

A Piece of My Heart

By Shirley Lauro

Suggested by the book by Keith Walker

Presented by Special Arrangement with Samuel French

SYNOPSIS - Act I

Act I sets up the conditions, the challenges and the resourcefulness of the nurses to survive. Follows each from their decision to go through the induction process, their personal experiences in Vietnam and concludes with the day each came home.

SYNOPSIS – Act II

Act II brings us the memories of what happened when they return home. Follows each as they land at an airport, their post-Vietnam experiences and concludes at the dedication of the Wall.

THE CAST

Steele Lisa Cripps
Maryjo Rebecca Maxey
Leeann Jessica Rowland
Sissy Beth Anderson
Whitney Candace Myers
Martha Christine Aranyos
American Male Chase Samuleson

THE CREW

Set Design and Construction John Taylor
Lighting and Sound Design Scott Bradford
Prompter Rose Marie Roth
Costumes Sarah Mack
Student Director Sarah Szwabowski
Assistant Director Joann McMahon
Director Larry Nielsen

"The play, *A Piece of My Heart*, by Shirley Lauro, has become the nation's most enduring theatrical production that deals with the Vietnam War." - - - *The VVA Veteran The Official Voice of Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. © an organization chartered by the U.S. Congress*

Originally produced in New York City by the Manhattan Theatre Club.

Professionally produced in the 1991 Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Originally produced by the Philadelphia Festival for New Plays.

WOMEN IN VIETNAM

The history of women and war has been largely forgotten in favor of recording men's military achievements. Women have always played a part; however, it was more than to simply keep the "home fires burning." While the US Military prides itself on knowing the number of enemy weapons captured, there is no exact number available for the women who served in Vietnam. Women were represented in all military branches, but over 90% served as nurses.

Many were awarded citations ranging from unit awards to Purple Hearts. Eight US servicewomen were killed, and their sacrifice is memorialized on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. But, records on their service, their heroism, their decorations earned, where they served, and what they suffered –and what some still suffer – are nonexistent.

Between 1962 and 1973, according to Department of Defense statistics, approximately 7,500 women served on active military duty in Vietnam. The Veteran's Administration puts the numbers even higher, at around 11,000. Independent surveys estimate that the number of women, both civilian and non-civilian, working in Vietnam during the war is between 33,000 and 55,000.

Women arrived in Vietnam with various levels of nursing experience, from newcomers to the field with barely six months of Nursing under their belts to experienced veterans of twenty plus years. Their average age, however, was 23.6 years.

The use of helicopters to transport wounded quickly to medical facilities saved the lives of thousands of men who in previous conflicts would have died. Because of this, Vietnam nurses were faced with more patients and more severely wounded men than they had seen in previous wars.

Women who had served in Vietnam exhibited the same symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that men were experiencing. If the men found it hard to get help for their trauma disorders, the women's needs were not even acknowledged. Most were cut off from traditional channels of help. Women who had been with the military for awhile, quickly learned that the Veteran's Administration had a history of ignoring women. Those who tried to join established veterans' organizations were often denied membership or shunted off into the ladies' auxiliaries. Civilian women, even those who had worked with military support organizations, were legally

ineligible for government compensation or benefits and technically ineligible for counseling at Vietnam Veterans' centers.

anyway. Cut it off." and so I did. And I remember the sound of the arm hitting the pail. That was the end of my orientation. - - - as told to Keith Walker in his book A Piece of My Heart.

THE VIETNAM WOMEN'S MEMORIAL

Tour guides may say The Vietnam Women's Memorial in DC is the Vietnam Nurse's Memorial, but it *the* memorial to *all* women who served in Vietnam.
www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org.

VIETNAM WEBSITES

Women in Vietnam - www.womeninvietnam.com;

The Sharon Anne Lane Foundation -
www.sharonannlanefoundation.org;

Red Cross History
www.redcross.org/museum/timemach.html;

Donut Dollies Photos -www.donutdolly.com/id39.htm

Timelines, letters home, history and more –
www.nyvietnamveteransmemorial.org

The Bitter Homecoming –
<http://grunt.space.swri.edu/bitter.pdf> or
www.vietvet.org/bitter.pdf

Agent Orange Talking Paper –
www.gmasw.com/aotalk1.htm

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder –
www.mnwelldir.org/docs/mental_health/ptsd.htm

COMBAT DAYS - A Significant Statistic

The average infantryman in the South Pacific during WWII saw 40 days of combat in four years. The average infantryman in Vietnam saw about 240 days of combat in one year. The significant combat increase is attributed to the role of the helicopter in Vietnam which was capable of transporting soldiers quickly from battle to battle.

58,169 Americans were killed and 304,000 wounded in Vietnam. Although the percentage of those killed is similar to other wars, the number of amputations and crippling wounds were 300% higher than in WWII. 75,000 Vietnam veterans were severely physically disabled.

