

*Be good,
smile pretty*



A daughter's journey to know her father... thirty years after his death in Vietnam

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Be good, smile pretty

BE GOOD, SMILE PRETTY

This personal, one-hour documentary chronicles the filmmaker's struggle to know and grieve for the father she never knew, a Naval officer who died in Vietnam when she was a baby.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

Grief is not an easy subject, particularly when it involves war. Some of you may be Vietnam veterans; some of you may be veterans of other wars; some of you may have lost a loved one; some of you may be friends or relatives of a survivor, trying better to understand his or her experience.

Designed to accompany BE GOOD, SMILE PRETTY, this guide will provide a framework for how to approach these emotions and how to begin a healthy conversation within your family, support group or veteran center. This guide also outlines ongoing activities to encourage continued healing and remembrance within your classroom and community.

Your group may have to overcome obstacles along the way—feelings of denial, mistrust, anger, guilt, shame, betrayal, fear. This guide will help participants find that although there is deep sorrow in reviving difficult memories, there can also be great joy and solace in reclaiming the past.

"We never talked about it..."

— Paul Droz, brother of Don Droz, who was killed in action in Vietnam

FILMMAKER STATEMENT

Before making this film, I thought about my father every day, but I rarely talked about him. I knew asking questions brought up painful memories for the people I love, and so I seldom did.

For so many of us whose fathers died in Vietnam, our fathers remain a mystery, shrouded in tragedy and remorse. We have no memories of our own, so we depend on the memories of others—and yet we are reluctant and sometimes even discouraged from reviving these memories. We don't want to cause our mothers or our families pain; we don't want to be morbid; we are afraid to admit our own grief and loss. And what good will it do to resurrect the memories anyway? Our fathers have been gone such a long time. The Vietnam War is a divisive and uncomfortable subject. And so we keep quiet.

More than anything, this silence is what I hope to break.

By chronicling my own personal struggle to know my father, I hope to help others talk about their loss, and to raise awareness. It is estimated that there are 20,000 Americans who lost fathers in the Vietnam War. The loss we have endured is real, and so is the opportunity for us to heal. Even if the Vietnam War did not directly affect your life, I hope you will be moved by what is universal in my story: the lingering impact of war on families and survivors, the damage of repressing grief and the importance and healing power of remembrance.

Thank you for taking part in this journey.

—Tracy Droz Tragos



Tracy Droz Tragos

Facilitator guidelines

FACILITATOR GUIDELINES

Whether you are facilitating a discussion in a classroom, community center, church, synagogue or support group, the following are suggestions about how to make the event a positive and rewarding one.

Purpose of the Event

After viewing BE GOOD, SMILE PRETTY, audiences may react in many different ways. A conversation might become deeply personal, or you may find an audience politically charged. To ensure a productive discussion, make it clear that, while all points of view are welcome, the overriding purpose of the event is not political debate but to encourage reflection, healing and reconciliation. In addition, be sure to set audience expectations about how long your event will last. (Possible times for each section are included throughout the guide, but are only meant as broad suggestions based on a small scale, two hour event).



Create a Supportive, Safe Space

Acknowledgment for the bereaved is important. The rekindling of emotions might be overwhelming. To support those who are particularly affected, here are specific recommendations:

- Let the audience know they are in a safe space where they should feel free to speak for themselves.
- No one will be required to speak—not talking is okay.
- What is shared in the room will not be shared outside of the room. Participants need to commit to confidentiality.
- Speak in a manner of empathy, compassion and objectivity.
- Be open to the difficult stories and tears, and try to avoid moving on too quickly when emotions are shared. (You may want to supply tissues.)
- Allow for silence.

Note: *Some soldiers who have experienced combat can suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which can be triggered by images and memories of war. You may want to consider having support systems in place during your outreach activities. For more information about PTSD, visit <http://www.ncptsd.org/>*

Be Flexible

The discussion questions are meant to serve as a “guide.” It may be appropriate to tailor some questions to your specific group. Audiences might have their own questions they would like to raise. While it is important to lead the discussion, be open to reactions within your audience and allow for detours from the discussion prompts.

