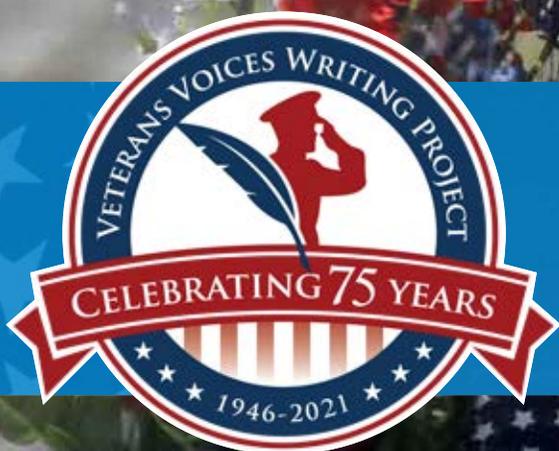


# VETERANS' VOICES®



**1946-2021**

VVWP Celebrates 75 Years of Service  
See Page 25

**"Help for All Veterans and Lessons  
for Our Society"**

*By Dean Vakas*

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**I'm Santa Claus**

*By Tom Lauterback*

**Let the Music Play**

*By Lawrence W. Langman*

**Withdrawal**

*By David Cahn*

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# Help for All Veterans and Lessons for Our Society

By Dean Vakas

Sincere thanks to all who have been involved in orchestrating what has become the Veterans Voices Writing Project (VVWP) for over 75 years.

I am a firm believer in the value of the VVWP. There is an ongoing flood of memories and emotions associated with being a veteran. You have seen a lot and you have done a lot. Many of the memories are hard to talk about. In some cases, you suffer guilt for what you did or didn't do. In other cases, there is an overwhelming accumulation of stress for all of the things experienced that you could not control. You keep a lot inside of yourself, and it weighs you down.

Writing about your feelings is a way to let them out. To find freedom from the burden. It is a private and personal means to confront yourself. Look into the mirror and decide what you see. You choose the words and express your feelings on paper. Tell a story. It can be an historical recollection, or it can be allegory. It can be a

poem. Regardless of the method, it offers a powerful emotional release.

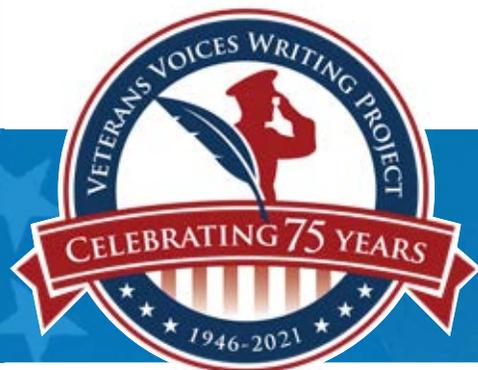
In turn, veterans who read the writings of others can often identify with the stories. Shared experience helps to create a pathway of healing. The VVWP amplifies veterans voices and creates sustained powerful therapy. The words of one veteran reverberate with many.

The value of our veterans' written words also extends into general society. Friends and families of veterans, as well as citizenry at large without a connection to the military, see the depth of humanity represented by the veteran community. Veterans have witnessed first-hand the pain and suffering associated with war. In their own way, every veteran tells a story relatable to all Americans. I want to believe this raises our collective sensitivity to the impact of placing our service men and women in harms way. The VVWP is a prescription for caution before we engage in future actions that create more veterans.

Veterans who write should feel a sense of pride. You are making a powerful contribution to the welfare of our society. I encourage everyone to make the widest possible distribution of the *Veterans' Voices* website: <https://veteransvoices.org>.



*Dean Vakas is a retired Army colonel. His military career spanned 30 years. He is a veteran of Kosovo and Iraq. He commanded companies in the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions, a battalion in the 2nd Armored Division, and a brigade in the 1st Armored Division. He retired from the Army in 2006, and recently retired from Kansas State University where he served as the Chief Operating Officer of the Olathe, Kansas campus. He can be reached at: [deanvakas@yahoo.com](mailto:deanvakas@yahoo.com).*



An anniversary serves as both milestone and reminder about purpose and accomplishment. For 75 years Veterans Voices Writing Project has encouraged veterans to tell their story in prose and poetry, as well as visual art.

Over the years veteran writers and artists have responded, profiting from the special encouragement offered by America's citizenry—everyone from U.S. presidents to military leaders and other celebrities.

— See the Summer 2021 issue of *Veterans' Voices*.

This issue of the magazine contains recent letters from Congressional dignitaries and a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs executive, as well as a proclamation from the mayor of Kansas City, Mo., the city where VVWP headquarters is located. (See center pages of this issue of *Veterans' Voices*.) Those letters are reinforced by the message found in the guest editorial by Dean Vakas, a retired military veteran and state university executive.

— VVWP Board of Directors

# Veterans' Voices®

Fall 2021 Vol. 69, No. 3

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**This issue of *Veterans' Voices* was made possible with assistance from Dr. Robert T. Rubin.**

## VVWP

The Mission of **Veterans Voices Writing Project** is to enable military veterans to experience solace and satisfaction through our writing program. Our Vision is a world where people appreciate that writing can both heal and entertain.

## History

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) 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.

## Veterans' Voices Reprints

Reproduction of material published in *Veterans' Voices*, in whole or part, is welcomed and appreciated. Full credit must be given to the author or artist as well as the magazine. Forward a copy of the reprint to the office director at the VVWP address below.

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- Register and submit your writings at [veteransvoices.org](http://veteransvoices.org).
- Read the writings of other veterans at [facebook.com/VVWP1946](https://facebook.com/VVWP1946).
- Email us with any questions at [support@veteransvoices.org](mailto:support@veteransvoices.org).

## Donations

The work of VVWP, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, is made possible by donations from foundations, military organizations and individuals, with circulation assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

## Magazine Subscriptions

Cost for an annual subscription (three issues) is \$35. Veterans participating in the writing project, as well as educational institutions and libraries, qualify for special magazine rates as follows: \$10 per issue or \$25 per year. VA medical centers, writing aides and other volunteers who assist veterans with their writing receive complimentary copies of *Veterans' Voices*. Veterans, whose work appears in the current issue of the magazine, also receive one complimentary copy of the issue.

## Audio Version

An audio version of *Veterans' Voices* provided by Audio-Reader Network is available for blind, visually impaired and print-disabled veterans. The latest issue can be found at [reader.ku.edu/veteransvoices](http://reader.ku.edu/veteransvoices) and can also be heard on Lions Telephone Reader Service. For more information call Audio-Reader at 785-864-2686.

## Magazine Guidelines

Manuscripts, photographs and artwork submissions are accepted online. Follow the guidelines on pages 66 and 67 of the magazine or as listed on the web site.

The editors reserve the right to edit copy for grammar, clarity, accuracy, style and length, as well as cultural and personal sensitivities. By submitting writing for the magazine, authors agree to this condition.

The opinions expressed in the stories and poems published in *Veterans' Voices* are not necessarily those of the publisher, editors or sponsors.

# Veterans' Voices®

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# Virtual Veterans Pen Celebration

**Saturday, November 6, 2021**

**2:00 p.m. CDT**

**VIA ZOOM**

Presentation by Dean Vakas, guest editorialist

*“Writing Helps Veterans and Offers Readers Life Lessons”*

To reserve a spot or find out more visit: <https://veteransvoices.org/annual-veterans-pen-celebration/>  
or email [support@veteransvoices.org](mailto:support@veteransvoices.org)

# From Poor Boy to College Professor

By Stuart Hoenig

VA Medical Center—Durham VA

This is the story of an 11-year old from a lower-class family who wanted to be a scientist, an engineer, and the role the GI Bill played in that story.

I didn't know what a scientist did. I had heard they looked at bugs, but I didn't know why. An engineer was a man who drove the subway; he had to know a lot about trains.

All I knew was that I didn't fit in with the other boys. I was small for my age, lightly built, and I didn't have any interest in baseball, boxing or football. I knew I didn't fit in, but I didn't know why. My parents knew nothing about science or engineering, so their only response was to say nothing about that.

One would think that my school was the place I would learn about the science-engineering side of things, but it didn't cater to that mind set, and that was it. So, I went on by myself and explored the limited resources at the local library. I really couldn't have benefited much from that because I had no idea of what to look for.

I went to school and didn't like it very much. Teachers had an interest in the athletic performance of the grammar school and high school teams and not much else. Actually, the whole school administration was the same way.

I stumbled along until 1945, when the Germans were beaten and only the Japanese remained. I was old enough to appreciate that my parents were not



going to pay for me to go to college. My high school grades also were not likely to generate any support in that area. I was not interested in most of the things they taught, so my grades were just above failing.

Reading the local paper, I learned about the GI Bill, which would pay for you to go to school after you had served in the military. My senses at 17 years of age told me that the war wasn't going to last much longer and I only had a short time to get in the military to take advantage of the GI Bill. I needed to enlist as soon as possible. A little investigation showed me that getting in the Army or the Navy was tough, and they required a four-year enlistment. The Marine Corps would take you at 17 and they still had enlistments lasting only until the war was over. The Marine Corps had a reputation for being the first in the fight but not necessarily the first in high-level thinking. Needless to say, there was a battle with my family about dropping out of high school and signing up for the Marine Corps. After much struggle, they agreed, and I signed up.

After the war was over, the Marine Corps was reducing its forces. There was no room for people like me who enlisted for

a period called "convenience of the government," so we were discharged, in my case with some 15 months as a Marine. The next step was to go home and see what developed.

After getting used to being at home again, I decided to start by going to the local college which was filled with veterans of the

recent conflict. My family was dubious; how could I go to college when I had done so poorly in high school? They felt it was better to go back to high school, where they had special classes for veterans. I stuck to going straight to college, and by making an effort I was able to get passing grades in the science program.

After two years, I transferred to the University of Michigan in the physics program. I got a bachelor's degree in physics, met the right girl, got married and took a job in the Navy. Then I returned to school, finished a master's degree in physics and we moved to California where I enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley for a Ph.D. in engineering.

After I completed my Ph.D., I took a job at the University of Arizona as an associate professor of engineering. I stayed there for 19 years until I retired as a full professor. After that I continued to work part-time as a professor emeritus in engineering, consulting with the Agriculture School at the University of Arizona and writing papers.

None of the above would have happened without the GI Bill.

# Remembering the War

*By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt*  
VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

Do you remember where you were in November 1969 when the “Age of Aquarius” was dawning and, in Vietnam, Americans were dying? I remember. I was there...in Vietnam! As an Army nurse, I was winging my way peacefully across the Pacific to a land I knew nothing about where I would survive 12 months that I would never forget. I perused the anxious faces of the 12 other women and 100-plus men on that flight. Would all of us return as complete human beings? Which of us would leave something behind -- a limb, an eye, a close friend, our mind?

War is the stuff of which memories are made. I stored them all deep inside but ready to return to the surface when beckoned. I remember my coworkers. The doctor from New York who sported granny glasses and sandals. He missed the kosher delis. A fellow nurse, who had been my roommate at Fort Dix before we “got orders.” We corresponded at Christmas for many years. Major B, the Hot Lips Houlihan of our hospital. She created enough rumors to fill a diary. There were, also, teenage corpsmen who knew little about medicine when they arrived, but to whom I would have entrusted my life after a year of working in the emergency room. I remember the Vietnamese people—some good, some not, and often difficult



to distinguish between the two. The sad faces of the injured children brought tears to my eyes. The piercing stares and muttered abusive language of captured Viet Cong put fear and anger in my heart. As a balance, talented Vietnamese nurses, assisting with the local patients, served up broken English humor and quick smiles. How could they hide their bitterness as they saw what was happening to their families and their land?

I remember the patients; their faces are the most vivid. The twenty-ish sergeant who was conscious, despite the tourniquet on each thigh where a leg and foot had once been attached. The PFC who, while walking point, tripped a mine. We gently tried to roll him over to check for additional wounds; his chest came away, his back stayed on the canvas litter. The GI, with his head and left eye swathed in huge field bandages, whose only concern was the condition of his buddy. The green vinyl

body bags which held someone who wasn't returning as they had come.

I remember all those victims—a sea of faces in green fatigues, turquoise scrub suits and black pajamas. In that sea, however, I frequently pause at the face of someone who was not just a face but also a name. Claude Bart Sneed was one of those names. As you might have guessed, Bart was a southern gentleman who preferred to be called by his middle name. He, like myself,

was sent to this tropical non-paradise in October 1969. Unlike me, his job was far weightier. He was a lieutenant in the infantry.

Our paths crossed in the officers' club at Long Binh where we were waiting to be flown to our assigned areas having just arrived in South Vietnam. As several of us shared beers around a Formica-topped table, conversation was strained. Each wondered what lay beyond the air base. Could it possibly be this unbearably hot where I was headed? Would the training that I'd been given help save my life? Was I going to “fit in” with the others in my unit? Would I ever see these new acquaintances again?

Bart, with his easy manner and soft southern drawl, was able to bring all of our thoughts together and put them in perspective. He was quick with tall

tales and numerous anecdotes. As our stay stretched from 24 hours to four days, he kept the tension at a tolerable level. Bart was like warm cookies and cold milk after a fight with the neighborhood bully.

When our flight finally arrived and assignments were completed, we found ourselves headed in the same direction. I recall stepping off that plane at Chu Lai into the monsoon rains. We shared a good luck hug and parted in separate Jeeps. A few months later, on an unusually quiet night, I glanced up at a tall lean arrival to see those familiar warm blue eyes. Bart had been on the fringes of a mortar attack and had suffered some fairly superficial wounds. After some much-needed rest and swapping war stories, he returned to his unit.

I never expected to see him again. Unfortunately for him, I did. I don't recall the date; two, maybe three months had passed. Several GIs had been wounded, and the emergency room was buzzing. As I checked the wounds of the soldier on my litter and prepared a syringe with pain medication, I heard someone say "Is Lieutenant Graul working today?" My hands kept moving as my heart froze. I knew that voice! Switching places with another nurse, I quickly assessed Bart's body, which had been peppered with shrapnel. His spirits were high as always, but his injuries looked complicated. I whispered a quiet prayer as he was wheeled into surgery. Another nurse put her hand on my shoulder asking, "Did you hear Dr. S say that he might lose both legs?" For the first and only time during my year there, I had to walk away to compose myself. The others were just faces; he was a name.

Bart convinced the surgeons to not amputate his legs, and he was soon evacuated to Japan and then to Fort Benning, Ga., near his home. We kept in contact, and I visited him after I returned in October 1970. He continued to recuperate in the hospital, had taken up the harmonica and still had his legs. His blue eyes still danced, and his drawl could melt an arctic iceberg. But he could not walk. I remember Bart and wonder if he ever did.

## What I Still Believe

*By Nila K. Bartley*

*VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH*

My country is the greatest nation on earth  
that the world has ever seen.  
We are free.  
Free to live, grow, and just be happy.  
We are blessed to be able to worship God  
as we so choose.  
We live day to day without fear of being jailed  
for disagreeing with the government.  
We have the right to vote for whom we think is best  
to hold a government position.  
We can hold a peaceful protest  
if we disagree with the government.  
We have the freedom to travel within our country  
without being questioned.  
We have the freedom to leave our country to visit another.  
We have the right to bear arms.  
We have the right to choose our own career.  
We are not spied on by our own government.  
We have a free, capitalistic market.  
We are not told how many children we can have.  
We have a free exchange of ideas.  
Our freedom encourages our way of life  
in which we can pursue our dreams.  
In order to keep this way of life,  
we must remember how we became  
the greatest nation on earth in the first place.  
We have to disregard all this divisiveness in our nation.  
We have to remember the way we became a great nation  
was because we respected each other as fellow human beings.  
A fellow citizen of the United States  
has the right to have an opposing opinion on an issue.  
We are both equal.  
Just because a fellow citizen does not agree,  
does not give someone else the right  
to treat him or her as less than.  
We are all equal.  
Respect each other; that is how we became  
the greatest nation on earth  
and how we will remain that way.

## To a Tee

*By Frank Mattson*

*VA Medical Center—Spring City, PA*

I cast a spell,  
I raise some hell  
To find the woman  
For forever,  
The one that matches me  
To a tee!

# Cuban Missile Crisis

By Gary Lee Jenneke

VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN

Oct. 16, 1962. My 19th birthday. Not the most momentous event occurring that day, however, because it was also the first day of what became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I was assigned to the Holiday Beach Communication Station on Kodiak Island, Alaska. I had already been in the Navy over a year, having enlisted at age 17. I was a radioman, one of about two dozen at the site. We were a remote outpost miles from the main base. Our barracks were on a cliff, the endless expanse of the northern Pacific stretching before and a range of snow-capped mountains sandwiching us in from behind. The radio station, we called it RC, was a mile away, part way up a mountain. RC was a windowless, gray, one story concrete block building with antennas on top.

Kodiak has long been a fishing and hunting destination, but we neither had the money nor the means to go where those activities took place. When I first arrived I was welcomed with “You’re gonna love it here, there’s a girl behind every tree.” I looked around; there were no trees. We were in the middle of nowhere with little in the way of diversion. No people, no gathering place, no TV, no entertainment center, and if we did have liberty, no place to go. We did have a pool table, but all the cues had the tips broken off. There was a shuffleboard but that quickly became

boring. We did have a ping pong table, and I was quite proficient at that sport by the time I left Holiday Beach. We also had a film projector and showed movies we picked up from the main base. It was our most precious form of entertainment. I estimate I saw close to 400 movies in my 13 months at Holiday Beach.

We were up there to work, and fortunately the work was interesting. We were a



receiving station, copying messages from ships at sea and relaying them on up the command chain. This was back in the days when Morse code, CW to us, was still a viable method of communication. The vast majority of the messages we received were of the routine variety. The next level up was a bit more exciting and required some operational action, usually because of severe weather. Then there were two categories above that, two conditions I never expected or wanted to hear. The first was “emergency” and meant war was

imminent. The top category indicated war had begun.

On my 19th birthday, information was passed to President Kennedy that the Soviet Union had begun a buildup of missile bases on Cuba. After monitoring the situation with U-2 spy planes, JFK announced the crisis to the nation in a speech on Oct. 22. In the meantime our lives got very busy. Holiday

Beach became the military’s designated command post on the island, and RC was filled with high ranking officers. Maybe because we were located out in the boondocks, they thought we were less vulnerable. A platoon of Marines was assigned to guard the cliffs. I’m not sure why, maybe in case a Russian submarine tried to land some forces. Some of our guys were issued helmets and M-1s and stood guard duty alongside the Marines. I escaped that pleasure.

We were up at RC working a lot, and on our off time we tried to grasp the enormity of what was happening. The world was being threatened with war, a nuclear war. It occurred to us, given our remote location, we were safer than most. Nobody was going to waste a hydrogen bomb on us. For the first time in history, we in the military, off to defend our nation, were safer than our loved ones back home. I tried not to think about that. One of our complement of sailors was—how should I gently put it—not wired in the usual

fashion. I'll call him Harding, not his real name. Harding thought the crisis was fun, something he had been waiting for his whole life. He also assumed we would survive. None of us were yet aware of the long-term effects of radiation or nuclear winter. We had a whale boat, and Harding began drawing up plans for how we would use it to get to the mainland and then fulfill our obligation to start a new society. Some women would have survived, he reasoned with delight, and it would be our duty to repopulate the world.

Somehow he ignored the logic that if some women survived the blasts, then the men in that area would too. When I was a kid some people in my small hometown began building bomb shelters in case of a nuclear strike. I asked my father if we were going to build one. He laughed and said, "Look who is building them. If they are the only people left, I don't want to be around." If I didn't get his drift then; I certainly did up in Kodiak.

