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Spring 2019

VETERANS' VOICES®

A Holocaust Survivor's Surprise of a Lifetime

By Ted Iliff

An Intrepid Hero
by Daniel Wolfe

Soul Sister
by Laura Lee Mahal

Visual Arts Initiative
by Robert Rubin, M.D., Ph. D.

Vol. 67, NO. 1
ISSN 0504-0779

VeteransVoices.org

A Holocaust Survivor's Surprise of a Lifetime

By Ted Iliff

It was supposed to be an afternoon for sharing and remembering...one woman's story of Holocaust terror and tragedy, perseverance and survival leading to a delayed discovery of her life's mission.

Sonia Warshawski, "Big Sonia" in a family-produced documentary, had gained fame in the Kansas City area and beyond for her series of presentations describing her teenage years in three of the most notorious Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz.

Her celebrity caught the attention of Veterans Voices Writing Project. The Kansas City-based nonprofit has published *Veterans' Voices* magazine for more than 50 years, giving veterans an opportunity to use storytelling as a form of therapy, archiving of experiences or just a creative outlet. Sonia, a riveting storyteller, seemed the perfect choice as keynote speaker for VVWP's annual Veterans Pen Celebration held on Oct. 27, 2018, at Kansas City's National World War I Museum and Memorial. But to spare Sonia the rigors of a solo speech, VVWP asked Museum President and CEO Dr. Matthew Naylor to interview Sonia in an "arm-chair chat" format on the museum's auditorium stage. He agreed, and the stage was figuratively and literally set for a stunning convergence of personal histories for two people who had never met.

The interview, eventually lasting an hour, mostly featured Naylor gently steering Sonia through her life story with occasional questions or clarifications. She recounted in great detail the night the Germans seized her family in her Polish hometown, the physical and psychological agony of concentration camp life, and above all the horror of watching her mother being led to the gas chambers in Majdanek.

Then she came to her day of liberation, April 15, 1945, at Bergen Belsen. She told of hearing and feeling the rumble of approaching British armored units, the panic of an SS guard who shot her in the chest, her rescue by a male Russian inmate and the life-saving care of a British military doctor.

About 50 minutes into their chat, it was Matt Naylor's turn for a shocking revelation.

Naylor: "You and I have another connection. When you felt the earth shaking...when you felt that perhaps you were going to be freed, when you saw those British tanks arriving...I want to show you a photograph of my father. You see, my father was ...



Sonia Warshawski



Matt Naylor

Sonia: "A liberator?"

Naylor: "He was in one of those tanks..."

Sonia: "O my God, O my gosh. My liberator?"

Naylor: "My father was in one of those first tanks to arrive at Bergen Belsen. He was one of those to arrive in your rescue. My dad was one of your liberators."

As Sonia sobs and Naylor fights his emotions, the audience applauds.

"Who'd have thought, Sonia, that here we are, all these years later...I wish my dad had known that you were alive...and here you are, and all this life you have lived. It would have made his life so much more meaningful knowing that he helped liberate you and your friends."

Fred Naylor emigrated to Australia from England after the war and built a new life there. He died in 2014.

For his son, that moment on the museum stage had been several weeks in the making. When he agreed to his role in the program, Naylor did not at first recognize the intersection of Sonia and Fred. That came gradually as he recalled echoes of Fred's reluctant, infrequent, fragmented war stories. His sister then confirmed the memories of their father describing his participation in Bergen Belsen's liberation.

"But he wouldn't have set himself as a liberator," Naylor added later during an interview in his museum office. "He instead talked about arriving and discovering what a terrible environment, what awful circumstances were there, and that the Germans left as they came in, which corresponds with Sonia's story."

(Continued on page 62)

Veterans' Voices®

Spring 2019 Vol. 67, No. 1



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This issue of *Veterans' Voices* was made possible with assistance from the Bill Liddle Memorial.

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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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Donations

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

Magazine Subscriptions

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

Audio Version

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

Submission Guidelines

Manuscripts, photographs and artwork submissions are accepted online. Follow the guidelines on pages 66 and 67 of the magazine or as listed on the web site. Page 67 lists criteria for the magazine's new visual art initiative.

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

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A Helping Hand

By Jonathan M. Craig
VA Medical Center – Portland, OR

My name is Jonathan Craig. I'm a veteran of the Gulf War, 1990 and 1991. I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia about 20 years ago. I had just turned 28. It's been rough going during those years, but I have managed. Today, I would like to share with you some coping skills that I have adapted to deal with my hallucinations, the voices and smoke and shadows that disturb me every day.

First of all, visualize what the Berlin Wall looked like shortly before it was torn down. It shows how I feel some days, the anger/frustration/anxiety. I am sharing this with you just in case you feel the same way I do.

Another method to try is to use a Native American dream catcher to sleep by. Before my best buddy Chuck passed away early this year, he gave me a beautiful dream catcher. It's on a wall at the head of my bed, and I sleep by it every night.

All you have to do is filter your dreams through the dream catcher's work. It's easy, it's simple and it works! Just think happy thoughts coming through. It's OK if you have bad thoughts going in, and coming out the back but in the end allow only happy, peaceful thoughts to break through. It takes some time to adjust, and to make it work, but you should see results in one or two days. Do this every night, before you close your eyes and you will rest better.

I also want to share with you that I meditate every day. I meditate 30 minutes every Monday through Saturday. On Sunday, I meditate for an hour and a half. I meditate on a tea candle in a short, round glass candle holder. If something is personally bothering me that day, I turn up the flame. It frees my mind for more important things, like feeling happy, calm.

Just imagine something bothering you, and hold it in the place of the fire, burn it up, get rid of it, let the wind blow it away. I suppose any size/shape of a candle will work. Just remember to breathe slowly in and out, and fixate on the candle flame. Also, for me, one other thing that helps is I made my own special/spiritual necklace. I used a leather string, and have organized colored beads on it, with a knot in between each bead.

Other religions use beads too; my necklace is my way of thinking/worrying on my beads. Also, each bead on my necklace is a different color! I have chosen a copper colored bead that stands for a soul. It can be myself, a friend, a family member. In addition, there is one bead for each element, each a different color. Red for fire, dark blue for water, brown for earth, green for vegetation,

and sky blue for wind. One element I have had the privilege to talk with is rust. I'm guessing he/she was a combination of earth and air.

Keep clear in your mind which way you can bend/sway. I myself am good, good neutral. But that spectrum can swing between good and evil, and any shade in between.

As you can see, there are innumerable/infinite ways these elements can align. For instance, for Jesus in the Bible, he once calmed the seas (water), and created fire that would not burn (fire). Each one was its own basic component.

Also, I recommend music to enhance meditation. Two of my favorite CDs are "Pure Moods" and "Pure Moods II."

ELIZABETH L. FONTAINE MEMORIAL AWARD

An Intrepid Hero

Daniel Wolfe
VA Medical Center – Bronxville, NY

Chorwon Valley, Korea: August 9, 1952. We read about Pearl Harbor, D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, Hiroshima, the battles for the hills in Korea, Agent Orange in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Yes, we hear about them on a division level, company level, on a platoon level, but rarely do we learn what is on the mind of the combatant who prepares for a raid and becomes a name with a dog tag. Finishing a C-ration can of ham and lima beans should earn a GI a Bronze Star Medal with a "V" for valor. The salt in that can could give a healthy GI a terminal case of hypertension.

Sgt. Flaherty entered our bunker as I removed my metal spoon from the mess inside the can.



“In three days we’re going to raid Hill 121,” he said. “Tomorrow night we’ll have a dry run, and the following night we’ll use live ammo.”

‘Let’s go, Mail Call!’

Some men from Company L gathered under a grove of trees on the reverse slope of their bunkers.

Our terrified mail clerk braked his jeep with the mail. He quickly called out a number of names, handed them their mail, tore back to his jeep then sped off to the rear. Charley observed, “He looks like he’s just scared as hell.”

I had a letter from Elaine to me, with a photo of herself in a bathing suit. Charley, leaning over my shoulder came up with his expected comment, “Yeah, these Jewish girls look good, but give them two years and they blow up like a Macy’s Thanksgiving balloon. Charley had every ethnic group labeled and categorized.

I returned to our bunker where Wayne Caton, my bunker buddy, and platoon medic, was struggling to compose a letter to his girlfriend. With a flickering candle trying to fight the gloom and dampness, it was difficult to elicit terms of endearment from a ballpoint pen. He hadn’t heard from her since that day in reserve when he came to our company. We became buddies then and shared this hovel when we moved up to the front line.

“Tell her you’re the same handsome guy as the day you left,” I told him.

“Cut it! I’m not handsome and she knows it. That’s why she isn’t writing.”

“It’s her loss. I’m sure that your replacement cannot be the dependable and decent person you are, you’re the best. I saw you tend to our guys on the Hill 117 raid two days ago.”

“I’m no hero. I just do what I’ve been trained to do. What am I going to do after my three-year enlistment? I don’t even have a high school diploma. Maybe I’ll reenlist.”

