

Interview of Laura Jacquelin Coggin on her career in the Army Nurse Corps

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4Ruth Stewart:

This interview is of, of Laura Jacquelin Coggin on March 26th, 2007, taken for the WOSL in San Antonio, Texas, with Ruth Stewart and Patricia Martin as interviewers. [00:22] Jackie, start off by telling us a little bit about where you were born and about your young years.

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10Laura Jacquelin Coggin:

Uh, I was born in Macon, Georgia, uh, on uh, August the 10th, 1931. Uh, I grew up there in Macon; started school at Bruce Elementary School; and had pretty good youth running around the neighborhood. And mother and... My mother was from the city of Sandersville, Georgia. And we used to go down the – my grandfather's farm. It was great for fishing; great for stealing watermelons. Uh, found out several years later that we grandkids stole watermelons from the neighbor. And after we all left, my grandfather paid for them. So, I think I felt better about my history. [chuckle]

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Uh, we left Macon in 1940-, September of '41, just as Germany was becoming a real problem. Uh, we were living in Pensacola, Florida. My father was working at the Naval Air Station, uh, when on December the 7th, 1941... And I remember that cause we were reading – he was reading us the newspaper – the Sunday's newspaper with the radio. Do you remember [inaudible 2:06]?

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41Ruth Stewart:

[3:01] What made you interested in nursing at that point?

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43Laura Jacquelin Coggin:

I don't know. I just always thought I wanted to be a nurse.

1 Ruth Stewart: [3:12] Always did?
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3 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Mm-hm. As far back as I can remember. Uh, it may have come
4 from the fact that my mother had a very close friend who was an
5 RN. I don't know. It just was something that was there.
6

7 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
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9 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: My grandmother wanted me to be a school teacher. And along in
10 this history in a few minutes, you're gonna discover something. I
11 ended up in teaching anyway, even though I was never going to be
12 a teacher. Um, graduated in, let's see – I said nursing from 19, in
13 1953 from the Macon Hospital. I took a course in maternity
14 nursing, uh, post graduate course. And it was very interesting. It
15 was in, uh, New Jersey – Margaret Hague Maternity Hospital in
16 New Jersey.
17

18 There I began to realize that I needed more... If I was going to
19 make a living out of nursing, I needed more education. So, I ended
20 up back at home in Pensacola, in Pensacola Junior College; took
21 the basic entry courses and then went onto Florida State and
22 received by mast-, my bachelor's degree in nursing administration
23 – nursing education administration.
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25 Ruth Stewart: [4:41] Where was that now?
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27 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Uh, Florida State University, uh, Tallahassee...
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29 Ruth Stewart: Okay.
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31 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: ...Florida. Uh...
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33 Ruth Stewart: [4:56] So you went straight then virtually...
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35 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yeah, well I was working.
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37 Ruth Stewart: [5:01] Post graduate course and then to junior college and then to
38 regular?
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40 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: I went to post and then to junior. Oh yeah, but I was working the
41 full time, cause uh, there were no funds available unless I earned
42 my money, so I worked my way through.
43

1 After I finished with my master's – I mean with my bachelor's,
2 excuse me – I uh, at Florida State, I went back to Pensacola and
3 worked with a new hospital back... Was invited back to help them
4 with a new hospital that was opening. They had an old small unit
5 called the University Hospital – uh, Escambia County Hospital was
6 its real name. And they built a huge building and then reopened it.
7 And I was part of that and helped with the policies, procedures and
8 setting up the psychiatric unit that they opened. And that was the
9 first one that they had in town.
10
11 Uh, I worked there for a couple of years, then decided I was going
12 away and getting my master's. So, I went to the University of
13 Alabama [inaudible 6:22] ... Got a scholarship, which I was
14 surprised about; and went to the University of Alabama and got a
15 master's degree in '63, 1963.
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17 Ruth Stewart: [6:44] You were at that point virtually a perennial student?
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19 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Mm, off and on, yes.
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21 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Okay.
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23 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: I worked on the side and went to school full-time. Um, then I went
24 back, and I went to work at, uh, the University... I got an
25 appointment the University of, uh, Southwestern Louisiana in
26 Lafayette, Louisiana. I taught psych nursing and spent most of my
27 time at the Mandeville State Hospital in Covington, Louisiana –
28 [soft voice] right across the bridge from the New Orleans – [louder
29 voice] right across the bridge from New Orleans. So, in the
30 evening and weekends I could have fun. [chuckle]
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32 Ruth Stewart: [7:41] You enjoyed New Orleans then, did you?
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34 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yes, I enjoyed... I enjoyed the history and the background of New
35 Orleans, yes.
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37 Uh, we as a group – we being the fac-, part of the younger faculty
38 at the university, all decided we wanted to go to New Orleans, I
39 mean to Germany. And we started attempting to save money to
40 get there. And we were not doing a good job. We wanted to go
41 spend three – a minimum three months but couldn't seem to get
42 there.
43

