affiliated—like, for instance, I ... enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania, and was going to go down to Philadelphia and take some courses, which would have helped me get a degree in nursing. I mean, a B.S. in nursing, as they say. Lots of times they would give you the equivalent of maybe a year and a half, or two years, on your diploma, but what we graduated with—and most every other hospital, big or small, graduated their nurses with a diploma degree.... That was a three-year, on the job, with class work and the practical work. And I consider it one of the best trainings today for nurses. I just wish we'd back up a little bit, because our girls in the hospitals now are well-schooled on how to operate their computers, and ... what's going on with the patients. They're almost pseudo doctors. But when you talk about empathy and care of the patient itself, how to make the patient comfortable, how to do a good dressing, how to do all kinds of practical things that go on. How to even take care

of a patient that's in a cast, or in an overhead sling. They look at you like—you know, and it's not their fault.... I've been in the hospital in the last couple of years, and I have had to show or tell a nurse what to do with me! (Laughter) How to get me out of bed, how to get me up! And that's kind of sad.

PIEHLER: It also must be a very odd experience, because you think, "I'm the patient, and I shouldn't have to worry about this."

SPARKS: No. They really don't know. And ... the good ones admit they don't know. My husband was privy to that recently, when he had that flare-up with his congestive heart failure, and he was admitted, and the doctor said, "Lem, I'm only going to keep you overnight, and we're gonna pull that fluid off your heart...." I talked to him on the phone, and I said, "You're sure you don't want me to stay with you?" He said, "No, they have some of the nicest girls up here, and ... I've met a girl that reminds me of the kind of nursing you did when I met you, and I want you to meet her." So the next morning when I went, he called the ... nurse and said, "Is so-and-so on duty?" She said, "Yes, Mr. Sparks, do you need her?" He said, "When she has time." When she heard them say Mr. Sparks—because he told her, he said, "I want you to meet my wife." Now, ... she was thirty-five. That's young, when you think about when I graduated. But believe it or not, that young woman who walked in that room, she had a little cap on—you don't see that anymore—she had her little nametag on, and she was professional. I was delighted to meet her, and I told her so. She said, "You should hear what your husband says about you!" (Laughter) I said, "Well, he better! I've been taking care of him for the last twenty-five years!" (Laughter) But there are a few out there—but see, it's not their fault.... It's the way our education system has gone. I'm not saying it's totally wrong. I just wish there was a better happy medium there, ... because I think we are going to get into trouble with our medicine, if we don't do something. But I'm afraid I probably won't be here to see it, so ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Do you think you would have—let's say you were nineteen today, or eighteen today. Do you think that you still would have gone into nursing?

SPARKS: Yes, I do. Yes, I think I would have. I think I would—I told my own daughter, but she had no inclination toward that, and since I only had one daughter, I didn't have anybody else to work on, and my little granddaughters, they said, "Oh, Nana." That's kind of a hard question. If I were nineteen in the atmosphere of today, I don't know, but I think I would. I think I would, and I think I would make the best that I could of it. I would try to change what I thought was changeable.... Well, see, it was only '83 that I stopped. My daughter-in-law, who is a registered nurse, graduate of Vanderbilt, with a master's, she's a nurse practitioner, which amounts to a master's. She's a fine nurse. She came every time I had my prosthesis done, every time she came.... She's a wonderful nurse. She's just a fine—and I've known others. I'm not downing the whole nursing profession. I'm just saying that we've done a disservice to medical people by having our nurses drop so many of the things that are important in one-to-one care. And of course, you don't have that anymore. You have team nursing, which is not all that bad, but I don't know what the answer is. I really don't. And nowadays, you see, you're so governed by your insurance and everything. Now they don't keep patients. My word, we'd have never

thought about ... sending a surgical patient home in three days, or—back when Lem had his aortic aneurysm repaired, and we were here. He had that done right after we moved here. So we moved here in '89. I think it was done in '91. And he did do well.... The doctor that did his surgery was Kevin Zirkle. I had worked with his father, Dr. Zirkle, at St. Mary's, back in the '60s, and I knew what a fine ... doctor he was. And I learned that his son was just as fine. He's a very good surgeon. But he sat there in that chair that day, and he said, "Mrs. Sparks, I'm going to let you take the Reverend home today." I said, "Dr. Zirkle, five days? An aortic aneurysm?" He said, "Well, we only send our open heart patients home on the seventh day." And now they don't do that! They send them home in five days. So I don't know what they do to aortic aneurysms! They probably send them home in three! But you know, it takes a lot of practical sense, I think, and thank the dear lord; I think I was born with some of it. I said, "Okay. I'll come—we'll go home...."

But those are things that were part of nursing when I was being trained, and I appreciated it. And to this day, I appreciate the training I got. It doesn't bother me a bit that I don't have a college degree. But your question was—I wish I had gone to school.... I wish I had. And not only that, I could have made more money, because ... I was paid the wage of an RN, but I couldn't advance as a diploma RN, unless I—oh, and I ... started to say: I took all of those what—they called CEs, or CUs. Continuing Education. I took all those things that they offer, you know. That would be night work, which was easy for me to do, because the boys ... and Janie were pretty grown by that time. Even though they were in school, I didn't have to be sitting there with them at night. If they needed anybody, their daddy was usually there. But I did that a lot ...

