REPORT ON COMMUNITY READ
“WAR AND OUR COMMUNITIES”
SPRING, 2012

Anne Statham
Director Service Learning Program
Division of Outreach and Engagement
Professor of Sociology

Michael Kearns
Professor of English
Department of English

Linda Cleek
Director Continuing Education
Division of Outreach and Engagement

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2012 Community Read Planning Committee Members

Project Coordinators:
*Anne Statham* -- USI Director Service Learning, Sociology Faculty
*Michael Kearns* – USI English Faculty

Members:
*Michael Aakhus* – USI Dean of College of Liberal Arts, Art Faculty
*Helen Azarian* – Circulation Services Supervisor, Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library
*Maureen Barton* – Ivy Tech librarian
*Steve Burger* – WNIN Vice President of Radio, member Indiana Military Family Assistance Network (IMFAN)
*Linda Cleek* -- USI Director of Continuing Education
*John Davis* – Dispatch Supervisor, Professional Transportation Inc., Vietnam War Veteran
*Vaughn DeCoster* – USI Social Work Faculty – OIF Veteran
*Mark Deschene* – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
*Lenore Engler* – Ivy Tech librarian
*Jennifer Greene* – USI Director of Archives
*Richard Litov* – Founder, Operation Veterans Remembered
*Denise Lynn* – USI History Faculty
*Gary May* – USI Social Work Faculty, President Veterans for Peace, Vietnam War Veteran
*Bonnie Rheinhardt* -- WNIN Vice President for TV Programming & Operations
*C. Larry Rhodes* – founder and director Operation Support the Homefront, Vietnam War Veteran
*Laura Schafsnitz* – U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs
*Brandi Schwartz* – USI Marketing Coordinator, Division of Outreach and Engagement
*Matt Schwartz* – Vincennes University Director of Military Education, member IMFAN
*Melissa Stacer* – USI Criminal Justice Faculty
*Dawn Tedrow* – Case Manager, Lucas Place II, Permanent Supportive Housing for homeless, Disabled Veterans
*Greg Wagoner* – USI Facilities Manager, Member Vanderburgh County Veterans Council, Advisor USI Student Veterans Association, Vietnam War Veteran
*Davie Sue Wallace* – Director of Development, Pedia Research; President Southwest Indiana Native Plant Society
*Jaclyn Wells* – USI English Faculty, Director of River Bend Writing Project
*Peggy Willoughby* – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
*Tonya Wolf* – WNIN Director of Corporate Development
The 2012 Community Read program, “War and Our Communities,” took place during March-April 2012, planning having begun in July 2011. The goals of the program evolved as more community and institutional partners became involved, but the main objectives were these: (1) to encourage local/regional veterans and their families to tell their stories, (2) to identify veterans’ needs and available resources to meet those needs, (3) to heighten community awareness of and involvement with those needs. The theme of “War and Our Communities” was deemed especially appropriate for Evansville and the surrounding region, given Evansville’s significant involvement with the WWII war effort and the disproportionate number of military from the area who served in more recent conflicts.

Programming included four public lectures, displays of art and historical material, and thirteen reading groups discussing Tim O’Brien’s book *The Things They Carried*; in addition, two USI classes collected interviews from veterans and conducted writing workshops. Program planners sought to encourage the broadest possible participation, recognizing that the impacts of military service can be felt by everyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, and are often as profound on family members, social services, and local institutions as they are on veterans themselves.

Important outcomes of the program include getting over 400 copies of *The Things They Carried* into the hands of readers, collecting and archiving interviews with veterans, and drawing attention to veterans’ ongoing need for assistance with housing, employment, medical care, counseling, and education.

We learned a number of useful lessons from this project; these four stand out. (1) While programming was extensive and varied and was well described on our web site, we reached relatively few individuals, indicating a need for more precisely focused publicity as well as for individual contacts—not only veterans and their families but business and government leaders in a position to make a difference. (2) The partnerships that had been established through our Big Read 2010 project were strengthened and will serve well for future endeavors. (3) It’s important to involve as many stakeholders as possible, but the group responsible for planning and steering needs to remain small and needs to preserve focus on the vision and goals. (4) In order to maintain interest and energy as well as to ensure thorough planning, this sort of program should be undertaken not yearly but every other year.
Introduction

The 2012 Community Read was the second such project that has been coordinated by USI’s Service Learning Program in the last three years. The first was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read program to engage the community in reading a book of short stories by Mexican authors, *Sun, Stone and Shadows*. Several members of that planning group applied for a second Big Read grant for academic year 2011-2012, around the book *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien, a Vietnam War veteran and journalist. Shortly after learning that we did not receive this Big Read grant, we received word that Dean Michael Aakhus of USI’s College of Liberal Arts had found funds at the end of the year to purchase the books for our project. When the books arrived, we began forming a planning committee, had our first meeting in July 2011, and met monthly thereafter through March 2012.

