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Interview with  
REVELLA GUEST  
December 8, 1978

Place of Interview: Las Vegas, Nevada

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Approved:

Revello Guest  
(Signature)

Date:

8 December 1978

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Oral History Collection

Miss Revella Guest

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Las Vegas, Nevada

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Revella Guest for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on December 8, 1978, in Las Vegas, Nevada. I'm interviewing Miss Guest in order to get her reminiscences and experiences and impressions while she was a nurse at Tripler Army Hospital during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and the surrounding military installations on December 7, 1941.

Miss Guest, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Miss Guest: I was born November 8, 1912, in Brownville Junction, Maine. My mother was Canadian; my father was English. I grew up and attended the high school there in that small New England town. I went to the Maine General Hospital in Portland, Maine, to receive my nurse's training, which was a diploma program for three years.

Marcello: Had you decided to make nursing a career for some time?

Guest: Yes, I always wanted to be a nurse.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you eventually became a member of the Army Nurse Corps.

Guest: After graduation in 1935 from the School of Nursing, I did private duty around Portland, Maine. Then I was getting fed up with it. I was restless and didn't know what to do or anything else. I heard about the Army Nurse Corps and applied. I received word that I was accepted into the Army Nurse Corps and reported on active duty on January 30, 1939, at Fort Jay, New York.

Marcello: How hard was it to get into Army Nurse Corps at that time?

Guest: You had to have certain qualifications. One of them was that you had to belong to the American Red Cross. You also had to have been a graduate for two years.

Marcello: Why was it that you had to be a member of the American Red Cross?

Guest: They were one of the controlling factors of nurses at that time. They were very outstanding, and you just belonged to that organization.

Marcello: Did you have a waiting period before you actually were taken in?

Guest: After you were accepted, then you waited for your orders to come, whatever their disposition was. Mine came in that I was to report to Fort Jay, New York, on or about January 1, 1939.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had become restless while acting as a nurse there in Maine, and that perhaps the Army Nurse Corps gave you an outlet for your restlessness. Why was it that you decided that the Army Nurse Corps was what you wanted?

Guest: Well, it was going to be something different. I was going to also have an opportunity to travel; I wouldn't be staying in one place all the time, and I was sort of adventurous. You had many opportunities that by staying in one place you didn't have.

Marcello: Was there very much of a transition involved in becoming an Army nurse as opposed to the type of nursing that you had done in civilian life?

Guest: No, none at all. Nursing was nursing.

Marcello: In other words, you had to take no particular orientation courses or anything of that nature.

Guest: No, no.

Marcello: Upon enlistment and upon acceptance, what rank were you given?

Guest: I was a second lieutenant, but we didn't become part of the regular Army until 1947, so we had relative rank. We were a second lieutenant, but it meant nothing. We were an officer, but it didn't have all the qualifications that went with that rank. We were given that token thing; we didn't become part of the Army Nurse Corps or a part of the regular Army until 1947.

Marcello: Would your pay have been comparable to a lieutenant in the regular Army?

Guest: No, not at that time. We were only making \$70 a month.

Marcello: Describe the process by which you got from Fort Jay to the Hawaiian Islands.

Guest: I was stationed at Fort Jay, and I was there for about a year and nine months. Then my orders came in, which transferred me up to Plattsburg Barracks. They had built a new hospital up there, and we were the first nurses . . . there were five of us, and we were the first nurses that were at Plattsburg since 1918. That was a training base for recruits in WWI.

I was there for five months, when my orders came in for me to go to Hawaii. My sailing date was March 15, 1941, and they moved it up to March 1st. I was over on the East Coast, and so we got aboard the Chateau-Thierry, which was docked in New York. We went to the Panama Canal. First of all, we stopped in Charleston to pick up troops, and then we went to the Panama Canal and then on to San Francisco. Then from San Francisco, we went on to Hawaii.

Marcello: What did you think about the idea of being stationed in the Hawaiian Islands?

Guest: Oh, it was wonderful! I was gnashing at the bits to get an overseas assignment. It was really great.

Marcello: Was Hawaii considered a paradise by most people at that time,

so to speak?

