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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Kathy Dobronyi
Conducted by Kelly Crager
Date May 10th, 25th, 2011
Transcribed by Aaron Kellerhals**

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.

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1 KC: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History Interview with Kathy
2 Dobron— Dobronyi, sorry about that Kathy. Today is 10 May 2011 I am in Lubbock,
3 Texas on the campus of Texas Tech University and Kathy is joining me by telephone
4 from her home in Inverness, Florida. Kathy, to being this interview I'd like to get some
5 biographical information from you if I could, can you tell me when you were born and
6 where?

7 KD: Well, I wasn't born, I was G.I. (Government Issue) issued.

8 KC: G.I. issued, okay.

9 KD: G.I. issued at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey on May 16th, 1951. I was born the
10 day after my father's 25th birthday.

11 KC: Interesting. What were your parent's names?

12 KD: My father's name was Bobby Dale Connor, C-O-N-N-O-R, and Martha
13 Marion Remer, R-E-M-E-R.

14 KC: Now you mentioned that you were born there at Ft. Monmouth and that you
15 were G.I. issued, so the next question is what branch of service was your father in?

16 KD: My father was actually Army Reserve.

17 KC: Army Reserve.

18 KD: Yep, it was very unusual, he wasn't Regular Army, he was Army Reserve.

1 KC: What about your mother? What did she do for a living?

2 KD: She supported my husband—my father. When they first met, she was in
3 training to become a nurse and she worked at Marlboro Mental Health Hospital, and they
4 met at a dance on my father's birthday at Ft. Monmouth.

5 KC: Interesting. Now did you have any brothers or sisters?

6 KD: I had one brother, he was older than me by eighteen months, of course he
7 acted like it was eighteen years. His name was Michael Dale Connor, and he was born
8 October 6th, 1949.

9 KC: Okay. Now if you can, take me through your childhood. What was it like,
10 where were you growing up, were you moving around from place to place as part of the
11 military, what was that like for you?

12 KD: Well as an Army brat I moved around a lot, especially in the very beginning
13 when my father was being groomed, I guess you might say, he stayed behind in Germany
14 just after the war and he was a clerk-typist. He started out by processing Nazis I believe,
15 and eventually he was also trained in radar which is why he was at Ft. Monmouth. So, we
16 were there, and then I believe that he was involved with McCarthy's investigation
17 military at Ft. Monmouth in the '50s and I think my father turned evidence with
18 McCarthy and was rewarded. So began his rise in the military. So, I was pretty much, we
19 had a little eight-foot, eight-by-thirty foot trailer we lived in, the four of us, and it had no
20 bathroom, we always lived in the trailer park with a bath house. We moved to Ft. Bragg
21 and back to Jersey, and I was baptized in Ft. George Meade in Maryland. Eventually
22 things started slowing down in about 1956. We had a lot of movement going on and my
23 father ended up going TDY (Temporary Duty) to Alaska during that first four, five years
24 of my life. Then we went out to Ft. Huachuca and then from Ft. Huachuca we went to
25 Hawaii. So, I pretty much, in Fort Huachuca I went to school in Tombstone, and I tell
26 folks that I went to a two-room schoolhouse. So, I got chalk dust and gunpowder in my
27 kindergarten years, and we went on a field trip to the Bird Cage Saloon so there's not too
28 many kindergartners who would say that they had gone on their first field trip to a
29 brothel. But that's what I got to do. We ended up in Pearl Harbor, and you'd think that
30 that was—we'd be there for three years, and we'd stay at the same place, so we lived in
31 four different places in Hawaii. We started at Halawa Heights and then we went over to

1 another military housing that overlooked the harbor. We ended up at Schofield Barracks,
2 so it's actually three different places. My father was with CINCPAC (Commander in
3 Chief Pacific) Fleet, and he worked crazy hours. My mother would've loved to have just
4 stayed in Hawaii, she absolutely adored it. Schooling was terrible, I went to two military-
5 base schools, one at Pearl Harbor Elementary and one at Wheeler Air Force Base
6 Elementary. The teachers were so bad that my parents put us into a Lutheran school, a
7 parochial school but they're great, which is kind of interesting because I had two
8 Buddhist students in my class. So, I was very aware of a lot of the things on the island. I
9 was very acutely aware of cultural differences and injustice, very aware of injustice when
10 I was a child. So, I would watch different cultures and different people and understand. I
11 was upset in kindergarten, in our two-room schoolhouse we were split and we took a
12 class. It seemed like all the white kids ended up on one side and the Hispanics ended up
13 on the other. We were told the white kids were smart and the Hispanics were stupid,
14 because they couldn't do what we did. I thought that was wrong, and I didn't like
15 missionaries in Hawaii because they destroyed the Hawaiian culture. So then when I was
16 a child, I was very aware of the Civil Rights Movement, I remember having a talk with a
17 girlfriend of mine, Beverly Kim Roth and she was talking about niggers, and I was telling
18 her that was wrong. So, I'm just giving you an intro to that because that's the way I saw
19 my time in Vietnam too. From Hawaii we—I stayed there until it became a state, and
20 then we went to New Jersey. My father worked for the Air Force at Atlantic Highlands
21 Air Force Base and that was the first time I actually, well had what you call a normal
22 American childhood (laughs). I actually got to see my aunt and uncle, my only living
23 relatives, and got a chance to be in the Camp Fire Girls and take part in the Memorial
24 Day Parade and all that good American life that everyone takes for granted. Then from
25 there, we went to Vietnam. And after about nine months there we came back to New
26 Jersey, back to my aunt and uncle, and headed up to Rehoboth, Massachusetts where we
27 waited out till my dad got home. We went out to Colorado, and that was—I came of age
28 you might say in Colorado. In November of my senior year in high school. I ended up
29 going to Tucson and stayed in Tucson for thirty-five years. So, lots and lots of travel, lots
30 and lots of opportunities to see different people and hear different ways of talking. My
31 mother was positive I would never learn English if I stayed any longer in Hawaii because

1 I picked up the lingo so heavily there that she was sure I would never speak real English.
2 But I fooled her.

3 KC: Well, let me back up a little here, Kathy, and ask you some questions about
4 this time in your life. Now you mention that your father, that you believed that he worked
5 with McCarthy, or at least on the McCarthy hearings or what have you, do you know any
6 more details on the nature of that involvement?

7 KD: Yes, it was involved in stealing State-secrets in the radar department because
8 radar was very high-tech and very hush-hush, and my father was involved a lot in what
9 he called “sneaky peak” kind of stuff. He seemed to be at different places, he was in the
10 cutting edge when it came to computers in the ‘60s for processing information, spy-type
11 of thing. He told me one time, he usually never really—people in that business don’t
12 really talk, and he had a very good friend, last name was Snodgrass, and he was a West
13 Point graduate. My father never graduated from college, well not until he actually got out
14 of the military. So, he became a lieutenant colonel on a high school diploma, which was
15 quite remarkable.

16 KC: That’s quite a feat.

17 KD: Quite a feat. Very intelligent man, but he was very intelligent, and he was a
18 code-breaker also. Cryptologist. Anyway, Snodgrass was really on the rise, and because
19 of something that I believe my father said, he never went anywhere in the military.

20 KC: That your father didn’t go anywhere, or Snodgrass never went anywhere?

21 KD: That Snodgrass’ career was destroyed.

22 KC: And you suspect it was your father’s—the information your father provided?

23 KD: It had to do with something my father said.

24 KC: Interesting.

25 KD: Yeah, it always was one of those things where I—but you never talked about
26 it. But he had a picture of Snodgrass by his MG (British sports car), one of those you
27 know collector items now, and a picture of when he and his wife were married at West
28 Point. Very soon after he was, I believe my father was a master sergeant when all that
29 with McCarthy took place, and my mother said that he was demoted when he became an
30 officer. So, she was very ashamed of that, she really liked the idea that he was a senior
31 master sergeant or something. She was very upset when he became—because she only

1 had a high school diploma also. It was very, very difficult for her to keep up with women
2 who had gone to Smith later on in her life. Very difficult.

3 KC: Well, tell me about the life of a military brat as it were, I mean you're
4 moving around an awful lot throughout this time. What is that like on or what kind of an
5 effect does that have on a kid who has to move around so much with different schools
6 and different environments or was it one of these things that it was, "Well we didn't
7 know any better, so that's what we did."

8 KD: Well, you wrote a lot, I wrote a lot of letters when I travelled. Whatever I did
9 I always write to somebody back home. I knew every three years I was gonna be packing
10 up and moving. I didn't like being a civilian. I was scared to death to be a civilian, didn't
11 understand how civilians functioned. You just you never had pictures on the wall because
12 you had to leave the house the way it came. You never had any nice furniture or anything
13 that could be destroyed in a move. If you had pets, it was difficult because you didn't—
14 like my mother's favorite cat—my father swore she loved the cat more than him, but his
15 name was Siamalley it's Siam alley. He was a part Siamese, part alley-cat. Siamalley had
16 to be quarantined when we moved from Hawaii. Well not too many people have that
17 experience with their pets and then eventually we had to give up Siamalley when we
18 moved to Vietnam because my mother was positive that he was gonna become dinner to
19 the Vietnamese 'cause of course they eat dogs and cats. You don't take thing for granted.
20 A civilian takes their neighborhood for granted, or their friends for granted, or they think
21 that things will always be that way. When you're an Army brat or military brat, you know
22 things are gonna change. It's gonna be difficult, you will always be the new kid in the
23 class. I was always thankful that although I was tall, there was always a girl that was
24 taller than me in the class. I made more friends with teachers than I did with students
25 because that's how I could identify myself. I never fit in with kids, but I seemed to fit in
26 quite well with teachers. Eventually I did become a teacher.

