

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

MARY RICH

An interview conducted on

April 1, 2016

Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

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 Mary Rich are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on April 1, 2016.

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LAMBERSON: My name is Christine Lamberson, and this uh . . . I'm in Waco. It's April 1, 2016, and we're doing an interview for the *War Stories* project. Let me just start. What is your name?

M. RICH: Mary L. Rich.

LAMBERSON: And when and where were you born?

M. RICH: In Waco, Texas.

LAMBERSON: And . . .

M. RICH: In Glenn County.

LAMBERSON: And did you grow up here?

M. RICH: Yes.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And um what is the name of the . . . your uh husband, in this case?

M. RICH: Billy J. Rich.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And when did you guys meet and get married and . . . ?

M. RICH: Well, it's a long story. I was uh . . . He was my brother's best friend. And uh met him the first time when he was about ten-years-old, riding a bicycle down a country road. And uh when I was fourteen, he said he was going to marry me, and we did when I was eighteen. Going on about ten, very immature. I was uh next to the last of nine children, so I was very sheltered. And uh we married uh when I was eighteen. He was nineteen in the service in uh El Paso, Texas—Fort Bliss—and he was in school at the time. Little private. We struggled. When we married, I think we had ten dollars . . .

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: . . . to . . . in our pockets. [Laughs] Um, we traveled. I'm sure he told you that we traveled around quite a bit. In his job, he uh was in Nike Radar and would set up a station and . . . and get it operating, then go to another station, set it up. So, we moved almost every year.

LAMBERSON: Um-hum.

M. RICH: Um, our first baby was stillborn in uh Presidio, California . . . San Francisco. And uh then the Lord blessed us with a little girl and she is now fifty-four years old. And then we had another little girl uh twenty-four months later. And she uh passed away when she was thirty-seven years old. We lost her, but um . . . Both of my girls love [coughs] . . . loved the Army. I loved the Army. We were good . . . We were a good Army family because we loved it. Excuse me.

LAMBERSON: It's good.

M. RICH: Um all the hardships, the things that we had to go through that were not pleasant or that were very difficult, uh we felt that was worth it. And even so at our ages now, we feel that it was worth it. We're glad we did it. Um, the Army was good to us. Uh, I'm sure my husband told you that when our babies were little, uh he got hurt in the Army. Broke his back. And uh that was probably the most difficult time because we were in Alvarado, Texas. I didn't know another soul except my landlord in Alvarado, Texas. Our parents were in Waco, and he was at Fort Carswell in Fort Worth, and there was no one. I had never written a check. I had . . . I had my driver's license but I had never really driven a car either. I had uh not liked to drive and so I didn't.

And he was always around, so . . . so when he went to the hospital, that probably was one of the most difficult times because of the babies. Um our youngest one was six-months-old, the other one was about two-and-a-half. Um God was good to us again. He's always seen us through. Uh, the barber at the base that cut the men's hair got us in touch with another family who had two little girls the same ages as ours. And uh met them, and they helped me keep the babies. And his mother came and stayed with me three or four days and then uh they helped me with the babies. And uh during that time . . . I won't go in to so much detail but we had a lot of problems.

Uh my youngest child um had a seizure in church one day. Looked down, and she was having a seizure. And uh . . . put her in the hospital in Carswell. My husband was on the fourth floor in critical condition. And they told me she had meningitis. And I wouldn't believe it, so they went back and took another test, and she did not. And she actually had the chicken pox. So, uh here again, I'm alone with two little girls, and in the middle of the night, I got so sick that I had to crawl on my hands and knees to the telephone. Nobody to help me. Got in touch with somebody, uh one of my friends, and they took me to the hospital. And they told me that I may have polio and I would have to stay in the hospital. "No. I won't stay in the hospital. I have two babies at home, and I'm not going to stay in the hospital." Went home in the middle of the night, I started itching, and I had chicken pox. I did not have polio.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: So, those kinds of things is what you go through when you're alone and panicky.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

M. RICH: You know, and I was still young. I was still probably twenty-four years old, and not very mature still, you know. But uh those were hard times. Uh, Bill was on the fourth floor, uh critical condition. I was called five different times. Um, funny thing happened. Uh, I had . . . They called me so many times and it was always in the middle of the night. I had to get transportation. I had to get somebody to keep the children and go. The last time they called me, they said, "The priest is with him." And I said, "Oh my goodness. Get that priest out of there. We're Baptist!" And I was so ashamed. You don't think when you're panicky and I didn't know what to do . . . how to do. So, I went through a lot of those kind of moments that uh you really don't have anyone to turn to. Your family is not there. And uh so, it makes you really strong. In

fact, to this day, people say that I'm a little bit different because I am so strong. I . . . It has made me a stronger person. So, I consider that a plus. I don't think that's a bad thing.

LAMBERSON: Right.

M. RICH: So, uh then we uh . . . Let's see. What else? We went to . . . we were in New Jersey twice. Two different times. Probably the time that I was happiest was . . . I never had a husband that had an eight-to-five job ever, you know. And uh so, I guess I was thirty-five at that time—or maybe not that . . . anyway, a little older—and um the girls were older. And uh he was able to be an instructor in the school there.

LAMBERSON: That was in New Jersey?

M. RICH: In New Jersey.

LAMBERSON: Um-hum.

