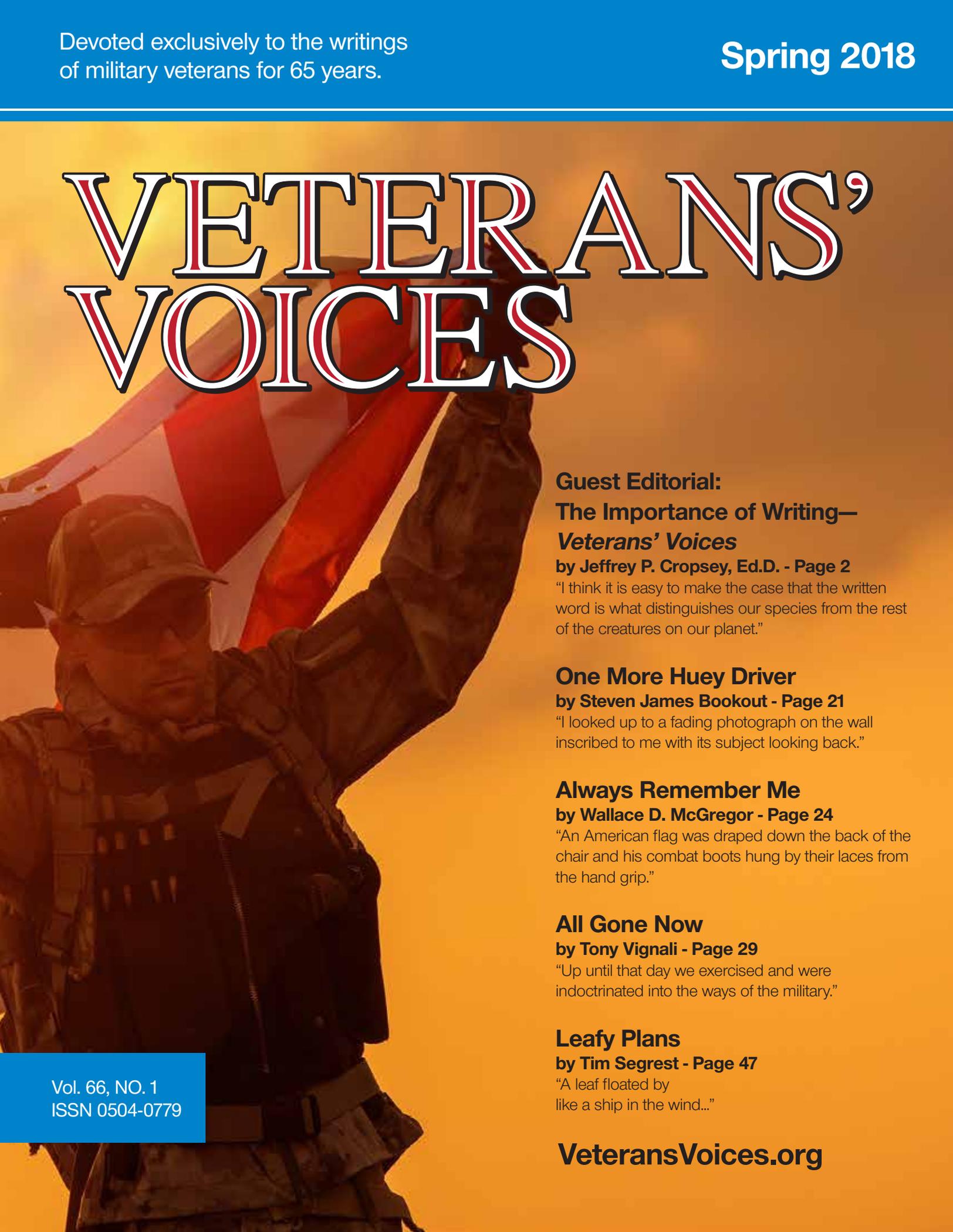


# VETERANS' VOICES



## **Guest Editorial:**

### **The Importance of Writing— *Veterans' Voices***

**by Jeffrey P. Cropsey, Ed.D. - Page 2**

"I think it is easy to make the case that the written word is what distinguishes our species from the rest of the creatures on our planet."

## **One More Huey Driver**

**by Steven James Bookout - Page 21**

"I looked up to a fading photograph on the wall inscribed to me with its subject looking back."

## **Always Remember Me**

**by Wallace D. McGregor - Page 24**

"An American flag was draped down the back of the chair and his combat boots hung by their laces from the hand grip."

## **All Gone Now**

**by Tony Vignali - Page 29**

"Up until that day we exercised and were indoctrinated into the ways of the military."

## **Leafy Plans**

**by Tim Segrest - Page 47**

"A leaf floated by like a ship in the wind..."

**VeteransVoices.org**

# Guest Editorial

## The Importance of Writing – *Veterans' Voices*

By Jeffrey P. Cropsey, Ed. D.



*Veterans' Voices* recently asked me for my thoughts on the importance of writing. While extremely honored by the request, I must say I wasn't sure why they had chosen me to discuss such an important and indeed fundamental subject of humanity. I think we all would agree that writing is the primary basis upon which your work and your intellect will be judged, whether in an academic setting, at your job or in your social circles. In the words of the German author Hermann Hesse, "Without words, without writing and without books there would be no history, there could be no concept of humanity." Our own Founding Father Benjamin Franklin made writing the core of a life well lived, "Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing." So am I an expert to address this incredibly important topic? The short answer is I am not.

OK, I'm a veteran, U.S. Army 1969-1972. I have had a 40-year career administering Department of Defense college level education programs before coming to Grantham University. But I'm not a writer unless you count hundreds of decision papers and probably thousands of e-mails I have composed over the years. So far I have written no poetry or prose to stir anyone's soul. I have failed to provide in the words of author Philip Pullman, "After nourishment, shelter and companionship stories are the thing we need most in the world." I am a great consumer of writing, however, and read to fill an important need in my life.

*Veterans' Voices* is a wonderful example of a vehicle that unites writers and readers in an invisible bond of souls. Somerset Maugham said, "Writing is the supreme solace." I would say it is a solace for both the writers and readers. Any of you that have read some of the many stories and poems of our veteran authors over the 65 years of the publication of *Veterans' Voices* must agree that it is a journal of solace.

I think it is easy to make the case that the written word is what distinguishes our species from the rest of the creatures on our planet. Humans alone among the inhabitants of earth have created writing as the physical manifestation of spoken language. Writing, originally cave paintings, goes back to 35,000 years BCE, in the caves of the Cro-Magnon people. Written language came much later around 3500 BCE in the area of Sumer in southern Mesopotamia, perhaps ironically in an area of the world that many of our Iraq war veterans now write about in *Veterans' Voices*.

**Dr. Jeffrey P. Cropsey, Ed.D.** – Dr. Cropsey is vice president for Government Relations at Grantham University. Before joining Grantham, he worked for more than 40 years in various positions, including; U.S Army Officer, Platoon Leader and Company Commander 1969-72, Army civilian education counselor, 20 years of civilian service in the Air Force Voluntary Education program including European command education and training director of the Air Force, director of the Navy College Program worldwide and director of Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support – all prior to his retirement from the Department of Defense. During his career, he received five armed services civilian meritorious service awards including the Secretary of Defense Medal for Meritorious Civilian Service and the Council of College and Military Educators' President's Award for his lifelong contributions to military education. Dr. Cropsey earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in history and sociology from Washington and Lee University, a Master of Arts degree in counseling from Ball State University and a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

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# Veterans' Voices

Spring 2018 Vol. 66, No. 1

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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, Inc.) to address the physical and recreational needs of veterans returning from World War II. In 1952, journalists **Margaret Sally Keach** and **Gladys Feld Helzberg**, with assistance from the Greater Kansas City chapter of Theta Sigma Phi, established *Veterans' Voices* to provide a national outlet for writing produced by the project's participants. The three founders believed that writing could do everything from entertaining bedfast veterans to helping others conquer mental health issues.

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## Submission Guidelines

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## Three Things I Learned After Experiencing Military Sexual Trauma

*By Jill Marie Baker*  
*VA Medical Center – Sioux Falls, SD*

### A Beginning

There are many beginnings in our lives. Our birth, our first step, graduating from high school, getting married, the birth of our first child, our child's first step, etc. The beginning of my journey as a survivor of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) happened quite unexpectedly the moment a male sergeant, higher up in the chain of command than me, decided to invade my physical space while I was on guard duty one night. I was twenty years old.

What followed afterward, the daily cruel, unrelenting and debilitating retaliation by fellow soldiers, which occurred once I reported his unwanted attentions, forever altered the person I had been and could have been. I became somebody else. Somebody I did not recognize and could not understand. The people who knew me from before the trauma did not recognize or understand this altered version of me either.

That was 26 years ago. I have learned a lot since then. I have learned that I still have a lot left to learn. But, enough time has passed that I can reflect on what changed within me and how I came to be the person I am today. From these reflections comes an intense desire to place my own stamp on life. I want to share my sweat and tears and an open heart to give others a small peek into the well of a broken, yet newly forged soul.

Let us throw a penny into those murky waters together for a short time and see what the ripple effect might be. My journey will not be your journey, though our stories may touch too intimately at times. I hope and pray that my words give you comfort and a little bit of shared understanding. Life is difficult enough without having a shoulder to lean on. That being said, here are three things I learned after experiencing Military Sexual Trauma (MST):

### Number One

My Patriotism and love of country did not diminish after experiencing MST.

Like many Americans, I get a lump in my throat every time I stand for the national anthem and place my hand on my heart, no

matter the time or circumstance. The haunting melody flings me back into childhood memories of a military brat romping around with her sisters on military installations, each neighborhood more alike than not. My mind drifts back to the day I graduated from Basic Training, where I was bursting with pride and ready to take on the world. The song is also an aching reminder of the loneliness and despair I felt after leaving the service as an “unofficial” consequence of Military Sexual Trauma.

I have been told by men, both who have served and those who have not, that women do not belong in the military. More specifically, I have been told that women do not belong in the military because they do not have the strength or scruples to fight during times of war and should be home raising children instead. I occasionally run across women who express similar sentiments as well.

It is true that it can be difficult to traverse a male-dominated culture that is hostile towards women. It is true that barriers to justice exist for those who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma. Personal stories, statistics, and research on the matter confirm these assertions. That does not change the fact that patriotism and duty to country reside in the heart. The pull to protect the country we love far outweighs the loss of innocence we incur as a result of that choice. It is the price we pay for freedom.

I have been asked often enough whether or not I would have joined the military had I known I would become a survivor of Military Sexual Trauma. There is no easy answer to this question. Yes, my life might have been easier, but I absolutely do not regret the choice I made to serve my country.

I believe that changing the past does not guarantee that life will be easier or more meaningful. We overcome hurdles, large and small, every day of our lives. And, though I mourn for the person I was before experiencing Military Sexual Trauma, I am proud of that accomplishment and will continue to support any woman who desires to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States as a member of our volunteer Armed Forces. It is an honorable choice.

### Number Two

I felt alone after experiencing MST and still do at times.

Standing up to a sexual predator is hard on a good day. Standing up to a group of co-workers that create a Groundhog Day horror flick scenario for you to experience in the workplace is a cruel twist of fate that can be impossible to overcome. The inability to defend my honor during my time in service left me with a feeling of helplessness, and it sucks to feel helpless. As a result, I have trust issues, even after all these years.

It is not that I do not want to believe in the good intentions of others. I do want to. But having my psyche hacked away at while serving remade me into something wholly unlike what I ever imagined I would be. A she-monster lives inside of me and I have

been placating to her every day since separating from the service. Even admitting that to you right now is humbling, and truthfully, I am ashamed to let that side of me be loved.

Logically, I know that not everybody would use my painful secrets to further their own interests at the expense of my well-being. But, that realization is not enough to prevent me from backing away from intimate friendships and sabotaging relationships at times. Not being able to trust people is a lonely habit, even when family and friends are experiencing life right along with you. It is a bizarre parallel world: the one I am living and the one people think I'm living.

Personal trauma sticks with you no matter how hard you try to let it go. It is an unfortunate side effect of living with the memories. But, then again, I am still here, trying to make a difference in the world around me as best I can. And, through it all, I have found love. There is an irony here that I cannot quite place my finger on, but I will be thankful for what I have nonetheless.

### Number Three

The woman I have become deserves to be happy.

The assertion that we deserve to be happy may seem like a trivial point to make; maybe even an obvious one. But that is not the case for me. Self-loathing, triggered by painful memories and the negative emotions that go along with them, are a brutal assault on the ego and can be debilitating when I am stuck in a low moment.

During my twenties, that cycle of self-loathing could only be broken by drinking myself into oblivion and then going home alone after the bars closed to cry myself to sleep. Weekends were especially difficult, and there were times when I would not leave my apartment except to go back out again the next night to begin that self-degrading process all over again.

The ups and downs of guilt and shame associated with personal trauma are unimaginable unless you have experienced the depths of that type of humiliation for yourself. I did not have anybody to talk to for a longtime. I felt nobody understood me; myself included. So I did not talk, not really, and I suffered alone.

I started to open up a little in my thirties. Love found me. I cracked an eyelid and let some light seep into my heart. I was starving for it. Becoming a wife and mother was a gift, a precious gift, that I thank God for every day. But letting them in also came at a price. I had to introduce my family to the she-monster. Such a circumstance was bound to happen after deciding to share my life with other human beings, and not just function like a robot around them.

Now I am in my forties, and my loved ones have an intimate relationship with the she-monster and with the woman I have become. My children are especially good at loving all that is me. And even though I fight to control the she-monster with varying degrees of success, I'm getting better at it.

It is empowering to know that even though my family sees the ugliest parts of me; the sadness, the depression, the anger, the isolation, they choose to love me anyway. The beauty of that kind of love is healing. I acknowledge that the path to happiness is not an easy one to walk when the cycle of self-doubt is always nagging at your heels. Even so, I deserve to be happy.

I deserve to have sunlight warm my face and to be given the wild freedom of choice to let love radiate outward from my soul and encompass those around me. You deserve this chance, too. To be loved. To be empowered. To radiate compassion. To feel understood. To find acceptance and thrive, even though life might not have turned out quite as you expected. You deserve to be happy. We deserve to be happy. Thank you for reading.

An old Irish Blessing. May the road rise to meet you. May the wind always be at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face, and rains fall soft upon your fields.

---

**ROBERT T. RUBIN AWARD**

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## Walking the Path

*By Tim Reamer  
VA Medical Center – Elgin, IL*

If, like me, you are battling the unrelenting monsters of PTSD and depression; this is meant for you. As we stumble through the dark, dank forest of despair, know that we will fall. There may be a glimpse of another traveler in the distance; we are not alone. What becomes important is what happens next. If you succumb to the tremendous weight of our burdens, the weeks, months, years, or even decades of that trek; and choose to just lie there – that is a choice we have made. No one can fault us for it, for no one else can possibly understand the vast depth and crushing magnitude of our struggles.

This is the place and time, where only you can make the difference in your journey! By choosing to stay right there, lying defeated in the darkness among the decaying layers of weeds, grasses, leaves and branches next to that huge putrid old dead tree of despair-waiting; you have introduced or intensified the suffering of the ones you love, and those who love you. Hiding inside the bottom of a bottle, at the end of a needle, a packet of powder or herb, a handful of pills or cowering in a corner only feeds the monsters. Deep down inside every one of us is a warrior

- imprinted in our DNA. This is the moment to unshackle the bound and gagged warrior. Let that warrior cry out: "Bring it on" while we pick ourselves up and start back on the trek.

PTSD and depression are dragging along anger and frustration, bound and gagged in a bag behind us. Rip open that bag and free the slaves - use them! There will be short glimmers of light; they are hope helping to guide our way. As your warrior fiercely marches along the guided path, you may begin to realize the PTSD and depression holding you hostage, caged, afraid, and unable to help yourself really have no power at all. We did not ask for these challenges, they came to us. It is important to understand that these monsters are not personal failures on our part; they are a medical condition!

That moment you made the purposeful decision to pick yourself up off of that forest floor, free the warrior, unleash anger and frustration, and start back down the path with renewed spirit was a significant turning point in your battle. We are not alone in this struggle for our own lives. When you come across another forest traveler on your journey, and you will; buddy up! Unity in our cause only strengthens us.

Once you stop running in fear and stand up to the powerless monsters, there is no need to struggle on your own anymore. There is powerful, compassionate and non-judgmental medical help out there for us. You have to take that first step; no one else can do it for you. Reach out to your VSO, the PTSD specialists at the VA, or a community based center. All of these resources will welcome you with open arms and know how to start the healing.

It is also important to understand that this may not be the only trek through the dark, dank forest. However, those journeys will be short-lived. You will already know what to expect, how to handle what may come, and know that there is a brilliant shining light at the forest end.

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**DAV, ERNESTINE SCHUMANN-HEINK CHAPTER 2**  
2ND PRIZE

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## **Friendship, Fair Winds and a Following Sea**

*By Jim H. Porter*  
— *Prairie Village, KS*

Growing up in landlocked Kansas, and being an adventurous young man, I always wanted to go to sea. In 1960, Vietnam was beginning to "heat up." My freshman year was spent at Kansas State where only Army and Air Force ROTC programs were offered.

I took the Army program but knew I still wanted "to go to sea." Transferring to Kansas University my sophomore year,



I enrolled and doubled up my first year in the Naval ROTC contract program. One of my Naval ROTC classmates was David Newcomer.

I didn't know David well at the time, but knew his family was in the funeral business in the Greater Kansas City area, as well as mine in Kansas City, Kansas. Also, he was a Shawnee Mission East High School graduate, and I a graduate of Wyandotte High School— bitter rivals in the Sunflower League and state high school basketball tournaments.

I remember as a cadet during semester break my sophomore year, flying from the Naval Air Station in Olathe, Kansas to Pensacola Naval Air Station and exploring the Naval Air options. My senior cruise occurred on the USS Mathews (AKA-96) sailing from the home port of Long Beach up the coast to San Francisco. Pretty good duty when midshipmen were paired up with a Mill's College girl's class for a dance at the famous Mark Hopkins Hotel.

After graduation in May 1964, it was off to Amphibious School at Coronado, California. The SEALs were also trained there, and I often saw them "running the streets" in formation.

In October, shortly after the Tonkin Gulf Incident, I was transferred to the USS Tortuga (LSD 26) after being sent out from Subic Bay, Philippines on an LST. A helicopter picked me up and set me down in a harness on the Tortuga's flight deck. We were one of 26 ships "on station" ready to land Marines at Da Nang, Vietnam.

History will show that we steamed in formation for 60 days, had two typhoon evasions, and five scheduled amphibious landings cancelled for various reasons. During that time, I was assistant communications officer then later communications officer.

After 60 continuous days at sea, our two days of R & R in Okinawa was a welcomed relief. How good it was to see land and green grass again!

During my two years of active duty aboard the Tortuga, we made a total of four Western Pacific cruises from our home port of San Diego, California. Ports of call over my two years were Sasebo, Japan, Okinawa, Subic Bay, Hawaii and Hong Kong.

We spent the last several months of my tour of duty on station at the mouth of the Saigon River outside the city of Vung Tau,

Vietnam. We had SEALs on board, as well as PBR's (River Patrol Boats) which tied up to the Tortuga.

In addition, two Huey Helicopters flew off our small flight deck. The military objective was to interdict weapons being sent south from North Vietnam. Shortly before I left, General William Westmoreland came aboard our ship to inspect our operation.

One of the ships in our squadron (Phibron 7) was the USS Winston (AKA 94). Aboard that ship, as Boat Group Officer was my friend and classmate, David Newcomer. We had seen each other when our ships traded movies and supplies in the South China Sea.

Returning to San Diego after the first tour, David graciously invited me to dinner aboard the Winston. It was uplifting for both of us to be able to share our Phibron 7's adventures. Fifty years later, David and I still see each other every holiday season and celebrate the Winter Solstice with prose and brandy. We reflect upon those days in Vietnam where we experienced "fair winds and a following sea," and shared the honor of serving our country.

## Mea Culpa

*By Tom Lauterback  
VA Medical Center – Elgin, IL*

"Mea culpa...mea culpa...mea maxima culpa. If you will pardon some old altar boy Latin (from a very old altar boy), this means "I am sorry...I am sorry...I am especially sorry." I write and offer this for catharsis, forgiveness and a firm belief that many others will identify and offer apologies of their own.

First, catharsis. I have borne a feeling of guilt that I never wanted to be in a uniform, not even that mandatory semester of ROTC as a freshman in college. Perhaps more than a few of you readers can relate. But there was a minor inconvenience called the Draft with which to concern ourselves. So, five of my buddies from grad school and I decided the best way to play the hand dealt us was to apply to Air Force OTS. Five of us made it and the one who was not accepted wound up in Navy OCS (and with an early discharge, I point out enviously). I'm fairly sure that each of us served our initial tours and got out. Then again, two of my fraternity brothers went to med school on the Air Force and became flight surgeons, so who knows?

