

SHARED WEIGHT

The Fall of Saigon, 30 Years Later

Unpredictable Journey

Billboard

I'm Marc Steiner, and welcome to Shared Weight, a radio documentary series about the Vietnam War, 30 years after its end. This hour, we take a journey through Vietnam with a group of eight people who went there to produce these radio documentaries. We find the unpredictable, the complexity of the Vietnamese world. We delve into the world of Buddhism we find is the underpinning of the society, and we find a land caught between the hopes of its past and the dreams of its future. We meet the poets, the writers, and the artists who fought during the war with the Americans, and we meet the young people who have come after them with their hopes and dreams for the future. First, the news from National Public Radio.

Segment 1

MARC: Welcome to Shared Weight, a documentary series about the Vietnam War and its effect on all of us 30 years after it ended. This hour, we want to share part of our journey with you. It was a transformative experience. I realized that we were coming on to the 30th anniversary of the Vietnam War a couple of years ago. It's a defining moment for me in my life, for many men and women who lived through that period, those who were antiwar activists and those who became Vietnam vets. As the host of a daily public affairs show on NPR's Maryland affiliate, WYPR, I had a platform to work from and secured a grant to go to Vietnam to find out about this land we had decimated in a war during the 1960's. Valerie Williams, who produced this entire journey; Wayne Karlin, a novelist who was a marine helicopter gunner during the Vietnam War and has returned there many times in the last dozen years; poet George Evans, who had been an Air Force medic and the first person to beat a court marshal during that war; his wife and poet, Daisy Zamora, who's a former Sandinista guerrilla; Woody Curry, who spent 25 years in and out of institutions addicted after he came home a decorated army combat veteran and who now runs one of the nation's most innovative drug recovery programs; field recording engineer, Neelon Crawford; and Steve Elliot, our videographer. So, this crew of eight, three Vietnam veterans, three who resisted the war, a former Sandinista guerrilla, a one-time community activist, were off for three weeks in Vietnam to produce radio documentaries. Their own journeys back would form the heart of many of our stories.

When we arrived in Hanoi late that night, I was immediately assaulted by the searing heat. One step outside, and you were drenched as if it were a summer monsoon, but we were drenched in sweat. It was the rainy season, and we arrived in the midst of one of Hanoi's worst droughts, but the next day we encountered the streets, and the traffic was like nothing I had ever experienced. It seemed swarming in seeming chaos. No stop signs. No one stopped for anything. Oncoming traffic turning corners, crossing intersections. To stop, to brake, seemed like an anathema to the national spirit. Horns blaring in an incessant drone of beeps never ending: it seemed like utter chaos. I thought people must die by the hundreds every day. I couldn't figure out how to cross the streets to get from one side to the other side of the street, and all of this, mind you, in slow motion. No one goes faster than 25 or 30 miles an hour. After a few days, I realized that the seeming chaos had a rhythm, a flow. It was like the Buddhist way meets and Escher painting. Things seem to meld into one another. People blew horns, but gave way, sped up, slowed down, yielded, took the right of way, but never stopped moving. It just flowed, but even knowing that, if you were on the back of one of those thousand honking bikes, your Western heart was in your throat. Finally, our first lesson in the lore of pedestrianhood on the busy Hanoi boulevards. Thuy, our shy, demure 26-year old translator, took us by the hand, stepped off the curb, and began walking. She said, 'Move slow. Keep walking. Don't stop. Don't look at the traffic.' We joined the flow and became one with the Escher essence of Hanoi traffic. And so it is with Vietnam, the ancient Buddhist way, the chaos merging with the discipline. It's a metaphor for the whole nation. That was only the beginning of my understanding of the power of Buddhism in this land and the nature of the community of people we were visiting.