M. RICH: Um-hum. Um . . . Townsend? I don't remember. Anyway, um we uh . . . He was able to be an instructor and he had an eight to five job. He left in the morning at eight o'clock, looking handsome in his uniform, came back to me at five o'clock that night. And it was wonderful. Lasted about six months until he went to Korea. But that was the best time for me was to be able to know that he's going to leave at eight o'clock in the morning, he's going to come back. Um, amusing things happened all through the years because we . . . we're that kind of family, but um one day, I locked the keys in the car. Never had I done that. Had to call him. He was in the middle of a class. The MPs came and got him out of class, embarrassed him to no end, and he had to come and . . . and unlock the car. Needless to say, I didn't do those kinds of tricks very often. But once in a while, those things did happen.

LAMBERSON: Um-hum.

M. RICH: And he was so important that . . . you know, he's the instructor, and . . . and the MPs came back and just terrified him when they walked in the room, you know, and that kind of thing. Well, he was in Vietnam for . . . Well, he was in Korea eighteen months. Um lot of things happened. I won't go into detail; it'd be too long. But um . . .

LAMBERSON: And where were you while he was gone?

M. RICH: In Waco.

LAMBERSON: But you came to Waco.

M. RICH: With the girls.

LAMBERSON: Okay. Uh-huh.

M. RICH: We . . . We rented an apartment. Um, our next-door neighbor had three or four small children, and as far as we knew, they were a nice family. I didn't know them that well. But her husband drank too much one night and she came in my back door and . . . saying that he had a shotgun and that he had the babies in the car and all kinds of horrible things happening. So, uh we moved. We had to move because of that situation. That family didn't . . . didn't uh work out their problems and I was afraid because he . . . he came out after her with a shotgun. Those kind of things happen to wives too and . . . and no protection. I was across town from anybody, from my family or anybody. Anyway, I moved in with my mother and dad and stayed with them for a short time. And then my aunt had a duplex and we moved in there. And that was the first trip to Korea. The . . . I did not get my husband back. I've never had husband since then.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: I've had someone that was a stranger. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know . . . We'd grown up together and he just wasn't the same person but he was a good person. And he . . . He was a family man and loved his family. And so, we made do. Uh, then he went . . . He was home for a short time and went to Vietnam. Um, that was a difficult time as well, of course . . . for everybody, not just me. Um, and I kept that in mind, I think, the whole time was that other wives were going through this, too. It's not just me. Yeah.

LAMBERSON: Did you have very much contact with other military wives and . . . ?

M. RICH: No. None at all. None. There was no help for us back then and I'm so happy to say that there is now. People are starting to realize that the families serve as well and that oftentimes, the wife stays in the city where the husband left instead of going home, and for sure had no support.

LAMBERSON: Right.

M. RICH: . . . or help . . . and money. The finances were very, very bare. We had very little money because he had to have money where he was. I had to have money where . . . for the kids. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Anyway, um he went to Vietnam. Uh one of the worst things, I guess, that happened, the girls were in second and fourth grades then and uh one day, I looked out . . . I, you know . . . I . . . You wait for that car to pull up in front of the house. Um one day, it did. The Navy car . . . a Navy car pulled up in front of the house, two uniformed men got [to dog: "Tiger, stop!"]. Two uniformed men got out, and I just went to my knees. I just knew this . . . this is it. The kids were in school, thank goodness, and I just fell apart. As it turned out, they were not there to see me. They were there to see someone across the street.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: It wasn't my call at all. But those are the things that you just wait for. I mean, you know, you pray that that's not going to happen to you or your husband but it does.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And so, uh that was probably the worst . . . worst thing during that time. I had a nice little house, and I had more support that time. Uh, the girls were older. And they were in school, so I had the teachers and people in the school for support and friends and . . . to kind of lift me up. Um . . .

LAMBERSON: And how did people treat you since, you know, it's the height of the Vietnam War, height of the anti-war movement? Or how did you view the rest of that?

M. RICH: I was okay during that time because I was at home.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And I had my church and, you know, uh friends. Friends, even from high school and people that I was in touch with. The time that was the worst for me uh that way was when we were in Alvarado, Texas. A very small city, very biased.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Very uh . . . cold.

LAMBERSON: Were they not pro-military? Were they kind of standoffish?

M. RICH: They were not pro-military.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

M. RICH: They did not want us there.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay.

M. RICH: Uh my husband was on a very small Nike site. Uh I don't know how many men. Maybe twenty, twenty-five men even. That's when he got hurt was when we were in Alvarado. And um they uh . . . I went downtown one day . . . we lived about two blocks from town. The girls and I walked down . . . that was our routine; we would get up and have a nice little breakfast and get all dressed up and go to the post office downtown. Well, one day I decided to buy a dress. I needed a sun . . . I had no clothes, hardly—we had no money—so, I had seen this dress in the window of one of the shops there and I thought, "I bet they'd let me pay that out." So, I went in and uh told her I'd like to look at the dress, try it on. It was perfect for me. I have my picture hung on the wall wearing it in there. And um I said, "I'd like to buy this dress, but I have to pay it out. My husband's in service."

“Oh, well, if your husband’s in the service, it’s going to be ten dollars more.” I said, “Ten dollars more because my husband is serving his country?”

“Yes. Military people pay ten dollars more.”

LAMBERSON: That is so weird.

M. RICH: It . . . It’s horrible. It . . . you know, I just left in tears. And that’s really the only time that . . . that I uh was treated that way.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: Then uh there was another time I’ll tell you about a little bit later. Um he came back from Vietnam and, again, we moved to . . . I believe that’s when we moved to Illinois. My mind doesn’t always work, but I think we moved to Illinois from there for a short . . . and then to Indiana. Near Gary, Indiana . . . Griffith. Griffith, Indiana. And uh those were hard times because he had begun to drink, and quite a bit.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And I don’t. I’m a very spiritual person, and I’ve never drank or smoked or anything like that. And that was a really difficult thing to adjust to for me. Um, he uh—

[Audio cuts off and resumes]

LAMBERSON: This is Christine Lamberson. It is April 1, 2016, and I’m continuing my interview with Mrs. Rich telling me about um when he came back from Vietnam and . . . and had started drinking and smoking.

