

**“Perhaps this will reinstate me in the eyes of the community:”
An Indiana woman’s experience in the 1960s Army Nurse Corps**

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Senior

American women who came of age during the 1960s experienced expanded expectations and fewer limitations than their mothers—women who had grown up during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and who abided by a much more restrictive and family-oriented culture. Wini Breines, herself an adolescent during the 1950s and the author of *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, explains that the factor that led to these differences in the lives of women in the new generation, the generation of the '60s, was individuality. The women of the '60s generation were able to become individualistic to an extent that had never been seen before by women—an extent that greatly surpassed the generation of their mothers. It was this newly allowed ability for women to be individual that accounted for the great leap that took place between the '50s/previous decades generation culture and the '60s generation culture. Breines clarifies this point, writing, “Women, in other words, were able to join men in a culture based on individual desire at the expense of traditional institutions, including family and community.”¹ The constraints that had been placed upon the past generations of women, both economic and family restraints, were lifted and the new generation was more free to explore and participate in American society.

At this same time, and as a result of the growing feminist movement within American society, the United States Army made considerable progress towards, according to Kara Dixon Vuic, “positioning itself on the side of progressive change in the lives of women.”² Through changes made within the Army Nurse Corps, traditional regulations were lifted and women who served as nurses were able to have both careers and families, ending the “discriminatory

¹Wini Breines. *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992. 82.

² Kara Dixon Vuic. "I'm afraid we're going to have to just change our ways": Marriage, Motherhood, and Pregnancy in the Army Nurse Corps during the Vietnam War." *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture & Society* 32, no. 4 (Summer2007 2007): 997-1022. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost, 1019.

policies” that limited nurses’ careers if they got married or became pregnant.³ Vuic explains, “Through these changing regulations, then, the army accepted an equal rights approach to women that pervaded much of society in the 1960s and 1970s.”⁴ Nurses in the army, similar to civilian women in America, experienced the 1960s as an era of fewer limitations. Women, nurses or not, were able to experience a life of greater freedom and choices as a result of the removal of long-held, traditional regulations and expectations.

Karren Mundell, a nurse in the Army Nurse Corps, encompasses the women who emerged from the social movements of the 1960s and an examination of her writing from the time reveals that these women defined self-improvement differently and were much more free to seek self-fulfillment and participation within society. In contrast, the women of the previous generations had built their lives upon family and domesticity and it was from these that they achieved their self-fulfillment and a sense of happiness.

The correspondence between Mundell and her family in Frankfort, Indiana, that was maintained from 1966 to 1967 while Mundell was serving in Vietnam, shows the effects that individuality had on her generation.⁵ This correspondence is housed at the Indiana Historical Society and contains the letters that Mundell sent home. It creates a detailed picture of the ideological and cultural changes that occurred between the older and younger generation when Mundell’s actions and beliefs in Vietnam were countered in response by letters from her mother in Frankfort. Although the response letters are not part of the collection, much can be inferred by what Mundell says in reply; at times, she even includes quotes or passages from the letter to

³ Vuic. “Marriage, Motherhood, and Pregnancy,” 1020.

⁴ Ibid., 1019.

⁵ Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*,” Overview. Finding Aid.

which she is replying. Through a description of her own life, including her divorce, decision to go abroad, career aspirations and feelings on marriage, Mundell demonstrates the differences between the attitudes and values of the older generation versus her own generation.

Karren Mundell was born in 1943 and, until she was twenty-three, lived a life that was standard for white, middle-class women of that time.⁶ Mundell grew up in the town of Frankfort, Indiana, in Clinton County. Frankfort had once been a railroad hub that was considered “the most important point for freight connections” since whatever manufacturers sent from the East would first have to pass through Frankfort before reaching its final destination of St. Louis.⁷ In the 1960s, railroad companies in Frankfort such as the Pennsylvania, Monon, and Nickle Plate, merged with larger national railroad companies.⁸ By the 1970s, all of Frankfort’s railroad lines had phased out their passenger services and Bellevue, Ohio, soon replaced Frankfort as being the most important point for freight connection once Frankfort discontinued its heavy car and engine work.⁹ Although Clinton County had always been largely agricultural, with the demise of the railroad industry it became even more agrarian with an economy focused on farming. James H. Madison makes note of this trend in Indiana rural communities when he explains, in his book, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, “In many small towns and rural areas, good jobs were scarce, [and] ambitious young people were making plans to move away...”¹⁰ Karren Mundell’s ambition would take her first to Indianapolis, and then halfway around the globe.

