

MiraCosta College Student Veteran Oral History Service Learning Project

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Acronyms: NG = Nikolas Gobrecht (interviewee)

DC = Daniel Cerda (primary interviewer)

EH = Eleazar Herrera (secondary interviewer)

BM = Brad Milton (secondary interviewer)

DH: Today's date is 27 October 2016. We will be interviewing Nikolas Gobrecht. Nikolas was born on 9 June 1998. The other people attending the interview today are Daniel Cerda, Eleazar Herrera, and Brad Milton. We are with the MiraCosta Community College Student Veteran Oral History Service Learning Project. Nikolas, do you consent to the taping of this interview?

NG: Yes.

DH: Tell me a little bit about yourself. Name age where you grew up?

NG: Sure, my name is Nikolas Gobrecht, I am 28 and I was born in Oakland, California. I then moved to Ohio, Cincinnati, Ohio. Then moved back to the bay area, Northern California, the Walnut Creek area. Then I moved back to the Midwest, to Indiana to do middle school and high school. Kind of all over the place.

DH: What made you move around so much?

NG: Family, my parents got divorced, and then my mom had custody of me from age 4 to 11. Then my dad and step mom had custody of me from age 11 to 18. In Indiana.

DH: What made you join the military, why did you join it?

NG: I originally wanted to join the Marine Corps to continue playing the trumpet. I wanted to be a professional musician and the military seemed like a pretty cost effective way to go about fulfilling that dream. I also joined the Marine Corps because I wanted a challenge, I like being challenged and the Marine Corps was definitely a challenge.

DH: Did the benefit of the GI bill encourage you to join the military?

NG: Honestly, I'm not sure I even knew that the GI bill existed when I first joined, but I, I mean if I did know at the time I don't actually remember, if I did know I'm sure it was part of it.

DH: At what point and when did you enlist?

NG: I enlisted about 3 months after I graduated high school, so September 2006 and that was when I actually went to boot camp. September 24th - 25th 2006.

DH: What was your MOS?

NG: My MOS was originally 5524 which is musician, and then after I graduated MOS school which was the "School of Music" I was given 5541 which is the marker of trumpet player.

DH: How was the trumpet playing?

NG: It was fun?

DH: How was the overall experience of that?

NG: It was fun, there was some challenging times definitely. There was a lot of pressure to play well, and play perfectly. Especially the bugle calls, but I mean it music and I loved music and I really loved the Marine Corps so... It was fun.

DH: What unit were you attached to?

NG: I was originally attached to, my first enlistment was with the Marine Forces Reserve Band New Orleans. But, they are actually now called the Marine Band New Orleans. They had a name change, I don't know why. That was on a reserve base in New Orleans, Louisiana, but there were active components, active duty components on that base as well and band was one of the active duty components. So even though I was on a reserve base I was active duty. And then those were my first four years and then I PCSed or moved to Camp Pendleton for the 1st Marine Division Band, here on Camp Pendleton, California.

DH: You mentioned you played the trumpet. How long had you been playing before joining the band?

NG: I was, I started when I was 11... so seven years. From age 11 to 18, when I enlisted, so seven years prior. (5:10)

DH: What is your rank enlisted beginning to end?

NG: I went in as a PFC, because some Marines go in as a Private and some go in as a PFC depending on what their MOS is what their job will be. Band members went in as a PFC, probably because we had to have extra training before we even enlisted. And then I

picked up Lance Corporal soon after I graduated boot camp and MCT. And then Corporal and Sergeant was my last rank.

DH: Oh wow. My uncle actually graduated as a Master Sergeant. He went from a Private all the way to a Master Sergeant. he served in the Air Force. Something you can definitely relate to.

NG: That's awesome.

DH: When did you get out of the military?

NG: I got out in August. August 19th 2014.

DH: Why?

NG: I wanted to pursue, well a couple of reasons actually. I had some issues when I was in the Marine Corps, mental health wise. My anxiety and depression, and PTSD from childhood were exacerbated while I was in the military. For some reasons and so I decided it was a good idea for me to get out of the military and pursue a different career and I'd always been interested in medicine. My dad's a retired ER doctor. I've always been interested in medicine, I always loved reading about medicine, medical stuff. I am also really interested in psychology so I thought that I could bring to two together, and I thought I could be a psychiatrist. So I got out to pursue a career in medicine, to go to medical school and get my medical degree.

