*Cara:* Hello, this is Cara Vanderree of the Ashland City Library on October 18th, 2022. We are talking with Georgeann Lang, who was born in 1947. We will be discussing the Vietnam era memories. This project is done through Humanities Kansas, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts, Big Read Project.

*Cara:* Georgeann. What type of work did you do during the war?

*Georgeann:* The year that my husband was in Vietnam, I taught school at South Haven, Kansas. I had high school Spanish, high school French, and sixth grade reading. I coached volleyball and I coached girls' basketball because I needed to be busy.

*Cara:* Why did you need to be busy?

*Georgeann:* Because he was gone and I didn't want to think about what he was doing. He was in airframe repair and when they shot the airplanes up, he patched them back together. If they were in really bad shape, he patched them up enough to get them to the Philippines so they could overhaul them completely.

*Cara:* And you're talking about your husband, Bill Lang?

*Georgeann:* Yes.

*Cara:* What was he doing during the war and which branch of the service was he in?

*Georgeann:* He was in the air force and his title was Airframe Repair. He went to tech school in Illinois, went to Tucson, Arizona to work on planes and then went to Vietnam for six months. The war was winding down, so after six months they closed his base, Cameron Bay, and he went to Taiwan. I had to finish out my teaching contract and then I was able to meet him in Taiwan and we lived on the colony with the Chinese for three months.

*Cara:* What was that like?

*Georgeann:* Interesting! We lived right next to a rice paddy and they planted a new crop about every month. So, they went through the rice paddy with firecrackers to ward off the evil spirits so they'd have a good crop. We lived in a two-bedroom townhouse. There was a row of eight of them and at the end of our row was a Taiwanese family that had 14 children, living in a two-bedroom townhouse! And the kids were all cute as can be and they always smiled and waved, but we really didn't communicate much with them.

*Cara:* I promise we will get back to that. What was your maiden name, Georgeann?

*Georgeann:* My maiden name was Wilson.

*Cara:* And you were born and raised...

*Georgeann:* Until the third grade and then my mom went back to college and we went to Fort Hays. My parents divorced when I was three. We went to Hays; Mom got her degree in business in two and a half years from Fort Hays. We moved to Jetmore. We lived in Jetmore three years, then she got a promotion and a much better job, really, at Pratt High School. So, we moved to Pratt and I graduated from Pratt High School.

*Cara:* And then you came back to Ashland just a few years ago.

*Georgeann:* Came back to Ashland in 2009 after having lived in Indiana for 31 years because Mom was getting older and we thought we might be able to help her some.

*Cara:* And you're still here. What was your family background? What did your parents do before your mom went to college?

*Georgeann:* My dad, when they divorced, went back into the army. He was career army; my mom was a secretary.

*Cara:* And your current occupation?

*Georgeann:* I'm retired.

*Cara:* At the time of the war, you were married to Bill Lang. How long had you been married before the war started?

*Georgeann:* Well, we were married in 1968. I think the war really started in what, 1965? At the time that we were married, it was really at the peak. Bill joined the air force so he wouldn't have to go to the Vietnam because the army was breathing down his neck and but he ended up in Vietnam anyway.

*Cara:* So, he wasn't drafted. He joined.

*Georgeann:* Yes.

*Cara:* Did he do a three-year tour then?

*Georgeann:* Well, he signed up for four years because of the end of the war. They were what they called "rifting" people. They wanted people out of the military, and so he only did three years, nine months, and I can't remember how many days. He can tell you much better than I can. I just remember three years, nine months. Then he was able to get out of the air force early because he had applied to go to Pratt Junior College and they had accepted him.

*Cara:* While he was in the war, you spent one year teaching and doing all of these extracurricular things, and then you got to go live with him in Taiwan. What was your main war-time activity. What did you do most of the time when you were living in Taiwan? What were you doing?

*Georgeann:* Having a blast, because every weekend the military would have a side trip to some part of Taiwan and they would pay our expenses, whether it was a bus or plane or whatever. But if we had to stay overnight, then we were responsible for our room and our food. So we got to visit a lot of Taiwan and see the Taiwanese people and be involved in their culture a little bit, see their native lifestyle, because they still have people that are like our indigenous people. You know, that still live the way they used to live up in the mountains, and so every weekend we would be doing something different. We knew we were there once and we knew we were never coming back, and so we wanted to make the most of it.

*Cara:* And you've never been back since the war?

*Georgeann:* Don't have any desire to go.

