

## **Rowe, Donna US Army**

[00:00:17.01] DONNA ROWE: I was married to my husband Al, who was also in the military. And we went together. And at home was my sister, brother, mother, and father back in Massachusetts.

[00:00:30.30] JOE GALLOWAY: And your hometown?

[00:00:31.77] DONNA ROWE: Sterling, Massachusetts, a small town, 750 people, outside of Worcester, Massachusetts, about 40 miles from Boston.

[00:00:40.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Outside Worcester?

[00:00:41.56] DONNA ROWE: Uh-huh

[00:00:43.35] JOE GALLOWAY: What year was it you went to Vietnam?

[00:00:46.53] DONNA ROWE: I was in Vietnam '68, '69.

[00:00:49.89] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you decided to enter the military?

[00:00:55.83] DONNA ROWE: Well, actually, I didn't have much of a sense of it at all. The way I entered the military was that the Army Nurse Corps and the Navy Nurse Corps came around to different nursing schools. And they had formulated the student Nurse Corps program, which was an ROTC program because they needed nurses. And I wasn't old enough at the time to sign to go into the Army Nurse Corps, so I had to take the paper home. And only my father could sign the paper. Not my mother, my father.

[00:01:31.98] And I sat there with my Irish father, and I said, daddy, I need you to sign this because they're going to pay for my last 18 months of training. And plus, if I wanted to, they would have also paid for a master's degree in nursing. And my father looked down at the paper, and he said, you know child, if I be signing this piece of paper, you are going to war.

[00:01:51.05] And I went, I am? And he said, there's a war going on over there in that Southeast Asia somewhere. He said, you're going to war. And that was my first real, gosh, we're going to war. And my father signed it. And three years later, I was there.

[00:02:12.37] In between graduating from nursing school, and I had to get my RN. And in those days, we did it with the number two pencil, and it had to be scored out in St. Louis. It wasn't this instant you knew you passed. So I took my state board exams. And it took about six months to get your RN. So I was a graduate nurse in Massachusetts. And, of course, I couldn't go in the Army and be commissioned unless I was an RN.

[00:02:41.89] So during that six-month period of time after graduating from nursing school, I decided to get a certification in ER. So I trained in various city ERs around Massachusetts, Worcester City, my home hospital, Hahnemann Hospital, Boston City Hospital.

[00:03:02.98] And I got certified in ER. And then, when I went into the Army, they sent us off to basic training at Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. And then, from there, I was basically assigned to either surgical wards or ER or OR during my military career before I went to Vietnam. So I had a lot of OR ER training civilian-wise--

[00:03:33.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Stateside?

[00:03:34.39] DONNA ROWE: Stateside. And at Womack Army Hospital Fort Bragg, North Carolina, DeWitt Army Hospital, I did have some time at Walter Reed, but it wasn't ER. But I did a lot of ER OR because ER nurses are cross-trained OR. And so that was my preparation for Vietnam. June 1968. And Al and I went together on the same plane. We went over together. And we came back together on the same plane.

[00:04:12.90] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your first impressions on landing in Vietnam?

[00:04:17.19] DONNA ROWE: Well, it was hot. And it had a funny, a different odor to it. And it was dusty because we landed at Long Binh. And it was dusty, and the people were tiny. People were small.

[00:04:44.63] And I'm 5 foot 4", and I was big. And I found that very interesting. But it was the smell and the heat that affected me. I mean, we came out of Virginia, and I had been stationed obviously in Texas and in North Carolina. But this heat was a different kind of heat.

[00:05:04.10] The chief nurse of Vietnam was Colonel Williams. To begin with, the Army Nurse Corps wasn't too fond of the fact that I was married. You know, you're supposed to be married to the Corps first. And then after that, I guess you could get married, but they want--

[00:05:19.11] JOE GALLOWAY: If they want you to have a husband, they'll assign you one.

[00:05:21.38] DONNA ROWE: That's right. General Emerson's famous words that he told me one time. But I arrived, and they didn't quite know where they needed me the most. Mainly because of this ER background I had. And at first they wanted me Cu Chi. And then they thought, no, they needed me down in the down Dong Tam at the 9th. And then they thought, no, that they really needed me closer to Da Nang. And so they flip-flopped around.

[00:05:51.17] So it's about three weeks I sat there waiting for them to decide what to do with me. And I finally went, and I asked to see the chief nurse Colonel Williams, and I said Colonel Williams, I really got to get going here. I'm the welcoming crew. I welcomed nurses in, and I said goodbye to them as they left. I told them where the hooch was. I told them where the bunker was. I told them what incoming sounded like and what outgoing sounded like. I became the welcome wagon for the Army Nurse Corps.

[00:06:17.24] And I said, you know, it's really time for me to get going. But at that time, Al was at Hue Phu Bai. And she said, well, you know, Donna, she said, I'm very concerned about where to put you. And I said, well, why is that? And she said, well, because you're married. And I said, well, what does that have to do with anything? And she said, well, she said, you know, Donna, I was married to my husband in Korea. And I know you're going to jump on choppers and joy ride to try to see each other.

[00:06:49.55] She said, so what I'm trying to figure out is where I can get you as close as I can to where he is. And I said, well, I said he's being reassigned to Saigon to MACV. Not that he's going to be in MACV all the time. And she said, well, then you're going to Saigon. You're going to 3rd Field in Saigon. And they did need me because they were building a new emergency room, a new triage area. They really needed to have that really thought through and configured.

[00:07:17.30] And my husband was very helpful in the engineering of that because I said to him, you know, they're engineering this wrong as far as the process of triage. And then he said, well, how do you want it to be? And so he helped engineer that. And so I got there at the right time.

[00:07:35.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah?

[00:07:36.68] DONNA ROWE: Yeah. First, they put me as supervisor. And I played supervisor because of my multiple cross trainings. And so I could check on ICU, I knew what was going on in OR. ER was OK but wasn't running the way it should be running. And we had nine wards, and we had 42 nurses in that hospital.

[00:08:07.28] And finally, they said, Donna, we need you down there to straighten out the emergency room, the triage, and get this thing up and running. So that was my-- I did supervisor maybe two weeks. And then they just pulled me out and said, you're going down here. You've got to straighten this thing out.

[00:08:25.70] But that's what I was trained to do. I mean that's, all the training I'd had preliminary to coming in the military. And then, in the military stateside, I had done nothing but emergency room or OR. So in the emergency room in Vietnam, the triage area was here, the inside ER was here, and then there was an L shape that shot off that, that Al designed, that became the 13 surgical suites. So we fed one right into the other.

[00:08:58.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Made sense.

[00:08:58.91] DONNA ROWE: It made sense. Well, and then inside the emergency room itself, we had back up two ER rooms. My men, all my men, were cross-trained OR techs. So if we had to, if someone started to go sour and those rooms were full, our 13 were full at the time, and someone started to go sour on it, we could open an ER/OR suite, and we could actually operate with our emergency room doctors. It was quite an operation.

[00:09:29.66] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your daily routine like if you had one?