After graduating from Frankfort High School, Karren Mundell attended Indiana University School of Nursing at Indianapolis. She earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing in

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mary Henry. *Legacy: The Clinton Bicentennial Committee*. Frankfort, Indiana: Heritage Lithographics, 1976. 30.

⁸ Henry, *Legacy*, 30.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ James H. Madison. *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2014. 299.

1965 and took a position at the IU Medical Center working on the Labor and Delivery floor. In 1963, when Mundell was twenty, she married a doctor. The marriage was not to last, however, and only two years later Mundell was a divorcée. With the divorce, Mundell's life took a drastic change of course; in 1966, at the age of twenty-three, Mundell signed up for the Army Nurse Corps.¹¹ She was the first woman in the Army Nurse Corps from Indiana who asked for direct assignment to Vietnam.¹²

Nursing, for Indiana women, has maintained a strong connection to female independence since the days of the Civil War. With their husbands leaving to contribute to the war effort, women had to find a way in which to provide for themselves and their families. "The crucial need for medical care in military hospitals and camps also opened new opportunities for women nurses."¹³ By engaging with situations outside of the domestic sphere, women gained a sense of self-confidence in their abilities. Mundell, a young woman in the 1960s, was able to experience the same independence by the same occupation that women her same age had been able to experience almost one-hundred years before. Nursing allowed for women to be their own providers. It decreased their dependency upon their husbands, who, in the case of the Civil War era, were away at war, or in Mundell's case, would no longer support her because of a divorce. Further, nursing was a way to contribute to a cause, and it allowed women from all generations to gain a sense of strength within themselves. Women in the 1860s and Mundell in the 1960s, through the occupation of nursing, developed resilience along with a self-awareness of their potential as females.

¹¹ Kara Dixon Vuic's *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*, and Heather Marie Stur's *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* provide for a thorough look into the Army Nurse Corps through the personal accounts of nurses who describe their lives before, during and after their service.

¹² Indiana Historical Society "Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967," Overview. Finding Aid.

¹³ Peggy Seigel. "Winning the Vote in Fort Wayne, Indiana: The Long, Cautious Journey in a German American City." *Indiana Magazine of History*, September 2006, 221-257, 226.

The buildup of American forces in Vietnam had started in 1965 and, by the time that Mundell arrived, there would be over 300 nurses already there with a request pending by the United States Department of Defense for 700 more female nurses.¹⁴ Altogether, the eleven-year involvement of the United States in Vietnam (1962-1973) would reach a peak strength of 900 Army Nurse Corps officers and 5,000 nurses in 1969.¹⁵ Seemingly, there were never enough nurses to fulfill the great need during wartime. According to Vuic, this need for nurses assisted the army's move towards progressiveness, especially in regards to allowing in women with dependents. Vuic explains, "Given that the corps desperately needed nurses as the war in Vietnam escalated, some regulations had to change. Thus, along with changing regulations on marriage for army nurses came changing regulations on pregnancy."¹⁶ In 1964, Executive Order 10,240, which was put forth in 1951 and reinforced the regulations that all nurses who were pregnant or became a parent of children under eighteen would be discharged, was replaced when the Army Nurse Corps realized that it inhibited recruitment.¹⁷ New policies were put into place that allowed women with dependents between the ages of fifteen and eighteen to request waivers for assignment, and in the late '60s, women who were pregnant or with younger dependents than the previously stated fifteen years were allowed to fill out a waiver.¹⁸ This move by the army to allow mothers into the Nurse Corps signified a new belief of the time: that women were capable of having careers outside of marriage and motherhood. Lilian Dunlop, who worked in the Army Nurse Corps assignment branch and later became chief of the Army Nurse Corps, explained, "The position we took was that if the individual demonstrated the ability to manage her affairs

¹⁴ *Highlights in the History of the Army Nurse Corps*. Edited by Lieutenant Colonel Carolyn Feller and Major Constance J Moore. Washington DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1995.40.

