

For Immediate Release

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READING TOGETHER PANEL DISCUSSES VIETNAM IN KALAMAZOO

A panel of Kalamazoo residents, led by Kalamazoo College professor Dr. Olga Bonfiglio, will describe their military service, involvement in anti-war protests, attitudes towards veterans, and reflect on how Vietnam continues to affect them on Wednesday, February 22, 7:00 pm, at the Kalamazoo Public Library, 315 S. Rose St. The panel discussion, "Vietnam in Kalamazoo: Local Residents Remember," is one of more than two dozen events sponsored by Reading Together, the fourth annual community-wide reading program led by Kalamazoo Public Library.

This year, Kalamazoo County residents are reading and discussing Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. Through his brilliant collection of short stories about U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War, author O'Brien reveals "the things all of us must finally carry through life -- grief, pity, terror, love, longing, doubt, embarrassment, great joy and great despair." O'Brien believes in "the power of stories to help us deal with our human burdens: to help us heal, to help us understand, to console us and to offer reassurance that we are not alone in our daily moral struggles."

This panel discussion focuses on the stories of Kalamazoo residents during and after the war. Panel members will consider such questions as: How has Vietnam has continued to affect you over the past thirty years? What meaning did that time give you, especially in light of the Iraq War? What do you think are the proper responses to soldiers, in the field and at home; questioning of government policy and rights of protesters; the responsibilities of citizens and the media during war; as well as their reactions to *The Things They Carried*. Audience members will have an opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Panel moderator Bonfiglio's recent book, *Heroes of a Different Stripe: How One Town Responded to the War in Iraq*, chronicles the activities of local peace activists as they tried to prevent and continue to protest the current U.S. war with Iraq. Bonfiglio has published articles in the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *America*, *Z Magazine*, and *Planning*. She has taught at Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo Valley Community College. Bonfiglio is currently acting chairperson of Kalamazoo College's Education Department.

Panelists include Vietnam veterans Mike Cooper and Bill Krasean and the siblings of veterans, Ron Kiracofe and Kathy Murphy.

Mike Cooper served as an M-60 machine gunner in Vietnam from August 1967 to August 1968 with the First Infantry Division. A retired elementary school teacher and principal, Cooper now teaches in Western Michigan University's Teaching Learning and Leadership Department.

Bill Krasean was drafted into the Army in November of 1966. A company clerk at Fort Benning, Ga., until ordered to Vietnam early in 1968, he was stationed in Saigon, now Ho Chi Min City, until his discharge in November 1968. Krasean recently retired as health and science reporter from the Kalamazoo Gazette.

Ron Kiracofe's brother Burley was killed in Vietnam during Ron's senior year of high school. Grief over Burley's death continues to affect the Kiracofe family. Ron teaches at Amberly Elementary School in Portage, and serves on the board of the Kalamazoo Amateur Athletic Federation, which hosts an annual softball tournament in memory of Burley Kiracofe.

Kathy Murphy's brother was killed in Vietnam. She now belongs to Gold Star Families for Peace and Kalamazoo Non-violent Opponents of War. An artist and elementary school art teacher, some of her most current artwork has to do with the effects of war on one's memory.

Kalamazoo Public Library leads Reading Together, the fourth annual community-wide reading program, with support from two-dozen organizations, including the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, Western Michigan University, and the Air Zoo. More than 50 other groups are helping offer numerous book discussions, 20 special events, an eight-week film series, plus a breath-taking traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution at the Air Zoo from February 14 to April 8. Details and more information may be found at www.readingtogether.us or call program coordinator Joan Hawxhurst at 553-7913.

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