M. RICH: Yes, even more so, yeah. And . . . and still uh was a stranger. Uh the girls, by then, was probably ten and twelve. Um, everything was okay there except for that. Uh, it was difficult. I . . . it was necessary for me to take a job. Um, my youngest daughter had started school and was set . . . the . . . the girls were settled, and so I’m going to get a job in Chicago. I applied for a job there as a teacher’s aide because I love children and I had promised the Lord that when my youngest daughter started school, I would do something for children that were handicapped because she was. She was born without a right hand. I don’t know if he told you that.

LAMBERSON: He didn’t, no.

M. RICH: Our youngest . . . our youngest was born without a right hand. She was fine. She uh was the youngest person in Texas to be fitted with prosthesis.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: We went all the way with her, you know. We gave her everything we possibly could. Anyway, I’m going to get a job because she started school. Okay. I go in to get work in Chicago. Here I am in my little red car—and I drove, and I drove, and I drove—could not find the place.

And finally, I . . . it was in the industrial part of Chicago, if you can imagine, and I finally found a worker that I stopped and told him where I needed to be. So, I was two-and-half hours late for my . . . for my interview. And I thought, “They’ll never hire me now!” No experience. I’d never worked. No experience, nothing. And lived uh probably ten, fifteen miles away. Anyway, I walked in and apologized, and she said, “Oh, no. Everybody does that. That’s fine,” and hired me.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: And I loved it. I worked with uh exceptional teenagers.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And it was wonderful. I . . . I was a . . . [to dog: “Tiger!”].

LAMBERSON: It’s fine.

M. RICH: Bill, come and get your dog, please!

LAMBERSON: [Speaking to dog] Hello. It’s okay.

M. RICH: Um . . .

LAMBERSON: [Speaking to dog] You’re friendly.

M. RICH: He knows to come and get the dog.

LAMBERSON: It’s all right.

M. RICH: Anyway, um I loved it but we didn’t get to stay there very long either. But that was my first experience with exceptional children and it was a . . . a blessing to me. And I was able to see some results and some good things happening there, but I had to leave. Then uh . . . let’s see. Um . . .

LAMBERSON: And then did he go back to Korea?

M. RICH: Yes, he did. Went back to Korea. He was in Korea, Vietnam, and Korea in five years.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: Eighteen-month tours.

LAMBERSON: And he was . . .

M. RICH: Eighteen-month . . .

LAMBERSON: . . . back for six months between each one or so?

M. RICH: About. I think.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

M. RICH: Yeah, about that . . .

LAMBERSON: Oh.

M. RICH: I don't know why Bill doesn't come and get him. He knows . . .

LAMBERSON: He just wants to be . . .

M. RICH: [Speaking to dog] You are too friendly. You are just too friendly. So, anyway uh . . . Let's see. Korea the second time was easier. Again, each year I matured and learned how to be an Army wife.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: I had never . . . well, my brother was in service and my daddy was in service but I'd never been . . . really been around military people until this time, until he and I were together. But uh when he was in Korea the last time, everything went quite well. I lived on a military base that had been closed. And they allowed us to live there, so I had a really nice little house, probably the nicest house I've had. And uh . . .

LAMBERSON: And where was that?

M. RICH: In uh Waco.

LAMBERSON: Oh, in Waco. Okay. Uh-huh.

M. RICH: But it was the old Connally Air Force Base. And they closed the Air Force base down and let military people and different ones uh live there. And the rent was . . . was reasonable, and I was near my family that time. And I also had a best friend that lived across the street that was a school teacher, and she helped me quite a bit during that time. Uh, just about two weeks before he came home from Korea the second time, I had a wreck. Totaled my car. Here we are getting ready to go to Germany and it was a . . . a really ordeal, too. Another one of those Army wife things. But, anyway, he did come home from Korea the second time—that was his last overseas tour—and we went to Germany from there. The girls and I had never been overseas and it was just . . . we were just so happy. So happy. And they were uh probably ten and twelve, maybe.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: At that . . . which was the perfect age. They weren't old enough that, you know, they could get out of our grip.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: But they were old enough to enjoy it. And uh we had a wonderful time in Germany for the most part. Uh, the girls uh were in school where I could look out my dining room window like here and see them walking from school, home, which really pleased me.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: They were close. And I would do things like I always did. I've always been active, very active, in doing all kinds of crazy things. And there were three hundred kids in that school, and the girls . . . "Mommy, we want to do something. We want to do something." We had an overseas . . . I mean overhead uh room, a great big room up over where we lived. And I said, "Well, how about if we make homemade pizza and have all the kids come over? And we'll have them grade by grade. And, you know, they go to lunch grade by grade, so we'll do that." So, we did. I made pizza for three hundred kids.

LAMBERSON: Wow. That's impressive.

M. RICH: Fun, fun, fun. Loved it, loved it, loved it. It was just so fun. And some of the neighbors helped me.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. And were . . . was the school an American school? Were they mostly American kids?

M. RICH: Yes, yes, yes.

LAMBERSON: Okay. Uh-huh. They were military kids, yeah.