¹⁵ *Highlights in the History of the Army Nurse Corps*, 45.

¹⁶ Vuic. "Marriage, Motherhood, and Pregnancy," 1008.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

after the baby was born, and we felt that she could manage this situation, we granted permission.”¹⁹ Nurses in the Corps, beginning in the 1960s, were no longer limited to a career or a family. They now could have it all.

In April 1966, Mundell left for basic training camp at Fort Sam Houston in Texas. Her port-call came in May, and in June, Mundell arrived at the 3rd Surgical Hospital in Beinh Hoa, Vietnam. She was stationed there from 1966 to 1967. The hospital was small, with only sixty beds, but this was important because it meant that the medical personnel could move rapidly and treat quickly. The 3rd Surgical only did emergency life or limb saving surgeries. According to the Mundell, the 3rd Surgical unit was “probably the best in Vietnam.”²⁰

Throughout her year in Vietnam, Mundell consistently wrote home to her parents in Indiana. Examining her correspondence reveals that the nurse had developed greatly different aspirations, views, and beliefs than those held by the nursing-student she had been years before, marking a transformation from the family-oriented women of the pre-‘60s generation to the individualistic women of the ‘60s generation. This change is described in Breines’ research, in which the author explains:

White, middle class women grew up learning in their families’ ways of being in and thinking about the world that were appropriate for earlier circumstances, receiving all the while contrary cues from the larger culture.²¹

In Frankfort, Mundell had lived a life that was appropriate for earlier circumstances, where women were fulfilled by getting married and starting a family. Once abroad, however, Mundell embraced the larger culture of social and cultural changes. Because of this changing society and culture, she became radically different than her mother, Virginia Long Mundell, who was born in

¹⁹ Ibid., 1009.

²⁰ Karren Mundell, June 16, 1966. Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967.*” Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 2.

²¹ Breines, 48.

1921.²² These contrasting expectations and lifestyles of Mundell and her mother reveal much about the differences between women of the 1960s generation, Karren, and the generations that preceded the '60s, Virginia.

The restraints that most women of generations prior to the 1960s had to deal with were regarding family or economic restrictions that arose from these women gaining their sense of purpose from domesticity and family-rearing. Women of the pre-1960s generations also were restrained by their desire to feel safe—a desire that stemmed from the decades of economic turmoil that surrounded the Great Depression, two devastating World Wars, and the threat of nuclear obliteration during the (ongoing) Cold War. These women, according to Breines, found safety in the home, which meant that they: “...with their children, were safe, domestic, and dependent upon their husbands.”²³ The women of the 1960s generation, in rejecting domesticity, abandoned this desire to feel safe and replaced it with new attitudes about what ideas and behaviors were appropriate for the female gender. Mundell never mentioned having any fear in any of her letters and she states multiple times how she feels that nothing bad is going to happen to her even though she is on the frontlines. Regarding the other restraints of family and economic restrictions, Mundell was not burdened by familial restrictions because she was divorced and childless. She was also freed from being economically dependent on another person by receiving a paycheck from the Army Nurse Corps.

Because of the sense of freedom and the newly available opportunities afforded to women of her generation, Mundell was able to escape from a community in which she was looked down upon because of the divorce stigma that still existed from past generations. She

²²Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*,” Overview. Finding Aid.

