

She's an author

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 28 April 2011 13:22 -



LaVon Pape publishes two novels with characters touched by Vietnam, Korean wars.

After her son Johnny shipped off to Viet Nam in the late 1960s, characters affected by war began to take shape in

LaVon Pape's mind.

She put pen to paper and started to write about a small town named Benton Grove and the people touched, in particular, by the Korean and Vietnam wars.

"I saw a town where people just lived their lives and I wrote it down," LaVon explained. "It came alive to me and Benton Grove became a real place in my mind."

LaVon said her husband Paul Pape's father served in World War I while Paul fought in World War II.

"War is so terrible, it doesn't solve anything," she said. "Only the biggest and strongest prevail."

The book, *To Honor Those*, was published by her family who surprised LaVon with a hard-back copy last Christmas.

Upon opening the package containing her book, LaVon said she sat and cried.

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In Benton Grove, townspeople decide to erect a monument to honor veterans. Controversy arises about whether to include a soldier who served as the town's first conscientious objector during the Korean War.

Prejudice, shattered lives and a couple of romances are woven throughout the novel.

Much of the story is from LaVon's experiences.

When she had a bookstore in Gothenburg—like the heroine Laura in the book— LaVon said a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War era would stop by to talk to her.

“He needed someone to talk to because some people didn't like that,” she said.

Dr. Meridith, a character in her book, explains that one of the reasons the United States fights wars is so citizens have the freedom to object.

“The young man told me that killing is the end of communication,” she said.

As a high schooler in Cozad, LaVon remembered a girl of Japanese descent and her family who were accepted by the community until Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japan.

“Then they were shunned as were German families,” she said, noting that the girl's brother killed himself.

LaVon said she didn't intentionally base characters on people she knew but took characteristics from them.

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Although her life has taken many paths, LaVon said she was a writer from the first time she could hold a pencil.

“Some kids would spell their words in a sentence,” she said. “I’d make mine into a story.”

Upon finishing the first novel, LaVon tested the publishing waters and said she received several good reviews.

“But the market was flooded with Vietnam stories at the time,” she said.

So she put the manuscript on a shelf where it remained until last year.

“I didn’t push trying to publish it after I completed it because I finished what I intended to do,” she said. “I also said what I thought about war.”

Rather than including a lot of description, LaVon said she moved events along in her novel.

“I was mainly interested in character development so that when anyone read the book, they would understand what motivates those characters to do what they do,” she said.

LaVon used Johnny as a reference when writing a chapter about a wounded Vietnam veteran and the equipment and guns used.

She also gained a sense of the Vietnam conflict from listening to tape recordings Johnny sent his family while he was stationed in the war-torn country.

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“You’d sometimes hear guns and explosions in the background,” LaVon said.

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