Karen Goit – Life During the Vietnam Conflict

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Box 6 Folder 12

Oral Interview conducted by Timothy Goit

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Brigham Young University – Idaho
TG: What were America’s goals in the Vietnam War?

KG: Well, they were to stop communism in that part of the world.

TG: Now did you volunteer for any services or were you drafted?

KG: No, I wasn’t drafted or served during the fighting.

TG: Did you have any family members that were then drafted or that served?

KG: No, I had two older brothers but no, no one in my family had to serve in Vietnam, though both your grandpas did in World War II.

TG: What were your feelings about other people who were drafted and [did not serve] through the whole process?

KG: I thought it was something they ought to be doing. They lived in this country and I thought they should be willing to fight for those freedoms that we have, it showed real irresponsibility by those people.

TG: And those you saw actually protesting and resisting the draft, you said you didn’t really like some of their actions. Did you ever know any of them personally or I don’t know how to put this. Did you know anybody personally who said, “I’ve been drafted and I’m not going because” or did you ever go to places where people were talking about what they thought people who were drafted should do to fight against that?

KG: No I didn’t, the only thing I saw was people on TV talking. I never really looked for it as I said I thought the people refusing to go should stand up for the rights they had and fight for those people over there who didn’t have those same rights. The people around where I was were scared to go but the people I knew went and fought for their country.

TG: Okay, how did you feel about this sort of sentiment and the things that they were saying, how did you feel about that as um, whole anti-war, anti-government thing, what were your feelings basically towards that?

KG: I felt how ungrateful, how selfish. Here we have all these things all these blessings and you are too scared or proud to do anything to help some one you don’t know.

TG: Well no, towards the thing basically, as you saw those people on TV and you saw some of their actions, did that sort of turn you off to the whole idea or did say that they were doing the right thing but their going about it the wrong way?

KG: It wasn’t the right thing in any way. There just was no excuse for people to say that they shouldn’t have to fight for their country. It doesn’t matter where the fight is, if your country calls you should be willing to answer it. They simply did not care who they
might be hurting or what the right thing to do was. They did what they wanted to not what needed to get done.

TG: Um at your age, were you ever exposed to much of the I guess you might call it a counter culture movement or sort of the I don’t know how to say this, basically it was exposure to the drug use and the fringe lifestyle that was out there with some of the protestors and at your age did you here about that or did you experience that did you see that as a part of the whole anti-war, did that come out?

KG: No, no what we had were people we would see on the TV speaking out doing things but nothing really around us. Near the center of Albuquerque, some people did start up some stuff but they really didn’t even know what they were doing and no one around me was ever into any thing like that.

TG: And when you had that, like you said, you had some of it in the area where you grew up did you…. I guess what I’m looking for is were there personal people that you could relate too, I mean was it the popular thing to do or was it a seriously fringe movement where it was those five kids in the high school did it and they were weird or was it a major popular thing?

KG: Not in my school, there were a few kids who got into that but it wasn’t anything people did. It just wasn’t there, and no one wanted it either. We were close knit and we liked that. No I didn’t think there were anyone I knew into that kind of stuff.

TG: Um, I guess the next question is then that as you saw the whole – as you saw it unfolding you saw people with these attitudes and when the soldiers and people and advisors started finally started coming home, what did you see as the soldiers attitudes to the protestors and then conversely the protestors attitudes toward the soldiers and how did that effect you, if you can recall?

KG: Well the soldiers I knew didn’t really speak out against anything when they came home and like I said I didn’t have anyone really close go out to war. But what we did see the TV reporting that in some large cities and other places the soldiers were being met with screams and other stuff. I saw people throwing things and chanting to them. This was kind of in the large part of the city but I didn’t really see all that much of it. I just didn’t see it where we still believed in what those men were going and fighting for.

TG: And when you saw this kind of behavior at the time have you ever seen anything else with other U.S. conflicts such as like you brought the Iraq, a thing was there any such other mistreatment or whatever on the part of people returning from the gulf war from Korea even, did you ever see blame placed on other soldiers at any other time that you can remember?

KG: This didn’t ever happen again. I can’t think of other times, and I think it only was then because so many people avoided going and fought so hard not to have to fight that when they saw these people I hope they felt a little guilty over what they had been
waiting to sacrifice while those people yelling had only thought of themselves and staying home.