PIEHLER: I loved your story about the men in the church saying, "Are we paying the pastor enough?" Do you think you had an easier time going back to work because you were a nurse, because in this era, what I've read, it's harder for women who are married, particularly with children, to be able to work. Just that people would talk.

SPARKS: I think it was easier in my profession. I think it was very easy.

PIEHLER: I get a sense that ... even with nursing, there was some questioning, "Why are you going back?"

SPARKS: Oh, yes.... "Why would you want to work? Your place is at home."

PIEHLER: People said that.

SPARKS: Yeah. I mean, you know. I had three little boys when we moved down here in 1954.... Steve was less than a year, so that made John about three or four, and David was seven.... Well, to the powers that be in the church, that was plenty to keep me busy! Why would I want to work? And then we had Janie. See, I really didn't work before her. Now, I did an occasional—somebody would call me, and they would say—but that was all gratis. I never took anything for that. People were kind to give me gifts and things, but I'd stay overnight with

somebody, or something. Actually, we had Janie—see, we moved here in '54. They used to have a joke about ministers. Every time they changed their parish, they added more books and babies. (Laughter) I told Lem, I said, “This is it.” But I really wasn't looking for another child, but I was happy to know that I was having her, and didn't know she was a little girl. When she was born, ... the doctor was a member of our church. It was Dr. Perry Williamson. He's still living.... He took Lem into the nursery and showed him the bare baby, because Lem said, “Perry, you're just joshing me.” He said, “We had another boy, didn't we?” And he said, “No, I'm not kidding you!” He said, “You have a little baby girl....” There was a picture in the paper, “Three little brothers welcome their sister.” And then the congregation got in on it. But see, that was 1956, and so I really didn't go to inquire at St. Mary's until '60, and then I worked there from '60 to ... '67....

We had several excellent women secretaries at the church. Two who worked all the time, or one part-time and one full-time, and then our organist was female.... That kind of thing was accepted more, and I think nursing was accepted too. Because once, I told the men I just didn't have the degree in education, which, to me, would have been necessary to do the kind of things that the woman [the previous pastor's wife] did before me [teaching Sunday School]. I can't think of the college. I want to say Sewanee.... Anyway, they were on campus. Either he was a campus pastor, or he taught, or something.... But I didn't feel competent, just put it that way. I wouldn't have been comfortable. I'm not comfortable now. I took a ... Carnegie course one time, and I got a little bit more comfortable, and I held offices in the church, because our women's organization is very active. It's ... the Lutheran Church Women.... [It] gives to the church-at-large over a million dollars a year. And I was very active in that, and served in the board, which met most of the time in Atlanta, and then I served on what we called our conferences, which are the smaller groups. Served on that first, and then served on the board, and then was elected secretary. Served two terms on the board, and was elected secretary, and served two terms on that. So I told them, I said, “I have given my eight years. You can't demand any more.” But they were cut-and-dried positions that I could handle. I might have had to do a little bit of public speaking. That's why I took the course, so I wouldn't be so ill at ease when I did have to stand up in front of a group, because our conventions would be anywhere from two to three, four hundred people, our yearly convention, and this was just the women. This had nothing to do with the church. I mean, it had something to do with it, but it wasn't like we'd go to synod meetings. I'd go with my husband, and get a babysitter. That was our vacation for the year. (Laughs) And it always occurred about this time! In fact, it's coming up next—not this weekend, next weekend is the synod. They used to meet around in the large churches of the synod. Our synod involves four states: Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and ... Mississippi. The large cities in there are in—you can name them on your one hand, almost. (Laughs) But it would rotate around. Well, they don't do that anymore. That's far too expensive. They have to ship their consignments of literature, and all that stuff, and the rooms, they have to get a hotel that's going to house that many delegates. It's too much. So they have a hotel in Atlanta that they've been going to for a long time. They may switch. Somebody said they were going to Nashville in a couple years. But we quit going two years ago. It's too much hassle.... I know it's a trite expression, but we tell everybody, “We've been there, done that, bought the T-shirt, we're finished.” (Laughter) We enjoyed every bit of it, but there comes a time when you just

don't have the stamina and the strength to do all those things. And that is tiring. It's tiring to sit through meetings, and it's tiring to travel.

WALLER: You mentioned in your pre-interview survey that your brother fought in Korea with the Navy.

SPARKS: Yes, he did.

WALLER: Do you know where he was stationed, and how long he served? Anything he discussed about that?

SPARKS: I should know that.

PIEHLER: Is your brother still alive?

SPARKS: Oh, yes. He's sixty-nine!

PIEHLER: How is his health?

SPARKS: ... Excellent! His field is physical education and health. He's a Penn State graduate, and has a doctorate in education.

PIEHLER: Where does he live right now?

SPARKS: He was a teacher at Towson University. When he retired from there about two years ago, he moved out of the ... Baltimore area, and built a little house right on the line of Pennsylvania and Maryland.

PIEHLER: Do you have an address for him? 'Cause ... I think we may want to invite him for Celebrate Freedom. We're actually looking for a Navy Korean [War] person ...

SPARKS: See, I do not know how many years he served, but I'll tell you what he was, that just about floored my mother. He was a parachute rigger, and see, this was before he finished college. He had gone a couple years to a little ... college outside of Philadelphia.... But anyway, he got pulled into the service, and he went willingly. He may have even enlisted. I don't know. But he was a parachute rigger, and he flew the brass, so to speak, from places to places. So I don't know how much land service he ever ...

