



Martha Barsky

World War II

WAVE-U.S. Navy

Homefront

Hospital Corpsman First Class

Martha Barsky

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
September 15, 2010**

**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District
Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Martha. Barsky**

Rank: **Hospital Corpsman 1st class**

Branch of Service: **U. S. Navy, WAVES***
***Women Accepted for Volunteer
Emergency Service**

Theater: **World War II – Home Front**

Interview Date: June 2, 2010, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Place: Large Meeting Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Wednesday September the 15th in the year 2010 here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I'm speaking with Mrs. Martha, "Marty", Barsky. Mrs. Barsky has graciously consented to be interviewed for this project, and she was a WAVE associated with the Navy. And she's just our second lady to be interviewed. And, so, now, we are going to begin her story. I have to ask you, Mrs. Barsky, you were born on—(Interviewer's words in italics)

June 28th, 1924.(Veteran's words)

June 28th, 1924. And do you recall when you entered the military service?

I enlisted on August 1st, 1944.

August 1st, 1944.

Mr. Barsky: Oh, you brought this with you; that's a release from the Navy, I guess.

Yes. Accompanying Marty, today at the interview, I should have mentioned, is her husband, Mr. Robert Barsky, and he has also been interviewed for purposes for the Veterans History Project. So that's the helpful voice you may hear in the background.

Do you recall where you were living at the time?

In Chicago?

Right.

Had you graduated from high school at that time or—

Yes. Foreman High School.

Oh, Foreman over there on Belmont Avenue, right.

Mmm-hmm. Yes. I lived at Fullerton and Laramie. We lived there about thirty years.

Wow! So, in August, before, say, in that summer of 1944 before you entered the Service, what were you doing? Were you working or--

I worked at Mills Novelty Company where they made slot machines. And then when the war broke out, when we got active in the war, they switched over to making shells, five inch shells. And that's where I met Bob. I was a factory mail girl, which was one of my first jobs. And I used to walk around with pigtails and a jumpsuit. The fellows would tell Bob, "There's a nice girl for you." And he says, "That kid!" But we got acquainted. And he met me one time at the Merchandise Mart when they had a program especially for the Mills Novelty people. And I was with my mother, all dressed up. And when he saw me, he realized I wasn't such a kid and from then on, well, that was our life!

And that was-- was that in 1944 or--

Probably '43. When I met him.

Yes. So you met Bob in '43?

I would say so.

So now, in the case of most of the people we interview are men, of course. And they either, you know, were drafted, or they went down and enlisted, or tried to join up, or whatever. But, in your case, you weren't required to go into the Service. But you did go into the Service. So how did you decide to enlist?

I always wanted to be a nurse. And, at that time, you had to go to college for four years to be a nurse. And I didn't want to wait that long, because I became engaged to Bob, and I figured we'll be getting married as soon as we get together again. And so I decided to join the Navy, the Hospital Corps. And I did the nursing that I would have liked to do. And at that time, the nurses were kind of upset with the WAVES because they had to do the paperwork, and the WAVES did all the nursing. So I was like a nurse. I would give injections. And my first job when I got there was an autopsy.

Wow.

Which really was kind of, oh, how can I describe it? It was a lot for me to accept.

Yes

Just a kid getting into the Service, and here they put me on to a hospital thing with the autopsy. So I had to go with the doctors and the nurses there, and they would take the organs out. I had to mark down the weights. You never knew this! (directed to Mr. Barsky)

Mr. Barsky: No.

So I had to mark down the weights of all the organs that were removed for testing. And that was quite an experience for me.

I can imagine.

And the hospital was for all the dependents as well, so whether this man was a dependent, or a veteran or not, or what do you call them, I don't know.

Yes.

But then, my second job, that was the next day, I saw a baby born, which this was so much to take all at one time. But to go back, I had my boot camp at Bethesda, Maryland, at the Bethesda Hospital. And we had to, besides learning how to do all the hospital things, we had to identify silhouettes of ships, we had to learn how to march, and stand in line for chow, real Navy. And we had, I think it was six weeks, we had calisthenics.

And in that six weeks, we had one leave off the base when I went to New York. And I don't recall how I got there, or who I went with, but I know we went to the Empire State Building, and then we went dancing to the Roosevelt Hotel.

Very nice.

And I don't remember how we ate, or what we ate in between times, or how we got back to the hospital. I don't know why I don't remember those things, but it was sixty-five years or so.

