



The Oaks with Larry Chilcoat, an Air Force security policeman and sentry dog handler during the Vietnam War. Larry Chilcoat introduced the Oak Ridge Boys to the National War Dog Monument project.

My wife (DJ) and I attended Operation Homecoming, a week long event for Vietnam veterans in Branson, Missouri, during the month of June 2005. It was a time for healing and fun for approximately 25,000 vets who attended.

We saw the Oak Ridge Boys in concert at The Grand Palace in Branson, which was also the center of activity for Operation Homecoming. The Traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, vendor tents, exhibitions, the Budweiser Clydesdales, Huey helicopter rides, etc. were all setup in this area. When The Oaks came on stage there was a huge American flag displayed stage left. They turned to it and with hands over their hearts they opened their show by singing the National Anthem. After doing a couple songs they told us how proud they was to be a part of Operation Homecoming. The Oaks also performed at the finale of the event, an outdoor concert in Saddlebrooke, Missouri on Sunday.

During the performance at the Grand Palace Joe Bonsall, the tenor for The Oaks read to the audience from a book that he had written (G.I. Joe & Lillie) about his parents, both WW II veterans. The passage he read was about war and how the experience is handcuffed to your heart for the rest of your life. He expressed how much he and the other Oaks appreciated the sacrifices that we made in Vietnam. DJ and I were very touched by their performance.

When I got home I looked up Joe Bonsall's website and sent him an e-mail telling him how much we enjoyed the show. I offered to trade him a copy of the War Dogs documentary for a copy of his book. He responded that he would love to know about the War Dogs and asked me to send the tape to their office in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

I sent a picture of my dog (Geisha A871) and I along with the tape. I received a note from The Oaks Marketing Director, Kathy Harris, said that Joe had received the tape and that the picture I had sent brought a tear to her eye. She explained that she was a dog lover and knew that dogs had served in Vietnam. She was thrilled when I sent her a copy of the documentary. She responded that I should let her know if The Oaks could help with the monument effort somewhere down the road.

The Oaks tour schedule for 2007 took them to Galveston, Texas in January, 2007. This was pretty close to home so I bought tickets and contacted Kathy Harris. I told her the monument effort needed help and asked her if it would be possible to speak to the group while they were in Galveston? Kathy arranged a meet and greet for DJ and I backstage with The Oaks. I felt that the group was very patriotic and influential and could help with our effort to have a War Dog monument in Washington, D.C. When we went backstage I had a gift bag for each of the 4 members of the group. The bags contained a copy of the documentary, a copy of John Burnam's book, Dog Tags of Courage, and a War Dog Monument brochure. I told them "if what you see and read touches you, goes straight to the heart, then please help me spread the word". When we got back home I was thrilled to receive a note from Kathy Harris letting me know that The Oaks were interested in helping. They have sent a letter to Congressman Walter B. Jones of North Carolina, sponsor of Congressional Bill H.R. 5145, expressing their support for a National War Dog Monument. They have also sent a letter to their Congressman in Tennessee supporting the War Dog Monument bill. They have posted blurbs on The Oak Ridge Boys website (oakridgeboys.com) and on Joe Bonsall's personal website (josephbonsall@aol.com) asking all of their fans to support the effort by sending letters to their Congressmen. Please go to nwdm.org for more info on the monument.