27 KC: That's very interesting, what about school?

28 KD: Excuse me?

29 KC: What about school? How was school for you in all these moves?

30 KD: I loved school. But I sure as heck hated (laughs)—when I got to college and I
31 was a social studies teacher, eventually I got my degree in secondary social studies, and I

1 had to take US History and I begged off. I said, “I’m not taking the class, I can’t do the
2 American Revolution again,” because it never seemed like we got past the American
3 Revolution because we moved around so much, I’d always be back and well we’d have
4 the pilgrims, and then we’d have the American Revolution, and then well that would be
5 the end of that. I never did find out too much—I had to do a lot of research on my own
6 just to find out about the Civil War. God forbid there was anything after that (laughs).
7 But I did very well. I did a lot of reading; I’ve always been a reader. I used to do a lot of
8 reading so of course that helped me out in school. When I got older, it was a lot of
9 romance novels, but I also read about people and their stories. My favorite series was
10 Signature Books that were popular biographies of famous people, and they were called
11 Signature Books because they had the signature of the person on the front of the book.
12 You got to see how they wrote or how they expressed themselves, so I did a lot of that
13 kind of reading too. Wasn’t really good in math, and in fact—but I did pretty well until
14 we got back from Vietnam, and we were over in—I was at Sproul Junior High in
15 Security, Colorado and I was in algebra class, and I was thirteen and I started getting
16 migraine headaches every time I went into algebra. I’d never had migraines before,
17 although it is hereditary, and my mother gets migraines. I was the only one who inherited
18 that in my algebra class, now I wonder why I had such trouble, but I think it was also that
19 I wasn’t talking to anybody. Nobody talked about Vietnam, and I’d been through trauma
20 and I could hold it together until weeks [NOTE: This does not make any sense.] part
21 came up and then I think it kind of brought itself out then.

22 KC: Now you mention that your family goes to Vietnam, and I believe you
23 mention this is in 1963? Something like that?

24 KD: Yes.

25 KC: ‘62? ‘63? Okay, what role or what was the job of the duties, what station did
26 your father have moving to Vietnam?

27 KD: He was with the 3rd Radio Research unit stationed at Tan Son Nhut. Later on,
28 I think they just started calling it ‘Davis Station’, the area that he was located in. He
29 stayed primarily in Saigon, but periodically he would fly out to Phu Bai. I’m not real sure
30 what he did out there except that they did a lot of, I think it’s the first I ever heard the
31 word ‘listening post’. Later on, my best friend was in the Air Force and she was in a

1 listening post in the mountains somewhere listening to the Soviets. She pretty much did
2 kind of the Airman part of my father's job.

3 KC: Well what role did your dad play with the 3rd Radio Research? What was his
4 job there?

5 KD: I think he organized the way they were listening and how to process the
6 information. I got in touch with one of the men who believed that he worked with my
7 father in Vietnam, and he remembers him as a person who set out the problem and trusted
8 his men to come to the solution, and that's kind of how my father worked with my
9 brother and me. If there was a problem in the family, we would sit and talk and we would
10 come up with our own solution. There were not a whole lot that he revealed of himself.
11 We were all personal problem solvers. I can't tell you exactly what he did because I don't
12 really know. Because he was with the Sneaky Peaks, with what he affectionately called
13 'military intelligence.' He instructed me that that was the first oxymoron I would ever
14 learn, because he was positive that what we were doing in Vietnam was very frustrating
15 for him because he says, "I'm supposed to be getting this information, but I have to get it
16 through translation, because I don't know French and I don't know Vietnamese," and I
17 never understood why he didn't learn it.

18 KC: So, the whole family moves to Saigon there in 1963.

19 KD: Mm-hmm.

20 KC: Now describe life for me as you remember it in Saigon in 1963. What was
21 Saigon like?

22 KD: It was beautiful. I absolutely, absolutely loved the city, it's the first time I
23 ever lived in a city. First time. We did not live on base, there were Americans scattered
24 all over, Americans and families scattered all over the city of Saigon and Cholon and
25 some of the surrounding areas. But primarily a lot was downtown. Because—and there
26 was major, major construction going on that the place we lived in at 214-A Yen Do,
27 that's Y-E-N D-O, and this was a street that was near downtown in fact we were about a
28 block away from the Xa Loi Pagoda [NOTE: This is the proper spelling, not what is
29 spelled out.], that's V-A-L-O-I and that was the center of the Buddhist unrest of that
30 summer. We lived across the street from the noted Nhu's secret police, that there was—I
31 never really knew what was going on over there, but my mother said that's where the

1 secret police were. It was a peaceful, unsettling time. You could travel around in the city.
2 You could walk on the sidewalk. You could travel in pedicabs, there's motocyclos—the
3 motocyclos, M-O-T-O-C-Y-C-L-O, and these were motorcycles in the back and like a
4 scoop in the front where there was a seat for two passengers. For two American
5 passengers. And you could travel around without any real fear. There were things that
6 were happening, but we weren't super aware of it. People went to—there was a brand
7 new movie theater, the Capitol Kinh-Do, K-I-N-H D-O, a theater that was just built.
8 There had been one before, but it was too small. There were officer's barracks, like
9 Brinks, were available, but they weren't really used because it was mostly families. There
10 was a bowling alley and a malt shop. There were places where lots of civilians,
11 Americans, involved with the USOM, the United States Overseas Mission. Lots of people
12 involved there. They were building roads to Bien Hoa [NOTE: This is the correct
13 spelling, not what I spelled.]. B-E-N H-O-A. There were all kinds of activities that were
14 going on between the civilians and the military, we didn't have a whole lot of contact
15 with the civilians, but they were very evident with the American aid that we gave. So, it
16 was one of those things where we believed that there wasn't a war going on, and that if
17 we just kept—we were very positive that American aid would make a difference to the
18 success of the Vietnamese. So, there was I guess you might say it was the pre-war
19 conditions, where everybody's dancing, that it would all turn out right and well. The
20 problem was that we had a puppet, Ngo Dinh Diem, but he had his own agenda, and we
21 did not understand it.

22 KC: Now you mention that you say there was no war, of course you're talking
23 about no major war for the United States but obviously as you well know, there was a
24 war going on there with the Viet Cong there, et cetera. Did you see any sort of
25 manifestations of what was going on in the countryside in Saigon?

26 KD: The major thing that I thought, that told—there was two things that I knew
27 for sure that there was a war going on. First of all, you never left the city at night. You
28 didn't do that. You stayed in the city at night, you did not go to the countryside. You did
29 not go to the countryside. Bottom line. You didn't set foot out of the city or get anywhere
30 near the perimeter; you did not do it. The countryside was owned by the Viet Cong. The
31 other thing was, I remember I was walking on Tu Do-Catinat, which is Rue Catinat or Tu

1 Do Street, but nobody ever called it the new name of Tu Do, I think it means ‘freedom’.
2 And its T-U-D-O. Catinat is C-A-T-I-N-A-T and that was the old French name for the
3 street. Well, I was walking up the street away from the river, the Saigon River, and there
4 was a soldier, a Vietnamese soldier in a green uniform. He was begging and he had one
5 leg. I was so—it broke my heart, and I wanted to do something, and my mother wouldn’t
6 allow me to do anything. I couldn’t give him any money. I couldn’t give him anything to
7 tell him that I cared. We kept walking on. Then later my mother made some comment
8 about how horrible it was for beggars on the street, he probably didn’t fight anyway.
9 Probably cut off his own leg because he wanted to, I don’t know, but she had a very
10 different attitude. I think part of it was that if she didn’t acknowledge fighting and the
11 war going on, that it didn’t happen. So, it really surprised me was that she was an ardent
12 subscriber to the *National Geographic*. You didn’t cut it up. You saved it. It was
13 seriously the only thing that we really brought around to every place that we moved, were
14 boxes, and boxes, and boxes, and boxes of *National Geographic*, and the one that they
15 had had just come out within the time I think my father got orders to say that there was
16 fighting going on in Vietnam and people were dying. American advisors were dying. She
17 read that and we still went to Vietnam. I have a copy of that *National Geographic* now.

18 KC: Now as a young teenager, were you aware of what was going on with the
19 War? Who was doing what, what side was believed in this set of principles or that set of
20 principles? Were you aware of why the War was being fought?

21 KD: Not really, not truly because I was a military brat. Military brats are very
22 patriotic. My country right or wrong, my country. You’re raised that way in the military.
23 I questioned a lot of things, but so what? I had no place to go, so I had to focus on what
24 was happening. The two books that my mother read to explain Vietnam was *Deliver Us*
25 *From Evil* by Dr. Tom Dooley, and the other was *The Ugly American*. Dooley’s book is
26 big time propaganda, truly big time propaganda now, I’m reading it—I’ve read it about
27 four times. But I was reading it then and reading about how the Communists drove
28 chopsticks into little children’s ears because they listened to—because they learned about
29 Christianity. So, she had a very strong attitude about stopping Communism, that we had
30 to stop Communism and so did my father, but my mother was more adamant. She’s a
31 dyed-in-the-wool Republican, my father was a Democrat. So, he gave a little bit more

1 lee-way, but my mother was always, “We need to fight Communism. Capitalism was the
2 way to go.”

3 KC: All right, now here you are at thirteen years old I believe it is.

4 KD: Actually, I was twelve.

5 KC: Oh, you were twelve years old.

6 KD: Yeah, I got—we left almost on let’s see on, I think it was within the week of
7 my twelfth birthday. May 16th is my birthday. We were, I think we stayed—we were
8 pretty much packing up around my birthday, and we stayed about a week at a motel and
9 then we headed off, so we were in Honolulu and then layover over Memorial Day
10 weekend. In June, the very first week of June, we were in Saigon.

11 KC: That sounds like you had some measure of freedom there, just based on the
12 few things that you’ve said. What were the things that you liked to do in Saigon?

13 KD: Well, my absolute favorite thing to do was wander the streets downtown. I
14 absolutely, I was on Nguyen Hue—I’ll come back with you on the spelling of that. Le
15 Loi, L-E L-O-I, Boulevard. I was on also on what was called the ‘Street of Pets’. I went
16 down to Ben Thanh Market a lot, wandered around there. I really loved to watch people.
17 Did a lot of people watching and absorbing and just enjoyed—sometimes my mother was
18 with me, sometimes I was by myself. I also, at first, I liked going to the Cercle Sportif
19 which was a private French-Vietnamese club, but I didn’t like the way—the attitude. The
20 chosen, the few amongst the many, I guess I was too democratic. The French and the elite
21 Vietnamese didn’t treat the workers very well at the Cercle Sportif and it was very
22 exclusive. You had to be interviewed and accepted, and they surely did not want
23 Americans in the club because Americans didn’t know how to act. But we ended up
24 being there, but I wasn’t ever really comfortable being in the swimming pool. There was
25 always seemed to be a fight breaking out, again the French would start yelling at us and
26 taunt us. Not very polite names. So, I would go out to Cholon and to there where they—
27 GI pool out there and I would go swimming, but I would be the only one out there.
28 Towards the end, and I can’t remember exactly when this was, but I was swimming and I
29 was the only one in the pool, and I thought how easy it would be just to lob a grenade
30 into the pool. And I scared myself out of it.

