

A Veterans Oral History
Heritage Education Commission
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Gary Nolte
Narrator

Linda Jenson
Interviewer

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LJ: Could you please state your name and what war era?

GN: I'm Gary Nolte and I'm Vietnam Era.

LJ: Thank you. Can you tell me where you were born and raised?

GN: I was born in Fairmont, Minnesota, and I lived there until I was 16, then moved to Moorhead. The first day of my senior year was the first day in Moorhead.

LJ: Now what did your parents do?

GN: My dad was a salesman. So he got transferred up here and so then they moved.

LJ: You graduated high school then from Moorhead?

GN: Yes.

LJ: What did you do after high school graduation?

GN: I tried to stay out of the draft.

LJ: No doubt.

GN: This is 1963-64. I tried my hand at college a couple times. I ended up joining the Naval Reserve. I was still working college jobs. I was an auto mechanic. That's where I cut my teeth, I guess.

LJ: How did you enter, so that's how you entered the service then?

GN: **I got the last billet for the Naval Reserve in North Dakota; the very last one. Some friends of mine were in. I got my draft notice and they said why don't you come out and sign up at the Reserve. So I did.**

LJ: So where did you do your training with the Naval Reserve?

GN: **We trained right at the quonset huts in Fargo, right at NDSU.**

LJ: So that was handy going to college and having your training right in town?

GN: **Yes, I was a student at Moorhead State, but still it was just a short hop, skip and a jump to go. Then we had summer active duties. Go to boot camp. Go to [unclear] go to the Great Lakes and sail on some World War II ship.**

LJ: What did you think about the training involved?

GN: **The training was pretty easy for me. You know I was an athlete and boot camp is athletics.**

LJ: What was training like? What was boot camp like for those of us that don't know what goes on in boot camp?

GN: **Boot camp is something where they try to break you down completely and build you back up. I mean, in their mold. This is what it does. If you say, "Do this." Do it, don't ask questions. Do it and because lives may depend on it.**

LJ: When did you get notice that you were going to Vietnam?

GN: **I got notice on January 15, 1967.**

LJ: What was that like, that day, getting that information?

GN: **That was an awful day, actually; because normally I was in the Reserve, of course, but I got activated. And normally we were supposed to have a month or two to get your stuff together. Well I'd been on vacation with some friends. We drove and took a road trip to California. Happened to drive right by where my ship was going to be when I went on active duty, but I didn't know that. I got back home with the Guard weekend. Saturday, they said, "You're going on active duty on Tuesday." Okay, I'm in college. I have a job. I have a girlfriend. I've got a whole bunch of things to do and there's**

- a blizzard. And so, I mean, the town is locked down. You can't go anywhere. But Tuesday night I've got to report to Treasure Island at San Francisco.**
- LJ:** And you knew that once you went to Treasure Island, you were on your way to Vietnam?
- GN:** **I knew that, yes. On a ship, but I knew I was going there.**
- LJ:** What did your parents say?
- GN:** **Well, I was 21. So that wasn't – my dad was a pilot in World War II. My uncles were in the service so, it was pretty much an obligation. They didn't like the fact that I was in the Navy because they were all Army, but . . .**
- LJ:** Oh, so it was a branch thing?
- GN:** **Yes, but, otherwise, my parents really had no qualms about it. I was 21, pretty much able to make my mind up.**
- LJ:** How did you really feel that day?
- GN:** **That very day I felt when I got off the bus at Treasure Island at midnight; and I looked at that sign, and I'm standing there with my sea bag and my ill-fitting boot camp uniform wondering, "what did I get myself into here." And then I got to walk clear across the island to get to the transit barracks. Then the next 35 days, we sat on Treasure Island getting our shots, getting our dental work done, waiting for orders.**
- LJ:** What was that thirty-five days like at Treasure Island?
- GN:** **That was boring. Little money – I was used to making and having a lot more money than \$80 a month. But we're living in a barracks with 75 people that you didn't know, your best friends. Treasure Island is a nice place, but it was still a transit barracks. We still had no home.**
- LJ:** Okay, thirty-five days then what happened?
- GN:** **Then an odyssey began, they took so little time to get me to Treasure Island; then I went to Anchorage, Alaska; to Tokyo, Japan; to Yukosuka, Japan; to Okinawa; to the Philippines; back to Sasebo, Japan. This all took about 90 days. In a barracks to here, on an airplane to here, on another airplane to here, in a barracks in the Philippine Islands, which it actually was an old POW camp. They just turned the wire the other way to keep the people out**

instead of keeping the people in. And all that time, we had no pay records, so we weren't getting paid ... so exacerbating a problem. That was a real problem. And we were sharpening our razor blades on the shower floor and using rainbow soap.

