

INTERVIEWER: This interview is between Melanie Zbinden and myself. Today is Wednesday, June 15th, 2016, and we are in Melanie's home in Dothan, AL. Describe what your thought process was why you wanted to become a nurse.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I did not really know anyone – well, I had a friend in high school whose mother was a nurse, but I never talked about that. I never really thought about doing that. In fact, up until the summer before my senior year, I was going to major in music.

INTERVIEWER: I could see that with you.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: And so it was just like – all of a sudden I had been praying that the Lord would lead me to what I needed to do, and He said you need to go and be a nurse. I didn't have any experience. I didn't know what to expect. I had nothing. So I said okay, "I'll do that." So my senior year I started looking at schools, and I was accepted to three, and made the decision to go to Georgia Baptist.

INTERVIEWER: So that's the next question, was why did you choose Georgia Baptist?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Financial was one of them.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Because the other two were Baylor and Samford. So I knew I needed to be somewhere where it wouldn't be so expensive, because my dad didn't have money to send me to school. I had to get loans and grants and stuff, to go. So that's what made me – also the hospital program – I am a visual learner; hands-on I learn twice as fast, versus just book. I knew that once I looked at the programs and what they offered, I knew that I would benefit. I would perform better, having done it.

INTERVIEWER: So that kind of leads into the next question. So, at the time... nursing has for years wanted the baccalaureate degree, so were you aware at the time – because those other two schools had baccalaureate programs.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No. I was not aware of that at all, and I didn't even understand that I wouldn't be equal to, until I was already in there. Then I realized. That was unfortunate to me, but it wasn't unfortunate enough for me to say oh please, let me forget this one and go on down the road.

INTERVIEWER: Talk about the classes at Georgia Baptist.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I remember that there was such camaraderie because we were all going toward the same thing. It wasn't – there wasn't a divided focus. I think that's one of the things that helped me so much. Not only did I go to class with people who were in my class and were all doing the same thing – I know we were divided out but – you know what I'm saying. Essentially we were going all to the same class. So we learned from each other as much as we learned in class. So, being taught the same way, it was amazing how like – you might remember what, now this is what they said, and I would remember this is what they said, and having that together. Also, living there with just girls, and everyone going to be a nurse, you know you don't have music majors and everything else in there – there was, even our talk afterwards was of nursing, or what we've learned, or you know, help teach me this, or that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Kind of like an immersion experience.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes, exactly.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything specific about any of the classes?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I remember that Microbiology was awful.

INTERVIEWER: With Ms. Tribble?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh, my, gosh, yes, and having those little things labeled with the pins. That was a fate worse than death, I'm telling you. That was awful.

INTERVIEWER: They all looked the same to me.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes! I'm like, really? You've got to be kidding me. That and the pharmacology. I remember pharmacology not making sense to me. I learn better if I understand what's going on. I remembered enough to memorize to pass the test, but it never clicked.

INTERVIEWER: No, I think – was it the guy from Mercer pharmacy school?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I can't remember his name

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I think he was on such a higher level than us – he was just so far out there, I could not relate.

INTERVIEWER: You know what I remember from that class? They do good, and then they have side effects.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I remember that I went to him several times and said I've got to do really well. I've got to pass this. It was one of the courses that I had trouble with, as well as Micro. I remember going to him and he said okay, you need to study and these are the things you need to study, and so that's what I did, and that's why I passed. I remember that.

INTERVIEWER: Well that's good.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah. Oh you know he helped me out there. I don't remember so much my – that first year of classes, that's very . . . I remember when I was in all the nursing classes, the fact that everything that was taught to us, the majority of it we saw, at some part. And seeing it, and learning it was fabulous.

INTERVIEWER: Feel like it's because –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh absolutely. That was the making, I think, of all of us. I think that that's why we did so well on boards is because – you know, I remember on boards questions and I would be sitting there and I'd say, okay now, this was Mr. Smith- he had this. Okay Melanie, those questions – Okay, oh, it was A & B, definitely. You know, you learned that because we did it.

INTERVIEWER: Put it into practice, yeah. Talk about clinical. What do you remember about clinical?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I remember that at first it was very stressful, and I remember that the medication part, memorization, um – but I loved it. I loved it. I loved the clinical part. That was my favorite.

INTERVIEWER: Where all did you have clinicals?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Georgia Baptist. I had clinical at Grady, some ICU (intensive care unit). Stroke unit. I did the ambulance.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, did you ride the ambulance downtown?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah, and Georgia Regional for Psych. Oh, my, gosh. The stories I could tell you there.

