

Susan E. Tavela
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
March 11, 2016
Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

SOLOMON: Hello. This is Hanna Solomon. I'm a student interviewer with the Dartmouth Vietnam Project in Rauner [Special Collections] Library at Dartmouth College. Today is March 11th, 2016, and I am speaking with [Susan E.] "Sue" Tavela [pronounced TAV-eh-luh], who is calling in from—where are you calling in from?

TAVELA: Silver Spring, Maryland, near Washington, D.C.

SOLOMON: Near Washington, D.C. Thank you so much for speaking with me today.

Did you want to say a little bit about why you chose to do this interview?

TAVELA: I'm doing this because my husband, John [E. Tavela, Class of 1964], was a Vietnam veteran, and it had a big impact on him and our lives, and he's hospitalized now and can't do it himself, so—and I had just—he wanted to revise the novel he wrote when he came back from Vietnam, but can't do that, either, so this is my chance to get—to get more information about him out, and about how it affects us.

When you're young, you think you studied history, and it's just—just something that you—oh, I'm— [laughs] if this wasn't a phone call I'd re-record it. But what happens is history—you get caught up in it. You don't control it. It happens. I feel like we were very much people of our time. You know, we campaigned for [President] Lyndon [B.] Johnson and such people, and then in '64 he signed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, you know? And I remember John was at graduate school, and we saw Lyndon Johnson come there, and we were both very—you know, "Oh, that's the president! That's the president!"

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

- TAVELA: And then later, we were so disgusted with him because of what happened in that war. And you just—
- SOLOMON: Sorry. Go ahead.
- TAVELA: Oh, you just get—you do what seems right at the time, and then later on, you look back and it's just really strange and interesting.
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.] Well, thank you so much for—for doing this interview. I'd like to start back way at the beginning. Tell me a little bit about *your* family, about your childhood. When were you born?
- TAVELA: My childhood or John's?
- SOLOMON: Your childhood. We'll start with you.
- TAVELA: I moved all over the country. I was born in Utah. I moved 12 times before I graduated from high school. John and I were high school sweethearts. He was my memory [chuckles], which is kind of ironic because now he's in a memory institution, and—I don't know, he was—he was the most—I'll choke up.
- SOLOMON: Take your time.
- TAVELA: Moving around is very hard. And after a while, you get to feel like it doesn't matter what you do or what you say because you'll just leave it behind. And John was this change in my life. And then, you know, if I get talking about myself, that could take forever. [Laughs.] I'm a garrulous old woman of 74 now, so [chuckles] I really—
- SOLOMON: I would love to hear it. No, I would love to hear your story, though. I'd like to build up some background, if you would like to talk about it.
- TAVELA: Oh, my parents—I have one sister, who's four years older. When I was two years old, I guess, she got polio and had to have—there was no real treatment, but there was a Sister [Elizabeth] Kenny treatment. My father thought that was, you know, useless and didn't want my mother to do it. But his mother thought it might help, and she came from

Pennsylvania, and my mother and his mother wrapped my sister in—in boiling hot old blankets, and that *did* keep her—she did get—paralysis on her right side left her, and it turns out later, you know, those high temperatures will kill the virus sometimes, anyway.

But in the meantime, they left me with this other woman, a friend of my mother's. My mother always had really good friends. She was a pretty good judge of character. And so she left me with this—I think Ina Bishoff [archivist note: spelling uncertain] in Utah, in Ogden. And then when my mother came to get me—it was much later—I said I didn't want to go with that mean lady. [Laughs.] Ina was a mean lady, and she—she was sort of at her best when she was swearing because then she wasn't up tight. She wanted to belong—oh, strange.

Oh, and I learned something interesting from her. I'm part Indian. I never knew that until *she* was senile and told me, but her father's mother was half Indian, and they lived in—my mother grew up in Indiana, and her father and mother were in the Ku Klux Klan because that was the social thing to do there.

SOLOMON: Wow. [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Yeah. This was—that—but my mother is the least racist woman of her generation that I've ever known. I mean, she was totally unprejudiced, herself. But I think—and I think that was because she—she knew that he was part Indian and—because one time—and this came out when I was talking about having my hair done and how I couldn't have French braids. "Well, you have that greasy Indian hair, like I do." And so that's how she thought of it, you know?

SOLOMON: Wow.

TAVELA: Through her parents. And so—but she loved her father more than her mother. I know because her mother was mean to her, although she was—my grandmother was a really funny lady. And then move all over the place. And that's kind of—kind of how I was. [Both chuckle.]

SOLOMON: Where else did you live?

TAVELA: Hmm? Where else did I live?

SOLOMON: Yes.

TAVELA: Oh, let's see. After—lived a couple of places in Utah. Lived in Indiana, near Terra Haute. Lived in Oak Park, Illinois. Lived in Chicago. Lived in garden homes Wisconsin, which were kind of—that was—West Chicago wasn't the west side of Chicago. It was this little hick town. And then we moved into Milwaukee [Wisconsin], and because they didn't want to have another mortgage, we bought this house that was in a terrible neighborhood [both chuckle], and there was all kinds of tough kids. And—and my parents—oh, my mother made me register myself in the third grade. [Laughs.] That was scary enough. They never believed us that the schools there were just terrible, and the kids brought zip guns to school, things like that.

SOLOMON: My gosh!