[00:09:34.25] DONNA ROWE: There really wasn't on. It was dictated by the choppers in the air, how many were coming in. And you see, in Saigon, not only did I-- was the hub of the wheel. And then out from me, there were evac hospitals and out from them were surgical hospitals. And if they got overrun-- overloaded, then they started to feed into the hub, which was me. And I had no other place to go except to shove them out to Tan Son Nhut and get them out of country.

[00:10:05.90] But we also covered Saigon. So if there was anything going on in Saigon, like down at Cholon or down along the river or whatever if there was--

[00:10:14.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Or they blew up the embassy.

[00:10:16.46] DONNA ROWE: Yeah, anything like that going on, we were covering that too. Days ran into days. There were some days that I actually remember going off duty. There were other days I remember just staying on and staying on and staying on. And I don't remember-- they brought food carts down to the ER because we were under such constriction that we could not really just wander around the hospital. I mean, we had to be there and-- because we never knew.

[00:10:56.15] A Jeep could come flying in the back gate with five casualties in the back. Or we could have a hand grenade go off in a little cafe outside our perimeter. And bang-o, we'd have casualties. Or all of a sudden, choppers started to come into our hotel, which was between Tan Son Nhut Air Force base and us. It was a green island space.

[00:11:21.17] So the days were long, but there were quiet times in the day. And that's when we sort of rehung IVs. We made sure we had enough needles. We made sure we had enough blood. We ran low on blood a lot of times. And there was a couple of times when we actually drew blood from the hospital personnel.

[00:11:49.25] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions, your quarters like?

[00:11:52.25] DONNA ROWE: Well, that was-- my husband pulled that one off. There was nurses' hooch, which was a five-story building. There was the nurses' hooch over there. And then there was the enlisted hooch which was a three-story actually part of our compound. Westmoreland and Abrams lived in our compound. They were outside, right outside my triage area. I'll tell you about General Abrams later. He was wonderful.

[00:12:22.14] But then there was the hospital. And then there was a little nurses' hooch here. And then there was the Massachusetts BOQ, which was basically for MACV. And so my husband got a room on the third floor, ba tram ba muoi tam. That was the number of our room. And my headquarters, my chief nurse, allowed me to move into the Massachusetts BOQ. I was the only female. So I had to sing going down the hallway to let the guys know that there's a female on the floor. So I lived in my husband's hooch.

[00:13:01.14] JOE GALLOWAY: All right.

[00:13:01.89] DONNA ROWE: Yeah. And that they wanted it that way. They didn't want Al living in the nurses' hooch. So that was OK that I lived in the MACV hooch.

[00:13:14.56] JOE GALLOWAY: What responsibilities consumed most of your time as a triage person?

[00:13:21.16] DONNA ROWE: The responsibilities that consumed most of my time was the management of the flow of casualties and the management of supplies. I was very cognizant of how many IVs we had, how many number 14 gauge catheters we had because that's what we used to start their IVs because we had to give so much blood at one time.

[00:13:52.18] JOE GALLOWAY: You were doing the cut downs?

[00:13:54.49] DONNA ROWE: We didn't do a lot of cut downs. The only time we did cut-downs is if we had a real cardiovascular collapse. If they really came in and they were sanguinated out, and we couldn't find a good vein, then we did a cut-down. And my men were trained on how to do a cut-down.

[00:14:11.74] I was trained on how to do cut down. We did things in Vietnam that were never allowed in the States. I mean, we did intubation. I mean, I had PFCs doing intubation because there was just so many hands. And there were so many casualties that if you waited for me to come and do your intubation, then you really had a problem.

[00:14:33.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Would you describe for the people who don't know what a cut down is?

[00:14:38.50] DONNA ROWE: A cut down is when you identify a vein you actually cut, and you bring the vein up, and then you make a small incision into the vein, and then you thread the catheter or IV catheter into that.

[00:14:54.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Because you can't find a vein. It has bled out.

[00:14:56.05] DONNA ROWE: Because the vein has collapsed. And when you're looking for a vein, you're looking for one that's sticking up. And in most cases, most of the men, fortunately, because of their age, because they were so young,

[00:15:10.48] if they had been hydrated at all, if they had had water that day at all, they were pretty easy to hit for me and for my men. But then again, my men were already combat seasoned. They had already been in the field. 90% of my man had already been in the field for 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 months. So when they rotated back to me, they already knew what under fire was.

[00:15:39.43] And that's why they wanted to work in the triage emergency room because it wasn't just changing bandages, giving food trays. I mean, we were constantly moving. We were constantly on the go. And while the triage area was running and we were doing whatever, we also were handling the inside, which were the snakebites, the heat strokes, the heart attacks, the small stuff were being handled inside, and the bloody stuff was being handled outside. And then

after we handled-- let's say the wave stopped. Let's say we got the 30 or 40 or 50 or whatever the wave was, and the wave stopped, then we were on holding.

[00:16:23.41] We'd bring them inside, and they were inside the emergency room holding with us, watching over them while they waited for surgery. And then, at the same time, we were treating the other things inside, the heatstroke, the broken finger, whatever it was. And then, at the same time, there was another group of my men outside resupplying and cleaning up the triage area for the next wave. So it was a constant motion, constant movement.

[00:17:00.64] We had civilian Vietnamese that worked in the hospital with us. My mama san was very dedicated to my men and her responsibility. She worked with us in triage. She was very cognizant that we had to get it cleaned up and get ready for the next wave, one right after the other. She didn't let things stay dirty.

[00:17:28.84] She was very loyal to us. She loved to bring us food. And, of course, we had to be careful about what we ate because we didn't know-- like I love lychee. And I loved watermelon. But you had to be careful about not eating some of that stuff because of the way it was fertilized.

[00:17:49.42] But on the other side, besides for the people that worked for us, I remember one day we'd had a real bad day in the triage area. And we hadn't lost anyone, but we came close. And I went home, went over to the hooch because everything had slowed down.

[00:18:11.67] And I was going to the hooch, and we weren't allowed to have keys to our hooch. It had to be given to us by the people that ran the main desk behind the MPs. It was sort of a security thing. But the people behind the main desk were Vietnamese, and-- Vietnamese men, boys.

[00:18:33.05] And I said, ba tram ba muoi tam, and I put my hand out. And I looked at them, and I said, how old are you? I said in Vietnamese. I could speak Vietnamese, some pidgin Vietnamese. I asked them how old they were. And one said 20, and the other one said 22. And I said, how come you're not in the army? And he looked at me very arrogantly, and he said I'm a student. I said no, it's your country. How come you're not fighting for your country? And he said you'll do it for us.

[00:19:11.53] And I went literally-- I don't remember it. My husband's friends told him that I did this. I went over the desk, and I literally attacked them. I did. And I don't remember doing it. But that kind of attitude I did see, and I didn't like it. I didn't like it. My husband, on the other hand, was serving with the Vietnamese airborne. And they were very dedicated to their country and what have you. But that little fraction of the population, I didn't have much respect for.

