

Tammy Blue

FIND THE WINDOW

Because of the Brave

It is just a few days after the July 4th holiday, and I can't help but remember what I was thinking and feeling while watching the fireworks "bursting in air" over Vulcan Park in Birmingham. Of course we remember the fallen heroes and respect the men and women who devote their lives to defending our nation. Even with all the nuances of what that entails, we can almost all agree that we owe them our support and gratitude.

Yet, when I was growing up, I'd sometimes groan out of boredom when my stepfather, Mark, wanted to show pictures and tell his military stories about being a Marine and serving in Vietnam. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I discovered my interest of military and war movies obviously stemmed from him; we had a blast watching and discussing them. And, for the first time, I appreciated the fact that he was actually there and I started to ask him questions.

I loved hearing about what it was like (even the unmentionable things that I now know he censored considerably for my protection). Some of his recollections, like the size and number of insects, seemed like "tall tales" until I became a resident of the South. I now often compare things I find to those he must have seen when he was there.

But what I truly loved hearing about the most was the teamwork, the ensemble of brave Americans who come together under the most trying of circumstances. The friendships and bonds, not to mention the incredible loss, and how they become a part of you forever. My stepfather lost friends, and had some very close calls himself while he served. As I listened to him talk about it, all I can feel is grateful – grateful that not only did he survive, but that he was telling me his story.



He could speak first-hand about things we can only read about; like how a lot of the soldiers were treated when they returned to the US. As we've all learned, (especially if we suffered through the movie, *Forest Gump*), there were radically different opinions on the war and our place there. I can't even imagine after all the survivors endured that they could come home to a country that would treat them like the enemy. Times seem to have changed - we now appear to be, at least on the surface, extremely pro-military regardless of the flawed government in charge. I hope that support continues to extend further and help those that have served and are still struggling with a variety of issues.

So, as I watched the fireworks this holiday, not only did I want to thank the founding fathers, but also my own. This is the Land of the Free, because of the Brave – so thank you for your service Mark Turner; Semper Fi. There are countless stories out there yet to be told by those who saw things with their own eyes; and as a nation, we really need to listen.



Tammy Blue is a freelance columnist for *the Leaf* and published feature writer. Follow Tammy on Twitter @BostonBluebird and her website, TammyBlue.com