

Donald Anderson

## Visions of War, Dreams of Peace: A Conversation with Joan A. Furey

In 1991, a collection of poems, subtitled “Writings of Women in the Vietnam War,” was published by Warner Books. This book of poetry by women who had served in Vietnam—most of them as battlefield nurses—was aptly titled *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace*. In a foreword to the book, W.D. Ehrhart (an editor himself of two acclaimed collections of Vietnam War Veteran Poetry) praises Lynda Van Devanter and Joan A. Furey for their persistence in assembling women veteran’s voices:

When Lynda Van Devanter first told me about this book in July 1990, just about the first thing I said to her was: “I wanted these poems. I tried to find them for *Carrying the Darkness*. Why didn’t anyone send me anything?”

“Of course they wouldn’t send you their poems,” she replied. “You’re a man.”

“But I’m not that sort of a man,” I protested, wounded by her reply.

“Yes, but they don’t know that.”

What they [the women vets] know . . . is that the U.S. government, to this day, can’t even say how many of them actually served in Vietnam. What they know is that the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project has met with stiff resistance from people—men—who keep insisting that The Wall and the three male figures cast in bronze beside it is recognition enough for women.

Small wonder that these women wouldn’t send me their poems. Thank God or whatever you believe in that they’ve been willing to send them to Lynda Van Devanter and Joan

Furey. . . . These are voices that need to be heard. These are voices we need to hear. The experience of Vietnam in particular and war in general cannot be complete without them.

That the editors and publisher of *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace* turned to a male poet-editor to validate their book in a foreword only punctuates the difficulty women veterans faced in getting their voices heard. Sadly, *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace* is out-of-print, as is Lynda Van Devanter's fine Vietnam memoir, *Home Before Morning*.

Joan A. Furey, the subject of this interview, followed up her Vietnam tour with a full career in government and nursing and has long been recognized for her expertise in the effects of and treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Women Trauma Survivors. Named Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs' Center for Women Veterans in 1995, Ms Furey is the primary advisor to the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs on all women veterans' issues.

**This interview took place at the United States Air Force Academy during March 1999.**

**Anderson:** Where and when did you serve in Vietnam?

**Furey:** I served in Vietnam January 29, 1969–Jan 27, 1970, in the 71st Evacuation Hospital in Pleiku.

**Anderson:** How long after Vietnam did you resign from the Army?

**Furey:** I had four months left. I returned from Vietnam and was stationed at Kimbrough Army Hospital at Fort Meade, Maryland. Then I got out.

**Anderson:** I don't think it's been written about much, but in some of the reading I've come across, women in the armed forces serving in Vietnam not only had the enemy to fear, but there was trouble with our own soldiers. Women were vulnerable to assault. How much of this is true?

**Furey:** Certainly what I can say outright is that during the time I was in Vietnam I don't recall any incidents where people were assaulted. Women—American women—were very few in number. We were surrounded by thousands of men who were very interested in developing relationships with us so that there was tremendous social pressure on us

to be entertaining, caring, or to get romantically involved. That, in and of itself, was a degree of stress that most women found by the end of their tour as being something they wanted to remove themselves from. I removed myself early by going on permanent nights. I figured out if I worked nights I didn't have to deal with all the other demands that were around. I should say, though, that some people developed relationships, very solid, caring relationships. It may have been an effective mechanism, too: if you belonged to someone, other people left you alone. Then again, we have to remember it *was* the 60s and we didn't talk about issues like sexual harassment and date rape. I can't deny that such pressures didn't exist, but these concepts were not in our social thinking at the time. If women were sometimes pressured into experiences such as I've mentioned, they probably wouldn't have interpreted it the way we might today.

