

Jane Barton Griffith
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

STEINBERG: This is Leigh Steinberg ['18] interviewing Jane Griffith Barton for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. We are in Baker-Berry Library at Dartmouth College, and it is October 22nd, 2017. All right. So, Jane, how are you doing today?

GRIFFITH: Fine, thanks.

STEINBERG: Welcome to Hanover, or welcome back to Hanover. So we're just going to start off with some biographical information, and the early years of your life. So can you start by telling me where and when you were born?

GRIFFITH: I was born June 28th, 1944, in Manchester, New Hampshire, because my father had volunteered for World War II. He was what they called a "90 day wonder." They made him an officer in 90 days, and he was in the Navy.

STEINBERG: So, did he serve overseas during World War II?

GRIFFITH: He did.

STEINBERG: Where did he serve?

GRIFFITH: In the Pacific. He was in Japan for the surrender. It was a very important part of his life. He was actually overage, I think, when he volunteered, but they took him. And, so I have a dichotomy in my family, because my mother was a Quaker, and so I grew up with that thread of Quakerism and military service. But as I say, the Vietnam War wasn't our fathers' war. It was a very different time.

STEINBERG: So, when you were growing up, how was your life shaped by being up close to—growing up in a post-World War II world, especially with your father as a veteran?

GRIFFITH: It was a very sheltered and idyllic life. My parents were in academics, so we had the summers off and we got to travel, and did a lot of outdoor canoeing and hiking together. So, it was a pretty idyllic childhood.

- STEINBERG: Did you have any siblings?
- GRIFFITH: I have a brother.
- STEINBERG: Nice, and is he older or younger?
- GRIFFITH: He's two years younger, and he went to Dartmouth [Thomas Couser '68]. He got a Reynolds Fellowship and was at [University of] Oxford [Oxford, England] when he got his draft notice. So, that was an event in his life, and he worked very hard to get an educational deferral.
- STEINBERG: We will get back to that later, yes. And what about your education? What was your childhood education like through college years?
- GRIFFITH: I went to public schools, and then I went to Wheaton College, [Norton, MA] from 1962 to '66. I wasn't very happy there because it was—my father wanted me to go to a single sex school. I'd been in a lot of advanced classes, and he felt, for example, in the math program I was in there were eight of us and there were only two women. So, he thought at a single sex school that, you know, statistically women would speak out more and so on. But, it was not a very challenging intellectual experience for me, and it seemed as if so many of the—I felt as if it was a very insular school, and the world was civil rights was happening, out in the bigger world things were going on, and I was sort of at this, quote/unquote, "finishing school."
- STEINBERG: So, when did you become aware, or like politically minded about what was going on in the world, both domestically and internationally?
- GRIFFITH: Well, I don't know if I want this on the record, but I was dating Angus King, who's now a senator from Maine, my senior year, and I remember his saying, "Doesn't your family talk about politics?" And other people that I—males that I was seeing were often very involved in politics here at Dartmouth, going to hear Martin Luther King speak, or whatever. And so, I was aware of what I didn't know, but it wasn't until I graduated that I was really able to get out into the bigger world on my own, and then I became politicized quite fast.

- STEINBERG: So, as a child, or growing up, you really didn't talk about politics with your parents?
- GRIFFITH: We talked a lot about values. No, I wouldn't say we really... I mean, they were socially liberal, but I guess we would say were voting Republican. My aunt was head of the Republican Party in New Hampshire, and I think they thought she was a little bit conservative. So, I mean, I sort of had general awareness, but we didn't obsess over international affairs, particularly the way I do now.
- STEINBERG: So, with the events of, thinking about 1963, with the March on Washington or JFK's assassination, what was the reaction at Wheaton, or what was your personal reaction? Did that kind of spark anything for you or did it come later after college?
- GRIFFITH: Well, like everybody else, I knew exactly where I was when I heard the news.
- STEINBERG: Yeah, where were you?
- GRIFFITH: Outside of the—I'd just finished an art history class in Renaissance art and I was walking outside. And it was a moment where this world which had seemed fairly ideal except for the Cuban Missile Crisis, I think we all felt vulnerable that things weren't under our control. But, I guess it was '63, so I was in the march in Washington by then.
- STEINBERG: You were at the March on Washington?
- GRIFFITH: Yes.
- STEINBERG: What was that experience like?
- GRIFFITH: Well, I was pretty much at all the main—because about two years later I was living in Washington. But, I don't think the marches ever... They did impress me in the fact that there were sheer numbers, but to me it was more the discussions that were going on about the choices that we all had to make personally about the war, and the whole issue of questioning authority. With JFK and all my friends that went into the Peace Corps, you sort of were taking your government at face value, and once I was out of

college and became politicized, questioning authority was one of the major things that struck me, and when General Kelly said that we—or when the—what is she, the...

STEINBERG: Press secretary.

GRIFFITH: ...press secretary said that we shouldn't question a four-star general, I said, "Yes, we can. Yeah."

STEINBERG: So, you keep saying that you became politicized. When did that happen? What was that process like? What were the motivations behind it? Can you describe that a little more in depth for me?

GRIFFITH: You're asking hard questions.

STEINBERG: Sorry. [laughter]

GRIFFITH: All right. So, I was working at the National Gallery of Art [Washington, DC], and I used to be friendly with the man who drove the director's car. So, the director got chauffeured around town. And Virgil sat as kind of a gatekeeper to what was called literally Peacock Alley, because that's where all the curators were. And these, in the old days in museums, a lot of the people that were in these positions were there because of their connections to collectors, and sort of had the inner track, so to speak. And I was working for a man who was very enlightened, but he did call me into his office once and said that I wasn't to stop and talk with Virgil when I passed his desk. And, so Virgil's black and I'm white, and all the guards at the National Gallery were black and all the curators were white. So, to me I had sort of gone south from New England, seeing, you know, the issues. And to get together with Virgil and his wife and kids, my husband, then-husband and I had a picnic in Rock Creek Park. And my husband was at John Hopkins [University] School [of] Advanced International Studies, so he had lots of friends that were talking about the war. And as I said, my brother was debating about what he should do. So, some of that. And then just being in Washington where everyone was just involved. So it was that process of talking.

And then I decided that I was an elite being a curator, so I went to teach at a high school in Montgomery County [MD]. And we had teach-ins. And I sued the school

because they wouldn't allow us—they made a ruling that suddenly on the day of the Cambodian bombing march, I think it was May 30th—for some reason, that sticks in my mind—teachers could not take our two days of what were personal leave for any reason without saying, giving a reason. So, you could go to a psychiatrist or you could, you know, do whatever you wanted to do without telling your business. And they had given a teacher permission to go to Cape Canaveral to watch some launch there. And I was incensed that I couldn't take a day off. And there was another teacher at the school, an anthropology teacher that was a Quaker, and a Harvard radical guy, Harriet Abrams, and I think two others, so there were five of us, and we made a suit against Montgomery County.

STEINBERG: Did you win?

GRIFFITH: It never... I left before there was any resolution. But, it was important for me as a role model to my students to take action, and then I was very instrumental in organizing these teach-ins at the school, and bringing in speakers from different places. But at the same time, I mean, there was such a big feminist movement going on, so I almost felt like I was theoretically working, but I was really immersed in defining myself and politics.

STEINBERG: So, did you identify with Quakerism at this time, as the Vietnam War started to ramp up? Or did that kind of come later when you looked to opportunities to go to Vietnam?

GRIFFITH: Being a Quaker was always very important to me, and I went to meeting fairly frequently. And, I mean, one of my things that I didn't like about the PBS documentary was that they made it seem like the anti-war movement came out of nowhere, and sort of suddenly these kind of Woodstock radical types came forward with not much planning and thought, whereas, you know, I knew friends of my parents that had gone and stood in front of the White House and were protesting the war before there were big demonstrations in the street. So, I think, yeah, I was heavily influenced, I suppose, by Quakerism.

STEINBERG: And when did you personally form your thoughts on the war separate from the feminist movement or civil rights movement, but specifically thinking about the anti-war

movement? When did you start to join that, if you did at all?