DH: Your anxiety and depression can you elaborate more on that because it is something that I can really relate to. That is something that I have always been suffering myself and it's never easy

NG: No it's not easy. I was abused as a child basically the whole time my mom had custody of me. She was really neglectful and I was going through a difficult seven years there. So that caught up with me, I guess and after I changed duty stations from New Orleans to out here on Pendleton, I'm not sure what it was, if it was the change of duty stations or just... I was expected to do more, play better, maybe there were internal pressures I was causing the pressures. Pressuring myself basically to do, to be perfect or age? I'm not quite sure but I kind of had a mental, I guess you would say breakdown or my anxiety levels were through the roof. My depression was through the roof. Anxiety, I would have panic attacks, I had a lot of difficulty running and so I would feel... my anxiety would get worse when I was running because your already at an elevated heart rate, your breathing fast,

and also I was kind of afraid that I wasn't going to do well on the runs and I would get even more anxious and that would lead to a panic attack and my depression was also really pretty bad. I was actually...I was heading down the road of being suicidal. I was, I'm lucky that I go in to see therapist while I was on active duty while here on Pendleton. I went over to mental health and saw a therapist and a psychiatrist and got on some medicine. I got on an anti-depressant to help with my depression and anxiety and that really helped kind of calm down my symptoms and helped me feel better. I wasn't as depressed and that also helped with the suicidal thoughts. And I mean it's mental health's something I've been struggling with for basically my whole life. But, therapy, I'm a huge ally when it comes to therapy. I'm always trying to recruit people into therapy. Everybody, everybody, anybody could benefit from it, even if just having a little of trouble with homework or school, you know, it doesn't matter to anything big like PTSD or whatever. So and while I was in the Marine Corps I also found one of my friends dead and that definitely made things worse as well. So it was kind of a bunch of things I guess added up and it blew up. Anything else you want to know about. (10:30)

DH: Did you work for a while before you decided to go to college?

NG: No, I, well I had a part time job in high school, like when I was still a senior in high school. I worked at Dairy Queen, but it was a neighborhood Dairy Queen so everyone that worked there went to my high school. It was a very, very small town, I went to high school in Yorktown, Indiana. It has like five stop lights or something. It was really fun but after I graduated high school I went right into the Marine Corps 3 months later.

DH: What kind of student would you say you were before your military service? Any classes that you disliked and why?

NG: I was constantly bored in high school classes. I was in the honors classes the AP classes, whatever you want to call them. But I always felt bored and I couldn't concentrate very well and I really enjoyed band because it's my favorite thing to do, it why I joined the Marine Corps. So I enjoyed band and I did not like... well actually I didn't like a lot of because I was bored all the time. So I wasn't a great student in high school, I passed and I graduated with honors but I don't think I really tried very hard because I didn't want to. I was bored.

DH: Can you describe your first day at boot camp? How was that experience?

NG: First day when I got to boot camp, well I flew into Beaufort I guess. No! I don't know. I either flew into Beaufort or somewhere in North Carolina, doesn't matter. Anyway I got there and the drill instructors, actually we went into this room at the airport and drill instructors were there and had already started telling us to do things. Eventually we got on a bus the infamous bus to Parris Island. We got there and the drill instructors "get off my bus right now", I was in a daze, I was scared, and confused. I honestly didn't know what I was getting myself into, I didn't know much of anything about the Marine Corps except for what my recruiter told me. There were a few things that I knew about but other than that I just, none of my family were in the military before so it was kind of a first. I was the first person in my family to go so I didn't know much. So the drill instructor yelled at us " get off the bus," we hurried off the bus and got on the yellow footprints. There was a lot of screaming and yelling and I made a phone call home saying that I got there. It was a little scripted you had to read, that the drill instructors had us say and that was it. We were hurried off to another room and shuffled around all over the place. Sometimes we were sitting and waiting for hours and you didn't sleep really for the first day, I think, boot camp. We were just shuffling everywhere and we changed into our cammies, said bye to our personal clothes for the next few months. Prayed to the boot camp gods to watch over us, watch over me. First day I really don't remember much else, we took our initial IST, our initial strength test I think is what it was called. The initial physical fitness test to basically get into boot camp was like a mile and a half in fifteen minutes or something and yeah I think fifteen minutes and an arm hang and crunches. Then black Friday when we picked up, was chaos, when we finally met our actual drill instructors who were going to be with us for the next three months was absolute chaos. There was screaming and yelling, and flipping things, it was entertaining and scary.(15:30)

DH: How did you adapt to all that yelling and moving around how were you able to adapt to all that?