**Anderson:** Not only were women fewer in number, but I would think generally you were outranked as well.

**Furey:** Absolutely. The majority of women were 1st and 2nd Lieutenants. I think there has been some writing about the fact that sometimes we were asked by our superiors and then actually helicoptered into parties. To be "the female companionship," or whatever. I think what happened, and, again, we have to remember we are talking about women in their early twenties who might have seen such requests as part of their duties; on the other hand, when you have spent twelve hours in a surgical or intensive care unit dealing with people who've been blown up, or have lost limbs, or are dying, bleeding, crying, screaming—sometimes the last thing in the world you may have wanted to do was to be sociable, to be nice and smile, or to even *be* with other people. Although to have that kind of attention—I suppose there is an element of attraction to it as well. I don't think there is any easy way to describe social pressures in wartime. I suspect most people who went through it would share my ambiguous feelings.

**Anderson:** The point I was trying to get to was that I think women, their experience and the level of stress they may have experienced in Vietnam is very, very often overlooked, with a kind of Clara Barton veneer.

**Furey:** I'm one of those people who believe, once a nurse, always a nurse. And you bring nursing with you. I think I believe all that I have learned over my years in nursing is a significant part of what I do now. I still do actually have a lot of veteran contacts, help people deal with issues, so that my nursing knowledge, my medical knowledge, my interpersonal skills, are really credible. I don't think I could do what I'm doing without the background I have.

**Anderson:** How long have you been Director of the Center for Women Veterans?

**Furey:** Five years.

**Anderson:** Is it an appointment position?

**Furey:** Yes it is. It didn't start out that way. Originally I was career VA. The position I now hold was originally a career position that I was promoted into, then it became an appointed position, when Congress passed a law creating a Center for Women Veterans. I had been the director of the Office of Women Veterans.

**Anderson:** Do you read Vietnam War literature?

**Furey:** I do so less now than I have in the past, but I've read extensively. There was a time when Vietnam War literature was *all* I read. I've tended to move myself away from it more in the last couple of years.

**Anderson:** Can I put you on the spot and ask you your two or three favorite pieces of art from the Vietnam War experience?

**Furey:** My most favorite is Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" from *The Things They Carried*. Hands down, it's the one—I don't even have to think about it. For me, the story captures the war experience an individual might have and then the way that person might be moved to interpret the experience later. Phil Caputo's *A Rumor of War* is way up there too, though my selection of *A Rumor of War* may be shaded by the fact that it was the first piece of Vietnam War literature that I read.

**Anderson:** It was the first piece a lot of people read. Can I say you've named two pretty "male" books?

**Furey:** Yes, but I was about to mention another one. One by a woman. Elizabeth Scarborough. *The Healer's War*. It's a science fiction book.

**Anderson:** Science fiction? About Vietnam?

**Furey:** Yes, I read a review about this book, then bought it. Elizabeth Scarborough was a nurse in Vietnam. She is now a well-known science fiction writer. *The Healer's War* is about a nurse in Vietnam and the metaphysical journey she experiences while there. The parts about Vietnam are so authentic that as soon as you read them you know this woman has been there, that she is real, that she has caught it all. Even in the science fiction part of the book which has to do with her journeys through the jungle with a GI. I was attracted to Scarborough's book because I really felt it *was* a psychological journey that most of us experienced with the soldiers.

**Anderson:** How is that science fiction?

**Furey:** The characters were on a quest. The nurse goes into the jungle with the GI and they have some magical metaphysical experiences.

**Anderson:** That doesn't sound much different than O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*.

**Furey:** Actually I was going to say, it's a lot like *Going After Cacciato*, from a woman's perspective. The thing I liked about *The Healer's War* was that it drew me into some of the existential dilemmas we faced as nurses in a war.