GRIFFITH: I was wrong. I didn't graduate till '66. So, I was not in the '63 march. No, I didn't. I would say... so I was living in Boston in '67, and I believe—I worked for the Peace Corps in the summer, then maybe I went back a second year. So, by '68 I was actively doing anti-war work.

STEINBERG: And through what channels? How did that manifest?

GRIFFITH: Well, demonstrations. I had an apartment in Washington, DC, and so lots of people came and stayed, so I was cooking and helping get rid of tear gas in their clothes. And then, running the teach-ins, as I mentioned earlier.

STEINBERG: So, what would you do at the teach-ins?

GRIFFITH: I led a couple of workshops, but mainly I was organizing people who spoke at the teach-ins who knew a lot about the war.

STEINBERG: Did you have the support of your school administrators, or was this kind of putting you at odds with the school?

GRIFFITH: The school was so—Montgomery County's fairly liberal, and the schools are good in Montgomery County. So, the principals really in a peculiar way didn't have a choice because everything from Earth Day to these teach-ins were in the control of the students. So, the schools went along, and the way that they made them palatable was to have both sides be presented.

STEINBERG: So, what was the other side presenting on?

GRIFFITH: I remember they had a lot of military people come and talk about how good the war was and...

STEINBERG: And was this at a high school?

GRIFFITH: Yes.

STEINBERG: And so, what were your students talking about at this time? Were they also becoming politicized because of time and space of where they were?

- GRIFFITH: Yes, and I think that was part of my own politicization was talking with them, and our kind of coming into awareness together in a way.
- STEINBERG: Interesting. Yeah, that's interesting.
- GRIFFITH: Yeah.
- STEINBERG: You mentioned you worked for the Peace Corps. Was that internationally or domestically?
- GRIFFITH: I worked for the Peace Corps in the US.
- STEINBERG: And what did you do for them?
- GRIFFITH: I was doing administrative work for one year actually at Dartmouth College. God, I'd forgotten that. Yeah, one summer for volunteers that were going to four countries in West Africa. And then the next summer it was in Quebec, where they were learning French and an African language up in Quebec.
- STEINBERG: And did a lot of your friends join the Peace Corps? Did you know a lot of people involved in the Peace Corps?
- GRIFFITH: I did know, yes. Yes. And some of those actually were in South America. So, Chile and...And not when they went into the Peace Corps then were we talking about juntas and so on, but, you know, I'm still a very close friend of somebody who went to Dartmouth, Chuck Benson ['66], and his wife, and he was in Chile and his wife is Venezuelan, so we're always talking, continuous, and it's gone on for many years. [laughter]
- STEINBERG: So, you mentioned that your brother was drafted. When was he drafted? And what were the conversations that you were having with him about the war and whether he should join it?
- GRIFFITH: He was drafted in, I think, sixty...So, he graduated in '68, and he went immediately to Oxford. He was in kind of this illustrious group, because he was with [Bill] Clinton and Bob [Robert] Reich and Strobe Talbott, who ended up being Assistant Secretary of State, I think under [Madeleine] Albright, or in the Clinton era. And, so he got a draft notice in the middle of the year, which would have

meant dropping out of Oxford. I think it was a two-year fellowship. But, my father somehow managed to get his physical deferred until the end of the year, so at least he finished that year. And by the time he finished that year, he got a teaching position at Kimble Union Academy, and I think he was there for two years, and then he went to graduate school.

STEINBERG: So, did he get an academic deferment?

GRIFFITH: Right.

STEINBERG: So, did he ever end up serving in Vietnam?

GRIFFITH: No.

STEINBERG: And your parents supported that decision?

GRIFFITH: My father actively worked to get him deferred, and I think having a son that was potentially going to Vietnam really radicalized my mother—"radicalized" is an exaggeration. But, she certainly would send letters and engaged in some anti-war activities.

STEINBERG: Yeah. So, your whole family kind of started joining the anti-war—had anti-war sentiments?

GRIFFITH: I don't know if my father... My father was very, very upset when I went to Vietnam, and he wasn't very complimentary about it in terms of the value of going to a, quote/unquote, "third world country." And this made me very angry, because he had spent three years right after college in Aleppo, Syria, and so, there were Armenians and Arabs that were his close friends, and I felt as if I was likewise embarking on an adventure into an unknown place. But, I suppose his anger was more that... I mean, I was a lot more left than he was, and so I think my politics were a bit upsetting and he wasn't sure where I was going with them. And you certainly saw people that, you know, other young people that were kind of going off what the adults at that time thought was a deep end. So, I wasn't sure he ever necessarily approved, but when I came back, I think he certainly was interested in the experience, and I actually remember that he and my mother came to a talk I did once about Vietnam, which impressed me. But, this is so interesting. Well, no, all right, this is...

STEINBERG: Okay, so when you were in DC, you mentioned that by the time you got to Vietnam, you spoke Vietnamese?

GRIFFITH: No.

STEINBERG: So, when did you learn Vietnamese?

GRIFFITH: The director before me was British, and he was so exhausted that when I arrived in country, he decided to leave. He was supposed to wait for two months, because the routine was everybody did two months of language training. But, I went with my former husband, and David was a French major at Dartmouth, and he was qualified to do simultaneous interpreting, which he did in graduate school for the State Department. So his French was very, very good, and AFSC [American Friends Service Committee] actually believed that we could use French in the area where we were, because the Viet Minh had a strong presence. They were fighting against the French there, but many of the older men had been educated in French schools. But, truthfully, there was almost nobody that spoke French. So, what happened was that we did immersion learning. And I speak with a central coastal accent, which is like having, they say, salt water in your mouth. So, I gave a big speech in Paris to ex-pat Vietnamese, and they just... It's pretty funny if you see a foreigner speaking with a heavy accent from some region.

STEINBERG: Yeah. Professor Miller gave us a little mini lecture about Vietnamese, and mentioned how every region has a slightly different accent. So, that's interesting that you have the central coastal one.

GRIFFITH: You know, one thing that's—one huge mistake that the Americans made, besides not knowing Vietnamese, is there were I think two million French Catholics, or Vietnamese Catholics that had supported the French that were moved from the north to the south, and the northern accent is quite distinct from the southern, and they have an extra accent. And over and over again you would find people use these, they're often well educated people as their interpreters. And the minute they spoke, the Vietnamese would know, *this person is Catholic, not Buddhist, they're anti-Communist, and I'm not gonna tell them anything.*

STEINBERG: That is really interesting. So, they just didn't really understand the differences between the regional dialects? Yeah.

GRIFFITH: Just crazy. I mean, over and over, good journalists would have these interpreters and they would come—I remember once right in the middle of the conversation, he was going to—the person was going to tell the journalist something, and then he just drifted into neutral. Because you don't know what the interpreter's ties are or political sympathies are. I mean, you know, if a journalist goes around with somebody who's a Trump supporter, the person that he's interviewing is going to be cautious a bit about...

STEINBERG: Well, and also from what we've learned about Vietnam, it seems so much like you were never sure who you could trust, and so that must have been a huge issue.

GRIFFITH: Right.

STEINBERG: But, let me take you back a little bit before you got to Vietnam. How did you get connected with the American Friends Service Committee [AFSC], and what was the motivations to go to Vietnam?

GRIFFITH: I had a job going to Africa and working to protect antiquities from being exported from the country, and my former husband had specialized in African studies, and so AFSC had a very interesting low-level diplomatic program in Africa. So, he went to AFSC to talk to them about that position. And AFSC has an interesting way of interviewing people. You're there for two days, and they interview you, but they want you to interview them. And, you know, it's committees. So, for example, when I worked for AFSC, I had a committee, and it's a committee of people who are kind of my peers who have expertise in the field, so they can advise and shape the program. And, so you meet with people on the international committee. And one of the women was somebody who had given sanctuary to some AWOL soldiers.