1 And the nurse recruiter for the Army Nurse Corps kept coming in
2 and telling us that she thought she could help us. She came in one
3 year and told us that she definitely could help us; that she could
4 guarantee us an assignment to Germany. And we had about
5 decided we weren't going to be able to save money. So first, uh, a
6 friend of mine who was an instructor signed up and went. She
7 wrote us a lot about what a wonderful time she was having and
8 how she was visiting all the places we wanted to go to; and how
9 much fun it was.

10
11 So, by the next year, there were two of us – myself and a friend –
12 who signed up to go that year. The end result was, I went and my
13 friend stayed at the university teaching. I went to 2nd General
14 Hospital in Landstuhl, Germany. And did – had a lot of fun. I
15 worked in the psych nursing unit. And as I got there, since I did
16 have more experience than many of the nurses, I seemed to go up
17 in rank, in, in positions rather rapidly in the two years. And then I
18 went, as the senior officers from the army came in, I went down
19 the ladder to the bottom back to staff nursing. It was an interesting
20 experience. Some ways a lot of fun; some ways a little confusing
21 at times.

22
23 At the end of the two years, uh, shortly before the two years ended,
24 I guess I should say, they started attempting me – attempting to
25 persuade me to spend at least another year stateside before I got
26 out of the service. And after having my friends, uh, talk a great
27 deal, I finally did go. And instead of... And the girl in, uh,
28 personnel office persuaded me I shouldn't go one year indefinite, I
29 should go, uh, in one year extension, I should go indefinite. And, I
30 did.

31
32 And after that, no one ever asked me about getting out. And I
33 knew the problems outside in civilian hospitals was about similar
34 to the same problems in the military hospitals, except there was an
35 advantage. Periodically, they move you in the military hospital, so
36 you get a different angle at the problem you've got. It's not the
37 same problem and the same faces and the same people every day.
38 You get a little break. Uh, where do you want me to go from here?

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40 Ruth Stewart: [11:31] What kind of experiences did you have? You were you in
41 administration mostly or – and teaching?

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43 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: I started off as most of us in the service, a staff nurse in psychiatry,
44 because I had a, a psychiatric background prior to entering the

1 service. Uh, from there, I went first to the supervisor of the psych
2 nursing. I had had a great deal of experience because of needing to
3 go to school at the same time in med surg-, medical nursing –
4 medical and surgical nursing. Uh, well, medical then surgical.
5
6 So, when the supervisor of the medical surgical nursing unit left, I
7 ended up, because I was older, filling in as a supervisor in medical
8 surgical nursing, uh, for I guess about a year. And then the senior
9 officers began to check into, uh, 2nd General. We had had... We
10 lost a lot of officers and then we were getting back the people to
11 fill those staff positions. So then, I went back down in. And I had
12 had an enormous amount of administration prior to entering the
13 service, so that I was a little better.
14
15 I had a great deal of problems in the beginning, because I didn't
16 know a thing called army regulations. But fortunately, I met a
17 women's army corps officer in personnel who happily educated me
18 to the military rules and regulations. And I appreciated that very
19 much.
20
21 Ruth Stewart: That's important.
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23 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Oh yes. It's hard to function when you don't really know where
24 the borders are. And I learned those from her. And she probably
25 kept me out of trouble a couple of times.
26
27 Ruth Stewart: [chuckle]
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29 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: In fact, I know she did. [chuckle]
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31 Ruth Stewart: [13:38] Let's go back to your time in Germany, which was a very
32 special time for you. Uh, and talk a little bit about living there.
33 Was it the experience that you expected in terms of – cause at first
34 you wanted to go as a civilian; and then you went in the military.
35
36 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: We, we lived in quarters. It was about 20 steps out the side door of
37 the old 2nd General. This was a wooden cantonment building that
38 had strings of buildings connected by long halls. Uh, the barracks
39 was fairly nice. They were, I was told, old barracks that the
40 German army had used years ago. But they had been
41 Americanized and we had rather large over-stuffed American
42 furniture in them. Um, I rented a TV that would connect to the
43 German lines. We had television.
44

1 I had my car shipped. Uh, we had a lot of fun with my car. It was
2 a mis-order when it came in before I left the States. It came in
3 called “evening orchid”, a light lavender color. The Germans
4 thought the light lavender outside and the black and white interior
5 were just magnificent. So, we got a lot of special privileges earned
6 by the automobile.

