

**Student Handout**  
**Oakland Museum of California**  
*What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era*  
**Lesson Plan #2**  
**1968: Year of Social Change and Turning Point in Vietnam and the U.S.**

**Oral History**

**Barbara Sonneborn #1**

**Barbara Sonneborn's husband Jeff was killed in Vietnam in 1968. Twenty years later, she made the Academy Award nominated documentary *Regret to Inform* about the experiences of women, both American and Vietnamese, during the war.**

We went to visit this friend who was about to be married, and her uh ... her new uh, husband. Her soon to be husband. And we sat down and Jeff was ... we had just come off the plane. Jeff was in uniform. And we sat down and this young man uh, who was as I said, the fiancé of my friend, launched into a tirade about the genocide that we were committing in Southeast Asia. And uh, I remember my stomach you know, just turning into a knot, turning upside down. You know, and we just finally excused ourselves and we left.

And what was my ... I was ... literally had to stop somewhere. I was sick to my stomach. I mean, I was so upset by this experience. And the reason I was so upset by this experience is because I shared his view, and yet you know, I couldn't face that. So uh, you know, Jeff went to Vietnam. We did not go to their wedding, and now they're good friends of ours and we've been able to talk about this, and you know, I think that he was quite uncomfortable. He was actually more than uncomfortable. He was horrified when Jeff was killed.

Uh, they were all ... you know, as all of our friends were, devastated. But facing what your husband is gonna do when he's about to go off to a war and you're a young woman is ... is something that I think most women don't think about. You can't think about the fact ... what was he going there to do. And that was the question after he was killed you know, that came to me in the dark of night. Not infrequently, for many, many years and to this ... you know, to this day. But it also you know, was ... by making the movie, you know, I could work through those kinds of questions.

*Interviewer: Did you stay at Fort Ord after the housing there after he shipped out?*

When Jeff shipped out to Vietnam, he had asked me to go back and live with my family in Chicago. He said if something happens to me, I really want you to be with your family. I had been working at the Monterey Mental uh ... Monterey County ... I had been working at the Monterey County Mental Health Clinic.

... The previous uh, June, I had gotten my Master's degree in psychiatric social work. My training had been as a therapist. I loved my job. I really wanted to stay there.

