

Veterans' views shared at reading

VETS AND FAMILIES SHARE TALES OF THEIR GENERATIONS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY COLLIN BEREND

Everyone has a story to tell. Some are never told, which is how we get unsung heroes, whose story we may never hear.

On Nov. 7, the English Department provided the opportunity for veterans of our armed forces and those who are not veterans to read a story that was related to the theme: Veterans Day. The Roger Rook building became the platform for which veterans could tell their story and allow others to come and understand a point of view through the eyes of a veteran.

The first story came from Ryan Davis, a faculty member of the English Department. Taking his position at the podium, Davis introduced his relative, Uncle Smoke.

"Uncle Smoke grew up as a sixteenth child," said Davis. "When he was old enough to move out of the house, his oldest sibling had already passed away.

"Living in Longview [Wash.], he didn't have anything to do. He worked in lumber, which is what a lot of people do down there. He did roller derby, which is all he could do besides getting drunk," said Davis. "And when the Vietnam War started the draft, he realized he had nothing better with his life in Longview, Washington. So, he enlisted."

He joined the Marines. He was the oldest in the boot camp company.

"Because of his age and because he cursed a lot, he became a commander of a tank in

his tank battalion," said Davis. "And he'd been through three tours of duty."

Smoke kept signing up and sending his money home, according to Davis. One of his sisters helped by managing his funds. However, upon returning, he learned that she had spent all of his money, and he had to start anew as a veteran in the U.S.

Around the year 1993 when Operation

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— Eric Bronson

Desert Shield became Operation Desert Storm, Davis, who was in class, heard the announcement involving U.S. troops in Kuwait. When he got home, Uncle Smoke called him. He warned him that if he were to get a draft letter, he was going to drive Davis to Canada.

Davis questioned this, saying he didn't want to go to Canada. He was told he had to, and so Davis asked, "Why?"

"Because I choose to do that [stuff]," Davis quoted as he went on. "And no one's going to tell you, you have to."

Davis explained that while Smoke was in Vietnam, the tanks were around 140 degrees, and when Agent Orange was dropped in the forest, they would open the hatch and lie on the tank to cool down, because the inside of the tank was just so hot.

"They had no idea, however, this slowly affected him," said Davis. Uncle Smoke passed away in early October.

Among the audience were students, faculty and even veterans themselves.

"I'm a veteran and a writer," said Eric Bronson. Bronson served and retired from the Army, having been to "Bosnia, Panama, [and] Iraq."

"Just, had a lot of fun. Except it cost me a good portion of my hearing," said Bronson. "Same stories, different people. We've lived half of them."

There were some people who did not serve and could still connect to the stories.

"It's so very moving," said Sue Mach, the English Department Chair. "My dad was a Vietnam vet. He was in Vietnam for 20 years. So, you connect with all those stories, because, you know, his legacy is a part of my past."

On Veterans Day, Nov. 11, both thanks was given and stories were shared of what some of our unsung heroes have endured.



Left: English instructor Ryan Davis tells the story of his Uncle Smoke, a Vietnam veteran. Right: Sean Warren addresses the room in Roger Rook on Nov. 7.