“Yeah, I’m with you. I don’t know about the other guys in the platoon, but raids and patrols leave me scared witless. We walk into the night without a clue as to where the Chinese are hiding. Ah, forget the Chinese, forget the patrols, I’m hungry.”

While struggling to digest the salty, inedible corned beef hash from an embarrassed C-ration can, Sgt. Flaherty, with his mustache leading the way, dropped into our bunker to report:

“Reilly, go to Massey (our armorer). Get an M-1, a grenade launcher, a flare and a bullet to fire a flare.” “What’s this all about? My weapon is a carbine. A flare? Tell Charley to get it. He loves these things.”

“Charley will point the way. We don’t need a runner on the next raid, so you will fire the flare.”

“Next raid? Where are we going? When?”

“This is a big one. In three days we’re going to attack Hill 121. Come to my bunker tonight and bring everything. We’ll go to the rear with the rest of the company for a couple of practice runs.”

In the evening, Flaherty and I crossed over two cratered ridgelines behind our position to practice firing the flare.

“Connect the grenade launcher to the end of the barrel. Fit the flare into the end of the launcher, then put the bullet into chamber. OK, now place the stock of the rifle firmly into the ground. Good. When I tell you to pull the trigger, have a firm grip on the rifle, and make sure you close your eyes tightly. A blinding flash will come out of the chamber. I’ll count to three, then pull the trigger.”

I pulled the trigger. A silver bolt streaked out of the barrel and rocketed into the blackened sky.

“We never used a flare on a raid, why this one?”

“A British Centurion tank is moving up to the bank of the Imjin River. The 105mm howitzers and the tank are going to bombard the hill. You will fire the flare as a signal to ceasefire. Then we attack.

Remember, shut your eyes when you fire the flare.”

Three days passed. Company L was ready. Some snapped on their armored vests, some buckled their helmets. Some wore neither an armored vest nor a helmet. All of us left for Massey’s bunker to pick up grenades, ammo, white phosphorus rounds for the recoilless rifle team and a bullet for my flare.

Under a grove of trees, Lt. Sidney, our company commander made sure our weapons were in the locked position. To ease the tension, he called us by our names and casually adjusted our fatigues or armored vests.

Frye, who had a serious marital problem, had just returned to the company from stateside. He was in a daze, wearing a greasy beard, a blank stare and unfocused, bloodshot eyes. We were on our knees as the chaplain read the 23 Psalm.

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with...”

Where was thou on our last raid when Massengale, Moen and Camacho were killed? Where was Thou when Nunns, Gehrig, Francis Mette, and Dickson were severely wounded two days ago?”

We left the chaplain for the jon boats and the heavy rope that was suspended over the Imjin River. Like empty sardine cans in the backyard of my tenement, the jon boats, were scattered along the Imjin shoreline. They held four men. Charley grasped the overhead rope then pulled us across the river. At the other side of the river we assembled at an unmanned outpost called The



Bubble, where Lt. Sidney reviewed the order of attack.

“Any questions?”

We could always depend upon Coy Jaegers, who never brought home a grade higher than an F, to ask an in-depth question.

“Why can’t that big ‘ole tank go with us when we attack? We need pertekshun.”

“What’s between that tank and us?”

“Trees?” The men roared.

“The Imjin River we just crossed.”

This exchange slightly loosened the tension that had been mounting from the time we left our bunkers. The boys had a good laugh.

“First platoon, out and into the valley.”

After they covered a short distance, we (second platoon) stepped out.

How many of our guys will I see when we return? Will I return?

Bereft of trees, the Chorwon Valley was naked, dry, wide and long. The first platoon set up on a ridge in the valley. The second and third platoons followed, and then the heavy weapons. Suddenly, the sky above us was pin-striped red from the Centurion’s tracer bullets as Hill 121 was being bombarded by the howitzers, the cannon and machine guns from the tank. The recoilless rifle team set up on a small hill opposite Hill 121.

What’s this? I can’t believe it! Amid the crater blasts on the hill and the clatter of the machine guns, a searchlight company just reflected their beams off the low-hanging clouds and lit up Hill 121 like a birthday cake. Will we be the blown out candles when we arrive?

Finally, Lt. Theiss signaled to fire the flare. I placed the stock of the rifle firmly into the ground, but curiosity got the best of me. I opened my eyes when I pulled the trigger. A blinding flash burst out of the firing chamber. Lt. Theiss waved to attack. We ran up the hill. Like a swarm of bees, burp gun bullets zipped at us. Whenever I blinked, I was blinded. The hill was ringed with

concentric trenches so the defenders could move to the trench behind them if necessary. I stepped forward into space. I hit my head on the lip of the trench then fell to the bottom. My helmet went somewhere. Dazed, I found a firing step, grasped the top of the trench then pulled myself out. In a stunned frenzy, I joined the men from my platoon and made my way up the hill. This candle was still lit!

Flaherty and Wayne were further up front, to my left. A Chinese concussion grenade kicked up a cloud of earth near them, I waited then ran over to see if I could help. Neither Wayne, nor Flaherty was there. My vest plowed the earth as I crawled toward Gus.

“Hey Gus, did you see Wayne or Flaherty?”

“Wayne’s probably with the wounded. Our litter bearers carried someone down the hill.”

Human shrieks temporarily drowned out the buzz of the burp guns and the clatter of our machine guns. On ridge to our rear, our recoilless rifle team spotted a squad of Chinese attempting to ambush us.

Three phosphorus rounds from their rifles carbonized them. Thank you Lt. Sidney!

Lt. Theiss signaled to withdraw. I ran down the hill avoiding the trenches. But where was my buddy Wayne? I’ll check with Flaherty as soon as I see him. I caught sight of Flaherty lying on a litter at the base of the hill, The concussion grenade pulverized his jaw. It was resting on his chest like a wet, bloody sock.

Like sprinters, we crouched and ran through the men of the first platoon. I wanted to leave my skin because it wasn’t moving as fast as my heartbeat. Was there any more adrenaline left in my adrenals? Speeding on, Ed Heister was frantically running with a wounded man who was collapsed on his shoulders. But, where was Wayne?

Finally, we reached the jon boats! I joined three shaken men. We pulled ourselves across the Imjin then plodded to a battalion truck that was waiting a half a mile from the river. Frye, Charley, Whitefeather and Konnerth joined me. We lowered the slatted benches inside the truck and then collapsed onto them.

Sitting on the bench opposite me was Frye. He had the same glassy, vacant gaze, as if in a hypnotic trance. The motor rumbled. We were underway. Frye stood up, lifted his BAR, stuck his finger onto the trigger and squeezed. Everyone fell to the floor. We didn’t rise until the truck, with its shredded canvas cover, arrived at battalion headquarters. Within minutes the medics came and evacuated Frye.

Sitting on the ground in benumbed silence, Charley, Whitefeather, Konnerth and I waited for the next truck. A motor hummed in the distance. The truck pulled up.

“Hey Gus, did you see Wayne?”

“Don. Did you see Wayne Caton?”

“Maybe he’s on the next truck.”

There was no next truck. Where was he? Eventually, Wayne was listed as Missing in Action. I kept in contact with Wayne’s family. No news. I wrote to the Department of the Army, perhaps they knew. No, Wayne was still an MIA. A month later I was sent to Japan to train for an attack on the east coast of North Korea. It never happened.

Finally, after two years in the Army I was discharged. Wayne’s mother and I exchanged letters. She sent photos of Wayne to the U.S. repatriated prisoners at Valley Forge General Hospital in Pennsylvania. No one was able to identify him.

After the truce was signed in 1953, I thought this was the end of the story. Some years later, I received an email from Wayne’s niece, Holly. She wanted to know the details of our raid on Hill 121. We had a very friendly exchange. I told her all I knew which lacked the details of his disappearance.

In 2007, my wife and I visited Wayne’s older brother in Allentown, Pa. His wife and Wayne’s niece, Holly, were there. The only information I could provide was that the last time I saw him, he was alongside Sgt, Flaherty. Their reaction to the two photos I showed them was, “Look how skinny he is.”

In 2010, Holly was in Washington D.C. Persistent and determined to discover information about Wayne. She went to the Department of the Army. They provided her with a satellite photo of Hill 121. With a magnified viewer, she went through the entire hill. Not a trace of Wayne. After Holly’s futile effort, I contacted Ed Heister (a rifleman in our platoon). He ended the story of Wayne and Hill 121.

Ed Heister was carrying a hemorrhaging Truman Bastin back to the Imjin River so that he could cross and reach an aid station. The jon boats that carried us across were waiting to bring us back.

Ed Heister placed Truman in a jon boat and told the GI in charge to release the boat. He refused. He said that three more men had to occupy the boat before it could be brought across.

Wayne, who was standing nearby, took out his pistol jammed it into the GI’s gut and told him if that boat was not released, he was a dead man. Truman was ferried across immediately.

“What happened after that?” I asked.

“Wayne returned to Hill 121 to see if there were any more casualties.”

