

**Interview of retired Colonel Crescentia Wellman
on her career as a U.S. Air Force flight nurse**

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

Ruth Stewart: Crescentia Wellman is being interviewed today for, as a member of the Women's Overseas Service League, uh, on April 6, 2004, in San Antonio, Texas. Ruth Stewart is doing the interview. [0:18] Cris, would you tell us a little bit now about where you were born, brought up, something about your childhood?

Crescentia Wellman: Yeah. I was born in West Point, Iowa, on a farm, and I'm a child of 11 children. And I attended a parochial school 12 [inaudible 0:40] years. The whole family, all, all my sisters and brothers attended there. And, uh, uh, I always enjoyed people. We always had a wonderful time with people. And we, anyway, uh, we always, we had to walk to school 3 ½ m-, miles. And, and so I was interested in being a nurse, uh, and so right after I graduated from high school we were starting the war and I decided to be a Red Cross volunteer, so I took a little course as volunteer. And after I worked for about – and I was working in a factory to make some money 'cause I wanted to do something to further my education. And so after 1 ½ years, I went to nursing school at Saint Francis Nursing School in Peoria, Illinois. And after 3 years in, uh, after 3 years in nursing school, I went to a small town in Keokuk, Iowa to work. And then I decided I wanted to go to Chicago to further my education and my exper-, experience. I worked in Chicago and went to school part-time at the University of Chicago and, uh, I was, I worked there for 5, total of 5 years. Then, I decided to join the air force. And so in 1953, during the Korean War, I, I joined the air force and...

Ruth Stewart: [2:38] Tell us a little bit about that time during the air force and doing nursing.

Crescentia Wellman: Well, I – at that time, nursing – there was always a shortage in nursing. But there was a lady, a nurse that had been in the navy that was working at the same hospital that I was and she thought that I should, she encouraged me to go in the service, and so I applied. I got an application and decided that, uh, after I dec-, I got the application, filled it out. I – within 10 days, I got my app-, got the information back. I had taken my physical and everything, and in 10 days I was sworn in.

Ruth Stewart: That was fast.

Crescentia Wellman: Yes. And then that was in March. And on May 23, 1953, I went to service. There my first indoctrination to the air force was at Gunter Air

1 Force Base in Alabama. It was a 6-week course where we learned to walk
2 and drill, to drill and, and about, you learned about the air force. And then
3 after that I was assigned to Amarillo, Texas. In Amarillo, Texas, I worked
4 in the obstetrical department. I was very surprised because I didn't
5 anticipate working because I had had experience in nursing. In maternity
6 and delivery room they put me in charge of the department. And we used
7 to have as many as 150 deliveries a month and not so much help.

8
9Ruth Stewart: Busy times.

10
11Crescentia Wellman: Yes. Very busy. And, uh, but I very, I enjoyed it very much. And then
12 from there I, I went to flight school and, uh, for it was a, that was a 6-week
13 course, uh, back to Gunter, Alabama.

14
15Ruth Stewart: [4:58] Gunter?

16
17Crescentia Wellman: Gunter Air Force Base, Alabama. It was in Maxwell – I mean, uh,
18 Montgomery, Alabama. And after that, I was assigned to Eielson Air
19 Force Base in Alaska.

20
21Ruth Stewart: [5:10] Go back, let's go back and tell me a little bit about flight training
22 and how...

23
24Crescentia Wellman: Okay.

25
26Ruth Stewart: ...and how that, what that was like.

27
28Crescentia Wellman: Well, uh, it is, it's very interesting because you have a complete review of
29 all your nursing and anatomy and physiology. You have, uh, you also
30 have, um, you learn a lot about m-, m-, medical and psychiatric nursing as
31 well as, uh, the difference when you would be flying than, than, than when
32 you were on the ground. At that time, we did not, we had – uh, what's it
33 called – the C-47s, which was a cargo plane. And we didn't have all the
34 facilities we have today. And, uh, so we have, but it was, it was, uh, we
35 had, we had to learn to, to swim if we didn't know how to swim and also
36 to survive if we got, if we had to ditch, and we also had to go out and pitch
37 tents, dig hole – trench holes for bathroom facilities and so forth. So we...

38
39Ruth Stewart: [6:23] And you did all that in 6 weeks?

40
41Crescentia Wellman: Mm-hm, yeah, yes.

42
43Ruth Stewart: You had to learn fast.