M. RICH: Uh military, yes. We lived in a military community at that time. So, anyway, did a lot of that kind of thing. You know, always was room mother, always was active doing things . . . girl scout leader. I was even a boy scout leader one time. And uh when we were in Germany, in fact, I was a girl scout leader for sixteen sixteen-year-olds. And we had one little girl in the group that would not salute the American flag. And her daddy was a GI.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: Her daddy was a soldier. She would not salute the American flag and she would not say anything about it. So, she had to get out of the troop. We took those girls to Switzerland. We saved up money. They had car washes and different things, earned their money. And we took them to Switzerland. We got on the Swiss train and it was the wrong train. There were three adults. It was the wrong train. Here, if you can imagine, sixteen sixteen-year-old girls, luggage, and all of this to gather up and get off of that train. We had three minutes.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: They called the train “the schnell.” It’s a schnell over there.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And train’s just going like this. We did it. How? I . . . The Lord was just with us, that’s all. We did it. Got them on that train. Well, by the time we got to the chalet where we stayed, everybody was a nervous wreck. And it was almost dark and it was Halloween. And snow . . . some of the girls had seen snow for the first time and they were scared. And some were crying and they wanted to come home and . . . you know. They . . . they had just had too much drama.

LAMBERSON: Right.

M. RICH: It’s too much drama. So, we finally settled everybody down, and the next day we had a wonderful time. Stayed in the little chalet. Um I don’t remember three or four days. I don’t remember exactly. And uh so, that was a really, really good experience and a good treat. Um while we were in Germany, we had . . . teenagers always came . . . all the kids always came to my house. I loved to cook for them. I loved to do things for them. And Bill was gone a lot, so he didn’t mind. And so, uh we would gather up kids and take them to the country, in the German country. In the forest, Black Forest. Bill was able to buy an old Volkswagen bus. Am I telling you too much?

LAMBERSON: No, this is great. It’s wonderful.

M. RICH: Well, it’s human things. It’s . . . It’s the things that happened.

LAMBERSON: Yeah. No, that’s like . . . That’s what we like.

M. RICH: Uh, he uh was able to buy an old Volkswagen bus, ugliest thing you ever seen and rattled down the road. I’m telling you, we . . . We’d leave on Friday . . . and we’d fill it full of kids, leave on Friday night, and we didn’t come back home until Sunday. And most of the time, we didn’t know where we were going. We would just get in that old bus, chug, chug, chug down the road, and go someplace until we wanted to stop. Stop and camp over the weekend and come back home. We never were uh approached or anything. It was just like freedom. You know, you just go out amidst these beautiful woods. We had . . . We all had walking sticks. We walked a lot. We hiked a lot. Had a lot of fun. And uh there was no bathroom, of course, so we had a bucket.

LAMBERSON: Mm.

M. RICH: And we called it our “thunder bucket.” So . . . and I won’t go into some other details because it’s a little bit too much but we had a good time. And uh what uh . . . we found some little reed straw—we thought they were tiny strawberries—little tiny things about this big. And they were so sweet and so good. We ate them and ate them and ate them and were sick.

LAMBERSON: Oops! They were not strawberries, huh?

M. RICH: They were not strawberries. So, some of those things happened but we enjoyed the woods. We enjoyed the camping. Uh, got us away from all the other things that were going on in camp. You know, there was six families that lived in a stairwell and it was, you know, just bedlam all the time with kids and noise and dogs and whatever. So, uh it was wonderful to be able to just get away as a family and take the girls' friend with them.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Uh, one night . . . we had sleeping bags from the Army, and uh one night, we were playing and laughing and having a good time and I swallowed a feather. And . . . and I almost choked to death because they thought I was playing.

LAMBERSON: Oh.

M. RICH: I'm telling them, "I'm choking! I'm choking!" And they thought I was playing. So anyway, they almost let me . . . let me suffocate. And on the way to Germany—I forgot to tell you too—um we were all so excited and never ridden in an airplane. Never done any of those things, you know. We're in Germany and we're just looking everywhere, and all of a sudden, I got so very, very sick. I was in the back of the Jeep that came to get us. Uh well, wasn't really . . . It was a closed-in Jeep. But uh Bill was up in the front with the guys, the girls were up in the second seat, and I was in the last seat. And I just got deathly sick, so we had to stop. And come to find out, the exhaust in the back of that Jeep was coming to me.

LAMBERSON: Oh.

M. RICH: In that backseat.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

M. RICH: So, I was sick the whole time we were in the hotel until we got settled but . . .

LAMBERSON: Oh.

M. RICH: Anyway, that was not . . . Those kinds of things happen too. A lot of them.

LAMBERSON: Right.

M. RICH: So, uh . . . but for Germany, everything was . . . I worked at the PX uh to make money for Christmas. By then, our finances had improved. You know, Bill had made rank and uh . . . He was probably staff sergeant at that time. And uh so, we had money. But I still wanted to do something, so I worked at the PX for a short time and got to work in a little German uh kiosk that uh a friend of mine ran. And uh sold uh dirndls and lederhosen and all those things. So, we got to buy all those things.

LAMBERSON: Cool.

M. RICH: That's where my money went was to buy . . .

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: I had a lederhosen . . . I mean I had a dirndl. Bill had lederhosen and all of this. And one day . . . uh he had everything. He had the sweater, the lederhosen, the shoes, the socks, the hat . . . everything. And he really looked like a German when he put all that stuff on. We loved it. Then one day, we went to a park or something, to some kind of festivities, and . . . and this German man came up and was trying to talk to him in German. And my husband kept saying, "Nichts verstehen. Nichts verstehen." And he was mad because he thought Bill was German and wouldn't talk to him.

LAMBERSON: Oh! [Laughs]

M. RICH: So, that was neat.

LAMBERSON: That's funny.

