

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

NICOLE MEYER

An interview conducted on

October 28, 2016

Interviewer: Breanne Gregory

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Nicole Meyer are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 28, 2016.

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GREGORY: Can you tell me your name?

MEYER: Nicole Meyer.

GREGORY: And where were you born?

MEYER: I was born in Longview, Washington.

GREGORY: Okay, so you're not from Texas?

MEYER: No, I am not.

GREGORY: Where did you grow up?

MEYER: I grew up in a small town called Cathlamet, Washington along the Columbia River.

GREGORY: When did you move to Texas?

MEYER: I moved to Texas this summer actually.

GREGORY: What are your views of Texas since you've moved here?

MEYER: I like it. The heat gets to me.

GREGORY: It's hot. The weather—I expected it to be cooler by now.

MEYER: Me too.

GREGORY: When and where did you decide to enter the armed forces?

MEYER: I was a senior in high school. I had been applying to schools and really didn't have the money. My family was in the tax bracket where we made too much to qualify for programs like FAFSA but not enough to send me to school, and I didn't want to start my life in debt. One day the Air Force recruiter happened to be there so I talked to him, and that put the idea into my head. I enlisted in April of 2010, a couple months after my 18th birthday.

GREGORY: What were your years of service? Just since twenty ten?

MEYER: Two thousand ten until August of this year, twenty sixteen.

GREGORY: You're still enrolled?

MEYER: No. No, I am no longer active, I'm what they call IRR which basically where you're just waiting out an additional two years until you're—can no longer be called back.

GREGORY: Okay. So, pretty much what motivated you was, you know, your—for school maybe? Since you couldn't really get money for FAFSA because of your parents' income.

MEYER: It was school, a little bit of that. And also nobody in my family had served since my grandfather and I kind of wanted to do something with my life.

GREGORY: Awesome. What was training like? When you first went . . .

MEYER: I went through back in 2010 and that was before the sexual assaults came to light, so I went through. They weren't as strict about how they did training. We still got put on our faces, we still did all the crazy stuff, and it was actually—I enjoyed it personally. I had fun in boot camp.

GREGORY: That's good. Usually you don't hear that it was very enjoyable.

MEYER: I mean, it was hard. I mean, being screamed by TIs isn't really anybody's cup of tea, but I enjoyed it.

GREGORY: How was your family's reaction when you told them you wanted to join?

MEYER: My mom didn't really want me to join at first. I kind of had to persuade her to my side of the argument. I didn't just one day say, "Oh, hey I'm gonna go enlist." I kind of talked to them first and then told them this is why I want to do it, this is why I think it would be a good idea. She actually went with me to the recruiter.

GREGORY: That's awesome. Whenever you got done with training did you find your work very challenging?

MEYER: I hated my job.

GREGORY: What did you do?

MEYER: I was logistical supply in the Air Force. So, I think our official term was logistics management or something like that, and I didn't want to be that. I had actually wanted to be an Air Force fire fighter. That was one of my goals. I was in a fire-fighting program in high school, I was a cadet, and I really enjoyed—I loved firefighting. And so when I went into basic, this was right after the economic crisis. No one knew what to do with their lives, nobody had money for anything, so everybody was trying to enlist. It took eight months for me to ship to boot camp, and they didn't have a job for me so they sent me "open general," which is where you have—when you get to basic you have like a list. And you choose from that list, and you choose five or six out of that list, and I had fire protection on there, EOD, all sorts of stuff. I was determined to be like the Jane Doe, I guess, or that one Navy SEAL movie. They were like, "Oh, yeah, you'll get firefighting. You'll get firefighting." And then orders day came around and I was supply. I was really salty about it for a long time.

GREGORY: So, once they give you that job there's no option of changing it later down the road?

MEYER: Many years later, but it's very hard to get. I was a four-year enlistee at the time, so that means I was only for four years, so at two years I had the option of retraining into chronic critical jobs. I think I tried to retrain into command post, chaplain assistant, and a few other jobs. Just ones that sounded interesting to me. But I was denied, which it was okay that I got denied because, a few months later they came down and started kicking everyone out and cancelling everyone's retrain anyway. So either way I wouldn't have gotten to retrain.

GREGORY: So, for all these years you've been stuck doing something you haven't really been happy doing?

MEYER: Well, I came to enjoy it. I actually really came to like my job. After I was deployed to Afghanistan in 2013, I came to really see what my job could do. I got to actually see the impact of my job and that really helps I think, being able to see that.

GREGORY: What did you understand about the mission you were being asked to complete while you were deployed?

MEYER: Well, you kind of see it from one perspective like, "Okay, our guys need this, this, and this. And then, you know, these guys over here, they need us to get them paper." You know, for example. So that's all you really think about. But it's also reassuring to know that you're making sure that your guys are protected.

GREGORY: Right. Did you ever have to serve in direct combat?

MEYER: No. Not a firefight, if that's what you're referring to. No. I came under indirect fire multiple times. Just rocket attacks, stuff like that. That was very often, sometimes multiple times a day.

GREGORY: What do you guys do in that situation?