PIEHLER: Did he ever do any sea service?

SPARKS: Yes, because he was on the Yorktown.... He was on the second Yorktown, and he has been to see that Yorktown, that's now a museum ...

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. Out in Charlestown ...

(Tape paused)

SPARKS: Dewey Zeigler, who served in World War I with my dad, ... just died, and he was 103. Nobody told my brother Bob about it, and he was so upset. Because Bob has been to see him. I've been to see him, too, and nobody let us know about that. I thought that was unkind. Okay.... (Mrs. Sparks provides her brother's address)

PIEHLER: ... And Zeigler is Z-E-I ...

SPARKS: Z-E-I-G-L-E-R. And according to the professors, we pronounce it wrong. We should be saying Zeigler (Pronounced with long I). And if we would say it the proper way, we should be ... spelling it Z-I-E. My dad never would change it. He said he didn't know. That was the way he thought it was.... He'd love to hear from you. He would be upset that I can't recall how many years he served.

PIEHLER: Well, we won't let on.

SPARKS: (Laughs) That's okay. I'll ask him the next time. He was our only brother. I had two sisters, and he was our only brother. We love him dearly, and he's been a really good source of support for all of his sisters. Dad and mother knew what they were doing when they made their will out. He was the youngest in the family, but he knew what to do. I thought it was good—you know, parents know their children, and they know who can take over that kind of thing. Not that there was much to deal with, but there is a good bit. And he was in school at the time that Mother and Daddy died.

PIEHLER: He was in college?

SPARKS: He was in college. He had a family. He went to Penn State when they had, like, two or three children. They moved up there.

PIEHLER: Was he on the G.I. Bill?

SPARKS: Yes. Yeah. He made use of that.... He went—you know, I guess his doctorate is in education.... Well, I'm not sure. But he has taught. He taught at Towson, and then he was head of the P.E. Department. Oh, he has been a runner, and he's had to slow down a little bit.... Guess what he had to have? I just make kind of a funny face, and he said, "Now Betts—" he called me one night, and he said, "Guess what I have to have done?" I knew he'd had trouble with his leg, and didn't know whether it was his knee, or what. It was his hip! So he had a hip replacement last year, at the age of sixty-eight. You just don't think of these people that are so engrossed in—I mean, he has equipment at home, and he uses all the equipment at the college.... But here he was. He had to have—the doctor told him, "There's no way. That hip's just worn out." So he's doing well with it, though. I think he looks fine. When he comes down here, they stay for two or three days on their way back home. The senior adult ministry board always

meets in New Orleans, I think. He sees my sister down there in Baton Rouge, and then they come up here. But he won't let a couple days go by without doing a pretty good walk, fast walking. And he'll walk clear to the end of Cedar Bluff up here, and back. He said, "Betts, that's—you should have done it." And I said, "I know. I know." I know that's true. (Laughs) It's a little late, in retrospect.

PIEHLER: ... You've given us some wonderful material about the changing role of women ... in the church, and [as] a minister's wife. Is there anything else about being a minister's wife? 'Cause' you've sort of seen the change over your lifetime. You mentioned the parsonage. This parsonage wife, with tea. So you had your own career, and increasingly full-time ...

SPARKS: That wasn't too hard. But you know, what bothers me so now—and it bothers my husband too—and I am well aware that these women have careers, and they need to fulfill themselves too. I think that's good. But too many women that marry ministers now marry them with all kinds of strings attached. "I won't go where you get a call to. I won't go if I don't like it and I can't get a job." And we have seen that happen in the latter years of our life, even. I mean, I'm saying like [in the last twenty years], we've seen that happen. One case in point was the church up in Bristol, Virginia. They ... offered this man a package, so to speak. My husband hates that word. But they offered him a good salary, and they offered him housing if he wanted it. Or ... in lieu of—so he could buy his own house. They must not have talked too long or too many times to the two of them together, because on the last visitation, when they asked him to bring his wife, she came, and she said, "No way am I moving here!" She was very frank.

PIEHLER: Where ... were they [from]?

SPARKS: Well, they were from up north somewhere. I want to say she was from New York, but that could be anywhere.... Anyway, it turned that congregation upside down, because they had to start from square one. But she was very adamant about it. Although they stayed for a week or two until she checked on jobs that she might be able to qualify for, she came to the conclusion that she'd never qualify for one there. And of course, Bristol is not a big city. It's just a little ... overgrown town ... in the tri-cities area there, you know. So I feel sorry for those girls, 'cause I think they've missed such an opportunity. If they would just seek out their part in this union that they have chosen to make, you know—and I truly ... don't feel like I have missed anything. Like I said, I'm sorry that—no, I didn't tell you the ... three things—The first thing was that we didn't try to save, which is kind of irrelevant, or whatever. The second thing is that I should have been more of a helpmate to Lem when he got his master's degree at Georgetown University, because that was a master's degree in history. Not church history, but history, and he loved it, but he didn't write a thesis. And he didn't do all the final things he was supposed to do, because he said he could do that after he took the call to Blacksburg. Well, he never did [finish the thesis]. I should have tried to insist that—I'd been willing to stay up there. We had been living in an apartment up in Silver Spring, Maryland. I would have been willing to stay there, you know, with the two little boys at the time. But he said, "No, I want to take that call. I feel like I need to go. I want to go down there." That was to Blacksburg, and the idea of being right on the edge of VPI—he was to be a chaplain there.... But he still had in his mind he could go

back up there and do that work, but he didn't do that, so that was one regret that I think we both have. The [third] regret is ... not using the G.I. Bill. But that's not bad for a lifetime, is it?
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: No, no it's not!

