RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH ITURRIAGA

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Joseph Iturriaga, on March 11, 2019, in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for sitting down with me.

Joseph Iturriaga: That's awesome. Sorry it took so long.

SI: No problem. First, can you tell me where and when you were born?

JI: March 19, 1983, in the Bronx, New York.

SI: For the record, what were your parents' names?

JI: My dad is also Joe, Joseph. My mom is Anna.

SI: Usually, we ask for a little bit about the family history. Do you know anything about your family's history, starting out with your father's side of the family?

JI: Yes, I know on my dad's side, my great great grandfather came over from Italy. I guess, prior to that, going past my great grandfather, they did a bunch of stuff, like travel from Italy to Spain a lot, somehow managed to make an Italian-Spaniard person. Then, my great grandfather came from Italy, from my dad's side. They settled in Manhattan. They lived there for pretty much his whole life. Then, my grandfather, when he was growing up, after my great grandfather passed away, my great grandmother remarried. He was living in Wisconsin for a while; he was all over, joined the military as well, and played a little Triple-A baseball back then. Then, they had my dad--that was the only child they had--in New York. They came back to New York, and then my grandfather remarried and then had--I have like five aunts, so five stepsisters to my dad, [who] all lived in New York.

My mom's side of the family, my great grandmother came from Puerto Rico. They settled in Manhattan as well. My mom was the youngest of, I want to say, four children, two girls, two boys. I guess my grandmother wasn't really involved in my mom's life, so my great grandmother, her grandmother, really raised her, as well as my grandfather.

My parents met sometime in Manhattan, and they just moved around New York for a while. They lived in Manhattan for a little bit. They lived in Queens for a little bit, and then they settled in the Bronx. They had my oldest sister and then me and my younger sister; we all were born in the Bronx. Then, we relocated, probably right after my little sister was born, we relocated to Jersey, and we lived there for a while. I lived in Jersey until going into eighth grade, so I was about thirteen.

SI: Where in New Jersey?

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: You were saying where you lived in New Jersey.

JI: I lived in Jersey City when we moved over, and I lived there all the way until I was about thirteen. We lived in Hillside for a little bit, but mostly Jersey City. From there, we moved to Pennsylvania. My dad's job transferred. We moved to Pennsylvania. We were right in the Poconos. I lived there until I was probably twenty, twenty-one, and then I joined the military. Then, the military took me to Virginia Beach. [For] bootcamp, it took me to Chicago, then to Virginia Beach, then from Virginia Beach to the Naval Academy, and then I stayed there. After I got out in 2012, I stayed there for about an extra two years. I also got married in between and had a child. Then, my wife had a really good job offer, so then we moved back to Jersey. Now, we live right here in Piscataway. So, full circle.

SI: Let me ask a couple questions before we get into your naval experience. What were your parents doing for a living?

JI: My dad was a civil engineer after he got out of the military. He also served for a little bit. My mom was a stay-at-home mom until maybe I was about ten, eleven, and then she did mostly hospitality jobs. She worked at a dry cleaner for a little bit, and then she worked at a factory place. When we moved to Pennsylvania, she worked as a housekeeper at hotels. Then, once I joined the military, they moved to Delaware, my parents and my little sister, and she started working at a state building as far as housekeeping-type stuff. My dad [did] civil engineering straight across the board, construction, dabbled in everything. Now, he's--I want to say--a surveyor or a foreman. He oversees projects now on the road. He's always been in some type of construction or civil engineering. My mom did housekeeping when we were younger, and she just stuck with it.

SI: Did your father ever talk about his time in the service?

JI: Very little bit. Ironically, he worked for a Seabee battalion when he was in. My first duty station when I got out of boot camp was working with the Seabees. I was doing boat driving and on-the-water-type stuff. We always talked about that. He was more on the construction side of the Seabees, and I was doing all their boat driving. It was interesting to talk about. Definitely the experience was completely different. It was definitely a way for us, I guess, to bond. I was more close to my mom anyway. Other than that, he really didn't have an exciting military experience. I forgot what the term is for it now, but you go in for active duty for a few months and then you transfer to Reserves for the rest of the time. I forget what it's called. He did that. He was active for like six months, almost a year, and then the last three years, he was just Reserve the one weekend a month and stuff like that. He liked it. He was working, doing construction and what he did out in town anyway. Other than that, I don't really know much about my grandfather's military history. I wish I did, but I never knew about it. [Editor's Note: A Seabee is a member of a U.S. Navy construction battalion. The "Seabee" nickname is derived from the initial letters "CB" in the term "construction battalion."]

SI: Do you know if he was in during Korea or World War II?

JI: I probably would assume World War II. Yes, probably World War II, based on age. But I never knew about it. He didn't really tell my dad much about it. He knew he served, but there were no war stories or nothing. I guess it's a good thing/bad thing. It could go either way.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your time in New Jersey before you moved to Pennsylvania. Do you have any memories of what Jersey City was like?

JI: I had a lot more friends, but at the same time, I was young, very influenced by stupid behavior, always out late, didn't do studies well. I got left back in seventh grade because I just didn't want to go to school. I wanted to hang with my friends who were skipping school and stuff like that. I never did anything crazy as far as drugs or alcohol or anything like that. It was just more like stupid stuff, like skipping school, going to the mall, hanging outside late. Nothing illegal, I never got arrested, never trespassed, never did stuff like some kids do. I just had a long leash parenting-wise. My parents let me do whatever I wanted as long as I wasn't hurting anyone and wasn't hurting myself or others. Should they have checked the leash back a little bit? Probably. I probably would've done better in school, stuff like that. Yes, it was basic kid stuff. I hung out with friends outside. Everything was so close by. You'd walk to the mall. You'd walk to here. You'd walk to there. The park was close. Fortunately, a lot of kids that now are coming back to Jersey, you bump into people you used to know, the way I changed my life around was for the better. Some people that I knew in seventh and eighth grade are in jail. I think a few overdosed. One got killed. So, I definitely made it out on the better end of that. What could've been worse [was] if I just stayed in Jersey City.

Moving to Pennsylvania probably was one of the best things for me. I was able to experience a whole new life. City-wise, everything's so close. You go to the Poconos, you've got to drive everywhere, a lot more nature. Schooling was way different. You don't have the chance to skip. You had to take a bus to school. I never had that. So, you went to school.

We lived in a development, so you hung out with the kids there and you did stuff. I became more active in sports. I became more active with friends in my community, doing stuff in the community. They had a clubhouse, so they always held stuff there. I had no need to walk around anymore. We had a pool in our development. We always just hung out. Still nothing--never smoked, never did drugs. As I got later on in high school, you start drinking, playing football and stuff like that. My grades got better. A lot more opportunities opened up for me as far as colleges and stuff like that, that I probably wouldn't have. It definitely was probably one of the best decisions my parents made, for me at least.

As I got older, I didn't want to live there anymore. I went to community college, loved it. I hit that point in college where I didn't want to go anymore, but I paid for it. So, I focused. I had good grades, but I didn't want to go anymore, but I'm paying for it. Making that decision to stop was either--this is before Target--I'm going to work at Wal-Mart or K-Mart, like all your other high school friends who aren't doing anything, or you do stuff, and I was like, "I guess I want to join the military and do that and see where it goes."