I had been at Holiday Beach for two and a half months when the crisis began. In that

time I had never copied a message more urgent than "operational." After Oct. 16 most of the messages I copied were coded "emergency." All were encrypted, so I wasn't privy to any secret information and had no idea of how close to war we were. What I did focus on, however, was the priority of the message which would be near the beginning of each transmission. It would be with relief when I copied the second worst of the possible scenarios and not the first, which would have meant the world would soon be turned into a huge baked potato.

The moment of truth was what would happen when Russian ships encountered a U.S. Navy blockade around Cuba. There were Russian submarines in the region, and if any hostilities erupted, if any American ships were sunk, well...again, baked potato time. Fortunately, the more rational sides of Kennedy and Khrushchev prevailed, and they negotiated a way out of the crisis.

Maybe there were a few people around the world disappointed with the outcome

of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Gen. Curtis LeMay comes to mind, but Harding was the only one I personally knew. He saw it as an adventure missed, an opportunity lost. Myself, while it was happening, I have to admit I felt more excitement than fear. Maybe because I never really thought, deep down, that it would happen. Even though I was part of it, it still felt abstract, still a step removed, part of the moment but still a step removed. And as soon as the moment was over, as soon as the danger passed, with the brass quickly packing up and disappearing, it was like "did that just really happen?" Despite my participation in it, my recollection of the crisis is still more of a surreal memory than anything else.

Our world had been close to an end. I think we should be reminded of that periodically in the hopes we won't go there again. If we do, let's pray those in charge are as intelligent and steady as JFK and Nikita had been.

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## Majority Elected, Heavenly Selected

*By Scott Sjostrand  
—Hallock, MN*

President Biden was recently elected.  
The majority cast their votes, plus  
I believe he was Heavenly selected.  
His Cabinet appears to be a cross-section of America's best.  
I'm confident they will help him lead us through any test.  
In my kitchen I have many cabinets, plural with an "s."  
Helps me to prepare meals for guests, I must confess.  
A cabinet has tools or people upon which you rely.  
The Bible is your recipe book to guide our nation.  
Please don't be shy.  
May God bless you, Sir, you and your team.  
I'm one of the many pursuing the American Dream.

## Acknowledgement

*By Scott Sjostrand  
—Hallock, MN*

My mom was the ultimate unsung hero.  
She was born in January, subzero.  
She had a warm, tender heart—the opposite of wintertime.  
Her mere presence was oh, so sublime.  
She was a woman of great faith and promoted education.  
She graduated from vocational school to no standing ovation,  
Always in the background while on the front lines.  
Other people received praise time after time.  
Happy-go-lucky, that was her style.  
Mom, I miss your infectious smile.  
You lived a harder life than I preferred.  
But you pressed on; yes, you endured.  
You're in heaven now surrounded by the royalty you are.  
I see the twinkle in your eyes at night with the stars.

# The Forgotten Terps

By Shon Pernice  
—Moberly, MO:

The utilization of indigenous interpreters is vital to the success of U.S. military missions overseas. While knowledge of the local language is a crucial communication skill, learning the customs and norms of a culture is a diplomatic tool that cannot be learned from any manual. This is where the value of the local interpreter, also known as a “terp,” becomes paramount. However, the trust and bonds that are formed during a one-year deployment leave just one major question in the departing soldiers’ minds: what will happen to them?

Upon my arrival to Forward Operating Base Grizzly (also known as Camp Ashraf), Iraq, I learned that my first major duty was to be the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Ashraf Refugee Camp. I had a solid grasp of the Arabic language, but the people I was to care for spoke Farsi. To complicate matters to the point of a political quagmire, these people were defectors from the People’s Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI) that fought for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988. Some were former Iranian soldiers and special forces. Muslim females were also part of this group. The U.S. Army did not train me for anything on this level of sensitivity. The PMOI had formerly been listed as a terrorist organization but were now considered protected civilians under the Geneva Convention. I could not have navigated my duties and responsibilities without



the help of my Farsi interpreter, Homie. Security reasons and the difficulty in pronouncing his Persian name prompted the medical team before us to give him that name.

It took our medical team a while to warm up to the Persian stranger who was always eager to help out. Not only did Homie serve as our terp, but he was also employed in a janitorial role for our Troop Medical Clinic (TMC). At first, anyone not wearing your flag on their sleeve was eyed with caution. After all, it was a foreign country and a combat zone. Nevertheless, Homie proved his worth and earned our trust. I believe the trust was mutual because Homie eventually opened up to us about his time in Iranian prisons being tortured and then joining the PMOI. In our chow hall, the third country nationals would sit in one particular area. This was a safety measure to give them less access to the weapons that we carried. Homie always had to have one of us escort him whenever he left the TMC. In the chow

hall, the medics would sit with Homie in the “TCN only” area. Yes, we would receive stares from the coalition forces, and the other third country nationals, but we were not going to let a member of our team sit by himself. That is not what the Army teaches us. Homie would inform me when I should revise what I wanted him to translate because it may offend someone. He would also let me know if someone was being untruthful, or if someone was trying to deceive me.

Otherwise, I would have never known and could have put myself or other soldiers in harm’s way.

When Christmas time arrived, one of the medics had a great idea for Homie: include him in our Christmas celebration. He was always asking about our holidays and what we did in America. Now it was time to bring him into our world. We pooled our money and had a pair of Nike tennis shoes ordered for him. This was a rarity in our area of operations and would be something really special for this man who we valued not only as a terp, but now as part of our family. On Christmas Day, everything had a relaxed holiday status. I took a military vehicle over to the Ashraf Refugee Center and picked up Homie. He asked what was going on, and I just told him that his services were needed. He was welcomed into the TMC where we had snacks and music. We told him about Christmas in America and how we would exchange gifts with our family and friends.

I brought out some boxes of goodies that were sent from various organizations in the United States. Then Homie was given his gift to open. When he saw those brand new shoes from America, tears trickled down his face. I cannot recall how many times he thanked us. Whether we are at home in the states, or on foreign soil, togetherness on Christmas has no fences. Even in a combat zone.

Fear and frustration were always on the minds of the refugees, and on Homie's. After being promised for many years relocation to a host country, hope turned into fear. "What will happen when the Americans leave?" They did not have to say the words; you could tell by the look on their faces. Interpreters took huge risks, not only for themselves, but for the safety of their families. Terrorists and extremists have no rules in warfare. Torture and senseless executions are used liberally against men, women and children. I worked with several Iraqi terps and would ask why they are working with us despite the possible consequences. Some said that they wanted something better for their country. Others wanted their children to have a stable area to raise their families. Others simply had nothing left except fear and loathing for the terrorists. They wanted to leave the country of their birth, where their bloodlines went back over a thousand years in Mesopotamia, and move to "the land of opportunity." For the terps who stuck it out with us, regardless of the possible penalties, they proved their courage to America and the citizens who live there.



*Photo courtesy of Shon Pernice*

We left FOB Grizzly the spring of 2008 without Homie. It was a tough good-bye for all of us. Homie had gone through this same process for the past four years. However, his sadness resonated through all of us.

Let me reflect upon what can happen to interpreters, and even people protected under UN mandates, when the U.S. military leaves foreign soils. According to Wikipedia, on Jan.1, 2009, the U.S. officially transferred control of Camp Ashraf to the Iraqi government. In late July 2009, Iraqi forces attempted to enter Camp Ashraf; 11 people were killed and about 400 wounded. Amnesty International revealed and condemned the violation of Ashraf residents' rights by the Iraqi government on July 28 and 29, 2009. On Dec.15, 2009, the Iraqi government sent a group of its security forces into the camp to attempt to relocate the residents to a former detention center in Negret al Salam, Iraq. On Jan. 7, 2011, Ashraf was attacked again

by the Iraqi security forces and wounded 176 people; 93 were women and they were prevented from going to a nearby hospital. Many more attacks happened over the years, and on Sept. 1, 2013, 52 civilians were killed at Camp Ashraf. Furthermore, as early as February 2015, there were no more PMOI at Camp Ashraf after the pro-Iranian Badr Organization claimed the city as its base.

While it is regrettable that many terps get left behind and it may take years to get their asylum status approved, this story is going to end on a positive note. I was informed in 2009, by a junior medic that I served with, that Homie had emailed her, and he had been granted asylum to a safe country in Europe.

## My Natural Highs

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center—Pittsburgh, PA

Some get “high” on hunting deer,  
some on stress and strife.  
Others drink their beer and ale;  
I get “high” on “Life!”

Little things can turn me on:  
coffee, cake, or pie,  
a red sunset at evening’s end.  
Such things tell me, “Why?”

A new road I can drive on,  
the cool breeze at the shore,  
my “high” is like a Christmas rush.  
There are many more!

The pure sweet taste of chocolate,  
the vows of man and wife,  
earthy smell of fresh-cut grass,  
I get “high on Life!”

A new-found friend for visits,  
a letter in the mail,  
a book to read on weekends,  
these things never fail.

A snack to eat at table,  
some cream cheese on a knife  
with bagels from the baker,  
the greatest “high” is “Life.”

## Little Willow

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

O, willow, my willow,  
Weep for me  
And sing your melody.  
Little tree  
Of majesty,  
Fluff and sway.  
You’ve much to say,  
So dart and dance  
And billow for me  
As you sing your melody.

## Ostara

By Michael Moslander

—Moberly, MO

Bound and frozen by winter’s cold blow,  
Frostbitten fate as time and hope slow.  
Nine nights wandering the shadow,  
Light and sight blinded and laid low.  
Suffocating on the mist of suffering,  
Weathering to the dusk of despairing.  
Wind-torn by bane and iced over in pain,  
Wayfarers’ yearning calls on her name.  
Her dawn glows and vigor grows,  
As she comes from the east, we prepare her a feast.  
Rains of restoration quench the thirst of cultivation.  
Rays of regeneration spark the inner light of acceleration.  
Nature’s enchantment is in the garden of immortality.  
Beauty blooms and songbirds sing.  
Youth, renewed by rising rays of inspiration,  
Quicken the pulse of passion.  
Twilight of truth no longer concealed,  
Arising aurora of awareness enlightened.  
A racing heart of intuition,  
A spirit of creativity,  
The Eternal Flame energized by the embers in her eyes.  
Her fiery radiance warms the skin of my soul.  
Ethereal tears wash away the frost with a storm  
of lightning and rain.  
The Goddess breathes softly into the void of hope.  
The gentle breeze caressed the universe of my soul.  
My Goddess and protector of vitality,  
Initiator of my voyage and destiny,  
Brings forth the essence of light and life,  
Awakens the Odin-quest to the traveler of trials.  
She strengthens the striving seeker with runes  
of courage and wisdom,  
To slay the darkness from the kingdom.  
Entering elucidation through meditation,  
The veil is lifted in Astral Projection.  
Queen of spring reflecting in my dreams,  
Face and voice eternal in the memory of moonbeams.  
Star of Hyperborea,  
Moving with stellar harmony,  
Kindling the Ariesian fire within me,  
Marking the celestial origin of goodness with astrology,  
Epically electrified with resolve by her embrace of me.



# My Indelible Military Career

*By Katherine Iwatiw*

*VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO*

I enlisted in the Army as an older, non-traditional recruit. The Army offered me a two-year contract, the rank of private first class, and money for school. With the intimate details saved for another day, the following is a brief description of my journey as a U.S. Army soldier.

## Basic Training

I took basic training at Fort Dix, N.J., during the summer of '84. My company was all-female with coed cadre. I held a leadership position for one week and received extra duty more than a few times. I learned the important difference between floor wax and rifle cleaner, broke a sink when I sat on it to soak my feet and made it through the "gas chamber" with a minimum of pain and embarrassment. I passed the PT test and shot sharp shooter but wasn't allowed to throw a live grenade since I "threw like a girl." Following lights out, I wrote in my journal with the aid of a flashlight. Long days, short nights, and eight weeks later, I graduated. Hoo'rah! I was a soldier in Uncle Sam's Army.

## Advanced Individual Training

Following graduation, the Army put me on a plane to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, for combat medic training. My company was coed. I wasn't the shortest or oldest soldier, and I had fallen in love with the Army. My cadre liked to run, so every morning long before sunrise, my platoon ran through the fort. By 9 a.m. we had showered,



cleaned our area, and had breakfast. We marched everywhere -- to class, to the dining hall, back to class. After dinner, along with most soldiers, I studied at the PX. I smoked the final PT tests, scored high on the final exams, and graduated. Hoo'rah! I was a 91A Combat Field Medic with orders to Germany.

## Active Duty -- Fuerth, Germany

My stuffed duffel bag and I landed in Germany as autumn began in my new world. I was assigned to Charlie Company, 47th Medical Battalion, 1st Armored Division with barracks in Fuerth while command was stationed in Erlangen. My unit was four to one male to female with coed barracks.

One evening in November, a male soldier invited me and a female roommate out on the economy for dinner. This soldier invited himself back to our room to listen to music. He offered me a beer. The

next thing I remember was touching the head of a soldier who was lying on top of me. The soldier ran out when he discovered I was waking up. I had been given a drug and raped. Welcome to this man's Army.

I traversed through unhinged emotions and consequential reactions which led to a mishandling of the assault in the worst of ways. I saw a male Army therapist twice, and not that I didn't want to continue our sessions, our schedules

didn't sync. My command wanted me or the situation to go away, but I stayed because my future depended upon "sucking it up."

With 18 months left on my contract, I put the assault in a bitter "lesson learned" category and refocused my energies on surviving in the Army. I became a "field rat" with duty at ranges and rail heads in Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels, living in decades-old ambulances, sleeping in cold barracks, or in tents or buildings in local villages. For the '86 Reforger exercise, I repurposed a five-gallon vegetable can into a toilet, so instead of searching for bushes that provided questionable privacy, I peed in the can in the back of the ambulance. For Sports Day at the post, I photographed the events and competitors with a camera I had bought before leaving Fort Sam. I competed in the Expert Field

Medical Badge exercise and came within four points of taking the badge home.

My last CQ duty with Charlie Company sucked my breath away. I was ordered to pull duty with the rapist. My Command decided since I didn't press charges against the coward, I wouldn't mind spending the night with him. My faith in Uncle Sam shattered into a thousand-piece puzzle, but I survived the night and headed to South Carolina for out-processing.

### **Army Reserves -- Florida**

I moved to Miami for a job. I joined up with the 437th Medical Detachment in Fort Lauderdale when they offered me a Preventative Medicine Specialist course, a 91S. I signed my second enlistment contract. After one year, I moved to a small town near Orlando and enrolled at the University of Central Florida. I joined ROTC as a cadet and practiced leadership skills, but after I failed chemistry, I withdrew from ROTC to focus on my studies.

In August 1988, I traveled back to Fort Sam Houston to take the final exams for the 91S MOS. Two weeks packed with training, exams and brief moments of amusement. On our last night, we celebrated at the PX. My platoon sergeant challenged me to a dance-off. I'm five feet tall, and while not a fast runner, I danced rings around him.

In June 1990, I attended a two-week basic NCO course at Fort McCoy, Wis. I started the cycle with 40 other soldiers, four to one male to female. While we trained together, we slept apart. On day two, I wore the wrong socks which caused my feet to blister from heel to toe. I didn't want to quit or to be recycled, so I continued on my sore feet. Soldiers dropped out

and our ranks decreased. During the compass course, I was put in charge of my squad. I kept us going in the right direction, completing the course ahead of time. The male soldiers weren't hostile, but they weren't pleased with my success; some rooted for my failure. In the end, I graduated as the one remaining female in the platoon.

On reserve weekends, I drove south from central Florida to the Fort Lauderdale compound. I attended the unit's Sunday morning church service, practiced leadership skills, studied environmental hygiene at the beach and parks and helped to train soldiers in basic first aid. My university grades had improved, and I worked part-time in the Student Veterans Affairs (SVA) office. Life was a routine until Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

### **The First Gulf War – Desert Storm**

In January 1991, I watched the war's opening scenes with friends from SVA. Once the mobilization call came, I traveled with my unit to our headquarters in Fort Gordon, Ga., to await further orders. Nervous, distracted soldiers were crammed into every available room. At night I ran laps on the open track to keep my anxiety under control. In February, I received orders to Fitzsimons Medical Center in Aurora, Colo. Further orders sent me to the Dugway Proving Grounds/Tooele Army Depot in Utah for industrial hygiene duty.

My military command was headquartered in Dugway, but for the daily work, I fell under the command of the civilian industrial hygienists in Tooele. I measured and monitored air quality and work conditions at work stations, inventoried and inspected bio-chemical canisters,

played racquet ball in the gym and drove around the high mountain desert. The war ended, but I remained activated until I had reached the six-month limit for mobilized soldiers. I begged my Command to release me from active duty in time to start the summer semester in Florida.

Before my release from active duty, I was honored with a Meritorious Service Medal. I was an "excellent, highly motivated and capable NCO who performed all duties outstandingly; served in an outstanding manner as an Industrial Hygiene Technician in the absence of four Industrial Hygiene Technicians; conducted complex Industrial Hygiene program elements in a thorough and professional manner." The citation concluded, "(My) ability to significantly contribute to mission accomplishment in a new and challenging position resulted in a notable impact upon the mission of the Preventative Medicine Service and Fitzsimons Army Medical Center." Hoo'rah!

Back at the university, I pulled my credits together, enrolled in three classes and six weeks later, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies degree. Antsy for an immediate challenge, I left the Sunshine State and returned to the high mountain desert in Utah.

### **Army National Guard – Salt Lake City**

I hooked up with the 144th Medical Evacuation Hospital, a National Guard unit in Salt Lake City that had been mobilized to the Gulf. The hospital had experienced a shortage of 91Cs or LPNs. Once home, the doctors and nurses created a two-and-a-half year-long LPN program with training and classes held at the armory. I was an ideal candidate, so I

signed my third enlistment contract. The cycle began with 40 student-soldiers. On drill weekends, we met at the armory for classes or at the Veterans Administration and surrounding hospitals for clinical rotations. I worked full time and in the evenings attended school for further science classes. Each month, from the original roster, another soldier or two dropped out of the program.

### **If you want the Divine to laugh, make a plan.**

My plan was to finish the 91C program followed by an accelerated Registered Nurse (RN) program, apply for a commission and return to active duty.

With six months remaining before graduation, I became pregnant with my only child. In March 1994, five male soldiers and I finished the program. I took the honor graduate position, much to the displeasure of my male Command. I aced the LPN boards and passed two of five preliminary RN exams.

In April, I checked into the hospital for an emergency cesarean. My baby was born two pounds, 11 ounces at 29 weeks. My body shut down, and I went into kidney failure. The next decision I made was not without great deliberation with the Almighty Divine. I needed to heal, and my baby needed a mom. After 10 amazing

transformative years, my career as a U.S. Army soldier had reached its finale. I said good-bye to Uncle Sam and hung up my uniforms.

These past 27 years have not been without challenges, along with a few heartaches, but there has been an abundance of adventures and blessings. I am grateful to the Veterans Administration for giving me a lifeline, for helping me keep my head on straight and my body healthy. And I am, without any doubt, thankful the Army gave me the opportunity to be “all that I can be.” Hoo-rah!

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## **The Tormented Soul Released**

*By Connie M. Tasby  
VA Medical Center—Dallas, TX*

The tormented soul released;  
How I feel as if I am at peace.  
I feel like I can do all things.  
As life goes forth and as life begins,  
My heart feels like it was going to burst.  
I feel like fear took hold of me; my head was unclear.  
Anger always haunted me.  
Outbursts continually entangled me.  
I found out I had PTSD.  
Many kept quiet, but not me.  
I took classes to learn how to cope  
With life's problems, floating like a boat.  
Triggers were the cause of my pains.  
Anguish which is its name.  
Sounds, smells and places unknown,  
My name being called,  
A voice over the telephone.  
When I thought I could not cope,  
Freedom was found; I still had hope.