**Anderson:** Why are there not more Vietnam War memoirs by women?

**Furey:** I really don't know why. When Lynda and I were compiling *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace*, we were surprised at all the poetry that became available. Most of the poetry had already been written, but the poets had not shared their work with very many people. They would share it with other women veterans, but that was all. When we decided to assemble the book, we were calling everybody, and since Lynda and I were part of this inner circle of poets, we were calling to say we wanted to create the book. We called to say, "We want to use your poems," and the poets would say, "Fine, just don't use my name." At one point Lynda and I thought we'd end up with a book of anonymous poems. We struggled with that, because we had struggled with owning our own work. I should say that none of us had the idea that we were writing great poetry. We just knew there was a tremendous catharsis and expression of pain we couldn't express any other way. And I think the emotions in the poems were so strong that they scared us. I believe we felt other

people would just not accept our perspectives, would see us as being meek or not capable. This is why I think, early on, so many of our poets did not want to be associated publicly with their work. And this is 1989-1990 that we're putting together this book—not 1975. This is *after* the war.

**Anderson:** Fifteen years had passed since the war had ended for most of the poets, twenty in some cases.

**Furey:** Exactly. We spent hours on the phone with some of the contributors. Encouraging them, and sharing other poets' work so that the more timid would see that they really weren't alone in their feelings, in their experiences, in what they were trying to express. Our emphasis was that nothing was out there, and there needed to be something. Lynda and I had gone looking and the only book we found was from World War I—*Testament to Youth*—by a nurse who'd served in that war.

**Anderson:** How did you know who was writing poetry?

**Furey:** Somehow or other we became part of this underground network. Lynda, of course, had published her memoir, *Home Before Morning*. So she was a key figure. Lynda and I had served together in Vietnam and we had kind of reconnected in 1982. I hadn't seen her since Vietnam. I had been writing poetry for some time and I shared it with Lynda

**Anderson:** But never publishing it?

**Furey:** No. I didn't show it to anybody. I didn't even show it to my family.

**Anderson:** These feelings you're talking about in Vietnam War women vets strike me as parallel to the men from World War II who, when they came home, refused to talk about war, *their* war. "Get on with life," seemed to be their slogan. Vietnam vets, in the eyes of WWII vets, are whiners. I've heard numbers of WWII vets say, "They talk too much." In the reticence of Vietnam women vets I see this parallel to the WWII male combat soldiers.

**Furey:** I think that a big part of it was that the majority of women were nurses. Nurses in the sense we were from a very traditional kind of nursing education background. Most of us were graduates of three-year hospital schools of nursing. People don't always appreciate what this means. We were indoctrinated with professionalism, the tradition of nursing, the honor, the self-sacrifice—all this stuff was part and parcel

of what was engrained into us during those three years in hospital student nursing. One of the things that I think most of us believed was that if we were having any difficulty, it made us less of a nurse—somehow we weren't good enough, or that we somehow hadn't learned all that we should have. We couldn't own the very human emotions of being exposed to high levels of trauma. We couldn't get comfortable with feelings. They were very frightening to us, very confusing. We had expected we would have a degree of detachment and in no way were prepared for the experience of being a nurse in a war. It's *not* gall bladders and heart attacks. It's young men—your own age or younger—and, again, I would like to point out: we're talking about *young* women, I was 22 years old, and I wasn't the exception. Most of us were 21, 22, 23. We didn't have a lot of experience, and, all of a sudden, we were dealing with our peer group of young men who had devastating injuries—had been blown to bits! We were doing things we never thought we would have to do, seeing things we never thought we would have to see. In some ways the experience was incredibly empowering, in others, so incredibly destructive.

**Anderson:** In Vietnam, as in all wars and especially in modern wars, a majority of soldiers never see the frontline, yet nurses experienced the consequences of the frontline all the time. So the Vietnam experience, considered proportionally, was far more traumatic for a nurse than for the average soldier.

**Furey:** I think it took us a while to really understand that. I know now, having worked for many years in the field of PTSD, that one of the things we had to get nurses to understand (and I had to come to understand it first for myself) is that when you're exposed to a war environment, one thing becomes clear to you and that's your mission and your goal: to take care of injured soldiers, to get them better. What we understood was that our patients *had* given the ultimate sacrifice. When you've been dunked in that fact, and *believe* it, you cannot own your own pain because it seems to diminish theirs. "Nothing wrong with me, look at this guy," you want to say. "Look what happened to him." To heal, you have to get to a point where you recognize and realize that owning your own experience diminishes no one else's. It's a big transition to make. Because somehow or other you feel that you are not worthy of finding relief because you constantly compare yourself to the patients you care for.