TAVELA: But anyway, the *[Milwaukee] Journal [Sentinel]* published an article where the kids had broken into the school and busted it up in the summertime, and then they finally believed us, and then we moved out into the country, the other extreme.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: [Chuckles.] And then we ended up in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, which is like an upper-class suburb, which was at one time the second-richest suburb in the country, is its claim to fame.

SOLOMON: Oh, wow. So quite the change.

TAVELA: Hmm? At what age?

SOLOMON: Quite the change.

TAVELA: Oh, quite the change, you bet.

SOLOMON: And, yeah, how old were you when you moved there?

- TAVELA: When I was there—let’s see, the first time, it was—I was—I must have been around 12. I was in sixth grade. And then—then we moved to New York, to Pleasantville. We stayed for a month in a hotel in Armonk first, and then I was there for junior high and ninth grade, and I wrote—I came into eighth grade, and we had to write a paper on the most important machine, and I wrote about computers. My dad was—
- SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]
- TAVELA: —applying for a job. And how *they* were going to revolutionize the world. And they had just [chuckles]—I didn’t know, but the eighth-grade teacher just finished a section on all the primitive machines and how the wheel is the basis of life, you know? [Both chuckle.] So everyone wrote about the wheel but me, and I got a D on my paper. [Laughs.]
- SOLOMON: And you were right. [Chuckles.]
- TAVELA: [Laughs.] Ahh! Otherwise, I was a real good student, a really good student. I should say.
- And let’s see, after New York we went back to Wauwatosa, and we lived with—there were two different houses there in the neighborhood, in Wauwatosa. And that’s where I met John. And then we moved to—and I graduated from school there. I don’t know if I’m missing a few places. Does that count as a—well [chuckles]—
- SOLOMON: It’s ok. [Chuckles.]
- TAVELA: But while I was there—while I was there, and I thought that was where my parents would be, they moved to Baltimore.
- SOLOMON: Oh, wow.
- TAVELA: Kind of broke me up with John. And—and then—and then there’s stuff I don’t want to talk about. [Laughs.] I would talk about it, but it would take too long. [Chuckles.], being a child [unintelligible].
- SOLOMON: That’s fine.

TAVELA: And John and I got back together when he was at Dartmouth. Actually, I think he first learned about Dartmouth from me, because one time, my parents were gone and I was staying with this girl who was a couple—well three years older than I was, and it was in the high school in Pleasantville, and a really wonderful family, just wonderful. And her brother went to Dartmouth, so that's how I had heard it was such a good place. And—

SOLOMON: What year—oh sorry. What year did you meet John?

TAVELA: Met John, let's see, I guess in 1963. No. No, no, no. No, no, no. When did I graduate? Nineteen fifty-eight. Nineteen fifty-eight. I was dating a friend of his and had a neighbor who was a friend, named Marsha, and so I invited him over. You know, the four of us were there together. And John and Marsha were going, "John!" "Marsha." [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

TAVELA: And I just thought—I wanted her to go out with him because I thought he was too good to waste. [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: [Laughs.] That's funny.

TAVELA: Then we started going out. Walked into town in the rain. [Laughs.] All the way from the suburb of Milwaukee in rain. [Laughs.] Went into an air-conditioned theater. [Laughs.] A lot of, you know, [laughs] things like that.

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

TAVELA: We walked everywhere we went. We liked to walk.

SOLOMON: Of course.

TAVELA: So he's walking around this Copper Ridge [Memory Care] place where he is now, inside. It's all locked. Moving around, usually.

SOLOMON: Can you tell me anything about—about his childhood?

TAVELA: Oh, yeah. He was born in Milwaukee and raised in Wauwatosa. He was in a total of three houses in his life, all

of them within a bus ride of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. [Both chuckle.] That's right, he's very stable. His dad was Finnish. Died very young from complications from diabetes, but "young" to me now is 60. And John—John was a really good student, and he was a football player and a track person and just very patient, very reliable, just—and funny. Funny, funny, funny. We both have this—pretty dark—but we both have the same sense of humor, and that—that's a story there, too.

We got married at Dartmouth College in '64, and the ministers said, asked us about our financial situation [chuckles], which was terrible! And then he said, "What makes you think this marriage will last?" And we said, "Because we have the same sense of humor."

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: And he said, "That's not enough." [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: But he married us anyway. John actually was hoping that this rabbi that he liked a lot would be there and would marry us, but the guy who—I can't remember his name, but he was somebody John had a lot of respect for. And neither one of us is religious now. Spiritual maybe for me, but not—no conventional religion.

But anyway—and I think—I think the minister who married us got divorced. [Laughs.] We're still married [Laughs.]

And let's see, what else? Oh, the other thing—story that I always tell about us that will give you an idea: Christmas is a very hard time for both of us. Neither of us had happy families. John's parents drank a lot. My father drank a lot, and my mother was always sick or taking pills, and the only way you could get her attention was by being sick, I used to try to—I had asthma as a child, and I used to try to wheeze loud, you know [chuckles] so she acknowledged me.

And anyway—so Christmas is not our favorite time, and we usually have some little fight around then, and then something happens and—usually something funny, and we

make up. And so one year, I was doing the laundry, and we were talking, and I guess—one of us—I don't even remember which it was at the time—it probably was me because I'm more melodramatic—"Well, this marriage is nothing but a farce!"