M. RICH: That was neat. So, anyway, we since have gotten rid of all that, but . . .

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

M. RICH: Um that . . . we just had a really good time in Germany. We . . . We went . . . there was a place called a schnitzelhouse and um usually there would be two or three couples of us, we'd go there. And it was real . . . It didn't cost very much and . . . wonderful food.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And uh one day . . . I . . . I like to collect wine bottles. Even though I am a teetotaler, I think wine bottles are beautiful. And uh we went with a . . . several couples one night, and—or one day—and uh I saw this beautiful wine bottle. Of course, I wanted it, so we took it in the bathroom, washed it off and everything, and I took that wine bottle. Well, we're looking up at the castle like this, I'm swinging my wine bottle, and I fall off the curb in the middle of the street. And the Germans thought I was drunk.

LAMBERSON: Oh, no!

M. RICH: Because here I am with my wine bottle.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

M. RICH: Fell off of the curb, broke my elbow. I'm lying in the German street, yelling, "I'm not getting up. I'm hurt and I'm not getting up." And all the Germans around me thinking that I was

¹ "[I] understand nothing."

drunk. So, that was fun. So, I don't know whatever happened to that wine bottle but I don't have it anymore.

LAMBERSON: That was the end of it, huh?

M. RICH: Yeah, that was the end of that. So, anyway, those kinds of things we enjoyed. We went to the guesthouses quite a bit. There was another incident that was just wonderful that just . . . still . . . I love, love, love to tell the story. I'm surprised Bill didn't tell you. But uh one Sunday afternoon, the girls wanted Coke, okay. So, we stop at a guesthouse to get a Coke. And we go in, and right immediately you go upstairs. Well, we went upstairs and opened the door and they were having some kind of a celebration. We still do not know what we celebrated but we walked in the door and they pulled us in. "Come in, come in." Big banquet, food everywhere, friendly hugging, kissing, you know how it is, and drinking and all this stuff going on. And we were just kind of in awe. You know, just . . . just didn't know really how to react or what to do. And Bill kept telling . . . "Nein, nein. Coke, Coke. Nein, nein. Coke, Coke." Well, we celebrated something. We don't know what we celebrated. We don't whether it was a wake or a wedding or what it was, but anyway, we celebrated. We were there for three or four hours. So, that was fun.

Another time, Bill had a wreck. Uh wasn't hit; he wasn't really in the wreck itself but he was involved uh . . . several cars back from the accident. So, they came and told me that he'd been in an accident. My neighbor took me and uh we arrived at the accident and the German police thought that I was in the accident.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And on and on and on because when you don't speak English . . . and I . . . I knew very few German words. The girls . . . The girls picked it up in school but I didn't . . . I didn't learn any . . . any of it. And uh Bill kept . . . He kept saying, "Whatever he says to do, just say 'nein,' 'no.'" That means no, no, no. So, anyway, we got through all of that. But we did get to go to German court and that was fun . . . an experience. We uh . . . first of all, we got the notice to come because he hit . . . was at the wreck. And uh there was a police station . . . We didn't know where to go. There was a police station, motorcycle policemen, and Bill said, "Well, let's stop and ask . . . let's see if they'll talk to us." And he showed them the uh . . . What do you call it?

LAMBERSON: Summons or something.

M. RICH: Yeah, yeah.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Showed them the ticket where we were supposed to be in court in five minutes. And we didn't have no idea where we were going. And if you don't go to court, it's a big thing in Germany. Well, it is here, too, I guess. But anyway, one of the policemen came out, "Follow me." You know, he motioned for us to follow him and he went ninety miles an hour. And he was showing out, you know, doing little didley dalleys all over the place, and Bill's trying to follow him. Well, we finally got to court and they lined up . . . It was so interesting because they lined up little cars on a board and Bill had to take the little cars and put them where they belonged and

all that. So, that was fun. And then about, I guess, three or four weeks later, we got a big check for doing that.

LAMBERSON: Oh, wow.

M. RICH: And we didn't . . . That was nice.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: So, that was another experience that we had there.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. Did you have more than one car? You said it was a . . .

M. RICH: No, I didn't drive.

LAMBERSON: Oh, you didn't drive.

M. RICH: Bill bought a Mercedes from . . . That was another really wonderful thing. He got a little Mercedes from one of the soldiers that was coming home.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

M. RICH: And he didn't want to bring it home with him.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And it was wonderful but I didn't get to drive because he . . . He had to have the car. And I didn't want to drive anyway.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: So, I never had a driver's license . . . German driver's license. A friend of mine did, and I . . . I went with her to the commissary and, you know, did the things that we needed to do. And worked with her at the PX that short time. So, I guess that pretty well sums up . . . I could tell you so many stories but that's too long.

LAMBERSON: And did you have any like uh concerns about safety or kind of politics or anything like that while you were there?

M. RICH: Very much so. Very much so. Uh normally, no. Um I did see uh one thing. And I told you I had the big picture window in the dining room.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And there was a helicopter that went down, and thirteen soldiers were killed. And they had their funerals and I looked through the window to the procession and all that. And that was very sad and very, very hurtful. The Baader-Meinhof.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Have you heard of them?

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. I do. I know who they are.

M. RICH: Baader-Meinhof. Baader-Meinhof gang was just threatening, doing everything they could to military people, especially Americans. So, they uh showed up at my house one afternoon, in the middle of the afternoon. I didn't know anything about any of this. I'm just as happy as I can be there at home by myself and . . . and they knocked on the door and there's three policemen, German policemen. They had their machine guns and all this and they were trying to tell me the Baader-Meinhof gang has threatened to come to this um . . . community . . . whatever. What'd they call it? I don't remember. Anyway, uh they were coming to this community and for me to be aware and that they were getting the children . . . They got the children out of school, brought them home. And that big room up over I told you about, where we had the parties and things for the kids? They were up there stomping back and forth with their guns . . .