SPARKS: I mean, they're the main things that I really regret.

PIEHLER: Well, it sounds like you found being a minister's wife, large parts of it, very fulfilling.

SPARKS: Yes, I did. I really did. I guess that may have been what drew Lem and I together, is the fact that we love people. I found my own little niche, and I discovered that other people saw it, too. Because—I can't tell you, and I don't say this in any kind of ... bragging way, ... but I can't tell you the number of people that have said to me, "You're what I think a minister's wife ought to be." But I would let people know that I was who I was, ... leave it, or take it, or whatever. I tried to be the best helpmate I could to Lem. I tried to make a home for him and for our children, but at the same time I loved people, and I took the good, you know. My mother taught me that too, to a degree. Take the good out of people first. Don't harp on all the bad things, or all the negative things. And that's permeating all of our—if you notice, all these motivational speakers.... Stedman Graham. (Laughs) Incidentally, there wasn't a word about how well that was attended. Do you think it was?

PIEHLER: I don't know.

SPARKS: You know, he's got a book on—there are books being written every day on how to respond to people, how to love people, how to let people love you. And I know that some people don't. I had a sister that was very negative. She grew up in the same atmosphere we did, but everything was negative. My mother, as good as she was, she would put a negative tone on the positive things in the ministry, ... and she would say, "Oh, but you're the preacher's wife, Betty. You're supposed to act like that," or "You're supposed to do that." And I would constantly say, "Mother, you know your Bible better than that. We're all supposed to be little Christs. We're supposed to be good to people. We're supposed to expect people to be good to us, and we in turn." So I just enjoyed the congregations. I enjoyed every one of them that we served. They were different; they were different as day and night. And the other thing I enjoyed in the ministry—and my husband taught me this, and he was past master at it—one week we could be involved in something that was so down-to-earth that we would maybe have dinner with a couple out on the farm, and Lem would just love to be with the man that was tilling the soil, and doing the [farm chores]. They loved him for that. But he had some of that in his background. The next week, we'd be down here at the Andrew Johnson Hotel with the TVA president, and Lem was holding the Bible for him to be sworn in. You know, with a whole bunch of people from Washington, and people that—that I had to watch my Ps and Qs, to make sure I didn't do anything [wrong]. But we were just who we were, but we enjoyed that swing from one atmosphere to another.

We've been in some wonderful—that's how I met Richard Nixon! You know. We were at a dinner. I said, "He must be running for something." He was going around, shaking hands with everybody. (Laughter) But we ... enjoyed what we did, and I told our children that to me, there is nothing worse than to have—and in this day and age, you can change.... Back when Lem and I were going to school, and when we were studying, and when we were making our way and being forced into a war, you didn't come out with all the options and the choices you have now. I was a nurse, he was a minister. Nowadays, you know, I tell somebody, "If you're in the ministry for the wrong reasons, get out. That's foolish." We've got people on our rolls all the time that have deleted the ministry, given up their—some of them are forced into it. It's a sad state of affairs. Whether you like it or not, they are supposed to be models of morality, stuff, and we are all human.... In recent years that we've been connected here with St. John's, there has been two or three things that have just saddened us ... so much. Where men have gotten into difficulty with other relationships, and then had to be asked to leave the ministry, or something. And those things happen in every ... profession. But today there are other options, and for people to not take advantage of those—ask God for forgiveness, if you have done something wrong. I ask him every night. And then go out there and do something that you really want to do, that you feel comfortable doing, and that gives you a certain amount of satisfaction and pleasure. Life is too short, entirely too short, not to do it. You know, if people would just realize that if they do profess Christianity, we have a forgiving God. You can start over. You don't need to be in an unhappy situation....

I think that is what's brought us to where we are, Lem and I both. I really do.... You know, it would be nice to have a little more money, it would be nice to have traveled a little more, maybe, but look at the blessings we had, just by him being a good pastor. The congregation at Holy Trinity in Kingsport, on his tenth anniversary there, sent us to the Holy Land. Everything paid. Even handed us spending money. We were on a seminary tour, so that gave us the advantage of ... getting into digs. It was conducted by one of the professors from seminary. That was just delightful. I was crippling up by that time. I had a real bad knee. I fell at Qumran. Amid all the ruins, I fell. Then, later on, when the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth came, the congregation said, "You need to go, Pastor. You really do need to go." And so we tried to amass a little bit of funds, and it was nothing, and they said, "No, don't worry about it. We're going to do it." And they did that! They sent us to that! We did have some of our own spending money by that time, but they sent us over there, to Germany. That was interesting. That was before the Iron Curtain came down. And we saw the special edition of the Oberammergau play.... You know, somebody said something about—we have friends, and we have some peer group people that have been to Hawaii twice. They've been to Alaska. They love these boat tours to Alaska. And it all sounds—[they asked], "Didn't you ever want to go?" And I said, "Well, yes, maybe in a way, but I've been where I always thought I wanted to go." And they said, "Well, how come?" I said, "Well, I always thought it would be wonderful to see what the Holy Land was like." And I've seen it. I'm not terribly impressed, but I've seen it. (Laughter) And I always wanted to see where ... my heritage began, and I've seen that, and I was very impressed. No wonder those people came over here and looked at East Tennessee and said, "Ah, we're home!" It's the rolling hills.... So ... coming on the end of my life—I hope I'm here a

little longer—I've got so many things I've got to do! (Laughs) I can't say I'm sorry about any of it, or that I wish I'd—you know. Like I said, those three things. I wish we had studied a little longer on ...

