

On Oct 2, 2013, at 1:15 PM, "Wayne Laessig" wrote: Greetings all! Great Reunion and great seeing friends again! We had several very special guests this year - family members of those we lost in Vietnam.

Tia McConnell is one of those and this is what she wants to share with all who were there – you touched her and helped make her life even richer than it was. Tia 's birth Father, John "O'Neal" Rucker was killed 11 hours before the cease fire took effect, and Tia ended up in the states where she was adopted. Almost 40 years later, with the help of her friend Robin Kyle and adoptive Father Jack Whittier, she's found her birth family, including Mae Rucker (O'Neal's Mom), and Frank, Marsha, and Margie (O'Neal's siblings). Her journey brought everyone together at our Reunion. Hopefully you met them. You definitely touched them.

I want to pass on what Tia sent; *"I cannot find the words to thank you enough for everything. I learned so much more about myself this weekend than I ever had. This opportunity, gave me place in this world, which I can't explain. I have attached a letter if I can ask you help one more time in getting it distributed I would appreciate it. I cannot wait until we meet again, and look forward to staying in touch with you until then. Love, Tia."*

Her message to everyone follows. Each time I read it, my tears are the good kind. Please share this with your spouses and guests who were there. See you next year! Wayne Laessig 2013's AC-119 Gunship Association Prez

(Tia's message) Dear All,

I have been trying very hard to word what I need to say to each and every one of you. I came to San Antonio this weekend, thinking that I would spend time with family, and meet new friends and maybe learn a little about my dad (Sgt. Rucker) along the way. And I did meet new friends and learned about my dad, it was however the following things I was not expecting.

As an adoptee from Vietnam, there have always been gaps in my life; however, this experience taught me so much in such a short amount of time. I learned in school about the Vietnam "War", I have always known how unpopular the United States presence in Vietnam was. As I have gone through my life I have not encountered many Veterans of Vietnam who want to share their experiences. There was a large part of me that was very confused about your inviting me here to this reunion. I cannot and will not even try to guess what each and every one of you experienced there, and I viewed my presence here at first as a possible "living" reminder of your time in Vietnam. The last thing I would ever want to do is open old wounds or causes anyone to be uncomfortable. With anxiety running high, and emotions a ball of confusion what I found was a deep sense of acceptance.

Out of something so horrible, know that there was and is some good that came out of your time in Vietnam, regardless of when you were there. There is a beauty in knowing that 40 years later, you opened your hearts to a child of one of your own. There for me was a profound impact in seeing tears and hearing stories. And yet you continued to share your stories even through the tears, to allow me a chance to know my dad through you. Last year I found my family, this year I found a connection to his time in Vietnam, a much needed and large piece of a puzzle. You accepted my dad who did nothing more than bring a child into his home 40 years ago, you accepted a friend who has watched this journey unfold without judgment.

I learned that in fact it does take a village to raise a child. I am after all still someone's child. I learned that love and family does not always mean you share the same blood, last name, or appearance. You taught me that family is those we chose to let closest into our hearts. I was so blessed to have incredible parents who have been there every time I needed them, whether it was celebrating a great moment, or picking me up from a bad decision. If not for them I would not be at this place writing this letter to all of you. I learned that I can have my family, my mom, my dad, my brother and sister, and also have the Ruckers. I cannot nor can the Ruckers get back 40 years, but we can have the next forty years blended with my first 40 years. I learned that in times of emotional turmoil, a friend is actually a sister, and most importantly I learned that your bond and brotherhood encompasses not only your generation, but the bond extends to the generations behind you. I heard more than once this weekend that I was a part of you, someone even pointing out how many uncles I have. I am honored and blessed to be a part of your group and I thank you with a never ending love for everything. I will not forget this weekend ever as you all entered the village that helped raise me, and this child is still learning.

As I began this journey finding my dad, I found a bible verse that I would like to share with you, please know I will not ever forget any of you and cannot wait to see you all again! 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.*

Please know I will never forget and I will share your stories with other adoptees, who may never find their fathers, but can share mine. With Love, Gratitude, Respect, and Peace, Tia