



There are two reasons why I am alive today. The relationship I have with God and with my wife. Without her I would have committed suicide many years ago as I grappled with the rejection by my country because I was a combat soldier in Vietnam.

In the following pages, in the models I created out of bone and stone, I have tried to show the way I saw what the rejection by New Zealand did to me and why I believe we, Vietnam veterans, have more difficulty than other returned soldiers in dealing with officialdom and especially Veterans' Affairs.

We are a special breed because no other group of soldiers in New Zealand history were rejected by those who asked them to go to war. Put enough stress upon us and most will run away and not fight for the benefits we are entitled to.

A few veterans have been able to lead the fight for us and paid the price and for those men and women I am grateful.

New Zealand, I forgive you!

Dennis Griffin

Victor 2 1967 - 1968

Disability pension of 160%

For 40 years I lived with rejection by New Zealand because I served my country in Vietnam. This affected everything I did and resulted in me living as an alien in my own country. This should not have been. I say Shame on You, New Zealand.



In January 2011 I was compelled to construct the following models as a way to express what I felt about the way we were treated after returning from Vietnam. When I was doing the final model, the burden of rejection that had affected everything I did and resulted in a very limited lifestyle, left me. This was the end process that began in 2008. This is the way I saw my problem and may not be correct from your viewpoint. Each of us has unique experiences after Vietnam and this is my way of dealing with it.



In 1968 I left Vietnam, a man of 24, proud of surviving six months in a hostile environment as a NZ soldier.

You do not have to agree with what I write but this is how I see all that has happened to me.

Vietnam was the big adventure of my life. When my country asked me to go I volunteered to risk injury and death, just as our parents and grandparents volunteered in WW1, WW2, Korea, Malaya, Borneo and still do in Afghanistan and other places around the world today.

I believed in why I went and I still do. I was proud to be a Kiwi soldier.

I spent six months living in an alien environment where the only people you could trust were the men who fought alongside you.

The combat situations I found myself in were, I think, minor to what other

NZ veterans experienced, yet I saw dead people, fired at men, experienced fear and started the fire-fight where we killed most of the enemy.

To my knowledge we killed 52 people and though I am not aware of personally killing anyone I took part in the killing and so am equally responsible for these deaths.

I do not feel guilty over this.

I was a soldier and a soldier is trained to kill on behalf of the people in the country he lives in.

I strode, with pride and honour as a Kiwi soldier, to the transport that would take me back to the country that asked me to kill on their behalf.

Can a Christian be a soldier?

I have put a Christian cross on my figure because it was as a Christian I went to Vietnam.

I experienced a dramatic meeting with a living Jesus two weeks before I went. It changed me completely and I no longer feared being killed because I had somewhere to go after death.

It never occurred to me not to go now I had become a disciple of Jesus. He was, and is, very real to me. I never felt in any way Jesus was saying that now I was a Christian I could not go to Vietnam.

The Bible tells us to be the best we can be in all that we do. My job was to kill my country's enemy and I believe being a Christian made me a better hunter and killer of men.

Like many soldiers in previous wars I was and am, a Christian.



Vietnam was the big adventure of my life. I wanted to be a soldier and a soldier was expected to lay his life on the line if his country asked him to.

I stress that the government of NZ is chosen by the people and therefore it was not only the Government who asked me to go but also the people of NZ. My finger pulled the trigger but all NZ's hands were on the rifle.

We knew there was dissension in NZ about us being in Vietnam but I was a "Knight in Shining Armour" who had battled my country's enemies and was now ready to return and reap the appreciation of the people who asked me to go to Vietnam.

It was with pride and honour I boarded the plane to come home.

In this model I have tried to emphasise my pride in returning as a Kiwi soldier. The kiwi marching at my side symbolises everything that NZ and its people represent. I wore my uniform with pride and honour,

What is honour? To me it was what made me a man - the ability to hold my head high as I marched into the future. To take away a man's pride and honour is to destroy him and make him an object of shame.

Although I marched with honour and pride when I returned to NZ, this was already damaged by the reports we had of demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and the way other veterans had been treated.

