

UW Seattle Essay contest winner

Charles Vo

“It is easy to love your friend, but sometimes the hardest lesson to learn is to love your enemy.”

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

As the young man hears the air sirens screech across the streets of Saigon on the final day of April 1975, the sirens signal the inevitable march of the communist forces that will ultimately take the city in the name of national liberation. Yet, the young man resists in futility and stays behind with the fall of his hometown and country. The young man asks himself, “Where are the Americans?”. That single echo would meld into the annals of history as a reverberating wave of sadness into the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people. That young man who called to that echo was my father, who had lost his country, home, and family at my age.

By the time he was my age, he had been bred to be a soldier who was expected to take up arms for his country and sacrifice his life. But, similar to the men found in the exhibit, he was also drafted to serve his country; my father very well could've escaped the draft, and he very well could've been a deserter even in the ARVN forces. After all, it was caustically common. But to my father, desertion designated death and dishonor. But I cannot compare the circumstances to the men shown in the *Waging Peace in Vietnam* exhibit. Though they are deserters, they may be deemed cowards, but to me, they were the ones who chose freedom.

As a UW student, I walk past the *Waging Peace* exhibit daily on my way to classes, it also serves as my checkpoint when I walk to my favorite location of study in the Allen library. The exhibit has taught me that in war, there are those who choose to fight, and those who choose

peace, but those who choose peace still fight when they should not have to suffer. These people who chose not to fight were still fighting battles of their own. As an American, I recognize that these deserters fought for true freedom, I believe the draft was disgustingly un-American and believe there never should've been a draft. As a human, I believe that war is our greatest sin in the world, it haunts people of all backgrounds and separates people, but on the other side of war is the advent of peace and remediation. I believe it starts with us to wage peace in Vietnam and to wage peace in the world, and it begins with all of us.

*To start off, I had recently finished a study abroad program in Vietnam, I had done things my parents would disapprove of: sporting the current flag of Vietnam, and paying respects to my father's enemies, the likes of Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Le Duan. The latter of which is considered the devil among my family as well as the South Vietnamese diaspora. I was not required to participate in these activities. However, I will not stand by and continue this cycle of hatred. The intergenerational trauma of war shall end with me. The people who opposed the war stand at an opposite viewpoint from my family, but simply continuing their hatred through me will only stoke the flames of war in my family.*

Thus, upon learning about the people on the front lines of the anti-war movement in America, I was captivated by their stories. Paul Cox, Terry Irwin, Clarence Fitch, Bill Short, etc. and even women like Joan Baez and Coretta Scott King paved the road to peace. But unfortunately, they were ridiculed and severely punished for expressing their thoughts. On the other hand, my father detested those who abandoned their duties. Do I follow in my father's footsteps as well? My father was never meant to be a man of war, nor should anyone have to

be. Having been inspired by the voices found in the Waging Peace exhibit, I have decided to fight for freedom.