But back to catharsis. I'm not sure I accomplished anything meaningful in four years. Most of my lieutenant years were spent on busy work, and even when I had a real job, I approached the job of selling the Vietnam War with a radicalized mindset, quite common at the time. Lots of time wasted. Fifty years later, I wish I had approached my duties with some reasonable commitment. A little late now.

Next, forgiveness. Feel like you could/should apologize to your service for any goofing-off, "basket leave", or showing up for work with a hangover to end all hangovers? I can't imagine I'm the only one who feels this way, not by a long shot. Was it just part of serving as a [fill in the blank] in the [fill in the service]? Obviously, those of us who feel guilty for momentary lapses of mission orientation have no father confessor empowered to forgive us, so perhaps we must remain burdened, or perhaps the writing and reading of this encyclical will grant us a modicum of redemption. One of the first military expressions I learned was "it's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission," but forgiveness seems a distant possibility.

Lastly, my firm conviction that I'm not the only one who ever wore a uniform to find my accomplishments wanting. This is really woven through the first two concerns. It seems like I knew and worked with a fair number of people who devoted an inordinate share of their time to alcohol and other controlled or uncontrollable substances. I should point out that I was a headquarters weenie, keeping the Midwest safe for democracy (with a tip of the garrison cap to George Gobel, for those of you old enough to remember him). I was never in combat, although one could question whether the stresses of combat justify what Steppenwolf called "Comfort for his Mind". I don't have a dog in that fight.

Perhaps I'm overestimating the percentage of veterans to whom the need for catharsis and forgiveness has occurred. But if you are in that percentage, I hope this slice of life proved helpful. Regardless, thank you for your service.



# What Brought Me to Where I Am Now?

By Jerome A. Longtin  
— Orlando, FL

Recently, I had a seemingly easy question asked of me from another VFW member, “What is my passion?” and whether I could write a paper about it? As with most of us, I too have different interests, so the selection of the topic of “what makes me tick” has been difficult. After giving some thought of my experiences, I narrowed down something perceived as a passion, which clearly identified what I have done and continue to do for employment.

As with anyone else, we get through life following our interests or passions. I believe our interests are much like a hidden road map, and that true passion or interest may not be known until later on in our life’s journey. Some of our focus is predetermined and other directions are randomly chosen. For myself, I reached way back into my memory to have a better understanding of how I ended up where I am today. As a youngster growing up in Wisconsin, I recall my interests in farm or heavy earth moving equipment and cranes, playing those types of toys for seemingly hours. Clearly, at an early age I had a fascination with large, noisy and intimidating equipment that I would see alongside of the road or at a construction site, and I loved to watch heavy equipment being used. An uncle of mine, who was a World War II U.S. Navy sailor and served aboard a destroyer and a cruiser, started a construction company after the war. At that time, what captured my attention was the crane he used in support of construction activities and it gave me the opportunity to get up close and watch the crane operator using the controls.

If I grew bored with my heavy equipment toys, I would play with my military toys. To mix things up, as with most boys, building models was another use of my spare time during a long winter. My favorite models were various types of naval ships. Naturally, reading the model assembly instructions was something I would do only after I found that the pieces and parts did not quite fit right the first time. My mother indicated to me, it’s a “guy thing”; what a thought!

Into my teen years, I continued to maintain an interest in heavy equipment, naval vessels and military. During the summer between my junior and senior year of high school, my neighbor, who owned a small construction company, hired me to work as a laborer. Due to his misfortune of unexpectedly losing both of his bulldozer operators, I had “my opportunity” to learn to operate a 1959 Caterpillar D-6 dozer. Instantly, I jumped at that opportunity spending the long, hot summer operating, maintaining and repairing the dozer with very few days off. As school started up in the fall, I’d work weekends or other non-school days. Upon completion of high school I was hired on with the County Road Department for four months as a dozer, scraper and grader operator, then it was on to U.S. Navy Seabees.

As I pursued my career of choice, I enlisted with the Seabees as an Equipment Operator (EO). After my first deployment, an opportunity arose allowing me to attend Seabee crane school, so again I snapped up that opportunity. For a Seabee Equipment Operator, cranes can be a specialized part of that rating from operations, supervision or management. Upon completion of 20 years of service with three Naval construction battalions, one construction battalion unit and 12 deployments, I retired from active duty as a Senior Chief Equipment Operator.

In the private sector, I continued to focus on what I was familiar with and gravitated towards cranes. I obtained employment with a heavy highway construction company to supervise their crane rental service, dismantling and relocating moving asphalt plants, rock crushers, concrete plants and a wide range of general crane and rigging operations. When the economic recession of 2000 raised its ugly head, the company had a very serious downsizing event.

The following year, the cranes were gone and my job search took me to Orlando, Fla., where I am employed as a crane safety instructor and crane inspector. The job requires quite a bit of travel, so I spend a good deal of time on the road. Occasionally, I’m involved in international projects, which is my preference. I seem to have gravitated to the work I do, blended with travel and various crane programs. I guess, in an odd way, it’s the Seabee in me - cranes, travel, work. So, to come full circle regarding my line of work and the “Invisible Hand” that helped me to arrive where I am, let’s review.

Youngster: Played with toy construction equipment, military toys and model ships.

Teenager: Operated farm equipment then the chance to operator a dozer. Interest in the military.

Young adult: Used heavy equipment and cranes blended with a dose of military experience.

Mid-aged adult: Supervising or managing heavy equipment and crane programs. More military experience.

Seasoned adult: Crane supervision, program management, crane and rigging safety instructor and inspector.

Looking at my road map from the past, I now have a much better idea how I managed to find my way here at this moment in time. The “Invisible Hand” guided me through the years with my focus and interests. How has your “Invisible Hand” guided you?

# Honor Flight

*By Bill McChristian  
VA Medical Center - Spokane, WA*

Notebooks, hats, jackets, shadow boxes, certificates, pictures, ribbons, and medals. These items represent my military career. Two different three-ring notebooks illustrate recent events that I participated in which mean a lot to me.

I was 18-years-old when I enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1950. I had been exposed to all the branches of the military, but the Navy appealed to me more than the others. The Navy went places! My Navy career had an impact on me: it got me ready to face life, and it broadened my knowledge and perspective of the world. I served as a machinist mate aboard the USS Telfair APA 21 0 - an attack transport vessel, during the Korean War. When the war ended, I headed back to California to live my life.

Sixty years later in Spokane, I was presented with the Ambassador for Peace Medal by Consul General Moon Duk-ho, the Seattle Consulate General of the Republic of Korea. The medal and a proclamation certificate were presented to me and other Korean War veterans at a banquet at the DoubleTree Hotel in Spokane. The medal and certificate were an expression of appreciation from the Korean government to American service men and women who served in the Korean War. To be eligible, veterans must have served during the Korean War from June 25, 1950 to July 27, 1953. The Peace Medal was also available to veterans who participated in UN peacekeeping operations until the end of 1955.

The Ambassador for Peace proclamation expressed the everlasting gratitude of the Republic of Korea and her people for the service performed in restoring and preserving freedom and democracy.

Before the banquet, I put my Korean medals on my cap to wear that night. I was grateful to be honored. I have a lot of respect for the Koreans for making this opportunity available. After the banquet, I made a three-ring notebook about the affair, and I framed my medal and the proclamation certificate.

In June 2015, another opportunity was made possible for me. I was selected to travel to Washington, D.C., aboard an Inland Northwest Honor Flight from Spokane International Airport. The first thing I did was have a navy blue zip-up jacket made to display my Korean medals, ribbons, patches, and commemorative medals and ribbons that I would wear on the flight. I didn't have any of my Navy uniforms to wear.

Before the flight left, I received a gift bag of goodies, including an Honor Flight T-shirt and other gifts. I remember two of the items in my bag were handwritten letters from elementary students thanking me for my service and wishing me luck. Each letter was decorated with patriotic artwork. I also received a small picture

frame that had been colorfully decorated in red, white and blue from another elementary student. I still have these items.

There were 87 veterans aboard my Honor Flight. Each veteran was escorted by volunteer guardians. My guardian was Air Force Lt. Nicole Holland. She was amazing. Since November 2009, the Inland Northwest Honor Flight association has taken 1,341 veterans and their guardians to see the memorials in Washington, D.C. The national Honor Flight Network began in 2005, and the first Honor Flight took place in May, when six small planes flew twelve veterans to Washington, D.C. At the end of 2005, the program had transported 137 veterans to the memorials. Due to high participation, the program began using commercial flights.

The mission is to transport America's veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit the memorials dedicated to honor the service and sacrifices of themselves and their friends. Honor Flight Network is a non-profit organization created solely to honor America's veterans for all their sacrifices.

Top priority is given to the senior veterans, World War II survivors, along with those other veterans who may be terminally ill. What an honor. I am forever proud. The memorials have special meaning for me; meaning for the world, and meaning for all people. Everything was impressive. I was taken care of from the first minute I arrived at the airport to the last minute when I returned home.

In Washington, D.C., the buses were chaperoned by a police escort, and they were able to breeze through the city. I was treated like royalty. When I returned to Spokane, I gathered the itinerary, the personal photos, the pictures of the memorials, the schoolchildren's letters, every little thing I had picked up on the trip. I have created another three-ring notebook to add to my military collection.

## Oscar Boneyard

*By Wallace D. McGregor  
— South Hamilton, MA*

### We Want You Back

Oscar Boneyard drove a fuel truck in Iraq. It was a job he considered far beneath his perfect mind. He was a perfectionist paralyzed with guilt that he had not achieved his worth in this great war. He didn't believe he belonged there. He didn't believe anyone wanted him there, anyway.

By way of justification he had imagined great exploits for himself as a redemption from his failures. In his mind he drove his personal Abrams tank, a lone wolf, apart from the battalion. He ventured deep into enemy territory against overwhelming odds. He hurled tree sized shells into the horizon with a single thrust of his arm. He crushed insurgents under his treads. He feared

nothing - not even death. He was a hero and he accepted no medals.

But, he was only an ordinary fuel truck driver and he had no value; something real battle soldiers could see. Because of this perception he drove himself emotionally and physically into the ground. When the sun set, when the night chills permeated his bones, the emptiness in his life overwhelmed his sense of being. He was condemned to this desert with the truck he hated. There was no escape. No place to hide. And, he became more and more afraid each pointless day because he was running out of time to make anything of himself.

His 18-vehicle convoy was ambushed, one night, by the insane Fedayeen careening over the infinite desert. They fired their machineguns killing many of the other drivers. They blew up the tankers with their RPGs. The possibility of his impending death shook him hard. The feeling of doom opened his eyes.

In an instant, it was revealed to him, as the heat rose in ripples from the morning sand. If no one could refuel the Abrams more men would die. He was last in line to save them. Battling his worst demons he knew full well that when he pulled his tanker out of the carnage the full force of the Fedayeen would be directed to destroy him, personally. With courage found only in absolute defeat, he pounded through the roving gauntlet to race into the sunrise in search of the Abrams.

What he found were the disabled tanks all scattered about, trapped in the talcum powder sand, looking as if they were dead. Their mighty engines were silent. The exhaust caps were flat and the 12-foot main guns hung flaccid, impotent to their very strengths. They were helpless. Their gas tanks were dry.

Oscar quickly extended his umbilical hose to the lips of each armored vehicle and inserted the nozzle into their pipes. He pumped the precious fluid into each tank and stood back proudly as their guns rose and blasted out shells to penetrate the enemy once again. The tank commanders cheered as Oscar roared them back to life. Oscar cared for no stardom after that. He had faced what he feared most and he became greater with his new belief in his worthiness. He knew he was part of the power behind the force that made all this possible.

His sense of lacking achievement floundered at this one, ultimate success. He came home proud after that. He never talked of this realization, though. He didn't need to justify his existence anymore. He had lost all his fear of failure when they said, "We want you back."

## The Forever War

When the pallet of steel cans hit the concrete floor of the supermarket, 20-year-old Oscar Boneyard, dived under the conveyor belt between the cash register and the plastic grocery bags. With uncontrolled fear he yelled for his rifle as he grabbed,



blindly, at the checkout clerk's ankle with a flailing that made her scream. The assistant manager, who had recently enlisted in the Marine Corps and was soon to be deployed, dialed 9-1-1 and frantically cried out, "There's a man with a gun over here." The police sirens squealed and the fire trucks honked as they pulled into the parking lot in front of the store. The ambulances came to a screeching halt. The swat team, guns drawn, pushed their way through the panicked crowd and surrounded the cowering Oscar.

A 70 year-old man with shoulder length, silver hair, a rugged face and a Vietnam veteran cap saw the event for what it was. "It's all right," he told Oscar in a confident tone. "It's all right, soldier. You're home now. You're in a supermarket. Stateside. It's over. You're doing fine."

The nervous assistant manager's life flashed before his eyes as he tried to protect the customers from some incomprehensible fear that took hold of him.

A trembling woman with thinning, lavender hair asked the assistant manager, confidentially, to tell the nice men with guns that such a person should be taken away. He didn't belong in a community as quiet as this.

"Who produced a young man like this?"

A woman with two small children and a sweatshirt that read "National Guard" clutched her kids protectively as she held back an overwhelming, rolling sob. She saw her husband now far away in Iraq. She saw him coming home and hiding under the conveyor belt, as well.

A 10-year old boy had learned what to say in school if he ever came across a situation like this. Without knowing why he muttered the words, "Thank you for serving." Oscar was a fighter. He didn't mean to fight everything any more. It was something he learned how to do in Iraq. It was an endless fight against his friends. Against anyone close to him. Mostly, he fought against himself. And, now, almost everyone was fighting against him.

# Never Too Old for the Navy Ball

By Barbara Meegan  
— Sun City, AZ

Just because you are retired does not mean you are too old for the Navy Ball. The other day I went to our local cafe with my daughter and wore the veteran hat she bought me. We discovered the couples sitting at the dining table next to us served in the Navy and in the Marines. What a refreshing joy to share stories of working for the government!

I was telling them about the Navy Ball here in Arizona, and how a friend recruited me to help with the Navy Ball Committee. This year's theme is to honor those who served in World War II.

We've heard of the Honor Flight where those who served in World War II can go for a tour to Washington, D.C. Along with the Navy Ball and supporting my friends going on the Honor Flight, I was featured in this year's published book, entitled *Since You Asked about Arizona veterans who encourage others to write about their military experiences.*

## My Story: Continued

By Andrew Jackson Smith  
— Elmore, AL

I agreed to meet the enemy combatant. He and I would be unarmed, in civilian clothing, in a shanty village. He would give me intel on a planned ambush of the soldiers I was training in the jungle several miles away. I would give him medicine to treat his malaria.

I ran the distance through jungle and trails into the village. Met him alone in a tattered wood covered pavilion that served as a spot to sell warm bottled beer. We sat alone and talked about an hour. The man across the room departed alone also. My eyes followed him not to the dirt pathway through the village, but into the jungle.

The generator stopped. The single dangling light bulb went out. Silence prevailed. I left the pavilion to orient myself back to the jungle camp by moonlight. Shadows caught my periphery. I walked calmly as my mind raced conceiving every possible scenario. The damn hitch in all of them - I was unarmed.

Four or five government soldiers casually strolled toward a parked jeep. At least two police lingered at a corner exiling the village. And there 'he' was again walking straight to me with his hand in a pocket; the man who was of enemy military age and stature. I had a bounty on my head, as did all U.S. military advisors. I sped up pretending not to notice him. He called out.



I turned rapidly determining now I would confront him and on his terms until I could evade. He came within a couple of feet where I stopped on the side of the path. There was no cover. He pulled out a pistol and pointed it into my head. I smelled alcohol. I heard "kill you" in his native language.

I saw the distant non-observant soldiers and police, of which were not necessarily to my advantage. I prepared to fight for my life but my first move would likely be the only one I would get.

I raised both my hands just to my shoulders, fingers spread, palms toward him. His gun lowered slightly. I spoke calmly and smiled, but my eyes were fixated on the gun, not the face. He raised the pistol to my head, inches away, as I slowly stepped back.

In a nanosecond I thought, "That's twice. A third time will not occur. I don't feel that lucky. Live or die, the next time is the last." I turned a right side profile. If the bullet struck my torso, it might miss my heart, assuming I could avoid taking a head shot.

He jabbed the pistol toward my head again and thrust both hands toward it and my body as far out of alignment as possible. The shot rang out like a pop. He was on the ground with me on top of him, his arm in one of my hands; the pistol in my hand.

Soldiers and police ran toward us. I slipped the pistol beneath my shirt and down my pants. I did not know if I was hit. The assassin was unable to get up on his own.

Police drew weapons on both of us as I raised my hands. They put me in the back of a truck at gun point with a couple of other soldiers and drove me to the jail in a nearby town.

Inside the outdoor holding cell, I assessed my situation. I could escape. I could wait till daylight when the team would know something was wrong with my absence. I was armed now and I had the hand drawn map of the enemy's ambush site awaiting our indigenous guerilla soldiers we trained.

It would not be the last time an assassination attempt would be made on my life, but the last attempt would be orchestrated by my own government and stateside.

## A Lucky Chance

*By William L. Snead*  
*VA Medical Center - Iron Mountain, MI*

On a brisk autumn day, a gray foggy mist hung over mighty Lake Superior Bay. Big John Stelmezak, Dale Tromblay, Tom Becks, and Leon Parrish stepped into a new Lund fishing boat. In an instant, the boat glided over an aqua sea of glass into an unknown blanket of murkiness. Walleye with the big eye would be the sportsmen's quest for the greatest delight. They would head northeast in hopes of a frenzied fishing feast. Leon was at the helm and pushed out in that direction. After the favorite spot was found; the anchor was dropped. All fishing rods pointed upward as if they might pierce the dark looming sky.

Two hours and a long uneventful wait for walleye proved to be a slow fishing day. Now with the whine of a chilling wind and a dense blanket of gray, the choppiness of rough waters, the boat began to rock. Big John bellowed out to Leon "it's time to go home!" They'd go back with limited visibility. As no catches were made, the anchor was raised. Southwest was the safe way back to shore and back to home. Hearing the hum of the engine reminded the four men of the good times of the past.

And as they moved expectantly towards shore, a deadhead that John did not see in time, spewed all of them over in one suspended instant. Bang, bang, bang, and it was done. Shivering in the brutally cold waters with no help in sight would induce a terror of indescribable emptiness. Young Dale, in a panic, swam blindly towards the shore. It was a mile in the distance; he'd never make it.

Big John's bellowing rang out again bringing unanswered echoes across the cold forbidding lake. And the others all chimed in, "Dale come back!" Suddenly he did swim back to John and the capsized boat. It was there that the great fight against hypothermia would test their resilience and will to live. It was now in the heavy gloom Leon croaked, "No feeling anymore!"

Lapping waves and rough waters with numb hands at the end, was small consolation for any of them. They would die.

But then a miracle, by pure chance the sounds of a commercial fishing vessel were heard. Closer, closer, closer, it was there. They would be saved. Finally all four men were lifted to the safety of the fishing ship, and, gradually the spark of life returned to them. Leon and Big John wept, but no tears could tell of their joy. And they raised their glasses filled to the brims with the best whisky ever downed. Leon winked at John and gazed through his glass at the sunlight. "To our luck - the luck of a chance that couldn't have happened but it did!"

## Words of Encouragement

*By Fred Minx*  
*VA Medical Center - Hines, IL*

My name is Fred. I've been paralyzed from a swimming pool accident since June of 1982. I came to Hines VA for rehab. I was depressed but never knew what it felt like before in my life. I tried to focus on getting myself better. I had to learn how to take it day by day, which is hard to do because I can be stubborn sometimes.

I had to get my thoughts right in my mind. My father was a big inspiration for me. He was a Ranger in World War II who was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge. He was shot in the stomach and because of that lost a kidney. But he dealt with it just fine because you can survive on one kidney.

Being of German descent, he liked to have a beer every once in a while, and he also drank water of course. He lived a full life, while raising my sisters, my brother and me to never give up. He taught us to treat others with respect and love, and to treat them as we would want to be treated. When we made mistakes, he was patient but firm with us.



I was in the hospital for nine months and came to Hines VA for a period of adjustment. After I got myself together, I moved home and my mother and father took care of me. They would literally lift me out of bed and carry me to the bathtub. I know my father hurt his back but wouldn't admit it. He was in his early sixties then.

I didn't like imposing on them but had no choice at the time. I had to go through a long adjustment period in my mind. They had to feed me, brush my teeth, and do everything for me. I had to relearn how to move my arms, hands, how to talk, how to feed myself, how to write, and how to wash myself. I was in a hurry to get better as fast as possible, but I still got depressed. I had to learn to take everything little by little, one step at a time. My father always encouraged me to take it moment by moment.

I finally moved to Hines as a permanent resident. Thanks to my mother and father for their kindness and patience with me, I've

been able to grow stronger and more positive. I exercise every day, eat right, and work hard to try to walk again someday. My dream is to one day work with an exoskeleton device. I also say a mantra several times a day to heal my spine and my mind. One of my projects is to become a motivational speaker to inspire people who are facing problems. I'm practicing a presentation and hope to be able to speak to groups of people before long. In grade school and high school I was afraid of speaking in front of others. I hope I can use what I've learned in overcoming my disability to help other people.