Guest: Yes. Hawaii was Hawaii in those days; it is not like it is today. It was just gorgeous.

Marcello: What made it so great at that time?

Guest: You had all the freedom, good weather. It was exciting. It was really great.

Marcello: I assume that when you docked in Honolulu, that is, when the ship docked in Honolulu, that you were met there at the docks by some representatives from Tripler?

Guest: Oh, yes, and we were taken to Tripler Army Hospital. It was not too far--down the road a piece.

Marcello: Did they have separate nurses' quarters right there at Tripler?

Guest: Yes, but more nurses were coming into Tripler, and so they didn't have enough room for us. There were sixteen of us that were billeted out at Hickam Field in duplex apartments, four nurses to an apartment. Then we commuted back and forth from Hickam Field to Tripler Army Hospital until the barracks were built down on the old tennis court for us. When they were completed and ready to be opened, then we moved. We moved back to Tripler on December 5, 1941.

Marcello: Basically then, you were staying out at Hickam Field during this period. Describe what those duplexes were like.

Guest: They were just like a small apartment. There were two bedrooms, a kitchen, a small living room, and there were two girls to

each bedroom. That was it. We were supposed to keep up our own gardens, but that was a fiasco. We were always getting letters about how our yard looked. None of us were gardeners, although we tried (chuckle).

Marcello: I would assume that you perhaps had just a little bit more freedom living there at Hickam than those nurses living at the nurses' quarters at Tripler.

Guest: No, it wasn't any different. You had plenty of freedom. You could come and go as you pleased with no restrictions. As long as you reported for duty and were there, you could come and go as you pleased. In fact, it was a little bit more difficult because we had to have transportation to get back, and we were about ten more miles out. We were transported back and forth by ambulance.

Marcello: What provisions did you make for taking meals and things of that nature?

Guest: We ate at the hospital.

Marcello: You took all of your meals there at the hospital?

Guest: Well, we had our own cooking facilities if we wanted to eat there, too, and we'd go out and get some food. Meals were prepared for us . . . not at the hospital, really. It was at the big nurses' mess that they had up there at the nurses' quarters there at Tripler.

Marcello: Just exactly how was your work schedule set up? You might talk



a little bit about your work schedule and the work that you did there at Tripler.

Guest: The work schedule was eight hours, but it was split up. Either you worked from seven to three o'clock . . . or twelve hours, I guess. It was split up. We either worked from seven o'clock to three o'clock, or you worked from seven to twelve o'clock and four to seven o'clock. So it was a broken-up thing. It all depends upon how the schedule was set up by your head nurse.

Marcello: Then from time to time, would you also get the night duty?

Guest: Oh, yes, you'd have night duty whenever it was scheduled for you to take your turn at night duty. You'd often do three to eleven o'clock.

Marcello: I'm sure that most of you probably didn't look forward too much to that night duty?

Guest: Well, it didn't make any difference. We had to do it, so we never gave it much thought. It was no different than a civilian hospital, you know. You have to do the same shifts in a civilian hospital as you did in the military hospital. You didn't have much more choice in a civilian hospital than you did in the Army. It was the same thing. It was mostly the same shifts and taking care of patients, no different.

Marcello: I assume, then, that you can very rarely expect to get a full weekend off?

Guest: That's true. That was true.

Marcello: What sort of specific work did you do there at Tripler?

Guest: I worked on an orthopedic ward, a surgical orthopedic ward.

Marcello: And did you remain there right up until and during the attack itself?

Guest: Yes, I did, at that time.

Marcello: Is this something that you were simply assigned to?

Guest: Yes, I was assigned to it.

Marcello: In other words, you really didn't have any choice as to what you went into?

Guest: You took the assignments as they came.

Marcello: How did you like working there?

Guest: Loved it! It was great.

Marcello: What made it so great, so far as you were concerned?

Guest: The patients were interesting, and it wasn't too difficult. The girls were fine, and we just had a lot of fun. It was interesting.

Marcello: Talk about the social life of the young nurse during that period prior to WWII. Just exactly how did the social life work for you personally?