7
8 Uh, weekends I found a group of friends; and on Friday when we
9 would get off, when I was working day duty, we would take off
10 Friday afternoon and we usually came back Sunday afternoon so
11 that we could be back on duty Monday morning. Uh, we... When
12 we didn’t go and spend overnight, we went to, uh, to different
13 communities that were close around. We could go shopping and
14 everything. When we could get some holidays together, we went
15 to Germany – we went to Berlin. We flew to Berlin on, uh, with
16 the army air force. And uh, we, uh, took a big trip – I took a big
17 trip through, uh, France, [inaudible 16:17] Portugal. It was 22
18 days, if I remember right. There were about three of us that went.
19 We went up to Holland. I went with another group. There were
20 two groups, uh, planned by the, uh, local – by the USO. I couldn’t
21 remember what I wanted to say.

22
23 Ruth Stewart: [chuckle]

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25 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Uh, in other words we did a lot of traveling. I didn’t stay home
26 very much.

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28 Ruth Stewart: [16:54] So your experience in the military, how did it affect you as
29 a person?

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31 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: It changed a lot of... It changed some ideas I had. Uh, when you
32 meet people, you make decisions about why you think people are
33 doing what they’re doing or acting in some way. But when you get
34 over there and you stay with’m or you work with’m on a daily
35 basis, you suddenly begin to understand that their way of thinking,
36 seeing things or feeling about things is so much different than
37 yours. And that their decisions, though they seem illogical to you,
38 really in their concept is logical. So, I learned to look at, uh,
39 people’s problems in a different way, than looking like I would
40 have, I think if I would have stayed in Florida in my community
41 and spent my life there.

42
43 I know when I talk with my brother and their families, they’re still
44 back a lot of the thinking that was appearing in Pensacola in those

1 days and still is there. And somehow, my thinking is a lot different
2 about a lot of items.
3
4 Ruth Stewart: [18:23] Does that make any problems with you and your family?
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6 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: No.
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8 Ruth Stewart: It's just different.
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10 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: It's just different.
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12 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
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14 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Uh, I guess my psychiatric nursing – my psychiatry training or my
15 nursing courses made a difference...
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17 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
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19 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: ...because I am listed, was listed in the service as a psychiatric
20 mental health nurse consultant.
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22 Patricia Martin: I'd like to ask you about that.
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24 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yeah.
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26 Patricia Martin: [19:00] Were most of your patients be active duty people or was it
27 dependents?
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29 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: In Hawaii, it was primarily dependents. And husbands as re-,
30 husbands and wives as related to their spouses. Because uh, we
31 had [Halle Newey, which is Neuhaus 19:29] and we worked with
32 families, primarily enlisted, because they were the ones having the
33 problems there at Schofield barracks. Uh, with being their only
34 island, they felt cut off – away from home, families – they had
35 little help; and of course, their income was limited in the
36 community with the monies were high – cost of things were high.
37
38 Uh, in uh, in [cut 20:07] two or three other areas, one I worked
39 with, uh, basic trainees. And the basic trainees, uh, were having
40 problems adjusting from civilian life to military. Uh, by the time I
41 saw many of them, uh, they were pretty close to being accepting
42 their way out of the army because they could not accept the
43 regimented or the lifestyle that we live in the army. Uh, they
44 wanted to – they wanted more instant gratification for their desires