And so we started getting into a discussion, and then pretty soon they said, "Well, we have our program in Vietnam. Would you like to go?" And we said, "Absolutely

not.” And they said, “Oh, good. That’s the kind of people we’re looking for.” And I thought that was interesting, because what they weren’t looking for were people who wanted to go and save the world or correct the mistakes or had some axe to grind. I mean, you could be against the war, but they didn’t want somebody going in who was completely prejudiced about the war, because obviously you’re going to work with people who were Vietnamese who were anti-Communist, and you’d have to—you can’t go in with a bias. So, we were kind of shocked at their interest in us. And also once we learned about the quality of the program, and these friends of my parents lived in Philadelphia who were Quakers and were very influential on my childhood, and I talked to them and I said, “Yeah, the program’s really kind of a brilliantly devised program.” So, then we had to go back for two more days of interviews, but we were really intrigued.

STEINBERG: Why did you initially say “no”?

GRIFFITH: It just wasn’t on our radar. And, oh, I think we were thinking Africa, and I was thinking something that would build my resume, which would be continuing work in the art history field. Also, in general I didn’t see what anybody could do to be very helpful in the war, and you could even be seen as patching up people that the US military was wounding. So, I didn’t want to be part of that.

STEINBERG: So, you say that the program was very well planned and developed. So, can you tell me a little bit about the program itself and what its mission was, and kind of what it looked like on a day to day basis once you got to Vietnam?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. Basically, it was a program to teach Vietnamese in the art of making artificial limbs. And we also made wheelchairs out of bicycle parts. We did surgeries in a closet, mainly just amputations to make a better stump, or if somebody needed an arm amputated. And as an aside, one time a rocket went into a school of kids and they all came into the hospital, but there weren’t any doctors at the hospital, because the whole hospital system was usually fairly corrupt. And so, we all had to help with amputations, including just getting saws out of the carpentry shop and...

- STEINBERG: So, did you receive medical training as part of it?
- GRIFFITH: No. I'd never even thought about artificial limbs before I went. And they said to me... Well, one thing—I don't know if I'll say this in my talk tomorrow, but it just really always hit me that kids need legs as they grow, just the way you need bigger shoes. Somehow it just was, oh, it's so sad. I mean, it's one thing to get a leg once, but then they would have to come back in, and they'd come in with these worn legs, limping because it was too short or whatever. Anyway, so the concept of the program was to look at the area in the country where there were the most civilian injuries, and they located in what the film calls "Pinkville," and it's the first time I'd heard that—it's not the first time I'd heard that term, but I really hadn't thought that I was working in Pinkville. But, it's five miles from My Lai, and lots and lots of civilians.
- STEINBERG: Where does the term "Pinkville" come from? I saw that in some of the American reports that we've read. But, it's called Quang Ngai. Is that how it's pronounced?
- GRIFFITH: Yeah. Quang Ngai. Well, it's because red is Communist. And, you know, when I was growing up the red dripped down the map and the whole domino thing. And so, these people were "pink," meaning not like guerillas. They were maybe not red, but, you know, you couldn't tell whether they were like "pink," they were sympathizers.
- STEINBERG: So, it was controlled by the Communists or strongly influenced by the Communists? Yes?
- GRIFFITH: Yes.
- STEINBERG: So, how did you feel about going into a region that you knew was hostile and...
- GRIFFITH: I was just going to say one other thing. So, also the concept was to train people who'd lost limbs to become prosthetists, and I managed to change the policy so we also selected women prosthetists, so then we had women doing kind of carpentry, which was a little against the patriarchal system there. And by the time I left, there were just three of us, and everything had devolved to a Vietnamese staff.

STEINBERG: How many Americans were over there at the beginning?

GRIFFITH: Gosh, I bet there were 15 or 20 at the beginning. The other project we ran, and I'll only mention this if we talk about the evacuation of orphans later from Vietnam, but there was an orphanage that the AFSC had run, and I didn't see it as a program that was building towards anything, whereas in 2006 when I went back to Vietnam, I saw the same people that I worked with in 1973. So, that was just incredibly gratifying that people were still there. Whereas, with an orphanage, you're just taking care of kids, and then someday the war's over and, you know, what have you really done to benefit? And, but what I realized that they were mostly what I called, well, they were economic orphans, or if there was a free fire zone in an area and kids had to go somewhere, they would park the kids in an orphanage. So, we were taking care of kids that definitely needed a place to go, but it is also a Western system of developing orphanages, as opposed to letting the extended family take care of family members, which is usually what happens.

STEINBERG: So, did you get pushback from the Vietnamese on that structure of an orphanage?

GRIFFITH: No, they were happy. They loved—the more orphanages and the more daycare centers, so to speak, that you could set up, and the more money they could get out of it, so to speak, the better. But, I thought it was a Western-imposed concept. And in truth, people came to Vietnam from various adoption agencies, and showed pictures of how, you know, beautiful lawns and houses, and “why don't you give up your child?” So, people actually would sometimes give up their children for a better economic opportunity.

So this goes to the end of the war, but later on, I brought a case against [Henry] Kissinger et al. with a very famous lawyer from the Chicago Seven—I can't remember his name—but anyway, because when we were bringing orphans from Vietnam at the end of the war on those planes and so on, I didn't want those orphans, if their families had placed them there and the families were still alive, for the kids to lose their roots or their records. And, in fact, the head of Atlantic Philanthropies Health Programs was a child whose mother was able to find him because she was able to open up the records. And when I

was at the Presidio when these kids were being brought in, it was—you weren't even alive, but [President Gerald] Ford was "Yeah, we have all these babies," you know. "We may have lost the war, but we're doing good." And I was working for AFSC in San Francisco at the time when they had a radio call for Vietnamese interpreters, and I went to the Presidio and I started interpreting for the doctors, and these were all kids of wealthy Vietnamese who'd been bribed onto these planes. They weren't orphans. So, it was a 48-hour big blitz of news, and then it kind of went away.

STEINBERG: And did the children stay in America and were adopted?

GRIFFITH: Most of them. But, you know, years later I ran into this example of this doctor who went back to Vietnam, and his mother had found him and so on. But, anyway, if I hadn't closed down that orphan program, I might not have seen a bit of what orphanages... It's a more complex institution in a country than many people realize. And I really objected to the way that some of the American agencies, or adoption agencies really marketed and solicited to get these kids. Vietnam says that the children are their most precious treasures, and they made it much more difficult at some point after the war to adopt.

STEINBERG: Did you see a lot of displacement in general because of free fire zones and American tactics in the war?

GRIFFITH: Yeah, huge. And I didn't write about it in my piece, one, because I guess I had to be selective, but I've been reading a lot of people's reaction to the documentary, and they're talking about the millions and millions of people that were displaced. But, the tragedy in the area where I was is that the Batangan Peninsula is this gorgeous piece of land with they used to say like they had 30 different kinds of bananas, and it's right on the ocean, all this pretty ancient irrigation, and then steeped paddies. But they moved everybody off of that area, everybody in this huge Pinkville, and moved them onto a spit of sand on the Tra Khuc River in town, and they were surrounded by barbed wire under these brown canvas tents. It was so hot, and they were given imported rice from Texas. And we weren't doing refugee or relief work with people, again because to me it was like orphanages, it was a stopgap. And other—USAID and other religious groups were often more

involved in those kinds of efforts. But I certainly talked to people. And yeah, the older people were—well, it's like in Syria, you lose a generation of kids that don't go to school, so they were saying, "Look, we're losing a generation of people, our kids. They're not learning how to farm. You're bombing the dikes, and the salt water's getting into our land." So...

STEINBERG: And so, how did you interact with the local population? It seemed from your writing that you were very integrated. So, can you tell me a little bit about what it was like interacting with them, and especially kind of serving both sides in the war?

GRIFFITH: Well, we lived in a normal Vietnamese house, and just on the main dirt streets, and the tanks and the armored personnel carriers would go by with their air horns, and you know, it's turning up all this dust. And it was so hot. And sometimes we had electricity and fans, but we didn't have air conditioning. But, because we spoke Vietnamese and we wore, I mean, I wore Vietnamese style blouses a lot. And we were working at the center with a hundred people. We got to know staff and got to know patients of all spectrum of political persuasion. And then, I started a program of grants, mini grants to former patients. So, I went on the back of a motorcycle with a guy who had some training in social work, even though it's sort of not called that in Vietnam. But, and we'd go out and we'd look at the patient's home and make suggestions of how the patient could be more mobile at the home situation, and we'd do things like give a loan of a pig or, I mean, the biggest thing we ever gave was a sewing machine, which was considered an expensive item. But, the idea was that the patient, it gave the patient a way to make a living, and then they paid back the loan. And it was pretty exciting, because in a country where there was such gross corruption, we got every penny back from all of these loans. But, since the only area that was controlled by the military were the bases where they lived and Route 1 during the day, then all of the areas I was traveling to were under the control of the National Liberation Front, the Viet Cong.

