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# Vietnam Veterans Welcomed Home with Open Arms at Long Last

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The return of the Vietnam Veterans has been a jagged wound for our Nation that has been gapingly open for approximately 40 years. On Friday evening at the Fox Theatre in Downtown Detroit, at the World Premiere of "Our Vietnam Generation", a film produced and directed by [Keith Famie](#) with [Bob Gillette](#) of American House included as co-executive producer, this wound was examined and preliminary sutures were applied.

Collectively, there was a gentle, tentative sigh of relief, as the film progressed, which was surrounded numerous times by cacophonous cheers and shouting. With that, the intricate process of healing, publicly, has finally, truly begun.

With multi-faceted sides to explore, the [Vietnam Veterans](#), both men and women, along with dozens and dozens of other Veterans and military personnel, along with their families, dignitaries, and the general public, had the opportunity to see "Our Vietnam Generation" at the World Premiere. And, if this viewing is an indication, the film is a huge success.

Mr. Famie and Mr. Gillette, with excellent assistance from a cast of thousands, should be wholeheartedly thanked. They made it OK to be a Vietnam Veteran. Even more than that, "Our Vietnam Generation" made it an honor to be a Vietnam Veteran, who should be celebrated and respected.

[Nick Hrycyk](#) of Digital Image Studios, the film's editor, should also be celebrated and respected. He was given 110 hours of film and magnificently "tapered" the details to one of 110 heartfelt moments and memories.

Keith Famie's dedication to a goal - 40 years in the making for a group who is in, shall we say, the late summertime of their lives, should be congratulated. And, his co-executive producer, Bob Gillette, in explaining his connection to the project said, "Keith is brilliant at what he does, even when it doesn't make economic sense. I got committed to what he is trying to do. He had a vision, I believed in his vision. There it is." These were the key ingredients needed to "bake this story" into this marvelous creation.

The hurt endured by the Vietnam Veterans, their families, and the Nation as a whole was revealed, to a degree, and soothed, even a touch. The entire evening made you want to shake the hand of a hero, hug a stranger, or just stand in awe of the military personnel that surrounded you.

The observation to "see what condition my condition is in," to quote a line from a song, is what actually took place. As the line from the song implies, and with the help of the "Our Vietnam Generation" film, a way was opened to understanding and acceptance, albeit 40 years later.

Dan Gowing, Vietnam Veteran, who served with the [U.S. Army's 9th Infantry](#), and was stationed South of [Saigon](#) for 10 months said, "Keith Famie did a good job showing all of the different aspects of the

War. It was done really well, and it wasn't just a blood and guts documentary." Continuing Dan added, "Keith Famie did a great job; it's really good. I'm happy someone took the time to put together a documentary like that."

Gowing shared that the "opening up" process, if you will, has taken him quite a bit of time. Just in the last few years has the process even started, and he was glad that he had finally taken the advice given to him by his father-in-law, who has since passed, and checked into the [Veteran's Benefits](#) available to him.

The process of a slow "opening up" seemed to be a common thread in the stories told by the Veterans. Perhaps people spitting on you, or screaming at you, needed a few years of distance, before you could "wrap your head around" the idea of people wanting to help you, let alone honor and celebrate your service to your Country.

The distance of time and place melted away as "Our Vietnam Generation" took you back. The sights and sounds were overwhelming at times. The repertoire of sounds included [Motown](#) songs. Many of the Veterans in the movie gave credit to Motown for a portion of their sanity, the ties to it gave them to home, and a strand of tenacity that it encouraged. There were tears and shock and stunned silence.

There were so many people in attendance with medals, ribbons, hats and brass, that for a moment, you wondered if you were in [Washington, D.C.](#) Those included many, many Vietnam Veterans and dignitaries, such as Donald "Digger" O'Dell, who spent 5.5 years in the Hanoi Hilton, during the same time period as did Senator John McCain; State Senator John Pappageorge, also a Vietnam Veteran; John Ellsworth, Chairman of Military Families United and also Gold Star Father of LCpl Justin Ellsworth, Robert Jackson, Executive Director of Military Families United; Joseph M. Salvia, Director of the Huron Valley State Bank; Lt. Commander Bob Booth; and George E. Ross, Ph.D., President of Central Michigan University, to name just a few.

In addition, Congresswoman Candice Miller and Colonel Miller (Ret) pausing a moment to greet friends and colleagues just before the movie opening, reinforced the thought that you might be in Washington D.C., but after a moment, you remembered you were actually in Downtown Detroit at the Fox Theatre. And to just say, the Fabulous [Fox Theatre](#), as full as the word fabulous is, may not be enough of a word to describe this particular venue. The outstandingly beautiful, cavernous arena allowed for the impact of the moments of the film to have room to expand and be absorbed by the audience. Bob Elliott wrote the check for the commitment at the Fox Theatre. Kudos and thanks go out to you, Mr. Elliott.

Going back to checks, prior to the showing of "Our Vietnam Generation" there was also a premiere of a mini-movie in honor of an Afghanistan Veteran, Sgt. Michael K. Ingram entitled "[One Soldier's Story](#)." You will want to get out your checkbook and write a check to "Mikie's Minutes," once you have seen this Veteran's story - Mikie's story. "All gave some - Mikie gave all," for his Country and for us. Mikie's pet peeve was the cost of calling home, which included the "lag time" as the voices traveled across the in between space from Afghanistan to the U.S. and back. The lag time, too, ate up those precious minutes.

In honor of Mikie's sacrifice, his proud family has set up a foundation called "[Mikie's Minutes](#)," where donations are accepted to facilitate the purchase of phone cards, which are then sent to the Veterans, to help them afford to call home more frequently.

The phone cards, in their permanent, meaningful way, accomplish two things, honoring Mikie and helping to fix his pet peeve by helping other Veterans across the world. An honorable, worthy goal suitable of support by everyone with a checkbook.

Another grand accomplishment by Keith Famie is the telling of Sgt. Michael K. Ingram's story. It was touching and poignant, and so wonderful to see, as it allowed Mikie's story to continue on, and lead easily into "Our Vietnam Generation."

Also celebrating "Our Vietnam Generation" were the [Cornerstone Children's Choir](#), the [126th Army Band](#), [Stewart Francke](#), along with the Honor Guard of the [Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter #154](#), who posted the colors. [Chuck Gaidica](#) of [Channel 4](#) delivered the Invocation and [Paul W. Smith](#) of [WJR Radio](#) performed as Master of Ceremonies. All did a wonderful job helping to make the evening and the Movie's World Premiere a special occasion.

"Our Vietnam Generation" finally shared the unique position held by the Vietnam Veterans in our modern day society, as the conduit between the World War II and Korean Veterans and the Veterans who were in Desert Storm, and those who now serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Vietnam Veterans are the men and women who work toward helping these Veterans receive the benefits to which they are entitled, and the men and women who stand guard in the cases where the Veterans have given "their all."

Their service to the Country and their brothers and sisters has no time constraints. And even though their "Welcome Home" has taken four decades, it did not stop them from assisting their comrades in every way they possibly could.

The gaping wound, with it's preliminary sutures has begun the healing process, thanks to the help of "Our Vietnam Generation." PBS, in understanding the importance of this film, will show it on February 21, 2011. If you didn't get the chance to see the film at the Fox Theatre, be sure to mark your calendars, as it is well worth the time.

Our job is to remember that America is the "Land of the Free, Because of the Brave." Thank a Veteran for their Service - to their Country and to us, her citizens.

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