

This interview was conducted by Goose Wagemann on May 28th, 2001. The interviewee is Jim Wagemann.

GW: How old were you at the time of the war?

JW: Well it was the late 60's early 70's. In late '69 or so we moved out here from South Dakota. I was in 1st grade when I tried being in Cub Scouts when I moved out here so it was the early 70's, out here in Oregon, that we were. So that would be, 2nd gradish.

GW: Was there any kind of difference between living out here and back there in relation to the war?

JW: Probably from my age level, probably not. I was just young enough that I probably wasn't very aware of it.

GW: How about the people's response, like the people in the Midwest in comparison to those out here?

JW: I don't know if there was a difference in response from what I saw. I would expect a little bit from when we've been back there before and during the Gulf War and the way people responded then versus now with a little more patriotism there, a little more countryside, kind of on an average than they do out here. Here you have a little more of a liberal view on things.

GW: What kind of commercials did you see on TV?

JW: As a kid I was probably looking for candy commercials, myself.

GW: Were you in Boy Scouts?

JW: Yeah, at that time it was starting in the Cub Scout side and going up into Boy Scouts.

GW: Did they do anything special in relation to the war?

JW: No, there was nothing I recall, it was your standard Cub Scout stuff, earning your little badge things and doing car races, and selling candy and things like that. There was really no representation towards any military kind of perspective.

GW: Did your fellow members in the Cub Scouts talk about the war at all?

JW: No, not that I recall.

GW: Did your Cub Scout leaders talk about it at all?

JW: No, most of what I heard came later in life as I was talking to people that had been through it.

GW: At school, did your friends talk about it much?

JW: No, it was, probably because we were on the younger side, just talking about what we watched on TV and recess. Those that were in Cub Scouts, talking about whatever event was next.

GW: Did your teachers say anything about the war?

JW: Not that I can really recall. I can look back now, and sometimes I can understand the news clips and a little bit of what they talked about, but in our family and my life there wasn't much representation of it at that time.

GW: What school did you go to?

JW: When I moved out here I went to Fir Grove Elementary for a year then I went to Meral Davis and then ended up going into the Hillsboro system and then moved into Reedville by the 3rd Grade, the Reedville School District.

GW: Did you see many people protesting?

JW: No, I saw some news clips about some of that, but that was it. A little on the news about 'this is going on in the war' or 'there's some protests' but it didn't seem to phase me at the time.

GW: What do you remember about those protests?

JW: Being a kid that age, it was like a waste of TV time.

GW: Do you know what kind of music people were listening to back then?

JW: My parents were still listening to Lawrence Welk, the rest of us were listening to the bubble gum rock of the time. I don't think it was necessarily portrayed as the real hardcore rock and roll stuff. We weren't listening to Jimmy Hendrix, we weren't listening to The Doors or anything like that.

GW: What was the hair like?

JW: We were all wearing it longer that's for sure. I was then.

GW: Was this pretty constant throughout the war? Was there a change at all?

JW: It seemed like it was a time in life, you know people wore their bellbottoms, the wilder clothes, you had the longer hair, the style hasn't seemed to totally have come back, you've only seen bits and pieces of it.

GW: Was there much of this before the war?

JW: No, at least not from what I saw. Maybe it was because we were in the Midwest before the war and during the early parts. We wore the clothes that weren't so bright and without bellbottoms and had the close cut haircuts from mom and grandma and wore suits and stuff like that.

GW: Do you remember much about much about the race and feminist issues back then about the same time as the war?

JW: Faintly a little bit. Maybe out here there wasn't as much out here as there was down South about the racism and stuff. Here and the Midwest, in the Midwest especially, there isn't as much of a mix from where we were at that I recall. Out here there is a little more, but not maybe as much as you seem to see the strongest amount of it when you are in the Afro-American culture and there's not the high intensity here that you have in other areas. Feminism was something that was always there. The girls wore their dresses, the girls had their so-called, more of a traditionally outline or place in life and style then they do now. Never thought about one being a flagger back then or working construction and things like that.

GW: Do you feel that these impacted school life more than the war did?

JW: Yeah, the war was kind of, in some ways, from my perspective as a kid at that point, not heavily involved it was more ignored than addressed, it was more being good boys and girls and the roles designed at those times of how boys should be and girls should be.

GW: Did you know anybody that actually refused the draft?

JW: Nope, no one that I'm aware of.

GW: Anyone that enlisted voluntarily?

JW: Nope, not that either.

GW: How were the vets treated when they came home.

