

LI1-- "MY EXPERIENCES WITH LAOS AND INDOCHINA", 2005

(NB: In the winter of 2005 I was asked by Mark Pavlick, who is preparing a book on U.S. crimes of war in Indochina, a series of questions about my experiences in Laos and during the Indochina war.)

Introduction

In early September, 1969, at the age of 27, a moral abyss suddenly opened before me. I was shocked to the core of my being as I found myself interviewing Laotian peasants, among the most decent, human and kind people on earth, who described living underground for years on end, while they saw countless fellow villagers and family members burned alive by napalm, suffocated by 500 pound bombs, and shredded by anti-personnel bombs dropped by my country, the United States. Even more shocking was the realization that the bombing was continuing apace, and that a few hundred miles away Laotians alive today would be dead by the morrow.

I soon learned that a tiny handful of American leaders, a U.S. Executive branch led by Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, had taken it upon themselves - without even informing let alone consulting the U.S. Congress or public - to massively bomb Laos and murder tens of thousands of subsistence-level, innocent Laotian civilians who did not even know where America was let alone commit an offense against it. The targets of U.S. bombing were almost entirely civilian villages inhabited by peasants, mainly old people and children who could not survive in the forest. The other side's soldiers moved through the heavily forested regions in Laos and were mostly untouched by the bombing.

As a Jew profoundly touched by the Holocaust, including knowing Holocaust survivors while living 14 months on an Israeli kibbutz in the early 1960s, I not only strongly identified with the victims but found it impossible to turn away from their plight. And I knew that U.S. leaders had specifically created the Nuremberg Principles protecting civilian populations in war-time as a precedent

that applied to all nations, in the hopes of deterring future leaders from committing war crimes.

It was a profound shock to realize that if these principles were applied to my own leaders that they would be executed, and that the judgment at Nuremberg did not leave me the moral option of saying that it was not my affair. And I felt deeply that the continued bombing proved beyond any doubt that there was no justice in the world, that innocents could be murdered daily with the world neither knowing nor caring, let alone intervening to stop it.

My immediate response was visceral and political, as I sought to expose the bombing to the world and halt further bombing which was to kill tens of thousands of more innocent peasants throughout Indochina in succeeding years.

But on a deeper level, this shocking discovery was to launch me on a lifelong search to understand the roots of human evil which could produce a Johnson, Nixon or Kissinger, and see the latter not only go unpunished but lauded by a society that largely ignored the murder of millions that occurred in its name. I felt I could not understand humanity without understanding how the richest and most powerful of the species could drop more than triple the tons of bombs (6.7 vs. 2 million) on the poorest of the species, more than it had dropped on all of Europe and entire Pacific Theater combined during World War II.

My search to understand that evil took me from the refugee camps in Laos, to U.S. airbases in South Vietnam and Thailand, including the top-secret headquarters of Seventh Airforce; to Washington D.C., to study war-making by Congress, the Pentagon and the Executive Branch itself; to grassroots politics in California and then the Governor's Office in Sacramento to understand the domestic politics that produced such leaders; to return to D.C. to participate in and understand more deeply national-level politics and policy; and to the past 15 years of spiritual and psychological inquiry to understand the deeper human drives that produced our present politics and policies.

In the end I have concluded that the key to understanding violence and human evil is to comprehend the lengths to which human beings go to avoid their own intense emotional pain, especially about the prospect of facing oblivion for all eternity. I have come to believe that only if large numbers of human beings will be willing to face their own deepest feelings about their own deaths while still in the prime of life, an unlikely but not entirely hopeless eventuality, will human beings come to appreciate life enough to significantly reduce their violence against each other and the biosphere upon which they depend for life itself.

The questions by Mr. Pavlick, and my responses, follow.

1) Please describe your early life and education.

-- I grew up in Great Neck N.Y., an upper middle-class and Jewish suburb of N.Y. City. My father was a textile executive, my mother a housewife. I began college at the University of Chicago in September 1960, receiving a B.A. in Political Science, and then a Master of Education from Harvard. I was a pretty typical liberal college student in those days. My first Washington D.C. demonstration was, as a member of the Student Peace Union, picketing John F. Kennedy all night in front of the White House for his hawkish nuclear policies. I attended the first major anti-Vietnam war demonstration at the Washington Monument in May 1965, organized by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

As I look back on those pre-Laos years, several issues seem particularly relevant to what happened later in Laos:

(1) My mother had a particularly strong political and social conscience. The main event I remember in my early years was her weeping convulsively when Eisenhower beat Stevenson in 1952. The TV was frequently on to the news, she discussed politics all the time in a very personal way, our house was filled with the New Republic, the Nation, etc. My mother CARED about the poor, civil rights, etc. My household upbringing was reinforced by my college years: I grew up with an identity that said our primary obligation as human beings was

to help those most in need, and that our focus should be on acting POLITICALLY to change the nation.

(2) My mother had been sexually abused when she was young, had tremendous unconscious anger toward men, was verbally and emotionally abusive toward me when I was growing up. I repressed my anger toward her, but acted it out in a wide variety of ways. This anger was later to become a major source of energy for what I did in Laos.

(3) My father represented southern textile mills which were run by racists, and begged me not to join the Civil Rights movement when I was in college on the grounds that the people he represented would fire him and our family would be destitute. I responded by not becoming a civil rights activist, which I would otherwise have jumped into full-bore, and which was the major issue at the time (the peace movement really began after I graduated college in September 1964) and instead found myself looking for adventure abroad - living in an Israeli kibbutz from June 1962-September 1963, going as a volunteer teacher to Tanzania September 1965-February 1967. Had my father not worked for southern textile mills, I would likely have become a Freedom Rider, gone south for Mississippi Summer, forged friendships and contacts in the struggle, found a way to get out of the draft such as having an arrest record or finding a friendly doctor (as did two of brothers), and probably taken a more typical course of "New Leftists" of that era.

(4) I had a particularly strong sense of generational betrayal. The very idea that I could be drafted to go fight a war in which I did not believe shaped my every waking hour. I was neither fearful nor philosophically opposed to violence. As a Jew with a strong feeling about and interest in the Holocaust, I believed that I would have fought in World War II. Believing this, I found I could not file as a conscientious objector, which required opposing all violence.

In addition to opposing the U.S. government politically - for discrimination, nuclear disarmament, support for Third World dictatorships, etc. - I thus felt betrayed on a very PERSONAL level.

