

UNIT ONE  
*Case Study*

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Transforming Vision into Reality: The Vietnam  
Women's Memorial

*Diane Carlson Evans*

*"I may be compelled to face danger, but never fear it,  
and while our soldiers can stand and fight I can  
stand and feed and nurse them."*

CLARA BARTON

The Vietnam Women's Memorial was dedicated on the National Mall just yards from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, "The Wall," on November 11, 1993, in Washington, DC. One may think that the approval, placement, and financing of a statue for such a just cause would be a relatively simple process; after all, this was the first memorial on the Mall of our nation's capital to honor the military service of women. However, to the contrary, the process was long and arduous and included two separate pieces of Congressional legislation and the approval of three federal commissions. The dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial represented the culmination of a 10-year struggle by thousands of volunteers who overcame controversy, rejection, and challenge by those who thought that a women's memorial was not needed. This case study is about the passion, the process, and the politics of turning a vision into reality and how one former Army nurse made a profound difference in women's history (Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc., 1993).

I am grateful for the unstinting help from so many who gave their time, expertise, and talents to make the Vietnam Women's Memorial a reality. Special thanks to Colonel A. Jane Carlson, United States, Retired (Army Nurse Corps), and Diana Hellinger, whose wisdom, inspiration, and encouragement helped make this case study possible.

#### MOVING A VISION

When this monument is finished, it will be for all time a testament to a group of American women who made an extraordinary sacrifice at an extraordinary time in our nation's history: the women who went to war in Vietnam . . . You went. You served. You suffered . . . And yet your service and your sacrifice have been mostly invisible for all these intervening years. When you finished what you had to do, you came quietly home. You stepped back into the background from which you had modestly come. You melted away into a society which, for too long now, has ignored the vital and endless work that falls to women and is not appreciated as it should be. (Powell, 1993)

General Colin Powell's words rang with passion and purpose on the day of groundbreaking for the Vietnam Women's Memorial, July 29, 1993. After listening to his every word on that historic day, one couldn't help but drift and digress to many years before. Thousands of women left the comforts of America to find themselves in the midst of guerilla warfare. Having volunteered, they served in helmets and flak jackets, spending long hours easing the pain and suffering of wounded soldiers.

On July 1, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation granting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) authorization to construct a memorial on a site of two acres in Constitution Gardens near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. The legislation read that the memorial would honor men and women of the armed forces of the United States who served in Vietnam. Two years after authorization was received, the design and plans were approved and construction was under way. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, designed by Maya

Lin and commonly referred to as “the Wall,” was formally dedicated on November 13, 1982.

Just as the Vietnam War had divided our nation, the veterans themselves were divided on the design of their memorial. Some argued that the V-shaped wall was inadequate and demanded something more heroic. Some called it a big black scar, a black gash of shame, a hole in the ground. A compromise was struck to settle the dispute. Former Secretary of the Interior James Watt had refused to authorize construction of the Wall unless a statue of an American soldier was added to it. The directors of the VVMF agreed to commission the highest-ranking sculptor in the design competition, Frederick Hart, of Washington, DC. He would design a bronze sculpture of three infantrymen to accommodate concern that the Wall lacked specific symbols of the veterans and their patriotism. Hart described his design as follows:

The portrayal of the figures is consistent with history. They wear the uniform and carry the equipment of war; they are young. The contrast between the innocence of their youth and weapons of war underscores the poignancy of their sacrifice. There is about them the physical contact and sense of unit that bespeaks the bonds of love and sacrifice that is the nature of men at war. And yet they are each alone. Their strength and their vulnerability are both evident. Their true heroism lies in these bonds of loyalty in the face of their aloneness and their vulnerability. (Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, 1982)

In 1983 a photograph of a bronze statue portraying three military men appeared in national newspapers, raising painful personal awareness that our country did not and might not ever know the women who served alongside those depicted. “Consistent with history.” These words crystallized for me the need to change that consistency, that image. In 1983 when I saw the design commissioned by Hart, I was moved by what I did not see. His account that the “portrayal of figures was consistent with history” reflected the belief that only men serve and therefore are portrayed.

The names of eight women nurses who died in Vietnam are etched on the granite wall. The Wall, in its minimalistic concept and simplicity, was complete, as Maya Lin had described it. The names of

men and women who died in Vietnam were etched together in granite for eternity. With the dedication, Americans began to learn about the lives and losses of the male and female soldiers. They were able to begin their healing journey. I was struck by a belief that the addition of the Hart statue honoring the living implored another point of view, and another healing element. Although people would see men in bronze, a whole and true portrait of the women who served during the Vietnam War, a portrait depicting their professionalism, dedication, service, and sacrifice, had yet to be seen, and their stories yet to be heard. Women, too, needed a healing place and a healing process. Historically, women who have served humanity during America’s struggles and wars have not been included in the artistic portrayals. They slip into history unrecognized and forgotten, compounding the myth that either they did not serve or their service was not noteworthy. Furthermore, as before, they had disappeared off the landscape of the Vietnam era.

Although many thought that the addition of the statue portraying three servicemen completed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, it is paradoxical that it rendered an incompleteness. A piece of history remained missing. By all public accounts, the profound legacy of women’s service in Vietnam was sealed, closed from view, and dispensable. However, the time had in fact come. The norm of leaving women out of the historical account of war had to change.