One of the first great impressions I had of Hanoi came when Wayne took us through a market not far from our hotel. It was a hot, steamy, open air, but covered market. There was an odor in the air I knew. I mean odor, not aroma. It was dogs, like

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wet dogs. I walked toward the side of the market where the smell came from, and there they were, not wet dogs, but piles of carcasses of gutted dogs waiting to be sold to those who savor dogs. It was all a bit too overwhelming for me that day, so I walked outside and around the corner to the Hanoi Hilton. The Hanoi Hilton was the prison where they held American airmen shot down over North Vietnam, men like Senator John McCain. While the Vietnamese have exhibits about how well the Americans were treated, the reality of these men's stories tell[s] a different tale. But whatever the Vietnamese learned, they learned from the French, who used this place to hold the Vietnamese and torture them for over 60 years. Almost as soon as I got there, I was ready to hop on the next plane and head back, a very unusual behavior for me. I wasn't sure what it was, the heat, the traffic, the smells, I had to get out of there. Steve, our videographer and a friend of mine, yelled at me, 'You brought us here! What the hell are you talking about?' I realized what it was. This wasn't my country. I didn't belong to me. It belonged to the Vietnam veterans who fought here. I was an alien. They were part of the fabric here, brothers who looked down the barrel of a gun at each other, now finding peace in a place that was a blood memory for all of them. Their blood commingled into one. Me? I was a stranger in a land I fought for against my own country. I was drafted, inducted, and rejected, and sent packing home in 1967. Before that and after that, I fought against this war. I just didn't fight to stop the war; I allied myself with the Vietnamese liberation fighters, with all liberation fighters. I wanted to overthrow my own government. I met with the NLF, the National Liberation Front, the Viet Cong, our nation's enemies several times during the war in Montreal and in Cuba. I was like an alien at times in my own country. Now, I was an alien in this country that I helped to protect. I felt like a stranger in Vietnam. It didn't belong to me; it belonged to them, my brothers, the guys who fought here, but soon that was all about to change. The journey was just beginning.

What was about to unfold on this journey was not expected. We came looking to interview artists about why they felt compelled to write after the war. What we found was wrapped up in the metaphor of the traffic, a deeply spiritual nation that confounded our expectations of this alleged Communist nation that won a war against the United States. I began working through all of this with my brothers, who were veterans of this war, and the Vietnamese that I met. There was a bond between men who fought one another I could never begin to touch, but I was beginning a journey that was deeply touched by them. We were sitting on the porch with a man whose name was Nam. He was a veteran of that war and one of Vietnam's major writers and editors. He, Woody Curry, and I talk about this journey.

MARC: There have been many antiwar movements in American history, but this was the first one where the antiwar activists felt allied with the other side. So, for me, this journey is about the invisible wall that can exist between the veterans and those who did not go. It's been a very emotional trip for me in that way. [translator in background]

WOODY: You know, I know personally, my opposition to the war did not come from politics or an ideology or a belief system or anything like that. It came from personal experience, and I don't think—I don't think personally that no one can be against war as much as a soldier. [translator in background]

HAO: (translating for Nam): Four or five members participated in combating. I had my blood brother, next to me, he was killed in --- Chi, and for 30, 40 years now, I couldn't find where his remain is. I have tried by own means to look for his remains. That is my blood brother.

MARC: I began to be struck by how deep the Buddhist culture was in Vietnam, systems, wars, leaders, allegiances to them come and go, but Buddhism is at the core of this nation. As we left this old Communist warrior's home, we visited his Buddhist shrine and put incense on the altar, and despite the losses suffered by these people, we discovered the Vietnamese had over 300,000 missing in action, but they had let it go. They were people of deep forgiveness and moved ahead, despite the loss suffered by all these families, while we in America still fly the MIA/POW flags. We met two figures the same day in Hanoi who were spectrums apart, but born of the same place. One was the poet, editor, and politician Huu Thinh. The other was an artist, a translator, and a venerated man named Duong Tuong. Duong was older. He lived in the center of Hanoi in the same house he's lived in since the French and the Americans divided the country at the 17th parallel after the end of the French-Vietnamese War. He fought the Japanese and the French with the Viet Minh, ran the war crime tribunals during the Vietnam-American War, translated the great novels of Dostoevsky, Victor Hugo, and John Steinbeck from the original

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languages into Vietnamese. Now he was something of a venerated guru to many young artists who gathered at the art gallery that had taken over his home. He was a gentle spirit.