MEYER: Well, you get down for a couple minutes, you wait for it to stop, and then you get up and do your thing. Where I worked at on base, we had—we were a unit command center, so whenever we came under indirect fire people in our squadron would call it in and say, "Hey I'm safe. I'm not hurt." And then, you know, we'd have to get accountability. Make sure nobody was hurt and anybody who wasn't accounted for we'd have to go find. Most of the time they just slept through it. Which happens, you start becoming desensitized and you just kind of sleep through it. It's not a big deal anymore.

GREGORY: So you never had to witness anyone injured from an attack?

MEYER: I witnessed it. We had one laying across the street on the other side of a T-wall from me. A T-wall is a giant cement barrier. We had a rocket land there across the street from where everybody hung out and used their phones and the WiFi. Nobody really got seriously injured, but

there was some blown out eardrums, stuff like that. Luckily that was, this sounds shitty, but it was New Year's so we were already knew to be wearing our IBA, and helmet, and everything, and so everybody was pretty protected and they everybody was pretty grateful to have their helmet on for once.

GREGORY: That's good. So how did you, you know, get a hold of your family? You said you guys had phones and WiFi. How did that work? Did you guys get to talk to them everyday or?

MEYER: Yeah. Well, not every—it was up to the person I tried to call my parents every other day. I tried to call my husband every day. We used apps like Tango and Skype that you can use over the WiFi. You can talk to them for as long as you want until you have to go to work obviously or you need to sleep. And then we had morale centers too where you could go in and use the phones and computers.

GREGORY: I wouldn't have expected that, so that's really good. You know, that you get to talk to them that often.

MEYER: It's really changed from ten years ago when you had to line up at a pay phone.

GREGORY: When I picture something like that I picture, you know, having to wait like a week to receive a letter. So that's awesome that you guys got to talk to them.

MEYER: We've been in Afghanistan for so long that things have really improved.

GREGORY: That's good. What are your most vivid memories of your time in the service?

MEYER: I have a lot, like multiple things. I guess my deployment is what really sticks out to me. That was a really defining moment for my career. My first deployment. My second deployment, not so much. Then I would say the time frame between when I made staff, like I got a line number for E-5, and then I was just waiting to put it on. I really started getting exposed to a lot more like . . . to be a leader and stuff. So that kind of struck out to me, and I kind of decided I wanted to get out. I was kind of done with it.

GREGORY: During your second deployment you decided?

MEYER: No, during the timeframe while I was waiting to put on staff sergeant.

GREGORY: Oh, okay. Did you face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

MEYER: Yeah.

GREGORY: If so, what challenges did you face?

MEYER: Just learning to get up and dress yourself sometimes. Six years in the military you always had a uniform to put on, and then suddenly I'm wearing cute clothes. What the hell do I

wear to a job interview? Yeah. That was definitely different. And I have to watch how I talk sometimes.

GREGORY: When you say watch how you talk, what do you mean by that?

MEYER: Just watch my language. A lot of people don't appreciate if every other word out of your mouth is a cuss word, so that's definitely difficult.

GREGORY: Yeah. 'Cause you know you hear, in boot camp you know, they don't say the nicest words, is that true?

MEYER: Yeah.

GREGORY: Is it just, what ever they want to say they say it, and . . . ?

MEYER: Well, no. There's things they're not allowed to say. You're obviously not allowed to say anything racist. You can't call someone—you can't call people, like, the C-word, you can't call trainees a bitch. Obviously, there's lines. So, sometimes they do cross that line, but . . .

GREGORY: After your time in the military has your conception of Texas changed at all since you've moved here?

MEYER: The last time I was in Texas before I moved here was six years ago when I went to boot camp in San Antonio. So, I didn't really get to see Texas too much there. I remember it was hot. I got off the plane in November and I came from Portland, Oregon, which is where I went to MEPS, and it was hot and I was like, "What the hell? What is this?" Now six years later I chose to move here, and I like it.

GREGORY: So, after your time in the military has your conception of the United States changed?

MEYER: I would say a little bit. I definitely don't think we should be over in the Middle East. I could see us helping the military there, but I think we're over there for the wrong reasons. Seeing the people over there struggle, it makes me hate being on Facebook sometimes and seeing what people think. People just think they're a bunch of terrorists. Yeah, you have bad apples over there, but for the most part they just want to live, and they just want to have their families be able to live and be free.

GREGORY: So people here have that outlook on those people that you don't really know what it's like until you're been there and seen them?

MEYER: Yeah.

GREGORY: How do you feel about your military service looking back now?

MEYER: I'm glad I had it. Sometimes I wish I hadn't gone in just because I've got a lot of health issues now.

GREGORY: What health issues do you have now?

MEYER: My back is all sorts of screwed up. I don't know what's wrong with it yet, I'm waiting to see a doctor. I just had to do a pulmonary function test and they found some abnormalities, which is testing your breathing. So, I'm waiting to find out what's up with that. It's not very reassuring.

GREGORY: Do you have any advice for men and women today who are looking to join the armed forces?

MEYER: If they want to join, go for it. It will teach you to be a disciplined person. I definitely see a difference between me and my classmates for example.

GREGORY: Do you—would you like to share anything else? Did I miss anything?

MEYER: No, don't think so.

GREGORY: Well, thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciate that.

MEYER: Thank you.