Believing that people would support a memorial honoring women if given the information and the opportunity, I gave my first speech in 1983 at a Lions Club. My anxiety grew as I looked out on the room and thought about the public, which had once been hostile toward and unappreciative of those who served in Vietnam. Reexperiencing the feelings I had when I stepped off the plane on my return from Vietnam and was greeted by angry war protesters, my knees went limp and I started to shake. I was reluctant to speak experientially, to open myself up to strangers. I talked about the other women and said that more often than not it was an American nurse who a soldier looked to during the last moments of his life. I talked about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, about how beauti-

ful and fitting it is, but also about how women needed to be honored and remembered as well. There were many questions about my own service. The speech ended with a standing ovation. I was stunned and realized I would have to overcome fear and personal anxieties and share some of my own stories. I remembered what Eleanor Roosevelt said: "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face . . . You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

Perhaps it was fate that year when I attended my first veterans reunion in my home state of Minnesota. It included an exhibition of war art by veterans, but no images of women were depicted. There I saw a work of sculptor Rodger Brodin entitled *The Squad*, a realistic depiction in bronze of 13 "grunts" on patrol. I was instantly taken back to Vietnam. I felt compelled to call and ask the artist whether he had ever thought of sculpting a woman soldier. We met, and over the course of 5 months Brodin listened to my stories of the women who had served in the war, of the deaths, and of the weariness and frustration of seeing young Americans and Vietnamese mutilated. Using a 21-year-old model, he created a 33-inch bronze composite of a military nurse. She was to become the galvanizing force and symbol affectionately named "the Lady" by former soldiers. To Brodin she was *The Nurse*.

Having never been involved in political action, raised funds, or spoken to the media or the public, and with a suspicious view of government and the press because of my personal experience in the Vietnam War, I now had to find the courage to work toward justice. Hard work did not frighten me. Failure to achieve rightful honor for women did. I had an unsettling feeling of powerlessness reminiscent of wading into uncharted territory—not unlike stepping off a helicopter in Vietnam, entering a field hospital, and asking, "Where do I start?"

The anxiety was justified. Little did I know that this vision would require a full-time, 10-year campaign convincing government agencies, Congress, journalists, and the public about the need for a memorial. Some engaged in vilifying our service and

undermined our intent to honor women, and it took time for them to understand us, a core of nurses, veterans, and others who had profound stories to share and a firm belief in a common cause. We would be misjudged and our motives challenged, questioned, and discounted. It would be our role to teach, move the mission forward, and create a national consensus while overcoming ignorance and denial. We would not be rebuked, censured, or deterred, because as Thomas Jefferson said, "When things get so far wrong, we can always rely on the people, when well informed, to set things right."

#### DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

Our first core meeting was held in February 1984 with sculptor Rodger Brodin and four people, all veterans. Soon thereafter I made telephone calls, wrote letters, and extended invitations to other veterans, lawyers, and a representative from the Minnesota Nurses Association. Nine people attended the second meeting. In the words of Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Together we decided to organize a national nonprofit organization for the purpose of fund raising and moving the vision forward. Officers and a board of directors were elected, and the organization was named the Vietnam Nurses Memorial Project. Later we changed the name to the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc. (VWMP) to embrace all the military and civilian women who had served during the Vietnam era in our education and recognition efforts. We laid the groundwork, developed a mission statement that included objectives, wrote bylaws, filed articles of incorporation, applied for Internal Revenue Service (IRS) nonprofit tax status, and wrote a policy and procedures manual filled with guidelines for meeting our objectives.

We began building the team and the coalitions that could help meet our three objectives: (1) to identify the women who served during the Vietnam era and facilitate research, (2) to educate the public about the contributions of these women, and (3) to erect a monument on the grounds of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, thus ensur-

ing a place in recorded history for women Vietnam veterans. We recruited advisory members to serve on the corporate advisory board, the education council, and the monument council. We looked for individuals who would lend their name and those who could do the work. We were all volunteers.

About 3 months after our first meeting, we organized a special event to unveil Rodger Brodin's statue *The Nurse*. We invited the press and made our first official public announcement that we wanted to place this statue honoring female veterans at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. We were an intrepid group! We had yet to feel the heat of the backlash or experience the entanglements inevitable in government bureaucracy. Furthermore, unknown to us, a new law was in the making—the Commemorative Works Act, enacted in 1986 after the Project's signed agreement with Rodger Brodin. This law made it necessary for the VWMP to meet the requirements of federal regulatory review and approval.

A Minneapolis corporation donated a small office space to be used by the core group of volunteers and later by staff. We created management and organizational systems for daily operations, including mail and phone logs, form letters for “thank you” notes, general information responses, an annual budget, and financial accountability systems. We set up a regional infrastructure of volunteer coordinators who would assist in publicizing the mission of the VWMP, solicit funds, amass additional volunteers, and seek endorsements from politicians and organizations. The American Nurses Association donated a small space in its Washington, DC, office for the use of our national volunteer coordinator.

Still with some stage fright, I found on the speakers' circuit that I was influencing people simply by sharing the stories of women's service and placing the tangible symbol, *The Nurse*, in front of them. Many were moved and wanted more information. They wanted to know names of books on the subject. They wanted to know whether women had been affected by Agent Orange and suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, as did their male counterparts. I began to learn the enormous scope and responsibility of our undertaking, and I realized how much I needed to learn so that I could

adequately answer questions and better represent the service of women. I became acutely aware of the non-nurse veterans, such as physical therapists, dietitians, administrators, air traffic controllers, Red Cross workers, USAID workers, and others who asked to be equally honored and remembered.

I was not ignorant of strong foes. At times I was described as a radical feminist. One person who so described me said I was using the Vietnam dead to further my cause. With increased public awareness of the vision, there were those who insisted on changing it or opposing it altogether. Our vision triggered hate mail, threats, and angry phone calls. Some said women had not been in combat, did not suffer, and were too few in number to be honored. Many people were comfortable with the popular stereotype of the all-male American military.