In addition to the project coordinators, Anne Statham and Michael Kearns, key leadership for this project was provided by USI Social Work faculty member Gary May, WNIN Vice President for television Bonnie Rheinhardt, and Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library Circulation Services Coordinator Helen Azarian. Tonya Wolf from WNIN also assisted in fund raising efforts, along with Greg Wagoner, a USI employee and member of Evansville’s Veterans Council. All planning committee members contributed a great deal to the project, and we are very grateful for their participation. We received financial support from the Evansville Literacy Coalition, Veterans for Peace, Operation Support the Homefront, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1114, WNIN, the United States Veterans Administration, several individual veterans, and USI Division of Outreach and Engagement.
Overview of Activities

A key aspect of our approach was to engage as many people as possible in reading the book and thinking about current implications for our community. What lessons could we learn about what Vietnam War veterans might still need? What could we learn about how our community might help those returning from current armed conflicts better re-integrate into their families and communities? To this end we settled on two main types of activities: reading groups and public events. Both existing and newly formed groups were identified, provided with copies of *The Things They Carried*, and encouraged not only to read but to reflect on these questions, ideally during March 2012; we also made available various types of material such as links to study guides. To encourage and facilitate communication among groups and to provide an additional forum for addressing our guiding questions, we organized a series of public events during April 2012, ranging from lectures and presentations to storytelling workshops.

Key Outcomes: Issues and Recommendations

The following **issues** came up repeatedly both within individual groups and in the group activities. (These are presented verbatim, as reported.)

**Impacts on those who served**
- Remembering the sights, smells, and feelings of war
- Families splitting up
- Homelessness
- Substance abuse and mental health issues
- High suicide rates among veterans of current/recent conflicts, complicated by treatment procedures for pain
- High unemployment rates among veterans of current/recent conflicts
- Military sexual trauma among women veterans

**Larger changes in society**
- Greater communication with those deployed now, may seem more in touch
- Public and government slow to recognize issues of Vietnam War veterans, and sometimes of current returning veterans
- Congress abdicating its responsibility for declaring war
- Manipulation of American public around issues of national security
**Needs identified by veterans**
- Suitable housing
- High quality medical care
- Childcare
- Opportunities for social interaction
- Opportunity to make a difference

To address these issues in our community, the following **recommendations** were offered. (These are presented verbatim, as reported.)

**Assistance from established organizations and professionals**
- Explore connecting with existing programs around the country, for example The Mission Continues, Give An Hour, the Wounded Warrior Project
- Businesses and organizations can help veterans by organizing Veteran Hiring Fairs
- Create Business Incubators such as Veterans Entrepreneurial Transfer, Inc. that was developed in Milwaukee
- Facilitate lawyers, teachers, other professionals helping veterans
- Service providers can help by better coordinating services
- Provide high quality care for those returning
- Simplify the process for accessing services; accept self-reports of issues being experienced; realize symptoms may not appear immediately
- Recognize that the majority of returning veterans are not suffering from mental health issues
- Recognize that when veterans do suffer from PTSD, it is from repeated, long-term trauma, not from a single event, as is often the case in non-combat situations
- Offer proactive help with family issues

**Informal assistance, one-on-one interaction**
- Help veterans have same sense of belonging they had before they left
- Talk to each other, don’t make assumptions, interfere with our war machine
- Have intergenerational conversations on a regular basis
- Veterans who have been through it reach out to those who are returning, as a mentor or peer support
- Generate more exchanges and reading groups, so veterans and others can exchange views and experiences
- Provide outlets so veterans can tell their stories
- Welcome them back, even if delayed, give them a “proper return,” never too late (Four Freedoms Veterans Parade, etc.)
- Contact with those serving through email and such is instantaneous. Make use of that in some way

**Better public education/approach**
- Develop teaching materials for teaching about this in K12 classrooms
- Educate population about fact that we seem to be primed for war. We have gotten into war about every 20 years, about 66% of the time we have been a country. Nationalism
and our flag are functioning as sacred objects/concepts we feel compelled to defend. This leaves us open to manipulation.