TG: So as soon as the root cause of the main protesting and the public outcry of people home saying “you’re this is this way” a lot, you would say was towards drafting and other policies put by the government and not necessarily the ideology of what they were doing?

KG: It was a lot against the draft but then it was toward the people fighting too. The protests were looking for any reason to say that what they were doing was the right thing and those fighting were only hurting America and Vietnam. I don’t really know what many of their reasons were since I didn’t want to be part of it but watching it all the time on TV you got to see. They would attack anything that told them they weren’t doing what they should.

TG: Would you say that part of that where they were able to broadcast like you said straight into the living room be the first time would you say that with that kind of be the beginning of the media really just showing anything and everything that they could get their hands on because as we have been seen recently, journalists and newspaper writers want to get into special operations and being actually there on the front lines and bringing the what they would call the American public the right to know what is actually happening, would you say that this is actually the start of it and I don’t know if this is the right way to put this but would you say that that has led sort of to the mentality where we don’t where we would that this is actually the beginning of where we become desensitized to this kind of thing where we can see people yes would you say that this is sort of the beginning place where we can see people where our culture beings to sort of desensitize it self towards violence and other things?

KG: Desensitize, no I don’t think. But it was the first time people could see this stuff in their living room on the news. It was just full of horrible pictures and stories of what the war was like. I mean you saw those awful things no one had ever seen before like that picture of a little girl in Hiroshima or yeah Hiroshima who was burned alive and you could help but feel sorry for all the people living in side of something like that.

TG: What I was looking for was you said it was the first time you’d ever seen basically on broadcast television was live well not necessarily live as it was actual battlefield footage and as you said war can be very atrocious it can bring out the worst in people and I was wondering if you felt that this could be one of the main points that brought about sort of the I don’t want to say moral decline but sort of the we can now portray any thing on TV because the public has a right to know?

KG: No I don’t think it was the pictures alone that did that. I think it was the attitudes of the people at the time. People saw that and thought only of the bad and no one was there to say but we’re helping these people or we’re trying to make this country better, they were seeing those pictures and hearing horror stories and paying attention to nothing else. The news wasn’t the problem.
TG: And when you, I guess with the continuing when you hear about people saying “this is what I credited with,” hate to bring up current political issues but you know some people will run office, based on their past military history others will try and hide their past military history do you think that what some one did in Vietnam actually bears out what they could do in office in 2004 today can those issues that they dealt with and the experiences that they gained help or do you think it matters or does it hinder them?

KG: I don’t think that it has anything to do with anything else then to say that they have served this country in the past. That kind of thing doesn’t qualify some one or disqualify someone. What is says is they acted once, it doesn’t say they’ll be a good leader of anything you have to look at the whole person not just what happened to them.

TG: Do you have any opinion about what should be taught about the Vietnam War in high schools, in colleges – do you even have an opinion there about the history courses that should be offered and what they should include?

KG: I think they should be truthful. They should be honest about what happened and how it all ended up.

TG: So when you hear it referred to by many, I’m taking this from my question, when you hear Vietnam referred to as the black mark on American history. Does that raise any emotions at all or any feelings for you or do you just say yeah there were some things done wrong or….

KG: No I don’t see it that way, you know some of my work the Natives in the area and that it what people should really see as the black mark. We have lots of points where we have failed but I don’t see any worse. You’ve seen how those people are forced to live on those reservations. It’s just awful and its right here where we ought to be able to do something but people just don’t seem to care.

TG: Getting back to one final thing when the peace agreement was finally announced and the war was over did you actually feel like there was closure to the thing or did you feel like there was too many unanswered questions or unasked questions about what we had been doing why were we there and what all did we do while we were there?

KG: When it was finally over I don’t think that anyone really felt like we had accomplished anything at all. We didn’t win a war we had set up to, we hadn’t done anything that we were told. We simply all felt like it had been pointless. If the whole war was over without anything changed or anything where were our ideals then where was the noble cause now. It just brought out a lot more pain and doubt.

TG: And my last question as you were dealing with all the issues surrounding the conflict and the war where did your religious beliefs play out and how did they change or did they change by your experiences.
KG: Well, my beliefs weren’t really all that affected. I hadn’t met the missionaries or your father yet, and I really didn’t see much of faith in the whole thing anyway.

TG: Okay, I thank you very much for your time and we are going to be done then, thank you very much.