Indeed. Indeed. Yes. Yes. So were you and Bob engaged, or planning to be engaged, when you entered the WAVES?

Yes. We got engaged before he went in the Service.

Yes. And then were you able to exchange letters, or was that pretty difficult?

Oh, yes.

Yes?

We corresponded together, and I always sealed his letters with a kiss.

Mr. Barsky: You what?

With a kiss.

Mr Barsky: Oh, yes.

A lipstick kiss.

Beautiful.

And I thought that he was going to come to California at one time where I was stationed at Oak Knoll Hospital.

So you went to the training in Bethesda and then you wound up being posted to California?

Right.

Yes.

And I thought he told me that they were going to be in California, and I thought we might get married at that time, but I don't know whether he never came or whatever reason. But, on the way, we were in a train from New York to California to my duty, and I never slept on the train. Because I think we got to Colorado at night, whatever it was, and I never saw a mountain.

Oh.

Well, I stayed awake the whole night looking at the magnificent scenery, and it was really something! And I don't remember whether we were picked up or what happened, or how I got to the hospital, to my base. It was Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California.

Oh, Oakland, Yes. And then how long were you stationed there?

The whole time.

The whole time. And were you assigned to a particular unit like--

I was there from September 20th, 1944, until I think it was, let's see, April something.

April '46.

Yes, until April '46, I was there the whole time.

Yes. So, did you, was that the first time you were ever away from home?

Yes.

So, that was interesting, and then probably meeting, seeing different parts of the country, and meeting people from all different parts of the United States, I would imagine--

Yes, that's the first time.

Yes.

And I enjoyed the train ride, and I had a compartment all by myself. But the bed, there was a toilet in there and a washbasin, but you couldn't use it when the bunk was down. You had to get out of the compartment and put the bunk up and then use it, use the toilet, it was so small.

Yes.

And that was kind of hard to do, but I guess you get used to all those little inconveniences.

So, in the WAVES, did they have ranks of officers? Were you like an officer or a corps-- they don't have privates in the WAVES, do they?

We had to learn how to salute.

Yes. And then did you have like a title-- like a particular--?

I didn't have a title. I just, well, actually, my title was HA/2 when I enlisted, and I was just HA/1 when I left.

And that HA, does that refer to hospital assistant or something, do you think?

Yes. Hospital corpsman.

First class corpsman, okay.

Then after my first couple of days with the baby birth and the-- what did I say it was?

The autopsies, the organ identification.

They put me in the treatment center and there I would change the bandages for the boys that were in the hospital area. And there was one young man in particular, I can even remember his name was Oxentine, very odd name. But, anyway, he was a Marine and he was out wherever he was for so long that he never was able to take his shoes off, so when he came back to the hospital, his toes had grown together.

Oh, dear,

So my job was to bathe his feet, and massage his feet, and get his toes separated, and get rid of all the dead skin. And he had a wound in his stomach that his whole insides were practically exposed. And he would smoke, and the smoke would come out of his stomach. And, of course, in those days, smoking was permitted anywhere. Everybody on the ward was smoking. And that's an experience that I will never forget. And he must have weighed about ninety pounds. And several months later, I met him on the base, and he had gained weight, and he looked like a million. And I was so happy to see that he recovered.

Wow, yes. Did his toes ever straighten out?

Oh, yes. Yes, I took care of that.

He must have appreciated what you did for him, I suppose.

Well, he never said anything.

Yes.

I mean, that was my job, you know.

It was payment to see him recover.

Very nice young man. And those are a couple of the experiences that I will never forget.

Sure. So, you must have been there for about a year at that hospital, would you say?

A year and a half, at least. A year and nine months, I think.

Almost two years. So was, were the, did you have nice living conditions, an apartment or base?

Yes. I was lucky enough to get a lower bunk. I didn't like climbing up on the top bunk. And we lived in a dormitory, and we could have visitors. In fact, I had several visitors. My cousin came to see me, who was in the Navy, and I don't know where he was stationed, I don't remember that. And then there was a friend of the family. He was an officer. And he took me to dinner one time. And a member of my grandfather's family came to visit me. I don't know how he even knew I was there. And so I had a few visitors in that time, and it was kind of nice.

Did you have to--who was your boss?

A nurse by the name of Magnusson. And she was a very nice person, and we got along real well. And she didn't do anything special for me, but she was just very nice.

So, during like a normal day, did you have normal days, like you'd start at nine and go until five, or it was whatever was needed, or it depended, your hours?