LAMBERSON: The police?

M. RICH: . . . and searching all over the place.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: The German police.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: And that was . . . That was frightening. And uh it went on for a good long while. Bill could not come home. Uh it was just us girls. Um there were six families that lived in one stairwell, what we called a stairwell, and there were three stairwells to each building. So, there were quite a few people around, you know. And again, it was exciting but that was . . . That was very frightening and frightening for the children. By then, they were older and it wasn't too long before we came home. So . . . they were already teenagers by then. So, um then after Germany, we retired.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And that was uh . . . our reason for saying that we were going to retire was that the girls were both teenagers. And I went to their school . . . went to the oldest daughter's school—Kathy, went to her school one day—and the English teacher was riding a motorcycle. And she got off of the motorcycle and she had her little helmet, and . . . and she was smoking a cigarette

and all kinds of things. And I said, “I want to go home where my girls will be safe. And it will be pure and, you know, it’s going to be a wonderful thing.” Well, we got home and it was worse.

LAMBERSON: Really?

M. RICH: Worse than Germany. I was sorry that we retired. We could’ve stayed in another two . . . Well, we . . . Another two months and he would’ve made master sergeant. But I wanted to get the girls home and I made a big mistake because it was worse here. But I didn’t know that.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: So, anyway, we did come home, and uh as you probably know, he went to work for the sheriff’s department.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. And what was it like . . . ?

M. RICH: And I . . . and I still didn’t have a husband. He still worked twenty-four hours a day. But uh by then, the girls were grown and finished high school and that sort of thing. So, I guess that pretty well . . .

LAMBERSON: And what was it like kind of transitioning back to being here? How . . . You said it was worse here. What kind of challenges were there for you or your girls?

M. RICH: It was . . . It was fearful. It was fearful. Um the good part of it was that I could work because the girls were teenagers, you know, almost out of high school. And uh again, I really didn’t have a talent or . . . or training or anything . . . or education or anything else. And uh that was really hard. I uh wanted to work with people. I knew that because I loved that. I still do. I do a lot of things here.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Um I saw an ad in the paper for an activity director. Well, here I am. I had done crafts. I had done everything with the kids.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: You know, always. And girl scout leader and all this. And it talked about those things, and I go, “I can do that.” So, I call the administrator out at Robinson, and I said, “I saw the ad in the paper today and I think I could do that job. What is an activity director?” And she said, “You’re wasting my time if you don’t even know what an activity director is!” Knocked me down. So, the next day, the Lord showed me in the paper where there was a class for activity directors . . .

LAMBERSON: Oh, nice.

M. RICH: And I thought, “Hm. I’ll show her. I’ll just go, you know, in that class.” I was in the class three days until I was hired and worked uh twenty years.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

M. RICH: In nursing homes.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: So, that was . . . That was a real blessing and loved it. And the last four years uh . . . Bill’s health declined terribly and uh the last four years that I worked . . . Well, I really worked sixteen years on salary and then the last four years uh he worked with me. And we worked for Christian Mission Concerns in six different homes. No . . . No paperwork, no rules, no inspections. Nothing. I was totally free to do . . .

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And oh, I could tell you stories. Wonderful things. Wonderful things we did. So, that was . . . and . . . and uh of course, both of the girls had graduated and left home by then. So . . .

LAMBERSON: And what was . . . what was frightening and . . . about kind of when you came home? You mean like safety or like . . . ?

M. RICH: Well . . . well, with . . . with two . . . well, first of all, Bill had been drinking a lot, and I wasn’t sure that I was going to be able to stay.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Those . . . That’s between the two of us. But uh with two teenagers, we were renting a . . . a little house. We needed to build a house. We needed to settle down. I had no idea how to go about doing that. Uh, he didn’t have a job and he finally did go to work for uh . . . cable television was his first job. And then a friend of ours worked at the sheriff’s department and he went to work there. But in between times when you first arrive . . . oh, you’re so happy to be home and everybody is so happy to have you home. And then all of a sudden, like I said about getting my husband back, we weren’t the same.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Our families weren’t the same. I was being told . . . In fact, my sister-in-law still—she loves me dearly and I love her, but—she still tells me I’m different.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: We’re different. We’ve lived a totally . . . Nobody in my family or his family . . . My brother had been in the Air Force for a short time but nobody had ever retired from the service, were not military-minded, didn’t understand anything about us. And Bill had come from

