

Erika Jenkins
Integrative Writing
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At Peace In Vietnam

It was April 4th, 1968 and I vividly remember the tears in my mother's eyes. We sat in silence, shocked, watching the breaking news coverage of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Five years earlier, I had the same immobilizing feeling when hearing of President Kennedy's assassination. I remember my sixth grade teacher coming into the classroom with tears filled in his eyes. Disbelief, then awkward silence filled the room as he delivered the sorrowful news. Watching the television, I realized for the first time the powerful effect the death of one person can have on an entire country. Some white folks in our country were telling colored folks that they weren't good enough to have the same rights as white Americans. At the same time, we were fighting a war in Vietnam for reasons so vague, most Americans couldn't even find the words to justify it. For days after the death of MLK, I listened to the news coverage on the radio and the stories that were told forever changed my life.

At this point in my life I began to spend most of my time with my friends from a local peace group. With these friends I discovered a sense of radiance when using LSD and marijuana. I was best friends with a girl who taught me everything from drugs, sex, to the corruptions within our own government. Her brother had been fighting in the Vietnam War for over a year. She spent most weekends going to local colleges to participate in anti-war rallies. She would tell me how she felt about the war and once told me "Eddie's life is at risk... and for what? They can't even tell us why." I often thought about my own brother and how I would feel if he were fighting in Vietnam. I believe I came to the decision that my brother would never enlist, therefore never have to go.

My brother Chris was a strong and self-assertive man for his age. My mother raised him to be a dependable man like our grandfather. She wanted what was best for him, meaning a wife and loving family of his own. My mother made it obvious that she wanted grandchildren but didn't really expect me to get married anytime soon. I was the stereotype of a hippie, a nonconformist at heart who loved her free spirited mind. I remember when I was five I demanded my mother to change my name from Heather to "Feather." It didn't last. I spent most of high school experimenting with LSD, pot, and cocaine and never felt my life

was out of control. My mother got angry a few times when my grades began to slip, but I quickly figured out ways to cover up my tracks and soon my mom was off my case.

My mother, Olivia is her name, was a superwoman for many reasons but especially for all the times she put up with my rebellious acts. One night she called the cops on me because I never came home and a few times she caught me trying to sneak out, but the worse was when she caught me trying to sneak in. I know now that it wasn't easy being a single mom. She spent all of her time working extra hours so that we could have the necessities it took to have a normal life. She had no desire to date, either because she didn't trust men or didn't have time for them.

My father left shortly after I turned two years old. He had been having an affair with a woman from his office and eventually decided to leave my family. My mother did what she believed was the right thing and moved us back to Northern California where my grandparents lived. We lived with them until I was five years old. My brother was only nine at the time and from then on he was seen as the man of the house. By the time he was 12 he was making me dinner whenever my mother had to work. He'd spend nights teaching me card games or helping me on my homework. I remember one Halloween he even helped me make a costume and took me around the neighborhoods to get candy. I always looked at my brother as a fatherly figure, and in a way I think he saw himself as that too. He would do all that he could to help my mother, since he always knew it wasn't her fault our father left.

However, when I was in high school there was always a jealousy that I had for my brother. Most weekends when he would come home with his perfect girlfriend, I would be getting high in my room and then fighting with him for most of the evening. I was so angry with him because my mother often told me I needed to be more like my brother. Well maybe she didn't tell me, but subtle hints gave me the impression that I wasn't enough like my brother. I didn't always get good grades, I didn't have a job, I didn't have a stable relationship, and I didn't have a relationship with God.

My mother was raised in a typical Christian family in which the women were only expected to find a man, have babies, and live a good Christian life. I didn't want to do any of that and made it very clear to my mother. In a way, she seemed to think she had failed at being a good mother. I felt horrible that I couldn't talk to my mother the way my brother could, but then again, my brother always had something good to say. Whenever I did something wrong, he would tell my mother that I was just going through a

phase. Chris did a lot for my mom, including coming home on weekends just to do the yard work. He even made sure he went to church with my mom almost every Sunday.

I graduated high school and was moved out of my mother's house by the end of 1968. I still went home often on the weekends just to show my mom that I could handle living on my own and that I wouldn't push her out of my life completely. My mother still wasn't too impressed with my anti-war protesting or my uninhibited sexuality. I spent most of the year trying to keep down a stable job and for the first time realized how much drug use impaired my ability to function to my highest ability.

By 1969 I was enrolled into a local college and was dating a girl Catherine from a local peace organization. For once in my life I had minimal drug use, a good relationship, a job, and was one of the only girls in my law program. The only thing I felt wasn't going well in my life was my relationship with my family. After I began dating Cathy, I began to slip further away from my mom and Chris. I knew they wouldn't agree with my sexual lifestyle and I felt that I couldn't hurt either of them by telling the truth.

On December 1st, 1969 my family's entire world changed. We were at my mother's house for an early dinner celebrating Chris and Lisa's engagement. I brought Cathy has a "friend from school," and my mother even invited Victor from church. The TV was on quietly in the background while most of us were in the kitchen helping prepare dinner. We were all enjoying each other's company when unexpectedly I heard my mother cry "oh my lord" in the background. My brother and I stopped what we were doing and rushed to the living room. I was looking at my mother but was instead drawn to the TV. No one had noticed what was on the television until now. My stomach turned to lead as I watched in horror. I wouldn't be able to recall any of the other birth dates that were drawn that night other than February 1st, my brother's birthday. The 1969 draft used a lottery to draft men into the military.