NG: As humans we are pretty adaptable, I think most humans per se. Not everyone can handle someone yelling in their face in boot camp. But those who would do well at boot camp we can adapt well. You just kind of get used to the yelling and it just kind of becomes the norm. The yelling and the moving really fast and screaming and eventually, I mean it

takes a while, it took me a few weeks, probably a month to actually get to where I wasn't freaking out all the time. When I knew what the drill instructors wanted because they talk so fast, sometimes it's hard to figure out what they wanted. Really just telling myself I can do it, I can do it and just hanging in there and doing the best I could. It worked.

DH: Did you take any college while you were in the military?

NG: I did, I was, I took online classes at American Public University or American Military University, Coastline Community College which is actually out here but I took online classes with them. I also took classes at National University, online classes. I'm not really sure why I switched colleges so much, I just did. So I took a few classes online using TA, Tuition Assistance.

DH: What were the challenges of being in and going to college?

NG: While I was in the Marine Corps?

DH: Yes

NG: I guess time management. I was at work all day then, or for however many hours, and then after work I had to come home and do homework. Take tests and what not so, I guess time management and prioritizing were the two most difficult things about being in and taking classes.

DH: What made you consider school after being in the military?

NG: I knew that I had the GI Bill and it was definitely a big motivator. I mean the Marine Corps is going to pay for it, you know so the military is going to pay for my education so I might as well use it. I also knew that I wanted to be a physician and I knew that I would be getting, I need to finish my undergraduate degree and also but a medical school, so I had to start it right away. Otherwise I was going to be really old because undergraduate takes four years and then another four years of medical school on top of that before I'm even really anything, doing anything doctor related.

DH: Has the military prepared you to be in college?

NG: Military gave me confidence in myself to be able to do things and whatever I wanted to really, and needed to. To follow that through. It gave me, military gave me, I guess follow through, task completion I guess. Responsibility in order to do my tasks all the way through and well. I became detail oriented, big time, so I was able to pay attention to details that I might have missed if I hadn't gone in the Marine Corps. In the Marine

Corps I did a whole bunch of administration and paperwork and stuff like that so I had to be very detail oriented so that helped a lot for school. Marine Corps also helped me, I guess I learned a lot about other people in the Marine Corps with my co-workers and other Marines I met and working with civilians. Being able to communicate well and affectively was important in the Marine Corps. Especially moving up the ranks and that helps a lot going to school, talking with other students, who may be younger than me, older than me, talking to the professors. Being able to get my ideas across affectively. (20:30)

DH: All this, did it change your views on school or your overall perspective to school?

NG: Did the Marine Corps change my perspective, is that what you are asking?

BM: You had mentioned that you bored when you were in high school taking AP classes, and now it sounds like you know what you want to do. Did the Marine Corps have an influence on that?

NG: I would say a little bit, just because while I was in the Marine Corps I talked to other doctors and... I mean, I guess my time in the Marine Corps helped me grow up. I grew up a lot, I matured a lot in the Marine Corps. All the, my mental health struggles while I was in the Marine Corps, I was kind of forced into reading and learning about psychology and my own mental health and others and so yes, I guess, the Marine Corps, my experiences in the Marine Corps directed me to my college and what I wanted to take in college, what I wanted to do. So, yeah, I'd say so, I mean I'm still kind of bored but not as much. College classes are a little harder and going to school full time is, after not going to school full time, was a challenge but, I'm getting there.

DH: It's a lot. They are pulling a lot of work but it's all worth it in the end.

NG: Yes

DH: Is there anything that you hold over from the military that is hampering your progress at college? If yes please give example.