SI: You would have been in high school when 9/11 happened.

JI: I was, I was. That was '01, right?

SI: Yes.

JI: I was a junior. I was a junior in high school. Yes, I remember that like it was yesterday. I was in geometry class, and everyone was running in the halls, telling the teachers to put the TVs on and stuff like that. We all put it on. I remember just seeing it, and it was like, "Man." It was rough. My older sister moved back to Jersey City. Once we moved to Pennsylvania, she lived there for her senior year in high school, and the day she graduated, she went right back to Jersey City. Her boyfriend was there, so she moved back home. But she got a good job from the start, right out of high school, very fortunate. She traveled back and forth to Manhattan. Of course, we were all trying to call my sister, and the lines were all tied up. We were freaking out, but eventually, we got in touch with her and there were no worries. A kid in high school, his uncle was a firefighter and passed away there. A lot of people in the Poconos came from New York, and they came right across the border. A lot of them, it hit them pretty hard. It was crazy to see.

That was in '01, and then I joined in '04. I don't know, I didn't get that--not to sound un-American--I didn't get that motivation like, "High school, that's it. I'm going. I'm fighting a war." I had an opposite approach to that. I wanted to be a teacher when I was in high school. I wanted to go to college and get my teaching degree and teach kids. Then, I thought, "Well, this is when they're going to need me." There were a lot of Reservists in our high school that were teachers, and they did Reserves. I was like, "A lot of these guys are going to get called up, females are going to get called up. There are going to be a lot of openings for jobs. I'll get my degree, and I'll jump right in." But then I hit that roadblock in college, like I said, and then I just joined the military from there mostly because I needed something. I didn't have that patriotic hole in my stomach yet. I just didn't want to be a loser. It was either become a loser and be like all my other friends who didn't ever go back to college, or my grandfather was in the military. My great grandfather probably was in the military. My dad was in the military, "Try that out, see how that goes. You can do it." It was more like, "I'll do four years. I'll get out. GI Bill. Use it up. Get my education and then that'd be it." Ironically, the goal was to come back to PA [Pennsylvania]. "I'll come back to PA and finish up school."

We were all Navy in our family, prior to me. I tried to sign up for the Army, and it was this big argument between me and my dad. He's like, "Why? Everyone in the family was Navy. Why?" I had an allergic reaction to shellfish, so I told the recruiter that. He's like, "Are you allergic to shellfish?" I'm like, "What's that? Lobster and stuff?" He's like, "Yes." "Well, I did have a reaction." He was like, "You don't qualify." I was like, "Okay." I thought I was never going to join the military after that. I said, "All right, I guess I'll suck it up and go back to college." I walked out. The Navy recruiter was like, "Come here," and he explained it to me. I was like, "No, I've never had it since." He's like, "You deserve to be in the Navy." Then, I was just Navy all the way at that point.

I did four years. I was really good at my job, traveled everywhere. I was like, "All right, let me do one more year. I like it. I'm making rank." So, I did another year, and then they said, "Listen, you're up for shore duty. It's a lot easier than sea duty. You don't travel as much." I was like, "Okay." I tried to go all the way West Coast. I was like, "Let me go to Seattle." There was an opening. They said, "No. The way you are, hardworking and all the stuff you've done, there's an opening at the Naval Academy to work on their boats." I said, "Okay, let's try it out." They didn't explain to me that I'd have to travel to Maryland, interview with the superintendent

for the Naval Academy, all this stuff. I was like, "Man, this sucks." I was like, "This is a lot of work," but I got accepted. They approved my orders, and I went there. Then, ironically, they put me on the actual university side of it, not the support side. So, I worked with midshipmen for three years, teaching them how to drive boats and stuff like that. I never wore a uniform. I had to wear what they wore on campus. It was great, probably the best duty I ever had. I loved it.

SI: Well, before we go further with that, let me go back to when you were initially getting into the Navy. You talked a little bit about the recruiting process. Tell me about that point to getting to boot camp. Was there time in between?

JI: I did that whole delayed-entry program that they had--I don't know if they still have that anymore, but the delayed entry, I want to say I was delayed for maybe four months, I think four months. You had to do the two weeks at the recruiting station, do training and stuff like that, [and] worked out every once in a while. Pretty much don't get into trouble until you leave. But, yes, it was a four-month delay. It sucked. I went to boot camp, let's say, on the 4th of March. I was twenty years old. I celebrated my twenty-first birthday in boot camp. It was horrible.

That three or four-month buildup I had prior helped me out. My mom, obviously we were really close, so just that connection, I had to use that three months to really get her onboard. Between the three months, tying up all loose ends. I started packing up my room, thinking my parents were going to do something with it. I came back from boot camp, and it was still the same. But I used the three months, they taught you about the military rules and regulations and stuff to expect in boot camp, all the pre-boot camp stuff. The night before, they take you away in Pennsylvania, it's Harrisburg. They put you into a hotel for a night, and then the next day, you fly out. I think, at that point, when we took that day before the trip, I was like, "Man, this is it." The buildup was good. The three months that we had in between, I used. You still don't know what to expect when you get there, but, yes, it was good. I needed it. I think my mom did, too. My dad was like, "Yes, you're going to do great." My dad wasn't really an emotional guy, no tears or nothing. My mom cried when I got in the car with the recruiter. I felt like I was at an advantage because I don't know how many other people were delayed, but I felt like the recruiting station I was at, they spent a lot of time with us and really hit us with the stuff to expect. When I got to boot camp, I was, I guess, more prepared than other people. Actually, it wasn't as bad.

SI: Boot camp was in Great Lakes?

JI: Chicago-Great Lakes.

SI: Tell me a little bit about what that initial day or first few days were like.

JI: Oh, man. Other than being tired, it was a cultural shock. I remember we flew to O'Hare Airport. They meet everyone who's going to go there. The bus picks us up. Then, we're getting close, and you get on base. Then, you start seeing it, and you see the drill instructors outside. Mentally, you know what's going to happen: they're running on the bus, and they'll start screaming at you and start really getting into you, and this whole bootcamp experience is going to happen. But we get there, we pull in, the guy came in [with a] very calm demeanor, [and]

said, "Hey, listen, you guys are going to get off, line up here." I was like, "Oh, maybe it's not going to be all this in-your-face type stuff." Then, you walk into the building, and that's when it started. [laughter] They tricked us a little bit.

I remember standing there. God, I remember it like yesterday. I was at the edge of the line, and he had this one kid all the way on the end. I can't remember what he was; he was foreign though. I think his parents came here from a different country. You had to state your name, your last four, and they wanted to know which branch you were in. I guess that was a test to see if you would fumble. They were really working this guy, in his face, yelling, all this stuff, and it was a female instructor yelling at him. At that point, I was like, "Holy crap, this is about to get real. The females are in it. It's no joke." You always want to be on the back end of things, at that point. You never want to be the first guy because if you mess up, you get yelled at. But if you're in the back, you [see] everyone who is messing up, so you know what they want, what they say. I was so lucky I was in the back, so by the time it got to me, I knew what they said.

