

Joann Stewart - 402-345-0183

I was present the first time Bob Kerrey sang "And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda." It was in a University of California class on the Vietnam War, and came in response to a student's query about his personal reaction to the war. As he sang the mournful lines about soldiers who go off to battle, full of bravado, then return so badly beaten and wounded that well-wishers and loved ones have to look the other way, we recognized that he was describing his own experience, having made the song his own.

I wasn't present the second time Kerrey sang the song, that happy November 1988 night when he had just won election to the United States Senate. But I was present last September in Lincoln when he announced his candidacy for the Presidency. As he spoke hopefully and constructively about the changes he desired for the nation while conveying his gratitude to his parents as well as his devotion to his children, I wondered if this would be the way we'd finally put Vietnam behind us. Perhaps the time had come for someone who had taken the worst of the war to make the best of it for the country, to ~~teach the rest of us how individual and collective~~ ^{take the lead in reestablishing national} priorities ~~can be re-established~~ in a post Cold War era.

I was present with Kerrey as he campaigned in New Hampshire, witnessing at close range the extraordinary personal demands of this ^{effort} together with his unbounded dedication. No one could have worked harder or given of himself more fully.

As Junior Tuesday election returns came in I felt the profound sadness that "Waltzing Matilda" communicates. The cheers remain, of course, the flags are flying, and the warm embrace of family and friends is even stronger and more knowing. But it isn't the way any of us who are close to him would have wished it to turn out.

His was not a campaign on behalf of a specific set of proposals, or even in support of a five, six, seven or eight-point program. Instead, it was an appeal to a depth of human understanding that is most difficult to acquire. Had he won, he would have labored mightily to rejuvenate our worthiest senses of ourselves. What I trust he knows is that he has already achieved this for lots of us, and we are steadfast in our gratitude and pride.

Walter H. Capps

Walter H. Capps, a native of Omaha, is the UC Santa Barbara professor who co-taught a class on the Vietnam War with Senator Kerrey in 1987.

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