In February 1985 a meeting was held in the Old Executive Office Building of the White House. We met with the associate director of the Office of Public Liaison to discuss the subject of recognizing the contributions of women in service to our country. Here we met women from the Pentagon and the Veterans Administration, representatives of the military services and other overseas civilian services (e.g., the Red Cross), and the woman who served as campaign director for the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and as an independent fundraising consultant. People brought their divergent views of how to go about recognizing women. Some left with an interest in a presidential proclamation honoring all women veterans and others with an interest in building a memorial to all women who served throughout America's history, in war and peace. It was an important meeting. For us it led to funding connections, volunteers, and visibility. For others, it led to an all-encompassing memorial to military women. Subsequently, in March 1985, legislation was authorized to build a memorial to all women who had served since the time of the American Revolution. It would be called the Women in Military Service for America (WIMSA) Memorial and would be built at the entrance to Arlington Cemetery.

We sent testimony from VWMP to Congress, supporting the legislative effort. Later a federal commission would use the WIMSA Memorial as an

argument against the efforts of the VWMP. However, we continued with our mission to complete the Vietnam Veterans Memorial with the addition of a sculpture portraying women.

By Fall 1985 we had four 33-inch bronze replica statues of *The Nurse* traveling across the country and being exhibited in California, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Accompanying the statue were VWMP press releases, photographs of *The Nurse*, brochures, and information packets with requests for donations. The statue became the primary focus and vehicle through which women veterans came out of hiding. At war's end, many had gone their separate ways, getting on with their lives and careers. Unknown within their communities and even among each other, they joined with their sister veterans—many for the first time—and with their male counterparts. A decade after the war's end, the cathartic process of healing began. The outpouring of interest and the offers to volunteer were phenomenal. Our office was flooded with letters of inquiry and letters from veterans and families expressing appreciation. Still, there were those who doubted that the effort was worth fighting. One letter from a former military nurse asked, "Do you think anyone will give a damn?"

At the Project's small Minneapolis headquarters, we developed short- and long-range plans of action for grassroots and national support, fund raising, education, and public relation activities. We wrote fact sheets, position papers, media advisories, and press releases, and we designed brochures. Our plan included action steps, a checklist, timelines, and plans for who would do what, when, and where. At the outset, garnering national support seemed like an overwhelming and formidable task. We broke it down into manageable lists. We targeted the audiences we wanted and developed the message that would motivate them to respond. For example, we designed a flyer with the slogan "A Small Donation Makes a Monumental Difference" and sent copies to volunteers to distribute at civic organizations. We began with small action steps focused on veterans and nurses.

For the short-range plan, I determined to start at the grassroots level and visit the local posts of veterans service organizations: Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Vietnam Veterans of America. I was also "testing the water." There were a lot of unknowns regarding interest or potential support within this community, but, if moved, male veterans could take ownership and meet the many challenges ahead with us. Galvanizing them now would ignite their energy and unleash the collective strength needed for a nationwide campaign.

With local support and a formal resolution in hand, I went to the district and state conventions. The language of the resolutions was fine tuned in committees, voted on, and forwarded to national offices. As hoped, some veterans and their auxiliary members were excited and proud to be a part of the process. They lobbied long and hard within their groups to defend what they had supported. After researching each of their unique procedures and parliamentary rules, I requested time to speak from the floor of their national conventions in 1985. Lines of individuals behind the "con" microphones were much longer than those behind the "pro." Comments were heated, and some questions were laced with barbed cynicism. Miraculously, having engaged strong and powerful support early on, the pros won. By the end of that year, we had the support of the five major veterans' organizations and their 6 million members.

I became active in these veterans' organizations and remained highly visible during the 10-year effort. It was important for the VWMP to establish a reputation of trust and credibility. Using the strategy model of the veterans' organizations, we asked nurses who were politically active in their organizations to represent the project and employ their influence. More than 100 did so with pride and enormous success.

In the long-range plan, we targeted a variety of civic and humanitarian groups with a clear intent to co-opt both genders and the age groups before and after the Vietnam era. We worked toward that end because numbers would count. The grassroots appeal gained national momentum.

Our first highly visible major fundraiser was held in September 1986 in Washington, DC, near the Lincoln Memorial. It was cosponsored by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and the William Joiner Center of the University of Massachusetts. About 300 people gathered in a tent. Senator Kennedy took the podium, commending those “gallant and courageous women who served our country in Vietnam” and stressing the need to “recognize those women who served under the colors of our flag and who lost their lives.” Senator John Kerry (D-MA) followed, saying, “Any of the names on the Wall could be any of us that are here. Our mission is to remember, and no one can remember in the way we ought to remember until there’s a statue that reflects the service of women in Vietnam.” A year later we would need the help of these senators in asking their fellow members to put these words into action.

We were on our way. Our media plan went into action, heightening awareness across America. Volunteers received official status to represent the VWMP and spoke at local and national association conferences, conventions, and civic organizations. Radio, television, and newspapers called asking for interviews. After a while, I found that the most predictable statement was, “I didn’t know there were women who served in Vietnam.” The most predictable question was, “Were you ever rocketed or attacked?” We would negate the myth and defy the stereotype on both counts. Yes, women were there, and, yes, they were wounded and killed. After what seemed a long media blackout, journalists were finally interested in the real-life stories of women veterans.