**Anderson:** Survival guilt?

**Furey:** Exactly.

**Anderson:** What was it like to come back to nursing in the United States?

**Furey:** It was awful. Probably one of the most difficult things that I ever went through, to come back to nursing. All you thought about when you were in Vietnam was coming back to the world, real life. But as soon as you came back and went to work, you realized you were no longer *in* the real world. Vietnam was your *real* world. In spite of all the awful things in Vietnam and your incredibly negative feelings about that war, it was, nonetheless, the most meaningful work you had ever done. There was a real mission in Vietnam. There was a tremendous commitment to what we were doing in terms of care for young Americans and the Vietnamese, these victims of an awful catastrophe. *That* was real. You pulled out everything you had and you did things that you had never been able to do before. All of a sudden you come back to the States and people start putting limits on you, on your practice. In Vietnam, for instance, we would put in jugular catheters because there weren't always doctors available. They were in the operating room. Back home, I was to start an IV and I was told, "You can't start the IV, you have to get the doctor." "Doctors to do this?" I said. It was people not responding when you made assessments that grated—this denigration of your skills and authority. In my first six months back, I kept having these kinds of experiences. I had a patient—I could laugh now!—she was younger than I am now, probably in her forties, who had had her gall bladder removed. I had to get her up to walk. She was moaning and groaning, and my reaction was, "Get a life, lady, get real." In Vietnam, I got people up who had no arms. *They* walked. I got to the point where I couldn't tolerate patient complaints about what to me was minor. At the same time, I knew there was something really wrong about my feelings. I knew that on some level I'd become warped in terms of my measurement of pain and discomfort and a patient's right to not be well. I mean, in order for a patient to legitimately complain he had to lose two legs and an arm? On some level I knew that wasn't right, but I couldn't quite shake it, couldn't get things quite back into place.

**Anderson:** Did it ever get closer for you?



**Furey:** It did, but it took a long time. I left nursing for a time. I think a lot of people did that. What triggered it for me was I was working in a community hospital and was called to ER because a bunch of teenagers had been in a car accident. I went to ER and they brought in these eight kids. It was Vietnam all over again.

**Anderson:** It felt normal to you?

**Furey:** I did what I had to do. There was blood everywhere; I was covered with it. We did what we had to do. And when we were done, I just collapsed behind this curtain. I didn't want to see it anymore. I didn't want to feel it. I didn't want to know what was out there. The night supervisor was a nurse who I knew had been a World War II nurse. She was working that night. She saw me. She said, "I just want to tell you one thing. When I came back from World War II, I thought I was going crazy. I thought I was going to have a breakdown. I didn't want to do it anymore. I just want you to know that you're going to be O.K." I decided to quit right then. After my shift, I quit.

**Anderson:** What did you do?

**Furey:** I went to school. Again, this was at the time the whole world was dropping out and being hippies, but if you came from my background you didn't do that. I had the GI Bill, and I figured I could do that. I could go back to school. I wouldn't have to work in a hospital. I had the GI Bill.

**Anderson:** Was your father in World War II?

**Furey:** He was.

**Anderson:** Have the two of you talked about this?

**Furey:** It took a lot of years. We did talk about it a little bit. He's dead now. He died in 1989. He was never that forthcoming about his own experiences.

**Anderson:** Where was he?

**Furey:** He was in Germany and France.

**Anderson:** During the bad years?

**Furey:** Yes. In fact I'm pretty sure he had PTSD. My mother always told the story about him being diagnosed, but this was before I knew anything about PTSD. When he came back he couldn't hold a job.