[00:19:50.56] Generally speaking, the Vietnamese military were very dedicated to their mission. I mean very dedicated. And, on the most part, most of the Vietnamese people were. But we have to remember, and it's a fact of history, the Vietnamese people had never really been free.

[00:20:13.45] They had been under the Chinese and then the French. And so what we were hoping for them and wanting them to have really didn't equate to them. All they wanted was the

three bowls of rice a day and a life. We're toting democracy and freedom, and you'll be able to vote. And we're going through all this.

[00:20:38.39] And they're looking at us, the average person on the street, not the hierarchy, the average person on the street, the only thing they cared about was three bowls of rice a day, and who gave it to him really didn't matter. Whether it be the Chinese, the French, us, or the North Vietnamese. It really didn't matter.

[00:21:00.60] My men were very unique. They came from the native lands of New Mexico. They came from the mountains of Utah. They came from Detroit, New York. They were just a microcosm of this country. They came from Texas. They came from Georgia. They came from the banks of the Mississippi.

[00:21:29.17] And they were very strong patriotic people. They were--

[00:21:37.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Black? White?

[00:21:38.74] DONNA ROWE: Everything.

[00:21:39.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Everything.

[00:21:39.89] DONNA ROWE: My first sergeant, Sergeant Grant, best NCO I probably worked with in the military, was tall, thin, black. He was from Chicago, and he shaved his head. And he would always say, ma'am, I really believe that that is a little bit too much.

[00:21:59.21] And I'd go, well, Sergeant Grant, you know, that's the way it is this. He'd say, hey, Captain. But I got him promoted to E-8 because he deserved it. He had been passed over three or four times. And I said, you're being promoted to E-8. And I did. I got him promoted.

[00:22:13.70] But I had Hispanics. Majority were white. Volkie I remember, he was from the Michigan peninsula. Dedicated, blond, blue-eyed. But they were darn good. They were good at what they did. They were good medics.

[00:22:33.95] The doctors were unique. Vince Rossetti is a good example of one of my doctors. He arrived in country about two months after I had taken over the emergency room. And he came trotting down. He was little, good-looking, but short Italian doctor. And he came in, he said, I have no earthly idea why I'm here. And I went, I beg your pardon. He said, I am OB/GYN.

[00:23:00.98] And I looked back, I said, well, there are 42 nurses here. I said, so we can use that every once in a while. And he said I am not an emergency room doctor. And I said, well, doctor let me ask you this. Can you do a cut-down? He said, Yes. I said, can you do intubation? He said yes. I said, give me three weeks, I'll make you into an ER doctor. And sure enough, he turned out to be one of the best ER doctors. But the majority of our doctors were drafted. So they had a drafter's attitude.

[00:23:29.81] But they sort of lost that attitude when they came into the triage area in the emergency room. I didn't have time for that. I didn't take the drafter's attitude. But and they all respected me and my men, and we all worked in harmony. Now, the nurses, Judy Dezoluski, Pat Maravola, I still remember-- we are still friends to this day. Judy's in St. Louis. Pat Maravola, she's in Chicago. Pat ran the ICU. And so we were close together because she came over to me to find out how many were coming at her out of OR.

[00:24:12.62] And when she'd come over to me and say, should I empty out to the wards? And I'd say, well, yeah. You've got 15 holding, and I've got 10 more here. I said you better empty out. I said because they're all definitely ICU, and so she would empty out to the wards. And then when the wards got full, I'd have to empty out to the Air Force. So I had them coming in and going out, sometimes at the same time. But those nurses, as I said, they were younger than me. Pat and I were almost the same age. Pat was 23, I think.

[00:24:50.60] But they were-- we were old women. We grew up fast. We grew up very fast.

[00:24:59.29] JOE GALLOWAY: As did they.

[00:25:00.74] DONNA ROWE: Mm-hmm. We grew up very fast. There was no time for-- well, we did have some fun every once in a while, which-- once in a great while. And I hung around with the chaplains, the Catholic chaplains, because they were the safest because I was married, and if I went anywhere, I usually went with the chaplains. It was my cocoon that I wouldn't be attacked by anyone or anything-- not that I ever worried about that.

[00:25:29.84] But the nurses were great nurses. Judy Dezoluski, she ran the renal unit because we had a lot of renal shutdown. A lot of kidneys shut down because of the blood, the amount of blood we had to give these guys. And we didn't have time to type and crossmatch.

[00:25:49.58] So we weren't always giving an A-positive patient A-positive blood. We were giving them all O-positive blood. Because that was the universal donor. And we didn't have time to type in crossmatch. So because of that, we had some renal issues. And there was also some copper sulfate issues in some of the treatments we were using, like the phosphorus burns. We used copper sulfate on the phosphorus. The phosphorus grenades when they went off could burn right through you.

[00:26:23.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Burn right through you.

[00:26:24.52] DONNA ROWE: And the counteraction to that was copper sulfate. Well, then we found out it caused renal failure. But anyways, Judy Dezoluski, who I said is in St. Louis, she was a remarkable renal nurse. I mean, just remarkable. And when I had to play supervisor, that's how I learned all their talents.

[00:26:44.60] And they were strong women. But they were all well-trained, every single one well-trained. We had very few go spacy. I only remember one that just flipped out completely. And she was new to country. She really hadn't been in a strong nursing program back home.



[00:27:04.25] Because I was trained in Massachusetts, I mean, you trained where I was trained. when you're trained by the Sisters of Mercy, they have no mercy.

[00:27:11.48] JOE GALLOWAY: They have none.

[00:27:12.47] DONNA ROWE: So you didn't have time to break down when you were trained by them. But I only remember one nurse, who was very young, and they had assigned her down to me. And I had to tell the chief nurse she had to go someplace that was not quite as--

[00:27:30.71] JOE GALLOWAY: Someplace to season her.

[00:27:32.41] DONNA ROWE: Mm-hmm. She wasn't ready to see some of the things that we saw.

[00:27:41.78] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for off-duty activities? Where did you and the chaplains go?

[00:27:47.21] DONNA ROWE: Let me tell you. Some of it was fun. Well, in between our hospital and the hooch, there was an alley. And at the end of the alley was the fighter chopper pilots' mess.

[00:28:02.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:28:04.29] DONNA ROWE: And they allowed the hospital personnel to belong to their mess. I think they liked to have the nurses come down. I think--

[00:28:14.21] JOE GALLOWAY: You know it.

[00:28:15.05] DONNA ROWE: --that was the reason. So like if the USO had a band come in, it would usually go there. And if there was a lull and we could go-- but, of course, that horn could go off at any moment, and we'd be right back to where we were.

[00:28:34.07] But we'd go, and I'd go with Father Sullivan or Father Cochran, and we'd have a lot of fun. Father JC was really a hoot. He really loved a good party. And we had fun. We danced. And then, of course, it was right back to where it was.

[00:28:52.58] And at the top of the Massachusetts BOQ, it was flat. So we discovered that we could take half barrels and make them into barbecue pits. And we barbecued. We'd get chicken and stuff like that from the mess hall--

[00:29:07.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Steaks.