- Read Terror Nation: Notes from the Perimeter – a particular letter in book
- Give real assistance, not pity

**Political process**

- Hold elected officials to a higher standard. Take responsibility for wars that we get into. Presidents are misusing the Emergency Powers Act to get us into wars that Congress should be debating and declaring.

**Reading Groups: Details**

Reading groups were of various sizes and met on different schedules. For example, the library groups met once during March to discuss the book, while the groups led by C. Larry Rhodes and Greg Wagoner held their discussions exclusively on-line. The Veterans for Peace group met three times at a local coffee shop and invited several University of Evansville students to join them. The group at the new Evansville VA facility met several times and came up with a fairly long list of suggestions. The group at the correctional facility included both inmates and family members; we are still receiving input from them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>CONTACT</th>
<th>MAKE-UP OF GROUP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evansville VA Mental Health Care Center</td>
<td>Dr. Robin Sanabria</td>
<td>for interested VA staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Turning Pointe, Methodist Church</td>
<td>Pastor Scott Cassel</td>
<td>his congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Transportation, Inc.</td>
<td>John Davis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Company D 151st Infantry Airborne Assoc</td>
<td>C. Larry Rhodes</td>
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<td>Inc</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Operation Support on the Homefront</td>
<td>C. Larry Rhodes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional facility</td>
<td>Eva Sanford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evansville-Vanderburgh Public Library</td>
<td>Helen Azarian</td>
<td>Reading groups at 4 main branches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veterans for Peace</td>
<td>Gary May</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group formed from American Legions, LST,</td>
<td>Greg Wagoner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VFW’s, etc.  
Point Man Ministries of Newburgh  
Mike Burkdoll/Mike Clegg  
7/8 meetings of 30 Iraq, Afghan and Vietnam era vets read and discuss book, develop “carry forwards” –
University of Evansville  
Dan Byrne, History

We asked group leaders to send us reports on their discussions, focusing on issues faced by returning veterans but also addressing other insights. Details follow. (These are presented verbatim, as reported.)

- Several groups, especially those composed of individuals who had not been in combat, reported gaining particular insights in their attitudes toward war and military service. The lessons learned tended to depend upon the extent of experience with military service of those in a particular group. For example, in one group where few/none had served, the group leader reported that. “Many found the book emotionally difficult to read, but all seemed glad they had read it.. A major topic of discussion in this group revolved around the story the author told about his trip to the Canadian border when he was contemplating a refusal to serve. This story touched many of us. A younger person asked about attitudes towards those who left the country. One member explained that they were not well thought of, that people considered them cowards and traitors. Then she said, ‘So did I.’ Because she used the past tense, I asked her if that was still her opinion. She thought for a moment, and said that no, it probably wasn’t. After reading the book, and particularly that story, she could see it another way now.”

- Another group, with members who had served in Vietnam, reported a different emphasis in their discussions—the military draft. The two students who had joined this group both said they would probably not or definitely wouldn’t submit to the draft. Options discussed including fleeing to Canada and serving in an exclusively non-combat role if at all. A couple of the Vets expressed the opinion that the draft would add pressure for war avoidance, as an equitable draft would affect a broader range of citizens, thus widening the stakeholders in war.

- There were also quite a few comments about the extent to which the stories were “true.” There was some discussion about the very nature of war stories, whether they were ever really true, or if so, if they had a moral or any neatness about them. This was something also discussed by the author, Tim O’Brien.who said: “A true war story is never moral, never instructs or suggests proper behavior. If it seems moral or if you feel uplifted by it, it isn’t true. You’ve been made the victim of the oldest scam. There is no virtue in war, only absolute allegiance to obscenity or evil.” (p. 68)

- One group leader reported a focus on whether O’Brien was deliberately blurring the line between “reality” and fiction. The consensus was that the style was intentional. The symbolic meaning of the work’s stories became a focal point. The UE students who were in this group were particularly interested in the Vets’ perspectives on this aspect of his work.
Another noted a unique theme (compared to other books written by Vietnam Veterans about their military experience) of the book was “the difficulty for the author to recall what actually happened vs. what was embellishment from the actual experience of the soldier. Flow of the reading seemed to be like the author's actual stream of consciousness & how his thinking process goes through the memories of the experiences. Another main theme seemed to focus on how people react when faced with fear & situations that challenge your value system.”

