

VETERANS' VOICES



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"What exactly does it mean to write, to commit our stories to pages where the ink stares back and demands that we engage?"

Stereo-Type

by Joseph A. Shirley - Page 10

"In February 1985, I left Kansas City, MO., for New Orleans. Mardi Gras! The biggest party I have ever heard of, and I was on my way!"

Booker: A Memorial Day Tribute by Henry Jay Tschirner - Page 14

"Today is Memorial Day, observed. It has been 34 years and seven months. Do you remember the day the music died for Alpha's CP?"

The Haircut

by J. B. Bramley - Page 23

"Just before leaving for basic training, I decided I might want to do a little preparation work for the journey. I ventured downtown and wandered into the local barbershop."

War Is a Waste

by Raymond L. Moore - Page 61

"They killed poor Jimmy this mornin'; there was hardly a drop of blood."

Guest Editorial

Why I Write

By Jon Kerstetter

What exactly does it mean to write, to commit our stories to pages where the ink stares back and demands that we engage? Some researchers at Strong Star (a Texas-based multidisciplinary organization that specializes in PTSD research) have asked that question. In essence, they want to know if writing can be as effective as talking for exposure-based therapies of combat PTSD. I think it's a question particularly germane to veterans. The answer is vitally important.

In my own experience as a soldier and patient, I now view writing as an integral component of injury recovery. I would also propose that the power of writing extends beyond the clinical question of healing and is relevant to the everyday-lives warriors live. How do we best express beauty and joy, or sympathy and encouragement? We write. Sure we talk, but if we want our message to last, we write. We try our hand at poetry or short stories or op-ed pieces or put heart-felt words in a card to be cherished forever. We gather our notes and work our stories until they hold the harshness of war or the banner-waving love of our children and spouses at a deployment or homecoming ceremony. The words we choose are the ones meant to reach the soul. Make us laugh. Make us weep. Make us think.

During my long course of recovery from combat injuries and a stroke which took my medical and military careers, writing became the foundation upon which I forged a new career. At first, all my writing was in the context of therapeutic exercises designed to help me understand the nightmares of combat stress. The writing re-exposed me to those traumatic events, but it also helped me gain some distance from them and establish clinical objectivity. That early therapeutic writing was tough, bone-breaking tough. But it was also necessary to help me define what those combat experiences meant.

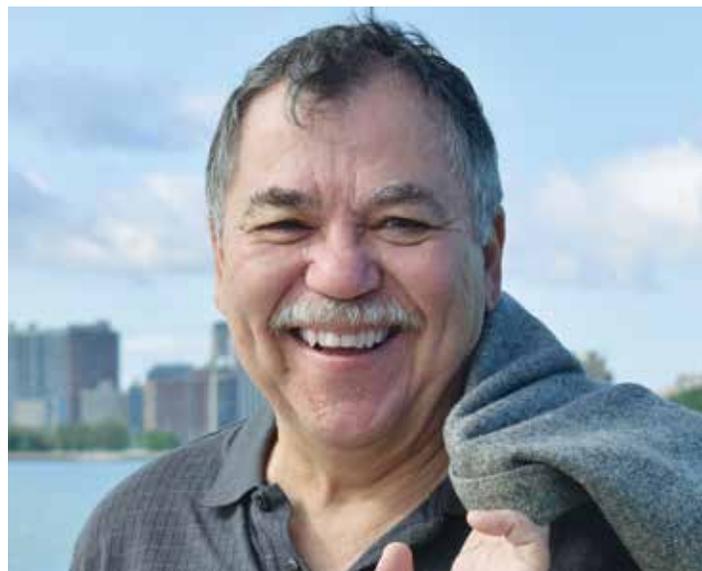
I eventually recovered enough cognitive function to enroll in a low-residency MFA writing program. The writing paradigm there: write and rewrite, then do it again, then once more. I learned that as I wrote and revised my combat essays, I could see things from a different perspective. That new way of seeing allowed me to write my stories clearly and powerfully. When I shared those essays, the experiences became real for readers and they wept for loss, but also felt the joy of recovery.

This is the tenth year of my stroke recovery and my seventh year of writing. I finished a book, wrote poetry and several cards to my wife and grandchildren along the way. When I write, I do so

in the scattered and intangible patterns that are dictated by my post-stroke brain, then I read and revise until I convey a specific meaning. The process is best described by a passage in my book.

“I try to write things as they really are, the way I see them and experience them, not necessarily the way I want them to exist. When I do that, the words tell me who I am in the full context of my weakness and my strength. I need these words. I need them like love and blood and oxygen. I need them to show all the defining stories, the ones that have no escape or need no escape, the ones that show me who I am, where I have been, and perhaps even where I am going.”

We all need our defining stories. Keep writing my fellow warriors. Keep writing. And, send your stories and poems to *Veterans' Voices* for possible publication.



Jon Kerstetter received his medical degree from the Mayo Medical School in Rochester, Minn., and his MFA degree from Ashland University in Ohio. He practiced emergency medicine and military medicine, serving as a combat physician and flight surgeon for the U.S. Army National Guard and completing three combat tours in Iraq. He has also taught disaster relief and practiced emergency medicine in Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Honduras. He is the author of the new book, *Crossings: A Doctor-Soldier's Story*. Kerstetter is also the guest speaker for the Veterans' Pen Celebration, Nov. 18, at the World War I Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, Mo.

Veterans' Voices

Fall 2017 Vol. 65, No. 3

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VVWP was established as Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project in 1946 by Elizabeth Fontaine with the support of the Chicago North Shore chapter of Theta Sigma Phi (now The Association for Women in Communications, Inc.) to address the physical and recreational needs of veterans returning from World War II. In 1952, journalists **Margaret Sally Keach** and **Gladys Feld Helzberg**, with assistance from the Greater Kansas City chapter of Theta Sigma Phi, established *Veterans' Voices* to provide a national outlet for writing produced by the project's participants. The three founders believed that writing could do everything from entertaining bedfast veterans to helping others conquer mental health issues.

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The Rains of Armenia

*By Francis O'Gara, Spring, 2000
VA Medical Center – New Orleans, LA*

I debated with myself as to when I should tell this story, or if I should even tell it at all. It is now quite apparent that the only way I can free my mind from this nightmare is to relive it and get it out in the open. Thus, with the facts still fresh in my mind, I will relate the facts to you.

My wife, Ilma, and I made plans to visit relatives in her hometown of La Ceiba, Honduras, which is situated on the southern side of the Gulf of Honduras. We hadn't been there in a couple of years and thought it would be a welcome diversion to our mundane days of work. We almost had second thoughts when we heard the weather reports about a hurricane churning its way through the Caribbean Sea. But then, the path was determined to be more to the northwest and headed for Belize and was projected to turn more to the north in a few days. This would put it in a desolated area in Mexico. After calling Lasca Airlines, the airline that serves Honduras, we decided that we could still go. The plane would head more to the east and go around the wide feeder bands of Mitch. So, our trip and my horrific journey began.

The flight was almost the same as before, except that we had a bumpier ride and had to land in Rotan, one of the barrier islands in the Bay of Honduras. After a brief stay on the island, we were again airborne, and in an hour, landed at La Ceiba International Airport. We passed through customs without much difficulty, although the customs officer wanted to know about the long white thing I carried. I explained that I was blind and that was my mobility cane. He examined it very closely and, after determining that it was not a dangerous item, allowed me to pass. Waiting outside for us were Tia Encilla and Prima Angelita. I always called her Cousin Angel, and whenever I did, she would giggle and say, "Do you really think I'm an angel?"

I have known Angelita almost since the day she was born. She was, by far, my favorite of all the cousins. She liked to punch the buttons of my watch and listen to the female voice announce the time. At first, she thought it was a small recorder and couldn't figure out how a tape could tell the correct time every time she pressed the button. She was 13 years old now and transformed, like a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, into a very beautiful girl. Maybe it was the way her dark brown eyes, almost black, contrasting with her long black hair accentuated her olive skin. Then, again, it may have been her subtle Mayan features that made her my favorite. My wife's father was Mayan while her

mother was Spanish. I noticed that even with her tender years, Angelita is almost as tall as I, about five feet five inches. It was Encilla who had the Mayan features, especially the high cheek bones and the straight nose that jutted from her face.

Both Encilla and Angelita ran to me and threw their arms around me, much to the chagrin of Ilma. But then, Encilla always called me her "sobrino." Even though they owned a small pickup truck, we took the bus to her house in Armenia, a small village 50 miles to the east of La Ceiba on the road to Jutiapa. During the hour-and-a-half trip, Ilma filled them in on all the things that happened since the last time we had been there. As before, Angelita sat next to me and punched buttons on my watch.

Tiό Trófilo met us at the bus station, if a bench on the side of the road could be called a bus station, and loaded us into his truck and drove the rest of the way to the house. The house was a massive place, as houses go for that village. It was built on large pillars 10 feet off the ground with an area under the house that was used as a patio where the family would sit during the afternoon heat. There, they would be cooled by a breeze coming off the Paploteca River.

Tiό Trófilo brought our luggage into the living room and indicated which of the three other rooms we would use during our stay. Angelita brought me into her room to show me the things she added since we last visited. Now, all settled in for the week stay, we gathered under the house for a cool drink.

"This house was built for any condition," Tiό Trófilo said. "I built it using two-by-sixes in the walls and two-by-eights for the rafters and ceiling joists. The floor is two-by-ten-by-two inches and set on these pillars, which are buried five feet in the ground. Yes, sir, nothing will take this baby down," he said, trying to sound American. He had a habit of trying to make idiomatic phrases which he thought I would enjoy hearing.

"It sounds pretty sturdy to me," I replied. I walked to one of the pillars and wrapped my arms around it. I couldn't reach completely around the massive support. "This feels quite substantial to me. It must have taken you a year to put this home up."

"A year and then some," he said with an air of pride. "Yes, sir, this is the best house in the area. Not only does it have water and electricity, it even has indoor plumbing." I turned to Radio Belize to get an update on Hurricane Mitch. I usually listened to that station since it is broadcast in English. Unfortunately, Mitch took a turn to the west northwest. For some reason, it didn't take the turn to the north as was expected; it was now heading for the northern coast of Belize. I told Ilma that I was a little worried now as the feeder bands could be quite strong. The only thing that was good, if anything about a hurricane was that we would be on the "dry side" of the storm. If the claims about the house were true, it could withstand winds of 100 miles per hour. With Mitch's winds now up to 150 miles per hour, winds in La

Ceiba could reach the velocity of at least 90 miles per hour. Thus, Encilla suggested that we go to the city and stock up on supplies, especially oil for the lamps and batteries for the radio.

Trófilo loaded up the truck for the trip to the city the following morning. I decided to remain behind, as I was still tired from the trip and my presence was not needed. Since I was not going, Angelita decided to stay with me. Radio Belize now reported that the hurricane took another turn towards the south. It would now pass over the Belize-Honduras border. As the truck pulled out, Encilla called out that they should be back in about five hours and for us to be good, as if I wouldn't be. Angelita and I snuggled up on the couch and listened to the radio as the rain started to fall harder. Mitch now was turning south, towards us.

"I wonder what's holding up Tia and the others?" I asked beginning to get a little worried because of the slick dirt road leading to the main highway. "They'll be along," Angelita answered. "It has only been four hours, and it will take longer because of the roads."

Before she had finished saying these words, the phone rang and she rushed to answer it. She listened without saying anything and then said, "If you think so. Everything here is all right, as long as Francisco is with me." She said a few more "all rights" and then hung up the receiver. She saw the puzzled look on my face and said, "The military closed all the roads out of La Ceiba. Everyone is going to have to stay with relatives in the city. You and I are marooned out here until the storm passes."

So it was, a blind man and a teenage girl, alone with a major storm on its way. I knew that the house would hold up, but we were now on the "wet" side of the storm. We were in for a lot of rain, possibly enough to put ten feet of water over us. I keep checking the velocity of the wind and the water level.

The river was pushed inward by the tides and the wind blowing it away from the ocean. It was now half way up the steps and getting higher. After two days of heavy rains, I felt as though the house had shifted on its foundation. Water soaked around the massive pillars and softened the ground, which wasn't even my chief concern. The wind was now 100 mph with gusts higher than that. With the softened ground and the high winds, I was getting worried about the stability of the house. As night approached, I could feel it shudder and creak. I felt even more uneasy at these signs, the same ones that I felt during Hurricane Betsy when it hit New Orleans. Going outside by the back door - the one away from the wind - I checked the water level. It was now up almost to the level of the porch. I hurried quickly back inside to inform Angelita that we were in trouble. "The water is almost up to the house and the pillars are giving way on the leeward side of the house. The foundation is waterlogged and is so soft that the wind is making the whole house bend in that direction. If there weren't any wind, the house would just settle evenly." Angelita shuddered



a moment and I could hear the fear in her voice. "What's going to happen?" she asked. "It means that the house is going down and us with it if we don't do something fast," I said. "From what I can tell, the water is about eight feet deep now. It seems that the river has overflowed and the ocean has pushed into our area. "I think the best bet is for us to make a raft. We can knock out that back wall and use the two-by-sixes as cross pieces and use the wall for a platform. This way we make a raft eight by six. I think that will be large enough for the two of us. Get a hammer and I'll show you what to do." We worked frantically making our raft and when it was finished, we "set sail" even though we didn't have a sail. We did use one of the studs to make a push-pole, a la Tom Sawyer, in order to steer our craft. For a final touch, we attached a rope so that we could tie ourselves together and to the raft. I didn't want us getting separated. Now, we were at the mercy of the unrelenting wind. The wind was blowing the river backward. Thus, our little craft was being pushed inland instead of towards the ocean. Good luck at last! Since the wind was our main problem at this time, we lay low on the platform to decrease the wind resistance, but still it blew us around.

Everything seemed to be going our way until a gust of wind caught Angelita's flimsy dress and ripped it from her body. She tried to cover herself but had trouble keeping her balance in the strong wind. I reached out for her and pulled her body close to mine to shelter her and could feel her nakedness against my body. I crouched as low as I could and took off my shirt to cover her. With the difficult maneuver completed, we lay on the platform. The wind blew heavy raindrops against my back, cutting and stabbing into my bare flesh. It felt as though someone had taken a scalpel to it, stripping the skin off layer by layer, and I knew that my blood was mixing with the rain.

By morning, the winds had slowed to a gentle breeze and our raft was not moving. We used our makeshift push-pole to try to move in the direction in which we thought we could find land. We were adrift on a great body of water, our progress being impeded by fallen trees and large boulders that had washed down from the hills. All at once Angelita let out a shrill scream. "There's a body lying in that tree!"

“Let me know when we get near it,” I told her. “We’ll have to strip off clothes so you can have something to wear.”

“I can’t do that,” she protested.

“Whoever it is doesn’t need them anymore and you do,” I said, trying to convince her that this was a necessity and not something I would do under any other condition. When we got close enough I was able to drag the body aboard our raft and stripped off the outer clothes. Reluctantly Angelita donned the clothes and gave me my shirt. I pushed our unresisting benefactor back into the water. Angelita stroked my sore back and mumbled, “It’s really not that bad.” I put the shirt on to protect my back from the sun which now appeared through the clouds. Late that afternoon we saw the first signs of land. Our pole was now getting stuck in the mud and was basically useless. I eased myself into the water and found that it came to my knees and suggested that we abandon our floating island. The only thing that I was concerned about was that we might encounter snakes that were trying to find haven on land.

“Come on Angelita,” I told her. “We’ll have to wade through the water. We can’t be too far from land.” She moved closer to me and kissed me. It was a kiss like she had never given me before. It was a slow, lingering kiss. “I’m so glad you were here with me. I don’t know what I would have done without you.” “At least we survived so far,” I said. “Now let’s find some land and get out of this muddy water. We need to find something to eat.”

Angelita untied us from the raft and led us towards some high ground. I had no way of knowing where we were. I figured that we were blown further to the southeast so we started walking west towards the foothills, which I knew were to the south of La Ceiba. When we finally found ourselves on solid ground again, we headed north. Of course, we didn’t really expect to see the disaster that lay ahead of us.

We tried to keep on high ground as much as possible, but we started running into mud slides. In some places I was once again up to my waist in mud and water. At times it was even deeper. All the time, Angelita was holding onto me, sometimes pulling me through the mud and water, and at other times she was trying to free herself from the sticky mess. I discovered that this was no place to try to use a cane, so I held onto Angelita as much as possible.

All around us there were up-rooted trees and boulders that had been shoved along with the mud as it came pouring down the side of the mountain. People were clawing at the mud and obstacles in order to free those caught under the debris. Angelita stopped to help one man who was under a tree with his head buried in the mud. She tried to wash him, but it was of little use. Mud had forced its way into his eyes and mouth and left him gasping for air. I knelt down to help clear his air passages.

“I can’t see anything,” he said as soon as his mouth was cleared. “Oh, God! I can’t see anything! Can you help me!”

Other rescuers rushed over to help remove him from the thick goo that entrapped him. I could hear the anguished cries of a mother who was trying to free her young children from under what was left of a rickety old house. We could do nothing for any of these people. Angelita stooped over and picked up a muddy rag doll and held it close to her. She heard a small voice saying, “That’s mine. I can’t find my mommy.” Angelita feverishly started digging at the spot where she found the doll. She reached a human leg and cried. She took the little girl around to find someone who would take care of her. We moved on in our own quest to find sanctuary with Ilma and her family in La Ceiba. All along the way, husbands looked for wives, mothers looked for children, and children looked for parents. I wished that I knew how far the river had taken us -- or even what direction the wind blew us -- but for some reason, I instinctively knew we needed to stay on high ground and travel north. We dragged ourselves into a banana plantation as darkness descended. After finding trees that were blown down, we ate some of the bananas that seemed ripe and stacked some of them together to make a mat on which to sleep. My major concern was the snakes that must have been crawling in that field, not to speak of the scorpions. Thus, we settled for the night, wrapped in each others arms and finally feeling a sense of peacefulness for the first time since the storm began. Angelita slept throughout the night while I lay next to her, listening to her light breathing and gentle moans that told me she was finally at rest. I fell asleep. The rising sun brought us to the reality that we were still lost. Angelita picked some more bananas and we ate them, giving thanks for the little nourishment. Having filled our stomachs, we continued moving. Angelita holding on to me and I, with my cane in hand, we searched for La Ceiba and safety. We knew that everyone would be worried about us and hoped that they would send out a search party to try to locate us. But I knew that was an impossibility. I turned on my radio which I had securely packed in a plastic bag along with my passport to protect it. I was able to pick up Radio Belize once again and heard the disturbing news-- 11,000 people feared dead. No, there would be no search party.

Late in the afternoon we found a major highway and decided our best bet would be to follow it. It more likely would lead us somewhere rather than us going cross country as we had been doing. By nightfall we approached a small village where we might find a place to rest. But, when we got there, we found it deserted and muddy. We found a hut that appeared to be in one piece and slept there.

The morning brought not only a new day, but new noises. I could hear some trucks and cars moving about. A voice called out, “Colonel, I found two people over here!” I could not contain my exhilaration when I heard voices. Angelita threw her arms around me, kissed me, and shouted, “The Army is here! Hundreds of men are here! We’re saved!”

I felt strong hands pulling me into the back of a jeep. "I am Colonel Rodigio. Who are you and where did you come from?" he asked with the air of a military man. Angelita filled him in on our plight and that we were trying to find our families. After hearing our story, he told us that we were in the village of Sonaguera, about 40 kilometers south of Jutiapa, and then said, "Hold on. I'll have you there in time for lunch. The road east to San Francisco is clear and I think the road north is also open now." He stepped on the accelerator and the jeep lurched forward. During the trip, he told us of the deadly devastation in the area. We were the only living people that he and his men had found in two days. There were an estimated 1,500 dead in the province. Three hours later, we pulled up in front of the house we had been looking for. Ilma ran out when she heard the jeep and threw her arms around me. "I thought you were dead," she said as tears flowed down her cheeks. "What happened to you two?"

"It's a long story," I said. "But with Angelita by my side, how could we not survive?"

Angelita looked at me and smiled. "I thought at times that we wouldn't survive, but I did learn one thing though. You sure get around good for not being able to see. Yo te amo mucho Quiero."

The flight back to New Orleans was two weeks late. When we were ready to board the plane, Encilla said, "Thank you for taking care of Angelita. You are by far my favorite nephew." She gave me a hug and a kiss. We landed at the New Orleans International Airport late that same day and headed home for some rest and a good hot bath. The final count I heard was 9,876 known dead, most of them from the mud slides. People, I found out the hard way, are the same all over the world in grieving for their lost family members -- the husbands, the wives, the children -- who will never return home, never to say "I love you," and never bring joy into their lives again. And I grieved for those I didn't even know. I felt their pain and agony. I heard their anguished cries as they dug through the rubble and I was powerless to help. So now, I am just getting over this ordeal. I had to write this so I can rest.

Ilma asked me what Angelita and I did while we were lost. I smiled. Maybe some day I will be able to tell her.

ELIZABETH L. FONTAINE MEMORIAL AWARD
STORY EXPRESSING COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING

Stereo-Type

By Joseph A. Shirley, Summer, 2002
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

In February 1985, I left Kansas City, Mo., for New Orleans. Mardi Gras! The biggest party I have ever heard of, and I was on my way! I was almost through Mississippi when I came upon a vehicle parked on the side of the road. I could see an elderly lady



in the vehicle, and on the ground were tire tools, a jack, and a spare tire. It was raining hard but I decided to stop and help. I backed up a little so I wouldn't have to walk too far in the rain.

As I got out of my car, the lady was stepping out of hers. When she saw me approaching she seems to recoil a bit, backing around the opposite side of her car and not once taking her eyes off me. She was a white lady, Caucasian American. I remembered then, that I had heard people in the south don't cotton to black people, African Americans. I also recalled stories about what some white people will do to a black person.

I assured her that all I wanted to do was help her fix the tire, and I proceeded to do just that. All the while I kept talking to her, and she just stared at me. The rain was pouring. I was getting soaked and so was she. When I finished, I told her it was okay to drive then, and still she stared. I returned to my car and proceeded on my trip to New Orleans; I felt good.

About 30 minutes later a car came up behind me, horn blaring and lights flashing! Right then I felt that I was in trouble! The car pulled beside me, and I saw the biggest white man I had ever seen, wearing a Marine uniform. He insisted that I pull over. I drove faster. He stayed behind me for a couple of miles, still flashing his lights. I decided that I had had enough. So I pulled over. I'd tell him, - Look, all I did was help someone in need. In an instant the man was beside my window. I rolled the window down, and before I could get a word out he said, "Are you the guy that helped the lady a piece down the road?"

I said, "Yes, but!..." and before I could say another word, he started talking, thanking me for stopping and helping. The lady was his mother and she had been late getting home. He told me how worried they had been, not knowing where she was. He said she had made him get in his car and try to catch up with me to thank me and give me a \$20 bill. She wanted to thank me herself, but she had heard what they say about black people.

Well he must have thought I was a deaf mute because I just sat there with my mouth open, staring. I was thinking about how I was ready to run away from this guy, and his mother was ready to run from me, just because someone had told us how we are supposed to be... stereotypes. Today, my stereotype... is a Sony!

**FLORENCE E. KENNY
AWARD**

First Encounter

*By Don Siegrist, Spring 2003
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

My first real encounter with the female of the species did not occur until I was in the Army and sent to England. Prior to that, I was too occupied with mere survival. Having come from divorced parents, I was forced to fend for myself; I had no time for the opposite sex.

When I was 20, I enlisted in the Army and was sent to England. I was later put in charge of four men and given an assignment: we were to go to occupied France and kidnap a German officer and his records. To assist us in this difficult task were several French women who were active in the French resistance and went under the name of “The Maquis.” It was their job to help us gain access to the French coastline, and to show us where our officer was to be found. They were also to assist in any way needed.

During our training and briefing, we began to know each other. When the time allowed, we’d listen to music, dance, and simply be young people together. Among this group was a slim, dark-haired girl of about 19. We became attracted to each other through our mutual love of music. Her outward appearance tended to be frivolous, but she was far from it when you got to know her. Appearing frivolous is an asset when you are a spy. I did not speak French, but she spoke English. I greatly admired her for her courage and intelligence. After one evening together (with the group), I walked her to her room, embraced and kissed her. Our business at hand, however, was far too important to allow us to get too serious in our personal relationship. The next morning she was quite friendly and I realized I liked females. They were warm, friendly and cuddly. I was hoping she and I could extend our friendship beyond the holocaust of World War II.

We saw each other several times during the war. The women accompanied us on small pleasure boats through enemy waters. We pretended to be young partygoers making whoopee in the small crafts. That is how we got beyond the German patrols. Once on land, the women gave us our instructions and we separated. My four men and myself were successful on three different raids. When we captured the German officers, it was my job to take them back to the United States. It would be weeks before I saw my lovely friend again. You may wonder why I don’t call her by

name. I have to say, I do not remember her name. You might think that odd, but I believe my psyche is being kind to me. We were on our fourth raid.

We had found out that some members of “The Maquis” had changed their loyalties: there were traitors among us. My orders were to put an end to their activities. My dear friend knew who these women were, and where they operated. She pointed out their headquarters to us. She returned home and we proceeded to do what had to be done. We raided their headquarters and took the prisoners to our nearest U.S. troops.

Anxious to see my friend again, I left my prisoners and went directly to her home. I walked up the stairs to the porch, looked in through the large windows and saw that there were eight black shirts standing around an object on the floor. It was my dear one. I knew at once she had been beaten and shot, but it appeared that she was not being raped. A terrible rage came over me: it was a rage that took away fear and reason.

