

Return to the Land of Dragons

A Veteran's Quest For Freedom From the Past, Emotional Liberation, and Mutual Forgiveness



exhibition

Mercyhurst University

mercy heritage room

11.5.2012 through 1.25.2013

artist's talk

monday, November 5

7:30pm

taylor little theatre

mercyhurst university

Reception immediately following

Noted nature photographer and Erie native, Michael Moryc, talks about his return to Vietnam 40 years after serving there. He describes it as *"a journey taken to confront those dragons from my youth. While part of the Vietnam experience has now been reframed for me, there will not be a day, that my life is not in some way touched by having been there the first time."*

Sponsored by the Dept. of Psychology at Mercyhurst University, as part of this academic year's theme of "freedom", and made possible by a generous grant from the President's Office and the Office of Academic Affairs. For further information, contact Dr. Gerard Barron at 824-3375

Background:

In 1967, Michael Moryc, was drafted, trained by the U.S. Army Signal Corps in radio and cryptographic communication, and sent to Vietnam. He served as a spotter to coordinate artillery and air support, as an advisor to the Montagnard Civil Defense Force, and eventually was attached to a forward base in the Central Highlands from which he carried out solo forward observer and scouting missions to identify Viet Cong assets and call in air strikes. Despite firsthand and intimate experience with the horrors of war, his real hell began

when he returned to civilian life at the end of June, 1969. For over 20 years he suffered with the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) before receiving a diagnosis and treatment through the Veteran's Administration. A talented musician, Michael's guitar playing became gradually impaired through an insidious loss of fine-motor coordination that was later traced to exposure to Agent Orange, a toxic defoliant used throughout the jungles of Viet Nam. Since his involvement in treatment, Michael has struggled with the ghosts of his past. He became a certified peer counselor through the VA to assist his brothers and sisters in arms. But he never felt free of what he witnessed or the emotional residue of his experiences, and so in 2006, he returned to Vietnam, to the "land of dragons", with his friend since returning, David Horvath (also from Erie), in a search for personal liberation, mutual forgiveness, and long-sought closure.

Since being forced to curtail his music career, Michael has become a renowned nature photographer (www.creationphotos.com), with his work appearing in print, in galleries, and in private collections. He documented his return to Viet Nam extensively, and on his return, assembled a presentation for professional and veteran's groups to discuss his odyssey through PTSD, his treatment, and what he experienced in his return to a hauntingly beautiful land he last saw in the throes of conflict and ravaged by war.

From the Artist's Statement:

I'm asked if the trip has helped me. It certainly has in the sense that now when I think of Vietnam, the country, I have a new set of memories to soften the other ones that have often held me captive for so many years. These are images from that profound and humbling journey with my friend back to Vietnam. A journey taken to confront those dragons from my youth. While part of the Vietnam experience has now been reframed for me, there will not be a day, that my life is not in some way touched by having been there the first time.

Vietnam is sometimes called "The Land of the Dragons" because of its rich history steeped in that mythology. The 30 archival pigment prints of the exhibit document my return to Vietnam after 40 years. I feel what makes this exhibit unique is that not only does it provide a compelling glimpse of the Vietnam of today, but that it also chronicles a personal journey of discovery and emotional closure for me after having served there in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. The journey became a humbling and powerful experience in an attempt to reconcile the 'dragons' of my youth.

Though I am known primarily for my work in Nature, I strive to bring a photojournalist's instinct for the critical moment to each image. This was a primary driving force in the capturing the images for this exhibit. Because of my intense history with the country and people I found my photos becoming both a study in human perspective and personal vision.

Additional contact information is

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<http://www.creationphotos.com/> Vietnam exhibit photos under "Collections"

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time....

T.S. Elliott