Simultaneously, we appealed for contributions of goods and services from businesses and organizations. Two major corporations printed thousands of brochures for the project pro bono, and another prepared a short documentary for fund-raising purposes. We asked supporters to help us identify and approach corporate sponsors and private foundations. Northwest Airlines agreed to provide air cargo free of charge for the 150-pound *Nurse* as it made stops around the United States. We sought professional counsel from an advertising agency. The slogan “A Small Donation Makes a Monumen-

tal Difference” made a poignant appeal in fund-raising materials and advertisements. By July 1987, \$250,000 had already been raised from corporate gifts, individual donations, appeals at veterans’ meetings and conventions, and special fundraisers. More than \$100,000 worth of in-kind services (e.g., management consultant services, legal fees, rent) had also been received. A pharmaceutical company approached us for a market tie with a surgical scrub used by medical personnel that subsequently netted the project another \$500,000.

Armed with a clear vision, a tangible symbol, public support, and preliminary funding, and grounded with a legitimate nonprofit corporation, we were ready to ask for the endorsement of the VVMF, the organization that built the Wall and placed the bronze statue of three servicemen. VVMF founders Jack Wheeler, the chairman, and Jan Scruggs, the president, offered an official endorsement, as required by the Memorandum of Conveyance, in the spring of 1986.

The ensuing months were filled with fund raising, education, public relations, sister search activities, and plotting of strategies for seeking formal approval from federal agencies. However, in 1986, in view of the rapidly diminishing outdoor sites in the nation’s capital suitable for the erection of commemorative works, Congress enacted the Commemorative Works Act (CWA). We read it with trepidation. The regulations were new and very complicated. We saw loopholes, language that was left up to the interpretation of the reader. We believed that our proposal was simply an addition to an existing memorial and therefore not subject to the CWA, which did not address additions. CWA governed new memorials intended as a commemoration of an individual, group, or event, requiring them to be authorized by an Act of Congress. We sought legal counsel and asked a lot of questions. Unanimous formal approval for a commemorative work, including additions to existing memorials, was needed from the Secretary of the Interior, the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the National Capital Memorial Commission. Subsequently, we spent inordinate hours researching the role and authority of each. This knowledge alone should have been

enough to deter even the most hearty and committed of souls. Indeed, that was the Act's intent, to stop the proliferation of memorials in Washington, DC.

With the endorsement of the VVMF in hand, we proceeded as planned and took our first major step. In September 1987 the Secretary of the Interior approved our proposal to add a statue representing women at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This permission was based on his conclusion that our proposal was an addition to an existing memorial and thus not subject to the CWA. The Secretary forwarded the proposal, bearing the Department of Interior's official approval, to the Commission of Fine Arts. Elated, we requested a hearing with the Commission of Fine Arts. As the "gatekeeper" to memorials in Washington, the Commission's purpose is to supply artistic advice related to the aesthetic appearance of Washington, DC, and to review the plans for all public buildings, parks, and other architectural elements in the capital (Kohler, 1985). While waiting for the hearing date, we prepared testimony and informed our supporters and the public at large of the upcoming hearing.

On October 22, 1987, we went before the Commission of Fine Arts. We listened to impassioned testimony from the opposition, letters of dissent from members of the public, and discussion and comments from the six presidentially appointed commissioners. We were thunderstruck that some minds and powerful pens in Washington, DC, had already been made up before we had an opportunity to testify before the prestigious and powerful Commission. Minutes before we entered the hearing room, someone handed us a copy of the *Washington Post* containing an article by Benjamin Forgey entitled "Women and the Wall Memorial Proposal: Honor without Integrity":

It has the lofty ring of a just cause, but the proposed Vietnam Women's Memorial, which has been approved by the Secretary of the Interior and which will be considered today by the Commission of Fine Arts, is not a very good idea. To be precise, it's a bad one. This is not to say that the women who served in the U.S. armed forces in Vietnam were not brave, did not perform essential duties, do not deserve our respect. It is simply to point out that if our female veterans deserve more conspicuous honor

than they already have received at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Constitution Gardens, where the names of the eight female dead are inscribed along with those of their male counterparts, then they should be given such honor elsewhere. To add a statue of a nurse to that extraordinary memorial—the central feature of this misguided proposal—would create a serious symbolic imbalance in one of the nation's preeminent commemorative places.

As I took my seat I thought: "So! Nurses and women aren't good enough for this sacred ground!" I knew we were in trouble before we entered the door, and soon the words out of the commissioners' mouths would echo those of Mr. Forgey. Backroom discussions had unmistakably taken place.

Our testimony included commentary on the lack of other memorials to women in our nation's capital. Of the 110 memorials in Washington, DC, at that time, only three were to women, and none of these honored military women. We addressed the history of women's service and issues of compatibility, dignity, need, simplicity, completeness, honor, and healing for all veterans, as well as the merits of a statue. Members of a prestigious Washington, DC, landscape architectural firm testified in support of our site and design.

Opponents to the concept insisted that an addition would encourage other groups and ethnic minorities to claim statues as well. One antagonist said that the Wall was complete "as is" and that attempts to depict everyone literally can only diffuse its symbolic power and weaken the memorial. Maya Lin, artist of the original design, protested further, concerned about "individual concessions" to special interest groups. "I am as opposed to this new addition as I was to [Hart's sculpture]" Lin concluded. "I cannot see where it will all end" (Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 1987).

There were derisive and heated remarks by commissioners. Frederick Hart, sculptor of *Three Fighting Men* (who disqualified himself from casting a vote), argued against the addition by insisting that the statue of three men stood for the whole veteran population regardless of sex. He held that his work had created a "fragile balance" with the Wall, a balance likely to be disturbed by the intrusion of

added elements. Another commissioner called it an “unneeded clarification.” J. Carter Brown, Chairman of the Commission, delivered the coup de grace. He declared that the three male figures by Hart were already “symbolic of humankind and everyone who served.” He asserted that a proliferation of statues would be uncontrollable, saying, “The Park Service has even heard from Scout Dog associations.” He referred to the VWMP statue as “an afterthought, sort of a putdown, almost a ghettoization.” Mention was made of a statue already dedicated to nurses—the Nurse’s Monument, which overlooks the graves from the top of a hill in Arlington National Cemetery. We were urged to believe that this was enough for nurses. I knew from my research that this monument had been placed in honor of Army and Navy nurses in 1938. It was rededicated by the chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force in 1971.

