

MiraCosta College Student Oral History Service Learning Project

Interviewee: Gerald Borja

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Acronyms: GB = Gerald Borjas (interviewee)

CW = Cody Ward (primary interviewer)

LB = Lourdes Bañuelos (secondary interviewer)

AR = Anthony Rice (secondary interviewer)

CW: My name is Cody Ward and we are interviewing Gerald Borja and along side me is Anthony Rice and Lourdes Bañuelos. We are doing this project for the MiraCosta College Student-Veteran Oral History Service Learning Project. Today's date is April 17, 2017. Let's get started.

CW: What year did you join the Marine Corps?

GB: I joined the Marine Corps in December 5th of 2005.

CW: What was your rank when you ETS or when you got out?

GB: When I got out I was a Sergeant (SGT) E-4.

CW: Let's start with when you were younger. Did you grow up around Oceanside?

GB: No. I grew up outside Los Angeles, CA. A smaller city called Alhambra.

CW: Did you attend college there or high school?

GB: I attended Alhambra High School.

CW: So why did you join the Marine Corps?

GB: Actually, I was not planning on joining the military right out of high school. I was planning on graduating and getting a job like everyone else--kind of go from there because my parents never went to school or college. They were successful just working so I figured I would do the same thing. When I had joined, the war had already started. I had a good

idea how things were already going. March of the previous year my cousins had already went to the Corps, so once they went they went they kind of talked me into going. I initially wanted to become a police officer. They [cousins] had told me “you are so young, 18, they do not hire 18 year old police officers.” Stay out of trouble, why not join the Marine Corps. We are going to war, you might as well come too. They got in my ear before I decided that was what I wanted to do.

CW: So I am guessing you joined the Marine Corps because you had already had family serving?

GB: We actually have a lot of other family members that were in the Army from Vietnam to World War II.

CW: You went to high school in LA and then did you join the Marines Corps shortly after high school?

GB: I joined the Marine Corps exactly a year after High School.

CW: Where did you go to boot camp?

GB: I went to boot camp at San Diego where real Marines are made.

CW: Can you recall what your first days were like?

GB: When I first got there I kind of had had a heads up from what my cousins had told me. I already went bald. They still tried to cut your hair when you were already bald. I had an idea of what it was going to be like more or less. But even then, when you get there it is a total shell shock. You are there with people of all different kinds of backgrounds. Different states and it literally chaos for the first 48-72 hours or so. Even though you are expecting something every second it is something new. It is a big eye opener.

CW: Can you tell us a little about your experiences there?

GB: Yeah. Bootcamp is a total different beast. It is a place you learn to fit in or stand out. People tell you to shut up, so you shut up. You observe and see what everybody else is doing, you see when they are getting in trouble, so you know not to do that. There is also little things that other marines find funny now that they are out or not in boot camp anymore. You see Marines getting yelled and some of them pee themselves. People standing up and cannot talk in third person properly, which is actually really hard. Just getting blasted by three or four drill instructors. Getting lit up constantly. Pretty much getting their butts

kicked all day. You are just trying to be the one that is not one of them. Every once in awhile you will get pulled up just because your bunk mate messed up. The drill instructors would say "hey, bring your girlfriend along". And there you are, getting your butt kicked. So there it is, a big journey of getting your butt kicked for about 3 months and learning to live in pity with everybody else because everybody else's life sucks.

CW: What actually helped you get through Boot camp?

GB: I would say it is more mental. Knowing what a lot of the DI's are yelling out to you, not supposed to be hitting you, but having a couple hands laid on you is good learning. Really what they are trying to do is get you that mental structure to help, where they can teach you even though with all this going on you can persevere this. A lot of people have never experienced that life style. Me, being Hispanic and growing up in LA, I constantly got my butt kicked by my mom and hit with all kinds of stuff and yelled at. I guess i was kind of used to that physical abuse. This stuff is just words. This stuff will not break me. Other marines that are in boot camp were never yelled at or hit at, when they are getting yelled at by these drill instructors, they are breaking down. The worst day of their life. Someone in my back ground this was easy. I knew when to shut up. When you walk away I will talk shit. That is what got me through bootcamp, it was knowing it will eventually end in three months. There was a start date and an end, that is when I am leaving.

CW: What was your literacy like when you were in the military, did you know basic fundamentals of reading and writing before and while being in there?