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: And so John stormed out of the room, slammed the door. I'm sitting on my pile of laundry, thinking [chuckles], you know—thinking—you know, knowing that I've been foolish, but still mad. And then John came back, opened the door, and we both, at the exact same time, said, "And let the farce be with you." [Laughter.] We had just seen *Star Wars*, then—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

TAVELA: And then we laughed and laughed, and then we went and played some prank on somebody, I think. [Laughter.] But it's [unintelligible] how far humor can get you. [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: Of course. It's a wonderful memory.

TAVELA: Yeah, and it kind of [unintelligible] funny things if you look for them.

And another thing I remember is we were driving—we were in a hurry, and we were trying to get around Chicago and had to get gas and pulled up—and then something was pinching this hose, and the gas is going into the car, like, a drip at a time, you know? [Both chuckle.] And we could both—you know, we were so rushed, and we both cracked up over that. [Both chuckle.] Ah! Ah, well.

SOLOMON: So you were married in '64. You met in '58. Were either of you political at this point? Were you sort of following what was going on in the world news and that kind of stuff?

TAVELA: Oh, yeah. I mean, yes, we—we—both of us were always very political. I know—oh, when I was in New York and we had to do some kind of little paper, I did something about Emmett [L.] Till. And both of us were really very civil rights conscious. And John—oh, John's mother is a Holocaust denier, and John is—is, you know—you know how people—

they would say—somebody would say, “My best friend is Jewish”?

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

TAVELA: Well, at one point, like, marriage [chuckles], it was, like, “Our best friends are Jewish,” including the maid of honor and best man and [chuckles]—you know.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: I thought—you know. So, you know, I mean, that’s important. That’s—that’s something good I got from my mother, was that—you know, she—at one time—in all this moving, some—some—oh, a new friend I had made—we had agreed to wear our new spring coats that day, and I wore mine and she didn’t wear hers, and it just crushed me, and my mother said, “She’s not worth it. You know, if she doesn’t do what she says she’s gonna do, then she’s—don’t feel bad. She’s not worth your time.” And that’s—you know, she told me—taught me to look for people who were genuine.

SOLOMON: Mm-hm.

TAVELA: That—and John and I have always felt like that, so we’ve worked for justice, and that’s why we campaigned for Lyndon Johnson. [Laughs.] And we were part of the northern student movement and tutored in Baltimore one—the summer of ’63, I think. And we were, again—I can’t get the time on the civil rights march. I’m pretty sure we were there, but we didn’t even buy a button, and I think later somebody gave us a button from the thing and said, “Look, you know, you were activists, and I just went. [Chuckles]. [Unintelligible].

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: But—

SOLOMON: Which—which march would that be?

TAVELA: HUH?

SOLOMON: Which march would that be?

TAVELA: Freedom.

SOLOMON: What year?

TAVELA: In D.C., the big one, the one—

SOLOMON: The big one, okay, got you.

TAVELA: We were in both the civil rights march, and we were in the Peace March [Kent State/Cambodia Incursion protest] when the buses rallied around the White House to protect President [Richard M.] Nixon, and we had—we had voted for [Spiro T.] Agnew for jobs and freedom. Yeah. We went to the 50th anniversary of that, even though John had dementia at the time.

And—oh, let's see, well, Dartmouth—Dartmouth was one—one of the best schools for the civil rights. I mean, while they were still excluding Jewish students from some—or excluding Jewish students in other Ivy League schools, they didn't have that at Dartmouth. And then they had the ABC program, which was A Better Chance, so they had some at that time you'd say black students and—and—oh, and faculty. And I remember Lloyd McNeill was a friend of ours. In fact, I'm looking at one of his works of art as I sit here, looking out into the living room. And it's just—I don't know, we al- —we've al- —and when we lived in Vermont, we were campaigning for single payer [chuckles] medical care and—again, when John had dementia, we were part of the Everybody Can Win program, where you read to students. No, we've always believed in doing stuff.

SOLOMON: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to march on Washington? Describe that experience a little bit?

TAVELA: John came back from Vietnam? That one? [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: Sure, yeah.

TAVELA: Because that was—well, John—okay, in—let's see, it was nine- —in the—1966 is when he signed up to go—

SOLOMON: Okay.

TAVELA: —to the [U.S.] Army. And the reas—

SOLOMON: Let's start there. [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Can I jump there?

SOLOMON: Yes. Perfect. Start there.

TAVELA: Okay. What happened was—what he did was after he graduated from Dartmouth and after we did some civil rights type stuff, then he went to [Johns] Hopkins [University] and got a master's degree. But after he got the master's degree, they offered him a chance to get a Ph.D. and to have even more money from teaching, and he turned it down because he felt like it was defeat—you know, not—just too safe a life or something, I guess. I don't know.

But anyway,—but he got a job at an insurance company, and we were still in the area because I hadn't finished college, so I went back and—I had gone back to college the year he was doing his master's and then the year he was working, but the December of that year he got a call from his Wisconsin draft board. And of course, since he's not even in the state, you know, he's not going to have any way of wiggling out of that, and even though we thought the war was stupid by then, he went—

I asked about going to Canada, you know, and he—he didn't want to do that because then you can't come back and I wouldn't finish college, so—

SOLOMON: Where did you go to—where did you go to college?

