

Aging is Unstoppable

By: Michael Sanders

The scariest part for 18-year-old Morris Berman wasn't the moment he discovered he was drafted. It was the agonizing anticipation between the time he read the letter, and the time he would be sent to a bloodbath. It was that day in 1959 when dawn turned to dusk, walls tumbled, light was extinguished, and his life changed forever.

Since the war, Morris has been in a nursing home in Chicago. The best part about being in a nursing home for Morris was waking up on his own schedule. As Morris rolls over in his bed towards his nightstand, he looks at the two picture frames on his desk. One with the picture of his battle group that he had the pleasure to fight alongside in the Vietnam War. Next to it, in a smaller frame, were colorfully embroidered words that read, "Aging is unstoppable. How you deal with it is your decision." Every day it reminded Morris of how great a state he was in, even after the war. Since the loss of his leg, Morris denied most forms of assistance. Thanks to therapy and exercise, his upper body strength was remarkable for the age of 74. It was his independence that kept his spirits aloft.

Morris transitioned himself from his bed to his wheelchair. Many employees at the nursing home constantly suggest an electric chair, although Morris ignores every suggestion. As Morris wheels himself to a table in the dining hall alongside some of his other friends, he eyes a couple of younger, adolescent looking people across the dining hall, chatting with another senior. Morris assumed that they were this person's grandchildren. This observance was short-lived. Not long after, both adolescents stood up to leave. Via Morris's peripheral vision, he caught a glimpse of these two people, exchanging looks with each other, looking to him, and then back to

each other. He could hear them chuckling under their own breaths, “Oh my god!” “Poor guy, he doesn’t have a leg! How do you think he lost it?” “Probably some sort of old people infection.” Their criticisms were barely sincere. As soon as Morris turned around completely to make eye contact with them, they averted their gaze as quickly as possible. Despite the daggers Morris was staring, he tried to let his indifference dominate. He knows who he is, and he doesn’t need approval.

Morris woke up staring at the ceiling of his tent with a pit in his stomach. His leg right above his knee was tingling, but he thought nothing of it. He realized that he had been asleep for a considerable amount of time due to some sort of accident. He couldn’t remember what it was. As the sensation became excruciating, he reached down to ease the sensation. What he felt was worse, much more sinister; he felt a stub. Where he felt his skin crawling, there was no skin, only blood. He let wailed like a banshee that could be heard throughout the camp. He asked what had happened, but almost wish he hadn't. He had taken a few bullets to the knee. Even though the bullets had been removed and the wounds stitched successfully, due to unsterile tools and working conditions, a fatal infection began to appear. The best decision was amputation. These words penetrated Morris and wouldn't leave his body. All he could do was choke up.

The main reason Morris stayed at a nursing home in Chicago as opposed to anywhere else was because he was close to the Vietnam War Memorial Parade. A parade that brought back painfully beautiful memories of the sacrifices he made, the people he protected, and the friendships he forged. He wore his formal military uniform much like his other fellow veterans. He held a small bouquet of flowers in his lap. Each battle group walked together. Morris stood out not because of the loss of his leg, but because he marched alone. He was the last survivor of his battle group. The hundreds of people standing on either side of Morris made up for the

painfully strong feeling of loss circulating in his heart. It helped him smile through it. Morris's vision was locked right in front of him. But with his peripheral vision, he saw a familiar face in the crowd. It was the face of one of the adolescents he saw at the nursing home. The same person who mocked him for being different. They locked eyes for a considerable amount of time. Morris gazed into sorrowful and apologetic eyes, which gave Morris closure.

After the parade, the adolescent didn't hesitate for a second to return to the nursing home. Morris was relaxing in a central lounge. When he approached Morris, Morris smiled, and held out his hand to greet him.

"I-I just wanted to apologize for the other day. My cousin and I were making fun of you" stuttered the young man apologetically.

"What's your name?" asked Morris with a stress-relieving smile.

"Eric"

"Well, Eric, now you know-"

"Not to judge a book by its cover."

"That, and not all of us are deaf." They shared a chuckle.

"Thank you for your service. You get around well for your age."

"Aging is just a process to me. And you'll see that it can take different paths."

"What path did you choose?"

"I chose to tell my body everyday 'If you're going to break down, don't do it on my time.'"

"I'm glad we can have some closure. Thank you..." Eric was cut short as he held his hand out. "I never caught your name."

"Morris Berman" Morris shook his hand one last time. "Aging is unstoppable. How you deal with it is your decision."