INTERVIEWER: Well tell some stories.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Listen, there was, um, Psych was one of those things that I never did get, because . . . I can say this, I'll say it – if you need to edit it out, you can. I feel like so much of Psych nursing is not the way God intended it. I feel like they do a lot of blaming and things like that in Psych, and so the first test I did in Psych I made a 45 on, and I almost died. So I – at that point I learned what the problem was. So I made one of my highest grades in all my classes in Psych that year, because I always chose the answer of what I would never do.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah that makes sense.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: What I would never do. I would never say that because it's wrong, but that's what they want you to say and that's how they want you to do it. So anyway so my Psych experience... so I went into Psych thinking, oh, my, gosh, I'm going to do something wrong because I don't believe the things, the treatments and stuff that they're doing. I went to Georgia Regional where we had to be there and we were put on suicide – we were locked in, for the eight hours. When we were locked in, I recognized that these people were unhappy. They were so unhappy, and so distraught, and so anxious, and everything else, and they felt so awful about themselves. So I – several of us – I said, “Y'all, you know what we need to do? We need to do a beauty parlor.” So we . . . on our girls – the four or five of us that were there – every Friday we cut hair, styled it, put makeup on, and did everything for them. It was wonderful. I had never cut African American hair before in my life. I had cut – but I cut everybody's hair.

INTERVIEWER: Did they like it?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: They loved it. It made them feel good. So, and just the fact that we were taking care of them. I was playing cards with the group one time and we were playing – oh gosh what is it? Crazy 8s, where you say two sevens or two eights? Is that what it is? The guy put in – and he flipped them over so we could see it – it was like a five and an eight, and he said two nines, and I said you're crazy.

INTERVIEWER: That wasn't very therapeutic [Laughs]–

MELANIE ZBINDEN: [Laughs]. No, it was not very therapeutic! He looked at me and he said “That's why I'm here.” And I thought oh me. He was, he was pretty normal, but he had just had some alcohol issues and that's why he was there but still I felt so awful that I said that out loud, but you know, it was just, rolled right on out there.

INTERVIEWER: That's so funny. Go back and talk about riding the ambulance at Grady. How did you feel about that?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Boy, I was downtown, of course, and I did it three to eleven or eleven – one of those.

INTERVIEWER: Three to eleven –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: And one time I had – I rode with a black guy and a white guy. They were both sweet as they could be. They were young. They were probably only about three or four years older than me.

INTERVIEWER: Probably.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah because I was, what, twenty? Twenty-one? Yeah, they hadn't been out there that long and they said – they looked at me and they got in my face and they said, "Melanie, if I tell you to go to the ambulance, you go to the ambulance. You don't ask. You don't do anything. I tell you to go to the ambulance." He said, "Because we've been in situations before where . . ." We had a call, a little boy got hit by a car, and it was down there across from the stadium, on the other side of (Interstate) 75/85, and . . . He broke his leg. It wasn't an awful thing. He rode out in front of a lady. This was a black neighborhood and she was a white lady going home, and she hit him – well, a crowd gathered of about – by the time we got there, there were about probably sixty people there. Both guys looked at me and said, "Melanie, if I tell you to go get in the truck, go get in the truck." I said, "Okay." So I went out there and tried to help the little lady because she was just crying. She was so upset. And the mother was okay, but all the neighbors were causing a ruckus, trying to make it an issue of race, and it wasn't an issue of race. They started closing in on us. The guys turned around and they said, "Melanie, get in the truck." So I had to go get in the truck. I remember that because it was – it was dark; it was like about eight o'clock at night. So . . . it was in the summer. So it, you know - but I remember that.

Yes, but see, my home care, my home healthcare. I was down there. That's what I did, was downtown Atlanta. So I was right in there after, after that. It enthralled me. I never was scared. I guess I was too foolish to be scared, but I never was scared.

INTERVIEWER: That's okay. Did you go to Grady for labor and delivery?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No, I did not. I wanted – labor and delivery I did it at Baptist, yeah. I went to Scottish Rite for Peds (pediatrics).

INTERVIEWER: The new hospital had been built by then. It used to be in Decatur, right, and then they were out where it is now?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes, you're right. But it was only one floor when I went out there as a – and then [pause] –

INTERVIEWER: Now its [garbled]

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah, quite a bit.