**Anderson:** Was he married before he went?

**Furey:** Yes. It was in the 80s when he finally talked to me about his war. We ended up in the most intense conversation we ever had. I finally was talking about what I felt when I left Vietnam—how much I wanted to leave, yet how much I felt like I was letting others down, how difficult it was to make the adjustment. My father had been wounded and had to be evacuated from the front. And he talked about—actually teared up—started talking about how he felt that in being evacuated he was letting comrades down, because by then he was an experienced combat soldier. He'd been wounded and was leaving these war guys—he was choked up about that. That was the most we ever talked about it.

**Anderson:** The combat soldiers I've known personally, that have been affected by war, dealing with authority remains very difficult for them, holding a job remains difficult, relationships remain difficult. I would think that would be true of most war nurses.

**Furey:** I think we see that. I think the data is kind of interesting in terms of formal study, that women in Vietnam are much less likely to be married when compared to their peers. They have fewer children. They do tend to hold more jobs. It's all they have. They may stay in nursing, but not in direct nursing. Nurses from Vietnam are much better educated than their non-vet counterparts. They dropped out, like I did, and went to school.

**Anderson:** Are there organizations for the nurse-veterans population?

**Furey:** The biggest organization for women who served in Vietnam, and it's not really an organization per se, was the Vietnam Women's Memorial project. It was a project that brought a lot of people together, most for the first time. We dedicated the memorial in 1993 and the ceremony was overwhelming. We got to talk to other people. There was a recognition of the work we'd done. I think this was, and is, a need in general, for both men and women vets. In fact, I have come to see it as being a real key issue. Regardless of whether you feel pro-war, antiwar, or whatever, I think most of us—certainly those of us in the medical nursing profession—felt very good about what we did, about how hard we worked, about how we saved lives. That we were in Vietnam to help people and that we did that, beyond even what we thought was our capacity. When we left Vietnam, we could take pride in having done a good job. Except you felt like you should feel guilty that you'd been

there. One of the things we had to work through was that feeling good about what we did didn't mean that we felt good about the war. And yet back then, it was, like, if I'm proud of what I did that means that I'm proud of having been in this war and there was so much confusion about the war and the purpose of the war that it just seemed like it wasn't O.K. to feel that way at all. So my heart goes out to a lot of veterans, men and women. I suppose most of us ended up feeling guilty about doing a good job.

**Anderson:** It's very complicated

**Furey:** Very. It's less complicated now than when I was 23 and coming back and trying to work through all of this on top of having this really fresh and damaging experience. I was so against the war when I returned that I joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. This was in New York and they invited me attend a rally at a local high school gymnasium. I was to be one of the speakers. As I got up to talk I was overwhelmed with the sense that I was betraying soldiers.

**Anderson:** But you see now that that's not true.

**Furey:** I see that now. I got through my speech and then I just felt bad. I couldn't take a stand one way or another because I couldn't get to peace with anything. It was a real struggle. I understand today how all those competing feelings can exist in one person, but it was a very difficult time, those first couple of years back. Trying to work through your feelings about the war and your feelings about what you did in the war. The feelings about what the war did to you and to all these other people. I'm always amazed that any of us ever survived to go on. I think it does speak to the resilience of human beings. Though, unfortunately, not everyone can rebound.

**Anderson:** It seems to me that, given your experience, it would be pretty difficult for you to be other than antiwar. Did the war change your politics?

**Furey:** Absolutely. I consider the Vietnam War for me a life-changing and life-defining experience. I became a very different person after the war than I was before. I think that the person who went to Vietnam would probably not be sitting here having this conversation with you if the war had not so readily changed my politics. And it changed me dramatically as a human being. I believe, and hope, that it made me a

better person. I guess I believe I'm a better person because of the experience, although I wish my gains, whatever they are, had come in a less painful way.

**Anderson:** I think for a thoughtful, thinking, feeling person, it would be impossible for it to be otherwise. What advice would you have now for yourself at 22?