31 KC: Now you talked—I’m sorry go ahead.

1 KD: I don't ever really remember travelling around with friends. I know that I had
2 friends that came to the house, and I know I went to other people's houses, but I never
3 bonded really with anyone except our houseboy, Nam.

4 KC: Now you mentioned that there were—the French presence there was still
5 quite strong obviously, and you also talked about this circle of friends or maybe a lack of
6 a circle of friends there. Who did you consider your compatriots while you were there?
7 Did you deal mostly with the Americans, or did you deal mostly with the Vietnamese?
8 What kind of contact did you have with them?

9 KD: I would say, well when I was in school, I was exposed—I went to the
10 American Community School, which was just pretty much outside Tan Son Nhut, and it
11 later became a hospital. 3rd Hospital or something like that. They were still constructing
12 that, they had just finished putting in new buildings when we were there, just starting
13 school. It was a three-story building where my classroom was located. I had friends at
14 school, but I was more embarrassed with their behavior. We had one Vietnamese student
15 in our class, and I liked him very much, but nobody really tried to make contact with him.
16 We had—I wanted more contact with the Vietnamese. Those were the people that I
17 wanted to spend my time with, and I did by walking the streets or talking with Nam our
18 houseboy and listening to his stories and trying to understand. Also, I had a Vietnamese
19 music teacher. I played flute, and a Vietnamese music teacher and he was trying to teach
20 me. I spent time near the pagoda where all the Buddhist uprising was. I kind of hovered
21 around there. I spent time down around the docks, just watching activity down there. I
22 almost talked myself into going to a Vietnamese movie theater one time, but I was too
23 frightened.

24 KC: Now with all this kind of exposure and observing the Vietnamese, what did
25 you learn about them?

26 KD: Very patient. They were very patient, they—and the people in the South
27 were different than the people in the North.

28 KC: How so?

29 KD: Well, the people in the South were more laidback, and they were heavily
30 influenced by the Chinese and by the East-Indian. They were dyed-in-the-wool
31 capitalists, there was nothing they liked better to do than to bargain. You get down on

1 your haunches, and they had a whole system of how to bargain and barter, and the
2 bargaining was something I'd never seen before, and so I would watch them. I had no
3 real idea what they were talking about, but their body language and how they would
4 express themselves, and how they would get up and, "Oh no, they didn't—oh no, you
5 were trying to take advantage of me," and then they come back and get back down on
6 their haunches and barter some more, and I just I saw a lot that it seemed like sometimes
7 that they'd sell their soul for whatever deal they could get. Meanwhile, Nam was from
8 North Vietnam. He knew what it was like not to have. He knew because he was there, he
9 would talk about the Japanese occupation. He talked about the horrible famine in 1945.
10 He talked about depravation a lot, and he used his mind, his brain, very strongly to make
11 sure he would never be without again. But he didn't do—I thought he was very, very
12 honest. That he worked very hard, and he wanted no more war. There was a neighbor
13 next door to us, it was a multi-family Vietnamese family, and I would play my flute on
14 the balcony, my balcony faced their balcony, or the sides faced the houses, and they lived
15 in an old French colonial house. Beautiful, beautiful house. She was young, married
16 daughter-in-law. She told me her name was Chi-Li, and she invited me over one time and
17 it was so—I was so overwhelmed with the beauty of the house, and she explained to me
18 when I first came in the door on the right was the family shrine over there. Well, I wasn't
19 familiar with family shrines, and she worked very hard to explain that to me. The family
20 was very polite and very nice to me. It was very heartbreaking because we never could go
21 over much farther because after the November 1st coup, by November 2nd they were gone.
22 They were raided. The police came and took the family away. Her father-in-law was one
23 of the designers of the underground tunnels that President Diem and his brother escaped
24 from in. They had a watchgoose. [NOTE: They had a large goose that patrolled the
25 ground attacking intruders.] A watchgoose was I think invited out to dinner, became a
26 meal for one of the occupiers of military police or whatever occupiers of the place, and
27 the house sat quiet and abandoned for the rest of the time we were there. Which was very
28 unusual, because the housing—it was very hard to get a house in Saigon at the time,
29 because of all the wealthy American military bringing all kinds of people in. There was a
30 huge waiting list on houses to be occupied.

1 KC: Now you mentioned a coup there early November 1963. What do you
2 remember about that?

3 KD: (Laughs) This is the first thing that I ever wrote about actually. When we got
4 to Anawan Junior High, Mr. Ellis my teacher had us write a report or essay or something,
5 and my—the first time I ever wrote about Vietnam really, to absorb or to process, was
6 about the November 1st coup. Now we had that day off, the school was not in session on
7 November 1st. [NOTE: I learned that we were in session, but the school day ended at
8 noon. There was no air conditioning in the classrooms.] It was All Souls Day or All
9 Saints Day or it was a Catholic holiday. I had two friends over, Linda Owens who was
10 the daughter of my father's CO (Commanding Officer) Colonel Thomas Owen, excuse
11 me, and another friend Niecy. I don't remember her last name. They came over and we
12 were playing, and we were by ourselves. My brother was nowhere to be found. Had no
13 idea where he was. My mother was at work at the BX (Base Exchange), and my father
14 was out at Tan Son Nhut. We were listening to the radio, the *Armed Forces Radio*, and
15 suddenly there was pretty much, "All Americans stay off the street." We were talking
16 about that going, "Well, what the heck's going on now?" We had no clue, no idea what
17 was happening. About one o'clock we started hearing bombs. Machine gun fire. We
18 started hearing sounds of war. I go, "What the heck's going on now?" Well soon after
19 that started, my mother came home. She herded the girls into the taxi, the waiting taxi,
20 and took off. She had pulled me aside before she took the girls out to bring them home,
21 and she said, "There's fighting in the streets." She had to get them home safely, and she'd
22 be back. So, I waited on the balcony overlooking Yen Do and I was by myself. We had
23 no phone, there was no phone. There was no television. There was—you know we had
24 one phone for the three houses that Americans lived in that were involved with the 3rd
25 RRU (Radio Research Unit). I just waited, and I guess she was back in a half hour, so it
26 seemed like it was much longer. She joined me on the balcony, and we watched. There
27 was firing from the harbor. We were watching all these airplanes flying over, and we
28 were absorbing what was happening. I think we were up there for about an hour or two
29 hours. [NOTE: Possibly longer because Father came home at 2000 hours.] My father
30 came home with what's called a grease-gun, a machine gun over his shoulder and he
31 came striding and he was so angry with us. He came up and he said, "What the hell are

1 you doing?” And we said, “We’re just watching to see what’s going on.” Well, he was
2 positive that we were going to be—the shrapnel was going to harm us. We came inside,
3 and we went to just normal time. It was the time for dinner. Nam served dinner. Nobody
4 knew where my brother was. By that time, he was—I believe he was fifteen, he had just
5 had a birthday in October. We ate dinner, then we went upstairs and what we usually did
6 in the evenings was because we had no television or anything and my parents were not
7 really into games, and we had no air conditioning downstairs, we would congregate in
8 their bedroom that had air conditioning. All three of our bedrooms had air conditioning.
9 We would lay on their California king-sized bed and listen to *Armed Forces Radio* and
10 there would be stories. I heard *The Shadow* and *Fibber McGee and Molly* and a lot of the
11 radio programs that pre-television had. Periodically there would be, “Stay off the street.
12 All Americans stay off the street” would come up, but like I said only other than
13 worrying about where my brother was, we didn’t talk about what was going on out in
14 Saigon. It came time for me to take a bath. Well, I got my stuff because I’d take baths—
15 well at that time my mother thought that showers were evil, and you could only get clean
16 in a bathtub. So, I went to take a bath and I turned on the water—and when I turned on
17 the water, it was blood red. I thought, “Oh my God, they’re fighting at the river.” I went,
18 “Okay, okay, okay. Settle down girl.” We didn’t get our water from the river, we got our
19 water from a cistern in the back, and it was treated with Clorox. The water was contained.
20 There was no chance of blood being in the water. So, I figured out it was rust. For some
21 strange reason that night and only that night the water was discolored.

22 KC: Very strange.

23 KD: I got in the tub, and I took my bath. I rinsed off and drained the tub, put on
24 my pajamas, kissed my parents’ goodnight, and went to bed. I never told them, I never
25 talked to them. We just didn’t talk about stuff like that. All that night I would hear the
26 explosions, the cannons, the machine guns going on all night, and I was positive that the
27 Viet Cong had invaded the city. I was positive that we were going to be overrun. But in
28 the morning, it was unbelievable. The birds were singing. It was the most beautiful day. It
29 was just gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous, and I couldn’t believe how peaceful it was. I
30 came down to breakfast and my father was there. My mother I don’t know where she
31 was, and my dad—they’d gotten in touch, they found out where my brother was and he

1 had been at Tan Son Nhut the whole time, so he was safe. My father looked at me, he
2 smiled, and he says, “Well congratulations, you’ve been through your first coup.” Well, I
3 didn’t know what a coup was, and he said that the President Ngo Dinh Diem had been
4 overthrown, and there was a new government. Later on, he made some kind of comment
5 about how Colonel Owen was at the side of Big Minh during the coup. It wasn’t until I
6 started reading about the coup, I found out it was Lucien Conein, not Owen, but I think
7 his name C-O-E-N, Lucien who was by Big Minh’s side. So, I thought that Linda’s
8 father, Colonel Owen was involved in the coup. I was wrong (laughs). My mother had a
9 little spy camera, a Minolta spy camera, little-bitty teeny-tiny thing. She worked in the
10 catalogue department at the BX, and she got ordered this little spy camera, and she loved
11 that sucker. She thought it took the best pictures ever, I thought it was pretty garbage. She
12 took a picture of the vehicle that contained the dead bodies of President Diem and his
13 brother who were murdered in Cholon. Because Yen Do was one of the feeder streets
14 from Cholon, kind of dog-legged a little bit, but you could take it straight through the
15 Cholon, the Chinatown of Saigon.