*Writing Aide: Armintia Alcorn  
Typist: Kenneth J. Miller*

## **Beautiful Tree**

*By CJ Reeves  
VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA*

Beautiful tree in your autumn gown,  
Red, green, yellow and golden brown.  
Your tall head crowned with azure skies,  
Lifting your limbs to God on high.  
Winter comes with breath so cold,  
Leaving you stripped, an outline bold.  
The soft snow comes with mantle of white,  
Covers you o'er the silent night.  
South wind comes with soothing caress,  
Awakes you from your winter nap,  
Brings life to your limbs and a bright new dress.  
Summer has made your leaves green,  
A shade from the sun, a shelter at night.  
Until winter brings her cold again,  
You are an oasis to beast and man.  
You are a symbol to young and old,  
A sentinel of honor through ages untold.

# The Bumblebee

By Richard Wangard  
VA Medical Center—Appleton, WI

I saw a bumblebee today. So cool!  
How can an insect that big fly?  
Huge body and small wings. Never  
fast but always gets its job done.  
Lumbering.

You know what it reminded me of?  
Flight. I always have been fascinated  
with flight. That is why I entered  
the Air Force at 17, hoping beyond  
hope to fly like a bird, and fly I did.  
Countless missions over South  
Vietnam but never dreaming that  
they would be medivacs in those  
lumbering C-130As.

I was supposed to work on their  
engines, and that I did over and  
over. But I never knew I would be  
required to work on human bodies  
too. The entire crew did too to save  
lives and help as many as we could  
as we flew for the hospitals of Da  
Nang, Cam Ranh Bay and Tan Son  
Nhut. That bumblebee brought it all  
back. Slow, lumbering, flying low.

But there is a huge difference  
between my friendly bumblebee and  
my C-130As. I am sure somewhere  
the bumblebee has a predator, but  
our C-130As had bullets coming at  
them and worse. The bumblebee  
has a stinger that it only uses in  
pure self defense. Our C-130As had  
nothing. But I should not say that.  
Our crews and specialists had the  
moxie and courage to save countless  
lives, and that they did.

We all realized that what we were  
doing was the real deal. Many never  
made it home, so if you want to trip  
my trigger go ahead and make an Air  
Force joke. I saw more courage, more  
bravery, more valor, more caring, more  
empathy, more love than in anything  
else I have ever done in my life.

I am no hero. The heroes never came  
home. Knowing full well their plane  
could get shot down, the pilots and  
crews went into enemy fire anyway  
to try to save those poor wounded  
troops on the ground. I saw it all  
in three years and three tours. I  
would not leave until the Air Force  
medivaced me because I tried too  
hard, saw too much, was ignoring  
my health, and just plain went nuts  
-- telling Army officers in their own  
club that they were cowards! Next  
stop--jail. Next stop--hospital. And  
next stop--Texas, waking up in my  
Nam fatigues, knocked out by drugs  
on the way home.

Think I have ever been the same?  
Wonder why I have no filters, no  
patience, get in someone's face in  
a heartbeat, live by my own sense  
of justice? But I have also saved  
lives since being out due to medical  
knowledge gained.

Fly, my friendly bumblebee, for you  
have given me great memories of  
times long ago and have reminded  
me of what I still need to work on.



## Teach Me How to Pray

By Gene Allen Groner  
VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

Teach me how to pray, dear Lord.  
Give me the words to say.  
Help me mend a broken heart  
For someone else today.

Lord, you've been so good to me,  
I want to share your love  
With a friend in need today.  
Teach me how to pray.

Let me pray the best I can  
To heal a soul in need.  
You answer all my heart's desire  
With grace and generosity.

Grant me, please, this one request,  
I humbly ask you, Lord,  
For many souls have lost their way  
And cry out for your word.

Teach me how to pray, dear Lord,  
Just like your saints before.  
Teach me how to speak your words,  
Helping others love you more.

Teach me how to pray, dear Lord,  
Like angels sing above,  
Giving hope to those in need—  
In need of your precious love.

Tune my heart to hear your voice,  
Leading me all the way.  
I want to give you all I have,  
In Jesus' name I pray.  
Amen.

## New Year's Eve 1965 San Francisco — North Beach

By John L. Swainston

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

The shame I felt made me sad and want to cry.  
The Army uniform I wore gave me pride.  
It was battered by the hate from those  
who could not see my soul.  
Everyone, up and down the street, had heard too much,  
Seen too much that night.  
The blow was struck from behind, to my head.  
I kissed the ground, stunned into silence.  
One kick, two kicks, three and more.  
I felt no pain just shame.  
In the distance I saw the shoes: black, spit shined,  
topped by white bell-bottomed pants.  
They moved like lighting, striking but one last blow I felt.  
Looked up, lying there next to me were the three.  
I smiled wide and knew it was the Navy that rescued me.  
When all was said and done—shame I felt.  
Made me sad and want to cry.  
The spirit damaged, not broken.

## I Dreamed

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

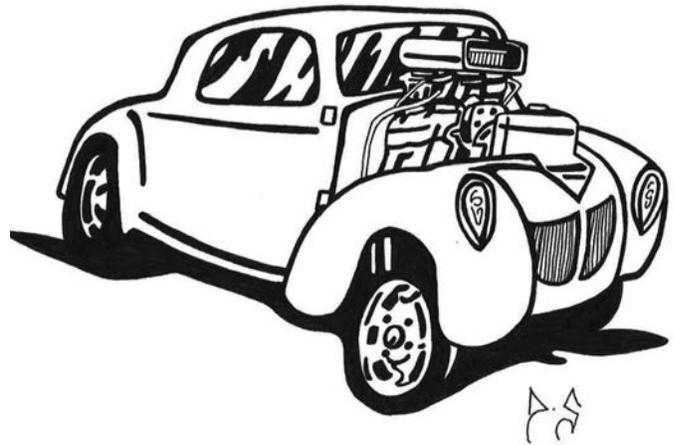
I dreamed I saw a soldier wounded and dying  
as his blood trickled onto the sands  
of a far-eastern desert.  
And I dreamed I saw men  
who were engaged in heavy combat.  
I heard their battle cries.  
And as the battlefield continued to take its toll,  
the wounded and dying were laid to the rear,  
and their blood poured onto the sands  
of a far-eastern desert.  
And then I dreamed I saw the nails  
pierce the hands  
of the man who saved the world.  
And his blood fell on the stones  
of a far-eastern city  
not far from the sands  
of a far-eastern desert.

## Cars

By William Shepherd

VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS

Do you remember your first car  
You worked so hard to get?  
It was the last year of high school for me, too.  
Mine was red and blue; you said yours was, too.  
Oh, what fun we had with all our friends  
On a Friday night, looking for a drive-in movie.  
Yes, we were loud and throwing popcorn,  
But when the movie started, we got quiet.  
We really liked those cartoons.  
Oh, we were so young, but we had fun.  
And now a new day has begun.  
It's hard for me to give my car keys to my son  
That he might enjoy his friends on a Friday night.  
I'm looking for his first car now  
So that he might enjoy his first ride in his own car.



ART 2

By Donald Sherwood

— Danville, IL

# Prison Parody - A Different Perception of Incarceration

By Shon Pernice  
— Moberly, MO

Prison can be a place that strips you of all happiness. It is not supposed to be an environment that parallels the free world. However, I believe I have found a way to see the good. It basically reflects on how you view the situation. Let's try this:

The living accommodations will let you relive your childhood with the junior-sized bunk beds. Yes, a 45-year-old man can still drape a sheet over his bunk, make a fort and be cool. The 12-foot by 15-foot cells come fully furnished with a small table, footlocker, and a stand-up locker for two adult men. There are no arguments over picking out colors or styles; the state has already saved you that dilemma. The development is a rent-free, gated community that has the best surveillance system in the state. Video cameras are everywhere, even the bathrooms. The perimeter security is sure to thwart any intruder. The 15-foot high fencing, complete with layers of shiny concertina wire, also has a vibration sensor should anyone try to use a ladder for entry. I am safe from the outside.

My gym membership will not expire as long as I live here. I pay no fees or get cornered by personal trainers seeking new clients. There are lines to wait in, and gang



members get first choice. But who can complain? I got my workout in today.

As for what is in style and the current fashion trend, you will never hear that "those gray pants are so last season's." I have no decision to make concerning matching outfits or even if something is wrinkled. Faded clothing just means that I have been here a long time, but it is still in style.

While the Corona virus is the headline news every day, I thoroughly believe that we are the only community of 1,800 people that reached herd immunity in less than a year. Everyone got sick at one time or another, and the quarantine wing was full for several months. As we watched on the news that new COVID-19 cases were still happening, we had no new cases in months. Furthermore, while store shelves

were running out of toilet paper, my single roll was passed out every Wednesday and Sunday. Although it is not the same quality as Charmin or Quilted Northern, it has the texture that cowboy legend John Wayne would admire because it doesn't take crap off anyone.

Have you ever had that neighbor who brags about his 64-inch flat screen television? He lets you know how great the sound is and vividly describes the crystal-clear picture. And he certainly lets you know how much he

spent for it. Not in here. Our 13-inch plastic flat screen is really not something to shove down your neighbor's ego. This is the type of TV that guys will purchase for about \$137 and not even take home to the streets. Television bragging rights are not an issue.

If you were ever a fan of the hit TV series "MacGyver," guess what: you get to see some magical mechanical manipulation first hand. For instance, how about turning a double-A battery and a standard staple into a lighter? Or, creating a functioning tattoo gun by using the motor out of a CD player, some batteries and a bristle from a steel brush for the needle. The homemade ink is created by using the soot from burnt hair grease, alcohol extracted from deodorant, and a homeostatic mixture that

a chemistry professor would admire. The handle of a flyswatter is a universal tool to stir boiling spaghetti in a water pitcher. So practical.

The culinary creations, made in a cell, would surely make Italian chef Emeril say “Bam!” Crushing up a 16-ounce bag of vanilla wafers in a medium size bowl, adding one can of 7 UP, and microwaving for 10 minutes will get a birthday cake baked and ready in no time. Ramen noodle soup recipes can be stretched to infinity by adding all sorts of meats, cheeses, crushed chips, mackerel or anything else in the canteen. The soup is also a prized choice for making prison pizza crust by crushing up around 10 soups, mixing in finely crushed crackers (any flavor) and adding hot water. Just kneed together in a large chip bag, roll a soda can on top until flat, and tear off the chip bag. Bon appetit!

Speaking of the canteen (grocery store), I just type in my order and pick it up on Friday. There is no bagging on my end, and the green mesh bag is durable and reusable. Such an eco-friendly society. Granted, I haven’t heard of grocery bag hold-ups on the news, but in here, just walk fast and no eye contact. You should be able to make it back to your cell safely with your stuff.

Relationship issues, divorce, and break-ups are common occurrences in this environment. When one guys receives a “Dear John” letter, or makes a phone call home and an unknown male answers, the pain stings us all since we have been there too. However, I cannot think of anywhere other than the military where such a diverse group of men can come together quickly and support the wounded in these types of tragedies. The support system will verbally condemn the heartbreaker as we

listen to Taylor Swift break-up songs and tears of misery trickle down our cheeks. You would surely need insurance for this type of support group on the outside.

I have not witnessed a car accident in 11 years, nor have I been held up in traffic. While I’m watching the morning news report on road construction or major traffic issues, it does not pertain to me. In addition, not having to deal with those darn car insurance premiums, or even renewing a driver’s license, is so much less to worry about. The long lines at the DMV are a thing of the past. Although Amber Alerts and Silver Alerts are sad, should someone go missing in here--lock down. The situation will remedy itself in several hours and the formerly “lost” person’s whereabouts will be known in administrative segregation (the hole). There is always a successful conclusion.

When there is a tornado warning and the siren is signaling impending doom, have you ever been unsure about where to seek shelter? It depends on where you live and what options are available. It could be the basement, the bathtub or a ditch. There is absolutely no confusion here; I go to my cell. No thinking is required.

For those who have a complex about self-expression or nudity, prison life will help you get over it. There is no privacy at all. The showers, with four showerheads, no dividers, glass windows and video cameras will let you experience voyeurism first hand. As the corrections officers walk through the wing, private parts are no longer private. Strip searches are a common event and mandatory before and after visits. The way in which we are forced to come out of our shell and be viewed naked by strangers, I am surprised that there are no brochures for nudist colonies as part of a home plan option.

Conflict resolution is a skill that is practiced almost daily. With a lot of alpha-type males living in such close proximity, the chances of pissing someone off are great. Accidentally bumping into someone, having bad breath, saying something that a guy takes the wrong way or even a stare taken out of context can get you in trouble fast. Being able to avoid a fistfight, or a stabbing, is a crucial talent that can save your life and help you succeed later in the outside world. I believe a course like this would cost money on the outside, but in here, it is just part of survival. I never saw this benefit advertised on Court TV.

A matter that can have great potential in my home away from home is the subject of living with another man in a 12-foot by 15-foot cell. We are stuck with each other’s moods, body odors, music preferences and favorite television shows for years on end. After five years, I believe that this cohabitation would constitute a common law marriage, regardless of one’s sexual preference. I am not exactly sure if the IRS has included that as a qualifier for a tax credit yet, but I do see great merit in the argument.

Prison life can bring a person down and destroy his sense of normalcy in the world. I have discovered that it is all in how I view the situation. If I am looking for the bad, I will find it. But if I look for promising potential, or how the situation parallels the outside world, I have realized that I am living in a low-cost, isolated community that accepts everyone regardless of their age, race, religion or sexual preferences. I have never heard of the institution turning anyone away who has been judged worthy of coming and staying for a while. They will always leave a light on for you.

## The Gift

By Ronald Nash

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

Alone in loneliness, his mind travels back, again.  
Candles flicker-dance in the semi-darkness of the room,  
Life in shadows on walls...horror-stricken from it all.  
A boy, eighteen, a hostile jungle in a foreign land,  
The camouflaged warrior. That killer is now a man.

Whoop, whoop, whoop, gunships pound the air, drop in low,  
Mini-guns ablaze, fire rockets, killing more NVA as they go.  
Still outnumbered thirty to one, NVA plans to overrun;  
Small arms fire, rocket-propelled grenades hit the mark.  
Wounded-dying call for mother, medic, lost in the fight.

Suppressive fire their only chance to save the Team,  
Ra-tat-tat bullets whiz by, pierce flesh, more cries, medic!  
RPG, death rains from the sky; shrapnel tears deep within.  
Gushing blood must be stopped; he needs morphine fast.  
Stay the course, drift in and out, never die, keep up the fight.

Silver-winged angels from on high fly Air Force F-4 Phantoms.  
Pilot identifies smoke, verifies coordinates as they roar by.  
Like eagles, they fly low, dropping canisters as they go. Napalm!  
Ear-spitting sounds, destruction, burned-burning  
dying all around.  
Fires ablaze, smell the Napalm, taste the death,  
forever it will remain.

Medivaced, boys wounded, dying, no memories, living in a fog.  
Pinned with medals, Purple Heart, Valor. He recovers fast.  
So surreal, to the jungle he goes, but with Uncle Ho;  
the war lasts.  
Monsoons, mosquitoes, malaria, more blood and guts, and  
battles.  
Pushing through the jungle, slaughtered like cattle. For what?

Freedom Bird flies high to take him back to the World, his home.  
Parents' joy, now dismay, who is this man:  
what is wrong, leave us.  
Mother says, "I don't know you! You're not my son."  
Fighting tears, he goes.  
Alone again at just nineteen, the bars become his friend;  
the drinks flow.  
A death wish: come one, come all; he's primed and ready  
to fight them all.

Years pass, so do women and jobs until he meets her,  
the right one at last.

She helps him and takes him to the VA hospital; he's diagnosed:  
PTSD.

Years of therapy begin; continual flashbacks and nightmares  
never end.

A new diagnosis, Bipolar Disorder; for him one more gift  
from Vietnam.

Many more hospital trips, shackled, four-points, strapped  
to a bed.

Age forty, another surprise gift arrives: Type II diabetes.  
Agent Orange.

A new diet must begin, but he likes his beer, ice cream,  
and cake.

He does not heed the warnings until the needle becomes  
his fate.

The warrior's strong body gave way to the roly-poly man  
at the gate.

He worked his body hard, got off the insulin, and life  
became great.

As more years passed, his nightmares and flashbacks  
did not subside.

The therapist, who had never known war, said, "Look on  
the bright side;

Although disabled, battle-scared, PTSD, and diabetes,  
you're still alive."

He wondered if that were true for brothers killed; the war  
ended too soon.

A song, an odor, fireworks, he's back in the jungle,  
and his war starts over.

Years mount, grey upon the beard, and he begins to walk  
a little slower.

Blood work and a trip to the VA brings a new special delivery  
from Vietnam:

Agent Orange returns. His prostate and more must go,  
a lifesaving surgery.

To a nurse, the surgeon says, "His loss is not good news,  
but at least he's alive."

With his eyes closed, he thinks of making love and wonders  
as he cries.

After recovery, she wants him to end the isolation  
of all those many years.

A psychiatrist and a friend, Dr. Rob, suggests he join a group,  
men with PTSD,

Sharing, caring for one another, good times and bad,  
a move forward,

And two steps back when the Facilitator left, and the group  
came to an end.

Dr. Rob called on him to become State Certified and volunteer  
to lead again.

Things were going well; he took the position, and years of isolation came to an end.  
Another new gift from Vietnam arrived: bladder cancer.  
Agent Orange once more.  
More surgery, infusions into the bladder, more blood work, finally remission.  
Giving all to the veterans he serves, teaching therapeutic writing to the survivors,  
*Veterans' Voices*, an outlet, a means of publishing heartfelt stories for many.

Grateful for all things, good and bad, that have happened in his life.

At 71 years of age, he knows God was there by his side

in that horrid jungle.  
And now another gift from Vietnam long since passed:  
Agent Orange again.  
Parkinson's disease: no smell, no taste, a failing gait, and tremors abound.  
Keep going, serving our nation's veterans, and he knows God is still around.

Twilight, again in his room; candles flicker-dance shadows on walls.  
He wonders. What's next, Agent Orange?

*Writing group: Cincinnati VAMC*

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## The Shape-Shifter's Tally

*By Charles L. Carey*  
*VA Medical Center—Topeka, KS*

When my mind cannot see in the darkened world,  
there are wheels turning behind my own eyes that do see.  
Shadowy, wayward entities drift through night's darkest hour.  
They don't request; they demand to be.  
Those dark figures subliminally pass,  
pass through my blazing dreams,  
fashioned by wanting or so it would seem.  
They're passing through without reasoning or knowing why,  
figments of inspiration and desire,  
lending to the horrors they surely inspire.  
Can anyone else hear that tortured cry?  
To cover true light and sincere reality,  
to mask true inspiration behind banality,  
this is a part of the shape-shifter's tally.  
Souls do dwindle in such still air,  
giving no warning, not saying, "beware."  
He offers seconds of pleasure for those who bend,  
not speaking of darkness, the reward an eternal end.  
He gathers youthful hearts, his trophies.  
Their dreams are crippled because he's their friend.  
He shapes their desires; it's their will he does bend.  
Growing more weary by a senseless display,  
these souls begin yearning for goodness and light.  
They start searching for something to turn the past  
from vaguely wrong to absolutely right.  
Still the shape-shifter hovers close by,  
waiting and watching to take his tally and fly.

## An Encounter at the VA Hospital

*By John L. Swainston*  
*VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO*

Today I went to the VA Medical Center for a Consult.  
In the waiting room half the chairs were covered.  
Social distancing.

I looked around for a place to stand and saw him.  
His cover: 25th Infantry Division.  
Tropic Lighting—the Electric Strawberry.  
I walked over, asked if it was okay to talk.