TAVELA: The University of Maryland [in College Park]. And I had had—had a scholarship, but I left that college. I had—got a—I at first had gone to Valparaiso [University] because thought that would impress John's mother, who was a staunch Lutheran. [Both chuckle.] And it's not the best way of choosing a college, but we were both—what is it? You know, the National Merit [Scholarship]—like, you're a finalist, you don't get any money I guess as a semi-finalist or something. Anyway—

SOLOMON: Right. [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: But John got lots—he had a full scholarship from Dartmouth, which he lost when he got married. His father asked me, “Why did you get married?” [Laughs.] But he got through Dartmouth, and did better after—after he was married, so anyway—I’m losing track of myself.

SOLOMON: That’s okay. [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Yeah. Okay. I’m trying to get to—yeah, it was—so he went to the draft board with a lot of guys from the football team at the University of Maryland, all of whom were too injured and were 4-F [Selective Service classification meaning “not acceptable for military service”]. But he was, like, all A’s, you know? [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: So he didn’t have a chance, and he was going to get drafted because he was out of state, and he had passed the physical, you know, the exams with really high marks, so he got—after he did that, he went around to the draft boards to see what the best deal he could get was. And he didn’t want to kill anybody in the stupid war, so he went to the Medical Service Corps. He went to the Army, and they got him in the Medical Service Corps. And he was commissioned as a reserve second lieutenant and got credit for, you know, having a college degree, and so then he went down to Fort Sam Houston [in Texas] and in March he graduated from their program. And I think that’s where he got his CBR [Chemical, Biological, Radiological] training. I know he got an award or some place for—he has these—we have this collection of sheets of paper [chuckles]—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: And it’s “OUTSTANDING!”—you know, “use of the comma,” you know, that kind of thing.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Anyway, he had something outstanding for his CBR training for—and—so anyway, he would send these [unintelligible]

and then he was sent to Ireland Army Hospital [sic; Ireland Army Community Hospital, now Ireland Army Health Clinic] in Fort Knox, Kentucky. And—and I finished college, so from March till June—you know, as soon as I finished my exams, I left and joined John in Kentucky. And we lived off post until probably around June, and then when we moved from this—we'd been living in a basement in what's called E-town, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and—let's see—oh, and when we moved in, he got chicken pox. I remember that. [Chuckles.]

'SOLOMON: Oh, no!

TAVELA: I had no sympathy for him because—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

TAVELA: —we had a downstairs—had really good friends in this apartment building we were living in when I was going to school, University of Maryland. And—and the little children—this one family all had chicken pox, and they never seemed very sick, and John was just—he was the most pitiful I'd ever seen him, almost. And I—I wasn't that sympathetic, but later I found out that's a big deal, to have chicken pox [chuckles] when you're old.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Ah, and then—so he—he was at Fort Knox, and he—I can read you some of the letter here.

SOLOMON: Sure. Just give me the date of the letter that you're reading.

TAVELA: March 15th, 1967. Okay. I'll just read a part of it. Okay. "As far as I can tell at this early date, I think this assignment will be at least palatable, as soon as I learn my job. Well, actually jobs. In addition to being commander of the 2nd Hospital Unit, I'm activities and recreation officer for the hospital, CBR officer, and will probably be security control officer. Captain Entolbe [archivist note: spelling uncertain] is young, on the way up and pretty reasonable. A nice guy. It should be fairly pleasant working under him. At least he doesn't want to go to Vietnam. He also made the statement that he didn't ever want to receive the Purple Heart or the Medal of Honor, so it seems that he's pretty rational for a

BMT graduate.” Or VPM, whichever. Anyway, career type soldier.

“He does have four children, of course, having seen their neighborhood which Lt. Robert Guy [archivist note: spelling uncertain] lived, war seems to be low for a family. When you get here, everything will be fine, and we’ll probably do better than survive.”

And that’s true. That’s the first time we had money. [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: It was an Army—and there was a commissary and—you know—oh, whatever the—the other store. I can’t even think of the word you use for it. But military post—you know, that’s a life to themselves, and it’s—and it’s—it’s—John said—sometimes—some study was—somebody said something about [Bernard] “Bernie” Sanders being a socialist, and they were—they were kind of militant person. And he said, “Well, you know, the Army is just communism.” [Laughter.] Ah!

Anyway—“But being home seemed so removed that it’s really hard to believe I was ever there only a few days ago. I already miss you as much as I ever did at Fort Sam. Well, in a few days I’ll feel confident enough to broach the subject of advanced leave with the good captain.” Blah, blah, blah.

And we got to know a lot of really nice people at that place. And Jim Entolbe and his wife were among them. And later on—and they were so pleasant and funny, and he—later on, we found out that Jim was in the Tet Offensive—

SOLOMON: Oh, wow.

TAVELA: —and talking to his wife I asked—you know, he said how did it affect him, and she said, “He hasn’t laughed. He doesn’t—he doesn’t laugh anymore.” And that’s just—that’s to me the telling thing about that. That was just—people who want to start wars are just so ignorant, so ignorant for what it does in so many ways. Because he was in the Medical Service Corps, and so was John, and I think a lot of the—the really bad things he’s going through now with dementia are just left over from Vietnam. So if he sort of—when he’s in the sort of

Mr. Hyde [as opposed to Dr. Jekyll] state of mind, he—it's like he's asleep. It's like he's asleep. It's just weird.