And it was just like they forgot about us. When we got to the Philippines and Subic Bay, the barracks commander was corrupt. He was caring for his little group of people, and we were doing all the work. And he lost our orders ... got buried behind a file cabinet so we couldn't leave. Our records were lost. So here we are. We're working in the fleet mailroom, dragging mailbags around, wondering what is going on – still got no soap for showers.

LJ: How awful.

GN: And finally we came back one day and the guy's in handcuffs. The SPs are hauling him away. Because he wasn't who he said he was and he was bullying people; and people were getting beat up and it was pretty much a gang warfare thing. And I'll say this, he was black and it was right in the middle of the race riots that were going on in the military at the time.

LJ: So he got busted.

GN: He got busted. We all got orders to report to the USS Navasota. Now, you're going back to Japan because that's where your ship might be. So we're chasing – in those days there was an old saying, "Loose lips sink ships." So nobody knew where you were going. I mean, all the people in the bars in town knew where you were going, but we didn't know where we were going. They said, "Well, you're getting on the Navasota and you're going back to Japan, because your ship is going to be there." So now we take a trip back to that Sasebo, Japan, from the Philippines on a Navy oiler. And we get into another barrack's situation. This one is where they pried the boards off the doors. And we had to clean the place up before we could move in, because they weren't expecting us.

LJ: And that was in Japan?

GN: That's in Japan.

LJ: How long were you on the ground in Japan again?

GN: The last total time was like 15, 18 days.

LJ: And what happened during that time?

GN: There was really nothing. They gave us little, meaningless details to do. I mean, we waxed a floor that hadn't been waxed for 30 years. And it sucked up a lot of wax. But we were cleaning out barracks that had been abandoned after Korea, which was 15 years before.

LJ: Were you finally getting a paycheck?

GN: We finally got paid, they finally got a paymaster at Sasebo who said, "Yes. We can get you some money." That was just like heaven to have money again.

LJ: I bet.

GN: I just lost my last 10 cents in a penny ante poker game, so . . .

LJ: Well, thank God, you got the paycheck, finally.

GN: Yes.

LJ: So after the 18 days in Japan, you went on another ship then?

GN: No, actually, then my ship came in. My ship came to Sasebo. Then we got assigned onboard.

LJ: And that's what took you to Vietnam.

GN: That's what took us to Vietnam, yes.

LJ: How long on the ship, leaving Japan, until you got to Vietnam?

GN: They'd do some training along the way, so it was probably about 10 days. And then we would be 30 days on the line; three days, four days in port; 30 days on the line; three, four days in port.

LJ: What was life like on the ship?

GN: The shipboard life was kind of comfortable, really. You had your job. You knew what to do. You had to do it. I was on an aircraft carrier and so there was a lot of activity; and there are a lot of people onboard, too. There are 3,500 people on there.

But we had our own little group. I first started out in the journalism department. I was writing hometown news releases and that; and then, my