-----END OF TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO-----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Betty Sparks on May 3, 2001, with Kurt Peihler and ...

WALLER: Lindsey Waller.

PIEHLER: ... in Knoxville, Tennessee. Lindsey, you wanted to ask a question.

WALLER: Yeah. This is a pretty broad question, but how do you think, looking back on your experiences in the war and what you saw there and the tensions, how do you think that has affected your spirituality, or made you stronger ... religiously?

SPARKS: Oh, very much so. My mother wrote me letters all the time, and at the bottom of her letters, she said—I can't say it. (Tearfully) I'm not sure where it is. It's a psalm. It's where it says, "10,000 shall fall by thy right side, and 10,000 by thy left, but not one will come nigh thee." And I would read that, and I would say, "Well, that's true. I don't know why, but I know I won't be destroyed now." She continued to write that every time she wrote. And there was something else she wrote. Well, I think I picked this out myself one time, and I think this came from something Lem wrote me. "I have not given you the power of fear." It's in Timothy. "But of a strong mind—" it's terrible I can't quote that, but anyway. Every time I have gone through surgery, I repeated that.... I really didn't know I'd come back. I wasn't in direct harm's way, when you think about being in combat, but I was in harm's way. They could have put a bomb on that hospital any time they wanted to, and knocked it out, but they were more interested in knocking out the powers that existed on the Southampton Harbor, Bournemouth, Portsmouth—Portsmouth was a big harbor—and London. They were much more interested in that than they were a hospital with a couple hundred Navy personnel. So I was spared there, I really was.

There were a couple of other things in inner life, not only in the war, but in our life, that—you know, I don't know what I would have done if I had not been taught to pray. And I regret—there's another regret, but I'm not versed in the Bible. I read my Bible, but I don't read it regularly, and I've been so totally turned off by people who can quote, quote, quote, quote, quote, but their actions don't speak the same language.... I believe the Bible, but I'm not so sure that we need to quibble about all these dates.... Who knows what a day was in Genesis? It could have been a thousand years. It was God's time, and I don't know what it was. And I'm not going to waste my time, because some day I'm going to know. My husband feels the same way, and he's studied it. He's a good scholar when it comes to the scriptures and can teach an excellent course, and give an excellent sermon. But all those little tiny—what I call innuendoes, or whatever, I don't know—I can't be bothered with them....

It bothers me that they are pulling up Senator [Robert] Kerry [who was decorated for controversial actions in Vietnam]. I don't why he came forward in that, and I think that's terrible, if he knowingly did that, but I'm not so sure that he knowingly did that. You know. He was a young guy in the black of night, told that he was surrounded by enemy. What would you do? I'd have let loose with everything I had, I think. It just bothers me that the press has to—and of course, maybe he's at fault. See, I didn't go back to the very beginning of that. Maybe he came out with it. If he's doing that to just smooth or salve his own conscience, that's too bad.

But anyway, there's a lot of things that I don't understand about life, my word! But I refuse to be so bogged down by small things. I like that book, and I don't know who wrote it.... [Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, and It's All Small Stuff, by Richard Carlson]. And it is. I have some nice things that I am proud of, but not to the extent that I would give my life for them, or anything. If the children any of them, you know, that's fine. We don't have much. This is what we have. This is us. In a year or two, I'm going to give the granddaughters a chance to choose some of that cut glass in there.... There's only one or two pieces—I think it's over here in this—that were my mother's, and one was [from] my dad's mother, who I never knew very well. But anyway, I'm going to give them the opportunity, and if they feel like they'd like to have that from Nana, that's fine. And if they don't want it, they won't hurt my feelings one bit! (Laughs)

You know, I have people coming to me and saying, "How do you respond on holidays to your children?" I say, "Well, what do you mean, 'how do I respond?'" It amazes me at what they tell me. They have lived in one house all their life. They have raised a family in that house. Now the family is gone, and they are bemoaning the fact that they don't want to come home for Christmas, they don't want to come home for Easter, they don't spend a week in the summer with them. They don't do this, they don't do that. "How do you do that? You moved around, didn't you?" And I said, "Yes." That was the answer to all of that.... We had no established place. Whether that's good or bad, we didn't have what you call a homestead, or a home, where all the children grew up in. So that doesn't bother me a bit. That is so materialistic. What we have as a family is absolutely not able to be described or documented in any way. If you can believe, there were twenty-one of us in this ... great room for four hours, between twelve o'clock and six o'clock, on the day after Christmas, between Christmas and New Years. My children have never come home on Christmas! I wanted them to build their own little nest, and do what was good for them at Christmas, but their daddy couldn't come! He had services the night before.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) That's one of the big work days!