And, I mean, it does things to people that if you're a civilian, you don't know. And I'm bitter about a few things because—[sighs]—but he was proud of having the Bronze Star. He did—he got a Bronze Star but, you know, not for saving lives, for rescuing somebody but for being, you know, an outstanding soldier and being in a war zone. And I think he actually did save some lives because he was once given a command to have his unit send some—carry some stuff over to another area, and it was on the—on the perimeter, I guess. So any- —yeah. So anyway, he did that, and then he heard a shot, and he realized that where he sent these guys—they were new recruits; they hadn't been on post for as long as a lot of the soldiers had, and he realized that—you know, usually they just had, like, incoming shells and nobody was firing at them from this perimeter. So anyway, John realized what the situation was and called up and got them—you know, said, "Hold your fire! There's—that's—this is the footmen coming to you. This isn't"—you know.

SOLOMON: Right.

TAVELA: If you see something moving in the dark right now because it was right at the twilight time, when vision is very dodgy. So that's what John figured out, was that he'd sent these men at a time of day when vision isn't clear over to where new recruits were, and so he stopped it right away, and nobody was hurt.

SOLOMON: Wow.

TAVELA: But you know, avoiding friendly fire isn't something you get a medal [chuckles; unintelligible]—

SOLOMON: [Laughs.]

TAVELA: Friendly fire while you're a commander is not something you get a badge for.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: But he did—you know, he did a lot of things. He did them honorable.

Oh, the other thing—a couple of things associated with war that I was bitter about. I was there because when he left to go to Vietnam, I was two weeks away from the due date of our son, Eric [Tavela], our first child. And so while he was in Vietnam, I had Eric. And anyway, he got—but he didn't see him until he got R&R [rest and recuperation], like, oh, seven months later, eight. And that was—that was really good because we were talking about what to do for his R&R and didn't know what to do, and didn't—you know, I was going to go to Thailand or he was going to fly to—to Maryland. We thought of a lot of things. None of them really struck us as a good idea.

And then these good friends of ours, Bob and Irena Graves, had a beach house in Hawaii, and they said, you know, "Come stay at our beach house, and we'll stay somewhere else. And, you know, you can have the sports car and—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: —full run of the place. It's right on the ocean, almost." [Chuckles.] So that's what we did. And I took Eric, as a little tiny baby to Hawaii. There's just a million stories I could—I could go on and on too long. But I was really ticked that he didn't—you know, that that happened. And now people hear about it, at least, that these soldiers that go off—they leave pregnant women, they leave little children, and a lot of times—you know, I did learn from a friend, whose father was in World War II and never had a good relationship with his father—but his mother wrote nothing but letters about the baby [both chuckle] to his—to him.

And the other thing is actually—it's bothered me. John went on to—you know, he took—he pretty much did any job that came along. But he always—his ability always got recognized, and he always got, you know, outstanding this and outstanding that.

And—and when he left—he worked for the government when he came back. First he went back to the insurance company for a while. Then he got a job in the government.

And then when he left government, he was the acting chief of the—chief editor at SBA [U.S. Small Business Administration]. But he didn't want to be the chief editor at SBA, so—

Then we moved up to Vermont, to Norwich, and—and he was happy being up there, but the work life was terrible. He—I'd have felt like nobody gave him a chance up there. I know he wanted to write, and he—one time he applied for a job, doing—renting out rental cars at the airport, and the guy wouldn't hire him because he said he lacked [chuckles] management experience.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Somebody with a Bronze Star. [Chuckles.] But then a captain in a war zone. "Lacks management experience."

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: [Laughs.] For car rental. He eventually got into the printing industry and worked his way up there, and—and we—after—and we—we put up with the lousy jobs that are in the Upper Valley [region of New Hampshire and Vermont] unless you're well connected, and used that and worked that, which neither one of us has ever wanted to do, even if we could.

And anyway—and—and—so when our kids—we have two sons. When our sons graduated from Hanover High [School], we moved down to Massachusetts and rented a place, and then—oh, and we were going to sell our house in Norwich, but it was [chuckles] February or January—anyway, it didn't rent. It was the ugly part of the winter, like, around later February. And we used to come back up on the weekends and shovel out the driveway and do this and—anyway, we ended up renting our house out, and that worked.

But I was bitter about Norwich because they put up a memorial to the Vietnam veterans from Norwich, and even though we were living there when they put it up, they wouldn't put John's name on it because he wasn't living in Norwich when he went to Vietnam. And those other people, you know, were either born there or could afford to live there

[chuckles], you know, after college, because that is the place that captured—you know, we both loved that area. We always loved walking around the BEMA [Big Empty Meeting Area], walking the trails. And it just made me mad that somebody that served, you know, in Europe or in the United States [chuckles] had their names on that memorial, and he didn't, because that war cost him.

I mean, it paid for having a baby—that was something that was good, and—and we met a lot of wonderful people, but it changed him in ways that I think he's paying for now. He told me—he didn't tell me—hmm—you know, he's a real stoic. He's a Midwestern—wear white socks, you know, suck it up kind of person; don't complain.

And before he went to Vietnam, if we were in a traffic circle in the D.C. area and somebody wanted to get in, he would just slow down and let them in, and if he missed his exit, he would just go around the circle another time. And he still would slow down for people, but if he missed his exit, he went on—off on the one right after that. [Laughs.] “Wasn't gonna drive around.” And then we would be lost, and we'd have to go find a hill so we could figure out how to get back to where we were trying to go. [Both chuckle.]

