

I'm Not Done Yet!

Some people feel that once they reach retirement age that their educational career is finished. I don't feel that way, my point of view is that I have additional opportunities to educate myself and widen my views on life. There was a pivotal point in my life that brought me to this realization, which I will attempt to describe in the following essay.

Here I am today in my early 60's, a senior making preparations for graduation with a B.A. in Sociology either this summer or fall quarter. I have completed my working career having worked over 39 years for the LA County Agricultural Commissioner/Weights & Measures Department. My family is mature; all of my children are grown. My wife and I are grandparents. This is the time to kick back and enjoy the "Golden Years" right? Well I think that I am doing just that. I am enjoying my retired life and part of that experience is taking classes two days a week here at CSULA.

How did I get myself into this unusual situation? My story has a long and winding road but the interesting part started a little over ten years ago. I am a Vietnam era Army veteran. As a combat veteran I belonged to a social network of Viet era peers. By networking through this peer group I discovered that a social organization called TELACU was offering job training and educational opportunities to Vietnam era veterans. The name of this program is "Veterans- Upward Bound", located in East Los Angeles. In 1998 I took advantage of this community based outreach group and attended evening after work classes in computer skills, Basic English, journal writing and mathematics. Working along with older veterans like my self established a comfort level and camaraderie that I enjoyed. I had been out of college for at least 15 years. My life consisted of working, helping to raise my family, coaching soccer teams, etc; these

activities were seen as the social norm. Going back to college was the last thing on my mind at this stage of my life.

I broke social conventions and restarted my educational career. Through my veterans organization I found the Upward Bound program, designed for someone like me who is not done yet. Through the Upward Bound program I saw that I was still able to compete in the classroom and possibly do well at the collegiate level. After completing the veteran's educational programming in six months, I found the courage and background to start back to school. The training sessions gave me encouragement and confidence in myself that I was not aware of. My networking with peer veterans let me know that I could still accomplish academic goals.

The newfound confidence translated into my work career as well. I took night classes at Rio Hondo, PCC, and even CSULA and more than held my own with classmates scores of years younger than me. My evening academic work enabled me to attain promotions in my employment sphere. I had worked in the field for many years; through additional education I was able to realize an office management position. By adapting my educational outlook and changing the way I viewed my inner self, I was able to achieve positive change personally and contribute to my family's well being via my employment system.

My Veteran's association has changed my educational as well as my sociological outlook on life. The Veteran's involvement group seeks to bring about positive change in the lives of people it touches, change for individuals who had a common background. Twenty five years after the Vietnam War ended, many troubled Viet era vets had given

up on the hope of education or placement in decent jobs. Upward Bound tried to allay those fears of alienation and rejection.

The original veteran grouping has enlarged to include persons from Operation Desert Storm and well as veterans from the current Iraqi and Afgan campaigns. Our original group expanded to include different generations of veterans whose ideas about life and culture differ, but who still have commonality in being soldiers, sailors, and marines who served their country and survived. The group's common goal of education and employment for our veteran peers remains the same. As older members we try to add our encouragement and positive experiences in our annual group meeting in order to uplift our fellow veterans. Our aspiration is that we help reintegrate some of the younger people into the constructive aspects of school, employment and society.

So here I am today, the current me. Having retired from my vocation, I am putting a renewed interest in my education. I restored my focus on cultural development after completing what many would consider as my career. Even though decades older than my student peers, I believe that I have value to add to the class setting. By interacting with fellow students, professors, and texts I am in a constant flux of change. Academic growth is a goal which has enhanced my life, leaving me feeling rich with fulfillment and secure in the knowledge that I can still compete emotionally and psychologically. My creative life is not complete; I am still working on my personal self, and what keeps me going is what will keep others going: education. By giving back to the community you enrich your own life experience, developing potentialities for others and yourself that you were not aware of.