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Vietnam Veterans of America: A Guiding Force

Carmine Christopher Iosue. My grandfather on my father's side was drafted into the Vietnam war in February of 1969 and his service ended in November of 1970. He served in the 1st of the 20th 11th Light Infantry Brigade Americal Division. During his fight of nearly 2 years, my grandfather led a rescue mission into a minefield where he detonated the mine. However, even through his bravery, shrapnel was sent into his legs, which has left permanent injury. This act of bravery earned him a Purple Heart on April 20th of 1970 in Quảng Ngãi province.

Even through his injuries, my grandfather dedicated his life to his mission while continuing to serve his community and veterans all around the world through his volunteerism and high spirits. During the late 60s, early 70s, it was a conflicted country, citizens were fighting against the conflict, and others were getting sent to fight the conflict. It was a unique experience to finally dive into a more personal look about a topic we had so heavily covered in school, something that was so distant to so many of my peers. A war that was fought over 50 years ago often had no other significance to them besides something we had to learn about in school and learn to go from as a country. However, I always felt a little more engaged, knowing that the reason I'm here today, in this classroom, is because of my grandfather's survival. It was fascinating to learn about this other side of my grandpa, the side we had never truly talked about one on one, something that I always knew of but never pursued. I think my interview continued to reinforce the importance of selflessness and the ability to give back in my own life. While my grandfather may not have expected to be drafted, he remained his true self, looking on the bright side and using all of his love to fight for a change and fight for his country. Instead of giving up,

he stepped up to be a leader, and even though he risked his life, his selflessness allowed him to persevere. He never let his determination wane as he continued volunteering at VFWs and for veterans, as he continued to be a father, husband, and a grandfather. As someone who has been heavily involved in my community since I was young, through Girl Scouts and engaging in student government starting in middle school, I always looked up to my grandfather, and this interview has allowed me insight into his experiences and how to continue applying his positivity and activism to my own life. As I enter college, I'll continue to give back to my new community, offering selfless acts knowing that I'll be able to better benefit those around me, as well as myself, as my grandpa had done.

This interview also allowed me to ground and check myself in regards to the stories and realities of others experiences. So many movies, books, articles, and overall education about the Vietnam War has provided different viewpoints or exploitations about the event. Again, many students in my classes may have never had any experience with loss, or conflict and consume this media, disconnecting themselves from those really involved. I often have to remember the realities and severity of not only this one event, but any war, tragedy, or experience that gets then translated into media. My interview helped me not only hear about my grandpa's experiences, but remember that there are hundreds of thousands of other people who have similar, or drastically different memories of the same event. That there are real people behind the media we intake. I was able to connect with him, and put a familiar face among all the photos and videos we had watched in class. I was also reminded how lucky I am that I am able to connect with my grandpa on this level. Although it was only over the phone, I understood how meaningful it was to not only talk to my grandpa about this one event, but to talk to my grandpa period. So many others whose family was drafted are not as fortunate as me, and this interview helped ground me

in gratefulness, a reminder to take nothing for granted and spend as much time with the important people in my life as possible.

Before my interview, my grandpa and I had never really talked about this aspect of his life, how it affected him, and I never truly evaluated how he responded after he returned. However, even after our conversation, I still see him as the same grandpa who had driven me through the blazing Arizona streets in his golf cart, who calls to sing me a happy birthday every year, and who always has a smile on his face, especially when he talks about golf. He's my grandpa as much as he is a hero and role model for so many others. While he is still injured in both of his lower legs and has been out of the US Army for over 5 decades, he continues to volunteer his services weekly. He has continued to awe me as he will soon be earning his next award for 17,500 hours of volunteer service with, and for, all Veterans. As I look towards my Grandpa, someone who has not only helped shape my childhood but impacted thousands of lives both through his service in the war and volunteering, I am inspired to continuously give back. I've learned that giving up time and effort for others is a reward and honor that I seek to achieve every day, thanks to him. Selflessness has surrounded me in my adolescence but I am now consciously working and am incorporating it into the next steps in my life as I enter a new community full of new people to help. Growing up surrounded by his endearment and bravery has encouraged me to strive to become as well-rounded and selfless as he is, and will always be.