

I. Marilyn Morin Slater - WWII Nurse

Part 1- Friday, November 25th, 2016 at 2:51PM, approx. 44 minutes.

Part 2- Monday, November 28th, 2016 at 11:49PM, approx. 42 minutes.

Objective: As a child, I heard about Marilyn's travels, but I never realized the significance of her adventures before taking this course. During this interview, I aimed to gain a better understanding of her experiences and motives for traveling in Japan and the Middle East.

II. Pre-Interview Preparation

My pre-interview research consisted of me writing down everything I knew about Marilyn, my grandmother, in time sequential order and sending it to my father, her son, Timothy. He then filled in some significant holes and corrected a few of my mistakes, and this is what I based my initial questions off of. When I first approached Marilyn to see if she would be interested in participating in this interview, October 29th, she seemed very reluctant, and was skeptical that her experiences would give me any insight into women in US-Asian relations. She said several times, "Well, why don't you find a nice Japanese or Muslim girl and interview her;" however, as she shared her experiences in Afghanistan over tea in her kitchen that Saturday, I explained to her that the short story she just told me about dining with her husband and Afghani men in 1975 gave me much insight about cultural differences and being a woman in the middle east. She

seemed to realize how determined I was to learn from her experiences, and seemed much more forthcoming afterwards.

After our initial discussion, I received a lengthy email containing a short summary of her time in Japan. She said she had difficulty keeping dates straight in her head, so she prepared them for me ahead of time. We decided that November 12th would be a good day for the interview, but due to an untimely death in the family, the interview was postponed to the 25th. Prior to the 12th, I sent my revised questions to Professor Christoff for review, and there were many of them. I am so curious about everything that my grandmother has experienced and she aided me in honing in on the questions that would really give insight and allow me to apply my knowledge of US-Asian relations.

Part One: General Information

When and where were you born?

What are the names of your parents and siblings? When and where were they born?

Where did you grow up and where did you go to school (K-12)?

When and where did you go to college?

How did you meet Grandpa?

When and where did you get married?

Part Two: International Experiences (especially in Asia)

Of all the countries that you lived in or visited (Italy, Germany, Afghanistan, Japan, etc), which ones did you like the most and why?

What years were you in these countries and for what reasons?

Because the class I'm taking course focuses on Asia, I wondered if you could tell me about your experiences in Afghanistan and Japan:

- What years did you go to these countries?
- Did you enjoy living in these countries?
- What friendships did you develop? How long did these friendships last?

- What kinds of things did you do in these countries – to learn about the people and cultures?

Part Three: Family Stories

I've heard a lot about your life growing up and I wondered if you could answer some questions I always had:

- Can you tell me about the dinner you shared with Grandpa's peers? [Will she know what dinner you are referring to?]
- How did you meet Shafi? What is he like?
- Who is Indra? How did you meet him?
- When did you attend Dartmouth's intensive language course? What was it like?
- Did you take Japanese to prepare for your trip to Japan?
- How did you become interested in Japanese weaving? Were you interested in weaving before you began to learn about Japan?
- What did your friends think about your endeavors? Did they do similar things? Did they have similar interests?

Do you have any photos or letters you wrote or received while living in Afghanistan? We would love to see them.

Part Four: What would you like to tell the future generation of women about living outside of the United States? Do you think everyone should have an international experience? Why or why not?

III. The Interview

1. Did you get complete answers to your questions? Explain.

For the most part, yes, I received complete answers to my questions. Mostly, I just asked her about her time in a country and she would tell the full story, beginning to end. I would interject with unplanned questions here and there, but all the questions were resolved without much effort on my part. We did not discuss one question about her friend Indra, because that was a different trip. She travelled to Pakistan for a short while and we did not have time to cover that trip as well.