44

1Crescentia Wellman: Yes. That's right. And, uh, we, uh, but it was very interesting. It was
2 very interesting for us. And so after I, I, I from there I was assigned to, to
3 Alaska and, um, I was there for 2 years. And there again was, we – the
4 facility, we lived in Quonset huts and the hospital was a Quonset hut. And
5 we had very few nurses, so we had to work 12-hour shifts and then take
6 call. But it was very interesting and though it wasn't so hard, the work
7 wasn't hard, it was just long periods of time.
8

9Ruth Stewart: [7:21] What kind of, of care were you giving? Were you getting casualties
10 at all...?
11

12Crescentia Wellman: No. Not at that time.
13

14Ruth Stewart: ...or just strictly... ?
15

16Crescentia Wellman: It was just strictly, um, uh – and they were all male patients because the
17 female patients we would see them in the clinic, but we would transport
18 them to the other hospital in Fairbanks. And, uh, there were times when
19 we had to go with the patients that were about to deliver that we –
20 sometimes it was very trying because the highways were very, it was, it
21 was very, you know, uh, treacherous. One time I had to go with a patient
22 who we thought was just going to have a single birth and so we – it was
23 the middle of the winter. We were in the cracker b-, box ambulance. We
24 got this 26-mile drive and so when we got to the facility, we took her to
25 the emergency room, she wasn't able to go up to the baby room, and she
26 had twins.
27

28Ruth Stewart: That does happen. [chuckle]
29

30Crescentia Wellman: Which was quite [inaudible 8:42]. But anyway, we also had to do a lot of,
31 uh, you know, um. I'm trying to remember what I – uh, you know, when
32 we, we had, uh, alerts and we had to go out and camp out. And th-, this
33 was mainly, this was during the summertime, but we would pitch tents and
34 go out and, and we – 24 hours sometimes we would be out and...
35

36Ruth Stewart: [9:10] Was that part of your duty or?
37

38Crescentia Wellman: Yes, uh-huh.
39

40Ruth Stewart: [9:14] You weren't doing it for fun and games.
41

42Crescentia Wellman: No, no. It was, it was duty. And, uh, we would have to do this. We were
43 with the 10th Tactical Squadron, which [inaudible 9:23] like that and we
44 would, we would be out for a couple of days actually.

1
2Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
3
4Crescentia Wellman: And, uh, the facilities were very limited...
5
6Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
7
8Crescentia Wellman: ...needless to say. And at that time, we had only, we had a few, just a few
9 nurses, so. And also at that time, we had no, no – we just had male
10 technicians, no female technicians at all, so all of the chaperoning and
11 everything was done by the nurses. Uh, and from, from, from Alaska, I
12 was assigned to the 13th Air Evac at Travis Air Force Basis on flying
13 status.
14
15Ruth Stewart: [10:08] What year was that?
16
17Crescentia Wellman: That was in 1957. It was a wonderful experience. Our duty was strictly
18 with air evac. We flew, uh, stateside most of the time, except we would
19 go to Alaska twice a, twice a month, but occasionally we would have
20 special flights to go to Japan or to Hawaii. And if you were an [inaudible
21 10:41] chief [inaudible 10:42] team, then you would go if they, they would
22 call you or the burn team which I was on, and then we, they would pick us
23 up and we would go to different places.
24
25Ruth Stewart: [10:59] So this was where your flight nursing came in.
26
27Crescentia Wellman: Yes, mm-hm.
28
29Ruth Stewart: Very much so.
30
31Crescentia Wellman: Mm-hm.
32
33Ruth Stewart: [11:05] And we left Alaska without your mentioning about the special
34 efforts that you did in the communities there, which was a very interesting
35 story.
36
37Crescentia Wellman: Oh, I forgot that. That's right. Okay, um, yes, um. I had been to Fort
38 Yukon on a, on a trip with some of my, with some of my friends, the pilot
39 that flew there. And so I saw the de-, the desolation there and the need for
40 medical care, so after I came back I asked our commander if we could
41 make a project of this, that the pilot probably would be willing to fly us
42 there. And he thought it was a good idea and so we got, got started, and so
43 twice a month we would fly up to Fort Yukon. It took us about 1 ½ hours

1 and we would hold clinic in an old Episcopalian Hosp-, Hospital,
2 Episcopalian Church Hospital.
3
4Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
5
6Crescentia Wellman: There were still, there were still some people there, no doctors, but there
7 were a few nurses there. And so we would go with doctors, dentists,
8 nurses, and technicians. And we had – they had x-ray ma-, machine there.
9 And we had laboratory work that was done, the dental work.
10
11Ruth Stewart: [12:32] The hospital was not operational at that time?
12
13Crescentia Wellman: It was, it was more like a clinic.
14
15Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
16
17Crescentia Wellman: At the time we'd...
18
19Ruth Stewart: So your team went in and supplemented...
20
21Crescentia Wellman: Yes.
22
23Ruth Stewart: ...greatly...
24
25Crescentia Wellman: That right.
26
27Ruth Stewart: ...their, their services.
28
29Crescentia Wellman: Uh-huh. So [inaudible 12:44] it was very, it was very interesting. And at
30 times they would keep some of the people there mainly because they
31 couldn't get back to their villages, you know, but they were not really
32 there as a hospital. They just would stay there because they couldn't get
33 back to their facility, but normally they would go back home.
34
35Ruth Stewart: [13:04] What was your relationship with your patient clients there that
36 were native Alaskans?
37
38Crescentia Wellman: Well, there was, they could speak some, most of them could speak
39 [inaudible 13:15]. And they were very grateful that, the help that they,
40 they just couldn't believe that we were doing it. And we would generally
41 bring food as well and sometimes clothing. And after we had gone for a
42 few times, we decided we were going to bring clothing as well and that
43 was always very well appreciated. And uh, but all [inaudible 13:42] we
44 started that about the 3rd or 4th month that I was there, so for about 2 years