Part of it was my age, which happened to be prime draft age. There was no lottery, and the draft was very real indeed. It was no joke. The feeling was "these bastards really are out to get me."

But, on a deeper level, I had grown up with a deep belief in American values, both because of my mother's deeply-held beliefs, and my father, who had escaped Russia at age 10 and was extremely anti-communist, patriotic and pro-American. Believing so deeply in America, I felt particularly betrayed when I realized beyond any serious doubt that my leaders - and the generation that spawned them - were selfish hypocrites and murderers. I experienced the undeniable fact that my government was prepared to send me to fight and possibly die for a clearly unjust war as the deepest possible PERSONAL betrayal. This had a profound impact on my psyche, as I came to feel that I had no real mentors, no one I could really trust from the older generation. It was only later, when I read All Quiet On The Western Front, that I was to more fully understand this phenomenon of generational betrayal.

Though I identified with people my age in "the New Left", I didn't know too many actual "New Leftists" since I was spending so much time out of the country. I felt on my own out here. This had a good side: I became relatively self-reliant, self-motivated, thought for myself. But it also left me feeling isolated, alone, and angry at the betrayal.

I think this strong feeling of being abandoned and betrayed by our elders is the key to understanding the sixties, and what has occurred since. I believe my generation, which grew up deeply believing in American values, was thrown into a moral abyss from which we still have not emerged. I think this has had disastrous effects upon American politics, culture and civilization.

I remember a Political Science professor of mine at the University of Chicago, Morton Kaplan. His main reason for opposing the Vietnam war, which he did as early as 1964, was his fear that it would divide our national generationally. He argued that the cost to our society of alienating large numbers of the younger generation

would far outweigh any good that could come of fighting in Vietnam. I strongly believe today that he was right. I not only see evidence of this proposition everywhere. It is the story of my life.

2) What series of events led you to be committed to going to Southeast Asia?

I had no interest whatsoever in going to southeast Asia. I was living in small village in Tanzania, 1000 miles inland, the only non-African for 50 miles, when I discovered one of Africa's central problems: children receiving just 7 years of education, too much to want to remain farmers the rest of their lives, too little to find productive jobs in the city. I wrote a series of articles entitled "Utilizing the Potential of Primary School Leavers," which was published by one of Tanzania's major universities. President Julius Nyerere read them and asked me to remain on in Tanzania, as an advisor to the Ministry of Education in the capital Dar Es Salaam, to try and implement my ideas. I was excited at the prospect, and made plans to move to the capital.

This was January 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War. I was 24. During 1966 I had, of course, realized I was prime draft age. My mother, who was in touch with my draft board, informed me that they were particularly going after 24 and 25 year-olds, since if you managed to stay out of the military until age 26 they wouldn't draft you, and urged me to plan out my next move. I had received a "2A" deferment, known as "service in the national interest" to stay in Tanzania, which had been renewed for six months in mid-1966. During the last half of 1966 I wrote a long letter to my draft board explaining why I hoped they would extend my deferment so I could remain in Tanzania.

Just in case they would not, however, I had applied and been accepted by the Peace Corps to serve in Malaysia, Service Civile Internationale to work in Sri Lanka, and International Voluntary Services to work in Laos. I had heard about the latter group by accident, and learned that they were funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, a government agency. I decided to apply, figuring that the combination of their being in Laos, part of Indochina,

and being funded by AID, would be my best shot at keeping my 2A deferment in the event my draft board would not let me remain in Tanzania.

When President Nyerere asked me to work as an educational advisor in Tanzania, and this led to my obtaining a letter from the U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania to my draft board stipulating that my remaining in Tanzania was in the national interest, I assumed the board would comply.

It was thus with considerable shock that I received a telegram from my mother in early February 1967 that my draft board had denied my request, made me 1A and thus likely to be drafted, though I could appeal their decision if I returned home immediately. Since IVS had accepted me into their training, which was beginning in a few days, I decided both to return home and to appeal to my draft board to let me go to Laos as an educational advisor. If they would not, I decided that I would either go to Canada or prison.

After completing my one-week training to go to Laos, I had a dramatic meeting with my Draft Board. I was screamed at by its head, who demand a "yes or no" answer to the question of whether I was willing to serve my country by fighting in Vietnam. When I responded "I can't answer that question yes or no, sir" my life passed in front of my eyes when he responded "that's all right, you've answered the question. Next!" At that moment, however, one of the other two members of the Board, neither of whom had until then said a word, asked me musingly: "Tasmania. I've always been interested in Tasmania. What's it like?" I responded "well actually, sir, it's Tanzania, you know I was there as a teacher .." and began talking for my life, explaining my motivation, how I had tried to help the villagers, my interest in teaching the kids agriculture, etc. At one point, he asked "what did you make over there?," he asked. "\$150 a month," I responded. "What, a Harvard graduate from Great Neck, and that's all you made?," he said, genuinely shocked. I later learned I had received permission to keep my 2A and go to Laos by a 2-1 vote.

A week or two later, my head still spinning, my heart still back in Tanzania, I found myself on a long plane flight to Laos.

3) Please describe your experiences with IVS in Laos.

-- My primary goal upon arriving in Laos was to live with Laotians. I studied Laotian assiduously, creating my own dictionary; hired a guy who spoke French and Laotian to serve as an interpreter; and moved into a small village, Ban Xa Phang Meuk which, though only 12 kilometers outside the capital of Vientiane, had no running water, electricity or toilets. I lived in the village the entire time I served with IVS, from March 1967 until June 1969, and generally avoided IVS. During this period the people I was closest with were Laotians and Vietnamese, and most my time was spent learning about Laotian culture, hanging out with villagers, or spending time with a Vietnamese family that I befriended downtown.

-- The letter I had received in Tanzania accepting me to go to Laos said I would be an "educational advisor" rather than a teacher. I was happy about this, since I did not want to teach English both because I found doing so tedious and I opposed it philosophically since I felt the kids should learn agriculture and community development. I had no idea why I had received this promotion, but assumed it was because I had an M. Ed. from Harvard, and experience teaching in Tanzania.

When I arrived in Laos I discovered that my services had been requested by the head of USAID Secondary Education in Laos, who wished me to find derogatory information about his rival, the USAID head of Primary Education in Laos, with whom me was competing to become overall head of USAID Education. I ignored his desire to have me spy on his rival, but did write a long report making several dozen suggestions about how to improve the USAID education program in Laos, focused on improving the education for the vast majority who would never go to college rather than the tiny minority who would. When my Congressman, Lester Wolff, came to Laos and requested a meeting, I met the head of USAID for Laos, Joseph Mendenhall, and

mentioned my report in response to his question about what I was doing. He said he'd like to see it, and I brought him over a copy.