I crashed through the door. They saw at once they had been caught in a terrible act and they ran from me. They ran towards the kitchen and saw what they thought was a back door, but it was the door to the cellar. They had no choice but to run down the stairs into the darkness.

When I reached the cellar door, I closed it behind me, and I slowly descended down the stairs. I had only my dirk knife, which was attached to my calf, as a weapon. I withdrew it and went into the abyss. I had an advantage. Anything I touched that was warm was my enemy. In the darkness, they knew they could be attacking one of their own. I don’t have a clear memory what happened down in that dark cellar, but I do know that I avenged my dear, lovely lady. So, when you ask me who my first sweetheart was... it’s a question that fills me with sadness.



**THE MCCULLOUGH BROTHERS (FOUR)
COMBAT INFANTRYMAN'S BADGE AWARD**

To Live and Almost Die

*By Robert D. Gonzales Jr., Summer, 2003
VA Medical Center – Leavenworth, KS*

To live and almost die in the desert. What a life that would have been: stuck where I didn't want to be and almost escorted out by the grim reaper. Come, let me share a day in the life.

My brush with death came in the winter of 1991. I was in Iraq as part of Operation Desert Storm. My unit's mission was combat support. We were combat engineers, bridge specialists by designation. At least that's what we were trained for; however, this particular mission we were tasked out as combat engineers (land mine warfare). SNAFU!

I can remember the morning we headed out for the airfield we were assigned to destroy. It was chilly out and smelled like sand and diesel fuel. That's all there was in the Iraqi desert at that time, sand that stretched for miles and military convoys from various nations, all running on diesel fuel.

We headed out, in what direction I'm not sure. East, west, north, south - it all looks and feels the same in the desert. I was the lieutenant's driver, so you'd think I would know which way we were headed. I'm sure I did at the time, but I just can't recall at this moment. Anyway, once we arrived at the airfield there were Blackhawks everywhere. They were lost, so this halted our mission for about an hour.

Once the helicopters had left, we set about our business: to blow up, break, smash, crush, or set on fire anything that could be used again by the Iraqis. First, we went around breaking windows and slashing tires on vehicles. Second, we set out placing demolition on all the buildings and satellite dishes. I remember having so much fun and thinking: Now, this is the Army! This is a man's job; and here I am, barely a year out of high school. Oh, yes- this is the life! It didn't take us long to make short work out of the poorly constructed buildings and the already-immobile vehicles. It was time to move on to the piece de resistance, tanks and other vehicles, full of fuel and their armament. We're talking big booms.

Heading back towards the perimeter of the airfield where the "big guns" were dug in, we came across, oh momma, the jackpot, a T-72 tank. We had been told that there weren't any at this airfield. I was so excited I began to quiver like a newborn doe.

For this behemoth we set aside our sticks of TNT and our blocks of C-4. We were going to use our M51 anti-tank land mines to send this monster back to the factory in Russia. Now there's a formula you're supposed to use in demolition: something like P = pounds. Not in our case: P = plenty. We put two M51

mines under this thing; each mine carried 50 pounds of high explosives. Not only did these mines render the tank unmovable, they flipped it and set the solid metal hull on fire. It was actually dripping metal. Talk about overkill.

We moved on, this time to troop transport trucks. It was me and a good friend of mine, Dino, who got the pleasure of destroying these trucks. Now you would think, that after what we saw two M51 anti-tank mines do to a 60 ton T-72 tank, we would not be stupid enough to choose as our tools of destruction, two M51 anti-tank mines. Well, we were. Dino and I grabbed our mines, two each, and went to the trucks. These trucks only weighed about four tons each.

Upon reaching the trucks we both dropped, winded from carrying the mines down range. Once we had caught our breath, we surveyed the immediate area for a place to take cover once we had set our mines. Having found what we thought would be suitable cover, we set about our task. I placed my two mines under the front and rear differentials and was ready to disco. I just had to get the thumbs up from Dino, letting me know that he was ready. I got the go.

We counted to three and ran like hell. We had set our charges with three minute time fuses. It was more than enough time to run the 100 or so meters to the safety of the berm. Time seemed to go on forever. Then out of nowhere, BOOM! The mines went off like the sound of a thousand stampeding elephants, all trumpeting as they ran, causing the ground to shake.

Next thing I knew there were truck parts landing all around us. I started to panic. It wasn't until a second later that the bed to one of the trucks landed about five feet off to my left. That set me off. I started screaming, "We didn't get far enough away; we didn't get far enough away!" In a frenzy, I tried to bury myself in the sand.

Throughout the entire 20 to 30 seconds, which seemed never to end, I continued to scream like a banshee. Dino jumped on top of me and started punching me in the side yelling, "I know! I know! Shut up!" I'm going out on a limb here and guessing that Dino was not too thrilled with the situation, either.

Once it was all clear we got up and started walking back to where the rest of the platoon was. It wasn't until we got close to the guys and they started laughing that I realized that I had wet my pants. It took a long time to live that one down.

Now that we were safely out of harm's way, something hit me. My life had not flashed before my eyes, like they say it does when you have a near-death experience. The only things I can recall are the screaming, trying to bury myself in, and Dino hitting me. It wasn't until afterward, that I began to think about all the things I had not done in my life. It wasn't until that point that I started dreaming and hoping for a better way of life. It wasn't until just a few months ago this year that I began to chase those dreams, because the day after that truck bed almost landed on me, I got up and set out to boogie with the reaper!



PALLAS ATHENE BEST STORY AWARD
NATIONAL WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS VETERANS ASSOCIATION

A Sailor's Surprise

By James J. Cosgrove, Summer, 2003
VA Medical Center – Manchester, NH

During the Korean War, when I was a sailor attached to the Battleship Missouri, the following situation presented itself. One particular day fellow crew members were under my guidance, removing a large motor up from the electric deck on a #316 gun turret through very tight hatch openings.

As I reached the main deck hatch I noticed a Marine standing at the bottom. In a booming voice, he asked if I was Electrician Mate Cosgrove. I answered yes. He then ordered me to wash my hands and face and follow him, because the admiral of the fleet requested my company in his sea cabin. Speedily I followed the Marine sergeant the entire length of the ship, up through the officer's company, with all eyes watching intently as we passed. I must say I was getting nervous as we approached the Admiral's sea cabin. The sergeant knocked and announced, "Cosgrove is here, sir." Then he stepped back, leaving me alone to face the admiral, who was sitting there enjoying a mug of coffee.

"James, I've been looking for you for quite a while," he began. "I knew all your uncles, including your namesake, Uncle James, but especially your father, Albert. We grew up together and were real pals. We rang the bells at St. Joseph's Church every Sunday morning. We did almost everything together until I got an appointment at the U.S. Naval Academy. Your dad joined the U.S. Army."

"James, what got you on my battleship?" he inquired. I told him that I had been a graduate student when the Korean War started and also a member of the Naval Reserves, so I was called to serve immediately.

The admiral said that he would call my father and let him know we had met each other and had enjoyed a nice visit. He'd also

assure him that I'd come home in good fashion when my time was up in his command. At that time, little did I realize what he was really saying. Along came May, the month that I was to be released, return to civilian life, and continue my G.I. Bill of Rights.

I had a watch station the night before. On that particular morning I was stepping in when suddenly there were three chiefs lined up in front of my rack, telling me to hurry. I showered, shaved and dressed and they took care of the rest as they packed my sea bag and suitcase.

This is really it, I thought! I followed the chiefs right by the enlisted men's gangway, all the way forward to the Admiral's deck. There he stood, holding my orders which he read, transferring me to the main side of Norfolk for discharge. He came forward and saluted me; I returned the salute. The boatsman was right there with side boards and piped me ashore just as though I was a four-striper or above. It was unbelievable! Then I descended down the gangway to the Admiral's gig, a real fancy boat. I turned and saluted the American flag on the stern as we passed away towards shore. I felt the tears on my cheeks as the Missouri BB63, the most famous ship afloat (except for the Constitution "Old Ironsides"), moved along.

On the way to the fleet landing, the ensign said that I must have influence in this man's navy in order to get this kind of treatment. I just replied, "You'll never know. You'll never know."

He dumped me and my gear at fleet landing, put my gear in a jeep, and off we went to the administration building where I got another Honorable Discharge. By train I arrived in Boston, Mass., and my Dad was waiting with the family car.

Epilogue: In three years they had a special day in Lynn, Mass., called Red Rock Day. A wreath was tossed into the ocean commemorating all sailors lost at sea. The guest speaker was my Admiral, now retired. I got the three of us together (Dad, Admiral and myself). It was closure to a wonderful experience at a very young age. I can close my eyes and in the back of my mind see it all wind down like a movie. This was one of the very good memories, among many others.

ELIZABETH FONTAINE MEMORIAL AWARD
STORY EXPRESSING COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING

Dinner for Nine

By Lee Hill, Spring, 2004
VA Medical Center – Oklahoma City, OK

I reside at the Clinton Veterans Center in Clinton, Okla., and we have many different activities. One of these is a dinner outing. I had been feeling a bit closed in, so I signed up to go along on Sunday, July 27. I arose early in order to prepare for the trip, and

I was ready and waiting by the time the bus was ready to go. The trip was quite uneventful until we arrived at our destination. My friends who could walk all made a mad scramble to disembark from the bus. I had to wait for the Tommy lift to set me on terra firma, because I drive a Rascal Three-Wheeler.

We all entered together and were seated at the same table by a very pretty waitress. We ordered our most-wanted dishes, from hamburgers to expensive steaks cooked to order. As we were finishing our salads, the manager came to our table and told us our dinners had all been paid for by a lady who was dining there when we entered. She had asked the manager who we were, wanting to know if we were disabled veterans. The manager had told her we were house-bound veterans from the Clinton Disabled Veterans Center. The lady then asked if she could pay for our dinners and be kept anonymous.

She did so, and told the manager that it was the least she could do. We had done more for her and the United States than most other citizens in our fine country. She wanted to show her appreciation.

Upon hearing this, I assure you that I had to keep my mouth full to keep from crying. The tears were running down my cheeks as it was. Looking down the table, I noticed I was not the only one. More than one hand had to reach to the tears sneaking down cheeks. There was a short period of silence before we all asked in unison who this lady was. The manager informed us that she was bound to secrecy.

We each gave a heartfelt thanks to pass on to our unknown benefactor. Since then, we have decided to purchase a large thank-you card that we all can sign. We'll send it to the manager of Simon's Catch to relay to this wonderful lady, to show our thanks and let her know the joyous effect she had on nine lives that day.

I don't know if my comrades feel the same; but for me, it's a feeling similar to a resurrection. I had almost come to believe no one cared whether I lived or died. You might say I had begun to think I was just an old crippled, worn-out discard to be a burden to others. This incident has given me a real shot in the arm and restored my faith in my fellow citizens.

I must tell you this lady must be one of the most wonderful people I have most sorrowfully never had the great pleasure to meet. I will always do my utmost to uphold her opinion of me. I am overjoyed to once again have the recognition I once had so many years ago. It is one of the reasons I hold and respect the symbols of our great nation, the Eagle and Old Glory. May her stars and stripes shine on through eternity. May this fine lady stay in good health and be able to enjoy that for the rest of her days.

She will always be in my prayers as I watch the stars at night and wonder which of the brightest one is hers.



**DAV, ERNESTINE SCHUMANN-HEINK CHAPTER 2
MILITARY SERVICE AWARD**

Booker: A Memorial Day Tribute

*By Henry Jay Tschirner, Spring, 2004
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

Dear Booker,

Today is Memorial Day, observed. It has been 34 years and seven months. Do you remember the day the music died for Alpha's CP? It was a Wednesday, and when I think of you, I smile. I hear the elephants from "Magic Carpet Ride" and remember our pact about passing a bowl if one of us were ever hurt. I recall how you and Doc Ray tried to get me high on the litter before I got dusted off, for pneumonia!

I wish we could have become Vung Tau lifeguards as we had planned. You will probably remember that after the Army, we were going to open a Mobil station in San Luis Obispo, where we could surf, repair dune buggies and desert bikes, and maybe even sell a little gas.

I remember our LPs, when only one of us had to be outside the perimeter, but we always went together. We were sentinels and brothers: listening, but not understanding. We celebrated my 21st birthday with a firefight that night, just four days before you died, at age 19. That was the last time I saw you, and you were laughing.

In 1992, and again in 1994, I ran my fingers across your name, engraved on a monolithic black wall that is called the "Vietnam Veterans Memorial" or, "The Wall." Sacred to many, meaningless to others, it stands in a public park across the street from Lincoln's Memorial in Washington, D.C. It took until 1982 to get it built, with private donations, and it probably wouldn't exist if not for the efforts of a fellow grunt, Jan Scruggs, and his reaction to a popular Vietnam War movie called "Deer Hunter;" which he watched in 1979. You and 17 others from Alpha Company are listed on two granite slabs, W37 and W38, in alphabetical order, along with everyone else killed or reported missing in Vietnam on November 27, 1968.

It is appropriate that, as in death, you, Lt. Parr and Doc Ray are only inches apart. One hundred and forty panels include the

names of more than 58,000 killed or missing in action. Some preceded you but more followed.

Once, in Austin, I gazed at your father's name listed in the telephone directory, but, regrettably, I never called him. I feel sorry for your family's loss and wish I could console them. Now that I have the courage to call, your dad is not listed anymore and may have moved or died.

On March 29, 1973, the last U.S. ground forces departed Vietnam with little ceremony. Twenty-five months later, April 30, 1975, South Vietnam surrendered. The 7th NVA, remember those people, were part of the force occupying Saigon, renamed Ho Chi Minh City. It is reasonable to believe that some of the same enemy soldiers we fought ended up drinking in the same Tu Do bars, getting hustled by the same bar girls! There are stories about the drugs, drinking and prostitution eventually corrupting the Communists, too. Capitalism had the last laugh.

In a VA treatment center, they asked me to write this "grief" letter to say "good bye," but I do not choose to do that. Your smile and your spirit will always live with me. I think of you every day, and especially during my most cherished experiences, for example, when John, my son, was born.

Two years ago, I went snow skiing from a Huey helicopter in the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia. 'Up, Up and Away' played through my mind every time we lifted off, and I could feel your physical presence as though you were again sitting beside me. I don't listen to Steppenwolf on purpose, but it still gets radio air play and I can visualize the grin on your face when those elephants started trumpeting. I really miss you, and I am struggling to "Keep Up the Fire."

After you died, I did not want to be a lifeguard anymore. I got home okay on January 18, 1969. After bumming around until 1972, I settled into a comfortable and successful career in the radio broadcasting business working in New York and Dallas. In 1989, I quit my job and moved to Colorado to become a ski instructor.

Mercifully, I did not hear your radio transmissions the day you died, but I heard some gruesome accounts of the battle. Alpha had 18 KIA and 36 WIA, and we lost some slicks and their crews. There was no react force to help you that afternoon, like this is NEWS to you!

The next day they found no dead NVA but worked out that some REMF plotted the wrong LZ and you landed inside an L-shaped ambush of heavily reinforced positions instead of behind them. It was probably an oversized platoon of regular NVA, with at least one anti-aircraft 51-caliber plus half a dozen RPG-7s and B-40s. They did not even scavenge up our weapons, except maybe a Missing M-60, and they cut the handsets off all the PRC-25s.

In 2000, I was diagnosed with PTSD, a kind of delayed reaction to combat stress. In therapy, I am beginning to feel a little better about the Vietnam experience. I have heard that Vietnam veterans have the highest suicide rate in history of returning U.S. combat soldiers.

You are still my best friend, and I am thankful for the eight months that we spent together. I am learning about letting go of my sorrow, but I am not letting go of you. I hope you are with God, but where ever you are, I pray that I will end up there, too.

When my dog, Mo Fat Chi died in 1988, I prayed that he could join up with you and that one day we will all be together again, wherever they send the dead Vietnam vets and their pets. The counselors at this hospital are caring and competent, and they are teaching me about "letting go," but you do not need to worry. I will never let go of my memories of you.

May God bless you always. I pray that you rest in peace. Thank you for being my friend. Keep your powder dry.

Your brother in combat.

Jay



PALLAS ATHENE BEST STORY AWARD
NATIONAL WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Journey with God

*By Janice Walker, Spring, 2004
VA Medical Center – Dublin, GA*

While lying on the bed, I'm feeling a deeper sense of my appreciation for God as I ponder thoughts of His love for me. God has helped me so many times. Before this particular hospitalization, I'd stayed out of the hospital for quite some time. I have schizophrenia, a brain disease with several disorders falling under this name.

My illness is a real medical concern! It is not just my imagination, or something I've found prayer or medicine alone can overcome. During the last hospitalization, I stayed for over three months. I didn't have many spells. A spell is when I hear voices, have

anxiety attacks, delusions, and a feeling of overwhelming hopelessness all at the same time. When I'm having these symptoms, I cannot see reality. All I know is I am feeling very afraid and distressed.

There were also times when I'd have seizures or convulsions; the cause has not been found yet, the doctors agree. It may well be side effects of the medication. The seizures are not the main problem; they came later, along with convulsions, but they do affect how I think afterwards. After being on the floor, bruising my head or arm, I wonder if my brain is not wild, or empty. Then I snap back to what is.

During my stay at the hospital, I participated in many activities other than regular doctor sessions. I also worked in the wood clinic, entered an arts and crafts contest, went bowling, played bingo, winning the jackpot twice. And I went to the ballet for the first time to see "The Nutcracker." During these activities, I kept my mind mainly on God. I'd have hard days and easy days, heavy days and light days. But I experienced few spells and learned to generate positive energy, which brought some good to me.

For I remember those wild times when I was strapped to the bed all night. Also, I think about the times I was on the back wards of the hospitals, barely functioning. That was then, but I'm much better now, thanks to God and divine medicine.

My faith in God is a positive help! I have gained more peace and self-control. There have been those who helped encourage me in clinics and hospitals as well. I give God the overall credit, for at one point I never thought I would be normal. But I'm becoming more stable. The disease is still in me, but it sleeps at times. And when it's quiet, I am able to have special times with writing poems, prayers, songs, going bowling with Beth, and out to dinner. Beth is a very supportive friend. I also talk to Lisa on the phone. She lives far away; I don't see her much. Then I go worship God in a place that gives me peace!

The healing is not quite done, in spite of my times of peace. Everybody wants to hear the miracle story, but the miracle is Christ in me. I don't call myself helpless or insane. I have an illness that causes me to experience anxiety, mood swings, confusion, depression and hallucinations; sometimes I hear voices.

I have lived with these symptoms for over 12 years and along the way, I hitched a ride with God. He's still carrying me through life's highways and byways. God has taught me to be more loving, compassionate, honest, competent, courageous and empathetic. I am working on becoming more assertive. I am letting go of my role as a victim. I have a steady prayer life, and I see God in this world. Now He is wherever I am.

As I originally wrote this, I had come back to the hospital. Last night I had to stay awake because I had a test done Saturday at Charter Northside Hospital, and I was hoping they'd find the

reason for the seizures. It was very trying to stay awake all night until 12:30 p.m. the next day. I came to the hospital this time due to stressful living arrangements and medication problems. I was hearing other voices, and I was preoccupied with personal and family problems.

On the morning of the test, a beautiful and kind woman took me to another hospital. She was very easy to talk to. She was insightful, gentle, and very empathetic: God works through people. With the Spirit's help, I was able to be cured of my fears. Vivian, the nice woman, helped. I took the last EEG; it lasted about 45 minutes to an hour. I slept through tons of it. I was made to breathe fast, to hyperventilate. It made me dizzy, and I was exhausted.

Even though I took those tests without any real sleep, I was at peace. When we walked outside, it was the last of spring. The ground's grass praised God, the birds were dancing, and I had peace, no matter the weather. I feel good about myself this moment, for I know truth will win. As I am learning to accept my limitations and build a life on my strengths, I can succeed in the ways of wisdom.

I have no undue anxiety about those tests. I wait hoping for the best. I trust that whatever the outcome, treatment will be effective. God is a helper to us but not a "sugar daddy." My faith is as good as anyone's. God doesn't always give us the miracles we seek, but God is faithful and will forever be in the heart of His children.

I feel I've experienced a miracle to be able to recall, to recite, to record what goes on and still love God without blaming Him. I'm just thankful to God for being there for me and for helping me to get to the hospital.

God's Love for me helps me to feel childlike, secure, brave and relaxed. Yet it can be a seesaw ride.

My illness brings negative thoughts and fear. I can't lay down my weapons of Spirit and say I'm cured. It's a continuous process of healing, leaving, and letting go of what doesn't work. I could never have survived the toils and snares without God. I am glad I can walk this journey called life "hand-in-hand" with God.



ADULT LEARNING CENTER AWARD
BY DR. JAN MAUCK, ED GOLDSMITH & MARTIN DILLON
HUMOR IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

Battle Dress Fatigues

*By John A. Mortimer, Spring, 2004
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

“Over-sexed, over-paid and over here,” the Brits proclaimed in World War II. They feared the “damn Yankees” would pinch their lovely lasses for their G.I. brides.

Balderdash! The allies had nothing to fear from their sweethearts swooning over our appearances. A far cry from “Spotty Duke,” as platoon leader, in my togs I looked more like the rag-a-bone man.

When our battalion arrived in Germany, we anticipated shell fire. Instead, the first thing that hit us was the bloody, perishing cold. One of the worst bone-chillers on record was underway: what a killer. I had prepared to sort out the enemy. Now, I had to prepare for another enemy - frostbite.

Our troops learned the hard way that many a battle has been lost by failing to adapt to the elements. I intended to dress to kill.

Setting about his dual mission, I slugged along, blue with the cold. What a relief when a tank came along and a buddy threw me a life-line - an extra insulated pair of trousers. Warm at last! That took care of my buttocks. Now, for my torso.

After solving the first problem, I stumbled into another obstacle. My Army overcoat was so long that it restricted my movement.

How I wished for a “Union Label” seamstress. Alas, there were no lady tailors in our trenches. Sewing never tickled my fancy: I don’t do hems. So I hacked off the excess. Oops-a-daisy!

This left the remains of the top half of my overcoat held together with a piece of rope, horse pins and a prayer. Lo and behold, in the rubble, I spotted something that looked like a ski mask: perfect frostbite protection! Just the job to prevent my chin from dropping off. I dusted off the woolly and pulled it over my head. To crown it all, I wore my helmet on top.

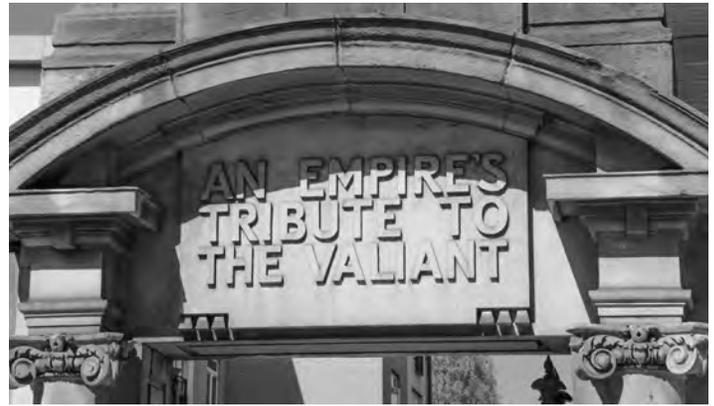
I pressed on, regardless of my scruffy appearance. I was enough to scare off any enemy.

Then, all of a sudden the dreaded word spread down the company line like wildfire: “Patton is coming.”

Everybody knew that General George Patton was a stickler for correct military dress code. His infamous reputation preceded him into battle, and we called him “Ol’ Blood-and-Guts.” Our blood, his guts. Now he was in our area, breathing fire and smoke. He poked his swagger stick at anything that moved.

In my mind’s eye, I pictured him taking one look at me and bellowing: “Court martial that slovenly mess of a soldier!” To that I would only plead: “Please, General, I may look like a dog’s dinner - all scraps, but would you believe we’re being fired on?”

Stroke of luck for me that Patton missed the sorry sight of my beard, hidden under my so-called ski mask. Otherwise the General might have had my guts for garters.



**FLORENCE E. KENNY
AWARD**

Whatever Lives Must Die

*By Leah Ann Jones, Summer, 2004
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO*

John, a 73-year-old retired man, sits quietly, looking out the window of his two-bedroom apartment in western Wyandotte County, Kan. He has been reading stories about life, love and dying. “A Song of Myself” by Walt Whitman, “Annabell Lee” by Edgar Allan Poe, and “Death be Not Proud” by J. B. Gunther are among the few choices he has made. He reads to forget the pain, but remember the beautiful life of his grandson, David.

David was a precocious and intuitive little boy, always surprising John with his clever opinions of life and living. John remembers how thrilled he and his son, Dan, and his wife, Paulette, were when David was born. David arrived two weeks early, yelling his way into the world to let everyone know he had come. John sent Paulette a dozen red roses to welcome David into the world at St. Luke’s Hospital in Kansas City, Mo.

As David grew, John was delighted to see his grandson learn to do things. John videotaped events, such as David’s first words, or what John believed were his first words; David’s first steps and David’s first day of kindergarten at Olathe Elementary School in Olathe, Kan. There wasn’t a day that went by that John didn’t phone or stop by just to see David and “catch up” on all the current events.

David would come to visit John on the weekends, while Dan and Paulette went shopping or to the movies on the Plaza in Kansas City. David would go with John to Loose Park when the roses were in bloom in the spring and summer. David would fly kites, catch bugs, and one time while John wasn't looking, David caught a toad that was crawling across a parking lot. This made the little boy ecstatic. He actually tried to throw the toad up in the air and scream, "Fly, fly away and be free!" That was David, John thought, always trying to set things free and let nature take its course.