SPARKS: Yeah! So that was just a part of our growing up. But it amazes me. We have the most wonderful relationship with all our grandchildren, and everything. Just recently, ... Steven ... was married a year ago last week. See, my husband was still pretty wobbly at that time. It was April, and ... I was home from the hospital in February with this hip, and he was sick with the shingles, so he was still pretty wobbly, but ... Steven wanted so badly for Pop to say a few words at his wedding. He said, "Don't you think you can come if somebody brings you?" Now for a twenty-five-year-old grandson to want you to do that so badly—and we did. When that

bride and groom—his little bride, Lori—we went, and ... Lem sat on the front pew with me, but robed. When it was time, the minister explained that the grandfather of the groom had a few words he wanted to say, and that he would do the blessing of the rings, and have the second part of the service for that. When it came time for him to do that, he just went up into the chancel area, and when Lori and Steven stood and looked at each other and said their vows, both of those big kids had tears running down their face! So they sent us a picture with them, and we have a picture of that, with his grandpa. Because they realize—every one of them realizes—that, you know, our time is limited, and especially with a grandfather that has all the problems he does. Now, I could keel over tomorrow, but I told them, I said, “You better get someone to take care of your daddy, ‘cause he doesn’t listen to me very well!” But I’m here. But anyway, ... that, to me, is life. I just refuse to be bogged down with all of these little things.

PIEHLER: Is there any Hollywood film or novel that ... any of your experiences in World War II are close to, and ... in terms of being in the church, being a minister’s wife ...

SPARKS: Oh, gosh. I’d have to think about that. I don’t know.... A lot of things remind us—the article in The Parade this weekend. I said, “Who did that remind you of?” He said, “Us!” It was about [President George W.] Bush. It was about how his father related to him. He said, “I won’t tell you what to do, but I will—” how did he say that? I saved it. I thought some of the things he repeated about his father were good. To me, those are personality and character traits. It has nothing to do with your politics. But yes, you know, at times like that, we will see things that remind us.... Some people say, “I can’t believe you had three boys, and not one of them went into the ministry!” I said, “Well, one almost did, but he decided not to, and that was fine with us.” We never, never tried to tell our children what they ought to do. I think it’s so wrong not to leave a child [to] experience—even at failure—than to force them into a profession just because their father was in it. David, David was the closest, the oldest, and he took Greek and passed it, and he took a lot of other courses that would have led him into seminary. But at the end, it was a teacher that he had in Lenoir-Rhyne College—and he has died a young death. I don’t know whatever happened to him. His name was Dr. Wood, or Dr. Cook, or something like that. Anyway, he gave David several books when David left college.... But he was in social work, and that’s where David ended up, and got his degree in ... social work. And stayed with it quite a while, but he’s not with it now.... He did work in that, and they came over here, and ... both he and Lynn—Lynn was a candidate for a Woodrow Wilson [Fellowship]. But they came over here and worked on their master’s degrees. They lived in the old cereal box [a residence at UT]. But I lost my train of thought. What were we talking about before that?

WALLER: A novel or a movie that related to your wartime experiences?

SPARKS: I was trying to think about that. I can’t think of any. We’re not real movie goers. Lem reads all the time, until this eye got so bad, and now he limits it a little bit.... They say that cataract’s growing a little bit, so he may have to have that done. We’ve picked out things, you know, that impress us, and that we can see ourselves in, lots of times. I’m trying to think of the movies that we might have seen that we enjoyed, you know. And I don’t know how they really relate to us. I’m a total blank on that. I really am.... I’ve read some good novels, and ... I like

historical things.... I'd rather read that than some of the ... fiction that—I'm not a constant reader. My daughter-in-laws have often brought me paperbacks, ... but I just can't wade through all that, because it's so fictional. (Laughs) Some of it, I guess, would relate to real life, but most of it's, you know, real fiction to me....

One of the books that stand out—and I have no reason why, except part of it is history—I just reading about the outback—is The Thornbirds.... I thought that was such a good novel, and it turned out to be a pretty good movie.... I'm more drawn to things like that, that will describe a part of the country, than ... these kind of ... flimsy paperbacks that people read all the time for diversion, and that's fine, if that's how they—it's the same reason why I watch ... Diagnosis Murder. I will look at that ... just to take my mind totally off of what I'm supposed to be doing. (Laughs) Lem will have the ball game on, and I'll watch the first part of it with him, and then I'm lost. I'm not lost, but they bat that ball around.... I don't like to watch tennis, but I like to watch a little golf. But when it comes about nine o'clock, if I'm not interested in what he's watching out there, I'll go in there and turn that *Diagnosis Murer* on, and just get into it. I'll try to figure out who it is, and sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't. But that's just as bad as reading a paperback novel, I guess.... (Laughs)

You talk about shows, you know, things like The Sound of Music. And I related to ... South Pacific.... I thought it was a little farfetched, but I still related to it. And you know, everybody saw that. On the New York stage, I saw Pygmalion, which was the forerunner of My Fair Lady. I loved that. We weren't real heavy moviegoers.... I was on convention with the women of the church, and [Lem] had the children in tow, and they talked him into going to see—it might have been ET. And Daddy snored about half way through it. (Laughter) They said, "How could you do that?" I think he looked up once, to David, and he said, "When does this get interesting?" (Laughter) But we've taken the children to some of those—I guess "classics," you might call them. But we don't go now, and part of that is because, even as loud as it is, he really doesn't hear it, and he doesn't like it. So I don't go either. We wait 'til they come on TV, and then I can't get him to watch it! I'll say something's going to be on, and he'll say, "Oh, you watch it." But I can't, offhand, think of anything that would really relate to my experiences. It's a totally different thing. I guess people that go through these wars, in whatever phase they are in, it's so ... real, and it's life, and all this other stuff is made up. There's a certain amount of it that's just superficial. Not all of it, especially if they are trying to tell a story that really happened. I like those stories. That's why, you know, the History Channel and Channel 2 [PBS], they reenact. I like that reenactment, to a degree. If it gets too flimsy, then I don't want to listen to it. It's just a waste of time, as far as I'm concerned.... Real life and real stories are three times as interesting, when you get down to it, even today. They're not all pretty. And the press—you know, I think some of our people, like Tom Brokaw, ... they are wonderful, but at the same time, the overall press just tears things up so badly sometimes. Do you see any reason why we should be hearing tapes of the electrocutions, that they're talking about putting out, for the public to listen to? Tapes of the words between the criminal and between the guy that's gonna pull the switch, and everything? Is that necessary? You're a historian, so I guess it's necessary for history's sake.

