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## 'Voices in Wartime'

By Sharon Roznik

*The Reporter*

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Voices in wartime are too often silent — the bearer of mute grief passed down from generation to generation.

Bill Zierdt, a Vietnam veteran and professor at Marian College, knows now he passed down his broken coping skills to his daughter.

"I don't have a friend because I push people away. I don't have the desire or the skills," he said Saturday morning in a room at the University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac filled with about 30 people who came to hear and share personal stories of war.

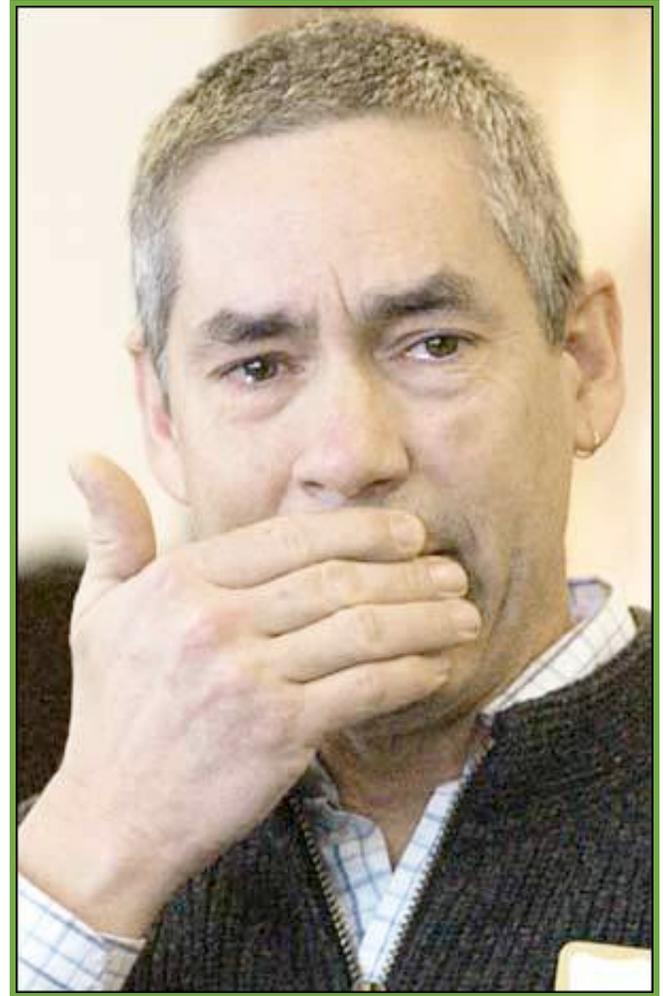
His daughter, Katrina Bruns of Illinois, cried her heart out. At age 10, while her father was going through his own horror serving in Vietnam, she was caring for her siblings, abandoned each night by an alcoholic mother.

"I know you don't even know about this," she said, turning to her father.

The story panel was part of a daylong series of events that focused on the impact of war and the community's response to a Friday night showing of the full-length feature documentary, "Voices in Wartime." Andy Himes, the film's executive producer, flew in from Seattle, Wash., to participate in the local project.

"It takes great courage for a person to expose themselves to the real consequences of war," said facilitator Martin Dronsfield, director of international communication at Hamburg University in Hamburg, Germany.

"It's natural to protect ourselves and shy away, but it leaves veterans returning home feeling excluded," he said. "It takes a willingness to feel discomfort and pain."



 zoom

"Voices of Wartime" executive producer Andy Himes shares a story about his daughter's relationship with an Iraq war veteran. *The Reporter* photo by Justin Connaher

### Food for Thought, 3 a.m.

They moved in unison  
like dancers in a ballet,  
the spider, twenty inches from my rifle,  
the VC, twenty feet farther out, in line,  
each slowly sliding a leg forward.  
I let the man take one more step  
so as not to kill the bug.

David Connolly  
57-year-old Vietnam veteran  
South Boston, MA

The stories were gut-wrenching and poignant.

As Kristan Gochenauer, a Fond du Lac mother of three, listened to the father and daughter tell their story, she reflected on her own life and how different her experience is. Her husband, Vince Gochenauer, is serving his second tour in Iraq, stationed at Camp Patriot in Kuwait since last October.

After viewing "Voices in Wartime," she said she went home and e-mailed her husband.

"I wanted to know if he was scared and if there were things he felt he couldn't share with me," she said.

He e-mailed her back a definite "no," but she isn't so convinced.

Marcus Oksa, a veteran of three wars, broke down when he recalled his first encounter in a bar after serving his country during the Persian Gulf War.

"I wasn't expecting anything from anyone, but a Vietnam veteran came up to me and criticized me because my war wasn't long enough," he said.

Boxes of tissue circled the room several times as he told his story and the way a soldier "walks out the door, leaving his (or her) heart at home."

"There is no length of war that makes it better or worse," he said. "The first day there is always the worst because you don't know how long you are going to be there."



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Community residents gather Saturday at University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac to talk about how they have been personally affected by war. *The Reporter* photo by Justin Connaheer