Guest: I wasn't bored or anything, because we had our own friends and we had our own group. If we had dates, it was fine; a lot of times we double-dated or we'd go on picnics or on a tour of some sort. There was always enough to keep you interested.

At least I never got bored.

Marcello: I gather that there was a lot of formal entertaining during that pre-Pearl Harbor period.

Guest: There always was a lot of formal entertaining. You had the opportunity to go to the club, and they always had dances. Those were always formal affairs that you would get dressed up to go to. If you didn't want to go to them, you didn't have to. The choice was yours. At least they were there, and available to you.

Marcello: Life at Tripler Hospital was a very pleasant sort of existence in the period prior to the war.

Guest: Yes, it was.

Marcello: In connection or in association with your social life, how closely were you keeping abreast of current events and world affairs and things of that nature?

Guest: We weren't paying too much attention to it. We were too busy having fun. We weren't really aware of it. We had some inkling to it, but we didn't pay any attention to that. We thought, "Well, our leaders in Washington will take care of it." It didn't matter to us. There we were--in Hawaii--having a good time, and they were in Washington.

Marcello: I would assume that if the possibility of war did enter your mind, you were probably thinking more in terms of what was going on in Europe rather than what was occurring in the Far East.

Guest: This is true; this is true.

Marcello: In other words, even if war did come with Japan, the Hawaiian Islands were almost 4,000 miles from Japan, and you were relatively safe.

Guest: No worries, no worries. We never even thought of it.

Marcello: Did you come into contact with very many Japanese civilians during your duties there at Tripler Hospital?

Guest: No, not before the war. In our mess that we had, we had a fellow that was our Chinese cook, and we had Filipinos mostly for our attendants that took care of our dining room and things like that, but nothing else.

Marcello: When you thought of a typical Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period, what sort of a person did you usually conjure up in your own mind? What sort of person did you think of?

Guest: I just couldn't believe that such a thing could happen, and I sure was mad that morning to think that they would do such a thing to us.

Marcello: I guess I didn't make myself clear. I was referring to your stereotype of a Japanese prior to the actual attack. What kind of person would you conjure up in your mind?

Guest: Nothing. I didn't think anything about them.

Marcello: Even though there were quite a few of them in the Hawaiian Islands?

Guest: Yes, that didn't bother me any. The Hawaiian Islands was a melting pot. It was nothing for you to get a patient who

sometimes for their heritage would have Portuguese, Japanese, and Hawaiian. So it was a mixture. There was always several races intermingled with these people, so you never thought anything about it. There wasn't any difference.

Marcello: As one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, could you notice any change at all in your routine there at Tripler?

Guest: No, none. None whatsoever. Going back, I closed out our quarters that we had at Hickam Field on December 5th. On December 6th, there was a group of nurses, myself included, that were friendly with some warrant officers aboard the West Virginia. We were out there aboard ship and had dinner and watched a movie.

Marcello: This was on December 6th?

Guest: This was that night, December 5th. On Saturday . . . we had friends that lived right across from the theatre, and they had invited us out there to dinner.

Marcello: Let's back up here just a minute and talk just a little bit about this dinner that you had aboard the West Virginia. Was this a relatively common practice, that is, being invited aboard the battleships when they were in and so on?

Guest: Yes. Several times we went out and had dinner.

Marcello: I'm sure this was very formal entertaining, also, was it not?

Guest: Yes, it was very nice. There were four of us that went out there, and I was the one that had to work the next morning.

Marcello: When you were out there on the West Virginia, did any of the officers ever get around to talking "shop," so to speak?

Guest: No, not necessarily. I'm sure that most of those fellows weren't any more aware that the event was going to take place so soon than we were. Everybody was just having a good time and doing their duty. We never thought anything about that.

Marcello: You were in the process of discussing your activities on December 6th when I interrupted you, so why don't you talk in as much detail as you can remember about what you did on December 6th.

Guest: On December 6th, we had these friends that lived right across from the theatre, and they invited us out for dinner, so we went. The discussion then came up during the evening that they were planning on us spending the night. I said, "Oh, goodness! Since I'm the only one that has to work in the morning, why don't you just drive me back to quarters. You can come on back if you want to." Then it was decided that we'd all go back to quarters. Well, the next morning came,

Marcello: By this time, you are now housed in the nurses' quarters there at Tripler?