The Commission voted four to one to reject our proposal. The commissioners’ comments seemed to mirror those in the *Washington Post* column, which had branded the project a “bad precedent,” saying, “*The Nurse* in answer to Hart’s statue has no psychological or physical relationship with the memorial as a whole” (Forgey, 1987).

Minutes after the vote, some of us talked to waiting members of the press. When asked about the hearing, I stated matter-of-factly that the Commission ignored the support of thousands of Americans and treated women veterans with arrogance and insensitivity, and I said that we would be back. One journalist asked me what it would take to place a statue of a woman at the Wall. Quite spontaneously, I said, “An act of God and an Act of Congress.” Chairman Brown also talked to the press: “It could be a work of art done by Michelangelo, which it isn’t, and it would still detract from the enormous power of the memorial” (*Washington Times*, 1987).

Balance with the existing memorials was a focus of debate. “What Brown neglects to specify, however, is precisely how much *The Nurse* might dilute the power of the Wall as compared to how much the existing statue on the site—*Three Fighting Men*—already compromises the Wall’s inclusive embrace by its omission of women” (Marling & Wetenhall, 1989).

I knew we were in for a long, tough fight. We would need legislation in our hands to challenge a hostile Commission of Fine Arts again. Navigating a twisted bureaucratic path would require researching the laws and using them to our advantage, activating even more of Americans to use their voices and power, cultivating relationships with federal agencies and legislative staff, finding more money, compromising, and plotting a good map. Hours after the Commission hearing, we regrouped and started charting the map. We would use our nursing skills to practice patience, diplomacy, and advocacy, and we would exercise the art of grace. Above all, we would need perseverance and a good sense of humor to keep ourselves balanced amid an endless barrage of what we considered irrational opposition. We viewed the roadblocks and setbacks as detours.

Before us loomed our tremendous responsibility to the people of America who shared our fervent hope that a memorial would find the way to its appropriate place of honor. We could not let Americans down, and we were soon to learn that they would not let us down. Morley Safer of the television program *60 Minutes* learned of the Commission of Fine Arts hearing. Featuring our efforts on one of the programs, Safer interviewed five military nurses who had served during the Vietnam War. He placed their extraordinary and compelling stories of service and our mission to build a memorial in front of several million households for 14 minutes. This was to be a major turning point.

## NEW STRATEGIES

*Our first new strategy was to win the support of more Americans by building coalitions of various interests and groups.* We had a strong infrastructure of dependable, reliable, and enthusiastic volunteers, and we accomplished our long-range goal of achieving the endorsement of 40 national organizations. Because we did not believe that this was a special interest “nurses” or “women’s” movement, we appealed to people of all ages, both sexes, veterans of all wars, and peacetime soldiers—in other words, to all citizens of America. Through efforts such as the *60 Minutes* program and numerous interviews with the electronic and newsprint media, we built a large audience of American citizens who



became a strong and effective constituency of loyal supporters, and we had evidence of this support. A clipping service we used sent us copies of hundreds of heart-rending, supportive letters to the editor, editorials, opinion pieces, and stories from newspapers around the country. Many of them were in response to negative pieces written about our efforts. More evidence arrived in the form of donations: thousands of dollars in small amounts poured in, many with a note attached saying that the giver wished it could be more.

*These constituencies were integral in the success of our second strategy—lobbying Congress.* In November 1987, just 1 month after the rejection by the Commission of Fine Arts, Senator Dave Durenberger (R-MN) introduced SJ 215 in the Senate. Representative Sam Gejdenson (D-CT) introduced companion bill HR 3628 in the House, authorizing the building of a Vietnam Women's Memorial at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Furthermore, consultation with a Washington insider and former lobbyist helped to familiarize us with the political process and prepare us for future hearings. (The VWMP office was moved from Minnesota to Washington, DC, facilitating our national and legislative efforts.)

In February 1988, we testified at hearings on the bill (changed to SJ 2042) before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests. The bill was received favorably and marked up to the full committee, and in June 1988 the Senate passed SJ 2042 by a vote of 96 to 1. Also in June 1988, we testified at a hearing held before the House Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials. Management and financial questions were posed. Preparation equals performance, and we were prepared. We answered questions honestly, clarifying and identifying the actions that met the committee's concerns. However, having our day in court brought out a myriad of contentious old conflicts, including those of a woman's place, tensions left over from the Vietnam war, and flare-ups of the original controversy regarding the design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We were dealing with more than just a memorial proposal. Our project had political and sociologic undercurrents.

After extensive debate between the House and the Senate over the language of SJ 2042, the House

rejected Senate language and on September 23, 1988, passed another version of the bill. On October 12, 1988 the Senate passed an amended version of SJ 2042 as passed by the House. A week later the House rejected the Senate's amendment. The Senate then conceded to the House position.

