

Thomas Hirsch

After realizing that this scholarship existed I knew that I had to talk to my uncle about his experiences in Vietnam and I specifically asked him if he would ever want to go back there. At first he seemed very hesitant about the answer to the question. He thought about it for a while and then explained to me what he was thinking. Initially he explained to me that he wouldn't want to return just for the fact that it would bring back so many of the bad memories he had dealt with while over there. He still remembers the vicious scenes of war, the smell of death, and the sounds of helicopters and artillery. How could he go back to a place where our country had lost so many friends and loved ones? He recalled the time when driving along the road he saw what he thought at first were piles of cord wood from logging but then realized they were actually dead bodies. As he told this to me I could just picture the horror that he must have felt. I had never heard actual war stories before, this was a first for me.

After recollecting his thoughts about this chilling tale he then told me that if he could maybe he actually would like to make a trip back to Vietnam. He came to the realization that although he had been to Vietnam, he had never actually seen it for what it was. All he saw was the hellish war zone that it was back in his time. He couldn't experience the once beautiful Saigon and surrounding areas like Bien Hoa, which were just hostile territory. He also wanted to see how the economy of Vietnam worked without the black market. I didn't really understand this at first but with his explanation I came to realize that this is how many Vietnamese people had to try and make money and live. He continued to tell me of stories from his time there and he finally came back to the question at hand. He told me that he could go back because he felt like it would be like

maybe visiting a cemetery for him. He explained that when you bury a loved one, all you see is the hole where the coffin goes, but as time passes the gravesite becomes more colorful and the tombstone glows to honor those who had died. This is what he pictures Vietnam as. A place whose landscape was destroyed by warfare, but with time could grow into something beautiful. Such a trip could soften some of the harsh memories he has of this place. He told me that he's sure that there would be a time of mourning and sorrow upon his arrival but eventually he could see it for its beauty and he could relive some of the good memories he takes from there, such as his buddies in his outfit. This kind of trip could allow some memories to be erased as well as enabling some to be remembered. He'll never forget those who were lost, or were close to him, and a trip like this could help him honor them again.