[00:29:08.18] DONNA ROWE: --and get up there and do that and occasionally have a beer. I didn't drink very much because I was always afraid the horn was going to go off. But we did things like that. When the big USO shows came on to our perimeters, we couldn't go to those because it was outside compound. But I remember--

[00:29:31.70] JOE GALLOWAY: You were pretty much confined to the compound?

[00:29:34.19] DONNA ROWE: Oh, nurses were not allowed outside the compound because there was a bounty on us. If the VC had gotten our caduceus off our uniform, our fatigues, they got 500 Ps for that. So they kept us pretty much behind the concertina wire.

[00:29:55.73] And we weren't-- I mean, I escaped a couple of times. They didn't know I did it, but I did. I escaped. And I made it out of there for my sergeant's promotion party. And I dispatched an ambulance with me in it, went to my sergeant's promotion party.

[00:30:14.69] And I flew to Vung Tau one time because I wanted to see the ocean. And I had just about had it with the dust and the heat of Saigon. So I flew down to Vung Tau, and I spent three hours in Vung Tau. And I came back with a sunburn, and it had rained the whole day in Saigon. So my chief nurse wanted to know how I got a sunburn. I said, well, gee ma'am, I was just on the top of the Massachusetts BOQ. I didn't tell her I had joyride to Vung Tau--

[00:30:46.01] JOE GALLOWAY: And sat on the beach for three hours.

[00:30:47.15] DONNA ROWE: And sat on the beach for three hours. But you know Bob Hope came in one night. It was just before Christmas Eve. And he came in to go to mass. And he came into the triage area, and we were receiving. And I didn't know it was Bob Hope. And he came in and stopped and talked to the casualties. And when I looked up, I went, oh, my gosh, that's Bob Hope. And he went to mass. And then he went back to do his show. It was amazing.

[00:31:22.24] Oh, I love the music, like Clarence Clearwater Revival. Yeah, I love that. I'm really not into that music that was in Woodstock or Haight-Ashbury. I watched a special the other night on Peter, Paul, and Mary. They were kind of a little bit off. Their music was great, but they were a little bit on the other side. And I watched that, and I said, gee, I never realized that they were quite that liberal in their thought process.

[00:31:56.48] JOE GALLOWAY: From the get-go.

[00:31:57.59] DONNA ROWE: I never realized it because--

[00:31:59.75] (SINGING) If I had a hammer, I'd--

[00:32:01.79] That's the kind of stuff that we all loved. And in Saigon, we had Good Morning Vietnam, and they'd play our music. But the thing I remember is that my parents never sent me The Boston Herald. We'd get the life section or the comics section. I'd get Better Homes and Gardens. I'd never get Time Magazine because our parents didn't want us to know what was going on. And that is the difference between our war and the war of today.

[00:32:38.63] The war of today, they're connected by email, Skype. And they know what's going on back home. When we came home, when I came home, and I saw what I saw, this group of weird-looking people with beads around their neck and dirty clothes,

[00:33:00.25] I felt like I had dropped into a different world. I had no idea who these people were. And I can remember saying to my husband in San Francisco, are we in the United States? Because it just seemed so strange to have these people being so weird.

[00:33:18.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Were they being nasty to you?

[00:33:20.15] DONNA ROWE: Oh, yeah. They were nasty. They were nasty. Matter of fact, when we landed in San Francisco, it was at some Air Force base. I forget the name of it.

[00:33:28.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Travis.

[00:33:29.42] DONNA ROWE: Al and I had a layover, and we were waiting for the bus to take us down to go to the San Francisco Airport to fly commercial to Chicago because Al was from Iowa. So we were going to Chicago first and then on to Boston. And I can remember we were in fatigues, and we were walking towards the gate. And the base MP stopped us. And they said, ma'am, sir, you really don't want to go out there. And I said, well, that says hamburger.

[00:34:01.19] You know, I hadn't had a hamburger. And I said it says hamburger. We want to go get a hamburger. He said, ma'am, you don't want to go out there. He said, look who's out there. And there were these people with these nasty signs, and they were yelling some pretty bad stuff.

[00:34:16.77] And that's when I looked at Al, and I said, are we in the United States? Because we hopscotched. First, we landed in Japan, then we landed in Alaska, and then we landed-- and Al said, yeah. We are in the United States. And I remember thinking, what are these people complaining about? Why are they taking it out on us?

[00:34:42.87] And I think Hal Moore says it best in the movie. You can hate war, but you must love the American Warrior. And I remember that. Now, I didn't experience any of that in my hometown. My little hometown was very patriotic. And there were 12 of us that had gone to Vietnam from 750 people. So it was a very patriotic hometown. But I can remember landing in Logan. I remember that.

[00:35:14.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Still in fatigues.

[00:35:18.12] DONNA ROWE: We were still in uniform. And it wasn't until about seven or eight months later until they stopped us from wearing uniforms in the airports. They stopped us from wearing--

[00:35:29.46] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you think about that?

[00:35:31.13] DONNA ROWE: I thought it was terrible. And I think the Vietnam vets came home, and we made up our minds of two things. Either we were going to be something great, and do something great, and do something positive. Or we weren't going to do anything at all.

[00:35:50.57] The majority of us chose to do something positive with our lives. And I just think like Cobb County, which is now outside of Atlanta where I'm from, commission chairman was

Bill Byrne, Marine, Vietnam. District attorney, Pat Head, Navy, Vietnam. So there are people that came home, and we decided to do something.

[00:36:15.48] And we also decided, when President Bush II declared war, that we were not going to let the men and women that are serving today come home to what we came home to. Because they were our sons and daughters, and in some cases, they were our grandchildren.

[00:36:37.05] So we made up our minds, matter of fact, my husband, who was president of the Georgia Vietnam Vets Chapter 1, said, if we're the only ones standing on the overpasses with bunting, waving the flag for these young men and women, we will be the ones that welcome them home.

[00:36:58.49] And so, a lot of Vietnam vets went down and volunteered at the USOs all over the country. And I think our experience made the American people realize that they had tolerated something that they shouldn't have tolerated.

[00:37:19.54] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your emotions in the heart of your tour?

[00:37:24.43] DONNA ROWE: Sometimes I got angry because they were too young to be so mutilated. I never got depressed. I don't remember being depressed. Sometimes I was just flatlined. I was going to do it. You have to do it. This is your job. Go and do it. And then there were other times when I was a positive, uplifting-- It all depended on the-- well, to begin with, those monsoons were the worst damn things in the world.

[00:38:10.27] And that terrible rainy season can be very depressing anyways. And then triage was outside. I mean, we were covered, but there were no walls. And that blowing rain and-- that can be very depressing.

[00:38:24.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Also, casualties were very slow to come.

[00:38:27.77] DONNA ROWE: Yeah. It was very hard in those conditions for those choppers. You can imagine. And in most cases during monsoon, we received a lot of choppers, but boy, they came through some bad weather to get to us. I give a lot of credit to those Dust Off pilots. I mean, those guys were angels. They went in where most people would not go. The opening of the triage there when it was brand new. I remember that was a major accomplishment.