NG: I think in the Marine Corps we were taught to have a lot of respect or show respect towards your elders or those that are of a higher rank than you. They are your instructors and it is difficult sitting in class sometimes and hearing other younger students, or not veterans who are being disrespectful to the professor. They are talking a lot or just interrupting. In the Marine Corps it was, if someone was doing that it was okay and it was expected to

tell them to stop or call them out and get them to stop whatever they are doing and chew their ass, so to speak. Here at school you can't really do that with, it's not look highly upon to chew another student's ass, necessarily in class. Or yell at another student because they are talking too much. People will look at you crazy, like you are crazy. So that's kind of a thing that's different and difficult to deal with.

DH: What was your perception on MCC? Was MCC really like you expected it be?

NG: Yes, I am very happy with MiraCosta College. I'm not just saying that because I'm doing a project for MiraCosta. I actually went to Palomar and National University after I got out of the military. For a short time, my first two years I was struggling trying to figure out where I wanted to go, where I wanted to live. I'm much happier at MiraCosta I like how they treat their veterans and like how logistically with paperwork and administration everything seems to just flow very naturally. It seems like MiraCosta has an idea of what they are doing as for logistical side and very student friendly. User friendly for everything, I mean enrolling in classes everything is step by step, barney style if you want to call it that. So it's very easy to do things you need to do as for college, classes or whatever you're trying to do. (25:10)

DH: Can you describe your first day of school at MiraCosta College, how was that like?

NG: I was excited, and I was excited for class because I'd been bored for my time this past August. I had nothing to do so I was really bored and ready to do something to do. I was a little bit frustrated because I accidently signed up for a class down at the other campus instead of all my classes here at Oceanside. So, it's kind of frustrating every other day I have to drive down to San Elijo. Other than that I was really happy with my professors, and meeting other veterans and the whole process. I think my first day went really well. The cafeteria here is the best cafeteria compared to Palomar, it's expensive, expensive! But it's pretty good. I was excited for my classes, students were fun, it was nice. It went well.

DH: What task would you describe being the most difficult transitioning to academic life?

NG: Transitioning to academic life from the Marine Corps, from active duty. Well it's a completely different world, what is there not. I mean everything from not putting on a uniform everyday to just wearing regular clothes to not being freaked if you miss or are late you're going to get yelled at, to not having someone to hold your hand, to everything.



Basically being on your butt, being on your ass for everything. That's how it was in the Marine Corps. You're kind of out in the world and it's almost as if I'm a new college student for the very first time, I mean, so it's like I'm an eighteen year old, all of a sudden going to school for the first time. And that's what it feels like because it's a brand new experience coming out of the Marine Corps. I had to find some self-discipline to do things, I mean I had self-discipline in the Marine Corps because I had to do things and it was mandatory. Now that I'm out it's not really, I mean it's necessary to do homework and things but it's not as forced upon you.

DH: Can you compare climbing the rank structure with completing semesters like each rank that you go up can you relate that to each semester you complete?

NG: So, yes, so each rank in the Marine Corps had specific things you had to accomplish whether it was your own education, it's called PME, I forget what that actually stands for though. Military education something, but anyway so you have certain educational tasks that are specified for your MOS, your job or your rank. There are a whole bunch of tasks that you have to complete in order to get that promotion and you also had to do a physical fitness test, for the band you had to play at the next rank's level. There was like a number level we were graded during auditions and we each got assigned a number, our playing ability. So we had to play at the next level in order to get promoted. You could say each semester is similar to rank because you have to complete your classes and you have to do them well enough in order to pass them to move on to the next semester or quote rank. So there is definitely some similarities, similar pressures, it can be stressful, especially if you are in a hard class that you're having issues. Maybe I'm not going to pass this, you have to think about your GPA, I can definitely relate my GPA to my playing score, the number. (30:40)

DH: How were the consequences of failing to complete a task in the military different from College?

NG: In the military you could get anything from; you could get yelled at, like berated yelled at by someone or multiple people. If you made it a pattern of it, if you constantly didn't do the things you were supposed to do, you could get paperwork written up about you, negative paperwork. Which all of which multiple paperwork, multiple pieces of negative paperwork adds up to a NJP. You could lose rank, you could lose pay, you could lose

liberty or you could lose free time. You could lose freedom, the freedom to do things out in town. So there is some pretty harsh consequences in the military if you don't complete your tasks. For school it's not quite as harsh. You might get a bad grade and that would hurt your GPA, and that's going to suck but it's a little different.

DH: How would you describe your rolls in the military when compared to school?