Combat vets suggested that recall of traumatic events may be impacted in ways that make finding the actual “truth” of the story difficult. In comparison, another group including both those who had served and those who had not said this: “The graphic nature of the reading with an apparent intent to mimic the actual experience (i.e. the baby water buffalo passage) evoked strong emotional reactions for group members…I never had to serve….reading this book has helped me…somewhat experience… the grief, trauma, and mental anguish they seem to face on a daily basis, both during and after their return home.”

Others, especially those who had not served in combat, reported that the book helped them better understand what the experience had been like. For example: “I love the book! The vivid details of the soldier’s sceneries at each place they walked to, the body parts that were injured, the love stories, how the title of each chapter has a story to tell, the fears each have (the dentist!), how the ‘sunlight’ was around Lemon and threw him into a tree. I was intrigued how the writer wrote such good and horrible details but then takes the field trip back with this daughter and was able to write in beautiful, positive details how the land/field is now. As I read the book I felt as though I was walking with them. I heard the noise, saw the children, walked in the rain, carried the weight and so on. When I look at the cover of the book on my table it brings back a part of the book that I read. Each of them carried something different, necessary but also meaningful (in their mind and heart).”

The groups also raised some issues that come with combat and staying in touch. A few groups talked about the difference new communication technology has made. “We talked briefly about how things have changed with so many Reserve and National Guard units being deployed. We talked about how the Internet has changed communication between deployed soldiers and families left behind, and the benefits/downside of those changes.”

Others considered the issues involved in coming home with the memories intact: “All veterans live with the things they continue to carry; the sights, smells, and sounds of war, the knowledge of having killed another human, and the fact of witnessing collateral damage (civilians – women and children) get killed in war. There are no ‘smart weapons’ only guided weapons that do not know a baby from an enemy.”

One group reported the toll military service takes on family life by saying “Collectively we have 6 divorces, 9 children affected, split families…”
Also noted was “a breakdown in our political system, in which Congress has abdicated its power for declaration of war to the President. Our Nation/Communities have evolved over the course of our history...From the revolutionary war through WWII the nation/communities as a whole were involved in the war effort, sacrifices were made by civilians and soldiers alike. Beginning with the Korean War, the national effort stopped and national/community involvement ceased to exist. No longer has the civilian population been involved in a war effort, so the vested interest of the nation as a whole has declined to soldiers (collectively Sailors, Marines, Air Force, and Coast guard) and those companies (employees) involved in making war materials. This leaves the majority of the population uninvolved to the point they begin to blame the war on profit hungry special interest groups/companies...Even our national government sheds or avoids its Constitutional responsibilities 'To declare War’...instead giving the President powers to commit our soldiers to an undeclared war. Committing 100,000 – 500,000 troops is not a peace-keeping effort; it is a war and only Congress has the right to declare war. We strongly feel for over 60 years Congress has failed in its responsibilities (like Caesar washing their hands of the blood) causing the death of 101,280 troops and should be charged with 101,280 counts of depraved-indifference murder, is an American legal term for an action that demonstrates a callous disregard for human life and results in death.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depraved-heart_murder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depraved-heart_murder)). Along with 17,799 counts of criminal confinement for all POWs and MIAs.

One group of recent combat veterans sent this list of insights they had gained from reading and discussing the book:

- It is important to have experiences like reading this book that help to create a sense of awareness.
- It is important to not repeat past mistakes about accepting the soldiers as they come back from combat.
- It is important to remember that when Veterans respond differently to situations, we have no awareness of how their specific past experiences have impacted them.
- It is important to have an outlet so that Veterans can tell their stories.
- There needs to be an understanding that because of their experiences, the community needs to take extraordinary efforts to assist them.
- We need to be accepting of their self-reports & operate with the basic assumption that their problems are real & not just for secondary gain.
Since strong community support is crucial for successful readjustment to civilian life, better coordinating the assistance available in our community would help Veterans access resources and would strengthen what is available.

Public Events: Details

Opening: Keynote Presentation by Jim McGarrah. Browning Reading Room at Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library, Main Branch followed by viewing of exhibition in lobby of library. The exhibition, which was up the entire month of April, included art work by Vietnam War veteran Rick McCarty, who now lives in Mt. Vernon, Indiana. April 1, 2-4 p.m.