[00:39:08.87] It was a major accomplishment not only for the engineers and the Seabees that helped build it. It was a big moment for my men in the hospital to have such a-- well, it was an advance in those days, an advanced unit like that in a war zone. And I remember that. I also remember my R&Rs. Those were wonderful memories.

[00:39:39.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go?

[00:39:41.78] DONNA ROWE: We went to Thailand. And then we were on our way to Kuala Lumpur, and something happened in Kuala Lumpur, and we ended up in Singapore. But I had a ball in Singapore. I just had the best time in Singapore. And I learned to drink those little

rainbow drinks. And what the rainbow drink is, is seven different liqueurs, all different densities. And so one sits on top of the other, but you couldn't drink more than one or two of those.

[00:40:08.02] Otherwise, you were a little bit too happy. But I remember Singapore. And I love Thailand. I love Thailand. I love the sa wa dees. I love the khlongs. I love seeing the wats, the temples. I love the people of Thailand. And I love the fact that they didn't eat with chopsticks. They ate with big spoons and a fork, and I thought that was great.

[00:40:36.23] The day before I was leaving, my commander, Colonel Chandler, at the time, he said, you know, Captain, we're one of the few triage areas that never lost anyone in the triage in the year you were here.

[00:40:56.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Not even one?

[00:40:56.92] DONNA ROWE: Not one. If they came in, I told my men-- a lot of people wanted to be assigned to the emergency room triage when they were rotating in, especially if they had been combat medics. And when they would come, the chief nurse would say, you know, Specialist Volkie wants to be assigned to ER triage. And I'd say to him, listen-- I'd say to everyone that came in. Specialist Volkie, we have a policy here. They come in alive they stay alive.

[00:41:29.95] I said, and that's a high bar. And I said, are you up to that bar? And he said, yes, ma'am. And that's true. We never lost one in triage. Now, they may have lost them in surgery, they may have lost them in ICU, or they may have lost them on the ward, or they may have lost them in the aircraft going home. But in that triage area, if they came in alive, we kept them alive. And sometimes, I look back and wonder if we were too heroic. I remember this one, not brought in by a Dust Off. He was brought in by a that little flying helicopter, that little tiny--

[00:42:16.03] JOE GALLOWAY: A loach.

[00:42:16.63] DONNA ROWE: A loach, the little fast little thing. And he couldn't find us. And he kept on flying around and around, and we kept on saying look for the red crosses. But anyways, he finally found us. He put down. And this young man he hadn't been treated obviously inside the loach because there was no medic. He had one arm gone with a lung exposure. He had both legs gone with intestines on the litter. And he came in. He was as white as these umbrellas are.

[00:42:56.26] And I got up on him, and I couldn't get a pulse. And I slammed down on his chest, and I said, darn it all. We lost him. And he opened his eyes and said, I'm still alive. And I said that's all you have to say, sweetheart. And we saved him. And as I rotated him out and turned him over to the Air Force, I always have this thought, what happened to him when he got home? What kind of a family received him? Because it was no Wounded Warrior. There was no-- there was nothing.

[00:43:35.59] And I'm saying to myself now, what if he's sent to the middle of Wichita or someplace? And I often wonder what became of him. And that bothered me. I mean, it didn't PTSD me, but that stayed with me.

[00:43:54.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Could have become Max Cleland.

[00:43:56.26] DONNA ROWE: Well, that's what I was going to tell you. I was in Washington, and they wanted me to consult on the design of the Vietnam Memorial. I don't know why, but they did. So Max Cleland was the head of the VA. And I'm standing there in the corridor, and he's coming down. And he said, hi, I recognize your eyes. And I went, you do? And he said, yes. We've met somewhere before. And I looked at his injuries, and I went, oh.

[00:44:36.57] So here he was, the Secretary of the VA, and then became Senator from Georgia. And I said to myself, maybe that's what happened to the young man that came home. I often think of that. That might have been what happened to him.

[00:44:54.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Never know.

[00:44:54.98] DONNA ROWE: No. It was after the monsoons. And there was a lot of firefight going on. And we were in offensive mode. And we were receiving a lot of casualties. We had a lot of casualties. And the way we lined up the casualties, there was tripods that held the litters, and it just went on and on and on. And then tripods that held up the litters, and it went on and on. And tripods that held up the litters. We could take an awful lot in that triage area.

[00:45:33.81] And I worked my way down those litters to make sure number one that they had an airway. Number two that we had an IV going on them. If they didn't have an IV, I started the IV. Make sure that we had their name. Their name and their unit. Their name and their unit. I mean, we pounded that. Because as I said, we rarely had dog tags. And I came to this one litter--

[00:45:59.94] And my husband was in from the field. And he was helping put the litters on the tripod because the ambulance was-- because where our helipad was, the choppers couldn't come in to the triage area. They had to come in to the helipad. And then my ambulances, I had 21 of them, they had to come in, drop off, and then go back out, and drop off, and so on. And so I'm working down the litters to make sure everything is going the way it's supposed to be going, making sure we're on the ones that are the worst, and so on and so forth.

[00:46:33.99] And I came across this red-headed young man, who had freckles, and he was from Kansas. No-- he was from Arkansas. And he was laying there with his eyes shut. And he had both legs gone, one from knee down and one from thigh down. And he didn't have an IV started on him yet. So I was starting the IV. My husband was at the end of his litter. And I'm starting the IV, and he looked up at me with these blue eyes, and he said, are my feet gone?

[00:47:13.07] And I said, yes, they are. He said I'm only 16. And he said, my mother and father don't know I'm here. And I said, well, they're soon are going to know you're here. I said, but I'll tell you what, why don't you write a letter.

[00:47:37.58] And I pulled over one of the Red Cross gals. I said he wants to write a letter to his mother and father. I said write it now. And get it to his mother and father. And he said, so they're both gone? I said, yes, they are. They're both gone. And he said, OK. And he closed his eyes.

[00:48:02.52] And my husband looked at me, and he took me aside. He grabbed me. He said, how dare you say that to him? How dare you tell him that? He said he could have found that out later. I said, Al, his rehab starts in the triage area.

[00:48:19.58] I said if I had lied to him, and he woke up with no feet, he would have been psychologically worse off than if I had told him straight out. I said he's going to be. OK, he's going to Japan. He will make it. But the rehab, his rehabilitation, starts in this triage.

[00:48:41.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Right now.

[00:48:42.11] DONNA ROWE: In that triage area.

[00:48:42.80] JOE GALLOWAY: With the truth.

[00:48:43.64] DONNA ROWE: And here he was 16 years old. That was the worst day. That was my worst day.

[00:48:51.83] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact, if any, did you have with our allies, the Koreans, the Aussies, New Zealanders?

[00:48:59.21] DONNA ROWE: Yes. We had a battalion of Koreans that would come through Saigon. And we knew they were there because it was very quiet. The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were petrified of the Koreans. So I'd say, gosh, it's really quiet, guys. And the joke was, well, it's either the Koreans or the Aussies are around.