STEINBERG: And did you ever feel unsafe or targeted because you were an American, even if you didn't have a political or military affiliation?

GRIFFITH: No. The Vietnamese were always very clear about “we’re opposed to the American government, but not the American people.”

STEINBERG: And so, what was your interaction, if any, with the American military or government while you were over there?

GRIFFITH: Very little. Occasionally for some reason the military would come to the rehab center, and we had a sign that said “War is not healthy for children. Most of these children have lost limbs to weapons. Please leave your weapons at the door.” So, the military had to take off their pistols, put their guns at the door. They didn’t seem to object. I mean, I never had an argument back from anybody about that. And then the other interaction I had was probably about three times during the time I was there. We could occasionally take patients to Da Nang to the military hospital, and if the doctors there were interested in the type of operation that the patient needed, which was something that we couldn’t do or the provincial hospital couldn’t do, they would sometimes take that patient. So, I learned the term... That happened every time we went, the patient was accepted. I felt really bad in one case because, well, actually they went to the German hospital from the military hospital, so that doesn’t really count. But I learned the term “on the economy.” You eat on the economy, and that’s a military term for meaning you ate Vietnamese food, because you know, the military didn’t eat Vietnamese food.

STEINBERG: Right, they eat rations and things from America.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. I mean, and this Chu Lai Air Base was a little America. I mean, they had pizza places and bingo parlors, ice cream stands. And I mentioned to one of the men that I was talking to that we had a German shepherd dog at the house, and that gets into a whole thing about whether you should keep the animals in a poor country and all this kind of stuff. But, before I got there, the dog had been there as quote/unquote “protection.” And the man said, “Oh, wow, we give our dogs the best steaks. Would you guys like to take some steaks back?” Thinking we would eat them. And we didn’t feed them to the dog, but I mean, what he was doing was giving us dog food, you know, and

we never had red meat. We actually ate quite poorly, and one or two of the people got beriberi from not having enough fruits and vegetables. But, that was a night where we got...

STEINBERG: A nice steak. And so, did you sense any resentment from the Vietnamese people about how the Americans lived on the base, or the cultural differences that divided them?

GRIFFITH: Oh, absolutely. I mean, one of the things that isn't brought out in the documentary is that there was a class struggle aspect to the war. It wasn't just a civil war, because you supposedly had elections, and they knew that Ho Chi Minh was going to win, so you prop up one government, but you prop them up with people who consider themselves superior to the Vietnamese, just the way the French did. And that included these fat Americans, not all of them, but, you know, driving around in their Jeeps and driving too fast down the road, and having movies and all the luxuries of America, and, you know, having prostitutes. And yeah, they were absolutely disgusted. And yet, they had a lot of sympathy for the young, particularly guys of color or young recruits.

And they said to me once, "You know, it is so difficult. Think of yourself. You're in an area where it's declared a free fire zone. Your family's lived there for six generations or longer, and you don't know when you could ever come out of your house, because if you come out and you're seen, they could shoot you. But if you go into a tunnel when they come into the village, they might consider you a Viet Cong and throw a grenade into the tunnel. But meanwhile, these people that are walking in your village are—they don't even speak your language—they're like 18 years old, you know? And you can be innocent, but you don't know how to act with all these strangers." And it was such an imposed system on them, and they were very clear about it. And one of the very funny things that I would teach the American guys to count to 5. And they'd say "[lật để đổ quốc mỹ]." And it meant, "Overthrow the American imperialists." [laughter] But doesn't it sound like "[lật để đổ quốc mỹ]"? [laughter]

You asked me something I didn't really answer, I guess, about going into the, shall we call them Communist held areas or the National Liberation Front? Yeah. If I hadn't

spoken Vietnamese, it would have been more confusing. And certainly, there were times when we could have been CIA or something like that. But, (A) there were no females in the military, so that was an advantage, speaking Vietnamese was an advantage. But, and the fact the program had been there long enough that some word had gotten out. It wasn't like we were a new endeavor. But, I never felt ever threatened. I mean, sometimes it was scary because I got shrapnel and there were fire fights or cross when I was out at My Lai and stuff like that, but nobody was shooting at me.

And our doctor was captured in Hue in '68, and she was walked north, but released. And my good friend, Diane Jones, was captured in '73 along with another good friend of mine, Sophie Quinn Judge, who was actually a Vietnamese history professor at Temple, and her husband, Paul Quinn Judge, and they were released. I wish that in a way, well, they or people like them... And our program stayed after the war. And in Quang Ngai there was no fighting, zero. The ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] just dropped their uniforms and ran. And it was bizarre. I mean, nothing. Nothing. And a North Vietnamese doctor was put in charge of the hospital. We'd never had a really good doctor before. And my friend, Che Mai [spelling unconfirmed], had been instrumental in making sure that the team was okay. And then, after about two months, the team saw that it was in good hands, and they went down to... I think there was liberation in Quang Ngai in March, and then it didn't occur in Saigon until the end of April. But, they stayed through the fall of Saigon. And the stories they tell are just so different.

STEINBERG: What kind of stories are they?

GRIFFITH: I'll forward it to you. I haven't really thought about it very much, except I'm going back to Vietnam with Diane, the one who was captured, and Claudia, the one who kept a diary in Saigon, and myself, and then, that guy who was a POW for five years, but he was one of the seven that wrote anti-war statements, and when he came back they brought charges of treason against these seven. But one guy committed suicide the next day, and they dropped the charges. But, anyway... But, knowing Claudia saw university women collecting the ARVN rifles, and people

throwing flowers, and they just... The war was over, and a lot of the people that had benefitted from the Americans had left or were scared, and the people that came forward were just relieved that finally the war was over.

But, when Diane was captured, so it was a little funny because Diane's Vietnamese was really good, as obviously Sophie who now is a professor. But, they had just arrived in country, Paul and Sophie, and we had people in Ho Chi Minh City, Saigon, and that's where Diane was. So, Diane takes Paul and Sophie up to see the hospital, the project that they were going to be helping to fund or supply, and Paul and Sophie, not speaking any Vietnamese, I couldn't believe it that they get captured and they can't—so, Diane's doing all of the translating. They were captured here, and then they had to travel during the night, two nights, right near American fire bases, and easily were areas that were mined and stuff like that, because they wanted to release them in an area that was further from where they were captured, because obviously the military's looking for them in this region, so they had to travel through the mountains. But, later when I went back to Vietnam to interview a woman, she was one of the women that was in charge of Diane, Paul and Sophie.

STEINBERG:

Oh wow. How did you figure that out?

GRIFFITH:

Well, because she knew that she had some association with this humanitarian organization. But, Diane said that the woman said to her, "Isn't this 'vui'?" "Vui" means joyful. So, one of the aspects that was driving, I think, the anti-war movement, and if you're involved in the environmental movement, is you're part of this movement and you think that the cause is right. And for Che Mai, too, this was like for women it was a chance to be treated equally, you know, to get a chance to do everything the men did, and for her this was an important cause. And "here we are under the stars, I have my captive. It's vui." [laughter]

But, the interesting thing is that Paul and Sophie had been the Quaker representatives in Paris, and they had gone to all the peace hearings and knew all the members from the North Vietnamese to the PRG [Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam] to

whatever. And so, they said to their captors, "Check us out." And sure enough... Now, how they communicated...

STEINBERG: ...who they were?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. But, how in this rural area did these... You know, in the Americans' view, the Viet Cong were these guys in black pajamas that were totally ignorant. But, they got word, this group of four people got word to Paris, and it was confirmed who Paul and Sophie were, and they were released.

STEINBERG: Wow, that's amazing.