That was Wayne: An intrepid hero in every sense of the word.

A Ride to Remember

By C. L. Nemeth

VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

In 1946, I had just graduated from high school and was looking for a job. My Uncle Louie, (he did not want us to call him uncle) just home from the war, was working at an auto dealership as a line mechanic and he helped me get hired as a “parts chaser.” This involved driving around town picking up parts, taking engine items to the machine shop, and helping in the parts room.

The vehicle I drove was one of the first civilian jeeps produced immediately after the war. It was almost identical to the Army version except it had the shift on the steering column rather than on the floor. It had a fabric top, and fabric doors with plastic windows. In fair weather I would remove the doors and let the wind blow in.

The service department was busy almost constantly, but on occasion work would slow down. One day in midwinter, we experienced a blizzard as can only blow along the east and southeast shores of the Great Lakes. It was not unusual for it to snow over two feet in South Bend, but 25 miles to the east or west you would find little to no snow.

The shop was very quiet. The blizzard had stopped almost all traffic with its blowing snow and icy roads. Sully, the service manager, had agreed to tow in a farmer’s old Whippet truck, which needed engine repairs and could not be driven. Sully sent Louie and me out to get the truck. We were not all that concerned. The jeep had four-wheel drive with snow tires, and it could handle snow and ice far better than a standard vehicle.

It was cold; the wind blew from the west. The wind and snow came through and around the fabric doors but we were dressed warmly. The farm was some eight miles out of South Bend off U.S. Highway 31. We found the farm, hooked up the old Whippet behind the jeep with a chain, and started back to town. That is when the fun started.

A jeep has a very short wheelbase and is not very directionally stable, especially with a vehicle chained behind. The road was very icy, with ruts, and Louie was having some problems keeping the old truck going in a straight line. There was no such thing as power steering in those days, and it took some strength to turn the steering wheel. The Whippet would catch a rut in the road, as did the jeep. This would cause one or both of us to slide around, sometimes one of us slid one way while the other slid in the opposite direction. But as young men (Louie being not much older than I), we were having a fun time sliding around on the road.

Suddenly, the Whippet turned at a right angle to the road—I

looked back and it was sliding along sideways. This caused the jeep to lose control, and the next thing I knew I had headed directly into the sloping side of the road. I came to a stop, and looking back saw the Whippet still sliding sideways down the road. When it passed me suddenly the jeep was pulled back onto the road, and the Whippet now headed into the roadside in reverse. Now I, in the jeep, slid sideways down the road. When I passed the Whippet again the momentum pulled it out of the ditch once more. Luckily there was no traffic; we had the road to ourselves. We finally came to a stop on the road, heading in the direction we had been going. Louie and I jumped down to the road and started laughing. We laughed so hard that we could not stand up.

There was no damage to either vehicle. As we stood there laughing, we heard the sound of air brakes cycling. A semi-tractor had come down the hill from the north, heading south. He finally came to a stop beside our two vehicles on the road. The driver stepped out of his cab and sat down on the running board of the truck. Wiping his brow, he said, "You guys scared the hell out of me."

This, of course, set off another round of laughing by Louie and me. After a few minutes the driver shook his head and got back into the truck and started away. I jumped into the jeep, Louie in the Whippet and we proceeded to the shop with no further difficulty. Louie is gone now, but when we would get together over the years, one of us would bring up this incident and we would once again break into laughter. The sight of the Whippet on the end of its chain sliding down the road behind the jeep is still very vivid in my mind.

LARRY CHAMBERS SPIRIT AWARD

Running Into Vietnam

By Jim Barker

VA Medical Center – Palo Alto, CA

No geography on Earth should exclude the impressions of the quiet and rhythmic foot-falls of runners in motion. This was my belief and intent throughout preparation for service in Vietnam as an advisor and linguist.

Background: Beyond a fascination for exploring the great outdoors and nature's mysteries in our nascent years in rural Oregon and Iowa, my twin brother and I were drawn to the competitive domain of cross-country and track. This propulsion started in grade school through undergraduate college. Being of more ectomorphic build than many of our Midwest classmates of more "angus dimensions," running beckoned strongly in this process of natural selection. One valiant attempt at football as a high school senior found me the smallest player after one friend threw in his towel! When it required 10 yards to drag down our star charging fullback, I realized there had to be a higher calling!



Preparation: Having a passion and facility for languages within a liberal arts college social studies curriculum at Iowa, I took my junior year at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. I achieved top of the class in Russian, aside from advanced Spanish. The year was 1967-68, the heaviest period of combat and highest troop strength in Vietnam.

The Tet offensive began in January 1968. Intermittent news of classmate casualties began to bring that distant war closer to home, not to mention that the most outspoken and angry student in a social science class was a newly returned Vietnam veteran. He became my closest friend. Graduation arrived, and shortly afterwards with our 1A draft status, my twin brother and I enlisted in Army intelligence.

Fortunately, I qualified for language training at the renowned Presidio of Monterey Defense Language Institute. Basic training had its normal rigors of two months. I graduated as the sole trainee with a perfect PT score in the Brigade. After a brief leave to say good-bye to family, and a blessing from my faith's sage minister, I departed to Monterey. Checking into language school on a Friday evening I felt confident and rather cocky, with the ideal and naive assumption that I would be continuing in Russian and hopefully stationed in Berlin and possibly become enamored with an intriguing German fraulein!

The clerk on duty opened my sealed orders and barked out unceremoniously: "Hanoi Vietnamese." Stunned, I strode toward my new quarters. By coincidence, the first soldier I met was inebriated, from Missouri and in the process of flunking out of Vietnamese! At that moment I resolved to take on this unknown language and become the most proficient student I could become, as lives could hang in the balance of my understanding.

Twenty months later the few of us in the honors class, passing the tests of a 45-minute speech from a three by five inch word card and a 30-page thesis in the language, received orders for classified communications training at a secure Air Force base in Texas. I maintained serious running training, including 10-mile workouts in the Texas heat and humidity. Prior military sports achievements included helping win the Fort Ord cross country Championship two times, running three marathons, the final one representing the 6th Army at the Boston Marathon where I finished in the top 6 percent.

Vietnam Arrival: Stepping off the Tiger Airlines flight at Bien Hoa in the early dawn in musty humidity, my running shoes were hung casually over my shoulder. A passing GI took note and stated, "Mister, you won't be using those over here." Undaunted, settling in at MACV (Military Assistance Command-VNam) headquarters, I embarked on an eight-mile run in the midday heat. Slogging in the final stretch, I must have passed for a prime Maine lobster! It was a humble realization that this climate had little mercy for distance runners. But it offered the greater challenge!

Assignment Nha Trang: Initial orders found me at the 330th Radio Research station, which was located not distant from the ocean at one of the desirable locations in Vietnam. The city, with its depth of culture, intimate bay, lengthy coastline, and exotic flora was a mecca for tourists. Along the bordering white sand of the seaside road, one could almost touch the sparkling waters of the South China Sea. Home of the last emperor Bao Dai, Nha Trang was not of great strategic significance to the invading North, therefore there was minimal enemy activity in the area.

I soon marked out a 10-mile course with a jeep. The route bordered the ocean, turned at the central city traffic circle, and returned along the airport. I ran "Hawaiian style" in shorts only, to the amusement of part of the local populace. Being the end of the rainy season the roads were soft and wet, and to my surprise, with the bacteria in the water, I had two bouts of blood poisoning within the first few weeks. Thankfully, this was corrected with tetracycline. Running solo, ultimately I found the company of a dedicated triathlete from southern California. Our best workouts were during pouring rains to mitigate the heat and humidity. It became a game and a pleasure chasing and pacing with bicycles and the three-wheel Lambrettas. An occasional treat to the final finishing mile was racing into the ocean for a quick cool down. On a few occasions I was greeted by an airborne incoming school of flying fish! Ascending the beach for the final distance to the company was the inevitable encounter with a highly-decorated coterie of the local nightclub gals dressed and adorned with as much makeup as one might see on a Betty Crocker cake mix box!

I would greet them in Vietnamese, however they could see that this semi-naked ape in motion didn't have a bankroll in hand. Next to my unit was a company of South Korean Infantry. One time I found myself sprinting after a truckload of these soldiers. They had a simian toughness that could have made tigers flee in their wake! In a war zone, everything can be unpredictable. One evening as daylight was fading, I was picking up the pace along the perimeter of the airport. Suddenly there was the sound of a machine gun locking and loading. A quick shout spared me the possibility of being mistaken for one of the Viet Cong sappers, whose infamous mission was blowing up aircraft and people who got in the way.

After a few months a captain buddy, who was a very competitive tennis player, invited me to join him on a special assignment

to the II Corps Central Highlands as an advisor with the South Vietnamese 23rd Division.

