

MARIAN SIEVERT MOSHER

Women's Overseas Service League  
Orange County, California Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Marian S. Mosher  
Laguna Hills, California

## PREFACE

This transcript is the product of an interview conducted July 7, 1989, for the Women's Overseas Service League, by Mrs. Vivian Peterson.

Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical information accompany the original cassette.

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers  
Lansing, Michigan

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**WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE**

**Oral History Project**

MARIAN SIEVERT MOSHER

10 Orange County, California Unit

12 NOTE: July 7, 1989. This is Vivian  
Peterson. I am recording Marian Mosher's  
14 oral history for Women's Overseas Service  
League, Oral History Project.

16 MM: I am Marian Mosher, and I was in the Army Nurse Corps  
from January 2, 1943, till January 3, 1946. I was  
18 inducted through Camp Haan in January, and in April  
we were transferred to San Francisco Port of  
20 Embarkation for the Hawaiian Islands. We joined the  
staff of the 165th Station Hospital on May 5, 1943.  
22 This was on the island of Kauai. We were there until  
the following year, but did have periods of temporary  
24 duty on Hawaii and Oahu.

We arrived in the Philippine Islands in May,  
26 1945, and we were there until the third of October,  
1945, when we went on terminal leave. Now one of the  
28 questions is what influenced me to become a  
volunteer. I had just received my bachelor of

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30 science with a major in public health nursing. The  
government was in need of nurses in the military and  
32 also in public health. I did not like public health  
nursing, so I volunteered for the Army. Prior to my  
34 enlistment, I had graduated from nursing in 1940, so  
I had done general duty nursing one year and then  
36 part-time general duty for the two years while I  
worked for my degree at UCLA. While I was in  
38 service, I did general duty nursing, primarily in the  
operating room and in the shock ward.

40 One of the questions relates to career  
preparation and my expectations. I already had my  
42 career planned, so I had no further expectations at  
the time being. After being in the military for one  
44 year, my basic pay was \$150.00 per month. Since most  
of my service was overseas, I had an extra ten  
46 percent (\$15.00 extra) added and a subsistence  
allowance of \$21.70; making a total of \$186.70. Of  
48 this, I had \$100.00 deducted as a Class E Allotment  
and \$6.90 as a National Service Life Insurance; so my  
50 monthly check was \$79.80.

As for equal opportunities for service and  
52 education: I was not aware of unequal opportunities  
for either service or for education. The place I  
54 probably felt unequal opportunities were movement

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56 from one place to another, and of course, in the  
Philippines a lack of freedom to move around; for  
safety and our own protection.

58 As far as our assignments were concerned, we  
were there as nurses and were assigned according to  
60 our education and our background of experience.  
Before the fellows were sent over to the Philippines,  
62 I did have the opportunity of teaching the corpsmen  
nursing procedures, first aid measures, and how to  
64 administer medications intravenously so that they  
could carry on the procedures in the combat areas.

66 As for housing in the United States and Hawaii,  
we lived in wood barracks, two nurses to a room. The  
68 barracks had a kitchen, living room, and bathroom  
facilities. They were not luxurious, but they were  
70 comfortable except for there was no heat in the cold  
weather.

72 In the Philippines, we lived in tents and floors  
built off the ground, burlap around the lower half of  
74 the tent and screen around the upper portion. Again,  
there was no plumbing for showers or bathing. These  
76 were in another tent that was enclosed up to about  
five or six feet. The toilet facilities were in  
78 another tent, which happened to be about an eight or  
ten holer. I don't remember exactly.

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80           Medical care was adequate. I had little need  
for other than the usual immunizations. When nurses  
82           in our unit required help, it was made available  
either by the unit doctors or consultation at a  
84           nearby general hospital.