When David was eight years old, John took him to the Kansas City Zoo and they walked for hours until David konked out but he didn't do so until after he made sure that the animals would be put to bed properly. John also took David to the Imax Theatre while at the zoo, and David was filled with awe at the sights and sounds of the Africa Tundra and its wildlife. David told John that he thought Africa was a beautiful place where animals are free to roam as they should be, according to nature. John agreed heartily and replied: "Yes, nature is wondrous and truly does take care of itself."

David and John, while on their trips to various parks would come across many different animals. They made it a game to see who could call out first when they saw an animal or bird that they recognized. John had taken David to the library and sat with him for hours teaching him to recognize various kinds of birds and animals.

As David began to get older, John and David would talk about nature and its natural course. John would explain about how old animals and other living things can become weak: that when animals, birds, and other living things are born, they are young and healthy, but that nature eventually takes its course. John further explained that when nature has run its course, animals, birds, and people know it's time to leave life and go to Heaven. David would listen to John ever so carefully when they talked about nature taking its course.

On one of their many strolls, John became concerned about David's silence and asked him, "Are you okay, David?" David replied, "Grandpa, the way you have explained nature to me, I guess what you're really trying to say is that everything that lives must die, right?" John answered, "Yes, David, that is true." He looked at David while David pondered this thought, looking ever so deep in concentration.

Then David asked, "But Grandpa, that really isn't so bad, is it? I mean; going to Heaven is what we learned about in church. Heaven is a wonderful place, so people, birds, and animals should be happy when they know it's time for them to go, right?"

John answered, "Yes David, Heaven is a beautiful place. All living things should look forward to going there when nature has run its course."

By the time he was 15, David and John had taken a bazillion walks at a bazillion parks and lakes, as David told John. David could never get enough of the outdoors, and John was only happy to accommodate his grandson's wishes... and go on another of their bazillion walks. A tear slowly trickles down John's face now, as he reminisces about David. The boy was so full of life, so full of love, so full of energy. There wasn't anything he wouldn't try at least once. John doesn't have to try very hard to bring back the feelings of joy that David brought to him throughout his life. This is why he hurts so, realizing that his life will never be the same.

David was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia close to his 16th birthday. Doctors tried everything they could – bone marrow transplants, blood transfusions, radiation and chemotherapy. Through all this, David held his head high and told John that he was feeling fine. David would remind John of the bazillion walks and trips they took together. He would remind John of the beauty in life and just how precious life can be. John agreed with David, and as the boy's life force was slowly leaving him, he would reassure David that he would meet him in Heaven one day. David told John he felt very happy about that. During the last conversation, David slowly reassured John. He said, "Grandpa, remember when I was about eight years old and I told you that I understood about how nature takes its course? Well, Grandpa, I really understand that everything that lives must die. But Grandpa, that's okay. I know I'm going to Heaven and I am very happy about that, so don't you worry about me! When you get to Heaven and see me, we can go on a bazillion more walks, okay?" John wipes the tear from his face and slowly gets up from his chair. He walks to his bookshelf and puts his books away, and thinks to himself, "Yes, David, life is truly beautiful and when I get to Heaven, we will walk together once more and be happy that nature has run its course and brought us back together again. John thinks to himself once more before going to bed, "Everything that lives must die." He feels no pain now, for he is filled with all the happy memories of his grandson, David, as he begins to fall asleep.



The Tooth Fairy

By Lowell "Duke" Embs, Fall, 2004
VA Medical Center – San Antonio, TX

Two weeks before I graduated from the University of Illinois, the Korean War started. As soon as I got home from school, I went to the Navy Recruiting office in downtown Chicago. The place was packed; so I stood in line, holding my birth certificate, college transcript and Social Security card.

When I got to the head of the line, a guy with several stripes on the sleeve of his white jumper looked at me from behind a desk.

I paused and said, "I want to be a Navy Fighter Pilot. "Go out that door, turn left, and go in the first door on the right."

His eyes said "Move," so I did. The first door on the right opened easily, exposing a very large room containing at least 200 guys my age, in various stages of undress. For the next six hours I became like them, answering more questions about my physical condition than I ever had before.

About 5:00 p.m., those of us who remained were told to come back the next day for more tests. These turned out to be IQ, psychological, and psychiatric evaluations. At the end of these exercises, we were told we'd be notified whether we passed and if we had, when to report to Pensacola.

Five months after being accepted, and while still awaiting orders to Pensacola, I developed a toothache.

Off, I went to the family dentist. His office was a second floor walkup in an old building in Blue Island, a downscale suburb south of Chicago. Dr. Cibock didn't make appointments: you just showed up, signed in on a legal pad, and waited your turn. The space wasn't air-conditioned and the doctor didn't use Novocain, so it was best to have a tooth problem in cooler months.

When I was finally seated in the dental chair with my mouth open, Dr. Cibock asked, "What's the problem?"

"This tooth hurts. I think it's touching a lower molar."

"Yep. You have some other cavities, too. What are you doing?"

"Waiting to go to Pensacola to be a Navy pilot."

"Oh well, we'll just fill this one and let the Navy take care of the rest after you report in."

"Okay with me," I said.

And that's the way we parted. I was five dollars lighter, but pleased that my dentist was willing to hand me out to Uncle Sam for future care.

Four months later, my orders arrived. They read something like: Report to Naval Air Station Glenview, IL., Building 21201 at 0800 on 1 June 1951, for processing to Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla., as a Naval Air Cadet (NAVCAD).

Whoopee! In the Navy at last. Well, almost... The first thing that began after we all assembled was clothing removal – much like we'd experienced nine months previously. When I reminded one of the medics we'd already been down this road, he replied, "That was then – this is now." The look that accompanied his statement clearly meant backtalk wasn't allowed.

So. I went along in silence until seated in the dental chair. The dentist was a full Navy captain, probably about 50. He poked, prodded, pushed, and finally said, "Sorry, son, we can't take you."

"You what"? I asked, leaping from the chair.

"You have too many cavities. You don't qualify for the NAVCAD program," he answered.

"Doctor, ever since I was accepted nine months ago, I've told every pretty girl who'd listen how I was going to fly the Navy's newest and fastest jets. If you don't let me in, I'll be destroyed."

"Sorry, Embs. You have too many cavities."

"I'll get them fixed."

"A dentist would have to stay up all night."

"I know one who will."

"What's his name?"

"Dr. Cibock."

"Really?"

"Please, Doctor, I've gotta get to Pensacola."

"Okay. Meet me here tomorrow morning at 8:00 a.m."

It was 4:45 p.m. Next door was the Ship's Store. I ran inside and headed straight to the cash register, where I traded two one-dollar bills for 20 dimes. Out of the corner of my eye I spotted a telephone booth. Inside hung a phone book for the North Chicago Suburbs, with both white and yellow pages. I flipped to "D" for dentists and started calling. My pitch was simple: "I need an appointment right now, to get some cavities filled so that I could go to Pensacola the next morning, to learn to be a Navy pilot."

The 14th call hit pay dirt. The dentist had been in the Navy and told me to get to his office as soon as I could. I called a cab, and 20 minutes later, he pulled up. The dentist had a Glenview address, so we were at his office in less than 10 minutes, the fare was five dollars.

The dentist smiled as I bolted in. I grinned back. His assistant had left, so it was just the two of us. Fortunately for me, he had the latest in equipment: high-speed drills, water circulating devices, and Novocain.

For the next three hours he drilled and filled. When it was over, he told me he'd repaired 17 surfaces. At three bucks a crack, that came to \$51.

The cab fare back to NAS Glenview was another five dollars, leaving me with thirty-seven dollars from the one hundred dollars I'd started with that morning. I found my room in the B.O.Q. where we were billeted and set my travel alarm for 6:00 a.m. My aching jaw didn't impair my sleep, and the next thing I heard was the buzz of my clock. At 07:30, I was waiting for the dental office to open. When it did, I went in and sat erect in the waiting room. The doctor arrived and gave me a half nod.

Soon my name was called, and I went to where the enlisted man pointed. The doctor with four stripes stood beside the chair. I sat down and he ordered "Open up."

I did.

"Well, I'll be damned. Go catch the train with the rest of your pals. Good luck."

Later that night, I thought of the dentist who saved my career. Without his help, my entire life would have been different from that point on.

In 1963 President Kennedy remarked, "I can imagine no more rewarding career than the Navy. And any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction: 'I served in the United States Navy.'"

DAV, ERNESTINE SCHUMANN-HEINK CHAPTER 2 MILITARY SERVICE AWARD

Talk about Falling Off a Horse

*By Michael Harrod, Fall, 2004
VA Medical Center – Tofus, ME*

Life on board a United States Navy aircraft carrier can be very exciting. The Navy carriers roam the seas of the world, as proof of the power of the United States Navy. The United States Navy is the most powerful in the world, and the carrier battle group is a sure sign of the power of the United States military. Navy ships show up all over the globe, both as a symbol of our readiness as a military power and as a deterrent to war. The United States Navy Aircraft Carrier travels in a large battle group of ships, consisting of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. The battle group is a large group of ships assembled to work as a team at sea, and they



can carry the military might of the United States to many places. The United States Navy Aircraft Carrier has on-board aircraft designed to attack both land and sea targets. These vessels are equipped with nuclear and conventional bombs, missiles, and other weapons.

The cruiser protects the aircraft carrier with large guns, anti-aircraft guns, and a variety of guided missiles that are used to protect it from enemy attack. Cruisers also have the capability of attacking land targets with their missiles.

The destroyer works in much the same way. It protects the aircraft carrier by crossing its course in a serpentine movement, with hi-tech sonar to check for submarines.

The destroyers are equipped with anti-aircraft guns and missiles, as well as depth chargers designed to destroy enemy submarines.

I was stationed on board the Aircraft Carrier U.S.S. Shangri-La, CVA-38. We were just returning from the Mediterranean Sea, after six months away from our home port. A six-month cruise on an aircraft carrier is very hard work, indeed. My ship was long, and the liberty hours ashore during the week were short. By the time you finished a six-month Mediterranean cruise, you were ready to take a little shore leave to see your family and friends. When you were ready to return to your home port for your well-deserved time off, the aircraft squadrons on-board left the ship while it was in home port.

It was on one of those days of returning to our home port of Mayport, Fla., that I witnessed an act of real courage. The aircrafts on-board my ship were firing up their engines; and the carrier was turning into the wind, in order to launch the squadron of jet aircrafts to the Naval Air Station at Cecil Field, near Jacksonville. The first aircraft was hooked up to the steam catapult. It was on the port side (left) of the aircraft carrier, and it was piloted by the jet air-wings squadron commander.

The Shangri-La's captain signaled that the carrier was ready to launch planes. That meant that the ship was turned into the wind, and it had at least 30 knots of wind-speed flowing across the bow (front) of the ship.

After the air boss got that information, he related it to the catapult yellow-shirt, the on-deck officer in charge of launching aircraft. He signaled the catapult crew to launch the aircraft, but it was evident from the start that the catapult misfired at low catapult steam pressure. This meant that the catapult steam pressure was low by half after it launched the plane. The pilot in the jet aircraft noticed this immediately, and began to apply his brakes. You could see the smoke coming from the tires, as the plane was dragged down the flight deck. The pressure was not strong enough to launch the heavy jet aircraft, but it was strong enough to drag the aircraft off the end of the flight deck and dump it into the Atlantic Ocean. It was lucky that the pilot of the jet aircraft involved was experienced. As a squadron commander, he had enough experience to know that he and the airplane were going for a swim. He began the ejection sequence for the Martin Baker ejection seat while he was still on the flight deck.

The aircraft involved was an F-8U Crusader jet. That type of aircraft had a Martin Baker ejection seat. It had a rocket engine; but in this type of ejection seat, you just don't push a button to eject. First you must push the button, and in the Crusader jet, you must also reach up and grab two hoops above your crash helmet. Then you must pull the two hoops down across your body, because they are attached to a crash screen. As soon as the screen is in place, the seat will be ejected through the Plexiglas canopy of the aircraft, but not until the screen is in place to protect the pilot from harm. All this takes time as you might imagine. The pilot of the aircraft started this sequence several seconds before the plane roiled over the end of the bow of the aircraft carrier; but by the time it ejected from the aircraft, the aircraft was underwater.

The Crusader jet is mostly engine, and it sinks like a large stone in water. The pilot and his ejection seat came out of the water like a missile launched from a submarine. The captain of the aircraft carrier had already started to turn the vessel. Luckily, the pilot did not eject into the side of the ship.

The officer was retrieved quickly from out of the Atlantic by the ship's helicopter, called the "Angel" by the ship's crew. As soon as the helicopter brought the squadron commander back to the flight deck of the ship, he climbed out unharmed, but soaking wet. Immediately after climbing out of the helicopter, the squadron commander went over to the aircraft that was parked on the starboard side, ready for launch. He gave the signal for the pilot of that aircraft to get out of the plane. After the pilot climbed out of the aircraft, the squadron commander replaced him in the pilot seat, still soaking wet and somewhat shaken. Then he gave the signal to the flight deck officer to launch him. The officer relayed the signal to the catapult crew, and the squadron commander and his aircraft were airborne and on the way to Cecil Field! Gomer Pyle would have said, "Shazam!" There is an old saying that might cover this incident.

It goes something like this: "If you fall off a horse, the first thing you should do is climb right back on it." In other words, if you

fall off a horse, you should get back on it right away, in order to conquer your fear of riding. I believe that squadron commander knew this theory.

When I think back to that time, I recall the courage that squadron commander must have had, in order to nip his fears in the bud.



IN MEMORY OF DANIEL GOODMAN, BROTHER
BY RUTH G. WASKEY

I Wasn't Born on the Fourth of July

*By Norman L. Humes, Spring, 2006
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO*

I wasn't born on the Fourth of July. It all started in January 1968, in a place called Vietnam. I was but 18 years old, and I was in the hellhole of the world at that time. My time went by pretty slowly, as time goes. I was going to spend 18 months there and there was not much I could do about it at the time. I should have remembered why my dad told me: "Never volunteer for anything in the service." I wished I had listened to him. I was a teenager and I thought I knew more than any adult at the time. Didn't we all? This still applies with kids today; not much has changed in three decades, unfortunately.

I had always liked the Fourth of July as a kid—the orgasmic colors of the aerial bursts, the smell of the burnt powder, and the oohs and aahs of the people watching displays of breathtaking fireworks as they exploded in a rhythmic tune.

I was to depart from Vietnam in June of 1969—just in time to get home to my girlfriend and the famous Fourth of July celebrations. I was really looking forward to the occasion, after not being home for 18 months. The big day was approaching faster than I thought possible. My girl had made plans for us to go to a drive-in movie. She had her mom pop us some popcorn, and my mom got us six bottles of soda in a cooler with an opener on the side. I had a red '58 Chevy pickup with six cylinders, with three on a tree, and a bench seat. Talk about uptown! I was walking in high cotton.

As I picked my girl up, we decided to take her eight-track with all the best songs. We were on our way; I was still a little excited about going to the drive-in and sitting in the back of the truck and watching the movie (yeah sure, watching the movie, come on). The movie couldn't start until dark, so we sat around and listened to tunes, ate popcorn, drank sodas and kissed a little... and then a lot.

About 15 minutes before the movie was to start, they announced that the fireworks would begin in a few minutes. We were all snuggled up in the back of the truck when the first volley went off. Something snapped inside me. I guess it was instinct to stay alive, survival mode, and I was on the ground yelling out commands to my troops to get under cover and return fire. The sound of the thumping reminded me of the mortars and the explosions that went along with the experiences I had in Vietnam. When I finally regained my sense of where I was, I got to my feet. I had scratches and cuts on my hand and knees.

Four young punks in a broken-down, hunk-of-junk car were laughing hysterically. I got so mad that I grabbed two of them and my fist made contact with the first one's nose. My girl kept yelling, "Norm, Norm, Babe stop it, stop it!" But I just couldn't stop. The second one got a kick in the groin, which put him on the ground. The first one came back toward me and I hit him square on the nose again, along with a kick in the stomach. The other two stood back and watched me kick and take names; and I didn't know how to write. After I was finished, they decided to leave the drive-in in a big hurry with their tires throwing gravel and dust all over the place.

My hand hurt a little from the contact with the punk's nose, but it was well worth it to see the two guys hurting: one with a busted nose and the other with his privates up in his chest. The other two were too scared to do anything to help their friends.

My girl finally came up to me and asked if I was okay. I told her that I was and asked if she would like to go home or stay. She asked me to take her home, and we left that drive-in, never to return. What I didn't tell you is that my girl broke up with me after being together three years. The night after the incident at the drive-in, she told me that I was an animal and that she didn't want to see my again. I guess the Army trained me well as a survivalist. That is when I realized that the Fourth of July would never be the same again. You know, I was right. It hasn't been the same, even now. I still get cold sweats, the shakes and startled jumps whenever a firecracker goes off. I haven't taken any kids or grand kids to a fireworks display since.

Many people say it's silly after all these years, to let something that's fun be a hindrance to your life. But I say to them: "If you haven't experienced the real thing, you have no idea what you are talking about."

I live with this fear every day of my life, and it heightens on a special occasions such as the Fourth of July, New Year's and other

times when people decide to let off fireworks. I have been under a doctor's care for a lot of years now due to this condition. I know there are many other veterans out there with this same feeling.



**FLORENCE E. KENNY
AWARD**

A Tear Shed, a Heart Broken

*By Eugene Kropinski, Summer, 2006
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

Just like most Americans, I was shell-shocked as I watched the events of Sept. 11, 2001, unfold before my eyes. With eyes glued to the television, I felt a knot in my stomach, coupled with the knowledge that life for me and the United States would never be the same.

I had always considered myself patriotic, although I didn't really know the meaning of the word. I learned a lesson that day that I will never forget. I was working as an activity director at a nursing home located 45 miles from my house. Upon awakening that fall morning, I switched on the TV and set it on CNN, as was my customary daily routine. I proceeded to the kitchen to turn on the coffee pot, when I noticed the newscaster saying there was a terrible "accident" at the World Trade Center in New York City. A plane had crashed into it. Hailing from that general area, my interest and concern were piqued as I immediately sat on the couch to learn more about the "accident."

I was aghast at the sight I witnessed next.

While the commentator was solemnly describing the events of the first plane hitting, a second plane crashed into the other tower. I remember thinking at the time that this was the end of the world. When Aaron Brown of CNN informed us that the Pentagon, as well as an open field in Pennsylvania were also sights of disaster, I felt like a character in the Twilight Zone.

The possibility of this being an accident was clearly erased, as information and conjecture began to pour in. A group known as Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for these tragedies: their leader, Osama bin-Laden, was the mastermind behind it. Bin Laden was

already credited with being responsible for the damage and loss of life on the USS Cole. He'd also been associated with the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

The sorrow I was experiencing was quickly replaced by anger. I had served aboard a United States warship in those waters, and I was willing to go back and find the demon who'd caused this.

I wanted to eradicate the world of this tyrant once and for all. Realistically, my age prevented me from doing this. I felt helpless and did not know how I could help.

I'm sure all Americans were touched by the horrific killings of our citizens on our home soil. The events of that day are not news any longer, and by now I have heard and read many accounts of that day.

That morning the only remedy, I could think of, was go to work and carry on with business as usual. This was wishful thinking on my part. As I began my long commute, I noticed there were no planes in the air as my trek took me past the local airport.

My parents were slated to visit me in a couple of weeks, so the immediacy of the situation came upon me. This was no TV show: this was real life, and it hurt.

I distinctly remember my girlfriend calling me and apologizing for some silly argument I cannot even recall. Tomorrow is not promised, she said, and we need to take advantage of every precious moment we have. I instantly felt guilty for ever arguing with her in the first place. Life was too short. I arrived at the nursing home and noticed that every television set in the building was on. My fellow co-workers were watching, and a hush could be heard throughout the place. There was clip after clip of the planes crashing, followed by the heartbreaking reports of one of the victims of the Pennsylvania plane. The man had actually called his wife from the plane, just as it was being overtaken. The last words his wife heard from him were, "Here we go!" as he and others attempted to thwart the hijackers. There were no survivors.

Part of my duties at work were to investigate my residents' backgrounds, as well as their spouses. Some families visited; sadly, some did not. A few of our residents were veterans, and they had served in the Second World War as well as the Korean War.

Most of the time, that was the extent of the information spouses would offer me, if they knew anything at all. Up until then, I did not consider this information to be very important, since all of my patients were memory-impaired and low-functioning. What did it matter, I foolishly wondered.

As I walked into the lounge area that day, I noticed Sam, one of our oldest residents, sitting with his daughter by his side. The TV was recounting how New York City policemen and firemen had lost their lives as the towers came crumbling down. These heroes were going up the steps to rescue people as others were coming

down. These men and women were, and continue to be, patriotic, brave, and honorable- in ways I may never know.

What I witnessed next, I swear I will never forget. In utter silence Sam was crying as he watched the TV. Speculation of more bombings on our homeland was offered by the now-hoarse commentator. Prior to this, Sam had what is known as a "flat" affect: normally he just stared into space in any situation. To me, his reaction that day was monumental.

It was then that Sam's daughter informed me that he was a bombardier in World War II, and that he had lost many friends on dangerous overseas missions. Unbelievably, Sam's only son was a fireman.

The overriding emotion Sam demonstrated to me that day was patriotism. It had never left his heart. Finally, to me, patriotism cannot be merely defined by words, movies or books. It is that sense of duty, that feeling of obligation, or the sorrow of loss that one experiences in times of peril, disaster or even joy. Patriotism has no labels. Sometimes patriotism is not free, as New York's finest taught us that frightful day. You don't have to be a fireman, policeman, soldier, or politician to exhibit patriotism, as my girlfriend so tenderly reminded me. Patriotism does not involve hate; it is etched in love and honor. You will know when you feel it. Just ask Sam.



**FLORENCE E. KENNY
AWARD**

The Haircut

*By J.B. Bramley, Fall, 2006
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

Just before leaving for basic training, I decided I might want to do a little preparation work for the journey. I ventured downtown and wandered into the local barbershop. Calling it a barbershop is social terminology, more than an accurate designation. It should have been called, "the place people met to talk about town events and sometimes get their hair cut." The barber, we will call him Tom, was a true multi-tasker. Without missing a syllable in his rendition of the infamous lost pig story, he simultaneously

flipped the haircutting bib from the chain, set his cigar in the ash tray and pointed to the follicle-encased barber's chair, with the scissors precariously dangling from his thumb and forefinger of his free hand.

"You're next, boy!" echoed throughout the shop. I had known Tom for as many years as a young man's mind could recall; yet at that moment, he was a stranger. He became the reaper of vengeance of every coach, uncle and father figure in my life at the time. He hungered to lop off the flowing mane I had so painstakingly grown as an expression of freedom and separation from the establishment. Truth be told, I just wanted to look like everybody else my age in the late '60s.

The mumbling inside the shop slowed, but never ceased. As I made my way down the row of onlookers, I could hear their thoughts: "I would have thought it was a girl," "The beauty shop is down the street," "Wonder if he's getting a haircut, or an estimate?" Well, maybe they weren't thinking those thoughts, but I sure heard them.

There I stood, before the "Chair of Doom, The Reaper of the Razor, Tom the Barber of Milford." In reality it was not that bad, but it's my story. I sat in the chair and awaited the dreaded question: "How do you want it?" I knew he was going to ask that, I just knew it. I situated myself in the chair. I kept reviewing in my mind what my uncle had told me to say. Then it happened: he asked the question, "How are we doing today?" Without thinking, I blurted out, "High and tight, short on top, bloody on the sides!" The room became deadly quiet. The scissors quit slicing the air, the clack of the trimmers became silent, and the vicious mumbling of Milford elders mingled into one gasp of air as the buzz of the barber's pole disappeared into the sunlight.

Tom turned the chair and asked, "Brian, you okay?" I guess that instant recall was still playing back the previous conversations, and I realized he had asked me how I was, not how I wanted it. I laughed. He laughed, and everyone started laughing - that kind of slow growth type of laughter.

Realizing that Tom was not some knife-wielding axe murderer hidden in small-town America, I became more relaxed. Tom asked again if I was all right. I relayed to him the entire story about how I was going into boot camp in about 10 days, and that after talking to my uncle and father, I decided to get my hair cut before the "ghouls of boot camp" could conjure up an "improper first impression." Everyone in the shop was intently listening to me describe my desires to serve in the United States military, how I wanted to be the best there was, and blah de dah dah. I swear that, in the background over the low hum, America the Beautiful was playing, flags were waving, and fireworks were exploding in everyone's minds.

I remember Mr. Carpenter leading a standing ovation when I had finished my story, but in hindsight, he was just getting up to use

the bathroom. Everyone in the shop was telling me how proud they were, as though I were their own child. It would be a couple of years later before I would know I really was their child. In their minds, I was one of theirs, a child of small-town America, doing what duty and honor called for: I was enlisting.

Tom slapped me on the back, spun the chair, flipped the barber's bib, clipped it to my shirt, picked up his scissors, took a couple of hits off his cigar, and initiated a conversation with the voyeurs of the shop about his days in the military during the "big one," World War II. I closed my eyes, because as everyone knows, you can't be found or hurt if you close your eyes. Tom tapped the back of my head, which in barber talk means: "Bow your head forward." I kept waiting to hear the clack of those monstrous clippers, the dreaded hedge trimmers of the barber's world. As the haircut progressed, the deafening report of the clippers seemed inevitable. Yet, it did not happen. I am not sure what Tom's story was or what he was talking about, because my mind was ablaze with the harassment I would suffer at the hands of my friends, who would see me without the "mane of malcontent" and then realize that I had become part of the establishment.

