

When her professor at St. Joseph's assigned an oral history project, Kristin Steele decided to ask her Grandpa Bob about his experiences during the Vietnam War.

Her grandfather agreed right away, but neither he nor Kristin anticipated where the interview would take them. Half an hour into the session, Kristin asked him about the most difficult decision he had to make during the war.

Bob paused for a minute, staring at the floor between his legs. He looked up at Kristin, drew a deep breath and continued, "The most difficult decision I had to make wasn't during the war," he said, "but before it. I was at Ft. Leonard Wood..."

"Where's that?" Kristin interrupted.

"In Missouri," Bob said, "Near the Ozarks."

"Anyway, we had a weekend pass, and me and two buddies bought a case of beer and checked into a motel. After a few, one of the guys, Hanson was his name, says he knows a place where a retarded girl will do anything you want if you pay her brother twenty dollars."

"It's not something I wanted to do," Bob told Kristin somewhat sheepishly, "but I didn't know how to get out of it."

"So Hanson drives us out to this dilapidated farmhouse. A guy comes out to the porch - he must be 28 or so - a good looking guy. He says his sister is inside and for twenty bucks apiece we can do anything we want to her - 'As long as you don't hurt her,' he says. He tells us his uncle is the county sheriff, who's got a deal with the base commander."

"We all go in to look at her," Bob continued. "She looks retarded, not like Down Syndrome, but you can tell she's clueless. She's wearing a slip; bare feet; propped up in a rollaway bed. I can see her thighs."

"'Twenty bucks a pop, she's yours,' her brother says."

Grandpa Bob stopped for a minute.

"What happened next?" Kristin asked him.

"Hanson and the other guy pay the brother," Bob said, "But I don't. I go out to the porch."

"I sit down thinking I'm okay," he said. "when the brother shows up with a shotgun, right in my face. I never stared down a gun before."

"'You don't like my sister?' the guy asks me."

“Without a thought, I wave his gun away. ‘I love your sister,’ I say, ‘but I don’t perform well under pressure.’ ”

“Luckily. he takes the joke.”

“So that was the most difficult decision you had to make - to refuse the guy with the gun?” Kristin asks.

“No,” her grandfather says, “the most difficult decision was the one I had to make when I got back to the base the next morning. I had to decide whether to tell someone what I saw.”

“I was afraid to tell anyone on base for fear the base commander would find out and afraid to tell anyone off base because of the sheriff. In the end, I said nothing. I’ve regretted it all my life,” Bob said. “That poor girl.”

Kristin thought she saw a tear in the corner of his eye.

“Do you want to stop for a while?” she asked her grandfather.

Why do you think Bob went with his buddies even though he did not want to?

Do you think it was morally wrong for the girl’s brother to offer his sister to strangers for money? Is it possible that this was an accepted practice in the Ozarks at the time? Would this make any difference to your judgment about its morality?

Do you think it was morally wrong for Bob’s buddies to have sex with the girl? Why or why not?

Was Bob right to feel regret about not reporting what he saw? What do you think he could have done? What do you think he should have done?

Were Bob’s actions courageous or cowardly? or both?

Do you think Bob should have told this story to his granddaughter?