16 KC: What about your brother? What was he doing, that he was down at the airport
17 there at Tan Son Nhut?

18 KD: (Laughs) Well they had the, what is it—I’m trying to remember the name of
19 it. There’s a compound. There was an American compound at Tan Son Nhut just outside
20 the gates, I don’t think there were gates at the time, and it was the JDB, JDP—something
21 Drake compound, [NOTE: Johnson, Drake, and Peiffer Construction] and they were the
22 construction company that built Highway One to Bien Hoa. The American equivalent to
23 the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He had friends, the Knox brothers. They were twins, and he spent
24 the night there. He just left the house that morning on November 1st and he didn’t bother,
25 he said, “I’m gonna go stay with my friends” or go—I don’t even think he told me. I
26 think he told Nam something, but he never told me anything. I don’t think he told my
27 parents anything. He was a bit—his story of Vietnam is totally different than mine.
28 Totally different. His—he was a teenager, and they, a lot of—if you’re a teenager and
29 you’re under stress, I believe that that invincible attitude kicks into gear big time, so
30 stupid things become very stupid things because you’re shouting at the devil. You’re
31 going, “I’m gonna live forever, so I’m gonna do some really stupid things. I’m gonna get

1 drunk, do drugs, get laid,” whatever. A lot of the high school kids had on their
2 motorcycles and went out of the city at night, which you did not do, but they did. They
3 would make poor choices, but they believed that if they acted this out then they weren’t
4 gonna die. Michael did some acting out. I didn’t know a whole lot of it. I just knew some
5 of it like the times he came back from I think he celebrated for his birthday and went to a
6 brothel. A couple of weeks or so later, my parents were in his room and when my mother
7 came out, she said, “He’s a man today,” and I thought he had his period. (Laughs) So I
8 was very innocent. Later I found out he had a venereal disease. So, what he was doing in
9 Tan Son Nhut, he was with his buddies.

10 KC: Yeah, certainly sounds like a vastly different experience than the one you had
11 as a twelve year old.

12 KD: Well, he was also, he was a male. He was very tall, very large, and he didn’t
13 like small people. So, his attitude was very different. I was five feet tall, and I weighed a
14 hundred-and-ten pounds at the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, I was 5’7”
15 and I weight a hundred-and-thirty pounds. It was a hell of a year (laughs).

16 KC: Yeah, I guess so. Well now that this coup has taken place, and things are
17 unsettled at least for the moment, do you have—did this spark any sort of curiosity in you
18 as to what exactly is going on, I want to get to the bottom of this, where are we at in
19 terms of who’s in charge, what’s the American military doing, did any of that come into
20 some sort of relief for you at that time?

21 KD: What the Americans pretty much did was go to ground. They didn’t know
22 who to support, they didn’t know what was happening, and besides there were Christmas
23 to prepare for. You had to make sure that all the stuff that you wanted for Christmas had
24 to be done early. It seems to me that sometime in August or September we did our
25 Christmas orders. The whole attitude was the military didn’t know who to support. US
26 military, and they used— and the people didn’t know who to support, the Americans
27 didn’t know what to do. It was okay, because we’d had time to worry about that because
28 that’s when the targeting of Americans started kicking in big time. It was sort of there
29 when the attitude against the Buddhists was so prevalent, the anti-Buddhist attitude with
30 Diem and the government was going on. August and September, especially August.
31 Towards the end of August, it was absolutely horrific. The pagoda was raided, and I

1 remember going by there right after the raid by the Nhu's secret service group, Diem's
2 brother, N-H-U is Nhu and Diem is D-I-E-M, it's got a little—the Vietnamese language
3 or spelling or whatever, if it's a D it's pronounced as a Z, and if it has a little dash in the
4 backbone of the D, then it's pronounced as a D. So, a regular D is a Z, and a dashed-D is
5 a D, a little Vietnamese for you. I went and there was a huge padlock on the gates of the
6 pagoda, September 1st. I remember it was so empty, the courtyard was so empty, and
7 there were scraps of paper blowing around the courtyard. So desolate, and it always been
8 so active and there had been a lot of activity there from the time of Duc—the honorable
9 Buddhist monk who set himself on fire on June 11th. So there had been a lot of activity
10 just prior to that, and I was very familiar with what happened in self-immolation because
11 I had gone to the site and saw the melted road in front of the Cambodian embassy where
12 he had set himself on fire. We knew something was going on, so we stayed home, but
13 when the next day I was there to pay my respects. It was a very moving experience to me.
14 A very important, and that gave me heads up that something was not going well. That a
15 lot of people didn't understand it. They didn't want to, they wanted to support Diem at all
16 costs. They didn't want things to change. But the Viet—and of course Diem and his
17 group blamed the VC (Viet Cong), in fact Diem coined the term 'VC'. The emperor Bao
18 Dai named Vietnam, and Diem named the Viet Cong.

19 KC: Now this obviously had quite an impact on you in these early childhood
20 memories. What was the atmosphere of Saigon like following the coup, when things
21 started to shake out a little bit? What was the atmosphere like there?

22 KD: The people in Saigon were used to change. They were constantly in flux.
23 They were constantly—refugees had been flooding the city for three wars. They were
24 there coming—well during World War II, 1940s, major changes happened. The
25 Vietnamese were used to kind of tucking and rolling. As long as they can make a buck
26 (laughs) it was okay, it didn't matter who was showing up because they'd survived the
27 French, they'd survived the Japanese, they survived the French coming back, they
28 survived the Americans and money was coming in. They were so, like I said, they were
29 so different from the north. They had, in their history, they had capitulated to the French
30 a good thirty years, forty years before the North, the Tonkinese became part of the French
31 colony. They had a different attitude. They figured okay, there's change but you know

1 there's change, but it'll stay the same. There will be new generals, but they'll be just like
2 the old generals. There will be—because they had gone through the French shake up,
3 they had gone through when Diem took over and they converted to Catholics because he
4 was Catholic, and the Buddhist generals were out, and now the Buddhist generals were in
5 and the Catholic generals were supposed to be out. They just—and besides, they were
6 busy preparing for Tet. That was more important than what was going on in the
7 government. Heads would roll, people would disappear, but it was—pretty much my
8 feelings were it was business as normal. The only thing that really happened was there
9 was, like I said, there was more stepped up VC activity. The first was in September
10 actually, when things were in unrest with the Buddhist problem, the Capitol Kinh-Do
11 was—there was a bomb that went off on September 23rd I believe, I was there with my
12 mother. The women's latrine, bathroom, in the front of the theater pretty much under the
13 screen blew up. It was during the showing of *Lady and the Tramp*. It was the afternoon,
14 about three o'clock or so I guess it was, and explosions went off and we sat. We sat.
15 There was no screaming or yelling or running to the doors, we would not have made a
16 good movie for Hollywood, so we sat. I remember the lights came on and there were two
17 huge wooden fish plaques of either side of the parallel walls, and the concussion from the
18 explosion caused these huge, huge fish to rock and they rocked huge, and they were
19 just— they almost touched the ceiling they rocked so high up, and then I watched them
20 just rock. And rock. And rock. And rock. And rock. And rock until they stabilized. Then
21 there was dust sprinkling down from the ceiling, and then there was a huge crash towards
22 the front. The air conditioning system ductwork fell down. While all this was going on
23 we sat. The MP (Military Police) came down the aisle and checked out the bathroom, and
24 then we started filing out. As the MP came up the aisles, we rejoined the line, and went to
25 the front of the theater and the taxis came, and they couldn't load people right in front of
26 the theater, they had to go either in front of the theater before they came to the front, you
27 had to stop over there and they loaded to the left and they loaded to the right, but they
28 didn't load in the front of the theater. I remember that we did not get into a taxi, that we
29 kept walking, we took a right and we just kept walking, and we walked pretty much
30 towards where my mother worked at the PX (Post Exchange). Eventually we got in a taxi
31 and went home, because I don't remember walking home. [NOTE: I had a PTSD incident

1 about this walk after the bombing, and we did not head for the BX. We went up Le Van
2 Duyet past a tall hedge that scared me to death. Nam opened the gate to let us in once we
3 got home.] But I remember that we just kept walking. So, the activity was that we didn't
4 look at or fearful of government unrest, because well, that was kind of the history of
5 Vietnam as we understood it, but we looked for more VC attacks. We were told to be
6 careful of slicing fruit, they had what's called a pamplemousse or a pomelo, I actually
7 had a pomelo the other day, it's P-O-M-E-L-O. It was hollowed out and plastic
8 explosives was put in the center of it, so when you cut it, it would explode. So, there
9 would be these different packages of bombs or grenades lobbed into courtyards, or
10 different activities that started stepping up from September on. It got to the point where I
11 talked to my teacher, Mrs. Georgina Nazarenus and she was there, her husband was a
12 pilot, and she wasn't there because the military allowed her, she was there because she
13 wanted to be with her husband, and she brought her six year old son, Bryan. She
14 remembered that you would have to check under our desks before school started to make
15 sure there were no plastic explosives under our desks that would blow up.

16 KC: Wow.

17 KD: So, the focus wasn't so much on the Vietnamese government, it was the
18 endangerment of the American citizens that was going on, that started stepping up soon
19 after the August curfew invasion of the Buddhist temple and the crackdown on the
20 Buddhists by the Diem government.

21 KC: Now these would be kind of the official things that you would do, that they
22 would advise you to do to be safer. What about your own personal safety, and living there
23 with your family? Did your family take extraordinary measures to provide for your own
24 security? Were you more wary as you were living there in Saigon? What was that like for
25 you guys?

26 KD: Not really. Sounds crazy now, but it's one of those things where the actual—
27 to understand where we were coming from, you have to go back to the example of the
28 bombing of the theater. We were in a bombing. We—no one cried, no one screamed. No
29 one screamed, no one stampeded to the door. We sat. Because we knew if we stampeded
30 to the door, there would be someone out there to gun us down. So, the best way was to be
31 passive. We're talking children. This was a Walt Disney movie, there were children in

1 the theater. It wasn't loaded with adults, later on in February they really bombed the
2 Capitol Kinh-Do to the point where it didn't exist anymore, and that was during *The List*
3 *of the Adrian Messenger*, and that was full of adults. That was a little different, but still
4 the accounts—we weren't there when that happened, we were in R&R (Rest and
5 Recuperation) in Bagio in the Philippines.