I don't know how much time passed between the initiation of the haircut and the subtle tap on my shoulder, as the chair swung towards the mirror, which is barber talk for: "Wake up and look in the mirror. I am almost finished."

Fearing that I would not recognize myself in the mirror, I slowly opened my eyes and peered into the image staring back at me. There, before me was a clean-cut, all-American kid, who had one of the best haircuts of his lifetime. I stared at the reflection as if it were going to disappear and reveal the true picture of my appearance. Splotchy plops of hair were strewn throughout my head, yet the picture never changed. My hair was cropped, cut, pleasant to look at, and it had been done with professionalism and integrity. I felt as though someone had lifted 10 pounds off my shoulders. Of course, it may have just been the 10 pounds of hair that lay scattered on the floor, I am not sure. Tom had given me a standard military haircut, using nothing more than a pair of scissors and the straight razor for the back of the neck and around the ears.

Almost in slow motion, I heard Tom ask, "How do you like it?" Before I could answer, the chattering ambiance of the room became a silent vacuum. I glanced back at the mirror, looked at Tom, and said, "I like it. It looks good!"

In the same instant as my response, the bib flew off my neck and Tom was brushing me off with talc powder and a whiskbroom. I stood up and reached into my pocket for the money to pay for the sculpturing of my flowing mane into the picturesque standard of military acceptance. Tom grabbed my arm and stopped my hand from leaving my pocket. "My treat, son," Tom said, as his strong booming voice crackled a little bit. "You come back a couple of days before you leave, and I will trim it up for you." "Thanks,

Tom!" I uttered. "Are you sure?" Tom started messing with his tools of artistic rendering, and he mumbled a few words and said: "You go out there and make us proud." I pulled the dollar out of my pocket, so that I could put it in his tip jar, but Mr. Carpenter gave me that "Don't you dare" look. I scrunched up the buck and slid it back in my pocket. As I made my way through the onlookers, they shook my hand slapped my back, and told me how proud of me they were.

I went in the barbershop to get a simple haircut, and I left with a life lesson. I will never forget the pride that they had in me, for a simple gesture I had made as an obligation I felt for servitude to my country. I was a child in a young man's body. I had no knowledge of the history of our small town heroes. It wasn't until later that I discovered Tom's own son had been killed in the service of our country in 1965. Being able to do something special for a young man was Tom's way of touching the heartstrings of his son's memory.



**WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION CHAPTER 50,
SAN DIEGO**
WRITTEN BY A WOMAN VETERAN

A Real Long Distance Call

*By Helen Anderson Glass, Fall, 2006
VA Medical Center – Tucson, AZ*

"Hello, Long Distance? I want to place a Mother's Day call to my children. I know, children are supposed to call their mothers today, but this is important. Please put me through to heaven. Hello, heaven? I'd like to talk to my children. I haven't talked to them for awhile."

"Hello, is that you Kathie? It's so good hearing your voice. I called to say 'I love you!' Artie, if you are listening, that goes for you too. I know I told you that many times when you were growing up. But often we failed to say it after you grew up and had families of your own. We were all too busy, 'just living.' You were such beautiful babies, my precious little girl and boy! You both had good points all of your own. Kathie, your art work was so outstandingly

beautiful and you were so smart in school, in all you did. I was so proud of you and your life. I don't mean to question God's wisdom, but I can't understand. Now, after so many years of hardship you had your own beautiful family, your land, and your home. You were landscaping it with your own artistic touch. Why did God take you, so young, especially when He had taken your brother just four years before? Why, God, why?"

"Art, you were an adorable baby and little boy. I wasn't sure I was capable of raising you both alone, your dad having left us, when he was so young also. Truly you were a handful and caused me many heartaches when you were a teenager. When you joined the Navy Seabees on your 17th birthday, you were so proud to tell me because you knew that I, too, had joined the Navy on my 20th birthday, many years ago. After that, you changed into such a wonderful person. I know God truly had a hand in that. Again, I question God. Why did He take you, after so much sacrifice and hard work, to get your land cleared and build your barn? I was amazed that you were such a devoted, loving father. Your son was too little to know why you were no longer there."

"Why, God, why? Parents aren't supposed to bury their children. Well, good-bye for now. Remember, I love you and perhaps soon I can say that to you in person."

"Talking to you has made this a wonderful Mother's Day, even though it had to be by long distance. But, I have your children to remind me of you now, all except for great-granddaughter Allyson, who barely saw the light of day, and Sarah who was only 28. They are so like you both, in so many ways! Sarah, you look out for Jon's little Allyson and remember, we'll be looking for those 'Pennies from Heaven' from all our angels. Now I have to make another call."

"Hello, Long Distance? Please put me through to God. I have to ask Him; why them, why not me?"

**DEPARTMENT OF KANSAS LADIES AUXILIARY TO VFW
PERSONAL STORY**

The Bracelet

*By Frederick J. Bussey, Spring, 2007
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

Second Lieutenant Robert O. Lacey was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force. He fought in Korea and went missing in August of 1952. Seven years later, I enlisted in the Air Force. I was stationed at Luke AFB, Ariz. Luke AFB was a training base for fighter pilots, so Lt. Lacey would have been stationed there, too.

I served my time in the Air Force and had my share of adventures, but I got to come home and have a life and family, too. I once wore a Vietnam POW bracelet.

But over the years, I lost it. I had joined the American Legion and every time I saw the POW/MIA table, I thought about replacing my missing POW bracelet. I finally sent away for a replacement, specifying Vietnam. When my bracelet arrived, it wasn't red for Vietnam, but blue, for Korea! I thought, "Oh well. They need to be remembered, too." So I put the bracelet on. Then, as I read it, I saw these words: "2nd Lt. Robert O. Lacey, U.S. Air Force, 19 August, 1952, AZ." I thought: This is weird. He was Air Force, I was Air Force. He would have gone through Luke; I went through Luke. He was from Arizona, I settled in Arizona. I began to feel a connection with him. Now I wouldn't give up my Korean bracelet for anything.

I have two granddaughters, one seven-years-old and one five-years-old. The seven-year-old asked me what my bracelet was for, so I tried to explain what a POW/MIA was and why the Legion-or, as they call it, Grandpa's Club-has a table set for them. Now, when I drive my grandkids to school we pass the Legion. The POW/MIA table is clearly seen in the window. The man I never knew has become—as silly as it may sound—a member of our family.

DAVA 18, BYERS, MOOREHEAD & GLOVER A WARD
EDITOR'S CHOICE

A Christmas Story

By Chuck Randall, Fall, 2007
VA Medical Center – Asheville, NC

Tonight is Christmas Eve, and my name is Chuck. I am currently an inpatient, recovering from hip surgery.

Last week, I was surprised with a visit from one of my best friends from high school. We graduated in 1957, from a small school on eastern Long Island, N.Y. I haven't seen "D" in 40 years! We sat in the lobby of ECRC (my building), talking about growing up in the fabulous fifties. "D" gave me a shopping bag, filled with presents he had brought for me. In it was a portable CD player, headphone and 10 CD 's "D" had made for me, of our favorite rhythm-and-blues songs from the '50s!

My eyes began to tear and I felt the joy of the holidays engulf me. I had been feeling "down," because I have no family. The thoughts, feelings and generosity of others, such as veterans' organizations and service clubs, civic groups, and the staff at the VA Medical Center at Asheville, NC, mean so much to me.

I invited "D" to go out to lunch with me, my treat. We had finished lunch and were getting up from the table, when "D" pulled out his billfold and handed me a check for \$200! Why did this man drive 750 miles to visit a hospitalized classmate whom he hasn't seen in 40 years? My only answer is brotherly LOVE.



**EARL S. HARDIN MEMORIAL AWARD MILITARY ORDER
OF THE COOTIES AUXILIARY 39, PARIS, TEXAS**
STORY ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE IN VIETNAM

Seals?

By Andy Narvaez, Spring, 2008
VA Medical Center – Topeka, KS

Early in 1966, as a battalion armorer in Vietnam, I was regularly sent on Marine operations whenever our grunt (line) companies went out into the field. Life was noisy and disruptive. Then after better than a month on duty there, our unit was moved to Chu Lai. I was looking forward to my first full night's sleep in some time. I was a very happy camper.

I fell asleep as soon as it got dark that first night only to be awakened about 30 minutes later by a sniper shooting at nothing. I asked my sergeant if bullets could penetrate nearby pallets that had been left by some Seabees. As soon as he told me that they could not, I went to sleep behind the pallets. Nothing was going to keep me from getting my beauty sleep.

A couple of hours later we were awakened again. This time an officer needed volunteers to accompany a group of sailors to rescue some seals that were under a bridge upriver. They told us we would have to go with the Navy River Rats to get them. They had been pinned down for more than an hour. I told them I didn't care if seals or whales were pinned down: I was going to get my sleep! Around 4:00 or 5:00 a .m., I was awakened a third time and told I had to go with the River Rats. I told them that this was the first night I'd had a chance at real sleep and I wasn't a happy camper about going anywhere.

But I got up anyway and took my M-60 machine gun with about 5,000 rounds of ammunition and jumped in the back of the truck. We unloaded about four miles away. A sailor told us the seals had not been picked up during the night, due to heavy fog.

We got into a boat that could carry only six or seven men. There were too many of us, so only seven were picked to go. I'd been selected because I had my machine gun and looked angry (or so said the pilot). Upriver approximately 40 minutes later, we started to get gunfire from the jungle. I returned fire at any muzzle flash I saw. In fact, I was doing pretty well until we received

multiple machine gun fire from both sides of the river. Then we got worried, but it ended just as abruptly as it began. When we spotted the bridge we were looking for, we went under it and picked up some Navy guys. As the pilot turned to go back, I yelled at him, "What about the seals? Didn't I get awakened to rescue some stupid seals?"

He and the Marines laughed. The pilot pointed to the Navy guys, "They are the SEALs." Even some of the SEALs laughed at me. I genuinely thought we had gone after those small, slippery, black animals that bark like dogs. That was my introduction to Navy SEALs, which I would later hear more about in both the news and the movies. *Author's Note: This is probably the only Vietnam story I will share with others.*

D'Angelo Has Something to Say

*By Sharon Gartrell, Summer, 2008
VA Medical Center – Memphis, TN*

"Grandma?" Crinkle, crinkle, tearing sound ...

"Hmmm?"

"Are you sad?"

"Yes."

"Why?" Crunch, crunch, crunch...

"I'm sad because your great-granddaddy went to Heaven."

"Oh."

Silence.

"Are you sad about anything else?" Crunch, crunch...

"Yes."

"What?" Pop, fzzzz...

Silence.

"Oh, I'm just thinking about your granddaddy."

"Grandma, who's my granddaddy?" Gulp, gulp, gulp, "Ahhh..."

"Shaun, don't you remember the man who stayed at your house for a couple of weeks last year?"

"Yeah." Large burp, "Excuse me."

"...well, he's my husband and that makes him your granddaddy."

"Oh. So why are you sad?" Sip, sip, crunch...

"We hurt each other's feelings and we haven't lived together for 15 years."

"Did you break up?"

"Hmmm, sort of."

"I can fix that!" Crunch, crunch, crunch...

"Oh yeah, how?"

"Do you love him?"

"Yes, I still love him."

"Did you say you were sorry?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did you say you were very sorry?"

"Yes, several times."

"And it still didn't work?"

"No, it hasn't."

"Awe man, Grandma, when you say you're very sorry it's supposed to work." Sip, crunch, small burp... Silence. "Sorry."

"Honey, sometimes saying you're sorry just isn't enough."

Silence.

"Grandma, I guess I can't fix it."

"It's okay, Shaun. There are some things even big boys can't fix."

Silence.

"Hey, Grandma, look at the rims on that red truck!"

"Where, Shaun, where?"

DAV, ERNESTINE SCHUMANN-HEINK CHAPTER 2 MILITARY SERVICE AWARD- SECOND PLACE

My Story

*By Rodney Robinson, Spring, 2009
VA Medical Center – Hines, IL*

Hello. My name is Rodney Robinson, and I am a war veteran. I grew up in Clarksdale, Miss., and I moved to the south side of Chicago when I was about seven. I served in the Army for a total of five years. I would say that it was the best five years of my life. I am a peacetime veteran, to be exact. I loved the Army with a passion!

It was a great experience for me. I love to travel. It is my favorite thing to do in the whole world. Traveling is a passion that I have committed my life to do; I love every second of it. The Army not only gave me a great opportunity to serve my country, but it enabled me to travel the world. While I was serving, Germany was my favorite place.

If I could have, I would have stayed in the military- it was great for me! My rank was a Specialist 5. I loved basic training; it was such a great experience. I had to wake up at 4:00 a.m., and I did an Army crawl to breakfast. This was tough, but I got my exercise. After breakfast, we put on our boots and gear and were ready to start the day. We started

with a 15-mile march, carrying 30 pounds of gear on our backs. Although it was hard, this was great exercise.

One thing that I absolutely hated while serving was having people boss me around. As a child, I thought that I was invincible. I thought no one could touch me or tell me what to do. It was sad, but all I cared about was myself. However, after spending five years in the Army, I learned a great deal about myself. I not only learned to respect the people around me, but I also learned to listen to what they had to say.

Unfortunately, I was in a car crash. I was off-duty, when this terrible tragedy in my life took place. I was driving from North Carolina to Richmond, Va. I fell asleep, and when I woke up I was at Walter Reed Army Hospital inside a CAT scan machine, trying to figure out where I was. I was told that I had crashed into a tree; my head and neck jolted forward and broke my neck. I also injured many other parts of my body. I do not remember much about it. It was one of the most horrible moments of my life. I had surgery and became a quadriplegic, as a result of this accident. At the time of my injury, I was grateful for my family, friends and support group.

All in all, my experience in the Army was a good one. I would have liked to have served for a long time, but unfortunately, because of my injury, I was not able to. I believe that not being able to serve full-time made me feel deprived. When I got home, I went into a state of depression. I was suicidal, bitter, and angry after my injury. Now, I am happy here at Hines V.A. Hospital, and I enjoy visiting my family every chance I get.

I have been living my life as a quadriplegic since the age of 22; this year I will be 50. I have enjoyed doing a lot of things. I took college courses at Kennedy-King Junior College, because transportation for disabled students was available. I also took telecourses at Triton Community College. I became a salesman for Amway, a board member and liaison/advocate for ADA, and a volunteer social worker at Hines, volunteering for more than 1,000 hours. There are trips for dinners given by the American Legion Auxiliary, and I have been adopted by the local Elks Club. I have been a medal winner at the Hines wheelchair games, where I competed in bowling, the obstacle course, and the 40-yard dash.

I have been challenged by pressure sores for the last four or five years. This has limited my wheelchair time. For the last few months, I have been confined to my bed.

The Lord has gotten me through these troubled times: He is faithful and keeps His promises. I can do nothing without Him, and I know that He gave His Son for me, as well as for the rest of the world. This faith and prayer get me through every day. There are things I can do in my bed, like read the Bible. If I put God above all things, I know I will have patience and nothing will go wrong. I am thankful for *Veterans' Voices* as a vehicle for my story.



**DAV ARLINGTON-FAIRFAX
CHAPTER 10 AWARD**

World War II as Seen Through the Eyes of a Child

*By Erika Palmer, Spring, 2009
VA Medical Center – Yountville, CA*

When Adolf Hitler started WWII in 1939, I was only four years old. I was born in Essen, Germany, but our family moved to Bonn before the outbreak of the war. As little as I was, I could tell by what people were talking about early on that it would mean bad news.

In the beginning, we were not affected too much where we lived. I do remember that my father was drafted and was no longer at home. At the time, we lived in a very large house with three stories. We started having a few soldiers live in some of the upstairs rooms at night. It seemed that every house had to take in a few soldiers and provide quarters.

After a year or so, we moved from that house into a much smaller apartment. Things began going downhill. I started first grade in 1942, and may have finished the second grade when the bombing started. We learned quickly which sound of the sirens meant imminent danger and which meant the end of current dangers. Schools closed, and we spent more time in the basement during air raids than we did being outside or in the third floor apartment. Food became scarce. I so clearly remember one lady from the building saying often: "I wish I had a cutlet." She also talked about missing real coffee. All people could get was Kava, a coffee substitute.

There was one radio upstairs that would bring the news. None of us had a telephone, and television was still years away. There were four of us children, and at one time, one after the other got

the mumps. We were all quite sick, but we eventually recovered. We never got to see a doctor in those days. We were not given any medicine, either, and I am sure that nothing would have been available.

Things went from bad to worse, especially in 1944. There were bombings often, both day and night. A number of houses were destroyed as were a large part of downtown and the university. One evening, it seemed a large section of the city was in flames. People who had lost family or friends were crying.

I do not quite remember when, but my oldest brother was pulled out of high school at the age of 16 and drafted into the Hitler Youth. Those young boys were not sent to "The Front," but lived in barracks as some kind of reserve. I do not know how he got out, but in late September of 1944, my mother took the four of us children into the middle of the country, where it seemed we would be safer.

The trip was harsh. We traveled by train and crossed the last bridge still standing over the Rhine River. I believe I even saw the famous Remagen Bridge burning. We traveled very slowly by a burning paper factory at night, and eventually arrived in Kassell at a bombed-out train station.

We ended up somewhere in the countryside south of Weimer, a tiny village named Thangelstedt. A group of refugees were put into a large room in the town hall, and the villagers could pick those they wanted to take in as refugees. We were picked first by the mayor, and all five of us were moved into one room in a old castle. It was not a fancy one, just a large, square building with immense, thick walls. There was electricity but no running water, only an old-fashioned water pump. My mother had to pump the water into buckets and then carry them back to our room. We had an indoor drop toilet closet, which was better than having to go outside. Mice would come through the thick walls and roam in our room. Once, the owner let his cat come in and have a feast, which finally took care of the problem.

We walked a long way to a small one-room schoolhouse. They put me into the third grade, but I could read better than students in their fifth grade. The older kids helped the smaller ones, but I learned nothing there. I remember someone taking down a picture of Hitler and a swastika flag, and then the school closed for good.

The Americans started coming from the west and the Russians approached from the east. Things got bad, and we had so little to eat. My mother made flour soup every day: one day salty, the next day sweet. Thinking of an empty stomach became a full-time job. We had a farmer next door, and he became very important to us kids, by introducing us to agriculture. He would let us work in his vegetable fields, and the farmer's wife would bring a wonderful lunch out to the field for all the workers. He also had a couple of cows, a few horses, and lots of chickens. My brother and I loved to

hang out there. Once, the farmer gave us a frozen cabbage head to take home, and he told us that for Easter, we could come over and ask for some eggs. Once, my brother and I pulled a few carrots out of ground, but we felt guilty and confessed to the farmer. He surely was a stingy guy, when I think of it today. He did not give us very much, and as much as we hated to beg, we did ask for eggs at Easter. We all went to the side of the road and dug up dandelions, and my mother made good greens out of it. Once in a while, a pig or a cow was slaughtered in town, and they would make big pots of soup. Everyone in the village was invited to help themselves, which was great. It must have been around April of 1945 and the Americans were close by. Apparently, we had all kinds of documents from the Nazis stored in our castle. The mayor said he would make a huge fire by the side of the road, and we would have to carry all those papers there and burn them.

It took all of us the whole day to do it. To our delight, the mayor threw a bunch of potatoes into the coals in the evening and we got some burnt baked potatoes.

One bright afternoon, we heard the humming of a group of planes flying quite low, probably B-17s, and the mayor ordered all of us into the basement, including the old German Shepherd dog that was trained with English commands.

Soon, American soldiers came into the building and searched the whole house. When they found us in the basement, one soldier stood, with gun drawn, behind my oldest brother, who was holding the dog. The soldier must have thought that my brother might turn around and shoot. No one said a word in that dark cellar, which had only one light bulb on. Finally, the mayor told the soldier that my brother was only holding the dog. The guy lowered his weapon, and things improved from that moment on. We all knew a few words of English, more or less. The Americans took over our building for a couple days and made it headquarters.

We were all confined to one large room downstairs. They had jeeps, and they gave my brother and me rides through the large grounds. The sergeant would always holler for a guy named Albert Clifton who must have been a goof off. I always wondered what became of him.

Before we knew it, the soldiers moved east. They did a wonderful thing for us: they left Army blankets, Army T-shirts, Army socks and all kinds of sewing stuff behind. They also loaded a small building in the middle of town with C-rations. When we found out, we all ran there and carried as much as we could hold back to our house. From that moment on, we had some much-appreciated food.

Not long after that, the war in Europe was over. My mother sent my oldest brother back to Bonn to see if our apartment building was still standing. It was, with only broken window damage. As Germany was divided into sectors, we ended up in the Russian

sector. We had to cross the Iron Curtain to get back to the west. We all wore several layers of clothing and carried the rest in suitcases. A horse-drawn wagon got us closer to the border. We tried to go west, but we were sent back by the Russians... my mother befriended one and told him he could have her gold watch if he could get us across. He said he would: he had family in Russia and he understood. He even spoke a little German. We slept in the woods, and I ate my first-and-only raw egg. The Russian told us to be ready at 4:00 a.m. In the dark, we followed him to a no-man's zone. Then we were on our own. We crossed a plowed field, and I remember falling several times. We saw lights shining back and forth in the dark sky, but we moved on. When daybreak came, we crossed a huge field to a tiny village, and we found that we were in the American Sector.

We stayed in a shelter and slept in the hay with the cows, then it was off to a train station. We managed to get on a train going west. It was horrible! We were all squashed in the train together, like sardines. There were people hanging on the sides of the train and on the roof. When we arrived in Cologne, it seemed as if the whole city was gone, bombed out. It took us seven days to get back to Bonn, which was probably no more than 300 miles.

Things were still very bad for about four more years after the war. We had to stand in line for three hours in order to buy one loaf of bread. School re-opened after two years, and I was placed in the second half of fourth grade. Missing the third grade and half of fourth hurt me for the rest of my school years. There were no clothes to buy, only used school books and a little paper to write on.

My parents' marriage fell apart. From our early days in a large house with two nannies, it was down to welfare. We started receiving care packages. A feeding program was begun in our school. Finally, in 1949, Germany began a new government with a new currency. People could exchange what they had, valued down by 10 percent. Every living person received 50 marks. The next day, everything was available in the stores. I could never understand that, since there was nothing before. My mother contracted tuberculosis, mostly for lack of food. In a university hospital, she was a test person for new medications from America and Russia. With those, she lived another 11 years, until the age of 57.

By then I was an adult, and I always had a warm feeling toward Americans. During the hungry days, I swore that I would never be hungry again.

I immigrated legally to the United States in 1959. I also served in the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Thanks to that service, I am now a resident of the California Veterans Home in Yountville. I have been a U.S. citizen since 1963. My son is a major on active duty in the Air National Guard. He has five children. My daughter is a self-employed private investigator and an Army veteran.



MARGARET SALLY KEACH FOUNDERS' AWARD
WHAT VETERANS' VOICES MEANS TO ME

What *Veterans' Voices* and HVWP Mean to Me

*By Van Garner, Spring, 2010
VA Medical Center – Murfreesboro, TN*

I started writing for the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project (HVWP) years ago. I was at the V.A. Medical Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn. At first, my writings were inferior. Plagued by tensions and anxieties, my efforts seemed an uphill battle.

To say the least, I needed nerve to continue my writing. Then one day, I entered the HVWP seasonal contest and won fourth place. It was for one of my articles, entitled "Writing to Heal the Wounds." Mental wounds, that is.

I remember Mrs. Elizabeth Fontaine, who founded HVWP at the end of WWII. She wrote a note to me saying, "Keep trying!" That was in 1962. I kept trying. After a couple of years, I began to improve enough to get published in *Veterans' Voices*, which was created by Margaret Sally Keach and others in 1952.

In 1965, I wrote myself out of the V.A. Medical Center, which was then called a V.A. Hospital.

The HVWP and *Veterans' Voices* volunteers have kept alive the dreams of thousands of patients. The mental therapy is beyond explanation. Being published in *Veterans' Voices* makes my heart sing, and the song goes on for all patients who dare to write.

The HVWP is a tool of mercy. She touches the hearts and minds of hospitalized veterans all over the United States of America! She has been a savior to me; she has calmed my nerves to a point of caring, not only for me, but for all who read her contents.

No other source of therapy has equaled that of HVWP. Mental alertness and a new awakening are just a few of the pluses for me and my writing friends.

As I look into the future of my writing, I see the world in a positive light, despite the fact that wars and terrorists are in the news daily. I think about how to improve my mental outlook and I will do that by writing for HVWP.

Making the world a better place in which to live is to present love and faith to those who know only darkness. One mind refreshed is a great leap toward light for all inhabitants of earth. All writing veterans are on the road to enlightenment. In short, we writers can make a difference.

Keep those pens a-moving! Touch someone's heart! Watch the world rejoice. It can just be a few words on paper! Thanks, HVWP!

WALTER H. BOCKTING AWARD
"AS I REMEMBER MY PARENTS"

Crazy

*By Robert Seifert, Summer 2010
VA Medical Center – Utica, NY*

I was in the back seat of our ol' Rambler when my folks and I first heard the news come across the radio. Strangest thing about it was that at the very same time a chicken hawk flew straight into our windshield, shattering it and practically causing my pa to crash into a big, thick oak tree.