You're pretty sleep deprived at that point. You're up for almost fourteen hours doing everything, checking in, getting your basic uniforms. You're putting all your belongings in to get mailed back home. You get your buzz cut and all that stuff. You take a urinalysis test and basic medical stuff. It was long. You get classed up with your division. By the time you get to wherever you're staying, wherever your bunk is, you're just seeing the reeds at that point. You go to sleep for two hours and they wake you up, and then you're right back at it for a full day. You don't get your full day's rest until that following day. Almost twenty-four hours, you don't get a full day's rest, so you're pretty much working on E [empty].

In my head, my dad was military, so he sort of told me about it. I was very fortunate. I guess some recruiters lied to people. Mine was very honest. He was like, "Listen, this is what's going to happen." You don't know if they're lying or not, and then you went in and you start seeing it and you're like, "God, I was fortunate." Other kids in my division were like, "Man, my recruiter said that I'll get a shower the first day. What the hell is going on?" Mine was like, "Listen, prepare for a long first day." You know how the mentality is. They're going to come in, and they're going to try to break you down. I think the first few days, you're in a culture shock. You're in a room with a bunch of other dudes from Texas, California, New York, Jersey, PA, all over, so you're starting to feel everyone out. Then, you just get in a routine. At that point, you're just like a robot until you graduate. Yes, the first few weeks, good; I was totally fine.

I think when I was halfway through boot camp, maybe like week three or four, you hit that block when you hit the homesickness. My birthday had just passed. I got in trouble for my birthday. Some kid tried to bring me a cookie. You can't do that, so we all got in trouble. At that time, boot camp was a lot different than how it is now. We had to do intensive training, what they call IT. You had to push all the bunkbeds back to the wall. You had the whole middle of the floor open. The first two letters of my last name are IT, and no one knew how to say my last name; it's very difficult [for] some people. They said, "We're going to IT for IT's birthday." I was anointed with my first Navy nickname. I remember I was like, "Man, this sucks." It's still snowing in March in Chicago. We had full sweaters, full uniforms, and just sweating our asses off. Afterward, they're like, "Man, IT, the name fits you. We like it." It has stuck with me ever since. I love it. People still call me IT. I love the name. I think right after that, my birthday, I

hit that night, if not a few days later, I hit that block. I'm like, "Did I make the right choice? Did I make the right choice? I miss my mom. I'm supposed to have a good birthday dinner like I do every year." After that, I think I just snapped out of it, said, "Listen, you're halfway there. I did a great job up to this point. You can make it the rest of the way." I just snapped out of it. At that point, the last four weeks were sort of a breeze. You go through stuff. They prepare you for stuff. Towards the end, you sort of just wait to graduate. From there, you go to whatever schooling you go to. My school was on the same base, just on the other side. Pretty much, I just transferred from one side of the base to another.

SI: Did you have any choice in that?

JI: Well, for me, I picked my rate prior to going in, so I picked to be undesignated. The way they described it was you go in undesignated, you see a bunch of jobs. If you go to a ship or whatever, you see a bunch of different jobs. If you qualify, you can go that route. Then, what happens is if your commander approves it, you will pass a test, and then they'll send you to school for that later on, send you to school for whatever job that is. I picked undesignated, and then I started working on boats. For a kid who really never had been on the water, for some reason, I picked it up really easy. I ended up being a boatswain's mate, which is pretty much like a boat driver. We do all the dirty work on the boat. It just stuck with me. I just loved it. I just ended up being a boatswain's mate. I went from undesignated to boatswain's mate. There's really no school for it. You went to a basic seamanship school to just learn the basics, how to keep yourself alive on the ship, how to do lines, and stuff like that. Then, somehow I got sent to a Seabee command. A bunch of my other friends got sent to ships all over, and I got sent to a Seabee command. I got there, and my job was to work on small boats and drive.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: What kind of boats were you training on?

JI: They were warping tugs. They were maybe ten feet long, twelve feet long, six feet wide. Some boats were made to transport vehicles from the ship to the beach …

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: You said some of the ships were amphibious vehicles.

JI: Yes. We worked on those, and then we had some that were more for salvage. They had the big crane in the front to pick debris up from the water or pull different types of equipment, stuff like that. We were able to connect platforms to our boats for more equipment to be on. [I] worked on those for four years. Then, just as I was leaving, they got more advanced ones, where they were more electronic in a way, like a joystick-type deal. Of course, you always get the good stuff before you roll out. I worked on that for a year. From there, at the Naval Academy, I was working on small boats, like Zodiacs and little twin-engine type stuff. It was completely different for a while. I had to learn a whole new system. Everything prior to that was more propulsion and more hydraulic. This was more just straight gas and engine, go. All I did was work on boats. I loved it.

SI: When you were in training in Great Lakes, either basic or advanced, did you form relationships with the people you were with, or did you try to stick to yourself?

JI: Yes, I made friends with a few people. I remember in boot camp, I was friends with this guy Burgess from Florida, and we just kicked it off. We were bunked right in front of each other. We always used to talk. Everyone else was very high strung in a way. I don't know, maybe our division was just that way. But me and him were just laid-back types of guys. We got along. He was supposed to go somewhere after--we both went to advanced together, and then he got put on a ship and then I got put at the Seabee unit. Somehow in transit, they changed his orders, and they put him at a different command on the same base. So, we were on base for almost a whole year and didn't know that we were on base together. I happened to be at the gym and he happened to be walking by, and it's like, "What's going on, man?" Everything he said he was going to do--he was from Florida, so everything he did was around boats and stuff. He said, "When I get out of here, I'm going to buy a boat and live on my boat on base." No shit, he bought a boat and lived on base. He was the one kid from boot camp I was really close to. Then, once I got to my first command, I met probably a few people, and three of them I'm still really good friends with. Ironically, when I moved off base, I lived with each one of them for a little bit of time. I had one kid from Ohio that I was really cool with, this kid Todd. He actually did that picture right there for me when I got out.

SI: Oh, that's nice.

JI: He took that picture in Spain, yes. He got into photography when he got out. Then, I had another friend, Danny, that I'm still cool with. We talk every day. We're actually godfathers to our kids, to my son and his son. This other kid Nuding ended up moving out to Maine when he got out. So, yes, they're probably the three people I talk to the most. Then, my old boss from when I worked with the Seabees, we talk all the time. Right now, she's in Japan, but she's actually getting relocated, transferring to the Naval Academy, up for orders in September. It's pretty cool. I've been telling her about it. That's the core people that I stayed in contact with after getting out. I still talk to a bunch of people here and there if I come across [them], but core people, probably those four.

SI: How long was the advanced training at Great Lakes?

JI: Oh, God, not long. Maybe five or six weeks. You go through a bunch of seamanship stuff in boot camp. It's just a little bit more advanced. They teach you about certain weight loads and shackles and different types of knots you can do, how to do security, stuff like that. I think it was only five or six weeks. It wasn't really long. It was probably the shortest one actually out of all the jobs. They just teach you the basics to survive on a ship.