"Sure."  
I told him that I had served with the 114th MI Detachment.  
A Reserve Round-out to the 25th when I lived in Hawaii.  
We talked.  
A few minutes later I looked at his cover again:

Combat Infantryman Badge.  
Bronze Star with V.  
Two Purple Hearts.

He told me that he was in Vietnam 1968—69.  
I did not ask, trying to be polite, but he told me:  
"Yup, shot twice, once in the leg and then in the left shoulder,  
above the heart, lucky that day."

George was a: Negro, African American, Black American,  
Black and some called him "N."

NO.  
He was none of those.  
George was—

A true American hero.

## Heathen's Harvest

By Michael Moslander

—Moberly, MO

The swift sending of summer staves  
Is found by the felling firth of silence.  
Crescent becomes descent in the celestial cycle;  
Light and life move to darkness and death.  
Coming of the cold and the frost in a flurry  
Brings the folk to the field to harvest in a hurry.  
Winter wanders with biting beasts;  
*Gere* gathers and *Freki* feasts.  
Kindred pour ale and kindred regale,  
Ready the home and ready the hearth,  
Boast by the fire  
To the lore of the clan and the lore of the tribes,  
Bolstered through the bitters,  
By the Ode of Odin.  
Following the Father of Fate-seeking Faces,  
Mastering his Magic-model through the Meta-matrix,  
Captain and Commander of the Cosmic Voyage,  
Make a sacrificial sojourn upon the Stellar-steed.  
Grasper of glittering *Gungnir*,  
Gear-rider of Galactic gallows,  
Hailed by *Huginn* and *Muninn*,  
Upon *Yggdrasil* and *Sleipnir*,  
Manifesting in masks, the path of the Norse *wyrd*.  
Concealed conductor of mortal mutation,  
Embodiment of evolution, infusing inspiration,  
May the scald-sagas send us to be warriors of the way,  
Wielders of wisdom, earned by elixirs of experience each day.

## Rain

By Charles Fredette

VA Medical Center—Bedford, MA

Staccato raindrops on my window  
awaken me and make me smile.  
They don't happen that often here, I know.  
They clean my car  
so I don't have to bother,  
and they make it warmer for us all.  
I hope to have more of the same.  
And I know that I will smile  
when they visit again.  
I know I'll smile  
when they help us through  
another New England winter.

## The Thoughts of Finding a Middle Ground

By David Philip Staffa

VA Medical Center—Orlando, FL

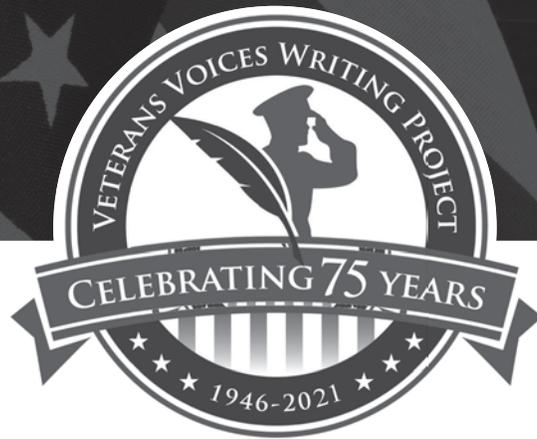
So, you are in darkness?  
Yeah, and I have thoughts.  
What kind of thoughts?  
Unnatural thoughts.  
I don't like being pushed.  
What do you mean you don't like being pushed;  
like someone shoving you?  
No, I don't like my mind being pushed in certain directions.  
If I am pushed too far and over the brink, then over, I cross.  
To where?  
Like I said, to the unnatural side.  
What is it like?  
It is like many people stabbing me with a long spear  
all over my body, piercing me in every piece of flesh.  
The only defense is to strike out at them.  
And do you strike out?  
Yes, in a fury of revenge, hate and then followed  
by guilt and regret.  
I can't find my way.  
I miss me.  
But I am still here.  
I am not the same.  
I know. I have seen and experienced things  
that have tarnished my soul.  
I want the old you back.  
That guy is gone.  
He gently weeps.  
I am trying but can't find my way to the other shore.  
I can help you paddle; we are in a tandem kayak.  
"Yes, take the rudder position because I can't quite yet."

## Return

By Lisa J. Farabelli

VA Medical Center—Lebanon, PA

My summer memories return  
to the grapevine we had growing  
on our back porch.  
By June, the grapes were ready to pick.  
The bees got first choice.  
My neighbor, Kimberly,  
would help me pick the best ones  
for eating on the spot.  
We also shared a pet turtle.  
We printed our initials  
on his shell with nail polish.  
Every year the turtle would return.  
Just like the memories of summer.



# 1946-2021

## VVWP Celebrates 75 Years of Service

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*In observance of the Veterans Voices Writing Project's  
Diamond Jubilee, the following officials have sent their  
letters of encouragement.*

---

Congress of the United States, **Sharice Davids**

United States Senate, **Roger Marshall, M.D.**

United States Senate, **Jerry Moran**

United States Senate, **Roy Blunt**

United States Senate, **Josh Hawley**

City of Kansas City, Mo., **Quinton Lucas**

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, **Sabrina Clark, Ph.D.**

SHARICE DAVIDS  
3RD DISTRICT, KANSAS

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

davids.house.gov

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-1603

March 9, 2021

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.  
406 West 34th St., Suite 103  
Kansas City, MO 64111

Dear Veterans Voices Writing Project community,

Congratulations on reaching the milestone of 75 years of your organization! I am inspired by the work you do to create an outlet for our nation's veterans.

My mother served in the U.S. Army for twenty years and I learned so much about service, sacrifice, and dedication to country through her. After all that our veterans have done for us, we must have their backs and the work at the Veterans Voices Writing Project exemplifies how we can give back to those who served us. Writing about our experiences can be incredibly healing and I have no doubt that your organization has benefitted the lives of veterans and their families.

Again, congratulations on 75 years! I'm so proud to hear of the work you are doing, and I look forward to seeing the Veterans Voices Writing Project continue to thrive for many more years.

Sincerely,



Representative Sharice Davids  
Member of Congress

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ROGER W. MARSHALL  
KANSAS

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SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## United States Senate

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.  
406 West 34<sup>th</sup> St., Suite 103  
Kansas City, MO 64111

April 13, 2021

Dear Veterans Voices Writing Project,

Congratulations on achieving such an incredible milestone. 75 years is an astounding accomplishment and a testament to the great work your organization provides.

As a veteran myself, I understand how important it is to have resources for our military members after their service. Our men and women in uniform deserve the best care available, and it's so great to see an organization like Veterans Voices Writing Project stepping up to the plate. Your publications showcase our veterans and their experiences so well through their various art forms. I can only imagine the positive results you see every day through this outlet. You are truly providing a great service, and I look forward to seeing what your organization and our veterans have in store for the future of your publication and programs.

Again, congratulations on this momentous occasion. It is well deserved for all the work you have done.

Sincerely



Roger Marshall M.D.  
U.S. Senator

JERRY MORAN  
KANSAS

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## United States Senate

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AND URBAN AFFAIRS

July 1, 2021

Mr. Theodore Iliff  
22565 West 112th Court  
Olathe, Kansas 66061

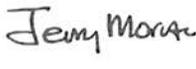
Dear Mr. Iliff and the Veterans Voices Writing Project Team,

Congratulations on your 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary! I join the many supporters, benefactors, and veterans impacted by your work, in Kansas City and across the country, in lauding this milestone.

With a lineage tracing back to outreach in VA hospitals to help wounded service members returning from World War II by sharing their stories on paper during recovery, the Veterans Voices Writing Project (VVWP) has helped multiple successive generations of veterans through the benefit of therapeutic writing. Headquartered in the heart of America, VVWP has published *Veterans' Voices* magazine three times a year composed entirely of submitted original work from veterans since 1952. The important work your team has done for over seven decades has climbed from pioneering writing therapy in hospital wards to now incorporating graphic arts designed by veterans all over America in your publication.

Mental well-being is an important component in the health of our returning military veterans, and many veterans find solace and satisfaction in sharing their stories through writing. Their stories also help Americans understand and recognize military service and the sacrifices made for our freedom. Thank you for your organization's storied work in service to veterans and best wishes for many more years.

Sincerely,

With gratitude - 

Jerry Moran

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1200 MAIN STREET  
SUITE 402  
HAYS, KS 67601

MANHATTAN OFFICE  
1880 KIMBALL AVENUE  
SUITE 270  
MANHATTAN, KS 66502

OLATHE OFFICE  
23600 COLLEGE BOULEVARD  
SUITE 201  
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306 N. BROADWAY STREET  
SUITE 125  
PITTSBURG, KS 66762

WICHITA OFFICE  
100 N. BROADWAY  
SUITE 210  
WICHITA, KS 67202



*Roy Blunt*  
*United States Senator*  
July 14, 2021

Veterans Voices  
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103  
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to congratulate Veterans Voice on your 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. You have served our veterans who have protected this nation since World War II. The men and women of America's military are the best examples of the strength and sacrifice that make our country great, and you have given our veterans a voice.

Our nation depends on her men and women in uniform. Your contribution is a vital piece of our National Defense. We will keep you in our prayers.

Thank you for your tireless efforts in honoring and caring for our veterans. Congratulations again on your 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Sincere regards,

Roy Blunt  
United States Senator

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United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2509

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AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
SMALL BUSINESS  
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

July 23, 2021

Mr. Ted Iliff  
Veterans Voices Writing Project  
406 West 34th St., Suite 103  
Kansas City, MO 64111

Dear Ted:

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate you and the Veterans Voices Writing Project on 75 years of operation in Kansas City, Missouri.

Since its inception in 1946, the Veterans Voices Writing Project has been dedicated to providing military veterans with solace and satisfaction through the art of writing. The pride you have in helping veterans heal and share their experiences with others is to be commended.

Please accept my best wishes for continued success, and may the Veterans Voices Writing Project always stand for the values in which it has upheld for the last 75 years.

Sincerely,



Josh Hawley  
United States Senator

CAPE GIRARDEAU

COLUMBIA

KANSAS CITY

SPRINGFIELD

St. LOUIS



## PROCLAMATION

### Recognizing the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Veterans Voices Writing Project

**WHEREAS**, Veterans Voices Writing Project is a philanthropic nonprofit organization headquartered in the VFW Building, 406 W. 34<sup>th</sup> St., Suite 103, Kansas City, Missouri; and

**WHEREAS**, three times a year, VVWP publishes *Veterans' Voices* magazine, an outlet for prose, poetry and graphic arts by veterans; and

**WHEREAS**, the organization's encouragement and recognition of creative expression serve as a documented form of therapy for veterans as well as a way for veterans to record their experiences, and the psychological and emotional effects of those experiences, for their families and posterity; and

**WHEREAS**, veterans submitting their work to *Veterans' Voices* have thanked the organization for improving the quality of their lives, and, in some cases, saving their lives; and

**WHEREAS**, this year, 2021, marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Veterans Voices Writing Project's assistance to American veterans of all branches; and

**NOW, THEREFORE**, as Mayor of the City of Kansas City, Missouri, I, Quinton D. Lucas, on behalf of the residents of this great city, do hereby recognize Veterans Voices Writing Project for its 75 years of support and encouragement of writing and other creative activities of our nation's veterans.



Quinton D. Lucas

Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Center for Development & Civic Engagement

October 1, 2021

Veterans' Voices Writing Project, Inc.  
406 West 34<sup>th</sup> St., Suite 103  
Kansas City, MO 64111

Dear Devoted Partners,

***Congratulations on 75 years of service to Veterans!*** Indeed, a milestone to celebrate. On behalf of the thousands of volunteers across the country who selflessly give their time and talents to brighten the days of Veterans served by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the VA Center for Development & Civic Engagement (CDCE) add our heartfelt well wishes to *Veterans' Voices* on your 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We are thrilled to share this Diamond-Year celebration with you, given that this is also the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VA Voluntary Service (VAVS), now CDCE, **and** the Veterans Health Administration.

To have a vision that has endured for 75 years is certainly an accomplishment, but to have a legacy of service that has put that vision into action since 1946 is an astonishing feat, one which has benefited an unfathomable number of Veterans. VA has fully embraced the principles of whole health and continues to transform its care delivery model to be less focused on "What's the matter with you?". Instead, we are putting more emphasis on "What matters to you?". This seemingly small but significant shift relies on Veterans learning and utilizing practices that help them remain focused on their vision, dreams, and becoming their best selves. You, better than most, are well aware that a very effective way to make those life-changing discoveries is through the practice of writing. *Veterans' Voices* has been and continues to be a well-positioned resource to helping us reach Veterans, having been on the forefront since heroes began returning home from the Second World War.

We consider ourselves very fortunate to have you as a partner in service to our nation's Veterans. For 75 years, the Veterans Health Administration has been a leader in providing world-class health care and services to America's heroes. For 75 years, VAVS provided a platform for volunteers and community organizations to serve within VA hospitals. And for 75 years, *Veterans' Voices* has been a steady presence in supplementing that care through the generous donation of magazines and the facilitation of creative and therapeutic writing by Veterans. Together, we have become a foundational resource for promoting health, healing and well-being for our Veterans, their families and caregivers.

In salute of your 75 years of service, we offer our sincere congratulations and best wishes for your continuing legacy for decades to come.

Sincerely,

Sabrina C. Clark, Ph.D.  
Director, VA Center for Development &  
Civic Engagement

# Visual Arts Initiative



## Flowers on Hold

By Penny Lee Deere

— Albany, NY

The editors of *Veterans' Voices* asked for your visual art and Dr. Robert Rubin, Los Angeles, Calif., promised to help us publish that art in full color.

Our writers and readers responded with generous amounts of artwork and we are pleased to share it with you in this ongoing section of the magazine.

We believe that this promotion complements VVWP's writing as therapy mission and offers the veteran another means of healing through artistic expression. Please continue to send us your artwork as well as your writing.

— *The Editors*



## Three Buddies

By Jack Tompkins

— Marshalltown, IA



**Thy Will**

By Daniel Hawk  
— Chesapeake, VA



**God's Touch of Sunshine**

By Gene Groner  
VA Medical Center - Kansas City, MO



**If Only Everyone Saw the Glory**

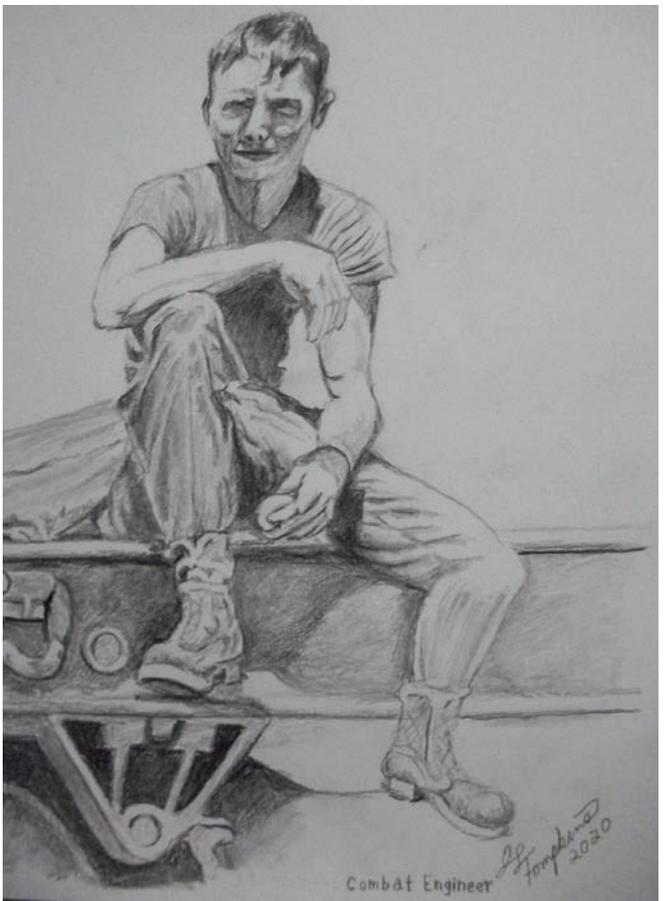
By Jacquelyn Cranford  
— Cordova, TN



**Poppy Array**  
 By Penny Lee Deere  
 — Albany, NY



**Mount Suribachi**  
 By Jeffrey Saarela  
 — Iron Mountain, MN



**One Young Soldier**  
 By Jack Tompkins  
 — Marshalltown, IA



**Emotions 2021**  
 By Diane Wasden  
 — Augusta, GA



**Flamingos in Miami**  
By Katherine Iwatiw  
— Kansas City, MO



**Pyramid**  
By Demetrius Kastrenakes  
— Miami, FL



**KOG Art Card**  
By Gary Walker  
— Leawood, KS



**Strange 3**  
By Daniel Strange  
— San Antonio, TX



**Welcome Sight**

By Ty Andrews  
— Lincoln, NE



**Drawing 5**

By Bruce McClain  
— Blue Springs, MO



**Art 3**

By Daniel Strange  
— San Antonio, TX

# Homecoming

By Christopher G. Bremicker  
VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN

Specialist Fourth class Bradford's mother sat at her vanity and put on lipstick as she looked in the mirror. She wore a black bra, black underwear, and a black slip. She looked at her eyes, noticed they were dead, and her crow's feet showed. She put on eye shadow and, with mascara, darkened her eyelashes. She applied rouge to her cheeks and finished with powder from her makeup pad.

Clean shaven, smelling of aftershave, and wearing a charcoal gray suit, starched, white shirt, black tie, and a fedora, Bradford's father came into his parents' bedroom. His mother stood up, pulled a black dress over her head, and turned her back to his father so he could zip up the dress. Then his father helped her into her full-length beaver coat. She grabbed the black, beaded purse off the bed, and said, "Let's go bury our son."

A major in the Army, in a dress blue uniform, with ribbons on his chest and medals hanging from it, waited in their living room for them to come downstairs. He held in his hand his hat and a folder with papers in it. Bradford's parents appeared, locked the door of the house behind them, and followed the major to the car with tinted windows that waited in the street below. No one said a word as they walked down the steps that



Bradford's father built out of granite and concrete when the family first moved into the neighborhood, when Bradford was seven years old.

The house, with picture windows on both floors, was on a hill where, as a boy, Bradford once slid on a toboggan in winter, hit their family's car and broke open his lower lip that needed stitches from the doctor who lived next door. A soldier in dress blues held the door of the dark car for Bradford's father. The major held the door for Bradford's mother, and the soldier in dress blues then drove them to the airport to meet their son as he came out of the cargo hold of the DC-10 from New Jersey to Minneapolis, where he was born and where he would be buried today.

The car sped along West Seventh Street, onto the freeway, then turned toward the airport. A service road took them through a security gate and onto the runway. The soldier who drove the car was silent all the way. The major presented the papers at the gate; the guard admitted them, and the car sped along the runway, approaching an airplane tethered to the terminal. Several men in uniform stood near the door of the cargo hold of the plane and waited for Bradford to be brought out.

Inside the concourse, above the man in the grey suit, woman in the fur coat, and soldiers on the runway, stood a middle-aged couple. They watched through the window as a casket covered

by an American flag was removed from the plane. The soldiers held the casket and in unison walked it to a hearse that waited on the runway. The man in the grey suit held the woman in the fur coat who leaned against him and cried convulsively. It was a gray day and the clouds promised rain.

The man in the concourse behind the window told the woman, "That could have been me." She put her arm around him and held him as he began to cry for the fallen soldier, his parents, and the men who had died without him. He was a Vietnam War veteran and remembered his comrades whose names appeared on The Wall. They watched the event on the runway, then boarded their plane for Washington D.C.

The major in uniform escorted Bradford's father and mother to the car with tinted windows, which followed the hearse off the runway. They rode in the back seat of the dark car and held each other as the two vehicles left the airport through a security gate and drove to the national cemetery nearby. Their son was under an American flag in the back of the vehicle that drove ahead of them.