Encourage Next Steps

Talking about grief is a first step, but if it stops there, lasting impact may be limited. Planning next steps and continued activities will leave the audience feeling a sense of hope, even when the discussion has been difficult. You may want to make photocopies of the activities and resources at the end of this guide, while recommending that the conversation continue within families and communities.

before viewing the film

BEFORE VIEWING THE FILM *Suggested Time: 10 Minutes*

- Welcome those who have gathered.
- Describe the schedule and agenda for the event.
- Canvass the room to find out who is gathered and what their interest is in being there:
 - Veterans or active duty military?
 - People who have had a parent, relative or friend die in a war?
 - People whose loved ones are missing in action from a war?
 - People who have had a loved one die in other circumstances?
 - Adopted children or adoptive parents?
 - People who have opposed war?
 - Others?
- Take note of the demographics of your group, so that during the discussion period following the film, you can direct relevant and appropriate questions. Knowing this information at the beginning of an event can help foster sensitivity both for the facilitator and for the viewers.
- For student groups, you may want to read aloud the one-line description of the program as well as the letter from the filmmaker to provide background.



AFTER VIEWING THE FILM

After viewing the film

Writing Activity *Suggested Time: 10 Minutes*

To allow time for individual reflection and to encourage a thoughtful dialogue in the discussion, begin with a writing exercise:

The title of the film comes from a letter the filmmaker's father wrote to her mother. Ask those assembled to take five minutes to write a letter to a loved one, to someone they've lost or to themselves (as a journal entry). During this time, encourage each person also to spend a couple of minutes writing down what they do or would like to do to remember a loved one who has died.

Post-Viewing Discussion *Suggested Time: 30 Minutes*

When you are ready to begin the discussion:

- Remind your audience of confidentiality and the safe space they are in.
- Allow for initial comments participants may want to share.
- Transition to a group discussion by asking if anyone would like to read what he or she wrote.
- Use sidebars to provide context for discussion questions.

The group discussion has been designed to cover three topics: Vietnam and Loss From War; Grief; and Memory and Remembrance. Feel free to use selectively or tailor your own questions to your specific group or interests.

Group Discussion questions
GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Vietnam and Loss From War

- Why do you think it is difficult for some veterans to speak of the “real stories” of the Vietnam War and for some widows to grieve?
- Why were some of the film subjects reluctant to answer the filmmaker’s questions, particularly about her father’s body? Why are their stories important?
- The filmmaker’s mother participated in the candlelight peace vigil in November 1969. When death is tied to a public controversial subject like the Vietnam War (or any war where there is strong opposing political opinion), how does this affect a survivor’s personal, private grief?
- The archival footage from Vietnam was real. The radio calls from the ambush and the photo of the body on a stretcher were from the day the filmmaker’s father was killed. How did that impact your viewing experience? How did these images affect you differently than what you might normally see on television and in movies?
- How did these images remind you of your own experience of war? If you have not experienced war, in what ways do you feel you have a greater understanding now?
- How does a better understanding about the Vietnam War help you understand current events and your daily lives?

About the Vietnam War

- The Vietnam War was the longest military action in United States history. The U.S. involvement in Vietnam spanned two decades—from the mid-1950’s to the mid-1970’s.
- 2.9 million Americans were sent to Southeast Asia.
- At the height of the war, more than 500,000 Americans were stationed in Vietnam.
- Over 58,000 Americans lost their lives there.
- It is estimated that over 20,000 Americans had fathers who died in the war. (*Sons and Daughters in Touch*)

“All the stories I told about Vietnam were all the funny ones. But I never told the real stories. I never told them how I felt.”