[00:49:20.99] And sure enough, and then we'd get a little accident with the Koreans, and then we'd know. And there was this one little Korean lieutenant who was in charge of a certain group of men. I don't know whether it was a battalion or a company or a platoon, but he was always coming into the emergency room with some problem.

[00:49:41.12] And he just followed me around every place I went-- and he was tall for a Korean. And, finally, one afternoon, he came in, and he said, dai uy, which meant captain. And I turned around said, yes, Lieutenant. He said we go to dinner.

[00:50:00.50] I said I beg your pardon. He said we go to dinner. I said, no, we don't go to dinner. And he said, why not? I said, because number one I'm married. And I don't go to dinner. I can't go outside the compound. He said, married? I went, yes, married.

[00:50:15.38] So he kept on coming and coming and coming. But the Korean people, the Korean men, were very regimented. I mean, if they came into the emergency room and we had to treat them, I mean it was just like they were regimented. The Aussies-- I love the Aussies

[00:50:34.13] JOE GALLOWAY: The antithesis of the Koreans.

[00:50:37.52] DONNA ROWE: Yes. The Aussies were just-- we were told one time the Aussies-- they put us in and gave us a Geneva Convention Alert. And I had TS clearance. And we had a Geneva Convention alert which meant that some POWs were coming in. And so we prepared for that.

[00:51:03.71] The command knew that we were getting POWs. And the Aussies come trotting in with this one POW. And I said I thought we were getting a whole bunch of POWs. He said, nope. You're just getting one. I said, OK, well, that's fine with me.

[00:51:22.43] The Aussies were fierce fighters. I mean, fierce fighters but, they were jolly as can be. And they loved to come over to the hospital.

[00:51:32.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Chat up the nurses.

[00:51:33.72] DONNA ROWE: Yeah. Well, they liked to see the blue eyes, the round-eyed blue eyes. They loved to be with us. My mother was wonderful. My mother was a hoot. She lived to be 94. She was a social worker in the state of Massachusetts for juvenile delinquent girls.

[00:51:55.65] So, needless to say, we were raised rather strictly. My mother was all of 5 foot tall. But my mother really got into those little tiny tape recorders with the double spools.

[00:52:10.98] And I would tape to my mother, and then she'd tape back to me. And she'd take the tape to church. And everyone would say a certain thing on the tape. And then she'd tell me what was going on.

[00:52:26.16] And then mother would send all these care packages if I went home because, see, in Vietnam, there wasn't very much stuff for women. Deodorant, powder, that kind of stuff, they didn't have that stuff in the PX for us women. So we had to depend on care packages. So my mother would pack up baby powder, deodorant,

[00:52:48.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Hair spray--

[00:52:49.57] DONNA ROWE: All that stuff for us as girls. And we were thrilled when my mother's care packages came in. That was the kind of communications we had. And then, mother would also send, as I said, she would send Family Circle magazine, Lifestyle out of the Boston Herald, the comics. And now that I look back at it, she was being very protective of us. She didn't send the front page of anything. We had a lot of communications.

[00:53:23.38] And a lot of the men-- boys from my hometown that had served in Vietnam, they wrote me in Vietnam because they knew what I was going through. And so they'd write. And then my sister was very diligent.

[00:53:39.85] JOE GALLOWAY: That's one of the questions coming up right there. How much news did you receive about the war from home? None.



[00:53:48.28] DONNA ROWE: None. None. The only time I realized that there was really something going on is when they started to talk about this Jane Fonda, and this, that, and the other thing, and I realized that there was some fraction of society back home that had gone a little askew.

[00:54:11.14] I didn't know quite what, but something had gone askew. But no, we were really-- well, we didn't have satellites. Air Vietnam didn't tell us anything like that. I mean, they played music, and they told us the weather in Chicago and that kind of stuff.

[00:54:31.73] And the entertainers that came, they didn't want to bring us down by telling us stuff that was-- like, I remember Gypsy Rose Lee and Ricardo Montalban. They came to the hospital to visit the patients. And my mother said, you had your picture taken with who? I said Gypsy Rose Lee. Mother said, do you know what she does? And I went, well, no. Mother said, well, never mind.

[00:54:58.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Never mind.

[00:54:59.96] DONNA ROWE: Just don't show it to Aunt Mimmy.

[00:55:01.11] JOE GALLOWAY: She takes her clothes off for gentlemen.

[00:55:02.12] DONNA ROWE: Do not show that picture to Aunt Mimmy. Anyways, so I didn't. I found out later. But Ricardo Montalban, his son, was one of my medics. He was very nice. He was wonderful. But they never even said anything to us.

[00:55:21.65] And the guys out in the bush, out slopping through the rice paddies or going across the mountain terrains up there, or up along the DMZ, their only communications was an occasional letter that made it into base camp or whatever or found them, finally caught up to them.

[00:55:42.20] JOE GALLOWAY: *Stars and Stripes* now and then.

[00:55:43.76] DONNA ROWE: Right. And so you can imagine the shell shock when we came home. I mean, it was just like you were being dropped onto a different planet. And I can understand why a lot of the men went introverted. They went home-- we didn't come home like the 48th brigade. We didn't come home like Jim Garvin and march down Times Square with a ticker-tape parade. We didn't have any of that. We came home one at a time. And then we went to our hometowns, most of us.

[00:56:21.26] Al and I were still on active-- Al stayed on active duty, but most of us went to our hometowns. And I here you are, going to your little hometown in West Virginia. Number one, the whole country hates you. And there you arrive, and you find out that they're hating you. And so you're not telling anyone where you've been. And you kept it inside. No wonder they had PTSD. No wonder. I mean, they buried everything.

[00:56:48.39] And so when you're with-- like the Georgia Vietnam Vets, when we all get together, for them to talk about where they were and say what they did, they do it with, well, I was with the 3rd Infantry up along (VOCALIZING) da da da da da. And we had a wonderful time. And they just leave it at that.

[00:57:10.40] JOE GALLOWAY: A wonderful time.

[00:57:11.36] DONNA ROWE: That's the way they leave it.

[00:57:15.44] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with your fellow veterans over the years?

[00:57:20.49] DONNA ROWE: A lot, mainly because when Al retired from the military, he came down here to work for Lockheed as a research engineer. And that's how we ended up in Marietta. And then we discovered that-- we became very active in the community. Al became active in certain things. I became active with Casa, which is for abused children. I became very active with Habitat for Humanity and so on and so forth. And through that, we found out about this, Georgia Vietnam Vets.

[00:57:58.64] And then there was the Dust Off Pilots Association. And then there was a Purple Heart Association. And we found all these different organizations. And so we have been in touch with these people for the past 30 years.

[00:58:13.40] As far as people we served with in Vietnam, Roy Collar who was our best man. He is godfather of our first son. He lives in Douglasville. He was Special Forces in Vietnam when Al and I were in Vietnam. We got to see him three or four times in Vietnam. Matter of fact, he spent Christmas with us in Vietnam.