NG: Similar and different in different aspects. In the military I played the role of student at MOS school and other schools like Corporals Course or machine gunners course, which was fun. We got to shoot big guns. I'm a student now, so I had to along the same, I had to study, I had to make sure I did well on tests etcetera. But also in the Marine Corps I was a Sergeant so I had to lead other Marines, younger than me and also other Sergeants. I had to supervise. As a student you're not necessarily supervising per se, I mean in projects you could definitely supervise your other students in some ways. You can definitely lead as a student, you can lead the other younger students or even students that are older than you if they are a little lost. There are some differences and some similarities.

DH: What about any writing, have you done any writing for the military?

NG: I did not write anything personal for the military. I did, I wrote up documents, correspondence between our bands and other bands, our bands and their sponsors, and I wrote up charts and stuff like that. Did I just write or what? Ok. For college I've done essays, I've written creative essays, I written research papers, I've written some personal things, personal blogs and poem or two. They differ military is very structured, they tell you what exactly to write and how to write it. Like down to the so many centimeters, I mean it has to be exact and college I mean there are some structures like with MLA, different types of research papers. You know like MLA or APA but not quite as structured. I think you have some leeway in how you write as opposed to; military is very word for word, specific. (35:45)

DH: What about any reading of some sort. Have you done any reading for the military and how does that compare with College?

NG: I've done quite a bit of reading both military and out of the military. I've done personal reading, and in the military again it was kind of structured and they kind of told you what to read and when to read it in some cases. Out in college it's kind of, I mean, some classes

like English class, creative writing class, they have to give you a book and you had to read such and such by whatever week in the semester. I think it came down to the Marine Corps was much more strict about the consequences if you did not read something or write something. In college it's not quite detrimental to life if you accidentally don't read a certain page by whatever week you're supposed to do it.

DH: How did the military make you feel compared to College, how did each of them make you feel?

NG: In what regard? How did I feel about?

BM: How did you feel about yourself, your overall wellbeing?

NG: Military, I was, I felt very physically fit. I felt like, I was very confident, I knew what I was doing. I mean in some cases I was less confident because I had performance anxiety, but I knew what was expected of me and I did it. In college it's a little different, I think when first beginning, when I first transitioned out of the military, I was a little concerned with my abilities going to school full time after so long not going to school full time. That was kind of intimidating for me. Not sure if I was going to do well, not sure if it was going to end up like high school. I think it just took going through it and making errors and figuring out what was best for me. I'm closer than I was much closer.

DH: Did you do any reading (books, magazines, websites) outside of required military readings? Any favorite authors? Genre?

NG: So for pleasure, reading for pleasure? Yeah, I like Harry Potter, I like Stephen King, I like Dan Brown his books are fun. I've read "Night" by Elie Wiesel, he's a holocaust survivor. I like to read a lot.

DH: What area would you read while you were in the military? Can you describe what the environment was like?

NG: I read, you mean for like Marine Corps reading? Like the actual area. I could read in my changing room, which was fine, we kind of hung out in our changing rooms. There was a couch, refrigerator and stuff like that, it was kind of a, if you want to hide you would go to your changing room and relax. I could read, actually that was pretty much it. Otherwise you'd get told to move. Or maybe in the break area where there was TVs and table and big refrigerator, you could read there. Or like if we were on a bus if we were traveling. But if you were at work, you were normally supposed to be doing work. Not

reading necessarily even if it was for the Marine Corps. It was more do your, either practicing or whatever logistical work you had. (40:25)

DH: What about now? Where do you read now you're in college, what area in particular do you like to read now?

NG: Now I can read pretty much anywhere, even in class. I usually read at home or you know in bed or on the couch, whatever at home somewhere. Maybe if I'm bored sitting waiting for a class or whatever I could read in class.

DH: How does your writing environment compare between while you were in the military to now that you are in college?

NG: That's a little different, writing, because I was in administration in the Marine Corps, well partly admin, partly music, it was; there was a lot more pressure to write perfectly or write well. Write perfectly the first time, so you don't have to go back and fix it. After so many things you got wrong you'd get yelled at, so again consequences were much harsher for doing something not quite right or not fast enough, something was always not good enough. Out here, you have your, you have to write a paper by next week but you can kind of decide when to do that, it's really kind of up to you. You can take more breaks if you need them, and it's a lot more relaxed.