- editorial comments didn't fit with the communications officer so I got transferred, because I wasn't rated. I was just a seaman, so they could just get rid of me. They couldn't say, "Okay, you do this." "You're gone."**
- LJ:** So you get to Japan. I mean, you get off the ship going from Japan to Vietnam. What happens when you get to Vietnam?
- GN:** **Then we started flying airplanes. I didn't fly airplanes but we started operating because we were doing a lot of close air support for the Marines and just doing, generally, what aircraft carriers do.**
- LJ:** Still on the aircraft carrier?
- GN:** **Still ... I spent my whole two years on the aircraft carrier.**
- LJ:** So you weren't on the ground?
- GN:** **I never touched the ground.**
- LJ:** Good for you.
- GN:** **I do have some Vietnamese currency, but my daughter brought that back.**
- LJ:** So you were on the ship the whole time?
- GN:** **Yes.**
- LJ:** So what was that like?
- GN:** **Well I was a signalman which is visual communications. So I got to have a suntan every day.**
- LJ:** How nice.
- GN:** **I stood one deck above the flight deck and watched hundreds of airplanes, watched and recovered every day; and saw some accidents, bad accidents sometimes. And just, in general, we were in the flag ship. And we communicated with our escorts. And everything was done with flashing light and with signal flags. Nothing was done by radio because we didn't have the radios like they have now. If we want to tell our destroyer that we're going to change course, then we have to flash to him "mike - corporate - mike - mike - course - 270." We're going to come around to 270 to launch airplanes, because we have to launch airplanes into the wind.**

LJ: So you said you were on the ship, off the shore, for over two years?

GN: **Not two years straight. But there was interesting event that I just –after you called me some of the stuff started to come back. We were just about finished with our first tour; July 29th is the date.**

LJ: So how long was the first tour?

GN: **My first tour in Vietnam was about four months. Let's see, I got there in May about and we were supposed to ship out the end of July.**

LJ: So that's relatively a short tour, isn't it?

GN: **That was a short tour because I spent so much time trying to get there.**

LJ: Yes.

GN: **But then on July 29th, the USS Forrestal was supposed to relieve us. I mean that there are four carriers all the time in the Gulf. The Forrestal was supposed to relieve us. We all turned into the wind to have one big air strike that we were flying and the Forrestal blew up. It's an aircraft carrier but it blew. They had a fire on the flight deck and they were our relief and we watched them burn. We got extended for another 30 days so they could get another ship over. Over 100 people lost their lives on the boat.**

LJ: How awful.

GN: **We were watching, we were watching all of this through binoculars because we were about three miles away and this could have been us. And they used our deck, right below my workspace, was was the morgue, where they helicoptered the bodies over. So I had body bags piled up underneath my workstation for the better part of two days.**

LJ: How awful.

GN: **And we cruised the water around there looking for survivors that would have gotten blown overboard or what. We'd see a gas tank from an airplane and there'd be a shark swimming around it. I don't know how many people actually perished in the water, but I've got a tape on it that I recorded off of public radio.**

LJ: And what was the cause of that fire?

GN: It was, actually, Senator John McCain was on that ship. He was and his airplane was hit by a rocket that got clipped off by somebody else's exhaust, shot through his fuel tank. His airplane was the first one that started on fire. You've got all that gas burning on the flight deck with all that ordnance, then things start going up. Yes. It was an incredible, incredible sight. We all took pictures but they confiscated them all.

LJ: Really?

GN: Yes, I was on the signal bridge. Of course, we had binoculars, telephoto lenses, all the other stuff and we're only three miles away.

LJ: That must have been absolutely heart wrenching . . .

GN: That was heart wrenching.

LJ: knowing that there was nothing you could do?

GN: Nothing we could do. I mean, while we were providing aid, we had people that came. And we had a hospital, of course, on our boat; and so they were helicoptering the badly wounded over to us. They were helicoptering the bodies over to us because they had no place to put them there. And just to watch that thing burn . . .

LJ: How awful.

GN: That was probably my most depressing time, the whole time I was in the Navy.

LJ: How do you wipe images like that from your mind?

GN: You can't. It's just there. I mean, you've seen the World War II movies and you've seen aircraft carriers burning. That's the job. That's what it is.

LJ: So for two days, you had the bodies there; then they were taken to . . .

GN: They were taken off.

LJ: So was this now during the first tour?

GN: First tour.

LJ: First tour and then how long a break did you have between the two tours?

GN: We got extended after that so we didn't get back to the States until October. And then I got 30 days leave, which I took. And went back in December. In January, the USS Pueblo was captured by the North Koreans, so we got emergency recall to go to Korea. So in January, we got cut short by a month for our stay. We were supposed to leave in February and we had to go in January. So we went to Korea to show the flag.

