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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Barbara Johns
Conducted by Richard B. Verrone, Ph.D.
January 12, 17, 2006
Transcribed by Mindy Moser**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am conducting an oral history interview
2 for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History Project. Today is January 12th, 2006. It's about 9:36am,
3 Central Daylight Time, and I am speaking from Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech
4 University inside the interview room within the Vietnam Archive and I am speaking today with
5 Barbara Ann Weathers Geoghegan Johns, and Barbara, you are in Annandale, Virginia, is that
6 correct?

7 Barbara Johns: That's correct.

8 RV: Okay. Barbara, before we begin the interview, I just wanted to ask you something that
9 we have discussed off the recording, that by doing this interview you realize that you are
10 consenting to donate the interview to the Archive and also that you are aware that this interview will
11 be made public, both on the internet as well as in the Archive for researchers and the public who
12 come here to the Archive. Do you agree with this and want to proceed with the interview?

13 BJ: Yes.

14 RV: Okay, very good. Well, I'd like to start with a little bit about your background. Can you
15 tell me, Barbara, when you were born and where you were born?

16 BJ: I was born along with my twin sister on March 21st, 1942 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

17 RV: What was your sister's name?

18 BJ: Betty. Elizabeth. Her name is Elizabeth and we call her Betty.

19 RV: And can you describe your childhood? Kind of tell me about your family and where
20 you grew up there in Indianapolis.

21 BJ: I actually didn't grow up in Indianapolis. My father was from Indiana and actually my
22 mother was from New York and my father worked for RCA at the time and was transferred to the

1 Camden, New Jersey plant in 1944 so we moved to New Jersey then. So from age two and a half
2 to twenty-two and a half, I lived in the same house in Haddon Heights, New Jersey.

3 RV: Where is that located exactly? Camden, is it in the southern part of New Jersey?

4 BJ: Yes, it is. It's about five miles east of Philadelphia, actually and not far from Cherry
5 Hill.

6 RV: Well, before we talk about growing up, tell me about your mother and father.

7 BJ: (Laughs) That's interesting. My father was from Indiana, as I said. He went to Indiana
8 University and then finished at Purdue in 1928 as an audio engineer and he worked for RCA
9 through 1946 I think it was and then left to form his own company called Weathers Industries. He
10 was responsible for developing the stereophonic equipment and high-fidelity equipment.

11 RV: Wow. So he was kind of on the ground level of developing this technology?

12 BJ: Yes, he was.

13 RV: Very interesting. What about his family? What was his ancestry?

14 BJ: Well, they go as far back to Nicholas Meriwether back to 1620-something, so my
15 grandmother's genealogy is the only genealogy that I have that goes back that far.

16 RV: Are they from Northern Europe or England?

17 BJ: I think England. Weathers, I believe is an English name or of that area.

18 RV: Tell me about your dad. What was he like?

19 BJ: Well, he was very different. He had a brother, an older brother, but my dad was very
20 much into scientific things. In fact, I just found a textbook yesterday, *Principles of Engineering in*
21 *1914*. So I've been going through things and I just hate to throw things like that out. But he was a
22 very interesting person and I loved talking with him a great deal.

23 RV: What about your mother?

24 BJ: I would say about my father that he was a son of very fundamentalist religious parents
25 who he disagreed with quite a bit and he was a bit of a renegade in that regard. Now my mother
26 was born and raised in New York City. She was about as far from my father – and not just
27 geographically but in other ways, too, because she was the daughter of Irish immigrants, Roman
28 Catholic, and one of eight children, six that lived to adulthood. And my parents actually met in New
29 York City when my father was there on business.

30 RV: What kind of person was your mom?

1 BJ: She was very quiet, rather reclusive, and became more so in her later years and when
2 we moved to Haddon Heights, New Jersey, which is a small town, neither of my parents had been
3 raised in an actual town and never really adapted to living in a small town, my mother having grown
4 up in a city. So she was somewhat reclusive. She was rather opinionated, too. A very bright
5 woman.

6 RV: And did she go to school or was she self-educated?

7 BJ: Well, she went through high school and then she took some college courses at Hunter
8 College, I think she said, in New York. She didn't graduate from college but she was a great
9 reader and very knowledgeable.

10 RV: Well, tell me about the household growing up in Camden.

11 BJ: Haddon Heights.

12 RV: I'm sorry?

13 BJ: Haddon Heights.

14 RV: Right, Haddon Heights. Do you spell that H-A-D-D-E-N?

15 BJ: O-N.

16 RV: O-N. Okay. Tell me about growing up there in Haddon Heights?

17 BJ: Well, it was rather an idyllic existence growing up. Well, the fifties really were
18 wonderful times, I think, for a lot of people, although when I look back and I think of the world
19 stage, that wasn't too long after World War II and people were worried at the bomb (laughs). I
20 remember there were civil defense shelters in the town and if anything happened we were to go
21 there. We used to have air raid drills just as we had fire drills and we'd run to the basement of the
22 school and put our head under our arms and that sort of thing. But I was never really – it never
23 scared me. I guess because nothing ever happened (laughs) and it was almost like crying wolf in a
24 way and in a way we'd look forward to these times because it was a break in the school day.

25 RV: So the Cold War played a role for you there in your younger years.

26 BJ: Yes.

27 RV: Do you remember World War II at all? I mean, I know you were very, very young, but
28 do you remember anything about that or immediately post-war?

29 BJ: Very little because I was very young but I do remember the rationing. Well, a lot of it I
30 remember more from my parents talking about it later. And butter. I remember butter. We had to

1 put the yellow color in the butter, I think. It used to be white sticks. I think that was butter. Maybe
2 it was margarine. But just little things like that.

3 RV: Right. Did you have any family members that you know of that served in World War
4 II?

5 BJ: Well, my uncle, my mother's brother was in the Navy but he didn't actually – he wasn't
6 in the war itself.

7 RV: You mentioned the 1950s. You enter the 1950s at age eight and nine and you go
8 through this, I imagine in to junior high and high school. Tell me what you remember about the
9 United States in the 1950s.

10 BJ: Oh my.

11 RV: You said it was kind of an idyllic time for you growing up. What made it so? What
12 was it that kind of characterized that time period for you?

13 BJ: Well, we didn't have many worries. We were fortunate that although we certainly
14 weren't wealthy, we didn't want for anything and we had a lot of friends. We used to go to the
15 movies. We didn't have the fears that people developed later on. We'd go to the movie on
16 Saturday afternoons. My parents were strict about where we went and that kind of thing but we
17 didn't have the fear that people seem to have or did have later.

18 RV: Do you remember anything about President Eisenhower?

19 BJ: He seemed to be president forever (laughs).

20 RV: Eight years and it was really a lot.

21 BJ: Those were very important years as I was growing up. I remember thinking that
22 Abraham Lincoln may have preceded him (laughs). But I can remember the 'I Like Ike' buttons.
23 That was interesting.

24 RV: Were your parents political?

25 BJ: Yes, they were staunch Republicans.

26 RV: Really?

27 BJ: Yes.

28 RV: Do you remember having conversations like this in the house or how much were you
29 aware of their political activity and their political awareness?

30 BJ: Well, they did talk about it and I remember they used to watch *Meet the Press* every
31 Sunday morning and they did talk about it a lot but I don't know how much of it I really absorbed.

1 But I was certainly aware that they were very strong Republicans and very conservative, my father
2 even more than my mother. Barry Goldwater's *Conscience of the Conservative* was his Bible, I
3 think (laughs).

4 RV: That's very interesting. And so they must have liked Ike.

5 BJ: Oh they did, yes.

6 RV: Tell me, you had Elizabeth as your twin sister. Were there any other brothers and
7 sisters?

8 BJ: I have an older brother that's still living. He's four and a half years older.

9 RV: And what's his name?

10 BJ: Scott. Paul Scott Weathers.

11 RV: Okay. And did the three of you get along well? What were those relationships like?

12 BJ: Oh, I think we did get along well but we had the normal fights that siblings do.

13 Needless to say, he terrorized us (laughs) but I don't remember that.

14 RV: Barbara, tell me about your school and education. Did you like school and what were
15 your favorite subjects?

16 BJ: I did like school and having a twin sister made it easier in a way. I often think of how
17 my sister, whenever I was absent from school, I could always depend on my sister to teach me
18 what I had missed in school. In fact, she became a teacher. She just retired after forty years of
19 teaching. (laughs) I used to say she went into teaching because she used to teach me when I
20 would miss school for illness or if I didn't understand something at school I would say, 'I can always
21 ask Betty. She'll understand.'

22 RV: Were you a particularly good student or average?

23 BJ: I was a good student and so was my sister. And my parents put a lot of emphasis on
24 school and they wouldn't let us be involved in activities on school nights. I remember my mother
25 used to say she didn't want us going to meetings or anything on school nights because it was too
26 important to do homework.

27 RV: You said that your mother was a reader. Did you all then kind of follow that suit and
28 read when you were young?

29 BJ: My sister did more than I did and I used to love mystery books. I used to read Nancy
30 Drew mysteries and I enjoyed that kind of reading more than more serious reading at that time.

1 RV: What kind of subjects were you interested in? What were your best subjects in
2 school?

3 BJ: Probably history and English. I was not particularly good at math other than arithmetic.
4 I did well in arithmetic, as we called it then, until we got to more difficult subjects like algebra,
5 geometry, and trigonometry. I depended on my sister to teach me those things. She inherited my
6 father's mathematical ability more than I did.

7 RV: Were you into sports or any kind of other extracurricular activities?

8 BJ: I was a member of the Girl Scouts. I was telling my granddaughter just last night how
9 much I enjoyed the Girl Scouts. She was selling me Girl Scout cookies.

10 RV: What was it about the Girl Scouts that you enjoyed so much?

11 BJ: I guess the meetings and the friendships that I made there. We'd go camping now and
12 then, once or twice a year. I enjoyed that a lot.

13 RV: Tell me about your high school years. What do you remember about that?

14 BJ: They were fun. I look back on it with a lot of warmth and fondness and they were not
15 difficult years but I guess the normal teenage years. But nothing difficult.

16 RV: Did you parents push you all to go to college? Was this something that was expected
17 of you?

18 BJ: It was. I think from the day we were born we were expected to go to college.

19 RV: Did you know this in high school, that, 'This is the way I'm going to go. I have to go,'?

20 BJ: I think I always knew that and we always talked about going on to college after high
21 school.

22 RV: Where did you want to go?

23 BJ: Well, my sister and I wanted to go to the same school just because it would be easier
24 and we ended up going to Beaver College which is outside of Philadelphia and for the last several
25 years it's been Arcadia University in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

26 RV: Were you there all four years?

27 BJ: Yes.

28 RV: And tell me about that experience. Good or bad?

29 BJ: No, it was very good. From '60-'64. In fact, I go to all the reunions. Every five years
30 there's a reunion and I always enjoy going back and reliving the college days. It's amazing how it
31 puts you right back there. All those years get swept away and you're back to where you were then.

