

Post-Vietnam Veteran's Stories

A couple weeks ago, while volunteering at a local event, I met a person who was a freshman at MSUM the same fall as I was. He and his family were also volunteering. I talked with his son as we were working registration and learned that he was finishing his doctorate in Clinical Psychology. I asked if he was going to teach or go into practice. He said practice, I asked where and he replied he wasn't sure. I suggested that the VA needs good psychologists to which he said a couple of his classmates were planning on applying with the VA. As we all know, many of our combat Veterans could use a good counselor or psychologist at the VA, preferably someone who can relate to the Veteran's experience. This reminded me of one of the more heart-wrenching cases I met while I served as the GI Bill person at MSUM, which I was for 36 years. I met a couple, he was a Vietnam combat Veteran and she worked on campus. I'm not going to use names to protect their story. He was an Art major and this allowed him to release some of his feelings through his art work. He was doing well in classes and in his personal life until one day. He had returned from Vietnam with a trunk of stuff from 'Nam but had never opened it. She came home one day to find him with the trunk open and that far-away look as if he were back in 'Nam. I know other Veterans had similar experiences. She tried really hard to be understanding of his change in behavior over the next several months, being withdrawn and not communicating. He stopped going to classes and eventually dropped out of college. We arranged for him to meet with counselors at the VA in Fargo. Remember this was a time when Vietnam Veterans were not treated well by the VA and the country in general. After a couple visits, he told me "They don't understand." Eventually the couple got a divorce, he moved from Moorhead and started seeing a counselor in St. Cloud with better results. She quit her job at MSUM and moved out of state. I've lost contact with both of them but hope they both found what they needed.

One more story I remember when a Vietnam Veteran came into my office all upset. He worked as a cabinet maker and installer and he had made some cabinets for a house being constructed. He was really upset because the building carpenter was a quarter inch off over a span of 18 feet meaning the cabinet maker had to make changes. I really thought he would do something violent so I spent time calming him down.

For the past several years, the VA has been responding to the needs of these Veterans. If you find yourself in a similar situation, give the VA a chance.