SI: Did you go from there right to Virginia Beach, or were there any stops in between?

JI: You're allowed to take leave in between, so I think I graduated mid-June, and I took two weeks off. They do that program where they--I don't know if they still do--but there's a program that if you go back during your time off, you can work with the recruiter. If you go back to your

recruiting station and work with them for five days, they will give you back five days off your leave. I took ten days, but actually, I worked five [days] with the recruiting. You're there for like half a day, do some paperwork, you talk to some people that come in, stuff like that, and then I was just home. My parents had moved to Delaware at that time, so I was in Delaware with my parents. I only took ten days; it wasn't much. You don't really save a lot by that time, so you only have pretty much two weeks to really use. Then, I just drove straight to Virginia Beach because I was in Delaware. I got there in July, just before the Fourth of July, and I checked in.

SI: What was a typical day like there?

JI: In Great Lakes?

SI: No, in Virginia Beach.

JI: We were an eight-to-five type deal. We did PT [physical training] three times a week. We'd get put on duty station for security, roving and stuff like that. Every eight days you're on for--if it was a weekend, you get stuck with Saturday and Sunday; if it's through the week, you get the one day, but pretty much every eight days, you rotated into the next day. I want to say eight to five. Then, we did workups for deployments and stuff like that, so the days were a little longer. We did a lot of field exercises, so those were longer days. You'd do maybe a twelve-hour day. You'd do those for three or four days, and then you come back, and you get a day off, and then you're back to work doing your regular job. Yes, it was eight to five, nothing crazy.

SI: What would you do during a field deployment?

JI: It depended. If you did a field deployment, they'd break you up into different divisions or different units. I think while I was there, we did, I want to say, three. My first one, I did communications. I worked in a communication tent. The second time I did it, I was part of a security detail, so acting like we were checking IDs; you'd go through the whole thing. Then, the third time, I was part of the training group, so I was the people who acted like people trying to infiltrate the base, or trying to get on base, or trying to get information from people. That last time, before I transferred, I was part of a training detail, but I did communications and stuff like that. I never got stuck doing [cooking]. Fortunately, I never did the cooking or cleaning part. So, I did those three, but some people do more. You rotate through everything, but the three I did were those.

SI: When you say your regular job, did that involve working with the boats as well?

JI: No. Once you did field deployment, you're not by the water anymore. You're all in the field.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: You were explaining about the boats.

JI: When we did field exercises.

SI: Yes.

JI: Yes. When we did field exercises, that's when all the boat people act like they were Seabees. We helped build tents and we helped do all the security and stuff that they would do if they deployed. We were just there as extras, in a way. We did all the labor stuff. We never did a field exercise where we needed to use boats. We never did that. Mostly all our deployments that we did were some type of training with that aspect. We deployed to Haiti, Spain, Jordan. I can't think of where else.

SI: When you say that, were you simulating it, or were you actually going?

JI: No, we went there. We would go there. Then, we would do all the ship-to-shore movement [in] Croatia and stuff like that. We would work with whatever the foreign navy was in that country to teach them how to work with us in doing an operation like that if we ever needed to. We did a bunch of boat operations on the water to show their navies how to do certain things, and those I was way more involved in. I was teaching people how to drive boats and how to do security in the water. We went to Africa when the whole pirate aspect was really big. We taught an African navy how to combat stuff like that, how to go from the water to potentially taking on a boat that's being overrun. So, those, [in] my job, I was doing way more of. When we went out in the field, all the Seabees wanted you to act like a Seabee, "I'm not a Seabee. I'm a boat driver. Put me on a boat. I know what I'm doing. You put me in the middle of the woods, and you expect me to know all these security drills." You'd do trainings. You'd do land navigation, how to read a compass and stuff like that, which is cool. I enjoyed it, but my talents were better used on water. [laughter]

When we did all the deployments--we helped out during [Hurricane] Katrina, we helped out in Haiti when they had the big natural disaster--those were our deployments for boat drivers. We were hitting the beach with equipment to get it off, taking equipment off, picking up SEALS, dropping off SEALS, EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal], stuff like that, and then teaching other navies how to do these things in their country that if we weren't there, they could maintain and do it themselves. So, those were long days. Then, you've always got to work friendly with the other countries. So, those were more our deployments, when we did those. In the five years I was there, I deployed maybe six times doing stuff like that, and shore is two months. I think the longest was six. So, it was everywhere in between. [Editor's Note: Hurricane Katrina was a Category Five hurricane that occurred in late August 2005 and caused over 1,800 fatalities and 125 billion dollars in damage, especially in the City of New Orleans and the surrounding areas.]

SI: Tell me what you remember about the response to Hurricane Katrina. That came up in my looking up your unit. How long were you down there? What were you doing on a typical day?

JI: I was there for, I want to say, a month, about a month. We did boat driving, where we were picking up logs from the water, picking up equipment, stuff like that. Occasionally, you had to pick up a body. If we were on land, we helped with the Red Cross. We took debris off the streets, helped put tree trunks on trucks that were taking the landfill out. I think maybe once or twice--we didn't do it much--we helped disperse food and water and stuff like that. Mostly, we did a lot of stuff on water, getting debris and stuff out, moving it over, so big cranes can come

pick it up. That's what we did for about a month. We weren't really [as] heavily involved as other units. The Seabees went as well, but they were doing building. They were doing electrician stuff. But we were out there with the Coast Guard. A lot of people on the water were doing pretty much all the same thing; we just broke it down into sections. "Okay, I'll do this square. You do this square." Important stuff, but obviously wasn't on land helping people relocate and passing out food and stuff like that. But everything counts.

SI: Do you have any memories of interactions with these foreign navies or other military forces that you dealt with during these exercises?

JI: Oh, man. Croatia's military was very aggressive, very aggressive. We'd get there and we had to walk to a barracks that they set up for us with no hot water, barely any electricity. To them, it was a joke. They were like, "You're on our turf. This is where you're going to sleep." We got there and you got the vibe for how it was going to be for the month we were going to be there. I think we were there for about six weeks. We already got the vibe. Very difficult to work with. We would try to teach them. They just wanted to do what they wanted. They were serving us very disgusting-looking food. They had a little store on their little base; I wasn't allowed to go there. But some of them were very cool. We went to Jordan. The people in Jordan were lovely. We had our own regulations we had to follow--can't talk to females--whatever religious and cultural rules they had to abide by, we had to follow. It was very nice, other than being amazingly hot. Spain, the people there were amazing. I love Spain. Spain was great. Africa, very nice people, very poor country where we were. A lot of kids weren't in school. They'd try to be tour guides and stuff like that. Where else?

Haiti, we didn't interact much with the Haitians because they were in their own lockdown with their government when stuff happened. I think Haiti was the first time where I felt like eyes were on us. I forgot what ship we were on. Oh, man, I forgot what ship we were on, maybe the *Truman*. But we had to go into a black room, and it was sort of like *NCIS* [Naval Criminal Investigative Service], it was like an NTAC [National Threat Assessment Center], and we had the fleet admiral come on from D.C. and went through all the rules of engagement, everything that we could do, could not do, don't do. I remember they said, "If you have any food on you, do not feed any people there. They have their own aid coming in." I guess people were killing each other for food and didn't care for the females, kids.