INTERVIEWER: What about the clinicals at Georgia Baptist? You remember any?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I remember that Joanna Green was my neuro professor, instructor. So I had gone and I was assigned to a patient, and it was a patient that was in a coma, and, um, I had done all my research of course and done all that, and then when I got there that day, I had just been in there to check on my patient, and I came out and she said we have someone in septic shock. You'll never get this chance again. You need to go in here and take care of this person in septic shock. The information and the knowledge I gained from that . . . In fact, I stayed nine hours that day to get – and I never left his bedside. Never left, because we were taking vital signs every fifteen minutes, because –

INTERVIEWER: He was so unstable.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Was he on the floor, or –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes. I'm surprised they didn't move him to the unit. But no he wasn't -

INTERVIEWER: We had sicker patients. ICUs (intensive care units) were still so new, then. So talk about the different classes, like freshmen, junior, senior –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: The freshmen of course are Know Nothing. They're the bottom rung. And, um, but you never felt inferior. I don't believe that our big sister classes made us feel inferior. They were more, like, nurturing, like you do with a younger brother or sister, sibling. You know, of course you're going to tease them sometimes, and harass them sometimes, but you're not ever hateful or mean. And it fostered – I think Georgia Baptist fostered very much the attitude of what I learn, then I'm responsible for making sure you learn it, as my little sister or in a younger class, because I enjoyed that so much – the opportunity to teach the others. If I had been a better student or enjoyed it more, I could've been any kind of student I wanted, honestly. I just did not want to do any better.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't you get Miss Student Nurse of the Year?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes. Miss GBH, or something.

INTERVIEWER: - or something like that –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah but that was a – it was – that was, um –

INTERVIEWER: That was quite an honor.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: It was quite an honor, but it was more where people voted. It wasn't that I was scholastically at the top of my class.

INTERVIEWER: I think it meant that you were a good clinical nurse. You don't have to be a straight A student to be a good clinical nurse.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: But I would have loved to have gone to school and taught nursing. I would have loved that but every job – just about – that I got. . .

INTERVIEWER: But you're still teaching.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. That's what I do, all the time, now.

INTERVIEWER: So you feel like that started when you were at Georgia Baptist?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes. Very much.

INTERVIEWER: [Laughing] Yes. So talk about the Big Sister- Little Sister thing – because nobody's talked about that yet.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Okay, it's where you're chosen. Someone in your Big Sister class –

INTERVIEWER: The class a year ahead of you--

MELANIE ZBINDEN: - was a year ahead of me. I came in September and graduated in June, so the class that was a year ahead was my Big Sister class. You would get to meet them through choir, or just through eating meals, or just through various clubs. Then you would be identified and they'd say okay, you – I want you to be my Big Sister- Little Sister. How they would do it, is they would come in and they would decorate your room and it would say will you be my Little Sister? It was just, I think, another layer of, you learn to take care of other people. It's the whole focus of caring for others.

INTERVIEWER: They made that chain. Don't you remember those little, like one for each month you're in school and we hung them by the closet. Your Big Sister didn't do that for you?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: She didn't do that, no. That's okay.

INTERVIEWER: You took one off each month until you got to the end and then you graduated.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: My Big Sister was Valedictorian. She was really smart, and she died very shortly –

INTERVIEWER: Who was your big sister?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: [Pause] now that you asked me. I can see her. I know. Oh my goodness. Gwen.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Gwen Bramlett.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: We were just talking about her yesterday. She was the first nurse that I ever knew that had a master's degree from Georgia Baptist and was the Clinical Nurse Specialist in the ICU. How did she die?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Don't know, I never – I didn't find out until years later, that it happened.

INTERVIEWER: I remember at one of the Alumni Days they announced it.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Then my Little Sister also died.

INTERVIEWER: Oh my goodness. Who was your Little Sister? You don't remember her name either?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh, my, gosh... She had epileptic seizures –

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Teresa Short.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: She ended up – she was in our class eventually, even though we started two years apart.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: That was so awful. She taught me a lot about epilepsy, because she had a seizure one time in my room.

INTERVIEWER: Oh she did.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah, and I had to help take care of her, and went through it with her and kind of helped her understand what she was going through affects her physically, you know. Kind of a life lesson.

INTERVIEWER: She wouldn't wake up in time for class which I think is why I think she struggled.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah. I think you're right.

INTERVIEWER: Talk about the capping and the blue stripe and the black band –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Those are wonderful things. It's heritage. It is making a concerted effort to focus on and make a big deal about someone's accomplishments. That's how I feel like it was. That's why I think they were so important, because it . . . and it was also a rite of passage, to a great degree, because you knew when you got that stripe on there – when you got your cap and then when you got the stripe on there and then when you got the black band, oh boy. You were big.

INTERVIEWER: You knew you had arrived.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh, I mean - you had arrived, big time.