2. Was your interview structured, unstructured, or mixed? Explain.

The interview was fairly structured, my questions were asked in four parts. The first was general information, the second international experiences which had to be split into two interviews. Marilyn is 93 years old and although her mind is still sharp for her age, she gets tired easily and I didn't want to pressure her or stress her out about dates and such, so we discussed Japan on Saturday and then when we reconvened on Monday we discussed her international experiences in terms of Afghanistan and then went on to discuss part three, family stories, and part four, her concluding remarks and statements. Most of part three was answered in part two, and where it was appropriate I would ask part three questions while she was telling her stories. After discussing the bulk of her time in Japan, I suggested we look through some photo albums to spark her memory. She had many photos of her time in Afghanistan as well, although they were in traditional slide technology and at the time her slide projector was not working.

3. What probing questions did you use? Explain.

Most of my information was gathered through probing questions. For example, when we were discussing Japan I asked her to tell me about some of the photos she took while she was there. We went through the photo album and she told me about the friends she made and the festivals she went to without me even having to ask. She mentioned that one of the first customs she learned was to take off her shoes when she entered a home, so I proceeded to ask her about other customs that may have come as a surprise. While we were discussing Afghanistan, she described a house as "typical," but because I am not familiar with Afghani culture I asked her what she meant by that, which led to quite an elaborate description of the

home and gave some insight into the domestic life and customs and she stressed how important teahouses and drinking tea was to their lifestyle.

4. Explain your team approach. That is, who did what?

I worked on my own, but Professor Christoff and my Uncle Gregory aided me significantly. Professor Christoff helped me develop the interview questions and organize them. My Uncle Gregory, Marilyn's oldest son, typed up the summary of her time in Japan and emailed it to me. He also pulled out all her corresponding photo albums, tried to set up the slide projector, and was present during the interview to offer information such as dates and locations when necessary.

5. Did the interviewee give you any documents or references to articles to read, or did she mention other people for you to talk to (or research)? Explain.

Yes, Marilyn gave me a typed up summary of her time in Japan and she wanted to go through the photo slides of Afghanistan to spark her memory a bit more, but unfortunately the slide projector was broken so we only made it through two slides. She wanted to give me a book on Afghanistan; however, we could not find it.

IV. Interview Notes

She was a little nervous and uncomfortable in the beginning, I think the interview was an inconvenience for her. When I opened my computer to begin the video, she was startled and then she asked me to get her a hat upstairs. While I asked her general information she was staring at herself in the computer and when she was trying to recall something she would look to her upper left corner (I was sitting on her right side, about a 90 degree angle from her). She spoke fairly

quietly, until she started talking about what she like about a place, Boston specifically. As she began to talk about her life, I noticed a lot of similarities between us. She was forced to move in the middle of high school, as was I, and when she discussed going to nursing school with her mother, her mother told her she wouldn't be a good nurse, which reminded me of when I started college she told me I wouldn't be a good engineer and that I should do something else, but we both stuck it out and ended up loving it.

She was quite animated when discussing her time at the Jersey City Medical Center and her relationship with her husband, Gregory. She laughed when she told me how he proposed. When I asked her of all the countries she like the best, she responded that she had a fondness for Italy, but her favorite is Japan. So, I proceeded to ask her about Italy and she got a little flustered and articulated that Italy wasn't her favorite, Japan was her favorite, so I apologized and asked her why Japan was the best. She sort of ignored my question and just went on to tell the story about how she got thinking about traveling to Japan and then when it came time to discuss her actual trip she read aloud from a paper she had prepared. Afterwards, I tried to get her to more freely discuss her time there and we went through photos. Whenever she remembered something from a photo she would say, "Oh, now here is something interesting" and point down at the photo. When I asked her about other customs and such that she learned she got very quiet and took a long pause trying to recollect her memories. She started to talk a little slower towards the end, because she was getting tired, so we stopped after forty-five minutes to take a break. Afterwards I brought her some water and she took a nap.

We reconvened three days later and she seemed much more comfortable the second time around. She started discussing why Gregory was going to Afghanistan, and when I asked her why she went she got a little irritated and said, "I just told you why." When she started talking about living there her voice got light and you could hear in her intonations how amazing even her memories were of the trip. She laughed a lot while she was telling this story specifically I think out of embarrassment for inviting her friend Shafi up to her apartment and then when she talked about running through a field of poppies and her husband calling her to come back. She loved talking about seeing the camels. When I asked her about the meal she shared with her husband and his Afghani peers she sort of rolled her eyes and made a sound sending the message that she was still put off by the experience. She said, "Oh, you mean the dinner where no one talked to me, well...". Her experience in Afghanistan reminded me of the experiences of the missionary's wives and the theme of identity as a foreigner crossed my mind as well.