PIEHLER: I almost never give an opinion during an oral history, so ...

SPARKS: You've heard that, though. You've heard that they ...

PIEHLER: I've heard—yes.

SPARKS: ... and I heard excerpts of the conversation between the ... criminal and the—and I said to Lem, I said, “Why is that necessary?” It's there, if there is a necessity for it, but why does it have to be aired to the majority of the public? I don't know. Some of that just boggles my mind, but then ... I don't know everything there is to know. (Laughs) I can't tell you if that's right or wrong. And we have the privilege of listening or not listening. It's like I told one of my granddaughters one time. I said, “I can't understand some of those commercials.... What are they trying to sell?” And she'd say, “Well you listened, didn't you?” She's an English major. She said, “Nanna, you listened to what they said. That's why they do it.” I didn't answer that question very well.... You talk about books and movies and everything. I'm kind of low on the totem pole with that.

PIEHLER: (To Waller) Is there anything else that you want to ...

WALLER: I guess one thing that crossed my mind when we were talking about coming out of the war was—did you ever keep in touch with Ski?

SPARKS: Yes, very much so. I have had wonderful letters from her, ... but she never elaborates on our service. We tried to keep in touch with, oh, two or three of us. Especially, you know, in that big old hospital over there, they gave the nurses a certain wing, and the ceilings went sky-high, and they were cold. There were ... four of us in there. Well, four girls with all their stuff and ... a bathroom down the hall, we became pretty close together, and we were all good friends after the war. Two of them I kept up with very closely, but the one girl was killed in a bad automobile accident in Florida. She lived in Newnan, Georgia, and she went back to work there. But she had stayed in the Navy longer than we did. It was the last part of her Navy career, I guess, that she was killed in an automobile accident. No, that wasn't the last part of her Navy career. She had a bad accident in the Navy, and she was discharged on disability. It was after that she died, but she died because of that. She had a steel plate in her head, or something like that.

But, yes, we tried to keep up.... (Holds up a photo of her friends) These are a lot of the nurses I served with. They had this reunion. I've been in touch with this girl, and then later her husband died.... I didn't go. They said, “If you can't go, send a picture.” So I sent that, and there were a couple of men [who] sent those.... I sent that. You can see the hospital in back of me. I was getting over a broken ankle there. Anyway, they did this too late. It took them thirty years to round up enough people from SNAG 56 that would be willing to come.... They either held this in St. Louis or Norfolk.... No, it says Annapolis, Maryland.... Okay. They had a reunion there. Then they had the second one, of which I got all the material, and [they] wanted to know if I wouldn't try to come, and it was out at St. Louis. And I said there was no way that I could go. I don't know when that was.... See, the Fifth Annual Reunion. My gosh, it took them twenty,

thirty years to get that together. So it's a lot of people's fault. I don't think that the author of that little book—I think ... it's a good account, but I think it's poorly written, poorly put together. But it was done by one of the doctors.... But I guess when you look at it in retrospect, you know, we were a comparatively small group of people that were sent to do a certain job, and that job was finished by the time they invaded France. That's my answer to that. We weren't big enough to be written up in all the—you know. (Laughs) That's the only answer I can give, because I know several people that I—and I still write to Ski, and she writes to me. She herself doesn't have that book, and yet I was sent it. Disorganization is the only thing I can think of.... Nobody took the initiative to do anything about that special unit. It was just hit and miss, whoever did something. That Dr. Hudson put that little book together, and that's all that was ever done, as far as I know. What we've called up on the Internet, what my grandson called up there, with this hospital, ... here's all these pages of this. And now there is a history, but it's taken them quite a while to do it.

WALLER: Did Ski continue with nursing?

SPARKS: Yes, she did for a while.... The boy she was engaged to while I was engaged to Lem was killed over Tarawa.... He was downed. He was a Navy pilot, and he was lost. She really—that was a real sad thing for her. We kept in touch. She was sent out to the West Coast after D-Day. She was the one that was sent out to Treasure Island. Then she met and married a big tall Irish Catholic boy, which was good, because she was Catholic and that first boyfriend she had was Lutheran. (Laughs) And back then, you know, Lutherans and Catholics didn't mix too much. She married him, and they had five children. He ... became very active in his church. He was also employed—he had a degree in ... political science. He was on [Ronald] Reagan's staff when Reagan was governor. I don't know what other jobs he might have done, but he became very active, later in their life, in the Catholic Church. [He] was a deacon. She sent me an article about him. I still have it. It was very good. He died not too long after he became that, of a massive heart attack. I guess he would have been in his seventies. She's now eight-five. She was five years older than I. We were the best of friends. It's a shame we didn't live any closer.... They did come to see us one time. See, her home was in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, which is outside of Philadelphia somewhere. They came to see us when we had a church in Virginia, and another [visit] while we were here. They visited us the first time we were here, in 1963 or '64.... A lot of girls went back to nursing. A lot of girls got their degrees. That was possible with the G.I. Bill. There were a lot of girls, and several ... in that book that never married, and they went to college, and got their degrees on the G.I. Bill. A degree in nursing, either a B.S. degree, or a master's degree, or whatever. You know, that was a very good option, if you wanted to do it. I just went the other way. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: But you were very conscious about going the other way, too. Even when you'd leave the Navy. You knew that.