I remember being out there with my friend Danny and my friend Nuding. I remember we were at the beach, and we were one boat off and we were about to jump on. Maybe five feet to our left was a big pillar that was obviously in ruins, but there was a little kid on there just watching us. He wasn't making any trouble, just looking at us. He picked up his shirt, and it was like one of those commercials where you give thirteen cents to a kid, you could save a starving kid. All you saw were bones. I remember sitting there spitting out sunflower seeds. I didn't even know he was there. I remember just spitting out sunflower seeds. I looked at my friend Nuding, and he's like, "Don't do it. Don't. You give that kid the sunflower seeds, they're going to kill that little kid." They were using the water for toileting and bathing. It was just very rough to see. Katrina was one thing, but we had resources on the ground for Katrina. You go to Haiti; they don't have the resources that Katrina had. They were rushing the fence. They were killing people. Yes, there was a lot of looting in New Orleans during Katrina, but it was a little more

controlled, I guess, in a way, still a horrible disaster but a little more controlled. Haiti was not controlled. Haiti was every man for yourself. Kids were being killed. Females being killed, they didn't care. You've got a cup of rice; you can die for that cup of rice. It was stuff like that.

We had a very lengthy talk about what you could do and could not do, to the point [where], the whole time, I was on edge. I was like, "Man, if I step the wrong way, am I going to get in trouble?" I was very new. I was maybe in the military for a year. It was my first time dealing with something as major as that. I remember getting on that boat, and they kept looking at me. My friend Nuding said to me, "That was a tough decision, but you [made] the right one." I was like, "Yeah." Me and Nuding were the same rank at the time. We had been to boot camp together; we were in different divisions, but we graduated together. I just remember dropping my sunflower seeds, I had them in a Ziploc bag, and I remember dropping them in the water. I was like, "Man, if it gets to you, it gets to you. If it don't, it don't." I always wondered years later, "Man, I wonder if those sunflower seeds got to the beach." It was crazy. But other than Croatia, we never had any issues with any militaries.

I remember when we went to Africa. We went to Africa, and we were doing boat transfers from the boat to the little dock that they had. We went there, and we had to get refueled. While we're refueling, a massive fog came, and you're talking about from me to you, I couldn't see you. So, they had us suspend all boat driving. We're sitting there in the middle of the water on a pier. Now, prior to that, we got there, we get off the plane in Africa, and they put us in this warehouse. The warehouse is fenced in, so there's fence around and in the middle is this brand-new storage warehouse. They put us in; they say, "Hey, wait here. The bus is going to come and pick you up," and then they lock us in. Everyone is like, "What the hell is going on?" There were tricked-out school buses. Then, driving, they were telling us how a lot of civil unrest was happening in Africa. Pirating was really big on the water. You're driving down the street, and you'd see kids with guns. You'd see people on rooftops doing security and some type of surveillance, and it was mind blown.

A few days later, we get stuck on the boat. It's the middle of the night, fog comes in, can't drive, and everyone is just antsy. Everyone was like, "Man, we're just sitting here." There was this abandoned karate school down the street. They said, "If you want, we have access to the building, you sleep in there." No electricity, no nothing. I was like, "Definitely not." I was like, "I'd rather die on my boat than die in an abandoned karate school." Some of the guys went. I was like, "No, I'm good. I'll stay here. If something happens [and] my boat's leaving, I'm on it." Nothing ever happened.

Other than that, I enjoyed all of my deployments. It was great. Obviously, the traveling sucks, but you're in a foreign country, I had never been. Spain was really nice for me because that's where my name comes from. You'd go to the town hall and you look it up, and you see twenty Ituriagas. It's like, "Man, I wonder if we're related. Any of you guys rich? What's going on?" Ironically, where that apartment was--this is an apartment--Ituriagas lived there. I never knocked on the door because Sunday is family time. Shutters are closed. They spend a lot of time with family. But that was a building where two Ituriagas lived. I was like, "Oh, cool." Then, my friend took it [a picture]. There was another part of the picture that I was down by the front door, but this part he really liked, so he made it for me. Yes, two Ituriaga families lived there. I never

knocked on the door or knew who they were, but it was pretty cool. I enjoyed it.

SI: One of the things that always strikes me is even doing routine things, particularly when you're working with the ships, it can turn dangerous quickly, even something like fueling or two boats colliding. Are there any accidents that you recall or any situations like that?

JI: No. We had a bunch of people who fell overboard because they weren't paying attention to what they were doing, but we got them back up really fast. I think the two most dangerous things that happened, one, on the warping tugs that we had, you had hatches and you'd go down to the engine space. One kid left one open, and another kid was walking backwards, pulling some line, and didn't see it and fell right in, busted his head open, needed a bunch of stitches. Then, we had another guy--we always tell people when two boats are together and you're towing, "Be quick, but mind your hands," and he got his hand caught and ripped like two layers of skin off his two fingers. We had another kid who had a ring on. We always wore our rings around our necks. In the water, you can never get hurt that way. It's always just tucked in your uniform. Plus, it's an old Navy tale; you keep your loved one close to your heart, so you wear your ring [around your neck]. We had one kid, the ring crushed the finger. Luckily, they were able to cut the ring. He didn't lose his finger. But that was about it. We never had any dangerous stuff. Very fortunate. We never experienced anything like the *Cole* did with the bombing, nothing like that. Even in Africa, we had a pirate ship come close, a little small boat, and they kept circling us for a day or so. They got close enough that we did some warning shots, and they were gone, never seen them again. But very fortunate. I slipped off the pier when I was in the Naval Academy and I had a massive bruise on my thigh, but that was about it. I'm very fortunate. I never had any major incidents like that, crashing into other boats or anything. No, very fortunate. [Editor's Note: On October 12, 2000, in Aden Harbor, Yemen, the USS *Cole* was struck by a boat packed with explosives, driven by suicide bombers. The explosion killed seventeen American sailors and injured thirty-seven.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: When you were not on duty, what did you do in your off time?

JI: We just hung out. We just hung out at the house. I've always been very laid-back. I wasn't one to always go out to drink or anything like that. We did a lot of stuff at the house, watched sports, stuff like that. We were sort of boring, I guess, compared to other people. In Virginia Beach, we always traveled, went to D.C. and stuff like that. When we went to Maryland, we did a lot of stuff in Baltimore and Annapolis, but just really laid-back stuff. When I was in Virginia Beach, I had a girlfriend. We broke up, and I started dating again. But most of the stuff that we did was just little house parties here and there. It's mostly relax. I started taking up college. I was like, "Well, the Navy is going to pay for it while you're in, so why not take it?" So, I did a lot of college courses. It ended up helping me out when I got out. I did that a lot. Once I started realizing the Navy would pay for schooling, I did a lot of classes. I was in college pretty much in between when I wasn't working.

SI: I know you have a degree from the University of Maryland, and they do a lot of extension work with the military.