When I think of that moment, an odd feeling overcomes me. Like how the radio station began playing "I Fall to Pieces," as if to overdramatize the bird's demise. This actually happened on March 5th of 1963, the day that singer Patsy Cline was killed in a plane crash. It seems like it was yesterday. I don't know how hurt pa was about Patsy getting killed, but I know it hurt my ma real bad. Because of it, my ma committed suicide one week later on March 12th. My ma truly believed that she and my pa met because of Patsy Cline songs. Subsequently, she swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills following Patsy's death and died in our bathtub. That night, when my pa awoke from his sleep, he noticed my ma was missing. He took a walk to go and look for her. When he came back, the song "Walkin' After Midnight" was playing on the record player. My ma planned it that way, leaving it on replay because it was the song that was most popular at the time when they met.

It was just before 2 o'clock in the morning when pa called the police, after finding my ma's body in the bathtub. Most of the people in my pa's family thought my ma, whose real name was

Suzanne Moore, was just plain out of her mind. My pa rejected that idea and would become exceptionally angry when anyone brought it up.

"Walkin' After Midnight" came out in 1957, the year I was born. My ma would take long walks with me after midnight, and I was just a bundle in her arms. Nobody in the neighborhood condoned the idea. They called my ma the "crazy lady with the baby." She was basically avoided by most of our neighbors. I think for that reason, the song "Crazy," one of Patsy's biggest hits, was my ma's favorite song. Ma knew what people thought and said about her, but she'd just sway her hand whenever it was mentioned. I remember her once replying, "As long as my husband, Ray, is alive, I'll always be crazy in love." Even to this day, as I am very much older, I can remember what happened after my ma was buried.

My pa and I were with my grandparents and some other relatives when suddenly the lights began to flicker. It was a weird sensation, especially what with all we had just been through. There was a loud clap of thunder and then outside there began a heavy downpour of rain.

The radio was on and it began to crackle and got all static-sounding. Then, I swear on a stack of bibles, the song, "Crazy," began to play louder than ever. It was almost as if it was being bestowed upon us, because everyone knew how my ma felt about Patsy Cline. The radio wouldn't shut off nor would the volume go down, even though the knobs were being turned by my pa. He even tried to change the station, but it was stuck.

Outside, it seemed as if the storm grew more tumultuous, the thunder became more frequent, and the rain and wind increased in intensity. Then, the impossible happened. The song was blaring and my pa pulled the plug as if to end its life. Nothing happened, except the song kept playing and became even louder. Everyone in the house was aghast. I knew in my heart that something supernatural was happening. I think me and my pa exchanged glances abruptly as the song ended and the radio finally went dead. The storm was still violent outside, and the house began to shake after a bolt of lightning hit and split a tree out in the front yard. The biggest branch of the tree fell right into the windshield of our Rambler. Everyone saw it. The Rambler had just been repaired following the incident when the chicken hawk flew in to it. Everyone looked at my pa as he threw his arms up in disgust.

Soon the rain began to soften and the storm died down. The room grew silent and still. My pa looked down at me shaking his head and said, "Your ma always did have a sense of humor, boy."

"She sure did, Pa," I replied. That was the first and the last time I ever saw my pa cry.

BVL FUND BOWLING AWARD
STORIES AND POEMS WRITTEN ABOUT
BOWLING

Bowling in the Sky

By Walt Guyer, Spring, 2000
VA Medical Center – Perry Point, MD

As a kid I used to wonder,
When I didn't understand why,
To me the sound of distant thunder
Was giants bowling in the sky.

If it was only my imagination,
Why did you feel the wonder, too?
If it was only my imagination,
How could you hear thunder as I do?

Not every reason must rhyme,
Not every season's on time.
Though each thing has its own message,
Not everyone can read its sign.

Your lips say we're not serious,
But your eyes know that's a lie.
Why make a rainbow seem mysterious,
Just because it's way up high?

You're still afraid of lightning,
The kind that struck you in the past.
Letting go of the old kite's string,
Is the key, if our love will last.

You think the weather's not right,
You think our chances are slight.
I say if we'd storm the moon together,
Even its dark side would be bright.

WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION BAY STATE CHAPTER 14:
WRITTEN BY A WOMAN VETERAN

Why

By Ethel Enocksen Williams, Summer, 2000
VA Medical Center – Salem, VA

Why do children enjoy hanging upside-down?
Why do they constantly circle on a merry-go-round?
Why do they climb up just to go down?
Why do they always carry home a heaping portion of the ground?
Why do I think these thoughts when they are sleeping safe and sound?"

WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION
COLUMBUS, OHIO, CHAPTER 3 AWARD

Willow Was Her Name

By Neal T. Lesh, Spring, 2000
VA Medical Center – Wilkes-Barre, PA

Under tall oak trees, the summer breeze, blows gently through her hair.
With her quiet sighs, and soft blue eyes, I couldn't help but stare.

She noticed me, and I could see, her face all flushed with shame.
It was very clear, I fell in love right here, and "Willow" was her name.

Through a summer rain, we walked the lane, not far from where we met.
We knew for sure, our love was pure, as pure as love can get.

The autumn wind, caused trees to bend, as it swept down where we stood.
She caught a chill and soon took ill.
The outlook wasn't good.

The winter's snow, began to blow, and shadows filled the day.
A love so strong though not for long -- in spring she passed away.

One shouldn't cry for sad good-byes, be happy just the same.
'Cause I can't forget the one I met, and "Willow" was her name.

Under tall oak trees, a summer breeze, blows gently through her hair.
Through mist-filled eyes, I still hear her sighs; how I wish that she were there.

Though the years progress, my one happiness would be to hold her just the
same.
As I did then,
I'd do again, and "Willow" was her name.

... And, I'll never be the same.



GLADYS FELD HELZBERG
AWARD

The Infantry Song: Foot Soldiers

By Cavanaugh Murphy, Spring, 2000
VA Medical Center – Augusta, GA

Slog on,
Lock and load.
Walk on,
Follow the shell pocked road.
Riflemen, you're the infantry,
The best that there can be.
Foot soldiers, growing bolder,
You may not get any older.
Zing, zing, zing!
Enemy rifles begin to sing.
Wham! Mortars coming in.
The United States Army Infantry.
Leading the fight to keep this country free.
Zam! Oh, God, not .88s!
Slog on, lock and load, follow the shell-pocked road,
Then deploy, foot soldiers, deploy,
Man and boy.
Listen to Sarge and the young Lieutenant,
They're heaven-sent,
Victory is victory,
That anyone can see;
And defeat is death,
Deadly, final death.
So slog on, from Valley Forge, to New Orleans - slog on,
Through Antietam, to Belleau Wood, Pusan, Saigon.
Slog on. "Understood; foot soldiers?" he uttered.
Understood, Cap'n," they muttered-sighing,
And went on, shooting and dying.
The United States Army Infantry: foot soldiers,
Ever forward. *En avant!*

HAZEL CHRISTENSON
AWARD

Man's Inhumanity to Man

By William C. Glessing, Summer, 2000
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ

As man seeks to fulfill his dreams,
He does not seem to care
That he pollutes the lakes and streams
And fouls up all the air.

He scorches the earth and cuts the trees
Just with thoughts of his own greed.
Wherever he goes, a mess he leaves,
Without a thought of future need.

Someday soon when he turns on the tap,
And finds the water's not too clear,
He will then be wishing that
He had held these resources more dear.

And then, when he gasps for breath
On the air that he has despoiled,
He will find that it is a living death,
Staying alive on what he has soiled.

Perhaps the only thing that we can do
Is to pass laws with a heavy fine.
This then may force him to
Remember where to draw the line.

The time is near; it's getting late.
He has despoiled nature since time began.
It seems as though this is his fate -Man's
inhumanity to man.

THE BVL FUND
SUPPORTED BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA

Smiling Man

By Jim Phillips, Summer, 2000
VA Medical Center – Roseburg, OR

He's in my sights.
Just yards in front of me,
Moving from left to right.

But he is not running
as if his life is at stake.
But it is.

And he is--
he is -- smiling?

We are in the middle
of a firefight
and this "enemy"
is smiling.

I'll never forget him.
The jungle jogger.

I still see his essence
jogging across my memories.

And I learned then
that I could never shoot
a smiling man.

Instead--
I demolished
some elephant grass
with a long burst
from my M-16.

The spasmodic tremor
shook my body.

Body Bags

By Barry D. Martin, Summer, 2000
VA Medical Center – White River Junction, VT

Oh Mother, where are the body bags now?
The ones that I helped fill.
The ones they shipped home.
Some were friends of mine.
In combat they did die,
and some I did not know.
You know, mother, they had one
with my name on it,
but instead, I came home like this!”

ELIZABETH BOHAN MEMORIAL AWARD (BEGINNER'S POEM)

Why Is It?

By Lynda Cameron, Fall, 2000
VA Medical Center – Sheridan, WY

Why is it that all distant roads the silence? to shatter speak out driven to one is always Why is it for the tears? as it does the laughter the same for bell sounds The tolling	are like songs of the past? They're sung to whatever tunes that can be heard Why is it so few are willing to face what we know has to pass and that the sadness always calls for the lonely late in the night?
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← WHY IS IT?

His Spirit Lives

By Deborah J. Wedley, Fall, 2000
VA Medical Center – San Antonio, TX

In an overtly racist nation,
One black man seized upon
The principles of non-violence,
To right an ugly wrong.
He fought discrimination;
He struck at old “Jim Crow.”
He battled for dignity, pride and love,
For a peace we all could know.
He lived his life with courage;
He made his destiny.
He indicted segregation;
He evoked for Blacks’ respect.
He had a dream for justice
That reality had not met.
His marches freed the masses
From spirits long discouraged.
He offered hope, self-discipline,
Pride, inner strength and courage.
He searched within for answers;
He agonized in prayer,
In every situation,
He questioned, “Is this fair?”
He was a humble giant,
A true leader to the end.
He was to all humanity
A prince -- a true and loyal friend.
The bullet of that assassin
Has failed with all intent
To still the spirit of this great man,
One truly heaven-sent.
Though silent now his voice,
A martyr for the cause he loved,
His death part of that choice,
His death shattered the masses,
As indeed it certainly should,
For once again among us
There was a man of peace and good.
His message still continues
Though silent now is his voice.
There was a man of peace and good.
The lifestyle that he lived
May be hard to comprehend --
Feed the hungry, clothe the poor,
Try to help all men.
To one who lived so nobly,
No worthy tribute could we give,
But work to keep his dream alive,
For through his death, his spirit lives.



The Night Before Christmas

By Grey Eagle, Fall, 2000
VA Medical Center – Wilkes-Barre, PA

'Twas the night before Christmas, he lived all alone
In a one bedroom house made of plaster and stone.
I had come down the chimney with presents to give,
And to see just who in this home did live.

I looked all about, a strange sight did I see.
No tinsel, no presents, not even a tree.
No stocking by the mantel, just boots filled with sand;
On the wall hung pictures of far distant lands.
With medals and badges, awards of all kinds,
And a sobering thought ran through my mind --

For this house was different, it was dark and so dreary,
The house of a soldier, at once I saw clearly.
The soldier lay sleeping, silent, alone,
Curled upon the floor in this one bedroom home.
The face was so gentle, the room in such disorder,
Not at all how I pictured a United States soldier.

Was this the hero of whom I'd just read?
Curled up on a poncho, the floor for a bed?
I realized the families I saw on this night
Owed their lives to these soldiers who were willing to fight.

And soon 'round the world the children would play,
And grownups would celebrate a bright Christmas day.

They all enjoyed freedom each month of the year
Because of the soldiers, like the one lying here.
I couldn't help wonder how many lay alone,
On a cold Christmas Eve in a land far from home.
The very thought brought a tear to my eye;
I dropped to my knees and started to cry.

The soldier awakened and I heard a rough voice,
Santa, don't cry, this life is my choice-
I fight for freedom, I feel no remorse.
My life is my God, my country, my Force.
The soldier rolled over and drifted to sleep;
I couldn't control it, I started to weep.

I kept watch for hours, so silent and still,
As both of us shivered from the cold night's chill.
I didn't want to leave on that cold, dark night-
The Guardian of Honor so willing to fight.

The soldier rolled over, and with a voice soft and pure,
Whispered "Carry on, Santa,
It's Christmas Day, All is secure.

One look at my watch and I knew he was right.
Merry Christmas, my friend, and to all a Good-Night!

VETERANS' HARBOR HOUSE AWARD

BY ROBERT TACKETT

Battle of the Bulge

By Loy L. Baker, Fall, 2000
VA Medical Center – Columbia, MO

I was soldiering with Willie and Joe, they were always on the
go, no matter how deep the snow.
Today I arrived back on the front-what a terrifying stunt!
Having been wounded already twice, it seemed to be quite a
price.
Shell-shocked in the previous campaign, no usable nerves
remain.
That first night back, we were hit by the blitz; ten thousand
fell at my right, but God remained there with us on that
black night as I prayed with all my might.
The S.S. Paratroopers came dressed in white, dropped in
behind us on that stormy night.
Cannons fired point blank; words will never describe that
awful fight, but our flag remained all through the night.
My canned beans had frozen; my feet were wet.
Thanks to God they had not frozen yet!

Somehow, some survived this terrible long winter with nothing
more than K-rations for our dinner.

We shared a pill box on the Siegfried line-- oh, if we were across
the muddy Rhine.

Patton assured us we would be there in no time.

When we were in Strasbourg,
I thought things were bad.

Later I discovered I should have been glad.

I had a tent to sleep in and that wasn't bad.

We still have to fight across the Voss Gees mountains, yet--

I wished for a time just to sit.

A bath would be nice;

I've had one in my helmet once or twice!

On April 28 we entered Dachau's gate, found all 10,000 had met
their fate.

Come May 8, we thought we were finally done -We had overcome
the awful Hun, only to find the job was not done.

There were some S.S. who would not sign-We were rushed to
Austria and the Yougo line.

There -- they were compelled to sign!"

**DAVA STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS
SECOND PLACE**

Meditation

*By Patrick Cobb, Fall, 2000
VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO*

Books and birds, fly me away
To ocean tides and golden sun rays.
If not for them I would dry up and die -But
thank goodness they make my soul fly.

**HAZEL CHRISTENSON
AWARD**

Night Light

*By Jerry Andrews, Spring, 2001
VA Medical Center – Temple, TX*

Sometimes, in the middle
Of the night, in the middle
Of my pain, of my tossing and
Turning.
In the middle of old, once-buried
Memories, I awake and
Grab a beer, tune the little radio
In to the golden oldies, and I
Try to write. In the middle of
The night, I search myself for
Some insight, for some way
To put some wrong things right
Or even just to beam some
Little light upon a question, a
Problem I ponder in the night.
In the deep dark middle
Of the night.



**GENERAL MELVIN J. MAAS CHAPTER #17 DAV & DAVA
AWARD**

I'm Still in Vietnam

*By K. C. Larsen, Spring, 2001
VA Medical Center – Phoenix, AZ*

A part of me is still in Vietnam
Sometimes I forget who I am.

I heard a clap of thunder last night.
It gave me an awful fright.

Because there in my dreams
Were dying Army men and Marines.

I awoke and started to shout,
But I didn't know what it was all about.

I was a good soldier -- special forces. We were one of the best.

We'd fight and take no prisoners, no survivors, and die like the
rest.

I was gung ho airborne all the way.
We'd get no peace, no rest and fight night and day.

We'd fight the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong
From one end of their country to Saigon.

I didn't want this war but I was there just as well. But to those of
us who served, we all had our own private hell.

A part of me wished I was not in this war,
But another part already knew the score.

I'm a very confused, angry man
Since I went to Vietnam.

I'm still a child deep inside,
For I never had time for foolish pride.

I used to think I was very brave.
Now to be left alone is all I crave.

The V.A. hospital says I have PTSD
Because I fought from the Mekong Delta to the DMZ.

We fought for freedom and the red, white and blue.
We fought for America, Liberty and for you.

But all in all, I'm still in Vietnam.
And I still don't know who I am.

**IN MEMORY OF DAVID ALLAN WENCL, SGT., U.S.
ARMY
BY PATRICK HARRINGTON**

Life for Me in the Military

*By Nicholas Spano, Spring, 2001
VA Medical Center – Brooklyn, NY*

Of course the records show
I was no ordinary G.I. Joe
I joined the military in 1976, not a clue why I did.
Maybe just for kicks.
Or maybe because my Dad was a Vet.
But the time I spent in, I'd soon rather forget.

A big part of me always wanted to do right.
But the other said, "Don't listen," and just wanted to fight.
My mind was messed up when I was a child.
Being raped as a little boy made me really wild.

My thinking was all wrong from that moment I see, allowing this man to take advantage of me.

So much anger I held inside for years; I regret I decided to hide. MTU and PMU, the military did everything they could to make me obey orders like I knew that I should.

They wanted a soldier ready for war.

But my mind was constantly saying, "no way and no more."

Always doing the opposite that I was told, till I found myself in a legal hold.

I could not trust anyone from this horrible event, and it was to the brig that I eventually went.

I bucked the system every chance I had, from the beginning of basic training till my family was sad.

They knew the troubles I had been in, but never knew why I always had to win.

I suffer each morning with great anticipation, denying the fact that I need medication.

Today I thank God I'm making it through life

With help from the VA and also my wife.

Thank you Michael Mooney & Anger Management"

IN APPRECIATION OF WOSL MEMBERS

BY DORIS COBB (EDITOR'S CHOICE)

Alcohol

By William Dutcher, Summer, 2001

VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA

Alcohol is a product of amazing versatility.
It will remove the stains from designer clothes.
It will also remove the clothes off your back.

If by chance it is used in sufficient quantity,
Alcohol will remove furniture from the home, rugs from the floor,
food from the table, lining from the stomach, vision from the eyes,
And judgment from the mind.

Alcohol will also remove good reputations, good jobs, good friends, happiness from children's hearts, sanity, freedom, spouses, relationships, love,
And man's ability to live with his fellow beings.

It will also remove monetary assets, personal goals, brain cells and the ability to think clearly.

The bottom line is that as a remover of things, Alcohol has no equal, is not prejudiced on whom it chooses to inflict its effects. The ultimate goal is to remove as fast and as much as it can, even to the point of removing the thing we all cherish -- which is life itself.

WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION OVETA CULP HOBBY CHAPTER 61, DALLAS

Okinawa

By Larry D. Kendrick, Jr., Summer, 2001

VA Medical Center – Fresno, CA

The big iron bird has come at last
To take me from the rock,
And as the island slips from view,
I quietly watch the clock,
Remembering all the good times
Along with all the bad.
Going "Stateside" should make me happy -
So why am I so sad?
The place where I'm going
Is the place where I call home.
But home is where the heart is,
And surely mine is gone.
So farewell to Okinawa,
May your splendor never die.
I pray that someday I shall return,
If not, my heart will cry.



IN MEMORY OF HENRIETTA BENN EVANS, SISTER, BY WILLIAM W. BENN

Just a Minute

By Jesse Moore, Fall, 2001

VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO

Just a minute, a tiny little minute.
What can you do with just a minute?
Sixty seconds is all that's in it.
Just a tiny little minute,
But eternity is in it.



WOSL, SANTA CLARA/PENINSULA UNIT: WRITTEN BY A WOMAN VETERAN

Walking My Lord to Calvary Hill

By Patsy Cumbie, Fall, 2001

VA Medical Center – Bonham, TX

Three men hung on crosses at Calvary, but only one died for you and me.
As he hung on the cross that cold dark night,
A world of sin was his only flight.
They put nails through his hands and feet so they would know him, should they ever meet.

With mocking and scorn, they placed on his head a crown of
thorns.
Throughout the night, he was heard to plea --
Oh God, my God, hast thou forsaken me?"
As the heaven's roared and rumbled and the skies opened, these
few words were spoken:
"My son, my son, I set you free,"
Just as he died, when
He died for you and me.

THE BVL FUND SUPPORTED
BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA - FIRST PLACE

A Child's Prayer for Peace, (Written 1939)

By Helen Anderson Glass, Spring, 2002
VA Medical Center – Tuscon, AZ

I'm only a child, just a few years from my birth,
But I'm scared because of what's happening,
Right here on earth.

Country fighting country,
People being hurt and killed,
And the voice of laughing children
Being silenced, being stilled.

Why do men have to go to war,
To show their strength and hate?
Why do they have the power
To decide OUR fate?

Don't WE have the right to live in a world of peace?
I pray someone listens to the children of the world, who want
wars to cease!

DAVA STATE DEPT. OF FLORIDA
AWARD

Unknown Heroes

By Joel K. Oliver, Spring, 2002
VA Medical Center – Mountain Home, TN

Tired old men sitting, eating their lunch,
Hunched over table and tray,
Who would ever think just to look at them
They were heroes of their day?

Grizzled hair and prickly beards
And sometimes shabby clothes --
Where would we be if not for them,
I believe that everyone knows.

In the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier,
No one knows his name,
But these proud men who gave so much,
Their fate is much the same.

Lift them up in word and deed,
Shower them with glory and praise.
Tell them all how worthy they are
Until the end of their days.

DAVA, HARRY L. HERRON CHAPTER 49,
WAYNESVILLE, MO:
EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Shaky Side of Good

By Lee Chesnas, Spring, 2002
VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI

What kind of world would it be without division?
Would people see it the same?
What about compassion?

He gets up before the stars set, works ten, but it feels like ten more.
It has been two weeks and he would not trade it if he could.
You see he's on the shaky side of good.

He can tell you to the minute since he had been to the well,
But the little girl he loves is worth the pain and hell
He needs to stay clean from the beer and shots and pills.

He would tell her if he could, but the skies are getting bluer,
He is on the shaky side of good.

He has God and all of the right meetings,
All the chairs and all of the right settings.
But most of all, he has his best friend's phone number
in his wallet.
He will be there for him in a heartbeat.

He knows it is his land to grow.
He sees his little girl's face and realizes he has miles to go.
He is on the shaky side of good.

God Bless second chances -knock on wood.
With his little girl's picture on the dash,
And that roar of the Kenworth under the hood,
He is on the shaky side of good.



LT. KALLED VERN KALLED MEMORIAL AWARDBY EMILY K. LOVELL

The Brave Hearts*By Tom Sanders, Summer, 2002**VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM*

To those who fell in battle, a prayer for you!
As I put my hand upon the Wall, there is a sense of sorrow.
As I put my hand upon the Wall, I pray for you!
As I put my hand upon the Wall, I shed a tear for you!
As I put my hand upon the Wall, I will remember all!
As I put my hand upon the Wall, I will feel the sorrow!
As I put my hand upon the Wall, the brave hearts are with me!
You are not forgotten! Because!
Because! Why! My heart is with you!
I put my hand upon the Wall!
Keep them who fell... in your heart and soul!"

**ELIZABETH ANDERSON CAMPBELL
MEMORIAL AWARD**

Seeing Soldiers Leave (for WW I)*By Burl E. Fruits, Summer, 2002**VA Medical Center – Danville, IL*

In the first World War, I was but a boy
And at the station saw,
Two heart-torn parents
Give up their pride and joy.

To me it was a sad picture,
With me ever still.
I'd rather not be a soldier
Who has to shoot and kill.

The platform of the black station
Was crowded with hand-waving men.
I watched them vanish from my sight
As they rounded the railroad bend.

The engineer would signal
As the cars went rolling past,
And for several mothers in that crowd,
It was forever their last caress.

If the warlords could have seen this sadness,
Rather than fire and fear,
All nations would live as brothers
Throughout the eternal years.



THE BVL FUNDSUPPORTED BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA - SECOND PLACE

Thanks, Folks*By Donald Siegrist, Summer, 2002**VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

When my throat acquires a lump because my life is in a slump, I
try to think of all the joy that goes with being just a boy.
Like roller skates, and bikes, and bats, and basketballs, and
baseball hats, and worms, and frogs, and garter snakes, and
homemade bread, and pies, and cakes, and pleasant picnics in
the park, and fireworks flashing in the dark and fish caught
on a homemade pie, or days spent at the fishing hole, and old
straw hats, and brown bare feet, and now and then a candy
treat.
But such thoughts further sadden me I missed most all those
things, you see.
The reason, simply this, of course -My mom and dad got a
divorce.

**50TH ANNIVERSARY SELECTION
SECOND PLACE**

Unending Love*By Albert Castenada, Fall, 2002**VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ*

In the quiet of the forest,
The mighty oak stands alone.
It seems to have stood there forever;
The forest has always been its home.
Its roots have tasted the raindrops
As they fell from the clouds up high.
It has seen many changes in the land
And never stopped to wonder why.
It has seen the rivers and creeks run full
And also dry as a bone.
It has seen the rivers and creeks run full
With a joy all of their own.
It has seen the white stripe on the skunk
And the antlers on the deer.
It has heard the mighty grizzly roar
And never felt any fear.
Its branches have reached to the sky;
Its leaves have flown in the air.
It has trembled in the freezing snow,
And warmed itself when the weather was fair.
All this has happened to the mighty oak
As it looks at the sky above.
It knows the Master has blessed it
With pure unending love.



GLADYS FELD HELZBERG

Ol' Winnie's Ode to the Oldies

*By Harry Winnie, Sr., Fall, 2002
VA Medical Center – Albany, NY*

How do I know my youth is all spent, 'cause my get up and go has
got up and went.
But life is not too bad as I think with my big grin
of all the grand places my get up has been.
Old age is golden I've heard it said,
but now I wonder as I get ready for bed,
what with my eyes and my ears on the dresser
and my teeth in their cup there to repose until I get up.
As I ease into bed I muse to myself,
is there anything else that should be up on the shelf
with my sly little grin
and all those places my get up has been?
When I was young my shoes were red.
I could kick my heels way over my head.
I got older and my shoes were blue,
but I could still dance the whole night through.
Now that I am old, my slippers are black.
I walk down to the store and shuffle my way back.
But I still have my own grin
and all those great places my get up has been.
Now that I have retired from life's competition my lifestyle seems
to be nearly complete repetition.
I rise up each morning and try to dust off my wits,
then pick up the paper and check the obits.
If my name is not listed it's not my time to go yet.
The VA personnel says I am not leaving soon,
and on that you can bet.