The problem was compounded when we were flown into Whenuapai because it was out of the public eye and the implication was we were sneaking back into our country. We were to slip back into NZ society and disappear.

The implication was to forget we had been to Vietnam, forget the war, and be silent and let time pass so we could once more be accepted into society, as if we had done something to be ashamed of.

"Well done Kiwi" was to be replaced with "Do not talk, do not be seen and do not be heard".

Thus was the foundation laid for the problems many of us had in the years to come.

My basic response to this is, "**Shame on you, New Zealand!**"

What had we done that soldiers in other wars had not? Why were we rejected when others had been welcomed? What was different in the Vietnam War? The answer of course is Television where people saw what war was really like and what ordinary people could do to each other. People like themselves.



Fifteen years after returning I was sitting in a Dr's waiting room to see him about why I could not handle living. A picture floated into my mind. I saw an aeroplane with me in it returning to NZ and across the country was the word, rejection. It was then I recognised that my own country had rejected us and all that we did.

I was not very aware of being rejected when I returned. No one called me a baby-killer or a murderer.

I ended up sensing that society did not approve of me and that I was no longer a welcome member of NZ society. I embarrassed people. I was no longer a Kiwi because Kiwi's did not do what soldiers did in Vietnam.

My pride in what we had done slowly died and I found myself carrying a burden that I was unable to identify.

I had spent six months in a hostile environment where no one could be

trusted except those in your platoon. I returned to a society that treated us in the same way. I was an alien in my own country - No longer a Kiwi. (The kiwi is dead)

My pride and honour was broken. I was tolerated but it would be better if I went away and died so the country could forget and move on.

The trouble was, everywhere I moved this rejection came with me producing continual stress within me. Eventually I could not handle stress involving people. I could not join in a society that had rejected me.

This revelation of rejection, though discouraging was the first step in my healing. I now knew what the problem was.

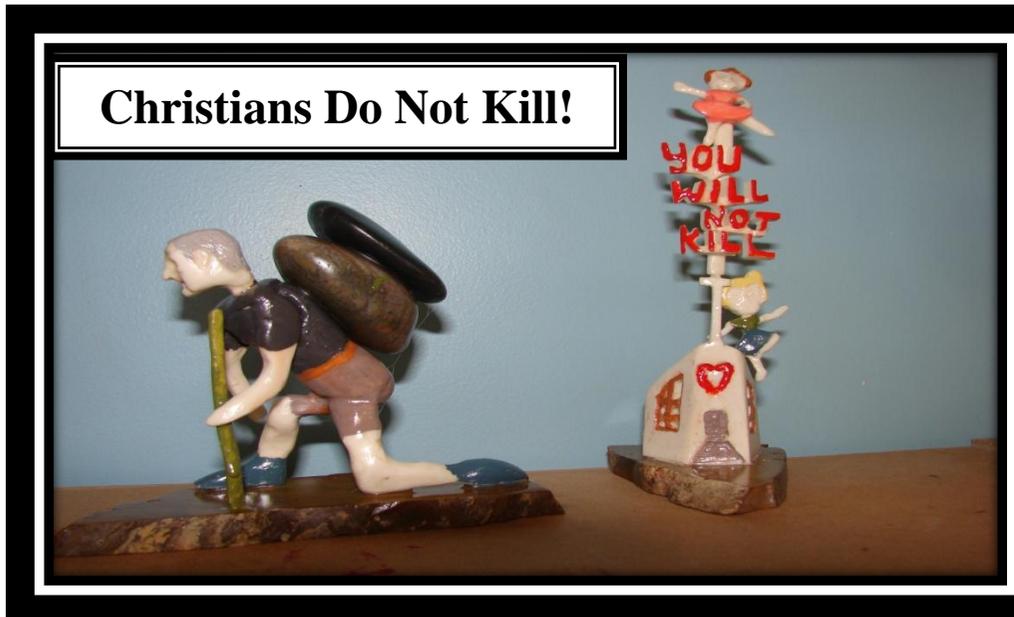
I have tried to symbolise the difference between when I left Vietnam and the way NZ greeted me. The rock symbolises the burden I unconsciously accepted and carried for the next 40 years. I could no longer stand upright with pride but needed a support to carry the load.