JI: I went to Maryland after I got out of the military. While I was in, I did a lot of community college stuff. I went to the community college in Virginia Beach. I went to the community college in Maryland. I always went to schools that stuff would transfer over, so I wouldn't be held up at the end. I did all my basic general ed [education] stuff. By the time I got to Maryland, I went straight into my core stuff. I only had two years left at Maryland. I got out, finished up my two years at Maryland, and then my wife said, "Listen, you've got to go to grad school." I was like, "I'm done. First generation graduate. I'm not going to grad school." My wife said, "Listen, if you want to be a licensed social worker, you've got to go to grad school." I said, "No." Then, she found me USC [University of Southern California], so I went to USC, but it was virtual learning online. I was in the classroom. You had to be there in front of your camera, you and ten other kids. The only good part was you're based off of California time, so you're always three hours behind. I'd get off work at four or five, but I'm taking classes at one o'clock in California. It worked out great. I was still able to work full time and still go to school full time to get my graduate degree. The military paid for pretty much everything other than one semester of grad school. I used my GI Bill perfectly, not to touch it until I got out, and it paid for everything but one semester. I am very fortunate.

SI: At what point were you looking towards social work as a field?

JI: I want to say halfway through, I guess, my community college, when I was in Maryland. I always wanted to teach. I always wanted to do elementary ed. Then, I was at Maryland and started talking to a lot of my friends I was still in the military with. I still do a lot of stuff with that aspect. I started noticing that a lot of military families were on welfare, were trying to work with the system [of] one of the family members who did serve. I said, "I can be a part of that. I want to be a part of that." My advisor always talked to me, she always said, "Joe, listen. Education, you got it. Would you be a great teacher? Yes. But you should look at social work because I think you'd be a great social worker." Teaching is one aspect of a hard job. Social work is also a hard job. I sat down. I went to the VA [Veterans Affairs] in Baltimore because I was still in Maryland, and I saw social workers there to get a feel. I was like, "So many families coming in desperate, needing help, medical, financial, whatever, and there's not enough resources for them." You always had that you're going to go in and change the world type of atmosphere. My mindset was, "I'm going to get my social work degree. I'm going to go work for the VA, and I'm going to change the VA. Whatever is wrong with it up to this point, I'm going to change." That was my goal.

I took family science at Maryland, which is the social work program. Then, I did social work in my graduate program, and I did mental health and I did a sub-concentration in military families just because I wanted to build up my GPA [grade point average]; that was the only reason why. I was in competition with my wife. She's a genetic counselor. I said, "I'm going to get a better GPA than you are." I was like, "If I did military families, I could get my GPA up." Just for the record, I did have a higher GPA than my wife did, in case she ever hears this. I just started noticing stuff. Obviously, when I got out, [my] mindset [was] straight into the VA. Well, the VA is very hard to get into. I started working with the homeless vets, like we talked about earlier, and did that for two-and-a-half years. I loved it, loved every day of my job.

SI: Can you say what the name of the organization is?

JI: Community Hope. I loved it. I had an amazing boss, Luisa, and we're still close now. It was great. Then, managerial changes happened. At that point, I needed something different. I needed a different task to do. I got here, over at Ashbrook, and took over their program. My caseload was not as big as it is here. So just different aspects, a different environment. I went from working strictly with veterans and now I work with everyone. There's some vets here; there's some not. There's some people with all types of mental health disorders, all types of health issues. You just work within that Kool-Aid of a nursing home-type environment. Eyes still on the prize, eventually, I'll get to the VA. It's just a matter of when, not if.

I'm still helping vets out every day. We still do food drives. I made them do a food drive here for vets. I do a lot of stuff over at Lyons [VA Medical Center]. I did my internship over there while I was in grad school. I joined the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] in New Brunswick, just staying active with vets as much as I can. It's always good for your community, but it's also good for my kids to see. Some people get out of the military and they just wash their hands [of] it, but some people still want to help. I always hope that it rubs off on my kids. My daughter loves it. She loves, during the holidays, always making cookies and stuff like that, which is great, just keeping that going. I miss being in the military active duty. I wish I could go back, but now I have a different role, a different job, and it doesn't mean you still can't help out.

SI: What stands out about your interaction with the homeless veterans at Community Hope? I would guess all their stories are very different, but were there any common themes you were seeing?

JI: Unfortunately, you see a lot of stuff with mental health. You see a lot of stuff with addictions to drugs and alcohol. Community Hope covered fifteen counties in New Jersey, and based on where you lived, they tried to put you with counties surrounding you. I lived in Middlesex, so I did a lot of stuff in Monmouth, Mercer County, Middlesex County. My boss Luisa always pushed me. I always worked hard for her, but she always pushed me to be better. I dabbled in a lot of counties that normally I wouldn't [go] to location-wise because it was more like Central Jersey, Middlesex, but I was traveling way up north, Parsippany. I had people in Flemington. I had people in Summit and everywhere in between, Warren County, everywhere, Burlington. I had people on the caseload as young as twenty-eight, younger than me, twenty-eight years old, just got out of the military, was told one thing, got out, couldn't get a job, struggling, living in the car. I had someone who was eighty-seven years old. Their brother thought it would be a good idea to let him go to Trenton and go stay at the Rescue Mission. The guy was eighty-seven years old and he was accepted because he served in the war, and I guess his brother had something medical and got disqualified and hated him ever since, let him stay there, but then kicked him out and wanted him to stay in the Rescue Mission. I'm like, "Oh, my God, this guy's eighty-seven years old and you're going to put him in the Rescue Mission?"

I had everything in between. I had a single females with kids, single moms, single dads, mental health, PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], anxiety, depression, alcohol, substance abuse, cocaine, all that. I guess I was fortunate. Unfortunately, in those situations, you wish you'd never seen that, but you learn stuff from every situation. You learn how to talk to different

people, how to handle someone who is more aggressive compared to someone who is just really lazy and just wants the VA to give them everything and not really understanding that's not how the VA works. It's very hard to get stuff from the VA. Some people who hate the VA, who've been on that aspect, they think the VA is going to give them everything and they got disappointed and now hate the VA. I try and tell them, "Listen, give it a chance. Work within the system." And then everything in between. It was definitely a learning experience. I started there from the bottom. I started doing outreach. All I did was go around and look for homeless vets. Then, as I completed my graduate degree and Louisa saw that I was working hard, she was able to push me to [be a] case manager. Then, I started working with them, getting them from the street into housing. I guess doing everything helped me out. Not that I went straight into case management; I was able to learn how to interact with them on the low level.

SI: In terms of the outreach, would you just go wherever the homeless folks congregated?

JI: Yes. You'd go to the train station, the woods, abandoned buildings. Well, not really abandoned buildings; you can't really walk into them. We'd walk around them and see what's around. Soup kitchens, churches, inside train stations, outside train stations, everywhere in between. It was crazy. I remember when I first started doing outreach, I went to the soup kitchen in Morristown, right in that town area. I don't know if you're familiar with Morristown, right around the green area. We had just moved to Jersey maybe a few months prior. Our daughter had just turned one. I remember sitting there at the table, talking to this one vet. I looked past the vet, and there was a mom feeding a little child, probably three or four. Oh, man, pulled cord, and I remember going home and just hugging my daughter. My wife was like, "What's going on?" I told her. I said, "Listen …" Obviously, she wasn't a vet, so I really couldn't help her. But you see it.