GRIFFITH: It was.

STEINBERG: And so, did the Vietnamese have an understanding of Quakerism or kind of what your mission was there? Not that it was a religious one, but...

GRIFFITH: Yeah, I mean, they got it. Buddhism, you know, it's sort of in the moment, not to be evil, show, you know, demonstrate by being a role model, not necessarily taking sides. The Vietnamese aren't as macho as a lot of cultures, and there's a gentleness to it. And I think they could understand that there was a reason why these odd people would come and do what we're doing. Yeah. Che Mai did an amazing talk once. She came to the US and she went to a Quaker meeting in Washington, and she stood up and made a little speech about Quakers.

STEINBERG: So, I was actually going to ask you, can you talk a little about Che Mai and your friendship with her and who she was?

GRIFFITH: Okay, it'll go on for hours. I'd actually love some water, and I do need to probably leave at 5:00.

STEINBERG: Okay.

GRIFFITH: I mean, you said it would take about two hours, so we're not really there, but...

[Pause in recording]

STEINBERG: All right. So this is the second recording. We are resuming our interview. So, I just asked you about Che Mai. So, can you explain who she is, how you met her, and how she was important to your experience in Vietnam?

GRIFFITH: Great. Yes, in the essay I wrote that she was somebody who'd lost both her legs. She came to the hospital, and then our doctor found her at the hospital and brought her to the rehab center where she was fitted with legs, and then because she was so bright and interesting, and we were then busy hiring former amputees to take over roles, so we put her in an administrative role at the center. And she came to stay, not right away, but a couple of Vietnamese were living at our house, just because it was big, and especially for some people that were pretty severely injured and would have trouble going a long way, the long distance to get to the hospital. And she could ride on the back of a motor scooter, but otherwise her transportation would have been tricky, because above knee amputations are difficult. And our legs were not like the kinds of legs that you see on people now. They were wooden, tied on with canvas straps. I mean, they were pretty antiquated. But, on the other hand, at one point when I wanted to see if we could invest in getting Mai a better leg or a better wheelchair, it was pointed out to me that you can't get replacement parts. So, things break down. It would be difficult for her to get her legs or wheelchair replaced.

So, the process you already know about was, you know, we began this slow dance of her trusting me and my trusting her. But, she would say things occasionally about... Well, for example, when Frances Fitzgerald came, and I said, "This is a woman who's written a book, called *Fire in the Lake* [: *The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*]." And Che Mai was like, "Oh, yeah, I know it." I was like, "Well, if you had seventh grade education, I mean, and you came out of the mountains, how do you know about *Fire in the Lake*?" [laughter] "Well, she said, you know, I listened to BBC." But, she just, you know, was that kind of smart, interested person.

So, anyway, we developed this friendship. But, now looking back, I really didn't—I didn't know her real name, I didn't know her real story. And when I left, I would hear about her from other team members, and like the way she

made sure that the Quakers were okay during the takeover, and that she must have had a role on the other side because they put her in a position of questioning ARVN officers and people to determine how bad or good they were. But sadly, they only had her do that job for about a week or two. They then found it too time consuming for people to go get her and bring her to the place. So, she, in some ways after liberation was not... The National Liberation Front did not gain the power that they wanted.

STEINBERG: After liberation?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. The North Vietnamese had a stronger voice. And to Mai's disappointment, she never had an important role. And some of that could be seen, concerning disabilities, people didn't believe that people who were severely disabled could do what they could do. And she never got to go to North Vietnam. For generations her family had been fighting against the French and so on. And so, I think she had visions that she would go take a position in the government in Hanoi. So, later she does go to Hanoi with Sophie and me, and it was a lot of fun.

35 years, well, in 2006, I went back to Vietnam with some former staff members, and my children and two of their kids. And I didn't want to go back because I thought I couldn't find Che Mai, but believe it or not, the travel agent that I was talking to found her.

STEINBERG: Wow.

GRIFFITH: I know. I'd been asking everybody to find her. And we'll skip over how that happened, but basically, and so it was one of these crazy situations where, you know, you're supposed to meet in Quang Ngai at 5:00 in the afternoon, and she wasn't there, but it all worked out. And, you know, it was just an extraordinary reunion for—I wasn't the only one that loved her. We all loved a lot of the people on our program, and I have several other women friends, and the head of our prosthetics shop was a really neat guy. I liked him, too. But, it was just amazing for my kids to get to know her and hear her story. And my daughter is Mariah Mai, after Mai. And Mai had had a daughter the same year as my daughter. So, the daughters met, and that was really cool.

STEINBERG: So, what is she doing now?

GRIFFITH: Well, now she actually just lives with her daughter and husband and two grandchildren. But, she is active in local affairs, and she has been active in Agent Orange. And when I went back in like 2010, I went to an area in Quang Nam where we did the same kind of thing we did at the rehab center, we gave gifts, grants, to families. And she and the local Agent Orange organization had identified people. So, this kid, the father was badly disabled by Agent Orange, and the child had some deformities, but he'd learned to repair motorcycles. So, we were giving him some equipment for a shop. Things like that.

So, but her job was that she was a propaganda specialist. And it was really a political war, not a military war, and the National Liberation Front was winning with propaganda so to speak. I mean, I always think of that as bad stuff that convinces people. But, Mai could argue anything with you and show you the point. She did a lot of consciousness raising with women. And her role was really important. I've only sort of begun to realize that even in the last year—so, she was involved in the Tet Offensive in Tan Ky, where they trying to take over the radio station, and she would have done broadcast. But, that failed and she wasn't killed, but a bunch of her comrades were.

But the coolest story, I think, is that her husband—and mind you, I knew her for three years, I didn't know she had a husband—her husband comes back to Quang Ngai while I'm still there, and he visits. He has a sister visiting the rehab center and asking for a divorce. He was an engineer. He'd gone north to get more training and he worked in the north. But by '73, they were beginning to send people to the south to place themselves in positions for what eventually happened. And, so Mai finally meets with him and the sister, and he says, "Look, you know, you have to divorce me because you can't have any children and you're of no use to me," and so on. And she said, "I put up this firm defense, because I told him I'd been working at this place where all these women were injured and had children and could get around on their wheelchairs or legs. And these Americans I've been working with, they've shown me another way." And she said, "You have no idea. The whole place is staffed with

people that..." And, so she never gave him a divorce, but he never divorced her either, because she wouldn't give it to him. So, then, in a traditional society, in Vietnam, you have to have a child to take care of you when you get old. So, she asked—by then she was a member of the Communist Party, which by the way is quite difficult to get.

STEINBERG: Oh, to actually become a member?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. I mean, we call these people Communists, but not very many of them were actual members of the Communist Party. But, she gets to be a member. But therefore, you have to be a role model. And she wants to have a child, but her husband's not going to give her a child. So, she is having an affair with, well, I guess it's an affair because she's married, but there's a younger teacher who's in training in Quang Ngai, and he found her very sexy. And one thing I thought that was really sweet, he would pat her thighs and he said, "You just love these," because they were a symbol of her bravery, not her deformity. And she was remarkable. And I can see, you know, making love to her if you were a man. [laughter]

So, but you don't have a child if you're not married and so on. And that was a very strong ethic, because the men and women were working together in the jungle and stuff like that. But she got permission from the Communist Party to have a child with this man, and that's Thuy [Dang Thuy Tram], her daughter. And, so she has this beautiful child, and Thuy goes to university in Saigon, and now is an anchorperson for a radio station where she has to research the stories. So she's not just a pretty face. She has to, you know, do the whole thing.

And, of course, the former husband comes back. He wants to be associated with her. [laughter] And she said, of course, "No way," you know, right? Then, he marries and he has a child that is born with some deformity, and of course then it's like karma, right? That's why it came. So, the wife, then, comes to Che Mai because she feels so bad. So, Mai becomes very friendly with that wife. Then the man who's the father of Thuy, and they carry on for some years, but he has to go back to his—he's just been in training and he has to go back to his village, and eventually comes to Mai and says, "You know, I'm the oldest of six daughters and the son, and the family's got

all these expectations for me, so I've really got to get married soon." "That's fine," you know. So, later she works. He comes and actually visits Thuy and Mai at some point after he's married. The wife finds out about it and causes a real screaming match and a scene and so on. But Mai, having been propaganda specialist, calms the situation. And it was incredible. I don't know how she manages this, but she becomes very friendly with that wife, and when Thuy gets married, the husband and wife—no, actually, I think the wife didn't come, but she sent some nice gifts. But the father came to the wedding.