1 we did that and I don't know how long they continued to do that
2 afterward, but it was very enjoyable.
3
4Ruth Stewart: Worth-, worthwhile project [inaudible 13:57].
5
6Crescentia Wellman: Yeah.
7
8Ruth Stewart: Thank you for including that.
9
10Crescentia Wellman: And then the, the one when I was at Travis, um, that was an – I was, was
11 made project officer for the squadron so that we could get all of our people
12 vaccinated for polio vaccination. Then, polio was still very prevalent at
13 that time.
14
15Ruth Stewart: [14:29] What year was that?
16
17Crescentia Wellman: That was in 1957, '58. I think it was '58 actually that we did the project.
18 And so we got, uh, we had, um, oh, uh, um, we had over 350 officers and
19 enlisted personnel and then the rest of'm were dependents. So out of 550,
20 we had 93% that responded and, and most of the, all, I think all of the –
21 you were required [inaudible 15:10] to take the vaccine, vaccination and
22 the, and then dependents was at their choice. So we, it was, we, they had
23 to get 2 vaccinations [inaudible 15:22] within a month, 2 I think it was,
24 and I had to do it another time.
25
26Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
27
28Crescentia Wellman: So, but we got that accomplished [inaudible 15:19] wonderful.
29
30Ruth Stewart: That was a major accomplishment.
31
32Crescentia Wellman: Yes.
33
34Ruth Stewart: [inaudible 15:33].
35
36Crescentia Wellman: Yes. And from there I went to Tinker Air Force. Well, then we had –
37 flying duty was really interesting because we got to go not only to the
38 military bases that included the army and the navy and all, but we also
39 would go to some civilian airports because, uh, if any of our personnel had
40 been in an accident or on a leave or anything like that, we would come to
41 pick'm up.
42
43Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
44

1Crescentia Wellman: And it was amazing how happy and excited people would be when we'd
2 go to some of those small airports. They knew we were coming, of
3 course. And many times they would come out with, uh, with food for us.
4

5Ruth Stewart: Really! [chuckle]

6

7Crescentia Wellman: Yes, mm-hm. And once in a while we would stay. You know, we would
8 have to stay overnight because we, you know, those days we didn't have
9 jets.
10

11Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.

12

13Crescentia Wellman: [inaudible 16:37] and so it took us longer to go, but, but that, that
14 happened every once in a while and we always had a, we got a thrill out of
15 that really.
16

17Ruth Stewart: So you were a hero.

18

19Crescentia Wellman: Yes.

20

21Ruth Stewart: Yeah.

22

23Crescentia Wellman: And I remember one time we went to, we had – we flew to Great Lakes
24 and we picked up a young little boy who had a, who was going to have a,
25 um, heart surgery. He had, he had a, uh – and, and we picked, we picked
26 up this young boy and brought him to San Francisco. I remember that so
27 well. Um, and we, we, one of the times, one time we had a, uh, from out
28 of March Air Force Base we had, we had, um, a patient that was a
29 psychiatric patient and we had aircraft problems and we had smoke in the,
30 in the, in the aircraft. You see in those days we always would restrain
31 them on the litter. And they told us we probably were going to have to go
32 down the chute because, uh – and so I was debating whether or not I
33 should take that young man out of those restraints because that would just
34 take time, so I, I decided to do that. And he, he was more calm than the
35 rest of us. [chuckle] [inaudible 18:12], but we all got back. We all got out
36 safely.
37

38Ruth Stewart: And you're living to tell the tale.

39

40Crescentia Wellman: Mm-hm.

41

42Ruth Stewart: Good, good. Yeah.

43

1Crescentia Wellman: But let's see, and then one time I almost had to deliver a baby in the
2 aircraft.
3
4Ruth Stewart: Well that's exciting.
5
6Crescentia Wellman: Yes. We – she was a patient that, that we picked up and I thought we
7 didn't – she was a psychiatric patient and they were moving her so that she
8 would go into, if she went into labor she wouldn't do like she did in her
9 last pregnancy. She had a psychiatric problem and as a – so while we got
10 her on the aircraft, and she was apparently not supposed to be due, and as
11 we were flying into San Francisco, uh, we actually were going b-, back to
12 Travis, she went into labor. And so it scared us going to Travis, we went
13 to Oakland and we put her in the – we flew there and we put her in a
14 helicopter and I went with her. Then we went to, to, uh, San Francisco to
15 Presidio and she delivered at, in the emergency room, so that was a close
16 call.
17
18Ruth Stewart: That was a very close call.
19
20Crescentia Wellman: Yes.
21
22Ruth Stewart: Yeah.
23
24Crescentia Wellman: But anyway, that's about, that was some of the exciting things that we had
25 happen in...
26
27Ruth Stewart: Interesting.
28
29Crescentia Wellman: Yeah.
30
31Ruth Stewart: Yeah.
32
33Crescentia Wellman: Then from Travis, I went to Tinker Air Force Base and stayed there for 2
34 years.
35
36Ruth Stewart: [19:53] And that was when?
37
38Crescentia Wellman: That was in 1959 to '61, yeah. And from there I went, uh – that was a
39 usual tour. Nothing too, nothing too exciting except that for me it was. It
40 was my first time that I got my foot, feet wet being a hospital, being the
41 chief nurse because the chief nurse got sick and died.
42
43Ruth Stewart: Ooh.
44