They were pretty normal days, except we had to have a watch, which I had to watch, where I don't know why. Maybe the person was dying. I don't remember. But I had to sit there for a couple hours in a room at night. And I remember dozing off. And the nurse on the ward came in, and I jumped up, and I said, "I wasn't sleeping!" Well, I really was, but you're not supposed to sleep on watch. But that's hard not to do, you know!

Yes. Did the Navy have any hospitals overseas where they might have sent WAVES?

If I took a course to become a chief, I don't know, not a chief, but a higher rating, they would have sent me overseas. They asked me if I wanted to go to Pearl Harbor or wherever they were going to send me, and I didn't want to bother. I wanted to come home.

Yes.

So because I figured Bob will get off around the same time that I will and we will be getting married so--

Yes.

This June, it will be sixty-five years that we are married.

Congratulations! Yes. Wow.

A lot of time.

Yes. I'm only married thirty years, so--

Thirty.

I've got a long way to go.

Oh, you're just a kid.

Yes. Learning all the time, yes. But, anyway, so that helped to keep both of you going during those war years, because you had a future in mind. You planned on getting married.

I did my nursing that I wanted to do. And it kind of came in handy in my life. And when I got out of the Navy, I went back to the Mills Novelty Company, and they put me in the records department so I didn't have to walk around in the factory with the mail anymore. But I didn't stay there that long because I got pregnant. And, well, that was the end of my career for a while.

Yes. Did you have any trouble getting housing when you got married after the war?

Yes, we couldn't find a place to live.

Yes.

There were no apartments. There was nothing. So, my folks took us in and we lived with them for about a year. And then they bought a home in Elmwood Park, and we finished off a room in the attic where we lived for about another year and a half, and then we moved into Niles after, oh, two and a half or three years living with the folks. And we brought this little house. It was \$11,200. It was a two bedroom and one bath. It had a utility room, a dining area, a nice living room. It was really a nice home. And we had the three children there. And then they started

building in a farm right where the library is, and, in the next block, we bought a house that they were asking \$21,000. And we gave them a half down payment on that. And, let's see, a couple years ago, that house was selling for over 400,000 dollars.

Wow!

And, of course, today, maybe 300,000, maybe less.

Yes, the market has dropped a bit.

Yes.

Yes, did you meet any, after the war, did you stay in touch with any of the other lady WAVES that you met?

No, I didn't. For some reason, everybody was just so busy in their own way. We never hung around together. They were all going every which direction.

Yes.

You know.

So there aren't too many WAVE reunions, or anything like that, or--You know, the guys always have their reunions.

Yes.

But the ladies, maybe it's not the same thing?

Well, that's because they were so close on the ship.

Yes.

There's not much they could do, you know, but socialize. But the girls, you know, they-- I don't know. It was a different situation.

Yes.

So, you may have mentioned this already, how do you think your wartime experiences affected your life?

Well, when we lived in our little house, his parents lived a couple blocks down the street and they had a friend whose husband was dying of cancer, and my mother-in-law asked me if I would go over there and give him a shot because he was in severe pain. So I knew how to do that. I had to give shots when I was in the Service, take blood, do different things. So, I went over there, and I did give him the shot. And he was critically ill, but, in a couple of days, he

passed away. And I always wondered if the shot that I gave him had anything to do with him dying, but I don't think so, because he was already very critical.

Yes.

So that was one experience. And then Bob went through cancer treatments for six months, and I think my experience in the Navy kind of helped pull him through.

I'm sure.

With nutrition and different things.

Yes, and then being a mom, right, and the three.

Yes.

I'm sure, came in handy, when you're--

I had three children.

Yes.

And my son had a brain tumor at 48 years old, and he passed away, and I really miss him because we used to play golf together, and he was a good friend.

Yes.

And my other daughter is in Washington state. And then I have another daughter in Hoffman Estates. But the daughter in Washington comes in about usually once a year checking up on the old folks.

Yes.

We always ask the vets, the men, at the end of the interview, we ask them how they think how their experience during the war years might have affected their outlook on war. Do you think you--

The outlook?

Yes. Your thoughts about war as a result of your having been kind of involved in the--

I can't read about the war. It's too depressing. It's too hurtful.

I'm sure.

Unnecessary. And I can't see why they can't take care of their own countries.

Yes.

Why we have to go in there.

Yes.