6 KC: Okay.

7 KD: But I belonged to a group called Saigon Kids and we do lots of talking about
8 memories about what happened then, and there were deaths with that one. But still, there
9 wasn't the Hollywood scene that people were, they figured if they froze or if they figured
10 if they continued life normally that things would be okay. It took—later we started seeing
11 different things, like for instances on the buses, the school buses, we went from the
12 Bluebird, yellow American school buses to Vietnamese buses. When we had the Bluebird
13 buses, we had MPs with machine guns get on the bus with us. They got off and we
14 entered, and they got back on, and they were pretty much sitting on the steps. Then we
15 had grills over the windows to keep hand grenades from being lobbed in. Seems to me, I
16 believe it was in January of 1964 they changed, they had done the guards, they had done
17 the screens, they had changed the bus routes. We never went the same way to get to
18 school because there would be a pattern that they could bomb the buses with. We also—
19 the kids started doing superstitions when we had to cross railroad tracks to get on the way
20 to school. So, everyone on the bus had to lift their feet when we went over the railroad
21 tracks, that was for good luck. We had to cross over canals on bridges, and everybody in
22 the bus had to hold their breath as we went over the bridges. I remember one time one kid
23 didn't and the whole bus turned against that person. They were so angry and— "If we
24 die, it's gonna be your fault." We had strange bus anyway. I had a crush on this guy, Karl
25 Slovak [NOTE: I mispronounced his name in the interview. It is Karl Sovak], and I had a
26 crush on him because he had a python. He would feed the python on the bus live mice,
27 and I thought that was so cool (both laugh). 'Cause all the other girls would go, "Eww,"
28 and I'd go, "Wow, that's really neat." That wouldn't happen on American schools
29 (laughter).

30 KC: No, I'm sure of that.

1 KD: We had—I mean they still had baseball games, they still had normal things
2 that were occurring because they wanted things to— if you didn't acknowledge it, it
3 didn't happen. That was pretty bad because we got kind of used to the military junta and
4 tried to figure out how the heck that was gonna work, and then January 31st I was out in
5 our courtyard and the Ryan's next door called over. I don't remember somebody called
6 over to our courtyard to say there was another coup. There was a man that had been
7 overthrown and we had another leader, and that's when I really thought, "Oh, we're
8 going to Hell in a hand basket." Cause things had—a little over two months and then we
9 had another leader.

10 KC: Why don't we stop there for today, Kathy?

11 KD: Mm-hmm.

Interview with Kathy Dobronyi

Session [2] of [2]

Date: 25 May 2011

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History Interview with Kathy
2 Dobronyi. Today is 25 May 2011. I'm in Lubbock, Texas on the campus of Texas Tech
3 University and Kathy is joining me via telephone again from her home in Inverness,
4 Florida. Now Kathy I had to interrupt you briefly, I apologize for that. We had you there
5 in 1964, I believe you said it was January of 1964 and you were going to pick up the
6 narrative of your time there in Saigon from that point, so please go ahead.

7 KD: We just finished Christmas in December, and it was pretty keyed down for
8 the Vietnamese, because they were getting real excited for Tet. Tet was a major, major
9 holiday that I was not familiar with at all though I had lived in Hawaii and there was a
10 large Chinese population there. Kind of knew about Chinese New Year but I didn't
11 realize that there were so many rituals involved. One of the things was to get all your
12 debts paid. Get all your debts paid, buy new clothes, start the New Year out just perfect
13 and fine. Lots of flowers on the Street of Flowers, which I always thought was Le Loi but
14 turned out to be Nguyen Hue, which is N-G-U-Y-E-N capital H-U-E. So, there was—
15 and there were all kinds of neat things there in shops and all and so it was a pretty
16 exciting time, but you needed new things and there was a lot of consumerism going on.
17 When we had our focus on the Tet celebrations, which were going to begin around the 1st
18 of February, I was in our courtyard, we had a small courtyard with a tiny grass enclosure
19 that our houseboy Nam kept filling with water because we had six ducks, and he liked to
20 just give places for the ducks to play. We were out there goofing with the ducks because
21 we needed to eat them before Tet 'cause we were sure—my mother was sure that people
22 were gonna come over the wall and steal our ducks for their Tet dinners. Suddenly there
23 was a call over the wall from the Ryan's stating that there was another coup, and I was so
24 shocked I didn't—I pretty much blocked it out of my mind. There was a coup, but I
25 didn't remember and want to remember, didn't want to know, who had taken over, I felt
26 devastated that Big Minh was no longer in power, I kind of trusted him for some strange
27 reason. I think it was because I thought that my father had told me that his CO, Lt. Col.
28 Tom Owen was standing by Big Minh during the November 1st coup, but it turned out to
29 be Lucius (meant Lucien) Conein who was a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) directive

1 who worked with Lansdale. Lansdale was very involved with pretty much anti-
2 communist propaganda and different bits and pieces of nasties that popped up, but the
3 Viet Minh were just fine doing their own thing, they didn't need any exaggeration by us,
4 but we wanted to help them out, I think. There were people disappearing, Americans
5 disappearing, who went out to work in the villages. I knew people whose fathers went out
6 and never came home, in the schools, and then we just didn't talk about it. Someone
7 would say something and then there would be silence. So, about this time we were—
8 seemed like that there were more attacks on Americans in January, and they were more
9 subtle. There were—it had always been a technique, starting back with the French
10 occupation or the Vietnamese trying to get the French out, was they would toss hand
11 grenades into courtyards and different things so that—or it was very popular to eat
12 outdoors in Saigon when it wasn't raining, and people stopped doing that because you
13 could be sitting there and there would be suddenly a hand grenade rolled into the
14 establishment or someone would leave, put a bicycle next to the wall that had plastic
15 explosive in the tubing. There would be bags left, different things happening. So, we got
16 to the habit of whenever we went out to eat, we would always face the door. You would
17 never go into an establishment and—it was just not comfortable to be anywhere where
18 you couldn't see the door. And you also made sure that you knew how to get out, there
19 was a way out you just didn't enter a place thinking that you were gonna stay and be
20 comfortable because you probably weren't. We took to eating in establishments that had
21 upstairs because downstairs was too dangerous. So, we went to one place, it was very
22 interesting, it was off of Le Loi and it's a kind of—anyway we went upstairs, and my
23 father ordered some squab soup, he thought that would be really neat, he thought it was
24 gonna be chicken soup. What it turned out to be was a bowl of broth with a tiny baby
25 pigeon in it, plucked very nicely, but its little claws were curled up and it was kind of
26 curled up and its little eyeballs staring at my dad. He didn't like that, and this is a man
27 who wouldn't have no problem eating most anything, but the idea of his food staring
28 back at him was not very comforting. We ate a lot of soup, or *pho*, and in Vietnam we
29 called it soup singnon. It's what we were told it was. So, when he found this little bird in
30 his soup singnon, he was not thrilled.

31 KC: I'm sure.

1 KD: The tension built. We had our—it seemed right around that time also that
2 security got more intense, instead of taking the normal route to school in our school bus,
3 we got picked up in front of our houses, our places. We usually stayed inside a gate until
4 the bus pulled up, and then there was a guard, American guard, and MP who'd step out
5 and we loaded on, and he stepped back in and pretty much stood on the steps at the
6 entrance of the bus. About the time right after the coup, that second—that coup of
7 January '64, they decided to (Cramer coughing) change the buses. They changed the
8 buses from the American yellow, Bluebird buses to Vietnamese buses. What these were,
9 they were different in one major respect that was very difficult for me to handle, because
10 they were five seats across. They weren't benches, they were five seats across. The
11 middle seat was on a hinge, and it was lifted up so that there wasn't an aisle, no people
12 could go down the aisle and take their seats, and then they would put the seat down, and
13 it gave a clang. So, as we loaded on the bus, we took our seats and then they'd put the
14 seat down and sit on it, and then the next person would come in and they would load up
15 and there was no way for us to get out. If anything happened, we were stuck. We were
16 stuck, there was no way, no way to get out. These were children who, for the most part,
17 had been in the September bombing of the Capitol Kinh-Do Theater. So, we got on the
18 bus every morning, and we held our breaths going over the bridges of all the various
19 canals, and we lifted our feet at the railroad crossings that we made on our way to school
20 because all these things would guarantee that we would make it. Not anything else. The
21 route to school was changed almost daily, so we never really knew when we were gonna
22 get picked up, and we never really knew when we were gonna get home, and when we
23 got to school, we had to check under our desks to see if there were any any plastic
24 explosive. To me it was kind of like when you're a kid, you look under your bed and you
25 look in your closet 'cause there's monsters there, and then you go, "What the hell am I
26 gonna do with it if there is a monster there?" So, we went and did our rituals to try to
27 keep safe. Meanwhile they were scrambling to try and figure out ways to keep up safer.
28 That didn't work out too well, about that time my mother decided that she had had
29 enough, that there wasn't—she just couldn't deal with living in a I guess you'd call the
30 mental siege. Didn't know what was gonna happen, so they made plans to go R&R to
31 Camp John Hay in Baguio in the Philippines. So, while we were there, figuring this was

1 gonna be our last holiday, hoping that we'd get back together in November of '64, we
2 just pretty much looked at it as we were on a holiday and that was it. While we were
3 gone, that's when pretty much all Hell broke loose in Saigon. There was the bombing of
4 the Playboy theater—not the theater, but the bar. [NOTE: This took place the week
5 before Tet began on February 1, 1964.] There was a bombing at Peterson [NOTE:
6 Pershing Field], which was a baseball field just outside of Tan Son Nhut. One of my—
7 sergeants who worked for the 3rd RRU, they had a baseball game going on between
8 different corps groups and was the high school kids and you know the soldiers were
9 young and they loved baseball. There were bleachers there and there was no protection, it
10 was just out in the field. This one young private begged his NCO (Non-commissioned
11 Officer), the sergeant, to see if he could stay. He wanted to know if he could report to
12 duty late because he really wanted to stay for the second game, and the sergeant said,
13 “Okay, now there's nothing going on here, go ahead.” It was during the second game that
14 there was a plastic explosive in a bicycle that was leaned against the bleachers that went
15 off, and the young man was killed. [NOTE: This took place on February 9, 1964.]
16 [NOTE: The second bombing of the Capital Kinh-Do Theater was on February 16,
17 1964.] Then later on that week, we didn't hear about these other bombings but we did
18 hear about the bombing, the second and last bombing of the Capitol Kinh-Do theater,
19 'cause my mother, she really wanted to see that movie, it was *The List of Adrian*
20 *Messenger* but I remember her telling me it was *The List of the Andria Dora*. That
21 evening there was pretty much a major VC attack on the theater that was pretty much
22 prevented from being a total tragedy by a Marine—Koelper was his name, I think it was a
23 major or something, he saw somebody put a bag inside the lobby and he opened the doors
24 and ran down the aisle screaming for everybody to get down, and while he was doing that
25 a bomb went off and half of the back of his head came off. I heard about it from friends
26 who were there, and it really destroyed the theater, it really, it caused all kinds of—I
27 mean there was major injuries, there were deaths, there were people taken out, they didn't
28 leave as quietly as we did in September. A lot of them went—they had to go to the Navy
29 clinic to get patched up. Out of all the—and then there was rumors that the bowling alley,
30 the American bowling alley which was just pretty much on the next street near the Cercle
31 Sportif was, they expected a bombing there. So, rumors were—I don't know if it

1 happened, 'cause the VC weren't really that organized at that time, they sort of struck
2 with—they were better organized outside of Saigon than inside. So, it was a hit-and-miss
3 kind of thing.