1 RV: Academically, how did you do there?

2 BJ: I did well. I didn't do extremely well but I did well. I graduated in June of '64.

3 RV: What else did you do there, obviously besides taking classes? What was your life like

4 there?

5 BJ: I have to think about that. I studied a great deal. I know I had to study a lot. I had a

6 lot of friends. There weren't too many groups that I was involved with. I was in a few things in

7 college but I wasn't a leader. It was more that I would join different groups but not to be a leader

8 but to be part of something.

9 RV: You had a lot of friends. Were you kind of socially oriented? Were you not shy?

10 BJ: Yes, I was probably more socially oriented than my sister was, although she had a lot

11 of friends, too.

12 RV: And she went to Arcadia, as well?

13 BJ: Yes.

14 RV: Did you all get along as closely as twins usually do?

15 BJ: We did. We're really quite different and maybe that's one reason why we get along

16 better because we complement each other. My sister was more studious than I was, always. She

17 still is, and also a lot more energetic.

18 RV: Okay. Well, that's interesting because as you know, I interviewed you in Washington,

19 D.C., a video interview, and you seemed to be very kind of vivacious and have that very positive

20 energy about you. Was this kind of in her shadow, you didn't appear or feel like you were quite –

21 that you had that more energy like she did?

22 BJ: No, and that's an interesting question because I don't think either one of us ever felt

23 that we were in the shadow of the other one. And perhaps that's because we were different. We

24 had different friends and different interests and so we were not competing with each other.

25 Interesting though, my mother made us dress alike through high school.

26 RV: Really? Why?

27 BJ: Just because she was so proud she had twins (laughs).

28 RV: (laughs) It continued what? For eighteen years, then.

29 BJ: We would get out of the house dressed differently as often as we could but my mother

30 actually bought our clothes for us. We didn't really have any choice in what we wore. It's much

31 different today.

1 RV: Before we move into other subjects in college and beyond, what do you remember
2 growing up close to such huge urban areas like Philadelphia and really not that far from New York
3 City where your mother was born? Did you all go into the cities and do you remember that as part
4 of your life?

5 BJ: I do. In my young years I remember going to Philadelphia with my mother on the bus.
6 All the big department stores were in Philadelphia. It was not until much later that the malls
7 developed. I remember Cherry Hill Mall and that was one of the first shopping malls. Early on we
8 would go to Philadelphia.

9 RV: What was Philadelphia like? What do you remember?

10 BJ: I remember how big it was and how many people there were. I remember the
11 department stores were very tall buildings and you would take elevators. It's much different than
12 the way they look today. John Wanamaker's and Strawbridge's and Gimbel's and Lit Brothers. It's
13 funny; these names are coming back to me. And Sears and Penney's were there. That's what we
14 went to the cities for, really. It was more for shopping once in a while.

15 RV: Did your father accompany you or was it more you and your sister?

16 BJ: Really it was my mother. In our younger years we went with our mother on the bus.
17 My mother did not drive a car. I think that's because she grew up in a city and people didn't need
18 cars as much.

19 RV: Right. So you don't remember her driving a car much at all.

20 BJ: No, she never did. She never did drive a car. Neither did her sisters. They all grew
21 up in the city. They all took public transportation.

22 RV: Well, switching gears a bit, you described your parents and I guess maybe your family
23 as Republican and conservative in nature, growing up in that household. What happened with the
24 election of John Kennedy? What do you remember about him as a president and I guess the
25 reverberations within your household?

26 BJ: Well, I remember that my parents were not in favor of John Kennedy. What I
27 remember most about that was that I was in college when he was assassinated. That would have
28 been my senior year.

29 RV: The fall of your senior year.

30 BJ: That was devastating. That was one of those situations where you will always
31 remember where you were. And I certainly do.

1 RV: Tell me about that. Where were you and how did you react?

2 BJ: Well, I remember that I had a meeting with the dean of the college and I was in her
3 office when somebody came in and said that the president had been shot. It gives me goose
4 bumps just to think about that. And so we stopped the meeting and went out in the hall. It was in
5 this big classroom building and people were running up and down the halls and then you'd pass
6 classrooms where people were still conducting classes and didn't know that it had happened. It
7 was just a big uproar. It was a Friday afternoon and I remember that I was meeting Jack. Jack
8 was coming to the school to pick me up. And I also remember that that was the period of time
9 where I was going through instruction in the Catholic church and we were going to have a meeting
10 that day with the priest and he cancelled it. I remember that Sunday, coming back to the dorm
11 from church and people were all crowded around the television because Oswald had just been
12 shot – Lee Harvey Oswald.

13 RV: Right.

14 BJ: That was just a very memorable weekend. And then I remember, too, when Kennedy
15 was buried and Jackie Kennedy really held the country together, I think, with her composure. And I
16 remember Jack saying, 'If anything ever happens to me, I want you to be just like her.'

17 RV: Wow. What did you think when he said that? Did he say that right there during this
18 time period?

19 BJ: Yes, he did. Yes, he did. While we were watching her on television. It must have
20 been during the funeral or soon thereafter, just the way she was and the way she held herself
21 together really held the country together. And her composure was just amazing. And he did say it
22 then.

23 RV: How did you feel about that when he said that?

24 BJ: I remember being shocked and saying to him, 'Well, nothing's going to happen to you.'
25 That I remember quite vividly.

26 RV: That actually presents a nice opportunity to start talking about Jack. Tell me when you
27 first met him and what that was like.

28 BJ: Let me see. It was in my junior year. Jack called me on the telephone and I didn't
29 know him. I think I told you this.

30 RV: Yes, you did. So he called you out of the blue?

1 BJ: Yes, he called me out of the blue and it was because I had been at what was then
2 Pennsylvania Military College I think two years before that. I had gone there for a mixer. They
3 used to call them mixers when the girls' schools would be invited to boys' schools just for a social
4 evening. And I remember meeting a couple of PMC cadets and they remembered me. I never
5 dated any of them but a couple of them remembered me and told Jack about me and dared him to
6 call me (laughs).

7 RV: This is quite a time period lapse here.

8 BJ: Yes, it was quite – I remember that it was. I think it was two years between the time
9 that I had been at this mixer and when Jack called me. I'm really amazed that anybody would
10 remember after two years.

11 RV: Tell me about the mixer. What do you remember about him specifically?

12 BJ: Well, I hadn't met him at the mixer.

13 RV: So someone just pointed you out?

14 BJ: Yeah, they remembered me and told Jack about me and dared him to call me (laughs).

15 RV: So two years later he got the nerve up to call you, I guess. What did he say on the
16 phone that first time?

17 BJ: Let's see. I remember being in the phone booth and I was just shocked. And I think I
18 remember telling you, when he said 'Jack Geoghegan,' I had graduated with a Jack Gagen who I
19 didn't know very well. I thought it was him and I thought, 'Why is he calling me?' and then I
20 discovered it wasn't that Jack Gagen. But he was very, very polite and very gentlemanly and
21 apologetic for calling me out of the blue like that because he was a very gentlemanly person,
22 although it wouldn't seem that way to call somebody out of the blue. We talked for a little while. I
23 can't remember what we talked about but I remember that I liked him over the phone and I thought,
24 'Gee, I'd like to get to know him better but I don't want him to think I would just go out with anybody
25 who would call me on the phone like that.' But he said he would call again and he did. And he
26 called and asked me to go to a dress parade at PMC on a Sunday afternoon. I thought, 'Well,
27 that's harmless enough. It's in the middle of the day in daylight, I can sit there in the stands and
28 that's it.' It sounded good to me. So I accepted and he came and picked me up in his uniform. I
29 remember noticing the big strips on the side of his uniform and we went to PMC. We were at the –
30 he put me in the stands next to some of his friends and I was talking with some of the girls and I
31 remember one of them saying, 'Well, there's your fella out there leading the parade.' They all

1 looked alike. The cadets are all dressed alike and marching alike and that was when I found out
2 that he was the brigade commander, the leader and brigade commander of the corps – the corps
3 commander.

4 RV: I take it that was a good thing.

5 BJ: Yes, it was. He was the top cadet. He was also the president of his class.

6 RV: Was that like Jack to be the leader?

7 BJ: Yes. Very much a leader.

8 RV: So the first time you actually went on a date with him you saw this, that he was a
9 leader and I take it, a popular leader if he's president of his class.

10 BJ: Yes, he was.

11 RV: After this date, did you all get together after this parade, the march, or was that it?

12 BJ: I think that we probably stopped to get something to eat on the way back to the school.
13 I don't remember.

14 RV: What were your impressions of him?

15 BJ: Well, I remember he was very handsome and very, very gentlemanly and very, very
16 polite and made sure that I was taken care of while he was out there on the field. He was just a
17 very, very nice person. I liked him very, very much when I met him and wanted to continue dating
18 him.

19 RV: That was my next question. How soon did you all go out again?

20 BJ: Well, probably the next week (laughs). And then we did start going out regularly.

21 RV: And tell me about his curriculum and what he wanted to do after graduation and his
22 plans. And I take it that you all kept dating through your graduation and his. And tell me about the
23 plans that you all had. First, individually for him and then what you brought in to that and how you
24 all decided what to do.

25 BJ: Well, let's see. Actually during my senior year he was at the University of
26 Pennsylvania. He graduated in '63 from PMC. Then he wanted to get his Master's degree in
27 international relations and he went to the University of Pennsylvania and so he was still close by.
28 Otherwise he would have gone right into the Army. He got a two-year deferment in order to get his
29 Master's degree. His long-range plan was hopefully someday to become an ambassador and I
30 think he would have been a very good one. He was very interested in international relations. So

1 he did get his Master's degree. I graduated from college in '64 and we married a week later. We
2 must have met in my junior year, not my senior year.

3 RV: So you all I guess had been dating – go ahead.

4 BJ: No, I should have thought about this (laughs). I thought I had it firmly implanted in my
5 memory. I think we met in October of '62 and then my senior year was the next year. It must have
6 been my junior year that we met.

7 RV: That's what you had said previously.

8 BJ: Oh, I did?

9 RV: Yes. So tell me what your plans were. You're married right after you graduate.

10 BJ: Yes. Because he had a two-year deferment, he knew that he would eventually have to
11 go into the Army to serve two years. At that point when we married, he wanted to look for
12 opportunities to use the year he had – no, he had a two-year deferment. His first year, he got his
13 Master's. He did all his coursework for his Master's and then I graduated from college and we
14 married we had a year left. So he wanted to use that year to help somebody else, is the way he
15 put it. And so he started to look for opportunities to go to a third world country and he was
16 researching various organizations and ultimately found the Catholic Relief Services. And we went
17 with the Catholic Relief Services to Tanzania.

18 RV: Wow. That's quite a change from Pennsylvania.

19 BJ: Oh yes. It truly was, much more than I anticipated. I was looking upon it as a great big
20 adventure, which it was, but when we got to Tanzania, we went through Kenya and we ended up in
21 Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. That's where we spent the next ten months.