*Cara:* Where did you work outside the home while you were in Taiwan?

*Georgeann:* No. I was there for three months. There was no way I was going to work. I just had a good time.

*Cara:* Were there any special rules or conventions that you had to follow while you were in Taiwan?

*Georgeann:* According to the American government?

*Cara:* Either way.

*Georgeann:* The only thing that we were told specifically was: don't drink the water and don't eat any foods that cannot be peeled. We bought most of our groceries on-base. We did not have a car, so we either had to ride the bus or we had to get a cab. So, you're hauling groceries back and forth from the base. You know, I can't remember how far it was from our place to the base. I don't remember that.

*Cara:* How did you get to live off base?

*Georgeann:* Because there were so many people over there that there wasn't room for everybody on-base.

*Cara:* So, you were lucky and got to experience different things.

*Georgeann:* It was the first time in my life that I had ever eaten fresh pineapple! There was a little fruit market right down at the end of our group of townhouses and you could go down there. I can't remember how far we lived from the base, but I could go down to this little fruit stand and buy fresh pineapple for a quarter. I learned to do a lot of things with fresh pineapple and I loved it. It was so good and we just bought fresh fruits and vegetables. Anything that we could peel, we could buy from the little fresh fruit market.

*Cara:* And it was safe.

*Georgeann:* Neither one of us ever got sick while we were there. We were very careful about what we did. Now when we travelled on the weekends, sometimes you wondered what you were eating, but you figured, "Well, if the air force had set up this tour, it was okay." And it was. Neither one of us ever got sick.

*Cara:* Did you make any friends that you've kept while you were there, because that's been a few years.

*Georgeann:* In Taiwan. No.

*Cara:* Do you have any military friends? Because it's been 50 years.

*Georgeann:* No, we don't. We had military friends when we lived in Arizona and they ended up in Carson City, Nevada. One time we were going through Carson City and I tried to contact them and I couldn't do it. So we don't have any military connections at all.

*Cara:* You lose touch. Were any of your other family members in the service?

*Georgeann:* Bill's younger brother was in the Air Force also and he was stationed in... I really can't tell you much about. I know there for a while he lived in a tent and I really can't tell you anything more about Bob's duty.

*Cara:* But he got to come home. This is just a general, but please tell me, how do you feel now about the Vietnam?

*Georgeann:* With the perspective of the number of lives that were lost senselessly, it makes me sad that our politicians are stupid. The French didn't do well there, why would we do any better? You know, we had marvelous young men that went to Vietnam, a lot of whom never came home. A lot of those who came home were changed for life. And what did we gain? We gained nothing because once we pulled out, the North Vietnamese came in. So, what did we gain?

*Cara:* Is that how you felt in the sixties?

*Georgeann:* You know, in the sixties I didn't pay attention to what was going on. I was going to college and I just was living in my own little world. I really wasn't paying attention.

*Cara:* When did you start paying attention?

*Georgeann:* When Bill went into the military! I had to!

*Cara:* It kind of came home.

*Georgeann:* That was part of it, but when he came home and went to college, of course he was 10 years older than most of these college kids, but once people had found out that he had been in Vietnam, some of them were not very kind to him. But he always hid that from me. He never let me know. He just went on about what he did, made his very good grades in college, and when he graduated, we just went on with our lives.

*Cara:* What were some of the first things that changed in your life when the war was over then?

*Georgeann:* I'm not sure I understand your question. I mean the change for me was we came back, he finished out his military service, and he started college, junior college.

*Cara:* What did you do while he was in?

*Georgeann:* I worked in a bank. I worked for a year and a half for the First National Bank in Pratt and then when we went to Pittsburg, Kansas, where he finished, I worked in a bank. He used the G.I. Bill, he worked, I worked, and he came out of college debt free.

*Cara:* So, he used the G.I. Bill very wisely. What did you do after he got out of college?

*Georgeann:* He got a job as a service engineer and covered the states of Georgia and Florida, and I started out selling real estate. I ended up going back to banking because I really liked banking. We were in Georgia for two years and then the fellow that covered this territory in Indiana was retiring and Bill had done a good job in the Georgia/Florida area, and they promoted him to Indiana. And then we spent the next 31 years in Indiana.

*Cara:* I know this is going back a bit, but one of the questions is: what was it like getting married during a war? Did it affect what kind of a wedding you got to have?

