

# COLLATERAL DAMAGE

MICHAEL BROHM



“They drilled into my teeth to get me to talk.  
When they realized I didn’t have anything to tell they kicked my teeth in.”

It’s only fitting that Darryl lives next door to a gun repair shop. Guns have played a big part in his life, a life that, from the outside looks to be in dire need of repair. I’d seen Darryl walking the downtown streets where I live, a tall, painfully thin man, bundled against the cold, talking to himself. Most of us avoid people like Darryl, trying our best to make him invisible. But there was something about Darryl, something that most of those on the street won’t do... Darryl would look me in the eye.

I was too young to go to Vietnam. The older brothers of my friends were sent. Some returned, quiet and changed. Some never returned. Every day, the front page of the newspaper contained photographs from the battlefield. Printed in black & white, the photos were not as wrenching as if the blood had been seen red and running. The impact of the war was slow coming to me, as it was to many in this country.

I was a junior in high school in 1968. 1968- The Tet Offensive, the My Lai massacre, Martin Luther King killed, Bobby Kennedy killed, students beaten on the streets of Chicago while protesting the war, Nixon elected president. On July 1, 1969, less than two months before I entered college, the first draft lottery since 1942 was held in Washington. Suddenly, the distance between me and Vietnam was shortened.

On the street, in short conversations, I’d learned that Darryl was a Vietnam veteran.

I’d been photographing and interviewing war veterans and asked if I could talk with him about his tour. His face dropped at the request, but he agreed to talk. The first time I visited Darryl’s small apartment I took along a heavy, metal tripod. I was afraid of Darryl. His handshakes were too firm, his gaze at me too piercing. He was roaring drunk by ten in the morning. I took along the tripod for protection.

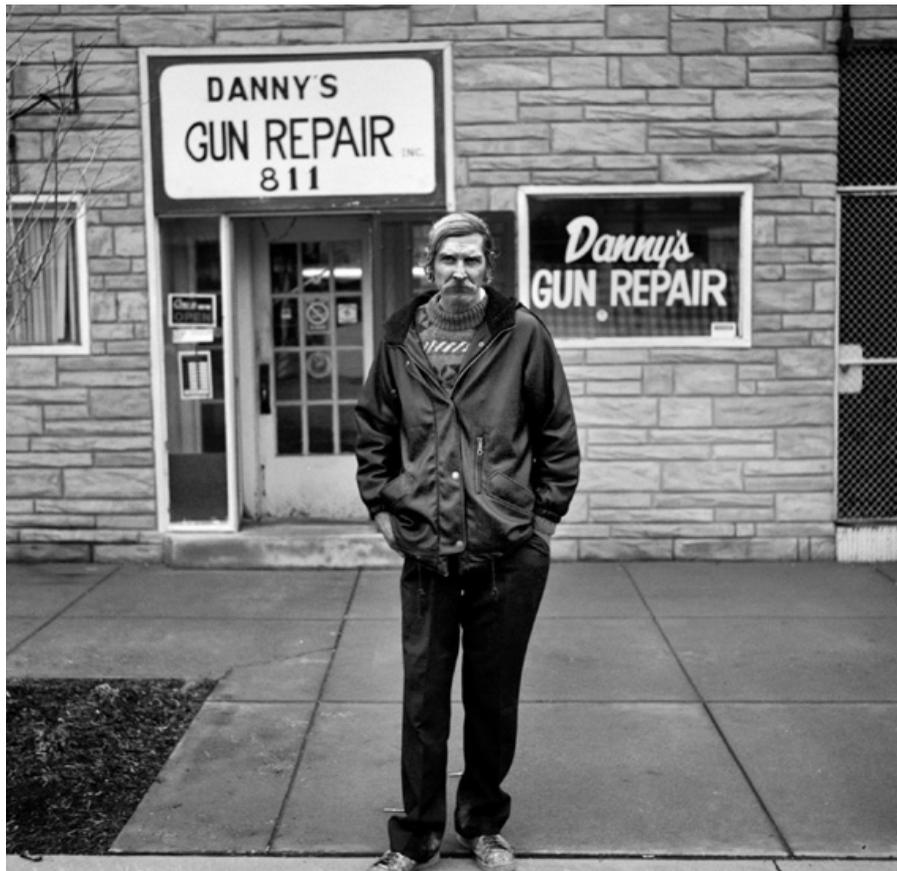
Darryl had been a star player on his high school football team in a small town in Texas, but an indifferent student. College was of no interest to him and there were few jobs to be had. When Darryl was given a low lottery number in the draft he was left with few choices. Besides, he knew what he wanted to do. He wanted “to serve his country and kill communists”. Proud to serve and eager for conflict, he enlisted in the army.