And the war that I was in was a real war, and, being so young, it didn't affect me that much. It was just a thing that was happening, you know, and I was helping out the best I could. But today, what is going on is just-- I can't handle that.

Yes. Yes.

So we're coming to the end of the interview. Is there anything you'd like to add that you recall, a particularly funny situation, or memorable situation, or where you were when you heard the news that the war was over?

No. I can't recall those things. I don't know why. I remember Pearl Harbor.

Yes.

But I don't remember--the end of the war, or why I was dismissed, or anything like that.

So, were you formally dismissed in Oakland when you left on your final day, was that where you were discharged?

Yes, when I was discharged, I went to back to Chicago where I left.

Back to Chicago, yes.

And that was-- Bob met me at Midway Airport because O'Hare wasn't built yet.

Oh, so you flew back. You flew back from San Francisco, did you, or from Oakland?

Yes.

You didn't have to come back by train And stay awake all night?

No.

Do you remember that? (to Mr. Barsky)

Mr. Barsky: No, I don't remember any of this. All this, I never heard this before.

Good stuff, eh?

Yes, he picked me up. And that was my first flight.

Wow.

And they didn't have like terminals or anything like that.

Yes.

You had to get off the plane out in the open and walk to the gate or however it was, but O'Hare, and, by the way, did you know that O'Hare was named after Al Capone's son?

His son? I thought it was named after Butch O'Hare.

He changed his name because he was ashamed of his father's name. He didn't want to use the name of Capone. And he was a big hero in the war.

He was.

Big hero!

Congressional Medal of Honor. Yes. He was a brave pilot.

So they named O'Hare after him.

Wow. I didn't know that.

Yes, very interesting article that I got on the computer.

Yes.

So, the computer keeps me busy these days.

Oh, you're not afraid of the Internet.

No.

No. Yes, it's amazing.

I've had the computer now for about a year, and I figured if we don't get one, we're going to really be up a creek, because everything is computerized today.

You're right. And I think it's good for staying in touch with family, you know, with the email. And people can send pictures of one another.

Right.

And then we have some people come in here who talk about, Skype. If you have got a little camera on your computer, you can type up there, and then you can have a phone conversation. But you can see them, using the little camera on your computer. There's this free program called Skype. I think it's s-k-y-p-e. My wife wants me to put it on ours, so we can talk to our son in California, yes. But we haven't done it yet.

I have that camera.

Oh.

I have that capability, but I don't know how it works, and you have to pay extra for that.

Oh.

And, well, it's not that we're so cheap, but I don't think I'd use it enough to make it worthwhile, you know. It just wouldn't be worthwhile. So, Bob brings up the ship on the computer, and he takes, he gets pictures and all kinds of stuff about the ship.

Yes. The computer and the Internet really help me, because when I interview the vets, you know, they think I know all the stuff, a lot of the stuff they're telling me, like these places, and names, and ranks, and military shells and weapons. And I might know it for like five seconds. But then I go back, so when I work on the interviews, it really helps to have the Internet. It's just amazing.

Well, every time he gets a new medication, or I get a new medication--

Oh, yes.

I look it up. And he was very sick with vertigo at one time, we went to four different doctors, and they couldn't figure out why he has this.

Yes.

And it was terrible. He got sick to his stomach. Anyway, I had a clue that maybe he was allergic to MSG, so I looked it up on the computer. And the information that I got kind of verified this. Well, I guess the doctors were amazed that I diagnosed it when they couldn't.

Very good. That was-- maybe that was your medical training again.

That could be.

From World War II.

Yes. So, I look up all the medications.

Mr Barsky: I don't eat in a restaurant unless I ask them do you use MSG. If they have that, I won't eat there, you know.

Yes.

Because I would get sick.

Yes.

You know what that is, right?

Monosodium glutamate or something.

Mr. Barsky: Yes.

Yes.

I'm sure we eat all kinds of funny preservatives and drug additives that we would never have eaten a hundred years ago, you know.

When we would inquire, they say, "We don't use it. Too many people are allergic to it."

Yes.

So they don't use it anymore. Mostly Asian, chop suey and things.

The Chinese restaurants, you would think, yes.

Uh-huh. But American restaurants don't use it. He doesn't eat Chinese, so we don't have to worry.

Well, we've done a good job on all of the questions, so, as I say, was there anything you'd like to add or--

I can't think of anything.

It must have been great to see Bob at the airport. Oh, man!

We were really happy to see each other.

Yes.

It was a long time.

Yes.

Sixty-five years later, here we are.