DH: Have you done any writing (journaling, blogs) for pleasure, because you enjoy it?

NG: I kind of started writing a book and I kind of write poems occasionally. I like to write it's just I don't really have a lot of time for it and it just seems like when I'm not doing school work I don't want to put more brain effort into writing. I'd rather just sit and watch TV or sit and play video games and just let me brain relax.

DH: If you wouldn't mind do you have a poem that maybe you can recite to us?

NG: Yes. If you want to ask another question while I pull it up?

DH: Do you feel the military gave you the discipline to complete college?

NG: I think, it, the military helped, my, helped me with my self-discipline and it also helped me mature more so I think that helped me a lot in my studies now. Ok so this is a poem I wrote called "Deception"

I can hear their wings beating in the cold dry air,  
They have me surrounded  
My insides freeze and I dare not move a muscle,

I can feel their sharp claws dig into the flesh of my bare shoulders,  
As I tear away from their grasp  
I feel my warm blood begin to pour down back  
I do not feel any pain,  
I can hear their familiar whispers,  
Insidious language only I can decipher,  
They yearn for my return into the abyss  
I can smell their rancid breath  
I sense their tangled face is mere inches from mine  
Expecting to plant a deadly kiss  
I can see their dark lifeless eyes  
They stare through me and reach into my desperate soul  
Hoping to claim what they once owned  
A cold chill runs down my spine  
I must not lose myself in their gaze like I have in many lifetimes before  
I must not let the siren song lead me to yet another agonizing death  
Leave me demon,  
Tonight I sleep alone (44:56)

DH: Oh, that was on point, that was perfect, that was amazing.

NG: Kind of dark. It could definitely, I mean I actually kind of wrote that about my ex, but it can also really be for the demons that a lot of veterans suffer with from PTSD and you know how sometimes, it's, it's we are battling, all of us are battling our own demons and it can be especially difficult for veterans who have seen combat. Who have combat related PTSD and I really didn't even see that part of it, the, how it can be like PTSD demons. It's kind of my, how I describe my ex and my tendency to get drawn to not the healthiest people in relationships, healthiest women in relationships.

DH: That was an amazing poem.

NG: Thanks

DH: When did you find out that you liked writing poems, like how did you discover poetry?

NG: I've always liked reading poetry and I kind of; writing is a bit of a release for me. But it doesn't really, I don't really do it on a regular basis, it's just kind of when I feel like I want to write, I write and whatever comes up comes up. So that's kind of that poem was. I kind of I felt like I needed to do something and I wrote and it came out.

DH: Right on, right on, right on. What about your differences between the military schools and college. How are those different, like your tests, were the tests different, how were those.

NG: Well it depends on what school, at my MOS school, at music school, there was, I mean it wasn't just sitting in class and learning. There were some playing instruments as well but in the middle of class there were tests and but it was a little different because I think there was added pressure because if you didn't do well at that school you were kind of screwed out of MOS. If you don't pass your MOS school, you have to go do else, some other job and that's kind of, I don't know, it seemed a bit more intense and it was very structured again. It was, they showed you how to act and you had to act right and respectful and do other certain courtesies and greet people in the way you're supposed to greet them in the military. College is a lot more relaxed and you're not getting yelled at over little things.

DH: What about your military instructors compared to your professors here?

NG: It's kind of funny how, because military instructors especially Marine instructors all sound pretty similar. They all have their unique; it's obvious to tell if they are a Marine instructor or Army or whatever or different branches. Marines usually cuss more, and usually are very direct and have certain phrases "All right devil dogs", "Ok devils", "You tracking", stuff like that and they demand your attention and will actually call you out if you are falling asleep or whatever, they'll "Get up go stand up". College is not like that professors, it depends on your professor of course but I think the majority of them are much more lax. I always find it interesting when I do have a professor who's a little more demanding of the students to actually answer their questions. I tend to like them more because they remind me of Marine Corps instructors or military instructors. I don't know but there is definitely a difference. (50:05)

DH: How has your learning style changed from the way you learned in the military, to how you learn in college now?

NG: I wouldn't say that it has changed per se. I think that over the years I have just matured and have also figured out how I learn best and the military helped me mature and time and

trial and error really. I don't think I really have to learn things as fast now as I did in the military. I always seemed kind of pressured or only had 1 day to do whatever and so we; fast, go, go, go. Out here in college it's a lot more lax and kind of relaxed and chilled.