Duong Tuong: This is on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the liberation of the south, and then the article is anti ---. America lost; capitalism won, and in a sense, I agree with him. Not that it is the man who fought the wars and flew the banner of communism who says that.

MARC: Huu Thinh was a larger than life figure, hard drinking, hard driving, an intellectual who was one of Vietnam's great poets. He ran three newspapers and journals. He was a leading official of Vietnam's Communist party, who you couldn't help but be attracted to. At a dinner he threw for us at a Chinese restaurant, Huu Thinh feted us with food, and drink, and laughter, and then broke out into his tank song, one of his poems from 40 years ago that became a patriotic anthem sung by the troops.

Huu Thinh singing in Vietnamese.

MARC: He and George Evans, the Vietnam veteran and poet who joined us on this trip became fast friends when they met in Massachusetts, and one day they sat together and George translated one of his poems.

GEORGE: Looking towards the fields of earlier years, rain whitens the grass. Grasshoppers spread their lotus wings. Mother walks about in a conical hat. Young rice stalks begin summer. A crescent moon ends fall. Around the fields, the same border, so much planning then, still unsettled now. Mother parts the high grass to step through. In thick grass, rice stalks struggle to rise, spreading one's fingers to count months and years and to count people. Who knows about the distant human world. Someone has already harvested the fragrant rice. In the field, mother's shadow alone beneath the sun.

MARC: At Duong Tuong's, there was a young man. His name was Thanh. He was an installation artist, one of Duong's protégés who epitomized the new spirit of Vietnam, whether that be the street kids selling books and postcards outside our hotel, or Thanh's peers creating a new culture out of the divide left by the war and the new globalization in their midst.

THANH: If we have the chance to make enough money and we learn more about the spiritual, we learn more about the culture, we balance with this, then we will get a better life and better world later.

MARC: Did you get your Buddhism from your parents or from here? Or from where?

THANH: Actually, my parents were Catholic.

MARC: Your parents were Catholic?

THANH: I had been learning very carefully the Catholic because my mother just wanted me to be a priest, so she send me to study with the bishop and the vicar, but then I found out this is not the really spiritual anymore, this is just like a party, the Catholic party, so more politic, so I am more and more interested in Buddhism.

MARC: This theme of living life coming out of Buddhist tradition, transcending the world of power and government, of the gentleness and forgiveness of the Vietnamese, wound its way throughout our whole journey. When we return, we come back to our journey to Saigon and the world of Minh Ngoc's theater, whose revelations at Cu Chi and Khe Sanhh were scenes of some of the bloodiest fighting during Vietnam's war.

Act II

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MARC: I'm Marc Steiner, and welcome back to Shared Weight, as we journey to Saigon and to the scenes of major battles that were fought during the Vietnam-American War. Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City, as it's now called, even though many of the residents still call it Saigon. It's a very different place than Hanoi. It was like the melding of Miami, New York, and Paris, very cosmopolitan, but also with overwhelming poverty. While there, we visited a most amazing woman, Minh Ngoc, one of Vietnam's celebrated theater people and outspoken in her views and ideas that often got her into trouble with the authorities. She grew up in Saigon during the war. Her father was in the South Vietnamese government, her mother with the National Liberation Front. She was a leader of an antiwar student movement. She now runs a theater and an acting school in downtown Ho Chi Minh City. She took a theater form from the delta, of folk theater, and resurrected it, kept its stylized form, but moved it into the 21st century. Back in the states, I used to run theaters for kids and in prisons and taught acting for 10 years at the Baltimore School for the Arts high school. I couldn't wait to see what my counterparts were doing in this school in Ho Chi Minh City. We walked up three flights of stairs. Inside were her students. No matter where you are, theaters are the same. Young acting students in Ho Chi Minh City could have been my students back in Baltimore. She taught them, directed, implored they perform their rehearsals for us.