22 RV: What did you all do there?

23 BJ: Well, he was in charge of the school lunch program that fed a hundred and twenty
24 thousand children a day and after a month or so, I thought, 'I'd like to find something to do myself,'
25 so I walked to the nearby elementary school and they were very happy to see me and they showed
26 me a typewriter sitting there and said, 'There isn't anybody here to use it. Would you be willing to
27 be our secretary?' I was very happy to be their secretary and I also did some substitute teaching
28 while I was there. It was a Catholic school. So Jack, his office was in Dar es Salaam. We lived on
29 the outskirts of the city but we did travel around the country a lot, which I was able to do with him. I
30 didn't have to be at the school all the time. Whenever I could be, I'd be there. But we traveled
31 around Tanzania a great deal.

1 RV: What was Dar es Salaam?

2 BJ: Actually, there were more Asian Indians there than there were anybody else. It was a
3 very largely Asian population at that time, which, later on that wasn't true. But it was then.
4 President Julius Nyerere was president of Tanzania and I taught his children in school when I did
5 some teaching there. A couple of them were in my classes, which was interesting. He was a very
6 good president. He was president for life.

7 RV: Right. I assume you met him.

8 BJ: Briefly, yes.

9 RV: Well, I wanted to ask you about Jack's activities there. You've described that you
10 were the secretary there off and on. He was in charge of the food program. What were his
11 activities and how long during the day – what kind of program was this?

12 BJ: Well, it was a program – they were distributing United States' surplus food to the
13 schools throughout Tanzania and his job was to make sure that the supplies were getting to the
14 schools the way they were supposed to, to ensure that they got there. That's why we'd go around
15 the country. He would meet with the people who were running the schools to make sure that food
16 was getting there as it was supposed to.

17 RV: Why was he there and why did he bring you there? What was the impetus? You said
18 that he wanted to do something for someone else. What was it about him that pushed him over to
19 Africa? I mean, this is very unusual for someone to do. I mean that not in any kind of negative
20 way but it's not your common story that you hear.

21 BJ: No, that's why it's so unusual. He's a very unusual person. He was a very, very good
22 person. He was always doing for other people and it just seemed to be the focus of his life, to
23 devote his life to helping others. Even in college, when he was in PMC, when he learned one time
24 that one of the cadets couldn't afford tuition for the next semester, so Jack formed a committee and
25 they went around throughout the night and collected enough money from the whole corps of cadets
26 to pay this one person's tuition.

27 RV: Wow.

28 BJ: But he would do things like that. He was just amazing.

29 RV: How did you all get along there in Africa?

30 BJ: As a couple?

31 RV: Uh-huh. Was it difficult?

1 BJ: Of course that was our first – and only – year of marriage. I mean, we were married a
2 year and a half when he died. We did. We used to feel – when I got over my terrible
3 homesickness which was unlike anything I had ever experienced before – when I got over that, we
4 used to look upon it then as a great adventure that the two of us were away from family and friends
5 that we had known all our lives, in a whole other part of the world, just the two of us. And it was a
6 wonderful feeling to be part of this big adventure and at the same time to feel that we were doing
7 something for someone else, one in particular – Jack, in his job – and traveling around the country
8 was incredible because we saw parts of the country – the tarmac roads and dirt roads and places
9 where there was not much electricity. We weren't used to that certainly.

10 RV: Well, tell me a little bit about Jack's family and your relationship with them.

11 BJ: Oh, I was very close to his parents. Jack was an only child and he had a cousin who
12 was two years older than he was and he was more like a brother. They lived in New York. They
13 lived in Pelham, New York, and they were a very close family. Jack and his family were very close.
14 I adored his parents. I was very, very close to them always, for the rest of their lives.

15 RV: What was it about them that made this such a good relationship?

16 BJ: Well, they were very, very loving and very non-judgmental and just very easy to get
17 along with. My mother-in-law and I used to sit and talk for hours. She was just an incredible
18 person, a wonderful person.

19 RV: After you all come back from Africa, he had to go into the military, obviously. Tell me
20 about that transition and what happened.

21 BJ: That was very difficult. Well, we came back knowing we had to go and he had to go
22 into the military. And that was just the beginning of Vietnam.

23 RV: Right. This is 1965?

24 BJ: Yes.

25 RV: Okay.

26 BJ: Yes, we came back in April of '65 and then we visited with our families. We had about
27 three weeks before we had to go to Ft. Benning. By that time I was pregnant and Cammie was
28 born in June of '65, June 8th, after we got to Ft. Benning. But we had a very nice meeting with our
29 families and they were so happy that we got back from Africa (laughs). They were worried sick the
30 entire time we were away. And at that time there were a lot of uprisings in the Congo and a lot of
31 things going on in Africa that were worrisome. So they were happy we were back but then at that

1 point we didn't know Jack was going to Vietnam. After visiting with our families we went to Ft.
2 Benning in May of '65. Actually, I was quite ill. I ended up in the hospital for six weeks.

3 RV: What happened?

4 BJ: I had severe toxemia: pre-eclampsia and I was very, very ill. In fact I even had the last
5 rites of the church.

6 RV: Really?

7 BJ: Uh-huh. They kept me in the hospital because I had extremely high blood pressure
8 and they were waiting until Cammie was far enough along that she would survive. I was only
9 seven months or seven and a half months pregnant when she was born. For the last month, I was
10 in the hospital. She was only four pounds when she was born.

11 RV: That must have been an extremely worrisome and stressful time for everyone.

12 BJ: It was. It was.

13 RV: Where were you in the hospital? Was in down in Georgia?

14 BJ: In Georgia. Not at Ft. Benning because they didn't have room at the military hospital
15 so I had to go to the hospital in the town – St. Francis.

16 RV: How long did it take you to recover?

17 BJ: Probably a month.

18 RV: Wow.

19 BJ: And after she was born, I'm still in the hospital for another two weeks and then came
20 home and she had to stay in the hospital until she was a month old. Cammie, I used to say she
21 was granted her independence on the Fourth of July. It was day she came home from the hospital.

22 RV: How did Jack react to having a child?

23 BJ: Oh, he was just (laughs) he was ecstatic. It was as if he was the only person in the
24 world (laughs). And even early on, she looked like him. She had his features.

25 RV: So when you get home and everybody is home, what was life like? When did you find
26 out Jack would most likely be going overseas, as he was going through his training there at Ft.
27 Benning?

28 BJ: Yes, because he went there for the infantry officers' basic course in June of '65 and it
29 was after that – I think it was well into July before he knew for certain that he was going to Vietnam,
30 that he was going to be assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division.

31 RV: So he knew right away or once he finished the training?

1 BJ: I don't think he knew then. I think it was within a couple of weeks after that when he
2 was assigned, but I'm not positive on that, I mean, the exact timing and all that.

3 RV: Right. Tell me what you knew, Barbara, about what was happening in Southeast Asia,
4 and I guess Jack as well. How much did you all keep up with it and what were your thoughts about
5 it?

6 BJ: Actually, I didn't keep up with it a lot. I remember my senior year of college, I had a
7 course in Emergent Nations, that was the name of it, and Vietnam was brought into it and that was
8 the only time I had ever heard of Vietnam. But at least I had heard of it through that course and
9 that's about where we were in July of '65, just knowing it existed. Well, actually, it was probably
10 more than that because we had sent some troops over there and there was a lot of concern over it.
11 But we didn't have a great deal of knowledge about it at the time. We were still more interested in
12 Africa.

13 RV: Right. Was this the time period when Jack met General Moore?

14 BJ: Yes.

15 RV: When did he meet him?

16 BJ: When he was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division then he was further assigned to the
17 7th Cavalry Regiment under Colonel Moore and I guess he met him in July of '65. I remember that
18 we were – and I went to a luncheon, I guess it was, for the battalion wives, and that's when I met
19 Julie Moore.

20 RV: Tell me about Julie Moore. What kind of person was she?

21 BJ: Oh she was wonderful. She was so charming. She would put you at ease
22 immediately. I used to be fearful of what she would be like and it didn't take me half a second to
23 know I had nothing to worry about. She was just a wonderful, warm, very gracious and lovely
24 person and I was very, very fond of her.

25 RV: What were your impressions of Colonel Moore?

26 BJ: At that point I hadn't met him. If I had met him, it was very brief. But he also was very
27 friendly and gracious and warm and easy to talk to, although I didn't talk much with him at that
28 point so I can't say that I saw him very much. And Jack and I went back to Connecticut when we
29 knew that he was going to Vietnam. We made a quick trip to Connecticut and also visited my
30 parents in that time. That was very, very difficult.

31 RV: Tell me about that experience.

1 BJ: Well that was when we were with his parents and they were just devastated that he
2 had to go to Vietnam. I remember my mother-in-law saying when we got back from Africa in April,
3 she said, 'I thought we would never see you again.' I remember her saying that. And then only a
4 matter of a few months later, Jack was going to Vietnam and that was just horrible for her and
5 terrible for his father. And my mother-in-law was a very strong person, I think. She had to be
6 strong. Jack's father enabled her to be the stronger one of the two and I'll always remember Jack's
7 father looking out the dining room window, just shaking his head and saying, 'I'll never see him
8 again.' It was just – I think they were both convinced that he wouldn't survive the war. And I did
9 not feel that way. I was sure that he would be fine and I couldn't convince them of that. And
10 maybe it's because they were older. It's interesting, because I'm the same age now as they were
11 then and when I think about that and I realize what a different perspective you have on life as you
12 go through life and I can understand how they felt the way they did.

13 RV: Why did his father – why was he convinced that he would not see his son again?

14 BJ: I guess because he was going into a war zone and he knew – it's interesting, he knew
15 what a thoroughly giving person Jack was and he knew he could give his life when maybe it wasn't
16 necessary, in order to help somebody else. I think he knew he was capable of doing that. Of
17 course, that's what happened.

18 RV: Yes. What did Jack say to his parents? How did he break this news and what was
19 the discussion like?

20 BJ: Well, he was also convinced that he would live through the war and that he would
21 come back and after he would come back he would still have another year in the service and then
22 we would go back to maybe the Catholic Relief Services and return to Africa or some other place in
23 the world. That was what our long-range thinking was at the time. But he didn't ever think that he
24 would die in the war. The only even slight hint was when the night he left and he said to me, 'If
25 anything happens to me – nothing's going to happen to me – but if it does, I want you to marry
26 again. Cammie needs a father.'

27 RV: Wow. So this was the night he –

28 BJ: The night he left.

29 RV: How did you feel about him going into the war? You said that you thought he would
30 survive but what other thoughts and feelings did you have?

1 BJ: Well, I did have fear but there wasn't a lot of hostility. I don't mean hostilities; I mean
2 there weren't many battles going on at that time. In fact, when Jack went to Vietnam, there were
3 fewer than a thousand people that had been killed in Vietnam. And so the Battle of the Ia Drang
4 was the first huge battle of the war. But there didn't seem to be in his letters, which I wish I still
5 had, but I don't, he didn't express any fears. He didn't really express thoughts too many times
6 about having to go into battle, because at that point they weren't going into battle until right before
7 they did. In his last letter to me, he said he had a chance to go on R&R but he said, 'My men are
8 going into battle and I must be with them. I cannot and will not leave them now.' That's what he
9 said.

