

## VIETNAM

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while there, she said, and her experiences especially taught her the value of life.

"I feel Vietnam shaped my life. It was kind of like it was a teacher, too," Gunson said. She said she learned that human life is fragile and can be lost "in a heartbeat."

Gunson said she tries to live life to the fullest now. "When you get to the end of the tunnel, you can't go back and redo parts of it," she said.

But getting to this point of acceptance and finding the good in a bad situation has not always been easy for Gunson. She spent time in counseling and still must talk herself through difficult times, like when she has flashbacks.

The smell of outdoor cooking is a stimulus for flashbacks, she said, and sometimes the weather is, too.

"The other morning when I went to get the paper, it was very balmy out. It was a Vietnam morning," she said. So she talked herself through the memory and analyzed why the day reminded her of Vietnam.

In 1980, Gunson had gone 10

years without counseling, until she became suicidal and quit a good job. At that time, post-traumatic stress disorder was just beginning to gain attention and there were not many support groups for veterans, she said.

Gunson turned on the television one day, a day "God orchestrated my life," she said, to see another veteran discussing post-traumatic stress disorder. It was then she realized what her problem was.

She then joined a local vets support group and began speaking publicly about her experiences because talking is therapeutic for her, she said.

In 1980, Gunson was interviewed for a 20/20 TV program on women in the military, but found the interviewer to be insensitive to women's trauma.

The interviewer said, "I don't know why you let it bother you because you weren't really there," Gunson said. "I came unglued," she said and explained to the interviewer that she saw the people that were shot and dealt with the blood and guts of what happened.

Gunson's many experiences have shaped her view of a woman's role in war, and she

admits she sometimes has mixed feelings about it.

As a mother of a 6-year-old girl, Gunson said she does not believe there should be a women's draft, and she said she believes there shouldn't be any more wars.

She said that in battle zones, there was no front line, so women who were sent to what were considered non-combat regions actually were in danger. Gunson said if women go to war, they need to be prepared to defend themselves and must not rely on men to protect them.

And, she said, women have the potential to be a strong fighting force.

"Have you heard that joke?" she said. "What's meaner than all the males on both sides of the Gulf war and can also contain water for five days? A woman with PMS."

You'd have to get all of the women on the same cycles so they would all have premenstrual syndrome at the same time, she said laughing, and then "you would have a very formidable force."

## FILM

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war.

She said when she now meets Vietnam veterans, she apologizes for what she used to think of them. And the friendly gestures were extended to her one time, she said, when a veteran thanked her for protesting the war, which he said helped bring soldiers home.

A World War II veteran, John Saemann, said he came to see the film at the Temple Beth Israel because he sympathizes with Vietnam veterans.

"They didn't have a Nintendo war like the Persian Gulf," he said.

CALC spokesman, Irwin

Noparstak, said the group showed the film to promote healing for veterans. The film was shown in 1987, he said, to a crowd of about 400 people. Afterward, counselors were available to talk with veterans, he said.

Noparstak said he hopes many people will see the film because it is a chance for them to consider alternatives to the military, he said.

"It's a subtle anti-war film," he said. "I thought it would be nice to show an ordinary (character). This is not Rambo."

And, Noparstak said, it is important for people to realize how many veterans are affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. He said that by 1980, more



Irwin Noparstak

than 60,000 Vietnam veterans had committed suicide — more people than are listed on the Vietnam Wall Memorial in Washington, D.C.

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THE FAR SIDE

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