



GUEST OPINION – July 10, 2013 – Sara Blum

Place to heal: support the Joint American/Vietnamese memorial

As a nurse Vietnam veteran and local Auburn resident, I support the joint American/Vietnamese Memorial proposed for Veterans Memorial Park.

I am not surprised that there is some opposition from veteran groups. That happened in 1985 as well.

Back in 1985 when I was focused on my own healing and that of my brother veterans, I connected with a Vietnamese hospital worker called Thu Van Nguyen who was also working on healing for her community of Vietnamese veterans. Together we began to share our passion for healing and our vision for how to do that.

We came up with a plan to bring all the veterans together at Veterans Hall at Seattle Center on Veterans Day 1985. We called it Recognition/Friendship Day. There was a lot of opposition from all of the American Veterans organizations. They were not yet healed and were still hurt and angry at what took place in 1975 and how they were treated when they came home.

I understood their reactions and believed they needed what we were proposing. I spent a lot of time supporting Thu Van Nguyen when she was frightened and wanted to back out. I stayed positive and trusted that it would all work out well if we could sustain ourselves and what we believed.

When the day finally arrived, it was one of the most healing and emotionally moving events that had taken place in support of our Vietnam and Vietnamese veterans.

The Veterans Hall was packed and had standing room only. Every Seattle newspaper and TV station was there, and they had a lot to report on. We brought in the flags, and then I opened it up and shared my story of being a nurse at the 12th Evacuation Hospital, Cu Chi, Vietnam and my vision for healing for all of us, both American and Vietnamese veterans. Then Thu shared her story and vision. From there, we alternated the sharing of stories, one American and one Vietnamese.

After the first set of soldier's stories, the two men hugged each other and cried together, and that continued throughout the event, story after story followed by hugs and crying. The men began to understand there was plenty of pain and suffering to go around. It was time to heal, and they began it that very day.

I went back to Vietnam in 1996 on the first Peacetreets Vietnam Trip and was able to return to Cu Chi. The one place I found a small replica of the flag of the Republic of Vietnam was a Catholic church. I took a picture of it. That flag is the one we as veterans know and remember. We were there to help fight for that flag to continue to wave, for Vietnam to be a democracy so the people could be free.

We lost that fight. Let us not lose the fight to heal our veterans and their families. From Veterans Day 1986 the Vietnamese soldiers have been marching with us in the Veterans Day Parade. Now our two flags can wave beside each other in Veterans Memorial Park, and it can be a place of healing for all of us.

Sarah L. Blum, ARNP, nurse psychotherapist, Vietnam War veteran and author.