We unhappily settled for a watered-down version of the original specific language regarding site and design. At the eleventh hour, as Congress adjourned on November 14, 1988, Public Law 100-660 authorized "the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project to establish a memorial on federal land in the District of Columbia or its environs to honor women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam era." *This was important for what it did not say.* It was not specific regarding placement of the memorial on the Mall. Although Congress stipulated that it would be most fitting and appropriate to place the memorial within the 2.2 acre site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the District of Columbia, it was *our* sense that, because of the standards of the CWA, the three federal governing agencies would yet have the last say, having the leverage to place our memorial anywhere in the *environs* to the exclusion of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We had yet to face the hostile Commission of Fine Arts, whose members had made it clear that they did not wish to see anything added within the 2.2 acre site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Moreover, although the Senate bill penned the word *statue*, the House of Representatives bill would not. It would not dictate design by specifying *statue* but opted for the more generic term *memorial*. We determined to go back to Congress during the next session and start the legislative process over to get the bill we needed that would firmly secure the site at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. However, the word *memorial* would remain.

Within a month of the passage of the first bill, we initiated a second and more powerful legislative campaign to put our strategies into play. We hired a public relations consultant who helped us generate thousands of stories across America from the women who served, asking them to share in their own words their personal experiences—the veritable substance behind the quest for a Vietnam

Women's Memorial—with the public. The response was phenomenal.

Throughout 1989, members of our board and staff met frequently with congressional members and the staff of legislative committees. We adopted a policy always to go in groups of two or more, depending on the circumstances. This allowed us to debrief, compare notes about what was said, discuss any conflicting messages, and subsequently write a summary for later reference (our own as well as that of the full board of directors). When deemed necessary, we set the record straight by sending a memorandum of understanding to legislative staff. Together we formulated a new slate for the 101st Congress and worked to identify panels of witnesses representing different organizations and interests for the hearings. In addition, I again spoke before committees and testified at four congressional hearings in the House and Senate.

Throughout the duration of the legislative process, we successfully employed the “Seven Rules for Testifying before Congress,” even before Thomas E. Harvey's work of the same name was published in the fall of 1989! We used common sense, respect, and assorted advice from experienced sages in the veterans' and nurses' organizations and from trusted legislative staffers. Furthermore, we used a plan.

*A third strategy was to activate our supporters.* Using the volunteer network, we initiated a massive campaign asking supporters to contact congressional members by telephone, mail, or personal visit. As the bills progressed through the political process, these efforts were targeted to specific legislators. One by one, the legislators signed on. We accomplished this strategy by the dissemination of information through the national newsletters of endorsing organizations, through local newsletters whose mailing lists we were fortunate to have obtained, through highly active telephone trees designed by the volunteers, and through appeals to the public through media relations activities. We sent press releases and fielded questions at press conferences.

It was critical for our supporters to know the goal, the progress of lobbying with Congress, and our expectations of them. With updates and the dissemination of information, we kept the vision of

the VWMP before them and provided a guiding force. Information is powerful. We found that our weakest links in the networking chain were those groups that had not been given the information. They did not act, and some lost faith because they felt overlooked or abandoned. At every national convention of the veterans' organizations, I gave briefings and asked specific actions of the members. VWMP board members and more than 150 official volunteers performed these same duties at the meetings of nurses' associations, women's organizations, social clubs, patriotic and civic organizations, schools, universities, and other groups. Mobilizing them and hundreds of unofficial volunteers toward action required articulating expectations through consistent distribution of information. Giving them something tangible to work with proved enormously successful.

With the help of an advertising agency, we designed a promotional poster for the legislative effort that read, “Not all women wore love beads in the '60s.” It depicted a female soldier's name imprinted on dog tags connected to stainless steel beads. On the reverse side, hundreds of signatures petitioned lawmakers to appeal on behalf of Vietnam's forgotten veterans. Thousands of these petitions and pallets of cardboard mailing tubes were sent to volunteers and supportive coalitions across America. At shopping malls, veterans' clubs, nurses' meetings, and street corners, Americans were asked to sign the petitions and forward them to their senators and representatives. More than 25,000 posters and tubes were sent to the national veterans' conventions alone in one summer. Legislators became so tired of receiving the tubes they said, “No more!” They had gotten the message. Later, we learned that many posters never made it to their appropriate destinations because the unique design was so well liked they ended up in frames on office walls.

#### BACKLASH

When our prolific and unrelenting lobbying efforts were covered by newspapers, the backlash was often fascinating:

Congress should resist efforts to tinker with one of the most effective and powerful memorials built in this

country—the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington's Constitutional Garden. . . It's hard to vote against the flag or Army nurses. But, in this instance, congressmen should. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is as close to perfection as it can be. To add anything to it would only be to detract from the powerful memorial it has become. (Indianapolis News, 1988)

We pressed on, and our legislative strategy won. On November 28, 1989, President George Bush signed legislation authorizing Area 1, the Mall, the central monumental core of the Capital City, as the site for the Vietnam Women's Memorial. However, the explicit criteria of the CWA had still to be met. We had yet to win the approval of the federal authorizing agencies to place the memorial near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or prove that the "subject of the memorial is of pre-eminent historical and lasting significance to the Nation" (National Capital Memorials ETC, 1986).

When speaking before these agencies, I asked:

Is not the selfless service of 265,000 women, all volunteers, who served during the Vietnam era around the world, 10,000 of them—the majority of whom were nurses—in Vietnam under grave and life-threatening conditions, saving the lives of 350,000 American soldiers, of the greatest historical significance and worthy of this nation's eternal gratitude?

Supported by drawings, sketches, mockups, and reports from engineers, planners, and landscape architects, in a 5-month process of informal and formal hearings, we finally gained the approval of regulatory agencies for our preferred site within Area 1. Site review ensured that the site selected was relevant to the subject and did not interfere with or encroach on existing memorials or features. In April 1990 the Commission of Fine Arts voted to accept a recommendation to locate the Vietnam Women's Memorial on the Mall near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We had held fast to the vision, and our determination was vindicated. We now had a site worthy of the women who had served.