SPARKS: It wasn't accidental. And like I said, any time there was extra education available, Lem always encouraged me to do it. In fact, he encouraged me to use the G.I. Bill, if I wanted to. Now, I can do a lot of things, like two or three things at a time, in normal activities of the

day, you know. I can be washing a load of clothes and cleaning out a closet, or cooking a meal, or something. But when you talk about long ... careers, I can't juggle a career in nursing and taking care of a family of four. I'm not built like that. And that's what I would have had to do. Now, I was encouraged many a time, mostly by my peers in Holston Valley Hospital in Kingsport. I was encouraged many a time to get some more credits toward a college degree, so that I could—at that time, while I was working up there in the '70s, they really demanded more education of their head nurses or people in charge of their departments. I was encouraged by two or three of the women who said, "Betty, you would be great ... but we can't hire you if you don't have some of those." And I said, "Well, I just can't do it with the children and the church." See, there again, these young girls that are coming out now and marrying these ministers, there are so many split-ups. It's just uncanny. You'll hear of this young couple, and they'll have one or two babies, and the next thing you know, they're divorced, and he's got the children, or she's got them, or he's got a church, and she's got a church somewhere. A lot of times, it's another minister. It's a female minister. Many times. But there ought to be a happy medium somewhere, because I think it's destroying families. I just wanted to be there with those children. I really did. And I loved them and enjoyed it. It wasn't a burden. Oh, you get tired and everything.... You have your days and stuff, but by and large, our kids were a joy of us. And I am glad to hear that they remember a lot of that stuff. You know. "Do you remember the when Dad did this?" Or "Do you remember the time we did this," or "We went here," or "So-and-so did this?" I don't remember the half of it, but they do. They remember the fun times. And a lot of it was associated with the church. We had a wonderful church camp in Harrisonburg, Virginia. All of East Tennessee and all of Virginia were privileged in that camp. We rented it from the Presbyterians. It was called Massanetta. It was out by the Massanutten Mountains. You could see that beautiful ridge. We went many, many years to that. (Laughs) You know, I forget I'm on tape! We went many, many years to that. One time Lem was dean of the camp, and another time he taught class. Another time, he was chaplain that was in charge of all the services.... We were privy to all that. We paid our way, but his way was paid.... It was a wonderful vacation, because there were so many activities for the children. I remember, when I was pregnant with Janie, we went. That would have been 1955. We met—and I'm not sure if Lem was dean that year or not.... The president of our church, who is comparable to the bishop, you know, he was there, and every time that I would come to breakfast in the morning, he'd say, "Are you still here?" (Laughter) And I looked him square in the face one time, and I said, "I'm *supposed* to be here! This baby isn't due until September!" (Laughter) Or October, I think it was. We just had fun. We took each ... year as it came, and made the most of it. Some were not as good as others, and some were better than others ...

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: ... Is there anything that we forgot to ask you about ... your family, career, or your military experience?

SPARKS: I can't think of anything. It bothers me somewhat that I can't remember.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Oh, you remember more than you think!

SPARKS: If you read the article about us, you will have read the sequence of battles that he told Fred Brown. I don't see how he did that.... I remember sailing over there. It took us eleven days on the Aquitania. I remember how—somewhat frightened I was, when we had to go north for a while, and it was cold, and we thought we would be shot at from subs. I remember special things like that. But I read in that book about how they had so many days to kick up their heels in London. I don't remember kicking up my heels in London! We were only there about two days, and then they put us on another train, and sent us down to—outside Southampton. I just—I guess I wish I had kept in closer touch with some of the people who had served with me, and I wish that I had thought enough about it that I would have researched it a little more, or something. At the time, it didn't seem to be such a big deal, and now it does. (Laughs) Does that make sense?

PIEHLER: That makes perfect sense.

SPARKS: It just didn't seem to be—it was just something I had to do. I was asking the Lord to help me do it, and He did. I was grateful, and so I got on with my life then. By the way, Lem has—he thought about staying in the Navy. It would have been nice, but the advancement in the Navy, as far as a chaplains was concerned, was almost nil. He knew that he wanted to work with people. And of course, you work with boys [in the Navy], ... or you work with military personnel. But he wanted to work in a parish. He wanted to have a church. So when he found that out, he dropped the Reserves. He would have stayed in the Reserves—and I didn't have the privilege of the Reserves. That was another thing. For whatever reason, when I was inducted into the Navy, I was inducted into the regular Navy, and that's the way my certificate reads in there. USN Navy Nurse Corps. Not USNR, which is what Lem's reads. I said, "See, I'm really above you!" (Laughter) I don't know why some of us were. And for that reason, I could have been called up, even after I was mustered out. But I just really wish I could remember a few more things. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

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