1Crescentia Wellman: And so I, after I had been there only maybe about 5 or 6 months and I was
2 probably the – well, I wasn't the senior nurse, but they thought I was the
3 most responsible. I was a little bit older when I went in the service and so
4 they, and so as a result, I spent about 1 ½ years as the, you know, chief
5 nurse with, with not very much experience. Um, I did have to do some of
6 the work on the units because they didn't have any, en-, enough help, but
7 we survived it. From there, I went to England. That was in 1961 to '64.
8 And that was a small hospital, uh, it was an old cantonment-type hospital.
9 And I worked in the obstetrical department part of the time, most of the
10 time. And then the last part of my duties, I spent about 6 months in the
11 clinic over at Alconbury which we were attached to. I had an opportunity
12 to do a lot of traveling. And again there were times when our, we were
13 without a chief nurse and I was put in charge for, you know, temporarily.
14 And when I left England, I went to administration school.
15

16Ruth Stewart: [22:16] What – you were in England '61 to '64?

17
18Crescentia Wellman: Three, 3, 3, years. Mm-hm.

19
20Ruth Stewart: Okay. That was in between...

21
22Crescentia Wellman: From '61. '61 to '64.

23
24Ruth Stewart: [22:28] In between fighting wars, wasn't it?

25
26Crescentia Wellman: Yes.

27
28Ruth Stewart: [22:31] That was the Cold War.

29
30Crescentia Wellman: Yes.

31
32Ruth Stewart: [22:33] So your patient care during these periods, were you still doing air
33 evac or?

34
35Crescentia Wellman: No. No, I was not.

36
37Ruth Stewart: You were doing strictly hospital care.

38
39Crescentia Wellman: Hospital, yes.

40
41Ruth Stewart: But for routine.

42
43Crescentia Wellman: Routine care.

44

1Ruth Stewart: Yeah. Okay.
2
3Crescentia Wellman: Um, uh, through, through this time there were periods when our chief
4 nurse was gone and we had a change of, of nurses and I generally had to
5 fill in. From there I went to Administration, Nursing Administration
6 School in Maxwell Air Force Base for 6 months. I should say within all
7 these times while I was in the different places, I always tried to take some
8 college courses, uh, because I do not have a degree and, but I always – I
9 have a lot of credits. But, uh, everywhere that I went, uh, Oklahoma and
10 when I was in England, when I was in Germany, everywhere, I, I've
11 always taken some courses. And, you know, uh, the air force always, you
12 know, um, they encourage you to take courses in...
13
14Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
15
16Crescentia Wellman: ...different things.
17
18Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
19
20Crescentia Wellman: Uh, when I was in Administration School, we had, uh, took SOS,
21 Squadron Officer cour-, uh, course too. And, um, from there I went to
22 Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois and I worked as a charge nurse of the
23 medical floor. And then I became – the last year I was assistant chief
24 nurse there, but always filling in when sometime when there was not
25 enough help in the unit, so I did recovery room nursing quite a bit while I
26 was at Chanute. Um, from there, my first assignment as a chief nurse at
27 San Antonio, Texas in Goodfellow, and I spent 3 years there. It's a very,
28 it was a small hospital. People are very friendly [inaudible 25:06].
29
30Ruth Stewart: [25:10] And what year was that?
31
32Crescentia Wellman: That was in '68 to '70, to '70, end of '70, yeah. And I – while there I was,
33 I joined the American Heart Association, did some work with the Heart
34 Association. And I have, I laugh at this, those were the days when
35 everybody was still smoking a great deal and I tried to encourage our
36 commander who was a heavy smoker to stop and try to get him to stop
37 smoking, you know, in the different areas of the hospital. We did
38 [inaudible 26:00] smoke in the nurse's station, but I had a few problems
39 with our doctors, but they, they complied after a while, so.
40
41Ruth Stewart: Good for you.
42
43Crescentia Wellman: Uh-huh. We did. And, uh, but I, um, from there I went to Okinawa, spent
44 2 years in Okinawa.

