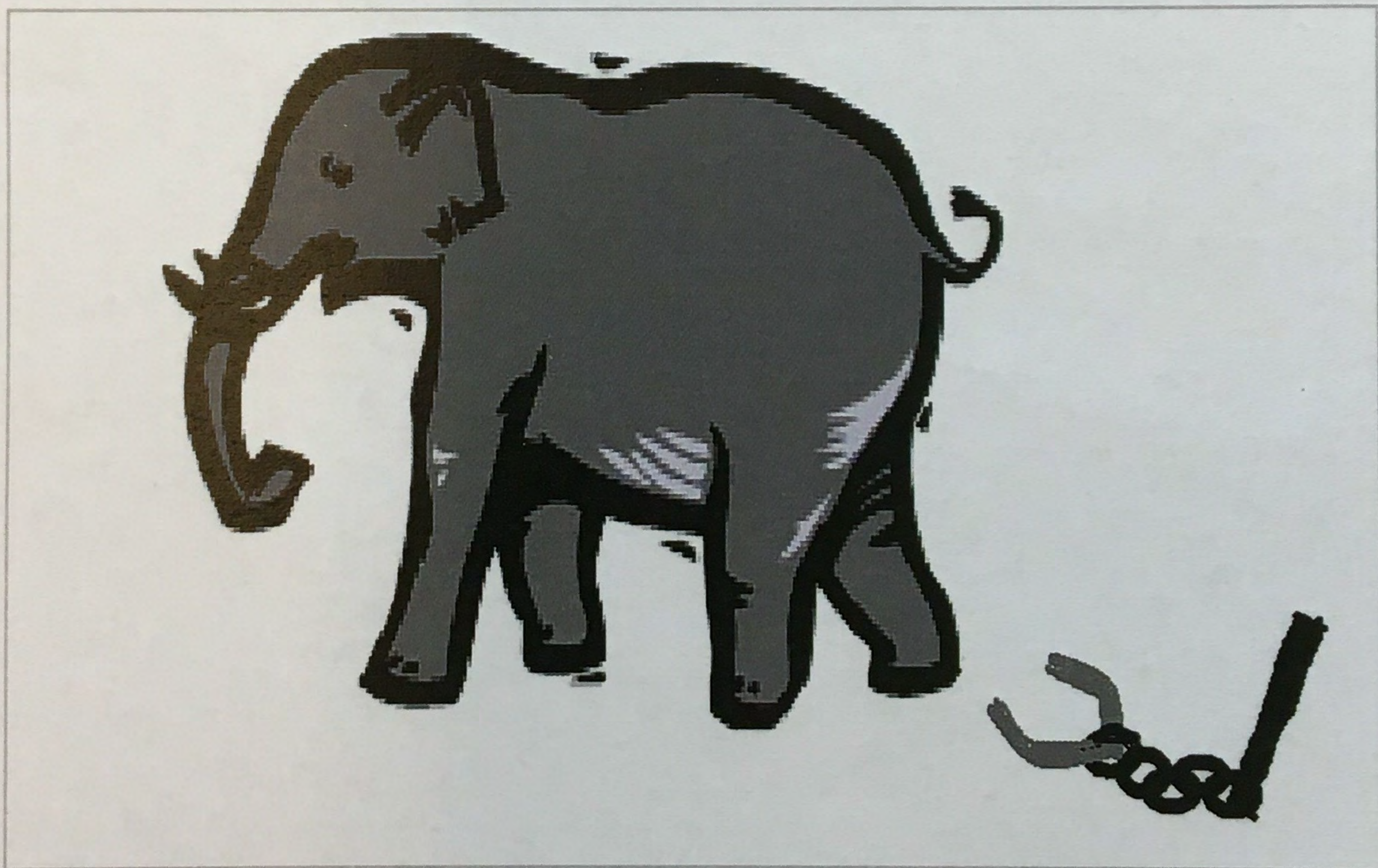


Free Elephants



No, we're not giving away free elephants

In his early years the baby elephant learned that as hard as he tried he could not pull the stake out of the ground. Now as an adult he has the power to uproot trees, but the chain still holds him to the stake. Or *is* it the chain? No, it's his *memory* of the early years on the chain that holds him captive to his past experience.

It's the *memory* not the chain
That keeps an elephant
captive,
But a new experience
Can replace old memories
And set him free.

“It don’t mean nothing!”

Sound familiar?

“Near total silence! For 37 years if you summed up the time that I mentioned my experience in Vietnam it would not have added up to ten minutes. Why would I mention it? Nobody was interested...Back then (when I returned from Vietnam) Americans were not real impressed with nineteen year old paratroopers that had just survived 12 months of heavy combat with the 101st Airborne Division 12,000 miles away in South Vietnam. *Nearly four decades would pass before the full impact of that bad experience would reveal itself.*” (Veteran, 3rd 187th Inf. 101st Airborne)

'Ah, I'm fine.' 'Why would you be fine? You've just had a man beg for his life die in your arms. Why would you be fine after that?' Ferrrara

It's a cover up. A way to not deal with the events. Michael Ferrara, Aspen's "Mr. 911", was a first responder for over 30 years and had seen it all. Finally it crashed in on him when the tape inside his head would not stop replaying the images.

Many have gotten past the past.

Is it your time?

"...you have only memories. It's not the forgetting but the new history..."

"We live here. They don't. It's like, say, you and me falling in love with the same girl. We both had good and bad times courting her, maybe she hurt us both. I win and marry her. You go home to your country far away. After twenty years, all you have of her are memories, both the good and the bad. Me, I live with her for twenty years. I see her at her best and at her worst. We make peace with each other. We build our lives, have children, and make new history together.

Twenty years and you have only memories. It's not the forgetting but the new history with the girl that is the difference between you and me."

(The observation of a Vietnamese tour guide regarding why American veterans seem to struggle with the war more than Vietnamese veterans.)

Make a New History of Viet Nam

(Even the name is different than what we remember. Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language. I use "Vietnam" when referring to the war and "Viet Nam" when referring to everything else.)

"New experiences replace old memories."

Prior to 2002

Sometime in the mid to late 90s it occurred to me that hardly a day went by that something didn't remind me of Vietnam. You know what I mean...a smell, sound, being in the woods at dusk when it is raining, fireworks...and on goes the list.

Post 2002

After my first trip back I had the same realization, hardly a day goes by that something doesn't remind me of Viet Nam. That's when I discovered that new experiences replace old memories. The old is still there but without the sting and not on the top.

VNE Can Help (Viet Nam Encounters)

Encounter a new Viet Nam right at home

Viet Nam has a long, rich history, but sadly most people only associate “Vietnam” with war. There are many ways to encounter a new Viet Nam right in your own hometown. For example, get to know Vietnamese people near your home. Nail shops are typically Vietnamese owned and operated. Email, Skype, and Social Media open a world of communication.



Email,
open

Encounter a new Viet Nam - go back

“We found ourselves amidst some of the gentlest people in the world and they loved Americans. In our two weeks in the country we traveled much and made many friends. We met ordinary people, doctors, businessmen and teachers. We made friends with families, young adults and children and even ex-Viet Cong fighters. Everywhere we went we were welcome and treated kindly. *My return trip to Vietnam had changed my life.*” (Bob Rummel)