A few weeks later my immediate USAID superior, the chap in charge of Secondary Education, called me into his office. He handed me a letter he had written to Mendenhall, dated a day earlier, explaining why every one of my suggestions was wrong, that I was young and naive, and that I had agreed that my report was useless and asked to withdraw it from circulation. As I looked at him in shock, he explained that I was a troublemaker, would be teaching English from here on out, and that if I gave him any trouble he would fire me from IVS and write and call my Draft Board to make sure they not only drafted me, but sent me to fight in Vietnam. He told me that he had done that with another IVS volunteer who had given him a hard time, and that he had just heard the fellow had died in Vietnam.

I went to my IVS superior, who worked closely with my USAID superior, and suggested a deal. I had no intention of teaching English, and just wanted to live quietly in my village until I finished my tour with IVS. If USAID would leave me alone and let me do what I wanted, which was to write a textbook in Laotian to teach agriculture to primary school kids, I would not cause him any trouble by going to my Congressman and Mendenhall. The IVS supervisor came back and said it was a deal, and I spent the next two years living in my village, avoiding USAID Education except to write the textbook and obtain funding to send some Laotian teachers to study Community Development in Thailand.

-- My major experience with IVS occurred in late 1968. After arriving I had quickly found myself out of synch with the IVS leadership and most of the volunteers, who seemed either non-political or to support the war, did not speak Laotian, were not interested in Laotians or their culture, and spent most of their time hanging out with each other or other westerners. I thus tended to avoid IVS. In late 1968, however, one of the volunteers with whom I was friendly, Chandler Edwards, an ebullient, sweet, friendly fellow, was killed by the Pathet Lao. This happened a few months before our upcoming IVS annual conference, and I launched a campaign to have IVS invite the

head of the Pathet Lao delegation in Vientiane to our conference, on the grounds that otherwise they would continue to see us as part of the U.S. war effort, endangering the lives of our volunteers. At a highly dramatic meeting I led the fight to have the volunteers vote on the invitation, and we won by one vote. I was ecstatic, believing this would both save the lives of my fellow volunteers and also give IVS a separate identity from the war effort.

But shortly after, the overall head of IVS, Arthur Gardiner, flew in from D.C., and summoned me to a meeting of IVS supervisors. (I only found out many years later that Gardiner had been the U.S. Ambassador to Cuba during Batista's final days.) He informed me in no uncertain terms that, despite the vote, there was no way IVS was going to invite the Pathet Lao to our conference. After an increasingly heated argument, I wound up pausing dramatically, and saying to Gardiner, "Mr. Gardiner, I want you to look around this room. I want you to look deeply into the eyes of each person in this room. Because there is a very good chance that due to your lack of concern for the lives of your own volunteers that one or more of these people will be killed in the next year. And if that happens Mr. Gardiner, and I fervently pray that it does not, but if it happens you will have their blood on your hands!" I then stalked out of the room.

Within months Arthur Stillman, an IVS supervisor who had been in the room, and an extremely decent fellow who was sincerely devoted to helping Laotians, was killed by the Pathet Lao in an ambush. As far as I was — and still am - concerned, Mr. Gardiner has Stillman's blood on his hands.

4) When did you begin to question the US mission in Laos? Did you meet persons working with the official "enemy" - the Pathet Lao? What was your impression of these people and their work?

-- Although I was strongly opposed to the U.S. war in Vietnam, which was going full-bore by the time I arrived in Laos in March 1967, I had an emotional stake in believing that Laos was different. I did not want to see myself as part of a U.S. war effort murdering Laotian

civilians. I was aided in this effort by the fact that throughout my IVS years and beyond, the U.S. officially claimed that it was not bombing or fighting in Laos, and that its efforts were limited to supplying the Meo (now called Hmong) armies fighting a guerilla war against the communist Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. Between March 1967 and June 1969 there were almost no stories describing U.S. war-making in Laos, and I received almost no first-person accounts of the war. This is why it later became known as "the U.S. secret war" in Laos.

My original doubts about the U.S. effort in Laos were originally focused on my area of interest: education and the aid program in general. I felt strongly that USAID was helping the small minority who would master English, go on to college and eventually join the pro-American Royal Lao Government, at the expense of the vast majority who were not learning about agriculture or community development, and would wind up - as in Africa - being part of an urban lumpen proletariat, working as prostitutes and low-wage workers rather than productive farmers. I also decried how the Americans lived in their own American suburban compound called "K-6" or Kilometer 6, which I passed on my way to my village, did not speak Laotian or learn Laotian culture, looked down on Laotians, and were not there to help but rather advance their own careers.

As I lived longer in Laos, spoke Laotian, and got to know the country from the inside, I became even more appalled. Our country was supporting a small, corrupt elite - including generals who were supplying the opium which wound up addicting tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam - at the expense of the majority of Laotians.

This issue became personal to me when I discovered that the very village I was living in, Ban Xa Phang Meuk, meant "Village of the Deep Pond," and had originally been built near a pond necessary for watering animals and growing crops. Some years before I had arrived a rich outsider had paid off corrupt officials in Vientiane and sealed off the pond for his own use, refusing to allow my fellow villagers to use it. It was a huge issue for the villagers, they had appealed to the authorities, but nothing had happened.

As I made my rounds around Laos, including living for six weeks in a Garden of Eden village in southern Laos called Lahanam, I had occasion many times to meet the poor, miserable youngsters who had been drafted into the Royal Lao Army. I never met one who believed in what he was doing, and the conversation tended to focus either on sex and women, or the disgraceful behavior of their officers, e.g. how their leaders would send them into combat while themselves remaining in the rear, stealing money and forcing young peasant girls to have sex with them.

As an anomaly of the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos, which declared that Laos was officially neutral, there was a Pathet Lao delegation in the middle of Vientiane. They would show movies on Friday night, which I began to attend after a year or so. I was immediately struck by the difference between the young soldiers at the compound and the RLG soldiers I had met. The Pathet Lao soldiers were also charming and friendly, but the conversation always revolved around politics: what did I think was happening the Middle East, the latest developments in the war in Indochina, etc. At one point I learned that AID had captured some Pathet Lao textbooks. It turned out that they were the very sort that I had been advocating for USAID Laos: written in Laotian, focused on agriculture and community development.

