

“Did you ever get homesick?” I asked as our conversation continued. “No,” he replied with a small chuckle and a shake of his head, “I didn’t have time.”

What you just read was part of a conversation I had with my grandpa about the Vietnam war. I’ve been struggling to put this conversation on paper. It was an honor to hear the stories he had to share, but there are no words I can write that will even begin to describe what he had to go through. I will try my best to share my point of view as his granddaughter.

Some might say that their grandpa is the best, but I think I have them beat on this one. Not missing a concert or sporting event, teaching me how to garden, baking cookies for me and my sisters, and never missing the opportunity to tell us how much he loves us are just a few of the things he did/does that makes him extra special. As I aged, I became aware that beneath all the love and the smiles he has to offer, there lives a soul that has been scarred by war. You can’t necessarily see the scars, but if you look closely enough, they are there. His arms that wrap me in his bear hugs, were once used to carry wounded soldiers. His hands that bake chocolate chip cookies were once used to hold a gun to protect himself from the enemy. His eyes that have gotten to see me grow up once had to see battlegrounds.

The question is, how does one forget the horrific experiences of war? I think the answer is, you don’t. The important part is how you cope with it. It took a long time for Grandpa to heal from what he went through. In our conversation, he admitted to a drinking and drug problem when he came home from his ten month deployment. If I could go back in time and tell him how loved he would be regardless of what he did or what he saw, I would do it in a heartbeat.

To current date, he still thinks about the war on a daily basis. The memories of the events that had taken place decades ago are still very vivid as if they happened yesterday. He can still recall slight details such as the effects of the malaria pill, the way Vietnamese people sat, and the snakes. His fear of snakes was always something that made me giggle. How could someone as rough and tough as Grandpa have a fear of snakes? One day, he informed me about the venomous snakes that resided in Vietnam. I did not find his fear of snakes funny anymore.

Multiple veterans, such as my other grandpa, don’t even want to think about the war let alone talk about it. That is why it was such an honor to hear the stories my grandpa had to share. Soaking up his words like a sponge, I took in all he had to say—learning more about the war

than any history class has had to offer. The bravery, courage, and sacrifices Vietnam Veterans had to make are beyond comparison to anything young adults now have to encounter now. It is almost sad to see how soft and sensitive the younger generations have become.

Imagine leaving your family, going off to war, seeing death with your own eyes, and waking up every day with the chance that you might not live to see the night. The sacrifices and traumatizing experiences Veterans encountered should not be overlooked despite the war happening years ago. Upon return of the war, soldiers weren't given parades and welcome-home parties, but rather were neglected or in some cases even spit on in public. With a divided country and frustrated citizens, America had lost its unity and the soldiers paid the price for it. So what's changed? Personally, I think it has taken time to heal what was broken. The patriotism wasn't there during and after the war. Now that we have a better understanding of the circumstances that took place, we now appreciate our veterans more. At my school, veterans are honored at the annual Veteran's Day program and children are taught to show respect towards them.

The American War Library estimated that as of 2019, 610,000 Americans who served in the Vietnam war are still alive today. Our national anthem quotes at the end "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave." America IS the home of the brave. The home of 610,000 brave Vietnam veterans who deserved to be loved, appreciated, and thanked everyday. The home of my brave grandpa who fought in a traumatic war, but a war that has also shaped his perspectives on life giving him the ability to provide endless love for his family.

No one can change the past, but we can learn from it. We can learn to appreciate life and not take what we have for granted. We should all appreciate peace and freedom. We can learn that if we disagree with our government, we should not take it out on other people. Lastly, we can learn to respect our military and our veterans because they made the ultimate sacrifice to serve our country. With that being said, to all the Vietnam soldiers that returned to the states but never got to hear it— welcome home.

VVA Chapter 331,

I would like to personally thank you for this scholarship opportunity, but more so I would like to thank you for the knowledge I gained and the raw emotions I felt while writing this essay. I thought it would be a normal essay, but it turned into much more than that.

It was difficult for me to grasp what my Grandpa had to go through, but even more difficult to put it in words on paper. He told me things about the war that he never even told my mom.

My love for this country and respect for veterans have always been unmeasurable, but this was still very eye-opening. I found myself getting very emotional while writing.

I would like to conclude by saying thank you once again and I appreciate your time.

Sincerely, Sophie Albrecht