²³ Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 49.

revealed the sentiment of her hometown in a letter to her father in February of 1967, in which she talked about her part in serving her country through the Corps:

Perhaps this will reinstate me in the eyes of the community. Small towns still frown very much upon divorced persons and I can tell you that I have felt the stigma and coldness just on visits to Frankfort. And I always did want you to be proud of me justifiably.²⁴

The letter continues on and indicates that Mundell chose to write this letter solely to her father instead of, as she usually would have, to both her parents, because her mother did not completely absolve her of responsibility for the divorce or support her in the decision to go abroad as a nurse. Her mother's unhappiness with both Mundell's divorce and decision to go abroad is a feeling that correlates to the belief of women from the generations preceding the 1960s that being a housewife marked the only "legitimate social and economic space for women."²⁵

Mundell's generation of women was not limited to this belief. They held the ability to do what they desired and were not constrained by traditional societal expectations about women solely belonging to the domestic sphere.

Virginia's unhappiness about her daughter's divorce may have stemmed from beliefs about propriety regarding both economic and social experiences, but her unhappiness may also have come from the stigma that women of her generation, not the younger generation in which her daughter belonged, associated with divorce. American law systems, especially those that focused upon divorce, transformed within the 20th century. Late 19th century and early 20th century divorce laws only recognized fault as grounds for divorce, particularly cruelty, adultery, and desertion.²⁶ With the creation of "no fault" divorces, divorce and divorce laws no longer

²⁴ Karren Mundell, February 14, 1967. Indiana Historical Society "Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 6.

²⁵ Breines, 53.

²⁶ Felice Batlan. Review of DiFonzo, J. Herbie, *Beneath the Fault Line: The Popular and Legal Culture of Divorce in Twentieth-Century America*. H-Law, H-Net Reviews. September, 2001.

regulated gender boundaries and the family. In Felice Batlan's review of J. Herbie DiFonzo's *Beneath the Fault Line: The Popular and Legal Culture of Divorce in Twentieth-Century America*, Batlan explains that the change in the sentiment towards divorce accompanied "the emergence of the new woman, which included a widespread perception of greater economic opportunities for women in the labor force as well as a transition from an ideology of domesticity to that of individualism."²⁷ To the women of Karren's generation, divorce was, henceforth, popularly acceptable. In her mother's lifetime, however, divorce was looked down upon—by both civilians and the law—as being detrimental to the stability of families. DiFonzo reveals the way that the state's efforts, in the 1920s and 1930s, "to prevent divorces must also be understood as having gendered implications and as being, at least in part, efforts to control women and to enforce a particular norm of what constitutes the appropriate family."²⁸ By Mundell's lifetime, this had fallen by the wayside, but for her mother, there was a very real negative connotation that accompanied the act. It was this connotation that perhaps made Mundell feel as if her mother was unhappy towards her about the divorce.

In a previous letter, apparently Mundell's mother chastised her for complaining about the hardship of her job in the Nurse Corps. To her father, Mundell stated: "I'm certain that mother's letter influenced me too. I have been complaining about the loss of two friends without thinking that you and mom have both been down this road before. I shouldn't complain."²⁹ The "road" that Mundell is talking about is the deaths of friends—in Mundell's case the deaths of soldiers that she had become close with during their time at her base. She mentions her parents going down this road because her dad was born in 1922 and her mother 1921, although nothing is

²⁷ Batlan. Review, *Beneath the Fault Line*.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Karren Mundell, February 14, 1967. Indiana Historical Society "Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 6.

stated directly, her parents most likely were affected by war sometime in their lives.³⁰ Mundell wrote to her father for it appeared that she had been closed off by a disapproving mother.

The contrasting opinions about lifestyle and beliefs between women of the 1960s generation and the women of preceding generations were brought to the forefront when Mundell wrote:

Mother is very concerned that I have become a wicked woman who no longer believes in God. My concept of God has changed very much from what it was in my high school days. But I don't think I'm bad, although I do things she would probably frown upon.³¹

The last sentence depicted the way members of the past generations were limited by the culture they had grown up in and were unable to accept the changes that a new and evolving culture allowed for women. Women of the 1960s generation, in moving towards individuality, moved away from long-held traditions, including traditions of community and of religion—both depicted by Mundell. These women then decided for themselves what they thought was appropriate, instead of letting society or an outdated culture tell them how they could participate within the world or find self-fulfillment.