Asked about the war, Darryl said he had “gone crazy” in Vietnam. He had been an avid hunter in the fields near his home, but in war he had turned these skills to hunting the enemy. When asked if he had killed in Vietnam, he said simply, “many, many”. He described details of the experience in amazing, precise detail... the smells, the sounds, the light outside of a building where, one dark night he and a friend sat smoking cigarettes until a sniper’s bullet hit his buddy in the head, killing him. He stood and screamed about how stupid they were to make themselves perfect targets, illuminated by the light. He

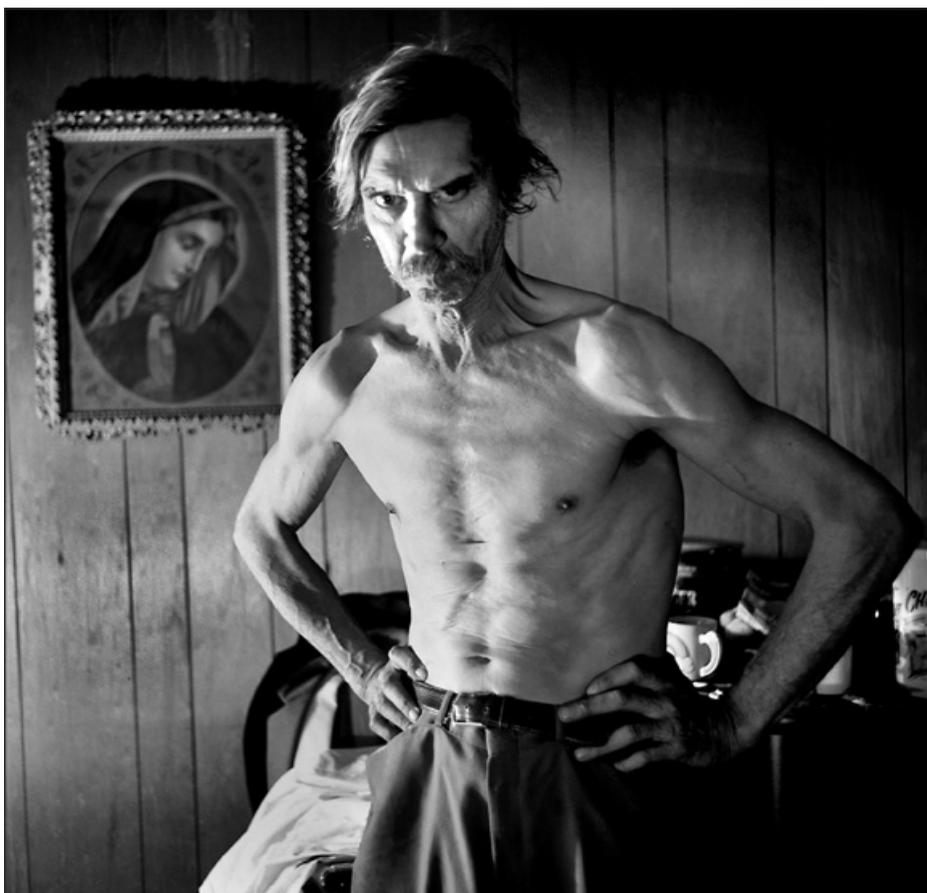
trembled as he talked of being taken prisoner, ripping off his shirt to show me his wounds. His gaze again was unblinking, his hand painfully gripping my hand.

I still see Darryl occasionally and I've come to know him along with his demons. Was it worth all of his pain? The war wasn't won, like one of his Texas football games.

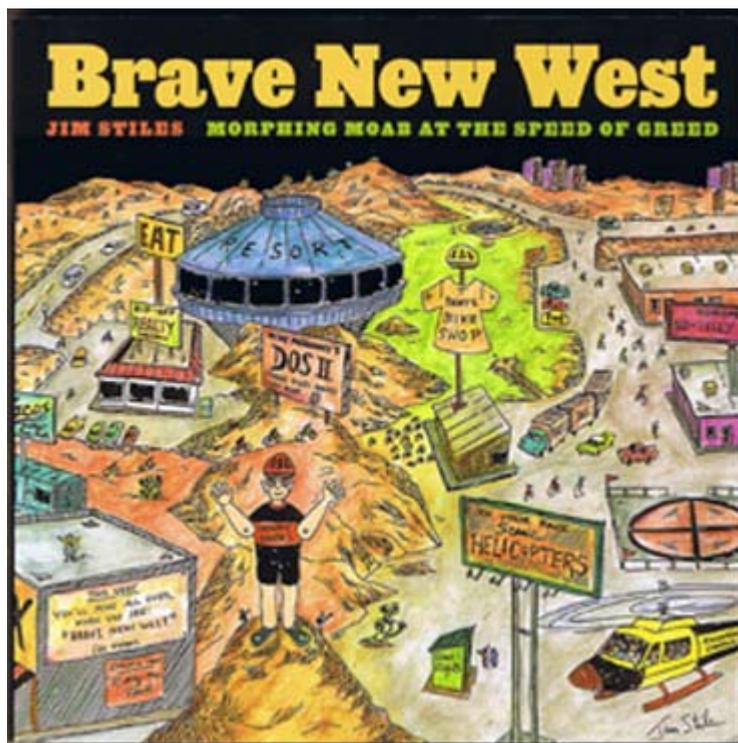
Michael Brohm



“The sniper got my friend. I looked down and his brains were on my boots. I hated him for dying. I hated him for that.”



“I was captured by the Viet Cong and stabbed in the stomach with a bayonet. For two days I was forced to walk to the POW camp holding my guts in with my hands”.



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--Terry Tempest Williams,  
author of RED -

Passion and Patience in the Desert

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