

“Spared”

As I was born in 1950, I was a prime candidate for both the counter culture movement of the mid 1960's, and for becoming an unwilling combatant in Vietnam. The personally life altering experience of my father's sudden passing in 1969 somewhat interceded in both my "hippie" lifestyle, and my eventual military service. While preparing for my freshman year at SUNY Albany, in fact the weekend before my father was to drive me up, he had a massive heart attack in our living room, and passed away. It tossed our lives into a hole of deep despair, and altered my personal path in a dramatic way. Having been a superior employee at our local supermarket, and having a mentor as a store manager; I was offered a position that would enable me to help support my now widowed mother. The counter culture experience kept creeping back into my now very responsible life, and so in the year 1970 - I quit my job, and hitchhiked to California with my best buddy Richie. Upon returning, and trying to straiten out my now obscure path I found myself a prime candidate for the military draft. I had for the previous year been awarded a 2F deferment for being my mother's primary means of support. The following year I had to appear before the draft board. I showed up with my teary eyed mother, and my tax return. In that dreary public school basement, I was informed that I did not earn a sufficient amount to claim that I was able to be considered the primary support of my Mom. I was, at the time, lost and confused by the tumultuous events of the day. Without the rock, that was my father, I was screwing up every where I went. Now the US Government was about to put a weapon in my hand, and send me off to kill or be killed. I believed at that moment, that I couldn't pull the trigger on a weapon that would kill any thing, least of all another human being. Fortunately, there was a poster in the hallway that read: "Enlist for 36 months, and you will be deployed in Europe for your time of service to your country." Despite the quotations that was the sentiment, I long ago forgot the exact words. On January 10, 1972, I reported for duty at Fort Hamilton, in Brooklyn, New York. I did indeed spend my entire time in Hanau, West Germany, and I was discharged on January 31, 1975. While I

did learn how to fire a weapon, I fortunately never had to fire at anything or anyone.

Chapter Two. By 1981 I had graduated from Queens College CUNY, and against my wishes was recruited once again. This time was for graduate school. Having had a unfulfilled desire for to become educated, I absorbed my undergraduate teachings like a dry sponge in a puddle. I finished at the top of my class, and while I wanted to spend some time going back to Europe, I was convinced that I should go to the CUNY Graduate Center on a full fellowship. While there I was awarded a graduate assistant position with a professor who was doing a DOD study of Vietnam Veterans. We were to do surveys of Vietnam veterans, Vietnam era veterans (of which I was one) and the similar aged male population of the general public. My understanding of our work, and the lack of commitment to the subjects of our study turned me into a cynic. I believed, at the time, that too much of our funding was spent on the study, and that money would be better spent on helping those unfortunate veterans who had to fire their weapons into others, as well as watching their fellow soldiers fall. In the rear view mirror of my life, I believe that I was correct.

— *Paul, Gardiner*