GB: I would say yes. I had a pretty good education level leaving from high school. College was not pushed to anybody in my family. I was always told that I was going to have to pay for myself through Junior college. Mostly people think, "hey after high school i need to get a job". I did what i did to pass school, close to 3.0 GPA. Education was never really pushed onto us. I will say bootcamp, I was not smarter than everyone else but had a better understanding than other.

CW: did you ever think about going to college?

GB: I did sign up at PCC (Pasadena City College) to play baseball. That was my thing. All I wanted to do was play baseball. I did not want to go to the classes. I would rather go to practice. Ended up getting kicked off the team because I never went to my classes. You cannot just play! They were not even that good, so I decided to just get a job.

CW: You graduated boot camp and what were you first duty stations?

GB: I was stationed at Camp Pendleton 1st Medical Battalion, which is kind of weird for a marine. Their whole actual function is all Navy in some medical asset. Our job there was motor-transport so we drove all the trucks. Pretty much our deal was direct security for all naval personnel and corpsman and the doctors that are there.

CW: Most of the questions we got are more relevant to Vietnam.

CW: Do you want to explain some duty assignments that you had, different missions, or anything that you would like to elaborate on.

GB: I pretty much just deployed.

CW: Let's start with some things that you did enjoy.

GB: One of the things that I like the most about being in the Marine Corps was that a lot of Marines do not like was going to the field. Doing all that field training. I liked it because it was a good time to go out in the middle of nowhere and bullshit with all your friends. There were a lot of times where it was shitty and things suck out there, you get pissed off because you are doing a lot of dumb stuff. But when you are there (the field) you are literally hanging with your friends. Obviously, there is no alcohol, unless someone sneaks some in. You are just really hanging out in the middle of the woods somewhere just B.S. with your friends for two weeks. Good way to just leave reality, it all behind and live life basic again, eating MRE's. Using restrooms in the bushes. There is a lot more downtime than there is training. Literally sitting in circles watching the sun go down.

CW: Were you only stationed here at Camp Pendleton?

GB: Yes, I consider myself to be lucky. Usually most of the time in my job people leave San Diego they get sent to North Carolina, Camp Lejeune. That was not for me, I was not about that life.

CW: When did you get out?

GB: I got out december 15th of 2013.

CW: So right after the Arab spring?

CW: Some deployments you did, let's get into that.

GB: That funny, my first deployment was about 7 1/2 months after I joined in the Marine Corps.

I was not even in it for a whole year yet before going to Iraq in 2006. I got done with all my training and bootcamp. Went straight to MCT (marine combat training) over here at Camp Pendleton, California. All of that was just a matter of days, waiting to get a class where I did my training. Next day when I was done with my MCT training I got sent to Missouri at Fort Leonard Wood, waited there for about a day. Did my school house training there and the second I was done there I flew back to Camp Pendleton. Checked into my unit. As I was walking through the hallway checking in with a couple of my buddies, they were like "hey what are your names". They said "do not even unpack your gear, you guys are leaving to Iraq in about 2 months". I was like, "what, do we not have more training before we go to a war?" They laugh, "you went to bootcamp right, MCT and MOS school, right, that is all you are going to learn so man the fuck up"? Now I got to decide how I am gonna tell my mom. "Hey, this is your worst fear, I am leaving now real soon." That was a real eye opener once we got back and got into our rooms. Shits for real now. It was literally less than a year that I went to Iraq.

GB: When we got there it was real interesting. We got to Kuwait, that is the meetup spot. From there you get assigned more or less your actual mission and what areas of the country you are going to. Me and 4 of my other buddies, when they called off the names to go to other areas they didnt call our names. We were all privates and PFC's at that time, we had just got into the marine corps. We were asking them "hey where do we go?" We also did not really know anybody yet either. They said, "hey, just stay here do not worry about it." Finally, as everyone was leaving somebody came up to us and said, "hey, you guys are going to air base Al-Taqaddum also known as "TQ", just stay here we are all going to leave and they will take care of you here." Our whole unit left us at the makeshift airport we have there and we waited for about two days before somebody asked why we were sleeping on the floor. We were like "we do not know where we are going." We did not

know our unit or anything, we literally did not know anything. So they found our names in the system and said we were "leaving on the helicopter tomorrow morning." "Get ready, you guys are going to TQ. Do you guys have any bullets?" We got in trouble for not having any bullet, so they gave us some rounds. They told us, "be careful where you guys are going, you will be flying over a couple hot spots, you will be flying over Ramadi and Fallujah (cities in Iraq) you will be going in a UH-53". So we said alright cool, we did not know any better all of us were about 18 or 19 years old. So we are flying in with a couple news reporters with "Press" on their flak jackets. So we are flying over and we do a dip turn over the city of Fallujah I believe it was and we can see through the windows through the helicopter that the city is just on fire, black smoke coming up everywhere. Everyone is like wow.