Audio of rehearsal, singing

MARC: But Minh Ngoc was more than just an actress and a teacher. She had a social commitment and an understanding of the world she was given to live in. Later that day, she came to our hotel so we could interview her. What happened next was almost surreal. As she entered the hotel, two men came running in after her. They demanded to know what she was doing here and what we were going to talk about. They insisted on sitting in on our interview, and I refused. So, we called a representative who's been showing us around the country. He was also from the Ministry that these culture police came from. What ensued was over an hour of negotiations, but they left and said that only our sound man, our translator, and I could be in the room with Minh Ngoc. She looked over at me, tapped me on my knee and said, 'Don't worry. This is comedy, not tragedy.' This has stayed with me since I left there and is emblematic of this gentle Buddhist world.

Vietnamese language

Thuy (translating for Minh Ngoc): As I told you, I travel all the time to many places in Viet Nam, so that kind of traveling gave me a chance to contact with many people. I know have I have a better understanding about the people, and I know they are feeling, as you are, there is something that I couldn't speak out, so I help them to reflect their feeling, those in prisons, and many of my friends, they had many inner feeling, but they couldn't speak out. And also many poor people, and, you know, whenever they saw me, they think I like the one to help them, not help them to get freedom, but get them, but help them to speak out their feeling inside.

MARC: That night, Steve, Valerie, and I went out to a little jazz club called Sax and Art we'd found a little earlier in the day. It turned out to be the only jazz club in Ho Chi Minh City. There was a woman there singing the blues, who sounded like Ella. She turned out to have learned the blues during the war singing for GIs in clubs. And then there was this guy blowing the sax as good as anyone I have ever heard. He mixed his songs with old Vietnamese tunes. He came over to our table and sat down, and he turned out to be the owner of the club. He was a graduate of the Berklee School of Music in Boston and was working on a jazz folk opera with, who else, Minh Ngoc. The talent here marrying the world of the east and the west and keeping its integrity, it was a real beauty here in the face of increasing western power and culture that the spirit of Buddhism and the ancient Vietnamese culture was like a counterweight to give them a balance to survive and hold onto. The war came screaming home when we visited Cu Chi and Khe Sanhh, sites of horrific fighting between the Americans and the Vietnamese. When we got to Cu Chi, we were indoctrinated, so to speak, with a 1960's era propaganda movie extolling the ingenuity of the Vietnamese people living in tunnels and proclaiming the ignorance and stupidity of the American troops.

Woman's voice narrating movie.

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MARC: Then we followed our tour guide, a handsome twenty-something young man dressed in the uniform of the National Liberation Front. He clearly considered his job to be just that, a job. He displayed about as much enthusiasm as most American twenty-somethings do at their summer employment. At each stop, the young man nonchalantly demonstrated the ingenuity of Vietnamese warfare, from hidden spider holes where snipers would jump out and ambush troops to booby traps that would take off feet at the ankle. He walked us through this surreal war world atmosphere, and as we approached the shooting range, we could hear the AK-47's, but we weren't prepared for the scene that awaited us. It was mostly other twenty-somethings, but all white, from Australia for the most part, milling around waiting to shoot rifles. One put the gun barrel into my face that I had to shove away to show him how to hold a rifle. They were purchasing trinkets made from bullet shells and buffalo horn at an open air gift shop adjacent to the range, eating ice cream as they shot their AK-47's. It all became very uncomfortable as we walked through Cu Chi. It felt as if I was walking through ghosts. I could feel them clinging to me. It was eerie. The murals of Americans being mutilated and killed by all manner of booby traps, these were the Americans, my brothers, could have been me. It was my friends. I knew this war in Vietnam was wrong from the beginning. I fought against it, but the emotions here were just so glaring and tearing. Then we went to Khe Sanh and saw American IDs on display and saw kids selling dog tags.

WOODY: You had a reaction both at Cu Chi—'cause you went off, and I heard you mumble to yourself—I don't know whether anybody else heard it, but I heard you say, 'Damn, those were Americans they were talking about killing,' and you went off on the other side of the place at Cu Chi, and then when I said, "Come on, Marc, let's go back up in there and get these dog tags,' you went back up in there without any thought of who we might offend or whether it was proper or whether it was offensive, which, when you look back at it, it was, but you didn't think about that, and here we is 13,000 miles away from home, but you, me, you, and Wayne, a marine, and me and you, we went back up in there and ca—"Give 'em to us.' So, you know, what made you do it?