10 RV: And I guess that was typical of his character.

11 BJ: Uh-huh. Very much so. He cared very much about his men – very, very much. He
12 used to talk about how – I remember when several members of the battalion were going home and
13 he said he was so glad that he was able to see them go home safely and that he intended to bring
14 his whole battalion home safely. Now, there was one member of the battalion who had drowned
15 and he was very, very upset about that.

16 RV: He drowned in Vietnam?

17 BJ: Yes, in Vietnam. I guess it was an accident. I've forgotten now exactly what the
18 circumstances were but it wasn't part of the battle. I guess maybe on maneuvers or something, he
19 drowned. And Jack was very upset about that. He was able to get past that and continue on but
20 he was very, very concerned about his men.

21 RV: He was first lieutenant in charge of –

22 BJ: He was the second lieutenant.

23 RV: He was the second lieutenant right when he went there.

24 BJ: Right. Well, he was still a second lieutenant only a few months later.

25 RV: Yes.

26 BJ: I forgot what I was going to say there.

27 RV: About the care for his unit and for his men? I mean, we're going to talk about this
28 later, but it's portrayed in the movie, *We Were Soldiers*, as just that, what you said, that he was a
29 leader, that he was responsible, he was accountable in that he did care deeply about the people he
30 led and he obviously talked to you about his. You recognized this.

31 BJ: Yes, I did.

1 RV: What did he say about General Moore and kind of the leadership quality that he
2 recognized or saw in him and of course Colonel Moore at the time? What do you remember him
3 saying about his training there before they went over?

4 BJ: Well, he liked General Moore – Colonel Moore then – very, very much and he was very
5 proud to be part of the battalion and he was very, very happy to be under Colonel Moore and to be
6 in his battalion. He looked up to him as a great leader and somebody to emulate and to be like.
7 So he was very fond of General Moore – Colonel Moore then.

8 RV: Barbara, before we talk about events in Vietnam, why don't we take a break for a
9 moment?

10 BJ: All right.

Interview with Barbara Johns
Session 2 of 2
January 17, 2006

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral history interview
2 with Barbara Ann Weathers Geoghegan Johns. Today is January 17th, 2006 and it's a little after
3 nine o'clock am, Central Daylight Time. And Barbara is again in Annandale, Virginia, and I am in
4 Lubbock, Texas. Barbara, we left off right before Jack departed for Vietnam and I wanted to ask
5 you a couple things about background, of the state of the United States, and where our country
6 was and why we had men like your husband at that time going to Vietnam. Tell me about your
7 feelings about international relations and international events and how that affected the United
8 States, especially in the 1950s.

9 Barbara Johns: Well, during the '50s, what was always lurking in the background of
10 people's minds was the threat and fear of Communism. It was just always there, lurking in the
11 background although the '50s were idyllic times, as I think I've said before, for me and for most of
12 my friends. It was something they talked about in school and it was just there always.

13 RV: Was it a fear that you all felt or was it just an awareness?

14 BJ: I think for me it was an awareness, not really a fear.

15 RV: What about your classmates?

16 BJ: I would say it was the same for them.

17 RV: Okay. President Eisenhower, you made it very clear that after World War II, he's the
18 hero general of World War II and now he's president and he's there all through the 1950s and he's
19 very staunch on how we are going to stand before the threat to the Soviet Union. Part of that was
20 America's entry into hot wars around the country. With what happened in Southeast Asia, Jack
21 was one of the first ones to go over there in 1965. Did he talk about this kind of global threat?
22 Was that part of his thinking and part of his awareness?

23 BJ: Yes, it was, very much so. It was the threat of Communism and in Vietnam was a
24 nation that people feared would fall to Communism. One of the main reasons for going there was
25 to fight that threat and he always had that fear and he felt as he went to Africa for a reason – he felt
26 called to go to Africa in a way – and he felt the same call when he went to Vietnam, in a different
27 way. I mean, completely opposite ways but he felt that he was doing his part to fight this threat.

1 RV: Did he speak specifically about kind of stopping Communism or was it more, 'I'm
2 going to serve my country and do what my president asks me to do'?

3 BJ: Well, it was both, I would say. Really, it was a combination of both.

4 RV: Okay. Is that something you all talked about pretty openly in the household or was it –
5 some people describe their families around the table talking about international relations or what's
6 going on politically, economically in the United States. Was this something that was part of yours
7 and Jack's conversations?

8 BJ: Not a great deal, no. Of course most of the time we were together in our marriage was
9 in Africa so that was – of course it came into conversation there at times.

10 RV: Did Jack's personality, of kind of an empathetic kind of person who could identify with
11 others, who not only could sympathize with others but put himself into their shoes and feel what
12 was going on – obviously this is one of the big reasons, as you've said, that you went to Africa –
13 did he feel that way about the Vietnamese people? Did he ever mention that?

14 BJ: He liked the Vietnamese people. He talked about going back there when the war was
15 over. He said it was a beautiful country and he did like the people very much, the people that he
16 met.

17 RV: Right. Tell me about the last few days before he left and what that time was like. You
18 know he's leaving, he knows he's leaving. He's going over with kind of a newly trained unit, a new
19 concept in air cavalry. What was the discussion like between the two of you about him leaving?

20 BJ: Well, the last few days we did go back to Connecticut and part of that time was spent
21 in Connecticut with his parents. I think maybe it was more talking about what I might do while he
22 was gone, that I would be living near his parents and with them for the first month until their house
23 was built on the same property.

24 RV: So you were not going to stay at Ft. Benning, down in the area?

25 BJ: No, we already had decided that I would go back to Connecticut to be close to his
26 parents and we would sustain each other during that year that he was gone.

27 RV: You've described your relationship with them I know, in previous conversations we've
28 had and you've touched on it before. Can you describe what the very special relationship was with
29 his parents?

30 BJ: Well, it was just probably very unique. I was rereading something that I wrote about
31 that. I found a lot of letters. When I wrote to Randall Wallace and he asked me for more

1 information about Jack, I went through some letters that I hadn't opened before. They were letters
2 that Jack had written to his parents and I didn't open them because, as I said to Randall Wallace, I
3 almost felt as if I was invading something that wasn't – a place that I shouldn't get into. But I read
4 the letters and one of them was a letter from me in which I said to them – remarked about how very
5 close Jack and his parents were. They were a very close family, the three of them, and there was
6 just a great love among them. And I said in my letter to them that some people would be jealous,
7 some wives would be jealous of that love but I didn't feel that way. I don't feel that way because
8 I've been encircled in it myself. I've become a part of it myself. And that is the way I felt, that their
9 love reached out and enveloped me. And they were just a very, loving, giving, warm couple. They
10 were wonderful people. And they always thought of me as a daughter and I thought of them as
11 parents, another set of parents, and it was a beautiful relationship.

12 RV: What did Jack say to Camille before he left? What were his thoughts and feelings
13 concerning her and what do you remember about his interactions with her in those last days before
14 he left?

15 BJ: Of course she was only two months old. He would hold her a lot and he would tell her
16 to take care of me (laughs) and take care of her grandparents and to be a good girl (laughs) and to
17 grow up and do good things and be a good person and things like that. And she did (laughs).

18 RV: Right. Was he saying this thinking, 'I might not come back so do these things,' or did
19 you hear him basically talking to you and her about – really telling her, 'I'll see you in a year?'

20 BJ: Well, he would say that, that he'd see her in a year and that he would miss seeing her
21 grow that first year. It's probably the greatest growth there is in anybody's life, is that first year and
22 he would miss it and he would not see her take her first steps and that kind of thing, and that
23 bothered him. Of course I used to send pictures to him every week.

24 RV: Right. And I want to touch on how much you all communicated with each other once
25 he left. What was that last night like and saying goodbye to him? And this is something that I ask
26 all people who are in this position. I ask the veteran as well as the family members what those last
27 days are like. Tell me about saying goodbye to him.

28 BJ: Well, I remember that the last couple of days we had left the apartment and got a room
29 in a hotel. We wanted it to seem like a honeymoon, which is crazy maybe, but that's the way we
30 wanted to remember it, being together like that and we did have Cammie with us. And I remember
31 driving him to Ft. Benning that night. They'd leave at night. And coming back to the hotel room

1 and oh, the emptiness of it was horrible, knowing he was leaving in a matter of hours was just
2 awful and that long year stretching ahead just seemed like an eternity ahead of us. But I
3 remember it was at night that he said in the car, 'I'm only going to say this once but nothing's going
4 to happen to me but if it does, I want you to marry again.' I said that to you in the last session.

5 RV: Yes.

6 BJ: I remember that quite vividly and actually I was shocked by it. 'No, no, no. Nothing's
7 going to happen to you. If it did, I wouldn't marry again,' is the way I felt.

8 RV: And you told him this?

9 BJ: Uh-huh. I did, but he still felt that it was important for me to know that he did want me
10 to marry again. And years later, several times over the years, I would remember that feel grateful
11 that he said that. It was as if I remarried with his blessing.

12 RV: Right.

13 BJ: I think another part of this story had to do with – I don't know if you want to get into this
14 now – but a dream I had in 1973.

15 RV: Tell me about it.

16 BJ: John and I were married in 1969. In 1973 was when the POWs were coming back
17 from Vietnam. I remember watching them on television and I remember sitting on the edge of my
18 seat, staring at the television and was so grateful for each one that came off the plane.

19 RV: Now, is this the dream or is this reality?

20 BJ: No, this wasn't the dream. That was before the dream but I think it's what caused the
21 dream. I guess it was that night, I had a dream that the doorbell rang and I went to the door and it
22 was Jack. And he was standing on the other side of the storm door and Cammie was next to me
23 and my son Bobby, then, was on the other side and I was holding our baby Barbie in my arms and
24 I saw Jack and it was such a shock. And he was wearing his tan uniform. And my first feelings
25 were guilt or great sadness and then guilt that my life had taken such a happy turn. And then in the
26 dream, he smiled at me and then his image faded away. And that's what I always remembered
27 and that's what I feel now when I think about that dream, that it was saying, 'I am so happy for you,'
28 that if he could be present in any way at all, that is what he was telling me. Once in a while I think
29 about that and it gives me a very warm feeling.

1 RV: When was the first time you knew that you could communicate with him once he had
2 arrived in Vietnam? Did you all know that it was simply going to be by letter or did he say that he
3 would try to get an opportunity to call you as soon as possible?

4 BJ: I don't remember him talking about calling me but we did each have tape recorders,
5 small tape recorders, and we sent each other tapes and we wrote. I wrote to him every single day
6 and he wrote to me as often as he could.

7 RV: Do you still have the tapes?

8 BJ: I don't. I have my tapes. I don't have his tapes. Sadly, my mother-in-law felt that it
9 was something that I shouldn't keep, which was a huge mistake because I have nothing of his
10 voice at all, which is something that my daughter misses, that she doesn't have the opportunity to
11 even hear his voice. But I have the tapes that I sent to him. In fact, I had them all put on CDs.