CW: What year is this in?

GB: Early, the beginning of 2006. (15:32)

GB: Everyone was like "wow, shit" this is literally just like a video game in a way, it is like a movie. You see everything, all the smoke coming up from random areas. It is crazy, like wow. No shit this is "The War".

CW: It is like an invasion right?

GB: Yes, this is going back to Ramadi and Fallujah, as we are going through, we do a little turn. It was pretty cool, whatever. The helicopter then comes and lowers down a little bit and that was kind of were but whatever. Then all of the sudden you could hear, "Ding!, ding!, ding!, ding!, ding! All over our helicopter, so our helicopter ended up getting shot at from somebody on the ground, cause we start hearing the "ding!, ding!, ding!." then the gunner that was in the helicopter just happened to be on the opposite side and the guy that was facing the side that we were actually getting shot at well he had actually fell asleep! I guess because he does this daily, so after awhile you get kind of used to it as deployment goes on. So we had to wake him up(the gunner), he woke up kinda lost, not knowing what was going on. One of the marines told him "shoot down there!" at the enemy so then he lights up the whole area there with bullets, then we kind of fly up higher and just continue with the flight. Everyone is just like what the shit just happened right now. The

gunners tell us, "Hey, congratulations boots! You just got shot at for the first time right?" "You got your cherries popped!" I am like wtf. 5 minutes later we land on our airbase. Full of adrenalin. What the hell is going on. That was pretty much our introduction into flying into Iraq, our first deployment. Then from there the mission continued you know, we got more training while we were there from the marines that were there. Like "hey, we are going to teach you guys how to do this and what you need to know." From there we were actually taught the ideas and concepts of what we need to do to stay alive, because even then armor in our trucks were not that good. We still had some trucks that had sandbags on the bottom of them just to prevent from IED's going off, there were still a lot of snipers that were picking off Marines left and right, so we got a lot of classes on all that, pretty much how to stay alive. I was actually a machine gunner, I drove but most of the time they had me as machine gunner because of all the classes I took and they pretty much told me that if anyone was gonna go, it is gonna be you, because almost all of the gunners we have had, they have been getting good clean headshots. They told me to clean out my little window and to keep my head low and don't die dude.

CW: You said the Russian snipers? Russian separatists?

GB: Yeah so pretty much they are "lot contractors" laacaita and all them were pretty much just putting everyone out like hey try to kill as many Marines as possible and if you could get the proper documentation we will pay you for it. So a lot of freelance snipers from all over the world, were coming out there to Iraq and joining the fight. So it was kind of rough that there were actual trained, good snipers out there that are trying to pick you off one by one. Out in the desert there is just open range for miles so if you can't see someone, they can probably see you. That kind of kept the hairs on the back of your neck standing for a while.

CW: Seriously. What did you do to pass time?

GB: I worked out a lot. There is quite a few gyms on base so literally once you get off, if you had a mission or even if you didn't, if you had a mission a lot of the time you were really tired and drained from it being hot out there, so you would always come back, get some food, probably crash out for a while but then you wake up and still have nothing to do.

Then you would go to the gym, it was open almost 24 hours, so literally all everybody did out there would just work out and run and lift weights. So everyone out there was in really good shape.

CW: Is that a hobby that you have maybe stuck with until today?

GB: Yeah so now, still to this day, I have to work out almost daily. I take Saturday off. It is a really big stress reliever, it calms me down when I start to get really angry and stressed out with everything, to me I feel working out and releasing all that energy and testosterone, all that stuff is a good way to calm myself down because it tires me out completely. Now thinking about it, it is something I have done since deployment. It basically equals me out.

CW: You said stress and all that, did you have any anxieties going into a country or do you still have anxiety until this day?