STEINBERG: Were other women as empowered as she was?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. I just kind of picked her to tell... I mean, there was another woman that I really liked that was in a cultural troupe, and they were captured. There was an operation against them, and she went into a tunnel complex, and they threw grenades in, and so when she came out of the tunnel, she said she had to crawl over several of her friends that had been killed. And then she gets out and the guy just takes a machine gun and goes back and forth across her body. And I don't know how he didn't hit any vital organs or something or how she was alive. It mainly hit, like blew out her shoulder and her legs and so on. And she was lying on the floor in our hospital, of the provincial hospital, and she said our doctor came up to her and smelled her. He picked up her arm and smelled her. I guess that's to see if gangrene has set in, and if it had, he was just going to pass her by, but it hadn't.

And she had a ton of operations, and we fit her with some kind of support behind her legs. She had a leg, but it was full of holes. But, she was just extraordinary. And she gives me moments of PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome] in a way, because it seems like whenever I go to a dance concert, I think of her, because with Che Mai too—life goes on, I mean. Everybody has cell phones in Vietnam and, you know, "who's this old lady without any legs?" You sacrifice. But, the time where people appreciate that sacrifice is not necessarily very present.

STEINBERG: Yeah. So, what about something you wrote about, as well was your experience of torture victims? Do you feel comfortable talking about that, and how you got involved in that?

GRIFFITH: Yeah, it was pretty easy. You probably know this interest in prisons, and thinking there's goodness in everyone, light in everyone.

STEINBERG: Yes.

GRIFFITH: Sort of like, let's at least tear down the prison... I've been involved in the Innocence Project. They go in and research cases where the people are in prison that are sure they are innocent, and like after this kid was in prison for 21 years, he's finally out, and it was all a big mistake.

But, anyway, so what happened in Quang Ngai is that they would take prisoners to an interrogation—well, take people to an interrogation center. They weren't necessarily prisoners. And it looked like a concentration camp with barbed wire, and people would come up to the boards and try to pull their heads over, and it was all right on the main street, and the CIA was operating it.

STEINBERG: And not trying to hide it at all?

GRIFFITH: No. I mean, this was really hard for me, because I was innocent that way. I just didn't think... Even with the My Lai massacres, you know, for a while I thought, *Oh, they're just young guys that were mad that their buddies were killed.* But, I mean, it was really awful. And it was deliberate. I mean, think to what they were doing, many of them. And anyway, there's a whole book on *My Lai*. It's [*A Brief History with Documents* about My Lai.

STEINBERG: We read it. [James S.] Olson and [Randy] Roberts?

GRIFFITH: Yes.

STEINBERG: And we had a whole debate in our class about what the motivation was and why it happened, and I don't think we came down on one specific...

GRIFFITH: It is complex.

STEINBERG: Very complex.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. Yeah.

STEINBERG: Do you feel like the Quang Ngai Province was really shaped by this massacre and the ones by the Koreans, as well? Or...

GRIFFITH: It was so common. If you mean shaped, no. Another person that was in the work for AFSC before I did just recently when we were talking about this email exchange, she said that she brought a journalist to My Lai. I was there for the five-year anniversary, so of course anniversaries, we have journalists come, fly in on their little helicopters and then go out with their North Vietnamese interpreters, and then they come back and they don't get the story right. But, anyway, but she tells about taking a journalist out there, and there had been a massacre, and he wrote about it—well, she had him interview some people that had been involved in the recent massacre. And then she said he threw the copy of his story in the trash, and she read the carbon, and it wasn't the massacre. There'd been another massacre after the My Lai massacre. That was the one she'd taken him out to write about. But, all he'd written about was the My Lai massacre.

And I wrote a story—there's a picture in the *New York Times*, I think—of a woman, Loi, and she had lost two arms and a leg because she was a kid underneath the bodies. And we outfitted her with arms and legs, and she went back to the village, and after peace was at hand, and it's a Vietnamized war, the ARVN, being really scared because they knew they didn't have the support, and so, in my opinion, what they did is to use firepower rather than going into villages and checking out what was going on, and they bombed My Lai. It was not even really covered, you know? And this woman was killed that I know. It just was, oh, you know, heartbreaking.

Anyway, so CIA are training people in torture techniques and I'm not believing it, but [Senator] Edward Kennedy was going to come on a fact finding trip, so everything was spiffed up, and they cleaned the hospital and so on and so on. And I was walking in this ward; I'd never really seen people in it before, and that was the first time I'd noticed it. And what they'd done is to take people that were badly tortured out of the interrogation center and put them in there...

STEINBERG: In the hospital.

GRIFFITH: ...to hide them from—in case the congressional people went into the interrogation center. And after that, what they seemed to do is torture people, and then if they were going to die, bring them to the hospital, because then they wouldn't be accountable. So... And I went to translate. Why did they let us in there? I do not know, except we had permission to treat prisoners at the prison, but those were criminals. Petty crimes, yeah. There were mothers of babies in there. It was just like, well, what did you do? Steal something? I don't know. And, so I started to take—well, the guard, I think the guard left? Yeah, he'd go out and smoke.

STEINBERG: Tell the story again in case somebody doesn't have your essay, when they listen to this.

GRIFFITH: Yeah, what surprised me is that the guards, there were two of them, and they would leave us alone with the prisoners. And at first I thought it was because the women sometimes had these awful seizures. They would have neurological damage and go into these seizures, which looked kind of like epileptic fits and they were really hard to see, and so I thought, *Well, the guys get out of here so they don't have to...* Because, you know, you can't help but have sympathy for these young women. But, anyway, they left me alone a lot with the doctor. So, I took pictures and I basically would sit on their beds. And Vietnamese women are very affectionate with each other, so... I mean, men, too, you know, put their arms around each other while they walk down the street. But, yeah, they would just, you know, put their hands on my leg and just hold my hand, ask me how I was. I thought it was so funny that I was—you know, could speak Vietnamese, and I was so ugly because I had curly hair, and white hair, so I looked like a—well, then it was blond, but I mean, it was...

STEINBERG: You looked so distinct from them.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. And not in an attractive way. They wouldn't remind me. But, when I went back recently because there's been so much more Westernization, blue eyes are actually not so ugly. So, I've gone up a little peg. But, yeah, I don't like to talk about what was done to these people, but I think the hardest thing is knowing how much torture is still going

on. And a friend of, a guy I work with's wife was a *Washington Post* reporter that broke the stories about how we have these camps in foreign countries, and keep people there, and just awful, awful things, and torture, which according to most officials doesn't really work, and to damage people, it's to me an evil thing to do.

STEINBERG: Yes. You mentioned that you testified in front of Congress when you came home. What was that for and what was that experience like?

GRIFFITH: It's interesting because I actually don't remember what committee it was, probably a committee on refugees or something. But, I think regularly people were invited from voluntary agencies to come and give their point of view on what was happening. But, you know, you testify about how you're not going to win hearts and minds by separating the people from their land and isolating them. I just did a talk with a Marine last Wednesday, and that's what he did and he thought he was very successful because the villagers weren't—they were never overrun. And it didn't make tactical sense for the National Liberation Front to overrun villages that were occupied by the Marines. [laughter] So, anyway...

STEINBERG: So, while you were over there, how did your views on the war either change, stay the same? And then, how did that impact your reentry home?