12 RV: Did those tapes get destroyed, the ones that he had sent to you?

13 BJ: Yes, they did. Sadly, that was an enormous regret. But my mother-in-law felt it was
14 important when I was starting a new life and a new marriage, she felt that it wasn't a good idea to
15 keep the tapes or the letters. And they were very, very happy that I was remarrying so it had
16 nothing to do with that. It was that they didn't want this to intrude on my marriage. So that's a
17 huge regret, that I don't have those.

18 RV: When was the first time you did hear from him once he was there?

19 BJ: Probably within a week.

20 RV: Do you remember what he said to you?

21 BJ: No. I just remember that he wrote to say that he had arrived and where they were. I
22 don't have the letter now to refresh my memory.

23 RV: Right. Did he expect to go into combat within a few months? What were the
24 expectations about that?

25 BJ: I think he did have some expectations that that could happen. Of course, that big
26 battle loomed ahead, that they didn't know until they were in it that it was going to be the battle that
27 it was.

28 RV: What about the Moores, Julie and then Colonel Moore? What do you remember
29 about them at that time, right when the troops were leaving? Was there a gathering with all the
30 families, the soldiers and the wives?

1 BJ: Actually there was a big gathering but unfortunately, we were in Connecticut when that
2 took place. But I had met Julie Moore at a luncheon and had met her and the other battalion wives
3 in the battalion. And she was such a warm and lovely person. I just really felt very good about
4 that. And she would communicate once in a while. She would send a letter to the wives in the
5 battalion. General Moore – then Colonel Moore – was just – and I had a very good feeling about
6 the fact that Jack was serving under him. He was such a good person, such a strong, strong
7 leader and Jack certainly was very proud to be serving under him.

8 RV: How did you know he was a strong leader? What made you feel that way? Was it
9 Jack's words or did you see things yourself that emanated that kind of leadership?

10 BJ: I think it was more Jack's words about him, I would say. I didn't see him very often but
11 when I did see him, he was just a very strong person and a very kind person, very empathetic and
12 he put you at ease immediately, just like Julie did. They were a wonderful pair, the two of them.

13 RV: What do you remember Jack saying about Colonel Moore?

14 BJ: That he was a very, very good leader and he liked his strengths and values and
15 Colonel Moore was Catholic also, as Jack was. Maybe that played into it. He was a very, very
16 religious person and I think that meant something. It was another connection, perhaps. I don't
17 know if they ever talked about it but I think just knowing that was something that made him feel
18 comfortable with him.

19 RV: Right. Did Jack have a bracelet with Camille's name on it?

20 BJ: No. he carried pictures of Cammie in his wallet but he didn't have a bracelet as was
21 shown in the movie. I try to sidestep that with people because a lot of people want to believe that
22 was really true and I wish that I could say that it was true. But he did carry a lot of things with him.
23 He carried religious medals and pictures in his wallet. He had a picture in his wallet of the little
24 house where I was living and pictures of Cammie.

25 RV: And I take it these were deliberate things he took over, that he wanted to have while
26 he was gone.

27 BJ: Yes, mementos.

28 RV: Tell me about the months – now, when he leaves in –

29 BJ: In August.

30 RV: August, okay. And really, three months later they're involved in this huge battle and
31 the United States had yet to really engage the enemy, the North Vietnamese or really the Viet

1 Cong, in any kind of sizable battle. Did he talk about, in his letters or before he left, about the
2 readiness of his unit and purpose of being able to hold their own? What kind of discussion
3 revolved around that topic, if you remember any at all?

4 BJ: I don't really remember much about that. I was just looking through something I had
5 read to see if I had had something that he said but I know he felt the men were ready and ready for
6 anything.

7 RV: Meaning his individual platoon and the whole unit as a whole?

8 BJ: Here is something I just found a little while ago. This is in something I had written for
9 Randall Wallace when I said I don't know that the men in his command were – I do know that the
10 men in his command were extremely important to him and he cared deeply about each one. On
11 board ship he wrote, 'Everyone here is a little edgy but this will end the moment we land and I only
12 hope that none of my men are killed. I know that they will fight like hell and that we are a well-knit
13 team. God bless them all. It certainly seems odd that these men who are going to fight for the
14 U.S. will find it difficult to get a job back home when they come back because they lack education.'
15 That's what I had read, that they were a well-knit team. And he was concerned when he said that.
16 'They'll have a difficult time when they get home for lack of education.' Most of them were black
17 and I think he was very aware of that and concerned and wanted to help that cause.

18 RV: The cause of civil rights.

19 BJ: Right.

20 RV: What did he say about that?

21 BJ: Here was something. No.

22 RV: This is in the letter you wrote to Randall Wallace?

23 BJ: Yes, and I just found in the next sentence in what was probably Jack's last letter to his
24 parents, he wrote on November 7th, 'We have been on the defensive perimeter for almost two
25 weeks and have been actively patrolling for that time. The men are becoming more professional
26 every day. Replacements have already arrived for the men who went home sick or those leaving
27 the Army for good. As each one goes home, I feel very good that he has made it safely.' And
28 then, 'Each day here increases one's love of the United States and the desire for security. Even
29 Grand Central Station seems a paradise right now. How I will enjoy a quiet ride in Connecticut
30 when I return, with no one shooting at me. I know that my life will never be the same after I return
31 from here. Even in Africa, we didn't realize how many comforts we had compared to here. Death

1 is so close that the small things make life worthwhile – a cup of coffee, a drink of water. Please do
2 not get me wrong. I'm not complaining, only thanking God for the opportunity to learn what is really
3 important and to see what honor can be like. It will make me a much better man. We learn each
4 day.' And that was in a letter to his parents so that tells you what kind of a person he was.

5 RV: Yes. Is there anything else there that you could share?

6 BJ: One week and day later – that is, one week and a day later after he wrote that letter,
7 Jack and all but three of his men died in the Ia Drang Valley. This is what I wrote to Randall
8 Wallace.

9 RV: Yes.

10 BJ: 'I will never know if Jack killed anyone but I will always, always, always be grateful to
11 know that he died as he lived, going to the aid of one of his men, a black soldier named Willy
12 Godbolt. As you know, their names are next to each other on the Vietnam Memorial. I can't help
13 but repeat the words of that Catholic Relief Services worker, that Jack would be incapable of
14 deserting a dangerous situation in order to take care of Jack. And several months later, Mom
15 Geoghegan made the ultimate act in forgiveness, and quietly had a mass said for whoever the
16 North Vietnamese soldier was who fired the shot that killed her son, God would know who he was.'

17 RV: Tell me about that. After everyone knew he was dead, what your mother-in-law did
18 and why she did it.

19 BJ: That was really quite a while I think, well, within months maybe, after Jack died. She
20 was a very religious person and I think she felt that whoever killed Jack, whoever fired the shots
21 that killed him wouldn't know they were killing Jack specifically, but that person was fighting for a
22 cause, too, is the way she looked at it.

23 RV: And she put together a mass to honor him?

24 BJ: Yeah, she had a mass said. In the Catholic Church you can have a mass said for
25 anybody you want and mass is said for that particular person. And she had a mass said for
26 whoever it was who killed Jack, that God would know who it was.

27 RV: Did you attend?

28 BJ: Yes, I'm sure I did.

29 RV: In the letters you all exchanged from July to November, what can you tell me about
30 them? If you do have any excerpts there, that would be wonderful to hear but what do you
31 remember about that communication?

1 BJ: A lot of it was about Cammie and what Cammie was doing and how she was growing
2 and changing and our hopes for the future, of where we might go when he came back from
3 Vietnam. We thought we'd go back to Tanzania, but not necessarily. But we had hopes of going
4 back into that world, into a third world.

5 RV: Do you remember what he said about Vietnam? I mean, what you just read was very
6 significant, but what did you get a feeling for about his feelings for Vietnam?

7 BJ: Well, I do remember what he said about it was a beautiful country and he wanted to
8 bring me there when the war was over. I think he may have even had hopes of some time when
9 the war was over that there would be a lot that needed to be done and he probably would have
10 seen himself in some role that way, going back to Vietnam in that role, which was really more the
11 essence of Jack, was doing for people. Helping people, not killing people.

12 RV: Right. How did you feel, Barbara, about the war and especially leading up to when
13 your husband was departing?

14 BJ: Well, I very much supported the war at that time. I didn't know a whole lot about it but I
15 felt, as a lot of people did at that time in 1965, that it was a means of stopping Communism. That
16 was during, I guess part of the time, the Domino Theory that all these countries could fall to
17 Communism. And so I supported it then and later, not as much later after '68 and '69. I continued
18 to support it but I had started to have great doubts about it.

19 RV: When did you feel those doubts were coming in? Was it '68 and '69 or before that?

20 BJ: I think probably '68 or '69 or somewhere in there. I remember Walter Cronkite's words.

21 RV: Were they significant to you? What kind of effect did that have on you?

22 BJ: Well I had great respect for him and what he said – I wish I had it in front of me. It was
23 just in the paper the other day, what he said, and it echoed some of my feelings, that maybe this
24 was a war we shouldn't be in.

25 RV: Barbara, in the movie, *We Were Soldiers*, it's depicted about how the U.S. Army
26 informed wives of the men killed in action. What can you say about that?

27 BJ: Well, with the telegram scenes I think in the movie is what you're talking about. That
28 was actually – it was not true – that Julie Moore, as a battalion commander's wife, would not have
29 been able to go to inform somebody of their loss. That had to be done by an Army official, but she
30 followed all of the cab drivers. She followed the people, the cab drivers who came to deliver the
31 telegrams to people at Ft. Benning. She followed them so she would be there when they actually

1 got the telegram. She went to thirteen funerals of people who had been killed in the war at Ft.
2 Benning, whose families stayed in the Ft. Benning area. And she was very, very supportive. Of
3 course, I had moved to Connecticut so that part of the movie is not quite accurate. But that is the
4 way I was informed. And many people have said about the movie that they didn't like that part
5 because they didn't believe that that was true, but it was. It was true that that is how people were
6 informed, by telegrams. When I mentioned an Army official, that was actually much later. But
7 during earlier in the war, the first few months, that is how people were informed, was by telegram.

8 RV: And that's how you were informed in Connecticut?

9 BJ: That's the way I was informed.

10 RV: Did the letter come to you or come to his parents?

11 BJ: Well, it was a telegram and actually it came to his parents because I was not home
12 when it arrived and I was with Jack's aunt in New Rochelle, New York, about an hour away. And I
13 wanted to be with her because her husband had died two years to the day, actually, before Jack,
14 which I, at that time, didn't know. And his mother had to call me on the telephone to tell me that
15 the telegram had come.