LJ: And how long were you in Korea?

GN: **Thirty-five days, about.**

LJ: And then on the ship, also, the whole time?

GN: **Yes, and just showing the flag. I mean, the Russians were there. They were harassing us, and we were just showing the North Koreans that we're here and we're not here to help.**

LJ: What was that like?

GN: **That was cold. Remember I'm an outside watch stander; and the wind comes off of Siberia.**

LJ: Enough said on that one.

GN: **And so we're working outside, you could be outside for maybe 15 minutes. I got the last pair of long underwear at Pearl Harbor. I went to the PX and they had one pair of long underwear, and I bought it.**

LJ: Good purchase.

GN: **Yes, I could have sold them a number of times.**

LJ: No doubt, so after 30 days, showing the flag, then what goes?

GN: **Japan, then Vietnam.**

LJ: So this time, were you still on the ship?

GN: **Yes, the ship the whole time, but the second time we got called out of Japan because the Tet Offensive had begun.**

LJ: And what was that?

GN: That was where there was a big offensive that the North Vietnamese launched against the south. It was called Tet. And Tet is a Chinese holiday. So they launched this huge assault and then we got called down south because our airplanes were flying close air support for the Marines.

LJ: And how long did that offensive . . .

GN: That was about 35-40 days, I think. It lasted quite a while. We were on the line over 40 days one time during that. We were flying 24/7.

LJ: And what was that like?

GN: It was just a grind, because I lived underneath the catapults. And when they're launching airplanes at night, you could hear that thing coming over the top of you like a train. And it hits the stop and it goes "BANG." Finally, I was assigned to a place called the "flag pot," which is a control center for the operation if you have an admiral onboard. It was also the coldest air-conditioned place on the ship. We all moved into there, which was up on the island structure of the ship, and we'd just go on to take our showers. But most of the time we stayed in there because it was a lot more comfortable.

LJ: So you got restorative sleep?

GN: We got refuge.

LJ: Yes. Good for you. So after that and then on to Vietnam – how long were you in the Vietnam on the ship?

GN: On the ship, we were there until about the middle of September.

LJ: How many months?

GN: That would have been January, end of February, until about the 15th of September. As a reservist, I had a two-year commitment; and it was on the 15th of September, which happens to be my wife's birthday. And I didn't know her then – so it's a whole separate deal.

On the 15th of September we got notice that we were all getting early outs because there was a draw-down in force, so all the reservists were getting early outs.

LJ: Great news.

GN: Instead of getting out in January, I could get out the first of October – as soon as I got back to the States. But I chose to stay onboard for another 30 days. Half of my team was Reserve and if I'd have left with everybody else, there wouldn't have been anybody left. So I stayed until Halloween. Then I just stayed another 30 days because I couldn't get into college, anyway. It was the wrong time of the year.

LJ: What was that time like?

GN: That was quite relaxing. It really was – I was in charge of me. I was in charge of about 10 other guys, too; but we just did our duty. We were pretty much were stand down, which is not that there was no communications going on which is a big deal, and so we just had to clean up our spaces and stay out of trouble.

LJ: So you got back on Halloween?

GN: Yes, I got home to Fargo. I got off the boat on Halloween so I got home about the 4th of November.

LJ: And then that year was?

GN: Sixty-eight.

LJ: Sixty-eight, but the war was still going strong?

GN: Still going strong, still sending people over.

LJ: Did you have to return at all?

GN: No.

LJ: Or were you done?

GN: I was done with my active duty component. I was done, but I was still obligated to be in the Reserve. And still drill weekends and then go on two weeks active every summer.

LJ: What was it like, stepping foot on home ground, home land?

GN: It was . . .

LJ: In November?

GN: It was positively incredible. I mean, just to get back home. Everything changes in two years. It was pretty special. I drove back the second time I came home. I drove back, so nobody knew I was coming.

LJ: Big surprise?

GN: Yes, I had mailed everything home ... except for my sea bag. I had mailed everything else home.

LJ: So drove back from California then?

GN: From San Diego, yes.

LJ: Well that was a fun cross-country trip.