GRIFFITH: Well, it definitely was a coming of age experience. I traveled in Europe with my family, but I'd never been to (quote/unquote) "a third world country." So, living at that level, I mean, I came back and I could turn a knob and hot water came on, I was just like "oh my God." This was because it was three years, you know. But, it was more my innocence really just disappeared. A friend at the National Gallery who had been living in Paris and was, you know, on the front lines for the Communists in Paris, and I thought, *Oh, this woman. She just believes all these conspiracy kinds of ideas, the CIA's behind everything, you know.* Pretty soon I'm like, *Oh, yeah, the CIA does train Vietnamese in how to torture people, and they do assassinate Vietnamese.* I mean, they had the whole Phoenix program when they went out and killed people. So, I come back sounding, I know—this friend of mine, the guy I was talking to you about earlier at Dartmouth, he

said, “Now, don’t say anything. Just talk about your experience and let them ask questions.” Because I know he thinks that when I talk about things that my view is a little warped. I mean, when I talked to Bob about his experience as a POW, it is so different...

STEINBERG: From your views on this.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. Have you read the POW oral history that’s on your syllabus?

STEINBERG: Not yet.

GRIFFITH: I think it’s coming up, yeah. But even that guy says, “Yeah, we were tortured in the beginning, and then we weren’t tortured. And we ate okay.” So, probably the best I could feed them... And, but Bob was given lots of history books and he was taken out of the prison to visit museums, and his experience was just really different. And he tells a kind of funny story about the POW – you can turn it off if you want... [laughter]

STEINBERG: No, it’s good.

GRIFFITH: ...the POW that’s interviewed in the—is it in one of the episodes you had to watch? The doctor?

STEINBERG: So, we have watched the first episode, and we’re watching the fourth for tomorrow. And then we haven’t—my plan is to watch it over winter break – the whole thing.

GRIFFITH: Yeah, I know, but the one, and I don’t know where this POW comes in. And I go to this island in Maine in the summer. I watch it there, but it streams so slowly on the island, like...I’d have to watch the little thing go around, and I’d watch a little bit and...So, I’m going to watch it sometime altogether so I can see it. But, oh, it doesn’t matter. He talks about what a good guy he is and all that kind of stuff. But, it turns out he was a doctor in Da Nang and a friend of his was a helicopter pilot, and another doctor friend of his in Ban Me Thuot had come back from Thailand with some pornographic films, and so, the doctor convinces the helicopter pilot to fly them to Ban Me Thuot. And they have this night of watching pornographic films and drinking. But they get worried that they really hadn’t taken the helicopter out on, you know, business, so they

decided to fly back. And that's when he's shot down and captured. And he gets to the Hanoi Hilton, and one of these anti-war POWs hands him, a black guy, Rake, he hands the doctor a broom and says, "This is what we do in the morning. We sweep the floors." And he said, "I didn't go to medical school to sweep the floors. You sweep them." So, it's just kind of interesting.

STEINBERG: Everyone's got their own experience.

GRIFFITH: Yeah, and I'm not saying the guy doesn't sound sincere and he isn't nice, but he isn't the little goody-goody that he pretends to be on the film, or there's more to the story, I guess you could say.

STEINBERG: Yeah. So, were you involved in anti-war activities when you came home? Or they basically, since you get home in '73...

GRIFFITH: Yes. Came home in '73, and I traveled across the country doing speaking, and then to get to a job in San Francisco. But, oh, I did the *Today Show* and a whole bunch of stuff in New York right away. And it was mostly about the political prisoners, because although the doctor had testified about that a few years earlier, the media was interested in the topic in '73. So, if it's something they're interested in, then you get coverage. But, so I did radio shows; I did, oh, gosh, everything. It was a good experience in the sense that there was a variety of ways to talk to people.

But the most interesting was getting sponsored by Amnesty International to go to Europe, and I did France—that's where I talked to the ex-pat Vietnamese, and the Netherlands, where they were very sympathetic to the fact that the Americans had bombed the dikes. They got it. And I went to Germany, and that was kind of wild, because one of the groups that was a sponsor that was on the stage was the Red Help, and I don't know who some of these people were, but they were definitely very radical Germans. I think the Red Help had been involved in assassinating people. I mean, they weren't sponsors. Amnesty International wasn't putting their name, but I was on the same stage with these people, and there were like 5,000 students. And I testified in a courtroom where there was disruption, and they had police come in and German

shepherd dogs. And, so it's everything from going to a local family where they might invite friends over to going to a big huge rally in Germany.

STEINBERG: And so, in Europe there were lots of anti-war sentiments. Were any of the European countries directly involved in Vietnam? Or it was more of a humanitarian rights movement?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. Right.

STEINBERG: What about your involvement with the BBC?

GRIFFITH: Well, I traveled with that movie. I'd really like to get a hold of it. But they had come and done this movie called *The Question of Torture*, and one of the things they did was to, when there was a POW release, we—I think Miller's going to let me show a slide tomorrow. These two guys came, were POWs, and they were released, but they couldn't walk because their legs had atrophied. They were kept in those tiger cages. And I looked it up on the internet and it said that only four American POWs couldn't walk off the planes. But, there were lots of Vietnamese POWs that couldn't walk, were injured. And, so I was about 28 or 29 years old, and these guys were just handsome young guys, and all I could think of was, *Oh, my God, they've been in prison the whole time I was in college? And I'm coming up to Hanover and skiing and all the stuff that you get to do as a normal living human being.* And they were my age. But, they really had sacrificed for the cause. And I think that's one of the things the documentary shows you, just the deaths, the bodies, the people, the war involves.

STEINBERG: And consumes.

GRIFFITH: Consumes. And one of these guys stepped on a mine a couple of years later and was killed. Anyway... There's a funny part in that movie, though, because I was listening to these military guys talking on Wednesday and they were saying, "Well, you get accustomed to the war." But, one of the things that was funny was you could tell incoming or outgoing. So, during this film, the BBC guys are going "ehhh!" and I'm going, "Eh, it's outgoing." [laughter] But, it's a Marine and he's trying to make a point that the war is awful, but a lot of it you get used to, and you don't jump until you know which—you get used to

knowing which way the weapons are coming, and then you worry about it, yeah.

STEINBERG: And what about your involvement with *Last night I dreamed of peace: [the diary of Dang Thuy Tram]*? Were you involved in the diary?

GRIFFITH: Yeah, right. So, I spent three years actually after I came back working for AFSC, and I did peace education work and so on. And one thing that I learned since I—I don't resent, but I spent six years of my life off my resume, so to speak, and particularly I think after I divorced and I had to survive on my own economically, not that I hadn't always worked. But, you know, you think it's six years that I wasn't going forward in terms of financial gain.

And, so in a way it's been interesting now that the documentary film has brought back this discussion of a time that I definitely compartmentalized, and if you're working restoring, you know, federal government buildings, it's not a time when you talk about Vietnam. And I also had to compartmentalize it because the torture part of it would periodically come back and cause me nightmares and stuff like that. So, it's like, well, it's the best of my... And, you know, and there's nobody—that's another thing I think about, being a civilian, and why I'm excited about going back with Diane and Claudia, because they live on the West Coast and I never see them. But, I don't get to talk with anybody about Vietnam. I mean, my contemporaries, my own friends, aren't interested. I'm not part of a vets group. I don't know another woman except for these two that were in Vietnam.

STEINBERG: So, how did your peers, especially your female peers, view you when you came back from the war and started back in the art history field? Was there speculation about why you went or anything like that? Or was it kind of business as usual?

GRIFFITH: I didn't have friends that were really interested. And I had lost touch with some friends because it was three years of living in Vietnam, and then three years of living in San Francisco. And my mother died the year I came back, a few months after I came back, and my father took his life eight months after that. So, I think there was just so much going on of trying to reenter, and moving across country,

and then coming back to the East Coast to clean out my parents' home. And then it was just a time where I was a bit numb, and friends really weren't that... Well, it was just such a different experience for a woman to have. So, I was friends with—I developed new friendships, I guess you would say, and I certainly had... Well, it was kind of a crazy time to be in San Francisco, because there was a lot of...

STEINBERG: The counterculture, '70s?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. And AFSC had this simple living program, and so it was back to the earth, and I wrote a cookbook that is involved with a lot of young farmers, and it's sort of a repeat of those times. But, I didn't answer that very well. When I was in San Francisco, I was in a cocoon and I knew Vietnamese and I was with Quakers. Then I came back to Washington, and it was just going into another world and with friends that didn't really have any appreciation, just putting this experience behind me.