[00:58:37.07] And so we stay in touch with all those people we served with. And, of course, Al served for 30 years. So people he served with served in Vietnam with us. And then, I stayed in touch with several of my nurses friends. And then we got active here in Georgia with the Georgia Vietnam Vets. So we have a real strong relationship.

[00:59:00.53] And matter of fact, Vietnam vets are-- we're kind of clannish. I think I can say that. We're very clannish. And I think that is our protective mechanism clicking in. That there's just so many people can come inside the circle. You know what I'm saying? It's kind of funny.

[00:59:25.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Was it difficult readjusting to life after the war?

[00:59:30.48] DONNA ROWE: Well, you know I've analyzed that. And I've often wondered why Al and I did not end up with some of the PTSD I've seen in some of our fellow vets. And I think it was because Al was assigned to the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He became a battalion commander. We were cocooned--

[01:00:01.81] JOE GALLOWAY: As a combat engineer.

[01:00:04.79] DONNA ROWE: Yeah. He was the commander of the 307 Engineer Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division. And then he became the G4 of the division. But I think the reason we adjusted so well because everyone at Fort Bragg had either been or going. Our hail and farewell parties were every Friday night. We had a group leaving. We had a group coming. And it was all Vietnam. It was constant. And we were cocooned at Fort Bragg.

[01:00:41.95] Fayetteville, North Carolina, was a very pro-military town. And we didn't have any problems. We had time to decompress. And when we said lai day or nuoc mam or di di mau to someone--

[01:01:02.05] JOE GALLOWAY: They understood.

[01:01:02.70] DONNA ROWE: --they understood because they had been there.

[01:01:05.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, they called it "Fayette-nam."

[01:01:08.98] DONNA ROWE: So it wasn't a major adjustment. The only time I really got taken back after we'd been home for, I don't know, two or three months. We came home in June, so this had to be around Thanksgiving. We were home, and my sister, very progressive liberal, and her husband, were sitting at the table, and she looked at me, and she said, you know, Donna, I really don't know if TG and I really want to eat with people who napalmed people and killed babies.

[01:01:45.32] Well, at that particular point in time, I had enough chutzpah. And I had never done this as a young woman. I stood up, and I just what I'll call I Army-nursed her. I dressed her down in no uncertain terms, and the whole family was sitting at the table. And my father was sitting quietly at the other end. And my father was a tall-- he looked like Fred Astaire, just spitting image of Fred Astaire. He was an Irishman, and he was sitting at the end of the table.

[01:02:14.97] And he said, well, now-- this is after my outburst. And my father said, well, now, child. I don't know what be happening to you. He said, we send over this giddy-headed girl, and we got back this strong, determined woman. And I looked at my father, and I said, is anything wrong with that? He said, oh, no. He said, it will see you in good stead. And then he turned to my sister, and he said, and you'll be apologizing to your sister and brother-in-law. Or you'll never be sitting at this table again. And I'm going to be telling you, Gail.

[01:02:48.89] He said, because of these two here and the other people that served in uniform, you can open your big mouth and say whatever you want. But you're not doing it at this table.

[01:02:59.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Not at this table.

[01:03:01.28] DONNA ROWE: And my sister went but, and my father said, there's no but. And Gail said, well, I'm sorry. And that was the end. But that was the first time because, see, we'd been cocooned at Fort Bragg. We hadn't come up against-- I mean, we'd seen it in San Francisco. We saw it in Chicago. We saw it at Logan Airport. I didn't see it in my hometown. And then we

went to Fort Bragg. And so we were cocooned. And we were protected. And so we could decompress there.

[01:03:32.75] But what about the people that had to go to Wheeling, West Virginia, Dubuque, Iowa? What about them?

[01:03:41.11] JOE GALLOWAY: How did your Vietnam experience affect your life afterward?

[01:03:46.52] DONNA ROWE: It made me better. It made me better. I'm stronger. I'm very determined. If I have a mission, I stay to the mission. I am compassionate. A lot of people say, Donna, you know, you call it the way you see it.

[01:04:10.54] I'm not mean when I say it. If someone asked me a question, I'm assuming they want the answer. And I give it to them the best way I can. I'm a little bit Southern. I've learned to soften it just a little bit. I said, well, you know, I just don't know if that's proper for you to be asking instead of just saying, I'm not answering that stupid question.

[01:04:34.39] But I think I'm a better person because of that. I think it made me a better nurse. I think it made me a better American. I think it made my husband and my marriage strong. I think it made us better parents. And I think it made us better patriots. So I consider the service an honor, and I don't consider it a detriment. I don't consider it a detriment to my life. I became better because of Vietnam.

[01:05:14.38] I came face to face with death on a daily basis. And I came face to face with the reality that I either accepted that challenge and helped these young men through this crisis in their lives, or I just give up, just fade. So I think that on a daily basis, I was reminded that these young people needed us to be strong and care for them. And it made a difference, I think. I know we made a difference. I know the nurses made a difference.

[01:06:01.67] The men will tell you that even though they didn't see us, they knew we were there. They knew we were there. Chopper flight away.

[01:06:13.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[01:06:19.41] DONNA ROWE: Oh, absolutely. I mean, unequivocally. I think the experience of coming home from Vietnam is what affects the way I think about veterans today. And I think that I am very much concerned about the treatment and the VA. I have worked and am working with Senator Johnny Isakson, the head of the Veterans Senate committee. I'm very concerned that they get the benefits that they are allotted.

[01:06:57.97] There are Vietnam vets to this day, Roy Collar, our best man being one of them, who has been applying for 30 years. And just the other day, he was given 50% disability. But he's been working on it for 30 years.

[01:07:19.56] JOE GALLOWAY: It's so wrong.

[01:07:20.85] DONNA ROWE: And it's wrong. And so, if the Vietnam vets can do anything, we can pave the road and try to make it easier for these veterans coming home today. I think the experience of PTSD is being discussed more. It's being recognized more. It's being identified more quickly. And I think that comes from the Vietnam vets being proactive in that particular field. And we can identify it. I mean, I can identify PTSD easily.

[01:08:10.35] JOE GALLOWAY: See it coming two blocks away.

[01:08:12.03] DONNA ROWE: I can. I can see it. I can feel it. I was giving a speech out in Paulding County, which isn't very far from here, about the movie. And this man came up to me afterwards, and I was in a library. And he had a hold on me, and he went right down in front of me.

[01:08:35.51] And he was full-blown. I raised him up, and I said, you need to get help. We need to get you help. And I got him the help. These veterans today, the ones that now have PTSD, it's recognized.

[01:08:53.89] When we came home, it wasn't recognized. And they called it strange things like shell shocked and that kind of-- shell shock? It's not shell shock. It's traumatic when you're 17, 18, 19 years old to see five people of your family, your platoon, killed. It's traumatic.

[01:09:13.68] JOE GALLOWAY: And they have their brains in your face.

[01:09:15.85] DONNA ROWE: That's right. It's traumatic. Or to carry like the man that's in the movie with us, the black gentleman who carried that young Italian man all the way, and then he died. You can't forget things like that. JOE GALLOWAY: Cannot. DONNA ROWE: You can't. You can't get over things like that.