16 RV: Do you remember what was said and how you felt?

17 BJ: Oh, yes. I can remember just where I was standing and I just sank down to the floor
18 when my mother-in-law told me what was in the telegram. And then she said to me, 'We're so glad
19 that he married you.' That was so beautiful. That was just the kind of person she was. Oh, it was
20 unreal, absolutely unreal. I just couldn't believe it. Of course, that's the same reaction everybody
21 has, I think, when you receive news like that. And we talked for a little while and Jack's aunt came.
22 She was my mother-in-law's sister, actually, and she came over to me when she saw my reaction
23 to the phone call and I had to tell her and she put her arms around me because she adored Jack,
24 too. Everybody did. And then when I got off the phone I remember walking through the dining
25 room and looking out the window and seeing cars going by and thinking, 'The world is still here.' It
26 was a strange, strange reaction. And I went upstairs where Cammie was asleep and she was at
27 that point five months old. And I picked her up and I held her for several minutes and thought
28 about how Jack had said that when he came back, we need to give Cammie a little brother or sister
29 but now it would just be the two of us. It was a very, extremely sad moment. Unreal.

30 RV: What did you say to Cammie?

31 BJ: I said to her, 'It's just the two of us now.'

1 RV: She was sleeping?

2 BJ: Yes. She was only five months old. At that age, babies don't wake up very easily so I
3 quietly put her back in her crib and she didn't wake up from my holding her. I just patted her and
4 told her I would try to make up for her loss, that I would be both parents to her. And I told her we
5 would be near Mimi and Gigi and they would always be there to help us and we would help them,
6 too. And that's what happened, really. Cammie was a bright little baby and always happy and
7 smiling and she really is the one who held us all together.

8 RV: Did your mother-in-law read the telegram to you, what it said?

9 BJ: I believe she did or maybe she told me 'The Secretary of the Army regrets.' Those are
10 the first words of all those telegrams. I guess that's why they put that title in the book for that
11 chapter.

12 RV: When did you hear from Julie Moore?

13 BJ: Probably within a short time after that, maybe within a month. Because there were so
14 many people who were killed in that battle, she went to visit, as I mentioned to you, and went to the
15 funerals of thirteen people. She visited people whose husbands had been wounded and she wrote
16 to the families of people whose husbands were killed. She was just a truly wonderful person and
17 she worried so about how people would look at her since it was her husband who was the battalion
18 commander.

19 RV: Like somehow it was – I mean, he was in charge but he and or she might receive
20 some kind of blame or some kind of negative reaction.

21 BJ: Yes. Really, that was sort of a guilt by association sort of thing. But it wasn't that way
22 for her. She said people welcomed her warmly and embraced her and loved her. I couldn't help
23 but love her. She was such a dear and warm and compassionate, caring, loving person and she
24 was there to help people. They already knew that and I think when they saw her it was not at all
25 the reaction she feared but a very welcoming and loving reaction. They were all in it together.

26 RV: How soon after this did you receive Jack's body?

27 BJ: It was two weeks. He was killed on the 15th of November and it was two weeks later
28 when his body came home. His funeral was December 2nd, I think.

29 RV: Did you receive the body or did it go through Delaware?

30 BJ: My brother actually went – my brother at the time was a Marine. He was a captain in
31 the Marine Corps and he was stationed in Hawaii and the bodies were sent through Hawaii and he

1 accompanied Jack's body home from Hawaii, which was a wonderful thing that he did. And he was
2 with us for several days through the funeral, my brother was. He had been in Vietnam himself,
3 twice.

4 RV: Were you able to see the body?

5 BJ: Yes. And it was something that – Jack's parents were so grateful that they were able
6 to see his body. My mother-in-law said, 'If we hadn't been able to see him, I would always wonder
7 if that was really him.' And a couple of years later, within two years maybe, there was a case of
8 mistaken identity. All you need is one case like that and people will think that it could happen to
9 them. And I felt that way, too. I felt so glad that we could see him.

10 RV: Did Cammie see him?

11 BJ: I don't know. She may have but she was so tiny, it certainly wouldn't have had any
12 effect on her. It would have been more of a symbolic thing for us if she had. But have a feeling
13 she didn't. I think my parents-in-law would have wanted to not put that grief on her. We were very
14 careful, always very careful around Cammie. We had a lot of fun together. We tried to do that.
15 That's one of the things that helped. It would force us to be cheerful and happy for her and that
16 helped us, too. You were talking about the funeral and although Jack's parents had moved to
17 Redding, Connecticut, and it was just that same year, we talked about it and decided to have the
18 funeral in Pelham, New York, which is where Jack grew up. The funeral was in St. Catherine's
19 Church in Pelham, New York, and there were hundreds and hundreds of people there. It was just
20 astonishing. And there was an honor guard from Pennsylvania Military College that came up to be
21 there. The commandant of cadets was there from Pennsylvania Military College. It was a
22 wonderful, wonderful tribute to Jack, the presence of all those people.

23 RV: When did you see his body? Was it before the burial?

24 BJ: At the funeral home. His body went right to the funeral home. I guess we went there
25 in the afternoon when we knew his body was there. They let us know and then we went over to
26 see him.

27 RV: I take it you were not by yourself.

28 BJ: No, I was with Jack's parents. We each individually went. Oh, gosh, I remember his
29 father. It was so sad. It was a hermetically sealed casket and there was glass top to it so his body
30 was under a glass top. And his father just kept – his hand just kept stroking the glass like he was
31 trying to get through it to touch Jack's body. Oh, it was one of the saddest things I've ever seen.

1 He never – Jack’s father actually lived for eighteen years after that. It was amazing. He was a
2 whole different person.

3 RV: What was your experience there at the casket like?

4 BJ: It just – unreal. I’d look at him and think – of course he looked like he was asleep and I
5 would think what a strong, wonderful, energetic person he was in life and it was so unbelievable to
6 see him there knowing that it was over, that he would never, never be with us again except in spirit,
7 memory, thought. It was a very powerful feeling. It’s why I didn’t think he would be killed in
8 Vietnam, because I had so much to do on this earth, that God wouldn’t take him. I really believed
9 that, which made the shock even greater when he was killed.

10 RV: Do you feel like there was some kind of purpose in his death?

11 BJ: In his death?

12 RV: In the sense in which you just said, that you thought that God would not take him
13 because he had so much to do. Have you thought about why his death occurred when it did and if
14 there was some kind of purpose behind that?

15 BJ: You mean, from God, you mean?

16 RV: Yes, and how maybe you translated that personally.

17 BJ: Well, no one’s ever asked me that before but I do feel that at that time that I always
18 wanted the world to know about Jack. He was truly a unique person and so I wanted to write. I
19 tried to write something, which wasn’t accepted by a magazine that I wrote to but they wrote me a
20 beautiful letter (laughs). But I always wanted the world to know about Jack. And after he died –
21 actually, before he died and after he died – I used to give talks to churches and schools about our
22 experience in Africa. I continued to do that because I thought it was a way of – it was something
23 he wanted to do to share our experience with other people and so I continued to do that. But with
24 regard to whether there was a purpose in Jack’s death, I would have to think about that more.

25 RV: Okay. What would you want the world to know today about Jack Geoghegan?

26 BJ: Well, what I think what was so wonderful was the fact that I had the opportunity to write
27 for the book *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*. I could tell about Jack there and then when
28 Randall Wallace a few years later read the book – he picked it up in an airport bookstore. The title
29 grabbed him and he wrote me a beautiful letter after he had read the book. In fact, I have it right in
30 front of me now. It just was such a wonderful feeling that I would be able to share Jack’s story with
31 him and hopefully, in some way, through the movie that Randall Wallace was planning to do. Of

1 course, I never dreamed that Jack would actually be a person in the movie at that point. I should
2 send this to you because it's really a beautiful letter. I'll send my reply as well.

3 RV: Are there things you can read from the letter now while we're recording this oral
4 history interview or would you rather have that here in completion so people can look at it and read
5 it when they listen or read this interview?

6 BJ: Well, I could send it to you.

7 RV: Okay.

8 BJ: I'm just glancing over it. He said to me – Randall Wallace wrote, 'The power of *We*
9 *Were Soldiers Once...and Young*, is that it speaks through individual lives and that of Jack
10 Geoghegan is one that cuts especially deep for me. No part of the book reached me more deeply
11 than the pages in which you describe the aftermath of his loss.' And he goes on later, 'Jack
12 Geoghegan's story is one that I find to be especially important in that it seems to me to be
13 representative of the finest and best spirit among the young Americans who went to Vietnam,
14 either physically as the soldiers did, or spiritually as families back home. Trying to capture that
15 spirit is an almost mystical endeavor.' Then he adds later, 'Maybe the best question I can ask you
16 is, "What is there about Jack that you'd like me to know that perhaps isn't covered in the book?" I
17 find the work in Africa prior to his going to Vietnam particularly intriguing and the incident of his
18 platoon volunteering to build a school. I'm interested in his theology and the way he looked on
19 being a soldier.' Then he said, 'And do you know if Jack was well acquainted with Rick Rescorla?'
20 You remember Rich Rescorla, the hero of the World Trade?

21 RV: Was he?

22 BJ: Yeah, Rick Rescorla – of course, this is years before 9/11 but Rick Rescorla was the
23 hero of the World Trade Center when he got two thousand of his people out. He had been a hero
24 in the Battle of the Ia Drang as well, and it's his picture that's on the cover of the book *We Were*
25 *Soldiers Once...and Young*.

26 RV: Did Jack know Rick?

27 BJ: If he did know him, I don't recall. If I had his letters then I would be able to determine
28 that but I don't recall that he ever mentioned anything.

29 RV: What about Jack's company commander?

30 BJ: Bob Edwards?

31 RV: Yes. Tell me about Bob, what Jack said of him or how well they knew each other?

1 BJ: Well, I don't recall much about that. He did know him of course, very well, he was his
2 company commander and he liked him very, very much. He liked to be part of that.

3 RV: I've spoken with Bob and Bob was injured very soon in that battle.

4 BJ: That's right. I've met Bob and his wife at the annual reunions of the survivors of the Ia
5 Drang here in Washington every year.

6 RV: After the death and after the funeral, what did you do? Where were you seeing your
7 life going at this point?

8 BJ: Well, at that point, of course I had Cammie, and I didn't want to seek employment
9 somewhere and leave her. I promised her I would be both parents to her and I didn't want to leave
10 her upbringing to a babysitter. Of course, Jack's parents were right there but I would not have
11 wanted them to feel that they had full time care of her. So I didn't seek employment but joined the
12 League of Women Voters, I did a lot of writing, as I mentioned; I gave talks to schools and church
13 groups about our time in Africa. I filled my time with a lot of that.

14 RV: Did you stay in Connecticut?

15 BJ: I did. I stayed there for almost four years.

16 RV: Where were your parents?

17 BJ: My parents were in New Jersey. I frequently visited them.

18 RV: Right. Tell me about that interaction and what you told them about Jack and how they
19 handled that and the support they gave you.

20 BJ: Well, they were very supportive but they were not happy about my staying on in
21 Connecticut, simply because they felt that I was stuck away in a quiet country town and they
22 wanted me eventually to marry again and they thought, 'She'll never meet anybody there.' (laughs)
23 I think that was it. They wanted me to come back to New Jersey and if not live with them, live near
24 them and I never wanted to do that because I really loved my home in Connecticut and being near
25 Jack's parents. I actually felt close to Jack. He was very nearby. And I really loved Connecticut.
26 But my parents were very supportive, and my brother and sister also.