1
2Ruth Stewart: You really traveled a lot, didn't you?
3
4Crescentia Wellman: Yeah, I did. Okinawa was a very interesting place. It was very small, you
5 know. It's, you know, it's only 60 miles long. The smallest place is 2
6 miles wide, so. I was at Ryukyu. We had a small hospital. That was
7 during the Vietnam War. We would get the air evac patients in, uh, and
8 especially the, they got a lot of drug addicts. And sometimes if we –
9 Camp Kue was not too far from us. It was an army hospital then. And
10 occasionally they were really shorthanded, some of us would go over there
11 and help'm out because they would get a lot of severe patients, casualties
12 and all, you know, so we would try to help them out once in a while. Um,
13 and I occasionally would take a flight. I was not on flying status, but
14 occasionally that – we had a smaller unit there. I would, I would go
15 [inaudible 27:47] the Philippines or to Korea or somewhere, but that was
16 not my primary duty.
17
18Ruth Stewart: [27:59] What was it like living in Okinawa?
19
20Crescentia Wellman: I lived in a Quonset hut and, uh, the people were very friendly. A lot of
21 them spoke English, but, of course, they were [inaudible 28:13]. And, uh,
22 unfortunately, we had a lot of demonstrations while I was there. And, uh,
23 we, the, the, the employees at the base would have to stay on the base
24 because there were...
25
26Ruth Stewart: [28:33] These were anti-American demonstrations?
27
28Crescentia Wellman: Yes, mm-hm. And they would flood the gates so they, they were not, they
29 were, the people that were working for the Americans were afraid to go. It
30 was dangerous for them to go outside the gate and so they would stay and
31 therefore the people were used to their own food. We did have our dining,
32 the dining halls, but it was not what they were used to eating, so. We had
33 maids and all in our little hospital. And, uh, they would have – we would
34 try – so one day I thought, oh, I know what I'm going to do. I went and
35 had a pot. I had a rice, rice cooker so I brought it to them and they, and
36 they could, they made their own rice. They really loved that.
37
38Ruth Stewart: I'll bet. [chuckle]
39
40Crescentia Wellman: Uh-huh, 'cause they really missed that, you know.
41
42Ruth Stewart: Sure.
43
44Crescentia Wellman: 'Cause they eat rice...

1
2Ruth Stewart: Yeah.
3
4Crescentia Wellman: ...every night of the week [inaudible 29:35].
5
6Ruth Stewart: Yeah, [inaudible 29:37].
7
8Crescentia Wellman: Yeah.
9
10Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
11
12Crescentia Wellman: But it was – then I was there during the time when they turned it over to
13 the Japanese and then all the signs were Japanese. And somebody was –
14 you know, they, they turned over to the U.N. and all. And they start, when
15 they started, they started building big, big high-rises and all that I – we
16 were all afraid that, that, that the island was going to sink. They did.
17 They – and the prices went up, especially the food. But I still, I love the
18 oriental food and I love the Okinawan food because it was different than
19 Japanese or Chinese, very different.
20
21Ruth Stewart: [30:20] Can you describe what the difference is?
22
23Crescentia Wellman: Well, I think they are, they, their quality of meat is so [inaudible 30:30]
24 seemed to be better and they, they ate a lot of, lot of vegetables. And, um,
25 oh, I don't know. And I don't think theirs are, was a spicy. And I, I did
26 attend, um, an Okinawan wedding, which was very interesting, and they
27 had beautiful customs, you know. They really did. They – dancing and
28 they would have parades and all. I always thought that, you know, the
29 Okinawans, you know, most of them really loved us. They really did.
30 They were, they were happy that the, that the Americans were there. You
31 know, there was over 200 military facilities there at the time that I was
32 there.
33
34Ruth Stewart: That almost covered the island, didn't it?
35
36Crescentia Wellman: It did, it did. And we had a real nice place for R&R which was nice.
37
38Ruth Stewart: [31:26] What – tell me about that.
39
40Crescentia Wellman: Well, it is – it was up on the main part of the island, way on the tip of the
41 island, and it had little, little, small huts that we can sleep, use to sleep in.
42 It had a facility like an officers' club and it had a beautiful beach and a
43 separate – beautiful flowers and you know the flowers there are so pretty,
44 you know. We had mostly all warm weather there. And the poinsettias

1 and the, um, hibiscus [inaudible 32:03] beautiful but, uh – and then they
2 had little boats that we could take out. It was a very nice facility. We – it
3 was about, it was about 40 miles from where we were and so we could go
4 up there without any problem. And, uh, sometimes we would just drive up
5 there for the day, but sometimes we would stay. Of course, you had to
6 make reservations if you wanted to stay because it was well, well used.
7 And uh, and then from Okinawa I went to Fairchild Air Force Base, was
8 the chief nurse there for 2 years. And, uh, at that time that is when I
9 decided I was going to do something for the Native Indians. And, uh,
10 they, uh – well, actually, I had a friend that was involved with it. She was
11 a civilian that worked at the hospital so, uh, she suggested that I do – go
12 teaching with the girls, and we, we did teach some social and religious
13 and, and health subjects to them.

14
15Ruth Stewart: [33:29] And these were American Indians?

