

Friends because inevitably the subject of war would come up at any gathering and I would feel like I had to defend my husband and the other young men who were in his position because they had not run away to Canada or burned their draft cards. To this day, neither my husband nor I have any close friends.

March 11, 1985

These are letters he wrote to us from Basic describing his attempts to rationalize about how a country like ours could take a man, completely isolate him from his wife and family and environment and any success in business he may have built up, and completely change him into a killing, happy war machine.

Walter Capps
U.C.S.B. Primary School, I moved on petitions for his friends and kept
Santa Barbara, CA. it rings for some of the guys who wanted to marry their

Dear Mr. Capps:

With a familiar but long-suppressed feeling of sickly dread, I read "Vietnam War: Veterans Relive Their Horrors in the UCSB Classroom" in the "View" section of last Sunday's Los Angeles Times.

I am a 37-year-old woman who is slowly working her way to a B.A. degree at Ventura College, hoping to transfer to UCSB Extension this fall. I wish I had known about your class or been able to attend. Last fall on Veteran's Day I stood alone in the back of the room at the Veterans' Hall Memorial Service, stood in the background on State Street watching the parade, and sat smoking in my car on the edge of the park during the rally. I thought that I might be able to come to terms with my life and feelings about the war, but I lack the self-confidence to assert myself and reach out to others.

My boyfriend all through high-school was killed in Vietnam, shocking me into the realization that my reading material of "How to be a Good Wife" was no longer relevant. I went through that summer, for all practical purposes, in a state of shock.

Later I fell in love with a handsome musician and we spent a few months pretending that the world consisted of the Sunset Strip then, as he was about to be drafted, he qualified for the Warrant Officer Program. I got pregnant, we got married, he went to Basic Training a week later. During his officer training school, we went through near starvation and constant mental pressure from the injustices, stupidity, and arrogance of the U.S. Army resulting in chronic migraines for me and a wracking pre-ulcerous stomach condition for him (which both still exist to this day). We wrote to each other every day through the times when we could not be together and our letters have proved to be a journal mirroring the incredulity and tragic waste of the times.

Before his enlistment I had attended seminars, lectures, rallies, and protests against the Vietnam War. I was practically a fanatic and I can only assume that I would have probably been one of the well-meaning extremists who screamed, "Babykiller" to returning vets and treated them with contempt. Except my world was suddenly populated with GI's instead of long-haired students; young boys out of high school, my husband and his new buddies who became such close fast friends in such a short time, who would never be as close to anyone in such a way again. I stopped socializing with childhood

friends because inevitably the subject of war would come up at any gathering and I would feel like I had to defend my husband and the other young men who were in his position because they had not run away to Canada or burned their draft cards. To this day, neither my husband nor I have any close friends.

There are letters he wrote to me from Basic describing his attempts to rationalize about "how a country like ours could take a man, completely isolate him from his wife and family and environment and any success in business he may have built up, and completely change him into a killing, hating war MACHINE."

In Primary School, I sewed on patches for his friends and kept "surprise" engagement rings for some of the guys who wanted to marry their sweethearts when they got back and wished they had done so before going in, served millions of humble but home-cooked meals from our little trailer to scared and lonely warrant officer candidates who overwhelmed and embarrassed me with their gratefulness and affection. I totally tuned out the war because I was terrified beyond comprehension to allow myself to think of the worst possibilities -- that my husband would be killed and, selfishly, that I would have to endure the pain of losing a loved one again. Consequently, I did not allow myself to come to terms on my feelings about this period because I rigidly did not allow myself to acknowledge any of it.

Toward the end of Advanced Helicopter School, my husband developed an infection in his inner ear affecting his equilibrium and was medically grounded. The army was furious that they "wasted" so much time and money on his exclusive training, so sent him on a round of daily tests and interrogations, from complete physicals to sessions with a psychiatrist, who pronounced him as normal as possible under the circumstances. Although my husband was one of the top students in flight class, the system wanted to prove that he was "faking it." They made our life hell and immediately busted him down several pay grades and threatened to send him to the infantry. I was ignored by the socially status-conscious officers' wives on base, treated as if I didn't exist. By this time, my grandmother died, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy had been assassinated, a friend I had regarded as a brother was killed by "friendly fire," a wife of another candidate almost bled to death from a self-induced abortion while I tried frantically to get help, then my mother died suddenly of a stroke. My father and brother were helpless. I had to borrow from the Army Emergency Relief Fund to fly home with the baby and leave my husband.

I volunteered at a veteran's hospital while we were apart. Instead of feeling that I was genuinely helping, I got too emotionally involved and ended up feeling more guilt at my own helplessness and the terrible conditions. I kept visualizing the face of my high school boyfriend, raised not to question this great country who patriotically enlisted in the marines and was killed at Khe Sanh; then I would visualize my husband's face on the patients with terrible injuries. Fortunately, just as I was about to have a complete nervous breakdown, luck looked our way and he was able to register for college and get out early with an honorable discharge.

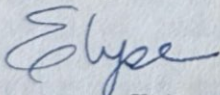
When my husband got out of the army, it was like we were dropped back to earth and nothing was changed, but several years of changes had taken place

and he soon dropped out of school and tried to go back to music with sporadic success. He was set up by a "friend" for marijuana (we lived in Georgia at the time) and an old army buddy, among others, wrote a testimonial for him to the District Attorney, calling our home "a place of warmth and honesty" and recounting how we had helped younger Warrant Officer Cadets whose "emotional stability was questionable at times." I cried when I read that letter. He avoided imprisonment, but we were ruined financially and have never really recovered solvency.

I have not been able to call myself a protestor, nor have I been able to call myself a proponent of the war. My husband was "guilty" for being in the Army, then "guilty" in a perverse way for not having to go to Vietnam. I believe that the time we shared getting through these few years together cemented our relationship for life. After 18 years of marriage, this year I gave him a hug and wished him Happy Veteran's Day, despite the fact that I thought he'd probably react with disgust and sarcasm. He smiled at me and said, "You're the first person who ever wished me that." We went out and drank a few toasts to our friends who were left behind and to those who came back but were never the same. Even though we didn't go to Southeast Asia, we count ourselves in the last category.

I read that a Vietnam Veterans Counseling Center will soon be in operation in Santa Barbara. I would like to help out in any capacity possible if volunteers are needed. I've been an executive secretary for years and have excellent organizational and technical skills in that area. I would appreciate your passing this on to whoever would be in charge of such an operation. If there is any literature regarding your class, the program, or the proposed center available, I would very much appreciate your advising me where I can obtain such material. The entire purpose and content of this letter was originally meant to consist of the last paragraph.

Sincerely,



Elyse Ann Kutz

3037 Harbor Blvd.
Ventura, CA. 93001

(805) 644-9944