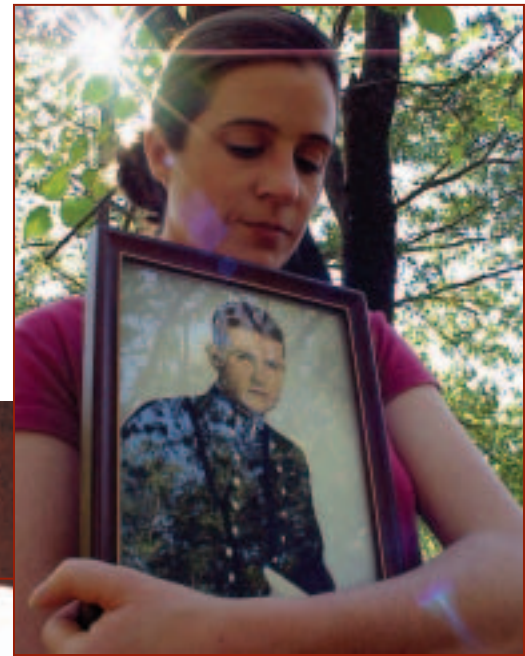
— *Tedd Peck, Vietnam War veteran*



Grief

Group Discussion questions

- The filmmaker was only three months old when her father was killed. How does an infant or child experience a parent's death? How can you relate this kind of experience to your own experience?
- Like many who lose loved ones, the filmmaker's mother talked about being "alone in her grief." After a death, why might survivors feel alone in grief?
- In what ways do you feel or have you felt guilty over the loss of a comrade or loved one? Why? What can be done to deal with this guilt?
- While there was nothing the filmmaker could do to bring her father back, she needed permission to mourn her loss, to know her father and to tell her story. Why do you think there is a need to know birth parents? What impact does this knowledge and understanding have?
- The filmmaker's adoptive father has his own grief and sadness. In what way do you relate to his perspective? How do you think you would feel if you were in his place?
- What happens when you don't go through the painful emotions of grief and "smile pretty" instead?



Factors That May Interfere with Resolving Your Grief

- Avoiding your emotions
- Overactivity to the point of exhaustion
- Using alcohol or other drugs to mask the grief
- Unrealistic promises made to the deceased
- Unresolved grief from a previous loss
- Judgmental relationships
- Acting resentful to those who try to help

— *Hampden-Sydney College Counseling Center*

"I'd always hoped it was a mistake...that one day he'd come walking in and go, 'Here I am.'"

— *Kurt Ziegler, whose father was killed a month before Kurt's tenth birthday*

Group Discussion questions

Memory and Remembrance

- The filmmaker's mother wanted to keep her husband's trunk in the garage, where she would never see it. In what ways do you understand her reaction?
- The filmmaker's grandmother responded in a different way: she was grateful to read the condolence letters from the attic. How would you feel about reviving these memories if you were in her place?
- What is at stake when memory and remembrance are avoided?
- Whose grief and loss has been overlooked or ignored in your family or community? What suitcases, trunks or boxes have you or your family kept closed?
- Who is memorialized in your home and community. Why?
- Who would you like to honor and remember? How?
- The filmmaker's aunt said she found no comfort in going to the cemetery. But the filmmaker and her mother found comfort in the words "Father" and "Husband" being added to Don Droz's gravestone. What has provided you with comfort and meaning after a loss? How do you think you might begin to heal and encourage healing in others?
- What is the value of keeping a moment of silence to honor those we have lost?

Review Next Steps *Suggested Time: 10 Minutes*

To encourage ongoing conversations, review the classroom and community activities suggested here with your participants. It may be helpful to make photocopies of these activity pages and the resources that follow.



Myths About Grief

- All losses are the same.
- Grief always declines over time in a steadily decreasing fashion.
- When grief is resolved, it never comes up again.
- It is better to put painful things out of your mind.
- Children need to be protected from grief and death.
- You will have no relationship with your loved one after the death.
- Once your loved one has died it is better not to focus on him or her, but to put him or her in the past and go on with your life.

— from *"How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies"*, Therese A. Rando, Ph.D.

"I always felt guilty I wasn't there."