[01:09:41.83] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today or is it?

[01:09:48.61] DONNA ROWE: Well, when my son Richard our youngest, who is 40, was studying in his social class in middle school the Vietnam War. This is before the internet. I forget which encyclopedia, but there was one 3 inch by 2-inch paragraph on the Vietnam War.

[01:10:16.12] JOE GALLOWAY: That's it.

[01:10:19.69] DONNA ROWE: Because he was studying the Vietnam War. And I said, Richard, that's not all there was. It said the beginning and then said the end. I said that's not all there was to the Vietnam War.

[01:10:31.89] So now, I believe because of the Vietnam vets and because of people like you, and because of people like Norm Schwarzkopf, and because of people like my husband, and because of many, many, many, many, many of us all over this country that have written about it, talked about it. Cheryl and Pat Fries doing the movie. Me and you willing to go out and talk about it.

[01:11:00.63] I think this country has a better picture of the Vietnam War. And I think it has a much better picture of the men and women that served in Vietnam. We weren't all high school dropouts. We were not all drug addicts. We were not all misfits. We were not all black or Hispanic. We were a microcosm of this country. We were a very well-educated group of men and women. And we served proudly.

[01:11:37.77] And I think that picture has changed. But it's because people like you have written about it. People like me have been willing to speak about it. I think that's what's changed it. And our children have changed it. Now, for example, I have three speaking engagements next month. One at Noonan High School. One at King High School in Roswell. And one and another high school, and I forget what it is. It's on my calendar.

[01:12:14.57] They're asking us to come and talk to their classes, the Vietnam vet classes. Southern Polytechnical Institute, which is now part of Kennesaw State, has a full semester class on the Vietnam War.

[01:12:30.05] JOE GALLOWAY: All right.

[01:12:32.63] DONNA ROWE: But it's because, for example, Roger Soiset who is the professor of that class, he's a Vietnam vet.

[01:12:43.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[01:12:52.80] DONNA ROWE: Yes, I did. I think both Al and I would say the same thing. It was a sacrifice. And it was hard. But I think both Al and I and our children, I think, well, our whole family was changed by our experience in Vietnam. And I think we became better people. I think we are better because of it.

[01:13:24.14] JOE GALLOWAY: What did that war mean to you and your generation?

[01:13:28.10] DONNA ROWE: We were idealistic. To begin with, we were raised by the greatest generation. And we were raised with the love of God, love of country, and love of family. And so when our country asked us to fight for people's freedom, it was just a natural thing for us to do as the children of the greatest generation. And so we were very idealistic. And we carried those idols with us to Vietnam. And in some cases, they were shattered.

[01:14:07.96] But I believe that our generation showed that we were willing to sacrifice for someone else's freedom. I just watched Sons Of Liberty, which of course, means a great deal to me coming from New England. And I watched Samuel Adams and John Hancock face the British at Bunker Hill. And I think I said to myself, you know, I'm a pretty strong patriotic American, but I don't know if I could have stood there in ragtag outfit with one little musket and really took on the British that way.

[01:14:54.06] But that's the way we were raised. We were raised to fight for liberty and freedom for people. And so I think we were idealistic. And I think we did what our generation naturally would have done.

[01:15:11.01] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[01:15:22.38] DONNA ROWE: I think that future Americans need to realize that there are sacrifices that you have to be willing to make to give a people the right to be free. But you cannot make them drink the water at all times. And you have to be willing to accept that.

[01:15:53.25] And I think when you are committed, when the American men and women are committed to a war for freedom of another people, and when you think of it, that's generally all we've done in the 200-year history of this country is freed other people, whether we freed them in Germany, or France, or Italy, or the Dominican Republic, or Bosnia, or wherever.

[01:16:26.72] When you free them, you have to be willing to let them take the reins of freedom and decide their own destiny. Sometimes you're going to be disappointed. Others, look at Germany.

[01:16:45.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Look at Korea.

[01:16:46.57] DONNA ROWE: That's right. So it's not all for naught. And I'm willing to do it. When the Wall was put in the ground, so you couldn't see it from Constitution Avenue or 23rd Street. You could see it from the Lincoln Memorial.

[01:17:21.28] My first thought was I was pretty upset by that. It was sort of like, OK, you can have your damn monument, but no one's going to be able to see it, OK? We're going to hide it in the ground, and it's going to be black. I mean, you couldn't make it red or anything like-- It has to be black.

[01:17:37.03] So at first, I didn't like it. And then there was a movement to have the monument of the three men and one woman. But the Park Service wouldn't approve the monument with the woman. They wanted the woman removed. So us women said, all right, get the men for the living their monument, the black, the Latino, and the white American. And then us women decided that we were going to get that monument.

[01:18:30.21] And thanks to Linda Carlson Evans and several others, we got that done. And I went back for the dedication of the Woman's Memorial, and I think it was 1993, and I think that's the last time I've seen the Wall. But it was a very moving experience for me to finally come at-- have peace with the Wall being the way it is. I finally realized that it had a meaning, but at the time when I was so much against it, I think I was not over the anger of how we were treated when we came home.

[01:19:18.18] JOE GALLOWAY: So majestic

[01:19:20.94] DONNA ROWE: So now I've come to realize that it gives a lot of peace to a lot of people. It's hard to go to the Wall. For a lot of people, it's very difficult. I like to go to the Women's Memorial. and just sit there. I like to watch how people react when they see that Woman's Memorial. Even children get quiet when they get near it.

[01:19:51.96] And I think the whole thing is good. And I'm glad we, the Vietnam vets, helped the Korean vets get theirs. The Vietnam vets were the ones that carried those petitions and got a lot of signatures on those petitions because the Korean vets were getting too old to do it. I said to myself, the 50th? They must be celebrating the beginning because it certainly wasn't the end-- 50 years ago. But I feel the same way.

[01:20:32.74] I think we should commemorate it. I think the country wants to sort of in some way say that we're sorry. And this gives them a vehicle in order to tell the Vietnam vets now. And as I told you, we're doing a big thing here in Atlanta at the end of October.

[01:21:01.20] And I'm going to make sure-- seeing as how I'm chairman of it, I'm going to make sure that it's done correctly. And we're presently working on the music, and the producer of the music is in her 50s. And I said, oh, no, you can't. No. No, no, no, you can't do that. You got to do this one.

[01:21:26.31] And she goes, Leroy Brown? Yeah, Leroy Brown, you know, bad, bad, Leroy-- anyways. But I spoke at, as I told you, the National Cemetery of the 50th. And when I looked out in the audience, it was good for the Vietnam vets to have that service. And it was good for their families. And it was good for their grandchildren.

[01:22:00.55] So I think it's a good idea. And we're dying younger because of this Agent Orange stuff, and Agent Purple and Agent Red and all that stuff we were exposed to. So I think it's good to do it while we're still young enough to ride the motorcycle or whatever we do, to drive up there and see it.

[01:22:26.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, Mrs. Rowe.

[01:22:27.62] DONNA ROWE: It was my pleasure. It was indeed my pleasure.