Guest: Oh, yes. We were in our barracks down on the tennis courts that they had gotten finished for us. We were back at Tripler.

Marcello: Describe what your barracks were like there at Tripler.

Guest: They were just like any old Army barracks. You see them all over today--old World War II type-barracks.

Marcello: But did you have your own separate rooms?

Guest: No, there were two nurses to a room. They were long and narrow--camping out, so to speak (chuckle).

Marcello: What time would you estimate that you got to bed on that Saturday night of December 6th?

Guest: Probably around midnight. We got home probably at midnight. The next morning came, and I was on duty.

Marcello: What time did you go on duty that morning?

Guest: Seven o'clock.

Marcello: And it was simply a short walk from the barracks to Tripler?

Guest: Oh, yes. I went to the dining room, had breakfast, and then I went on duty.

Marcello: Where were you on duty that morning?

Guest: I was on my ward--ward five, the orthopedic ward. Everything was fine, lazy, not much to do. Some of the patients were out on pass. There were just routine things to do.

All of a sudden the radio started blaring for all military people to report back to their stations. We had porches and I was out looking on the back porch, and I saw smoke, heard some guns, and I saw black smoke coming up. I thought, "My goodness! I've never seen that before!"

Marcello: You were looking in the direction of Pearl Harbor?

Guest: Yes, off over into that area. Then the radio started to blare that we were being attacked by the Japanese. Then I called down to my friends where they were, and I told them to get up and get dressed because everybody was going to be working, because we were being attacked by the Japanese. Shortly after that, our chief nurse had called down there, and everybody was alerted and on duty.

Marcello: What sort of a staff would be at a hospital on a weekend? Would it be just like any other day of the week?

Guest: Your staff would be more limited because more people would have time off. That was like any hospital; you try to get your patients in and out before the weekend occurs.

Marcello: You would not have had as many doctors, for example, there as you normally would.

Guest: No, not really. It was just a routine thing. They would come in and make their rounds. If they had somebody there that needed attention, they would be there to give it to them. It wasn't the routine thing. The only thing would be that you would take care of an emergency. For routine stuff, that always was left over or taken care of. If anything would come up, then it would wait until Monday morning. This is nothing unusual; it is done all the time.

Marcello: You hear the word about the attack at Pearl Harbor. What would



you say was the immediate reaction among the hospital staff?  
Was it basically one of professionalism almost from the  
beginning?

Guest: Absolutely! You had to get back, get on duty, and get things  
ready.

Marcello: You mentioned the term "getting things ready." In other words,  
am I to assume that you knew that casualties would be coming  
in, and therefore you were ready?

Guest: We knew that when we were being attacked that we were going to  
have casualties because we were the largest general hospital  
on the island. In fact, we were the only general hospital.

Marcello: What would you personally be doing, that is, you, yourself?

Guest: First of all, I had to get my ward emptied out of patients that  
were there. These people were not acutely ill or seriously  
ill, or ill or anything. We used to call them "goldbricks"  
back in those days, you know, "Go to the hospital so we don't  
have to do any duty." Kind of easy. So we got rid of all  
those fellows. I only had two people left on my ward that  
were up in traction. I had to watch those guys like a hawk,  
because they were going to cut themselves out of traction and  
go to war.

We didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know.  
We were there, but we didn't know what the assignments of the  
ward were going to be. At the ward down below me, which was

ward three, it was emptied out, and that was the "pre-op" ward, where they came in from the emergency room, and they were put into this place until they could go into the operating room for the serious injuries. Then, about twelve o'clock or one o'clock, my ward was all "post-op." Every patient that I received had already been to surgery. There was no sorting out of patients. You had amputees, abdominal wounds, head injuries. You name it, and it was there.

Marcello: And burn victims as well, I'm sure.

Guest: I don't remember any burn victims.

Marcello: Where were most of your people coming from?

Guest: From the Navy, from Pearl Harbor. By nightfall, about five o'clock in the afternoon, maybe a little later . . . I've forgotten. I know that the next morning I ended up with sixty-five fresh post-operative patients.