It is only my relationship with Jesus and with my wife that prevented me from committing suicide.

I could not exist in the world so I withdrew from every activity until I found a place where I could at least manage the restricted lifestyle I had left.

This set of carvings is the final act in 40 years of rejection. This says what I want to say. When I had finished one carving I knew what the next would look like.

When I finished I knew I was free. I have forgiven NZ and the church, and I face the time I have left to spend with my wife as a man free from bitterness and anger.



I returned to NZ a disciple of Jesus. I eagerly went to church and it was there I met my wife, married her and expected to live happily ever after as a member of that church.

Unfortunately my restlessness led me to leave and join the Salvation Army. Here I found the ideal in vision I believed in. Unfortunately this vision belonged to the days of William Booth the founder. The S/Army today is no longer an army but a church and increasingly I was having difficulty fitting into a church.

I mistakenly believed I was to lead so eventually we became Salvation Army officers.

The Army and I parted over the gifts of the Spirit, particularly "Speaking in Tongues". I would not have lasted anyway because my symptoms were becoming worse.

Thus began a procession through the churches trying to find what I was looking for while battling all the problems of rejection and Agent Orange

poisoning.

Why the difficulty? It was in 2010, after reading the book "Why Men don't go to Church" that I realised I was carrying an extra burden on top of one of rejection.

Feminine values had overtaken masculine values as the dominating value system in the church as well as society.

Feminine values (nurturing values associated with the love of a mother for her child) such as love, kindness, forgiveness, do not judge etc. have taken the place of masculine values such as adventure and risk taking etc.

I realised I was trying to fit into a church that quotes the commandment "You shall not kill" as "You shall not kill", when the true meaning is "You shall not murder".

Yet here I was, a man who confessed to taking part in the killing of humans trying to fit into groups of people dominated by feminine values.

This was an extra burden and I have illustrated this by the black rock added to the brown rock of rejection. The two female forms on the church is my attempt to illustrate feminine value systems that dominate in the church today.

My figure is nearly on his knees under this added burden because the place I thought I belonged in had become another rejection and the idea of killing people in war was no longer acceptable for a Christian.

Now I am too damaged to be a part of any church but I do belong to God's church whose membership is found in many denominations.

To Forgive – Or Not?



2008, after 40 years of rejection I had the choice of whether to forgive NZ and the church or not.

The beginning of my healing began in 2007 when I realised I had to stop dealing with symptoms and try to find the cause of my problems.

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) was the beginning. With it I was able to go back through my life, not only Vietnam, and deal with the emotions attached to my memories.

Over the next year I neutralised all the bad emotions attached to Vietnam, my treatment by NZ and other trauma. Now I can think about events without destructive emotions.

It was like peeling the skin off an onion. When I had freedom in one area another arose, until finally I finished and my life started to change and I discovered a freedom I had not known for 40 years.

Then Tribute 08 came. Here I met old comrades and marched the streets of

Wellington in the Welcome Home Parade. I smiled at aged protesters and relished the atmosphere.

It was at the concert on the Saturday night that I realised a sense of pride was creeping over me.

One very touching event was when, at a mall while we were having lunch, a woman and man about my age came to me and said she saw my medals and wanted to say thank you. This still brings tears to my eyes.

I returned home with my pride and honour restored

However, although the rejection by NZ and the church had been softened it was still attached to me.

This is shown in the model where I am holding my restored pride and honour but the two stones are still attached to me.

I knew that Jesus had forgiven me and one day I realised that I had the authority and power to forgive NZ and the church.

It was an easy decision to make but not so easy to do. Over the next few days I struggled with this. I wanted revenge. I wanted payback. I wanted NZ to suffer.

Jesus is real to me and what he did for me is real as well. I knew I had to forgive if I was to be free.

So I did.



When I made the decision to forgive NZ and the church something went from me. The burden of rejection lifted and has not returned.