-- By June 1969, when I finished with IVS, I strongly opposed U.S. involvement in Laos. I knew from experience that it was primarily helping a corrupt elite that had no interest in their own people, and that it was neglecting the interests of the vast majority of the 2 million people living under RLG rule. And I was favorably impressed with the Pathet Lao, whom I saw as relatively non-corrupt, and sincerely dedicated not only to freeing their country of the Americans and RLG, but helping their own people. I didn't feel I knew the Pathet Lao very well, however, and the focus of my attention was the wrongdoing of the Americans and RLG.

-- My main emotional focus, however, was on the villagers in Ban Xa Phang Meuk, the "Old Man" with whom I ate every day, and all the other Laotians I got to know during those years.

-- It is hard even now, almost 40 years later, to try and describe what I felt for these villagers. My life in America had been deeply disappointing to me. Though there had been people I loved, I could not relate to average Americans in general, who did not share my values (at this time, to pick only the most dramatic example, most Americans still supported the war). I'd also felt estranged in all the other places I'd been, including Israel and Tanzania. But here it was different. They had a hard time pronouncing my name, and I was a foot taller than most. So they called me "Phouvieng", or "mountain of Vientiane," and somehow I became more me as "Phouvieng" than I had ever been as "Fred".

Laos was different than any place I had ever been. It was hard not to like Laotians in general, as well as specific individuals. And this was not only my experience, but that of most other visitors as well. Everyone loved "the Lao", even as most westerners treated them with the kind of condescension one felt toward a cute terrier, or naughty child.

Perhaps the best description of the villagers I knew in Laos was that of the Hobbits in The Lord of the Rings: Laotians were above all human: alive, funny, good-natured, paid attention to the simple, human things in life. They liked a good time. When someone of note died, like a monk, hundreds would come from miles around and party for three days at the foot of the casket. They tended to be sincere, not cynical. They were honest. And if you had a difficult task you needed to accomplish, with someone you could trust, there was no one else you would more naturally turn to. I don't want to romanticize the Laotians I knew. They were human beings, with all the human faults and more. I knew lying, hypocritical and nasty Laotians. But in general, most of the time, if you liked human beings at all, there was no one more likable, admirable and trustworthy than most of the Laotians I came across.

-- I not only liked but admired these people. The "Old Man", who owned the shed I rented next to his home on stilts, and with whom I ate every day, appeared from the outside little more than an illiterate peasant farmer, dressed in a sarong, puttering around his house. But as I got to know him I saw him more as a Renaissance Man than anyone I had ever met. He could build houses, make bedding, grow crops, raise animals. He had raised several children, and was now raising his grandkids. He had farmed, driven a samlaw downtown, and had seen one son travel to the U.S. to learn how to give people artificial limbs, and another become a member of the Lao Secret Police. He was also a natural doctor, making medicines from plants, roots, branches, and helping people when they were sick. And, most strikingly to me, he was a devout Buddhist. He was the lay head of the Buddhist Temple in the village, which we lived next to. He would spend months every dry season copying the Tales of the Buddha on to dry strips of bamboo with a piece of wood with a needle protruding from its end. It was a devotional task, and he was so absorbed in it that I once got to within 6 inches of his face before he was able to hear me calling to him.

Most importantly, he was a beautiful human being: funny, cheerful, generous, curious, kind, competent, loving, sincere, earnest, who liked nothing better than to sit around and joke and talk with people late into the evening. It was many a night that I feel asleep to the sound of laughter and good cheer from the house next door.

One day, the old monk in the village took sick. They took him to the hospital and he returned a few days later in a coffin, dead. This was an occasion for a 3-day feast, a few yards away from where I lived, and hundreds of people came from miles around, laughing, drinking and gambling all night in front of the open coffin.

The next day I approached the Old Man's house and saw, to my amazement, a villager walking up and down on his wife, whom I called Old Mother. She was quite sick, moaning, and this was a traditional way of dealing with pain. I saw immediately that she needed to go to the hospital. As I told this to the Old Man, he said she wouldn't go. She heard me and began screaming, "No! To go to the hospital is to die in

the hospital!”, since that is what had just happened to the monk. The Old Man shrugged. Beside myself I began arguing with both of them when their son, the guy who had studied making artificial limbs in the U.S., pulled up. I told him we had to take his mother to the hospital. He went to tell her, she refused again, he gave up, also turning to me with a shrug.

I lost control. “Listen! Stop this nonsense! Now you just go over there and pick her up and put her in your jeep, we’re taking her to the hospital!” I shouted. He did so, we got her to Operation Brotherhood, the U.S.-funded hospital run by Phillipinos, and we got her into emergency. They saved her, telling us that she had been within 5-10 minutes of dying.

A few days later I had one of my most terrifying experiences in Laos (there were many more others than I like to remember).I was awakened by loud noises in the middle of the night. I got up, saw large explosions lighting up the night sky, went to my neighbors, and to my amazement saw their heads sticking out of the ground. It turned out that every villager in the village had a trench next to their home, in which they were now hiding. What is going on, I asked. The Pathet Lao are attacking Vientiane, they answered. What should I do, I asked them, suddenly scared for my life. Go ask the Naibahn (village chief) they said.

I went over to the village chief’s house. He had always been very friendly to me, but tonight was quite cold. What should I do, I asked, still not fully awake. He answered through the door, not opening it, “get out of here!” But, I protested, if I just get on my motorcycle and start riding around I’m more scared of being shot by the Royal Lao Government troops than the Pathet Lao.

He shrugged his soldiers.

Feeling totally isolated, I suddenly remember the Old Man. As I approached his house I saw his wife and grandkids’ heads poking up from their trench, but found the Old Man sitting in front of it with a big smile on his face. As soon as he saw me he called out “hey,

Phouvieng, great to see you! Come over here and sit down next to me and let's watch the movie together!", slapping the ground. I did so, suddenly feeling my terror evaporate in the face of his friendship and joviality. We talked for a while, and finally I asked him what I should do, saying the Naibahn had said I should leave the village, but that I was scared of the RLG soldiers. "You're not going anywhere!", he laughed, "you just sit here with your father and watch the movie." "But Old Man," I asked, "what will you do if the Pathet Lao soldiers come and see you here with an American?" "I'll just hide you under my mattress," he laughed, a joke since his mattress was on the floor of his bedroom. "But what will you do if they see me?", I asked. "I'll just tell them I'm your father and you're my son," he laughed again. "Don't worry about it."