Presentation by General Billy R. Cooper, author The Reluctant General, Ivy Tech Community College. General Cooper now lives in Newburgh, Indiana. April 12, 7 p.m.

The Things I Carry: Storytelling Workshop, Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library. Writing coaches were available to help people tell their stories and thus to help the community understand. A WNIN Vice President was available to record stories, as well. The stories could be submitted for the WNIN web archive and/or presentation at the closing event. April 14 and 21, 2-4 p.m.

(Although the workshops did not generate stories that could be housed on the WNIN web site, WNIN Vice President Bonnie Rheinhardt interviewed eight local veterans of various ages, from several wars, for a 30 minute television program and a 60 minute radio program. Those interviews are on the web site. One veteran submitted a poem he had written for posting. (We are reviewing transcripts and papers from interviews done by USI students for possible inclusion on the web site.)

Presentation: “Women Proudly Serve,” by Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, Associate Director of the Center for Women Veterans in the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Evansville VA Center. April 19, 7 p.m.

Presentation: “How to Build a War,” by Dr. Steven Williams, USI Sociology Faculty. USI. April 26, 7 p.m.

Closing: Things to Carry Forward, selected presentations of work done and insights gained throughout the project, Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library, Main Branch. April 29, 2-4 p.m.

Some issues were singled out during the public events. These are noted below.

Opening (with speaker, Jim McGarrah)

- Our speakers discussed that fact that it took the public and government a fairly long time after the Vietnam War ended to admit there were health issues to address.
• When people came back from Vietnam, the country seemed confused about its obligations to those who were returning – with some pretty significant health issues that were not recognized.

• It was 1981 before the government started admitting to the extent of PTSD among the Vietnam veterans. But our communities knew what was going on.

• The public also seemed not to be very supportive when veterans returned. Vietnam veterans returned to a public who blamed them for an unpopular war and they suffered greatly because of this.

• Our speaker, McGarrah, referred to “the constant anxiety of the struggle to survive,” both while in combat and after arriving home. The struggle changes from surviving physical danger to “a struggle with the weight of memory... Today’s veterans return to a public largely indifferent to the war.”

• McGarrah, our speaker, listed other issues that need to be addressed: the possibility that Vietnam War veterans are dying at a younger age than World War II veterans because of the health issues caused by exposure to chemicals and other issues, homelessness, substance abuse or mental health issues, the relatively high rate of suicide among currently returning veterans (possibly enhanced by poor treatment practices in which those with both post traumatic stress and pain are being treated with narcotics), and an unemployment rate which seems to be hovering between 14% and 18%.

• Soldiers should be able to depend on communities to survive the weight of life – veterans outreach, church groups, close friends and family.

• More specifics
  1. Get involved with the resources available – on our web site
  2. Lawyers and other professionals can help – houses repossessed while on deployment – shouldn't be happening!
  3. Get teachers involved in doing some grant writing
  4. Employers need to hire veterans – hiring fairs and other measures?

Presentation by Dr. Betty Moseley Brown

• Dr. Betty Moseley Brown, Associate Director of the Center for Women Veterans of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, listed issues identified by women veterans. She stressed the importance of dealing with military sexual trauma (MST). She also noted that about 50% of women in the military are women of color (minorities). She reported that homelessness is fairly common among women veterans, but they are more likely to hide their homelessness by staying with friends and other methods.

• Her office hosted a weekend Summit for 700 women veterans recently and here is what they said they wanted:
  Recognition and Respect
Gainful Employment
Suitable Housing
Access to High Quality Health Care
Childcare Options
Opportunities for Social Interaction
To Make a Difference

- Other issues identified at the Summit included a need for a culture change in the VA, gender-specific comprehensive health care, recognizing that some women may only want to talk to women (depends on her issues), need for outreach/marketing.

Presentation by General Billy Cooper

- General Cooper made the point that the military, while presenting some difficulties, also offers those from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance to compete on more equal footing. He made the point that “only in this country is it possible to go from private to general,” that we live in “the best country assembled in history.” He also noted that the military offers young people adventure, incentives for education, equal pay for equal work, and a chance to demonstrate patriotism.

- General Cooper said that we should be sure to provide a “proper return,” adding that “it’s never too late to say “Welcome home” or congratulate and thank them.. Too late to go back and change the way Vets were welcomed back from Vietnam. but can do things like the Evansville Parade in November.”