INTERVIEWER: I remember you were a senior when I was a freshman and I thought y'all knew – y'all were so confident, and I thought you guys knew more than the nurses.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: We were. And that was bred into us because our instructors did that. I count our instructors – because they would tell us, you can do this. They deliberately put us in situations that were really crazy. We needed to see, when we had someone – I use this analogy all the time, especially with my babies that are in ICU (intensive care unit). We have these babies who are in ICU and these moms and dads who are learning their care. They are surrounded by all these nurses who know what's going on and that's their safety net. But when they get home, they have to perform, just like they did in the hospital, without all that support. That's one of the things that I do a lot, when teaching with moms.

INTERVIEWER: That role transition, going from being the mom in the hospital to the caregiver.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. I said utilize these nurses now. Don't try to do everything by yourself. When you have questions, you ask questions. I think that that's how

they did with us. They pushed us into situations because they knew, at some point, they weren't going to be there and they were going to have to make those decisions.

INTERVIEWER: Like step-wise progression, like you learned this and then they added that and then their confidence grew.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. And we had done so much. I remember giving report when I was a, um, when you were – you know, that's when you were doing the, oh god, and see . . . Anyway, it's when we did the course where we –

INTERVIEWER: Leadership?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes. Where we actually [Pause]

INTERVIEWER: Were team leaders –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. I remember giving the report. I did six weeks on the ortho floor because I really enjoyed that. Let's get them better and send them on out the door. I remember that I gave report, and when I gave report, there were two new grads that were there, within six months, that were receiving a report on three eleven and they said now . . . when did you graduate? I said I haven't graduated, and they said, "You just told me that you'd given over thirty shots today." I said, "Yeah, I have." One of them said, "I have never given an injection to anything but an orange." She was an Emory graduate. I said, oh me, in my mind. I didn't say that out loud. But I thought, oh, my, gosh, I would be terrified. Having not done all that I had done. It was scary enough. You think about it. We are the only people at our age who graduated at twenty-one years old that made the life and death decisions. We made them more than the med students – who always had somebody over them.

INTERVIEWER: You felt prepared

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes, I was prepared.

INTERVIEWER: Let's see. Talk about the faculty. Did they? . . . you talked about Joanna Greene. Any others?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Susan . . . Ford. In my leadership, I really wanted to do labor and delivery, and of course that's what everybody wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: Yes that's what I did and I hated it.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Okay. Well . . . yeah. Let me tell you. So anyway, so she talked me into going and doing normal nursery, and OB (obstetrics).

INTERVIEWER: OK. I think that was her background.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: She said that would give me – yes, that was her background. So she talked me into doing that. So I said, “Okay.” So I did that. After a week, I went to her and I said, “Get me off this floor.” I said, “If I have to see one more bottom or one more boob, I am going to jump out the window.” I had no tolerance for these mothers who had had a baby – that’s all they’d had was a baby – and they couldn’t lift their right hand over there to get their drinking glass water and drink. I’d been down there with people who’d been in bad accidents and who had had total hips and who had had spinal issues –

INTERVIEWER: So labor and delivery was not your thing.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No. And she said. “No, Melanie, you will stay here. You will learn all you can, because this is reality. You’re going to sometimes have jobs that you do not like at all. You don’t like the patients. You don’t like the people you work with. You don’t do everything.” She said, “But it builds character.” That’s what she told me. So I went there and I told the Lord, I said, “Lord if you get me off this floor, I promise I will never go back because I wanted to kill those patients.” [Laughs] I learned very quickly I did not need to be there.

INTERVIEWER: You never worked in labor and delivery again even a day –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No, not even a float day. Oh no.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, it takes a unique, I mean – you have to really like it to work in labor and delivery. Any other instructors that you remember?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Carolyn Blalock. She was good. She was one of those that just seemed to have it all together. She was always calm. Always just kind of – always seemed to be in charge and everything was fine. That’s probably – Joanna Greene, to me, was the epitome of the kind of nurse I wanted to be. She was very personable but she could still garner your respect. Some of them, they were almost too difficult. They enjoyed being difficult. I’m not going to name names.

INTERVIEWER: That’s fine. You don’t have to.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: But they enjoyed being difficult. There was one in particular that made people cry every clinical day.

INTERVIEWER: I may have had that person.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Probably did. Everybody did, and I was determined she would not break me. She didn't ever make me – not that she could see, because, you know, I cried when I got back. I thought, I did not like that because to me, you don't learn as much in fear as you do when you are nurtured. It wasn't a nurturing environment at all, with her. – being difficult. That's the only negative one that I had, the whole time. Everything else was a very positive experience. Who was the lady who used to work three to eleven and we always – she was so sweet. A lot of the people, a lot of the nursing students had Miss Gaffney and they said oh she doesn't know – Miss Gaffney knew so much.