          As far as uniforms we wore: In the Hawaiian  
86           Islands it was OD for the cold weather or light beige  
for summer. Suits and dresses; either one were  
88           acceptable. For duty we wore beige and light striped  
seersucker wraparounds. We were also issued a khaki  
90           slack and blouse outfit which we wore that was a  
little cooler. In the Philippines we wore khaki or  
92           the seersucker pants and tops at all times. Of  
course, we had to be protective of mosquitoes there.  
94           We were also issued a field outfit, but never wore it  
except when we were enroute from the Hawaiian Islands  
96           to the Philippine Islands; and again when we were out  
for gun practice in the field.

98           Now for memorable experiences: In the Hawaiian  
Islands, one of the colonels on the island decided  
100           that his administrative staff was spending too much  
time behind desks. He wanted them to get some  
102           exercise so he arranged for hikes on Sundays; all day  
hikes Working in the op, and they invited all the  
104           nurses that were available to go with them if they

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wanted to. Those of us in the operating room had to  
106 take turns so that we were staffed for emergencies,  
but these were very nice hikes. We went into areas  
108 which were very remote, places which tourists today  
still do not get to see. It was educational as well  
110 as enjoyable for its exercise and for its social  
event.

112 In the Philippines, the night we arrived on  
Leyte and enroute to the receiving area we saw the  
114 most beautiful sunset, which I shall never forget.  
When we arrived at the receiving area, we shared our  
116 tents with the prisoners of war who were just on  
their way back to the United States. The next  
118 morning as we came to breakfast, they came with their  
tin cups in hand and plates for their breakfast. We  
120 saw these green scrambled eggs and were turning up  
our nose; yet they took time to give thanks for them.  
122 Then during our breakfast period, the loudspeaker of  
the camp announced the death of President Roosevelt.

124 When these people were made prisoners of war,  
children up to a certain age were sent with their  
126 mothers; were imprisoned with their mothers. The  
boys had now become in their teens. We shared toilet  
128 facilities and shower facilities with them. This was  
a little bit difficult for some people to accept, but

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130 to them it didn't make any difference at all. Also,  
it was interesting to us how little we knew. When  
132 they announced President Roosevelt's death, the  
former prisoners that were in the tent I was in were  
134 asking us who the vice-president was and what was he  
like. Most of us didn't even remember his name, much  
136 less know anything else about him. We really learned  
a lot in those few days we were in Leyte, living with  
138 these former prisoners of war.

Now one of the sections is comparing my  
140 experiences with the present: I don't feel qualified  
to make comparisons. I do get (because I also later  
142 on in Vietnam was working under the State  
Department), I get a lot of questionnaires about  
144 various things. In those forms I receive to fill out  
for somebody's study (because many people seem to be  
146 studying the result of this), I sense a lot of self-  
pity. All I can think of is that, probably, they  
148 were either not chosen; at least they did not know  
what to expect either socially or jobwise, when they  
150 were accepted or applied for that program. I sense  
so much self-pity; and we really enjoyed our --

152 I was with the United States Agency for  
International Development, so I was not there as a  
154 military person. I was there in a nurse advisory

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156 position. We worked in visiting hospitals: We  
158 worked with the Vietnamese military, but we lived and  
160 had our services from the American military (like PX  
162 services). We enjoyed our service there in Vietnam  
with the Agency for International Development, but we  
did not have contact with the injured, which makes a  
difference. However, we did have contact with some  
of the fellows as we would see them around.

164 Now my next topic is: Conflict between feminine  
166 and military profession. I was not aware of any. We  
168 realized that those who were in military service as a  
170 career that they would be assuming more  
responsibility. They were under a completely  
different jurisdiction than those of us who were  
there just for three years, so we expected them to  
carry a higher rank and a greater responsibility. It  
did not bother us one bit.

172 Another question about the GI Bill: Yes, I was  
174 very grateful for the GI Bill, because it allowed me  
to get my masters degree at minimum cost; and later  
on, for a home loan.

176 About the adjustments we had to make: As a  
178 nurse, I was accustomed to dormitory living (because  
student nurses in those days always lived in  
dormitories) and the camaraderie that goes with it.