The comment from Mundell's mother was also very revealing of the way preceding generations of women judged the morality of the women of younger generations. Seemingly, although Mundell endangered herself on daily basis to save the lives of United States' soldiers, she was a wicked woman for not attending Sunday services and for questioning the faith in which she had been brought up. From Mundell's letters, it appears that her mother never once considered all that her daughter had experienced working on the frontlines of a war with no end in sight; she instead wanted to question her daughter's morality for its shift from tradition.

³⁰ Indiana Historical Society "*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*," Overview. Finding Aid.

³¹Karren Mundell, February 14, 1967. Indiana Historical Society "*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 6.

On the whole, the focus on the traditional aspects of women (such as women's morality) instead of combat when it came to the examination of the female members of the Army Nurse Corps was not an uncommon fixation. While Mundell's mother was concerned about her daughter not attending church service, the American public, particularly those in charge of the Corps and the army, was concerned with the perception of the nurses within the Army Nurse Corps. According to Kara Dixon Vuic in her book, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War*, "Female nurses were seen as nurturers, mothers, girlfriends who took care of injured men, and, at the same time, as the objects of soldiers' sexual desires (especially when recruited as playthings for officers' parties)."³² Vuic examines the traditional and progressive aspects about nurses in Vietnam and the details that surrounded them, for instance, nurses were stationed in combat zones yet received no weapons training prior to deployment. Further, even though nurses were depended upon to react quickly and trained to do procedures that far advanced what female nurses were capable of doing stateside, arguments surrounded the nurses on whether or not they should be able to replace their uniform of a dress and heels with fatigues within combat zones.³³ Although it seems as if Mundell's mother is being critical of her daughter, especially since her daughter was acting as a national hero, Virginia's reaction mirrored the public's perception that rebuked the progressive Army Nurse Corps based upon traditional values and opinion of gender.

Another instance that the traditional view of women clashed with the role that women assumed as nurses during the Vietnam War revolved around the subject of abortion. Military hospitals were not subject to civilian law and were able to carry out abortions, regardless of the

³² David J. Caruso. "Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War (review)." *Oral History Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 364-366.

³³ Caruso. Review, *Officer, Nurse, Woman* (review).

laws that regulated abortion at civilian hospitals.³⁴ In 1971, however, President Nixon overturned this policy and stated, instead, that military hospitals had to comply with the same laws that state hospitals were made to comply with.³⁵ This had no effect on the women who sought abortions in Vietnam for the medical institutions there were determined by local customs and laws. Because of this, pregnant women of the Army Nurse Corps could, and did, have abortions. Kara Dixon Vuic, in her article, “ ‘I’m afraid we’re going to have to change our ways’: Marriage, Motherhood, and Pregnancy in the Army Nurse Corps during the Vietnam War,” examines the army’s reasoning behind its decision to allow nurses to have abortions prior to the 1973 decision of *Roe v. Wade* and after Nixon had reversed the official policy. She explains, “Considered in the context of Cold War regulations on seemingly threatening sexuality, the army’s abortion policy can be read in several ways. It may have been an attempt to minimize any publicity about the predominately unmarried and sexually active nurse corps...”³⁶ The army’s quiet acceptance of the practice points to a greater implication of an aforementioned trend: the traditional versus the progressive. Although the army allowed for progressive decisions, such as whether or not to have a child or a career, it still wished for the rest of the country to see the women in its Nurse Corps as traditional.

A generational clash of values between Mundell and her mother that revealed her mother’s expectations of how women should behave in society involved one of the gifts that Mundell was excited to send home. A friend of hers was a frequent traveler and told Mundell that she would always take photos from wherever she was at and send them home to her family on slides. Her family would then view the slides on a projector, making it, as her friend said,

³⁴ Vuic.” Marriage, Motherhood, and Pregnancy,” 1016.

³⁵ Ibid., 1017.

³⁶ Ibid., 1018.

“...like the whole family traveled right with her.”³⁷ Mundell began taking pictures of the base and the surrounding areas, including her trips into Saigon. Multiple letters in the correspondence relay Mundell’s anticipation and excitement for her family to get the projector and slides so that they could see what her every-day life was like. To the nurse’s great disappointment, however, the slides arrived and were watched by her family only for her mother to comment not on the wonders of the foreign land, but on her disapproval and disappointment that there was alcohol on the hospital base.