Marcello: Approximately how many patients was the ward designed to handle?

Guest: Well . . .

Marcello: Under normal circumstances.

Guest: Probably fifty. We also had beds out on the porches where we used to put the ambulatory patients. We never put any of the bedridden patients out there. But they were out there that day. Anyplace that they could get, they were put there.

Marcello: As these post-operative patients were coming into your ward, what would you be doing for them as a nurse?

Guest: First of all, we had to watch them and see that they were coming out of anesthesia all right. We also had to start I.V. fluids, but we didn't have the modern equipment that we have today. Our I.V. bottles that we had were the glass-type where you pour the solution in, and you had to be very careful to keep it sterile. I had three of those on my ward, and we went from patient to patient giving them 1,000 cc. of fluid. The only thing that we did was being very careful in changing the needle, and then we'd go to the next one to start. We were fortunate, and the Lord was on our side, because not one--not one--ever got a chill or an infection.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had sixty-five patients. How many nurses were there to take care of those sixty-five?

Guest: That morning I only had myself and one other. I often look back on that and wonder how I did it. How I did it, I don't know. But we did.

Marcello: Generally speaking, were these people coming out of anesthesia by the time they got there?

Guest: Yes.

Marcello: I guess this perhaps would have therefore increased the amount of work that you had to do.

Guest: You had to be very careful. You had to be very careful. You had to watch them and see that they were getting oriented.

Marcello: I'm sure that everybody around the hospital was jumpy, so to

speaking, that night.

Guest: You wouldn't know because you were too involved in your own section. You didn't have any time to worry about another section of the hospital. You had your own little area, and you were responsible for that. You never left it; you didn't have time. You couldn't worry about what was happening out there; you didn't have time for it.

Marcello: Were there any blackout precautions taken or anything like that in the hospital?

Guest: Absolutely, absolutely.

Marcello: What was done?

Guest: We had no lights in the first place. We had a flashlight, and a piece of blue carbon paper was put over the flashlight. That was practically like working in the dark. I can remember going out on the porch and giving a shot to the patients needing a pain injection. I'd take that thing off, and some guard would holler, "Put out that light or I'll shoot!" I'd yell, "Shut up until I give this shot!" (chuckle)

Marcello: But there were a lot of trigger-happy and jumpy guards around that night.

Guest: Absolutely. It is amazing that more people weren't killed.

Marcello: I guess for your own safety, it was a good thing to stay in the hospital even if you did have an opportunity to go back over to the nurses' quarters again.

Guest: We could get there without too much difficulty, but we didn't have time.

Marcello: Were you working all through the next day also with these patients?

Guest: Absolutely.

Marcello: When did you finally get relieved for a few hours rest?

Guest: Probably about four or five days later. I can't remember. We never thought about the time; we had so much to do.

Marcello: In the meantime, were you able to take some catnaps on occasion?

Guest: No, no. I went to duty at seven o'clock, and I got back to my barracks just long enough to change my clothes, get into a clean uniform. At about six o'clock in the morning, I changed my clothes.

Marcello: This was six o'clock Monday morning?

Guest: Monday morning. I went down to the barracks--no lights. The only light was a blue light in the bathroom. One of the girls had a radio there, and we tried to get on and to get some news from the States, but we couldn't. So we just gave that up and went back to work.

I had an interesting experience that is kind of hard to believe. We had one small central supply that was issuing all of our supplies. I thought, "Well, I'll help them out." We had other people who came in to volunteer to help, so I had them making bandages and rolling them. We had an old gas stove.

So I thought, "Well, I can fill that oven with these things, and if I can get it filled and keep it on for at least eight to twelve hours, then those supplies would be all ready for when the dressing day came for the first dressings for these patients." I didn't have any muslin to wrap the supplies in, but we had some brown paper, so we wrapped those in that. I did this. We just had the fire lit, you know. It was an old building.

Pretty soon I was out in the ward doing something, and another nurse comes to me and says, "There is a fire!" I said, "Where is the fire?" She says, "In the kitchen!" Brother! I went off, and here I am--all my dressings were aflame. I grabbed the frying pan, put the water in the sink, got a pair of forceps, and was running back and forth taking all my flaming dressings and dumping them into the sink in the water. I thought, "Wouldn't you know it! All that time and effort gone! But at least I tried!"