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180 We were expected to wear uniforms and abide by all  
the regulations that go with group living and uniform  
182 codes. These things did not upset us one bit. There  
was a lack of freedom, which was for our own safety  
184 in most instances. I would have liked to have gone  
shopping in Honolulu more often, but we were on the  
186 outer islands, and transportation was not always  
available. But then that applies when you are living  
188 in your own city. You can't always go to town when  
you want to, because somebody else is using the car  
190 or whatever. That was no problem, other than that we  
didn't always get our wants like we wanted them.

192 Terminology was not upsetting, because every  
occupation and profession has its own terminology,  
194 and we knew that we had our terminology as nurses.  
So the military had its terminology too.

196 Something about unpopular requirements: Some of  
the things that irked us was the thought that  
198 "command performances" were usually a bore. I don't  
remember any particular regulations that really gave  
200 us a big deal of bother, other than that we did  
resent saluting sometimes: But that was a pain to  
202 everyone, I think. I enjoyed my military experiences  
and the people and the work. In civilian life we may  
204 not salute, but we have other ways of acknowledging

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peers -- both uppers and lowers. One of the things,  
206 probably, that did bother us was not being allowed to  
fraternize with the enlisted men. These were the  
208 people with whom we worked; we liked them; we had  
probably more respect for them than we did for some  
210 of the officers around.

I remember one night in the Philippine Islands  
212 the Red Cross arranged a dance in the boys' mess  
hall, and they got special permission that the nurses  
214 could come. It was one of the nicest social events  
we had out of our whole military service with the  
216 165th Station Hospital.

After service, I went on and got my master's  
218 degree and taught nursing and later did some teaching  
with the nursing education advisory work in Vietnam  
220 and in Cairo, Egypt. I think that's about it.

VP: Tell me about this duty in Cairo?

222 MM: Cairo was my post-retirement. I retired in 1975, at  
the age of sixty so that I could still do another  
224 overseas assignment because I had enjoyed them. When  
I retired, I took a job with Project HOPE, and I  
226 spent two years as nurse education advisor at the  
High Institute of Nursing at the University of Cairo  
228 (It's a big title). I was there for two years and it  
was very interesting.

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230           We were one of the first land based -- We were  
          there at the beginning of the time in Cairo. Project  
232           HOPE, I think, is still there in Cairo. I was  
          assigned to someone who had a doctorate degree, and I  
234           had a master's, and I think this made a difference as  
          far as my effectiveness goes. I was supposed to  
236           teach in the baccalaureate level and do an evaluation  
          of the master's in medical-surgical nursing. When I  
238           got there, I discovered that the students in the  
          baccalaureate level were just learning English so  
240           they could not understand me. Besides that, the  
          lecture room was right on a busy, busy, busy street  
242           with horns blowing; and my voice would not drown out  
          all that noise.

244           The master's program as it had been set up was a  
          farce. A bunch of stuff had been put into it without  
246           any reason why it was there, or who was going to do  
          it, or how much of it should be done or not so there  
248           was a change of staff there. Instead, I ended up  
          being in more-or-less an advisory capacity and helped  
250           with the faculty of the baccalaureate students and  
          setting up the medical-surgical part of the master's  
252           program. The first year was a flop of all the flops  
          I've ever had, but the second year made up for it in  
254           that it was one of the most dynamic groups of

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256 students I have ever had. It changed my whole view  
of nursing; in Egypt.

258 VP: When you came back from the Philippines, what did you  
do then?

260 MM: When I came back from the Philippines, I started  
looking for a public health job. I wasn't satisfied  
262 with anything, but the school at Huntington Memorial  
Hospital, Pasadena City College, needed an  
instructor. I started teaching at Pasadena City  
264 College in their nursing program the fall of '46, but  
I did not have my teaching credentials so I was  
266 teaching under emergency teaching credentials. That  
required that I get back to school, so that's why I  
268 went back and got my master's degree; master of  
science in education, so I could get my teaching  
270 credentials. That involved teaching once-in-a-while  
science classes on campus as well as teaching nursing  
272 subjects.