INTERVIEWER: She had been a nurse for a long, long time.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes. She was just very easygoing, and people thought because she was easygoing she didn't – but she was so kind and nice to those patients. I think those kinds of things – the kind of things that we learned that when you go in and you see a patient in there that one of the first things you do is you grab the end of their covers and pull it up so that their toes are not pressed down.

INTERVIEWER: They don't get foot drop.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. Those kinds of things, they never do any more. That's not something that's taught.

INTERVIEWER: I do it.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I do it. When I go visit people in the hospital, one of the first things, in fact – my mother had surgery and she had never been sick at all, and she had to have surgery, and so we went to see her and Dee came in and the first thing she did was adjust that. How did you know that was killing my feet? It was ingrained in us.

INTERVIEWER: It was. Yeah. Do you find that there are those little things that they taught us, those little basic things that you still do. Like the pillowcase, do you still put your pillowcases on?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes. And I do the –

INTERVIEWER: Mitered corners?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes, and I do the mitered corners, Yes, mitered, absolutely. Absolutely, Laura. The other thing I was thinking about like the positioning – the things that you learned with the pillows and stuff like that – that is not taught. I can't tell you the amount of

times I had friends or family that have had surgery and they always – Melanie I can't get up or I don't know how to do this. They didn't show you how to do this?

INTERVIEWER: To splint. I know.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah. In the hospital? No they didn't, or they don't tell them about the importance of pillows. Even now, with total hips and total knees – it's amazing the amount of stuff that I teach them, over the phone.

INTERVIEWER: That's good. Aren't you glad that you were taught those little things?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I'm very grateful.

INTERVIEWER: Talk about activities – any kind of events that happened. You were involved in a lot of things.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I want you to talk about senior raids because when I think about senior raids I think about you.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh me. I didn't do senior raids, did I?

INTERVIEWER: Yes you did [Laughs].

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Are you sure? [Laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Yes. There was that sound that you knew. Remember it?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No. I really don't remember about senior raids, Laura, I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER: Are you serious? I think you were one of the first ones that did it when I was a freshman.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I'm sure I was. If I could – I was a ringleader in lots of things.

INTERVIEWER: Yes you were. You could hear that banging sound coming down the hallway and you'd get up and try to lock that door as fast as you could. You don't remember?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No I don't. That's awful that I don't, but I don't remember. One of the things that's burned into my memory and I don't know if you even need to know this was because my fourth quarter of my freshman year was in the summer time. Of course everybody else that you knew that was in college was home. That was almost painful, you know. Here you are in Atlanta, you know, and it's a Thursday night, and you're stuck inside. I had been studying for a test and I was over it. You can only study so much. Your brain can just only hold so much. So I have a very vivid imagination – always have. You know how the windows at Georgia Baptist were altered? Third floor was directly under fifth floor, and fourth under sixth, that kind of thing. That's how they were. The windows there, you could stand completely up in the window –

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah they were huge.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes, they were really long and tall, and you know, no-one ever jumped out or anything crazy like that, they probably sealed them up after a few years, but they didn't with us. We had the door open and it was comfortable. It was a late spring, early summer evening. We thought how funny would be to get these jumping ropes and to dangle them down into the room below us, and swing it in the window, because everybody had their windows open. They said Melanie. . . It wasn't that I was trying to traumatize or do anything like that. I just thought it would be funny. Do you remember this?

INTERVIEWER: I don't think you did it to me.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No, no, no. So anyway, the first quarter freshmen were here on – the March class was here and it was their first quarter. You know how kind of out of water you are that first quarter, just kind of getting your bearings. We were on the fifth floor. We lived on the fifth floor, but the girls – there were no doors, there were no windows on our side that were open. So we got one of my suite-mates' donkeys, little donkey, stuffed donkey, name was Damaris. We tied a rope around him and – we tied three ropes around him. It wasn't enough to go down. We tried it down that side just to see how many we would need, and we had to have three jump ropes. This is when everybody was jumping rope and doing all this kind of stuff. You know, majoring in PE (physical education). So anyway, we went over there to the other side of the thing to see. So we went over to the other side and underneath our friends, there was a room that was on the third floor, that had the window wide open. So we dangled it down. It went all the way in and back out and we, you know, nothing. So I said we need to do it one more time. There were four of us standing there looking. It went all the way in, and you hear this [makes screaming sound] and it just reverberated because that was the side with the courtyard. So it just was like someone was, you know, being murdered. So I started quickly bringing it back up. The bottom rope came loose and the donkey fell to the ground below. So

two of the girls went down there and retrieved it, and when they retrieved it – when this girl had this screaming fit, everyone from the floor ran there. Come to find out the girl had issues. They had to take her to the ER (emergency room). She had to be medicated.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Melanie.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: [Laughs] I'm not laughing at her demise. I'm just saying, of all the people. Then the housemother came up. The housemother went up and identified us and then next day. She said, "You will hear from Mrs. Ransbotham." You know, so the next day we all got up and got dressed. You know how you just went to class and kind of threw on something? No, we got up and put dresses on, and everything else. We ended up having to go and talk to her and she said, "I can't believe that you girls – who actually did this?" I said, "Me." She said, "Well whose idea was it?" I said, "Mine." She told me that I should – and the whole time – who was the second one in command?