Needless to say, these kinds of experiences with the Old Man and his family, and many others too numerous to mention here, gave me the deepest possible appreciation for Laotians as human beings. It wasn't just that the people I was closest were nice, decent, honest. It was that they were real, courageous, and could be counted on when it mattered.

During all my years in the village the Old Man never discussed politics. While I would rant about the U.S. bombing or the latest example of RLG corruption or disgusting American behavior, he would just listen. I thought of him as a non-political peasant, wishing only that the two sides would stop fighting, the grass in that old saying "when the Elephants fight the grass gets trampled."

It was only after the war ended and I returned for a visit in 1993 that I learned that he had been the local representative of the Pathet Lao in that village throughout the years I'd lived there. To the long list of virtues that I so admired in this Renaissance Man was now added real courage, real idealism and real commitment.

4A) How did you discover the bombing? What did you do after discovering it?

-- After I finished with IVS in June 1969, I thought about returning home, but decided to remain on in Southeast Asia. For one thing, I thought myself deeply in love with Kim Lien, a Vietnamese woman. She had gone off to Japan for the summer and would return in September. For another, I had spent most of my time in personal matters, hanging with Laotians, and with the aid program the previous 2 plus years. I knew very little about the war at that point, and felt that I wanted to know more before returning to the U.S. I had this idea that I would be embarrassed if people asked me about Laos, and I knew nothing. And, on a deeper level, looking back on it, I can see now that I really had nothing to return to. I'd missed the prime part of "the Sixties" having spent almost all of the period from September 1965 out of the country, had few contacts or personal ties, and on some level felt at that point more "at home" and also very much alive in Laos. I can remember during this period looking at a map of the U.S. and trying to remember what it had felt like to live there.

Jacques Decornoy of Le Monde published a series of articles on the bombing of Pathet Lao zones in June 1969, and I was shocked to read them. I decided to go to Paris to try and convince the Pathet Lao delegation to let me visit their zones and see it myself first-hand. It proved a fool's mission, since they weren't about to trust a French and Lao-speaking American who wore black Vietcong-like clothing, and had been a former IVS volunteer.

-- I returned to Laos and, in early September, was staying a few days downtown with the journalist T.D. (Tim) Allman, who was then writing for the Bangkok Post and stringing for the N.Y. Times and Time. At that time, Laos - unlike Vietnam - was divided into clearly demarcated "communist" and "Royal Lao Government" zones. He said he wanted to interview the first refugees from communist zones, from the Plain of Jars, who had been brought into U.S.-controlled zones, and asked me if I would interpret for him. I said sure, we hopped on my motorcycle, and drove to the That Louang Buddhist Pagoda in the center of Vientiane, to a moment in time that would change my life forever.

-- The villagers had just been brought down from northern Laos a day or two earlier, and there were hundreds of them sitting around the Pagoda. Each family had little more than a burlap bag or two into which had been thrown a bit of clothing, a stove, pots, pans, silverware, and a few other necessities.

-- Tim and I went up to one family at random, started chatting, and then asked them whether they'd seen any bombing, remembering the Jacques Decornoy stories. Their eyes grew wide and they began talking about how they had been bombed for the previous FIVE years, but particularly the last year. I frequently remember as if it is etched in my brain the first villager I talked with, who squatted down and drew an "L" in the dirt. He explained that he had lived in a cave for most of the previous year, only venturing out at night to try and salvage some food or water for those of his animals which hadn't yet been killed.

-- Every single villager that day, and every one of the more than 2,000 refugees I was to interview in the next 15 months, told essentially the same story. The bombing began in mid-1964, gradually escalated, until in late 1968 the planes were coming every day, raining down death and destruction, and destroying whole villages and, eventually, the whole society that had existed for the previous 700 years on the Plain of Jars. And, they made it clear, most of the bombing was from American jets. They knew the difference between the small, propeller-driven aircraft of the Royal Lao Airforce (many of which, I later discovered, were piloted by U.S.-trained Thais), which were relatively few in number, and the enormous numbers of jets which dropped huge bombs upon them day after day, month after month, year after year.

-- I cannot, even now, describe the shock, outrage and horror that I experienced hearing these reports from the refugees. I could not, and even today cannot, fathom how humanity had reached the point when the richest and most sophisticated of the species could carry out a policy of what was in fact systematic murder of the poorest and weakest of the species- innocent, subsistence-level farmers who had not only not committed any offense against their murderers, but DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHO THEY WERE.

-- The first level of shock was simply realizing that my country, the United States, was conducting these massive bombing raids without the world even knowing. At that time, September 1969, the official U.S. position was that U.S. planes had never dropped a single bomb in Laos. (It wasn't until March 1970 that Richard Nixon finally admitted this was a lie and that the U.S. had been bombing in Laos for the previous six years, although he and the U.S. government continued to maintain the most monstrous lie of all until today: that the U.S. only bombed "military" targets and avoided hitting civilians.) I knew from South Vietnam that my leaders were lying and murdering their way into history. But realizing it in this personal way, in a Laotian refugee camp, with the victims two feet away, transformed this intellectual knowledge into a deeply felt emotional experience.

-- The second level of shock was to begin to try and absorb the horror of what I was seeing and hearing. Here were these kind, beautiful, decent Laotian farmers, no different than the villagers I knew so well and loved so much from Ban Xa Phang Meuk, describing seeing a beloved grandmother burnt alive by napalm before their eyes, a child buried alive or wife blown to bits by 500 pounds bombs, a husband shredded by anti-personnel bombs. There in front of my eyes was a young boy missing a leg, a beautiful young 6-year old girl with napalm wounds on her breasts, stomach and vagina. I took pictures of that young girl. When I happily came back to give a photo of her to her mother, the woman appeared tired and miserable. I handed her the photo. She informed me her daughter had died a few days earlier. I was also given a photo, of a beautiful, sincere-looking, happy young girl named Sao Doumma, on her wedding day. She had been killed by bombing a few days later.

-- The horror was magnified by the slow realization that the vast majority of the people that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had murdered were civilians, particularly children, mothers and old people. Northern Laos is deeply forested, and the only "targets" visible from the air were villages. The Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese soldiers, moved easily through the forests. The main people forced to remain in and near the villages were mothers with children, old people, and the

children themselves. They were the vast majority of the bombing victims.

-- But the greatest horror was my realization that the bombing was continuing, that at the very moment that I was talking with these refugees bombs were dropping on other innocent villagers, just a few hundred kilometers away. To realize that each and every day Laotians who awakened alive would be dead by the evening, burned and buried and suffocated and shredded, was almost more than I could bear emotionally.