**MILITARY ORDER OF THE COOTIES, GRAND OF
MICHIGAN
BEST HUMOR AWARD**

A Tomato I Am

*By Richard Savadsky, Fall, 2002
VA Medical Center – Northport, NY*

I feel ripe and full
Red, bursting with juicy freshness.
Slice me into a nice bed of Romaine
Or give me to Aunt Rose.
She'll make me into a spicy sauce
So I can make love to that sexy linguine,
Or eggplant. I'm not comfortable with meat,
But don't you dare put me in that brine.
I refuse to be pickled!



**LILLIAN DONNER-JACOBSON,
EDITOR'S CHOICE**

First Jump

*By Richard A. McKay, Spring, 2003
VA Medical Center – Battle Creek, MI*

The young paratrooper prepared to leap, his guts were a quiver
and his feet were asleep.
He shuffled to the door that was open wide, and thought of the
others who had jumped and died.
He gazed out upon the empty air, and his heart was filled with a
great despair.
He didn't look down and he didn't look up, but still he puked in
his vomit cup.
The red light was on, less than a minute to go,
How he got into this is what he wanted to know.
What crazy, irrational, foolhardy quirk had ever persuaded him
to enter this work?
While racking his brain to answer this riddle, he knew in his
pants he was starting to piddle.
Upon hearing the Sergeant holler, "Get ready!" He grabbed for his
knees to keep them more steady.
Was it glory, or fame, or just for the loot that he got into this game
of descending by chute?
He thought at this point the question was moot, and was helped
out the door with the aid of a boot!

**WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION
BAY STATE CHAPTER 14**

September 11

*By Mary N. Stanley, Spring, 2003
VA Medical Center – New York, NY*

Buildings fall. Screams of horror pierce the air.
Fear replaces any concept of an ordinary day.
The morning becomes an endless, timeless hell.
The inconceivable impossible is the here and now.
God Chaos has assumed reign over the city.

This can't happen! It didn't take place!
A moment ago it was just an ordinary work day.
The airplane was soaring in the blue sky.
People were rushing to work amid the noisy traffic.
Now, nothing familiar. Airplanes replaced the Towers
With mountains of rubble, smoke, fire, horror.
Cries of falling steel disturbed both heaven and earth.

Time has passed, an endless month has been endured.
Through the haze of tears, the agony of being alone.
The grief shared by thousands, hope displaced with despair.

The pervading question- is there a future? Can we go on?
The answer in the affirmative we can survive!

Life did proceed, students did return to schools,
Commerce now slowly approaches a new norm.

We go on, struggling to lift our chins and grit our teeth,
Bravely stumbling on, facing others with a smile,
Hoping they will not see it as a forced grin.
We will ever do our duty, never neglecting
Necessary tasks heavier than yesterday.

**DAVA BIRMINGHAM HOSPITAL CHAPTER 73
AWARD**

The Arizona

*By Harold Holland, Spring, 2003
VA Medical Center – Loma Linda, CA*

We are the Arizona lying here in the deep, never to rise again, we
are all fast asleep.
We shall never again see our family and friends, for life as we did
know it has come to an end.
We used to watch the sun dip deep into the sea, thinking of the
good times we had, just you and me.
We want you, who have survived us, to always remember, all
those who lie in the deep because of seven December.
We are among the many shipmates who died, and fast asleep,
forget us not, lying here in the deep, and in your prayers, do us
keep.

**GLADYS FELD HELZBERG
AWARD**

Confinement

*By Clifford Gaidosh, Spring, 2003
VA Medical Center – Ft. Lyon, CO*

Makes one do many strange things.
That's why some play cards, chess, and checkers while others sing.

Sometimes I write letters while on the brink.
What can I say when I can't think?

Poetry helps to slow me down.
If it doesn't sound right
I can turn it around.

Been there and done that was just a game.
As done that and been there are both the same.

I didn't mean to hurt you while I was in a cloud.
Like a parachutist,
I was caught in the shrouds.

I hope my poetry explains it all, as it isn't easy to take a fall.

VETERANS' HARBOR HOUSE AWARD
BY ROBERT TACKETT (POEM FROM THE HEART, BEST STORY-IN-
VERSE)

Lucky the Dog and Me

*By Vivian Hath, Spring, 2003
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL*

Lucky was just a brown dog
Of no certain pedigree,
No one owned a dog
That was more faithful than Lucky was to me.
We roamed the hills and woodlands together
Through the inclement weather and deep snow;
Lucky was always ready
When I told him to the woodlands we would go.

I know he would have been satisfied
To live in the woodlands and in some giant hollow tree,
And lay on the cold, cold ground
Just to be close to me.
Lucky and I understood each other—
He had almost human sense.
I know he never saw me as hip-hop or master,
Always his daring prince.

Lucky was a master at trailing a rabbit -
He could set a wild quail;
He always let me know when wild game was close
By the fast motion at the end of his tail.
I shot a fast-flying duck;
His momentum carried him a little further beyond
The duck fell into the ice cold water
About 30 feet out into the pond.

I said, "Go get him, boy.
He obeyed my command,
Jumped in that ice cold water
And swam with him - back to land.
Lucky was dripping wet with ice cold water,
He was wet as he could be;
And I vowed no man had money enough to buy
This dog from me.

Lucky and I happened in the 1800s
When with hard work and a little pay,
A man with a large family
Was fortunate to make 75 cents a day.
The older boys of such a family
They loved the woodland, too,
They learned how to trap and hunt wild game
That helped out immensely with the family menu.

Hot biscuits, fried rabbit, brown gravy
Were special treats;
Old timers depended largely on wild game

For their source for meat.
Lucky and I hunted rabbit for the market;
We bagged four or five each evening after school.
I'd dress them out neatly
And hang them up to freeze and cool.

Early Saturday morning, I'd take my rabbits into town,
Up and down the streets,
I didn't get much money for them,
Just \$4.25 a piece.
This business of hunting rabbits for the market
Was my pot of gold,
But it all ended abruptly
When my dog had grown too old.

I knew I was going to lose him, as he was growing more weak by
the day;
I often went in the work shed to cheer him up, and on his bed he
lay.
I said, "Let's go get him, boy."
He struggled to raise his weak head;
He kissed my hand and laid back down
And soon my dog was dead.

It had been 80-plus years since I lost my dog
Many changes have taken place since then.
All my youth is gone;
The days are long and my body is full of pain.
I woke one morning early
And fate has been unkind,
I knew something was radically wrong
The doctor said I was blind.

Man, I can't live forever
But for my friends close and across the sea,
I want to be remembered as a good friend and neighbor,
Just as my dog thought of me.

THE BVL FUND
SUPPORTED BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA - SECOND PLACE

Last Request

By Fidel Ramos, Spring, 2003
VA Medical Center - Hines, IL

I carried him across my back, never knew his name.
Struggled two miles, across enemy-held terrain.
So weary, finally we had to stop and rest.
I leaned him against a tree, in this rainy, muddy mess.
I offered him a smoke, he murmured,
"Soon I'm going to die."
Saw his blood-soaked clothes, closed his eyes and began to cry.
He refused to let me move him, begged me not to leave.
Told him I had no choice.
In desperation he grabbed and held my sleeve.
He'd taken massive wounds in this lousy, living hell.
Seeping from his body was death's sweet sickening smell.

His fading eyes sent a message and a plea.
Sadly, I understood what he was asking me.
I didn't want to think, just to get this last job done.
Slammed in the clip, raised my rifle, fired -
For him peace at last had come.

WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION
BAY STATE CHAPTER 14

Out of the Ashes

By Karen A. Green, Summer, 2003
VA Medical Center - Las Vegas, NV

Out of the ashes our flag was raised, while rescue workers were
shocked and dazed.
Among the rubble she was found, and they raised her up on a
pole from the ground.
Though battered and torn she proudly waved, above the rubble,
above heroes' graves.
A sign that America won't fall, and like in all other wars, Old
Glory came through it all.

WOSL SANTA CLARA/PENINSULA UNIT
WRITTEN BY A WOMAN VETERAN

Ain't I Still a Woman

By Dorothy Williams, Summer, 2003
VA Medical Center - Prescott, AZ

Been lied on, spied on, pried on, and cried on but ain't I still a
woman, I will survive
abused, confused, misused, and misconstrued but I's still a
woman, I shall survive
whacked, sacked, shacked and I been lacked I was born woman
and I can survive
a crook, took, shooked, looked and booked I's just a woman, and
I must survive
dead, begged, misled, bled, and misread can't you see I's a woman,
I will survive
alone, no phone, no song and far from home, blessed, confessed,
possessed and refreshed
ill, without will, filled, pillled and still I's came here a woman and
I's goin' to survive
kicked, licked and sick, been hit and fixed, Lord God, I's a woman
and I'll survive
broked, choked, poked and hoaxed this here is a woman and I
shall survive
around, upside down, on the ground and found raped, shaped,
faked, waked and taped mean, lean and clean, just had to be
seen been a soldier, bolder and colder cause I still a woman, I
survive
bad, sad, without dad, glad and had true, and blue, through a few
and I been you this here girl is a fine woman because I did
survive.
Amen, Amen, and Amen.

VETERANS' HARBOR HOUSE AWARD

BY ROBERT TACKETT (POEM FROM THE HEART, BEST STORY-IN-VERSE)

Together

By Tom H. Lowman, Summer, 2003
VA Medical Center – Martinsburg, WV

Side by side in rocking chairs, with streaks of silver in once-golden hair, they sit in the light of a sunny day. She turns to him in a tender way.
She says, "The sun is cascading over the sill like a waterfall, if you will. A flight of geese is passing near."
"Ah yes," he smiles. "I hear them, dear. They're heading south this time of year. Leaves are crackling, cold winds blow. I guess they think it's time to go."
And he whose eyes had long grown dim could see the pictures she drew for him. While she no longer could hear his words, she read on his lips the sounds of the birds.

THE BVL FUND

SUPPORTED BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA

Navajo Code Talkers: Silah Sun'na

By Chester C. Clah, Fall, 2003
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan and Iwo Jima.
As young men, you were called upon
By a nation
That needed your help in desperation.
You all left your reservation
To bear arms against an Asian nation.
Most of you never left your land,
Let alone fight an enemy you didn't understand.
Your weapon was your native tongue,
Sending messages that left your enemy stunned.

You were known as the Marine Code Talkers
Who puzzled the enemy on their radio squawkers.
Bougainville, Solomons, Guam and Okinawa.
You saved countless equipment and lives,
And you were overlooked when heroes were recognized.
Only your natural warrior instincts
Helped you survive overwhelming defeats.

A lot of you never returned home.
Some spirits are still roaming all alone.
You are warriors who dared,
And you did your job because you all cared.
You deserve every warrior's admiration
For a job well done for our great nation.

You are the Navajo Code Talkers
Who defeated the enemy with your radio squawkers.
Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan and Iwo Jima.

**DAVA STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS
AWARD**

Adopted

By Howard Kirkman, Fall, 2003
VA Medical Center – Bay Pines, FL

Orphan word... alien inference, a stranger without advocate.

Yet to be adopted
is to be yearned for,
searched after,
to be wanted...
for love...
to receive love,
to give love...
To be adopted
is to be beloved.
O, dear child,
you are no accident,
no unscheduled event.
We first dreamed...
then we hoped...
then we searched.
And we knew you,
for you were love,
watching for us,
who were looking for
just such a gift.
You are no stranger...
You are ours.



**LILLIAN DONNER-JACOBSON,
EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Repair Man

By Clyde Jacobs, Spring, 2004
VA Medical Center – Wilmington, DE

I was in the Air Force for three years and I repaired everything that moved or couldn't move.
Planes, trucks, cars and tanks.
But whatever we were fixing, mostly it was engines.
They're all the same really...
We fixed what we could and swapped new engines in when we couldn't.
I fought my engine battles in Texas, Delaware, Florida, Colorado, Utah, California and New England.
Never got out of the country.
After the war I joined civilian life as a repair man.
I fixed cars, trucks, tractors, planes, made steel and concrete.
Cars were my favorite repair work.
My favorite was General Motors because they were the easiest.
But it didn't much matter because I was a repair man.
That's what I did. Fix things.

I Don't Belong Here

By Johanna Levesque-Hartsog, Spring, 2004
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

I don't belong here... too much violence,
And they say we natives are violent.
I like the quiet of the desert,
The wind and the mountains talking,
Telling me secrets of long ago,
Whispering to me of journeys not taken,
And places not seen,
And visions yet to come.
To sleep under the protection of the ancestors
With a clear mind,
Drifting into the past so easily.

So, think of me, when you do,
And remember that I'm in there
Walking in the desert with the ancestors
And sitting watching the mountains that surround me,
Changing, ever changing, as the minutes pass.
Different, but always the same,
Giving me comfort in that sameness,
But revealing the past in its many faces.

As the need for sleep overtakes me,
I lie gazing at the mountains.
Grandmother Moon shines brightly
And I drift off to sleep
Surrounded by the ancestors,
With a clear mind,
Slipping into the past so easily.
Starting another journey,
Leaving the city in the past.

So think of me, as I do you,
And feel no sadness...
I walk in the desert with the ancestors.
I sit and watch the distant, horizon in the morning chill,
Behind me the dark, so deep,
But before my eyes, the light begins to creep.

First, a sliver of light so thin
It seems almost not there,
Then that silver begins to spring
Encircling me gently
With a promise of warmth to come.

I watch, glued to the spot, unable to move,
No leaving this grand light show.
As time passes, the desert wakes
But wait, she does wake, she never sleeps.

She changes, offering a new show to behold.
Those creatures who hide themselves in the night's chill
Waken to lie in the warmth of their glow...
Thus, the day begins.

The Fox

By Ronald Coleman, Spring, 2004
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

My heart is pounding,
As I run for my life.
My nights are filled,
With days of strife.
The dogs are close,
I can smell them now.
But I must run,
Get away somehow.
Up the hill,
And over the rocks,
I will survive,
I am a fox.



Biography: Sergeant Major

By Charles Brooks, Summer, 2004
VA Medical Center – Wilmington, DE

I graduated from high school at 16
and enlisted in the Marine Corps the next day.
It was June 1942 and WW II was blooming.
I was trained in Montford Point, N.C.
That's where blacks were sent for training.
I went to the Pacific for four years
and stopped at Guadalcanal, Sipan,
Iwo Jima, Tarawa, Guam and Bougainville.
My MOS was 03111, a machine gunner.
I was wounded in the leg on Guadalcanal
and also wounded on Sipan.
Sipan was the worst.
I could walk on bodies for 400 yards without
touching the sand.
Five waves of the Marines never made it to the beach.
Most of the other Corporals were killed,
so I was promoted on the beach
by a General who happened by.
I received two purple hearts, a bronze star,
two Navy commendations and other medals.
After the war I was sent to China

to guard Japanese prisoners.
In 1945, I came home to the States,
but my mother, father and grandmother had died.
My grandmother had told me when I left,
“Do good. I won’t be here when you’re back.
I tried to follow her advice.
I served three years in Korea,
Coldest I’ve ever been in my life.
Had three tours in Vietnam,
Was shot down three times in a helicopter.
I was very lucky.
I retired after thirty-four years
as a Sergeant Major,
the highest rank an enlisted man can reach.
My grandmother would have been proud.

LILLIAN DONNER-JACOBSON,
EDITOR’S CHOICE

My Name Is Steam!

By Matthew G. Eastman, Summer, 2004
VA Medical Center – Martinez, CA

I start in the boiler,
Cold and lifeless,
Waiting for my time to shine.
It begins with a lighted torch
To bring me to life.
After a short while I start slowly hissing,
Along with growing,
200 pounds
500 pounds
700 pounds
Right on up to a friendly,
But also dangerous 1,275 pounds.
I can’t be seen, though my job is endless.
My friendly side makes many stops
Along the highway of lines
That travel the ship’s passageways.
First stop, the engine room
Turning the main engines
Allowing the ship to cut through the mighty sea.
Then it’s on to the ship’s laundry,
Washing uniforms to keep a clean crew.
Last stop is the crew’s favorite place on board!
The galley and mess decks, cooking meals,
Keeping the crew fed and happy.
On some ships I launch aircrafts in less than 300 feet.
My dangerous side is that I can cut
Like a knife through melted butter.

IN MEMORY OF HENRIETTA BENN EVANS, SISTER
BY WILLIAM W. BENN

But

By James S. Reihel, Fall, 2004
VA Medical Center – Chicago Heights, IL

I never killed a man but I went to school and learned how we
must fight to protect our friends and allies.
I never killed a man but I enlisted because God knows we’re right
and I’d be called up anyhow.
I never killed a man but I took my place in Vietnam with so many
others who never killed.
I never killed a man but I aimed and squeezed off rounds at
countless forms we knew as the enemy.
I never killed a man but my body shakes and I wake up
remembering how much the enemy looked like a man.

HAZEL CHRISTENSON
AWARD

Joy and Sorrow

By Ralph V. Stockheker, Fall, 2004
VA Medical Center – Quincy, IL

There was a girl named Joy
Who lived on a distant star,
She traveled on a beam of light
She had to come so far.
There was a girl named Sorrow
Who lived on a tiny moon
She had traveled all around
Riding on a blue balloon.
Both were so very busy
They had no time to dance or sing
So many homes to visit,
So many bells to ring.
Everybody welcomed Joy
And wanted her to stay,
But when Sorrow moved in,
Joy moved out,
It has to be that way.
So children don’t you fret
And children don’t you grieve,
Both Joy and Sorrow will always come
And both will always leave.



DAVA, HARRY L. HERRON
CHAPTER 49, WAYNESVILLE, MO: EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Pledge (Dedicated to the POW/ MIA Flag)

By Allen S. Kilnballion, Fall, 2004
VA Medical Center – Manchester, NH

I pledge allegiance to the flag and to the brothers and sisters for
whom it stands.

One nation still free, thanks in part to their sacrifices.
It's time that we brought them all home.

Wheelchair

By Joseph P. Stella, Spring, 2005
VA Medical Center – Manchester, NH

Scooter
Skates
Wagon and the cycles:
Tricycle
Bicycle
Motorcycle
and
Automobile
Guess what?
A Wheelchair -
that's my moving vehicle!



GLADYS FELD HELZBERG
AWARD

Disdained or Honored

By Richard Dillion, Spring, 2005
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

As Americans
Who fought wars before this one -
Brave soldiers fight on.

Guerilla warfare
In Iraq, the war goes on,
Who knows for how long.
Native sons maimed and dying,
Flag draped coffins coming home.

How will this war's vets
Be treated by our nation
Disdained or honored?

DAVA, HARRY L. HERRON CHAPTER 49,
WAYNESVILLE, MO:
EDITOR'S CHOICE

Here I Am

By Thomas Shurbeck, Spring, 2005
VA Medical Center – Cleveland, OH

I walked the streets a broken man;
The years had worn me down.
From GI Joe and combat Bro,
They don't need us now.
More than once I gave it up
only to be found.

Don't come
'round here, my friend,
There's nowhere for your kind.
We just don't like your frame of mind;
To see you now is just too tough.
We think you all know why
A helping hand I found one day.

They told me I'm no fool.
They pulled me up and brushed me off;
They sent me back to school.
"Welcome home," they said one day,
"You're in OUR system now."
I see the world a different way,
I've learned to wear a smile.
Even as the times grow bad,
There's a place I take exile-
I use the VA now.



Bring Our Soldiers Home

By Jason Wade Clark, Summer, 2005
VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO

Who is that so far away,
With a gun in his hand every day?

He fights and he toils
For our President's oil.

But the price is too high for his life,
For who will comfort his kids and his wife?

When he dies from a bomb,
In the land of Saddam,

Is that what we believe to be true?
To trade soldiers' blood for the wealth of a few?

And a flag and salute,
For the blood left on his boots?

And the empty hearts left crying alone.
Come on Bush, bring our soldiers home.

**GENERAL MELVIN J. MAAS CHAPTER #17 DAV & DAVA
AWARD**

Little Dummy

*By Thomas R. Burns, Summer, 2005
VA Medical Center – Mountain Home, TN*

Back when he was lying there “cutting Zs,”
He thought I was lying there scratching fleas.
But Cronkite was telling me about Vietnam every night,
And Eric Sevareid had even more insight.

The main thing I found out was dogs wouldn’t be drafted,
But my poor ‘ole master was about to be shafted.
And the more they’d want the big dummy, the louder he’d snore!
The last thing on his mind was going off to war.

But I was proud of him when he went off to help keep us free.
He kissed his girlfriend good-bye and said, “Keep an eye on him.”
‘Cause when it came to brains, he said I’d never had a lick,
And said I wouldn’t know it myself if I ever got sick.

While he was gone I’d hear her crying a lot,
So I’d say an extra prayer that he wouldn’t be shot.
And I’d listen with her to the tapes he sent in the mail,
And he’d say, “Hello Little Dummy! Stop chasing your tail.”

His tapes kept telling her he was doing just fine,
But I knew better ‘cause I could read between the lines.
He said LBJ and the draft board were all as dumb as ME!
And from the strain in his voice, I detected battle fatigue.

The first thing he said to me when he got back home
Was “Hello, Little Dummy! Bet you never knew I was gone.”
Old Big Dummy was in pretty good shape when he got back.
Now he’s back “cutting Zs” and Rather’s telling me about Iraq.

**DAVA STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS
AWARD**

A Vet’s Wife

*By Thomas Emanuel, Jr., Summer, 2005
VA Medical Center – Miami, FL*

A vet’s wife is a woman
Who deserves much respect.
For the sake of her loved ones,
Her dreams she neglects.
The Lord blessed me with one,
A companion and a friend,
Someone to be part of
Until life comes to an end.

But never did I realize,
The true gift God gave

As she bore the pain
of having my children,
With courage, oh, how brave.
For the birth from her body,
So fragile within,
Could have cost her life,
For the new life to begin.

It becomes clear to my eyes,
And apparently it’s true
She didn’t fight in Vietnam,
But she’s a casualty, too.
Although I came home,
From the war in the end,
She still lost a husband,
A lover, and a friend.

She watched in confusion
For many a day,
The death of a whole man,
Painfully fading away.
Although he’s alive,
Or so it may seem,
The return of her real man
Is only a dream.

He suffers with emotions
She doesn’t understand.
She is baffled and bewildered
By her shell of a man.
He cries in the nighttime
And screams during the day.
The family tries to help him,
And he turns them away.

The booze, drugs, and anger
Come first in his life,
Then come his children,
And maybe his wife.
He denies having problems,
But she knows that’s not true.
She really, truly loves him.
But what can she do?

She prays to God to help her,
And her husband, in pain,
Since his return from the war,
He isn’t the same.
He loves us, we need him,
He is part of my life.
I feel so guilty,
God help me, the wife.



**DAVA STATE DEPT. OF FLORIDA
AWARD**

The American Pastime: Baseball

*By John J. O'Neil, Fall, 2005
VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA*

The sport of baseball has commenced;
Frantic fans have bought their seats.
The park is filled to capacity;
The players adjust their cleats.
The National Anthem is sung with gusto—
Thousands of fans stand in a row.
The umpire then shouts, “Play Ball”!
To get the game to go.
Some fans have favorite players;
They carry names on cards to tell.
However, it takes nine innings
To prove the players did that well.
When the game is over,
And their team has got a win,
It's hard not to realize,
It was those fans who had the grin.

**LILLIAN DONNER-JACOBSON,
EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Don't Give Up

*By Richard Schroeder, Fall, 2005
VA Medical Center – Seattle, WA*

Drifting in and out
of a medicated fog,
Don't give up.

Paralyzed
in body
in mind
in spirit,
Don't give up.

Torn between
heaven and hell
life and death
sanity and insanity,
Don't give up.

Afraid
of living
of dying,
Don't give up.

Wavering between
hope and
hopelessness,
Don't give up.

An angel came to my side,
a heavenly angel
sent to comfort me
to fetch me from my despair,
Don't give up.

Learned to fight
learned to win
never accept defeat,
Won't give up.

Thank the Lord
for sending the angels.
There is life worth living
after personal tragedy,
Won't give up.

**ELIZABETH ANDERSON CAMPBELL
MEMORIAL AWARD**

Hurt

*By Denise M. Titsworth, Fall, 2005
VA Medical Center – Omaha, NE*

Did I hurt you
With the sharpness of my words?
Did I hurt you
From the rumors that were heard?
Did I hurt you
From the look I gave you?
Did I hurt you
By giving you one instead of two?
Did I hurt you
When you needed me and I wasn't there?
Did I hurt you
When I said I didn't care?
Did I hurt you
Through the pain and sorrow?
Did I hurt you
Like there's no tomorrow?
Did I hurt you?
Because I'm hurting, too.



Twin Towers in Blue

*By Flanders Jordan, Spring, 2006
VA Medical Center – Montrose, NY*

Firefighters and police officers never entertained the thought of
stopping as they raced toward the tops of the World Trade
Center's towers.

Faced with overwhelming danger,
they ran up step after step,
challenging national fears and braving personal fright.

Some of the men and women in
blue carried injured victims to safety.

Others held panic at bay,
and led its victims to open space and sunlight.

The air was filled with dust and debris amid
a powerful rumble
when the towers crumbled.

In everybody's mind there was no doubt;
not everyone inside the towers had made it out.

With thousands of people trapped below the rubble,
firefighters and police officers never left Ground Zero.

They steeled their resolve
and used their hands as picks and shovels.