GB: Yeah! I had anxiety. Kind of while I was there, at first being so young. The fear of the "unknown" you do not know what is going to happen. Like I said, a lot of the stuff you have have seen like on T.V., especially now the way war has been documented but there would be times where we rolling into a city like outside of Fallujah or rumati and we are rolling like at least 15-20 trucks deep and as we start to get close to the city, you can start to hear the certain prayer sound come out, which is normal, but sometimes it's not that normal out there. They shouldn't happen at certain hours where we kind of knew the hours when prayers were going. All of sudden sometimes as we are going a hill area from certain points the city would start killing all their power in grid points, so you'll start seeing as we start to roll, a part of the city on the left side starts turning off all their lights then it would start getting shut down all the way through as we are trying to drive through. They know we are there. That got us like, "oh shit, why are they turning off all the power here now" they want us to drive through the dark so we can not see them but we also did have our vision capabilities, vision goggles. But at the same time, we thought well how many are really there? It just made our jobs a lot harder because we can not see everything that was going on there. You can't see all around you and even with the night vision goggles, you lose a lot of depth. You can not see all around you unless you turn

your head left and right. Then it kind of makes you dizzy. You have to be focused in certain areas. It makes like a little bit harder for you.

CW: We will start transitioning into school and everything, you got out of the Marines in 2013, did you transition right into school?

GB: When I got out, towards the end of my Marine Corps career, I was getting tired of all the dumb nuances going on and all the fuck-fuck games. I was getting too old, too high up in the ranks to be going through this. We were having new Lieutenants coming in every other day that were like 22 years old, fresh out of college, telling me how to do my job, telling me about war and all he has ever done was read about it in books and seen movies on it. I started to get tired of that. As I was getting out, that is also when we started having the big cut down in the military, so promotions, I would have been a sergeant for like 6 years then looked to become staff sergeant. So I did not want to stay at that one rank for so long, you know for something that was not going to advance my life. This became the make it or break it point where it was time for me to get out and go to college and do something better with my life which from being in the military, you start to see life from a whole different aspect of things. There is always more than what you are doing and there is other ways to give back to mankind, to humanity. One of the biggest ways is by going to school, once you get that degree, it opens up a whole world of I guess careers that you could do and help out other people.

CW: So giving back to society, are you continuing to go to school now?

GB: Yes I am.

CW: So we will start with what is your major?

GB: My major is nursing. Surprisingly, from what I did in the Marine Corps from being motor-t and then being a straight security element, since I was attached to these medical units for pretty much all 3 of these deployments. From the 2 in Iraq and the one to Afghanistan after providing direct security for Naval corpsmen and doctors that wanted to go out to treat patients in the middle of nowhere in the small villages, so we got a lot of cross training, how to see patients, how to treat them you know this and that. They need us to help them out sometimes. Especially when went to Afghanistan, they changed our whole

training. We were a hand-picked team, so they knew we had a lot of military and Marine Corps security knowledge, we had that down. They sent us to TCC, it is out in Los Angeles area to a live teaching training where they have animals and they kind of shoot them so we can learn how to stop bleeding a fix wounds for different war situations. They taught us a lot of surgical stuff that we might need to know and a lot of stuff like that. A lot of that played in handy when I was in Afghan because our mission totally changed when we were out there, we pushed into Masha and other areas out there to where the army medevac team was getting lit up as they were landing. Marines there needed help and so did the corps men. So they had us actually fly medi-vacs, riding security and aid for the army so they could shoot while we are trying to get patients up and then once we were in the helicopter, we were giving aid to people that were quadruple amputees and pretty much any kind of causality that you can think of was on those helicopters. So we had to do a lot of hands-on life saving techniques. Do what we need to do to help save lives like help push drugs, try to calm them down, do what we need to. From being in that atmosphere, I ran into another nurse, who was a male nurse, a nurse there who was actually a Recon Marine because I saw the tattoo that he had and I said, "hey you are in the Marine Corps?" he said, "yeah but that he recently got out and now I make good money doing this." So yeah, it kind of turned me onto what I was doing, I already has a passion for this anyways, but now that I had met another Marine who has become a nurse, I knew I could do it. So that is why, from all the stuff that I have done, all the medical stuff overseas to now, it pushed me to where that is what I want to do and also provides for me the same idea/concept that I can help give back to other people especially in their most times of need where now medical training that I have, going to the school side will give me access back into that world again.

CW: Was there a specific event that you have encountered or specific experiences that might have urged you to get into the medical field?

GB: I wouldn't say it was just one experience, it was the multiple experiences throughout, you start seeing military personal that get badly injured whom some do not make it home which really hurts a lot. But at the same time, while we were out there, we saw a lot of

good foreign nationals, the iraqi people and especially kids, the people that are not necessarily involved in the war but they are secondarily hurt by the fall of the war, either hurt by us or by them. These kids out there don't really have say on what is going on besides what they have seen and are getting hurt for no reason, just trying to help them all out. There was not the same medical capabilities, seeing kids and people that are really hurt that need that help, it really pushes me towards trying to help people out.