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Gunby.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No, no, no – she wasn't then.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Rainey.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Mrs. Rainey. She was sitting behind Ms. Ransbotham with her hand over her mouth. She was shaking so hard during the time I was telling the story. Tears were in her eyes. They didn't ever come out, but they were in her eyes, and I thought oh my goodness. But anyway, she said, "You girls, you don't ever do anything like that, without making sure that they can handle (it)." And I said, "I'll be glad to apologize. I never meant any harm." We told them we didn't. We had our picture taken for the yearbook with the four of us holding Damaris the donkey. We did a skit our senior year. In fact, we went to this girl because we said we want to do this skit but we don't want to offend you. We said is it okay? She said no, it's fine. Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Looking back, she probably thought it was funny.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. But it was just . . . you know. So anyway, that's one of the things I remember. No, I don't remember senior raids but I remember that.

INTERVIEWER: I can't believe you don't remember senior – where you'd get pots and pans and shaving cream –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh yes, and water. Sometimes you'd get water and throw. Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And run down to the freshman floor –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh yeah. I remember that. Yes. But see, I loved being the Big Sister. I guess – maybe it's because I was the oldest one in my family, and so . . . But I always loved – because when the new ones came in I was always one of the ones that went and welcomed them.

INTERVIEWER: How about the choir?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: That was so much fun. It was a good outlet. It was one normal thing that wasn't stressful. You know in that first year, you're getting used to everything, but you want to feel like you're doing something fun, too, and that was fun. Being able to go and tell other people about what we did, and drum up money for the school – that was fun.

INTERVIEWER: Money raised, and it was used for recruiting.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. And then we went to Jamaica that year. That was fabulous.

INTERVIEWER: It was. We went back the next year, too. The first year was better.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah, okay. It was good. And what else was I thinking about? I was on the yearbook, and I was a photography editor, and enjoyed doing that. Enjoyed getting the pictures and depicting our, *Hypo*. Anyway, that was a lot of fun.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the Halloween –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh yes, where we dressed up?

INTERVIEWER: The festival, the Halloween –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was it called? The Fall Festival or the Halloween Festival?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I think it was the Halloween Festival that we did. We had a lot of people from around the community.

INTERVIEWER: The faculty would bring their kids.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes, that was fun. I remember one year I dressed up as a Sugar Daddy.

INTERVIEWER: OK, how did you do that?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: The candy. I painted – I got the wrapper and I painted, on cardboard, and it tied together, and I wore yellow and then I had white hose of course, the nursing hose, and like the stick, and my nursing shoes.

INTERVIEWER: That was cute.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah, it was fun. I remember one year doing that. I don't remember what I was the other years. Oh yes. I enjoyed doing all those kinds of things and my – when I was in high school I made straight A's, and I was a fairly good student. I was raised very strictly, so when I got away to college it was like *woohoo*. So I learned and I did what I had to do to get through class. I could have done a lot more and I could have learned a lot more, but I didn't. Now I wish I had, of course. I know if I went back I'd learn four times as much as I did before. I was always doing something. Going somewhere, doing something. If people were going somewhere, I was in the midst of it. I loved doing that.

INTERVIEWER: You learned enough to be a good nurse when you graduated, right?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah. There you go.

INTERVIEWER: How about some struggles that you encountered?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: One thing was being away from family. And not being the best and not doing well when I had always been one of the best students. So when I came up here and I wasn't, it was really hard to get used to not doing the best and several times I wanted to quit. But my parents said no, you're not quitting. We don't quit. This family doesn't quit. So I stuck it out and I realized that it was the making of me – doing things beyond where I thought I could go. I think realizing all of these things that I was learning to do in that first year, I was going to have to do one on one or with someone. I think that was sobering, and hard to swallow, at times, that struggle.

I think the other struggle was to see as a nurse that there's only so much you can do. You can offer comfort always, but offering hope – you can't always offer hope. It was, again, very sobering. Sometimes I remember thinking that if I ever, ever work with kids because the thought – I loved kids too much and to think that they were hurting or sick or dying – I could not deal

with that at all. So Peds (pediatrics) was a real struggle for me, I enjoyed it, because I loved kids so much, but I said –

INTERVIEWER: But you ended up going into Peds--

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I went into it and it's always been my love, since then.