JW: Based on what you always hear about World War I and II, it was like it ended and it was done. But I wasn't aware of anything happening special for anybody that was in the war in any way, at least not in that war.

GW: What was your family life like?

JW: We had a stay at home mom for the most part, other than her running a little Avon on the side. Dad worked multiple jobs because there were four of us kids and it took quite a bit to keep all of us going. Dad worked a lot and mom tried to keep us up and we all had a series of chores to do to take care of things and take responsibility about whether it was animals or vehicles or whatever it was. In the household we took care of it.

GW: Did your brothers and sister have much of an opinion on the war?

JW: No, that's interesting, I never thought about it before now, we saw news clips about the current events going on, but we never talked about it around the house, we never talked about it whether it was kids or parents. Just kind of ignored it like it was just another event that happened.

GW: Was there any place really that you talked about the war?

JW: Not as a kid. Later as I met people that had been in the war whether it was friends or coworkers and who had actually been through it. People I had worked with they'd hear helicopters saying 'this one sounded like that type of a Huey' then they would sometimes digress a little bit and then they'd talk about it and I learned more that way than I ever did from actually watching news or being there at that time.

GW: Do you feel like the war really affected your life much back then?

JW: No, you heard about it, but it was more of a daily thing that you ignored more than anything, it's kind of like Saddam Hussein today, like we just ignore him and his existence, short of when something actually occurs. The rest of us don't talk about him or deal with him.

GW: Is there anything else you'd like to say about it back then?

JW: Not back then, probably I was young enough and the way it was presented and where I was around, it wasn't an issue that was really talked about or dealt with or even paid much attention to. Later, watching the Discovery Channel, and learning some things, most of it was from people I'd worked with whether it was what the war was like and what they went through and how they weren't respected for what they did over there, and a lot of them were people that weren't volunteers but were drafted and they had no choice and they had to come back and not be respected. There were stories about the awful things that had been done. But not being able to just change that everything's a booby trap, everything's an issue, you couldn't go pick up a baby you saw laying in the middle of the road because it was probably a booby trap. One guy was a Marine guy, he was my friend's dad, and he said most of his time was spent jumping out of helicopters with people, machine gunning the heck out of the front of it so the guys could get off and start the process and jump back in and go, and that was his whole process, and he never knew if he killed anybody or hurt anybody. Another guy I knew, he talked about this and this and he had little flashbacks and one of the big things was that he always tried to be

careful and one time he came around the corner and one of the Vietnamese jumped out with a bazooka and then the only time he ever froze and he froze and it went right past him and just blew up far enough away that it didn't kill him but threw him a little bit and threw him off to this day it's something that seems to throw him off a bit. I know another guy who had been out there and he had pictures of those that they caught and hung and it seems very grotesque and coarse but it's what they did and I think he was one of those guys who did drugs and got into that kind of stuff to survive with a culture that's totally different from using babies and kids and everything to blow you up it mentally destroys you from a good clean family life type of culture to something that everything is used for the advancement of a political or social gain or some way.

GW: When did you hear these stories?

JW: One guy he must have been 18, 19, the one that got into the drugs side and had picture of the ones he hung and talked about how ugly it was over there and just surviving to get through. It was about 15 years ago when I heard about the guy with the bazooka and talked about the babies and how you couldn't trust anything from anybody and you couldn't even tell the good Vietnamese from the bad Vietnamese. It was such a tough thing to deal with. One of the things that was interesting with him was that he found out that he had taken some Karate class that had allowed him to take some anguish out from the past where normally they don't desire that sort of physical sort of response getting it out because it was more going with it than going against it. The other guys were more guys I'd worked with through high school or college and they talked about hearing things. Like one guy was on the coast when the Coast Guard helicopter would go over, he would hear and say some of this. And another guy at another restaurant did that. That was more like 18, 19 years ago that those guys were there.

GW: How long have you known these people?

JW: The guys in the restaurant were ones I've probably known from a couple months to a year at the most.

GW: Was that before you heard their stories?

JW: Probably most of the time you knew them for about a month before you would here some of their stories and they'd talk. The other guy, when I was 18 or so was more of a family friend we'd known for quite a while and he talked a little bit. And the last guy was one that I worked with day in and day out and it was like 6 months before I asked him what it was like because I had heard various stories before and he gave a little different perspective with more compassion to it because the other guys seemed more rough but he was more of a good family guy and it's like he gave more of a true perspective about what it was like because he didn't get into the drugs he was just out there to survive and get back.