Dar Lac Province, Ban Me Thuot City: There were few American military remaining in the region. Captain Harris and I quickly observed we were now truly in "Indian Country." Driving into town someone took a potshot our way from the adjacent rubber plantation. The area with its red laterite-gluey soil was undulating terrain and profuse banana and coffee plantations. It was also the center of the largest group of ethnic minorities, the Rhade Montagnards, who were generally fiercely loyal to their American advisors and Special Forces. As the area was under Red Alert the first month we were there, I spent my workouts running 40 laps around a rutted soccer field bordering our Intel compound. After conditions stabilized, I started countryside runs on Highway 14. The route passed by a South Vietnamese regiment and a minority's battalion. After a few weeks I observed minorities out jogging slowly. Maybe their command did not want to be trumped by this American soldier flowing by their premises. One late afternoon after doing Intel intercept, I was jogging and encountered some school children returning home.

A young fellow encumbered with books began jogging with me in his sandals. I offered to carry his books which was a great relief (to him). When I handed the books back there was a clear perspiration hand imprint on the cover. He smiled broadly. A good moment of autographed diplomacy! In time, Captain Rogers a recreational runner, joined on some of the runs. Running uphill in the weather elements was laborious and the captain tended to run behind me some distance. One time a Lambretta (motor scooter) was chugging up the hill filled with its passengers, including their flora and fauna. Clean emission was an unknown phenomenon.

I happened to look back to see my running buddy completely engulfed in the black sooty smoke. To crown the event, a village urchin ran out with a rotted piece of wood and smacked our noble captain on the buttocks! He then smartly picked up the child and held him upside down a moment. This mischievous affront nearly threw the villagers into a panic. An elder chief then picked up a larger stick and proceeded to chase the child. My language fluency was put to the test and peace was gracefully restored! The elder then jogged with us several yards as a final gesture of good will.

As the Spring of 1972 arrived, heralded by the onset of the monsoon season, Hanoi planners chose to launch the Easter Offensive with Kon Tum as the third front. As the siege began to escalate, I was called up to do communications and language work as a member of Defense Command. Any chance for workouts evaporated. Nearly two months of splintering from my team's above-ground communications while trying to dodge incoming artillery and rockets from communist forces, my weight plunged as dysentery (along with a scarcity of fresh vegetables) ravaged me. By June, the siege lifted, and the

diminished North Vietnamese forces withdrew. All parts and limbs intact, I returned to Ban Me Thuot as a lucky survivor. Feeling an immense sense of relief and liberation, I worked out more fervently than ever. GIs at the intelligence unit assumed I would start saturating myself in booze and/or marijuana. However, self-numbing was not an option; I was more focused and vigilant than ever. More than fitness, running now offered me an opportunity for healing and meditation.

Finishing military service and discharging home to Idaho, I felt I had literally landed running. With no time-out, there was the resumption of full academic life and part time employment. With the internal intensity I felt, running and endurance sports became a big part of my lifestyle, to the point of qualifying for the Olympic trials in the marathon at one point. The Vietnam experience was now a permanent part of my emotional real estate.

Note: 20 years later a vanguard Aussie sports organization was approved by the Vietnam government to sponsor the first inaugural marathon in Vietnam. This was a similar historic action like President Richard Nixon's opening dialogue with China via ping-pong tournaments. I seized this opportunity to organize a contingent of wheelchair veterans and join with two Olympian friends to run the marathon. Beyond the dialogue opportunity with former foes and national athletes, the event served a deeper purpose as an illustration of American freedom, and as a statement that as individuals we had never abandoned the original intent to assist the people of South Vietnam.

GLADYS CANTY MEMORIAL AWARD

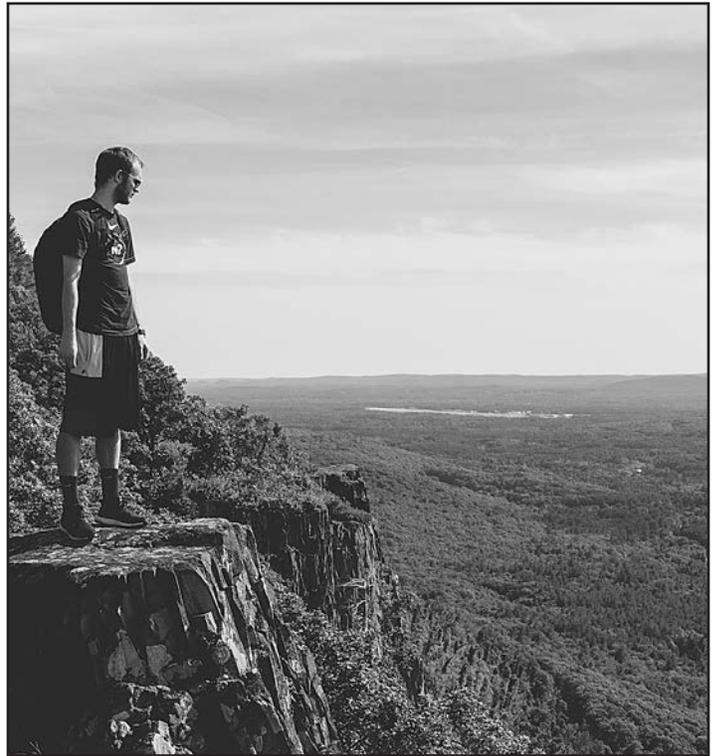
The Delusion

*By Wallace D. McGregor
VA Medical Center – Boston, MA*

Oscar established the Boneyard estate exactly nine months after he returned from Vietnam in 1972. It is located on an easement just south of the Gulf gas station in Everett, Mass., between the Firestone and Michelin tire mansions in the junkyard he calls home.

He lives there, alone, secluded behind a chain-link fence against all who dare to intrude. He isolates himself from the Viet Cong who inhabit the railroad tracks he regularly wanders down in search of cans and cigarette butts. He knows they will steal his precious life if he doesn't avoid them. He thinks they throw bottles in his direction when he passes.

His girlfriend, a Farrah Fawcett pinup, hangs on the wall in a secluded corner of his cardboard, country house. Although her edges are tattered and stained, she remains faithful and true because he protects her from the forces that try to pull them apart. She loves him dearly and, prudently, he keeps her a secret from a doubting world.



He hides from the news helicopters that come to take him away from the safety of his home just like they used to do during the war. As they hover overhead he pulls down his dirty bush hat while he drifts between the sounds of rushing automobiles on Everett Street and the terrifying rustling of the jungle canopy.

He eats his MRE box lunch from the gas station's dumpster as his dog, Scout, guards his supermarket grocery cart filled with cans he has gathered on his missions into the suburban jungle.

As the crippling night creeps into his blinded eyes he searches for the forgotten words of pride and valor he's lived by for what seems like a thousand years. Clinging to the rocks along the low land river he is shackled by a cursing and unforgiving world near the back roads of a distant, happy youth.

He dips his tin can into a spitting, bubbling cauldron of soup and leaves his door open to the memory of soldiers in his mind. He holds, close to his heart, the regretted, reverberating thoughts of patriotic slogans and promises that drove him here to this little strip of land.

Caught inside his crackling flashbacks he hides inside his house of cards where he protects himself from power tools rattling off the bolts of cars hanging on the pneumatic lifts inside the garage.

He stays, forever, in a rapturous state of mind never seeing the writing on the walls of his stately mansion. Social workers hunt him down and say, "We understand."

He lives safe, all alone and separate, from the enemy in the jungle who inhabit the world outside his paper house.

How To Box a Joey

*By Joseph A. Squeo
VA Outpatient Clinic – Stamford, CT*



Did I ever tell you about the time I took up “professional” boxing? Well I only lasted three rounds in my one and only professional debut. It happened by chance while I was on military leave in Australia during the Vietnam War.

During the war American GIs were given the chance to take Rest and Recuperation, referred to as R & R, as a chance to escape the horror of war for a week. Each GI could pick a destination and the U.S. government would provide transportation to the country of choice. Many of the destinations were in Asia yet, often GIs would pick Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, or other pro American countries willing to allow troops to wind down, relax, party, and get a feel of freedom from military life and war.

My choice was to spend a week in Australia. My closest GI buddies, Sgt. Bob Wilson and Sgt. Mike Margitan, and I left war torn Vietnam and headed for Sydney, Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. Upon our arrival we took a taxi from the airport and headed for King’s Crossing in the heart of Sydney. The Aussie taxi driver educated us during the drive as to the dos and don’ts in Sydney. He pointed out a reasonably priced hotel in the heart of downtown, and told us it would be the ideal place for young, wild, and fat wallet GIs to set up our “freedom” base. We gladly thanked our cabbie and handed him an Australian 20 dollar bill to pay the cab fare. He commented, “Gee, don’t you Yanks have any smaller bills? I don’t have enough change!”

Bob and I looked at each other as we searched our wallets for smaller bills. The cabbie went on to explain that the highest currency in Australia was a 20 dollar bill! He then went on to share the fact that things were not too expensive in Australia when compared to the United States. We quickly learned that our Australian thousand dollar bankroll was going to carry us a long way! To us it was like playing with Monopoly money and we couldn’t wait to see how much of Sydney we could buy.