Presentation by Dr. Steven Williams

Dr. Steven Williams of the USI Sociology Department discussed the ways in which the American public can be manipulated into supporting wars through devotion to our nation and its flag, and fears about terrorism and security.

How was the war in Afghanistan **constructed** for us?
Saddam Hussein compared to Osama Bin Laden, with connections to al-Qaeda
Needed to liberate the people of Iraq
Promoting democracy
Not fully complying with UN resolutions
Had weapons of mass destruction

People’s beliefs about weapons of mass destruction and connections to al-Qaeda were highly related to whether they got their news from Fox News or National Public Radio

The **pre-conditions** that allowed this to happen:
Portrayal of Hussein
Post 9/11 fear
Seeing this as our responsibility to fix
Lack of investigative reporting in the media
Post Cold War vacuum
The state of our civic culture
Glamorization of war in our society
Depiction of war as painless – games, last war portrayed that way (embedded reporters), etc.
Fact that most deaths are civilians in other countries, not on our soil

Closing Session, April 29

● The acronym PTSD has become too generalized to apply to a combat veteran. The victims of 9/11, a natural disaster, a car wreck, rape, assault, etc. have certainly suffered a traumatic event and many will suffer PTSD, but how does that compare to the combat vet who sees a year or more of combat or its results day after day? The majority of returning veterans accept and cope with the “things they carry” and go on with their life, PTSD is not pandemic.

● The students who participated in Gary May’s group were effusive in their expressions of gratitude to the Vets, both claiming that they had never had such intense exposure to military veterans, even though both have Vets in their immediate families. This feedback was appreciated by the Vets who expressed that this student feedback gave them great hope that their time was well spent and that these bright, articulate students would have a very beneficial exposure to student through the teaching they were preparing for.

● Someone asked, “How do we mark the end of a war that never should have happened, such as the war in Iraq, which depended upon deceiving the publics in both countries – a murderous, immoral war?”

● Many people say they “support the warrior but not the war.” How does that make the warrior feel? When you are in combat, you have to believe you are doing something valuable. How do we convey that support to returning veterans in ways that are useful to them?

● The National Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars interviewed thousands of returning veterans and determined “the one thing they do not want from the community is pity.”

● Recognize that the minority of returning veterans unable to cope with the “things they carry” deserve the finest treatment available and should not be subject to the VA’s two-year backlog of claims processing. Understand that symptoms of Combat PTSD may not occur for several months or years. The veteran should not have to PROVE she or he is suffering but instead the VA should presume injury.

● Our opening speaker declared a “need for more storytelling, so kids will understand. Young people need to talk to those who have experienced war.” Also, a member of a
group who attended his talk became committed to this point, deciding to begin reading her book and considering painting a collage (inspired by the artwork) representing each veteran’s feelings of their military experience which would be displayed on the wall of our site.

**Suggestions For Future Programming**

In reflecting on the project, we feel we learned a number of useful lessons from this project; these four stand out.

(1) While programming was extensive and varied and was well described on our web site, we reached relatively few individuals, indicating a need for more precisely focused publicity as well as for individual contacts—not only veterans and their families but business and government leaders in a position to make a difference.

(2) The partnerships that had been established through our Big Read 2010 project were strengthened and will serve well for future endeavors.

(3) It is important to involve as many stakeholders as possible, but the group responsible for planning and steering needs to remain small and needs to preserve focus on the vision and goals.

(4) In order to maintain interest and energy as well as to ensure thorough planning, this sort of program should be undertaken not yearly but every other year.

Here are other suggestions made by other committee members in doing their own reflections:

1. Use a less top-down approach to event planning, to get the buy-in from the groups and people we hope will participate

2. Would themed movies have helped us?

3. Try to draw in more students – high school and college

4. Shorten the time of events from 4-6 weeks to one or several weeks.
Appendix

WEB SITE

A web site was created by Mark Brendel, USI web developer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>about community read</th>
<th>The Community Read is a recurring event, facilitated by USI, to promote reading, reflecting and community action on issues affecting the Tri-State Area.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>group information</td>
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<tr>
<td>upcoming events</td>
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<td>veterans resources</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>family resources</td>
<td>The Opening Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online discussions</td>
<td>The opening event for The Community Read will be at Central Library's Browning Room on April 1, 2012 from 2pm to 4pm. Jim McGarrah will be the featured speaker. (more events »)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related programming</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>your stories</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>contact us</td>
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The Community Read is a project to involve the community in reading, reflection, and awareness of issues facing our community. This is an annual event held in the spring. This year the group is promoting the book, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien. This is a book that focuses on the effects of war on the people who fight these battles. It is a semiautobiographical story about a platoon leader’s experiences in Vietnam.