DH: That was the last question. It was a pleasure, it was a pleasure interviewing you and thank you so much for taking the time to; allowing us to learn, and me to interview you.

NG: Sure it was my pleasure and I thank you for this opportunity, I'm honored to give my story so that people not associated with military or veterans have an idea what it is like. (51:35)

DH: It was an honor to hear it.

DH: When did you get out of the military and why?

NG: I got out in August 2014 and I also got out of the military because at the time trans-gender individuals were not allowed to serve openly as open trans-gender individuals in the military. Now you are allowed as of a few months ago over the Summer, yes I think it was actually June of 2016. We are allowed to serve openly but at the time I; about six months before I got out of the military I realized I was trans-gender. I wanted to transition from a female to a male and I had to get out because of that also. I would have been kicked out if I would have started transitioning while I was still in the military. If my unit would have found out I would have been kicked out for that similar to how gays, lesbians and gays were kicked out back in the day before "don't ask don't tell" was repealed. That's the other reason. (55:45)

BM: How has that transition corresponded with your transition from the military to the academic world?

NG: You could say that I went through two different transitions, I transitioned from military life to civilian life and I also transitioned from on my personal, my personal life as well. I was female throughout my whole life until I got out of the Marine Corps and in October 2014 was when I began; only a couple of months after I got out of the Marine Corps I began hormone therapy. I began taking testosterone and that changes, that does a lot ... it affects moods, it affects physically how you feel. For me testosterone gave me more energy, it gave me; you know I could work out longer I could lift heavier, faster. It also physically, I started growing hair on my face, more hair on the rest of my body, my voice changed obviously. So it was like a social transition as well and everyone knew me prior to as Stephanie Anastasia Gobrecht or Sergeant Gobrecht and now all of a sudden I was

Nick, Nikolas Gabriel Gobrecht, and it was the first few months before I really got facial hair and started to really look and sound like a male. It was difficult because I was like in between, it was awkward going out in public. It added tension to; already I was stressed out because of school, because of classes and figuring out how to be full time student again. Plus I getting used to being a civilian plus now all of a sudden I am changing genders and all of a sudden I don't look how I used to and I don't sound how I used to. Now I have a different name also, it was difficult, there was a lot of different extra dynamics involved.

**BM:** Did your moods from the medication affect your school work at all?

**NG:** Yes, I when I first started testosterone I started at a dosage, I was injecting inter-muscularly every two weeks at a high dosage. At first it was really, really difficult because when I first injected I would get this like high of testosterone and be really aggressive and have a lot of pent up energy. I was angry a lot and my moods would switch on a dime so I'd be in class and all of a sudden I'd get really angry. At the end of those first two weeks my testosterone was less, my testosterone levels were less so I would get this depression. I'd get really depressed and low and I really didn't understand what was going on. Then I switched to injections every week at a lower dose and seemed to kind of even me out. That helped a lot. There a month or so, it was definitely my moods were like a rollercoaster, up and down. Very distracting from school work. (59:55)



Interviewee: Nikolas Gobrecht contact information email: [gobrecht.nick@gmail.com](mailto:gobrecht.nick@gmail.com)

Interviewer: Brad Milton contact information email: [bmilton68school@gmail.com](mailto:bmilton68school@gmail.com)

Interview Date: October 27, 2016

Interview Location: MiraCosta College Library

Acronyms: NG = Nikolas Gobrecht (interviewee)

BM = Brad Milton (primary interviewer)

BM: The question that I have is, if it was authorized at the time, would you have stayed in the Marine Corps and transitioned to a trans-male there?

NG: No, I actually decided to get out of the Marine Corps before I wanted to transition from female to male. Because I decided to do a career change towards being a physician instead of staying in the Marine Corps and continuing with music or band field.

BM: How has your PTSD, depression and anxiety affected you in your daily life as a student?