After spending a few days in Sydney, having the time of our lives, we stopped by a store with a huge banner that read “Welcome American GIs.” Curiously we went into the store. There were posters that read “Discover the Outback” and “Why not spend your R & R with an Australian Outback family?” And so my Air Force buddies and I signed up for an Australian Outback adventure. The best part was this vacation was totally free! All expenses paid by generous donors.

We were shuttled to the airport, boarded a small four passenger plane and headed up the east coast along the Great Barrier Reef. Three hours later we landed in the small, outback town of East

Hills. The entire town had come out to greet us, the Boy and Girl Scouts, a small marching band and countless residents waving American and Australian flags! It was like the parades we loved back in the United States. Even the mayor handed us the key to the town. When the festivities died down, our host family, the Morses, whisked us off to their 85,000 acre 44,000 sheep raising outback station. Ranches and farms are called stations in Australia.

The three of us were given a tour of the bunkhouse where the hired “ranch hands” bedded. We, as guest of the Morse family, would have separate rooms at the main house. Mrs. Morse introduced us to one of their three sons, Randy; the other two were out on horseback tending the sheep. Randy, was the oldest at 25, Ross was 22 and Richard was 19. We all took a liking to Randy. After unpacking our bags we quickly surmised this wasn’t going to be the wild, fun filled, R & R we were expecting. Seeing how there was no turning back and were stuck for seven days on a sheep station we’d have to go along with the flow. And so it was, learning how to herd sheep, shearing sheep, riding on horses to check fencing, even riding in a World War I biplane to make sure none of the sheep escaped or were attacked by wombats, dingoes, or other wild animals. Randy, piloted the Red Baron Snoopy-like biplane and loved to take us up doing daredevil twists, turns and loops. He’d be laughing the whole time while we were looking for a way to not throw up on ourselves.

Each new day was filled with another test of endurance, up before sunrise and exhaustion at the end of the day. We were counting the days almost wishing to return to the war zone. Little did we know the plans the three sons had for us on Friday night. Fridays are really a big thing in the small outback towns – first there’s a sheep shearing contest to see who’s the fastest shearer on the station. Sheep are herded into the shearing barn, the contestants line up and the contest begins. A bell is rung each time a sheep skin is sheared. When all is said and done thousands of sheep skins are piled high and naked sheep are in a tizzy.

Once all the hands have cleaned up and put on their best Friday party clothes a caravan of jeeps line up for a trip into town to visit the local beer pubs, pool rooms and dance halls. So there we were with a bunch of Australian cowboys who had gotten paid and were going to have a wild time on the town.

And so it was, the Morse boys escorted us into one of their favorite watering holes. The place was mobbed and many of the occupants

were feeling pretty good after rounds of Foster Ale. As soon as we entered the place the Aussies began singing Waltzing Matilda, started patting us on the back and offering to buy us beers. Meanwhile I couldn't help but notice a small boxing ring off to one corner of the pub. The conversation quickly turned to the art of boxing and talk of American heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali. One of our hosts asked if I had ever boxed. Not wanting to sound wimpy I replied, "Of course, I boxed back in the States."

"Well, me and a few of my mates would love to see if you'd like to spar a few rounds with one of our local chaps?" Oh boy, what was I getting myself into? My Air Force buddies started to encourage me as well, most likely not wanting to take on the challenge themselves.

The Aussies sensed my desire to back out and quickly said, "Yank, we're willing to put up 200 Australian dollars if you'll get in the ring. It's just three, three minute rounds. You can dance, dodge, duck, and run around the ring. Plus we have all the equipment you'll need: boxing shorts, shoes, gloves and headgear."

Now I was boxed into a corner, my own friends willing to sacrifice me to this crazy Friday night boxing match. Again I was thinking of how I could get out of it, when the word spread throughout the pub that a tough American GI would take on the local boxing champion. By now the wager had doubled, 400 U.S. dollars, 400 Australian dollars, for nine minutes of boxing. I agreed, to the delight of the frenzied crowd.

I was quickly escorted to a changing booth, donned a pair of red, white and blue boxing shorts and red boxing gloves. No sooner did I open the door when someone started playing "I'm A Yankee Doodle Dandy" on the piano. The announcer stood in the center of the ring. He mumbled something about my weight, height, and made up some other nonsense about my boxing record. What boxing record? What was I to do? So, I quickly thought of all the moves of Muhammad Ali and pretended to prance and dance around the ring. Meanwhile the Aussie crowd chanted, "USA, USA, Ali, Ali." This is insane, totally insane, I told myself.

After the crowd calmed down a bit, the piano player started to play the Australian national anthem followed by "Waltzing Matilda." The crowd was going wild, the ring announcer had yet to introduce my opponent. After gaining control of the mob, "Ladies and gentlemen, weighing in at 225 pounds, six feet six, with an undefeated record, is the pride and champion of the town of East Hills, Matilda."

People were laughing, and practically rolling on the floor. I was in shock, their local champ was a girl named Matilda! What a dirty deal, box a girl, my dad had taught me you never touch, let alone punch a girl. Yeah, I got the joke and the joke was on me! I'd be "Waltzing Matilda" around the ring for three minutes while everyone would whistle, hoot, and blow kisses our way. Then I thought for a moment, maybe this won't be too bad. Perhaps she's pretty and who knows I could end up with an Australian

girlfriend. So I smiled and shouted, "Bring her on!"

Out of a darkened corner of the pub came an Aussie with a kangaroo on a leash! A kangaroo hopped about wearing a pair of boxing shorts resembling the Australian flag and a pair of red boxing gloves on its small front paws. The crowd went nuts yelling, "Matilda, Matilda." I'd be boxing Matilda, a girl kangaroo!

And so it was, the bell rang, round one, I ran from one corner to the other trying to stay clear of my opponent. She kept trying to corner me, the crowd began to boo. Someone shouted, "Come on Yank, you going let a girl scare you? Fight like a man!" Someone else piped up ain't she pretty? Give her a hug, Yank."

Thank God the bell rang ending round one. I'd have to come up with a plan. The piano player began playing that crazy waltzing song, that's it I thought. I'll get in close and bear hug Matilda. I could try some wrestling moves, slow her down, and try to make it through to the next round. So I rushed at her put a bear hug around her furry body and held her tight so she couldn't raise her arms and punch me. Let me tell you six-foot six kangaroos are strong. Matilda started rocking back and forth on her enormous tail. The rocking motion was like riding one of those spring loaded rocking horses you find on kiddy playgrounds. This plan of mine wasn't working and I lost my grip. Thank, God the bell rang ending round two.

No sooner did I catch my breath, the bell rang signaling the final round. The crowd wanted to see a real round of boxing. They started yelling, "Put up your dukes, Yank!" I got the message, really try to really box Matilda. So I started jabbing at her, she met blow with blow extending her small paws, pawing at me with those red boxing gloves. Not bad, a little punch here a little punch there. So I started my best Muhammad Ali prance and dance around the ring. I even started to chant in my head, "Fly like a butterfly; sting like a bee, this Aussie kangaroo won't kick the living daylights out of me!"

Another big mistake! The crowd knew it, but I had no idea. Kangaroos don't fight fair. I didn't know what happened until someone threw a bucket on ice cold water on me after Matilda had knocked me out! You see kangaroos rock on their tails in order to gain momentum and in doing so they are able to use their powerful legs as weapons. So Matilda gave me one powerful kick and knocked me out cold to the delight of all, including my wonderful Air Force buddies.

The Aussie pub crowd sang, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" as they handed me a bucket filled with 400 Australian dollars. Even though I lost the fight they all decided I was the paid entertainment for the night. What happened later on and well into the night is another story.

Thinking back on my one and only professional boxing experience, I would have liked it better if I had boxed a Joey instead of a Matilda!

Jack, Are You Out There Somewhere?

By Judith Sweet Guittar
– Louisville, KY



Photo submitted by Judith Sweet Guittar

Dear Jack,

It's the Fourth of July, 2010. I still remember you! I often wonder if my footprint on your life made a difference. Forty years later, Jack, I can still remember sitting across a classroom from you at Ft. Holabird, Md., Military Intelligence School. Jack, do you remember the only woman in your class? We were both so young then, and so innocent to the horrors of life. I was enamored by your smile. You were such a cute young man! Your smile was all sunbeams. We'd chat and joke at breaks. I remember you went on a three-day pass back home to see your girlfriend. You told me when you got back you'd blink your headlights outside my barracks window so you could tell me all about the trip. I waited up all that night, Jack, but you changed your mind and didn't come.

I think what I remember most about those weeks we spent at Holabird is the day we got our orders. The war in Vietnam was raging. Our class contained both Army enlisted, like us, and Marines. First to get his orders was a marine named Hank. It didn't matter where exactly Hank was going; the shattering words I heard over and over that day, 60 odd times were "Vietnam... Vietnam... Vietnam." Then I heard a lone starkly different echo, "Ft. Bragg." I was a female in a man's world, Jack. As an Order of Battle Intelligence Analyst, a combat related occupational specialty, I couldn't be sent to Vietnam. Instead, I was being assigned to the Continental Tactical Intelligence Command at Ft. Bragg, N.C.