INTERVIEWER: That's great. Your education and career. You started back to school, you said.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I started back to school after about ten years, and I was going to do the RN (registered nurse) to BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) program. I went and I didn't get really good advice, and they put me in a Chemistry class.

INTERVIEWER: At Georgia State?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No, I went to Kennesaw, which had a very good reputation even then. I went there and I did a History class and did super in that, to get some credits, but I just needed just a few. I forget what it was. Then I went and they put me in a Chemistry class. They signed me up and it was Pre-Med Chemistry but I didn't find that out until like the fifth week. We had a test and I made the mean, but he had to round off our grades, everybody did so poorly. I think I made a 65 on it. I was in the top six, but still.

INTERVIEWER: I had the same experience with college Algebra when I went back.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh, my, gosh, it was awful. So that kind of did it for me, because I studied so hard and it was so time-consuming and I realized that doing the crazy hours I was doing, there was no way.

INTERVIEWER: You were working nights and trying to go to school.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I couldn't do it.

INTERVIEWER: You have had a variety of career options. How were you prepared for them?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh yeah. And my – maybe it was because of how it was done with us at Georgia Baptist and the fact that they – you know we changed every quarter and went to a total different focus and everything. I really felt like I had – my personality is one that tends to become complacent after so many years, and I recognized that I needed that stretch of going into something totally different. A total different job to keep me at the top of my game, so

to speak, and I also enjoyed learning new things. So that's one reason why I changed around and did those different things, was to stretch myself. It made a huge difference and I think it gave me the confidence doing those kinds of things – gave me the confidence to do like the medical missions, things that I've done and all that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so let's talk about the seventies. I don't know if you remember much, like the Vietnam War ended in like '73, and then all this, not equal rights – well the equal rights was like through the whole decade, they were trying to get that passed. But like the civil rights – all that was still developing and Nixon and all his issues... gas lines and all that. So the economy was bad and the politics was bad, oh yeah. So did any of that influence your decision to nurse, or [skips several times] anything like that?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I think that still, at that age and at that era you had a couple of choices – a nurse or a teacher or . . . you know, those were the focus. That was the focus.

INTERVIEWER: Especially for women.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes that's what I meant, for women. Exactly. That's what I mean. I think that, my thought was, with nursing – cause my desire always was to be married and have children – was that it would be very workable as a mother, to be a nurse. It would help me prepare to be a good mom. So that's one reason why I thought well, it's a win-win situation, to do that, and I also thought, you're always going to need nurses – no matter what's you're always going to need nurses.

INTERVIEWER: So do you – you've kind of already talked about this a little bit – tell how the education you received at Georgia Baptist, did it help with your transition into nursing?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: When I graduated, I had no fear. I really didn't. I went right out, I took – I was a charge nurse the next day, you know, that kind of thing, and was in charge. Now I'm not saying that I was foolish, because when I didn't know, I was confident enough in myself to say Hey, I don't know this. Let's call and ask someone. But there were lots of times I had to make – you know, quick decisions. I didn't second guess, because I had done it before.

There was only one thing that I can tell you now, after all these years that I did not do, that I foolishly skirted around, and never did in school that I had to do later, by myself, that was ridiculous, and that was . . . and I've used that example numerous times to teach people – especially nursing students – and nurses – to never get out of doing something if you're

uncomfortable doing it, because the next time you have to do it, nobody's going to be there with you, and it was changing a trach.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, yeah, scary.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Very scary. The first time I changed a trach was on a special needs bus with no-one but me and like sixteen special needs kids. I was terrified. I was praying big time. The little boy had Down's syndrome, and no neck, Laura. He looked at me and we have – you know I had been working with him for months, so this was part of my visiting nurse time, when I was doing school nursing for part of the day. I looked at him and I said, "Matthew, Melanie's fixing to change your trach, and you cannot move, okay?" He loved to dance, and he would dance as soon as he saw me. I said you understand and he said – he didn't speak, he was non-verbal, and so he shook his head. I had the thing. I knew what to do. I knew the semantics. I knew what had to happen, but I was terrified. I'm sure it showed on my face, even though as a nurse you learn to school your features. I switched it out, and when I did, he looked at me, and he knew. You'll never convince me that he didn't know. So I say, don't do that to yourself. Don't do that to yourself for your patient's sake or for your sake. You make sure that – I don't care how sad you are – you do it . . . So yeah, that's my soapbox.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So that is all of my questions. You have anything else you want to – any other memories you want to talk about, or anything?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Probably the friendships that we developed there are some of the best and the most lasting, simply because you spent thirty-three months where you ate together, cried together, studied together, learned together, failed together, and succeeded together. I think even more so than other colleges.