4 KC: What kind of an effect does this growing violence have on not just you
5 personally, but the overall American civilian community in Saigon? What's the
6 environment like among the group?

7 KD: Well, I think that a story that sticks in my head, was I play flute, and I had
8 just started to play flute and my mother was—she found a flute teacher for me. He was
9 Vietnamese, and it was very interesting because I was more interested in learning about
10 the culture and the ways that the Vietnamese used flutes than I wanted to know about
11 what he had to teach me. Anyway, every Saturday morning it seemed to be very early in
12 the morning, like nine o'clock or so, I would walk to the professor's house and one
13 morning no one was out. I mean simply nobody was out, and there was just me walking
14 on the sidewalk. The birds were singing. It was a beautiful morning, it was a beautiful
15 morning, but I was acutely aware of the absence of sound because if life is going on
16 normal you are fine. If it's too quiet, then something terrible, terrible is gonna happen.
17 There were no taxis, there were no pedicabs, there was no one or no escape. I didn't
18 know what to do, except that I just kept walking towards my professor's—to my flute
19 lesson, because that's what you did. Up this street there was a man on a bicycle coming
20 towards me. He kept coming towards me, he was Vietnamese, he kept coming towards
21 me and I kept walking towards him. He kept coming towards me and I kept walking
22 towards him, and I was scared to death, but I didn't want him to know I was scared to
23 death. I was going to my flute lesson, that's what I was supposed to do. We got closer
24 and closer, and I was more, and more, and more, and more frightened but I just kept
25 moving because that's what you're supposed to do. Just when he was in front of me, we
26 made eye contact, and he gave me the most beautiful smile and it was one of the most
27 beautiful things that's ever happened to me. Then he pedaled on. He was enjoying the
28 morning, and I was part of that enjoyment. He became a very precious memory for me.

29 KC: Certainly, sounds like it. What kind of feeling did you get from other
30 Americans who were there in Saigon? I mean, was there a growing sense of panic? Was
31 there talk about, "Okay, we need to get the civilians out of here"? Was there any sort of

1 effort to remove or the beginnings of talking of removing American civilians from
2 Saigon at that point?

3 KD: There was no cohesive effort. They did protective kinds of things, there were
4 more MPs around, there was more guns around, but there was no effort—see the
5 American population for the most part, they were scattered all over Saigon and Cholon.
6 They were—in fact only the JDP Compound at Tan Son Nhut had a high concentration of
7 Americans. Everything else was they were split and spread all over the place, and it
8 seemed that the military personnel, the dependents, they were groups that were focusing
9 on just getting their dependents out, the civilians didn't seem to—they did different
10 things, they sent their children to boarding schools in Europe. A lot of the embassy
11 personnel, a lot of the Pan American Airlines employees, the US Overseas Missions'
12 group, USOM, those seemed to think that if they get their kids out and someplace else
13 then it's okay because they had things to do. They were you know; the men had their
14 projects or their USAID (United States Agency for International Development), their
15 Hearts in Hands, their focus. The women had the orphanage, the Vietnamese American
16 Association to teach English, Project Hope, the women were also—they had their focus,
17 it was the children that they were concerned about, so they shipped them off to family in
18 State-side or they shipped them out to boarding schools in Europe. I remember it was
19 very strange, my mother had a conversation with Major Ryan's wife, I cannot remember
20 her name. They had three children, there was Randeem who was thirteen, Ron, Ronnie
21 was eight, and Kristine was seven and Kristine was—she had serious kidney problems,
22 and every month or so she had to go to Clark Air Force Base to have dialysis. She had to
23 go to the Philippines, in fact while they were in the Philippines, Mrs. Ryan and Kristine,
24 the Ryan's were behind during the November 1st coup. They dealt with it a little
25 differently than we did, so they were a split family that did that, and my mother said,
26 “You need to take Kris back to the States. She needs the medical attention.” But their son
27 Ron was such a handful, she didn't think she could handle him without her husband. So,
28 she put it off, and when we were evacuated on March 10th, '64, [NOTE: We had
29 permission from the Army to leave because Mother had serious female medical
30 problems.] the waiting room at Tan Son Nhut was chalk full of wives and children.
31 [NOTE: There were six families that left with us, but the room was small.] In fact, my

1 first seventh grade teacher, Mrs. Jenkinson was there with her three kids, with their three
2 children. We stood around talking and I believe husbands were there, but they kind of
3 dropped everybody off, gave them hugs, and went on to work it seemed to me, and we
4 just stood waiting for them to clear to runway because there was a VC sniper nest at the
5 end of the runway, so they had to make sure that was clear before we could take off. We
6 didn't take off till after lunch, we didn't even eat lunch, we ate lunch on the plane, they
7 gave us a box lunch on our way. They gave us the box lunch and we went up the tarmac
8 and got into the plane, I mean they were worried about snipers, it seems rather strange to
9 keep us on the tarmac for food, but that's kind of what they did. I thought that that was
10 the beginning of the evacuation of dependents, but it wasn't. That, the major evacuation,
11 the major statement that, "You know, we really probably should get people out of there,"
12 didn't happen until the first—official evacuation didn't happen until Valentine's Day
13 1965 when General Westmoreland had his family leave. That ended up in the *National*
14 *Geographic* too. But even the senior class, they went on their senior trip to Da Nang I
15 think they went. I couldn't believe it, all Hell is breaking loose, and they were off doing
16 their senior trip. It seemed so bizarre, but at the same time how is their attitude any
17 different from me walking down the road, and just continuing on and doing what was
18 supposed to happen you know. You're supposed to go on a senior trip.

19 KC: So, you're evacuated there in March of '64, now 'evacuated' is a key phrase
20 there. This was a concerted effort to get the civilian population that could, the families,
21 the dependents, out of Saigon and this was run by, was it the US Army that directed this?

22 KD: I believe it was, and I don't really know—there were three different US
23 Army divisions at that time, there was MAG (Military Advisory Group), MAC-V
24 (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam), and the 3rd RRU. Now which one actually got
25 everything put together? I mean it was to the point where we didn't even stay to have our
26 household goods packed up. We were gone, and my father oversaw where everything
27 was crated up and shipped back home. In fact, I had an old treadle sewing machine that I
28 purchased that the cabinet where the machine swung down into was pretty much caved in
29 by the time it arrived State-side that summer in '64 when we were staying at an
30 abandoned Nike site in Rehoboth, Massachusetts with pretty much retired Navy and
31 Navy wives whose husbands' were shipped out of Newport News—or Newport, Rhode

1 Island. Not Newport News, that's Virginia. Then my father ended up over at Brinks BOQ
2 (Bachelor Officer Quarters). That's significant because of Christmas of '64, the Brinks
3 was bombed. By that time my father was home, he—we picked him up at the airport on
4 November 5th.

5 KC: What was it like for you and your family to leave in what essentially is a
6 pretty big hurry, being evacuated like that, leaving Saigon, and leaving your father there
7 to continue to work, did you have any thoughts on the dangers that he may be facing?

8 KD: Oh yeah, well I was very aware of that, and I kept telling him that he needed
9 to be living at Tan Son Nhut, but he—that's my father, always felt that he could take care
10 of himself. Although he never talked about it, I believe he was part of the forces that
11 landed at D-Day in June of '44. He didn't rarely ever, ever, ever talked about his combat
12 experience. If he did, he talked to my brother about it. But he took my brother and me to
13 go see *The Longest Day* when it was playing at the Capitol Kinh-Do. Instead of watching
14 the movie, I watched him, and he wasn't sitting in Saigon. He was on the beaches I would
15 swear, I would bet my life on it. He was completely and totally caught up in what was
16 happening, and he never did that, never. His thing was that he was military, that he was
17 serving his country, and my mother told me one time, she got so angry at me because I
18 didn't write to him as much as she did, once we got State-side I just couldn't handle it, I
19 couldn't handle the idea that he was still there, and we were safe. She told me one day
20 that she hoped that if anything happened, he would be killed and not become missing in
21 action. She couldn't—she said, "That's a living Hell." She said, "If he's dead, he's dead,
22 but if he's captured," and there were a lot of instances where Americans were captured by
23 the VC and never came home, and he was in—he periodically went up to Phu Bai. There
24 was a listening post in Phu Bai, so he was up there quite a bit. He had been TDY before
25 when I was four and that was the last time, and he was in Alaska, and he came back. So,
26 my thing was, I'm an Army brat, my father is in the military, you go be with the
27 assignment, and if I needed to go home, I had to go home and if he had to stay, he has to
28 stay, and he has to stay till November because I asked him, I said, "Could you get home a
29 little earlier?" He said, "Well, my assignment is over in October, I have to stay." I don't
30 really remember saying goodbye to him. I remember we got on the plane, we sat on the
31 tarmac a little bit longer, and then when we did takeoff it was almost at a ninety-degree