The majority of Mundell’s communications with her mother revolved around marriage. These exchanges are a great portrayal of the discrepancies between a culture based upon individual desires and self-fulfillment and a culture orientated toward family and based upon tradition. Mundell’s mother apparently asked her in every letter if she had found a man to marry yet. Even in basic training, Mundell wrote to her mother, saying, “Please stop building Ben Casey up to me. I haven’t heard from him. When I do believe me-you’ll hear about it.”³⁸ Her mother’s ceaseless worrying about her daughter marrying is a direct manifestation of the generation in which she, Virginia, grew up. In that generation, a woman’s life goal was to find a man, marry him and have children. Virginia Mundell’s mindset, standard for women of the years preceding the 1960s, is described by Breines when she states:

Getting married and becoming a mother were the only genuinely valued activities for women, to which women’s behavior conformed. To remain single or pursue a profession...was to be considered deviant and marginalized.³⁹

It is due to this domestic culture that Mundell’s mother was raised in and conformed to that makes her daughter’s love life so important and other aspects of her life less so. Mundell had

³⁷ Karren Mundell, September 4, 1966. Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 3.

³⁸ Karren Mundell, July 7, 1966. Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 2.

³⁹ Breines. *Young, White, and Miserable*, 51.

mentioned the possible future plans of returning to IU to attain a Master's Degree in History and possibly even her PhD in previous letters that she wrote to her parents. After she had stated these aspirations of returning to academia, she had asked her parents not to laugh. Her mother seemingly did not consider any of Mundell's aspirations, including a return to IU, more important or worthy than finding a man to marry.⁴⁰

The difference between Mundell and her mother regarding marriage is fully revealed when Mundell described to her parents her feelings on one of her fellow nurses getting married—calling it “very foolish” and a “very bad mistake.”⁴¹ Other women in the Army Nurse Corps, however, did not share this same sentiment regarding the option of finding love in Vietnam, in fact, the Vietnam War has come to be known as the first time that the army altered its perception on gender and “attempted to blend its traditional gender roles for nurses with feminist goals.”⁴² Where pregnancy and marriage were once grounds for automatic dishonorable discharge, beginning in the 1960s the army went so far as to recruit for its Army Nurse Corps by using the phrase, “Doctors, patients, and colleagues will be your friends, new ones made in the Army Nurse Corps will be some of the finest you have ever had. Your Army friends will last a lifetime. Don't be surprised if a diamond crops up on your left hand!”⁴³

Prior to this development, women from the Army Nurse Corps who married faced limitations such as voluntary discharge, mandatory discharge and placement within the Army Nurse Corps reserves. These restrictive policies reflected the “broader societal norms holding that married women's primary responsibility was the home,” further, they hinted at the ideology

⁴⁰ Karren Mundell, September 30, 1966. Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁴¹ Karren Mundell, October 16, 1966. Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 4.

⁴² Vuic.” Marriage, Motherhood, and Pregnancy,” 998.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1001.

held by the army that nurses should be the possible heterosexual partners for soldiers.⁴⁴ Similar to the previous presentation of the army's traditional concerns about its female nurses, a married nurse who served away from her husband was surrounded by questions about her respectability, for she had left her husband to care for another man. Married women, along with those who married while serving within the Army Nurse Corps, experienced a change of policy starting in 1962 that not only reduced the limitations that surrounded marriage but went so far as to advertise marriage as a positive result of service.⁴⁵