If you've recently been injured or paralyzed, don't lose hope. Each moment is important. Do whatever you can each moment to become stronger and more positive in your mind. Think of the positive role models you've known, and accept the strength they give you. Inspire other people just by trying your best each day. There's always somebody who is in worse shape than you are. Try your best to help them. By doing that, you'll help yourself as well.

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**PALLAS ATHENE BEST STORY  
AWARD**

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## **In Retrospect: A Tree...So Far**

*By A.D. Moore*

*VA Medical Center - Chicago, IL*

It has been over 50 years since I last traversed the jungles of Southeast Asia. In fact, it was May 7, 1966 - a date that will eternally remain imprinted in the deep recesses of a perplexed young mind.

Mention the name Vietnam and it conjures up all kinds of unpleasant images. From the divergence of a nation and anti-war protesters, to pawnable participants in an unpopular conflict that resulted in the loss of over 58,000 young American lives and combat-related injuries too numerous to idealize. Vietnam was serious business, as most of us who pulled duty over there during the long, agonizing war can attest to. But like life in general there were humanizing and humorous experiences as well.

For me, one particular incident sticks out in my mind, although it wasn't so comical at the time. I was a grunt (infantryman) with the 1st Cavalry and its Airmobile Reconnaissance Unit. In fact, it was the very first of numerous recon missions that I'd engage in during my year tour of duty as a member of B/Troop with the 1/9 Cav.

As I mentioned earlier, it was May 1966. In recon, the job was searching for the enemy. An elusive enemy, whom among other names, we called Charlie, VC (Viet Congs), gooks, and PANV (Peoples Army of North Vietnam) most often referred to as PAVNs. The choppers (helicopters) would drop us off in an area

where our adversaries were spotted or expected to be operating, and if there was no immediate contact we'd trek, sometimes what seemed like 15 or 20 miles through sweltering, leech-infested, almost impenetrable terrain before being picked up again.

Night was usually falling when we were transported back to a temporary base camp somewhere "out in the boonies". Our main base camp, Ahn Khe, harbored our airstrip and its superb helicopter fleet, which the enemy had tried to destroy a number of times. It was situated next to Hong Kong Mountain. That's what we called it; only thing though, it wasn't really a mountain-just a big ole hill.

Even without sick calls and an inordinate amount of casualties, our platoon always seemed to experience a shortage of manpower. A unit of 34, 35 men at maximum strength, there was little doubt of the big disadvantage we would have faced had we encountered a company, regiment, or brigade of enemy soldiers. But for an outfit our size we could and did hold our own. "We brought smoke! We brung 'P'!" was one of our favorite tag lines. 'P' meaning total, maximum firepower.

Like most GIs, prior to coming to 'Nam I'd heard all the horror war stories about the native women and their ingenious ways of utilizing razor blades in select parts of their nubile bodies for unsuspecting soldiers.

Also, how the VC would humiliate and infuriate our troops by displaying the heads of fallen comrades on punji stakes; how the Cong were so adept at stealth that they could sneak up on gullible soldiers and slit their throats on guard duty. How little Vietnamese children, some as young as four, five, and six years old were being exploited, urged to use hand grenades to kill and maim American soldiers and themselves too. (The Vietnamese youngsters were given grenades and told to wait until they were around a bunch of Americans, then pull the pins and they would hear music). So, to say the least, I was extremely apprehensive (scared as hell!) and unbelievably vigilant during my initial introduction to jungle warfare, Vietnamese style.

That first recon mission found us, only God knows where, in the middle of a clearing, except for a few stubby bushes, surrounded by dense woods. The clearing was about the size of a football field. And as night rapidly approached we sat watching the tree lines, awaiting pickup.



## Thoughts I Couldn't Share

*By Harold L. Watters  
VA Medical Center - Spokane, WA*

Then I saw it - something moved! The green, frog-like object camouflaged among the trees and vegetation was slowly inching its way closer to the edge of the field. Immediately I notified Sarge; he in turn, informed Captain Soon there were other sightings of our well-concealed observers. I even convinced the CO (Commanding Officer) that there was some kind of line above the jungle's edge. The possibility of one of the enemy's notorious underground cities loomed large in the back of our minds. And to make matters worse, word came down from the Big Brass for us to spend the night on top of what could turn out to be a brigade of PAVNs, crack troops from North Vietnam.

So all we could do was dig in, as much as humanly possible in the rockhard surface, which at most, was only a couple of feet. No sooner had the sun sank beyond the trees, erasing lingering remnants of daylight, when the unmistakable rat-tat-tat of machine gun fire erupted on the left flank, followed by the staccato burp of 16's. It was as if some long signal had been unleashed, as a cacophony of weapon fire burst out on all sides.

"I think they're coming at us on the right!" someone shouted before tossing a couple of grenades in the invaders' direction. I busied myself peppering the tree line with round after round from my trusted grenade launcher.

Fearing an imminent overrun of our position, Captian phoned for emergency air support. The helicopters swooped in and it was beautiful! A most welcomed sight - the chopper gunners and their tracer-laden machine gun fire lighting up the jungle's edge. The firefight lasted less than an hour, followed by an eerie serenity. Since I was the first to spot the fogger, the next morning our squad was awarded the task of going out and getting a body count. "What's the kill?," Captain inquired over the squawk box. "Only a tree, so far!," someone shot back derisively.

To be perfectly honest, no one could verify that we'd been fired on. But if unfriendly forces were in the area that night, you can bet that our overwhelming display of firepower undoubtedly had discouraged a confrontation.

Meanwhile, word got around camp how this rookie grunt had zapped a tree — me and my grenade launcher. My buddies started calling me Tree Man. I didn't really care, because if that's what it took to survive over here in Vietnam I'd gladly do it again!

You can bet there were many other recon missions, some more dangerous than others, but I will always remember that very first one when my kill was . . . "Only A Tree, so Far!"

Today is my 17th birthday. I was born April 5, 1949 eight days before the Great Seattle Earthquake. I grew up watching World War II movies with Audie Murphy and John Wayne: "The Longest Day," "D-Day," "To Hell and Back," "The Red Badge of Courage," and "The Gun Runners." Audie Murphy was my hero. He was a decorated combat veteran; a World War II Medal of Honor winner. He received every military combat award for valor available from the U.S. Army.

I wanted to emulate him. The spirit of serving my country and protecting those who couldn't or wouldn't serve was engrained into me at a very young age. I was a Boy Scout and an Eagle Scout. I was a track and cross country runner, so I felt I was fit and prepared to serve.



When I was in high school, I participated in the US Army's Delayed Entrance program. With my mother's permission, I joined the Army on my 17th birthday in April. My mother took me to the Everett, Wash., recruiting office after school to sign up. I had three months of high school to finish before I reported to Basic Training. I was proud that I was going to do my part to keep America free. At the recruiting office, standing tall, I walked up to the sergeant and said, "I am ready to join." With the Vietnam War starting, I didn't want to tell anyone at school or my girlfriend until after graduation in June. There were too many questions, and some Americans were against us going to war.

My father was Navy and that was not what I wanted. I wanted to be in the trenches where we had boots on the ground, not hiding on a boat. It wasn't until a week or so later that I told my dad. From that day on, he distanced himself from me. He avoided me as if I didn't exist. I never could understand why. Was it because I didn't follow him in the Navy? I will never know.

Three months later, I graduated from Mountlake Terrace High School, a suburb school north of Seattle. I reported to the Seattle

Induction Center. Within a half an hour I was standing in shorts and a T-shirt. I was asked to turn my head and cough. The physical exam had begun! An hour later, 30-something inductees gathered together and an Army captain ordered us: "Raise your right hand and repeat after me." We pledged our commitment to the Army with the US Army oath.

We soon boarded a bus and drove 40 miles south on Highway 99 to Fort Lewis in Tacoma, Wash., for eight weeks of Basic Training. Drill Instructors were in our faces, yelling as we marched to get our basic issues. I had begun Basic Training.

I was regular Army. I had enlisted. I had not been drafted like the rest of my group. I was immediately given sergeant stripes. "Congratulations, Harold, you are in charge of 30 draftees who don't want to be here." I was surprised and shocked that I was in charge of older men. I was only seventeen. Most of the men were 20 to 25 years old and didn't want to be there. How do I tell someone older than me to clean up his locker? Press his uniform. I did it. I think my Boy Scout training helped me.

I survived and was sent to Advanced Individual Training at Ft. Sill, Okla., to become an Artillery Cannon Cocker. I also continued my leadership training. I was trained on everything from a 105mm to 8-inch howitzers, both towed and self-propelled. Three months later, I thought to myself, "Not bad for a 17-year-old high school graduate." After breezing through AIT, I had orders to Vietnam. However, instead of going to Vietnam immediately, I was asked to stay on and attend the NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) Academy. After three weeks, I graduated as a sergeant and was given my order to follow my AIT group to Vietnam from Fort Lewis and McCord Air Force Base in Tacoma. I was given a week's leave before shipping out.

It finally struck me . . . I would be responsible for a gun section consisting of young men who had been drafted. Most of these men were married with children. I was scared. I was terrified. Could I live up to the responsibility? Could I do the right thing? Before it had been a game. It was no longer a game. In training, if I had screwed up, I just reported to the training sergeant.

Now if I screwed up, someone could die.

Plus, here I was in a summer khaki uniform with only my shaving kit, boarding a plane in the middle of December. I had no steel metal pot, no flak jacket, no weapon, no duffel bag. Just a summer uniform and a shaving kit. Nothing. And no idea what I was getting into when I arrived in Vietnam. Scary. But I couldn't let anybody know. On board the plane, the other soldiers were joking and laughing. I sat in the rear of the plane lost in my thoughts. What have I done? Can I be a good leader? To be honest, I was scared to death, but I had my "game" face on, so no one would know.

After the longest flight I'd ever been on, we circled the base at Da Nang, Vietnam. As the wheels touched down, I was welcomed by mortars following the plane, one by one as we taxied down the runway. After the plane coasted to a stop, the doors opened and as I deplaned I was hit by the 110 degrees of heat and humidity. I could hear small arms and mortars exploding. We soldiers lined up on the tarmac dressed in our summer uniforms holding our shaving kits. We might as well have been naked. No weapons, no steel pots, nothing.

Welcome to Vietnam! December 21, 1967.

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**WAC VETERANS ASSOCIATION, ARIZONA  
ROADRUNNERS CHAPTER 119  
AWARD**

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## **Navy Veteran, Felix Reyes**

*By Lucy Wong  
VA Medical Center – Phoenix, AZ*

He was my friend from 1985 to 1991. I lost touch with him when he was stationed in Pearl Harbor. In 1991, when I had called him in Hawaii to wish him a Happy New Year and a female voice answered the phone, I obviously had woken them up. I assumed that he was married to whomever was with him.

I met Felix at Naval Station Long Beach Reserve Center, California; he was in charge of the medical clinic on the second floor. Being from the Bronx in New York, he had seen a lot of life and was able to work well with any diverse, multicultural groups.

Coming from a family of 10 brothers and sisters, he learned how to stand on his own. He read me accurately when he said, "It was more difficult for you growing up in a big family where there were language barriers." I never gave him one clue about my family background. Felix was a smart one.

I have fond memories of Felix such as when, on my twenty-sixth birthday, he took me out for dinner at Long Beach Seaport Village. Also when his ship docked in San Diego, he let me stay one week with him while I attended my leadership and management course at the Naval Training Center, now closed due to military cutbacks. He treated me like family, even sharing his photo albums. From this, I learned of his military life before I met him in 1985. I saw topless dancers posing on the vertical bar in the Philippines, and photos of his ship performing a humanitarian mission, rescuing the homeless Vietnamese. I believe this happened in the late 1970s. Saigon had fallen apart in 1975. The next thing I asked him was about his family where he took some leave from his ship.

“How was your leave in New York?” I asked when he returned.

Felix replied, “I’ll never spend my leave there again. I would have had more peace on the ship.”

“Why?”

“All my brothers’ and sisters’ kids and cousins kept screaming and yelling. There was no peace and quiet.” I nodded my head and never forgot that conversation. I hope he has his own place now.

At this point in his naval career, he was an IDC, an independent duty medical corpsman. This is almost like a physician assistant in the private sector. He has seen so much of the world. He covered Vietnam on foot looking for lost POWs. He said, “I covered the whole surface area. There are no more.”

He traveled and often when I came home from work, I would discover a postcard or a letter from him. He sent me a letter from Shanghai, China in 1989. It was a commemoration of the first friendly and courteous visit of three U.S. Naval ships: the Amphibious Command Ship Blue Ridge, Guided Missile Cruiser Sterett, and Guided Missile Frigate RM Davis at Shanghai port from 19-22 May, 1989. This historical event included a party for the Chinese sailors at PLA-N Shanghai Naval Base.

While taking liberty to tour China, Felix had been one of many who filled Tiananmen Square during a pro-democracy movement that turned violent. He wrote in his letter, “China was OK. But it wasn’t worth all the trouble we went through to get there.” I figured that he had Chinese people all around him.

I am hoping he went on to be a physician’s assistant, happily married and enjoying his retirement pension after serving in the Navy. I miss my friend; I wonder if he thinks of me.



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## GLADYS M. CANTY MEMORIAL AWARD

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### Who’s on First?

*By Stanley Zack*

*VA Medical Center - Iron Mountain, MI*

In the European Theater of Operations in World War II, there was a danger to our soldiers that might not have been obvious at first thought. Enemy soldiers or spies wore American uniforms, could speak American English, and knew some of the culture of the United States.

This was a great danger indeed. We were trained to be on the lookout for them. We knew to ask questions that only genuine Americans could answer. Questions could be, “What is the capital of Illinois?” Many people who were not resident Americans would automatically answer “Chicago” instead of Springfield. Even Americans who were not from the Midwest might get that one wrong. A few questions like this could, in short order, expose a spy in U.S. Army uniform. But the questions that most easily separated the imposters from real Americans were those about Major League Baseball.

If asked “Who is the Yankee’s center fielder?” the answer had better be “Joltin’ Joe DiMaggio.” Other good questions could be, “Who won the series in 1943?” or, “Who pitched a no-hitter in last year’s Series?” Little did I suspect I would ever be on the other side of that line of questioning.

I was part of General Patton’s army, and was in France at the time the Battle of the Bulge began. Our group was ordered to move to the Bulge site. It was unusually cold, even for that time of year, and there were several inches of snow on the ground. I was part of the 3rd Army, and was given the task of delivering a message to the 2nd Infantry Regiment headquarters. I arrived at approximately 5 p.m., which was the time that the password changed. The password had just changed when I got there, and I had not been given the password to be used after 5 p.m.

Of course, I was challenged by the sentry. He was merely being a good soldier and doing his job. He did his job very well, poking his bayonet at me so hard that it pierced my heavy winter overcoat. I could feel the point against my body. Fortunately, the skin was not broken. I was held at bayonet point until, fortunately, the sentry’s sergeant arrived. I was able to convince the sergeant that I was genuine by naming all the officers in my unit. With that test passed, I was allowed to deliver my message with no bayonet through my overcoat.

## Why *Veterans' Voices* Means So Much to Me

By Richard Wangard  
VA Medical Center - Appleton, WI

I can paint pictures. Nothing on canvas, but using words I paint: words that my fellow veterans can see and understand. Words that provide me with an emotional outlet that lets me get by day to day. Make no mistake--I am an artist, and the written word is an art! Am I any good? I don't know! All I know is the outlet I receive every time I use thought, experience, and patience to write something that (I hope) relates to my brothers and sisters.

I want to reach out and somehow make things better for my fellow veteran who may be having the same issues as I do. I want to share and bring perhaps a few minutes of peace to myself and the reader. I cannot answer the question of What *Veterans' Voices* means to me, but I can tell you why it means so much. *Veterans' Voices* acts as a force for good and to fight against the darkness of a mind that can be in trouble. It can provide a comfort zone for veterans to share their deepest thoughts with others who can relate. It acts as a communication between strangers, but those strangers are all brothers and sisters who, no matter what era they're from, know what is being written about. It takes a special person to take the oath and write a blank check to their country.

I do understand how writing can act as a therapy tool and for just entertainment or fun. I laugh and I cry with each issue I read. *Veterans' Voices* is powerful! The pictures the authors paint leave a lasting impression, and the talent is outstanding. I wonder if the issues produced save just one life--how much is that worth? Allowing a veteran to connect in the privacy of his or her own space and tell our nation what is going on in their world: the world that lives inside of themselves. The world they served and the country they came from.

Sacrifice, Duty, Honor, and all that goes with it. That is why *Veterans' Voices* means so much to me. It is all about my fellow veterans!

## It Never Ever Stops

By Richard Wangard  
VA Medical Center - Appleton, WI

I wish I could inspire you with this story and make you happy - maybe even make tears roll down your face from joy. Indeed, in wartime there have been great heroics and stories of strangers



and neighbors who went above and beyond. Nothing mattered but saving lives, everyone doing their best. Volunteers came from all over because the need was so great and the devastation so complete.

I recall only one event in my life that compares. It sticks in my mind like I just saw it yesterday. Destruction so complete and devastating, it seemed like the cratered surface of the moon. Only it was not the moon; it was mother earth, and the place was in western Vietnam near the Cambodian border, stretching all the way from the highlands right up to the DMZ cutting through the A Shau Valley. I was indeed looking at the moon. Nothing but bomb craters where thick jungle grew, while Agent Orange ruined everything else for as far as the eye could see.

I had a bird's eye view, flying in a C-130A at 2,000, 3,000, and 5,000 feet above the destruction. It was complete and thorough. The B-52s had done their job trying to shut down the Ho Chi Min trail. Some 500 pound, 1000 pound, and 2000 pound bombs had rained down upon the land ruining everything in sight. As hard as they tried, the extensiveness of the trail was never ever really discovered as supplies from the north always made it to their destination due to the clever enemy. They were just that good and determined. The enemy was willing to give up life and material so they could sneak material in other places. But ultimately they never, ever gave up.

I have lived long enough now to understand that war never ever stops. It is always going on someplace in the world. Unbelievable what humankind can do to each other and how weapons cause more death, destruction, agony, and misery, with the civilian population always taking the worst of any war.

I witnessed another war zone with a soon-to-be-war zone created in a little more time. It may be the Caribbean Islands, or Florida this time. Look what Hurricane Harvey did — now Irma is coming and predicted to hit as a Category 4 or 5. Only Mother Nature can create as much destruction as we human beings do to one another in any war. Trillions of gallons of water fell on the Houston area and surrounding areas, making a wasteland where thousands and thousands of people were left with nothing. It reminds me of flying into Da Nang and seeing naked children living in cardboard boxes. Now nothing! All Gone! Eighty percent

with no flood insurance and no prospects of rebuilding or regaining their loss. They do not qualify. Their best hope is trying to get something to eat or drink--maybe a change of clothes. Yes, people came together and no one cared about skin color, religion, rich or poor, or what neighborhood you lived in. The news media made a big deal out of that.

But what happens after the cameras are gone and the fourth largest city in the United States lies in ruins? Congress is in the process of approving a whopping \$7.9 billion package for Harvey's devastation. The estimated cost of that storm was \$120 billion. Epic, historical, unimaginable were some of the words used to describe it. People are giving and the nation is trying to help. It will take years of help, and that is the truth because that is the power generated by just one of our modern day storms.

In 1969, I was on Okinawa and in that part of the world a hurricane is called a typhoon. It hit full force and we sheltered in place. The Air Force flew all their planes out before the storm hit. It was so powerful that the wind picked up a dump truck and smashed it into one of our barracks. The whole island was a mess! Lives were lost.

Now the storms are getting more and more severe. As the seas get warmer, the ice melts, sea levels rise, some people prefer to bury their heads in the sand and disregard the new war zones they are creating by themselves. Both from real war and the war Mother Nature is presenting to humankind because of our own doing.

People will always help people in need and do the best they can in situations that are intolerable. Both in war and in a natural disaster, maybe that is what it takes to bring out the best in human nature and if there is such a thing as a silver lining from traumatic, devastating destruction that is the only positive I can see. Long after the event itself, people will be hurting, struggling, and needing counseling, finding the necessities of life and rebuilding from nothing. The sadness of this story is complete and now the only thing you and I can do is to reach out to those affected and let the sunshine of our human nature through to help those who cannot help themselves. In a few days Irma will become another catastrophic story and tens of thousands more will be affected from her wrath. No folks, it never ends and we have not even talked about the West burning up. We have not talked about Russia and the Ukraine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and many other regional problems in the world. Now throw in North Korea! One button pushed and I guess no one will have to worry about anything anymore. I ask you: is this what we as a human race have come to? Rome lasted for 600 years - we have not even made 250 yet!

All we can do is try to do the best we can and somehow learn to get along, help each other, realize peace is better than war, and that love is better than hate. After Vietnam I learned we are nothing more than water, blood, muscle tissue, and bone, so very easily destroyed beyond recognition. So vulnerable! It is our duty to keep each other alive. It never stops!