GN: It was really fun because I bought a Corvette. I got combat pay, we had overseas pay, I didn't spend a lot of money and so I was able to write a check for cash for a Corvette. So a friend of mine and I from Minneapolis, we played Route 66.

LJ: Good for you. What a fun treat after the previous two years.

GN: Yes.

LJ: How long were you in the Reserve after you got back?

GN: I retired from the Reserve in '86. So I did 21 total years.

LJ: How far did you have to travel, staying in the Reserve after you were back from Vietnam?

GN: The drills, of course, were just in Fargo. But quarterly, we had to go to Minneapolis for a weekend, and then once a year we had to go someplace for two weeks. And usually, because of my specialty as a communicator, I would go on a ship and go someplace.

So I'd get orders to go to Portland, Oregon. I'd get on a ship in Portland, Oregon, and ride it down to San Diego. And in the meantime, we stopped in San Francisco and that business.

Or I'd get orders to go to Jacksonville, Florida; and we'd end up in St. Croix and the Virgin Islands. And, I mean, it wasn't like being on a cruise ship. Because we're out. We're working.

Especially in the specialty I was in, there weren't a lot of people that were there. One cruise I was on was 15 days and I think I got two hours of sleep one night and one hour of sleep the other night for 15 days, because there was only two of us. And the admiral happened to think that he needed to put out all the communications via flashing light.

LJ: Really, interesting.

GN: Yes.

LJ: So you got to see a lot of places?

GN: **I did. I stopped writing them on my sea bag after a while, but there was a lot of interesting things.**

LJ: What was one of the most interesting places that you ever had to go to?

GN: **St. Croix and the Virgin Islands were really interesting because there were four of us reservists on an old Navy destroyer. We tied up to the dock; and when we're getting ready to leave, the Navy sent an airplane for us that had engine trouble. So we caught a ride with an Army "helo" back to San Juan, Puerto Rico, and that was a very interesting ride.**

LJ: What went on?

GN: **Well he gets up in the air after we're in his aircraft, we get up in the air and he says, "Is anybody hungry?" "Well, yes, we could eat." "Well, here's a McDonalds." [unclear] right into McDonalds, lands in the parking lot with his helicopter. He was a Cobra pilot ... they're pretty crazy, anyway.**

LJ: So you got McDonalds via helicopter?

GN: Yes.

LJ: Not many people do that.

GN: **No, not very many people get to do that at all. After I left the newspaper and became a stock broker, I was getting pressure from my family to get out of the Reserve because I didn't have the time to spend doing that. I waited as long as I could before I went back up – took another two-week. I'd put in for orders in 1984 – anyplace I need to go, just because I want to get done with this. I got orders to the SEAL team in San Diego.**

LJ: How long were you with them?

GN: **Just for two weeks.**

LJ: Two weeks. That must have been an amazing experience.

GN: **Well, I was working in communications, but I'm also a firearms expert, so they gave me a bunch of parts and said put some guns together.**

LJ: Interesting. What was that like?

GN: **That was really fun. I lost 15 pounds in two weeks.**

LJ: And how so?

GN: **They run every morning for five miles before they have breakfast.**

LJ: Oh, I didn't realize.

GN: **Every morning on the beach, they're out there running. There's an hour's worth of calisthenics, and then we went to breakfast. So it was kind of fun for an old 35-year-old to keep up with those guys.**

LJ: What was the average age of the SEAL team?

GN: **They were in their 20s, mostly, but they're all jocks. And they're all guys that jump out of airplanes and that kind of thing.**

LJ: What other stand-out people did you meet in the military during your time?

GN: **People that really made a big difference to me? Yes, there was several. Bob Wefald, who is a retired judge in North Dakota, was one of my commanding officers, and so I got to know him pretty well. Another gentleman by the name of Gordon Lau, Concordia professor, but he was a Reserve captain. We won the national award, the Forrestal trophy in Fargo for having the best unit in the country.**

LJ: Oh, that's amazing.

GN: **Yes.**

LJ: Well, that's a real honor.

GN: It was. I even have the ribbon in my book.