Growing up, my family, we grew up on welfare. We were part of that system as young kids, all the way until we moved to PA probably, and that's when we stopped. We didn't need it anymore. But all the way, I guess, to thirteen years old, thirteen years, we were a part of that system, food stamps, rental assistance, all that. I never forgot that. I never forgot where I came from. You see kids in it. The kid stuff is always heartbreaking to see. I remember coming home and seeing my daughter. You count your blessings. Now, I'm the most fortunate. So, I always try to tell her, "Listen, don't ever take any of this for granted." Me and my wife work extremely hard. We work long hours to make sure that I never have to go back to what my parents struggled with. I always try to make sure that she always gives back, give back to your community, give back to something, because you never know what's going to happen.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your family. You met and married your wife while you were still in the service.

JI: Yes. We met. Very unorthodox. I was seeing someone else at the time. I just wasn't really ready. Then, things happened, people break up, and we reconnected. We just reconnected, rekindled everything, and when we moved to Maryland, we started living together. I got orders to Maryland. She moved in with me. Then, probably a year later, we got married--got engaged, got married--and bought a home. We tried to do everything per steps: move in together, get married, get a house, then have kids. Nine years later and two kids later, it hasn't always been

easy, and we're both similar in aspects of planning and family first. We are an amazing team together. It's been great to not have to worry. One of my friends got married and divorced three times. Very fortunate that any issue that we had had, we were able to work it out. It's not always been easy, but we do what we need to do for the family, and we make sure that we're always there for each other. It's been great. Definitely the military, marriages aren't really long anyway. There's always a high rate of divorce. We have two beautiful kids. My daughter's five. My son just turned six months, and we are done. We are officially done. We would've been done after two anyway if it was a boy or girl.

She was there through the military. She was there for the easy part. Maryland was the easy part. I was on shore duty, so we did a bunch of stuff. If there was a hurricane coming, we worked on the water. We protected the boats that the Naval Academy owned, but didn't deploy, nothing like that. I was very fortunate that we got together at the right time.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: You were talking about how in Maryland it was more of a regular deployment.

JI: Yes, Maryland was more your basic nine to five. I came in in the morning. We had PT two times a week, but our job, summers were longer than the fall. In the winter, you take all the boats out of the water; you did a lot of maintenance, so you were done by two or three o'clock. Summers were long hours. You're prepping boats to go out. The midshipmen would take the sailboats out and do their training out on the water and all that. They'd be gone for two weeks, three weeks at a time. So, you prepped the boats to make sure they're good, the sailboats, and they'd take them out. So, summer was a little longer. It was very lax. Fridays, noon, you're out of here type deal. We always did stuff as a unit on Friday, went to lunch or did something. It was great. I think it was maybe a handful of times that we stayed overnight if the water was really bad to protect the boats and stuff like that. It was a totally different environment.

The unit that we were a part of, the sail team, we fell underneath NCAA Collegiate Sailing randomly, so we had to wear polos and khakis and stuff like that. I only wore a uniform when we switched uniforms for the season or if there was a ceremony. I maybe wore my uniform a handful of times in three years. It was great. On the other side, they were wearing full uniforms and stuff. They'd always get pissed. It was very lax. It was very laid back. I loved it. We always did stuff. We always hosting Thanksgiving for the unit to make sure if they didn't go home, they stayed with us for the dinner. I loved it. It was great.

SI: You were in for eight years. At that point, you felt like you wanted to get your degree and start your career?

JI: Yes, something like that. Towards the end, I was very on the fence because, at the time, they were doing the whole PCS [Permanent Change of Station] thing, so you had to get qualified to do your job, in a way. After six or seven denials, you get out of the military, if you want to reenlist. I was on the fence. I went to my PCS and I failed, denied, denied, denied. The very last one, they approved me. I talked to my wife, and I was like, "Listen." She loved the military. She loved what I did. She loved giving back, but she was like, "If you want to start a family, I

don't know if we can do it if you're on active duty because your next orders will be somewhere overseas, somewhere really far away." We'd just bought a home. It was a very tough decision, but I ended up getting out. I thought back to, "The whole goal was four years and get out. You did eight. You did twice what you said you were going to do and did a lot of cool things in between." So, I got out.

Then, obviously, upon getting out, you go through that withdrawal in a way where you're like, "Man, I should've stayed in." You go back to school. At that time, I was twenty-nine years old, going to school with a bunch of eighteen-year-old kids who were lazy. By this time, you sucked in all the Kool-Aid from the military. You know how to get up early. You know how to prep yourself. You are a totally different human being. Now, I'm working with eighteen-year-old kids who are just like, "Yes, I show up when I show up." I'm like, "Oh, my God, this is so frustrating." Even working, I got a part-time job when I got out just to make some extra money, working with kids. I was working at Under Armour, doing retail. Kids would work a four-hour shift, and they're like, "This is so long." I'm like, "You kids don't know what the hell a shift is, man. You don't know what it's like." You go through that.

After the first year, it's like, "Man, I should've stayed in. I'm not adjusting well. This is not my life." It was hard. It was hard. The adjustment was very hard. I'm fortunate that my wife, she's never not had my back. She always pushed me to keep going, to finish up school, and go to grad school. I felt like it would have been different if my wife was lazy and was like, "Okay, you just do whatever you want. You want to work part time, go work part time." I think it would have affected me more, but she was always motivating me. She always pushed me, "Listen, don't let it go for nothing. Finish up undergrad and go on to grad school." I had that aspect, and I had the goal, the plans. I guess I was fortunate compared to other people who get out with no plan and they go through that sort of resentment of getting out like I did, but then they didn't really have [a] plan going forward. Me, I had a plan; I just wish I still had done it while I was still on active duty, but you can't change it.

SI: You were at the University of Maryland for two years after you got out.

JI: Yes, about two, almost three years, and then we moved.

SI: Did they have a veterans' adjustment program there?

JI: No, not really. You go through the basic TAP program, the Transitional Assistance Program, that every branch does. But there was really nothing. I mean, they probably had VFWs and American Legions to join. I know Maryland had a very good vet program. We had our own little lounge. They were very active in vet stuff, probably because they were so close to D.C. and they were close to Baltimore, so they had vets on both sides. We always did stuff with them as far as a community-type aspect of it. But the transitional program is sort of a joke. They talk about it in a general aspect, like, "Oh, you get out. Have a résumé," blah, blah, blah, but they don't teach you how to do it per state. They don't say, "Okay, well, where are you going? You're going back to Jersey? Well, okay, this is a good resource for you in Jersey." "Are you going back to Maryland? Here's some resources in Maryland." I feel like they spend a lot of time on the interview process, which is great. Everyone should learn how to interview. But if you're not

telling someone how to look up resources in their state, you're failing them in a way. They need to know where the local VA is. They don't even talk about it. When I was getting out, they said, "Where are you staying?" I said, "Oh, I'm going to stay in Maryland and finish up school." They didn't tell me that the VA hospital was in Baltimore. They said, "Okay, well, you've got to work on your résumé." I get it, but where is my next step? How do I get connected to the hospital? How do I connect to so-and-so? I had to do all that legwork myself, but it is what it is. But not everyone is going to be as motivated as I was, or at least be mature enough to do that, or have a wife that pushes you to do that stuff. So, I was fortunate. But there are a lot of kids who get out who are not. I get it; it's a money thing. They teach the same TAP program across the board. You have to be more generalized. You have to start giving people more options, especially now. People get out with whole different problems. Young kids join, get out, but what are they going to do? What's the next step? Now, I talk about it, so I put the social worker hat on. "I'm a social worker. I do this."