-- By the end of my first hour interviewing these refugees from the Plain of Jars my life had changed forever. I did not decide consciously, but it was decided that I would devote my every waking hour from then on, to the best of my ability, to stop this horror.

-- As it happened, there were other journalists besides T.D. Allman at the pagoda and one of them, Craig Spence of ABC TV, hired me the next day to be his interpreter. He also interviewed me about the AID program. I then spent much of the next 15 months working for U.S. journalists visiting Laos, usually for a week, as an interpreter and guide. I was to work with Wells Hangen of NBC, Ted Koppel of ABC, Bernie Kalb and Ed Rabel of CBS, Flora Lewis and Sidney Schanberg of the N.Y. Times, David Greenaway of Time, Les Whitten of the Jack Anderson column, and many others. From their perspective they would pay me \$30 a day to arrange interviews, take them out to the refugee camps, investigate a variety of stories. From my perspective, I was getting the story of the bombing on national television and able to live (I could live on 3 or 4 days of work, \$100 a month, if I had to.)

-- As I would take the journalists out to the refugee camps, I would also document our interviews with photos and audio recordings, which I compiled and sent on to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Refugees and Senator William Fulbright. I would also spend time with visiting anti-war activists like Howard Zinn, Dave Dellinger, and Noam Chomsky, filling them in on what was occurring. One of the most meaningful weeks of my life was putting around Vientiane on my motorcycle with Noam Chomsky on the back seat, as

he gathered material for his powerful chapter on Laos in his book At War With Asia.

-- At the same time as I had this powerful emotional reaction to the murder of these innocent peasants, I also had an equally powerful intellectual reaction: what was going on? How had it occurred? I have always been a curious person, and this taxed my curiosity to its maximum. I developed an almost visceral need to understand the air war, understand the minds and beings of those who could perpetrate this horror, and to understand what it meant for the human species as a whole.

-- I remember well how when I first heard these stories from the peasants I was flabbergasted as well as horrified. So many questions came to mind. Who had ordered the bombing? Why? Who was doing the bombing? Where were the planes based? How did the bombing work? Why were there so many kinds of bombs - napalm, 500 pounders, anti-personnel bombs? How did they decide which ones to drop where? Why did they bomb so much? Did they know what they were doing? What on earth was going on? I knew nothing. Literally nothing.

-- I thus spent much of the next 15 months visiting U.S. airbases in Thailand and South Vietnam, and talking with airmen to try and understand the bombing. My search eventually led to my meeting Jerry Brown (not the future Governor of California), who had been an Airforce Sergeant in Vientiane (disguised as a civilian) in charge of selecting bombing targets. Now in advertising in Bangkok, he told me the whole story of the air war, giving me a unique perspective that no one outside the military had.

-- Between September 1969 and February 1971, when I was expelled from Laos, I interviewed over 2,000 refugees, visited Udorn airbase in Thailand and Danang airbase in South Vietnam, and talked with CIA pilots and others in addition to Jerry Brown with first-person knowledge of the bombing. I learned about the air war from both the bottom up and the top down.

5) How and why did you leave Laos? Were you alone in making such decisions, or were you in the company of others?

I was working for Ed Rabel of CBS News when 3 Laotian secret police came to arrest me one morning in early February, 1970, at the Hotel Lane Xang. They were acquaintances of mine, who knew me from my friendship with the Old Man's son, one of their colleagues. They apologized profusely, saying they had been forced to arrest me by "the Americans". They explained that a bunch of Americans were meeting at the USAID "Public Safety" office (a CIA front which worked with secret police around the world) to deal with me, and they had been ordered to take me in. They took me to National Police Headquarters and, as we trudged up to the cells on the top floor to which I was taken, one of the police smiled and gestured meaningfully as we walked past the door labeled "USAID Public Safety" on one of the lower floors.

I had a bunch of papers with me, and the deputy head of the Lao National Police came into my cell, and demanded that I give them to him or I would be held indefinitely. Although there was nothing that incriminating in my huge pile of papers (the Secret Police and kindly let me go to my apartment and take my papers on the way to the cell), I refused to surrender them. I said to him, "I don't mind if you hold me here. Every day CBS, with whom I'm working, will photograph the top of your police headquarters, and tell the world that you are holding an American whose only crime is to try and stop the horrible bombing of your own people." "Phouvieng, please don't talk that way!," the deputy police chief said imploringly. "The Americans said I had to get your papers, what should I do?" I had an idea. "Look," I said. "You're a Laotian and I'm an American, right?" "Yes!" he said eagerly, hoping for a way out. "Okay," I said. "We'll go through my papers and you can have anything in Laotian, I'll keep everything in English, okay?" "Yes!", he said, even more eagerly. I then flipped through my papers rapidly, giving him a few sheets of advertisements in Laotian which I didn't read. He took them happily, left the jail cell imploring me not to tell anyone of our agreement, and I was released an hour later.

-- I was on my own throughout this period in Laos, with the exception of two key friends: Francois, a French-Vietnamese teacher, and Ngeun, a refugee from the Plain of Jars and former Pathet Lao cadre and soldier, who had become my closest friend. I was even more isolated from the Americans, only one of whom besides myself had shown any visible concern for the plight of the refugees or the ongoing bombing. Francois was a wonderful friend: brilliant, kind, informative, comforting. He took a kind of Buddhist perspective on things, which increasingly comforted me more and more as I became increasingly anxious and worried about the possible consequences of what I was doing.

-- Ngeun played a particularly important role in my life. He was a strong, ebullient, funny, serious guy, with a fun, wild side, of just my age. I learned a great deal from him about the Pathet Lao, from the bottom up. He also buoyed my spirits, for example when I felt near-total anguish as Nixon was about to invade Cambodia, doing to that country what he had done to Laos. And Ngeun also collected the drawings and stories that eventually became the book Voices From The Plain of Jars. The villagers would not have trusted me to collect those stories. Ngeun gathered them at some risk to himself. My most moving memory of the many, many many hours we spent talking was one night, when we were rooming together. After talking for hours, I asked him at 3 a.m., in the darkness, "Ngeun, what do you want out of all of this? What would be your highest dream for yourself?" His voice came back, disembodied, "you know, Phouvieng, I'm only 26, and I've been almost killed more times than I can remember. I don't expect to live much longer. But my only hope is that some time after I'm dead, some of the villagers might be sitting around and talking, and my name might come up, and somebody might say, 'oh, yes, Ngeun. I remember him. He loved the people.'" This wasn't propaganda or cant. The hour was too late for that, our friendship too close. This was Ngeun.