16
17Crescentia Wellman: Uh-huh.

18
19Ruth Stewart: [33:31] Civilians?

20
21Crescentia Wellman: Spokane, the Spokane tribe, uh-huh. And so I used to go up there, every
22 other Sunday I'd go up there unless I absolutely couldn't, but otherwise.
23 And, uh, they had a little facility. They had a church there. But the girls
24 would come and they would teach'm a little bit about – in fact, some of
25 them even taught, tried to teach them how to read a little bit and so forth,
26 so it was, it was very interesting. That was a good project too.

27
28Ruth Stewart: [34:06] Did you have other contact with the local American Indians?

29
30Crescentia Wellman: Oh yes, I did. Uh, we had – there were several other tribes in that area. I
31 can't recall what the names of the tribes are. But we did, we went to this
32 one place where we would bring, we did some work with the, occasionally
33 to help build, uh, repair the school and then we brought clothing to them
34 and food, so. I forgot to mention that – it just dawned on me. When I was
35 in Okinawa, I went to a leper town a couple of times.

36
37Ruth Stewart: [34:51] Tell me about that.

38
39Crescentia Wellman: Oh, it was our church and then we had other churches too from the base.
40 We'd go up there and we would bring food, not – yes, some food, but
41 mostly supplies. You know, some, I think some, um, medications as well
42 as some – and clothing. And we – it was really amazing. Those people,
43 you know, they, they live at the hospital, but they lived right there, the
44 whole little village, you know. And it was very, um, I would say kind of

1 crude. Uh, they had just the bare necessities. And I can recall how they,
2 they used a therapy with wax that they put their hands in warm wax to
3 help them relieve the pain.
4

5Ruth Stewart: Hm.
6

7Crescentia Wellman: Uh, they also had, um, um, you know, they had – a lot of them had some
8 of their limbs – they didn't, they didn't have their arms or legs and all, you
9 know. But as a whole, the people were receptive to us and they were
10 always smiling, you know. It was, it was, uh, we – I went up there 3
11 different times in the 2 years that I was there. And, uh, the first time I was
12 reluctant, I don't know if I want to see that or not. But they were all ages,
13 very small people, but most of the people were, you know, oh, oh, I would
14 say 40 or 50 or 60 years old. I don't remember too real old people, so.
15 But they would help themselves, you know, as far as they could. And they
16 had, they had doctors there and nurses and, uh, but they were all of, were,
17 you know, [inaudible 37:04].
18

19Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
20

21Crescentia Wellman: But most of the doctors and nurses speak enough English that we could
22 communicate, so.
23

24Ruth Stewart: [37:15] When you went to the leprosarium, did you volunteer any
25 activities or was this more observation?
26

27Crescentia Wellman: More, more observation, yeah. That's what it was. It was not really – we
28 didn't really do, we didn't do any, anything, uh.
29

30Ruth Stewart: But you took...
31

32Crescentia Wellman: We took, we took supplies.
33

34Ruth Stewart: Things that they needed.
35

36Crescentia Wellman: Yes, uh-huh.
37

38Ruth Stewart: Yeah.
39

40Crescentia Wellman: Yeah.
41

42Ruth Stewart: Good.
43

1Crescentia Wellman: And let's see, getting back to where we were. I, uh – in Spokane, from
2Spokane, I went to Germany. I had requested a tour to Germany when I
3first came in the service and I finally got my choice. I am of, of German
4nationality. Both my mother and father are of German descent and they
5speak, they spoke some German at home but not, not very much, but they,
6you know, they would speak. I knew a few, a little bit of German, but I
7did take courses in German, college courses, and then when I was over
8there I took some, uh, conversational German so I could speak better. And
9I have relatives over there which I found, which was wonderful. I have
10about 50 families there.

11

12Ruth Stewart: [38:40] What kind of experience did you have [inaudible 38:42]?

13

14Crescentia Wellman: Well, I was really – we had a little bit of contact with this one cousin of
15my father who kept in contact during World War II. And, uh, we did, we
16just would write once in a while, my aunt did. And so we did have her
17address and so I decided – shortly after I had gotten there, my niece came
18to visit me and we decided to take a, to go up to see if we could find them.
19And as – it was about 200 miles from, from Wiesbaden up in the northern
20part of Germany and when we got there she had, uh, she wasn't home.
21The neighbor saw my license plate and we had our little book with us and
22we'd communicate. She said "Oh, she teaches. She's a schoolteacher, but
23she'll be back at 6 o'clock." So we went and came back there. When we
24came back, she had an interpreter and everything. It was just beautiful.
25And then she, uh, she got us in contact with some more of the relatives
26from both my mo-, my dad's mother's side and father's side. And so it
27was – and after that I found even some family right in Wiesbaden and they
28have come back to, they have come, they have been to the United States
29and they also had been, I've been over there since I left too. And it's
30been, it's a real friendly situation and they've been to my home in Iowa
31and everything, so.