Because our first design, *The Nurse*, had been rejected in 1987, we launched a nationwide, open one-stage design competition to solicit a new design for the Vietnam Women's Memorial. The competition would provide us with the opportu-

nity to discover the most creative and appropriate work of art. It was an exciting way for Americans to participate in designing a national memorial that honors forever the heroic spirit of more than 265,000 American women. We were confident that a jury of eminent architects, renowned members of the arts community, and highly regarded Vietnam veterans would select a design worthy of the women who served. Ultimately, however, the VWMP board would make the final decision. With the guidance of a professional competition adviser, site feasibility consultants, technical advisers, and legal counsel, we developed the design standards, rules, and procedures to be used by the design competition applicants. We put out the call for the memorial design entries and required that they be received between August 1990 and the end of October 1990.

The design phase was arduous and demanding, and required hundreds of hours of work by committed individuals from August 1990 through March 1993. In the weeks and months that followed the design competition results, we worked with the artists who won first place to develop their designs further. Ultimately the board of directors of the VWMP decided to move forward with the design offered by Glenna Goodacre of Santa Fe, New Mexico, who had won an honorable mention in the design competition. We did not schedule meetings with the federal agencies to review her design until we had solicited the opinions of representatives of several of the project's endorsing organizations: the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Disabled American Veterans. Again, this was a part of our overall philosophy and strategy to be inclusive and inform our supporters, to seek their input, and to ask their counsel. In quiet celebration while meeting together in Washington, DC, they unanimously embraced the design placed before them as fitting, appropriate, and worthy of the women who served. With their positive consensus on the Goodacre design, we were ready for the last phase.

During 1991 we met with the National Capital Memorial Commission, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the National Capital Planning Commis-

sion to present and review Goodacre's bronze model of a multi-figure sculpture-in-the-round depicting three Vietnam era women, one of whom is tending to a wounded male soldier. By Fall 1991, after many staff meetings, hearings, and unsuccessful bureaucratic attempts to alter the concept, the design was approved by all three commissions. In Santa Fe, Goodacre proceeded to build the life-size monument in clay for its final review. On March 11, 1993, the clay sculpture-in-the-round was approved by all the regulatory agencies. The monument would now be cast in bronze.

By this time, the news media neither helped nor hindered the approval efforts. Opinions continued to be voiced by well-known syndicated columnists and small-town journalists, but there was no turning back. "Monumentitis is making the Mall in Washington a monument to Mars and to irritable

factions" (Will, 1991). However, most of the media were now on the side of building the memorial. They would be the chief catalyst for informing America (and foreign countries) of the upcoming dedication.

Finally, on November 11, 1993, female veterans were thanked by a grateful nation during the dedication ceremony entitled "A Celebration of Patriotism and Courage." The Vietnam Women's Memorial statue was unveiled on the grounds of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial 300 feet southeast of the statue of three servicemen near the Wall. Many in attendance shed tears and shared thoughts and sentiments. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William Crowe noted, "This moving monument finally completes the Vietnam circle by honoring the spirit and achievements of the women who participated in that effort. But more impor-



Vietnam Women's Memorial. Glenna Goodacre, sculptor. Gregory Staley, photographer. (Copyright 1993 by Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc.)

tant, it will serve as a shining beacon for future generations of American women." A wounded Marine said, "I would not be alive today without the super professional service of the American women the memorial honors." Gail Hager, a woman who served in Vietnam, said in a letter to the project's office, "I'm so grateful for your perseverance, commitment, and passion to make the women's statue become a reality . . . My heart is still overflowing with feelings from my experiences in DC. You have given each of us women a priceless gift—the gift of hope and healing. For us to be recognized, honored, appreciated, and united was unbelievable." For the VWMP's commemorative book, *A Celebration of Patriotism and Courage* (1993), Charles T. Hager said, "The dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial will complete the long march toward universal recognition of all who served their country in Vietnam. This memorial honors the

commitment and inspiration of the American women whose service during this turbulent and difficult time cannot be overstated."

Vision, that picture of desired results, is just that—a vision. Although I provided the vision and leadership, accomplishment was achieved with the help of many who provided the complex combination of necessary abilities. Keeping the vision clearly out in front of the American people, having a board and staff committed to written policies and speaking with one voice, and maintaining commitment to strategic planning and results—these helped realize the victory. Moving the vision of the VWMP forward is truly a testament to the will of the people. It took a creative team of diverse talents and personalities. Many came and went at critical junctures, offering expertise and guidance, and all made a difference. It was important to listen. Ultimately, it was collective persistence and determination in using political action that moved a nation. Eleanor Roosevelt said: "It is deeply important that you develop the quality of stamina. Without it, you are beaten. With it, you may wring victory out of countless defeats." Her words rang true more than once.

It is easy to be intimidated by the mysteries of politics, politicians, and the political process. Yet this is where action, driven by our personal aspirations, values, and beliefs, can force change—and even alter the way people view the world. The secret to the process isn't all that mysterious after all. Demystifying it is analogous to breaking the intricacies of nature down into understandable parts. "By viewing Nature, Nature's handmaid Art, Makes mighty things from small beginnings grow" (Dryden, 1995).

A small group grew to the thousands of veterans, other Americans, and people from around the world who went to Washington, DC, on Veterans Day 1993 to dedicate the Vietnam Women's Memorial and say "thank you" to women who served our nation. Vice President Al Gore, a Vietnam veteran, praised his sister veterans during the dedication ceremony, stating, "Let's all resolve that this memorial serve as a vehicle for healing our nation's wounds. Let's never again take so long in honoring a debt" (Gore, 1993).