An action like this is not an action that is only made once. I have my models lined up so when I am using the exercise bike I can see again that I am free.

At times I raise my hands and state "I am free". The continual stating of this has solidified my decision to forgive and each day I am freer than the day before.

What changes have taken place in me?

Instead of waking every two hours and having to go to the toilet I now only wake once and often I am sleeping through the night.

Food is moving through my digestive tract faster and my bowel movements are often two to three times a day.

I feel peaceful and I am hopeful this will enable me to move back into some areas of society.

I am no longer a driven man but enjoying each day as it comes.

I feel a Kiwi again and I have symbolised this by the kiwi at my feet, alive and walking with me.

I have tried to show a difference in vitality between the former figures and now. I have taken artistic licence with the abdomen muscles.

Does this mean I have no problems?

No, all it means is that I can face my problems without the handicap of rejection crippling me.

Do I regret the Vietnam experience?

No! I feel sadness that other veterans are still carrying this crippling burden of rejection because I know what it is like to be free.

Would I go to war again?

The society I went to war to protect is no longer the same so I wouldn't fight again. But, if the enemy came to NZ I would take up arms and kill again. Why? This is what men do! Women do the nurturing; men do the killing if required.

Or it used to be this way when I grew up. Now, we would probably handicap our armed forces, apologise to the enemy and invite them in for a discussion on how we were to surrender. Illustration of this is the way people reacted to the SAS story about handing over prisoners and the idea that Osama Ben Laden deserved mercy. Go the Greens – out of the country.

After 40 years of rejection by my country I feel free to be a man in trousers and not a skirt. Free to walk again, proud and tall as a Kiwi, a New Zealander and not be ashamed of the country I was born in.

To those who disagree with me I give them the right to disagree and I say to them. "Kaua e whakatoi e pepe. Haere ki te wharepaku".

D A Griffin 210685 Victor 2 1967–68

A Scab Is Torn Open



Healing, I have found is a process, not a one time event. I get free from one problem and feel great for a short time, and then I come under symptoms of something that is difficult to grasp at the time. This is what happened after I attained a real freedom from the rejection by my country.

My wife and her ladies group put on an Anzac/Easter production this year (2011) in a Rest home. (I feel a great sense of pride when I see what these ladies do). However there was a speech in the show which referred to the welcoming home of the veterans from wars.

A scab was suddenly torn from me when the words flashed in my mind - **“But not us!”**

I was in trouble again. It was unexpected and deeply felt. During Tribute 08 I heard the apologies from the Government, the RSA and the Army. The only one that resonated within me was the Army apology. The Government will always be suspect but it was the RSA betrayal that hit me so hard at this time.

The RSA leadership had apologised but the rejection came from fellow soldiers, members of different wars than ours who had sat in judgment upon us and told many of us we were not welcome.

This rejection is felt by many of us. These were our brethren, those who like us, served our country as soldiers. This was the greatest rejection, from our own peer group. Not all rejected us but it is like we feel about New Zealand where not everyone rejected us but we felt rejected. It was something caught like you catch a cold. It was not spoken but felt when I walked into the RSA.

What have I done about this? Have I forgiven them? I don't know the answer to this. I don't feel as bad now as I did then but this is a rejection that goes deep. I have decided to forgive them but have I really? I don't feel welcome at Anzac celebrations, merely tolerated.

Other vets I meet have this rejection deep within them. I don't think local branches have faced up to the rejection given to us and made amends so healing can take place.

When it is reduced to basics we are all only soldiers who did our best for our country when asked to. Our experiences may be different but all of were once NZ soldiers.

When we march on ANZAC day I feel it is more a protest than a celebration of remembrance. We are tolerated by the **‘real’** soldiers.

What could be done to bring healing to Vietnam Vets who feel the RSA and ANZAC day have no place for them.

I suggest each RSA branch needs to give some thought to what they could do to bring healing to many Vietnam Vets. It is not for the Vietnam vets to come to you but for those in the RSA who rejected us to come to us.