Germany where uh his office was in the basement and everything was crude, you know; it's only men. And he tried to be nice but one day we were sitting at the dining room table . . . one thing comes to my mind . . . and uh his mother was very strict and very religious. And all the family around the dining room table and he's, "Pass the damn potatoes." And I thought she would fall out of her chair, you know, the way he spoke, the mannerisms, the way he acted. Uh we just were different, and the girls were, too.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Uh they never had trouble that I know of . . . Well, they pulled a few stinkeroos but they . . . We never really had trouble travelling around in the service because we were still connected. But when you retire, you're not connected to anything. These people . . . My . . . My sister and my sister-in-law are my age and they had never been out of Waco, Texas. And here, you know, I didn't have anything to talk to them about. I didn't really have anything in common with them. And still to this day, I don't feel like I completely fit in.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Because I am different and that's not a bad thing. It's just that sometimes I stand back and think, "Well, you know, I don't want to take part in that." Or, "Oh, I'm just different." And so, being an Army wife, being in the service for that long, you are different. Uh, I was here at home, and of course, everything settled down and everything was okay. But uh to uh . . . I didn't act the way they expected me to act. When I was young, I was very quiet and very sweet and very nice and na na na na na. Well, when I came home, I was tough.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And still am, you know. I wouldn't have made it if I hadn't been and they don't understand that even . . . even to this day. And we've been home, well, much longer than we were . . . you know, we've been home forty-something years, fifty years, and I still uh sometimes feel a little separated, you know. And I'm not around military people anymore. And uh I feel a little separated. And I guess I probably will. It's not a bad thing because I'm . . . I'm uh . . . I'm very . . . extrovert, you know, and very active, and . . . and uh that kind of thing. But uh . . . and I'm very loved, especially here. Sometimes too much. Sometimes to the point where I don't get any rest. But because I was an activity director, you know, I do a lot of things here. I do parties, and I do bible studies, and I do a prayer meeting uh once a week, and all kinds of things here, too. But um there's still just some little . . . some little hesitation sometimes.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: You know, and I still hear uh, "Well, Vietnam was a tragedy," you know. And my brother even . . . My brother Neil was two years older than me. I lost him last year. But we were in a camp with him one time and he said uh, "Well, all those soldiers ever do are drink and carouse around and . . . and cheat on their wives and blah blah blah." Talking about military people. And that's more or less the impression that I get from people that have never been around military people.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: Because that's true to some extent. Those guys are under so much stress and so much pressure, somebody shooting at them. I mean, that's not an excuse or it's not excusing that but I do understand. You know? And they don't. And I said to him, "Well, Neil, that's why your brother gave up his life in the service and that's why my husband stayed twenty years in the service to give you the freedom to say that." You know. And so, that's my answer. If I'm . . . And there are people here, because these are all like ninety—we have one lady that's a hundred and four—and their . . . their mindset is still a little bit biased about military people, you know. Uh, some of them have had family in the military and of course they understand. But um I . . . I, on . . . as a general thing, uh people who have never been out of Waco, who have never got an education, um have clustered around family and those kinds of things, don't understand us.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And I don't know that I understand them either, [laughs] you know. But . . . But we . . . Bill and I are . . . we . . . we have a good marriage. We've had a difficult marriage. It's been really hard uh through the times that . . . and I still don't really have my husband, I really don't. And now that he's sick, especially. He's . . . he's . . . and he is very sick. Very, very sick. In pain most of the time. And so, I don't have that anymore. But we have had a strong marriage. We both wanted . . . My daughter asked me, one time, "Mother, why did you stay with him when he was in service and it was so hard? Why did you stay?"

"That's because we . . . first, we love each other, and have since I was fourteen years old. Second, we love family. We want . . ." our family is very close. They come every Sunday. We have little twins, two-year-old. Cutest little things you ever saw. But we . . . We both love family and I think that's the strongest bond, you know. And . . . And even with this mental condition, we still do.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: And our family's very good to us. I feel so sorry for a lot of the people here that uh never see their family or they've just been put out here, don't ever have any contact or anything. We're so blessed.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: But uh Bill has never been very religious. Uh, I am. Have always been since I was ten-years-old. But being here I think has helped him in that way. Uh, he does a blessing at the table, which is something I dreamed of having, a Christian husband, you know, all those years. And uh he is a Christian now and he . . . He loves the Lord. And . . . And his witness here is very strong because um he has been through bad times. He has been shot at. He has wondered if he was going to live or not. And . . . And he appreciates the life that he has now and shares it. And he does the blessings at the table. One man told me uh the other day that uh his . . . that Bill's blessing at the table . . . I don't go for breakfast. He goes with the . . . and all the men sit together at breakfast, and he said his . . . his uh breakfast prayer had touched him and that he had never

been to church. And he came to my prayer meeting and so I said, “Well, Jack, do you have a Bible?” He said, “I don’t know anything about the Bible.” I said, “Do you have a Bible?” He said, “No, and if I did, I wouldn’t know what to do with it.” I said, “Well, you’re going to get a Bible.” Bill gave him a Bible that afternoon and talked to him.

So, Bill has a mission here now that feeds his soul that he never had before. And it’s pretty great, I think. We had one lady who was uh Catholic. And I have nothing against Catholics, except that it’s a lot different than Baptist. And of course, I do a disclaimer every time I do a bible study that I’m sorry if I come across as Baptist. That’s how I grew up. That’s all I know. And please forgive me and tell me if I’m wrong, you know, if that doesn’t suit you. Well, this one lady was German, and uh she . . . she too came to me and said, “I’ve never had a Bible. I’ve never seen a Bible.” So, we bought her a Bible, and she was saved in our bible study.

LAMBERSON: Aw.

M. RICH: Isn’t that great?

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: What more could you ask for at eighty-years-old? You know, here we are in this little place, you know. We had to give up our home. We couldn’t stay at home anymore. And uh sold our little house, and . . . and here we are. And I think that’s a pretty good ending for an Army family.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. For sure.

M. RICH: So . . .

LAMBERSON: Do you have any . . . One last question we like to ask everyone; do you have any advice for uh young men and women who have family members or spouses who are part of the military?

M. RICH: Uh . . . well, I think it would be hard for me to advise somebody now because the Army is not the way it was. It’s so different now. And I am so . . . as I said earlier, so happy that military wives and families now are supported financially. That’s a big thing. It’s really hard when a . . . when a mother has no support and she has to go to work and leave her children and her husband is overseas. That’s hard. And I would say contact every resource. And I was too shy to do that. I wouldn’t do . . . I’m independent. I wouldn’t do that. I didn’t . . . I didn’t ask. But I would say to them that there are resources out there recently that— Bill!

LAMBERSON: It’s okay.