One of the four figures of the Vietnam Women's Memorial. Glenna Goodacre, sculptor. Gregory Staley, photographer. (Copyright 1993 by Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc.)

## REFLECTIONS

The original target date for dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial was 1988, 4 years after the founding of the organization. Ultimate success would require 5 more years. During those wakeful nights and stress-filled days, it was difficult not to become discouraged and wonder whether the struggle was worth it. We had received many offers of pared-down memorial concepts and different sites. We could have accepted them and gone on with our lives. We lost volunteers, we lost some support, and some of us lost friends. The personal price and the price to the organization had to be weighed. Our particular crusade required waiting, working harder and longer, and taking new risks. Externalizing the destructive criticism and skepticism, which became part of the norm, was critical to maintaining harmony amid the balancing act of family and project responsibilities.

It became clear that to succeed the achievement of the vision before us would require some compromise, but giving up was not an option. When it became necessary, we found a new design, but we would not concede on the choice of a site. I often had to remind myself of my own words before the national veterans' service organizations in 1988 when requesting their legislative support:

We wish to stand near the Wall of names of those we cared for in death and the bronze statue portraying the men we helped come home. We were with them in the war and we want to be with them now. I want the women who served to know that they are not forgotten, that there is a special place for them, too, on honored ground.

The nature of a nation's memory of war can be contentious and emotionally charged. Commemoration does not simply encourage people to reflect on war and remember the veterans and their contributions to society; it also affects how that war is viewed. Do memorials and commemoration shape the memory of war, or does memory shape the memorials? It took the political process to create an inclusive remembrance for the thousand of nurses and other women who served their country during the Vietnam war. The debates surrounding the need for such commemoration offer Americans enlight-

ening vision of how people think about the past, the present and the future in response to a tumultuous time in our history—and the role of women in it.

## CONCLUSION

Commemoration of the women who served during the Vietnam War has begun a healing process for that silent contingent of military personnel while changing the imagery of those who serve during wartime. The Vietnam Women's Memorial is a place to remember and heal. War buddies, families, and mourners are consoled by the strength and compassion represented by the women caring for the wounded. Many leave with a greater sense of peace. The Memorial provides a glimpse into a historical experience previously unrecorded and unheralded. Beyond the intention of honoring women veteran's service, the monument prompts thought and questions. Hundreds of students, ranging from fourth graders to doctoral candidates, request the VWMP's assistance in research projects. Colleges and universities have become more inclusive and invite women veterans—along with the men—to speak to students and participate in educational forums and workshops. Several times a year, the VWMP sponsors oral history storytelling at the site of the memorial entitled "Vietnam: In Their Own Words." The stories of the women cast in bronze come to life as veterans tell "in their own voices" about their experiences. The symbolic figures of the Vietnam Women's Memorial not only offer insight into the war but also create a gathering place for stories that serve as living history.

## POSTSCRIPT

Many women veterans who volunteered to go to Vietnam to help save lives and who experienced the carnage of war came home to the same hostile treatment as the returning combat soldiers. The women suffered posttraumatic stress disorder with all the accompanying problems, as well as pancreatic and uterine cancer and other diseases related to combat. However, only recently have major studies been initiated and appropriate health services provided. More than a decade of research and numerous publications looked at the psychobiologic consequences of combat on male theater veterans, but

## Profile of Those who Served

**POPULATION**

More than 265,000 women served in the military during the Vietnam War. Although an accurate number of the women who were actually stationed or performed military duty in Vietnam is not available, it is estimated that 10,000 to 11,000 served "in country." Within the total population of military women, 85% were enlisted. However, 90% of the women stationed in Vietnam and the adjacent waters were officers. The majority (87%) were military nurses.

**SERVICE SPECIALTIES**

In addition to being nurses, women served in a variety of military positions, including intelligence, public affairs, supply, air traffic control, special services, administration, finance, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and dietetics.

Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of civilian women who served in Vietnam, their contributions are no less important. These women served as news correspondents and workers for the Red Cross,

the USO, the American Friends Service Committee, Catholic Relief Services, USAID, and other humanitarian organizations.

**CASUALTIES**

Eight military women (seven Army nurses and one Air Force nurse) lost their lives in Vietnam. Their names are engraved on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial along with those of 58,209 other military personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. More than 50 civilian women died in Vietnam.

Fewer than 2% of the casualties treated in Vietnam died. However, more than 350,000 casualties were treated, and 75,000 of these people were permanently disabled.

Other facts about the women who served in Vietnam:

- About 5.8% were wounded in Vietnam.
- About 1.3% were wounded in combat situations.
- Approximately 1.2% received the Purple Heart.
- More than 20% have service-connected disabilities.

The major source for the following information is the tables from the *National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study* (Department of Veterans Affairs, 1988).

no biologic trials with female Vietnam veterans in the theater of operations have been published. Research has provided some basic information, but much more is needed to understand the complex issues surrounding combat theater assignment of female military personnel (Department of Veterans Affairs, 1998). In 1996 the first major female veterans study with a national outreach was commissioned by the Department of Defense and the Veterans Affairs Department. In 2000 a Congressionally mandated study of Vietnam veterans, including women, was conducted by Columbia University in New York. The study examined aspects of exposure to combat, trauma, and herbicides in Vietnam, and the VWMP worked with the scientists in facilitating this research. (Additional information can be obtained through the *Newsletter of the Vietnam Veterans Health Study*, 600 West 168th Street, 6th floor, New York, NY 10032.)

Further information about the Vietnam Women's Memorial and the storytelling project may be obtained from [www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org](http://www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org).

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