

TRIBUTE TO DEV COCHRANE

Adam Bartolik

I wear his bracelet
Denver CO

The sadness of wearing down

Last night was one of the saddest nights I've ever experienced, because I had to buy some jewelry. I was in high school 30 years ago. (That's enough to bring a sea of emotion.) I happened to be in Boston one spring afternoon and ran into a woman who was selling POW/MIA bracelets. Keep in mind that the Vietnam War had only been over for five years at that point. After we had talked for awhile, she picked a name for me she knew all the Massachusetts names and their families, and chose this one because she said I looked a little like a picture of the soldier when he was younger, and the anniversary of his disappearance date was coming up shortly. Deverton C. Cochrane. It's the name of a man I never met, but is forever in my mind and physically attached to me. He swam in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Mediterranean with me. He went back to the Army with me, and his bracelet was the only piece of jewelry other than wedding rings allowed to be worn during basic training. He helped me stay out of the drill sergeants' crosshairs, so I owe him a beer for that. When I made sergeant, I toasted him and his brethren. He was with me both times I was married, for the birth of my son, and he has helped me carry two coffins. He's gone to every job interview with me, and worked as many hours as I have. He reminds me when it's really cold or too hot. He helped me become more aware of the fate he shares with so many other soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors. He made me become more involved with the National League of Families, and Vietnam Veterans of America. Dev has been with me for thirty years, and I owe him for a lot of things I know, and people I've met. I never considered that he would be with me for so long. For the first few years, I had the hope that I would be able to give it to him one day. Later, I thought the day would come when I would travel to a cemetery in Brookline and join a line of others to return the bracelet to Dev's family when his remains were brought home and interred. But now I wonder if it will be with me for the rest of my days. June 17th will be the fortieth anniversary of Sergeant Cochrane's disappearance. When I thought about that this week, I looked at the bracelet with a new perspective. That's when I noticed that the letters and numbers are so worn down after thirty years, that they are no longer readable. So much time. So many physical jobs. So much rubbing. But mostly, so much time. 'Worn down' is an appropriate phrase, because that's how I felt last night when I ordered a new bracelet to replace it. Once I had hoped to return it to the Cochrane family. Instead, it will go into a nice little box and wait silently, while I slip on another band with fresh engraving to keep the memory of this unknown friend sharp and focused, for myself and anyone asking about it. I hope I never have to do this again.

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