This funeral convoy approached the cemetery of countless white gravestones beneath trees and in rows in the grass, extending miles into the distance. A large crowd of family and friends gathered at the gravesite, and cars lined the road deep into the cemetery where Bradford was to be laid to rest. His mother approved of the trees in the area, knowing her son loved the outdoors. They both loved to golf because the game was played outside and golf courses were beautiful places to be. The rain held off and no one opened an umbrella.

A color guard waited for them and the

minister was already at the pit where Bradford's body was going. The color guard removed the casket from the hearse and placed it on the rack that held it above the grave. The edges of the American flag fluttered in the slight breeze. The color guard stood behind the crowd at parade rest with their rifles ready.

The minister wore his vestments and held a Bible. Bradford's parents did not know the minister but hired him for propriety's sake. The minister said a few words, something about the bravery of our men and women in uniform, their service to their country, and the ultimate sacrifice Bradford had made. The last rites were good and, given the minister did not know Bradford or his family, they served the purpose, satisfying everyone who was there.

The color guard fired a three-volley salute that reverberated in the still, heavy air. The commands of the sergeant major broke the silence between the discharges of the guns. Two soldiers folded the American flag into a triangle and gave it to Bradford's mother, who gripped the flag to her breast and cried uncontrollably.

The crowd dispersed, after talking in groups, some not seeing each other in years. Bradford's friends hugged each other and said goodbye, some returning to distant towns. A lot of people were present, since Bradford and his parents had many friends and a large extended family. Despite the size of the crowd, the gathering was quiet, even after the ceremony, and people began drifting to their cars.

The minister asked Bradford's father if the family wanted him to come to the reception. His father said no; the family wanted privacy. Bradford's immediate family from all parts of the country

gathered for dinner at the house of his grandmother, where all such gatherings occurred. His grandmother cooked roast beef, and his parents, uncles, aunts, brother, and sister sat at the dining room table. His cousins sat on a couch or at card tables set up for the overflow.

The gathering was somber. Bradford's father spoke softly to people in attendance, and his mother was catatonic, stupefied that her son was not there, enjoying the company of his relatives and the food that was out of this world. Instead, her son, with blond hair, blue eyes, and long eyelashes, was covered by gravediggers' dirt. His mother sat stoop-shouldered at the table, not saying a word, and everyone passed the dishes gently and quietly, afraid to break the mood of unspeakable grief. His uncles could not believe Bradford was gone. His sister, who felt it most, put up a good front, and his brother got ready to take over as head of the family.

"I don't want to be a Gold Star Mother!" Bradford's mother suddenly said. "My son! My son! Where are you?"

His mother began to lean on his father, then slid from her chair. His father grabbed her as her head hit the table, and she collapsed into his arms. "She's having a breakdown!" someone said. "Call an ambulance!"

Bradford's grandmother got his mother to sit up and drink some water and then walked her to the kitchen, where his father held her in his arms and said, "Anne! Anne!"

"You'll hold me up, won't you, Paul?" she said, and smiled up at Bradford's father, out of desperation, grief, and love. His father saw the light come back in her eyes and knew she had returned from the abyss. The party continued and broke up at dawn.

# Cathay Post 384

By CJ Reeves

VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

Nestled in San Francisco's Chinatown is an American Legion post with a unique distinction. Historic Cathay Post 384 is the city's only post that owns the building it occupies. But its distinctions don't stop there.

The building in the 1500 block of Powell Street belongs to the 89-year-old Cathay Post 384 and has housed it for over 70 years. In that time, it has become a bulwark of the community.

The post rents out the first floor to an art gallery. The basement is leased to a club. Additional outreach to the community is done by renting the space out to a church on Sundays. Supporting the neighborhood is key, so the Boy Scouts use the meeting hall for free. Cathay Post also holds tai chi classes the mornings before the monthly meetings.

As a Chinatown icon, Cathay Post 384 is the face of the American Legion in San Francisco. When the Chinese Historical Society needs a veteran's point of view, they look to Cathay Post for solutions. Both the Chinese American Citizens Alliance and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association value the integrity and mission of Cathay Post and regularly partner in community events and celebrations. The city calls on Cathay Post for many civic functions and parades. Cathay Post 384 has long been a staple in the Italian Heritage Parade, Memorial Day Parade and Veterans Day Parade. This kind of positive exposure is effective in



drawing people to the post and thus may be considered a recruitment tool.

Having your own space automatically creates a homey and welcoming environment. This is a singular advantage to owning your building. It's local, it's historic, and therefore many people find this comforting. This atmosphere is another useful recruitment tool. People yearn for a sense of belonging. Cathay Post accomplishes this by having a lunch buffet at every meeting. Good food plus good conversation equals a comfortable and inviting setting. People feel safe and secure.

It is in this setting that people are open to joining the American Legion. This is nothing short of a winning combination, not a magical formula for recruiting. There is a strong sense of comradery, commitment and belonging as a result of simply blending great folks with good food in an attractive facility. As a result, people want to become a member of the post. This itself is a successful tool for recruiting. It is during these luncheons

when relationships are forged. Guests are welcomed and invited to attend. Members who prepare the food are called support members, because the post has no auxiliary.

The members of Cathay Post 384 are ultimately what make the American Legion appealing. It is only on a personal level where a profound connection is made. This can only happen when there is mutual admiration and a high degree of respect.

After 88 years, the post elected the first female commander, Helen Wong. She has volunteered tirelessly for the interests of all veterans. She is actively involved with six veterans' organizations. She ran the Veterans' Success Center for more than a decade as a volunteer. She is only interested in helping veterans. This has earned her much respect as a model Legionnaire. She strives to get veterans involved by encouraging them. What's important is that she leads by example. She constantly listens without judgment as they tell her their story.

Finally, the Cathay Post is comprised of many Legionnaires who are kind, caring and compassionate. It is this temperament, coupled with an inviting, iconic neighborhood home, which allows new members to feel welcomed and honored to participate. Other posts are encouraged to borrow these best practices of Cathay Post 384. It would go a long way to maintaining members and bolstering member rosters of all posts of the American Legion.

## Let My Life Speak

*By Jason Kirk Bartley*

*VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH*

Jesus, let my life speak.  
Lord, work through me,  
so people can see your goodness  
spilling over out of my heart.  
Help me to be your beacon of light, dear Jesus.  
Let my life tell your story without uttering a word.  
Let your love guide my tongue  
and bring joy and peace to my heart.  
Help me to kindle fires in the hearts of others  
with your word, and uplift the downtrodden.  
Lead others to the cross through my example.  
Let my life speak, O Lord, to those who are in need,  
those who are in darkness drowning in sin,  
those who are on the outside looking in.  
As Jesus reaches out His hand to pull them ashore,  
let my life speak, speak life forevermore.

## Highway

*By Anthony Kambeitz*

*VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

Now I've been so many places  
Places in time  
Like choosing between lemon or  
lime.  
The trouble with you  
Is the trouble with me.  
You've got two good eyes  
But you still don't see!  
There are so many things  
That feel so nice,  
But ask yourself  
Can you really afford the price?  
North  
South  
East  
West  
Right now New York feels the best,  
Best to me  
So it seems.  
Happiness fills my latest dreams.  
No need to head to the 7-Eleven,  
I'm on the highway,  
The "Highway to Heaven!"

## Casualties

*By Daniel Allen*

*—Port Richey, FL*

For war has no "true" winners,  
Only the brave survivors.  
Victory can be bittersweet,  
As civilians also lay in defeat.

Pain is felt when we see the wounded and dead,  
For the hurt at each home is also ahead.  
Many are touched with each shattered life;  
We give our support in times of strife.

Many have laid down their lives for others,  
Ensuring our freedom and that of our brothers.  
Arlington Cemetery is full of these sacrifices,  
But service of our country usually surfaces.

We came together from around the world,  
Offering our skills as our flag was unfurled.  
Our lives at home may have been put on hold,  
But we came to heal the wounds of our bold.

We always prepare for the very worst,  
To be at our best for combat's first.  
For freedom and justice are not cheap,  
But thank God the numbers weren't steep.

## In the Light of Christmas

*By John E. Jones*

*VA Medical Center—Milwaukee, WI*

Jesus Christ is the child who came to be.  
His Spirit lives within everyone; this we can see.  
We rejoice at his coming, both now and then.  
His holy birth we commemorate; He never sinned.  
Joyous church bells ring and ring;  
Within their walls, happy people sing  
Of Christmas Day's blessed meaning,  
And the joy the day is bringing.  
His Spirit is within us at all times,  
Showing us how to be thoughtful and kind.  
The inspiration of Christ reaches every soul;  
His passion and hope for us were foretold.  
His righteous love is for everyone's sake;  
Our belief gives us everlasting faith.  
We exchange gifts and celebrate farther,  
Through parades and feasting like no others.  
Always uplifting our souls and minds,  
Jesus Christ is commemorated through all times.

*Typist: Marybeth Matthews*

# The Grouse Road

*By Christopher G. Bremicker*

*VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN*

I drove west of town along the paved, curving, narrow, and dipping road that passed the cemetery and the small house of the people I knew from the coffee shop. I passed a big hill with maple trees past their peak of color and now red-brown, yellow and beige. The trees looked like an aged artist's palette.

I took a hard left at the road leading to the greenhouse that was now closed. I drove straight, past houses so small they seemed unlivable. I turned right and drove past posted land and down to where the dirt road started that led to where I hunted grouse.

I parked the car on the grass beside the pavement. I got out my shotgun and loaded it. I began to walk into the woods.

I could tell from the tracks leaving the puddles that the road had been driven the day before. There were rocks in the road. The road curved through the woods past a small duck pond and between low banks and up to a junction. The road led across a clear-cut to the right and through another clear-cut on the left and into the woods again. I went left through the high grass of the road between the poplar saplings of the big clear-cut.

The road re-entered the woods. A small road cut off to the right. It was overgrown and covered with yellow leaves and surrounded by pine trees on the right and hardwoods on the left. The sun was out, and streaks of light cut through the leaves.

The road went uphill past a fallen white pine and leveled on a ridge of oak and maple above a floor of saplings and yellow and red leaves. The road ended at a big, packed-dirt logging road. I took the logging road north to where I knew there would be grouse.

I found the road I was looking for and cut onto it, off the logging road. The small road became dense. The trees were close on the side; the grass on the road was high, and green clover grew close and tight in the ruts. The road had not been driven.

The road fell away and took a sharp left at a swamp of cattails surrounded by jack pines. Brown, withered ferns covered the road. A big rock like the prow of a ship stood alongside the road. The ferns continued. Thorny, red-leafed branches on the road tore at my pants. A big clearing of brown ferns appeared at a bend. A partridge exploded out of the clearing.

Gray and brown, the bird flew straight up, wings whirring like a helicopter, toward a stand of pines. I carried my gun loosely and fumbled to get it up for a shot. The bird made it to the woods before I could aim.

A shot rang out, reverberated through the woods, and the bird dropped. A man in a red and black wool shirt stood in the road, looked at me for a moment, then walked into the woods to find the grouse. The bird flapped in the brush, its wings fluttered furiously, and the man reached down to pick it up. He wrung its neck and put the bird in the back of his shooting vest.

"Nice shot!" I called to him.

"You were behind him."

"I couldn't get my gun up in time."

"Let's see if there are any grouse up ahead."

We walked along the road and he introduced himself. "Are you the owner of the Johnson Wax Company?" I asked.

"Yes, I am."

"I've lived here 10 years and never met you. My name is Chris Bremicker. I am Anne and Paul's son."

"I know who you are. I saw you once with your parents at Metro's Ski Inn."

"You are a good shot."

"You have to swing with the bird," he said and demonstrated with a swing of his gun while he swiveled at his hips.

"I'll try it," I said, and practiced a swing or two with my hips.

"You drink too much," he said.

"How did you know?"

"You have a reputation in town. I'm glad you are doing something besides sitting on a barstool."

"Is it that obvious?"

"It is to me."

The road continued past a black mud puddle and up a steep hill with small pines

and tall grass. I caught the silhouette of a grouse in the grass, aimed at its head, and shot. The dead grouse was a warm clump of feathers in my hand, and I put it in my shirt. The tail feathers stuck out between the buttons. I looked around to show Sam Johnson my grouse, but he was gone. I figured he went back along the road.

From a hill, the road dipped down through fallen yellow leaves and then up a slow rise. Two partridges broke from beside a tree near a clearing in the road. They were in the open. I shot at one and missed.

The road continued through more small pines and high grass and up a very steep hill. I was near the end of the road. On the left was a large park-like woods of old white pines and a few tall, thin poplars with leaves at the top and fallen trees overgrown with grass. A steep ridge formed an amphitheater.

A grouse flew up from behind one of the white pines. It flew through the amphitheater and I shot and missed. I

stepped into the woods. Another bird flew out of the leaves. It swerved through the trees and slanted up into one of the high poplars. I missed that one, too.

I waited. A third bird took off and headed for the ridge. I was unprepared for it and did not shoot. I took another step, and another grouse flew up and headed for the opening in the amphitheater to the left. I aimed, shot, and the bird fell dead. "Nice shot!" someone called, but I turned around and saw no one. I put the grouse in my shirt with the other bird. The road was one mile long.

At the café, I told my story about running into Sam Johnson while grouse hunting. Bunk Knudson and Myron Nelson looked down the counter at me in amazement.

"Sam Johnson's been dead 10 years," Bunk said.

"He was one of the richest men in the state," Myron said.

"His wife killed him, but they could never

prove it," Bunk said.

"Never found his body."

"Why did she kill him?" I asked.

"Wanted to leave town with her boyfriend."

"Who was her boyfriend?"

"Ron McMillan, who owned the gas station."

"Did they leave town?"

"Went to Mexico."

"Made the New York Times."

"They say he comes back to haunt us. Makes sure everyone behaves."

"Then why don't we?"

"Our behavior is too much for him."

"Poor Sam." I went back to the road but never saw Sam Johnson again. On a brighter note, I stayed out of Metro's Ski Inn forever.

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## Cat, Vase, Flowers

*By Penny Lee Deere*  
*VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

Looking through a window, resident unknown.  
Seeking something that can not be found,  
A cat on the window sill looks content.  
Is it a trap, this scene of tranquility?  
The creature is looking into the room,  
Seeking something that can not be found.  
A light tap would stir this peaceful portrait  
The second the heart takes a breath,  
Seeking something that can not be found.  
The creature would jump from the tap,  
The vase would fall and break,  
Seeking something that can not be found.  
The flowers would be thrown about wildly on the floor,  
Arrangement no more, calm no, serenity lost,  
Seeking something that can not be found.  
It just is.

## I'm Thinking Today, My Love

*By Anthony Coccozza*  
*VA Medical Center—Los Angeles, CA*

I'm thinking today, my love,  
Of all that we've shared,  
All the years you made me happy  
By showing me you cared.  
You've given me encouragement  
By brightening my way.  
You've listened to all of my problems  
And always knew what to say.  
I'm thinking today, my love,  
Of all the sweet things you've done,  
All the memories we've known,  
All the laughter and fun.  
And I just wanted to say,  
On this day we're apart,  
Oh, my darling, yes, I love you  
True with all of my heart.

## Lost and Found

By Lenny Ellis  
—Madison, WI

Emotions, there are plenty.  
They differ in variety.  
We hold them in,  
We let them out  
Like turning on a water spout.

We love  
We laugh  
And then we cry.  
We steal glances  
Then we sigh.

We think  
We feel  
We burst with pride  
And empty zeal.

Upon first glance  
The world seems pure.  
But when we touch,

We're so unsure.

We hide in the shadows  
Afraid of fear.  
The reasons why  
Are so unclear.

We're Spartan  
With our feelings,  
Afraid to let them show.  
But this is life  
With time to grow,  
To quench our thirst,  
Let feelings flow.

With arrogance  
We mock the soul.  
We're mesmerized  
By greedy goals.

How to listen  
We don't know.  
Fire crackles  
And winds blow.  
We're so deceived

By earthly gains.  
Who am I?  
At last remains.

Upon my brow  
The sweat appears.  
I tremble with remorse  
At long lost years,  
For having cried  
Those silent tears.

And now I gaze  
Upon the stars.  
I'm no different  
Than they are.

I have a light  
Which now shines through.  
My naked soul  
Appears to you.

---

## Feelings

By Lenny Ellis  
—Madison, WI

I wish I had a girlfriend,  
Someone smart and nice,  
Someone who would listen  
To the poetry I write.

Someone I could count on,  
Someone I could trust,  
Someone to believe in me  
And say to me  
Write! My love, you must!

I know I write for me,  
Mainly 'cause I must.  
It's my ambition  
In this life,  
More important than is lust.

But how I wish to share  
My feelings day to day  
With someone to encompass  
Everything I say.

I write about the themes in life  
Which are close to me  
Whether it be mirth  
Or plain philosophy.

I've written about love,  
Of what it is to share  
With someone that you need  
And show how much you care.

Feelings are aplenty,  
Important to express.  
Instead of stuffing them,  
Get them off your chest.

Good or bad  
I always feel something.  
Pleasure, pain and solitude,  
Anger, sadness, gratitude,

Misery and pain,  
Happiness and glory,  
I have a lot to say.  
With rhyme I tell my stories.

I'm glad I learned  
To read and write

And practice at this skill  
Which for me is ecstasy,  
An overwhelming thrill.

I know it's not important  
For everyone to read  
A poem written in the night  
When everything is still.

But to me it **is** important  
To write about the soul,  
To venture deep inside myself  
And realize a goal.

**My** goal in life is singular,  
Not merely just survive.  
I want to write with feeling  
To know that I'm alive.

# I'm Santa Claus

*By Tom Lauterback*

*VA Medical Center—Elgin, IL*

I'm Santa Claus. Not one of Santa's "helpers," not an elf, not a toy builder. What's that you say? Santa lives at the North Pole, while I live in Illinois? Doesn't matter.

I know that someone delivers toys to good little girls and boys worldwide. Sounds exhausting to me. When I slip my red suit on, I'm thankful that I don't have to freeze my derriere off flying around the world, let alone handling the labor-management negotiations with all those elves and keeping track of the reindeers' medical records at the vet's office since no one wants to hear about late deliveries due to a sick reindeer. Sounds like a lot of work. No thank you.

But I know I'm Santa. White hair, check. White beard, check. Red suit and hat plus black boots? You guessed it. It's all in place. Every time I slip them on, I become more firmly convinced that I am the true Santa Claus.

When I first slipped on the red suit, in the '80s, I didn't have white hair or a beard, so those had to be added. I visited a number of nursing homes. Since I was new to being Santa, I had no idea what to expect. I had no presents to bring, just an image from the senior citizens' past. A hearty Ho! Ho! Ho! and a big hug all around. It turned out to be one of the most rewarding days of my life, even if it did leave me with a tear in my eye.

For whatever reason, I didn't don the suit again until the past dozen years. I'll blame job pressures, kids, mortgages, marriage, more marriage and still more marriage for the interruptions.

I moved to a Del Webb community after I retired, and they needed a Santa to provide a lap for the hundreds of grandchildren to sit on while explaining to Kris Kringle that they had been good and unfaithfully obeyed their parents, thus deserving the extensive list of toys they'd prepared.

Some years I managed to find other opportunities to ply the Santa trade, others not. But I always looked for someone who was in need of a "right jolly old elf." Have suit, will travel.

All I can tell you is that when I look into the eyes of a small child, just as when I looked into the eyes of octogenarians so many years ago, I know I am Santa to them, if just for a moment I can cause their hearts to skip a beat, cause the trepidation associated with sitting on Santa's lap, give the children small presents and stoke their hopes for bigger ones on Christmas Eve.

Yes, my friend, even if only for an afternoon or an evening, I am most assuredly Santa.