And other things that—there are things—he told me it didn't affect him. He was in the rear echelon; he wasn't in a really active war zone—you know, part of the war. He didn't have to crawl through the tunnels or anything. And yet when he came home, if the fire alarm went off, he'd dive under the table. [Chuckles.]

And one time—this was recently, because I said something about—you know, “You always said Vietnam didn't affect you,” you know, “but didn't you know, I couldn't walk past the meat counter after that, when I came back?” And that's true. When we—we always grocery shopped together, and when he came back, he wouldn't go, you know, past the meat counter. And he said it was because—here he is, with the baby he's never seen, and the Medical Service Corps people used to go out on—I guess it was called MEDCAP [Medical Civil Action Program] operations. But they—they'd go out into the countryside, sometimes, and—and help people. And so the people would line their injured children up along the

roads, and sometimes they could stop, and sometimes they were on a mission to actually go someplace, so sometimes they had to drive past these injured children. [Voice cracks with emotion.] [Pause.]

And I do remember, too, one time—oh, John said something harsh, or it was something from Eric, and I had, you know, lived for Eric while John was in Vietnam, and—and I said, “How can you be so mean, John?” And he said, “He’s a spoiled American child.” And when he came back, too,—once—at one time—point, he was so distraught, I was going to leave him, but—called my mother [laughs], and she’s, like, “Oh, no, it’ll work out.” [Chuckles.] You know, she wouldn’t let me take the baby and come stay with them.

And he was just so depressed, and he said he—he was considering, you know, killing us all. And—and after he said that to me, he broke a spoon, and I’d never seen anybody do that. I mean, I’ve seen him go crush beer cans and them things, but I’ve—and this wasn’t real good, heavy, you know, stainless or anything, but he just broke it. So—and—

SOLOMON: So it was pretty—go ahead.

TAVELA: Oh, just—I have a friend, whose husband was in Korea—another little prize war, but at least some things were to come out of that. You know, maybe North Korea is—also—that’s also an outcome of the Korean war. Maybe all the sane people stayed in the south, or the ones that were harder to brainwash. But this friend of mine and her husband had shrapnel in his legs. It just—you know, no sympathy.

Oh, and when Vietnam—you know, soldiers now still don’t get treated in a way that makes—you know, it’s still not great, and the Veterans Administration [sic; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs]—I think they’re trying, but they—you know, the worst thing—the worst thing the Republicans ever did, in my estimation, and I think they were largely behind it, was you separate the costs of war and take them out—they were counting them as part of welfare. You know, like, the charitable part, the part where you support schools and hospitals and, you know, helping people, like the dom—

They used to have domiciles. Back in the old days, like World War II, you know, it was this old soldiers—after they're alcoholic and wrecked, they could at least go someplace and the VA paid for it, and it was part of what veterans need. But after a certain point, that started getting included in the non-military budget. You know, if you're going to have a military, all of that stuff should come out of it, and let, you know, Kellogg, whatever it is, KBR [KBR, Inc., formerly Kellogg Brown & Root]— those—those companies that make—they don't even have war profiteering investigations after war anymore. All this war that's non-war—nobody—nobody who makes money off of it has to pay the kind of profit that the soldiers paid. I just—I'm for the old days. You know, give them—give them big pointy sticks and let them run at each other on horses fast, you know.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: [Unintelligible]. Right until they're happy. Never look back. And now with the drones—I really think [Barack H.] Obama is a great president and one of the best that's we've seen, although I think [James Earl "Jimmy"] Carter gets little credit for even bringing any kind of peace for the Middle East. But Obama's using drones, and it just makes it more remote and easier to indiscriminately kill people, and I—I think Obama has the good sense to use it in a very cautious way, but that doesn't guarantee that the next president—you know, can you imagine [Donald J.] Trump with a fleet of drones?

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.] I don't want to. [Laughs.]

TAVELA: Yeah. I'm going to—John can't vote anymore because he's mentally incompetent and he's locked up, but I'm going to go out and campaign this time. And I did last time too. I'm—and, you know, that was something we would do, we would always—I mean, we would talk about politics. So anyway—so I'm a screaming socialist,—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: — and I hope Bernie wins. And I'm upset because the women that—I just hear women saying, "Oh, you know, Hillary [Rodham Clinton] a smart—good background woman. You know, if you're a woman, you should vote for her." And I

just think, *Yeah, and there were a lot of people I knew who were intelligent, black women who voted for*—you know, who were saying that Clarence Thomas should get in, because it's prejudice was what was stopping him. And until they appoint Anita [F.] Hill to the Supreme Court, I'm going to be outraged. You know.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: It shouldn't be—you shouldn't be loyal to, you know,—like my mother would say, you should look for genuine people. It doesn't matter where they come from. You know, nothing else matters, there is a quality of genuineness that some people have, so—

SOLOMON: A good thing to remember.

I'd like to go back really quick to when John came home from the war.

TAVELA: When he came home from—

SOLOMON: What year was that? Yeah. You said that was '69?

TAVELA: Yeah, it was November of '69. And they wouldn't even hold the plane to let the veterans get on. He was scheduled for some flight, but it took off before they delivered the guys from wherever they were holding the veterans on the West Coast. I went to the airport and had to come home and go back later. [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: Oh, my gosh. So he came home, and you said he went back to working at his old job?