CW: Now we will transition into academic life, are you are doing the nursing program?

GB: Not yet, once I am done with this semester, then I will try to find a nursing school, that is the hardest thing, is trying to find a nursing school because of how packed it is.

CW: Are your family relatives really pushing for you now?

GB: Yeah a lot of them ask me like how come you are not in the program yet but they don't understand a lot of these classes you can not take back to back or the same semester at the same time, especially all the biologies, they are like 4-5 credit classes and they are ass kickers. It takes awhile to get to that point to which you are finally there. Even then for a lot of nursing schools you can not apply to them until you are 100% complete with all your prerequisites which makes it harder. In fault by knocking down all my prerequisites, I got my associates degree last semester but I am still here just because I need one more prerequisite to get into nursing school.

CW: Is it true what they say about nursing school? It is hard because there is a lot of applicants so you are basically outshining the rest.

GB: Yeah that is pretty much exactly what it is. To get into nursing school a lot of places in California you need to have a certain academic test you need to take where you need to score at least like a 91 to eligible. The nationwide average in the test is a 62 but for a lot of schools in California you need to have a 91 which is not easy. MiraCosta only allows, I think 50 something people a year and for those seats they have a couple hundred applicants where your GPA and everything falls into it. It makes me feel dumb sometimes when I am applying for this. I have a 3.80 GPA right now. A lot of the people that I am competing with have straight 4.0's and score like a 96 or 97 on the T's test. To where it is like shit, am I not smart enough? But 3.8 GPA is not too bad for a lot of

people in college. That is just how competitive it is. If you don't have a 4.0 like you are not smart. You can not do this.

CW: What was the transition like, initially?(30:59)

GB: Going to school, I knew that I wanted to do it, I was just a little if-ey about it just because when I was in high school I did not have to try as hard. Just because when I played sports everyone knew who I was and I was kind of the cool kid at school I guess you could say so a lot of teachers would just pass me regardless, but I still did all the work. I liked school you know. I got good grades. So I know I could do this when I came to college. What helped me more was my wife, she already has her degree and she told me, she's like you could do this you know like you are not stupid you know I see from your friends and the way you are you know you are smart you know you can do this you know you just have to apply yourself, do not give up do not get down on yourself so it was actually with a lot of support I have from my wife that when I first started it gave me the biggest boost of confidence that I could do this. I could keep going, even when I struggled getting back to school cause it was a good almost ten years or so or maybe 8 or so from when I was last in school. So when I was getting frustrated with it, she's like you could do this relax, calm down you know you're not in the marine corps no more, you can't just punk your way around and have other people do your stuff for you no more, it is a whole different experience, you are going to learn it and you will be fine.

CW: You gotta take off your striped huh?

GB: Yeah, Exactly...(Laughter) No one cares who you are or what you have done anymore, you are just one of another back in school. So it kind of opened up my eyes to see you know how school was going be and then once I started figuring out how school was ran in college it turns out this is not really that hard. I want to say it is pretty easy but it is along that path because a lot of the time if you just do your work, show up to class, do your homework, and do alright on the tests you're gonna get, in most classes not all of them but most classes you will get at least a "B". Like it is kind of funny to see how a lot of these kids today they like do not, I guess appreciate school and what's offered. Because a lot of them come straight from high school and just do not know any better do not have a

lot of life experience where they do not show up to class, do not do their work, wondering why their grades are low and they get mad or some of them even come to school high and you could just tell they are just all high in class it is bullshit and you know they are like I mean come on I literally get paid to come to school so this is my job right now. I guess when you think about it that way too it makes you push harder to get what you need you know and it is just, it is a different world when you see other people that are just here because they were told to be here in a way as. People that have been through life in way, I know that how crucial and important education is and how it is gonna push them to the I guess the next step in their life.

CW: So true, so what is it like? Interacting with civilians.