LJ: Yes, that's great. I want to see this. Do you go to any reunions?

GN: We have a Chief Petty Officer's Association in Fargo. And we try to get together on the Navy's birthday, and whenever there is a retirement for a chief petty officer at the Reserve Center, I get invited. We used to have more promotions when there were a lot more people out there so, whenever we had to do a hazing then I would get invited. Not because I'm an expert hazer, but I get invited out for that, also. But now the unit has gone from over 400 people to about 100.

LJ: Okay and that happens with age, with time?

GN: Well that also happens with forced necessity and figuring out what you need. Now everybody in Fargo is either a medical person or a construction battalion person. And we used to have entire shipboard replacement units. We were assigned to the USS Dixie; and there'd be 30 of us that would go to the USS Dixie for our active duty. We worked together and that business, and we knew each other, and we could actually take over the ship and sail it ourselves. Now it's not that way anymore.

LJ: Yes. Now when you got done and you said you're married, you have children, you have foster children.

GN: Yes.

LJ: Do you want to share with us your decision to have Vietnamese foster children?

GN: It's an interesting story. I was at a Reserve weekend and a gentleman by the name of Minh Tran spoke to us. And it was a compelling story about boat people and the refugee kids. I came home after my Reserve weekend and I said to my wife, Cindy, "Cindy, we've got something to talk about." She says, "You know, I've got something to talk about, too." She'd heard the same presentation at church the same day. So we said, now we need to look at this. We called the Lutheran Social Services on Monday. They came out on Tuesday and Thursday we had three girls.

LJ: Three girls, were they sisters?

GN: Yes.

LJ: And what year was this?

GN: This was 1985.

LJ: How old were they?

GN: They were 14, 15, and 16.

LJ: Just one year apart.

GN: Yes.

LJ: Fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen and how long were they living with you?

GN: They lived with us for a year, and then our church, Trinity Lutheran, repatriated their entire family. There were three sisters, and there was three brothers, and then there was three younger ones that were at the refugee camp with the parents; and we got them all in a house in South Moorhead.

LJ: Wonderful, so they were all reunited.

GN: They were reunited and then we got Mr. Quach (sp?) a job, and they got self-sufficient. They went off welfare, and they moved to Massachusetts because they had relatives there. They live in Worcester, Massachusetts.

LJ: Do you still keep in contact with them?

GN: We get Christmas cards from them ... which is interesting from Buddhists.

LJ: Yes. What was that year like having those three?

GN: It was a real learning curve for my children.

LJ: Did these three sisters speak any English?

GN: No.

LJ: That would be very hard, I would think.

GN: It was our job to teach them English. We took them to ESL classes. I don't speak Vietnamese, and we had a Vietnamese dictionary, but we didn't use it unless we really had to.

It was an interesting thing. For instance my daughter – it wasn't in this house – but my daughter took them downstairs to show them how the shower

worked. So she showed them, turns the water on and it's hot [unclear]. About a week later, they don't smell like they've been taking baths. Well, they'd been washing their hands in the shower. So we got that straightened out. And the girls became friends with my daughter. And my son didn't really want much to do with it.

LJ: Really and why do you think that was?

GN: **Because they were foreigners. He he was at the age where it was not very important to him.**

LJ: Sure.

GN: **And after they left, we got a boy.**

LJ: A Vietnamese boy?

GN: **Yes, he lived with us for several years.**

LJ: And how old was he when he came?

GN: **He was 16, also.**

LJ: Did he speak English?

GN: **Perfect.**

LJ: Oh, wonderful. That helps a lot.

GN: **Actually he was a Amerasian boy. He was delivered by a street woman in Saigon and the midwife that delivered him, adopted him because the mother couldn't take care of him. So the midwife was his mother – was his custody mother, but the birth mother was different. But Tin came to us, and he lived with us for several years, and we still are in really close contact with him.**

LJ: And what was the age when he came, you said?

GN: **Sixteen.**

LJ: Sixteen.

GN: **He graduated from high school and did his college; and then he went off to California and went to fashion design school.**

LJ: Good for him. Is that where he is now?

GN: **No, he's in Tennessee.**

LJ: Do you still keep in touch with him?