Jack, I remember the tears and the guilt I felt. I saw the confused faces of all those young men. The sergeant, who was in charge of us all, whisked me away to some poster covered little office to hide my tears. Could you understand, any of you, what I was feeling as I looked at you all that day with Vietnam stamped across your foreheads? Which of you, I wondered, would die because of me? Which of you might have gone to the safe haven of Ft. Bragg, if I had not been a woman? When I composed myself enough to return to our platoon, Jack you stood soberly at ease as I took my place next to you. Later you told me that the befuddled sergeant told everyone standing there in formation that he didn't know what was wrong with me, but for God's sake he would box the ears of any man who mentioned our orders and made me cry again! That was May of 1970, and it is now a lifetime later.

I started writing to you, and to Hank in Vietnam. Months passed and I would read the "Stars and Stripes" in a morbid ritual looking for the first of your names among the dead, the first to die because of me. I never saw a name, Jack, but I am sure somewhere in Arlington there is a name on one white cross that could have been mine, if I was a man. I remember putting together Christmas care packages for you and Hank, dried California fruits and nuts. I was still paying penance for being the woman that might cost you your life. Sometime in February Hank quit writing. Was he dead? Your letters, Jack, were becoming dark and troubled, you were changing, a ghost of the boy I had known. You talked of losing buddies, and the heat, and the insects, and the death. Sometime in early spring you wrote that your only escape was using heroin. You didn't care anymore if you came home or not. You just wanted to sleep.

Jack, I sat there in my safe and clean barracks in North Carolina reading that letter with profound sadness. I could feel you slipping away. I wrote to you of home, of the crocus peeping through the soil, of spring birds, and of pine scent in the air. I told you that life mattered, Jack. I told you to find a chaplain, and tell him you needed help. I'd seen several suicide attempts stateside. I had been on casual duty waiting for my security clearance at Ft. McClellan after basic training. I was the charge of quarters at night in Company C. Three despondent girls had tried to end their lives on my watch. I knew that dark despair was about to swallow you alive.

I can't pretend to know what war is like, Jack. I don't know. I do know despair though. Later, on a short trip to Washington, D.C. for an Association of the United States Army convention, I stayed at the WAC detachment at Walter Reed Army Hospital. It was located one floor above the barracks for the severely maimed in Vietnam who were matriculating back into civilian life soon. I did see the ravages of war, men without faces, men missing limbs, eyes without life. I know a bit more now than I did when I wrote you that spring.

It was Good Friday, in 1971 when the last letter I got from you arrived. I sat and read it with tears of joy. It was the first day I really believed there was a God, a God that not only had saved

you but me as well from my overwhelming guilt at being safe. Jack, you told me when my letter arrived, it had been or was going to be the last day of your life. You had shot up with heroin, and were in your tent staring at your rifle trying to get up the courage to end your life when my letter of spring birds and hope arrived. You did go to the chaplain. You were about to be sent to a hospital for drug rehabilitation and therapy. Jack, you did the most vindicating thing a man has ever done for me. You thanked me for saving your life.

Today, when I look at all the flags flying in the breeze in celebration of the birth of our nation I thank God for our own individual rebirths. Jack, are you out there somewhere? Have you led a good life? I like to think so. I know many Jacks returned from Vietnam. Many did not mend. I've looked into homeless faces, Jack, wondering if you became one of the lost men that society turned its back on. I hope not, Jack.

I got married, raised three wonderful children and am a grandmother now. I hope some of the same good things came your way when you got home.

All these years later, Jack, on the Fourth of July, Veterans Day and Memorial Day, I stand with pride to be recognized among those who served. We all gave something, Jack.

That is something I came to realize as the years passed. Some did die. Some lost an arm, or a leg, or freedom to move. Some were burned beyond recognition. Some bear scars inside that only those close to us know about. Regardless of how we felt about the war in Vietnam, or how others feel about the war even today, we did serve. It really does mean something when a stranger says, "Thank you for your service." Jack, you are not a stranger to me but thank you for your service and God bless you.

DAVA STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS AWARD

When Darkness Falls (My Struggle With P.T.S.D)

*By Clive Livingston Brown
- Boston, MA*

It was shortly after that day; March 24, 1984, that my life took a downward turn for the worst. My ambition of doing 30 years in the Marine Corps along with immeasurable pieces of who I was, and was to become, went up in flames on a hillside in Pohang, South Korea.

Since then, a breathing remnant of the searing flesh that littered the hillside, I've tried to make sense of the mess that has become my life. I've screamed, but no one has heard me, I've been running with nowhere to go but inside this cold dark meaningless cell where there's no end to the sights, the sounds and the perpetual smell of purgatory.



It has been years since the thunderous roar and the raging flames from the helicopter crash seem to have died, yet, death's cold hands have slowly but, continuously sought me.

These memories, feelings, thoughts and nightmares, relentless in their nightly assaults shatter the fragile borders of my reality, driving me to the precipitous edge of a swirling chasm; a place of insanity, where I'm pursued by ghostly screams coming from faces without names. Behind the threatening fingers of skeletal souls, the languished looks from hopeless eyes in hollow tear stained faces accusingly voice the unnerving question,

"Why, why, why, did you leave us here to die?" How could I have left anyone if I am always with them?

How could I have left somewhere, specifically, this dreadful place if I am always here? My days, yes! Even my days are filled with the darkness of this place, where continuously encased in a tomb of paranoia, impulsively I try to hide my fears behind an unstable plastic smile. God knows! I do not want to be here in this place where the sun rises mockingly above imposing mountain of pain and sets beneath horizons shadowed by the twin specters of death and suffering. Not because of selfish indifference, but, because in this frightening place all my dreams have come to die.

Having been routinely plagued by demons of the past, many not of my making, my life has not been my own, but unwaveringly, I fight to rid myself of them. More than anything else I deserve to live my life in pursuit of happiness and the fulfillment of my dreams, even if it means constantly navigating through varying moods which for their expression temporarily confine me either to the corridors of heaven, hell or purgatory. So, though badly broken in spirit, body and mind, as a warrior I fight with my feet grounded as firmly as they can be on the decaying plains of this earth where everything that exists conveys fragments of this truth: my past as well as the things of the earth will eventually crumble as dust beneath my feet.

Still, I wonder, can it be realized what it is like to live on multiple planes at the same time with none of them being home? This has been my reality, my unending curse, my sacrificial cross to bear, as each day sweating beads of blood and crying crimson tears I endeavor to rebuild my life from a heart that is torn, yet, heavy as a stone.

Author's Note: *This narrative is written in memory of my friend Lance Cpl. Herman L. Osceola and the 28 Marines who were called to guard the gates of heaven on that fateful day in March 1984.*

Oh, I Would, if I Only Could

By Helen Anderson Glass
VA Medical Center – Tuscon, AZ



Photo submitted by Helen Anderson Glass

I was recently asked when and how I started writing poetry and also, what made me so dedicated to volunteering. I told the videographer interviewing me for a documentary, that it started when I was a child growing up in New Jersey. It progressed as I visited my dad at the Lyons Veterans Administration, in N.J., and Coral Gables in Florida. Then, I joined the U.S. Navy, married, had a family and later moved to Arizona and volunteered at the Arizona Training Center with the VFW and the VA as part of an American Legion project. I told her how I wrote my first poem when I was seven years old and it seems I started volunteering as a child without even realizing it.

My mom and I visited and took my dad to the Lyons VA in New Jersey. He had been a Private in the Army in World War I, 76th Field Artillery, 3rd Division, in France. He had been gassed, wounded and suffered from shell shock (now known as PTSD). While there to visit, I would push the patients out into the sun in the courtyard, read or write letters, read magazines or books to them, play games with them, or just talk. It was when we “just talked” or I “just listened” that I started being inspired to write about them sometimes in story form, but mostly in poetry. I owe my success to these veterans. They inspired me to document it in my own way.

To date I have written over 500 military and patriotic poems, and have hundreds of others in memory books entitled, “Love and Feelings,” “Family and Friends,” and “Stories.” I wonder if in the Guinness Book of World Records there is a place for the most poetry written by one person? Writing is excellent therapy!

I am proud to say my first published book was about and for men veterans to honor members of my family who served our country ever since the Civil War. My father and uncle (Army)

served in World War I; my brother, World War II (Navy) KIA September 11, 1943, on the U.S. Savannah at Salerno, Italy; my son a U.S. Navy Seabee; nine uncles and four cousins in World War II, who are now all deceased. That first book is also dedicated to the living, two grandsons, U.S. Army Desert Shield/Desert Storm and U.S. Coast Guard, various branches of the service, wars and patriotism.

My second book just recently published is “Women in the Military.” The book honors women veterans and their service to our great country. It covers from the Revolutionary War to the present. I feel that I didn’t do anything great in service, so I am trying to make up for it by my writing and poetry. I also centered on the women who were the “first.”