GB: For the most part, when I first came to school. The lower intermediate classes, because I have been out of school for so long math and English and English is like my best subject too. Umm but you know seeing a lot of those kids actually I got mad in a lot of my classes. I had a lot of arguments, I still do in a lot of classes. Just because I am a very opinionated person. And school is a very liberal place. Where a lot of people can speak their minds which is 100 percent find but I just feel that if you are gonna speak your mind and say what you want you better have something to back it up. Because if not I have what I need to say and I will back up what I say. So there would be a lot of ignorant people that would talk down about the war completely and people that served in the military, saying like oh well they are just stupid they do not know what they are doing, they are just dumb, dumb people that could not even make it in college or in life and that is why they came to college now. Which is completely not the case for almost all veterans that are in college because there are veterans they get out, and just continue life and then you have the handful that come out and go to college. For those that we know who would say you are just, people are just stupid, that is when I start argueing like this and that back with them. Like oh well what have you done with your life you know, where have you been. And a lot of them are not doing shit like they get arrested 2-3 times, the cops are always messing with me. The cops are not always messing with you, You are doing something that is provoking the cops to mess with you. You know and it's

just, It is different to see, other people that do not have appreciation for education because like I said, I have been around the world and I can see where education is not a right or a privilege to a lot of people, even for kids. A lot of people don't understand how what you learn in school just by a piece of paper could make your life completely different if not by ten but 20 years. Down the line. Whatever you have done in school could project you life to live in that house that you want, to have that lifestyle that you have always wanted or that you see on tv. Towards as people who just come to school kind of gaff it off and end up dropping out because they get themselves in some bad moral life decisions and they do not go to school no more, they got a partial education which was not good to begin with and now they are living life and they are still and they're still bitter and sour and their like everyone else. It's kind of just like heinstheight 20/20 when you can see, when you're in school and you already lived that life in the early 20's where you where you were partying reckless but you were in the military so you had security you were fine where kids doing it here no background no security and it's going to lead to a big epic fail sometimes for these kids. You know, to where us we have seen it all like oh shit, now we need to get our lives together. Go to school and do what we need to so that now we could go back and be better than what we were.

CW: I capture the same thing with the pre-requisites, (laughter) who has been the biggest supporter throughout your military service and now your academic life?

GB: For sure, definitely my wife. Even when I got out, she didn't want it to be about her, she said whatever you want to do, if you want to stay in I support you, if you want to get out I will support you just make sure, she always told me, just make sure that you are 100 percent content with your decision. I don't want you that down the road you say that it was my fault you got out or my fault that you stood in. I want you to be happy with whatever you do. If you want to go to school I will support you, we will do what we need to and that will be that. So from pretty much that time I decided that i'm done with this, ima get out. The marine corps is not fun for me no more. I always said I would do this until it wasn't fun no more. I did all three of the wars which is you know sounds crazy but I had a blast, went through all these deployments and as the marine corps was

downsizing. All these little rules started coming into play and life changed where it wasn't fun no more, no more deployment going on. It was done so I knew it was time for me to do something else. And now that I'm in school she supported me and still stands by my side, even if we had to move out of the state to go to a school, she's still with it. It's actually really awesome.

CW: What things changed in the military that really had urking you?

GB: It got real, uh the word is garrison. It got real book. I guess by the book for everything. So we started marching to work everyday, having to march to work, uniform inspections, a lot of things you usually see on tv's of what the marine corps is, is stuff that's not fun. It was just marching to work everyday you know, you literally would have to get your marines in trouble because that's what makes you a better leader. So you would find any reason you can to write them up for something. If their uniform wasn't good or cleaning their rooms constantly, we would do bed inspections every other day and staying at work getting there from 7 in the morning staying there until about 9 o'clock at night for just dumb stuff you know. Literally things that made no difference on the world or for the next day. It was just continuance of nuances, that were just getting old real quick. Everytime that I would go to someone who was of higher rank than me saying why are we doing this? They would say I don't know man. The guy above me has a higher rank and he said to do it so we're just going to do it and after a while that got old like if it doesn't make sense, why are we doing this? If we could do this tomorrow why aren't we doing this tomorrow. Is this mission essential? No. It's not we have two months to do this. Not just all in one night. It was just little things like that that started getting real old where i'm like i'm done with this. I came into the marine corps in time of war. So that's all I knew, as soon as I came in like I said I went to war, came back did a little bit more training, learn some other cool things, came back went back to war and so on. The lifestyle in the marine corps at that time is a lot more relaxed cause because the tension is high with everybody, everyone is just about the wars that is going on. So no one cares about uniforms as much, there is no uniform inspections, but there was a few in between like the barracks had to be cleaned but everybody knew that they were partying because

they are probably leaving in two months. So it was constantly just marines being marines. A lot of the stuff we see on TV, the way marines are that was the lifestyle. It was just a constant, at least 4 years of partying non-stop. It did not matter like no worries let him go he is cool he's leaving in back to iraq in two months he is fine, let them go. And that is the kind of relationship that I liked because there was a lot more bonding going on with you and the other marines that you worked with so you had a lot more kamatari going on than as when you got out or you're going towards the end when it was more about fucking your friends over and it wasn't about us no more it was about me. You're trying to improve your rank and stuff like that by fucking other people over and that wasn't cool with me.