As part of the Community Read there will be lectures, group discussions, and exhibits around the area. There will be an opening reception and exhibit at the Evansville-Vanderburgh Public Library on April 1, 2012 from 2pm to 4pm. The public library will be hosting an exhibit of veteran’s art, war posters and images from recent conflict in Iraq that will be on display for the month if April. There will be another display on the first floor of the David L. Rice Library.

One of the premier collections that will be exhibited is Outsider Folk Art work from a Mt. Vernon resident, Rick McCarty. Rick served in the Vietnam War and found a way to express his struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder through drawings and poems. These pieces depict the continuing nightmares from his memories of the war. The images are centered on a particular mission where a village was destroyed in the Province of Bien Hoa in 1971. During this mission Rick lost two close friends and a village child, Mimi, who he became close to while in the area.

There are re-occurring motifs like the Boy of Peace, often shown preaching or holding a book. Another is the Demon Face representing the enemy or the god of war. McCarty’s work has been shown at a traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, Mt. Vernon High School, Alexandrian Public Library, and the Evansville Museum of Arts, History, and Science. These are moving images of the effects of war on the people who serve.

Also at the exhibit will be World War II bond posters from the Sonntag Collection that is at the University of Southern Indiana and some candid photographs of military personnel life during the Iraq War donated by a student at the university, Jason Hayes.

For more information on the Community Read or to see a listing of events and organizations involved see the Community Read website, [http://www.usi.edu/communityread/index.shtml](http://www.usi.edu/communityread/index.shtml).
“The Price of War”: Outsider Art by Rick McCarty

In 1999, Rick McCarty of Mt. Vernon, Indiana turned to art to heal the psychological wounds of combat in Vietnam in 1971. Like many fellow veterans, McCarty suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition that causes victims to endure nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing, anger, and hopelessness as a result of living through traumatic experiences, like war and its aftermath. The devastating effects of the war can be felt for decades after its traumatizing events and affect nearly every aspect of a person’s life.

Despite three decades of pain, shame, and guilt experienced because of the Vietnam War, McCarty finds healing through his poetry and drawings. A former landfill manager, he is an untrained artist who began drawing for the first time at the age of 49, after a crushing mental breakdown caused by his PTSD symptoms. Unable to read or write since childhood, McCarty suddenly began to draw and dictate poems about his feelings and war experiences to his daughter Amy who recorded them for him. McCarty’s unusual drawings are considered to be Outsider Art, a genre of folk art characterized by a lack of formal training and by a highly personal, often primitive, expressive emotional style. Like most Outsider artists, McCarty draws to vent and express his emotions, rather than to create great art. His evocative pieces were shown in 2000 in a veterans art exhibition displayed locally, accompanying a traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall visiting Evansville. His works have also been exhibited at the Alexandrian Public Library, Mt. Vernon High School, and the Evansville Museum of History and Science. McCarty continues to exhibit his works to educated people about the wounds of combat-induced PTSD and the ongoing emotional price of the Vietnam War.

Themes and Motifs
Many of Rick McCarty’s works of art depict or relate to events, memories and nightmares of a brutal three-day reconnaissance mission in November 1971 in which a village in the Province of Bien Hoa was destroyed and two of McCarty’s close friends, Chico and Wild Bill, were killed. His works also express unresolved grief over the deaths of Mimi, a village child McCarty befriended, and Geronimo, his pet monkey who was shot from his shoulder.

Recurring motifs
**Boy of Peace** - A child, often preaching, holding a book
**Angels and Roses** - Representing love and redemption
**Twining Vines, Stems, and Branches** - Positively signifying connections, life or growth, and sometimes negatively signifying immobility, entrapment or being frozen in time
**Demon Face** - Representing the enemy or the God of War
**Weeping Face** - Representing the victims or witnesses of war
**Soldier/Self** - McCarty as a grieving remembering soldier participant, trapped in the story of his nightmares
**Spooks or Charlie** - Small black enemy figures peeking out from behind trees and bushes
**Papasan** - A Vietnamese village elder McCarty befriended
**Mickey Mouse** - Mimi’s doll (sometimes just his hands are drawn holding roses)