1 angle. It was unbelievable, the G-force was just, and they said that was to avoid the
2 snipers, just in case they'd come back because they'd been kind of diddling around.
3 There were marks on the plane that it'd been dinged up. Because the plane went, "Oh
4 sugar-pie, this is not a good idea," but got in the plane and then we flew to Honolulu, we
5 fueled up in Guam, but I don't remember getting out like I did when we went there, got
6 there in June '63. I just remember getting out and going into the terminal in Honolulu and
7 I got a little koala bear. I named him Dinky Do and that was an expression that we used
8 was basically, "Oh my God." Then Dinky Dit was "Holy shit," pretty much. When I was
9 in a bad mood, he was Dinky Dit, and when I was in a good mood, he was Dinky Do. We
10 arrived at Travis Air Force Base, it was in the wee hours of the morning and the rain was
11 coming down and it was—you see the lights of San Francisco and it was just—so
12 peaceful. So beautiful. We landed and we were surprised nobody was there to greet us,
13 there was just nobody seemed to know we were coming. We thought that maybe the news
14 people would be there, and there wasn't anything. We got put into a bus and taken over to
15 the airport in Oakland, and Pan-Am put us on a—no TWA (Trans World Airlines), TWA
16 flew us first class, wow, that was so cool, we got to fly first class and we ended up at
17 Kennedy in New York. We were pretty much going home, we went back to the Holly
18 Motel on Route 35 in Hazlet, New Jersey, at where we started from, and we stayed there
19 a month. My mother tried to—she found a car for us, we found a car, my aunt and uncle
20 live in Matawan which is right next door pretty much to Hazlet. He gave—you know we
21 stayed there until my mom could find a place the military could put us which was in
22 Rehoboth, and all I really wanted to do was remember just lying in bed looking at the
23 wall. I didn't wanna do anything. My mother she berated me and ridiculed me and yelled
24 at me. She thought that I would be weak, and she had no patience with that. I'd started
25 my second school pretty much, I went to school, I think it was Lehigh Drive School
26 [NOTE: Lehigh Elementary located on Lehigh Drive], elementary school, and then just
27 when I started to feel—I didn't talk to anybody, I don't remember having any contact
28 with anybody or caring or telling them about where I was from or anything. That was
29 March, and then by April we were up in Rehoboth, and I was going to Anawan Junior
30 High and Mr. Ellis was my English teacher and he wanted to hear my story. I had a very
31 good friend, in fact Betty and I are still friends, her mother pretty much adopted me, she

1 told me in '86 that I was the saddest little girl she had ever met. That she'd ever seen, and
2 I didn't think I was that sad but that's what she told me, that the weight of the experience
3 and nobody wanted to talk about it. Nobody—you know now at that time they were
4 talking about, there was the Johnson Goldwater thing. The election, campaigning going
5 on and people knew a little more about Vietnam, but still not that much. It was really
6 interesting, I was thinking, going back to you were asking about how we reacted.
7 There're two things that come to my mind about how we handled the stress, or I don't
8 know if it was just us or whatever, but there's two rumors that I really remember. One
9 rumor was this Vietnamese, he was called the Palm Tree Prophet, something like that,
10 and he really wanted to, this is in March around the time we were getting ready to go, he
11 made a big stink to see Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. He was really, really important
12 and he and his followers tried to get into the Embassy and show them a cat who was
13 nursing some baby rats. His thing was that if enemies could—if these two enemies could
14 work together, why couldn't we work together with the Viet Minh? I remember that,
15 thinking—wondering if it was true or not. The other was right after the venerable monk
16 burned himself on June 11th, everyone—the rumor went out that people could see Buddha
17 in the sky over Vietnam, that he was looking down, the face of Buddha was looking
18 down on Saigon. I didn't see that, but I figured I came too late, but there were some signs
19 people were grasping for to make sense of things. [NOTE: The rumor that evening was
20 that Buddha's face was seen in the sky at sundown, and he was crying. I immediately left
21 the table, ran upstairs and stood on the balcony overlooking Yen Do, but I only saw
22 beautiful fluffy clouds in a pink and blue sky.]

23 KC: All right now you are home in late winter, early spring of 1964 and your
24 father comes back in November of 1964, now his part in Vietnam is over at that time, is
25 that correct?

26 KD: Yes, he started a—his next assignment was at Ent Air Force Base in
27 Colorado Springs. He was—eventually he was one of the major military liaisons on the
28 Nike X missile.

29 KC: Mm-hmm. So, the family then moves to Colorado Springs then shortly after
30 he returns?

31 KD: Yes.

1 KC: Okay. So, we have you there in late '64, early 1965. Of course, the War in
2 Vietnam is gaining more and more attention in the United States as it's gaining more and
3 more effort on behalf of the United States, the Marines landing later on that year of
4 course around the Da Nang area.

5 KD: Oh, plus you had also the questionable what happened at the Tonkin—

6 KC: Yes, Tonkin Gulf in August of '64.

7 KD: Yeah, and I have a feeling my father was involved with that, and it didn't set
8 with him because soon after he got back from Vietnam, he started drinking heavily. I
9 didn't realize the difference until when I was older, well I was an honors student at the
10 University of Arizona in my thirties and my project was adolescent substance use and
11 abuse, because I was a secondary teacher, training to be a secondary teacher, and I
12 thought that was real important. I found a book, *Adult Children of Alcoholics* and I could
13 answer 'yes' to almost everything, and I realized that drinking a quart of whiskey a night
14 was not normal. That's what he was doing. By that time, he was Lieutenant Colonel and
15 he retired after twenty-five years, and I think his alcoholism did a lot to pretty much have
16 him decide or have the decision made for him that he needed to end his military career.

17 KC: So, your time here in Colorado Springs, you are growing up, you're coming
18 of age as it were while this mess in Vietnam is continuing, while the conflict, the War is
19 continuing there, and again American involvement continues to increase. How aware are
20 you of what's going on in Vietnam? How closely are you following events, and what is
21 your attitude towards these things as they continue to occur?

22 KD: Well, everybody that I talked to, I told them that we should not be there.
23 Everybody. I talked to—I said, "We don't know what the Hell we're doing." I had a little
24 bit of information about the French, and I said, "We're fighting the French War all over
25 again, and they didn't win. How can we win? There's no such thing as 'winning' in
26 Vietnam." I said, "It's a civil war." To me it was a civil war, we didn't belong there. I
27 was told, when I was in Vietnam, there were rubber plantations, it seems to me that I
28 passed on our way to Cholon, because I used to go to Cholon periodically to go to
29 swimming, there were rubber plantations and I don't remember who told me, but they
30 said that we were in Vietnam to protect Michelin's rubber plantation. I thought that was
31 pretty crappy. So, I would—I couldn't do as much as I wanted to because of my father's

1 security clearance. He had a very, very, very high security clearance and whatever my
2 mother, brother and I did, we were told would reflect on his keeping his security
3 clearance. So we weren't to do anything, in fact when I was sixteen I had just come back
4 from a trip to Oklahoma with one of my best friends and I'd ridden the bus, and I landed
5 at the bus station and I was looking at some magazines and the woman behind the counter
6 started giving me grief and I made some stupid comment about her being an ass and she
7 slapped me, which I thought was kind of bizarre, so I grabbed a hold of her hair 'cause
8 that's what girls are supposed to do and I'd never been in a fight in my life, and it came
9 off in my hands 'cause she was wearing a wig and she was bald as a billiard and her
10 boyfriend was there and then, well gee that was a bad thing 'cause then she started to beat
11 the crap out of me. My brother just showed up in time, hustled me home, my mother
12 refused to press charges, she said what I did endangered my father's security clearance.
13 That's kind of how acute or it was—but that November I had friends who were anti-war
14 protesters who lived in Manitou Springs just north of Colorado Springs, and they told me
15 about a march that they were going to do on Prospect Avenue and asked if I wanted to be
16 there, and I was. I was there. I've got a picture of my friend and I don't know why I
17 wasn't in the picture also, but I wasn't, and they took a picture of him, and he was
18 wearing a fatigue jacket, green fatigue, and he was wearing a black beret like Che
19 Guevara beret. But I didn't know anything about Che at the time. But that's the only one,
20 and then all Hell broke loose when my parents found out where I was. Although I have a
21 feeling that my father sympathized with me. But rules are rules.

22 KC: Right. So, what was the local community's reaction to this march there in
23 Colorado Springs?

24 KD: Colorado Springs did not become the uber Christian, military bullshit it is
25 now. At that time yes there were a lot of military establishments there, there was Peterson
26 Air Force Base, there was Cheyenne Mountain, there was Ent, there was the Air Force
27 Academy, and there was Carson Army Base. But it was—the first time when we lived in
28 Security, which was bedroom-community of Carson you might say, it was in the south,
29 south-eastern part of Colorado Springs, more southern than anything off of I-25. Across
30 the railroad tracks from the tank fields in Carson. My mother had made a comment about
31 how, let's see—military weren't always wanted in civilian towns, that there was an anti-

1 military attitude, and I was surprised because I couldn't comprehend an anti-military. But
2 in history with the Western forts, I began to understand, especially when I lived in
3 Tucson because Fort Lowell [actually Camp Lowell] was moved to almost ten miles
4 outside of Tucson because the people in Tucson didn't want those grubby soldiers
5 around. But it was the first time that there was an anti-military attitude in Colorado
6 Springs in the '60s. So, there were a lot of people on Prospect Avenue, which is—no it's
7 Pike's Peak Avenue that I was really surprised, it filled up the downtown. This was in
8 '66, '67—'67.

9 KC: 1967, okay.

10 KD: Yeah. I think it was in November, I know it was in the fall.

11 KC: All right, so you've talked about the reaction I guess of Colorado Springs,
12 what about within your family?

13 KD: My brother joined the Marines when he graduated. I thought he was nuts. He
14 graduated in '68 and he was supposed to go to Colorado University in Boulder, but he
15 joined the Marines and he ended up in Okinawa. He never did end up in Vietnam. He
16 made it up to being a lance corporal but then he got busted for breaking a cue stick over
17 some guy's head in a fight, so he was pretty much assigned brig guard duty after that, and
18 he taught prisoners how to read. When he got out, it was, he got out—I don't know, I
19 don't remember exactly, anyway he ended up being at Woodstock. So, here's this Marine
20 at Woodstock, and he knew Alice from Alice's Restaurant. After Woodstock, he
21 hitchhiked across Canada by himself, and eventually ended up in Tucson for a visit, and
22 my mother was very upset because she said he came with crotch crickets. Infested her
23 house. I don't know what his transition was, I don't know how he turned from being this
24 gung-ho Marine to being at Woodstock, to eventually he became a nurse.

25 KC: What about you? As far as the rest of the War is concerned, did you remain
26 active in the anti-war, the protest movement?

27 KD: I was never quiet talking about Vietnam. I was never quiet about that
28 because as soon as I say that I was in Vietnam when I was twelve, it becomes a vacuum
29 of people just automatically stop and turn and look at me. And I can tell my story. I
30 protested after the killings of the May 4th in 1970, when the National Guard gunned down
31 the students at Kent, but my husband, well he was my boyfriend at the time, he really got

1 on my case. He didn't want me protesting, he didn't want me to be killed. He was
2 positive that if I opened my mouth I would be killed. About that time, he joined the Air
3 National Guard because he did not want to go to Vietnam. No, I've never been I guess
4 you can say I haven't, I'm not a Weatherman [NOTE: A militant protest group against
5 the Vietnam War where members resorted to violence.]. I didn't try to blow up American
6 establishments that supported the War, but I always talked about it, and I have talked
7 about it since '64. When a good friend of mine, Marilyn Day, when we invaded Iraq she
8 said, "We're seeing Vietnam all over again," I go, "Marilyn, no. Let's let it play out, let's
9 not jump to conclusions," and sure enough it was Vietnam all over again.