M. RICH: [Speaking to dog] Tiger, go outside with pa. Go with pa.

B. RICH: [To dog] Come on, Tiger.

M. RICH: Go with pa.

B. RICH: Come on.

M. RICH: Um I would say the . . . The very first thing would be to find a church. Find a church family because that is family and . . . if they can. And to use every resource. Uh there are places that they can go on-post and off-post now. And . . . And I would use the resources, which I did not. I didn't know about them. I don't . . . in fact, I don't think they were in place then. I really don't. But . . . But uh I would say, too, um . . . I don't know how to say this in a nice way. I was probably too close to my girls. I . . . I just . . . they were my life, and we were so close. I would say that I have seen so many military families that were not. Hug your children. Love your children and realize that they are going through the same thing you are. My little Edith one time . . . she was about three-years-old, I guess, when Bill went away the first time. I believe. I don't remember.

Anyway, we were at the post office and you know they have all those big steps there. And uh Bill had been gone quite a while. And a soldier was walking up those steps and she broke from me and ran and just grabbed by the legs, "Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy." You know, those . . . Those little Army children are really having a hard time. And especially now with mom and daddy both in the service. See, we didn't have that back then. But be close to your children because when they get grown, you're going to be sorry. That's what I see here. A lot of these people were not. And so, they don't have that family contact, you know. But wherever you are, in whatever situation you're in, hold your children and give them a . . . a family. Give them something uh safe. Uh let them harbor uh your love and . . . and know that they're okay, you know. That would be, I guess . . . and uh use your money wisely. Uh my husband still laughs at me because he . . . he told somebody the other day, said, "We eat out and there's two french fries left, Mary's going to ask for a to-go bag."

LAMBERSON: Don't want to let it go to waste.

M. RICH: I learned!

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: You know, all those years, I never wasted anything. And that's something that I see, too, now from a few people that I know that are still in the service. That . . . young people don't think about that but, in the long run, you're going to need that. And so, I would say be frugal, you know, and . . . and uh watch your money. I would say enjoy what you're doing. Enjoy life. I uh . . . I guess the one thing now that holds me up . . . We have a lot of problems: Bill's health and a lot of other things. And we've had a lot of problems but I guess the one thing that's given me the stamina and the desire to make a good life is the joy of the Lord. I can be sad and sometimes I am, especially right now. I'm really going through some adjustments right now. And uh and I'm sad sometimes but I always have the joy of the Lord inside. And if they have that, they'll have enough strength to survive. So . . . preaching. Sorry.

LAMBERSON: That's okay. That's great. Any other concluding remarks that . . . that a good note to end on?

M. RICH: No, except that um I don't know about retirement now, how it is, but Bill and I are comfortable. We're not wealthy. We don't have a lot of money. It costs a lot of money to live here but uh at the . . . at the end of retirement, we don't have a lot of things they promised us. They promised us free . . . complete free medical care, which is one of the reasons we stayed in the service, because of Bill's back . . . because of his injury. Uh we don't have that now but we do have medical care. We do have to pay a little bit but oh my goodness, when I hear people talking about spending \$1,000 a week on medicine, we don't. Uh when I hear people saying that uh they're paying this enormous amount of rent, we don't. We have help. And Bill had a caregiver three days a week for about three years when he was so bad. He has been worse than he is now. And when he was at that point, before we moved here, we had help three times a week that the Army provided. And it is well worth retiring from the Army.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: It's hard. Hardest thing. But . . . But uh that's what we . . . That's our reward now. Uh we have a good income. We don't have to worry. Uh most of our worry about finances and things are not . . . so, that would probably be uh . . . I would encourage them . . . I have a niece that lives in Maryland, and she's just recently married a GI and uh he's in the Green Beret. And I've told her . . . She . . . She asked me questions all the time, and I said, "Well, honey, the one thing that I can tell you is that it has been worth it for us." It's worth it because, now, at our Age—he's eighty and I'm going to be seventy-nine Monday—and uh it . . . It's been worth it. And, too, I . . . this is going to sound terrible. I really love that I've had experiences that's made me strong. I really do. You know, uh like I said, some people look at me and say, "Oh, you're just different." Well, that's fine. I love that, I really do. And I would not have been if we hadn't stayed in.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

M. RICH: So . . . that would be, I guess, my final remarks.

LAMBERSON: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

M. RICH: Unless you have some more questions.

LAMBERSON: No.

M. RICH: Well, I talk a lot. Did I talk too much?

LAMBERSON: Not at all. This is wonderful.

M. RICH: Well, there's so many things. So many stories, so many wonderful things, you know.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

M. RICH: And then to be a deputy sheriff's wife. Again, so many stories.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

M. RICH: So many things, you know.

LAMBERSON: I'm sure.

M. RICH: And working in the nursing home, those people blessed us. Oh, my goodness. There was one old man . . . Bill . . . I was over in the dining room doing a bible study, and he'd be over here in this dining room with the men. And they'd be drinking Pepsi and eating donuts and, you know, talking men talk and all this stuff. And one of the men's son wanted to come and visit him from Wisconsin. And he said, "Well, I'll tell you one thing: you can come any time you want to but, on Wednesdays, I go see Bill Rich and eat."

LAMBERSON: That's great. Great story.

M. RICH: So, we . . . We can tell so many, you know, stories . . . nursing home stories. And we love it . . . loved it.

LAMBERSON: Well, that's good.

M. RICH: We've had a good life. We've had a very difficult life. We've had some times when I really didn't think that we would . . . we'd be together at this point but here we are.

LAMBERSON: Made it through.

M. RICH: Here we are. So . . .

LAMBERSON: Well, that's wonderful. Thank you so much.