The rest of the evening was small talk about what he was to do next and another burst of tears from my mother when she realized he wouldn't be here for the holidays. I remember sitting on the back porch crying has Cathy held me. I was so angry that "they" got to me. I remember thinking that the war has gone too far, its gone too far because it has now threatened my family.

I realized how much my brother did to keep our family together and how hard it was going to be to see him go. It was so hard to not be angry with him for having to join the army. At the same time, the radio talked about Nixon withdrawing troops from Vietnam and how he wanted to bring a closure to this

war. But at the same time my brother was at home, packing and promising his soon to be wife that he would return to marry her.

By the middle of 1970 I was receiving a letter from Chris every month. He would tell me how hard it was over there and how the first friend he made had already died. The realities of the war frightened me so much that I frequently wondered what type of man my brother would be when he came home. My mother didn't talk about the war much and even stopped going to church. She usually kept the conversations between us short and sweet. That was until one Sunday when I went to my mom's house and picked her up for church. Together we prayed for my brother's safety along with the rest of the church. There was so much support given to my mother from the people in the community that for the first time she felt she could talk about my brother. We went home that afternoon and had a long talk about our family and what would happen if Chris didn't come home. We talked about her relationship with Victor and how comforting she felt when she was with him. In the way she described him he had similar aspects of my grandfather. I felt like my mother and I truly bonded for the first time since I was in grade school. And it was the first time since I had moved out that my mother told me she was truly proud of me. She told me she understood why I was so dedicated to peace and was proud of me for going to school. I went home with a sense of hope, that together our family can accomplish almost anything. For the first time in my life, I felt I could be honest about who I really was.

A month later I got a letter from my brother, he told me he was concerned for our mother and wanted to make sure I was there for her. I was proud to tell my brother that in fact mom and I had been meeting every weekend for dinner and always talk about how much we missed him. Over the next two years the death toll for soldiers from California was the highest in all of the country. Gradually I came to the realization that every letter could be the last letter I would receive from my brother so I made an effort to let my brother know who I really was. I began telling him about high school and how after he moved I began sneaking out and partying a lot. I also told him about my friend in high school and how her brother was fighting in Vietnam and how I became involved in the anti-war protests. I let him know that I wasn't ashamed of him, that I knew he was just doing his job and how much I loved him. He always wrote back with respect and love, which helped me see him in a completely different light. He told me about how much he loved my mother and me and how proud he was of me for going to school. He would ask me to

take care of mom and to make sure I visited Lisa. He wanted me to let him know how she was doing. He told me he was concerned that she was telling him everything he wanted to hear in their letters. I spent a few weekends a month with either my mom or Lisa or both. It was so nice to have all three of us together for dinner and have each other as support.

After getting to know my brother better I felt I needed to tell him about Cathy. At first I wrote a letter about the basic things my mother and I did and a little bit about Cathy.

He wrote back and told me how he was glad that I found a good friend and told me to do things that made me happy.

By 1972 my brother and mother both knew the truth about my relationship with Cathy, and they both surprised me with their support. My mother was officially engaged to Victor and I was about to finish my last year of college. My brother made it through his time in Vietnam with only a gunshot wound to his left leg. He married Lisa shortly after coming home but spent several months disoriented because of his horrifying experiences in Vietnam. Though there are times I still feel my sexuality is unaccepted by my mother, I feel she has accepted that I was able to choose my own path in life. I felt that because of Vietnam our family issues were something we could talk about, issues that other wise would have been ignored. The letters that we wrote will always be dear to Chris and me. Though I will always believe the war was an unnecessary war, out of all the lives lost my brothers was spared and for that I have to be thankful for. Thousands of lives were lost and millions of people were affected by this war. I can however hold with me one good thing that came out of the war, my brother.

KEY:

Mom: Erikson Adulthood Generativity vs. Stagnation CARE, Jung Id because survival wants to make life easier, comfortable. Jung Mother Archetype, Psychosexual Phallic wants to begin new relationship unconsciously seek out men that are more like her own father. Mother wants to give best life possible to children who grew up without knowing their father. She has a close relationship with her parents and makes it a crucial point to have them part of her children's lives. Feels out of control however when youngest daughter seems to be rebelling and not caring about her feelings. Feels her son takes too much responsibility for her and his sister and wants him to have children. She feels she did everything right by raising the children in a good Christian household and sometimes blames herself for daughter's mistakes.

Son: Erikson Intimacy vs. Isolation LOVE, Superego, Self Archetype; listens to himself feels he has hope; Feels need to live good Christian life and get married. Psychosexual Anal Stage orderliness, parsimoniousness, and obstinacy, need to take care of family. Son is determined to carry on family name and marry current girlfriend and begin a family. A lottery draft puts plans on hold as he is sent to fight in Vietnam. He worries about leaving mother and sister, has a need to protect them.

Daughter: Erikson Identity vs. Identity Confusion FIDELITY Ideological worldview, search for inner harmony, hope for consistent future; Freud EGO, Creates opportunities to explore sexuality, Jung explores individuation; Jung Shadow Archetype; (doesn't acknowledge that she could be doing something wrong, feels right in her opinions; Psychosexual stage – Oral because of smoking and eating a lot, highly sexually active, drug user, struggles with sexual identity, ignores mother, lack of father figure, brother leaves and she becomes peace protester against Vietnam war along with hundreds of other colleges and thousands of people.