MARC: This experience coming to Vietnam for me is different than yours or Wayne's or anybody else's because it's mine, and all during the war I felt a real unity with the Vietnamese people.

WOODY: But?

MARC: But I also could never go with my friends in the movement—not all of them, but some of them—and leaflet American troops being killed. It was never something I could do, and my father was in the army. It was expected of me to go into the army. I almost did go in the army. Even during the antiwar movement, I felt a real kinship with the guys who came back. I had more in common with them in some weird way than I did the students. Now you don't take those dog tags and sell them to some tourist to go hang up on their wall. If that's a real dog tag, that's a man's name. He gave his life. He died there, and they took that dog tag from him. It didn't belong to them. It's not their right to sell it. That's like selling a piece of a burial ground. It's not right, and so I said, that's why I said to you in the van, I said, you know, 'Let's go get these things,' and you said, 'Let's go get these things,' and the moment I saw them, the first thing I said to myself was, 'No, I don't want them,' but as soon as I said, 'No, I don't want them,' I said, 'I should buy them all,' so we said when we got back to the van, 'We should just buy them all,' and we went back there and bought them, you know. And even in Cu Chi, it was weird. I was just—what I felt, whether some folks in the world might believe it or not, I felt it, and something happened inside that place that just—I don't. I told Wayne later that I thought Cu Chi should be more like Antietam, should be more like Gettysburg, should be more of like a quiet place, not a place full of amusement, firing guns, eating ice cream, drinking Cokes, and although Wayne and I both agreed that the Vietnamese have a right to say this is our land and we fought for it, you know, but maybe they're not yet ready to leave the stage where you belittle your enemy. In that sense, the Vietnamese, some Vietnamese, haven't let go, you know, as we've been talking about, and it's hard that part of letting go, but it is because you're mocking your enemy, as opposed to saying, 'They shouldn't have been here invading us, but we respect the men who died here,' you know. And I'll read you what I wrote. "Cu Chi, a hallowed ground, place of patriotic pride, tunnels built underground, an ordered maze, a revolutionary warren, beneath the feet, the bunkers, unseen, unheard, but known. Guerilla farmers at war with invaders. Young men knew not that they were carrying out the work of the beast, who would devour the world and them as well, a monument to a time and a place. Ghosts stalked the forest, pieces of soldiers' souls living within the earth, feeling their presence though I never shed blood or took blood there myself. Never walked point, never felt the fear. I could

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hear them in my heart, smell them in my senses, skin wrapped in their invisible mist. Did they know where they were? Did they really understand what happened here? Do they know that this is a spiritual ground? Men, women fought for their families and their country. Men fought for their country because they were told it was the right thing to do. Do these people know what they're walking through? Two men did. A look of recognition: 'You were here. I was here.' Smiling embrace replacing stalking death. Language barriers broken, arms exposing wounds, tapping them with his little, brown, tough fingers, fingertips, looking to the heavens, 'Forget it. It's gone.' Yet here we were, a monument to their victory, but it seemed to mock the invaders they fought, an air of an amusement park. Shoot an AK-47, buy a Coke, stuff crocs for your pleasure, play pretend war, have a Coke among the ghosts. Should there not be a place here for quiet?" That's what I wrote. It was a very powerful place. And Khe Sanh was too, being there with Wayne. I mean, he didn't fight in that battle, but he was a Marine, he knew that place, and you know, it's—and all of us, whether we started out in 1963 against the war or came back and understood it was wrong, ended up being against this war. There's no man on this crew, or the women as well, but I'm just saying because the men were all of draft and fighting age, who didn't know at some point, begin to understand at some point that this was wrong, what we were doing here, what our country was doing here, but you guys who served here fought bravely, you know, and two of you are direct combat veterans, and so it's been a very heavy experience, but going to the Buddhist temple today with Valerie was very heavy experience for me today. I was overwhelmed by that place and by the prayer, being there with her. It was just—this has been a lot of overwhelming experiences for me.

