

## Remembering Charlie

Thank you to everyone for taking the time to come here today. Secretary LaHood, thank you for being here.

To all who have worked to make this day possible. First, to the Paralyzed Veterans of America. Our Service Officer, Joseph Badzermoski, took the time to visit with Charlie in the West Roxbury VA Hospital before he died. After Charlie passed away, he stepped in and took care of everything without ever having to be asked. He made sure the petition which was needed for Charlie's name to be included here was correct and included all the required documents. Thank you Joe. Thank you to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation and its founders who had the foresight to build this memorial. Their activities help to maintain and support this Memorial. With every day that passes, the Vietnam War becomes more distant; even though it profoundly changed America in so many ways. Recently I said to a friend of mine, that the Vietnam War is to today's generation what World War I was to mine. In order to keep the memories of those who sacrificed their lives during this conflict, ceremonies such as this are important to keep the stories, the experiences in our collective thoughts. In order to improve as a society we must pass onto the next generation what has happened before.

For me, the Vietnam War was what had been on the news my father watched as he got ready for work each day. My oldest brother, Michael, talked of the draft as he neared graduation from high school. Although his draft number was in the range for selection, he was never called. My knowledge of Vietnam was that of a child – too young to understand the news reports and too soon to learn about it in school.

I met Charlie in 1979 after the War was over. Charlie was charismatic, engaging and a committed advocate for persons with disabilities and veterans with disabilities. I had never met anyone like him before. He was a man who took his responsibilities seriously. He had taken on financial responsibility for his niece and nephew, whose mother had passed away the year before. He was at that time, the Assistant National Advocacy Director for the Paralyzed Veterans of America and eventually became the National Advocacy Director.

He talked little about his experiences in Vietnam. I knew he had terrible dreams from his screams in the night. For a long time he did not want to discuss what his dreams were about, but he did finally explain some of what haunted him. Sometime in 1983, two years after our marriage, Charlie mentioned a producer from WGBH, the local PBS Station, was coming by to interview him about his time in Vietnam. When the cameras began rolling, I learned more about his experiences in Vietnam that day than I had in the previous five years I had known him.

He spoke softly, shifting into his Texas drawl. He talked about how he ended up going to Vietnam. Once he saw the country out of the window of the airplane, he said "All of a sudden: it was real." He recalled "I'd grown twenty years without thinking about anything more serious than what was going down for the weekend, and all of a sudden I realized I might not live to be twenty one or twenty two." After meeting up with the 5 or 6 guys that were left in the 4th and 23rd on his first day in Vietnam, he learned the situation was far worse than he could have imagined. He tried to joke with the men a little by saying where he came from there were 200 soldiers in a unit. He said the men just stared back at him and repeated that they were what was left of the unit. He said "I was not prepared for this."

Each memory led to the day where Charlie was shot. He said his unit was down to less than two dozen guys. As was their custom, the night before the fighting, they picked him as the next to go - injured or killed.

According to Charlie the mission for the day was not out of the ordinary. There had been a lot of activity lately. Their mission was to flush out the snipers in the swamp. When they got there they realized there were a lot of people dug in-It was a trap. They called for airstrikes and moved in. As they did, 51 caliber guns started firing, so they jumped into a bomb crater. He said the noise was deafening. There were three men in the crater. They were in a bad position-exposed. One started firing and was killed right away. Then Charlie heard someone calling his name. His nickname was Tex. He said he heard "Tex, Tex, come help me. Tex!" At first he resisted, then suddenly jumped up to go get his friend. He could never explain why he went out there. Just as he got there he thought he had been kicked in the back. His friend asked "do you think I'm going to die". Charlie pulled his shirt back and told him, "Yes, you are." A few moments later he was gone.

Charlie tried to protect himself. But when he would breathe, blood rushed out. So he tried to take just a little air at a time. He hung on.

Around sundown, he said the Wolfhounds came in and pulled him back. The first soldier helping him was killed. Two more came, and pulled him back. They put him in the pile of the dead, thinking he was. He was able to move his hands a little, someone saw it and they threw him on a chopper. He knew then he would make it. And he did.

After fumbling around for a few years, he went to UNLV and majored in business. On the day he planned to drop out, he switched to political science. He graduated in 1972 on the Dean's list and was proud of it.

After graduating Charlie worked for non-profit organizations, city, state and Federal Government agencies. He imagined himself a gunslinger. He joined an organization with a goal in mind. Once that goal was done, he moved on.

John Lancaster, who brought Charlie to the Paralyzed Veterans of America in 1978 wrote in his Remembrance of Charlie "His unreasonableness over the next 30 years helped create some of the most sweeping social, legal and physical infrastructure changes Massachusetts and country and indeed the world have ever witnessed."

In 1989 he started law school and we became the parents of triplets. Things were never easy or simple with Charlie and me.

All through his successes and travels, he battled urinary tract infections, bladder and kidney stones, broken bones, skin grafts and pressure sores. His injury, while it never stopped him entirely, often slowed him down. He always said he thought he would die young, and he worried about having enough time to do all the things he wanted to do.

We came close to losing him in 2000. Charlie needed triple bypass surgery. I stayed home to help him recover. Nine months later I started working for the Federal Transit Administration. I worried he would never work again, so I enrolled in a Masters Program in Public Administration. On the day of my graduation in 2004 he was very proud of me.

After I graduated, he moved to Washington DC to take his last professional position with the Department of Labor. He worked in the Office of Disability Employment Policy and concentrated on issues affecting disabled veterans. He worked there until he passed away. His agency worked with him and allowed him to telecommute while he was ill. I can't tell you how important that was to remain productive, active and be a contributor as long as he could.

Before Charlie died, he told me he was worried that he would be forgotten. That people would not remember the contributions he made. Adding his name to the Memorial today will keep that from happening, He came here often - to think, to reflect, to remember those he used to know. Now his name will be among his peers. I hope when you come back here you look him up and think of something I said about him today or something you knew about him because he was your friend. I hope you think about all the others whose names fill the walls. They need you to remember. We all do.

Thank you.