1 in what they wanted. They wanted to be able to do what they
2 wanted to do.
3
4 Uh, in the case of another group, we worked with family units and
5 with some enlisted. We had a lot of... In Hawaii, we had a number
6 of, uh, naval personnel that was having some difficulty because of
7 the long sea duty they had in Hawaii, which was something to be
8 expected. And the wives, uh, had difficulty adjusting – where they
9 did not have their families there. And so, we kept'm busy with
10 crafts and art activities and groups and cooking lessons and things
11 that everyone does, you know? If you get yourself occupied in
12 something with a group of other ladies, then you can – the wives
13 can get along better.
14
15 Ruth Stewart: More diversionary therapy.
16 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: And more support, yeah.
17
18 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [21:58] So then, uh, your experience in the
19 military has been a very positive one for you, it sounds like?
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21 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yes. I won't kid you, sometimes there have been negative
22 experiences, but... The negative experiences were outweighed by
23 my positive experiences.
24
25 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
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27 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Because for some reason or another, they taught me in psychiatry,
28 life is just going to have some negatives along the way. [chuckle]
29
30 Ruth Stewart: [22:28] It's interesting you referred periodically or regularly to
31 your psych experience; and yet your first education after nursing
32 school was in maternity, right?
33
34 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yes, uh, I don't know whether you have ever noticed this, but I
35 was in with a group, uh, that had an interesting experience. Uh, a
36 group of nurses had computed psychiatry and OB. And it was very
37 fascinating, out of this study they found out of – I think they had –
38 if I remember right, it was 250 nurses, psychiatric nurses, that they
39 talked to regarding... Uh, it was run by some university up in, mm,
40 the New, no not the New England area – New Jersey area. Around
41 in that area, New York, New Jersey.
42
43 Ruth Stewart: Sounds like Hildegard Peplau.
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1 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yes, it wasn't her, but it was from her group that it was. And made
2 a discovery that out of that large group of nursing teachers or
3 instructors in the universities and all, about 90% of'm started in
4 OB.
5

6 Ruth Stewart: It is interesting, isn't it?
7

8 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yeah, yeah. How the change-over occurred, I don't know.
9

10 Ruth Stewart: [laughter]
11

12 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: It just does.
13

14 Ruth Stewart: Yeah, yeah.
15

16 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Except that both areas are highly emotional areas.
17

18 Ruth Stewart: Yeah, certainly.
19

20 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: There's nothing more emotional than a new mama and a new
21 daddy when the baby comes.
22

23 Ruth Stewart: Yeah, yeah. [24:14] Since you, uh, left the military, have you
24 belonged to military organizations, other than WOSL?
25

26 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yes, I belonged to the Military Officer's Association in Florida. In
27 fact, still have a lifetime membership to that.
28

29 Ruth Stewart: [24:38] Any other veteran then?
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31 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: American Legion. There's another one I belong to. Oh, of course,
32 AARP. Uh, but that wouldn't be military.
33

34 Patricia Martin: [24:57] Army nurses?
35

36 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Army nur-, thank you. [laughter] Army Nurse Corps Association.
37 Uh, it used to be rank or and I think they changed the name now
38 because we took... First it was for all retired army nurses, now it's
39 for active duty...
40

41 Ruth Stewart: Okay.
42

43 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: ...as well as retired.
44

1 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [25:22] Anything else that you'd like to say
2 about your experience in military or life in general leading up to
3 this good life that you're leading now?
4

5 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: [chuckle] Uh, no. I enjoyed my military life. Uh, at times it had
6 some real rough spots. At times it wasn't... But when my years in
7 the civilian market before I came on active duty, I found some of
8 the same problems and the same experiences. Really didn't
9 change – just what we wore. There was a closeness in the military
10 that frequently is not in the civilian market. Though many people
11 would tell me I was wrong; and it was the other way around. I
12 have no idea. Um, I've enjoyed it.
13

14 I got out of the service. I went to work in real estate and sold real
15 estate for a couple of years. I took care of my mother until her
16 death. And at that time, uh, I and a friend, whose mother had died
17 a couple of year before – two, maybe two years before my mother
18 – we got together. We had known each other since '66 and we got
19 together. And for a while, we came to San Antonio and bought a
20 house together – lived together for a while. Unfortunately, she
21 died in 2000. And then shortly... I guess in 2002, my health began
22 to fail. And with the help of a friend I moved to the ARC. So, I
23 have since been here. Been here for five years now. I don't
24 believe it.
25

26 Ruth Stewart: [27:22] And the ARC is the Army Residence Community in San
27 Antonio?
28

29 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yes. That's right.
30

31 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
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33 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: And it's been a very nice place. I won't say it's perfect, but it does
34 well. [chuckle]
35

36 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
37

38 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Of course, as many people would say the food is good one day and
39 bad the other. But wherever you live, the food is good one day and
40 bad the other. [chuckle]
41

42 Ruth Stewart: My kitchen is that way too. So...
43

44 Laura Jacquelin Coggin: Yeah. [laughter]

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2Ruth Stewart:

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Well thank you so much Jackie for your time. We appreciate this.
It's been a very interesting interview. And we'll get back with you
in terms of the, the uh, when we get this to its final destination.