**The above summarises what I want to say
and I hope it will be healing to you who
read it.**

**If you want to contact me please email
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**The following models were made before
the above and were part of the healing
process for me.**



Our eldest son, Nicholas had brain damage. In an attempt to help him have something profitable to do we asked the Vietnam Trust Board for finance. They agreed and their cheque arrived the same week Nick died, November 21, 2008. We think he had a seizure while in the shower and drowned.

I had all the equipment to make jewellery and to work with ornamental stones such as Jasper. Fortunately I wanted to work in this area as well and it proved invaluable as we went through the grief period in the months after his death.

This was the first carving I tried. It is made out of red jasper, green jasper and the cat is greenstone.

The carving symbolised the way I felt at the time about dealing with the government and Veterans Affairs.

The National party asked me to go but it was the Labour party that gave me all the benefits. I received more from the Labour Party than National and it was Labour that put on Tribute 08 and led the apology. I don't think I could ever trust National again yet I find the people in the Labour party odd as

well. A pox on both their camps would be my feeling. How can I trust a politician? It is difficult.

Veterans Affairs is difficult to deal with. Case managers are sincere and helpful but as soon as you get comfortable with one case manager they change and another refugee from WINZ appears. You are back to square one fighting for everything.

Over the last two years I developed my skills and made quite a bit of jewellery but what was I to do with it? The obvious way was to go to markets and sell them. I tried it once and even made a profit but when I arrived home I collapsed mentally and physically. I felt okay while at the market but again I couldn't handle the stress.

This has been my ongoing problem over the years. The rejection I felt but was not aware of produced stress, and living as an alien in my own country gradually depleted my ability to handle even mild stress over an extended period. I can't guarantee my emotional state under stress at any time. One moment I am good then the next I am running away. Very frustrating and this has prevented me from achieving many of my youthful dreams and ambitions.

40 years if rejection is a long time and though I have forgiven those who rejected me it is still a long time of learned reactions to rejection and does not go away overnight. I am still a rejected personality but I hope to see this change as the years pass and I move back into society as I am able.

Added to the above is the fact I am presently 66 and my death is on the horizon. Like many older men I often feel lonely, without purpose in my life and wondering why I get up in the morning. Fortunately I have my wife to love and because of the generosity of the Veteran's Trust Board I have something to do. I can create objects out of stone and bone and this gives me satisfaction to turn what was rubbish into beautiful art. (In my opinion)



This carving was inspired by the book “The Grey Ghosts” by D Challinor. I had returned from Tribute 08 with my pride and honour restored but when I read the attitudes of veterans in this book I felt grubby. Each person sees different things in art so I will explain why I did the carving this way.

The NZ veteran is half way to the grave but he is still fighting, symbolised by his weapon. He is being helped not by the government, symbolised by the two faced fat cat with a large stomach, who is not looking at the veteran but by his equivelant in the Vietcong who is also wounded but still fighting the war.

Why is the one not helping him the same colour as the Government fat cat? Because I felt betrayed by a veteran (ex officer) associated with the Agent

Orange Trust board when I found on my file an unsolicited letter to the National Review officer which was damaging to me. The Agent Orange Trust board apologised for this man but he still retained his position so I felt betrayed by my fellow veterans. I find it difficult to trust my fellow veterans because this is a betrayal of peers, similar to the RSA’s betrayal.

The key to my interpretation is the title “Honour”. I am a romantic and I went to war with a romantic view, of pulling out my sword, waving it over my head and with a rebel yell rushing towards the enemy. I am still a romantic and honour is something that means a lot to me.

The meaning of this carving to me and why I did it was to try and say, ‘**There is only trust and honour between a soldier and his enemy on the front line.**’ He or she is the only one who can understand when civilisation is swept away and basic survival is all that is left.

Everyone else merely tolerates you but between you and your enemy there is truth.

This is a romantic way of looking at things and belongs in novels rather than real life but I think it is a sad reflection on the way we were treated that the only one besides God and my wife I feel I can trust at this stage of my life is the person I tried to kill and who tried to kill me.