## One More Huey Driver

*By Steven James Bookout  
— Knoxville, IA*

While cleaning off my old roll top desk recently, a small blue and white spangled address label drifted down from between the roll and the top of the desk. It said:

W.C. Westmoreland  
Box 1059  
Charleston, S.C. 29402

I looked up to a fading photograph on the wall inscribed to me with its subject looking back. The lower desk drawer was opened and a fat bundle of letters were removed and re-read. In a heartbeat, the years rolled away and several pleasant memories came flooding back

It was back in 1970, a week before the Cambodia incursion. I was flying for the 120th's Deans and drew an early morning mission to the Hotel 3 main heliport. Three pax would be waiting and would give me a mission briefing after liftoff. "O.K. by me." Arriving at Hotel 3 in Saigon, there were unusually large numbers of personnel surrounding the heli-pad. Also noted was the fact that our bird was the only one there. Hmmm. What's up we thought.

Landing, we were immediately encircled by a well-armed mob, and a tall, stern looking, white-haired gentleman with four stars sewn on his collars climbed aboard. We pilots looked at each other as if God, himself, had just climbed aboard. "Fly due west" were the only instructions given. After half an hour into the flight, I was shown a map and then told where to land. I distinctly remember reading the word CAMBODIA with the feeling that something unusual was in the works. Our destination was a small village located on the far side of a river, quite close to the Cambodian border as several naval vessels were parked in rows across the width of the river. The general and staff spent the next couple of hours with Special Forces personnel before returning on board.

Later, when the copilot was on the controls, curiosity got the best of me. I glanced at the passengers in the rear and Gen. Westmoreland was in the jump seat watching the Huey's instruments quite closely. It was then that his pilot's wings were noticed. Not being one of the Deans star pilots, nor able to keep his mouth shut when appropriate, and for some reason feeling the general was a deprived fellow aviator, I asked if he wanted to fly. With eyes twinkling over a large smile, he nodded a very affirmative YES! I asked the co-pilot to get in the back and let the general borrow his helmet.

After getting settled, he took the controls and beat feet for Saigon. His control touch was smooth and technique was strictly by the book. As we approached Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base at 4,000 feet, I told him we lesser mortals had to get below the approach path near the end of the runway to stay clear of all fixed wing aircraft. It was an eye opener for the crew to see him descend and fly low level under the approach path and then perform a good cyclic climb on the other side. I told him that the small kites flying in the vicinity of Hotel 3 might have wires for strings, so please avoid them. He looked my way, smiled, and started his decent. Upon landing, we were once again mobbed by staff and security. They undid his harness, but he continued to sit there and look at the instrument panel. He then got out, gave me a thumbs up, and walked away.

To my delight, I drew the same mission the following day. This time as the general was crawling in back, an older captain, Infantry type, came around and grabbed me by the harness and yelled for me to not be dumb and do something stupid again! I nodded in agreement and quickly pulled pitch. Who was that guy? The trip was pretty much a mirror image of the day before and thus pretty uneventful. As our destination came into view, it seemed as if more small boats were anchored near the village. While we awaited our passengers return, speculation ran amok amongst the four of us about what was going down, but none of us had the guts to ask anyone.

After departure, I asked the general if he wished to fly again. Not a word was spoken, but he unbuckled and waited for the copilot to crawl in back. After putting the SPH4 helmet on, I asked if it was a little small. He nodded his head yes, and smilingly said "My ears seem to hate me." He flew as before, but asked several questions about operational flying. What happens to lift when hovering over very tall grass? Do you ever get out of CG with a whole load of troops in the rear and standing on the skids? Answers were given from my perspective and experience. He would nod his head affirmative at each answer and then ask another. As we approached Tan Son Nhut once again, he took the H model down about 5 miles out and rolled it over to 125 knots. Holy mackerel, Kingfish! I was sitting on the edge of my seat, ready to take the controls in an instant... I wasn't used to flying quite this low... at this speed... and especially with a full blown general on board, let alone the Army Chief of Staff (My entire meager military career flashed before my eyes!)

Looking at him, a huge grin was on his countenance and eyes that were quite intense... probably just as intense as the pucker factor I was experiencing! Another cyclic climb to altitude, followed shortly thereafter by a text book descent into Hotel 3. He crawled out, flashed a thumb's up, waved at the crew and drove off. We all looked at each other and vowed we'd never let the unit find out about this flight.

Five days later, the general was waiting for me again at Hotel 3 . . .and with a helmet bag! A light rain was falling as we landed

at the Cav's camp in Cambodia. They had captured an NVA commo center, literally mounds of new arms, and tons of other loot. Westy motioned for me to follow, so I left the bird in the capable hands of the copilot. The commo center was a bit dark on the inside and the roof was leaking in places. A telephone switchboard was lying on its side and many papers were scattered about. A few officers briefed the general while trying to keep him dry as much as possible. He nodded, then turned and walked out of the small hooch, motioning me to follow. We were shown pile after pile of new SKS carbines, AK-47s, RPGs, and two flintlock rifles!

While returning to the chopper, the general handed me a blue and red NVA Gia Phoung medal with two gold stars on the ribbon, one of Ho Chi Minh's funeral cards, and a hard backed foreign stamp collection book. The stamp collection had belonged to an NVA lieutenant. In it were many first day covers from Saigon and several Adolph Hitler stamps. "Perhaps you can find some use for these?" He crawled in the front and cranked up the Huey, using his own checklist, brought us to a hover, pedal turned, and took off. On climb out he told me how much he appreciated the opportunity to "get on the controls again". He stated that he had really enjoyed flying again and that for today's mission he had asked for that "old 101st pilot" again. I laughed at him saying that, even though I was on my second trip across the pond, I wouldn't be 22 until come October. He then radioed Cap Center, but the remainder of the flight back was in silence. This time, he stayed at altitude across the end of the runway and then descended for the last time into Hotel 3. I took the controls as he got out and was immediately jerked back into reality by that captain jerking on my harness again. Westy heard him yell, turned around, pointed a finger at him, and shook his head NO... ..and that was the last time I ever saw him.



Fast forward to 1979. Two unexpected books arrived in the mail. One was *A Soldier Reports* by W.C. Westmoreland and the other *Twenty Years and Twenty Days* by the former South Vietnamese leader Nguyen Cao Ky. We had corresponded with one another for several years, he often writing that the American soldier did not fail in Vietnam and he was proud of their accomplishments. I believe he felt remorse about the war's outcome and the way his bosses handled the affair. He also mentioned that what he missed most about the Army was flying Hueys. This was also mentioned in his book. He also sent a copy of his official retirement portrait addressed to me. He is seated wearing jungle fatigues. He said

that he would rather I have that instead of one of his official photographs because he preferred to dress like his men and not in dress greens.

Westy's flying lessons were set up specifically to allow him to perform his duties at the same time. Sounds a little like the colonel in the movie "Apocalypse Now", doesn't it? Yes, perhaps he was far removed from us lesser mortals, but even at that, he was still just like us. Oh. About that captain jerking me around? Westy said that the President had officially prohibited him from flying in Vietnam and thus the captain was only trying to keep the general out of hot water! It's common knowledge that several pilots had flown Gen. Westmoreland in Vietnam, but it seems this Iowa farm boy was the only one who ever had him as his copilot! Cheers!

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**DAVA, ARLINGTON-FAIRFAX CHAPTER 10 AWARD  
2ND PLACE**

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## **Snooker? What the Heck Is That?**

*By Loren Flaugh  
VA Medical Center - Sioux Falls, SD*

The memories are fond, though fading fast, of Dad taking me along to Sam's Pool Hall in Archer back in the middle 1950s. Dad frequented Sam's, especially during winter's often brutally cold, long months because Dad relished a good card game with his many Archer neighbors. Winters seemed so much harsher then. Not so many years after these early memories were formed, in October of 1959 in fact, Dad suddenly passed away due to a massive coronary occlusion at only 41 years of age. At all but 11 years of age, I sorely missed his reassuring presence in the years shortly after his shocking, untimely death.

I found myself wondering back in 2004: Where have all the snooker tables gone that once occupied floor space in the pool halls of rural northwest Iowa's O'Brien County? Indeed, where have all the local bars gone? That's probably the other great question.

Archer, a community with a population of never more than 250 folksy folks, is located in Iowa's largely flat, fertile farm country. Our corn stalks stand tall, routinely soaring to heights a foot taller than corn grown in any other state.

A decade or so ago, one small combination bar and cafe in Archer had perhaps the last remaining snooker table available for public use anywhere in the county. That establishment, too, has since closed. Snooker tables in the county have all but vanished.

Ira Saunders was an early proprietor of Archer's pool hall. The late 1940s and early 1950s were mighty busy times for most any pool hall. Many young, battle-tested men had recently returned from fighting in World War II and those veterans were now

enjoying life and growing their families. However, other men were now engaged in a new fight in a distant, hostile place called Korea.

Dad fathered two boys and three girls with the last girl born two months after Dad's sudden death. "Baby Boomers" is what this generation would be called.

Jerry Saunders, current Paullina barbershop owner and former Archer resident, fondly reflected over when his dad enjoyed a "hundred-dollar night" while owning the pool hall. "A glass of beer cost ten cents and to sell \$100 worth of beer was a very good night," Saunders lamented. "The bar was a bustling place almost every night, until television came into its own during the early 1950s."

Jerry's uncle, Buss Saunders, remodeled the bar's northeast corner into a one-chair barbershop.

According to Mom, this was probably where I squirmed in the chair while enduring my first haircut. What little kid didn't like their first haircut? My son, too, balked and bawled when he experienced the traumatic ordeal for the first few times.



I can still remember what that small corner of the pool hall looked like. Large window panes from the waist extending almost to the ceiling encircled the swiveling chair. Harold Muilenburg cut hair there for many years, including mine. When the torment in the chair was over, I was allowed to walk back and watch Dad play cards. Standing near his shoulder and listening to them discuss the issues of their time was a real treat and a grand thing to do. I didn't dare sneak a sip of beer, though, for too many adults were watching. However, I do recall eyeballing the yellow frothy fluid.

Several of Dad's card buddies were farmers too, with many being World War II veterans. Carl Akeson, Ted Idso, Herman Tiemans, Ivan Summa, Sterling Archer, Orlin Henspeter, Pete De Boom, Bill Haht (the local banker), Marvin Johnson, Lee Williams and Frank Mateer were some that Dad was likely to be playing pitch, pinochle or gin rummy with.

Dad earned his Purple Heart Medal at Bagnoli, Italy on Thanksgiving Day of 1943. Carl Akeson as well earned a Purple Heart Medal while fighting in the European Theatre. Orlin, a short man in stature, was a local livestock hauler and owner

of a corn shelling machine. Year after year, Orlin came to our small 160-acre family farm to truck livestock to the Sioux City Stockyards, or to shell corn.

Perhaps the most fascinating object to occupy space in the pool hall was a monster 6 feet by 12 feet billiard table perhaps even more fascinating than the snooker table nearby. Saunders had the one billiard table, a snooker table and an 8-ball table.

I suppose it was in 1952, or so, when I was finally tall enough to peer over the edge and see the huge, smooth, green surface. I can recall reaching for a ball and rolling it hard into a cushion, just to watch it carom around the table. What was so weird, though, was that the table had no pockets. I'm sure I must have wondered, "Why?"

Most people my age will fondly recall the popular 1960s sitcom, "The Beverly Hillbillies." J.D. "Jed" Clampett had a "billyeeearrd table" in his Beverly Hills mansion. But to Granny, the green monster was the clan's "fancy eatin' table" with the pool cues being the "pot passers."

Not too many Archerites ever became serious about the challenging game of billiards. Billy Bilsland, "Mechanic Billy" to his many friends, was arguably Archer's best billiards player and a clone to Minnesota Fats, the best known pool hustler of that era. A tall, slender, laid-back farmer from south of Archer, Ted Idso, was the other sharp-eyed billiards hustler. Idso was Dad's favorite duck hunting partner. Bilsland owned a small farm implement repair shop in the rural area west of Archer. Whenever our orange Minneapolis-Moline tractor needed repairs in the 1960s, I was designated to make the seven-mile drive to Bilsland's shop. From my perspective, that was the only part of farming of any enjoyment to me.

A person walking in to the pool hall would likely see small groups of men seated around tables playing cards while visiting with town and country folks, men playing pool while visiting, or men simply seated at a table watching. Not very many ladies ever ventured into the pool hall. An ornate, long, varnished wooden bar and a line of bar stools occupied space along the south wall. Several card tables were in the center of the long rectangular building. High-backed bench seats lined the walls around the pool tables at the west end. People often relaxed while watching a hotly contested game of pool from the benches.

A large, steel floor grate was near the southwest corner where heat emerged from the oil furnace located in the basement. A dingy, dirty, dust-covered yellow metal covered the ceiling. The smoky atmosphere would probably be frowned upon by today's health conscious standards. Having to go stand outside to "grab a smoke" was a rule unheard of back in those days.

Almost nightly, the pool hall was the center of activity in Archer, as with most any small, rural Iowa farming community.

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## ELIZABETH L FONTAINE MEMORIAL AWARD

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### Always Remember Me

*By Wallace D. McGregor  
— South Hamilton, MA*

I saw the Afghan war veteran, one day, in a staging area next to North Station, Boston. He sat, shoulders bent in his tank-sized wheel chair, parked by the entrance on a scorching hot day. An American flag was draped down the back of the chair and his combat boots hung by their laces from the hand grip. He wore a Marine Corps battle cap that held his long hair in place from the wind. His Purple Heart was pinned to the visor, his face was thin from too much drink and his nose had grown pitted from the sun. His eyes were glazed over and he seemed to look right through me.

Below the stumps of his legs, spread out on his empty flak jacket, were his miniature portrait paintings of combat soldiers he served with overseas. Some had square jaws and patriotic smiles. Some raised the flag in triumph, others fallen comrades. All were noble and possessed infinite pride.

I knelt on the sidewalk and studied his portraits as he told me stories of exploits I had never imagined. He had slipped into stone houses to search and destroy insurgent elements. He was dogged by sniper fire, explosions and blood. He had stories of battles where he discovered he had deep fears. He lifted what was left of his legs and in a bold laugh told me the story of the final great blast of his soldiering career.

He expressed no regrets. He gave to his country all that he had. There were no more wars for him to win.

Passing tourists stopped to observe what they saw as an unfortunate refugee from society. They muttered among themselves, "How does he live such a wretched life? Why doesn't he put the past behind him and pick himself up? Why doesn't he snap out of it?" They say these well-meaning things as they meander on to museums where real paintings hang on the walls.

I look for him every time I get off the train at Boston. He knew something about life — or was it death? I did not understand. War had made him elusive.

I don't know if I'll ever run across him again. But, I know I will always remember this veteran of the Afghan war.

## Chemical, Biological and Radiological Training

*By Stephen E. Kirkland  
VA Medical Center – Detroit, MI*

Another unpleasant exercise during military training, was the gas mask drill, also known as Chemical, Biological Radiological (CBR). In addition to extensive classroom training on the various types of CBR currently in use, we were all fitted with M-17 gas masks. These masks were designed to allow us to withstand the effects of the gases that might be encountered on the battlefield, one of which is 2-chlorobenzylidene malononitrile (CS), more commonly known as tear gas. This type of gas works on the mucous membranes, causing the victim to have uncontrolled mucus from his nose, and tears from the eyes, thus the term tear gas.

The masks were made of rubber and incorporated straps that would allow them to be fastened over the head area while allowing a helmet to still be worn. Goggles were built in to facilitate vision while cartridges were used to filter out contaminants and allow the wearer to breathe clean air. If the mask did not fit perfectly, gas would seep in, rendering them useless. The basic test of a good fit was to place both hands over the filters and then breathe in hard. If the mask collapsed against the face, a fit was considered adequate. If any air was pulled in from around the mask, the straps were readjusted. This process was repeated until a proper fit was attained.

The standard practice was for a platoon size group to don their masks, then march into a Quonset hut and stand at attention in squad formation. A tag with name, rank and serial number was attached to the pocket of the fatigue shirt. Once everyone was inside the door was closed and sealed and, on some unseen signal, CS gas was released into the hut. Since we were wearing gas masks, the only indication that anything had changed was that the room seemed to be filling with fog. One by one, beginning with the soldier in the first rank, we were called to step forward and face a mask equipped instructor who would pick up the tag, have us remove our mask and recite our name, rank and serial number. No one made it much past their name before being overcome.

When this happened, we were led to a door that contained a breezeway and then released out into the open. We were admonished to not touch our faces, as this would only spread the awful stuff around and make it last longer. We were told to stand with the wind blowing on our faces and let time do its work. There were chain link fences surrounding the CBR training facility and we all leaned against the wire, crying and sniveling, until we could again function. I believe if any of us could have caught a feral cat we would have tried to induce it to urinate on our faces. This was a terrible experience, but one I would suffer several more times during my stint in the Army.

## My Life in the USN Reserve and Army - MASH Unit

*By Richard E. Marenger  
VA Medical Center – Iron Mountain, MI*

I enlisted in the United States Navy on November 7, 1945, and served until I developed rheumatic fever and was hospitalized for six months. I was discharged on June 21, 1946, with 100 percent disability. When the Korean Conflict began, I was drafted into the United States Army and had to waive my disability. I served at Fort Sheridan and Fort Jackson on a MASH unit (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital).

I went to Adjutant General School at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis for stenography, and after 18 weeks, I received an MOS-1213. As the Korean Conflict was underway, I was assigned as an admitting and disposition clerk. After two years, I was discharged as an SFC and returned home.

While on maneuvers at Southern Pine, Texas, where I was admitting and disposition clerk, an officer who had chaplains' insignia stopped at my desk. He asked how everything was. I told him that I'd like to go home. He was sympathetic and said he would pray for me, and he handed me a T.S. card and punched it. Needless to say, it was a moment that cheered me up.

At home, I joined my dad and my brothers, Harold and Wally, in our family business, the Escanaba (Michigan) Machine Company. We were dealers in International Harvester farm equipment and trucks.

Years later, I developed a severe infection and was assigned to the Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center in Iron Mountain, Mich.. At that facility, I could be with my brother Wally, who was gravely ill. He died on July 17, 2016. Our brother Harold had died of cancer previously.

At Oscar G. Johnson, I was appointed Resident VA Council President, where I was assigned to announce coming events and accept complaints to turn over to the VA Committee for further study. I have been given long-term resident/patient status at the VA in Iron Mountain.

The VA has been fulfilling all my needs, and I am grateful for their services. My needs are physical therapy daily, and I am improving.



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**SALLY-SUE HUGHES**  
MEMORIAL AWARD

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## A Tour To Remember

*By Larry L. Penrod*  
— Buffalo, NY

The jungle floor beneath me, my boots are under my head.  
I would give anything right now to sleep in a king size bed.

Claymores are set and the trip wires are tight.  
It is a whole other world in the jungle at night.

One hour per night, you will sit and watch guard.  
To see anything past your nose gets pretty hard.

Your eyes and your mind see things that are not there.  
Deep in your heart, you know the VC aren't scared.

It's not like hide and seek.  
They know where we are, so we don't get much sleep.

Born to fight and they will fight for life.  
The North against the South, both sides want to be right.

Win lose or draw,  
I went and I saw.

I did my best,  
Right along with the rest.

The monsoons and leaches, bamboo vipers and rats.  
150 lbs I carried on my back.

No air mattress, no steel pot.  
I carried what I needed, and need what I got.

C-rations, LEARPS, and ammo for a week.

Smokes, some frags, and a special love letter.  
1 quart of water, and a 2nd LT. that thinks he is my father.

Three 6-man teams, recon missions both day and night.  
Lock and loaded we are ready to fight.

45 days at a time.  
Then 3 days in Vung Tau to fry your mind.  
Wine and dine behind the enemy lines.

Load your pack and sharpen your knife.  
Another mission tomorrow night.

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**WOSL MEMBERS**  
APPRECIATION AWARD

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## The Tax You

*By Scott Lehman*  
VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO

They tax you  
When you're in your bed

They tax the thoughts  
That are in your head.

Well, I would not feel so relaxed  
Everybody must get taxed.

They tax you when you're  
Playing your guitar

They tax you when  
You're putting gas in your car.

Well I would not feel so relaxed  
Everybody must get taxed.

They tax you when you're  
Flying in a plane

And then they tax you  
If you start to complain.

Well I would not feel so relaxed  
Everybody must get taxed.

They tax you season after season  
Then they tax you for no  
Apparent reason.

Well I would not feel so relaxed  
Everybody must get taxed.



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## I'm a New Recruit

*By Helen Anderson Glass  
VA Medical Center – Tuscon, AZ*

I've been recruited to serve  
in a very special way.

Grampa would call me a "pup,"  
as they did in his day.

I'm clumsy and all "paws"  
too young to go to war.

But I'm told I am needed  
in what I was recruited for.

Kissed and cuddled  
are what I want to be  
as I in turn help those  
suffering from PTSD.

I'm proud to be a member  
of the new canine "PAWS,"  
assisting wounded service  
members with this great cause.

Those "older guys" excel in what they do.

When they get to go to war  
they fetch and carry, sniff out bombs,  
find the wounded and much more.  
So I'll be content with what I am here for  
until I get recruited to go.

