

For one documentary, I got to ride a bicycle the length of Vietnam, Hanoi to Saigon, elbow to elbow with fifty American vets and fifty Vietcong vets. As we swept through the rice fields, pedaled en masse through the villages, the women in their colorful *ao dai* tunics carrying huge loads on their heads—our marines largely macho and proud of their service to country, the army vets many of them ashamed of killing innocents in a war they couldn't defend—I myself was transported through a page of dark and critical history. I won't ever pretend to know the experience of war (and I rail against sportscasters pushing the metaphor of players taking the field as soldiers taking to the battlefield; a football game has no bearing on the anguish of war), but I got a privileged glimpse into that particular war.

I went with a few of the vets to a school one day after a 110-mile ride. Jerry Stackhouse, a navy man blinded by a grenade, wearing around his neck a photo of himself as a twenty-one year old just having arrived in 'Nam—handsome as heck—was doing our ride on the back of a tandem bike. A girl about age ten asked Jerry to share his worst experience in the war. Before he could take a breath, the girl blurted out that she wanted to recant her question. She said she felt foolish in asking it, that of course his worst moment was the grenade that exploded in his face.

Jerry said: "No. I've been to hell and back with this injury. Fifty major surgeries. A new face. A partial esophagus transplant. But I'm living a good life. My worst moment wasn't my own grenade blast. We came into a village one night. I was youngest so was sent ahead to make sure it was clear. We were wanting to spend a few nights recuperating from losses we had suffered the last couple of days. My heart was pounding. I was shitting in my pants. I am sweeping my AK-47 left to right in between the huts. Nobody was there. The village had been abandoned. Or wiped out. Then a little boy, he was younger than you, I think, came darting out from behind a hut. His gun was bigger than mine. His eyes were dead. And I blew him to pieces."

Jerry, holding his white cane, started to sob. "I've never forgiven myself. I saw that little innocent boy's head roll."

As Jerry wept, this little girl came over and wrapped her arms around his hips. She held him tight and then she gave a speech most politicians couldn't muster. "Jerry, we will never forgive JFK and Henry Kissinger and all those men who took our country from us. Agent Orange still lingers in our air. The birds have gone away to Lao and are not coming back. But, Jerry, I forgive you. You were a young soldier doing what you thought was right for your country. You can't forgive yourself but I forgive you."

I will never forget that moment, that girl. Neither will Jerry.

The text on the left is from the 2015 book:

[Find A Way](#) by Diana Nyad

The book is a self documentary of Diana's massive efforts in her lifelong swimming quests.

When my wife was reading this book on our downhill mountain biking vacation in Big Bear California during August of 2016, she stopped to read me these paragraphs.

I was so moved, and reminded of the bullshit non-war in Vietnam that I had protested against in Washington DC, while attending the City College of New York, that I had her mark the pages for me.

I have scanned them so you can read them here. I hope that Diana Nyad would not mind my reproducing this tiny part of her magnificent book on my web site in her honor.