

MARK STEIN (MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL 1995)

WALL OF NAMES

FROM PAGE 13

The men and women pleaded for help, enraged and vulnerable. I was struck by how these veterans who I heard were so bitter and angry did not seem to hate. I asked Shay why: why did they only cry out in pain and need? Shay answered, "They have no choice. Where else can they go for help?" Of course; isn't that part of the pain? To have to work with the people who ripped you apart, who ripped your values to shreds and who then dismissed themselves from any responsibility? Steven said to me, "It hurts to have faith in something so strong you'd die for it, then come back and be slapped around. It hurts. But you can't let go of your values, that's when you crack up. There was no honor in dying in Vietnam. There was value dying for the values we went over with, but those values didn't hold true."

I probed my life for something comparable and found nothing. Nothing to help me understand the pain or the love that enveloped everyone there. I felt at times alien; I wanted to be among them and felt awkward. When I was thinking of attending one of the reunion parties I turned again to Shay for help. "What do I say to them?"

"You don't say much of anything," she replied. "They're all talking and laughing and there's so much love between them it just feels good to be in the room with them. I just listen to them talk. It's been so long since they talked to anyone who'd want to listen — most people have been telling them to shut up. They just need to tell somebody their story."

There were individuals like Butch in the bar at the Dupont Plaza Hotel. He told me about his uncle who had been with him in Vietnam and who committed suicide. "I told him I knew he was having marriage problems, and I told him, 'You got anything you want to talk about you come to me anytime, okay?' He was my uncle but he was a big brother too, and my friend. He didn't talk to no one but me after we were in 'Nam together. And two weeks later I heard he blew his brains out. He was so sane, man. He'd adjusted so well, but he held it all in."

There was Ron Bobish in the party for the 173rd Airborne, who said, "I feel safe here. I felt safest in the field with these guys. They saved my fuckin' ass. We gotta lot of respect for each other." I said something about camaraderie, and he exploded. "Camaraderie, that's it exactly! We were there and we didn't know what we were doing and everybody hated us. Camaraderie was the most important thing about that war." He also commented about "The Herd's" (the 173rd) lack of racial discrimination, but I have to question that claim since Michael remarked, "What war was he in?"

There was a man in an elevator who talked about a veteran whose name was not on the Memorial. He had been

sent home in a coma and died and was not acknowledged to have been killed in the war. I discovered that was the case for all the men who had come home wounded and died here. Some of these have been added since 1982. (The Wall also lacks the names of men who died in covert action in Cambodia and Laos. No one knows how many would be added if it were to include the veterans and civilians who have died from the violence of the Vietnam War at home.)

And there was a nurse who talked about being a woman in the war — don't forget about us, she said to cheers and applause from the men: and countless others who swapped stories and asked the same questions of each other over and over again: *Who were you with?*

Michael observed the ritual of healing at the unit parties in Washington but did not feel a part of it. He was angered by the government's political manipulation of the weekend. He felt that the veterans, by participating in the flagwaving parades and speeches, were showing gratitude toward the government that had deceived them. Of all of us, Michael found no resolution that weekend. His personal anger warred with his observation that the men and women themselves felt pride and love in one another's presence. He wrote on returning:

In D.C. I felt smothered by flags and military bands. I sensed we were about to be used again. Our sojourn to Washington had been played up as a healing of the country still divided from the Vietnam War. I felt the government would take advantage of our ceremony of reconciliation and use it as a basis of support for its descent toward the final outcome of a military-industrial partnership. Yet for all that our presence must have been an embarrassment, a tattered, crippled specter of a lost war. Our image was to be manipulated but we were to be got out of town as quickly as the ritual was finished.

I expected too much: an honest evaluation of the war and our roles as soldiers, coming to terms with our feelings toward the Vietnamese and the manner in which we treated them, and refusal to be manipulated in support for another war. I also hoped to see at least one of the few close friends of combat. None were there. My disappointment was almost complete.

The exception was how deeply moved I was by the veterans' need for each other. Common and everyday barriers

REVIVAL OF THE LIVING

My personal pilgrimage to the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C. was a hopeful journey. The anticipation of bringing to reality twelve years of dreamlike memories and feelings was of unreal proportions. While there I felt many of the men and women made the pilgrimage for much the same reasons as myself. We came to meet and touch, to share emotions and stand together as humans who shared such an extreme experience and remained silent for so long.

For me it was therapy. There was not so much the feeling of being war heroes, but we all shared the heroic feeling that comes out of surviving and enduring.

We stood together and marched together as if to say, "Look, we're still here whether you want us or not. We survived and we possess a great amount of knowledge that might help prevent the next war which would be started at the whim of the privileged few."

Personally, I did not go to Washington for a pat on the back or even a welcome home. I've always known I was home.

We gathered in D.C. not for the final burial of our dead but for the revival of our living."

~STEVEN CAREY

Steven Carey was a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam in 1969.

A HERO OF THE VIETNAM WAR

BY JAMES M. JONES

The Vietnam War, which lasted for a generation to the Vietnamese and more than a decade for the United States, ended in 1975. With bombs, napalm firebombing, the use of chemicals such as Agent Orange to destroy forests, crops and people, and with search and destroy missions of soldiers on the ground, the United States government attempted to destroy Vietnam, its people, its culture and the land itself.