When that will be or where  
I'm too young right now to know.



## So Great a Price We Had To Pay

*By Tom Reilly  
VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO*

We said goodbye, I left for war,  
We pledged too much to hump that far.  
Come back the boy you are today.  
I hope I can, all I could say.  
Will you be here when I return?  
I will be here, have no concern.

So much occurred while I was there,  
Some good, some bad, a lot to bear.  
My tour was done, after one year,  
I came back home — there was no here.  
No girl, no youth, innocence spent-  
The price we paid when we were sent.

I see her face at night these days,  
Through mem'ry's eyes and dreamy haze.  
They come and go, these dreams of mine,  
Of days gone by and love's sweet wine.  
It hurt to see her face this night,  
Familiar pain, familiar sight.

If I could choose my dreams this day,  
I'd choose a youth that slipped away.  
With eyes closed tight to hold my dreams,  
I'd search for Innocence it seems.  
I wake from dreams I wish would stay,  
So great a price we had to pay.

## **Hiding in Plain Sight**

*By Christopher Ryan  
VA Medical Center – New York, NY*

I am Hiding.  
What you see is not me.  
Hiding is sometimes safer and sometimes harder.  
I am hiding in plain sight.

Behind the uniform, I am hiding.  
What my fellow Veterans see is not me.  
A Veteran is what you see, but that is not all that I am.  
I am hiding in plain sight.

In my life, from morning to night, I am hiding.  
I walk through the world hidden from sight.  
I am a man who projects one thing and lives another.  
I am hiding in plain sight.

Now I am no longer hiding.  
I am proud to be who I am.  
I am a Veteran.  
I am an American.  
I am a Man.  
I am Gay.  
I am no longer hiding in Plain Sight.

## **Transition**

*By Kamal Bowen  
— Richmond, VA*

My Music WAS...  
Lovely  
Moody  
Sentimental  
Melancholy.  
It kept my blood pumping  
My mind wandering and  
My heart beating.  
As long as my heart was beating  
The music was flowing.  
My Music IS...  
Rough  
To the point  
Attitude  
Raw  
Like an earthquake  
Chaos.  
It wakes me up  
Carries me through the day and  
Puts me to bed at night.

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**GLADYS FELD HELZBERG MEMORIAL AWARD**  
BEST POEM

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## All Gone Now

*By Tony Vignali*

*VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM*

I was drafted into the United States Army in August, 1966.  
That was 52 years ago.

I boot-camped through the end of a hot summer  
into the fall and cold, cold winter of North Carolina.  
Sometime in October of that year we were given the M16  
carbine  
and went to the rifle range.

Up until that day we exercised and were indoctrinated  
into the ways of the military.  
Almost all of us were drafted into service, and as the weeks  
went by,  
many of us were not happy with being in the Army.

It was a daily ritual to complain, with calls to moms or anyone,  
to get them out of the Army.  
When we returned from our first visit to the rifle range,  
the evening quiet in our barracks was deafening.

Everything had changed.  
It was a fearful event to behold!

Having fired the .223 carbine that afternoon,  
no one was complaining now.  
As I think back, I could see these young troops were now fondling  
their M16's.  
I could see they were in awe of their weapon.  
The power of its spell.

They had changed.  
The look on their faces.  
Anticipating firing it again.

I sat on my bunk in quiet resolve.  
And as I looked around I knew in those moments, I was different.

And feared what was to come.

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**DAVA STATE DEPARTMENT OF KANSAS**  
AWARD

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## Doctor Lovey Dovey's Lonely Heart Advice

*By Mel Brinkley*

*VA Medical Center – Tucson, AZ*

I am Doctor Lovey Dovey, author of the bestseller  
"Seven Habits of a Fairly Functional Fella."  
Here is a short review just for you.

HABIT NUMBER ONE: Stop smelling like a knuckle  
dragging troglodyte.  
Use deodorant just like a socialite.

HABIT NUMBER TWO: Master the art of being suave.  
Be brave unless you like sleeping alone in your man cave.

HABIT NUMBER THREE: Wine and dine your loved  
one after a fight;  
even if you have proof that you were right.

HABIT NUMBER FOUR: Melt your body down to a clean, lean,  
aerodynamic loving machine.

HABIT NUMBER FIVE: Remove unsightly hairs wherever they  
sprout.  
Trim inside your ears and way up in your snout.

NUMBER SIX: In the heat of passion, keep your cool.  
At the very least, control your drool.

HABIT NUMBER SEVEN: When going out, put on a pair of dress  
pants.  
Look your very best in the game of romance.

I guarantee you will transform the arctic chill  
of your love life into a tropical thrill  
if you practice every skill or I will  
refund your every dollar bill.

## Right Hands

*By Tom Lauterback  
VA Medical Center – Elgin, IL*

We raised our right hands, some proudly, some grudgingly,  
some apprehensive, some scared. Different times, different  
services. Doesn't matter now.

The Afros, DAs, flat tops, ducktails, once fashion statements,  
maybe political statements, all on the barber's floor, on hold  
for a few or maybe several years.

We raised our right hands and vowed to "support and defend,"  
some with early war face attempts, some with tears, some  
with smirks. Doesn't matter now.

"Protect and defend," some in the sound and fury, the fog  
and fear of war, some hearing only typewriters and copiers,  
some, alas, ceasing to hear.

"Charge," "Hit the deck," "Incoming," "Get it out, get it right."  
Train, learn, train, train some more. What for? Pass the test,  
stay alive. Doesn't matter now.

Today we go to the VA, immersing ourselves once again  
in the ranks of those who raised their right hands, yesterday's  
airmen, corporals, mates, officers, all in those damned lines we  
remember well. Worth it.

We're white, black, every color of the rainbow, former hipsters,  
hep cats, bad asses, mama's boys. We marched, we flew, we  
fixed, we saluted, we bitched, some cursed our fate.  
Doesn't matter now

We get tests, shots, surgery, advice, treating PTSD, HIV, MI, TIA,  
the accidents of old age or young fate, "On the table," "Open up,"  
"Roll over." "Service-related" or not. Help us. They do.

We're all "one percenters" now, immersed in a sea of vets young,  
old, walking, rolling, limping, queuing. To stay alive, to be our  
best. It all matters now. Big time.

All because we raised our right hands.

## Lab Rat

*By Jill Marie Baker  
VA Medical Center – Sioux Falls, SD*

The pressure to do something  
To protect the dignity and rights of  
Younger generations of women  
Being recruited into  
Our nation's all-volunteer force  
Has put me in  
A most unwanted predicament.

Speak out  
Or  
Be silenced.

It shouldn't be this hard  
To collect what I've earned  
Yet the military culture  
Continues to maintain an unhealthy balancing act:  
"Gender rights versus the status quo."

Allowing perpetrators to  
Run free  
And victims to be  
Persecuted and unsupported.

As one of the latter I say  
NO  
Enough is enough  
So I fight

Allow myself to become  
The lab rat  
That I don't want to be  
And open my scars  
To the scrutiny of those  
Who have allowed such behavior  
To continue in the first place.

YES  
I do it for me first  
But they  
The younger generation

They give me the strength  
To scurry back  
Into the cage  
Toward the smell of cheese  
Within that crazy maze.

## Seeds

By Paul Wilkison  
— Albuquerque, NM

Every civilization  
Contains within  
Itself two types  
Of seeds:  
At the beginning,  
Seeds of greatness.  
At the end,  
Seeds of destruction.

## Double Love

By Jesse W. Sturghill, Jr  
VA Medical Center – Memphis, TN

To measure your love is a very hard test.  
It must have the unity and highest respect.  
People talk of hate and pain every day,  
The only solution is to have double love in play.

To live a good life, you must know what these things mean.  
Today is not promised, tomorrow is never seen.  
I met an old man who once had a good start.  
His hopes were all crushed by a broken heart.

One day it will be my chance at success.  
Until that, I'll work hard and do my best.  
To live a good live you must know what these things mean.  
Today is not promised, tomorrow never seen.

## Veterans Day

By David B. Waldon  
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ

Today I saw grown men cry  
As they looked a statue in the eye.  
A flood of memories they have to hear.  
We will never understand since we were not there.

They served this country like many before,  
But we spit on them and slammed our doors.  
So many died; I watched the news wild eyed.  
I could not wait to fight by their side.

Fifty-thousand young men never came back,  
So we built a wall that makes it fact.  
The parade was great, the smiles, puppies, and people galore.  
For an hour we forgot that we still at war.

Our freedom each day has been paid for with blood.  
There's a soldier somewhere in the rain and the mud.  
He never really knows if he will ever come home,  
As he sits on a hill afraid and alone.

The one thing he has is his brother beside,  
And together they fight for all of our lives.  
So remember these men in your prayers every night,  
They are standing guard so we can sleep tight.

## A Gift of Hope

By Charles S. Parnell  
VA Medical Center – Pittsburgh, PA

Give me a gift that none can give,  
A gift of hope, a reason to live.  
Grant me this gift within your reach,  
A lesson to learn, a lesson to teach.

Give me the faculty to cry,  
To start again, a reason why.  
Grant me the strength to fill the need  
As never before, in word and deed.

Grant me a life to live in hope,  
To smile each day, to fully cope.  
Grant me this gift, I ask once more,  
From your full house to my front door.

This gift of hope will fill a need;  
From dusk 'til dawn it scatters seed.  
And when this gift is mine to keep,  
Calm comes again like peaceful sleep.

## Hope for Humanity

By Carlos Ortiz  
VA Medical Center – Brooklyn, NY

A great person once told me life is a journey to be lived,  
Not a problem to be solved.  
I continuously reiterate these words to all my friends and family  
Who are overwhelmed with life or are dysfunctionally involved.  
These words are the essences of my sanity,  
For I am constantly worried about superfluous things like vanity.  
We are social beings that need each other,  
In order to coexist we should live like sister and brother.  
I close these few links with total reservation  
And hope one day all humans can show each other love and  
dedication.

## Healing

By Earnest Jenkins  
— Las Vegas, NV

Healing comes when we come together to bring peace.  
Our faith keeps us connected to one another.  
Our thoughts constantly rotate around in isolation.  
We fall into a deep sleep.  
We awaken to a sound of a new day, a day of reckoning that gives  
us the power to heal the brokenhearted.  
Healing comes when our minds are renewed by our faith that  
created a new being.

## Thanksgiving Dinner

By Joseph W. Krawczyk  
VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO

I believe the year was 1998. My mother was terminally  
ill, and I was taking care of her. My cousin, brother  
and his wife were the only family left. We were not as  
close as we used to be. However, that year, we all had  
Thanksgiving dinner together. My brother and his wife  
prepared the dinner, and Cousin Jerry also brought some  
fantastic desserts.

We were so glad to see each other in one place,  
together again like old times. We never said a word about  
how seldom we saw each other but we were reassured  
by the fact that we loved each other, no matter what. We  
talked so much; we talked our way through dinner. We  
also prayed in Thanksgiving for all we had meant to each  
other. God bless that day. It was important to all of us; it  
was soon after that, my mother passed away.

## Untitled Warriors

By Richard W. Haling  
VA Medical Center – Madison, WI

As the ocean's waves come to a mist,  
They soothe my mind like a woman's kiss.  
An eagle lands upon our mast,  
To God I bow with prayers to cast.  
We fought in Beirut and Libya,  
With no future thanks or media.  
We sailed bravely into Soviet naval groups,  
And did not allow them to lead their troops.  
We still stand proud with honor as a vet,  
We are still forgotten as of yet.  
However, we are brothers hand in hand,  
The role we played we understand.  
We won the mission and saw victory,  
As sailing warriors upon God's sea.

## Beautiful and Colorful Butterflies

By Ronald Patrick Grella  
VA Medical Center - Tampa, FL

Butterflies Look So Delicate When They Fly  
and Colorful To the Eye  
You Can See the Gentleness in Nature and the Awesome  
Power of the Creator When A Butterfly Flies  
These Tiny Little Creatures Show the Grace, Love  
and Intelligence like The One Up Above  
This Intricate Design Is Made By the Divine  
with Such a Clever Mind  
Only If People Can Behave Like a Butterfly There  
Be No Cruelty to Humankind  
So Remember When You Read This Poem  
before You Do Harm To another Soul

## Proud Veterans

By Ronald Patrick Grella  
VA Medical Center - Tampa, FL

Veterans Gave It Their All to Stand Tall  
They Are Extremely Brave  
Because They Are Well Trained  
Veterans Fight with All Their Might  
To Keep Things Right  
Our Freedom Starts with Them  
Because Of What They Did  
These Precious Souls Sacrificed It All  
So We Can Have Freedom in Today's World  
Thank These Veterans When You See Them  
And Tell Him or Her  
How Grateful You Are For Our Freedom  
Also May God Bless These Precious Souls  
For The Ones That Did Not Make It Home  
God Bless America for the Best  
Armed Forces in the World

## What's New on Arc 2

By Ronald Patrick Grella  
VA Medical Center - Tampa, FL

Arc 2 Is Where I Come To Get Renewed  
Also Get Rid Of The Moods That Are Blue  
And These Thoughts Which Are Not True  
If You Only Knew This Pain in My Mind At Times  
You Would Understand Why I Am On the Psychiatric Ward To  
I Feel Like I Cannot Be Helped  
With These Awful Thoughts That Brew  
Because It Seems Like They Never Change  
Which I Actually Feel Like I Am Going Insane  
Anything and Everything People Say To Me  
Seems Like It Hurts and Disturbs Me

I Know it's me and Not Them  
Because It Is All In My Head  
It's Hard to Tell People What I Am Going Through  
As I try To Make A Breakthrough  
So It Is All Up to the Good Lord  
To Save Me from This Mad World  
And Also My Thoughts and Feelings  
Which Do Not Seem Real

## God's Decoration for the Sky

*By Ronald Patrick Grella*  
VA Medical Center - Tampa, FL

Clouds Are Massive in Their Size  
To Imagine Objects in Our Mind  
There are Different Types of Clouds  
Some Bring Rain for Ground  
Others Wreak Havoc on This World  
Pure in Color to the Eye Floating Through the sky  
Only the Wind Makes Them Flow  
Having No Direction to Go  
And It Is All the Divine Design

## Tears

*By Karen Anne Green*  
VA Medical Center - Las Vegas, NV

I'd like to have a dime  
for every teardrop that I shed,  
then it wouldn't seem worthless  
to shed tears to clear my head.  
Sometimes my heart feels heavy,  
my life so filled with fears,  
I could relieve myself from this weight  
if I just would shed some tears.  
I've always been told to stand tall,  
that crying's a waste of time,  
but to hold back those tears  
only hurts the mind.  
Tears are like raindrops.  
They cleanse the inner man,  
so I don't have to hold back,  
I'll cry, I know I can.  
When my heart feels heavy  
and my life starts to fill with fears,  
I'll relieve myself from that weight  
by crying some healthy tears.

## My Gratitude

*By Michael D. Monfrooe*  
VA Medical Center - St. Cloud, MN

"Do no harm," a sacred oath to which you swore.  
I too took an oath preparing me for war.  
You trained long and hard to be the very best.  
I served our country, medals on my chest.  
You treat the suffering, comfort families that wait.  
I trained men and women, not knowing their fate.  
You visit patients at night to ease their fear.  
I've consoled many a soldier as they shed a tear.  
Your skills are a true gift, to ease one's pain.  
Patients see in you, hope, a future and that you care.  
Once people saw in my eyes a "Thousand Year Stare."  
Such awe inspiring words, "Do no harm."  
You did fine by me, Doc; I didn't buy the farm.

## American Soldiers in a Foreign Land

*By George Higgins*  
VA Medical Center - Tucson, AZ

From Afghanistan to Iraq and then  
From Baghdad to Tirkrit and back again  
There're G.I.s combating terrorists on the run  
In the hot desert air and blazing sun.

American soldiers on duty in foreign lands  
With rifles, BAR, and carbines in their hands  
Ready to fire when there's an alarm,  
Ready to fire in time of harm.

Some engaged in brutal combat  
Are trained and seasoned men.  
Thirty thousand strong, ready to strike  
The enemy again and again.

Marching in columns one by one,  
Ready with their weapon, here they come.  
The American soldiers in Afghan and Iraq,  
Moving forward and ready to attack.



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## Million Veteran Program

By Randolph Lucid Byrd  
VA Medical Center - Hines, IL

I can feel and hear the pain, of veterans young and old. Who after  
being sent to faraway lands, didn't come back whole,  
in either body or mind. Anything I can do to help them, could  
never be enough. What I can do, is pray for their spirits, be  
they alive or dead,  
whether still on this earth, or seeking peace somewhere  
unknown.

## Paralyzed Veterans of America

By Randolph Lucid Byrd  
VA Medical Center - Hines, IL

What's your perspective, from that chair you now occupy?  
I can't possibly see what you see, unless I get on my knees.  
Does anyone ask you where you've been, or what you've seen?  
Or do they now just look down on your head, topped with  
graying snow.  
I've fed you at a picnic on the hospital grounds, to get you off the  
ward, and into the sunshine that abounds.  
Being with you I was amazed, and quite couldn't understand.  
How you could seem happier and more objective than me,  
without limbs, and I had both my hands. I left your presence  
introspective and my mind a little battered. The revelation  
hitting me, how I continue to focus on such trivial things, that  
now don't seem to really matter

## Addiction - It Affects Anyone in Many Ways

By Errol Chetwyn Moore  
VA Medical Center - Tucson, AZ

It's amazing that it starts with a one-time play.  
You don't realize the denial just by the things we do and say.  
We work all day from nine to five,  
Filling our bodies with nonsense to feel alive.  
Gone is value, humor, honesty, dignity and pride.  
Now, can you handle the downhill slide?  
Family, home, food, and money doesn't matter,  
Now your mind and life really begins to shatter.  
Friends and family will say: "You need HELP!"  
You'll reply: "Oh Well!"  
Now you have created this terrible mess,  
Without realizing that this is an illness.  
Hey, "I'll cry, say goodbye and want to die."  
Well, here we go again, "I'm HIGH."  
Slow-down, come-down, "Oh, I feel so bad."  
This ADDICTION is really Bull\*\*\*t,  
The only, and best thing to do, is... just quit.  
With counseling and help, I may come to see,  
That the real problem is within me!!!

## Soldiers

By Earl W. Rugen  
VA Medical Center - Albuquerque, NM

Some the jungle  
Some the mountains high  
Some the valley  
Some the delta, why?  
Why were we there?  
Why should we care?  
Curious ways  
Count the days  
'till I go back  
The real world  
So far away  
The flag unfurled  
I never knew  
Not too much fun  
The past would haunt  
I'd come undone



## Gone

By Earl W. Rugen  
VA Medical Center - Albuquerque, NM

Up all last night  
Nothing to write  
Thought of my friends  
It never ends  
Medics and true  
Red, white, and blue  
Saved so many souls  
Their deaths took a toll  
They did not return  
My tears, they burn  
Their names on the wall  
Their memory stands stall  
I thought I was through  
What good can I do?  
I miss them a lot  
What else have I got?

## Whose Arms?

By Karen Anne Green  
VA Medical Center - Las Vegas, NV

Whose arms  
can we always run to,  
that are always open  
for me and you?

Whose arms  
hung on the cross for us that day,  
to wash

all our sins away?  
Whose arms  
will never turn us away,  
and welcome us back  
when we start to stray?

Whose arms  
hold us tight,  
when we are hurt  
and filled with fright?

Whose arms  
spin the universe and put the flowers on the hill,  
yet they can also  
calm the raging seas and make them still?

Whose arms  
will someday welcome us home,  
to walk on streets of gold  
and live under God's Heavenly dome?

Those arms  
are Jesus Christ's the Holy One,  
they belong  
to God's Beloved Son!

## How Many Kings?

*By Karen Anne Green  
VA Medical Center – Las Vegas, NV*

How many kings  
who have ruled the earth,  
knew the names of every person on it  
long before their births?

How many kings  
were all the peoples friend,  
who loves them all  
until the very end?

How many kings  
walked this land,  
and lived  
among his fellow man?

How many kings  
could create the universe,  
and turn around  
and quench your thirst?

How many kings  
performed miracles in ancient days,  
and still performs them  
this very day?

How many kings  
can calm the angry sea,  
and with his right hand  
set the sinner free?

How many kings  
would give their life to pay for all men's sins,  
then raise from the dead  
to come back and judge all men?

How many kings  
will come back to rule and reign,  
and live forever  
and never die again?

## America's Plight

*By Karen Anne Green  
VA Medical Center – Las Vegas, NV*

From the burning land  
up Montana way,  
to the hurricanes  
in southern U.S.A.

There are protesters  
from shore to shore,  
brotherly love  
is getting harder to see anymore.

Shootings  
ring through the halls of our schools,  
while our politicians  
are breaking all the rules.

We have our military  
fighting and dying in far away lands,  
while terrorists run rampant  
with blood on their hands.

The name of God  
is forbidden more and more every day,  
while our flag  
is abused and ignored in all kinds of ways.

America  
is crying for help every day,  
but many nations  
just turn her away.

But she'll climb  
out of the ashes some way,  
and recover from the storms  
on her own some day.