TAVELA: Back to work at the insurance company. It was a different job. He came back. They made him a systems analyst, I think.

SOLOMON: Okay. And then you said he worked for the government? Go ahead, sorry.

TAVELA: Yeah, then he got a job—let's see, where did he—let's see, I think—which was the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission [sic; Occupational Safety and Health

Review System]. And that was a just a new—a new entity that they created to review the enforcement of occupational safety and health laws. And that was a good bunch. And that was such a—that was such an ideal job, but John—I don't think John ever had a job he was really happy in.

Oh, and the other thing was I asked him about going to school when he came back, and he said—oh, he thought of being a lawyer at one time because his friend, Chuck, had done that when he got out of the military, and I said, “Are you going to be as remote as you were in graduate school?” And he said, “Yes.” [Laughter.] And I said—you know, “We could”—I said, “Do you really, really want to be a lawyer?” And he said, “No.” [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: “[unintelligible]?” “No.” And so I said, “I don't think [chuckles] that's a good idea.” And then—and then what he really wanted to do was to join the Army and go into the infantry because he thought he could save lives. And I said, “Would you be assigned to Fort Huachuca [Arizona]? Would we move all the time?” And he said, “Yes.” And I said, “I couldn't—I don't want to do that. I really don't want to do that to our kids.” Moved enough as a child. I could not—it's not—when you're a military, at least you're moving into a community where others were moving all the time, but it's still not the best way to raise kids. And certainly not while a war's going on.

But that was the only thing he ever expressed a real desire to do. The rest was just earning money to keep us going, you know. Or to be a writer. [unintelligible] [Chuckles.] That's why this stuff is so important to me, because he always wanted to do—and when he did so marvelously was write. And then to have that taken away from him. You know, we really—we saved money. We could have lived so comfortably. But, you know, that's why I say—I mean, history doesn't—what happens—you're not in control of what happens. Things happen. Deal with it.

And now we support the Harvard Stem Cell Institute, and we are donating our bodies to science, partly to save money for

our kids. [Chuckles.] Because there may not be any left after this nursing home stuff. And partly because—

Oh, John got the books—I think they reviewed it on Comedy—on *The Daily Show* or something, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*], and John got it out of the library, and we read it aloud to each other back before he had been diagnosed with dementia, and we both thought that was really noble. You know, you can give your body to—you know, with no big stipulations, and they might use it as a crash test dummy or whatever, but there's no substitute for a human body, so why not do something with it? And instead of having graves and the markers, we'll have our names on a plaque in the Silver Spring Library, because we used public libraries a lot in our lives.

And that's not really about John coming back from the war but that's—[Both chuckle.]

SOLOMON: That's okay. It's okay.

One thing I did want to talk about, though, was—was your experience marching in Washington?

TAVELA: Marching in Washington?

SOLOMON: Yeah. You said after he came back.

TAVELA: Yeah, yeah, after he came back, yeah. Well, that was just—it was—it was powerful for him to do that, for both of us. And—but he didn't want to give up his Bronze Star. I remember that. He wouldn't do that. But it was—we still have—I have a button from that one, though. [Both chuckle.] And it was—it felt so strong. And to see—see the buses around the White House! [Chuckles.] That was really—that was, like, you know, you kind of—you felt like—oh, it wasn't as party-like, in a way. I mean, the civil rights march—it was sort of real upbeat. You know, you're singing "We Shall Overcome," and it—and it was—seemed like fun. I mean, it was—it was in the time of year when it's pretty down here, and I don't really remember what it was like when John came back from Vietnam, what time that was, if it was, you know, so early in the spring that it was maybe still cold. I don't think it was cold—warm enough. But it was huge. It was huge. And they

were reporting that the crowd was, like, 250,000, and they were saying that there were many—much bigger than that. It was just—you couldn't—and neither of us likes crowds. John—John and I are very, mmm—we're happy to be alone. We don't—we don't really need—we don't like cocktail parties. You know, didn't like—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: —the faculty club, Dartmouth or Hopkins particularly not, that kind of thing. Like, kind of have friends that throw good dinner parties and enjoy them, but, eh! But just—but this is just—you know, you can't breathe! You can hardly turn around. It was just so crowded. And I—I don't remember a lot of it. I don't—I would remember music. Also I remember we got closer—we got closer to the front of it in that march than in the civil rights one. But both of them were just huge, just huge. And it made me feel good. And it made John feel good too. I mean, we were—we were real glad we went. And think it—it helped change things, and—

Oh, and I also want to tell you something that you shouldn't admit to—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: —but we, you know, because we were civil right people, we went out and voted for [Spiro T.] Agnew. That's the only time [chuckles] we voted for a Republican, I think. But we voted for Spiro Agnew as governor of Maryland because the guy that ran—instead of having one of the liberal tidings family run as a Democratic candidate, there was so much racist stuff going on in the country at that point that the Democrats had elected as their candidate some guy [George P. Mahoney] who could barely structure a sentence and whose motto was “Home is your castle.” [sic; “Your home is your castle: protect it.”] I can't remember the guy's name, but he was a racist jerk. So we actually campaigned somewhat for Agnew. [Laughs.]