Gradually the American people rose up against this brutal, senseless devastation.

Schools and colleges all over the United States were closed when students went on strike and picketed to keep them closed. Mass demonstrations and miles-long marches in the cities got longer and larger. I will never forget the parade of perhaps 300,000 people on one march in San Francisco. I looked back from the head of the march and saw miles of marchers like a gigantic caterpillar winding up and down the city's hills toward Golden State Park.

The huge marches and strikes finally got the message through to the warmakers in the White House and Pentagon that the slaughter would have to stop. Their response at first was to strike back with force and arrest and it took more marches and civic protest to finally compel the government to end the war.

There were many heroes and heroines, here in the United States, who fought to end the senseless slaughter and destruction. One such was Jenny Stone. Her story stands clear in my memory.

Jenny Stone was slender, slight, beautiful, brunette, 19 years old. When Jenny took an assignment as a reporter for Pacifica Radio Station KPFA in Berkeley, which was listener-sponsored, to cover a demonstration at the San Francisco federal office building, she knew there could be bad trouble. The vicious police "TAC" squad had already maimed students at San Francisco State College, and at Berkeley at People's Park sharpshooters had killed one person and blinded another. But KPFA was short of reporters and it was necessary to get the news out to the people in Northern California who supported the efforts to end the war. Jenny volunteered to do it.

She carried a portable tape recorder and joined a picket-line that circled the federal building. When people gathered around the steps to the building entrance to hear a speaker, as suddenly and as mindless as a load of bombs landing on a Vietnamese hamlet, a troop of heavily armed police attacked the pickets. They beat people to the ground with full swings of their clubs and continued beating them.

Jenny Stone recorded the attack. She stayed right in the center of the melee and described what the police were doing and recorded on tape the sounds of clubs crashing on skulls and bodies and the screams of those who were hurt. A blow from a police club split her scalp. A second blow almost broke her neck.

In spite of being badly stunned, Jenny managed to show her press identification. She was arrested and charged — a grim joke — with assaulting a demonstrator.

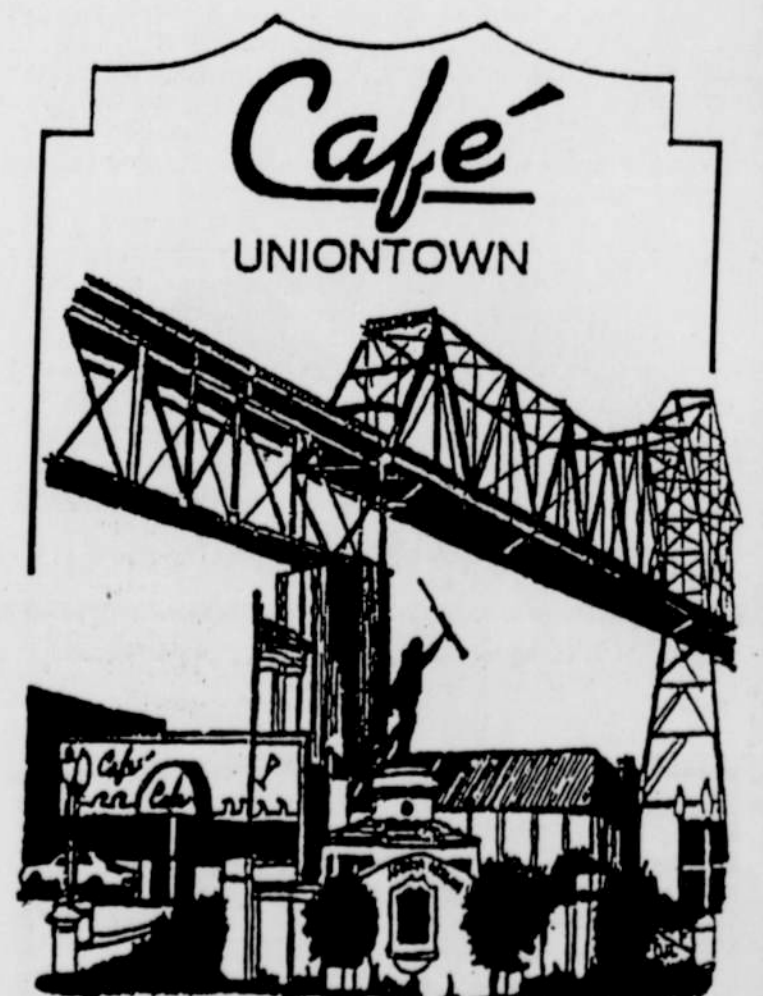
Ronald Reagan was then governor of California. He had declared, "If it takes a bloodbath to stop protest, let's have it!" But the protests and the marches grew larger and longer until the men in Washington were forced to stop their merciless war in Southeast Asia.

James M. Jones wrote this article for the NCTE when he was 81 years old in 1985. He had been involved in the American Left, in particular the labor movement, for more than 60 years. After living many years in Central America, he spent the final years of his life in Otter Rock, Oregon and wrote many articles about his experiences for magazines and newspapers. He died in the late 1990s.



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