On they way back down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the scenery was just gorgeous, a triple canopy forest, Montagnards walking around thatched huts, but the sense in our bus was anything but light until Valerie broke the tensions.

Valerie: Is there a song when you hear it now it reminds you of being back here in Vietnam?

WOODY: Yeah, that damn Beatles song, She Was Just 17, you know.

WAYNE: She was just seventeen.

GEORGE: Do you remember the lyrics?

WOODY: I ain't—yeah.

WAYNE: Well, I know the first line was, 'She was just seventeen, do you know what I mean?'

Woody, GEORGE & WAYNE: Couldn't dance with another when I saw her standing there.

WOODY: And then a scream came after that

Someone: Ow!

WOODY: Yeah.

MARC: We took a side trip out of Hanoi to a very old and ancient and mystical place called Halong Bay. It's known worldwide for its beauty. Films like Indochine and Vertical Rays of the Sun painted this place in quiet, hidden glens, romantic, pristine, dragons in the water is the legend. These ancient rocks jutting out of the water, their ---'s ancientness sadly watches over their hallowed bay, much like our own Chesapeake Bay, pollution slowly strangling this mystical dragon, ringed by a working harbor, human sewage flows just beneath the sidewalk, crumbling under your feet, an open sewage pit, its stench wafting to fill your nostrils already warring over the soft breezes of the bay, the Vietnamese spices from the sidewalk cafes, and the belching beasts of the road. And back in Hanoi, and in Saigon, the mad hustle of the street people, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the corruption that people fought everywhere, spoke of a country caught between the hopes of the

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past and the dreams of the future. I should always remember the words of the Hindu holy man, Amrit Desai: 'No expectations. No disappointments.'

When we return, we come back to Hanoi, to Buddhist temples, confronting some of this land's contradictions, and taking some unpredictable journeys.

Act III

MARC: Welcome back to Shared Weight as we journey once again through the streets of Hanoi. As with any trip, this one was full of the unpredictable. We take one of these side adventures on a mission to find a guitar. Steve Elliot was our videographer. He's also a great musician and wanted to find a guitar that he could use on the trip and just leave it in Vietnam. He hadn't wanted to bring his Martin guitar for fear that he might lose it or it might get damaged. The other couple on the trip, George Evans and Daisy Zamora, had been out shopping in Hanoi's old town. They told Steve about a shop that sold musical instruments, so Steve went off one morning on foot in search of this recommended venue. Steve had difficulty finding the shop that George and Daisy recommended, so he ducked into a camera shop and showed the young man behind the counter a piece of paper with the address of the shop written on it.

STEVE: I wanted to do some street shots with the pedi-, whatever you call them, cyclos?

Neelon: Pedicabs.

STEVE: Pedicabs. Thank you.

MARC: The young man looked at Steve and said, 'You're looking for a guitar? I can find you a guitar.' He walked outside, and he instructed Steve to hop on the back of his motorbike. So Steve jumped on the back of the bike, and off they went.

STEVE: So, I got on the back of his bike. I said, 'Okay, take me where you're going.'

MARC: After several blocks, Steve realized that he was in a very precarious position, an American who didn't speak any Vietnamese on the back of the bike of a man he didn't know, riding through areas of a city that was completely new to him. Eventually, the young man turned down an alley.

STEVE: We traveled down one of the side streets, and then he turned into a building, which was an alley, and I guess the early part was kind of like a restaurant. I mean, there were people washing dishes at the bar, and it's about maybe eight feet at that point, then he turns the corner. It's about five feet wide at that point, and then, you know, people are moving out of the way. There are bikes on the side. There's a bike coming, and children playing on the side. It's like crazy, and then finally we turned another corner, and it was like I was afraid my knees were going to hit, and then finally we reached the dead end, which was the guy's shop, and it said Lutière over the door. And when we pull in, this German Shepherd comes down the stairway and kind of like lays down at our feet and starts panting at the bottom of the stairs.