10 KC: Now what sort of things, as you continued to follow the War and the media,
11 what sort of things stand out in your mind that would either drive you more into the anti-
12 war effort or at least the anti-war mindset, as the War continue? Was it just the continual
13 day-in, day-out news broadcast of American deaths and these kinds of things, or were
14 there particular events that stand out in your mind? What sort of things really touched
15 you in your opposition to the War as the War continued to play out?

16 KD: You mean in Vietnam or Iraq?

17 KC: Vietnam.

18 KD: The use of 'gook', I heard more and more as—you know 'cause it's my peers
19 that were fighting the War. It was my peers that were out there, and I said to them, "You
20 need to stay out of this." Because they would—I had a good friend, Mike Tutor, and he
21 was gonna join up when he got out of school, out of high school, and I said, "Don't go
22 there, they don't know what the hell they're doing." Every night at six o'clock we'd have
23 our dinner, and our special dinner guest was Walter Cronkite and every night I'd get the
24 War with my spaghetti. I'd see and hear, and we still never talked about it. We still never
25 talked about it. I heard more about—I used to play cribbage with my father every night.
26 No, no—yeah. If Michael wasn't playing chess, I was playing cribbage, and my father
27 would drink. By the end of our three games, he talked about thousands of deaths. How
28 could we just keep killing, sending people to die? I know his CO, Colonel Owens, he got
29 out of the military right after Vietnam and retired to Mexico. The things that they said
30 and did, it was like they—the hubris. That, "We have the toys, therefore we're gonna
31 win." But we didn't have— (airplanes can be heard passing over, through the phone)

1 wow we never get airplanes out here. Airplanes just buzzed the house. Bad experience for
2 me, I don't like to hear helicopters or airplanes close by, scares me. The hubris, that think
3 that we've got the right way as long as we have our toys, but we don't have what the
4 Spanish call *ganas*. We don't have the will, we are not really a military country, we don't
5 have a history of military. In fact, we have just the opposite, and why we keep trying to
6 sell ourselves on that, I have no idea. I would hear these things and I would go, "These
7 are lies." We didn't even have to really look for the lies, they were there. When the Tet
8 Offensive hit, it was my experience of Tet is that if ever you were gonna hunker down,
9 you were gonna hunker down at Tet. You didn't say, "Oh, they'll never attack at Tet,"
10 because one of their greatest generals, Nguyen Hue, set that up, a major attack against the
11 Chinese the third day of Tet. Because why? The people started thinking about fighting
12 during the most quote, "sacred", unquote day of the year. So, it just seemed like we came
13 to the game board, and we were like the British in the French and Indian War and the
14 American Revolutionary War. Well, we're soldiers, people are supposed to soldier like
15 us. No. We won our wars because using guerilla warfare. We didn't have—we had the
16 *ganas* to get rid of them, but in a pitch battle we—Washington never won a battle. He
17 never did. There were a couple of draws, but he never won a battle. But there was a lot of
18 guerilla warfare, and pretty much wore the British down. We could go to our own history
19 and know, but we don't.

20 KC: When Saigon falls in late April 1975 where were you and what do you
21 remember about that day?

22 KD: I blocked it out. I did not deal with it. Saigon falling hit me ten years later in
23 '85.

24 KC: Mm-hmm, tell me about that.

25 KD: It was—that's when it hit me. I was—in '73 [NOTE: I was remembering
26 April 1975.], first of all I don't watch a whole lot of television. Never have. And I didn't
27 watch any news and different things, and I was—we were in the midst of moving out to
28 the desert. Had a two year old and I had hepatitis. So, I was not paying much attention to
29 much anything (laughs).

30 KC: Sure.

1 KD: But ten years later, I saw it on television, and I was just—I kept looking for
2 sights that I knew. I kept looking for landmarks. I kept looking for—I kept looking for
3 myself in the picture on the pictures that I saw. I kept looking for people I knew. I kept
4 just—there really was a Saigon. There really—Oh my God. And that seems kind of
5 ludicrous but that’s where—and then I went to pretty much Hell. That’s when my Saigon
6 experience hit.

7 KC: Mm-hmm, and how did this take place? How did this happen?

8 KD: I think I was in the living room and my son and daughter were at the dining
9 room table. Clay was born in ‘73 and Cindy was born in ‘78. They were sitting there at
10 the table, and they said, “Come and eat,” it was lunch time, “come and eat.” I sat down
11 but I no longer was in the Arizona desert. I was no longer in my home. I was sitting at the
12 dining room table in Saigon. There was a turquoise lizard up on the wall watching me eat.
13 My children weren’t there. I was back in Vietnam. Literally. Totally and completely. And
14 I don’t know how long I stayed there, but when I came back my children were staring at
15 me, and they were frightened. They were frightened to death. So, I say, “Okay, I’ve gotta
16 do something about this. This is not good. This is bad. It’s frightening my children; I
17 need to do something.” So, I went to the Vietnam Vets on 1st Avenue in Tucson, and I
18 walked in the door, and I said, “Can you help me?” And they said, “Well yeah, sure.
19 What’s your story?” And one guy said, “Were you a nurse?” And I said, “No,” I said, “I
20 was twelve years old.” They listened to my story, the shortened version, and they said,
21 “Wow, could you come talk to the group?” And I thought “You’re not gonna help me, are
22 you?” And they said, “We can’t help you.” And it wasn’t fair. I didn’t know what to do, I
23 didn’t know—I had no idea what Post Traumatic Stress was, I had no idea, and I thought
24 I was losing my mind. So, I went to the Marana Clinic, and Marana’s a small town
25 northwest of Tucson, and they had just started the clinic up and I went in, and they had
26 counseling. There was Dr. Jon McCaine, no relation to the worthless Senator from
27 Arizona, anyway he started working with me and I started understanding how to deal
28 with the stress. I started dealing with just all kinds of things, and coming to terms and
29 realizing that, okay, I got through the actual experience, I can get through the memories. I
30 have—I can’t get hurt anymore, so I can deal with it. He was there when I saw *Good*

1 *Morning, Vietnam* and cried through the whole thing. I didn't expect that. I cried, and
2 cried, and cried buckets through *Good Morning, Vietnam*. It was too real for me.

3 KC: Now as you look back all these years later at your experiences, not only in
4 Vietnam, but the Vietnam War also as you saw it from the United States, how would you
5 say that it has most affected your life?

6 KD: I don't take things for granted. I don't believe that there are any guarantees. I
7 have today, I have yesterday, I don't know if I have tomorrow. That whatever that I need
8 to do, I need to do now. That I am—I believe very strongly, I have a story I tell that if
9 you throw a rock in a lake, you know that there's going to be a change in that lake. It may
10 happen at that time, it may happen in the future, it's gonna happen. What it is, I really
11 don't know, but it's going to change. I know exactly what's gonna happen if I don't
12 throw a rock in the lake, there won't be any change. So, I'm a great rock thrower, I throw
13 lots of rocks in the lake. I speak up a lot. I question, but I also—I don't question for
14 destruction, I question for growth. I work where I can to educate people. That it's very
15 important to know what's going on. You may not be a mover and shaker, and I'm not a
16 major mover and shaker, but by being aware and being involved, and I write my
17 Congress people all the time, I write the President all the time, I write letters to the editor
18 all the time. These are my rocks. If we get into situations, I want people to realize what
19 the costs are, because I think one of the biggest tragedies is that we love our dead
20 soldiers, but we don't like our living soldiers. They weren't supposed to survive, that we
21 have to deal with their memories or deal with their horrors or deal with their wounds. We
22 don't like them. They're not supposed to be there, we're there to honor them when
23 they're dead, then to have to deal with them alive. I think that's a real tragedy. I don't
24 think that a flag should be used to sell crap. I don't think the flag should be worshipped. I
25 think it represents the country, but once you started waving a flag in front of my face, I'm
26 immediately skeptical of what you're trying to sell. It is my country, and I don't like the
27 way it's being used a lot, and the lies that are being used, and the men and women who
28 are sacrificed. When the people, like Cheney, will wave the flag but not put in any time in
29 knowing what war is like. Or Rumsfeld. Or on the field. GW. Don't sell me a war. Don't
30 bankrupt my country.

1 KC: One of the questions I ask the Vietnam veterans that I interview, is the same
2 I'm gonna question, the last question I have for you today, Kathy. As you look back on it
3 all these years later, what do you believe is the legacy of the Vietnam War?

4 KD: I (laughs)—Globally?

5 KC: However, you choose to answer it.

6 KD: Well, no, I truly—it sounds rather cynical, but to me the Vietnam War
7 became a battle between Capitalism and Communism, and although the War, the
8 Communist part of the War was—I mean the Communist won the War with the soldiers,
9 the capitalist won the War because of what happened to Vietnam. I mean you can't buy
10 anything that doesn't have, "Made in Vietnam" on it. You can't look at pictures of
11 Saigon without seeing all these people who are writing and doing—it's a very capitalistic
12 country. They have whole generations that's gone. No one carries the memories. No one
13 remembers the customs. So, the legacy? Capitalism won there. What happened to us? I
14 think we're still shell-shocked. I think we're trying to replay it over and over again until
15 we win. We can't win. But it's like being in this horrible nightmare. We come back and
16 you just know this time you're gonna win. I think that that's kind of how they sold the
17 War on Terrorism, is that "It's not gonna be like Vietnam, we're gonna win." We can't.
18 We can't win. I think we need a different legacy. I think we need to stop the nightmare
19 and say, "Look, it's a different world." It's not a clean war like World War II. Where
20 there really were good guys and bad guys.

21 KC: Well Kathy, is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview before
22 we bring it to a close?

23 KD: Not that I can think of (laughs). I have this terrible habit that the harder I
24 think, the deeper I get, so that it's hard for—. My voice gets softer, and I think I—when I
25 hang up, I'll remember what I wanna say. (Laughter)

26 KC: Well, I get that quite a bit. Well, if there's nothing else then we'll put an end
27 to the interview then.