INTERVIEWER: It was a different environment.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Totally different. It was more like a boarding school.

INTERVIEWER: It was.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I mean really.

INTERVIEWER: You and I both were from far away. So you were there. Did you go home much on the weekends?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: No. I didn't have a car.

INTERVIEWER: Right. I didn't either.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: So I was stuck, unless somebody came to get me.

INTERVIEWER: You were there seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah. Exactly. In fact, there's a girl that I met at my church that graduated a year ahead of me, and went to Baptist. I remember her. I was standing there – when she came in I was like, okay, I know this person. We're talking how many years ago, thirty years ago? I remembered her and she said, "I didn't get all of this camaraderie," she said "Like y'all did because I was a commuter."

INTERVIEWER: They do. They do have—because some of them you can see, they've formed study groups and things.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Right. They don't have that dependence on each other.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: But it's still different. It's different. It's not five days a week, twenty-four hours a day, and even on the weekends.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Oh absolutely. I account for a lot of my knowledge base too, there, and learning because I was an aide so I learned even more things of how to care for people. I do have one funny story I'll tell you.

You know how the first thing we did, one of the first things on our list was we went into our patients' room – this was when we went in to like our first –

INTERVIEWER: Freshmen –

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Freshmen Fundamentals. One of the first things you did was you filled up your ice . . . [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: Filled that water pitcher up.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Well, I had never seen a urinal, okay, and back then they had stainless steel urinals with the handle on there that looked like a water pitcher. So I went in there and this gentleman I'm sure had had several other nursing students since he'd been there – you know, because you weren't just in and out of there like – it was so many years ago. I went in there and I looked – I did not think that that was the water pitcher, but I could not find his water pitcher and I knew he had one. I kept walking around, looking, looking – so finally I just picked up his urinal and started to go out the door to go put ice in it like, you know, ice water.

He said, “You realize that’s my urinal?” I said, “Yes Sir, I’m just going over here and washing it out.” You were taught, not to be deceitful, but you were taught that they needed to have confidence in you and if you came across and said, “Oh I thought this was a water pitcher.” So I went over there. I know he knew that I thought it was a water pitcher, and he knew that I knew he thought that but we never said it.

INTERVIEWER: That’s so funny. That’s still my pet peeve; I can’t stand it to this day when men put that on the table right next to the water pitcher.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I put it down, either hook it to the bed rail, right –

INTERVIEWER: Other stories?

MELANIE ZBINDEN: I will say this. When I was a junior – this was when I was a junior – I had to do my first male catheterization. For a single, strictly raised girl, I had no knowledge of the male anatomy, much less had touched one, or anything else, and I went in there, and I had my suite-mate go with me because she had had all kinds of experience – we won’t go down that road but anyway – she went in with me and she said, “Okay, let me tell you how to do it” – so she talked me through it. I put the catheter in and didn’t have any trouble because she told me exactly how to do it because she had done – had worked on a male floor and had done all this kind of stuff – well I went out to the – I was still working there of course because you’re there for eight hours which was wonderful, and I was standing there and a urologist came in and he said, “Who put the catheter in 431?” And I went Oh no. I said, “I did.” He said, “You want a job?” I said, “I’m just a nursing student.” He said, “I haven’t been able to get a catheter in that man in ten years.” He said, “Was it hard?” I said, “No Sir, I just put it right in.” He said, “I really need you in my office.”

INTERVIEWER: That’s so funny.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: You know, the first time, but that, again, those kind of things were confidence builders. Then I never was worried about it.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely. I didn’t at first because all the Baptist ministers went to Georgia Baptist. I think the first three men that I catheterized were Baptist ministers. It was embarrassing, but they were nice about it.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Exactly. Well I remember the first time I ever had to do the prep, the surgical prep, and it was a man having an inguinal hernia repair. So I had to go in there and do it, and he was not a whole lot older than me. I remember he was so embarrassed. I remember when I got in there but I was not embarrassed because he was, and I said I’ve got to make him feel better, and that was my focus, because that’s what I’d been taught. You take care

of the patient. Your focus is the patient. You're there for the patient. You're taking care of the patient. You are to be what that patient needs. So I said, "Hey, do you get vacation time?" I said, "Where are you going?" So he started talking on that, and then all of a sudden I was done, and he said, "You're done?" And I said, "Yeah." That was my first experience with understanding the importance of not being embarrassed when I could have been, because he was.

INTERVIEWER: We learned a lot.

MELANIE ZBINDEN: Yes we did.