The army's sentiment for married nurses transformed into one that was supportive of married nurses, even going so far that "newspaper articles featured the experiences of these new military families and implied that the army valued and even encouraged family life for nurses."⁴⁶ Although military couples had no guarantee that they would be assigned the same base, oftentimes both would request Vietnam and wind up in close proximity of each other. In one lucky scenario, Babette Clough, a nurse in the Corps, married her husband who, at that time, already had orders to leave for Vietnam.⁴⁷ On her honeymoon, she requested an assignment in Vietnam and was not only granted her request (itself not entirely surprising, due to the insatiable need for nurses), but was assigned to the same base as her husband. As if her luck could not get any better, the two were assigned bedrooms that shared an adjoining wall which they promptly knocked down.⁴⁸ The transitioning policies on marriage, just like the transitioning policy on motherhood, represented the army's progress toward a belief that women could have both careers and families. Domesticity was no longer the end-all.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 999.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1001.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1001.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1003.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Mundell's own feelings about her fellow nurses getting married stemmed from the angst that she felt from her own marriage and the divorce that ensued. About this, Mundell wrote:

I think I've decided to go to Germany. I'm not ready to settle down yet. I can't take a chance on a man this soon. Maybe two years in Europe will sooth me somewhat. I'll never trust a man again as I did Mike. I suppose I'll never be naïve and innocent again.⁴⁹

The entire concept of "not ready to settle down" would have seemed foreign to the women of previous generations, but to the women of the '60s generation, this was a newly allowed privilege that went hand-in-hand with individuality, self-improvement and self-fulfillment.

In the generations that preceded the '60s, as Breines states, the culture and system of beliefs denoted that: "The family and the home were the expected sites for fulfillment for all Americans; there were simply no others," and, "Children were their [women's] main achievement and reward in life."⁵⁰ This belief system and culture were transformed by the 1960s generation. Self-improvement no longer translated to getting married as it had with pre-1960s generation. Self-fulfillment was no longer equated with becoming a wife, mother and housewife.

These changes in values are embodied when Mundell writes:

I think, Mom, that you should give up on any hope of seeing grandchildren from this member of the family. I was too young, naïve and innocent to get burned as badly as I did—much worse than you or Dad have any idea. Every day sees me more convinced that I can never take that chance again.⁵¹

Mundell, as part of the 1960s generation, was free to explore and participate in society as a woman. This was the first time in American society that women had been granted the opportunity to do so and women took advantage of their newfound freedom. The same men that her mother saw as potential caretakers and providers, Mundell saw as equals—as friends with

⁴⁹ Karren Mundell, September 15, 1966. Indiana Historical Society "*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁵⁰ Breines. *Young, White, and Miserable*, 51, 54.

⁵¹ Karren Mundell, September 30, 1966. Indiana Historical Society "*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*. Collection #M700, Box 1, Folder 3.

whom she could explore a strange country or from whom she could take comfort when living on a hospital base became hard to handle. For the 1960s generation of women, men were no longer the main component of their self-fulfillment. Women, like Karren Mundell, could and did decide what would fulfill them to their own standards.

For Karren, this turned out to be a two-year deployment to Landstuhl, Germany, which followed her service in Vietnam.⁵² While in Germany, although Mundell had told her mother that marrying again was too big of a chance to take, Mundell met a man who convinced her that he was worth taking that chance. She married him in 1968.⁵³ The couple returned stateside in 1969.⁵⁴ Today, Karren Mundell Kowalski resides in Denver.⁵⁵ She has two sons and is a nationally known speaker and author.⁵⁶

The 1960s gave women a sense of freedom that they had never experienced before, whether it be in civilian life in the States or abroad in the Army Nurse Corps. Women who came of age during this generation, such as Karren Mundell, were able to decide on the life that they wanted to live. No longer were their lives, like the lives of their mothers, ones that revolved around marrying and having children. Careers became viable options for women and women sought out this opportunity. The United States army is an institution that reveals the transformation that American society made during the 1960s. Nurses within the Army Nurse Corps were given the new capability to have both a career in the Corps and a family (either within the military or not). The Army Nurse Corps, while revealing the progressiveness of the era, also demonstrates the conflict between that same progressiveness and traditional ideology

⁵² Indiana Historical Society “*Karren E. Mundell Vietnam Correspondence, 1966-1967*,” Overview. Finding Aid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

that remained attached to women. While women stateside joined the feminist movement, nurses abroad worked towards the privilege of wearing fatigues instead of the standard issued uniforms of a dress. Whether home or away, women fought against the same thing, the strict gender ideologies that had mandated the lives of their mothers.

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