

**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 #2**

**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.**

One of the film's editors, Ken Schneider, was editing, some footage from ... archival footage towards the end of the film. And he was taking the point of view, in the editing of the soldier. And I came in and I looked at this piece of film and I said uh ... you know, that's not really what we're looking for. We want to see this from the point of view of the women who are victims. And he completely got it and you know, was as sensitive after that you know, as any woman could possibly be in the editing.

But what we were trying to achieve was a different point of view than all of the other films, basically, that had been made about the war and that generally have been made about the war. I mean, when you look at the number of directors ... you know, are mostly men. There are very few women who are directing. And you know, we inevitably bring our gender to our work.

*Interviewer: Indeed. And so if ... Homer had written about Penelope [Inaudible] the time it would be a little bit different than writing ...*

Yeah.

*Interviewer: ... from Ulysses point of view.*

Right.

*Interviewer: Let's hop over to something else in which I'm ... tell me about what it was like coming to California in 1967. What was in your mind? What ... what did you find? What was it like to be there, to arrive at Fort Ord [?] as a young person with a ... a freshly minted ... a semi-minted officer husband?*



When I came to California in 1967, I went uh, to Fort Ord, which was where Jeff was stationed. And we had very much wanted to come to California. Uh, we didn't realize at that time that Fort Ord was the major infantry jumping off point for Vietnam. But 1967 was the era of Golden Gate Park and of people dancing... you know, dancing nude in the park.

It was uh, a time of our generation turning against the generation before. And yet being at Fort Ord uh, at the same time as huge protests were happening against the war was difficult for me, because I was against the war and I was against his going to Vietnam. But he felt that he was doing what he had to do. So by then we had stopped fighting about it. We weren't fighting anymore. We had had some pretty s- ... you know, heavy duty fights.

I mean ... I don't mean physical fights at all, but I mean, we really had argued about uh, whether he should go to Vietnam and the right and wrong of the war. But California, I grew up in Chicago ... and when I came to California I remember sitting out on 17 Mile Drive with some friends who had come to visit on a gorgeous spring day, and I felt as though my life had gone from black and white to Technicolor.

I loved being in California. I loved the ocean. I loved the beauty of the land. I am someone who has always really loved the out of doors. And sitting and looking at the turquoise ocean and the cypress trees ... my basically very romantic nature was utterly seduced uh, by California. At the same time, I was filled with fear as to whether Jeff was going to be you know, called to Vietnam. And I felt it was inevitable.

But I was 23 years old, and when you're 23 years old, denial is still ... you know, you ... you can have a fair amount of it. And uh, I just didn't think anything terrible could happen in my life. Um, and we had a good time. We would go up to San Francisco. And usually, we would stay in Berkeley because there were cheaper places to stay in Berkeley, and we would wander around the city and eat in cheap restaurants. You know, where you could get a nice meal for \$3 and ... or \$2. And it was ... it was a wonderful uh ... a wonderful time with a very poignant backdrop.