A few other countries  
are helping where they can,  
by sending supplies  
and lending a hand.



## A Sojourn in the Winter Woods

By Gerald R. Spette  
— Pleasantville, NY

I entered a nearby woods today, where a blanket of snow had fallen. So different from the jungles of Nam back then.  
My hands now cold and swollen.

My memories traveled back to the foreign war, thinking will I be coming back?  
I just sat in the quiet woods alone, a big oak tree now had my back.

For security I guess, just a form of habit. I adjusted my collar and hat.  
As a deer walked near so slowly, not seeing where I sat.

My field of fire was long and wide, but now no reason to hide.  
A bird lit on a tree limb, fallen just a bit to my side.

I looked into the trees of white and brown, was there danger where I sit?  
A squirrel, a skunk, a raccoon I thought? Then, I giggled a bit.

The silence was deafening, as I dozed with no fear.  
I'm at home now and safe, with my loved ones quite near.

## Tombstone Blues

By Charles Sturges  
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

Back to Arizona the procession goes  
no more of a bona  
than king stuck in those caves  
it just goes to show  
everybody has their very own very favorite fave

## Memories of Stilettoes and Stockings

By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt  
— Overland Park, KS

Memories of Stilettoes and Stockings  
The winning smile is still there  
The long shapely legs and loving arms too  
The good intentions and caring disposition  
The deep brown eyes that comforted so many.

But where are the long tresses once rich in auburn  
The skin, glowing by the light of a candle?  
What has marred those legs with veins of blue  
And lightened that hair with silvery streaks?

Age, Parkinson's, time in the war---that's what!  
Ah life, all compressed into my being of clay.  
You remind me of what used to be.  
You bring back the memories of youth.

Alas, you also speak of what is yet to be  
Arms to hold grandchildren, legs for dancing  
Lips to kiss, skin to blush, hands to write.  
Yes, there is still time to learn, love and leave a legacy.

Still time; still time...

## The Night

By James R. Crissen  
VA Medical Center – Battle Creek, MI

The night is a subtle artist  
Painting sinister silhouettes into  
The shadows of my home.  
Unwelcome memories play in my Mind.

I shut my eyes tightly, As my hands grip the sides of my head.  
I know these scenes are not real, Yet their familiarity haunts  
my soul.  
I concentrate on steady breathing, As I chant my mantra,  
"I am home, I am safe, I am home, I am safe" Until sleep at last  
takes me.



## Queridos

By John Bradley

VA Medical Center – Nashville, TN

My Calendar Birthday is near...I've had a very good year...  
not all of the days were serene...  
Blessedly, because of my "senior moments"  
I only remember the good ones in-between  
One thing I do recall and retain... I share this wisdom, with you...  
frequently, hug your Daughter/ Son, Significant others, as the case  
may be...

does wonders, will make the coming Year, a very good one too!  
If circumstances are such, that none of the above three...  
are readily at-hand...here's another plan!  
When the Postman/ woman; the FedEx person delivers  
give them a Hug; that's OK too!  
You are feeling really, really, blessed and that  
sometimes seemingly well intentioned but very obnoxious  
Relative, (Blah!) drops in...  
Better yet...when you are having a not quite ready for prime time  
day... that same relative asks...  
what kind of day has it been for you?"  
But before you can reply with even a word or two...  
continues to lay a word harangue about their troubles on you...  
Give them a hug ...followed by another...  
It's a very Hip thing to also do!  
Additionally, under these circumstances,  
expressing yourself in this way will bring...  
Body, Mind, and Soul benefit to you!  
I've had a very good year!

## I Had a Friend Like You Once

By Jill Marie Baker

VA Medical Center – Sioux Falls, SD

Soon after leaving the military  
I found myself alone and unable to connect with others  
Former friends and my loved ones  
Were like strangers to me  
I didn't like this version of myself  
But I didn't know how to be anything other than what I had  
become  
Persistent violence can do that to a person  
Remaking a soul and stamping its mark upon you  
Like a cattle brand  
You came along during those early years  
When I was vulnerable and closed  
You seemed strong and open to the world  
And I envied that  
We were friends for a long time  
And without your presence beside me  
Filling up some of that emptiness  
I might have stumbled down  
The wrong path on my way  
To discovering the new me  
And what I was meant to become

Some years later  
I must have grown stronger somehow  
And had the ability to function in a way  
That made sense to me  
Giving me purpose once again  
It was then that I realized  
Our friendship wasn't what it seemed  
And I was more of an outlet for  
Your criticism and mockery  
I was devastated  
When I cut the ties to our friendship

Having invested so much time into maintaining it  
But I realized that such interactions aren't  
Foundations for strong lasting relationships  
I haven't thought about you until recently  
When I met someone who reminded me of you  
From the time when our friendship was new  
And I trusted you with my secrets  
I chose to write this  
Instead of giving that person my words  
And making myself vulnerable to her  
Quip of tongue and quick wit  
We don't have to engage with people like that  
Giving toxic people our power  
Just take it back and be powerful  
In and of yourself

## At Night I Day Dream

By Samuel J. Hall

VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

There isn't much I can do in my life these days, so at night, I day  
dream.  
When I go to bed each night, I do what you may call day  
dreaming.  
I live a different life in my mind.  
A dream, a life that I cannot live in my real life.  
I dream about a life I want to live other than my actual life.  
I can be anyone and can do anything.  
I live a life that I would live if I did not have my disabilities.  
I marry who I want.  
I go to school as I want.  
I build houses and develop my property as I want to.  
There is no limit to what I can do in my dreams.  
I can travel, I can build, I can hike and bicycle, I can go to school,  
I do anything my mind can think of, to make my world feel great.  
My whole world is in my mind when I go to bed.  
Some nights I spend hours dreaming.  
I guess you could say that what I dream is fiction.  
Some nights I go right to sleep.  
When my mind goes afool, I change my dream to make it right.  
There are times when my real life gets in my way of my dreams.  
My dreams make me feel very satisfied.  
What else do I have to do with the disabilities that I have.  
In my mind, I am perfectly healthy.  
I have no health problems.

I have no physical problems.  
I have found a new kind of entertainment.  
It is free.  
I can travel across country in minutes.  
I can fly without waiting in the long baggage lines.  
In my dreams there are no plane crashes or train crashes.  
I can walk through a light rain and not get wet.  
When I hike, I never get tired.  
My bicycles never break down. I never get a flat tire.  
In my dreams, I am educated. My wife is educated.  
Everything I build comes out perfect.  
What an outlet I have found for myself.  
I wake up every morning with a smile on my face.  
And I am rested.

## End of Life

*By Samuel J. Hall*  
*VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM*

I was attending a reading group last week.  
The subject came up, the end of life.  
Some people have a hard time with the end of life.  
I guess if you still have dreams, the end of life is not a subject you want to have a conversation about.  
My life has changed a lot over the past few years.  
I have been diagnosed with having a Peripheral Neuropathy, and earlier this year I was diagnosed with having Congestive Heart Failure.  
I no longer have those dreams.  
I have to struggle to live these days.  
For me, the end of life will stop those struggles.  
I can hardly wait.  
The end of my life may be a struggle for some but it will be a god-send for me.  
When my life ends, the world will move on, as it has forever.  
Someone will move into my spot and become themselves.  
I will become a memory as others have.

## Fire Rescue Crew

*By Samuel J. Hall*  
*VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM*

I have a disability with my legs.  
One of my legs is lame and the other one does not work really well.  
I get along pretty well, moving about during my day.  
I am in a wheelchair all day for my mobility.  
I have been having problems transferring from one wheelchair to another.  
There are times when I don't make it to the spot to where I want to be sitting.  
I do what I can with the strength that I have.  
When I cannot make it, I go down to the floor as easily as I can.  
Going down on the floor is called a fall, technically.

The first thing I do is straighten my legs out.  
I don't want to break any bones.  
My wife calls 911 for help.  
They ask their usual questions.  
She tells them that this is an assist call.  
An assist call means there is no need for an ambulance.  
The Fire Rescue Crew usually shows up in about ten minutes.  
Fire Station number 9 is located at the end of our street.  
The Rescue Fire Crew usually consists of two to four people.  
Sometimes they are men and sometimes they are women.  
They always know what they are doing when they get here.  
First they check that I am not hurt in any way.  
They get my wheelchair out of the way.  
Then they straighten my legs out.  
They put my gait belt on me so they can lift me safely.  
I am lifted into my wheelchair or my bed, wherever I was heading when I went down to the floor.  
The Fire Rescue Crew take down my vital information, my name and age.  
I sign their note pad and they are on their way.  
I cannot say enough good about how I feel, that we have such emergency people available to us.  
These Fire Rescue Crews come to my house quite often.  
My wife and I feel we use these Fire Rescue Crews too much.  
We are so thankful they are there for our emergencies.  
I just can't say enough for the need and availability for these crews.

## Meds in Rehab

*By Samuel J. Hall*  
*VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM*

The medications are handled by the staff while in rehab.  
I knew what medications I was taking, before I went to the hospital.  
I had several medications added to my menu while in the VA Hospital.  
When I arrived to the rehab facility, I always asked what pills were served up to me several times each day to be sure I was not taking the wrong drugs.  
The meds were served at different times each day, some were generic drugs.  
I was not used to the times nor the extra drugs I was given.  
I wanted to be careful I did not overdose on anything.  
The drugs would come at any time, at dinner, in the morning or at night.  
The keeper of the drugs would find us no matter where we were.  
I survived the facility and was given the remaining drugs when I left the facility.



# We Stand on the Shoulders of Giants

By Joseph A. Squeo

VA Outpatient Clinic - Stamford, CT

We stand on the shoulders of giants many known and immortalized throughout history. Others, so many countless others, long forgotten yet the bricks and mortar so necessary to form the foundation of the "Home of the Brave and the Land of the Free." Never once did they seek the light of fame and glory yet without their undying love and actions the nation of the golden crested eagle would be tarnished and dead.

We stand on the shoulders of Giants flesh and bones raised from the dust of the earth. Risen with the breath of the Divine choosing to defend a promised land so full of

"Milk and Honey." A land seeking a mirror of perfection, searching its soul and moral conscience to live up to, "We hold these truths to be self-evident."

Yes, we stand on the shoulders of giants who fell at Lexington, were slaughtered at Gettysburg, gassed on the Western Front.

We stand on the shoulders of giants butchered on the Beaches of Normandy, brutalized on the March to Bataan, forgotten at Chochiwon, imprisoned and tortured in Hanoi, maimed and crippled in body and mind at Kandahar.

We stand on the shoulders of giants who freed the oppressed in foreign lands, clothed the naked, fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, extended a hand of peace to strangers, and who comforted the survivors of Auschwitz and countless forgotten places.

We stand on the shoulders of giants unknown at Arlington, resting at Meuse-Argonne and Ardennes, entombed at Pearl Harbor, and Missing in Action known only to God.

There are giants among us; let us open our eyes, give them honor and praise for many will not come forward from the towering shadows of the past and say, "We are the bricks and mortar, the tired pallbearers of freedom." Rather than shoulders of giants to stand upon they need the embracing arms, gentle touch and love of the future giants among us.

## All Ahead - Full?

By Richard Wangard

VA Medical Center - Appleton, WI

I use a term from my Navy Brothers  
Set course--Where to Sir?  
To world destruction Helmsman!  
And just where is that Sir?  
It is in lost values, lack of civility  
It is in Hatred and lack of decent  
Communication!

It is in division of a Nation  
That has always been great!  
Heroes abound from every era and every war  
Lack of understanding someone's right to speak  
I disagree so therefore I Hate!  
All Ahead Full Helmsman  
We are on our way  
To meet our fate  
Nobody can take us down!  
We are the most powerful Country in the World!  
We the 1% will make sure to follow orders  
Even as we watch  
Our own Country disintegrate  
Into chaos — Lack of respect  
Civilians with bullets piled up to their ceilings  
Set Course Sailor — we are on our way  
We the 1% is all that is left  
To watch each other's backs  
Be Humane  
Show sympathy and empathy  
Compassion  
For we know HOW TO SERVE!  
How something bigger than you or I  
Counts in this World  
We follow lawful orders  
That is our job  
What's that you say sailor?  
How the hell should I know?  
I am just a captain of this one ship!  
Find the middle of the biggest ocean  
Drop Anchor  
Maybe we can ride this one out  
Until people start engaging their minds  
Before putting mouth into gear!

## 22 Push Ups

By Earl W. Rugen

VA Medical Center - Albuquerque, NM

24 hours  
Don't send any flowers  
22 more  
Who's keeping score  
Army, Marines  
Similar scenes  
Trained to go  
Returning... slow  
Coming home  
The feeling... alone  
Isolate, medicate  
Suicide doesn't differentiate  
For our brothers who have gone before  
Please appreciate the meaning of war.

## IOU Love

By Daniel Yates

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

On the mantel is a picture, of our wedding day,  
Forty years of “us” and “we” our love is here to stay.  
Every couple has a secret for their marital bliss.  
For some it is a daily hug, for some a daily kiss.

For some it is a daily walk, no matter what the weather  
Or when it’s time to do the chores, some always work together.  
But you and I are different, we had our own breakthrough,  
We operate on three little words, yes, they’re “I love you.”

We wrote them down on paper, no other words around,  
Suddenly it hits us, the wonder we had found.  
The phrase begins with “I” and ends with “o” and “u”,  
“Love” is in between, so we knew just what to do.

Simply said another way, it’s “IOU Love”  
For the joy you bring to me, sent from up above.  
It’s the mantra that we live by and every day  
Knowing when we do our part, our love will never stray.

## Show People

By Lucy Wong

VA Medical Center – Phoenix, AZ

Show people your best side  
Show people how you value your health  
Show people your healthful habits.

Show people you value their time  
Show people you value their resources  
Show people you’re not negative.

Show people you can listen  
Show people you’re not self-centered  
Show people you are kind with words.

Show people you are kind but not a doormat  
Show people you can give and take  
Show people you are REAL.

Show people you mean what you say  
Show people you say what you mean  
Show people you can let them be their own person.

## Blue-Throated Macaws

By Lucy Wong

VA Medical Center – Phoenix, AZ

Beautiful Blue-throated macaws  
Leave our nests alone and stop  
Unfair invasions on our habitats Do not  
End our spirit from earth from parrot  
Trade from third world’s government not taking care of its people  
Help save us because we are the  
Rarest and vanishing species  
Only 500 or less of us in the wild  
Assassinating us  
Tragedy dooms us to extinction  
Environmentally diminishing the world for humans  
Death to us all.

Majestic and magnificent free-flight creations in the skies  
Action from using every anatomy and organ parts  
Call to action to donate money toward avian research  
And teach humans to understand themselves better  
With stalking and trapping us down, Instead let the Ara  
glaucoularis breed.

## PTS: When I Was Sent

By Michael Wilson

VA Medical Center – Columbus, OH

When I was sent,  
I should have known then  
That I didn’t matter.  
My number came up,  
My name was called,  
But still I didn’t matter.  
“You”  
“GO”  
“Now”  
That’s all that mattered.  
I went; what else mattered?  
And I returned.  
(Although that too, didn’t matter.)  
Each passing day since,  
I imagine a heat-seeking missile plowing through my wall,  
Shattering glass, slamming my face into the nearest destructive  
surface,  
And mowing me down.  
I take a deep breath  
And keep going  
Because I do matter.



## Strangers

By Benjamin J. Williams  
VA Medical Center – Biloxi, MS

Strangers  
are only friends  
who are  
patiently waiting  
for the chance  
to become  
a part  
of your life  
just when  
the time is right.



## My Mississippi

By Benjamin J. Williams  
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

Mississippi,  
where hospitality is served  
around Mint Julep Time  
and the living is never easy.

Mississippi,  
where cotton once reigned Supreme  
and the blues were born  
in the fields of the delta.

Mississippi,  
home to Elvis and B.B. King  
where Leontyne Price  
first learned to Sing.

Mississippi,  
where injustice, hatred and violence  
are still casting Shadows  
on any hope the future brings.

Mississippi,  
where the racial equation  
is still Separate  
and decidedly Unequal.

## Holy Wars

By Terry Wilcox

Embattled spirits across the autumn sky  
Wage primacy wars as mortals die.

Holy Wars only God should wage  
Not mortal man with contempt and rage.

Now lightening bolts like arrows fly  
Through angry clouds and dark grey sky.

As battles rage and God cries  
O'er blood that's shed to the desert dry.

Holy Wars only God should wage  
Mortals stand down from this Holy stage.

A market explodes — no one knows why  
And a man screams whilst his brothers die

It's not how GOD meant US to be  
When he parted the waters, and calmed the sea.

Still, lightening glistens off charging swords  
And blood-stained sand of the Holy Land.  
Holy Wars only God should wage  
Not mortal man with contempt and rage.

Grey clouds weep, God Cries...  
More blood's spilled to the desert dry.

Contempt and Rage  
Contempt and Rage  
Holy Wars  
Only GOD should wage.

## Joe

By J. Allen Whitt  
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

We gathered all sad to see Joe go,  
And our tears watered his way.  
The pastor told of Joe's good life,  
And bid us each to pray.

With Peg he'd raised a mob of kids,  
And endured both joy and woe.  
But he favored too well the jug, they say,  
And his liver laid him low.

So when they closed the coffin up,  
And he left the world behind,  
We mourned each cuss and twitch of Joe,  
Who always spoke his mind.

Then the coffin lid flew open wide  
And straight up old Joe sat.  
And wouldn't you know, we heard him say,  
"I ain't a-goin' yet!"

## Pray, My Son

By Conrad Webley

VA Medical Center – East Orange, NJ

I've been gettin' the blues  
The blues been gettin' me.  
Just been gettin' the blues  
To the left and right of me, the blues  
In the day and night of me, the blues.  
I've just been gettin' the blues  
The blues been gettin' me.  
I looked to the sky for peace of mind  
Talk to myself and myself just cries the blues.  
I've just been gettin' the blues  
The blues been gettin' me.  
My head hurts, my feet get sore pacing the floor  
Trying to walk the blues away.  
Can't sleep 'cause it don't come  
The blues just linger on and on and on.  
I've just been gettin' the blues  
The blues been gettin' me.  
When a voice came along  
With a sweet, sweet sound  
Chanting, pray, my son. Pray, my son.  
Pray the blues away, my son.  
I prayed and looked to the left of me  
I prayed and looked to my right  
In the day and night of me I prayed.  
I prayed even through my tears  
The blues, the blues is nowhere around  
The blues is nowhere to be found.  
That voice has a beautiful sound  
It just keeps on chanting  
Pray, my son. Pray my son.  
Pray the blues away, my son.

## My PTSD and You, My Love One

By Conrad Webley

VA Medical Center – East Orange, NJ

Give me space when I need it  
Don't tell me what to do  
Not even for a minute, please.  
No interrogation moves  
Don't pity me, respect me  
And move away when I lose it.  
It's not your fault, please understand  
It is the price of being at war, and damn,  
I have good days, I have bad days  
And unpredictable high and low days.  
That's how it goes when my PTSD is in control  
My survival behavior I can never let go  
And the things I had to do in war  
I can never share with you  
I would lose you, I know.

I fear that more than anything,  
More than the war I spent years in.  
The war took hold of my emotions  
And has never let me go.  
Being close to you is my desire  
So please don't go away, stay.  
Don't ask me to go to crowded places,  
I find no comfort there.  
The hypocrites still bother me  
They run their mouths and have no clue  
Were never there to witness a fight  
A fight to save one's very life, damn hypocrites.  
Too bad, I say; my PTSD won't go away.  
Don't stop loving me, I plea.  
My love for you remains  
Get to know me better, please,  
And learn about my shadow  
My PTSD.

## The Night My Life Was Saved From the Grave

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center – Augusta, GA

You don't know how hard it feels to watch your life being torn in  
two,  
when everything goes wrong and can't be fixed.  
You can't imagine the pain until it happens to you.

Finding yourself in a state of mind  
that you question everything.

Life pulls us in so many different directions,  
leading us through stepping-stones of who we were,  
who we are and where we will be going.

Depression can downright take you to the limits of your self-control,  
making you do things you would not normally do.

When I sleep I don't count sheep.  
I count mistakes.

Leaves one to wonder about one's self-worth,  
and you question how the hell did I ever get this far.

They say time can heal,  
but my time has just stood still.

My future looked uncertain and felt flimsy,  
the demonic trap is the greatest danger I face now.

The vulnerability, anxieties, the blackness in my heart  
was the devil wanting to dominate and manipulate me.

The devil, the evil one, now whispers his lies in my ears  
and my eyes have become blind.

I can no longer hold on to the barricade of my feelings.  
I become flooded with fear.

I am playing Russian roulette with my life.  
And sooner or later that bullet will be in the chamber,  
And I will fire.

They say there's no better place to be than in heaven.  
How far is heaven...I want to know.  
How far is heaven...I want to go.

Little did I know that one night I found my heaven,  
a little bit closer to home.

I was told faith and truly believing in that faith  
will help carry you through.

One night and a brotherhood of soldiers  
make this statement true.