27 RV: So after your initial time in Connecticut, you stayed on there.

28 BJ: Yes, I did. Beyond a year of course. I was just going to be there for the year that Jack
29 was in Vietnam but I ended up staying there and they were very gracious and kind to me. Jack's
30 parents, they let me stay in the little house, which was on the same property as the house that they
31 built, the larger house which they moved to about six weeks before Jack was killed.

1 RV: Did you follow the war on television when he was there and then afterwards?
2 BJ: I did.
3 RV: Because Colonel Moore was actually on television right after that battle.
4 BJ: That's right, he was.
5 RV: Did you see that?
6 BJ: I'm sure I must have. I remember seeing the news of the battle and how awful it was.
7 The news was just very, very frightening and I remember Jack's parents were just terrified that
8 Jack would be killed but even then I didn't think he was.
9 RV: And you knew he was involved in that battle.
10 BJ: I did know he was involved in it. I knew he had to be because they mentioned his
11 battalion.
12 RV: And you followed the war on TV after his death and as you went on with your life? I
13 guess you followed the war in general, not just on television.
14 BJ: Yeah. It wasn't a huge focus for me but I did follow it.
15 RV: And you said your opinion of the war changed after I guess the TET Offensive in '68
16 and then into 1969. What changed for you? Why did it change?
17 BJ: Well, by that time there were so many thousands and thousands – I don't know how
18 many at that point, how many men had been killed, but I kept thinking, 'For what?' It didn't seem to
19 be going anywhere and I really had great doubts about whether they were accomplishing what they
20 were setting out to do. And it's interesting, when I met John, I met John in Jack's parents' home in
21 December of 1968.
22 RV: How did that happen?
23 BJ: Well, we had a mutual neighbor whose name was Reuben Nathan. He was a retired
24 colonel and he knew John from when they were stationed together at Ft. Bragg some years before
25 and he learned that John was stationed at West Point which is about an hour away from Redding,
26 Connecticut. And he asked Jack's parents – he thought, 'Hmm, he'd be a good person for Barbara
27 to meet.' So he asked Jack's parents if they would mind if he introduced us. And they did want me
28 to meet people so they said that would be nice, so Reuben Nathan – John went to visit him and
29 then they went over to Jack's parents' house for cocktails and they asked me to come 'up the hill,'
30 as we used to say, and so that's when I met John.
31 RV: Did you know this was going to happen?

1 BJ: I think I suspected something like that was happening (laughs).

2 RV: How did you feel about that?

3 BJ: Well, you mean, that they were providing an opportunity to meet somebody (laughs)?

4 RV: (Laughs) I guess they're being really good in-laws when they're trying to take care of
5 you in that sense, but how did you feel, I guess about that incident but also about remarrying and
6 where you were emotionally in doing that?

7 BJ: Well, at that point, I was dating people. Every so often I'd meet somebody. I'd go out
8 on dates but I never met anybody that I could be serious about. And that didn't bother me because
9 I really didn't think I would marry again. I was very content with my memories of Jack and that
10 would sustain me my whole life, I thought at age twenty-three (laughs). Of course, let's see now.
11 That would have been a couple of years later, so it was 1968 when I met John. And I liked John.
12 As soon as I met him I liked him very much but I didn't think I would be serious about him. I just
13 liked him very much. He called me a couple of weeks later. He went to Alabama, where he's from,
14 for Christmas. When he came back to West Point, he called me. He's almost fourteen years older
15 than I am and I had never dated anybody more than two or three years older. So that was
16 something. So he was forty and I was twenty-six. But then, I did go out with him and I liked him
17 very, very much and I realized that people my own age or even a couple of years older seemed so
18 immature to me after what I had been through, that my life had taken such a dramatic turn and it
19 aged me quite a bit. In my mind it did – I mean my values and what was important to me. So the
20 age difference really didn't matter to me. We didn't know each other terribly long before we got
21 married (laughs).

22 RV: When did you get married?

23 BJ: April 5th, 1969, and we met in December of '68 and then we moved to West Point – or I
24 moved to West Point.

25 RV: Tell me about, now, General Johns, about his attitude then and now about Jack and
26 how he's handled those memories and your emotional state and his support of you.

27 BJ: Oh, he was always wonderful, I think perhaps though he never knew Jack but he knew
28 his parents and he would ask them about Jack and he learned a lot about him and of course he
29 saw pictures of him and I told him about Jack.

30 RV: Did he ask? Did he want to know when you all started dating? Did he want to know
31 about Jack and what had happened and things like that?

1 BJ: Yes, yes. Of course, being a military man himself, he was aware of that battle and all
2 of it. It just saddened him tremendously, too, to have – I guess meeting somebody like me who
3 had been through this really brought it home to him again. He had also had friends who were killed
4 in Vietnam. But it was very important to John to carry on Jack's memory. I don't mean on a day-
5 by-day basis. He didn't close the door when we were married and that's the end of that. Not
6 anything like that. In fact, when we were married, Jack's parents came to our wedding. We just
7 had a small wedding ceremony and then a small luncheon and they didn't want to come to it at first
8 because they felt they were casting a shadow on a happy event just by being there and he insisted
9 that they be there, that it just wouldn't be right for them not to be. So they did come there and to
10 the wedding reception and I was very glad they did. And I felt very good about the fact that they
11 were there, the fact that they were part of the transition to a new life and it was very, very important
12 for them to be there. I couldn't imagine my life continuing without them being in it. That was
13 something else that was important to John, that we spend time with them and when we were still
14 living at West Point, we would visit Connecticut. It was also important for Cammie to spend time
15 with her grandparents.

16 RV: How did Cammie take to John?

17 BJ: Oh, she adored him because he was very good with children. She was very, very fond
18 of him and he was very good to her. He was a wonderful father to her. And one thing that Jack's
19 mother requested of John was that he not change her name because she felt that if John adopted
20 Cammie and changed her name it would be – that Jack would lose his daughter, is the way they
21 felt about it. And John had no problem with that at all. It didn't make any difference to him in how
22 he could be a father to Cammie. She always remained Camille Geoghegan. Of course at some
23 point we did talk about adding 'Johns' to her name but it was probably a matter of just something
24 we didn't do more because we didn't get around to doing it than because we didn't want to do it.
25 But we were close to Jack's parents all the years of their lives. My mother-in-law died in 1979 and
26 that was a very sad day. She died of cancer and his father lived for four more years. It's
27 interesting because they died in the exact opposite order that you would have expected.

28 RV: Really?

29 BJ: Uh-huh. Because Jack used to worry about his father, that he didn't think his father
30 was in very good health. He lived to be seventy-nine, close to eighty when he died. His mother
31 was seventy-four when she died.

1 RV: Did you visit Jack's grave?

2 BJ: Yes. In fact, we just visited Jack's grave a few months ago. We were with our
3 younger daughter. We took a trip up to Canada and then came back through New England and
4 drove through Redding and drove by the little house and drove up the hill and drove by the house
5 that had belonged to Jack's parents. And we went to the cemetery and visited Jack's grave.

6 RV: So he's buried in Redding?

7 BJ: Actually, in Bethel, Connecticut, which is right next to Redding, at St. Mary's cemetery.
8 It's about two miles or so from where we lived.

9 RV: What was that like for you, just a few months ago?

10 BJ: Well, it was strange. We had visited there a couple of times through the years,
11 whenever we happened to be in that area but it was one reason why – of course, we would visit
12 there anyway but what we wanted to see was a new gravestone that they had made for Jack's
13 grave, which included the Silver Star.

14 RV: Who had that made?

15 BJ: Actually, the military does that. I don't know actually who does it but they do pay for it.

16 RV: It is significant to mention that he did win the Silver Star for that action.

17 BJ: That's right.

18 RV: How did you feel about that?

19 BJ: Well, it was not until 1997 that they upgraded several awards for people who were in
20 that battle and General Moore put in a request for it.

21 RV: Did you know that he was doing that?

22 BJ: I believe I did, yes. Then it was awarded. In fact, we met – Cammie and I and John
23 and our other two children went to the Vietnam Memorial where General Moore presented the
24 Silver Star to Cammie at the Vietnam Wall.

25 RV: That was actually my next question, was your visits to the Wall. How often and what's
26 it been like?

27 BJ: Well, I go at least once a year when we meet with the survivors of the Ia Drang Valley
28 battle and maybe a time or two throughout the years. It's a very warm experience. That wall is like
29 a shrine. It's incredible what it has done for people. I always felt that it actually had to be in place
30 before people could appreciate it. It must be very hard to imagine what somebody said what it was
31 going to be and it would be very hard to picture the impact it would have on people, to actually

1 have this wall with fifty-eight thousand names on it. It really makes you realize the tremendous
2 sacrifice those men made in all wars but it's the first time I guess they ever had a wall with names
3 on it.

4 RV: Right. How has Camille dealt with her biological father's passing and what happened
5 in the subsequent years?

6 BJ: Well, we didn't – it was a subject that was always open to her to talk about if she
7 wanted to and if there was ever a time that I might try to prompt her to ask about it, she shied away
8 from it a lot throughout her teenage years. She always knew that her father was killed in Vietnam
9 but we didn't dwell on it or talk about it a great deal. She was just aware of it and we were open to
10 any questions she might have. But it wasn't until much later, even when Joe Galloway was writing
11 – Joe and General Moore were writing the book – Joe asked me if I would be willing to write part of
12 the chapter on the families left behind and he wanted Cammie to, also. But she never could do it.
13 She just couldn't. She was still pushing that aside. I think she was fearful of the emotions that it
14 would bring out in her. I'm not sure and I'm not sure she knows why she tended to shy away from
15 it. So it wasn't until later and it wasn't until she was married and had children, her first child, I think
16 she realized. She looked at Stephanie and realized that Stephanie wouldn't be there if her father
17 hadn't been there and the ongoing generations, the fact that he lives on, not just in her but in his
18 granddaughters. And I think that really had a profound effect on her. That in itself, and then she
19 was older herself and more mature and more able to deal with the emotions of it. And she can get
20 very, very, very emotional about it. And then when the book and later, the movie, and all the
21 people she has met because of the movie. We went up to what was Pennsylvania Military College,
22 now Widener University and they had a special screening of the movie the year that it came out,
23 2002.

24 RV: This was the first time that you had both seen it?

25 BJ: No, we had seen it a couple of times, but we went there because they had a special
26 showing of it and many of Jack's classmates were there and they were so startled, many of them,
27 when they saw Cammie because a couple of them said, 'She looks exactly like him.' She does.
28 'She's a female Jack,' they would say (laughs). And she does. She has always looked like him
29 and that's always been wonderful. She doesn't have the red hair and freckles but she has his
30 features. Stephanie, her daughter, has the freckles.

31 RV: Oh really?

1 BJ: Yes (laughs).

2 RV: Well, let's talk about the impact of the book. Before we do, Barbara, why don't we

3 take a break?