— Bill Rood,
Vietnam War veteran

Classroom and community activities

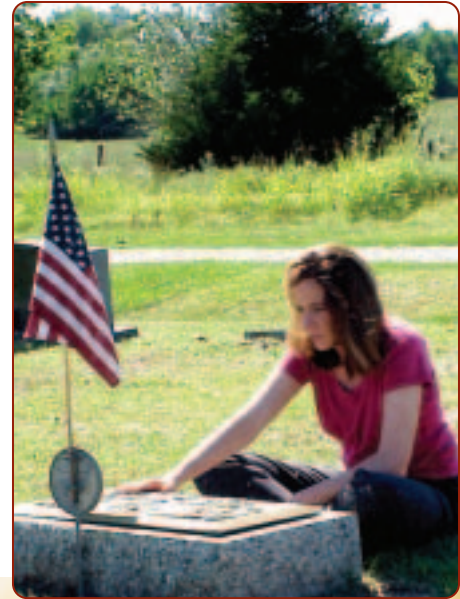
CLASSROOM AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

The primary subject of BE GOOD, SMILE PRETTY is one father. His life is no more extraordinary or worthy of remembrance than any other name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—or any loved one who has died.

Memorial Project

Whether it's a headstone on a grave, preserving a battlefield or a picture on a dresser, we memorialize so that we don't forget the past. Memorials can take many different forms; you may focus on the memory of an individual, or choose to honor a group, event or a time in history. To create your memorial, consider the following questions to help define what form your project might take:

- What and whom do you want to remember? Be as specific as you can.
- Is this a personal, private memorial or something you want to share with others? Do you want to work individually or collaborate with your family, classroom or community center?
- If you would like to create a memorial to impact others, think about the venue or space. How do you want to affect your audience's way of thinking or feeling? What information do you want to communicate? What emotions do you want to evoke?



Examples of Memorials

- A photo display, album, memory box
- A video, film or web site
- A piece of artwork (drawing, collage, sculpture, etc.)
- A written work (poem, short story, letter, song etc.)
- A funeral or memorial service
- A visit to your local school or vet center to share your story
- A visit to a grave site or cemetery
- An invitation to a veteran or survivor to speak to your group
- A presentation for your family or in your neighborhood, classroom or community center
- An activity or ceremony on a special day (anniversary, birthday, Father's Day, Mother's Day, Veteran's Day, etc.)

Classroom and community activities

CLASSROOM AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Interview Project

Think of an interview as a scheduled conversation—a date to discuss an event or person you’d like to know more about and honor by documenting. While the structure of your talk can be entirely flexible, you might find the following suggestions helpful:

- Prepare yourself—set aside time before the interview to write questions and be clear about what you hope to accomplish. What is the information you most specifically hope to learn? What are the stories or events you would like to capture?
- Prepare your family or subject—explain why this is important to you, address any suspicion or mistrust and be clear about why you are conducting the interview. Be sure to obtain verbal or written permission to record the interview in advance. Bring paper and pens, an audio tape-recorder, a digital camera or a video camera.
- Schedule Time—breaking silence and delving into the past is not always welcome. Remembering a time of loss and grief can be very difficult and is certainly easier to avoid. Scheduling time allows everyone to prepare emotionally and otherwise. Be sure to allow time for getting settled and for ending the conversation responsibly.

Interview Guidelines:

- Review the facilitator guidelines (p.2) for ideas on how to create a safe, supportive space for the interview.
- Come prepared with open-ended questions that allow for reflection, instead of one-word “yes” or “no” responses. If you feel your question wasn’t answered, don’t be afraid to ask again.
- Allow stories to be told. Don’t feel you need to rush to cover the silence.
- Respect your subject’s privacy.
- Invite your subject to ask questions of you.
- Remember to thank the participant at the end of the conversation.
- Sometimes an initial conversation will spark memories or stories after the fact. Suggest and schedule a second meeting, if it feels appropriate.



After the Interview

It is nice to follow up by sharing copies of your notes, audio or video tape with your subject. If your subject is willing, you may also want to share your interview and the stories you’ve learned with your family, classroom, library or a local publication, such as your town newspaper. You might even consider sending your interview on video or audio tape to the Library of Congress’ American Folklife Center’s *Veterans History Project* (see national partners).