*Georgeann:* It kind of sped things up. We were supposed to get married in June after I graduated from Emporia State. Then because Uncle Sam was breathing down his neck, we thought, well, maybe we'd better move it up a little bit, so we were going to get married over Christmas break. Well then, because of three college friends and everybody getting married, we moved it up to November. I'm sure there are still some ladies that are waiting for me to have an illegitimate child. But anyway. So we got married during Thanksgiving break and then, you know, took a brief honeymoon, went to Amarillo, Texas anyway, and then came back and I went back to school. He went back to work and then in January he was called for his physical. I think it was January and he had walking pneumonia and he didn't know it. So then in March he retested. He was healthy and they took him and I went to Kansas City to do my practice teaching. So that's what we did. And then I graduated in May.

*Cara:* Where was he when you graduated?

*Georgeann:* At Lackland Air Force Base, he could not come home, he had to finish his school. That was okay, I got my degree and got my diploma. He got home when he finished out, I think it was like the first week in June. Really, it's been too long, Cara, but anyway he had to report to Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois, and so we packed up and went to Rantoul for three months for his school.

*Cara:* And you were a military wife at this time.

*Georgeann:* I was.

*Cara:* That means you lived on-base.

*Georgeann:* He had no rank at all, he was a slick sleeve, they called him. But there was a tech sergeant in his group that had bought an old house there in Rantoul. It had a carriage house out back and he had converted it into four apartments. And he rented strictly to military people because some would be there for three months, some would be there for six months, some would be there for 18 months. You couldn't sign a lease for anything because you... and so we were blessed in that we had this apartment, a one bedroom, one bathroom, furnished apartment. We didn't have money to even buy a fan and we lived in Illinois in the heat. I thought I was going to die and I said, "I will never be back to this part of the country again." So, I spent 31 years in Indiana!

*Cara:* But you had a fan then!

*Georgeann:* I could afford to have air conditioning then, but we were so poor that we would turn off our lights at night (we were good friends with a couple upstairs) and we would move our kitchen table out and sit right next to the big alley light. We survived on popcorn and Funny Face, which was a take-off on Kool Aid, and we could buy it for three cents a package in the PX. But we survived.

*Cara:* Three months. Do you like Kool Aid now?

*Georgeann:* I never did like Kool Aid.

*Cara:* After the three months, what did you do?

*Georgeann:* We came home on leave, Bill's grandmother died and we were able to get home. Well, no, I'm sorry, I take that back. Bill's grandmother had had a stroke. Bill had been very, very close to his grandma and so he was able to get a few days off extra. So, we headed back to Kansas because his grandma was in Emporia and we were supposed to be going to McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita and we had come down from Emporia to start looking for a place. When we got home, Bill's mom said, "Somebody is trying to call you; you need to call them right now." They had changed his orders and we were going to Davis Monthan Airforce Base in Tucson, Arizona! So, we ended up the next year and a half in Tucson, Arizona, before he went to Vietnam.

*Cara:* And what did you do in Arizona?

*Georgeann:* I've worked for a commercial lighting business. Builders would bring their blue prints in and say: here's the house, here's the building, here's whatever they were doing. This is your budget. Now design it, you know, put it together for lights and things like that, and so that's what I did there.

*Cara:* You designed?

*Georgeann:* Well, picked them out, put them together, stayed within the budget.

*Cara:* Made it look nice.

*Georgeann:* Made it look good.

*Cara:* And while you're doing this, Bill is learning to be a service... a mechanic?

*Georgeann:* Airframe repair.

*Cara:* Okay, what is airframe repair?

*Georgeann:* Nuts and bolts. They blow holes in it and you patch them with rivets and nuts and bolts. That's all I know.

*Cara:* You put the skin back on the plane.

*Georgeann:* So that it can fly, you don't want metal breaking off when you're in the air!

*Cara:* I can see that.

*Georgeann:* And he was very good at his job. The sergeants in charge of him knew that when they gave him a job, he could be trusted to do it. He did a good job, but he's always been very mechanical anyway. So, he understood what he was doing. He also, when he was in Vietnam... He went to college a little bit there, but he also walked guard duty at night just to make the time pass and everything. That always kind of... I didn't, yeah, it did. It bothered me a little bit. But I also understood he was trying to make the days go as fast as he could. One of the highlights one year: well, the Christmas he was there. He went in September and so the Christmas he was there, he wrote home. We didn't have internet, we didn't have iPhones, we didn't have... We wrote letters and he wrote home and he said, "A bunch of the guys are going to this orphanage for Christmas. The name that I have is little boy. Can you send gifts? I sent two boxes, my mom sent a box, and Bill's parents sent a box. Finally, the people at the orphanage told the little boy, "You have to share. You have too much." But I could not imagine a child living in a war situation, and I think that's why I think about these Ukraine children so much is being in a war situation and having nothing, it was a very special Christmas. Even though I wasn't there, I just knew I'd done something good for somebody.