Marcello: I've also heard it said that the prostitutes from town came out and volunteered their help at Tripler. Are you familiar or aware of this?

Guest: I am not aware of that.

Marcello: Had you ever heard the story?

Guest: I didn't hear that until last night, and I don't believe it.

Marcello: Why is it that you don't believe it?

Guest: I don't know. They were not that type of individual. They might have gone somewhere else, but I don't know. I can't say that. Maybe they were; I don't know.

Marcello: Makes a good story, anyway.

Guest: It makes a good story, but I can't verify it or deny it, either. I don't know.

Marcello: I've also heard it said that when the nurses would go back to their quarters, several of them would seem to congregate in one of these little rooms, because there was a certain amount of security in numbers. Did you notice that when you went back to the barracks?

Guest: No. It didn't bother me any. I thought if I was going to get shot at, I was going to get shot at. That was all there was to it (chuckle).

Marcello: What sort of rumors did you hear in the aftermath of the attack? I'm sure that the hospital must have been one big rumor mill.

Guest: The years have faded a lot of these things. If this was done many years ago, your memory would be much more vivid. I can't recall.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of the rumor that perhaps the Japanese had landed or were about to land and that sort of thing?

Guest: No, no. I hadn't heard that. I know that a friend of mine had a car . . . at the time, I didn't drive. She was working, so she gave me the car keys. I found somebody that could drive,

got permission, and I got the gal who wanted me to send a telegram back home. That was about four days afterwards. We got down to the telegraph office, and all we did was sign our names--"Revella." Some people would have known me by that, and some people that got that telegram would have wondered who in the world that individual was; but at least we got them sent off, saying that we were safe and sound. That was all we could do about it.

Another thing that we did . . . you're probably wondering about charting. We didn't do much charting, because we didn't have the time for it. All we did was that we'd put a piece of paper up and tape it to the head of the bed, and we kept track of the last time they'd had any injections. Also, the pharmacy made up a vial of a quarter grain of morphine to a cc. to use for pain. We carried that in our pockets. We didn't have to record it there, but we just kept it in our pockets so we would save time. All we'd have to do is just use it, and when we were through, we'd get another bottle. Each nurse that was on duty had a vial of that in their pocket and would just go ahead and do it. We just keep track of it at the head of the beds. We didn't think about charting for about a week afterwards. Then that was a mess trying to get those records straight, you know, to try to get them together.

We got the first shipload of casualties ready to be



shipped back to the United States on December 24, 1941. I know in my ward we were up all night and all day plastering-- getting these people in shape for transportation. They sailed for the United States on December 25, 1941.

Marcello: In those initial days following the attack, did you actually run out of any medical supplies?

Guest: That I can't tell you. We had plenty of it. I had a well-stocked ward. I was very fortunate.

Marcello: From your own experience, then, you did not run into any shortages?

Guest: No, not that I know of. We didn't have all your modern equipment that they have now, but we did very well with what we had.

Marcello: All in all, as you look back upon those hectic days, in your opinion did the staff and everybody work in a very professional manner?

Guest: Absolutely! Absolutely! They are to be commended. For a small staff with a big job, it was well-done.

Marcello: I have one last question. From your own experience, could we say that perhaps December 7, 1941, was the end of an era? Life for you as a nurse, both professionally and socially, was probably not the same as it had been prior to the war.

Guest: No, I can't say that. I was in the military for twenty-five years. I am retired as an Army major. I've had very, very interesting assignments through my career. I'll admit that

Pearl Harbor was the highlight of it. It had its tragic moments, and it had its great moments, but the Army Nurse Corps is just great. It is one of the best things that ever happened to me.

Marcello: That's probably a good place to end this interview, Miss Guest. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to participate. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things. I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments very valuable when they use them to study Pearl Harbor.

Guest: It was interesting. You do wonder how you did things, but you never know until you're put to the test.

Marcello: Again, thank you very much.

Guest: Thank you.