NG: I think the biggest issue is I have test anxiety or I guess performance/test anxiety and that can get in the way a lot when I am handed a blank test to fill out I immediately start and if I don't actually understand the first question or first few questions it sends me into almost a full on panic attack. I think everybody has a little bit of test anxiety but my PTSD and anxiety in general is quite a bit more than the average person and when it comes to taking tests or being graded on anything, I have a tendency to be really anxious and the anxiety can make me blank on things that I know that I already know, I've studied or during homework I did really well or in another environment that was less stressful. I did well and the pressure of this is a test and I don't know if I'm going to do well can definitely send me into a little bit of a panic attack and I'll blank on answers, I'll get shaky, I'll sweat, typical symptoms of anxiety and sometimes I don't do very well on my tests; depending on the subject or if I went into the test prepared or not, it kind of changes also, changes my anxiety also. So, and also you know depression, when I'm feeling extra depressed, maybe at night or something after my daily medicine wears off, my depression can be a little higher and it makes me not want to do homework, not want to prepare, it

makes me just want to sit at home and do nothing because I'm just; I have no drive so it's kind of tough sometimes to get past those kinds of things.

BM: You have to force yourself to do it.

NG: Yeah, you have to think past that and realize that I can do these things. I have the ability. I am intelligent.

BM: Has your transition to a male helped at all with your anxiety, or anything. Did that have any effect? Was that contributing to your depression and anxiety that you have?

NG: I think being pre-male, pre-transitioned female, I think definitely added to my low self-confidence, low self-esteem. I was walking around looking like someone that I didn't want to look like and I think it definitely added to depression and added to my anxiety and now that I've somewhat transitioned, not completely with surgeries and stuff. I'm further along and I think that I am more self-confident, I have more self-esteem; so less anxiety in that aspect, in a social aspect I've gained a lot more confidence.

BM: Alright, Have you used any of the resources here at Miracosta Community College to help with your depression, anxiety, your PTSD? Sometimes they have special allocations for students who are afflicted with disabilities. (4:35)

NG: Yes, it's called DSPS here. I forget what the acronym actually stands for, disabilities services something services. I actually use that for tests, for taking tests for like my physics tests because that class is more difficult for me and so I go to DSPS and I take; I also have ADHD so I get distracted really easily and concentration is really difficult for me. Especially in any class and in any testing environment, especially class that I'm already anxious about so I can take the test at the DSPS by myself with just one proctor who sits in the room with me. I can have food and drink and I have twice the amount of time as the other students who are in class do. I can have breaks that when I need them, that do not count against my time, so it helps a lot. It doesn't make the anxiety go away per se but kind of helps me tone down the extra distractions or whatever.

BM: - My son has Asperger's, he's at San Marcos and they have a whole room or section where they got, they can put on headphones with white noise and take their tests. It's a great thing. I didn't know if they had it here. We have another guy [Daniel] finding out all the list of everything they have available to us here at the school for people with disabilities.

NG: Yeah they have a lot of stuff, note takers-

BM: That's great.

NG: They have a lot of good stuff.

BM: Trying to get my son to utilize those resources that are available to him but he's hell bent on-

NG: Stubborn.

BM: I'm going to do this on my own. It's like use the help that is there.

NG: I'm stubborn as well. I don't like admitting when I need help. I think a lot of Marines are like that. Most people-

BM: Most people in general do that.

BM: How do you cope with the different emotional rollercoasters that you go with meds and when you are using your testosterone. How would you cope with that while at school?

NG: At school, I have my specific medicines that I take, an anti-depressant that I take twice a day, once in the morning once at night that kind of helps with the depression and anxiety. And then I also have a Adderall that I take once a day for ADHD and that helps a lot. I think a lot of anxiety comes from having ADHD because I'll be sitting reading something or trying to take a test and I won't, I'll be not concentrating right. It's like my brain is, it's like a fog in my brain and some of the questions, or I won't see the answer right away or whatever because I'm not concentrating well enough. Then I get even more anxious, it's like this cycle.

BM: It just builds upon itself.

NG: Yeah but you know I am on medication and I am in therapy out in town. I see her every week and she's helping me with PTSD issues and my depression, anxiety kind of helping me cope better. Just working with me on how to solve some of those issues from the past. As for safe zones, I don't really- I use my car sometimes for a safe zone. I'll go and if I need a break, I tend to do better by myself when I'm having, when I'm anxious. I'm kind of more of an introvert so I like to get away from everyone and just kind of be in my little safe zone in my car, listen to music or I'll just put headphones on and listen to music and that sometimes helps as well.

BM: Thank you again (8:50)