

An Open Letter to Vietnam Veterans

This letter was written by Julie Weaver of Burleson, Texas which has been published on various Vietnam Veteran-based web sites. It is repeated here with her express permission.

Dear Hero,

I was in my 20s during the Vietnam era. I was a single mother and, I'm sad to say, I was probably one of the most self-centered people on the planet. To be perfectly honest, I didn't care one way or the other about the war. All I cared about was me—how I looked, what I wore, and where I was going. I worked and I played. I was never politically involved in anything, but I allowed my opinions to be formed by the media. It happened without my ever being aware. I listened to the protest songs and I watched the six o'clock news and I listened to all the people who were talking. After awhile, I began to repeat their words and, if you were to ask me, I'd have told you I was against the war. It was very popular. Everyone was doing it, and we never saw what it was doing to our men. All we were shown was what they were doing to the people of Vietnam.

My brother joined the Navy and then he was sent to Vietnam. When he came home, I repeated the words to him. It surprised me at how angry he became. I hurt him very deeply and there were years of separation—not only of miles, but also of character. I didn't understand.

In fact, I didn't understand anything until one day I opened my newspaper and saw the anguished face of a Vietnam veteran. The picture was taken at the opening of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. His countenance revealed the terrible burden of his soul. As I looked at his picture and his tears, I finally understood a tiny portion of what you had given for us and what we had done to you. I understood that I had been manipulated, but I also knew that I had failed to think for myself. It was like waking up out of a nightmare, except that the nightmare was real. I didn't know what to do.

One day about three years ago, I went to a member of the church I attended at that time, because he had served in Vietnam. I asked him if he had been in Vietnam and he got a look on his face and said, "Yes." Then I took his hand, looked him square in the face and said, "Thank you for going." His jaw dropped, he got an amazed look on his face, and then he said, "No one has ever said that to me." He hugged me and I could see that he was about to get tears in his eyes. It gave me an idea, because there is much more that needs to be said. How do we put into words all the regret of so many years? I don't know, but when I have an opportunity, I take it. So here goes.

Have you been to Vietnam? If so, I have something I want to say to you — thank you for going! Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Please forgive me for my insensitivity. I don't know how I could have been so blind, but I was. When I woke up, you were wounded and the damage was done, and I don't know how to fix it. I will never stop regretting my actions, and I will never let it happen again.

Please understand that I am speaking for the general

public also. We know we blew it and we don't know how to make it up to you. We wish we had been there for you when you came home from Vietnam because you were a hero and you deserved better. Inside of you there is a pain that will never completely go away and you know what? It's inside of us, too; because when we let you down, we hurt ourselves, too. We all know it and we suffer guilt and we don't know what to do so we cheer for our troops and write letters to "any soldier" and we hang out the yellow ribbons and fly the flag and we love America. We love you, too; even if it doesn't feel like it to you. I know in my heart that, when we cheer wildly for our troops, part of the reason is trying to make up for Vietnam. And, while it may work for us, it does nothing for you.

We failed you. You didn't fail us, but we failed you and we lost our only chance to be grateful to you at the time when you needed and deserved it. We have disgraced ourselves and brought shame to our country. We did it and we need your forgiveness. Please say you will forgive us and please take your rightful place as heroes of our country. We have learned a terribly painful lesson at your expense and we don't know how to fix it.

From the Heart,
Julie Weaver

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