274 In 1963, I knew I was due for a sabbatical  
leave, and I felt I needed some refreshing. I had  
been taking courses all along the way. The school  
276 year of 1963-64, I took a sabbatical leave and taught  
nursing at the Christian Medical College of Nursing  
278 at Vellore, South India. That was a real, cultural  
experience, but I always felt that I could (because

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280 of having gone through the hot weather in the  
Philippines), I could tolerate and adapt to the hot  
282 weather in India and didn't get upset about these  
cultural and traumatic kinds of things. There I was  
284 just as an ordinary teacher and met some of the most  
wonderful people I've ever known.

286 Then I went back to work at Pasadena City  
College again. After awhile, I got restless. There  
288 were some things that weren't working out like I had  
hoped they would work, so I knew there was trouble  
290 ahead. I wanted to get out of the trouble, so I took  
a leave of absence and joined the United States  
292 Agency for International Development and went to  
Vietnam as a nurse education advisor for a year-and-  
294 a-half contract. Then I stayed over. There, there  
was a language problem, and I had to work through an  
296 interpreter.

One of the most interesting things there is that  
298 there was so much difficulty in communication, so  
much resistance because my counterpart with whom I  
300 worked was an older woman; that is, older for their  
country. I think it was embarrassing for her among  
302 her own peer group to be having to work with an  
outsider.

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304 I found out indirectly that she could understand  
more English than she could speak. She always  
306 insisted that my interpreter and I work right at the  
desk with her (which was a big desk). You could do  
308 this; so as we talked, I would make suggestions and  
try to get my interpreter to understand what I was  
310 trying to do and why I was trying to do it. I soon  
found out that these things were being put into  
312 action before I ever got around to start talking to  
my counterpart about it. Then I realized she was  
314 understanding, and why she wanted us to sit at the  
table with her. That way it saved her face. She  
316 didn't have to worry about the peer situation. From  
then on, things worked much more smoothly, and I  
318 stayed a little longer than my contract.

While I was there we built a new nursing school  
320 building. That last month I was there, every morning  
when I would come to work, she would come in and want  
322 to consult with me about how she should do this or  
how she should do that, which she had never done  
324 before: So I'm glad I had stayed an extra little  
time, so that it wasn't as if I was finishing a  
326 contract and running. I was staying a little bit  
longer.

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328           Then I went back to Pasadena College and stayed  
          until I was sixty. I retired at sixty so that I  
330           could take on another overseas assignment because I  
          had liked the overseas work.

332           I had been approved and all ready to go to join  
          the International Volunteers in New Guinea, but that  
334           fell through because they were having political  
          problems. Then a friend of mine put me in contact  
336           with Project HOPE, starting a program in Cairo. I  
          went to Cairo for two years at the High Institute of  
338           Nursing at the University of Cairo.

          I was supposed to be there as a teacher at the  
340           baccalaureate level and evaluator of the master's in  
          medical-surgical nursing. Because their bachelor  
342           students were just beginning to study English, I  
          couldn't teach; besides, the classroom was right next  
344           to a very busy highway that I couldn't compete with  
          (the noise). I ended up doing the master's in  
346           medical-surgical nursing, setting it up. The first  
          class was a real failure. The second class made up  
348           for it, because it was a very dynamic group.

          After that, I thought I had retired, but I  
350           didn't have my social security because I had not  
          worked enough under social security. As a public  
352           school teacher, we didn't get social security.

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I helped with the census in the 1980's to get  
354 more points in social security, and then Whittaker  
Corporation called me. Their personnel director had  
356 called the college, wanting to know if they had  
anyone who would be willing to teach medical  
358 vocabulary and simple nursing procedures to bilingual  
students to act as interpreters in their hospitals in  
360 Saudi Arabia. Of course, the college immediately  
said, "Well, if anyone would, Marian might be  
362 available;" so Marian was available. Of course, the  
fact that I had already spent two years in Egypt was  
364 to my advantage.