They threw aside brick, block, wire and steel
even as their fingers became cramped and raw,
and their backs ached in committed pain.

During those first hours of the search,
not a dry eye could see, and not a man nor woman complained.

Faithfully they searched for the living,
but unseen by any eye, a thought of dread remained.

That day will live in infamy,
when the United States was attacked in an unthinkable way.

No one foresaw, predicted or knew
what terrorists were about to do.

When we remember the horrible events of that September 11th
day,
with honor we will say,
firefighters and police officers showed us
what it means to be true blue.

What Veterans Day Means to Me

*By Herman Waschull, Spring, 2006
VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI*

War
Heroes
America
Thanks
Veterans
Experiences
Tyrannies
Everyone
Republics
Axis-powers
Nationalism
South Pacific
Democracies
Aggressors
Youngsters
Military
Explosions
A-Bomb
Nagasaki
Surrender
Thenceforth
Obliging
Multitude
Exist



WAC VETERANS ASSOC. BAY STATE CHAPTER 14
WRITTEN BY A WOMAN VETERAN

Katrina

*By Josephine Kapke, Spring, 2006
VA Medical Center – Alexandria, LA*

Katrina, Katrina,
You were tough, you were meaner.
Like a poisonous snake's fang,
You came in with a bang.
You blew your torturous breath,
Causing young and old death.
To you it never did matter
How you made people scatter,
Could hear rips and roars
Spewing water across cities and shores.
It mattered not how long you last,
You were having yourself a blast.
You didn't care that you took people down,

You stood and laughed while they drowned.
Oodles of what's, when's, and why's
You could hear moans and cries.
Across the wayside some did roam,
No longer had a happy home.
Your desire was not to please,
Brought Big Easy to its knees.
You had not the courtesy to stop
While some clung to the rooftops.
Disastrous was your style,
Across your face an ugly smile.
Yeah, you will go down in history,
Leaving behind misery and mystery.
You are just a hateful cheater,
Happy to be followed by Rita.
Neither of you can boast about your thrill,
Some brave people will rebuild.
They must have faith,
Live by God's grace.
To all you were strange and odd,
Hard to believe you were an act of God.

THE BVL FUND

SUPPORTED BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA - FIRST PLACE

They Are Still in Love

By Craig J. Schnase, Summer, 2006
VA Medical Center – Lincoln, NE

They pulled up to the V.A. hospital emergency room together,
He in the back seat with his wheelchair,
She at the wheel.

With a grimace on her face, she steps out of the car,
Walks to the back to open the door for him.
He doesn't want to get out.

She is a short, robust-looking woman, her dress is flowered,
Her hair is gray, a hump on her back, perhaps from years of toil.
Her body has a strange lean to the left... somewhat like a cartoon
character.

"Come on now." I said, "get out of the car, get out of the car."
He is slow to move.
She is angry now.
"Come on, come on, get out."
"You can do it, I know you can, hurry up."

She's pulling on his arm; he is edging slowly toward the door.
An orderly offers to help; she wants no part of that.
She says, "Get away from me, I can do it. I know I can,
I always do it."

The wheelchair stands there waiting for its charge.
She is pulling harder now, lifting, pulling, shouting,
"Lift with your legs, lift with your legs, you can do it."

Suddenly, he slides into the chair,
All this time not one word uttered.
She wheels him in through the emergency room door.

Several minutes later she returns to park her car.
The orderly and others standing by watch her
As she drives to the far end of the lot for there are no places close by.

On return, she is running as fast as she can,
With that lean to the side, and her face fixed on her audience.
In passing she shouts, "And just think, I am two years younger
than him."

One observer comments, "Boy, was she mad at him."
The orderly calmly replies, "No, she loves him very much."

Muhammad Ali

By Bradley Greer, Summer, 2006
VA Medical Center – Detroit, MI

There's not a man today who can beat Clay.
Not today, maybe next week, you'd find a man
who can beat Cassius Clay.

Ali stopped Quarry in three, Bonnavenna in fifteen
Ali is steel, the king.

There had to be a test so everyone could see,
Who would be victors between Frazier
and Muhammad Ali?

Frazier knocked Ali down in the fifteenth round,
and won the match.
Ali didn't accept defeat.

He won the second fight with quick speed
and a devastating right;
the only one left,
and he held the Heavyweight Belt.

Mr. Devastation, who the press said
would do a thing on Ali's brain.

Ali knocked Foreman out in eight,
And it wasn't too late, as he regained his
rightful title and fame.



SALLY-SUE HUGHES
PERPETUAL AWARD - FIRST PLACE

A Mother's Cry

By Ernest Tukes, Summer, 2006
VA Medical Center – Chillicothe, OH

At home, a mother is crying.
In Vietnam, someone's son is dying.
Here we are in our bush site,
lying still and low
Charlie's out there,
trying to make a stand.
We are here to resist his command.

Suddenly, the bush silence
is broken as if by a claymore's blow.
Everything is illuminated.
Fragrants are thrown.
Tracers streak through the sky
as if it's the Fourth of July,
and we're having fun
just like kids
when they're out to play.

But war is not for kids;
war is what a mother dreads
for she knows that it might be her son
who will come home dead.
Suddenly, someone yells,
"I'm hit."
Another says, "Get the Doc!"

And as we stood there that rainy night,
a lone star shone down on our friend.

In his last words, we could hear him say,
Mother's crying. I'm dying.
I'm coming, mother.
No more tears shall you shed.
No more fear of dying shall I fear
for I have fought and fought well.
Now it's time for me to rest,
not above but below
this war-ridden sky.

IN APPRECIATION OF WOSL MEMBERS
BY DORIS COBB (EDITOR'S CHOICE)

Sitting in the Dark

By Michael D. Monfrooe, Fall, 2006
VA Medical Center – St. Cloud, MN

Author's Note: This poem is dedicated to Leo, who helped me cope. I saw it in his eyes.

As I sit in the dark fighting back the tears,
Remembering the past, remembering the fears,
I miss my buddies, friendships dear.
It's been so long, so many years.

We looked for the enemy wherever they might be;
We saw the side of war that most never see.
We were the infantry; we trained to be the best.
We had pride in our unit; we stood above the rest.

I remember my friend falling; I still hear his screams.
I still see it after all these years, see it in my dreams.
I held him close; medivac was on the way.
I could see death in his eyes; I didn't know what to say.

The world turned silent as I gently closed his eyes.
I wondered if when a soldier passes, do the angels cry?
As if he were a child, I carried him to the bird.
The medics took him from me; no one said a word.

The mission wasn't over; the enemy was close by.
There was no time to mourn, no time to cry.
Remembering the past, remembering the tears,
Sitting in the darkness, fighting back the tears.

GLADYS M. CANTY MEMORIAL AWARD
BY NORTHERN VIRGINIA CHAPTER 33 WAC VETERANS
ASSOCIATION

WW II and Beyond

By Jay Albrecht, Fall, 2006
VA Medical Center – Montrose, NY

Depression years, then the war.
We toughed it out, got patriotic,
enlisted, meshed into the flurry,
ranged in rigid rows, obeyed.

Smashed our way to V-Day.
Now what? Slid into civilian.
Drafted machinery, wrote ads,
avoided closeness and dissent.

"Look- just let us earn some, save some,
run away to beaches, ignore who's shot, hungry tots,
while making forty thou."

"Let's watch comedians who prance,
game shows, ballroom dancing to
tinkly tunes... forget inner peace,
God, love that gives us meaning."

"Must we fight again to remember?"

Let's Give Thanks

By Janice Walker, Fall, 2006
VA Medical Center – Decatur, GA

Let's give thanks
To God for all.
Let's give thanks for our heritage,
And for those who answered
God's call.

We are the African-Americans.
And we are free.
We, too, can answer
God's call and be
What God wants us
To be. Let's give thanks
to God for all.

Let's give life
Our best shot.
Even if we don't think
We know a lot.

Being African-American
Is beautiful, you know,
For we have so much
To learn and so many
Opportunities to grow.

Our faith has brought
Us safe thus far.
And the Lord loves us just
The way we are.

We are the African-Americans.
With hopes and dreams and fears.
We are the strong people,
We've survived throughout the years.

We can succeed,
We can grow.
Let's give thanks,
And know,

That even though,
We are African-Americans,
The spirit makes us free.
So let's give thanks!

The Life of a Drug-Filled Kid

James O. Cross, Spring, 2007
VA Medical Center – Roseburg, OR

I was only eighteen years old when I looked in your eyes.
I could see love lying there, but that I denied.
I got on drugs and booze and joined a gang.
I thought they were having fun and it would be a bang.
I knew we were wrong in everything we did,
But little did I know I would be gunned down
by a wild and crazy kid.

I felt the bullet hit my spine and I fell to the floor,
But little did I know I was paralyzed
and would never move anymore.
Now I sit here in a wheelchair and can't move my head,
And it takes three strong nurses to put me in bed.
Now cold bed pans and urinals are all I ever see.
My whole life is wasted and I'm only twenty-three.

When my parents come to see me they just sit and weep
As they think about their only boy, gunned down in the street.
But I can't get up to comfort them; there is nothing I can do
But lay here and pray that this doesn't happen to you.
Now all you kids take warning -
Don't get on drugs and booze and do the things I did,
Or you may be gunned down by some crazy hopped-up kid.

Never take your gun in hand and think you can't be beat,
For if you go against the law you'll die on some lonely street.
They will put you in a casket and when they close the lid,
Your whole life would be wasted and you're still just a kid.
So go start a gang of your own with no drugs or alcohol,
And get the girls to join you and you can have a ball.
Later when you are married and look out on your kids,
You can look up at the good Lord and be proud of what you did.

MILITARY ORDER OF THE COOTIES,
GRAND OF MICHIGAN
BEST HUMOR AWARD

Who's Your Daddy

By Marvin L. Wilson, Spring, 2007
VA Medical Center – Coatesville, PA

My mother seldom gave in to me.
My father never gave up on me.
My "habit" never gave a darn about me!

Senses Consensus

By Paul Francis Creighton, Spring, 2007
Boston, MA

I am not so blind that I cannot see
What knowing you has meant to me.

And I am not so deaf that I cannot hear
The beat of my heart as you draw near.

Not so dumb that I cannot tell
The whole wide world. I think you're swell.

For my other senses I cannot say much
The one of taste, the one of touch.

But when I kiss your brow and soothe your cheek
There just aren't words that I can speak.

Healing

By Timothy G. Sheridan, Spring, 2007
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ

My heart is full of melting regrets,
Like a flock of margarine jets
That flew too close to the sun.

My eyes are burning off the tears,
Like a brain that's cooked for years
And finally realizes that it's done.

The fear has gone from my face,
Like a leper in a self embrace.
I can't hurt myself anymore.

My life's becoming round and whole,
Like a body that's found its soul.
I finally came home from the war.

Attention, Please

By Andy Narvaez, Summer, 2007
VA Medical Center – Topeka, KS

A whole new bunch of guys are in Washington.
I'm sure they know there is a bad war going on.
They must get serious; it's about dying and guns.
We need a plan to guide us, not just war slogans.

No relatives of theirs are now dying in the sands.
We certainly need a new stand and to make gains.
Others' relatives are there fighting in the sands.
Some went twice to fight for the same piece of land.

It's a vicious cycle we're in. The Prez said we won!
Let's get them back if only to write and sing patriotic songs.
Oh! He finally got to Vietnam to talk about this newer war.
Where was he when we had to go to our Vietnam war?

The new bunch must be careful with people's lives.
Do not worry about the truth or their ceaseless lies.
The main reason is that they're dying in the sands.
You need to send them home from those far lands.

The reasons at best are unclear why we are even there.
Now we're looking for new places to send them, where?
Guys, don't let it happen. They're our youngest and best.
Maybe if the U.S. and our allies withdraw, so will the rest.

A plan of withdrawal would be the best plan of all.
Need soldiers? Let's have a universal draft or none at all.
Let everyone's kids answer these last patriotic calls.
Please don't buy the idea of oil and lose your souls.

Now stick to your pledges and stick to your guns.
It'll be easy since we got rid of the warmonger bums.
Remember a war is raging and many people are dying.
Do not let anyone trick you with their endless lying.

It will be hard at first because you have so much to undo.
If warmongers cause trouble, just tell all Americans who,
And they'll be on jobless lines unless they care to enlist.
Guys, no others should be on anyone's obituary list.



LILLIAN DONNER-JACOBSON,
EDITOR'S CHOICE

I Get to Say, You're Welcome

By Michael Maurice Thomas, Summer, 2007
VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI

On Veterans Day
the little kids dress up, carry flags
and wave to me and say, "Thank You."

On Veterans Day
old men and women smile
and wave to me and say, "Thank You."

On Veterans Day
rich people come out of their big homes,
get out of their nice cars
and shake my hand and say, "Thank You."

On Veterans Day
all kinds of people line the streets,
cheer and shout, "Thank You."

On Veterans Day
I get to say, "You're welcome."

ELIZABETH ANDERSON CAMPBELL
MEMORIAL AWARD

A Wise Man Will Go the Extra Mile

By Kenny C. Trujillo, Fall, 2007
VA Medical Center – Phoenix, AZ

A wise man will go the extra mile,
But a foolish man won't even smile.
The words of the righteous man give us life,
But the words of the ungodly man cause strife.
A God-fearing man will receive his reward,
But a foolish man stays without.
A wise man will go the extra mile,
But a foolish man won't even try.
A wise man is willing to lose a fight,
But a foolish man always thinks he's right.
A just man is ready for instruction,
But a prideful man is headed for destruction.
A wise man will go the extra mile,
But a foolish man won't even smile.
So put on a smile and do what's right,
And let's be like Paul and fight the good fight.

HAZEL CHRISTENSON
AWARD

I Feel

By Jerry Soto, Fall, 2007
VA Medical Center – Waco, TX

What greater gift has been granted by God
than that to be able to feel?
I can feel the kindness in one's heart
and the harness of danger in the sound of the voice.
I can feel the fervor of love and the bitterness in life
by the touching of one's hand.
I can feel the freshness of the morning
by the rosary beads of dew that spray upon my face.
I can feel there is beauty by tenderly
touching the petals
inlaid in the eye of a flower
as I feel my way around a maze in the garden.
I cannot feel the silence of night.
I know there is light, by the joy of laughter
of children playing in a distant field.
I can feel the end of summer and
know that winter is near by the sound of crumbling leaves on the
ground
as I take a walk with life.
What greater gift can there be given to me
than that to feel what you see, for you see,
I am blind.

DAVA BIRMINGHAM HOSPITAL CHAPTER 73
AWARD

Ode to Autumn

By Creative Writing Group, Fall, 2007
VA Medical Center – Washington, DC

A cloudy, grey sky with blue highlights,
A setting sun with golden rays
Dappling the trees of many colors.

Hear the bird calls and the cry of the lonely loon.
See the ducks fly in formation to a warmer land.
See children in search of Halloween treats,
And the Great Pumpkin.

In the air is music
And the aroma of turkey and pumpkin pie.
All the world is bathed in sunshine and a spray of frost.
Beauty is reflected everywhere.

**GLADYS FELD HELZBERG
AWARD**

Two Feet of Snow in Buffalo

*By Gene Stewart, Fall, 2007
VA Medical Center – Hines, IL*

There were two feet of snow in Buffalo;
it came down by the pound.
Snow was all around, in people's driveways
and on the interstate
and highways,
on trails and byways.
Rooftops were clogged.
The internet had blogs
on two feet of snow in Buffalo.
Was it Mother Nature
or was it global warming?
Either case, it was alarming
or could it be an angry God
who wants us to have clean hearts
as pure as the driven snow
like the two feet of snow in Buffalo!

**DAVA BIRMINGHAM HOSPITAL CHAPTER 73
AWARD**

U.S.M.C.

*By Melvin Alexander, Spring, 2008
Tuskegee, AL*

I always wanted to be a United States Marine,
first to arrive and last to leave a scene.

Steeped in tradition and esprit de corps,
Semper Fi is our motto, our way of life, and what we stand for.

Chesty Puller led the way. He was a fine Marine,
stressed his love and patriotism, his commitment to the team.

Marine he was, is, and always will be,
one of the many fine men to build and shape Marine Corps
history.

Iwo Jima showed our mettle for a watching world to see
as we proudly crested the hill, Stars and Stripes blowing free.

From Korea's Chosen Reservoir, to Khe Sahn in Vietnam,
Marines have done the things that America needed done.

Safe and secure, Americans can live their dreams,
knowing that their freedom's assured by the United States
Marines.

Why Should I Write?

*By Dennis Silas, Spring, 2008
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL.*

Why should I write?
To impress my self esteem
Or be the best of the best.
Why should I write?
When that feeling comes along,
I am like a junkie needing a fix.
I have to write to make my physical
And mental stability whole.
I use my pen or pencil
Whichever one is available.
Then I commence to put poetry in motion.

**WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION OVETA CULP HOBBY
CHAPTER 61, DALLAS**

A Submariner's Nightmare

*By Arthur Bradley Goans, Spring, 2008
VA Medical Center – Las Vegas, NV*

I awoke with a start!
In the cold and the dark...
With a nightmare fresh in my mind.

Someone tells me it is time to go on watch...
I say, "There must be some mistake!
I'm not supposed to be here!"
He laughs, then says
Neither am I.

On my way to my watch station
I sneak a nervous glance at the hatch,
And try not to think about
The 30,000 pounds of pressure put on it
For every 100 feet we go down,
Making it humanly impossible to open,
From the inside,
Once underwater.

One explosion, then another rock the boat!
It starts immediately down
And ploughs a groove
In the shallow muddy bottom.

Emergency lights come on in engineering.
The reactor shuts down automatically.

The "survivors" try frantically to contact someone
In the control room.
All forward circuits are dead.

Damage report!
Slow leaks aft!
All electrical circuits are dead!
No battery power!

Status report!

Several broken bones, one concussion.
Plenty of water, no food, air for 10 days.
Water temperature outside 90°.
Inside temperature 70° and dropping.

Orders

Go to the escape hatch and wait to be rescued.
Conserve air.
Conserve body heat.
Conserve emergency lights.
And wait... And wait... And wait...

Those to be rescued first wait in the escape hatch.
The rest just below.

A scraping on the hull!
Metal to metal!
Hope!

Those waiting in the escape hatch
Frantically tap out S.O.S.!

As the long hours pass,
Hopes of a quick rescue fade.
When the noises cease...
Silence...
And more silence.

Rescue attempt after rescue attempt is carried out
As the temperature drops...
And the air goes bad...
And the temperature drops...
And the temperature drops...
And drops.

To 9° inside and out
Of the water...
Of the submarine...
Of the bodies of the “survivors.”

I awake with a start!
In the cold and the dark...
With the nightmare fresh in my mind
And read the headlines about
The Kursk.

ELIZABETH ANDERSON CAMPBELL
MEMORIAL AWARD

Brothers of the Wall

By Thomas Rodney York, Spring, 2008
VA Medical Center – Durham, NC

I wish I could walk inside, in there with you.
I wish I could talk to you, you to me.

I wish I could feel what you feel
To know what I feel is real.

I wish I could tell you I'm sorry
For my inability to make up for your loss.

I wish I had gone out there with you,
Maybe I could have made a difference.

Or traded places.

What do you feel when you look at me?
I feel you see the pain I also carry.

I hope my pain doesn't add to yours
I guess we all have to bear the pain.

I wish you could tell me what you want me to do
For I feel I haven't done enough.

I hope you can feel by our presence here
That you are still with us, and always will be.

For we are your brothers.

CHARLES RETTINGER
MEMORIAL AWARD EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Eleven-Man Squad

By Albert Whetzel, Jr., Spring, 2008
VA Medical Center – Martinsburg, VA

As I dream of that battle
I still tremble and shake, and the guns on the warships cannot jar
me awake.

The men in my dreams are strong, young and brave in the eleven-
man squad on that first landing wave.

Our enemies were many as the battle grew rough, and we
remembered Pearl Harbor, we were trained to stand tough.
In bloody water to our knees, no land, sand or sod, three souls
went to Heaven from our eleven-man squad.

With bayonets fixed and ready, it became man to man as we
searched for the enemy beneath the coral, ash and sand.

When the second wave hit, we took time to thank God but three
more had left our eleven-man squad.

I saw four brave men still in the line of fire climb Mt. Saribachi to
raise the stripes and the stars.

Don't tell me, my friend, generals don't pray and cry. Jones looked
over his men with tears in his eyes.

As I awoke from my dreams, I bowed my head to thank God. I
was one of the five from that eleven-man squad.

HAZEL CHRISTENSON AWARD
DAVA STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS

My P.T.S.D.

By Sam Tambe, Summer, 2008
VA Medical Center – Buffalo, NY

Nightmares and terrors keep awakening me,
Just another chapter of my P.T.S.D.

Visions of fallen comrades keep haunting me,
Just another part of my P.T.S.D.

Self-medication and numbness are ruining me,
Two more things to deal with when you have P.T.S.D.

Hyper-vigilance, lost dreams and the anger in me,
Just another day with my P.T.S.D.

Depression and anxiety keep consuming me,
Just two more components of my P.T.S.D.

I try to live a normal life and hide it you see,
But I just can't get away from my P.T.S.D.

Look into eyes, tell me what do you see?
More than likely not a veteran with P.T.S.D.

But it's a part of me.

DAVA STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS
AWARD

In Memory

By John A. Boley, Summer, 2008
VA Medical Center – Clarksburg, WV

No hope,
No dream.
Nothing left to gain.
Each night a brand new nightmare,
Each day is filled with rain.

No home.
No love.
Despair my only friend.
I'm lost in a steamy jungle,
In a war that will never end.

No past,
No memory,
Of a lad that's long, long dead.
His hopes, his dreams, his dying screams
Are locked up in my head.

No sun.
No light.
Just blood-red clouds of war.
I know that I can never be
The man I was before.

LT. KALLED VERN KALLED MEMORIAL AWARD
BY EMILY K. LOVELL POEM

Recipe to Enhance One's Life

By Lionel P. Williams, Jr., Summer, 2008
VA Medical Center – Houston, TX

1 cup of sense
2 tablespoons of honesty
1/2 teaspoon of will
1/4 cup of tears
1 whole heart
3/4 cups of love
1/2 cup of energy
Hint of conceit



Mix sense, honesty and will in a large bowl
Slowly add tears, for crying sometimes soothes the soul
Put in one whole heart, with love.
Stir up all that energy with the mixture in bowl above.
Add the hint of conceit to make sure your goals in life will be met.
All of this should be slowly cooked
Over medium heat for every day and night.
That's how one is able to enhance one's life.

WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION OVETA CULP HOBBY
CHAPTER 61, DALLAS

In One Soldier's Healing

By Chuck Widmer, Summer, 2008
VA Medical Center – Tacoma, WA

I used to say I'm sorry,
I didn't start this war,
All the pain and sorrow it brought,
I never could ignore.
I lay a wreath up in my heart
And hope you will forgive
The many wrongs we had to do
Just so we could live.
I'll see you all again someday,
Hope you'll understand,
But now I have to walk away
And be a stronger man.
Knowing God picks his own bouquet
Brings a calming to my heart.
I think with me, I wasn't perfect enough,
So with you, he had to start.
Rest in Peace
All God's Children

WOSL SANTA CLARA/PENINSULA UNIT
WRITTEN BY A WOMAN VETERAN

Run

By Laura Francis Leonard, Fall, 2008
VA Medical Center – Leeds, MA

Run the path
Run through the fields and wood
Escape the painful thoughts
Run in shade and sun
Thoughts of Army days
Mercifully postponed
Green trees
Blooming flowers
Beauty caresses the panic of my brain
If two miles are good
Four are all the better
The sun warms a cool spring day
May this run never end.



THE BVL FUND

SUPPORTED BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA - FIRST PLACE

Times

By Lawrence E. Rahn, Fall, 2008
VA Medical Center – Minneapolis, MN

Old man sitting on the curb, I'm wondering where you're at
With bottle in hand and not a dollar in your pants, just what have
you got left?

You haven't the courage you once had in the war, but you would
kill for that bottle of yours.

What memories have you of those you want to forget? I'm sure
the pain is from your regrets.

If I gave you a fin and said, "Get a shave," I'd bet you would be
back, still looking the same.

With bottle in hand and not a dollar in your pants, you would say,
"Thanks man, I sure needed that.

What happened to you in those good 'ole days, when you were
someone who gave praise, when you were looked up to as one
of the greats and whiskey from a bottle was frowned upon?

What happened to the person so full of life, when sitting around
was a waste of time?

Did you really shrivel up and die?

Or are you waiting for your moment to arrive?

When will you stand up and say, "Hey, I'm-----?"

Old man sitting on the curb, just what have you got left? I know
your shame, I'm not to blame, but I wish I could call you "Dad."

ELIZABETH ANDERSON CAMPBELL
MEMORIAL AWARD

Military Moments, Military Time

By Gail Williams, Fall, 2008
VA Medical Center – Detroit, MI

Each day at the crack of dawn, I rise to the sound of reveille.
Out of the bunk onto my feet as my heart races.
Confronted by the demands of the drill sergeant calling out
orders.
Attention!
You maggot get down and give me twenty, fall in line, get in step,
Mark time, huh.
Perspiration builds on my forehead as his shouts ring in my ear.
Not a moment to waste as we hustle to his pace.
Sun up to sundown we exercise until we are overcome with
fatigue.
Five o'clock chow time, everyone is at ease.
Eight o'clock lights out, the drill sergeant has left the building,
Panic has left the air,
We're feeling relieved and free indeed:
Military moments, Military time.