GN: **I get a – we share a birthday.**

LJ: Oh, wonderful.

GN: **So, yes. We stay in close touch.**

LJ: Great. Did you welcome any other Vietnamese?

GN: **We had another boy, briefly, about a month. He was having a lot of trouble and we got him resettled with a really nice family. Actually, she was my former sales assistant when I worked at West Acres.**

LJ: Oh, nice.

GN: **And then we had another girl after that we have been adopted by her.**

LJ: Oh, wonderful.

GN: **So I'm Dad. I'm not foster dad, I'm Dad.**

LJ: That's awesome. How old was she when she came?

GN: **She was 17. She had some trouble with some foster homes. Actually one of her foster mothers died ... a single mother and she died. So Venice had no place to go and she's not old enough to time out of the system yet, so she came to us as what they called a "troubled girl." But she wasn't trouble, she just needed to be understood. Yes. She's turned out to be the most fun of all of them.**

LJ: Oh, awesome. How long did she stay with you?

GN: **She was with us for almost five years.**

LJ: And where is she now?

GN: **She's in Denver. And we were just out last spring to her daughter's high school graduation.**

LJ: Wonderful.

GN: **And her son is graduating this spring and then he's coming to NDSU.**

LJ: That's terrific.

GN: **So I'll have a Vietnamese grandson in town.**

LJ: That is awesome.

GN: **We decided to do it, Linda, because I felt that when we left Vietnam, we left them in a real mess.**

LJ: That is so gracious of you and your wife to take in someone from a foreign land and especially those that don't even speak English. That takes a very special person to welcome someone in.

GN: **It was an interesting time.**

LJ: Yes. I bet you learned a lot.

GN: **Oh, we did. We learned a bunch. The last daughter, Lynn, was with us during her senior year.**

And we also had a French foreign exchange student and my daughter. They had a little dormitory upstairs.

LJ: That's great, a French foreign student.

GN: **Yes and the thing about it is that the French had a big influence in Vietnam.**

LJ: Really?

GN: **Oh, yes. The old French Indochina. That's what it was before it became Vietnam, it was French Indochina. So they fought a war in the 50s that was a war of independence from France, because the French got them back after the Japanese were chased out.**

LJ: So what was the relationship with those three girls?

GN: **Oh, they were just like dormitory sisters.**

LJ: That's wonderful.

GN: They'd go over in the park and talk all night long. There's a big hill over in the park. They'd go over there and lie on that hill and look at the stars and they had boyfriends. They all went to prom together.

LJ: Great.

GN: And my foster son, Tin, came over and did their hair. We had a beauty salon in here.

LJ: That's great. So how did you feel, was it '86 you said you were done?

GN: Yes.

LJ: What was that like?

GN: It was a sense of loss, really.

LJ: Really?

GN: Well I had been in the Navy for half of my life. And you get used to the people that you're around. It's different people than in the professional world. I mean, after I graduated from college, I went into the newspaper business and I went into the stockbroker's business. And it was a different kind of people. You got a lot of working class people in the Reserve, especially in the enlisted Reserve. And they're wonderful people. I got used to them, being around them. And the excitement of their – I get to put on my uniform. I still put mine on every Veterans Day. And I still march in parades, that kind of thing.

LJ: That's great.

GN: But it was a sense of loss, almost.

LJ: Did it take a while for that to subside?

GN: Yes, it did. I didn't have to go on active duty for two weeks the next year, that was the first time that it subsided.

LJ: Are there any other memories you'd like to share before we close this interview? Anything that stands out that you'd like to say?

GN: I was proud to serve. I didn't understand what we – still don't understand, completely, what we were trying to do. But it was important to do it. When

your country calls, if everybody says, “I’m not going.” There’s going to be trouble.

LJ: Absolutely. How would you like to be remembered, Gary?

GN: **Hmm. I would like to be remembered as someone that cared. That’s how I would put it.**

LJ: An excellent way to be remembered and you’ll be remembered also as a foster father.

GN: **Yes, that’s a proud moment. It really is.**

LJ: Thank you very much, Gary.

GN: **You’re welcome.**