32

33Ruth Stewart: Okay.

34

35Crescentia Wellman: Really great. But they, you know, we – I had anticipated that they would
36be rather, rather poor, but they were very conservative but had beautiful
37things that they, uh, they had beautiful furniture and crystal and all that.
38Of course, they love [inaudible 40:47]. And it, it was always joyful to go
39there [inaudible 40:52]. Then I went to the place where my, the house
40where my grandmother was born and raised and there's still somebody in
41our, in the family that has the home, so. And from Germany – I spent 4
42years there. While I was in Germany, I did also – I was an [inaudible
4341:13] chief for the command nurse. He was stationed in Ramstein.

44

1Ruth Stewart: [41:19] Now what's an [inaudible 41:20] chief?
2

3Crescentia Wellman: [inaudible 41:41]. In other words, when she can't, couldn't go on trips to
4 different places for inspection, I would go. I was, I was the [inaudible
5 41:32] chief for her.
6

7Ruth Stewart: You were the substitute.
8

9Crescentia Wellman: Yeah, mm-hm. And then as a result, I traveled quite, you know, I – all
10 over the – Turkey, Greece, Spain, you know, Italy, Belgium, Holland,
11 everywhere, and all over Germany, you know. Different times I was able
12 to go just for a couple of days or, you know, so.
13

14Ruth Stewart: Hm.
15

16Crescentia Wellman: That was interesting. It was very par-, particularly interesting when I was
17 able to go to a celebration in, in a, at a, at a British, uh, base, air base in
18 Germany that they had invited the commander and myself. We went up
19 there and it was just beautiful. They treated us like so well. You know,
20 the British people they're very, their protocol is so precise and so beautiful
21 and it was very, it was very interesting. And as a result, they came down
22 to visit us. Of course, we were able to give them a good welcome too, so.
23 And at Wiesbaden we also always held, uh, seminars for the whole
24 command because it was the largest hospital there. And so all the
25 different people from the different areas of the, of, of the European
26 command would come to Wiesbaden for seminars so that the nurses could
27 keep up their, their license accreditation 'cause they had to have so many
28 credits every year, so.
29

30Ruth Stewart: [43:20] That was an air force requirement, was it?
31

32Crescentia Wellman: Yes, mm-hm. And, uh, and, uh, you had to have so many credits and, and
33 you, of course, you had to keep your license up in, in one state.
34

35Ruth Stewart: Hm.
36

37Crescentia Wellman: So. And it was, it was, it was very interesting as well as, you know, we
38 would get, we would get guest speakers from the States that would come
39 over to, uh, to help with our seminars and [inaudible 43:52], you know,
40 people from [inaudible 43:56] University of Kentucky and I, I forget
41 where all [inaudible 44:00]. We had one from Florida. I forget a lot.
42 [inaudible 44:08] they had quite a few of them, so. And from Germany, I
43 went to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida where I was chief nurse there till I
44 retired in '81. And while I was there is when we'd had the Cuban

1 refugees arrive. They called, they notified us 2 days, oh, I'd say maybe 2
2 or maybe a week before that we were going to have, they were going to
3 come to Fort Walton Beach, Florida and we were going to have to be
4 taking care of them. And so we – fairgrounds was not too far from our
5 hos-, from our hospital as well as one of the old, old, uh, uh, where they
6 put the airplanes [inaudible 45:06].
7
8Ruth Stewart: Hangar.
9
10Crescentia Wellman: Hangar. And so anyway, we, we had set up a hospital and they let us use
11 2 of the permanent buildings on the fairgrounds. And 10,000 Cuban
12 refugees came with them about 2, 3 weeks and this was the, the patients.
13
14Ruth Stewart: Yeah.
15
16Crescentia Wellman: Yeah, mm-hm.
17
18Ruth Stewart: [45:32] And were they sick or was this a screening?
19
20Crescentia Wellman: No, they were screening, but there were a lot of them that were sick. We
21 put up tents for them to live out on the, out on the, on the fairgrounds, but
22 those that were ill they would go into the hospital unit. And those that
23 were severely ill, then they would come to our hospital. But it took, oh,
24 about 10 days, 10 days to 2 weeks before we got any, any extra help from,
25 we got a few med-, medical technicians, but we really had to stretch our
26 help during that time but we survived it. And, uh, then they, they had.
27 there was in September 12 there was, [inaudible 46:25]. They were
28 leaving, they, they tried to get, they were moving some of'm out. They
29 had to get'm out because there was forecast for a hurricane, so therefore
30 on the 12th we, we did have a hurricane. On the 12th of February we had a
31 hurricane there and – the 12th of September, so we had gotten all these
32 people out.
33
34Ruth Stewart: [46:46] And that was what year?
35
36Crescentia Wellman: That was 1979.
37
38Ruth Stewart: '79.
39
40Crescentia Wellman: And I retired in July of '81, July 1 of '81.
41
42Ruth Stewart: You certainly had an interesting career [inaudible 47:02].
43

1Crescentia Wellman: I thought it was. I haven't done anything really tremendous, but it was
2 interesting.