I let Satan in my life and the darkness fooled me,  
telling me that I wasn't loved,  
and that God would not extend his mercy from above.  
I didn't realize that the devil was on an assignment  
to just take me out.

He was slowly sucking the life right out of me.  
One must always remember — Satan is never idle.

He can kill your body,  
but he can't kill your soul.

I found myself on foot patrol in Arlington Cemetery,  
And I placed my 38 to my head.

After quickly viewing everything that they had done to me,  
I felt I was just better off dead.

Tears were falling down like falling rain,  
but I thought there was just no other way.

I sat up against a pearly white gravestone  
of a soldier I never knew (yet).

I looked out at the rows and rows of fallen soldiers  
who paid the ultimate price (their lives).

If only I could change places with one of them.  
I could feel a stronger spiritual guidance  
working hard to conquer all my fears.

One by one I could see them all,  
Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.

Then out of the grave,  
in full Marine Corps dress uniform,  
Brigadier General James Patrick Devereux  
sat down beside me.  
These words he said  
are forever embedded in my head.

“You are not a girl in this army,  
you are a soldier, like one of us,  
who happens to be a female.

“You are not a prisoner of war of your past.  
It's just another lesson in life,  
not a life sentence.”

I felt my guardian angels all around me,  
as they took the gun out of my hand.

I looked into each one's eye, they all told their story  
of the wars that they were trained to fight.

Battles are not always fought on the battlefield,  
people are fighting them every day.  
Alcoholism, gangs, hate, drugs,  
the list just keeps on growing.  
How many it's hard to say.

The general goes on to add  
“We all took a solemn oath  
to defend the Constitution against  
all enemies foreign and domestic.”

I'm proud to say on behalf of all of us,  
no one has ever relieved us of our duties.

“It's just not your time yet,  
God is not ready to take you home.

“Repent, he said, and you will be forgiven,  
your soul washed of sins you have committed.

“Slowly back away from the spell of death,  
escape your prison of memories.

“You must continue on your journey.”

For all I've waited for and gone through,  
an answer I have finally found.

In life we all live and learn,  
life throws us curves as if everything in life is a lie.  
Your demons slowly torment you,  
insults get hurled and they put down your pride.

But my life was forever changed that night,  
the night God sent down his army of angels.  
Each one of them earned their wings  
for helping soldiers like me out of the darkness.

## Flown the Coop

By Tony Vignali  
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

Like many veterans, I think of dying.  
We all seem to have a fascination with this thinking.

I have become passively engaged in the thought  
myself of late.

Joking about my obituary,  
taking the final picture that goes with it.

Perhaps, because it may be soon?  
I was thinking, sometime in December?  
That would be a good time!  
The new year would begin without me.  
The weeks ahead, calm and clear,  
as though I can see through fog.

For some reason I'm am very settled with this...notion.  
In a strange way, looking forward to it.  
Almost a realization!

In review, my life has been complete for some time.  
No depression.  
No anxiety.  
No unfinished projects of merit.

No anger.  
No feelings of loss.  
No unresolved personal problems.  
No love lost.

I live fully every day.  
I enjoy every breath I take.  
Every move I make.

I will just fly away, I think  
Following the birds in the sky to wherever  
the sun takes us.

If no one tells my mother, she will never know  
I am gone.



## Donald Trump - Is He a Thriving Autocrat Already?

By Charles Sturies  
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

By autocrat I mean a domineering, bossy pseudo-dictator  
of a basically free country.  
No, I say. He's doing a good job  
but he has this kinda harsh-peopled following that probably  
wouldn't exist if it wasn't for certain pink, lazy young people  
infiltrating the power structures of this country.  
That sounds far-fetched, I know, and the babbling  
of a jealous old man. But that's my hunch.  
There are too many young people in high school who come home  
and plop themselves down on the couch to a bunch of inane TV  
with a whole bag of Lay's Potato Chips at their fingertips,  
irritating their right-wing fathers, cheating afterward,  
getting educated in a technical field  
and offending dangerous psychotics off the street.  
If Trump would just correct that and not take his hang-ups out  
on us Latinos. (I'm partially Mexican, Puerto Rican,  
South American and Spanish as far as I know.)  
Also on Muslims like me. Then this country wouldn't disintegrate  
with mass murderers and such who might have delusions  
that Trump is their "Der FÜhrer."  
He's kind of a know-it-all and becoming autocratic, it would seem.  
He could prevent this from coming to full fruition  
by just minding the liberal media  
a little bit.

## My Favorite Candy and Me

By Charles Sturies  
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

Juicyfruits  
probably cause  
I think  
they won't make me toot  
but more than that  
I like the texture  
and variety  
so it makes me a fixture  
at the movies  
so I can move in high society.  
This one's just as silly  
and semi-meaningless  
as a number  
of others I've written  
recently but I reiterate  
as the song goes  
by the Gallery  
"Little things mean a lot."

## Postscript

*By Georgiana Striat*  
*VA Medical Center – Cincinnati, OH*

I am your old woman  
swing dancing in the kitchen  
with the mop to John Prine.  
Baby please  
don't blame Daddy  
for Afghanistan. He's damn cold  
in freedom fatigues.  
Well, I'm tired, too.  
A mother can only  
decoupage a clothesline  
with fingerprints  
of boxspring birds,  
or enveloped-APOed  
letters so many times  
before the wire  
runs out of room.

## The Soldier That Yearns

*By Colleen Stanhouse*  
*VA Medical Center – Memphis, TN*

You hear the inner voice calling out  
Almost saying, "What am I about?"  
Don't stop caring even when it's hard  
Life was never about a magic charm  
War created an inner empty harm.

I am the Soldier that yearns  
For the peace of joy; the time of happiness  
When a child could play and share a toy  
The forgiveness a child could give  
Not the soldier with war that continues to live within.  
That's is why I am the soldier that yearns.

The years have passed and war memories last  
Shooting and bombs, running to live  
War, a game of survival.  
Strive to survive  
for the soldier that yearns.  
Through the years  
God helped me with my fears  
I finally cried the forgiveness tears.

## An Inconvenient Truth

*By Scott Sjostrand*  
*— Hallock, MN*

My sister, Rhonda, has stage four breast cancer,  
An inconvenient truth.  
She undergoes chemo  
And had a little to soothe.  
She's gone to the Mayo now.  
She's Chicago bound.  
New forms of therapy,  
The research is sound.  
She's gone through the range of emotions  
Tossed about like a ship on the ocean.  
She has the anchor of the Faith and still got her fight.  
Will she finally be cured? She just might.  
She drives to the hospitals  
Studying for school  
Holding down a job  
She's a motivational too.  
As I write this poem  
I look on with amazement.  
She's an over-comer  
That's a true statement.  
She's also working on  
Books to publish.  
I promise you  
They won't be rubbish.  
So here's to Rhonda-  
Your strength is great.  
Never ever will that  
Be brought up for debate.

## A Poem of Hope

*By Scott Sjostrand*  
*— Hallock, MN*

This is a poem of hope  
To build faith.  
Without it we are defeated,  
The fight in us is depleted.  
My sister was diagnosed with  
Breast cancer and was crying.  
Inside I felt like part of me  
Was dying.  
I wrote a therapeutic poem  
About the resiliency of dandelions.  
I sent it to her and  
No more cryin'.  
I offered her hope and  
She got back the will to fight.  
Now she says, "Take that, cancer!"  
Much to my delight.  
You can have two people

With the same disease-  
One loses the will to fight  
While the other  
More years he sees.  
The clergy strengthen' faith  
Through your darkest hour.  
God can save and heal you  
With His amazing power.  
I hope this poem comforts  
Many people in need.  
You see with pen and paper  
I have planted fertile seed.

## Second Thoughts

*By Dennis Silas  
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL*

If I should...  
Why did I...  
If I thought I could  
Get away with it...  
Should I do what I heard  
The voices in my head telling me  
To Do?

Why do I listen to my second thoughts?  
I know  
I am facing life in prison.  
No family  
No girlfriend  
Mother, father.  
If I turn to God do you  
Think he would  
Forgive me?

## Writing Poetry

*By Dennis Silas  
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL*

I asked the receptionist  
For a sheet of paper  
While I was waiting for my  
Granddaughter when I brought  
Her down here to the  
Clinic for a check up  
So I could write some  
Meaningful thoughts that just came over me.  
I like to thank God and Jesus  
For giving me such a gift as

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To ask. God and Jesus  
are Waiting 24/7 with their  
Arms open to welcome  
Accept  
Forgive  
Love  
You.  
Call Him.

## Leafy Plans

By Tim Segrest  
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

A leaf floated by  
like a ship in the wind  
drifting on the current  
not knowing  
how or when.



I reached to touch it  
but withdrew my hand  
for why stop  
the movement  
why destroy the plan.

It drifted away  
without a care  
in the world  
made me think  
what was  
my plan today.

## A Debt Owed

By Tim Segrest  
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

She smiled  
at me  
until she looked  
into my eyes.  
Then she  
screamed  
seeing the pain  
horror...rage  
in my  
damaged soul.  
I know...because  
I see it too  
in my own  
reflection.  
I feel it  
the black wolf  
the white wolf  
battling

raging another war  
inside my head  
a war...that  
regardless  
of who wins  
may...could  
take my life  
as a debt  
forever...owed.

## The Time Has Come

By Rosalie Cooper  
VA Medical Center – Buffalo, NY

The dinner has come to an end.  
The chair, forever empty,  
the glass, untouched.  
Tears never mending  
their fate.  
The candle will burn out,  
the ribbon may fade,  
the rose may perish.  
In our hearts their memory remains.

## The Door

By Peter Rompf  
VA Medical Center – Mastic, NY

Standing in front of the door,  
looking oddly different,  
as if I have seen it before.  
Placing my hand on the smooth surface,  
my fingers feel and follow the grain.  
A paint chip falls on the floor,  
revealing a color I thought this wood never wore.  
A color in contrast to the present surrounding,  
A personality covered trying to break through,  
shedding a different light  
to something that I thought I knew.

My hand turns the worn brass knob,  
the mechanism slips, the latch is still ajar.  
This door has always opened for me before?  
Is its hidden color trying to tell me more?  
I take a step back to look and see.  
It is plain and simple what has conspired to me.

I thought I knew just how you worked,  
your mechanics, your swings, your every little quirk.  
Looking back it is so very clear,  
My memory races, the pictures appear.  
You have cried out that you need repair,  
your squeaks, your hollows, the scratches, the despair.  
The very hinges that carried your weight,  
the awful burden, you realize it is not too late.

## Symptoms of PTSD

By Sean Richards, Jr.  
VA Medical Center – Fort Worth, TX

When you go out you sit in a corner so no one sits behind you,  
You jump and start at every loud sound, too.  
The sound of passing helicopters fills you with dread,  
All of these sounds make you cringe  
even though you know it's all in your head.

You cannot go to the gym because the sounds of dropped weights  
remind you of artillery.  
Even smells can trigger an episode,  
burning grass or meat can make you cringe.  
Sometimes even a strange smell can bring on a binge?  
Often even the sound of a car backfiring  
can trigger the duck-and-cover hard wiring.

Even with sounds of every aircraft that passes over,  
Our memories are blown open and laid bare with no cover.  
The high-flying jets are not so bad,  
But those low-flying aircraft can drive you mad.

You avoid crowds like the plague,  
Your control is gone and all you can do is rage.  
You look for ways to avoid being hemmed in,  
But between you and the crowds it's a no win.

In all your time spent in the military,  
It gives you no tools for recovery and methods on how to be wary.  
The time comes for your release from service and bang you are gone,  
Now you are no longer the military's burden  
and with civilians you just don't belong.

All that remains is for you to seek help and begin the task,  
The voyage begins at the local VA where you can go and ask.  
If your doctors are special and smart  
You are soon referred to mental health.  
Now you can begin a glowing time  
of great mental health and personal wealth.

## Comfort

By Susan Smith  
— Charlestown, NH

On tireless feet  
She checks each room  
Seeking to soothe pain  
Or uncomfortable chests  
Some of nightmares  
Or of undetectable wet.  
On tireless feet  
Night Nurse and Aide  
Give comfort through  
The nights.

## Grandpa's Dagger

By K. W. Peery  
— Blue Springs, MO

My Grandpa  
Kept the dagger  
In a Craftsman  
Workbench drawer

Said he won it  
Slayin' Nazis  
In the second  
World War

Wouldn't talk  
Too much about it  
Till a few months  
Before he died  
Yeah... my Grandpa  
Kept that dagger  
To remind him  
Of those times

My Grandpa  
Faced pure evil  
At the Battle  
Of the Bulge

Said he killed a man  
With frozen hands  
And soaked his fingers  
In the blood

Those curdled screams  
In his crazy dreams...  
They never really  
Went away

Yeah...my Grandpa  
Kept that dagger  
As a reminder...  
Of all he saved.



**THIS COULD BE YOU!**

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## Listening to Talk Radio

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center – Pittsburgh, PA

How much I love Talk Radio!  
I listen every day.  
From politics to every sport, I  
pass the time away.  
The subjects are so interesting:  
Pop Culture or the news.  
The entertainment world appears a lot,  
We listen to their views.  
I change the dial and listen to  
An alternating view.  
No matter what the time of day,  
Fun conversations brew!  
Some are more the favorite,  
Some again, just so!  
Together they are wonderful,  
I hate to let them go.  
The a.m. dial is vital,  
For “Talk” is always there.  
I learn to listen carefully  
And make myself aware.

## 11-Sep

By Bonnie Davis

— Roseville, CA

The world lost many wonderful souls  
When the terrorists came and took their tolls.  
But one thing they can never destroy or understand  
Is the love we have for our noble land!  
We will ever be true to the Red, White and Blue.  
Out of the ashes, debris and the dust  
Our country will rise...  
For it's “In God We Trust”  
And this great nation will continue to be  
The Home of the Brave and the Land of the Free.

## A Soldier's Game

By Hollie Elkins

— Patton, CA

As I sit  
I miss the hit  
Coming my way  
I'm not here to stay.  
Between them and us  
A battle we never trust  
At the end of the war  
We even the score.  
Moving up, moving around  
Making no sound

The enemy is silent  
One moment and it's violent.  
When the end is near  
Have faith and hear  
Hope and grace  
With an upright face.

## July Fifth

By Clinton Jarrett

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

In my neighborhood this morning, haze hangs.  
The celebration left trash all about  
from fireworks torched off by people in gangs.  
Many combat veterans won't go out.  
Reminders of times they try to forget:  
death screams, body parts, a child's burning flesh.  
Nightmares make soldiers relive all the shit.  
They just want a chance to start over fresh.  
Bureaucrats withhold much needed treatment.  
Vet's hands are tied tight with red tape.  
There's always the question, what's to be spent?  
Some lost warriors seek another escape.  
Billions set ablaze could go if we dare  
to give our freedom fighters good health care.

## Virgin Rape

By Mike Mosier

VA Medical Center – Battle Creek, MI

Ladders of smoke rise  
above concrete walls.  
The commanding officer slowly paces  
his harsh voice whispers loudly,  
“If it moves, kill it.”  
Fresh combat boots march forward  
like a child's first step, wary and unaware.  
Hands dripping sweat — nerves, not heat.  
Dead Americans scattered,  
cover blood-soaked dirt,  
limbs like the butt end of a burnt cigarette.  
Death's breath, hot on my neck  
like a lustful rapist, no remorse.  
I scream inside — a silent scream,  
as I see a reminder of my homeland.  
The stars and stripes still proudly flying  
from an American vehicle:  
ripped apart like a smoldering pop can  
encapsulated by vulgarness.  
It is forced upon me.  
War penetrates me,  
Deep inside.  
It stays  
Until completion.

## Garden in the Ghetto

By Dannie Lee Baldwin Jr.  
— Woodbridge, VA

Gardens in the ghetto -  
is that so hard to believe  
amongst all the turmoil and poverty?  
It's not hard to see  
like a garden of roses  
covered by a weeping willow tree,  
like a flower in someone's window  
where a butterfly grazes  
as it flows within the breeze,  
where a man tills the soil  
that plants a fruitful seed  
To grow a fruit or vegetable  
which some day he knows  
he will need,  
where a child looks up toward the sky  
at the tallest tree  
that reaches out toward the heavens  
reaching to be free.  
Yes, a garden in the ghetto  
is not so hard to believe.  
Just listen to a baby laugh,  
then ask him what he sees.  
Gardens in the ghetto -  
this is really a reality.



## Leaving a Legacy

By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt  
— Overland Park, KS

When I'm gone and only a memory, what will they say of me?  
I'll recycle a wine bottle and compost my garbage.  
I'll buy someone dinner and share my dessert.  
I'll smile when I'm hurting, give a hug when it's needed.  
I'll plant my own veggies and share them with a friend.  
I'll write silly poems to help others heal.  
I'll speak of the war and give praise to the wounded.  
I'll honor the fallen, lest others forget.  
I'll vote for the candidate who can make a difference.  
VETERANS' VOICES, Spring 2018 53  
I'll make a donation to lift someone up.  
I'll offer my time when others have little.  
I'll call a sick neighbor and listen - just listen.  
I'll share my life's past if it teaches a lesson.  
I'll work this old body as hard as I can.  
I will make a difference. I do have a plan.

## Count My Blessings

By Stu Carlson  
VA Medical Center - Salt Lake City, UT

I woke up this morning, feelin' dismal and blue, mired deep in the  
dumps with depression-fueled glue.  
Then I hobbled and shuffled my way to the head.  
Later, my bod hurt so much, I flopped back into bed.  
As the dawning sun graced nearby rangelands and hills,  
through my window glowed landscapes that once gave me thrills.  
But no more can I rider switchback rock-cobbled trails,  
or chase renegade calves, since my stamina's frail.  
This tired body's too weak to saddle my mare,  
and bruised bones from my past trigger aches I still bear.  
No more can I hoist hay bales high o'er my head,  
and I back-country camp in an RV instead.  
While I'll ne'er buckaroo, saddle trampin' far peaks,  
or again push spooked cows across deep turbulent creeks,  
my body still functions, but at a much slower gait.  
I just need to jog slow, and not challenge the fates.  
Then my spouse, a wise lady, noting time that was late,  
said, "Roll out of the sack, Dad. Get your head on right straight!"  
And, so later that day, when I got into gear,  
to the V.A. I journeyed to aid patients served there.  
My volunteer tasks found me walking the halls  
for those bedridden brethren could I visit them all?  
On one ward I crossed paths with a lad in a chair.  
He'd lost both of his legs and sought medical care.  
Next, I rapped with a warrior whose eyesight was gone,  
but his spirit was chipper so we chatted quite long.  
For the rest of that day, I held hands and heard fears.  
I would listen and nod in an effort to cheer.  
Bad hearts, diabetes and cancers add up,  
plus the horrors some faced due to war or bad luck.  
Then, with the sun nearly setting, I started back home,  
my memory sad for vets back there alone.  
Then I shamefully challenged my thinking and said,  
"Stu's problems are minor. Most are all in my head."  
Thus mentally salvaged by that tour I just had,  
I savor my blessings since my health's not all bad.  
No more can I scale far-off crags and high peaks,  
or tempt cutthroats when hip deep in summertime creeks.  
I just need to survive at a much slower gait,  
with my brain full engaged and not challenge the fates.  
I oft' recount my blessings compared to sick pals,  
some on dire terminal trips, others suffering in hell.  
War-torn vets are my heroes. Some endure chronic pain,  
while my ailments are token thanks to rehab I've gained.  
Today, if the weather is good, I can sit by a lake,  
enjoying great scenery from a lawn chair I take.  
I can untangle fish lines or put worms on kids' hooks.  
Grandchildren cluster 'round me, I'm convinced with fine looks.  
And when my scorecard is tallied at the end of life's race,  
tear-stained notes will reflect blessings gained with God's grace.  
THE END

## The Voyage

By Sean Richards, Jr.

VA Medical Center – Fort Worth, TX

A man is like a ship on a cold dark night.  
He needs a woman to guide him by the stars into the light.  
This bond is called marriage; it makes a man and wife a team.  
Together they move along in life like water in a clear-running stream.  
As a team the couple steers a path amid the storms and rocks.  
They move side by side as God intended. Their course in life is locked.  
Some do this better than others. And some couples get lost at sea.  
But if you can love each other, you will find love to a higher degree.  
A man loved his wife for years and years even after she died.  
The woman was his life mate, the rudder to his ship, the captain of his life.  
When he lost her, it was only the third time that I have ever seen him cry.  
While his life had not been all smooth sailing, now was filled with strife,  
Even now he continues on, one day at a time, as he awaits the day.  
Soon it will be his turn to rest, looking forward to the time when with her he can stay,  
When they will go hand in hand, arm in arm, to face God's final test.