Steve talking in shop: ...exactly, and then I would return the guitar.

Vietnamese language

MARC: The young man took down the guitar and began playing classical music perfectly. The shop belonged to an old man, a lutière, who builds and repairs string instruments, mostly violins. The old man's daughter brought Steve some tea. He sat down and played the guitar that had been hanging on the wall. It played beautifully, but Steve knew he couldn't afford a

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handmade instrument. When the old man came out, they talked. He told Steve the guitar would cost \$300, and although he recognized a bargain, Steve had little money on him, and he explained to the man he couldn't afford the guitar. He explained he just wanted a guitar he could play and leave in the country. The old man offered him the guitar for \$150. Steve couldn't refuse. He drove this young man to the nearest ATM, took out the equivalent in duong of \$150 and rode away with a guitar that he played throughout the trip and carried with him everywhere and brought it back to the states.

STEVE: I just was asking directions, you know what I mean? All I could think about was like just ask this guy like, you know, I wanted a cheap Japanese knockoff, you know, and I ended up with a hand built guitar.

MARC: On the last day of our trip, Steve went off with Tue, our interpreter, and Woody, who rode on the back of another motorbike, to find the shop again. They were successful in their hunt, and the four of them sat and had tea with the old luthière, played guitar, and took photos.

MARC: Buddhism was pervasive. The parks were filled each morning with people doing tai chi and all forms of meditative martial arts and movement by the dozens of groups and those off alone by themselves. Whether in the homes of Communist officials or that of young artists that we met, there were Buddhist shrines. It was part of their daily existence. Right around the corner from the Gourmand Hotel, where we stayed in Hanoi, there was a Buddhist temple. I went there one day with Valerie and then went back almost every day thereafter, if only for a few minutes to light some incense, to take off my shoes, to sit quietly in this temple. What was most shocking and interesting was that the banned Buddhist monk Tik Nat Han's image and books were seen throughout this temple. He was banned by both Communists and the South Vietnamese government during the war for his engaged Buddhism that preached active nonviolence, yet here we were in old North Vietnam, in Hanoi, in a Buddhist temple, with people remembering and following the works of Tik Nat Han. Everywhere we went, in Hue, Valerie and I went to a temple and saw an old car there we thought was a relic. The closer we got, the more relic-y it looked. But then it turned out to be the car of the monk who famously immolated himself in Saigon in 1963, Tik Quong Duk. We stayed there for the longest time. We walked up into the temple, and at the behest of the monk leading the prayer, participated in the service. When we were at Duong Tuong's house, we heard his young protégé, Thanh, talk about what it meant to him to be a Buddhist. Shortly after that, Woody began to describe how he picked up Buddhism and what it meant to his life and his work in drug treatment back in the states.

WOODY: I learned a lot about Buddhism when I was here in Vietnam, and so I, more or less, lean in that direction, and I see the world differently from that perspective, almost in the same way that you do, that things evolve, but there's an underlying unity that connects all things, and these surface things sometimes are illusionary, and that's where we get our perceptions from, this dualistic way of thinking, and it's almost a[n] alien or different way of thinking than most of the people that I have to treat believe in because what I try to get them to see is that there has to be a balance between the material and the spiritual, and what they have done is went too far in the material world and created a deficit or a lack of spiritual connection, and that's the basis of all the misery that they're experiencing, so I try to get 'em to come back to the essence, rather than get caught up in the material. And it's very, very difficult in a society where nobody even, where very few people even understand what I'm talking about. It's a totally different way of looking at things, and they keep comparing one to the other, and I keep trying to tell them it's the same thing. It's not either/or; it's one thing. You're just only seeing it from one perspective. You have to open your mind and begin to see that it's all one. It's not this or that; it's totally different from what most people think, but the ones that do get that, the ones that do make that connection, tend to wind up being a whole lot better in living their lives and being tolerant and being able to see other points of view other than their own, and it works pretty good, even works in the United States, which is the last place you would expect it to.