**Furey:** One of the things that has happened to us vets is that we get stuck back there, and we judge *that* person by the values and ideals of *that* 22-year-old. When I was working through my stuff in my thirties, I said to myself, "You have to get this 35-year-old to look at what the 22-year-old went through. To not be stuck in time and also to realize that what you went through was in fact an aberrant, horrendous experience. That you were placed in a situation that few people ever are. How to mediate the effects of war is the important issue for all individuals who have experienced war. Some people don't ever manage it. Simple as it sounds, we have to recognize that war is an incredibly dramatic and traumatic experience. What you see is extreme, what you're exposed to is extreme, what you feel is extreme, and what you do when you stop feeling is extreme. At some point, the experience has to be mediated. It probably can't happen while you're *in* the experience. It has to happen when you come back, but it can't wait too long. And it's not necessarily going to be short-term.

**Anderson:** What was the most effective coping mechanism for you?

**Furey:** I was a workaholic.

**Anderson:** Was?

**Furey:** Well, I probably still am. When things got really bad, I did self-medicate with alcohol, then realized that over the long haul that road would prove too destructive. The best coping mechanism for me came when I finally decided to sit down and talk with somebody about what my experiences had been.

**Anderson:** Friend? Or professional?

**Furey:** Professional. I went to see a therapist—a woman in her sixties. I remember walking into her office thinking, "Oh yeah, right, this woman'll understand me." But she was terrific. I would describe my experiences and she would look at me, then say, "You really think you weren't supposed to be affected by that?"

**Anderson:** Did such acceptance seem new to you?

**Furey:** Yes, it did.

**Anderson:** And how long was this after the fact?

**Furey:** 12 years.

**Anderson:** That's a long time. Was it important that you were talking to a woman?

**Furey:** For me at that time, I think it was. But I think even more important is that in 1982, I started to hook up with other women who had been beat up by the war. Up until then, from the time I left Vietnam, got on the plane and came home, I had never talked to another woman who'd served. People who knew me didn't know I had been in Vietnam. I was a head nurse—that's what I was. That I'd served in the war finally came out when I did an interview in a newspaper. I arrived at work the next day, and my colleagues just said, "Why didn't you tell us?" It was the publication of Lynda's book that had precipitated my interview and my "coming out of the closet," so to speak.

**Anderson:** When was Lynda's book published?

**Furey:** 1981, I think.

**Anderson:** So in the meantime you'd been reading about Vietnam?

**Furey:** I had started to read. I think I had read *A Rumor of War*, and I went to see *Apocalypse Now*. It was kind of out there, and I did have this obsession about Vietnam. I read Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam*. I was trying to get some mastery over my experience, so I was reading all this stuff.

**Anderson:** Hemingway talked about that. The notion that when you come home from war, you start to read about it and look at the maps.

**Furey:** Right. After I started to read, my ability to wall off memory weakened. And when that happened, I began to make contact with other women. That was key. When we sat down, just a group of vets—women vets, not male vets (because with the male vets it was always us and them, and they'd been *in* combat and we *hadn't!*)—we started talking and found we'd experienced so many similar things in our isolated worlds. By then Lynda had become the central spoke, and we went up and spent a weekend in her house.

**Anderson:** Where was this?

**Furey:** In Virginia. We would get together at Lynda's house. Lynda had this big, hundred-year-old house. We would get together, but it wasn't like we knew each other. People had responded to Lynda's book.

**Anderson:** Women mostly?

**Furey:** Lynda became this focal point of bringing women together. And then the whole PTSD movement started. We started to go to PTSD conferences. There would be other women. I remember the first conference we attended—The International Society for the Study for Traumatic Stress. It was at King's Island, Ohio, and it was in 1982. Five of us went there. We didn't stop talking. I think I got about three hours of sleep that week. Everything felt so true. Of a sudden, our experiences felt valid.

