



## One February Morning in Vietnam, by Eugene Hilderbrandt

It was another morning in Chu Lai, Vietnam -- a large and ugly army base where I was. ^ One February morning, as I avoided the mud puddles  
in my morning duty, I found myself standing on top of a drive-up ramp.  
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Looking through the mists toward distant purple mountains, I suddenly became aware that I WAS those mountains and they were me. The now perfect little mud puddles were as much me as my fingers. The olive drab trucks, the concertina wire, the things that had always possessed a negative connotation in my mind were simply ... man's folly! ^  
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Another GI, whom I barely knew, walked across the compound and I experienced a love beyond words ^ for him, a realization that he was me wearing his own personal disguise. I was immersed in this joy that I had never even heard of -- no separation from anything or anyone, no judgment of the world around me. Later, when I attempted to explain what I'd experienced with words, the only word that came close was one-ness. ^  
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Less than 2 weeks later, I was at LZ Bronco and was looking through a meager dozen or so collection of books left by earlier tenants and I saw this curious title, "The Book ... on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are" by Alan Watts. When he began describing the experience I recently had, it triggered the experience again, only this time as I immediately tried to hold on to it, to keep it, it dissolved, like quick-silver through my fingers.  
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A few months later, as I prepared to return "to the world" -- America -- I thought, "Okay, I now know some important truths. ^ Life will be easier, more simple." Instead, it has become more challenging than ever. ^ But those experiences changed this Southern Baptist bred Okie for life. I am thankful every day for the grace that I received that February morning along with the realization that this beautiful state of being belongs to every single being of every color, culture or persuasion on earth.  
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Although I have pursued, even lusted after the Oneness experience I'd had, like a donkey chasing a carrot on a stick, I have slowly and painfully come to realize that only through knowing and then having the compassion to love myself just as I am and accepting completely this wonderfully terrible world just as it is, will I be able to open my heart to the state that is always there, that makes the pain and the fear of self-discovery so worth the journey I'm on.

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--Eugene Hilderbrandt

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