Resources

RESOURCES

National Partners

Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA)

The AVVA assists in advancing the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) through cooperative projects and programs for veterans and their families. They are the publishers and organizers of the "Coping Skills for Loving Your Vietnam Veteran Program."

www.avva.org
800.VVA.1316

The Dougy Center

The Center assists children, teens and families in coping with the death of a family member. Through their National Center for Grieving Children & Families, they also provide support and training locally, nationally and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist grieving children and teens.

www.grievingchild.org
503.775.5683

Gold Star Wives

A support organization for spouses of those who died in the military on active duty or from service connected disabilities.

www.goldstarwives.org
888.479.9788

Sons and Daughters In Touch (SDIT)

SDIT locates, unites and provides support to sons, daughters and other family members of those who died or remain missing as a result of the Vietnam War, promoting healing via networking and special projects.

www.sdit.org
800.984.9994

Swift Boat Sailors Association

This organization was created by and for the personnel who manned or supported U.S. Navy PCFs (Patrol Craft Fast) or SWIFT Boats assigned to Coastal Squadron One (COSRON1) in Vietnam between 1965 and 1970.

www.swiftboatsailors.org

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

TAPS is a national non-profit organization serving families, friends and military service members who have been affected by a death in the armed services, providing counseling, peer support and community and military outreach.

www.taps.org
1.800.959.TAPS (8277)

Veterans Administration

The VA strives to meet the needs of the nation's veterans and their families.

www.va.gov

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

The VFW is the oldest nonprofit veterans service organization, with more than 1.8 million veterans who have served over seas in war-zones or areas demanding hazardous duty. It serves as a voice for veterans and a catalyst for change in improving veterans benefits.

www.vfw.org
816.756.3390

Veterans History Project

This project preserves stories of service for future generations.

www.loc.gov/vets
888.371.5848

Veterans for Peace (VFP)

VFP is a non-profit educational and humanitarian organization dedicated to the abolishment of war.

www.veteransforpeace.org
314.725.6005

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)

The VVA promotes and supports the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans and creating a new identity for this generation of veterans.

www.vva.org
301.585.4000

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund

This organization brings honor and recognition to the men and women who served and sacrificed their lives in Vietnam.

www.vvmf.org
202.393.0090

VietNow

Veterans helping veterans and their families.

www.vietnow.org
815.227.5100

EVALUATION FORM *Suggested Time: 10 Minutes*

We appreciate hearing about your community and classroom activities. In order to better understand how individuals and communities are using our programs and outreach resources, please take time to submit an event evaluation form online at www.itvs.org/outreach/events/evaluation.htm

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

BE GOOD, SMILE PRETTY is a co-production of Orphans of War Foundation and Kansas City Public Television (KCPT), produced in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS), with funds provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional funding was provided by the Women In Film Foundation Film Finishing Fund.

To purchase a DVD or VHS:

Home Video purchases

Docurama
800-314-8822
www.docurama.com

Educational purchases

Orphans of War Foundation
866-500-2300
www.orphansofwar.org

An *Independent Lens* premiere, November 11, 2003 at 10:30 p.m. on PBS.
Check local listings at www.itvs.org

To download outreach and educational materials for this film, go to www.itvs.org/outreach/begoodsmilepretty. For more information about ITVS's Community Connections Project, go to www.itvs.org/outreach or contact outreach@itvs.org.

Discussion Guide Credits

Writer: Tracy Droz Tragos

Reviewers:

- Meaghan Edmonds (Educational Consultant), University of Texas – Center for Reading and Language Arts
- Michael Gormalley, VFW
- Joan Schweizer Huff, Dougy Center
- Angee Simmons, ITVS & KCPT
- Jim Sommers, ITVS
- Bob Waechter, Vets Center

Editor: Eric Martin, ITVS

Art and Design: Chris Roe, Brad Bunkers

Photos: Judy Droz Keyes, Timothy Teague, Kat Tragos