CW: If you were to give any words of advice to another marine or soldier or sailor that is also in a time of transition such as you are, If you were to give them any words of advice, what would it be?

GB: I would say make sure that you have a good support group around you, surround yourself with people who are like-minded. Don't be hanging around with people that are gonna try to put you down or talk you out of what you are doing cause school is not an overnight process, it is gonna take time. But everything that takes time usually has a greater outcome for you. Make sure that if you are going to school being a veteran try to find your veteran center that's in your school. The resources that are there are amazing. A lot of veterans don't even know about it just because they have that stigma of being in the military like it's a veteran office I do not want any part of it you know but they do not realize we have our own counselors that are there and that know the GI bill in and out, know what classes we need to take, if there is something you don't want to take there are ways to get around it where you don't mess up your own GI bill where you don't lose pay, we have so many job opportunities, resources, for veterans that are there only, scholarships that get pushed around in there, Privileges you get for printing, computer access, our own space in there where it's not a rat race when you are trying to get a room in the library to try to study, so where we have our own capabilities there, and there is so many resources that if you were to ask a question that you think is dumb there's actually

a really good answer for you cause just like in the military there's still same thing in school, there's no such thing as a dumb question, So I think finding your veteran resource center is gonna play a big key part in any way of getting out. Because they'll be able to guide you in the classes you need to take, which ones not to take and how to make your college experience a little easier than which you would think it would be.

CW: Like you mentioned, you are with like-minded people.

GB: Yeah, exactly that. Inside the veteran's office it's completely different than anywhere you would be in campus. Language is kind of pretty much like if you were in the military. You can drop pretty much whatever you want to say in there, there would be good arguments and bad arguments but at the same time everyone is coming from the same idea concept and it feels sometimes like you never left. Like you left all the dumb stuff behind but bringing back all the good stuff from the military which is all the good arguments, fights back and forth cause that never changes with military.

CW: No it doesn't, I myself have had a hard time with uh trying to be politically correct and oh my fucken gosh dude, I can't help it. I even sometimes in class, I tell them all the time. Like they're talking and I lose it.

GB: I feel like that all the time like just shut the fuck up. The instructor is trying to talk. Just let them talk. Give him 5 minutes. Go the fuck outside. That's actually like the little things that come back from military like kids, a lot of people are actually very disrespectful in class. You see them like, people that sit in the front row too like they're just on their phone. Right there in the front where the teacher is talking. Put your phone away for at least 10 minutes man. Like he is a cool dude just let him talk, let him do what he needs to do and just do your own fucken work or just get out of here. No one's making you stay here man.

LB: I would like to touch on something. In school what was your favorite subject again? I think you mentioned it was English right?

GB: Yes.

LB: Do you do anything in relation to that, for example journalism or any writing?

GB: No, I do not. Because the GI bill. With that you have to stay major oriented. If any of the classes do not follow that, they are not going to pay for it and you have to pay for it yourself. At the same time English to me it is really easy. I had above 94% in all my English classes. It is just something that comes really easy to me. The reason why, I know it is going to sound bad but the only reason I am not pursuing anything in the English career is because it is really hard to be really successful in a career like that. If you want to become an English teacher or something like that you need to have your masters and a lot more experience behind that to be considered a teacher in a lot of colleges and it is really hard especially because becoming a teacher there's not really much else you can do with an English degree. It kind of sucks sometimes. Something that comes really easy to me is not very beneficial to me in a way.

LB: What do you like about it that makes it your favorite subject? Is it reading or writing.

GB: Yeah, I do like reading a lot. Allows me to just think about things in a different perspective. But I actually enjoy writing a lot more because it allows me to elaborate on my own thoughts. I like it when a lot of the prompts are open prompts where I can discuss what I want to think about; I can pick my own narrative and just totally elaborate on life experiences or whatever the topic is I could get into good arguments from a lot of different points of views.

LB: You said there was a male nurse that kind of guided you or made you want to get into nursing. Do you recall his name?

GB: No, I can not remember his name. He only worked there for a couple of weeks. This was actually, when I first met him was in my first deployment. Yeah, a nurse.

