



Jesse Chang Scholarship winner

Steve Noworatzky

Vietnam Veterans chapter 731 Scholarship winner 2013 (c)

By: Jesse Chang

All American Protagonist

Within psychology, the final stage of social development exists as integrity versus despair. In this stage, people reflect on everything that has unfolded in their lives and feel either satisfaction or failure. After Steve Noworatzky revealed his life story, his perspective as soldier during the Vietnam War and his life prior to and after the ordeal, in an interview, evidently, Noworatzky has carried out a full life to which he feels satisfaction for. In addition, Noworatzky's story holds great educational substance both through history and life lessons.

Growing up in St. Nazianz, Noworatzky carried his youth with little variance from most. He attended high school and, in his free time, relished in sports and traveling. In fact, after graduation, Noworatzky decided to take traveling even further by moving with a friend to a new life in Chicago, demonstrating an innate adventurousness that would foreshadow his positive military attitude. After about a year in Illinois, Noworatzky received notice that "Uncle Sam wanted [him]," cutting this new chapter short.

Noworatzky detailed his name being picked as “no surprise” because his “friends had been drafted before” at that time, leaving him excepting of service. In addition, Steve had already recognized that his love for the United States outweighed fear of fighting for it, leaving little room for mental uneasiness. Thereafter, Noworatzky packed up his belongings, open-mind and courage to take with him to basic training in Kentucky and eventually overseas.

Basic training and deployment pioneered a new path in Noworatzky’s life. While attending “basic,” the man specialized in weapons technology and reconnaissance. To this, Noworatzky replied that the idea of recon felt a bit frightening as the line of work called for its men to move in first and gather the information for everyone else. Without the convenience of info for themselves, the increased the risk perturbed Noworatzky. When deployment time finally arrived, to Noworatzky’s surprise, instead of Vietnam, the military shipped him to Europe. Sending men into Europe during a war in southeast Asia may stand out as surprising to some, however many forget that the beginnings of the Cold War took root during Vietnam. Many young people of today can learn that, at the time, American’s dispatching of troops to Europe obviously reflected its desire to fend off world-wide communism. With Germany, already divided into East and West, Noworatzky spent two years stationed in West Germany, in Fulda. In regards to this section, Noworatzky commented that, even though sent to Europe, he “was prepared to do what [he] had to do” wherever sent. He could have been destined to the most treacherous jungles, bombarded with the ever present paranoia of hidden enemies, and still not waver in uncertainty. He felt confident that the military had equipped him with all the physical and mental tools needed for whatever lied ahead. These truly admirable words fused with the evident unconditional trust in one’s country rang clearly during the interview and would compel any listener to nod in respect. In addition, Noworatzky complimented the atmosphere even more by joking about how the invincibility that all young people feel drove his fearlessness. This charming manner kept the interview genial and, hence, a pleasure to partake in, as it shows relate-ability and a genuine connection with listeners. Naturally, Noworatzky readily continued by elaboration on the daily life while stationed in Fulda.

Noworatzky gave insight to his exact duties as well as other experiences that stood out during his service in Fulda. The veteran explained that the main mission of all soldiers in Fulda was to patrol and prevent any invading Russian armies from crossing into West Germany. Furthermore, Noworatzky’s recon training came into a great deal of play. Missions of this nature consisted of perching upon watch towers and using night vision to monitor small towns, identifying leaders, as well as enemy weaponry and technology. On an interesting side note, Noworatzky pointed out that these monitored towns looked “very grey” and “very poor,” one of the unfortunate outcomes of World War II. In addition, Noworatzky spoke of the most memorable experiences while in the service. At a time, Noworatzky trained in Grafenwoehr, a place known for housing Nazi forces, to familiarize himself with a new tank model. During this instance, the reality of residing in the same barracks as one of the history’s greatest enemies had summoned an ambience of surrealism for Noworatzky. Also, Noworatzky recalled a fifty foot minefield that snaked along Fulda’s patrol border. On a number of accounts, many attempted to cross out, desperate for liberation from communism’s oppressive hand. Unfortunately, many failed to pass the minefield’s steep bar, victimized by explosion. On a more positive note, Noworatzky showed optimism in the midst of an ongoing war. While in Europe, the man relished in one of his greatest

passions in life, traveling. Paris, Amsterdam, Austria, to name a few, helped comprise Noworatzky's list of visited sites in which he traveled to with a dear German friend at the time. At this point in the interview, a wrinkled smile arose from under Noworatzky's pale mustache and coupled with a shift to a higher, more cheerful vocal register. Indeed, Noworatzky illustrated an undeniable fondness for his memories of travel. It remains reassuring, that even when life may seem less than beautiful, soldiers could still find ways, whether it be through hobbies or friendship, to make days a little brighter. After completing the necessary 2 years of service Noworatzky returned home in 1971.

As Noworatzky returned to America, the veteran continued where his life had left off. Having moved back to Chicago, the veteran resumed the role as a working class citizen once again, holding positions in an electronics firm, appliance stores and, today a mechanical contracting business. As for his love-life, mirroring that of romantic literature, Noworatzky had exchanged numerous letters with a pen pal during his deployment and the two hoped to meet after his service. Eventually, the two married and began their lives together in Pennsylvania. Ultimately Noworatzky returned St. Nazianz with his wife, where the duo added four more children to the family. With a smile erected once again, the father punctuated this interview section with "and the rest is history," indicating an apparent satisfaction while reflecting on his life. Speaking of looking back, the final set of interview questions dealt with looking back and thinking about Noworatzky's war experience.

Noworatzky brought up interesting thoughts upon reviewing his service time. Insightful and honest, the sagacious citizen professed that "respect for other people" existed as the most important thing he learned while in the service. He then justified that life brings people into situations where co-existence remains key and that everything would run more smoothly when everyone respected each other, especially when the world houses such a vastly eclectic population. In practice, there remained some instances in the Army where Noworatzky encountered bullies. Regardless of hostility, the soldier followed his principles and "killed 'em with kindness" which, a vast majority of the time, worked very well. In some instances, these situations even resulted in friendship. Moreover, the patriot agreed that the Army definitely reinforced his character as he feels appreciative of tempered responsibility gained as well as the ability to deal and respond under pressure.

Without a doubt, Noworatzky's interview taught not only a history lesson which, by far, transcends the quality of any textbook, but gave lessons about life as well. The story of this humble man details service, love, family and personal development, acting as testimony to how complete his life remains. Like any successful story, it remains satisfying to see the likable protagonist receive his due and in Noworatzky's case this came in the form of a satisfaction for how life is unfolded. I personally shared a great deal of pleasure with Steve Noworatzky in sitting down for this interview and I will surely use the lessons of this unique experience to help guide my life.