## Grandma Loves Chocolate

*By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.*

*VA Medical Center—Hampton, VA*

My grandma  
Is the sweetest lady I know  
With good reason.  
Grandma is sweet, kind, generous and lovely.  
My grandma is the sweetest of the sweet  
Cuz Grandma has a sweet tooth.  
I used to wonder why  
I love candy so much.  
I used to wonder why  
I had such an incredible sweet tooth.  
Cuz my grandma is so sweet,  
She has a sweet tooth also.  
My grandma and I were just sitting around  
As she pulled out this bag  
Filled with a bunch of little silver things in it.  
Little did I know  
Grandma had a big surprise for me.  
She pulled out this tiny little silver thing,  
Unwrapped it, and when I looked,  
It was brown and shaped like a kiss.  
Grandma said, "You want one?"  
I said, "Yeah sure, Grandma."  
I took this round thing  
That looked like a kiss. I put it in my mouth.  
I didn't know what this thing was,  
But I sure found out what it tasted like.  
This little thing I put in my mouth  
Just exploded with wild delight.  
It tasted so good I just lost my mind!  
"Grandma, what is this?" She said, "It's chocolate."  
I didn't know what chocolate was.  
I didn't care; I just wanted some more.  
I said, "Grandma, can I have some more?"  
She said, "Sure."  
From that moment on,  
Chocolate and I became best friends.  
I love chocolate!  
But I love my grandma more.  
From that day forward,  
Every time I eat chocolate,  
I remember my sweet, lovely grandma.  
She is the sweetest lady of all  
Cuz she loves chocolate,  
And Grandma loves me, too.

# My Military Summer

By James William Miller

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

What did it take to graduate from the U.S. Army boot camp, also called basic training, at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C. in the summer of 1969?

I remember the salt tablets recruits were given so many days to replenish the salt in our bodies after sweating so much because the temperature seemed like boiling.

I had a heart murmur. I was questioned if I wanted to be released after I had been examined after marching double time to the rifle range. I said no. Instead, they gave me a new responsibility to ride to the rifle range in the ammunition van. I was somewhat scared that it would blow up. I was disappointed to hear that one recruit committed suicide on the rifle range.

Written tests were sometimes given. I particularly remember the word order that was the right answer on one of them.

I heard some recruits had stolen U.S. military medals, and they were trying to sell them to other recruits. They were thrown out of military service with dishonorable discharges.

The staff was not always the best. Some recruits had big blisters on their hands



after being ordered to do push ups outside in 103-degree weather. I got damnation myself because I forgot to salute the bursar officer before I received my paycheck.

I must have made up for it because I was put in charge of our barracks cleanliness contest. With that, a nickle had to bounce two inches on tightly made beds.

The biggest obstacle was “drag ass” hill slanted at a 60-degree angle. At the bottom, we had classes, such as with the pogo stick, and other combat events.

As the three and one half months were coming to an end for stadium field graduation, I missed it because my father died in Port Charlotte, Fla., and I was given two days to attend the funeral. But I still graduated.

## Shore Lines

By Daniel Paicopulos

—San Diego, CA

Water has always calmed me,  
extending farther,  
deeper than I could see.  
I have often awakened,  
here, near the border with Mexico,  
with nowhere to go,  
feeling the onshore flow,  
okay with the grayness,  
knowing the sun would bake it off,  
create a gentle, wispy sky,  
here near my home,  
in the sweet by and by.  
Still inspired, but  
less calmed now,  
remembering the beaches of sand  
covered by the rising seas,  
climate changing the shape of the land.  
I stand and think,  
oh, to be a child at the ocean,  
barefoot, joy-filled,  
sand-covered, smelling the salt,  
nostalgic to a fault.  
I close my eyes, realize  
I am just a drop  
in the sea of life.  
Then I recall  
I am also a part of the Infinite.  
Then I remember to laugh.

## No Decorations

By CJ Reeves

VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

When all the world is weary  
And sadness fills your heart,  
Think of him who died for you.  
He wore no purple heart.

No star was on his gentle breast,  
He wore no stripes of gold.  
A crown of thorns was on his head  
With this Christmas Day.

Now he sits upon his throne,  
A king, supreme, divine.  
The foe to evil everywhere,  
The friend to all mankind.

## Need More Love

By Ronald P. Grella

VA Medical Center—Wilkes-Barre, PA

Love Is A Quality From God He Puts In Humankind.  
We Need More Of It In These Troubled Times.  
We Have To Show We Care For One Another And Be Kind.  
There's Just Too Much Hate That Separates The Human Race.  
We Have To Come Together And Get Along.  
Otherwise, We're Just Going To Keep Having Wars.  
It Hurts God To See When We Live Divided.  
That's Why We Have To Obey The Almighty.  
God's Kingdom Is The Answer To All Our Problems.  
When It Comes Nobody Knows The Hour.  
So Be Prepared To Inherit All Of God's Blessings.  
Then You Will Not Miss Out To Live Forever.

## Compassion and Love: Are These Now Lost Words?

By Helen Anderson Glass

VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

In days gone by it seemed to be  
there was more compassion and love.  
People cared for one another  
and every man was a "brother."  
In our quest for fame and fortune,  
we now don't seem to even care  
about the misfortune and suffering  
of those around us everywhere.  
"It's about time that we used wisdom,  
showed courage and compassion universally,  
putting our own needs aside for a while  
and heeding the importance of these three."  
We must again show our fellow man,  
before it is too late,  
that faith, hope and love now take the place  
of indifference and hate.  
Sympathetic concern for others  
and aiding in their misfortune and suffering  
will benefit not only them but you as well.  
And who knows what other joy this will bring?

## Relapse? Reset!

By Jennifer Graf

—Middleburg, PA

I am drowning in these emotions that are attacking  
from all sides.  
Do I stop? Do I quit? Do I run? Do I hide?  
Which direction do I take? Which path do I follow?  
I'm exhausted: I want to stop, sit in my misery and wallow.  
Just a short time ago I was happy with every aspect  
of my being.  
How quickly it has turned into torment: I am paralyzed  
and grieving.  
Each struggle took a piece of me every single day.  
All the work I had done went to hell where it stayed.  
I lost every tool I had worked so hard to learn.  
I turned left, I turned right; in the fire my tools were burned.  
I don't want to hurt myself or to hurt anyone.  
I just don't want to feel these emotions or think  
of the damage they have done.  
Mindfulness: one of the best tools I had once mastered.  
My mind tells me, however, I am a complete and utter disaster.  
Stay in the present moment and be nonjudgmental.  
The words that won't be silent are not quiet and gentle.

STOP!

Focus on my truth at this very instance.  
Silence these fears; keep them in the distance.  
My truth is that I'm wise, loving, and giving.  
This truth I need to focus on to get back to living.  
Recognize situations for what they really are.  
Don't take on the blame; you have come too far.  
Focus on myself and what I need.  
Validation, proceed with heed.  
This is one speck of sand through the hourglass.  
Let the sorrow and self-doubt pass.  
Take this opportunity to learn and grow.  
Don't let this moment cloud what you already know.  
Healing is a journey that is not easy to travel.  
Stand strong; don't let yourself unravel.  
This was not a relapse or failure on my part.  
Reset! This is a new day, a fresh start.

# New Year's Celebration

By Shon Pernice  
—Moberly, MO

New Years—a universal event that affects all time zones. But how would one celebrate in the middle of a war, during the deadliest year for U.S. troops in Iraq? Let me tell you how we did it.

We were more than halfway through our one-year deployment. Christmas had solemnly passed, and the next major holiday was New Year's Eve.

At home, I love to host New Year's parties. Everyone is happy, silly, and the atmosphere is always electric. I want to bring that energy to the troops. Well, at least to the extent that nobody gets hurt. We are in the Diyala Province of Iraq. Everyone carries a firearm, and alcohol is against regulations. Adapt, improvise, and overcome--the U.S. military motto.

Forward Operating Base (FOB) Grizzly contains approximately 1,000 people--U.S. military, coalition troops, civilian contractors and a nearby refugee camp. We are situated on the outskirts of the city of Ashraf, which is under the control of the People's Mujahedeen of Iran. As the Troops Medical Clinic (TMC) non-commissioned officer in charge, I want to vaccinate the FOB with a healthy dose of fun. My celebration supplies are limited to a few party poppers that emit confetti. I need to get creative with what I can acquire.

I first get the word out to select individuals about a New Year's "get-together" behind



the TMC. I tell a few soldiers from the 28th Military Police and the 73rd Combat Support Company. I do not want a huge crowd due to the possibility of it attracting a mortar attack. Every party needs a bonfire. It is the end of December, a bit chilly, and everyone likes a good campfire. What a great opportunity to utilize the burn barrel that is used to destroy expired medications, documents and medical waste. In addition, I have some wooden pallets stacked up with nowhere to go. Issue solved for the bonfire.

The dining facility on the FOB has plenty of near-beer stocked in the coolers. The week before New Year's Eve, I instruct the medics to fill their uniform pockets with a few cans of near-beer every time they go eat. Alcohol is prohibited; however, this foul tasting, military-authorized fluid that produces copious amounts of urine will have to do. One medic who cannot stand near-beer gets creative and stocks up on small

containers of grape juice. The drink issue can be checked off.

Music has been taken care of by the younger medics. A hookah pipe, with apple tobacco, has been purchased at another military base during a convoy operation. We now have the items required for this secret mission of revelry.

The evening of Dec. 31 begins as a few soldiers trickled to the back area of the TMC. We are somewhat protected by the 16-foot high concrete T-walls that can absorb the impact of mortar rounds and missiles. A cement bunker is nearby in case of an attack along with HESCO barriers.

Remember, we are in a hostile war zone with al Qaeda, not in Times Square with Dick Clark.

One medic begins breaking the wooden pallets apart as I get the fire lit in the burn barrel. The younger medics play their favorite cd's on the boom box and the non-alcoholic drinks are passed around as the soldiers have their feet up, laughing and joking. This brings normalcy to a foreign land that is filled with death, destruction, and for some, a lifetime of twisted memories. I stoke the fire to where the flames get up to about 10 feet high. The warmth and crackle from the fire mesmerize us. This is a normal fire compared to the burning vehicles from the roadside bombs or the smell of cordite from military grade explosions.

These flames bring us serenity and a few more guests. A couple of soldiers from

the 1/3-5 Military Transition Team come over because of the columns of smoke they saw from the other side of the FOB. They think the TMC is on fire because it's an unusual time to be using a burn barrel. I invite these warriors to stay, relax, and take their minds off Iraq.

Next comes the lighting of the hookah pipe. This is similar to a water pipe or bong in the Western hemisphere. It is common to see men in the Middle East smoking on these devices that are straight out of a Cheech and Chong movie. For non-smokers like myself, it produces a light headed feeling. It is hilarious watching each soldier "hit" the pipe and then blow out a ridiculous amount of smoke.

Midnight is approaching, and one of the medics informs me of a covert plan about to occur. The soldiers on perimeter security at the five different checkpoints are going to pop off some flares at midnight. I decide to climb on the roof of the TMC to get a royal view of the event, but it is also a bit more dangerous by exposing myself. When the radio checks start at midnight, and each station reports that it is secure, the anticipation boils as if I was about to watch the ball drop. The second when the Tactical Operations Center gives the "all clear," five starburst flares in unison give us a sense of normalcy, a sense of control and a sense of home. The beauty of a U.S. military standard-issue flare bursting in the midnight sky and not meant for casualties to be evacuated is moving for me.

And those party poppers I have stashed in my pockets that I give to the other medics to pop off. Bits of confetti and sparkles rain down on the group. Happy New Year, smiles, and cheers are everywhere at that very moment.

My goal as a medic and an NCO was to bring some normalcy to an abnormal and dangerous place. Being far from home, missing loved ones, and losing some friends in combat had affected us all. For elevating morale to a small group of American warriors, Mission Accomplished: Bravo Zulu!

## I Walked Alone

*By Paul David Gonzales*

*VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM*

I walked alone through this life,  
Through thick and thin and miles of strife.

You people here in the States  
Closed your welcome gates.  
You called us names, spit in our face  
And put us through your prejudice pace.

We fought that war that aroused the nation  
to a purpose.  
It all seemed right on the surface.  
We fought so hard to win that war,  
Coming back to society's roar.

I'm not cry'n in my beer,  
So please don't think I want your RAH-RAH cheer.  
I took the hits on the chin,  
But I can still manage a grin.

It's the private sorrow that I hide;  
I keep it buried deep inside.  
No one wants to hear my story,  
So I'm not looking for any of your glory.  
I'll keep my sorrow in a place;  
I'll call it my private space.

Little did I know I wasn't alone.  
It was the Spirit of God that brought me home.

## The Cowboy Life!

*By William Shepherd*

*VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS*

Up and headed to the barn to saddle up  
Before the sun was even up.  
Long days in the saddle, fences to mend  
As my spurs jingle to the sound  
Of music in the wind.  
It will bring the day to an end.

Life on the ranch is the only life  
For a Cowboy like me!  
Yes, cutting wood for the stove in the winter  
And hunting in the high country for my food.  
The cold and the wind remind me of the life  
I choose and the freedom I live for.

# The Cleansing

By Tanya Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

A powerful storm is brewing.

Heavy dark clouds are rolling in;  
The trees sway in the gusty winds.

An ominous still fills the air.  
As the worst approaches, wildlife  
Scatters quickly for protection.

Rain streams rapidly from the sky  
In a deluge of water that  
Floods everything in its rage.

Thunder booms shaking the moist ground.  
Lightning streaks across the black sky  
Reflecting a frightening glow.

Slowly the fierce tempest recedes,  
Moving to a new location,  
Taking its destructive forces.

Left behind in its telltale wake  
Are tranquil blue skies and white clouds.  
A calm wind blows across the land.

The silence from the storm's passing  
Erupts with the sound of nature  
Seeking morsels bared by the storm.

Plants once brown and covered in death,  
Washed by the storm's abundant tears,  
Now glisten with their bright colors.

For in its destructive nature,  
The storm cleanses and purifies,  
Giving life through its savagery.

# Transformation

By William Martin Greenhut

VA Medical Center—Ossining, NY

I was a boy of the suburbs,  
never hunted, never saw a  
real gun. I'd had my share  
of fights, but fists were the  
only weapons I could ever  
imagine using. So, when I  
entered the Army, firearms  
were all new to me.

I went about learning  
to shoot the same way I  
thought about everything  
we were required to learn. I  
had to master it as quickly  
as I could to avoid the wrath of the  
drill instructors who seemed to be in  
competition as to who was the best  
at intimidating and breaking down  
recruits.

It became a mechanical exercise--  
loading, positioning, acquiring the  
target, squeezing the trigger, absorbing  
the recoil, readjusting the sights, do  
it all again. Put those bullets into the  
pasteboard targets.

By the time I arrived in Korea in my  
first posting as an infantry officer, I had  
fired M-14 and M-16 rifles, M-60 and  
.50-caliber machine guns, a 3.5-inch  
rocket launcher, a .45-caliber handgun  
and had learned how to call in artillery  
fire. Those things, in my mind, were far  
different and divorced from actually  
destroying living creatures.

Each evening we manned what was  
known as "The Barrier," a line of foxholes  
that stretched completely across the  
Korean peninsula. It was designed to  
prevent North Korean agents from  
infiltrating through the Demilitarized



Zone and into South Korea. To  
accomplish their mission, they did what  
they could to get around us and avoid  
detection. But they had changed tactics,  
aggressively attacking American troops.  
In the early morning of July 16, 1967,  
three young men in my company were  
killed by the North Koreans.

I was not on The Barrier that morning;  
we had four officers who rotated the  
responsibility. But I was in charge of  
the troops that evening. My command  
post, in which I would spend the next  
twelve or so hours, was situated atop  
a hill about 100 meters behind the  
line in an M-113 armored personnel  
carrier. Accompanying me was a platoon  
sergeant and two radio/telephone  
operators. Once I was certain that  
communications had been established  
with all my positions, as darkness  
descended I took up a post for awhile  
on the perimeter. The objective of all my  
weapons training, hoping to intercept,  
shoot and kill a human being, was  
foremost in my thoughts.

# Wonder Women vs. the Taliban

*By Melvin Garrett Brinkley  
VA Medical Center—Davis, CA*

I was deployed to Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003. My unit lost a Medical Evacuation team of six close to the village of Ghazni. They were attempting to rescue Afghan children. I couldn't talk about that tragedy for two years when I got back.

I guess that's why I daydream of a different scenario for Afghanistan when I watch the awful news these days. In my daydreams I fantasize about what we should have done, if we wanted to truly change the dynamics of that region. I firmly believe we should have disarmed all the men, and armed and trained the women. And then we should have fought alongside these units until they demonstrated they could lay down

their lives for each other and their country. Once that metric was ticked off, we should have stepped away, slowly. I know this is a John Brown sort of solution and that did not work out as he had planned but he was right—slavery is wrong and if no one else will fight for your freedom then you must find a way to do it for yourself.

I am well aware there are many problems with my daydream. To name a few, members of the U.S. military never had the level of access to Afghan women that what I propose needed. We were the invaders. No one trusted us. We weren't invited to liberate the Afghan women, not even by the women, because the

women do not have a voice much less a united voice in that country. Those rare exceptions are silent now, for good reasons. Also, most of the Afghan men would have sabotaged this plan by any means at their disposal, not just the Taliban. There are precedents for arming women. The Kurds did this with great success. Female Soviet snipers were a huge military asset during World War Two. The Israeli Defense Force has fully incorporated women as fighters.

My little fantasies comfort me, but for the Afghan women all they have left is a heap of ashes of what could have been.

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## One Hour Left in Christmas

*By Katherine Iwatiw  
VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO*

On this Christmas morning,  
there is a stillness on this porch  
which rests across from the cemetery.  
A nothingness—no sounds, no birds—is heard.  
Shadows of trees grown tall and lanky  
entertain me with their twists and bends.

On this Christmas Day,  
the wind whips circles around the trees  
and tosses crunchy, golden-dried leaves end over end  
across the street and then back again.  
Cars zoom past carrying happy families  
on their way to visit impatient relatives.  
It's been four years since I was last here;  
my phone sits in my pocket in case someone calls.  
I put my arm around the house dog; we sit, we watch, we wait.

On this Christmas night,  
party goers hasten home  
singing songs of drunken cheer  
with calm, warm winds  
at their backs, on my cheeks.  
I hug the house dog and wipe away my tears,  
one hour left in Christmas.

## The Beautiful Changes in Autumn

*By John E. Jones  
VA Medical Center—Milwaukee, WI*

This season of changes we find  
When fresh air outside uplifts the mind.  
Cool wind touches us; the sun brightly shines.  
Clear sky fills each day,  
As soaring geese migrate far away.

Leaves upon the trees appear orange and brown,  
And colorful scenery shows all around.  
Peaceful surroundings remain sound,  
As morning frost covers the ground.

The dry weather in fall settles and stays,  
And nature's greenery starts to fade.  
Daily the warmth is giving delight,  
But cool air reaches into the night.

We remember a time, yesterday's vision,  
While we meet outside in beautiful conditions.  
The sunlight spreads and we find  
Feelings of calmness coming to mind.

# White Light

By Paul James Nyerick

VA Medical Center—West Haven, CT

It started as the perfect evening.

Moonbeams slowly danced between glowing green fireflies, accentuating the subtle differences between the clarity of pure color. Night birds chirped melodically; while crickets and peepers synced themselves to the rhythms of this night of nights. Stars blinked while planets glowed. As I basked in the awe of this celestial experience, my eyes noticed that a storm was brewing on the western horizon. A soft rumble and intermittent changes in light could be seen or heard in the far away thickening cloud bank.

*Not to worry, there was no way anything would dare ruin this night's majesty. These visions reminded me of the beauty our planet has to offer.*

After a few meditative breaths, I was ready to enjoy a safe and restful slumber. Fast asleep, I peacefully experienced positive dreams of peace and love for my fellow beings I share this beautiful blue sphere with.