**Anderson:** I'm thinking of two books. First, Jonathan Shay's book, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

**Furey:** I actually have that book. I haven't read it yet. I bought it when it first came out. The book that ran for me was *Trauma and Transformation* by Arthur Egendorf.

**Anderson:** Is the author a vet?

**Furey:** A vet psychologist who did a lot of work on Vietnam vets. The other book that helped me was *Out of The Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Veterans* by Bill Mahedy, who was a Catholic Chaplain with the U.S. Army in Vietnam. Have you ever heard of it?

**Anderson:** No, but it's good to get them mentioned. Another book I think may speak to women is Kali Tal's *World of Hurt*.

**Furey:** I'd like to talk some about PTSD. Prior to my present job I actually was a driving force behind opening up the first PTSD treatment program for women.

**Anderson:** Where was this?

**Furey:** Palo Alto, California, at the VA. The *New York Times Magazine* made it a cover story in 1993. "How to Bandage a War," was the name of the piece. Laura Palmer wrote it.

**Anderson:** I read it.

**Furey:** I'm one of the nurses mentioned in the essay. The essay captures the issue of healing in a way that the general media had not done before. At least to my mind. Let me say something about Lynda's and my book. When you're looking for validation one of the places you go is to literature. Well, there was none. Because there was no where to go, we started searching out women vets who were writing. Although we were interested in literary quality, what was more important to us was that readers would see that women had served in Vietnam, bravely and honorably. Further, we wanted women vet readers to know they were not alone in their ordeals. One of the more touching experiences Lynda and I had with the book was at the ground-breaking of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project. General Colin Powell was the keynote speaker. In preparing for his speech, he'd read our book. He mentioned that, then he said, "And I was there. You cared for me." General Powell, as you may know, was awarded two Purple Hearts in Vietnam. In his speech he talked about war for the average soldier being calm, even boring, with episodes of fire and terror. He then talked about the relentless stream of casualties that nurses like us had faced and dealt with.

**Anderson:** It was war everyday.

**Furey:** It was everyday. Wherever the battle, the casualties were shipped to us. So if one soldier wasn't fighting, another one was. Most people probably can't imagine the incredible, incredible carnage that war creates. Even a big-city emergency room doesn't come close to what you face in a war triage area.

**Anderson:** Big cities don't deal in napalm and cluster bombs.

**Furey:** Or Bouncing Betties and B-52s. People have no clue. I look at the stuff going on in Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Africa. Whenever I give a public speech, I try to remind Americans that for the Vietnamese it was "The American War," and that the battle was on *their* soil.

**Anderson:** Yes. And we buried some 2 million Vietnamese, as opposed to our 58,000. Since 1941, our blue skies have been unmolested.

**Furey:** The truth is, the people have no clue.

**Anderson:** Final thoughts about women Vietnam veterans?

**Furey:** When the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was first built, the original design called for only a wall. And the wall represented many things to many people. It had the names of everybody who died in Vietnam, including women. There was great controversy over the design, although, I think, most everyone felt it was right. Then some folks decided we needed a conventional statue. When the statue was placed, it consisted of three men. I think most women had accepted the wall as an appropriate statement, but once the male-only statue was placed, it required a response.

**Anderson:** The Vietnam Women's Memorial, like the men's statue and the Wall, was manufactured and erected by private funds?

**Furey:** Yes.

**Anderson:** Were you part of the fund raising?

**Furey:** I was. Diane Evans, who was the President and the driving force behind The Vietnam Women's Memorial served at my hospital in Vietnam, as did Lynda Van Devanter. People have said, "What the hell was it in Pleiku?—the water?" It wasn't the water. It was the level of activity. We had a very busy hospital.

**Donald Anderson** is editor of **WLA**.

**Editor's Note:** Royalties from the sale of *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace* were donated by the authors to the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project. For information on the now completed Vietnam Women's Memorial, please visit the web site at <<http://www.nps.gov/vive/index2.htm>>.