

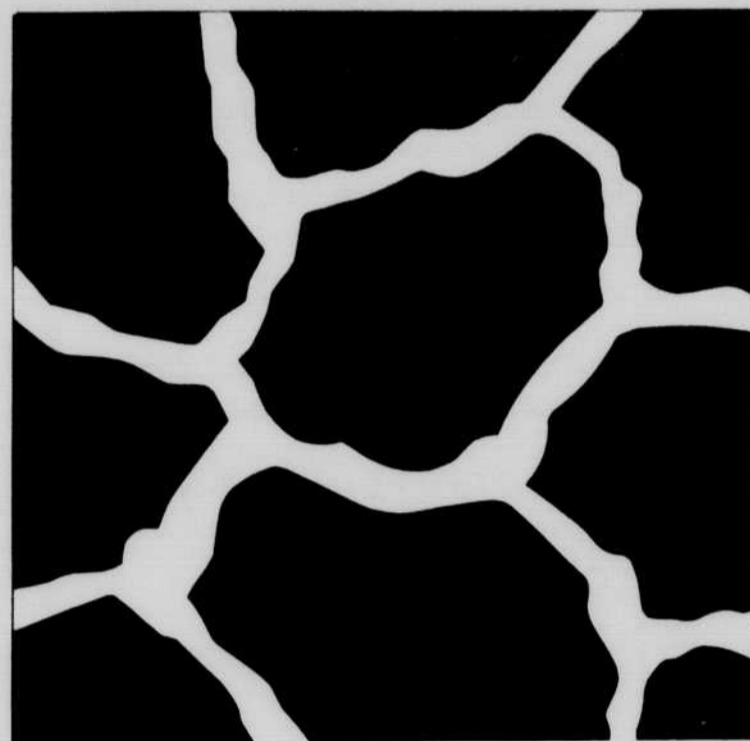
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Something Wild Is Coming to Springfield!

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SAFARI

ALL STUDENTS ARE INVITED TO AN OPEN FORUM WITH:

PRESIDENT MYLES BRAND

Noon Tuesday February 6 EMU Fir Room

Moderator:
Marlene Drescher, Director Office of Student Advocacy



Another in a series of opportunities for students to meet with the president and discuss issues of mutual concern.

University

Veteran mixes politics, literature

By Pat Malach
 Emerald Contributor

Veteran Gerry Kamp returned from Vietnam on Christmas Eve, 1971. Nineteen years later he teaches a University course on the literature of the Vietnam War, and he is the owner and operator of a distinctive used book and record store, the Bookstation.

In a period when many veterans are stereotyped as unbalanced or unable to adjust, Kamp is living proof that the scars of the Vietnam experience can be healed.

Kamp's interest in books and his personal knowledge of the war, combined with his observation that there were few if any University classes being taught on Vietnam, led him to pursue the possibility of teaching the course.

Kamp's involvement in Vietnam began in February 1971. He left for Vietnam from a naval base near Chicago.

"I had been there for two years. It was a real active place politically, and I became very politicized in Chicago. I was actually anti-war by the time I went to Vietnam," Kamp said.

"I was going to go find some anti-war people to get involved with. I thought I could really be a voice."

When he returned home he discovered that a lot of wind had gone out of the sails of the anti-war movement.

"People were moving on and doing other things," Kamp said. "People had also been killed at Kent State and Jacksonville. It seemed to become a question of whether or not people were willing to lay down their lives to protest the war."

With little to attach himself to, Kamp became withdrawn and very quiet for a number of years.

"I sat back and read a lot and listened to a lot of music. I didn't communicate with many people," Kamp said.

He became so withdrawn that when Saigon fell in 1975 Kamp said that he became aware of the news by overhearing two students in the EMU talking about it. "I was just shocked. It was about a month after it happened. I was that withdrawn,"



Photo by Andre Ramirez

Vietnam veteran Gerry Kamp operates the Bookstation, a unique collection of books and music, in addition to teaching a University course on Vietnam literature.

Kamp said.

It was during this time that Kamp accumulated more than 3,000 books. These books would later be the beginnings of his store.

Things began to look up for Kamp when he began counseling at the University. He also began talking about his experiences with the woman who later became his wife.

Kamp slowly pulled himself out of his shell. He graduated from the University in 1977 with a degree in English.

Kamp married the day after graduation and he and his wife, Debra, went to Europe for their honeymoon. That is where Kamp discovered the first of many books that he would read about the war.

"I came across Tim O'Brien's book, *If I Die In a Combat Zone*," Kamp said. "That was the first thing that I had seen in print on Vietnam. You just didn't find things in America. So instead of being a tourist in England I was hold up in a room over there reading this book."

After they returned from Europe, Kamp and his wife spent the next two years working with the Peace Corps in the Sultanate of Oman, a country located across from Iran at the bottom of the Strait of Hormuz.

Kamp said that his time in the Peace Corps was a turning point in his life. It allowed him to spend time away from Americans and the country that he felt had used him, he said.

"You could look at it as karma, I guess," Kamp said. "I spent one year in Vietnam, and two years in the Peace Corps."

After their Peace Corps service they returned to Eugene and began running the Bookstation. At that point the store was a gas station that had been in Debra's family since 1919.

Kamp said that one day he came up with an idea that would fulfill a childhood dream of owning a book and record store and at the same time fill empty space in the station. He put his collection of books on the shelves.

"In July of 1980 or '81 I took my books down there and put them up," Kamp said. "We put up a sign that said 'Bookstore' and we were rolling."

The record-selling aspect of the business came about almost by accident.

"Some guy came into the

store when I just had books and asked if I dealt in records," Kamp said. "I said sure, all of a sudden. So he sold me about 20 records. I put them on the shelves and they sold before the week was out. Other people brought in records and it just took off. It was truly a business that grew out of nothing."

The records featured at Kamp's store include many sixties rock-and-roll classics with jazz and classical selections as well.

Kamp said the books at the store are mostly works that one would have wanted to read in college but never got the chance.

The station no longer sells gasoline.

Due to new federal regulations Kamp said he would have had to replace his underground tanks. He added that it would not have been practical to do that. Kamp said that he also could not afford the federally mandated \$1 million liability insurance premium that is now required.

While Kamp's gasoline business may have faded, his literature of the Vietnam War class has been consistently growing.

The class is now offered summer term through the International Studies Department. It meets one night per week for three hours.

The focus of the course is on the combat experience, he said.

"We try to understand what it is in the combat experience that changes people," Kamp said. "We look at how it changes them and how they express that in writing."

Kamp plans to expand the course to include the coming home experience as well. The books that make up the class are mostly factual accounts of the war.

"I attempt to pick books that don't romanticize or depreciate it," Kamp said. "The whole idea of the course is not for me to tell people that war is hell or that war is neat. I try to leave my feelings out of it as much as possible."

Kamp encourages students to take in the facts and make up their own minds about war.

Kamp tries to avoid the current efforts in the media to depict romantic aspects of war, because he believes they are missing an opportunity to begin looking at what actions as a nation could do to other people.