Mr. Barsky: She might have done better, but she got me,

No, she's "too young."

I had a lot of boyfriends, but they're all dead.

Oh, dear.

So, I'm glad I got him! He's still around.

So, I think on that happy note, we'll conclude the interview. Thank you very much, Marty, that's terrific.

The future Mr. and Mrs. Barsky shown in their service uniforms. Robert's Navy picture was taken in New York, and Martha's in Oakland, California



Mrs. Barsky's "Notice of Separation From U.S. Naval Service"

NOTICE OF SEPARATION FROM U.S. NAVAL SERVICE NAVPERS-553 (REV. 8-48)

1. SERIAL OR FILE NO.		2. NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE)		3. RATE AND CLASS/OR		4. PLACE OF SEPARATION	
RANK AND CLASSIFICATION		4. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES				5. U.S. Naval Barracks (WR) Balboa Park San Francisco, California	
		KLECZEWSKI Martha Jane HALO				6. CHARACTER OF SEPARATION Discharged - Honorable	
		Montana St., Chicago, 39, Ill.				7. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT Same as #4	
8. RACE W		9. SEX F		10. MARITAL STATUS Single		11. U.S. CITIZEN (YES OR NO) Yes	
				12. DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH Chicago, Ill.			
		13. REGISTERED <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		14. SELECTIVE SERVICE BOARD OF REGISTRATION		15. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE Same as #4	
RECORD OF NAVAL SERVICE		16. MEANS OF ENTRY (INDICATE BY CHECK IN APPROPRIATE BOX)		17. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE		18. NET SERVICE (FOR PAY PURPOSES) (YRS., MOS., DAYS)	
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED <input type="checkbox"/> INDUCTED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMISSIONED		9-20-44		1-6-43	
		DATE 8-1-44 DATE DATE		19. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE Chicago, Ill.			
		20. QUALIFICATIONS, CERTIFICATES HELD, ETC.		21. RATINGS HELD		22. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE WORLD WAR II <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	
		23. SERVICE SCHOOLS COMPLETED		24. SERVICE (VESSELS AND STATIONS SERVED ON)			
		USNHCS (WR) NNMC Bethesda, Md.		MTS Bronx, New York USNH Oakland, California			
PAY & INSURANCE DATA		IMPORTANT: IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WITHIN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTOR'S SUBDIVISION, VETERAN'S ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.					
		25. KIND OF INSURANCE NSI		26. EFFECTIVE MONTH OF ALLOTMENT DISCONTINUANCE Apr-46		27. MO. NEXT PREMIUM DUE May-46	
		28. AMOUNT OF PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$3.25		29. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO CONTINUE INS. Yes			
		30. TOTAL PAYMENT UPON DISCHARGE \$ 155.78		31. TRAVEL OR MILEAGE ALLOWANCE INCLUDED IN TOTAL PAYMENT \$ 113.25		32. INITIAL MUSTERING OUT PAY \$100	
						33. NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER M. E. Iauer	
EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL DATA		24. REMARKS		34. SIGNATURE (BY DIRECTION OF COMMANDING OFFICER)			
		Issued: Honorable Service Lapel Pin Honorable Discharge Emblem Honorable Discharge Pin		Cora May Hanson Cora May HANSON, Lieut. (W) USNR			
		35. NAME AND ADDRESS OF LAST EMPLOYER Mills Industries Inc. Chicago, Illinois		37. DATES OF LAST EMPLOYMENT FROM Jun 43 TO Sep 44		36. MAIN CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND D. O. T. NO. Clark - Gen. Office 1-05.01	
		39. JOB PREFERENCE (LIST TYPE, LOCALITY, AND GENERAL AREA) Doctor's Assistant - Chicago, Ill		40. PREFERENCE FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING (TYPE OF TRAINING) Medical Course			
		41. NON-SERVICE EDU. (YRS. SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED) GRAM. 8 H. S. 4 COLL. -		42. DEGREES		43. MAJOR COURSE OR FIELD	
		44. RIGHT INDEX FINGERPRINT		45. OFF DUTY EDUCATIONAL COURSES COMPLETED			
		46. DATE OF SEPARATION 4 2 46		47. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED 1-28			

TO: BUREAU OF NAVAL PERSONNEL

Mr. and Mrs. Barsky share thoughts about their service during World War II at the 4th Annual Veterans History Project Breakfast at the Niles Public Library on Wednesday, November 10, 2011.

