

Webster's dictionary defines courage as "mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty." Part three of Christian G. Appy's book "Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides" is full of amazing stories told by people who lived through the Vietnam War. I felt there was a lot of anger, pain, and bewilderment conveyed in the stories over the things these people experienced, but the theme that impressed me the most was the courage of their actions. Whether they volunteered to serve or were sent to Vietnam unwillingly, these people had to be brave or they wouldn't have survived. To illustrate this theme, I have chosen the stories of three women who I felt shared incredible stories of hardship and courage: Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy, Sylvia Lutz Holland, and Truong My Hoa.

Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy began her courageous journey as a teen by volunteering to work on the Truong Son, or the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This was her contribution to the war. She endured bombing, loss of sleep, witnessing the deaths of her fellow workers, and malaria. She worked hard for the benefit of the Viet Cong soldiers that traveled over that trail, and at the same time, trying to care for herself and the other girls around her. These young girls were very brave because they willingly put themselves in harm's way. They filled holes and rebuilt sections of the trail every time they were bombed, to ensure safe passage for the soldiers. They gave up their homes and their lives for the chance to help the war movement without knowing that they would be permanently changed and scarred for their volunteerism. Nguyen thought nothing of her sacrifice, thinking of others instead of herself, and saw no reward for her work. She gave up so much for her country at such a young age because she believed that what Ho Chi Minh and the North were fighting for was right.

Sylvia Lutz Holland enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps and was sent to Vietnam to serve in an Army hospital. Sylvia worked long hours and saw the kind of horrible injuries and atrocities that only war can bring. She was charged with triaging injured soldiers and deciding who might live or die, a daunting task for anyone, but especially a young nurse. She also had to help Vietnamese villagers and soldiers, and had compassion and consideration for what they lost even when they treated her poorly. Sylvia saw things during her tour that most of us will never see in our lifetime, but also commented on the fact that she would go to war again if she was asked. She spoke with regret over some of her

experiences, and admitted that her actions may have been different if she wasn't being directed to do the things she did. Sylvia seemed to carry her time in Vietnam like a badge of honor and accepted responsibility for the things she did, even though she was critical of the American policies that put her there.

Truong My Hoa was born a revolutionary, and began participating actively at the age of 15. She was arrested in 1964 and sentenced to 18 months, but she ended up being imprisoned for eleven years under the Diem government's rule. Truong was interrogated and tortured repeatedly, and confined to a tiger cage with four other women. She kept her resolve throughout her time of imprisonment, and would not betray the regime to which she was so loyal. She endured shame and indescribable physical and mental pain while struggling to protect her integrity, because she believed that the cause was a worthy one. She was even instrumental in bringing the devastating conditions of the prisoners to light to an American delegation and subsequently, the world. Truong was particularly moved and encouraged by some of the things she was hearing about the Americans that demonstrated against the war, and this gave her strength in her struggle. She was incredibly brave for eleven long years, and never gave up hope that she would be released.

It was very hard to choose just three stories, but these are examples of how courageous the human spirit can be regardless of their beliefs, nationalities, or affiliations. Just the fact that these three women survived, and were able to tell their stories, was a testament to their will. I was amazed by their stories and impressed by their courage even though I may not have believed in some of their reasons for being involved in the Vietnam War. I cannot say that I would have been so fortunate if I was faced with any of their situations.

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