So I went back to Cairo, and I taught what was  
366 supposed to be a forty hour course; but with all the  
holidays (between their holidays and the American  
368 holidays), this course stretched out into five and  
six weeks. I taught two groups then of medical  
370 vocabulary and simple nursing procedures.

The following year (fall of 1981), I did the  
372 same thing in Amman, Jordan. Those students were  
going to be going to North Yemen to act as  
374 interpreters.

The interesting thing about that assignment was,  
376 if you know the Arabic culture and the relationship  
of male-female kind of thing, I had a class of all

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378 boys (or young men). The course which Whittaker  
Corporation had decided these students had to be  
380 taught included the anatomy and physiology of the  
male and the female reproductive system. Put  
382 yourself in that spot! < Laughter > They were  
embarrassed, but I just plowed through as non-  
384 committal as I could. One of the men (one of the  
older fellows; I imagine he was in his thirties) was  
386 a school teacher, and when the boys would ask a  
question, he would answer it in their language  
388 because he knew what we were talking about. When I  
came back from that, I decided it was time to retire.  
390 By that time, I was sixty six years old.

VP: I'd like to hear more about your Service in the  
392 Philippines, Marian. Would you tell me more about  
it?

394 MM: We went to the Philippines as soon as MacArthur  
allowed women to go in. Our boys had gone in ahead,  
396 our corpsmen and doctors; but the nurses weren't  
allowed in because MacArthur really didn't like women  
398 in his unit. By the time we got there the boys had  
become so skillful that we wondered why they even  
400 needed us, because of their experiences.

While we were there, we had a lot of interesting  
402 experiences. One night, one of the girls got hold of

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some steaks. We rigged up several flatirons and our  
404 mess kits, and we prepared them using our flatirons  
as our heating. That was a real treat to us.

406 Also, if you listen to "Radar" on the TV show  
and his bargaining for things: One time (our fellows  
408 bargaining) we ended up with a supply of pork beyond  
which our refrigeration could contain, so to meet  
410 that situation we were eating pork three times a day  
for about a month.

412 Among our casualties that we had over there, we  
had quite a few plane crashes for awhile. They were  
414 always in the early morning when the planes were  
beginning to take off. It was considered that these  
416 were due to sabotage, and these were usually burn  
patients. They were bad burns.

418 One morning while feeding a patient who wasn't  
doing too well (really wasn't recovering at all), he  
420 had an emesis of an ascaris, which is a long  
intestinal worm. That made all of us wonder what  
422 else we might be carrying around inside our bodies,  
but the man improved immediately after he had gotten  
424 rid of that worm.

There were many flies in the area, and most of  
426 you might know burn patients' dressings begin to  
smell once in a while -- and ooze. The flies harbor

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428 and lay eggs on these dressings. I had heard of  
using maggots for orthopedic infections when I was in  
430 training, but I had never seen them. Because of the  
flies laying eggs on the dressings, these patients  
432 would become infected with maggots.

Now maggots are not what you would call an  
434 aesthetic form of treatment, but it is very  
effective. Those patients' wounds were very clean,  
436 and they healed quite readily. We also had a lot of  
patients who had hepatitis.

438 One time the government provided a trip for us  
to the city on the island, Calpan. We flew over a  
440 lot of green land which I imagine was jungle, because  
there wasn't too much else on the island. We had a  
442 good time, but when we got home all of us had  
intestinal upsets for several days.

444 One time the Red Cross planned a dance for us in  
a community. We were picked up by jeep, and we were  
446 riding through some of the trails, which were rutted.  
As we went over the tree roots, you wondered why the  
448 jeep didn't turn over, so I know jeeps are very good  
on rough terrain. One place we stopped to ask  
450 directions, and we were invited into their bamboo  
house. It was night, and most of them had been in  
452 bed.