LB: You have been thinking about nursing as your major for awhile now, was there something he specific that he did that stood out to you most?

GB: Not necessarily, I guess there was a lot people that were there. There was other male nurses too that I got real cool with. It was just seeing that, I always thought that if you are male you have to be a doctor. When I was younger I wanted to be a Dr. but that was not going to happen. Just being able to see that a male could do this role and not be looked down upon. Yeah there is little jokes in between but I was in the military so I am fine with the

windows in between, I can take it. I am fine with it. Just seeing somebody else in that atmosphere jumping to help a patient, doing CPR or right in front of you helping amputate a leg. Not just in an OR or a treating room. But seeing all this going on, knowing anyone can be apart of it helped me get into that area.

LB: You also said that there was an 8 year gap between your military service and college. Did you do anything to prepare yourself for the transition? Like practice reading, writing...

GB: I practiced nothing, I was like whatever. I already knew most, uh math was my worst subject. It has always been my worst subject in school since I was little. I am like number dyslectic. Like if it is 14 I will put 41 sometimes. I am real bad with numbers. I just hate math. Math was my greatest barrier in college and still is. I started at Math 20. Took Math 30 then Math 64. Math 30 was my hardest one, I got like a C. That was the lowest I have ever got. After that, I took stats, the easy math. Stats was easy, it is really just reading and some adding and subtracting. Just plug in some numbers and call it a day. That is as far as my college mathematics has gone.

LB: While you were in boot camp, was there someone you missed the most? Someone or something.

GB: My grandmother got really sick while I was there, when you are in boot camp you do not have any access and do not know what is really going on. The only form of information that you can get is through letters so you could literally write letters on sundays to anyone you want, family, friends. Every other week they would do mail call. So everyone would write you letters to tell you about how everyone is doing. Then reading about it, how your family doing kind of hurts you know. Because you know about it and there is nothing you could do, like you can not even call someone. You have no access to telephones. At bootcamp you get 2 phone calls. One was the day I got there to let them know hey I am alive, I made it, talk to you later. That was just like a 30 second phone call then the second phone call was towards the end. I was just calling to let them know hey I am just about done with bootcamp so graduation day is this date and so on. So when you get to hear your family it kind of tears at you too. Like oh my gosh I miss you guys. You do not realize how much you become detached from the whole world when you are there. So a

lot of times just thinking about your family and thinking about what you are doing in boot camp is actually helping everyone else in the long run. It is really interesting when you are there.

CW: I am sure you made some really good friends there.

GB: Oh yeah! There is actually a couple guys. One of the guys still comes here. I met him at bootcamp. We were in all the same units together throughout our whole career. Which is really weird, I have so many stories about him. I was a very strong minded person and he was not. He has a lot of things that happened to him at bootcamp that I remember. Day and night and that we still bring up even at different units like hey remember when this happened. He gets all embarrassed so it kind of sucks but I met a lot of good people. There is a lot of them I still keep in touch with but a lot of us got out you know, and moved on now, most of us got out. Weird story from my first unit, one of the guys that I worked with. Me and him ended up having the most deployments together. When I checked in he was a radiant in Iraq and when I left to Iraq he came back so we met right before my second deployment. Anyways, this was back in 2007 so we became good friends, pretty much best friends like brothers we did everything together. Long story short, I ended up marrying his sister. Before we went to afghanistan, I asked him first like is it cool man. I always saw her pictures in his house and I was like okay she is pretty cute so I was like hey dude, is it cool if I ask your sister out. He was like oh yeah dude, hell yeah! Go for it man, he was with some lame as dude anyways. So he was like all for it. I was actually really nervous. So from there he was cool with it and this and that. We ended up marrying so now he is like hell yeah now we are permanently brothers and he is like now nobody can tell us why we do everything together. It is really crazy how everything worked out. They are from Texas, I am born and raised in California so it was just through that one experience.

CW: You said your wife has her degree? What does she do?

GB: She does yes. She is a Pharmacy Technician. Once I am done with my school she is actually trying to go back to school too for radiology ultrasound.

CW: Crazy work schedules huh.

GB: Oh it is yeah man, even with school right now. Me being a male nurse a lot of us end up working the night shift. Which is fine with me because we get paid night differential. We get paid even more. Both of us working at a hospital is crazy, hospitals never close. They are 24/7 so she works pretty much throughout the whole week she does not have the weekends off. She might have one weekend off the whole month. It is just crazy. Once you get into that whole grind it is crazy but it is worth it. (54:12)