

It has been accurately reported that Senator Bob Kerrey, who is running for President, put in a brief stint as a guest professor in the University of California after leaving the governorship of Nebraska. As it happened, Kerrey's teaching came at my request, and I was privileged to teach side by side with him throughout the winter quarter, 1987.

Our course was an undergraduate offering on "The Impact of the Vietnam War upon American Culture." Kerrey's involvement was prompted by his experience in the war and by the thoughtful attention he had given to the subject since returning home. Before being selected for the ten-week faculty appointment, Kerrey had delivered two guest lectures. He came well prepared. He lectured well. He brought fresh insight to the subject. And though he had every right to posture himself otherwise, he was upbeat, optimistic, constructive and hopeful.

But there was pathos in his message too. When asked why he remained silent for so many years, he quoted Elie Wiesel, "when an event is unspeakable, it takes some time to learn the right words." When asked about the killing and the dying, he confessed that "there are some things the country asks you to do that are more difficult than dying: it is more difficult to kill than to die for one's country." When asked about his personal feelings about the war, he hesitated, then, in accapella voice, sang several verses of the Australian song "And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda" (about brave young men who go off to battle, then return badly beaten, with "nubs and stubs" instead of arms and legs). As he walked from the stage, unable completely to conceal the limp from the partial amputation of his right leg, we recognized that he had been singing about himself.



Does any of this qualify as fit content for presidential politics? Naturally, I think that it does, particularly when one notes that George Bush will certainly be the last World War II Veteran to occupy the White House. Bob Kerrey is the second (following Al Gore) serious presidential contender who served in Vietnam. This, by itself, is a noteworthy chapter in the story of the continuing achievements of those who returned home from that troubled war. It is apparent that most who served there can no longer see the world the same way their fathers did.

I listen to Bob Kerrey speak, and I hear echoes of continuing, persistent reflection over Vietnam. I hear his pained, reluctant ambivalence over Desert Storm, and I view it as extension of his Vietnam War struggles. I hear him attempt to make adequate health care the fundamental national issue, and I remember the bits and pieces he has disclosed about his own extended hospitalisation. I hear him talk of the plight of third world nations, and I recognize him to talking about his experience of revisiting Vietnam, certainly not to wage war, but to assist in the building of a prosthetic services clinic to provide artificial arms and legs from Vietnamese amputees. I hear him plead for an updating of the role of government, and I know that he believes that government is source for good as well as impediment to freedom. I observe him addressing the election crowds, and I recognize that inside the politician is a dedicated teacher who recognizes all too well that the deepest, most trusted human truths cannot be sloganized nor encapsulated in sixty- or thirty-second sound bites.

No, I do not think that valiant military service is qualifica-