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: To keep him out. [Chuckles.] And then he becomes vice president! Good, God! [Both chuckle.] And it—I just—well,

what I wish for this country is—I wish—if you're going to consider money and corporations as signs of free speech—if money is speech, then you've got to keep your money in your state, in your voting district. You cannot spread it across the country. You cannot, you know—you can't drive some yokel from, like, Agnew, with money from interests that aren't right in Maryland. [Chuckles.] You know, I think that's a big mistake. I want to see money get out of the elections. That—that would be a big thing. That, and the genetics research. I think all change for the much better, possibly—I hope you see it in your time. [Both chuckle.]

SOLOMON: I hope so too. All right. Well, is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

TAVELA: Excuse me? I—would you repeat that, please?

SOLOMON: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

TAVELA: What do you think about Vietnam after doing all this research, being part of this project? Do you have any impressions?

SOLOMON: I tend to feel the way that many of the—the people who I've spoken with feel, that it was an enormous human cost with not much hope of a good result. I don't know if you would put it a different way.

TAVELA: Yeah, in a truly pragmatic way, war is just pretty stupid.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: You blow stuff up. You know, you waste material and human lives. The only good thing that came out of Vietnam is that there is—Oh!

I have a cat eating the wrong stuff here. [Both chuckle.]

—is that you have communication with that part of the world, and the only good thing out of the Nixon administration was the pandas. You know what I mean? Things like—things that—you can go and create relationships with other countries without trying to destroy them, you know? [Both chuckle.]

Yeah, that was—that was—we got in it because the French didn't win, right? [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: Right.

TAVELA: Now, there's a reason! [Laughs.] Achh! Yeah. Well I just hope people—you know what I hope? Actually, my big—I have—I have two—I have several hopes. One is for robots to have compassion, empathetic robots.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Let's see, what was the other? Oh, oh, that in the genetic research and everything, people will learn—will finally have the ability to learn to live long, healthy lives so that they have to live with the consequences of their actions, instead of their grandchildren living with them. That's what I'd like to see. [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: I'm going to keep those in mind. [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Okay. [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: Wow! So all right. Is there anything else you'd like to say about Vietnam and the way that it affected your life, your relationship? I know we've talked a lot about that, but if there's anything else you'd like to add?

TAVELA: I don't think I can't—you know, these are just, like, anecd- —I don't—I should—it affected us in some way that's, you know, sort of—like John's dreams. You know, it's like this is a dream that's not obvious but it's definitely there. I know our sons have said, you know, "Oh, Vietnam, Vietnam. Everything's because of Vietnam. We've heard that one." [Chuckles.] But it is! A lot of it is. A lot of it—a lot of things changed.

SOLOMON: Do you have anecdotes you would like to tell?

TAVELA: Hmm?

SOLOMON: Are there any anecdotes you would like to tell?

TAVELA: Let's see. Well, I'm sort of preachy, so I've done my preaching, but there—there aren't a lot—a lot of memories. It also leaves you with a lot of fond memories, like when we were at—stationed at Fort Knox, we had good friends and going to parties. And I met this one woman—actually, this couple were good friends of ours, and—and I learned a lot from this woman because she was just a really great artist and—and she taught me that it's a lot easier to turn out really good products if you have really good equipment. I never realized that. [Both chuckle.]

Just—whatever happens, you know, you can—there's always something you can get out of it, too. And there were—there were good things about John's being in the—in the military. And the—and the—you know, now they have tours going to Vietnam, and the better sh- —the shoes I like are made in Vietnam. [Chuckles.] So—[Chuckles.]

But that time was mostly just hanging on, just hanging on. Just glad when it's over.

SOLOMON: Yes. [Chuckles.]

All right. Well,—

TAVELA: Thank you for taking all this time and doing this. I really appreciate this.

SOLOMON: Oh, thank *you* so much for speaking with me. It's really—it's an honor to hear your story and to hear John's story as well.

TAVELA: Well, I wish John were—could tell it [chuckles] because he'd do a better—

Oh, the—one oth- —one other thing! [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: Yes.

TAVELA: You know, I said the march—the march didn't really—you know, that was good, and it felt like, you know, you're having your say and—and it helps. It helps put things in a kind of perspective. But the thing that really hit John and me the most is seeing the Wall [the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.]. That is the best memorial to that war.

And I know lots of people say that and mean that. But that's—that is the right way for that war to be captured, with that memorial. To have some sculpture that was, you know, dramatic some way wouldn't say it like—like that Wall does with all the names. And wonder what it will be like in 50 years—you know, if people will still come there, but I imagine they will. It always gets to John and me to see that place.

SOLOMON: It's a beautiful memorial.

TAVELA: And the other—Hmm?

SOLOMON: Go ahead, go ahead.

TAVELA: I was going to say, on the other hand, the [National] World War II [Memorial is, like, this, you know, tribute to unity and camaraderie and—you know, it's not stark like the Vietnam Memorial is, so it seems—they seem right. [Chuckles.]

Let's have no more mem—you know. The space is pretty much—it's getting crowded on the [National] Mall.

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Let's just stop with this stuff, you know?

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: Think it over, you know? How much—you sign up if you're so—Donald Trump—go you know, get your little gun—

SOLOMON: [Chuckles.]

TAVELA: —and, you know, go talk to [Russian President Vladimir V.] Putin or somebody or—you know. So anyway, good luck to you and your generation. [Chuckles.]

SOLOMON: [Laughs.] Thank you. I think we're going to need it.

All right. And, again, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

TAVELA: Thank you, too.

[End of interview.]