When I joined the Navy in World War II (on my birthday), March 8, 1943, my Dad said, “She’s not a WAVE she’s a ripple.” Well, I say, “I may have been a ripple then but I’m making WAVES now.” I hope I am and can keep it up for years to come. The videographer asked me in detail to tell her about volunteering in Arizona, and what inspired me to do it. Her question reminded me how I reacted to a recent documentary about a young quadriplegic. Despite his situation, he was still pleasant and not resentful. I was so moved, in tears and remorseful, that I was inspired to write something. So I expressed myself in story and poetry about “taking things for granted.”

It seems throughout our lives we have the tendency to take life and what we have for granted, but then we suddenly wake up to reality when we get older and we start losing our hearing and sight, even the ability to walk and move about. These are natural losses that are destined to occur and we do the best we can with what we do have. I know this for a fact because this is happening to me and it made me realize how I had taken seeing, hearing and my body for granted all these years. But others have losses due to wars, disasters, diseases and conditions at birth.

It made me think and remember. As part of the VFW post and auxiliary’s Child Welfare program I had the privilege to assist with their project at the Arizona Training Center for Handicapped Children. These young boys and girls suffered from muscular dystrophy, Down’s syndrome, birth defects and more. During my life I had not been exposed to such disabilities. Soon, I overcame the shock and I no longer saw them as disabled young men and women, but as they were themselves, mostly happy and able. The closest I came to it was in 1947 in New Jersey when there was a polio epidemic. My daughter was just a few months old and was not exposed to polio, however my dear friends were, and their 4-year-old daughter died and their 6-year-old was severely disabled.

While working with the disabled children I learned a great deal from them. We took those who were able, to the circus, the ice shows, ball games, and whatever events we had tickets. We had parties at the center on Halloween, and some birthdays as well,



and we assisted them in the Special Olympics. I was then fully obsessed with doing it for them. I soon knew their names, wants, likes and dislikes. I even met a few of their family members. One young boy in a wheelchair who was an amputee, loved cars, so I contacted the local car dealers who gave me pictures of cars and trucks, and I made him a scrapbook with them. He was delighted with it and showed it to everyone. Another boy seemed to love animals and made sounds like them, so I made him a scrapbook of animals, domestic and wild.

A pretty and sweet young lady loved makeup and, “junk jewelry” so we secured the organization’s permission to celebrate her graduation from high school. One beautiful boy could see and hear, but could not speak. With the help of a man who makes boats, I designed a tray that clipped to his chair. I put pictures on it — a bed, a milk glass, a cookie, a toy and other illustrations. My friend covered it with a resin like on his boats. It worked out just fine.

We always included Mrs. Jones’ Down syndrome family in whatever we did. They were so beautiful, sweet, happy, and delightful to entertain. Mrs. Jones always dressed them for the occasion, the season, or holiday. Green for St. Patrick’s Day, red and white for Valentine’s Day, and red, white and blue for patriotic days. We did not do it for the glory or publicity, but with their permission we documented it all in a book that was submitted to the VFW Child Welfare Project and it won the award for our committee in that category. I had my picture taken with one little boy, with their permission, that appeared in the local newspaper.

My life changed, I moved and no longer took part in that VFW project. I became a volunteer at the Veterans Administration in Tucson in 1978, and have been ever since. I am proud and honored to say I was presented “The Volunteer of the Year Award” 1998 American Legion, the VFW 1999 and the VA in 2002.

I am almost 95. I no longer regularly volunteer at the VA, only for special events. I do still make needed and wanted items for the patients: walker and wheelchair tote bags, holiday tray favors,

covers for urinal bags, and more. I make lap robes, throws, and blankets. I recently designed lap robes for over the shoulder and some to put their hands in to keep them warm. These I plan on giving to the patients during the American Legion Auxiliary Annual Gift Shop at the VA that starts December 6, 2018.

I was reminded recently about the children from the training program and the poem I wrote for them, when I overheard a veteran at the VA say “Oh, you know I would, if I only could” and he held up what was left of his two arms and they laughed.

Oh I Would, if I Only Could

The morning is bright and beautiful. It warms me from head to feet. I cannot see its beauty I can only feel its heat.

Oh, I would, if I only could

Birds chirp, children laugh and sing. I can’t hear the cows moo or church bells ring.

Oh, I would hear, if I only could

I can’t walk or dance or even chase a cat. I can’t play, or hit a home run swinging a bat.

Oh I would walk and play, if I only could

God made a beautiful woman to love an equally handsome man. Then He gave them a child to love as part of His wonderful plan. These children may not be strong in body, nor beautiful in appearance. But they have a heart full of love to take its place. God did not promise that we’d all be perfect, beautiful, strong and smart. He only promised his eternal love from an overflowing heart. So you who can see and hear, you who can run and play, please do all of these things for us who can’t and make us happy today.

Because you can and we would, if we only could.

A Veteran’s Lament

*By Kwame F. Toshambe
VA Medical Center – Northport, VA*

Located on the northern part of the island, this facility was designed for the health and welfare of our nation’s veterans. Positioned on the same property is the VA nursing home, its function is to take care of those veterans who can’t be taken care of at home. This could be due to age and the other symptoms that plague us in our latent years. By latent years, I’m referring to what happens when old age sneaks up when we aren’t looking and nothing seems to work like it used to.

For a veteran, there are other issues. Things that he forgot to do. Things he will do when he has the time. The fates that govern

our lives jump in occasionally and turn things upside down. Our politicians call it a conflict while others call it what it really is, a war. A conflict with all the trimmings. Airplanes take to the sky, ships are on the move loaded with the tools of war slated to bring peace. The marching feet of those who serve are heard on the streets of foreign shores, far from home. At night when the clouds have gone to sleep a lonely soldier looks to heaven and counts the stars and then on his cheeks he feels the kisses of the winter wind.

Josh was his name. He was only 21 years young. He had completed two years of junior college and was wondering what he was going to do with the rest of his life. He had a girl that he had bedded once or twice, but there were no stars after the event. There was a song being sung called, "Fly Me to the Moon." They remained friends and had the occasion to walk the paths of life, and be FRIENDS! That was what he wanted it to be, but the young lady called him all the names that she could think of as she tossed the wedding planner at him. He had gotten what he wanted. Memory of this caused Josh to pause. Maybe he should have at least looked at the planner. It may have saved him the knot on the side of his head. Josh smiled to himself and continued his trudge down the road.

Being a veteran means you have served somewhere for some time, but there are some things that give you pause. There was a man that you shot today. You remembered firing your weapon and you saw him fall. You knew that he was dead. When the bullet hit him in the chest, a little of the blood erupted from his body and then his small frame was lifted off the ground and he fell backward crashing into mother earth. The leaves that were green are now red from the blood spewing from his body. The night was crackling with sounds of men shooting men. A remorseful silence filled the night. A job had to be done, and Josh remembers as he walked into the night with the thought that it could have been him. He wiped a tear from his eyes.

Josh pulls the covers over his shoulders. The clock reads 3 a.m. Suddenly the room seems a little colder. For some reason, he can hear his heartbeat. His breathing becomes heavier. He can count the beats. Soon it will be another day. The sun will rise and then the chill he feels will vanish. The rising of the sun paints an orange glow across the horizon.

For a short time, Josh appeared to be in a dream state. He was at church and the minister was preaching about the end of time and the coming of the judge who will consider what's in our hearts, and see the good and the bad. As the good book states "He will separate the people one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

Josh's mind is in a dream. His thoughts were on the soldier that he had killed earlier that day when he was on patrol. Josh awakes with a start as he envisions that he is standing before the judge of all judges of humans. Josh is covered in a cold sweat. He falls

from his cot to the floor. He curses and then gets up wondering whether he is alive or dead. The nurse walks into the room, calling his name. He pushes past the nurse and goes running up the hall shouting that he didn't mean to kill him. The doctor says, "Who did you kill?"

Reality slowly returns to Josh. He looks at the doctor and says, "No one of any importance." I will explain when my time comes to do so. Not knowing what to say, the doctor, not knowing any more than what he knew before, returns to his office.

At the VA, there are many cases where the veteran has a short-term memory of an event that took place in the distant past. There is a key that unlocks the hidden event. The vet finds safety in the hospital, and if they are there, they are safe. The nurse brings the meds which keeps the safe in their minds closed. Sometimes a doctor or group of trained physicians can unlock that which was hidden. A nurse's perfume can be the trigger or the sound of a horn. Perhaps, the backfiring of a car.

A veteran's story is not something that the community thinks about in their comings and goings of the day, only when there is a war. There is a price to be paid, but no one wants to pay for the conflict until it is over. Perhaps he should have asked for payment in advance. And perhaps in advance, there could have been peace.

After the war when a vet wants or needs something there is no money because the money was used to pay for the war. And the cycle goes on repeatedly and again until there is no one else to fight.

This, in my opinion, is a veteran's lament. What's yours?