MARC: As happened often on this trip, the unpredictable occurred. We were sitting in the lobby of our hotel in Hue when a woman walked in, turned out who knew Wayne Karlin. She was a poet, a Vietnamese poet who published for the same publisher Wayne did back in America, Curbstone Press. She had written a book called Green Rice. Her name was Lum Ti Mi Da. She grew up during the Vietnam-American War, and she looked at Woody Curry, who was sitting there with us in the lobby of the hotel, and opened her poetry book and said, 'I wrote this for you.' It's called The Face Beneath for the American soldiers who died in the war in Vietnam.

SHARED WEIGHT

The Fall of Saigon, 30 Years Later

I want to be a small deer running under the sky through the green grass

Don't make me go into the thick jungle, or I will become a fierce wolf

Who can foresee the tricks and snares of life?

Deception is disguised by sweet tongues

I was an unwitting deer, wandering far from my field of fresh grass

My face was the face of a wolf in deep caves, in shadows, dark and still

Then a call startled me awake, and I remembered that once my eyes had been clear, the eyes of a deer

At the end of the road, I fell down when a bullet struck my blood filled chest

If you look under the wolf's skin, you'll find the red heart of an innocent deer

This poem by Lum Ti Mi Da showed the forgiveness in the Vietnamese's hearts. It was emblematic of the feeling and spirit of the Vietnamese people towards the men they had fought, 35 and 40 years ago. I didn't meet one person in Vietnam who held one ounce of anger or hatred toward the Americans, even though we laid waste to this land, left it with Agent Orange and birth defects, unexploded landmines throughout the countryside, killed 2 million of their people and left 300,000 missing Vietnamese soldiers. Despite all of that, they didn't dwell in the past. They lived in the moment. The war was behind them, and those who had trained guns on one another were now brothers. This war in Vietnam unleashed spirits that may never have come to light if not for that war. Remember that Duong Tuong, the venerated hero of two wars said to us in his home that he had read an article on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the liberation of the south, that America lost, but capitalism won. He added that it was a strange thing for a man who fought two wars under the banner of Communism to say, and that was the fear and hope we found throughout Vietnam, independent spirits who saw the dead end world of the bureaucratic Communism state and knew that global capitalism was lurching to rule throughout the land, and while they had as much trepidation about that, they kept it in perspective with the Buddhist understanding of how the world works and being part of the great continuity of thousands of years of Vietnamese life. I thought about some of the people we had met, like writer Lue Min Que, whose parents were killed during the land reform in the '50s, but who patriotically volunteered during the war with the Americans to clear the Ho Chi Minh trail when she was just 16 years old, and still she writes, and still she has hope. And Minh Ngoc, whose theater keeps alive ancient traditions, but collaborates with modern arts and is unafraid to say what she feels, whether she's in Vietnam or America. And Phan Dan How, whose father, a great poet, was imprisoned by the North Vietnamese during the war for poetry they did not like, yet she served her country, pulling the dead and wounded out of the rubble of American bombs, who now writes and works for the young people for the future of Vietnam. And Chung, the leader of the street kids just outside our hotel in Hanoi, who believes in a better future ahead, with his gentle spirit shared with Thanh, the young artist who adopted Buddhism, shows no allegiance to government and both see hope in the future of the world coming to Vietnam. I came to search for lessons from our past, but I learned lessons from this place about how to live in the present, about forgiveness, watching people live their spirituality with every step they take. The politics of the past almost losing its meaning in the face of the long view of our lives, and I'm Marc Steiner, and thank you for joining us for Shared Weight.

For the rest of the story, go to www.centerforemergingmedia.com. This has been a production from the Center for Emerging Media. Major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Osprey Foundation. Executive Producer, Marc Steiner. Producers, Steve Elliot and Marc Steiner. Editor and engineer, Andrew Eppig. Studio recording and mixing facilities provided by Clean Cuts Music and Sound Design. For a complete listing of funders and participants in this program, go to www.centerforemergingmedia.com.

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a 360° view of the people and stories behind the issues

SHARED WEIGHT

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