HAZEL CHRISTENSON

AWARD

Hug-A-Hero Dolls

By George Higgins, Fall, 2008
VA Medical Center – Tucson, AZ

Little boys and girls love hugs
From their mommies and daddies,
But now they must have a Hug-a-Hero doll.

While their mommies and daddies
Are overseas on their country's call,
These children must hug a look-a-like
Hug-a-Hero doll.

The dolls show photos of their parents
In military uniform,
For parents know missed hugs
Can make their children unhappy.

Some get sick and cry in their beds
For their parents, they shake and quiver.
And for these children, their parents
Are the ones we can't deliver.

So to take their place,
The children have a Hug-a-Hero doll
'Til their parents return
From their country's call.

Bleeding Relief

*By Mark E. Booth, Fall 2008
VA Medical Center – Topeka, KS*

I cut hard and heavy
and deep
just to believe
it's me
and I'm
still alive.
I don't feel a thing
and I do wonder why
blood
runs
on the outside of my skin
to make a path for another drop
by my feet,
a dark red, almost black
puddle gets ready to harvest.
Any vampire would be
delighted with the feast
already warm and ready to drink.
Oh sad warrior, thank you.



Missing My Child

*By Lisa Harrod, Spring, 2009
VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO*

I miss my child,
I miss her so.
Being away from her
Makes me full of woe.
Even though she understands
Why mommy slipped through her hands,
Mommy's still upset and feels like she ran.
Mommy still can't say, I can, I can.
Mommy works on having hope, knowing she is ill,
And her daughter knows she will, she will.
Then mommy's light bulb clicks on,
She feels better and comes home.
When she enters her house,
Her teenage daughter is on the phone.
Her daughter drops the phone and yells,
Mommy, you're back!
Mommy, you're home, you're home,
You're home!

If My Shoes Could Talk

*By Theopolis A. Wright, Spring, 2009
VA Medical Center – West Haven, CT*

If my shoes could talk...
They would walk you through trials and tribulations
and tell you stories of bravery and
how a young black slave girl
built her own underground railroad.

If my shoes could talk...
They would tell you how they walked in hatred
because of the color of our skin and also injustice
and how trying to have equal rights
had men and women and children being hung
because we wanted freedom.

If my shoes could talk...
They would tell you of a man who walked
in the state of Montgomery, Ala.
and never struck a single blow against mankind.

If my shoes could talk...
They would tell you about a woman
who decided to ride the bus and not give up her seat
and move to the back because she was black.

If my shoes could talk...
They would tell you about black soldiers
who marched in a war and fought,
and were called buffalo soldiers,
and are very seldom mentioned in our history.

If my shoes could talk...
They would tell you of the revolution of the black men
who formed a group called The Black Panthers.

If my shoes could talk...
They would tell you of two men
who both spoke of being free and having freedom,
and one spoke on the White House grounds
that today still rings out from the mountain tops,
while the other spoke about any means necessary,
and a last name with only one letter in it, "X."

If my shoes could talk...
They would say they are old and tired and run down.
However, they must keep on walking.
So they would say that they have to take their
shoes to the shoemaker.
to get their souls restored and now they have new life.

If my shoes could talk...
They would say thank you to those who walked before them
and paved the way for black men who
can now walk up to the mic and say
I am not running for my life today, instead I am running
for the President of The United States of America.

SALLY-SUE HUGHES
PERPETUAL AWARD

Goodbye Forever to Miss Cocaine

By Thaerius S. Berry, Spring, 2009
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

This letter is to say good-bye. I've made up my mind that I don't need you in my life any more.
Things I see in stores that I want to buy and places I want to go, I can't, because you take all of my money.
I'm tired of being broke and wearing dirty clothes because I can't afford to wash them, and going hungry because I can't buy food.
I've been introduced to a Higher Power that gives me hope, joy, inspiration and teaches me how to be honest with myself.
I will not miss you, miss Cocaine, because I've also found something to keep me busy to fill that void.
With me working with my Higher Power, I will never need you in my life ever again.
Goodbye forever... I'm in recovery.

DAVA STATE DEPT. OF FLORIDA
AWARD

Haditha

By Dean Robinson, M.D., Spring, 2009
VA Medical Center – Shreveport, LA

Perhaps you'd grasp the reasons why if you had helped a buddy die, and heard his savage shrieks of pain, and shoved his guts inside again, and breathed the stink of burning blood, first a trickle, then a flood, -- why then, my friend, and only then, would you know where I have been.

When you have touched his face in death and felt his final, gasping breath, and tasted the rancid spit from clouds of flesh and sundered grit, and surged with waves of helpless rage for bombers vanished from the stage -- why then, my friend, and only then, would you be where I have been.

When you then turn from Him above, abandon faith in grace or love, and chose the paths that must descend to where the demon snarls within, unleash it to avenge them all, yet live to witness your own fall, -- why then, my friend, and only then, would you be what I have been.

So when you're done, and must return from where such vicious hatreds burn to just reclaim the life you knew, but find war's not done with you, and taunts your thoughts and tortured dreams with restless dead and silenced screams, -- why then, my friend, and only then, dare you presume to judge my sin.

Generation Gap

By Benjamin J. Williams, Summer, 2009
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

This occurs
each time
a father
needs
an interpreter
before
he understands
the words
from the mouth
of his son.



WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION BAY
STATE CHAPTER 14
WRITTEN BY A WOMAN VETERAN

Korean War Medics

By Deanna Stephens, Fall, 2009
VA Medical Center – Long Beach, CA

Together we trained as medics to care for you,
We became one color.
As we prayed with you with wounds so deep,
We were one faith.
As we shouted words of comfort in the midst of your despair,
We spoke one language.
As we held you for support on bended knee,
We became one gender.
As we donate blood for you,
We became one body.
As we cried silently with you over loss of limb,
We became one soul.
As we tell with pride of your sacrifice,
We are one people.
As we unite together,
We are the power of one nation.

DAVA STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS
AWARD

Bring 'Em Home

By Ryan Christopher Smith, Fall, 2009
VA Medical Center – Martinsburg, WV

Here I am in a distant land.
The sun is so hot like the rifle in my hand.
I've been shooting for hours here in the sand.
My targets go down.
My targets are man!
Kill or be killed, my adrenaline flows.
Where's the next bomb, nobody knows?

It's hunting season here, but they're not shooting deer.
They're killing my brothers that the President sent here.
Just lending a hand to this dangerous land,
and the price for our help is the falling of man.
Support the troops; make this stand.
Bring them all home to the Promised Land.

SALLY-SUE HUGHES
PERPETUAL AWARD

Pain, Pain, Go Away

By Mary K. Johnson, Fall, 2009
VA Medical Center – Leavenworth, KS

Pain has no feelings,
No conscience, no concern,
And cares not of the consequences,
Of how its sting does burn.

Pain hears no pleas,
No words to block its way,
And will not give answers,
To anything you say.

Pain has no sympathy
To soothe the aching heart,
It's gone before you know it,
And leaves us torn apart.

Pain knows not the depth
Of the trouble it relays,
And cares not the length
Of how long it stays.

Pain has no direction,
Has no eyes to see.
Asks not what our names are,
Before it makes its flee.

Pain you are not welcome here
I say to you once more.
I need more time for mending
You've been here once before.

GLADYS FELD HELZBERG
FOUNDERS' AWARD

War Is a Waste

By Raymond L. Moore, Spring, 2010
VA Medical Center – Leavenworth, KS

They killed poor Jimmy this mornin'; there was hardly a drop of blood.
And many a tear was by brave men shed, as we knelt round him there in the mud.
He was the best and smartest of us all, you know, always with a

smile on his face.
But no one's smiling now, our Jimmy's gone.
The dead are proof war is a waste.

It's out there before us in no-man's land; where the ground's
turnin' white with men's bones, That the hopes, dreams and
ambitions of a whole generation died on.
They came for adventure and glory, but found horror and death
in its place.
Brothers, sons, fathers, and husbands no more.
I'm sure they'd say war is a waste.

We wrapped him in his blanket; his mates bore him silently here,
Laid him gently on a stretcher and carried him back to the rear.
Now another man picks up his rifle, just as Jimmy took another
man's place.
Nobody knows like the next man in line,
Just how much war is a waste.

So, let's raise a glass for Jimmy; drink, and remember the dead.
Then pour one more for the living 'cause it could have been us
instead.
In this latest war to end all wars, remember each name had a face.
And as row on row of white crosses show,
It will always be true - war is a waste."

THE BVL FUND AWARD
BY THE BOWLERS OF AMERICA

Iowa Autumn

By Ron Barker, Spring, 2010
VA Medical Center – Boise, ID

Oh thread my spirit along the road
By dew-dipped grass and lowly toad, Where horses peer and
Angus plot
In hay framed tapestries and goldenrod. Set me down on a
gravel-gray snake, A pebbled path of purity's make, Garnered
with grain, soybean and corn, Kernels of being, the country
adorn.

Sing out the meadowlark in sunrise tones,
By the ditch, the cattail owns,
Where brandished like sparks, the redwing sings on misty
mornings above lily pad dreams.
The land's fragrance, like mincemeat pie
In pheasant dressing, captures the eye.
The rustic wonders - piled so high
By fields of rainbows in autumn's dye.



LT. KALLED VERN KALLED MEMORIAL AWARDBY EMILY K. LOVELL

Healing

By Bill Lowe, Spring, 2010
VA Medical Center – Pueblo, CO

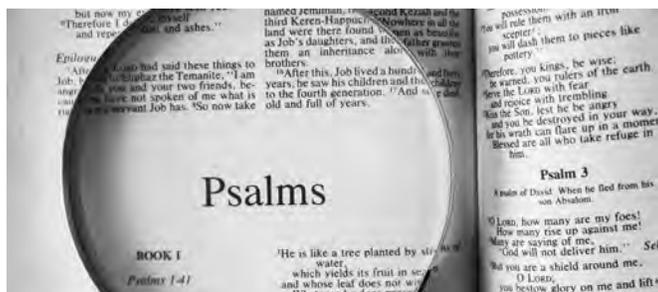
My wife left me some months ago... That's all right, I said.
I'm probably better off without her.
Social Services took my grandson... That's all right, I said.
He's probably better off without me.
My daughter put a shotgun to her head, (April 13, 2009)
Pulled the trigger and... she was dead. That's all right, I said.
Her death will end her suffering.
And then, I awoke yesterday, finding my little gray kitten lying
dead on the kitchen floor... and it was then, I wept.
Have you ever heard anything as silly as that?
A foolish old man crying over a gray dead kitten cat? But as the
tears flowed across my face... I knew the healing had begun.

GLADYS FELD HELZBERG FOUNDERS' AWARDBEST POEM

A User's 23rd Psalm

By Kirk Benton, Fall, 2010
VA Medical Center – St. Cloud, MN

The Lord is my sponsor,
I shall not use.
He makes me rest in sobriety.
He leads me to a meeting that is anonymous.
He restores my sanity.
He leads me through the twelve steps for my own sake.
Yea, though I walk through the relapse of addictions,
I will fear no recovery.
For He is with me
Thy big book and coin, comfort me.
He prepares a testimony for me in the presence of my fellow
addicts and alcoholics.
He awakens my understanding, by the Holy Spirit, and my cup is
filled with coffee.
Surely peace and the serenity prayer shall follow me all the days
of my life, and I will rely on my higher power forever!



MILTON CHARLES JACOBSONMEMORIAL AWARD BY LILLIAN DONNER-JACOBSON

Insomnia

By David Pierce, Fall, 2010
VA Medical Center – Omaha, NE

Leadens lids
Gritty eyes

Tic-tock-tic
Time flies.

Neighbors sleep
Dogs bark
You lay awake
Pitch dark.
Tried all the pills
The old and the new Red, green, orange
Yellow and blue.
A club for insomniacs
Free for all to join
The price of admission
Just read this poem.



IN APPRECIATION OF WOSL MEMBERSBY DORIS COBB (EDITOR'S CHOICE)

Brother, Can You Spare a Dime

By Donald Szurek, Fall, 2010
VA Medical Center – Bay Pines, FL

To the desperate and homeless who wander streets that look all
the same in search of food and kindness, who knows where
lies the blame?
A shopping cart is your closet; a bridge, on cardboard is where
you sleep
Daytime is when you panhandle; nighttime is when you weep.
You feel the fist of government kindness,
“Do not park yourself near here!” for you need a shave and
shower and our citizens feel much fear.
Do not bother the suits that walk near you for they really don't
see you at all.
Pull yourself up by your bootstraps,
“Stay-the-heck-away” from all our malls.
You once were someone's friend and neighbor before you had
holes in your shoes.
A mirror no longer knows you, so you escape alone in booze.
I remember the first time I met you; dog tags slipped from your
torn shirt.
Once you served your country in wartime; now it fails your needs
and hurt.
So your country doesn't know you now after you served its time
of need, but let them know what bridge you're near in case
they need you again to bleed!

Mail Call

Kenneth M. Schnaubelt, Greenville, S. C., wrote, “After all of these years, I still do not have any real closure on my experience in Vietnam, but writing helps a great deal as your wonderful magazine has repeatedly shown over and over again.” Ken’s last unit, Delta Company, 1st Bn., 9th Marines earned the name “The Walking Dead” because of the number of casualties suffered.



From Gypsum, Kan., **Ron Alexander** said he was honored to get his copy of *Veterans’ Voices* (summer 2016) on its and his 70th birthdays and to see that his story, “Old Crutches,” had won the Elizabeth L. Fontaine Founder’s Award. He said using braces and crutches and now a wheelchair has not slowed him down. “A disability shouldn’t be a barrier,” Ron says.



“I’m returning my prize check,” wrote **Diane Wasden**, Millen, Ga. “I am the one in debt to you for all the help your magazine gives to me...I came across *Veterans’ Voices* while waiting for my weekly appointment at the VA PTSD-MST Unit. I was emotionally drawn into every story and poem. They all touched my very soul...You must always keep this magazine going. ‘*Writing from the Soul...for the Soul.*’ You couldn’t have said it any better. Veterans Voices Writing Project is such a wonderful way to reach out and help heal so many soldiers by sharing our pain and good-time memories. It allows us to see that we are not alone on our journey through life.”



Andrew J. Smith, Elmore, Ala., wrote to tell us that *Veterans’ Voices* author, Craig McLaren, had died at the Draper Correctional facility. He said, “Craig highly prized his being published. You brought some sense of pride to his service, as well as you have me. Thanks from the both of us. I know Craig would want me to say so, to you, for him.”



The national treasurer of the Women’s Overseas Service League, **Joan Garvert**, Springfield, Ill., wrote, “The VVWP has been one of our national projects since 1975. We are pleased to support this most worthwhile program for our veterans.”

Roger G. Chagnon, Jr., Westfield, N. Y., said, “Thank you so very much for the check and award. I greatly enjoy reading the many articles and poems in each issue and I share with veteran friends encouraging them to subscribe and perhaps submit items for publication.”



“Please continue my *Veterans’ Voices*,” wrote **Glenda M. Lauzon**, Hope Mills, N.C. “I read it over and over.”



Demetrius, N. Miami Beach, Fla., told us “Like I said before, ‘You don’t have to worry about going to Heaven, Heaven has already descended upon you.’” He posted our letter where others could see it as “there is no better place for a few extra bucks.”



From Onalaska, Wis., **Corkey Waite** wrote, “Thank you for continuing this great work!”



Shon Pernice, Moberly, Mo., wrote, “Thank you so much for your response and receiving your outstanding magazine! It really spoke to my heart and I loved the American flag stickers on the envelope! I am inspired by the magazine and what you are doing. I am 100% on board...Thank you for all that you are doing with this awesome magazine! I am really excited about this! I have to say you amazed me with it. A few of those stories triggered some raw emotions in me. It was good to feel again.” The Missouri Department of Corrections has its first veterans PTSD group at the Moberly Corrections facility. Shon also heads up a Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 70 there. He also is starting a writing group for veterans.



“Please continue to send me *Veterans’ Voices* by mail. I really enjoy reading the magazine,” wrote **Allen R. Casey**, Fenton, Mo.



“Because you folks are taking the time and effort to bring stories and poems to the nation that otherwise would be lost forever and in the process are helping thousands of veterans, YOU FOLKS MAKE A DIFFERENCE! AND THAT IS HUGE!” wrote **Rich Wangard**, Neenah, Wis. “As you fight for funding to continue

this work, let all of us authors double our efforts to increase the work we can do, not only to help our brothers and sisters, but to continue the therapy *Veterans’ Voices* provides for so many...The biggest thing it does for me is to improve my mental health and let me share my own history in a very unique way.”

Thank You



Contributions to *Veterans’ Voices*, both the writing and the financial gifts, are an inspiration to the editors and publishers of the magazine. The writers who submit their stories and poems as well as those who read and subscribe to the magazine encourage veterans everywhere to express their thoughts and feelings in writing. The financial contributions, no matter how large or small, make possible the publication of the magazine. Those who have made larger financial gifts since the last issue of the magazine are listed here. – VVWP Board of Directors.

Gifts of \$20,000 or more

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Veterans United Foundation, Columbia, Mo.

Gifts of \$10,000 or more

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Anonymous

Gifts of \$2,500 or more

Sheryl Liddle, Independence, Mo.

Gifts of \$1,000 or more

Gifts of \$500 or more

American Legion Auxiliary 21 Tیره J. Ford, Independence, Mo.

Local Independent Charities (Combined Federal Campaign)

Pat Meads, Roeland Park, Kan.

Richard Wangard, Neenah, Wis.

Gifts of \$200 or more

Todd J. Ennis, LaCrosse, Wis.

Samuel J. Hall, Albuquerque, N.M.

Dorothy VanHoy, Independence, Mo.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 4548, Cabot, Ark.

Women’s Overseas Service League National

Gifts of \$100 or more

American Legion Auxiliary 153 Earl Collier, Olathe, Kan.

American Legion Auxiliary 257, Loudonville, Ohio

Janice Criswell, Kansas City, Kan.

Kennith Harvey, Partlow, Va.

Karen I. Johnson, Westwood, Kan.

Tracy A. Rosenberg, Marvin, S.D.

Rodney A. Santos, Spokane, Wash.

John Springer, Bandera, Texas

Donald A. Szurek, Seminole, Fla.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5789, Lee’s Summit, Mo.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 1561 Boyer Daniel, Granite Falls, Wash.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 2521, Santa Maria, Calif.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 9283, Southgate, Mich.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, Department of Alabama

Vietnam Veterans of America 70, Moberly, Mo.

Gifts In-Kind

Kansas Audio-Reader Service, Lawrence, Kan.

Kaw Valley Computer, Mission, Kan.

Summit Litho, Lee’s Summit, Mo.

VA Medical Center, Kansas City, Mo.

Publication in *Veterans' Voices* Qualifies Writers for Special Prizes

Please note *Veterans' Voices'* prize structure includes three Founders' Awards honoring Elizabeth L. Fontaine, Gladys Feld Helzberg and Margaret Sally Keach. Contributors to *Veterans' Voices* receive \$10 for every published story, poem or drawing. Photographers receive \$5 for every published photograph. Published submissions also qualify for special awards made possible by generous donors. Those awards are listed below.

Medical Center staff is encouraged to reproduce this page in patient publications.



FOUNDERS' AWARDS

Elizabeth L. Fontaine Memorial Award:

Story expressing compassion and understanding (Perpetual) \$ 50

Gladys Feld Helzberg Memorial Award:

Best Poem (Perpetual) \$ 50

Margaret Sally Keach Memorial Award:

Story or Poem about What Veterans' Voices Means to Me (Perpetual) \$ 50

STORIES — *Fact or Fiction*

David A. Andrews, Jr. Memorial Award: Prose reminiscing about learned values by Kathy Andrews \$ 25

Gladys M. Canty Memorial Award, by Northern Virginia Chapter 33, WAC Veterans Association \$ 15

DAVA, Arlington-Fairfax Chapter 10 Award 1st Prize \$ 60; 2nd Prize \$ 40

DAV, Ernestine Schumann-Heink Chapter 2: Military Service Award (Perpetual) 1st prize \$ 60; 2nd Prize \$ 40

DAVA, State Dept. of Kansas Award (Story) \$ 25

VFW Auxiliary, Dept. of Kansas Award: Personal Story (Perpetual) \$ 25

Pallas Athene Best Story Award, by National Women's Army Corps Veterans Association (Perpetual) \$ 25

WAC Veterans' Association, Arizona Roadrunners Chapter 119 Award: Written by a woman veteran \$ 25

American Legion, Elvis Presley Post 249 Award: Story about Resisting Suicide or Fighting for VA Benefits \$ 25

Robert T. Rubin Award: Restoring My Mental Health (Perpetual) \$ 35

POETRY

BVL Serving My Country: What It Means to Me Award \$ 50

DAVA, Harry L. Herron Chapter 49 Award, Waynesville, Missouri: Editor's Choice \$ 25

DAVA, State Dept. of Florida Award \$ 30

DAVA, State Dept. of Kansas Award (3 Poems) Each \$ 25

Sally-Sue Hughes Memorial Award (3 Poems) Each \$ 15

WOSL Members' Appreciation Award: Editor's Choice, by Doris Cobb \$ 15

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

Joseph Posik Award: Given to a veteran who encourages other hospitalized veterans to write.

Medical center administrator nominates; publisher approves \$ 50

Conquering Homelessness Award: by American Legion Auxiliary,

Elvis Presley Post 249 (Story in Summer issue) \$ 50

James Grant Memorial Award, by Matthew Grant: Positive, uplifting theme (Story) \$ 20

Larry Chambers Spirit Award: "How Meditation and/or Prayer Helped My Recovery"

by Anthony J. Williams (Story or Poem) \$ 20

Submission Guidelines for *Veterans' Voices*



Any military veteran or active service person may submit original writing or artwork for publication consideration by the editors. Material previously published in a VAMC publication is ACCEPTABLE; copyrighted material is NOT ACCEPTABLE for the magazine. Once work has been submitted, please do not resubmit the same story or poem. Instead, wait and watch for the material to appear in the magazine, on the VVWP web site, and/or on Facebook. Be patient and remember that editors work up to six months in advance of the magazine publication date.

SUBMIT ONLINE:
www.veteransvoices.org

SUBMIT BY MAIL:
Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043

Instructions for Writing Submissions



- Manuscripts should be typed in Helvetica or Times font using upper and lower case letters, DOUBLE LINE spacing and flush left margins. Do NOT submit handwritten manuscripts.
- Writers may send up to three poems at one time, each no longer than 24 lines with 60 character width. Stories can be up to 10 typed pages in length and writers may send up to five stories at a time. Artists may submit up to 10 original pen and ink drawings (no photocopies, please!) or photographs at one time.
- Mail two copies of each manuscript, or submit your material online to VVWP headquarters.
- When submitting online, fill in the required personal information field and then type in the prose or poem. When submitting by mail, include the information to the right, typed on an 8.5 x 11" sheet of paper followed by the text of the prose or poem.

QUESTIONS:
info@veteransvoices.org
(816) 701-6844

Guidelines for Local Contests



Writing contests can encourage others to write. Announce such contests through VA Medical Center publications and bulletin boards. Prizes might be cash, books, gift certificates, or publication in a hospital newsletter. Send award-winning stories, poems or artwork to VVWP for possible publication in *Veterans' Voices*.

Author Name _____
VAMC Name _____
VAMC City, State, Zip Code _____
Author's Permanent Street Address _____
City, State, Zip Code _____
Phone Number _____
Email Address _____
Branch of Service _____
Conflict or Era _____
Approximate dates served _____
 I certify that I served in the U.S. military
Date Submitted to *Veterans' Voices* _____
Title: *Example: What America Means to Me*
Text: *Example: I consider the United States of America "My Country." This is because I have spent at least 14 years in Europe and in the Far East.*
Writing Aide: _____
Typist: _____

Publisher's Letter to Our Readers and Contributors

The publisher of *Veterans' Voices* hopes you have enjoyed this commemorative issue of the magazine. The redesigned front cover for Fall 2017 not only updates our look but marks the first time an online version of the magazine will be available on our website. So, with that milestone in mind we decided to make the contents special, as well.



This issue contains prize-winning prose and poetry selections originally published in *Veterans' Voices* between 2000 and 2010. Why did we decide to highlight those years? As the start of a new millennium, 2000 seemed a propitious beginning date and there was so much good and interesting writing that we had to stop somewhere not too distant.

The front covers from that decade show a progression of updates. In 2000, the prose table of contents still appeared on the front cover but by 2010 our designer, Christie White, had created the red, white and blue Lady Liberty cover. For that entire era, Tina Hacker edited the poetry, while Lynn Mackle and Desiré Hendrix edited the prose. The writing of at least 100 veteran authors was published in each of the 33 magazines from that timeframe. We are hopeful that some of the prize winning authors featured in this commemorative issue will be able to enjoy seeing their writing in print for a second time. However, there will be no second-time prize money, since we shared awards the first time the writing was published!

While it has been enjoyable and nostalgic to showcase this writing from the past, it did mean that we couldn't publish anything from our stack of current manuscript submissions. We're sorry about that, but be patient, writers! We'll begin looking at those submissions soon to select writing for the Spring 2018 issue of the magazine. We hope our writers will continue to submit writing for publication consideration and we want to encourage them to send it to us online. We can still accept material through the U.S. mail but it streamlines the editing process considerably if our authors submit via the web. Go to www.veteransvoices.org to learn how you can submit writing, art and photos electronically.

This commemorative issue of *Veterans' Voices* and the redesigned VVWP website, which will showcase the digital version of the magazine and allow our writers to write or paste material directly into the website portal, will be introduced at the Veterans' Pen Celebration Saturday, Nov. 18, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City. We hope many of our readers and contributors will join us that afternoon to mark this special occasion.





Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.
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