As a Vietnam Veteran who inherited the title “baby killer” I find it difficult to fit into the church, which seems to interpret the Commandment “You shall not murder” as you shall not kill. While praying about the church and my difficulties, a picture came into my mind and this is what I have created.

Why cows? I don’t know but it could be that the church today is motivated by feminine values – love, nurture, peace, kindness etc. It could also be that cows follow leaders and are passive. There is one cow that is different. What am I saying?

It is my observation that many older Christians feel there is no place for them in the entertainment church of today. The old idea of pastoring a people has been replaced by offering various forms of entertainment and expecting people to attend. Older Christians withdraw and gradually wither away, outwardly secure in their faith but inwardly have little assurance of a

life after death or that the church cares about them. (Cows on the left are starving).

If you have a crisis in your life the church can be very good but once the crisis is over the church moves on to the next crisis and people are left to struggle with the issues of life and death.

I believe this is wrong. The victory Jesus obtained for us is only ours when we die and enter into the Kingdom. It is as we grow older and can see death in the near future that we need the love and nurture of fellow believers, yet we seem to abandon those who have served the church faithfully for years because age has given them problems or ill health.

Jesus said the world will know about God by seeing the love among His people. Church history does not witness to producing a group who actively love and care for each other. Is it any wonder people see no value in visiting a church?

The two coloured cow is meant to be Jesus (God and man) who is present until the day we die to forgive us. Many in the church have faith in what they believe about Jesus but do they know Jesus?

I believe in deathbed conversions because to me the battle is between two kingdoms and the choice we make. It is the choice we make rather than the life we have led that is important.

Grace is God showing us mercy and there is nothing we can do to earn this. We can’t serve God. We can’t win brownie points by our actions. We come to God as we are, just as we are and ask God for His grace to be given to us, and it is because of Jesus. A Christian knows God is real. We may not be able to explain it but we know we have a destiny after death. We have a living relationship with God now and He will be with us through the death experience.

Being a good Baptist, Methodist, Anglican etc is not the question. The question is, “Do we know Jesus?”



I did this after our son Nick died. At his funeral I said that this is where the “rubber meets the road”. There is no more pretence. Is God real or not? He is. He was at this time and has been ever since. The grieving period was intense for six months and then eased but it was not until two years had passed before I could say we were on the other side of the grieving period.

I still grieve at times but it is momentary when something reminds me of him but this grief is tempered by the fact that God is real. That Nick came back to Jesus two months before he died. There is a place to go after I die and one day I will see him again. How people handle grief without a relationship with Jesus I do not know.

The interpretation?

The goal of life is find God. The only way to God is through Jesus, represented by the cross. After this, life goes on and has ups and downs, trials and tragedies. Christians are not spared from these. The promise God

gave us was that He would walk with us through the trials of life, not deliver us. It is only through trials of life we grow as a child of God.

Eventually we die and this is represented by the grave (I should have painted it black) but for a Christian this is not a sad moment because when we die we leap into the kingdom of God, into the arms of Jesus. What happens after this I have no idea.

What happens to those who do not know Jesus? Many in the church have faith in what they believe about Jesus but I wonder if they really know him.

What about the unbeliever?

As a Salvation Army officer I preached on the streets of the horrors of hell. It has been a long time since I have believed that there is a hell as portrayed by the church. When I hear a preacher rant on about hell I find myself thinking that if he really believed in hell he would be out evangelising 24 hours a day. I do not see this so to me he only believes in hell as a theory and not a fact. So I took the concept of hell out of my theology.

What happens to those who reject Jesus? I don't know. All I do know is that they cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. I will never see them again. I suggest you can take any of the current or past views about life after death and adopt them for yourself if you reject Jesus. You have to die, just as I do, to finally prove whether hell, heaven or another universe with 70 virgins waiting is real or not.

It is simple to me. Jesus is alive and because he is alive so will I live on after death. In Vietnam I was not afraid to die because I had a place to go to.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, if he is not alive today then I am a poached egg and I have wasted my life. The Christian faith rests solely on the resurrection of Jesus.

**The
End**