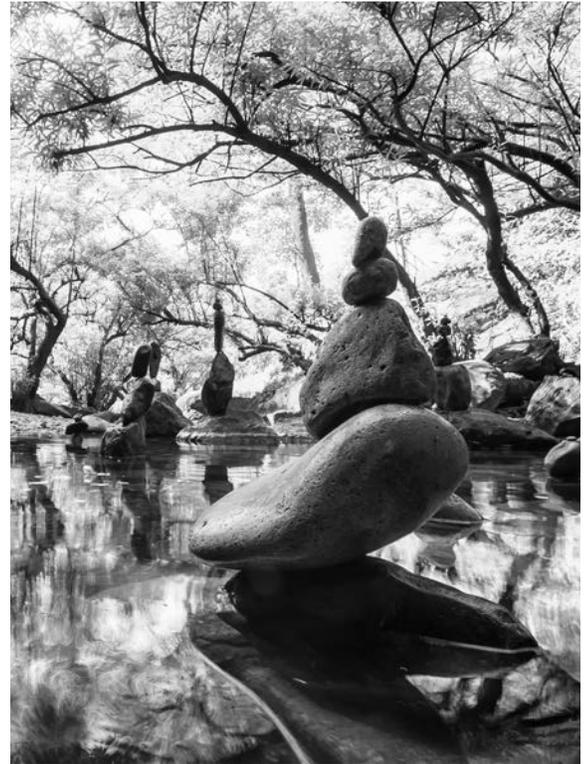
Subtle flashes of light penetrated my closed eye lids, while louder crackling sounds rumbled into my open ears. Eerie sights and sounds began to intensify, as though they were zeroing in on my euphoric state. Moment by moment, the sky began to lose its grip on the peace it had promised. I stood fast, hoping the siege would turn away from my dream, when in a long moment, salvos of vicious claps interspersed with rolling booms startled my psyche.

The storm took on a sinister path, when a sizzling bolt with a simultaneous

explosion landed right outside my open window. My mind levitated my body off the bed. An intense, pure white light enveloped everything. This pure white light felt as if it were sent by the hands of the gods. Thor did a number on changing the peacefulness into chaos and terror. The smell of the burning air filled the entire space between what was real or just an illusion. That second dripped with irony.

After witnessing that explosive fury, I was instantly transported back to that Buddhist monastery where I was a nanosecond away from an audience with the Grim Reaper. Yes, the pure white light, devoid of all color, from that dangerous cracking bolt mimicked the glow and thunder from that exploding shell not five feet from my shallow burrow. Wow, I thought I had a grip on that fateful night, but the Republic of South Vietnam has a menacing way of sneaking back into the picture.

After a few moments, the sky lit up again, but this time the barrage lasted more than a minute. The pure white light furiously glowed, while that deafening roar continued. After a while, the sky tore open with a deluge, drowning away all the negativity, and just as it began, it was all over. But wait, the power went out. I had about 12 hours to try to process the previous night. This just goes to show, that you can take the boy away from the jungle, but it's just temporary. Oorrah!



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## SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL

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### Sounds of Love

By Gene Allen Groner

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

High up in the sycamore tree  
The owl descends from flight.  
With skill he glides so gracefully  
To find his place at night.

As evening falls I hear him call,  
His voice so clean and clear,  
The echo so familiar now  
As though he were quite near.

Then, lo, I hear another voice,  
Not quite as loud as he,  
Nearby reply in loving tones.  
She sings so lovingly.

“I’m here, my love, draw close to me,”  
She coos in sweetest song.  
“I’ll wait for you in nearby tree;  
Our love will be so strong.”

And now there are two faithful owls,  
Twice as lovely they seem,  
Two souls in love above the world  
High up in the sycamore tree.

# Accidental Astronauts

By Lynn A. Norton

—Leawood, KS

After eons of mute obedience circling a celestial warden,  
Earth began to speak, sing. Clever creatures emerged  
from her womb, launched their voices  
on waves of energy into mechanical ears.

Wispy cacophony at first, nascent voices grew stronger  
with each dawn. Misbehaving waves escaped a prison of gravity,  
lanced through her embryonic shell, spoke to nearby stars.  
They listened politely. Did not respond.

*Who's on first? You throw the ball to first base.  
Then who gets it? Naturally. Naturally. Now you've got it.  
I throw the ball to Naturally.  
You don't! You throw it to Who! Naturally.*

Earth shouted into the void. Gibberish to all but her children.  
Visions suddenly appeared, self-portraits.  
Towering spires broadcast dancing beauty, ugliness,  
mischief onto glassy screens.

*Hi-ya kids, hi-ya hi-ya. Lucy, you've got some 'splaining to do.  
It's Howdy Doody time. One of these days Alice—pow!  
Straight to the moon. You bet your life.  
Come on down, you could be queen for a day.*

Pallor yields to rainbow hues. Loquacious satellites  
cast messages into the cosmos, like notes in bottles  
forever adrift on endless seas. Colorful renderings  
of beings marooned on an island in the Orion arm.

*The Minnow would be lost.  
To boldly go where no man has gone before.  
I'm coming to join you, Elizabeth. Bazinga!  
The truth is out there. Oh my God, they killed Kenny.  
Who loves ya, baby? Winter is coming!*

Ones and zeros, language of choice for Earth's children,  
stream into the universe from personal megaphones.  
Accidental astronauts, hurtling through space  
until the end of time. Proof of life? Death? Immortality?

*Stay tuned for previews of next week's exciting episode.*

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## SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL

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# Let the Music Play

By Lawrence W. Langman

—Portage, IN

Music has this soothing way to fill the empty holes  
As it burrows down deeply to entice your very soul.  
When you're down and lonely, just searching for a way,  
That certain song comes on and the words start to play.  
That feeling rushes over you, no matter how you felt,  
Searching, until it finds right where the pain has dwelt.  
Endorphins rush through every fiber inside your mind,  
Touching each emotion as though setting them to rewind,  
Slowly passing and waning away as the weight lessens,  
Clearing each unease, erasing, diminishing all depressions.  
As the chorus starts to play, your mind goes into automatic.  
Volume turned up loudly, you sing like a teenage fanatic.  
With every note you hit, your pitch sounds smooth like butter.  
Your mood is now complete as your heart goes all a-flutter.  
All the evils from your day have now all been forgotten  
like a dream.

Everything you've endured is now just a mountain in a stream.  
Into your driveway you arrive; another day, you have survived.  
Home life stands before you as two worlds are about to collide.  
With that song still playing, you dance as you sit  
behind the wheel.  
Out your window appear your children's faces,  
now so, so surreal.  
Gone, that mood you had as you left your job,  
and all that amassed stress.  
Now your mind is at ease, your soul at rest.  
Your life now is timeless.

# Natural Resources

By Scott Lehman

VA Medical Center—St. Louis, MO

I'm a practical man,  
digging through the trash can,  
saving aluminum,  
finding a piece of stainless,  
discovering brass.  
One man's trash is another man's treasure.  
Finding copper wire can be a great pleasure.  
So don't throw those old papers away.  
Bundle them up and put them out  
for the Boy Scouts this coming Saturday.  
We need a good snow.  
Maybe with the cold, the virus would go!

## Have You Heard

By Lawrence W. Langman  
—Portage, IN

It takes all types of people to make the world go round,  
trying to make it steady and trying to make it sound.  
We are an elective species of which we stand apart.  
Words can be used like knives and taken straight  
to the heart.  
Try to look at yourself in a mirror; see the reflection of self.  
Don't trivialize the importance of your ego,  
high upon your shelf.  
Everyone deserves a place on this celestial piece of rock,  
spinning in orbit around a fiery disc, watching the atomic clock.  
We all have differences from one another,  
some more than others.  
No matter race or social status, in the end we are all brothers.  
We have rocket scientists and street cleaners,  
all playing this game.  
Not one is above the other; we all end up in a grave the same.  
Life is hard enough to go through without someone  
calling you out.  
It's their own insecurities holding them back,  
a dark cloud of doubt.  
We need to accept one another with all our faults and failures.  
Children are always learning from watching adults' behaviors.  
Each and every one of us needs to rise  
and make a solemn stand  
to be there in the dark times and rise to help our fellow man.  
They say variety is the spice of life,  
yet people walk with blinders.  
No reasons to remind them of their differences;  
they're a constant reminder.  
Do unto others as they would do for you;  
treat them with compassion.  
In this day and age, when times have made conformity  
out of fashion,  
let's all finally stand as one,  
showing the powers-to-be our hands,  
refusing to allow our differences to control us  
in our demands.  
I am proud of all your personalities and traits  
that make the breakthrough.  
When all is on the table, it's what makes you—you!

## Where Am I?

By James Robert Janssen  
VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS

If I told you I was standing here right in front of you.  
You'd think I was being obvious but not true.  
Why? I stand here right now and you see me.  
You hear me, but you really don't know who I be.

Chorus: NO NO NO NO NO Mama Mia Mama Mia

A spectrum of colors, a rainbow's delight,  
Pot of gold at one end. The rest a beautiful sight.  
Evidence of rain that freshens the air,  
But blurred vision with salt not so fair.

Chorus: NO NO NO NO NO Mama Mia Mama Mia

The lizard changing colors, surviving a deadly plight,  
Pending doom swooping down from on high,  
Colors changing in rapid succession,  
Then BAM came that sudden percussion.

Chorus: NO NO NO NO NO Mama Mia Mama Mia

Why, Mommy? Why are you hitting me, he pleaded.  
His tender, broken skull, bandaged and bleeding,  
Three years his Angel gone in the blink of an eye.  
Pain from the beating? NO. Pain from a broken heart. Aye.

No more chorus for this boy of three,  
Just a painful memory of being free.  
Imprisoned for life, rainbows he would never see.  
Changing colors just to survive in a world called PTSD.

## The King Lives

By Scott Lehman  
VA Medical Center—St. Louis, MO

Soon, oh very soon,  
we are going to see the King.  
The King lives,  
the King gives,  
but most of all, the King forgives.  
As far as the East  
and toward the West,  
forgiving is what the Lord does best.  
Into the sea  
our sins go,  
making our hearts as white as snow.  
Love one another  
as best as you can.  
Let yourself be a new-world man.

# Lorenzo

By Tanya R. Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA



Lorenzo Hamilton was 24 years old when he was drafted into the Army. He had requested an exemption as an only son so he could stay to take care of his widowed mother, but that was denied. Yet others had been granted the exemption even though they were not the only son.

So off to basic training Lorenzo went with a group of soldiers just like him. They had a separate send-off from other soldiers from the town. They were sent to a camp in the South but were unable to go into town as other soldiers could. Lorenzo probably wanted to be an infantryman and fight in the war like his father before him. His father had been an infantryman serving with Union troops in the Civil War and had seen action in several battles.

Once training was completed, Lorenzo, along with his fellow soldiers, was sent overseas to France. Lorenzo, like many others of his background, was assigned to a service battalion.

He and his soldier buddies hoped they would have the opportunity to fight for their country, but

Lorenzo and the others weren't allowed to fight.

Black soldiers were not allowed to mix with the white army. So, Lorenzo and his company were sent to perform manual labor such as digging trenches, filling trenches, burying bodies and other tasks deemed fitting for his race at the time.

The French Army, however, had requested more troops from the Americans. They didn't care about skin color, only about whether the men could fight. Lorenzo took a chance and volunteered. He was assigned to a trench mortar battalion. Lorenzo never had the chance to fight, however. By the time Lorenzo arrived to serve with the French Army, the armistice had been signed, and fighting had ceased.

A month or so later, Lorenzo became sick and was sent to a French hospital. Lorenzo Hamilton died on Dec. 19, 1918 in France of pneumonia. He never got the chance to fight for his country, his race or his freedom. His service was only acknowledged by his headstone.

## Ode to a Desert Warrior

By Kimberly Green

—Fort Smith, AR

Thirty years have come and gone  
Since you deployed  
With your desert ruck on.

2 August 1990  
Iraq invaded Kuwait.  
Saddam just laughed;  
He sealed his own fate.

Days turned into months  
And now months have turned Into years.  
I still hear your voice  
Even though you are not here.

Your desert storm uniform  
You wore when you were young  
Lies in a chest.  
When I'm gone it goes to our sons.

And the love letters  
Sealed with string  
Lie together  
Underneath our wedding rings.

Memories are all there is now  
For life is gone.  
But the soul never dies;  
It forever lives on.

So I give you this Christmas,  
Not something bought in a store.  
I give you my love  
Which lives in the heart—not stuffed in a drawer.

## The Shadow Song

By Charles Fredette

VA Medical Center—Bedford, MA

The shadows were singing to me  
About the light in the room.  
I love them like summer—  
The warmth and the colors.  
The summer is in the distance  
Though I think of it often.  
The times that I've spent  
Were not times of joy.  
I'm thankful for the times  
I've had as different as a rhyme.

## **What It Means To Be a Veteran: Reflections on the 20th Anniversary of 9/11**

*By Michael Fuller McBride*

*VA Medical Center—Milwaukee, WI*

I should have known.  
I am the son of a Vietnam era veteran.  
I should have known.  
We spent two years on a naval base in California  
during the height of the Vietnam War.  
My parents' best friend was shot down over Vietnam.  
Every night we knelt by our beds and prayed  
for "Uncle Art to come home safely."  
They found his remains and he was buried at sea.  
My mother flew out to the aircraft carrier  
to escort Art's widow.  
I should have known.  
I grew up in a country striving to be a more perfect union.  
A bastion of freedom.  
I should have known what it means to be a veteran.  
Then I watched two towers crumble  
while ordinary people faced a choice of jumping to their  
deaths  
or dying in the fire and rubble.  
And the ordinary people who charged a cockpit  
knowing this was their last desperate act for survival.  
What does it mean to be a veteran?  
To care about something so much you are willing to die for it.  
To voluntarily forfeit your independence  
and put your life in the hands of total strangers.  
To subject yourself to all manner of scrutiny, examination  
and harsh conditions.  
To immediately make lifelong friends with people  
from all across the human spectrum,  
and not care about their color, creed or caste.  
To work as a team toward one goal: complete the mission.  
To learn how to be lethal in the service of others and the  
mission.  
To write letters of love and apology to a spouse and children  
to be opened and read in the event of death.  
To prepare oneself physically, emotionally and spiritually  
for death, including suicide in the event of potential capture.  
To stand next to a 19-year-old soldier  
as he determines who will get his death benefit.  
To be in a hospital in Germany and sit by the bedside  
of a teenager who just had his leg amputated,  
and call his mother in Iowa, waking her up to tell her he's alive.



To crouch in a bunker while bombs burst around you and  
realize  
for the first time that this is what it means to be an American.  
To watch hundreds of American soldiers in formation  
at the Al-Faw Palace in Baghdad  
as they took the oath as new U.S. citizens.  
To fish in a canal in a boat at night with an Iraqi doctor  
who stated there was no PTSD in Iraq  
because all Iraqis have been traumatized.  
To watch Tongan Marines perform a Haka  
before destroying the combat medics in volleyball.  
To play hockey with Slovakian soldiers  
on a cement slab in Kandahar  
while temperatures hovered around 110 degrees.  
To buy a chess board for my son in a bazaar,  
while listening to the Afghan merchant describe his dream  
of a safer world for his children.  
To watch flag-draped caskets loaded onto a cargo plane  
on Memorial Day,  
knowing there are grieving families waiting in Dover.  
To come home but never to come home.  
To feel happiness but always colored with guilt for surviving.  
To be ordinary and live each day with memories  
of the extraordinary.  
To become emotional every time you hear the national  
anthem  
and gaze on a fluttering American flag.  
To do penance by sitting with veterans at the VA,  
listening to their stories of resilience and recovery.  
To walk through a veterans cemetery knowing each stone  
holds  
a sacred story of service, sacrifice and purpose.  
I never knew what it was like to be a veteran,  
until I became a veteran.

## Why, Jesus, Why

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

There's no doubt that I'm a Christian;  
I know His blood runs through my veins.  
There's no doubt that He's my Master;  
I know where my Lord reigns.  
Is it wrong to question the King of kings,  
if not everything goes as planned  
when you wake up in that hospital bed  
or you find out at work you've been canned?  
Do you find yourself with tears in your eyes?  
Is this a sign of weakness?  
Have you been wearing your heart on your sleeve?  
Has everyone taken advantage of your meekness?  
Have you grown a little anxious waiting around  
for those results and you finally get a bad report?  
I ask the question—where's Jesus?  
Closer than He's ever been.  
Waiting to perform the miracle.  
Waiting for you to ask and believe  
that He is who He says He is.  
Is it wrong to question Him? No!  
But why would we when He's proven Himself  
over and over again?

## Calculated Risks

By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.

VA Medical Center—Hampton, VA

Opportunity and chances are unlimited;  
No opportunity comes without risk.  
You must take a chance if you want to advance;  
Risk is what life is all about.  
There are no guarantees;  
If you want the opportunity, you must take the risk.  
If you get knocked down, get up; if you fail, try again.  
If it doesn't work, try a different approach;  
Failure is nothing more than a lesson.  
If you don't concede, if you don't give up,  
You are never defeated.  
Learn from your mistakes;  
Turn your failures into success.  
Your destiny awaits you  
Only if you have courage;  
If you're not afraid to take a risk,  
Life is filled with opportunities.  
If you take a risk, the payoff is great,  
For only the winner, takes it all.  
This is the showdown.  
Do you have what it takes  
To step forward and claim your prize?

## If I Could Be Remembered

By Helen Anderson Glass

VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

Oh, if I could be remembered  
after my passing from this earth  
and feel that I had made a difference  
in that time since my birth.  
I wanted so much to be able to sing,  
make music, to dance  
so well as to please the world,  
and maybe, also perchance  
To write a novel so inspiring,  
so filled with love and perhaps mirth  
that my name WOULD be remembered,  
that I HAD been of some worth.  
But from my voice came no music,  
nor from an instrument, not a note.  
From my pen no words of wisdom flowed,  
only through the poetry I wrote.  
But, God knows, I did my very best  
as a daughter, wife and mother,  
as a grandmother and employee  
or as a veteran, a volunteer  
and any other place  
I filled in this life while I did live.  
So when I die, this epitaph  
To you all I solemnly give  
That simply says, "I DID MY VERY BEST!"

*The Greeks believed that you remained immortal  
when your name was remembered on earth. I did  
not do anything great in my life. But I vowed I  
would make up for that by honoring our veterans  
through my poetry, and make them "immortal" so  
THEY WOULD BE REMEMBERED!*

## From Hopelessness to Dignity

By Nila K. Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

This feeling went beyond sorrow.  
It permeated my entire being,  
so I did not care about the morrow.  
I was living in defeat  
till hopelessness I did meet.  
Hopelessness led to a suicide attempt.  
Because of my mental illness,  
it was my life I held in contempt.  
The delusion had led to hopelessness  
being in control.  
Hopelessness had robbed all motivation  
to live out of my soul.  
Hopelessness and the delusion  
I had experienced as masters who were cruel.

Then came the consideration of kind people who said,  
“Do not let the delusion rule.”  
These same people who, by showing their concern,  
helped dispel the delusion and caused me to yearn.  
To yearn for my life before the delusion,  
before hopelessness reigned  
and led me to the wrong conclusion.  
The wrong conclusion that no one cared.  
These kind and caring people bothered about how I fared.

No more did hopelessness and the delusion rule,  
so my outlook took on a different view.  
Before, I did not know what was true.  
Now I see a future, if I may be so bold,  
and realize, because of my mental illness,  
none of us fits into a mold.  
We are all unique.  
It is diversity of the human race  
of which I speak.  
Those kind people who helped put me back  
on the tracks of life,  
helped me realize we need to show kindness and respect  
to all to keep out the strife.