-- The months before my expulsion were among the most stressful in my life. A CIA operative at the U.S. Embassy, Matt Manchevsky, had taken on the mission of trying to destroy my credibility with the American press. Shortly before I was expelled from Laos, I met Francois's father who said that Manchevsky had arrested

Francois and said he would hold him in prison indefinitely unless Francois publicly accused me of being a Communist. Francois refused to do so. Manchevsky also visited Ngeun and threatened to have him inducted into the Meo army, a death sentence, unless he accused me of being a Communist. I learned this just before I was expelled from Laos, and spent much of the next 22 years worrying about what had happened to Ngeun and Francois. It was only decades later, when I found Francois in Paris and Ngeun in Vientiane, that I learned that both had survived their association with me. A journalist and close friend of mine said he'd been told by a CIA operative that there had been a debate over whether or not to kill or imprison me, but that it had been decided not to do so because of my close ties to the press. I do not know if this story is true.

6) Please describe the work you did on returning to the US (Project Air War, the Indochine Resource Center). Who did you work with on these projects? How important and effective were these organizations?

-- The timing of my expulsion from Laos in February, 1971, was interesting. It occurred at the one time during the entire Indochina war when Laos was the focus of world attention. The Americans had sent the South Vietnamese army into Laos in an ultimately disastrous attempt to try and close off the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and for a moment in time Laos was a major focus of world attention. The view of the peace movement was "first Nixon continued the war in Vietnam, then he invaded Cambodia, now he's invading Laos."

Upon my return at the end of February I went directly to the Dispatch News Service office in Washington, D.C., and threw myself into a 24-hour workday, taking naps on the couch. I was almost immediately invited to speak to peace groups, who found the message that "Nixon is bringing home U.S. ground troops but vastly increasing the air war" vital for their ongoing efforts. I published an oped article in the N.Y. Times about the bombing of the Plain of Jars. I began briefing Members of Congress, and confronted the former U.S. Ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan, at a hearing of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on refugees, when he falsely claimed that the U.S. had

never bombed villages in Laos, an event that was carried on national television.

This visibility and activity led to an offer from progressive donors like Cora and Peter Weiss, and Carol Bernstein, to donate funds if I established a non-profit, which I did, called Project Air War.

During the next 4 years, from February 1971 through April 1975, I directed first Project Air War and then the Indochina Resource Center. During this period we testified to Congress and helped write legislation, briefed the media and Members of Congress, spoke on many hundreds of occasions to peace groups, continued to research the air war, and published dozens of articles as well as the first book to emerge from the Indochina war written by the peasants who comprised 90% of the population, called Voices From The Plain of Jars. Highlights included our group authoring legislation which increased Food For Peace by \$500 million in 1975, speaking at a rally of 500,000 people in New York City, a review of Voices on a full page of Time magazine, publication of drawings by the peasants on an entire page of the N.Y. Times oped section, and a long interview on the Cronkite CBS Evening News.

I married a saintly Vietnamese woman during this period, who played a key role in inspiring and organizing our work, and tremendously influenced my life.

After the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement I spent from January to August 1973 in Indochina, both to research and expose the bombing of civilian targets, and to understand the situation of political prisoners in South Vietnam. When in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, I borrowed a radio from a CIA pilot friend of mine and tape-recorded and transcribed the pilots' conversations as they were in the midst of bombing villages. These recordings allowed me to accomplish the difficult task of proving to Sidney Schanberg of the N.Y. Times, whose own credibility was on the line, that U.S. pilots were not checking with the 7th Airforce Bombing Officer to ensure there were no civilians in villages they were bombing, as the Airforce falsely claimed. This led to a front-page story in the N.Y. Times the day of a key vote to end

the bombing of Cambodia indicating that pilots were bombing civilian targets. The legislation passed by one vote, and I've always hoped the story might have influenced the vote.

I entered South Vietnam illegally by boat, since I had been detained trying to enter through the airport, and spent six weeks investigating the murder and torture of political prisoners. And I spent several months at U.S. airbases in Thailand, eventually visiting the top-secret Project Blue at 7th Airforce Headquarters in Nakhorn Phanom, Thailand, where I talked with the Bombing Officer who confirmed that no one ever checked with him about bombing villages, other than to ensure there were no CIA teams in the area.

We worked closely with a wide variety of organizations and individuals, including Members of Congress opposed to the war, media interested in our information, and the peace movement, for whom we served as a kind of information center. From 1973-75 we worked particularly closely with the Indochina Peace Campaign to cut aid to the Thieu regime in South Vietnam, and help the plight of political prisoners there.

I firmly believe that the peace movement as a whole was a restraining influence on the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, which we know from the tape-recorded conversations of Johnson and Nixon themselves. There is also no question that the peace movement as a whole played a key role in the two key U.S. decisions of the 1971-75 period, when I was active. The movement played a major role in the close vote to end U.S. bombing of Cambodia in the summer of 1973 and the decision to reduce aid to Thieu from \$1.2 billion to \$700 million in the winter of 1975.

As for my own organizations, Project Air War and the Indochina Resource Center, it's difficult for me to know what our actual impact was. It was interesting that the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Graham Martin, came back and testified to Congress that the Indochina Resource Center and Indochina Mobile Education Project bore the major responsibility for convincing Congress to cut aid to Thieu, which he saw as the critical step toward the Thieu regime's

falling apart. He described the Indochina Resource Center as "the most effective propaganda and pressure organization the world has ever seen". I would like to feel we had that kind of impact but, clearly, the key factor determining the war was the balance of forces on the battlefield.

7) In your opinion, what is the continuing value of the US Indochina antiwar movement? What might have been done differently and perhaps better?

I think the movement for peace in Indochina has had a major and beneficial impact on American foreign policy, which continues until today. As horrible and unconscionable as has been much of recent U.S. bombing in Iraq, for example, there is far more concern for the negative public relations impact of killing civilians wholesale than was the case during much of the Vietnam era. I think the peace movement also had a major impact on the elimination of the draft. Another major difference from Vietnam, for which the peace movement is at least partly responsible, is that U.S. leaders are much more reluctant to get involved in conflicts where there could be a high number of American casualties. Even in Iraq today U.S. casualties are a fraction of what they were in Indochina .

