

Politics and law keep him busy

Vietnam vet beats blindness to rebuild life



John Todd not only practices law, but teaches political science and business law at Michigan Christian College.

By LETHA D. WILLIAMS
Shelving along one entire basement wall await John Todd's law books.

He built the shelves himself, which is not an unusual feat for a 33-year-old. Except Todd is legally blind.

While piloting a helicopter in tactical support for the infantry during 1969, Todd was hit in the face by a Viet Cong anti-aircraft shell. Ten years later, he passed the bar exam.

Todd and his wife, Joyce, graduated in May from Georgetown Law Center in Washington D.C. In June, they moved to Avon Township with their 4-year-old daughter, Lacey.

Todd is practicing law and teaching political science and business law at Avon Township's Michigan Christian College. Mrs. Todd is an assistant prosecutor at the Oakland County District Attorney's office in Pontiac.

Todd was in college when he was drafted and sent to Vietnam in 1968. He had only three goals in mind then: to be a captain stationed in Germany, to buy Jaguar an XKE, and to build chalets with his father.

But flying near the Cambodian border, he was wounded. He spent the next year in Maryland's Walter Reed Army Hospital.

For his work in Vietnam, Todd received the distinguished flying cross for valor, 17 combat air medals and the cross of gallantry with the bronze star. For his wound, he received the purple heart.

WHEN HE LEFT Walter Reed, Todd moved to New York City for treatment by an eye surgeon. The doctor restored enough of Todd's vision for him to distinguish shapes and colors.

While in New York, Todd heard a television anti-Vietnam War editorial. "The anti-war movement was taking a new tact," Todd said. "They were depicting the vets as war criminals and drug addicts. I was terribly offended by that."

He contacted the television station and asked for and received reply time. A member of President Nixon's staff saw Todd's presentation.

"And I was asked by the President to speak on behalf of him on Vietnam," Todd said.

Todd supported Nixon's "Vietnamization" program.

"We had taken their war away from them," Todd said. "Vietnamization was simply a way to give them back their war if they wanted it."

He publically debated people like Gloria Steinem, Jerry Rubin and David Dillinger. And he won two Freedom Foundation awards for writing and speaking.

But he was not paid for his work with the Nixon administration.

"I DIDN'T get paid because I didn't want to be attacked for taking money from the Nixon administration," Todd said.

He did, however, author and lobby for a bill passed by the 96th Congress in 1978. It provides survivor benefits for families of permanently and totally disabled veterans.

During his work with the Nixon administration, Todd was invited to a state dinner honoring South Vietnamese President Thieu. Joyce Todd, who was working as a CIA analyst, was to meet Todd there.

"It was a blind date," Todd said. "No pun intended."

It was the first time Joyce Todd had

been near someone who was a celebrity.

"And I was very impressed," she said, "by his voice and his sense of presence and command of the situation."

Two months later, the Todds were engaged. In another two months, they were married.

When Todd decided to attend law school, he encouraged his wife to attend with him.

"She was going to have to read for me," Todd said. "So I figured she might as well get credit for it."

While attending law school, Todd helped raise Lacey and continued his work on Capitol Hill. But he soon resigned because he said he felt himself being used to stimulate support for Nixon.

TODAY, TODD is excited about his new teaching career. He is especially thrilled about teaching an evening business law class during Michigan Christian College's winter semester.

"I think I do a good job with the course," he said. "I certainly love it. I love teaching."

He said despite seven plastic surgery operations and three cornea transplants that have still left him legally blind, he is happy with his life.

"I'm perfectly content with my wife and my life," Todd said, adding his second child is due in January.

His blindness does not keep him from teaching or practicing law or building a study in his basement.

"I'm just so lucky to be alive that the minor inconvenience of not being able to read doesn't bother me a bit," Todd said.



"I'm just so lucky to be alive that the minor inconvenience of not being able to read doesn't bother me a bit," says the Avon Township resident.

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