STEINBERG: And so, it sounds like you went back to Vietnam in the 2000s. What sparked your interest in going back? What has made you start talking about it more, and being more involved?

GRIFFITH: Well, I had this incredible experience of being asked to work on the diaress book, and I think Sophie and I went to Vietnam before I worked on the diaress book, because we got a grant to interview women who'd worked for the National Liberation Front. And I feel as if I should do something with that material and publish it so somewhere there's a record of those interviews that Sophie and I did. As far as I know, we're probably the only two—I don't know who else has ever interviewed South Vietnamese women who worked with the National Liberation Front. But I talked her into doing that project. And that helped her out. She was at the London school for Asia and Africa [SOAS University of London], the big grad school in England. And then, she became a professor. So, she's used some of that material in talks, but neither of us have published anything about it.

So, but that was an enriching time, and that's actually when I got to hear Che Mai's story. And we brought Che Mai to Hanoi, and we went to see Ho Chi Minh's tomb,

and she told the guards that they need to make it handicap accessible. But, the handsome young guys in white uniforms with red lapels carried her up the stairs, so she had her moment, right? [laughter]

But, Frankie [Frances] Fitzgerald goes to a place in Maine that I go to, and so after she came to Vietnam, we run into each other sometimes in Maine. She comes and looks for mushrooms on my island. And she asked me if I would like to go to Vietnam and research for her, because she had been asked to do the introduction to the diary. So, it was incredible.

STEINBERG: So, what did you find when you went over there to research with her?

GRIFFITH: Well, she didn't go. I went for her. Yeah, she was too busy. Well, I got to meet the daughter's mother, who was 73 then, and the three sisters, and I traveled with two of them to Quang Ngai. And as much as I'd traveled in areas that were liberated, I'd never gone up into the mountains, and that was amazing to me to really... I mean, all those years in Vietnam and I could never, except for Buddha Mountain near our town, I could never—which was a monastery, so there was never any fighting up there. Everybody left it alone, so we could go up there.

But, yeah, so I followed this trail up into the jungle, the mountains. And Thuy was shot through the forehead. Supposedly it was during a military operation where her hospital was overrun, but we also know from some evidence that turned up that she was on a hit list, CIA hit list, because she was so demoralizing to the American military.

STEINBERG: Because she was a female doctor?

GRIFFITH: A female doctor. And you know what's interesting, I was thinking—I was supposed to talk five minutes tomorrow, and I was wondering if I would just say something about her, because I didn't write about it in the essay. But, so you have two women, same age, and Thuy has gone to this elite high school and her father's a surgeon and she goes to medical school and she has a boyfriend and he's in a cultural troupe in the South. His father was a very famous poet. Later, he's actually assigned as a sapper,

which I think are the people that go in under the barbed wire and plant bombs. I'm not sure. Whatever his job was was so dangerous, and he was no longer in the cultural troupe. But, she volunteers, and she doesn't even—she had to fill out an application to volunteer. But, I volunteered and she volunteered. And she did public health work, and then later she was doing, I mean, she worked on soldiers and people that were injured. But...

STEINBERG: So, do you identify with her in some respects?

GRIFFITH: I do. Yeah, yeah, I feel like, you know... I mean, we were seven miles apart. And then the coincidence of going back and being asked to do this work. But, yeah, it was pretty fascinating to learn her story and to meet her sisters, and then to meet the... Fred Whitehurst found the diary, and he kept it for 35 years. Then, it's actually in the—it doesn't matter, but anyway, it gets back to Vietnam as a CD. That's how the mother saw it, on her computer. [laughter] It's so amazing what happens in 35 years. And then, the mother had lost her son. He was in Russia studying, got a brain tumor and died.

And so, when Fred—she knows that Fred brought her daughter's voice back to her, so they started corresponding. It's very tender. And Fred's brother, Rob, was also in Vietnam. And Fred is a little bit—he's suffered from PTSD, and Rob has a Vietnamese wife and has kept up his Vietnamese, and so many times Rob was playing the role of communicator with the family, more than Fred was. But, Fred was the symbol. He was the guy that found the diary. And she just had sewn together little papers and wrote. So, Fred finds it and his interpreter says, "Don't burn this. There's fire in it already." Because it's full of passion and poetry. And then, the interpreter reads it to Fred, and Fred says, "Well, I just fell in love with this woman." So, when the diary gets back to the mother, obviously he has affection for the diarist, and he encourages the mother to publish the diary. And they don't want to, because she's no different than a lot of other women that have fought or been in the war. But, Fred persuades her.

And then he, because the diary is in Texas in the archive, because he finally didn't know what to do with it, and so, he invites the mother and sisters to visit, and to hold the

diary. Well, he's living in North Carolina. So he says, "Come and visit my mother. She's the same age as you are, Mother Tram," is what calls her. "And then we'll go to Texas. And I want to buy your tickets." And the sisters say, "No, no, no, we can afford our tickets. We can't take it." And so, he said, "Well, Mother Tram, at least if you are really my mother, then I get to buy your ticket, right?" because a son buys the airplane ticket for the mother. So, they come. And they visited back and forth a few times.

And hopefully I'm going to Vietnam in November, and hopefully will see Mother Tram and the sisters. But, the real story to me is not the diary. The diary is interesting, but it's hard to read. She uses, you know, "Brother 2", because they are often called, you know, "Brother 3" and... Or she'll call "M" is her boyfriend, and she'll refer to "M." And when she finally gets together with him, she only meets him I think once. But, by then he feels like they shouldn't have a relationship because he feels he's going to die, given the new role he's in. So, that's very sad. And then, I know actually, when you get involved in the book, it's like "what happened to M?" But, he actually lives and Thuy doesn't. It's sort of a sad irony, her following him, so to speak. But, she was her own woman in that way. But, I think the story to me really is of the two, the wonderful bond that has developed between Fred and Rob and the Tram family, that they came to peace. As Mother Tram said, they were both patriots. They just were on opposite sides of the war. So...

STEINBERG: That's beautiful.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. I'm not watching the time, but I don't want to keep you too long, but I was just going to tell you one other kind of amazing thing that happens when 35 years go by. So, Mother Tram told us that when the diary came out, actually a lot of people who knew Thuy then gave her letters and, you know, there was kind of a whole connection. So, a family called her and said, "My son was in the same area with Thuy, and I wondered if you had ever, now that information's coming out, if you'd ever heard anything, because he's been missing in action all these years?"

So, Rob comes to DC, and we go to the [National] Archives, and we look through the Archives. And being a

military guy, he knows how we could look at all these things we're reading, coordinates and the day it happens and reports and so on. And it's a lot of gobbledygook to me. And he's been going through it all day. And I'm at work, and I say, "Well, I'll come pick you up at the end of"—"well, I'll come and..." I guess I picked him up. Yeah, I dropped him off in the morning. "I'll come look through the papers with you for a half an hour, an hour at the end of the day."

So, I join him, and we're flipping through. And there it is. It's a report of... Thuy was shooting at the Americans to cover this guy that was with her, and then he was killed. And his name and his identification, everything, was right there. So what do we do? You pick up your cell phone and you call Mother Tram, and we say, you know, [Vietnamese male name] was killed on such and such a day in such and such a place. And she calls the family, and they have a funeral. And as you know from the stuff you've read, the ghosts didn't have to wander anymore.

STEINBERG: Yeah, they had some closure.

GRIFFITH: Yeah.

STEINBERG: That's amazing.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. So, I don't know, finding somebody that was lost in the jungle by going through these Archives, why they happened to keep this information about the—well, there was information about Thuy, too, which was pretty interesting, what they found on her body, and blah, blah, blah.

STEINBERG: Was that also the day she was killed?

GRIFFITH: Yeah. So, well, that's true, he knew that. But it was finding—she was in one place and he was in another, so that was...

STEINBERG: Well, is there anything else that you would like to add?

GRIFFITH: No, I'm exhausted. [laughter] And I'm sure you're tired of hearing about Vietnam, right?

STEINBERG: Thank you so much for doing this.

GRIFFITH: Yeah.

STEINBERG: And I will see you tomorrow.

[End of Interview.]