From a philosophical perspective nothing could have been done differently, given where young people's heads and feelings were at. I believe, for example, that the peace movement would theoretically have been far more successful if peace activists had been operating more from compassion and sadness than anger and frustration. One of the fellows who had the biggest early impact on me, for example, was my upstairs neighbor in Cambridge whom I ran into one day in late 1964 who was about to drive several hours to give a talk opposing the war to a church group. I was not against the war at that time, taking the view that the U.S. government and North Vietnamese communists were equally wrong. He heard me out patiently and then, in a very friendly and compassionate way, told me his point of view. I can still remember his face and manner more than 40 years later, and I can tell you that he started me thinking. The folks who attacked or belittled

me for being too "right wing" during that period tended to reinforce my views rather than getting me to think about them.

But what are you going to do? Young people were angry, and the anti-war movement would have been much weaker and declined even more rapidly had it been limited only to those willing to be "Clean for Gene." The specter of hundreds of thousands of angry youth and others did inhibit Johnson and Nixon, by their own testimony. The peace movement was what it was, and it seems to me mainly idle speculation to suggest how in theory it might have been more effective.

If I applied the lessons of the Vietnam peace movement to today, my own view is that those of us who oppose the war will be far more effective if we focus on how the war is endangering American lives by spreading terrorism. But I understand this way of thinking does not motivate most of the people presently working against the war, and I happier they are doing so for their own reasons rather than remaining quiet.

8) What work are you doing now? What are your hopes for the future?

I was deeply disillusioned by the aftermath of the Indochina war. I had really believed that the guerrillas of Indochina would usher in a far better society than the one they were replacing, one that was not corrupt and which was motivated above all by a desire to help the peasants. While I still believe that they behaved admirably during the war I have been sickened by the transformation that occurred after the war, particularly the widespread corruption, and lack of concern for peasants and working people. Wide scale corruption in a poor Third World country is more than mere thievery or wrongdoing. It is literally murder, as money stolen by the rich is money that could otherwise go to food, healthcare and help in farming needed to keep whole families alive. Such corruption speaks to a sickness at very heart of a social system.

I was flabbergasted when the victors in Vietnam and Laos so quickly created corrupt societies that showed a cruel indifference to the needs of the majority. I could not, and still on some level cannot, believe that people who fought a war like that in which they were required to face every kind of hardship, in which they lived so purely and showed so much more concern for the majority than those they opposed, would betray their own ideology, values and ideals so completely so quickly.

I had been too busy during the war to try and develop my own deeper understanding of life. I more or less agreed with those who saw humanity's problems as fundamentally a question of economic and social systems, and who believed that if socialism triumphed in the Third World, or economic democracy in the first, that humanity would be launched on a path toward social justice, decency and happiness.

What the experience of Indochina dramatically suggested, and my own observations in my own post-Indochina life in America confirmed, is that either understanding or solving human problems involved far more than social, economic and political issues, which were a reflection of deeper psychological and spiritual questions.

After working in American politics for 15 years - serving as Research Director for Tom Hayden for Senate, writing the state of California's SolarCal campaign, serving as Governor Jerry Brown's Director of Research and creating his 1981 and 1982 State of the State initiatives, working as Research Director of Senator Gary Hart's think tank, and directing Rebuild America which included a wide variety of future Clinton cabinet officials and other worthies - I found myself more and more drawn to psychological and spiritual issues. Working at this level of politics it was clear that the kind of fundamental change needed to save the global biosphere, promote genuine social justice, or create a politics that served the majority, would have to come from outside the system, and involve deep psychological and spiritual transformations

As I was reaching these conclusions intellectually, I had a deep, life-changing experience in which I faced my mortality on an emotional

not intellectual level in August 1990. I immediately left politics and embarked on a spiritual journey which included six months in India and a return to Laos, intensive meditation culminating in a silent 3-month meditation retreat, marrying the great love of my life – the Hungarian writer and activist Zsuzsa Beres - and studying extensively with Hungarian spiritual teacher Laszlo Honti. I have spent the past 5 years in Santa Barbara, working and studying psychology with Dr. Robert Firestone and a group of his friends.

I've remained somewhat politically active, marching against and writing about the war in Iraq and a wide variety of other issues for Salon, and creating a project called "For Generations To Come" which focuses on saving the biosphere.

My main interest at the moment, however, is writing a book about and facilitating workshops aimed at encouraging people to face their own mortality while still in the prime of life. I think doing so is a necessary pre-condition to being fully alive for an individual. And I also believe that only if large numbers of people do so will humanity generate the consciousness required to save the biosphere and avoid the vast number of other calamities awaiting it in the 21st century.

You ask about my "hopes for the future". Well, I have to say, that my mind doesn't seem to generate too many these days. I am particularly concerned with the effect on the biosphere of the interaction between global warming, biodiversity loss, water aquifer depletion, chemical contamination and a wide variety of other new threats to the biospheric systems upon which human life depends. It is a new problem for humans, and we have not only been slow to respond but are in fact accelerating our long-term suicide. When I look at this issue alone, let alone the likelihood of increasingly technologically sophisticated terrorism and its impact on Western societies, and the threats facing the Third World, I find it hard to have much "hope" that the species will better itself in coming decades.

But I have also reached a point in my self-inquiries where I came to dislike the whole notion of "hope". If I need to have "hope" to motivate me, what will I do when I see no rational reason for hope? If I

can be "hopeful", then I can also be "hopeless", and I do not like feeling hopeless. I came to see "hope" as just one more of the many games that we humans devise to keep us occupied.

When I looked more deeply at my own life, I noticed that my life was not now and never had been built around "hope". Laos was an example. I went there, I learned to love the peasants, the bombing shocked my psyche and soul to the core, and I responded - not because I was hopeful or hopeless, but because I was alive.

Although I have to say I would rather be where I am today, since I seem to have a much fuller experience of life, I have never been so alive and energized as during my Laos years, both before and after I discovered the bombing. And I lived that way because I was alive, not because I was hopeful or hopeless. I was not hopeful that the war in Indochina would end. On the contrary. I assumed that it would continue, and I would be opposing it, for the rest of my life.

I feel I am at my best these days when I can allow the life-force to move through, and move with it, as opposed to creating all sorts of intellectual constructs in my head, such as being motivated by hope, meaning, or all the other ideas that I used to gravitate towards.

So, on a good day, I have no hopes for the future. Nor am I hopeless about it. I just wake up, work on opening to the forces of life, love and energy, and do the best I can to experience life as deeply and fully as I can, which includes doing the best I can to help others.