3

4Ruth Stewart: Very interesting. [47:08] What are your main memories overall, general
5 feelings about your time in the air force?

6

7Crescentia Wellman: Well, it was a very rewarding experience. It was, uh, uh, we had
8 wonderful experiences. I had, it was, and it was very rewarding. Uh, it
9 probably wasn't anything that I really thought it was going to be like, you
10 know. I thought it was, you know, I thought it was – I don't know what I
11 thought it was going to be like. But I – it was – made wonderful,
12 wonderful friends. And I got to have plenty, so many opportunities to do
13 things I never would've been able to do. And, uh, I, I can tell you that I, I
14 never, you know, I always, I was very fortunate to have good, good, uh,
15 supervisors and chief nurses and [inaudible 48:01].

16

17Ruth Stewart: It makes such a difference.

18

19Crescentia Wellman: Mm-hm. It really does, you know. And, and, and commanders,
20 commanders were good and the, the doctors. You know, the thing is, you
21 always work with youth. You know, you always – and then that was one
22 of the things I thought it was so interesting that, you know, that the young
23 people they come to you and they were, they had very little experience or
24 had never probably maybe been away from home for very long and how
25 they developed into such good people. We had a, we had a few that were,
26 we had problems, you know, sometimes. But as a result, most of the
27 people were, were very, very dedicated and I think that's what – and we
28 put in lots of long hours, but we had lots of fun, so. I got to travel a lot.

29

30Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.

31

32Crescentia Wellman: So.

33

34Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [49:00] And since your retirement then, did you retire here to
35 San Antonio?

36

37Crescentia Wellman: No. I retired, I retired at Eglin in 1981 and I left there in '85. I enjoyed it
38 there. I liked it. I liked Fort Walton Beach and I have lots of friends
39 there, but it's a very small place. And, uh, it is – and if you love water
40 sports and all, you know, it's just wonderful, but there's, and there's not a
41 whole lot [inaudible 49:39]. You have to go away to get somewhere. And
42 I just always enjoyed going to San Antonio because I used to come down
43 here for seminars and for, and for – I sometimes had to be on the board,
44 promotion boards, and so that's why I enjoyed coming here. And I had a

1 lot of friends, some friends here, but I made more, lots of, lots of friends
2 here when I'd been here.
3
4Ruth Stewart: [50:07] So that was in '85 that you came here?
5
6Crescentia Wellman: Mm-hm. And I built, I built a home and...
7
8Ruth Stewart: [50:14] And have you been involved in veterans' activities since you came
9 here?
10
11Crescentia Wellman: Oh yes. Well, I joined the WOSL right after I came here. And I have
12 been going to Veterans Hospital once a month ever since '85 – I think, '86
13 I think I started going over there. And I used to, uh, for a while, uh, we
14 had a, um, a courtesy booth when we were at Lackland for the newcomers,
15 uh, every Saturday and I used to go out there one of my first couple years
16 that I was here. I would go out there once a month. And, um, I went to
17 the USO. I helped them down in the USO some number of times, you
18 know. When I first came I did a lot more of that.
19
20Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
21
22Crescentia Wellman: And then I got involved more in my church activity. And, and I was an
23 ombudsman for a nursing home for 8 years till I [inaudible 51:23] too
24 much walking, so.
25
26Ruth Stewart: Hm.
27
28Crescentia Wellman: But I still do a lot of volunteer work. Um, I have, I, I work about 3 or 4
29 days a week. I work over at Santa Rosa. I do the information desk and I
30 also give communion there. And I, but I, I visit at our Church of Saint
31 Matthew so we, I, we visit new parishioners and the sick, things like that.
32 We have a meeting every week. I do at least 2 to 3 hours a week of work.
33
34Ruth Stewart: So the basic interest that got you into nursing is liking people and liking to
35 work with people and help people has carried through not only your
36 nursing, active nursing career, but it's – you are still nursing in many,
37 many ways, aren't you?
38
39Crescentia Wellman: Yeah.
40
41Ruth Stewart: Yeah, so. Very, very interesting career and very interesting story and
42 certainly appreciate all the special activities and directions that you took
43 during that time and took advantage of.
44

1Crescentia Wellman: I really, I really enjoyed my career. I really did. You know, uh, it was
2 really [inaudible 52:38] and I still get calls from a lot of people.

3

4Ruth Stewart: Yeah.

5

6Crescentia Wellman: But I bet you, your, your career is very interesting too. I know it is.

7

8Ruth Stewart: [chuckle] Well, thank you very much. We'll close out Cris' career at this
9 point.

10

11Crescentia Wellman: Okay.

12

13Ruth Stewart: And do appreciate the time and effort that you spent in getting this
14 recorded...

15

16Crescentia Wellman: Okay.

17

18Ruth Stewart: ...for our Library of Congress.

19

20Crescentia Wellman: Okay.

21

22

23/mlc