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< Side 2 >

454           One time, someone from the Philippine -- whether  
government or Army -- I wouldn't know, arranged for  
456           us to have a trip to Calpan, which is the big city  
(about the only city, I think, on the island). It  
458           was a very interesting trip. We had a nice time. We  
met a nurse who had graduated from Philadelphia  
460           General, and she stayed with us the entire time. She  
seemed so glad to have contact with American people.

462           Red Cross planned this. We went by jeep; we  
went on very rugged roads. They were at an angle so  
464           that as we drove over tree roots, I wondered why we  
didn't turn over so I know the jeeps are good. Of  
466           course, we didn't really know where we were going,  
and it was dark at night. We stopped at one of the  
468           houses. It was a bamboo house built up on sticks  
(stilts); and asked directions, and of course, we  
470           were invited into the house.

          Pretty soon the children started appearing from  
472           their sleeping mats. We were the center of a lot of  
attention. We were served chicken which had a few  
474           little ends of feathers on them, but of course, we  
ate them. The bones were thrown out the door to the  
476           pigs who were underneath the house, so you can see

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478 what some of the families were living in and why some  
people got sick when they were over there.

480 When we finally found the place, we had to park  
on a road. Then we had to walk what seemed like an  
482 awfully long distance in the dark over one of these  
little paths that goes between the rice paddies.  
Eventually we got to this place where there was a  
484 little light; I think it was a lantern. There was a  
camouflaged parachute hanging over a spot of dirt  
486 (earth); I think it was growing, and there were  
Filipinos there who were dancing in their bare feet.  
488 We didn't dance, but some of the fellows did. It was  
an interesting trip out to see another section of the  
490 country and how they lived. Roads don't go all over,  
so I was very grateful for that.

492 As far as nursing was concerned: One of the  
things that I often look back, since I did go into  
494 nursing education -- and how fussy we were about our  
students' technique. This was the day when  
496 penicillin was still new, and you gave a lot of it,  
and it had to be given intramuscularly. There was a  
498 shortage of syringes so we had to fill a 10 or 20 cc  
syringe with penicillin and then change needles  
500 between patients, which meant you never aspirated to  
check if you were in a blood vessel or not. I hope

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502 no one ever got sick because of it. When I think of  
how strict I was with teaching students, and here we  
504 had been in a position of doing that kind of nursing  
out of necessity.

506 The prisoners of war that were on Leyte when we  
came in (and of course, all I know is what we talked  
508 to the people who were in the same tent that we were  
and seeing the others around the camp): These were  
510 people who were employed by the U.S. Government,  
working in the Philippines, and got caught there and  
512 had been imprisoned at San Tomas.

VP: They weren't Filipinos, then?

514 MM: No. They were Americans, and they were on their way  
back to the States. The two people in the tent where  
516 I lived were younger people. It was a woman whose  
husband had been employed by the government, and her  
518 sister, who had been visiting her. They were  
younger, and they didn't look too bad for the wear  
520 and tear of a prison. Some of the others that we  
saw, the older ones, they looked so fragile and  
522 almost as if they were still in sort of a daze from  
the experience. These were people who were  
524 Americans, who had been working there; that is, the  
ones I talked to and saw. But they were all  
526 Americans: They were not Filipinos.

WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE  
MARIAN S. MOSHER, Orange County, California Unit

528 I went into Service as a second lieutenant. I  
was given a first lieutenantcy after I got to the  
Philippines, but I think it was just a routine  
530 promotion that you get if you stay in long enough;  
you get raised to first lieutenant. I was given a  
532 "combat" because this was considered a combat area.  
I was given a combat star, but to my knowledge, I  
534 never saw an enemy.

536

< End of Interview >

538

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Transcribed by Patricia Siggers

542

Lansing, Michigan

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