God made all of this diversity  
of the human race.  
It was part of His plan from the start  
for us to share this place.

All of these rioting and angry people  
we see on the news again and again.  
Oh, do not let hatred win.  
Make this your decision today.  
Start a revolution by showing kindness and respect  
to all along the way  
because all fellow human beings are worthy  
of this and more.  
By doing this, on hatred we will shut the door.

## Prepare for Battle!

By Karen Green

VA Medical Center—North Las Vegas, NV

When we think of armor we think of metal and steel,  
but God’s armor isn’t visible or anything we can feel.  
We wrestle against the rulers of darkness of this world.  
So put on the armor of light, for the day is at hand after the night.  
The armor of God is from God’s power and might,  
and by the armor of righteousness on the left hand or the right.  
Memorize the word of God which is the sword of salvation.  
Gird up the loins of your mind that is to be brought unto you  
at Jesus Christ’s revelation.  
Shod your feet preparing for the gospel of peace,  
but you still need more than all of these.  
You still need the breastplate of righteousness,  
and continue to pray with thankfulness.  
You need the whole armor of God to stand against the evil one.  
Then you won’t miss the love of God’s Son.



# Withdrawal

*By David Cahn*

*VA Medical Center—Wilmington, DE*

I have been asked about my opinion on America abandoning our allies in Afghanistan.

We could call this winning battles and losing wars or the misguided obedience to our enemies.

War is the act of imposing our will upon the enemy until the foe is morally broken and no longer willing to resist our policy objectives. In other words, we fight until the enemy has lost the will to win.

The very definition of war is the failure of the political process, resulting in violence. We accomplish the fight by many means, including bringing the war to the enemy, gaining and maintaining the initiative, unity, speed, surprise, overwhelming fire superiority, air supremacy, etc.

The “leaders” have followed the same failed tactic as when we ran away and surrendered to America’s enemies in Iraq, creating another opportunity for “Mr. I Hate America” to pursue his evil objectives and atrocities against his own countrymen and democracies around the world.

Without direction or leadership, our enemies do not fear us, our allies do not trust us, and nobody respects us. As of this writing, our enemies are taking over and planning continued violence against anyone who wants to be free. When the inevitable thousands and thousands



of people who remained are killed or enslaved by the atrocities of our enemies, history will look back and know that this submission to evil was one of the worst, ill-advised failures of leadership.

Our overseas enemies were lifelong warriors determined to win or die. For us, the wars were limited. We fought with too few forces with too many rules and restraints. While the Islamists proved dedicated to an unlimited struggle with our brave men and women, we still found ways to eventually bring some limited form of freedom to an ancient people.

Which brings us to the actual subject of this article. The finest fighting force the world has ever seen is our United States military. We are a nation whose armed forces report to civilian “leadership,” and overall that is a good thing. The forces have shed blood and treasure for this

nation and for others far from our shores. Our military will successfully accomplish any mission given to it. It is the best trained, equipped and armed in history. We have a proud history and draw on our experiences to fight battles and win wars. Note that war is a national struggle. Our warriors require the entire spectrum of beans, bullets and bandages. In addition they require our nation’s moral support and backing.

Our armed forces have suffered physical, emotional and moral pain. Their families have been affected much to the same degree. They deserve every accolade and recognition we can bestow upon them. This surrender to the forces of evil and their taking over the part of the world where so many men and women have bled and died will create an emotional scar on the fighting forces and our national record. This is unacceptable. One thing we learn in the military is there is always a way. Surrender is not in our creed. This withdrawal is a stab in the back of all those who fought for freedom and democracies from our founding fathers to the latest recruit.

America was never a nation to run and cower. We are strong and intelligent. Well, we used to be.

## The Game's Afoot!

*By Charles S. Parnell*

*VA Medical Center—Pittsburgh, PA*

I love the game of SCRABBLE!  
Its nuances thrill me so.  
I will not rant or babble,  
But tell you what I know:

The choosing of seven letters  
Gets us under way.  
At times we play with our betters  
And form words as we may.

How much we like this playtime  
And study now the board.  
Each game is like a great rhyme;  
In fact, we're never bored!

Like crosswords, we start building,  
And the words unfold so well.  
We play, as words are melding,  
And the scores have much to tell.

To win, or lose—no matter!  
The fun is in the playing,  
The banter and the patter!  
“I love this game!” I'm saying.

## U.S. Meat Mart

*By James William Miller*

*VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO*

See the wind blow  
the top of the grown trees.  
No bumblebees on the way  
and no birds, I see.  
As the skyline is trying  
to take shape from air  
pollution and dirty clouds intake,  
I hear the birds chirp.  
Somewhere, hiding  
without light, I assume  
they learned their lesson of not clean air  
to the rhythm of a piano  
tune day and night.  
We are forced to buy  
that as we sleep in,  
fight that we don't suffocate.

## Under the Flag

*By Paul David Gonzales*

*VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM*

Under the American flag lie the bravest of the brave.  
They now lie motionless in their military graves.  
Men and women stood in the gap for you and me.  
Their future they will never see.

They died young to keep us free  
And never asked for what was to be.  
These soldiers paid the price;  
They never thought of their own sacrifice.

Words with very solemn tones  
Are forever etched in those granite stones.  
I stand and view those stones aligned  
While thoughts of “Joe” never leave my mind.

Joe was like no other.  
Rough and tough, Joe was my brother.

## Ode to PTSD

*By Penny Lee Deere*

*VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

You broke your agreement with yourself.  
You are but a pile of dust of what you were.  
Where is your foundation?  
We will, we can rebuild  
your true self.  
After all, it's all in the perspective.  
Start with healing words;  
use them as a building block.  
Add wellness practices for the mortar  
to hold yourself together.  
Fill your heart with love;  
spread this with everyone you see.  
Rejoin the trust you lost of yourself and others;  
forgive moral injury.  
With this new pathway agreement,  
we can transition into a new, better self.  
Good luck!

# What *Veterans' Voices* Gave Me

By *Daniel Paicopulos*

—*San Diego, CA*

Through *Veterans' Voices*  
I was blessed  
with important personal choices,  
essay, art, photo or poem,  
of current thoughts and feelings,  
and of memories long gone.

I went there to submit,  
but then I started to read,  
and then I read some more,  
fulfilling more than ego need,  
seeing the wondrous minds at work there,  
the brilliance of their concepts laid bare,  
their surprise endings often haunting,  
sometimes a little daunting.  
I don't think I'd call it jealousy,  
but I do experience ink envy.  
I have to wonder why I'd bother  
with so many marvelous pieces each issue,  
a million beautiful words in play.  
Why should I write, submit?  
What does one more poet have to say?

I tell lots of stories,  
so that's no problem,  
and it's too late now to worry about  
too much exposure, fear,  
regrets or even doubt.  
Ultimately, there is only one choice.  
I will write because I have a voice.  
I will write for the pure expression of life,  
about my joys and fears and hopes,  
certainly about love,  
of the Grace some refer to  
as from somewhere else above.

I will write, inspired by the writing of others,  
especially by veterans, my sisters and brothers,  
by the natural world in constant motion,  
by speechless days at the nearby ocean,  
by the sun and the moon,  
their setting and rising,  
their colors and moods  
sometimes surprising.

I will audaciously write  
of great hopes, of grand schemes,  
daring to be the artist  
of my very own dreams.  
Not really fearless,  
not in any way,

I will write to discover what  
I don't otherwise know how to say.

As age has flattened me,  
as humility has claimed me,  
I now write more about Spirit,  
about oneness, about transition.  
I don't know what tomorrow will bring.  
I'm simply sure I will write to be near it.

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## GLADYS FELD HELZBERG MEMORIAL AWARD

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### Repurposed Chair

By *Tanya Whitney*

*VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA*

Once a shining example of someone's patience and love,  
Gleaming and pristine, in immaculate condition,  
A direct purpose given by its creator.

Through the years, battered and beaten, but well loved,  
Arms and legs scarred through time and use,  
Its cloth faded, tattered and torn.

Like a relic, considered no longer functional or useful,  
A ragged piece of furniture left for someone else.  
Now it is homeless and forgotten.

But another sees a new setting with a new mission in life.  
Lovingly stripped, repainted, and recovered,  
A new look born of the old.

A new purpose, now sitting at the head of a different table,  
Serving still its mission but now in an altered form  
Like a person reborn in faith.

I am that repurposed chair lovingly reshaped and remolded  
Into a new package of differing colors and cloth.  
My purpose is the same yet not.

I have been recovered and re-clothed, but my scars  
are still there.

A new resolve keeps the scars hidden and contained,  
Giving me strength and courage to live.

## Answering the Call

*By Daniel Allen*

*—Port Richey, FL*

With a life dedicated to others,  
Answering the call of my brothers,  
Sacrificing many freedoms and rights  
Under adverse conditions and long flights.

Friends and family left far behind,  
An uncertain future is on my mind.  
With support and kindness from home,  
Letters and gifts of warmth are shown.

As I wait and prepare for the worst,  
Standing vigilant, “Who will fire first?”  
The potential is great for much suffering;  
Dedication and skill are my offering.

I have always served the sick and injured;  
With pride and devotion I have endured.  
I volunteered when I answered the call;  
For my country, I would give my all.

*THERE ARE NO GREATER ASPIRATIONS  
THAN THE WORDS “MY COUNTRY” MAY EVOKE.*

## Wounds

*By Kimberly Green*

*—Fort Smith, AR*

Sometimes the wounds aren't visible,  
One nation under God indivisible.  
Stood my ground in the sand  
For my country, for my own homeland.  
Don't count me out; I'm not invisible.  
Sometimes the wounds aren't visible.  
I'm still making it day by day,  
Never thinking my head would turn out this way.  
Memories of war and death,  
Burning bodies and burning flesh,  
Iraq's war crimes unforgivable,  
Sometimes the wounds aren't visible.  
I'm not a freak; I'm not a show.  
I'm taking life easy now, taking it slow.  
Triggers come and triggers go.  
I'm a combat veteran with an afterglow,  
An Army of one, not just as an individual.  
Sometimes the wounds aren't visible.

# Mail Call

**Matthew David Davison**, Long Beach, Calif., wrote, “I am honored to have my poem, ‘He Is In the Wind,’ appear in the Diamond Jubilee Edition of *Veterans’ Voices*, and be further honored by receiving the Gladys Feld Helzberg Memorial Award. **I’m sure that you realize the incredible good this publication does in the healing process of all veterans. You and your board do a great service to all who served and sacrificed for this nation.** We are all grateful for all that you do. I am especially grateful for the honor you have bestowed on me.”



**Denise L. Cunningham** wrote, “On behalf of the Topeka VA Eastern Kansas HCS patients and staff, we extend our appreciation for your donation of new magazines for veterans enjoyment. It is through the efforts of community partners like you that allow us to continue the quality care and services that we seek to provide our deserving veterans. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you again. Thank you for your continued support.”



A message similar to the above was received from **Kristy Rene Cole-Day**, chief of Voluntary Service at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va.



A note from **Scott J. Sjostrand**, Hallock, Minn., was included with a donation and a vow to “alot more as I can.” He said, “Many people are unaware of your publication and I would appreciate ‘a bunch’ of back issues to disperse. People express interest once they know you exist.” He also sent more poem submissions for *Veterans’ Voices*.

**Rich Wangard**, Neenah, Wis., wrote, “Of course I want to thank you for publishing my story, but what really impresses me is how far authors can come and improve in their lives. A good example is the beautiful story, “Hunting,” by Diane Wasden followed by her brutal honest poem about what has haunted her and caused lifetime PTSD. My, my, what a brave woman to share her words and help others understand their own feelings. What a gift! Just as so many of our authors share and the painters paint, and the drawers draw. All made possible by dedicated men and women who make *Veterans’ Voices* possible. Thank you so much for all you do! For allowing much needed freedom of expression so people like me and Diane and who knows how many others can become the best versions of ourselves as possible! To feel human – allow some healing – to feel valued – to be able to share. This is all made possible by you volunteers at *Veterans’ Voices* and not only do we appreciate that – we love you for it!”



“*Veterans’ Voices* staff: You are our unsung heroes in so many ways. Please continue to inspire all of us,” writes **Kenny C. Trujillo**, Las Vegas, Nev.



“I am proudly returning my award check, wrote *Veterans’ Voices* author, **Helen Anderson Glass** of Tucson, Ariz. “I admire what you are doing and having you publish what I write is payment enough for me. I am honored that you do it. I am 98 – feeling fine and think I can make it to 99!”

**Editor’s Note:** Helen is a longtime contributor to *Veterans’ Voices* and the staff wish her continued writing success.

# 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, artwork or 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

### 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, 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

**Robert T. Rubin Award:** Restoring and Maintaining My Mental Health (Perpetual) ..... \$ 35

## POETRY

**BVL Serving My Country: What It Means to Me Award** ..... \$ 50

**DAVA, State Dept. of Florida Award** ..... \$ 30

**Sally-Sue Hughes Memorial Award** (3 Poems) ..... Each \$ 15

**TH Norton Award: Editor's Choice** ..... \$ 25

**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

**Larry Chambers Spirit Award:** "How Meditation and/or Prayer Helped My Recovery

by Anthony J. Williams (Story or Poem) ..... \$ 20

# 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**

## **Gifts of \$10,000 or more**

## **Gifts of \$5,000 or more**

## **Gifts of \$2,500 or more**

Hon. Thomas and Margaret Clark,  
Kansas City, Mo.

Doug and Dorothy Iliff, Topeka  
Sheryl Liddle, Independence, Mo.

## **Gifts of \$1,000 or more**

Carol Habgood, San Antonio, Texas

## **Gifts of \$500 or more**

Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary  
10, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
WOSL National, San Antonio, Texas

## **Gifts of \$200 or more**

Carleton "Swede" Beckstrom, Shawnee,  
Kan.

William and Charlene Burton, Russell,  
Kan.

Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary  
34, Lenexa, Kan.

Chris Iliff, Stillwell, Kan.

Rich Wangard, Neenah, Wis.

## **Gifts of \$100 or more**

Donna Delaney, Salina, Kan.

Daniel Paicopulos, San Diego, Calif.

Scott Sjostrand, Hallock, Minn.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary,  
Dept. of Alabama, Scottsboro, Ala.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 4709,  
Conroe, Texas

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 7234,  
Acushnet, Mass.

Veterans of Foreign Wars 7743, Osborne,  
Kan.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 8586,  
Perrysville, Ohio

Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Auxiliary 10624, Mt. Pleasant, S.C.

## **Gifts-in-Kind**

Dazium Design, Kansas City, Mo.

Kansas Audio-Reader, Lawrence, Kan.

Kaw Valley Computer, Kansas City, Kan.

Summit Litho, Lee's Summit, Mo.

The National World War I Museum  
and Memorial, Kansas City, Mo.

VA Medical Center, Kansas City, Mo.

## Virtual Veterans Pen Celebration

**Saturday, November 6, 2021**

**2:00 p.m. CDT**

**VIA ZOOM**

Presentation by Dean Vakas, guest editorialist

*"Writing Helps Veterans and  
Offers Readers Life Lessons"*

To reserve a spot or find out more visit: <https://veteransvoices.org/annual-veterans-pen-celebration/>  
or email [support@veteransvoices.org](mailto:support@veteransvoices.org)

# 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.

## Instructions for Writing Submissions.

The editors prefer that writers and artists submit their work online. To submit writing online, go to [www.veteransvoices.org/user-registration/](http://www.veteransvoices.org/user-registration/) or [www.veteransvoices.org](http://www.veteransvoices.org) and select **Registration**.

Once on the page, complete the registration form by typing your name, username, password, and email. If you don't have an email, please use one from a relative or friend. Scroll down and click **Open Section** under Military Association and choose your branch of military service and years served. Continue down the page and select **Open Section** under *Your Details* and fill out your contact information. Your address is required. Now click **Register** and you will be directed to a login page. Log in by entering your username and password that you just chose.

Once you have successfully logged in, start by adding your submission headline. This will be the title for your writing. When you have finished adding your headline, click **Add New** and you will be directed to a new page. Click **Open Section** under *Writing Type* and choose the type of writing you will be submitting. Then click **Open Section** under *Writing* and use this area to add your written piece by typing or copying and pasting into the text box.

Once you have finished scroll down and click **Open Section** under *Notes* to type additional information, for example you might add details about someone who is helping you as a writing aide or the name of your typist. If you are uploading a file, select **Open Section** under *Upload File* then click anywhere inside of the dotted box, or drag and drop your file. You can upload a Word file to submit your writing. Also you can submit artwork using *Upload File*.

Once you have uploaded and completed this section, click **Submit For Review** and your work will be successfully submitted. You can click **Save For Later** if you would like to save it and submit at a later time.

## Guidelines for Local Contests.

Writing contests can encourage others to write. Announce such contests through 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*.

### SUBMIT ONLINE:

[www.veteransvoices.org](http://www.veteransvoices.org)

### SUBMIT BY MAIL:

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.  
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103  
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043

### QUESTIONS:

[support@veteransvoices.org](mailto:support@veteransvoices.org)  
(816) 701-6844

## Mail Submission Sample.

When submitting creative work by mail, attach an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper with the following information:

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: \_\_\_\_\_

# Heal Through Visual Art

**Watch for your artwork in a future issue!**

This issue of *Veterans' Voices* includes a special section featuring art from military veterans. We already showcase your writing, now the editors highlight your art as well!

Robert Rubin, M.D., Ph.D., a military veteran and V.A. staff psychiatrist, is the inspiration for this initiative. He is convinced the arts can heal. He has observed how veterans heal by writing their thoughts and feelings on paper and he knows other art forms possess the same potential.

Validate Dr. Rubin's confidence in the healing power of art. Send us your drawings, paintings and photographs. Follow the Submission Guidelines below and help fill the pages of *Veterans' Voices* with colorful art!

## Instructions for Artwork Submissions

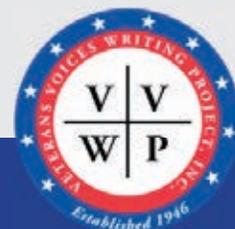
For more than 65 years Veterans Voices Writing Project has provided an outlet for military veterans to experience solace and satisfaction by sharing their stories, poems and artwork. Send your submissions today!

- Entries must be submitted as a digital file, either online or by U.S. mail.
- All art must be original and submitted by a military veteran or active service member. (List branch of military service and years served.)
- Media may include: acrylic, airbrush, assemblage, casein, charcoal, color pencil, graphite illustration, drawings, ink, oil, pastel, printmaking, tempera, watercolor, and traditional and digital photography.
- An artist statement is preferred to convey the artist's inspiration behind the artwork.
- Image requirements for entries: JPG files (Please try to keep the file size under 2MB to ensure proper uploading). For publication these files should be 300dpi when saved at approximately 8x10 inches (2400x3000 pixels), ideally, and 5x7 inches (1500x2100 pixels) at minimum.
- Submissions will be considered on an ongoing basis for subsequent issues.
- If you have questions, contact us at [support@veteransvoices.org](mailto:support@veteransvoices.org) or (816) 701-6844.



**Submit Today!**  
For a Future Issue

Calling for  
Photographs,  
Drawings and  
Paintings



**Artwork Submissions**

*Online or By Mail*

[www.veteransvoices.org](http://www.veteransvoices.org)

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.  
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103  
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043

*Please reproduce this announcement to encourage others to share their art!*



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*Special Anniversary Section  
See Page 25!*

Looking for earlier issues of *Veterans' Voices*,  
check the website at [VeteransVoices.org](http://VeteransVoices.org).



IT'S OUR  
**DIAMOND JUBILEE**

Veterans Voices Writing Project is celebrating **75** years  
as a life-saving creative outlet by veterans, for veterans.