When I asked her about her friends in Connecticut and if they had adventures similar to hers, she didn't quite understand what I was asking at first. It was like she didn't notice that she had all these experiences and adventures that no one else had. Marilyn told me about a conversation she had with her good friend Deandra just a few days earlier who said to her that she could never think of going anyplace like Afghanistan by herself and Marilyn simply responded, "Well, I just go," as if there was nothing to it.

Through her travels in Afghanistan, she reminded me of the missionary's wives, providing a female perspective to a culture which was not much known and how her purpose in the country

was to benefit a community. In terms of cultural identity, I think she struggled here and felt alienated before she met Shafi. I picked up bits and pieces that suggested she felt like an outsider, not fitting in with the hospital staff, not fitting in with the women, not fitting in with her husbands male friends. When traveling in Japan, she seemed much more prepared than Afghanistan and could communicate with the culture more effectively. I think also at the time of her travels, between 1975 and 1986, Asian culture was much more open to Americans than Afghani culture was. She mentioned making many friends and going to parties and feeling safe even in the city at night in Japan, it really seemed like she felt at home there.

V. Analysis

I found the whole interview to be meaningful. To have an oral history of my Grandmother, even though it is just fragments of her life, means very much to me and it is something I hoped to do even if I didn't take this course; however, integrating the themes of US-Asian relations definitely made me view her life in a different perspective and really tie her life and the opportunities she had to a larger picture. I especially loved hearing the little stories, like when she met her husband and their proposal, when she leaned on a paper wall at the weaving school and fell through the wall, and her running through the field of poppies. I have only known her for a little of her life, and I have never seen that side of her. What wasn't useful, was the time constraint. I would have loved to talk with her and ask her questions for hours. I think what I want to know most after interviewing her is what her mother thought of all of this. What she thought about her husband, about traveling through Europe so young, about her hobbies and adventures. I would like to

know more about her travels through Europe, South America, Egypt, Russia, and Pakistan and how her relationship with her husband changed (if at all) from being a wife to a mother.

After watching all the other final presentations, I especially loved hearing about Sophie Richardson and Vanessa Johanson. The interview with Sophie Richardson revealed that her goal was to improve human rights and work more directly with the locals in the community. I thought that was very interesting and the connection towards the textile case we discussed in class and how locals were advocating for rights despite fear of persecution was very strong. I think her goal of improving human rights by working at a local level and by improving relationships in China will prove to be very successful based on our class readings. I also thought it was very comical that she told off Obama for not doing his job, that story gave some insight into her personality.

Vanessa Johanson also gave off a very good vibe and she seemed to very strongly advocate for women's empowerment which was a very big topic in the video-recorded panel I participated in. She articulated that she wants women to take more firm control and initiative and she wants to develop further solutions to help the government fight rebel groups in Myanmar. What I thought was most interesting about her experiences was that even after she spend so much time living in Myanmar, knew the language and the culture, she still did not feel integrated. She said that even though she knew the language there was always a language barrier and she had trouble making friends due to a law that had recently been abolished banning foreigners from entering the homes of locals. I thought this was very interesting in terms of cultural identity and I related this

experience of hers to the one Marilyn Slater had in Afghanistan. Marilyn mentioned that at a dinner she shared with her husband and his Afghani peers, not one of them spoke a single word to her the whole time and she recollected that she had wished she could go sit in the kitchen with the women, but even then she said she wasn't sure she would have been welcome there either. These experiences are similar, because they bring up cultural differences which directly effect how foreigners integrate and develop their own identity in a strange place. Lastly, the message Mrs. Slater felt she wanted to share was that anywhere you travel or live abroad it is essential to learn the language prior to your travels and while listening to all the presentations, I found that this message was a common one!