4 BJ: All right.

5 RV: Okay. Barbara, I wondered if you could tell me about when the book came out and

6 you've talked about the preparation for that but how did you feel about a book being written about

7 that battle and about these people and the families and how it affected your life afterward?

8 BJ: I was very glad to know that it was being written. It's been an awful lot of years since

9 that battle but it was something that I always felt would be a wonderful story for the world to know

10 and so I was very happy to know they were going to do it, especially General Moore and Joe

11 Galloway.

12 RV: Did you know Joe before the book?

13 BJ: No, I didn't. It's interesting because the reason why he called me was because Tony

14 Nadal, who is in the book, was a captain and he knew Jack and he was stationed at West Point

15 with John when we were at West Point and so he knew that my first husband was Jack. So when

16 Joe was writing the book, Tony suggested to him that he call me for the chapter on the families left

17 behind and that's why Joe called me, is because of Tony Nadal. And whenever I see Tony Nadal, I

18 thank him for that.

19 RV: And when the book came out, how did it impact your life?

20 BJ: Well, I received a lot of letters from people who had read the book who were really

21 moved by the book and the stories and the stories of the families who were left behind. It was very

22 meaningful to a lot of people and so I did get a lot of feedback on it.

23 RV: What did the letters say?

24 BJ: Well, I should have gotten them out and read them because I still have those but they

25 were grateful that this book had been written and this story had been written and they got to know

26 something about Jack through the book, which I really appreciated and still do, between the book

27 and the movie, that so many people have gotten to know Jack through both of them. It is

28 extremely meaningful to me.

29 RV: And when the movie idea kind of came on to everyone's radar screen, you told me

30 about Randall Wallace's letter. Was that the first that you heard about what was happening?

31 BJ: About the movie?

1 RV: Uh-huh.

2 BJ: General Moore actually wrote to me to say that Randall Wallace was going to write to
3 me about the movie, which he did, so I was prepared for it coming and it was a beautiful letter. I
4 always said, 'If nothing else happens, I will always have that letter.' It was so beautiful and it meant
5 so much to me. It's right here in front of me. September 10th, 1998, he wrote it.

6 RV: Tell me about the movie making process. You were involved, as was Camille.

7 BJ: Yes.

8 RV: And Keri Russell played your part. Can you tell me about that process, of making the
9 movie?

10 BJ: Well, that was quite interesting. John and Cammie and I went to Ft. Benning to see
11 some of the filming of the home scenes of the movie at Ft. Benning and that was in March of 2001
12 and that's when I met Keri Russell. (laughs) I was just so touched that somebody like her would
13 actually play me in a movie. I couldn't believe it. I still can't. I still look at that. I have a picture I
14 could send you with Keri Russell. And she's just a delightful person and her birthday's only two
15 days after mine. She called me on the phone and that was quite a surprise in itself, to ask me
16 some questions and ask about Jack and our life together. We spent a while on the phone but then
17 I met her at Ft. Benning and it was a wonderful experience for Cammie, too.

18 RV: In what way?

19 BJ: Well, the whole idea of making a movie (laughs) of this battle and of the people who
20 were left behind. And the Moores were there and so we spent time with them and that was
21 wonderful. Cammie hadn't really had much opportunity to be with them, except she did meet
22 General Moore at the dinners.

23 RV: What was her impression of him? Do you remember what she told you about it?

24 BJ: Oh, she liked him enormously because he's just so warm and gracious and fun. Like I
25 said, he puts people at ease immediately. They're not intimidated by the three stars (laughs).

26 RV: And while the movie was being made, how was that emotionally for you, to have Jack,
27 his character, or Jack to play a part in the movie so prominently, as well as yourself?

28 BJ: Well, it really meant a great deal to me, that he would be represented in the movie.
29 Now, Chris Klein isn't anything like Jack. He doesn't look like him and even in the movie, I don't
30 think anybody, even somebody with red hair would look somewhat – well, he'd have to look an
31 awful lot like Jack for me to feel that the person playing this role was Jack. So from that

1 standpoint, I didn't feel that he actually was Jack, but I was so pleased that so much of it showed
2 what Jack was like, that Chris Klein's part in the movie demonstrated much of what Jack was like
3 and what was important to him and how he cared for his men.

4 RV: Well, Chris – actually Chris and Keri – you all saw each other at the premiere.

5 BJ: Yes.

6 RV: All the families were invited, is that correct?

7 BJ: That's right.

8 RV: Okay. And what kind of – I'm drawing on what you and I talked about in Washington,
9 D.C. last November 2005. You were telling me about Chris and how nice he was at the premiere.
10 Is that the first time that you really had a chance to talk to him in any kind of detail or had you spent
11 time with him beforehand during the filming to tell him about Jack?

12 BJ: We did meet at Ft. Benning in 2001 and we did talk some then but we didn't have an
13 opportunity to talk a great deal then. But later on he told me at that premiere how he had Jack's
14 picture in his room and he was always trying to be Jack. He read the book, he read what I had
15 written about Jack and he was just thoroughly awed by the whole thing (laughs). He had never
16 really met anybody quite like Jack and it was just very important to him to play that part as
17 accurately as possible, to demonstrate the kind of person that Jack was. I met Chris Klein's
18 parents that time. I think he was from Omaha and I think he lived at home and his mother told me
19 how he spent so much time when he was reading the book and things that I had written about
20 Jack, that it was so important to him. So I was very pleased about that.

21 RV: And you and Keri kept in touch, is that correct?

22 BJ: Yes. Occasionally I will hear – I'll send her a note or maybe I'll read something about
23 something she has done. *Into the West* I think was a series that she was in recently. I'll write to
24 her and congratulate her on how well she's doing and how pleased I am that her career has taken
25 off as it has. And she'll write back just a couple of sentences, but it's really nice. It's wonderful to
26 hear from her and she always signs 'love and hugs,' and she's a very, very sweet person and a
27 very nice, nice person.

28 RV: Tell me about the premiere, the first time that you saw the movie and what that was
29 like for you?

30 BJ: Well, actually the first time I saw it was at Ft. Benning.

31 RV: A special screening, is that right?

1 BJ: Yes. Yes, and it was General Moore's eightieth birthday. I remember we celebrated it
2 in February, February of 2002, and I guess that was the first time I saw it, was there. And I
3 remember making sure I had plenty of tissues with me (laughs). But I think I was looking at it
4 differently. Because I knew so much of what was going to be in it, it didn't affect me the same way
5 as it would have if I had not known everything that was going to be in it. If I had just gone into it
6 cold and had seen it, I would have reacted the way so many people who write to me reacted. I still
7 get letters from people.

8 RV: Do you really?

9 BJ: Uh-huh. Emails.

10 RV: How do they find your email address?

11 BJ: Oh, because there's a Vietnam site that you can go to, the Vietnam Memorial website
12 and you can write tributes and memorials. That's where I wrote something about Jack and
13 included a couple of pictures and at the end I included my email address. So that's where people
14 get it. Funny, Randall Wallace asked me that, too (laughs).

15 RV: He asked you what?

16 BJ: He asked me that, too. When I told him how many emails I got, he said, 'How did they
17 get it? How did they get your address?'

18 RV: Right. What was it like with Randall Wallace? He seems to have tried to really put
19 everything he could from a professional standpoint and a personal standpoint into making this
20 movie right. You know, I guess as realistic as possible without doing too much of the 'Hollywood'
21 stuff to it. Tell me about your interactions with him.

22 BJ: Well, he was very warm and friendly and easy to talk to and very personable. We
23 exchanged a lot of emails over the years and I would send information. In fact, I've got this book of
24 emails in front of me, starting with his letter, where he would ask me questions and I would answer
25 them. But it was very important to him.

26 RV: And did you have a chance to meet Madeleine Stowe and/or Mel Gibson?

27 BJ: Yes, Madeleine Stowe is also a very delightful person. We had lunch with her one day
28 during the filming. She's a very, very pleasant, sweet person. We met Mel Gibson briefly. He's a
29 very friendly person, too, and very nice. And we also saw him at the Vietnam Memorial when they
30 did the final scene where it shows him walking down the path by the wall. It's amazing how they'll

1 spend so much time on one scene (laughs). It's only a matter of seconds in the movie and it's
2 hours and hours in the making.

3 RV: Tell me about going to the reunions and what that experience has been like for you.

4 BJ: Well, it's been very nice to talk with these people, many of them who knew Jack and
5 it's been a very good, heartwarming experience to go back there each year and General Moore
6 has always been there as the leader of this wonderful group. Unfortunately this last one, last
7 dinner, is the last one he's going to be part of, unfortunately, because he's the focal point. He's the
8 reason why people come, I think. Well, not just – but he's the most important person, but they like
9 to be together, the people who fought in that battle, and they've become very good friends, many of
10 them. They come from all over the country to this dinner once a year and then the next day, in the
11 morning, they go to the Vietnam Memorial at dawn and have a little service there and read all the
12 names of their people who were killed in battle.

13 RV: And I take it you've attended that memorial service?

14 BJ: I've only been able to go to one or two of them in the morning but if you mean the
15 dinner, I've gone to that every year.

16 RV: Right, right. Barbara, is there anything else that you'd like to add to any of our
17 discussion that we've had during this interview?

18 BJ: Well, as I think I've said, I'll probably think of many things afterwards but I think
19 perhaps the thing that I would want to add to it is that I would never have been able to do any of
20 this, the book, the movie, or even conduct this interview with you if it weren't for my husband John.
21 He has been so enormously encouraging and supportive of all of it, has always felt himself that it
22 was very important to tell Jack's story, and he was so pleased that I had the opportunity to do that.
23 And that means more than I can say to you. I mean I love my husband dearly. We've been
24 married almost thirty-seven years and I so appreciate that he has felt that way and he does not in
25 any way feel that the memory of Jack is a threat to him at all, not at all, and he shouldn't. It was a
26 part of my life that, as he said once, 'Jack has become a part of all of our lives,' and our other two
27 children, Bob, who's thirty-five, and Barbie will be thirty-four next week, they also honor Jack. And
28 that means a great deal to me, that he's a part of their lives, too. So I guess that's the important
29 thing that I wanted to add.

30 RV: Okay.

31 BJ: And I can send you other information, if you'd like.

1 RV: Yes, I would definitely like that. Having met General Johns, that is exactly the feeling I
2 got from him and sensed from him, that he was absolutely supportive. It shows on the outside and
3 you can see a genuineness about him in his support for you.

4 BJ: Yes.

5 RV: Barbara, what's it been like to conduct this oral history interview and to talk about
6 things in detail again?

7 BJ: Well, the only thing that worries me about it is how much have I left out or haven't
8 answered fully enough and I'll probably go back and think of things that I could add to it or could
9 have said, maybe important things that I didn't put it that might clear up and I didn't say all that I
10 could have said.

11 RV: Okay, well we'll end the interview now. Thank you very much for your time, Barbara.

12 BJ: You're more than welcome, Richard. I've really been very pleased to do it.