*Cara:* And he included you in some of the things he was trying to do. You said that you wrote letters. Did you ever get to make a long-distance phone call? Was there any way?

*Georgeann:* I think I talked to him at Thanksgiving. He left in September. I think I talked to him at Thanksgiving and I think I talked to him at Christmas.

*Cara:* How long?

*Georgeann:* How long did we talk?

*Cara:* Did they give you 10 minutes, 30 minutes? Did they put a limit on you?

*Georgeann:* I don't remember. I'm not even sure it's two times. I'm pretty sure it was because we spent Thanksgiving and Christmas with his family, Mom and I did, I think, or maybe I was, I don't remember, but anyway everybody got to talk to him. So that was good but it was hard. You know, I think of some of these World War II wives that went for four years and they had no idea...

*Cara:* So, we got better at some things. How did it affect your health? Not knowing exactly what kind of situations he was in and him being gone and being worried about it? You had said at one time that you just made yourself work extra hours to try to get through it. How were you feeling?

*Georgeann:* That's been so long ago. I don't remember.

*Cara:* Did you feel like he was in a relatively safe place, being in a repair shop, basically?

*Georgeann:* Well, Cam Ranh Bay was a repair shop and a hospital. So, if there was a safe place... If you're looking at a map, it was the farthest away from the DMZ (demilitarized zone) and everything. I don't know, I just never let myself think that Bill wasn't coming home. He was coming home.

*Cara:* Did you think we were going to win the war?

*Georgeann:* I don't think I ever thought about that. No, I never did. For one thing, what I read in the paper was not what I felt like Bill was over there for, and so I just got so I wouldn't listen to the news. I didn't read the paper, I just tried to do the best job I could do and make the days go by as fast as possible and block it out.

*Cara:* I remember my mother turning off the TV whenever it came on war stuff. How did you feel about the anti-war protests that were going on?

*Georgeann:* Didn't know about them. Didn't think about them, just said, "I'm on a different side of the fence than you all are."

*Cara:* How did you feel about political leadership at that time?

*Georgeann:* I did not know this until later, but I never did trust Lyndon Johnson. It was just a gut feeling. I found out later, Bill and I've talked about this, Ladybird Johnson's parents had part ownership (or maybe all ownership, I don't know) in Sea Land. Sea Land was in and out of Hanoi Harbor-- big shipping, huge shipping ships, you know, major freighters.

*Cara:* Did they make money from the war?

*Georgeann:* Yes, they were never bombed. They were in and out of there every day, sometimes multiple times a day, according to Bill, because where he was, he was right on the water, he could see. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out and, like we still say, "Follow the money."

*Cara:* Did learning things like that change your view of the war then?

*Georgeann:* It makes me sad that so many guys died so senselessly.

*Cara:* So how did you feel when the war was over?

*Georgeann:* Keep on line, keep on putting one foot in front of the other. Do what we've been doing.

*Cara:* Where were you when you heard it was over? Or what were you doing?

*Georgeann:* That's a really good question because I don't remember when we actually pulled out. I know Bill left. We left, let's see, he left for Vietnam in March of '72, and then I got out of school the end of May, June of '72. We went to Taiwan for three months and then we went September through December of '72, back at Kelly Air Force Base in Texas. And then he started junior college at Pratt in January of '73. So, I don't even remember what the date was for when they said, "No war." He was home and he was going to college and I was working and life goes on.

*Cara:* Is there one thing about your life during the war that you would like for future generations to know? The one thing that you wish they would learn from this.

*Georgeann:* Pay attention to your history, because if you don't know your history, you are going to make stupid mistakes and we are dealing with stupid right now. Having lived through that and seeing the impact that it has on people's lives and things, it's a little frustrating to see us going down the same path and not having learned from our history.

*Cara:* Do you feel powerless now, like you did then?

*Georgeann:* At times I do, but then again, look at the polls. No, I don't look at the polls. I look at the opportunity to vote and I say, "I don't care, I'm going to vote and I'm going to vote, hopefully, as an informed citizen."

*Cara:* Is there anything else that I should ask you or that you would like to add?

*Georgeann:* No.

*Cara:* Georgian, thank you very much for your time.