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: Just a general question, during your time in the service, obviously, Iraq and Afghanistan were going on. There was the anti-war movement going up and down. Does any of that affect you when you are in the military? Is it something that you followed? Does that have an effect on you?

JI: No, it didn't. The closest we got to any type of war environment was when we went to Jordan. We were never in the deployed status where we were heading over there. I stuck on it with the news; you read about it and you hear about it in the news, but it was never something that directly affected me. Even the anti-war stuff, I never got involved in. It just wasn't my thing. I loved the military. I loved that I joined. After I went to boot camp and stuff like that, I drank the military Kool-Aid, where, "This is it. This is great. I'm serving my country." It didn't mean I had to go to war for it, but I still served my country in other aspects. I still did things that mattered. I just never got involved in those types of things, any anti-war stuff.

When I was at the Naval Academy, that's when "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" got switched. That really affected us as far as me being in more of a supervisor role at that point and leadership role, where I had to break that barrier up between people who on one side [said], "I hate gays. I hate all this." Then, there would be a kid in my unit who was homosexual, and working that bridge, "Listen, outside of here, you don't approve it, that's fine. When you're here, you're in the military. Act like you serve in the military. You want to get out and go home and bash homosexuals; that's your right. But when you're here, you're together. You're a unit." That was big for us, especially me, working that aspect. Any anti-war stuff, Iraq--I had a few friends who deployed over and very fortunate they all made it back. But I never got involved in it. [Editor's Note: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) refers to the former U.S. policy (1993-2011) regarding the service of homosexuals in the military. While the policy intended to allow gay and lesbian service members to continue to serve in the military as long as they did not openly declare their sexuality, in practice the policy led to many gay and lesbian service members to be discharged from the service. In 2011, during the Barack Obama Administration, DADT was formally repealed, allowing gay and lesbian service members to serve openly in the armed forces.]

SI: It sounds like you always had good relations with your officers and the people in charge.

JI: Yes. My whole eight years in the military, I got in trouble once for talking back to a senior chief, and I'd never do that again. I got reamed out for doing that. Even my good friend, who's in Japan now, she was my boss at the time. So, they went to her directly and told her what happened, and she got into me when I got back. It was just a lack of judgment, and I should've just kept the lips zipped. But at the Naval Academy, I never had an incident. There was one time when I lost my cool on one of the younger guys, and you sort of get reprimanded in a way, "Do you agree with what you did? Yes." Boatswain's mates have a certain way of talking to people. "But can you do that all the time? No." So, in eight years, I was very fortunate. I never had any issues. I never had no Captain's Mast, no write-ups, no nothing, never was late, none of that stuff. I think the most I got in trouble, other than talking back, was one time, when I was at the Seabees, we had the bootstraps to hold the pants up, and I remember having an inspection, and one time, my pants sagged too low. But I was very fortunate, very fortunate. [Editor's Note: "Captain's Mast" is a non-judicial punishment procedure in the U.S. Navy under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. It authorizes commanders to discipline service members without having to convene a court-martial.]

SI: Is there any other aspect of your time in the service that I am either missing or that you would like to talk about?

JI: No, I think we hit it all. I loved it. It was eight great years in the service. I was very fortunate that the Army said no and the Navy said yes. I especially felt like my family, my dad didn't know why. I'm pretty sure my grandfather probably would have rolled over in his grave if I would have joined the Army. But it took me around the world. It gave me a different experience. It gave me amazing friends that I still [have]. I always was a hard worker prior. Yes, I had my periods of being lazy, but it instilled a different aspect in me. It flipped a switch. Sometimes, I drive my wife crazy. I'm like, "We've got to be fifteen minutes early. If we're on time, we're late." I still have that mentality. I get on my daughter like I'm in the military. I tell her all the time, "Sweetie, you've got to go to bed on time. You've got to listen. You've got to focus. You've got to do all these things." I'm always talking to her about the military and always talking about giving back to vets. But I think we touched on pretty much everything. I don't think there's nothing we haven't talked about yet.

SI: Looking back, what skills do you think you use from your time in the service in your current position?

JI: I'm definitely more time structured now. I'm definitely schedule structured. Back in the day, I would be like, "Okay, I'll be there at one." If I'm there at one, I'm fine. One-fifteen, okay. Now, I hit the ground running. Fifteen minutes prior, I'm always up. Unfortunately, you go through so many years of having to wake up early, my body just now--I have never really been a deep sleeper anyway, but my body, five-fifteen, eyes are opening up. Eight years later, I'm just like, "I want to sleep in." Even in the military, I always joked around a lot, and here, I joke around. I'm one of two males who work in a director position of all females, and I'm very fortunate. Every job I had from the military all the way until now, I had a female boss. The Naval Academy was the first time I had a male boss. But I always had a female boss, so I know

how to work with females probably better than I work with men. I had very strong female leadership. I had females who didn't want to be handicapped in a way and handheld. My good friend who's in Japan [is a] very hardworking female, and I learned from her. Even when I got out and I worked part time at Under Armour, I had a very strong female, and when I got to Community Hope, Louisa was phenomenal. My boss now, here, she's great. But I know how to work within diverse units and teamwork. High-stress situations, got it; I know how to do that. Part of a small team, big team, got it.

All those little things that you really don't know you have until you have to put it to use, I'm fortunate I put it to use for eight years. It was always on display. Here or anywhere since, I always used it. Hard work is hard work. I had that prior to the military, but all the little things that heightened my job ability, I got from the military, being task-oriented and stuff like that.

Even in my marriage, we clicked. Me and my wife clicked so much that we both are very scheduled and very goal-oriented and very focused, and we know how to work together and [have] effective communication and all that. It makes it work. I really didn't have that prior to the military. I had a group of friends and I worked part-time jobs here and there, but you're eighteen years old, seventeen years old; all you think about was getting off and go party and stuff like that. I was able to compartmentalize certain things, if I got off work, "I know I've got homework to do. I'm in college. I'm paying for it. Don't waste your money." But once I joined the military, it flipped a switch. Some people don't. I was able to drink that Kool-Aid and be like, "All right, these are amazing tools. Use them, never lose them." It's been great. I think everything I do from here, from pretty much 2012 on, has been in some way or form shaped [by] what I learned in the military.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to share?

JI: No, that's pretty much about it. I live a very boring life, nothing that my kids will listen to and be like, "Oh, my God, I didn't know [that] about my dad."

SI: Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

JI: Thank you.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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