

DEFINE 'CASUALTIES'
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Many childhood memories float in my mind. There are some embarrassing ones that I wish I could forget, but most are happy. Then there are the few that continue to have a strong affect on my life as an adult. These are the memories of Realization — the moments when I understood something important about the *real* or *grown-up* world around me.

In 1969, I was 10 years old; this was the Vietnam era. Between episodes of *Speed Racer* and *Kimba, The White Lion*, I would occasionally catch some TV news. For the first time I heard the word casualties and I wondered what it meant. To my child's mind it sounded almost pleasant, a casual-sounding word. But I sensed it meant somebody got hurt. So when the newsman said, 'Today there were 132 casualties,' I thought, again in my child's mind, that people had fallen down, scraped their knees, cut their fingers or broke an arm. This was totally logical to me because I had seen images of army men running through jungles carrying rifles and with big packs on their backs. It sure looked like they could fall down very easily.

Years later my big eighth grade project was to write a report on World War II. I remember reading all kinds of books and looking through our family's *Encyclopedia Britannica*. I came across an issue of *Life*. It was a retrospective about Vietnam. Inside were many images that I had seen years ago. There was that little girl, naked and crying as she walked down the street. I realized she had no hands, yet I had to look at her several times in order for my mind to acknowledge this very important fact that I couldn't see before. As I continued, I came across that word, *casualties* and for the first time I understood that it meant *killed*. Thousands of dead American young men.

Today it's 1999 and I've never stopped hearing that word, *casualties*. There are other words, *ethnic cleansing*, *national interest* and my new favorite, *collateral damage*. The difference is I no longer process these words through a child's mind. All these benign PR words used to cloud the horror of mass suffering and even death in foreign lands, only as far away as my TV screen.

The things I could not "see" as a child I can not ignore as an adult. The feeling I was somehow being fooled by the words people choose to describe events has stuck with me. I began to look beyond the obvious and the simple. I am grateful for that moment of realization. It hasn't made me cynical or negative. Quite the opposite I think.

My mentor, [SGI President] Daisaku Ikeda recently said, "The first step toward peace is recognizing the other party's humanity." Fundamentally, that is what this memory was all about. Realizing that human beings were suffering and consequently, beginning to develop a desire to see justice and peace. This is a positive thing and it has lead me to learn about ordinary individuals who did and are doing *extraordinary* things to make a positive difference in our world. They are a constant source of encouragement as I try to learn from our collective history.

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