## A Job for All

By Larry L. Penrod

— Buffalo, NY

“When you're the best... You do more than the rest.”  
Grab your rucksack and jump. Elephant grass up to our waist,  
Yet another firefight with Charlie, and I can hardly wait.  
A hot LZ near the DMZ and Cobras fill the sky...  
I radioed the fire base, “Let those big guns fly!”  
I'm walking out of Vietnam, no body bag for me.  
The Viet Cong or the N.V.A. can't put me in my grave.  
I'll keep my word and the promises to my wife that I made.  
From Saigon to the Khe Sanh, I had a job, I got it done.  
SOME GAVE ALL AND ALL GAVE SOME.  
The freedom bird is waiting and I want to tell the world,  
“Build a wall from sticks and stone and build it ten feet tall.  
Nobody really cares if it stands or if it falls.  
Write the names of all the men who burnt the American flag,  
And the names of men who dragged the flag like it was nothing but a rag.  
The ones who went to Canada or down to Mexico.  
The ones who yelled, “Hell No, We Won't Go!”  
Write those names for the entire world to see  
Let the children see what part their fathers played in keeping this country free.  
The United States of America, The land of the free because of the brave,  
And all the sacrifices the servicemen have made.

Days of Valley Forge, fighting in the bitter cold,  
Gettysburg, when the bullets were gone, they started throwing stones.

Custer was outnumbered by men just using bows.  
World Wars I, II, and Korea were no picnic. You know what they went through.

Freedom isn't free, it never has been free,  
And it never will be free.

“The price to be an American is due from everyone.

If you can throw a stone, or you're big enough to hold a gun,  
That's the price to be American.”

“The place that I call home!!”

## Ride the Wave

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center – Pittsburg, PA

I want to have adventure!  
I want to ride the wave!  
No matter where I venture  
From now until the grave.  
This life is meant for action,  
Of that we are aware.  
It stands a clever maxim  
That life's not always fair.  
So now let's take to “doing”  
What capers that we dare  
But pay no heed to booing,  
And cast off with a prayer.  
Our life goes fast, we all must learn,  
We stumble and we fall.  
But keep your pace at every turn,  
And always give your all.  
So ride the wave,  
be free and wild  
And throw caution to the wind!  
You'll satisfy your 'inner child'  
And know you haven't sinned.



## Spring

*By Charles Fredette  
VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA*

The cars are like friends  
Brother sun, sister moon.  
They often make a lot of noise  
Somewhat like a tune.

Spring is coming soon  
Only a few more weeks.  
It'll make many smile  
And brighten their cheeks.

We can wear only a layer  
And shorts sometimes, for sure.  
The warmth will be welcomed  
And we won't have to endure,

I bet you have a Spring story  
You'd love to tell.  
It's such a joyous time  
Like the ringing of a bell.

## A Day

*By Charles Fredette  
VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA*

I went to the market  
Early in the morning.  
My groceries were cold.  
The gals were yawning.

I then went to breakfast  
With a friend.  
It was wonderful.  
I hoped it would never end,  
Though there was hardly a customer.

We enjoyed the meal  
And the sun was shining.  
I went to the meeting  
and an understanding was mine.

I was sad and excited  
As I headed for home.  
No time was there for a negative tone.

## Tribute to an Unknown Soldier

*By Harold (Hal) Fulton  
— Wooster, Ohio*

We gather this day to honor the life and the service  
of one whom we did not know, but who was our brother.  
We know not the place, the time or the conditions  
of his service.

We know not if he stepped forward or was called.  
We know that he served, he returned and that,  
in the normal course of time, was felled  
by what Abraham Lincoln once called,  
“The silent artillery of time.”

For reasons beyond our understanding,  
he has, for too long, been alone and unhonored.  
Now he is here, in a place made special  
by those who have also served.  
He is home.

To you, our silent comrade, we say,  
“Rest in peace and thanks.”

## Bob

*By Earl W. Rugen  
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM*

A mover and a shaker  
A meth maker  
A Vietnam Vet  
He did not forget  
French Indochina  
Nothing could be finer  
It ain't no joke  
Came home from the war  
His arm became sore  
The memories invade  
No peace in the shade  
Made medicine for his friends  
Until the end  
What made me cry...  
He did not say “goodbye”.



# In Memorial

By A.D. Moore

VA Medical Center – Chicago, IL

Black, cold granite standing tall,  
With the name of them all  
Who answered the Clarion's patriot call.

It was not to some annual ball  
Held at some Civic Hall,  
Or a romp at the local shopping mall!  
But to a place where they showed some gall,  
Before making the final, fearful, fatal fall  
And now I'm a'telling y'all-

Their Supreme Sacrifice will never be forgotten,  
Their names, their deeds-though not so small,  
Will live on for an eternity.

ON THE VIETNAM VETERAN'S MONUMENTAL WALL!!



## Guest Editorial Continued from page 2...

Originally writing was developed to support commerce. Writing was needed to communicate across the expanses between cities or regions for resources, which were lacking locally. The earliest form of writing was pictographs – symbols which represented objects – and served to aid in remembering such things as which parcels of grain had gone to which destination or how many sheep were needed for events like sacrifices in the temples. These pictographs were impressed onto wet clay, which was then dried, and these became official records of commerce. As beer was a very popular beverage in ancient Mesopotamia, many of the earliest records extant have to do with the sale of beer. In modern terms the need for “Bud Light” was one of the first reasons for the development of writing. Remember that the next time you write your weekly shopping list! By 1000 BCE the Phoenicians (who lived in what is now Lebanon) and soon after the Greeks, developed an alphabet that is the basis for many modern languages. Soon writing became a tool for much more than commerce. Stories, histories, poetry, politics and religion all became the subject of writers. The Talmud, Bible and Koran are probably the most influential examples of ancient writing in all of history. Without the written word they would not exist.

Writing is an important part of modern life, whether in the workplace or school, as a hobby or in personal communication. This skill helps the writer express feelings and thoughts to other people in a relatively permanent form. Personal writing builds a connection between the writer and reader in a different way

from oral communication, and it helps people to organize their thoughts when seeing them on paper or on a screen. For over 72 years *Veterans' Voices* has provided a forum for veterans to release their inner most feelings and thoughts while communicating with thousands of interested readers.

A new age has dawned for the written word in the form of digital media. In the words of futurist Douglas Engelbart, “The digital revolution is far more significant than the invention of writing or even of printing.” Never before in history has a writer been able to connect with millions of potential readers around the globe almost instantaneously. Rather than destroying the written word, digital media is propelling it to even more importance and worldwide reach.

*Veterans' Voices* intends to be part of the digital revolution. It is the logical next step in the mission to “serve today's veterans and active duty service members.” In fulfillment of that mission, the digital version of *Veterans' Voices* was launched on Veterans Day in 2017. It has the same great writing and thoughtful ideas as the print version. Let us hope that *Veterans' Voices* will continue to support the notion of the French writer Gustave Flaubert, “The art of writing is the art of discovering what you believe.”

**Editor's Note:** The publishers of *Veterans' Voices* invited Dr. Cropsey to share his thoughts on writing due to his association with Grantham University and its commitment to veterans. In addition, Grantham provided volunteer prose editors along with technical assistance to make this issue possible.



# Mail Call

**Helen Anderson Glass** of Tucson, Ariz., was to be 95 on March 8. She joined the Navy in New Jersey on her 20th birthday. At the time, her dad said, "She's not a WAVE, she's a ripple." Helen says, "I may have been a ripple in the Navy, but I feel I am making WAVES now." Her brother, also in the Navy, was killed on Sept. 11, 1943, on the U.S.S. Savannah at Salerno, Italy, along with over 200 on his ship by a German radio-controlled bomb.

Helen married her chief, Elvin Leavitt Rickard, and they had a daughter – both are deceased. Ten years later, she married Army Sgt. George S. Glass and they had a son – both now deceased. Helen sent *Veterans' Voices* a check "to save her family the task." Helen has published a book, "Women in the Military," because she is so proud of women veterans.

"I have enjoyed being a part of VVWP and having my poems published. I truly believe it is a marvelous means of therapy. I know it was and still is for me...I can really feel the emotions of the contributors in what and how they write...Keep up your great work helping us veterans feel appreciated and worth caring about."



"As a veteran (USA 1979-1991, USNR 2003-present), I can think of few better ways than writing to deal with the internal conflicts many of us struggle through," wrote **David Yousha** in sending a donation to *Veterans' Voices*. "When I first learned of your project, I was immediately reminded of two of my favorite poets, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and their own writing during and after WWI. Thanks for doing this."



**William R. Browning**, chief of volunteer and community relations at the John D. Dingell VAMC in Detroit, Mich., thanked VVWP for the donation of copies of *Veterans' Voices*. "It is through the efforts of community partners that allow us to continue the quality care and services that we seek to provide our deserving veterans," he wrote.

A VFW Auxiliary member of Post 4228, **Marilyn Harwood-Graw** of Titusville, Fla., wrote a "Tribute to the Fallen." Her father was an Army veteran.

What is happening in our world today?  
I know the answer, and here's what I say:  
Satan is running rampant, to and fro,  
Laughing at all the carnage as he goes!  
Evil has taken over everywhere we go,  
But there's one thing I want you to know.  
We need to spend more time on our knees,  
Praying for God to make the devil flee.  
God I know in my heart, You won't tarry long,  
Please place in our hearts a happy song.  
I don't know what to do to comfort our people,  
I will encourage them to visit a building with a tall, white steeple.  
You promised you would never put more on us than what we  
could bear,  
I am a firm believer in this, even though some think you don't  
care.  
I know you care and your heart is breaking  
I will pray daily for innocent lives lost,  
They have all paid the ultimate cost.  
Father, thank you for your love,  
Sent down by You, from above.



**Jan Lawrence** sent this poem:

Thank you and welcome home  
For serving your country  
In a faraway land  
Words you never got to hear

Parades in your honor  
And pats on the back  
And welcome back  
Words you never got to hear

Praise for a job well done  
You need and deserve  
Before it's too late  
Words you never got to hear

THANK YOU and WELCOME HOME

# Tribute to VVWP Past Presidents

During the past several months, Veterans Voices Writing Project lost three loyal supporters. All of the women had served as president of VVWP as well as assisting with labeling and bundling *Veterans' Voices* for mailing. Their commitment to military veterans and the writing project continues to serve as inspiration to members of the current board of directors.



**Ann Van Dyne** passed away Sept. 29, 2017, at her home. She was born Oct. 22, 1927, in Marshall, Mo., and lived in Kansas City all of her adult life. She was preceded in death by her husband, George Van Dyne and is survived by their three sons. Ann

worked for 46 years at the national headquarters of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, retiring in 1992. She served on the VVWP board for 14 years and was president during 2006. In addition to her work with VVWP, she also volunteered at St. Luke's Hospital, Kansas City, Mo., where she accumulated over 22,000 hours of volunteer service; she worked in the surgical waiting room and sewed blankets for the newborn nursery. Ann warmly welcomed visitors to her gracious Brookside home and was renowned for her home baked pies.



**Dorothy Van Hoy** passed away Nov. 17, 2017. She was born March 19, 1926, in Stotts City, Mo., and lived in Independence, Mo., for her adult life. She was preceded in death by her husband Allen Van Hoy and is survived by nieces and nephews. Dorothy worked

for Russell Stover Candies for 43 years. She joined VVWP as an advisory board member and was elected to the board of directors in 1973. She resigned from the board in 2015. In addition to serving as president of the project from 2006 to 2009, she also served as treasurer. Her other memberships included Women of the Moose, P.E.O. Sisterhood, American Legion Post 21, and VFW Post 1000. She served as National Commander of the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary from 1973 to 1974 and was a member of the Kansas City Liberty Memorial Board. Dorothy was a committed volunteer—especially for veterans' causes — and credited her husband's family with instilling in her the spirit of volunteerism. Her VVWP friends will miss her style, parliamentary expertise and attention to detail.



**Rose Marie Schilpp** passed away Dec. 24, 2017. She was born on Halloween, 1927, in Spring Garden, Mo., one of nine children. She was preceded in death by her husband, James W. Schilpp, Sr., and a daughter. She is survived by two daughters and one son. For 20 years, Rose Marie worked

at Jean's Day Nursery schools in Independence, Mo., where she was director of music. She joined the VVWP board in 1989 and served as president from 2004 to 2006; she resigned in 2015 due to poor health. She was also a committed volunteer for the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary and served as national commander in 1989. Her other volunteer commitments included VAMC hospital volunteer, American Legion Auxiliary, VFW Auxiliary, Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary and the Women of the Moose. Rose Marie's love of life, sense of humor and positive attitude will be missed by many.

# 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 \$15,000 or more**

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

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

## **Gifts of \$2,000 or more**

Auxiliary to Veterans of Foreign Wars National, Kansas City, Mo.

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

Bowlers to Veterans (LINK), Fairfax, Va.

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

James and Louise Eisenbrandt, Overland Park, Kan.

Carol Habgood, San Antonio, Texas

WAC Veterans Association National, Weaver, Ala

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

Lynn Mackle, Kansas City, Mo.

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

Priscilla Chansky, Olathe, Kan.

DAV Auxiliary, Department of Florida

Samuel J. Hall, Albuquerque, N.M.

Ted Iliff, Leawood, Kan.

Local Independent Charities (Combined Federal Campaign)

Sarah Schroer and Kobi Mamun, Overland Park, Kan.

Marianne Watson, Lee's Summit, Mo.

Kay Watts, Springfield, Mo. in memory of Ronnie Millard

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

DAV Auxiliary State Department of Missouri

Family of Rich Wangard in honor of his birthday

Helen Anderson Glass, Tucson, Ariz.

Ann Ogden, Overland Park, Kan.

Robert S. Tastad, Mound City, Kan.

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

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

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 3169, Hull, Mass.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 6507, Chassell, Mich.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 9283, Southgate, Mich.

Richard Wangard, Neenah, Wisc.

## **Gifts In-Kind**

Kansas Audio-Reader Service, Lawrence, Kan.

Kaw Valley Computer, Mission, Kan.

Summit Litho, Lee's Summit, Mo.

VA Medical Center, Kansas City, Mo.

# Publication in *Veterans' Voices* Qualifies Writers for Special Prizes

Please note *Veterans' Voices'* prize structure includes three Founders' Awards honoring Elizabeth L. Fontaine, Gladys Feld Helzberg and Margaret Sally Keach. Contributors to *Veterans' Voices* receive \$10 for every published story, poem or drawing. Photographers receive \$5 for every published photograph. Published submissions also qualify for special awards made possible by generous donors. Those awards are listed below.

*Medical Center staff is encouraged to reproduce this page in patient publications.*



## FOUNDERS' AWARDS

### Elizabeth L. Fontaine Memorial Award:

Story expressing compassion and understanding (Perpetual) ..... \$ 50

### Gladys Feld Helzberg Memorial Award:

Best Poem (Perpetual) ..... \$ 50

### Margaret Sally Keach Memorial Award:

Story or Poem about What *Veterans' Voices* Means to Me (Perpetual) ..... \$ 50

## STORIES — *Fact or Fiction*

**David A. Andrews, Jr. Memorial Award:** Prose reminiscing about learned values by Kathy Andrews ..... \$ 25

**Gladys M. Canty Memorial Award,** by Northern Virginia Chapter 33, WAC Veterans Association ..... \$ 15

**DAVA, Arlington-Fairfax Chapter 10 Award** ..... 1st Prize \$ 60; 2nd Prize \$ 40

**DAV, Ernestine Schumann-Heink Chapter 2: Military Service Award (Perpetual)** ..... 1st prize \$ 60; 2nd Prize \$ 40

**DAVA, State Dept. of Kansas Award (Story)** ..... \$ 25

**VFW Auxiliary, Dept. of Kansas Award: Personal Story (Perpetual)** ..... \$ 25

**Pallas Athene Best Story Award, by National Women's Army Corps Veterans Association (Perpetual)** ..... \$ 25

**WAC Veterans' Association, Arizona Roadrunners Chapter 119 Award:** Written by a woman veteran ..... \$ 25

**American Legion, Elvis Presley Post 249 Award:** Story about Resisting Suicide or Fighting for VA Benefits ..... \$ 25

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

## POETRY

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

**DAVA, Harry L. Herron Chapter 49 Award, Waynesville, Missouri:** Editor's Choice ..... \$ 25

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

**DAVA, State Dept. of Kansas Award (3 Poems)** ..... Each \$ 25

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

**WOSL Members' Appreciation Award:** Editor's Choice, by Doris Cobb ..... \$ 15

## SPECIAL CATEGORIES

**Joseph Posik Award:** Given to a veteran who encourages other hospitalized veterans to write.

Medical center administrator nominates; publisher approves ..... \$ 50

**Conquering Homelessness Award:** by American Legion Auxiliary,

Elvis Presley Post 249 (Story in Summer issue) ..... \$ 50

**James Grant Memorial Award, by Matthew Grant:** Positive, uplifting theme (Story) ..... \$ 20

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

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

# Submission Guidelines for *Veterans' Voices*



Any military veteran or active service person may submit original writing or artwork for publication consideration by the editors. Material previously published in a VAMC publication is ACCEPTABLE; copyrighted material is NOT ACCEPTABLE for the magazine. Once work has been submitted, please do not resubmit the same story or poem. Instead, wait and watch for the material to appear in the magazine, on the VVWP web site, and/or on Facebook. Be patient and remember that editors work up to six months in advance of the magazine publication date.

**SUBMIT ONLINE:**  
[www.veteransvoices.org](http://www.veteransvoices.org)

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

## Instructions for Writing Submissions



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, desired username, password and email (not required). Scroll down and click "Open Section" under "Military Association" and choose your branch of military service and how you served. If you would like to keep this information private click "undisclosed." Continue down the page and select "Open Section" under "Your Details" and fill out your contact information. Now click register and you will be directed to a login page. Log in by entering your username and password. Once you have successfully logged in, type a headline or title for your submission in the textbox.

When you have finished 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 Selection" under "Writing" and use this area to add your written piece by typing or copy and pasting into the textbox. Once you have finished scroll down and click "Open Section" under "Notes" to type additional information. If you are uploading a file, select "Open Section" under "Upload File" then click anywhere inside of the dotted box. Once you have uploaded and completed this section, click "Submit For Review" and your work will be successfully submitted.

## Guidelines for Local Contests



Writing contests can encourage others to write. Announce such contests through VA Medical Center publications and bulletin boards. Prizes might be cash, books, gift certificates, or publication in a hospital newsletter. Send award-winning stories, poems or artwork to VVWP for possible publication in *Veterans' Voices*.

**QUESTIONS:**  
[info@veteransvoices.org](mailto:info@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	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> I certify that I served in the U.S. military	
Date Submitted to <i>Veterans' Voices</i>	_____
Title: Example: <i>What America Means to Me</i>	
Text: Example: <i>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.</i>	
Writing Aide:	_____
Typist:	_____

# Veterans Pen Celebration—2017

## Writing from the Soul...for the Soul

Since the 1960s Veterans Voices Writing Project has paid tribute to veterans, especially writing veterans, with an annual celebration showcasing their writing and seeking dollars to fund the project. The celebrations have been held in private homes, church basements, community centers, post and chapter buildings and most recently at The National World War I Museum and Memorial.

The theme of the Nov. 18, 2017, event was “Bridging the Generations” and introduced VVWP’s new web site and the digital version of *Veterans’ Voices*. Magazine writers from the greater Kansas City area and as far away as Tennessee, Virginia and Alabama drove to Kansas City to attend the celebration. Dr. Jon Kerstetter, author of *Crossings: A Doctor-Soldier’s Story*, was the keynote speaker. He told how writing helped him recover his life after a devastating stroke. A digital version of his speech is available on the VVWP website. The dramatization of selected *Veterans’ Voices* stories and poems by a troupe of actors from Arts & AGEing KC completed the program.



*Arts & AGEing KC brings the poem, “Nurse Ratchett’s Mistake” to the stage.*



*Dr. Jon Kerstetter encourages his “fellow warriors” to keep writing.*



*Deann Mitchell, vice president of VVWP, announces the new website and digital version of *Veterans’ Voices*.*



*Deb Campbell, introduces the Arts & AGEing KC performance.*



*Vaneada Terrell, Partlow, Va., talks with Pris Chansky, VVWP administrative director, during the reception following the presentations.*



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

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To Our Readers and Contributors:

At the 2016 Veterans Pen Celebration, I shared my vision of *Veterans' Voices* magazine going digital. I am so pleased that a year later my vision has become reality.

Our new website was launched in November. You will see on the home page, a digital flip book of the current magazine. When each new issue is published, it will be available on the website.

This will make our magazine shareable and accessible to people worldwide. It can be read anywhere, anytime, on any electronic device; computer, tablet, or phone, as well as on paper.

In addition, the website will consistently be updated to bring the reader more content to enjoy between magazine issues.

Veterans Voices Writing Project also has a new submission process. Each author can register on the website to develop a **User Profile** and **Password**. Our new system will allow the author to write within the site, edit, save and directly upload the submission to VVWP for possible publication.

**Devoted exclusively  
to the writings  
of military veterans  
for over 70 years**

The author's work will also be stored within the User Profile in order to review what works have been previously submitted. This will allow each author to maintain a personal archive of their work. This will also streamline the process internally to make the development of the magazine less of a manual process.

Veterans Voices Writing Project is now truly Digital! Visit our website, [www.veteransvoices.org](http://www.veteransvoices.org) to enjoy the realization of our goal. Please also follow, like and share us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

**Deann Mitchell**  
*Vice President and Marketing Director*