- - - *The McCaffery Papers; "Speech by Lt. Gen. Barry R. McCaffery, reproduced in the Pentagon, June 4, 1993. McCaffery was Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The speech was given to Vietnam veterans and visitors at "The Wall", Memorial Day, 1993.*

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"The surgeon threw a pair of scissors at me and said, "Don't just stand there. He's going to lose that arm

In Their Own Words . . . continued . . .

"Nine months after graduation - I'm covering eight 36-bed wards on night shift - each ward has a single corpsman; I'm their only nurse. The patients are nearly all west coast Marines - orthopedic injuries. A call from the emergency room nurse - medevac flight arriving - 32 have orthopedic injuries. The wounded arrive on gurneys..."

- - - Rebecca R Henderson, Spring 1967.

"We had a group of new patients - Marines med-evaced - The head nurse was happy to see me and eager to begin report. As I wrote hurriedly - I suddenly went cold. My pen stopped. The head nurse stopped report when my tablet hit the floor. She was talking about my cousin, a Marine. He now lay in a bed with multiple shrapnel wounds of the head."

- - - Margaret Butler, 1967-1969

"When I made it back I could hear Christmas carols. Christmas was a time for joy and Peace on Earth, yet we were surrounded by sadness, death and destruction. There is not a Christmas that goes by that I don't remember my year in Saigon."

- - - Darby Reynolds, Feb. 1964 - Feb.1965

"Tet in February was exhausting - so many wounded casualties. The decks were lined with stretchers headed for the operating room."

- - - Barbara Collins Rodgers, Sept. 1967 - Sept. 1968

"The General came aboard for presentations of Purple Heart Medals. A handsome young Marine dressed in his hospital pajamas was seated in his wheelchair. Not a hair out of place, a recruiting poster picture of a Marine, above his knees. The mail arrived on the chopper with the General. Following his medal presentation, the young Marine opened his Christmas package from his family. He smiled when he saw the contents, a dozen pairs of heavy socks."

- - - Joan Bowels Glass, Feb. 1967 - Feb. 1968

"If the American people could only have experienced what it felt to be present when our young men were dying, they would not have to ask me - Should you have gone to Vietnam?"

"To be the last human being to whisper some words of comfort into their ears, the last one

to touch their cold hand or wipe their forehead, was a privilege afforded to me."

--- Juel A. Loughney, March 1967-1968

In Their Own Words . . . continued . . .

"In his wallet, I discovered a photo of a young woman standing with two tiny toddlers. The little girls were as pretty as their Mother...I reached down and held his hand. It was cooling, his fingers stiffening. I looked at that young, handsome face and tears filled my eyes. I am certain that procedure was followed and the photo and other effects were turned over."

--- Bobby Hovis, 1963 - 1964

"Visions too horrible to remember.

I IV's, incisions - incoming

E mergencies by the score

T - Tet and triage all mixed up

N othing from home, why doesn't the mail come?

A nother air evac - God can we make it?

M orning arrives, the plane is here - I'm gone but will never forget.

--- Bernadette McKay, Feb. 1967 - Feb. 1968

"We comforted them during nightmares, administered their treatments and medications, let them smoke cigarettes, played cards and tried to understand the torment they were going through since their whole world was turned upside down.

"We were there - as we had been on battlefields and on the battleships - caring for those who could have been us."

--- Joan M. Engel, Fall 1969

WHAT THE CAST IS LISTENING TO

Our ladies were stationed in Vietnam during approximately 1967 to 1971. They would have listened to the hits of the day on Armed Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN). The music throughout this play is selected from lists provided by combat troops in Vietnam as among their favorite listened to music.

For more information about AFVN visit the website www.geocities.com/afvn/multimedia.html.

For another reference about music of Vietnam visit **Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War** by Lee Andresen. Anderson makes a

connection between music and war. Visit him online at www.battlenotes.com/index.html.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Was a discussion of the Vietnam conflict a part of your education? If so, what was 'taught' and what impressions did you come away with?
2. Has this play or learning more about those who served in Vietnam changed from your prior impressions?
3. How does this play differ from the typical movies about the Vietnam conflict and Vietnam veterans?
4. Why were official military records of the service of women in Vietnam non-existent or so poorly kept?
5. What are your remembrances of the Vietnam era?
6. Can we learn anything from the 'Music of Vietnam'?
7. Pick one of the websites and describe what you learned from the website.
8. With which character in the play did you most identify and why?
9. What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and why would veterans of Vietnam experience more PTSD than veterans of other wars?
10. What was the impact of the 'conflict at home' regarding US involvement in the Vietnam War on service men and women in Vietnam?
11. How have the roles of women in the military changed from those during the Vietnam Era?
12. Discuss the impact you felt after experiencing this play.

LAST WORDS

"Those who see "The Wall" or the "Women's Memorial" are sure to be affected. We hope you have been affected by this play as well.

"Many veterans and non-veterans have found their peace at "The Wall" or the Women's Memorial. It may be a different peace for each, but a peace nonetheless.

"For those who have been affected; your tears are a universal experience even if you don't know

any of the dead or any of those who suffered
because of their personal experiences.”

--- Cast and Crew of “A Piece of My Heart”