It's Sunday, March 5, 2017. The troops were talking about what they were going to do on St Patrick's Day. For most of them it's just another day. Henry rolls over and checks the clock which always seems to have the same time. Knowing that it's time to get up, he curses as it's going to be just another nothing day. James had just gotten back from Afghanistan. This time it was going to be his last. The gods on high had closed the books on his career.

James had witnessed the horrors of war and the fates sent him. But for some reason he could not understand, war was his blood. And yet the enemy was there, he could remember shooting one. His weapon was fired and the barrel was hot and there was smoke and he heard cries of the enemy and there were bodies here and there, but none was his target. For a time, he gave it some thought.

The doctors told him to think of something else. To take his mind off war. There was a girl in town as well as one back home. Lucy was her name. She was approximately five foot five inches tall and she weighed about 110 pounds, and at times could curse like a sailor. When there was drinking to do, she held her own. As James's thoughts linger into the distant past they are halted by something more current. There was someone more in the present and not in the past. Lu Ling Chou, that's a long name but that is how James remembered it. He called her Lee, lei, if he had to remember

the Lu Ling and forget about the Chou he might as well go back to the base. Sometimes he did for when he had too much to drink there was a blank period, one that he couldn't remember. That name came out any way that his tongue could arrange the syllables or the parts of the name that made sense. She became his pillow for the night when he had too much to drink.

James' attention was drawn to the calling of the charge nurse who wanted him and some other soldiers to give some blood. As he walked up the hall he thought to himself, "Take, take that's all they do is take."

David looked past the snow barrier above the building tops. Into the night, his thoughts went as if they had wings that lifted them into the heavens above. They took him back to a time when things were different in his life. He remembered skiing and the snow of that night. Jane's dress was blue. It was short in the front but long in the back. Her hair was blondish or the color of something that the artist does with paint. Her portrait hangs in David's mother's house. When one walks in the house, she commands the attention of all who enter.

David told me about the last dance they had before he left for a distant land whose name he couldn't say. Moonlight was the covering for the evening and then it started to snow. The kind of snow that one can count each flake or should I say droplet? In David's mind, it has been a million years ago, or just a second. As it is doing now, as his thoughts are turned around in his mind. David said that he remembered the kiss. Deep and long, his shirt collar was torn before she let him go. The kiss was to last until he returned. To return from that magic place that he described to Jane in his letters.

Jane was about 115 pounds and approximately five foot six. Somehow, he couldn't remember the color of her hair. David felt the first drop of snow, as he wiped it from his face. Opening the start of a new day, it turned into a tear. He tried to wipe it away but for some reason he couldn't. Then there were two then three. His face was covered with tears. You see his beloved was in an accident, and she is with him no more except in his heart, and when the winter wind blows and it snows, David remembers. Josh and David were from the same company but this night they were miles apart. The chill in the air came from the nearby mountains. Yet there was a connection, a mystical bridge. One linked by two hearts beating as one. One might call it a computer link. One could, but one shouldn't. Their thoughts were tied together just for a split second. Perhaps it was the chill or something else, in war that binds all men and some women by the same beliefs and fears.

What is the future? The future of those who read the paper each day and there is doubt about everything from "A to Z." What did you give up so that the dreams that mountains are built upon are still there (Mountains are a metaphor for buildings that reach to the heavens). When one walks down the cobblestone streets in a foreign land, there is a laughter deep within. Why cobblestone?

They make a noise when you walk in the dead of night returning to the base. The night holds all secrets. For what was done in the darkness shall remain among each stone as you tiptoe silently while the phantom awaits to smother the perfume that lingers in your clothing. The MP at the gate smiles as you pass. The night, with its many stories, fades into the nothingness of time. Until another night.

Josh and David, David and Josh, does it really make a difference? It's just a little story.

Big Leon and John "Duke" Wayne

*By Rodney Anthony Santos
VA Medical Center – Spokane, WA*

As Father Garbo began Big Leon's funeral Mass, he spoke of the life of Napoleon Villaluz Cabading (April 1, 1933 - May 3, 2016): an honorably retired U.S. Navy chief petty officer. A devoted husband to Madeline, loving father to Caroline and Leon. A grandfather, an uncle, a cousin, a coworker, a friend and neighbor. The relationship I shared with Leon as a family friend and neighbor also included John "Duke" Wayne, the film actor.

I was a taller-than-average Filipino American teenager, and I was introduced to Big Leon in the early 1960s by my foster father. Leon and his wife lived around the corner from us in a San Francisco neighborhood that could have easily been referred to as "Manila-town," given the significant number of Filipino families living in the four-square block community.

It was Leon's height and mass that impressed me. He was the first Filipino I ever met who was over six feet tall; he was well over 200 pounds of muscle. From my perspective he was a giant of a man, as large as any of the professional football players I would see playing at San Francisco 49er games. Yet Big Leon was a soft-spoken man with a warm smile that always made me feel at ease. Just knowing him made me feel comfortable as I grew into adulthood and my own six-foot two-inch, 200-pound body. It was because of Big Leon that I never felt like a Filipino cultural oddity. Because of Big Leon, I was not alone.

In the summer of 1967, I was stationed at Fort Benning in Columbus, Ga., with the 3rd Army awaiting deployment orders to Vietnam. One Saturday morning, I stood with 30 other soldiers of Asian descent in a single-line formation on the parade ground as the actor John "Duke" Wayne came up to each of us individually for an inspection of sorts. The ordered formation was the military version of a Hollywood casting call for Wayne's movie "The Green Beret." When Mr. Wayne stood in front of me, I couldn't believe I was taller than him. He looked into my eyes and in his notable drawl said, "Son, you're pretty tall," and I responded, "Mr. Wayne, my father gave me a lot of milk and I would really like to be in your movie." Yet, I thought to myself: Duke, if you think I'm tall,

you should meet Big Leon.

I was cast as an extra in the film and portrayed a Viet Cong soldier attacking the Green Beret compound. Because of my height I was strategically placed in a trench surrounded by height-appropriate Asian soldier-actors who were at ground level. As a footnote, within two weeks after my Hollywood moment, I was in the Central Highlands of Vietnam watching another John Wayne war movie, "The Longest Day."

A few days before Big Leon passed away, the California Assembly rejected proposed legislation declaring May 26, the actor's birthday, as "John Wayne Day" in California, due to the actor's "disturbing views toward race."

As for me and for more than 50 years, whenever I see, hear, or read anything about John Wayne, I always recall his remarks on my unusual height and fondly remember Napoleon "Big Leon" Villaluz Cabading.

Having a Baby in the Navy: A Memoir

By Deborah C. Welch
VA Medical Center – Buffalo, NY

It was the Vietnam era, the 1970s, when my daughter was born while I was stationed at the Communications Center in Charleston, S.C. What a life-changing event for me at 24, five days away from turning 25 years old. Her dad and I met while we were both TAD (Temporary Assigned Duty) attending naval schools in California. Her dad was on a destroyer in the Mediterranean at the time of her birth. I felt so fulfilled even when I was big as a blimp. After a difficult 11 hours of labor I had a saddle block delivery.

Of course, I had been given maternity leave and put on a day schedule at work I was late by two weeks, and we were all getting anxious. I told everyone, "God is making her extra special." He did. I started reading about raising a child as I wasn't given an immediate knowledge as some think mothers are. She was so precious – my girlfriend and I would watch her instead of the television. A real charmer!

Not too long after schedules were resumed, my family came to visit their new granddaughter. Then the joy became problematic. I received orders for Keflavik, Iceland, for two years of isolated duty. My time was up and I would have needed to re-up for another two years, as well. She was a newborn. I was young and unprepared to bring a baby overseas. She would need a series of inoculations and I knew she was much too young to receive them. I pleaded by letter to be given a wait period until she turned six months old. There was another option, the Naval Communications Station in Sidi Yahia, Morocco. Yet for both

places I would need to find a nurse or full-time child care giver for a newborn while I worked a 56 hour rotating watch bill. This did not sound good to me.

Since I was not granted a wait period, I completed my enlistment by a few months and received an Honorable Discharge under general conditions. I was a 3rd Class Radioman Petty Officer with five years of active duty service. I drove home with my girlfriend and my baby girl to New York. She is now 40 years old, beautiful, talented, intelligent, a USAF veteran married to a Retired USAF officer and I have grandchildren to boot. Her dad is very proud of her, too.

KISS v. SMOOCH

By Melvin Garrett Brinkley
VA Medical Center – Tucson, AZ

"Keep It Simple, Stupid," or KISS, used to be my mantra. KISS formed the foundation of how I went about my day, until I met Lt. Wonder. But that wasn't his real name. His first name was Steve. I called him Stevie to his face. So did others who had the same rank. We didn't call him "Wonder" because he was wonderful, but because we could never find him when we needed him. During those frequent frustrating moments, we would routinely ask each other, "I wonder where Lt. Wonder is?" We were all fascinated by Wonder. No one was quite like him, nor did we want to be like him. For instance, he had a "walk in" tent. I had a cramped "crawl in." He also had a cot, an air mattress, a gas grill, and an ice chest big enough for a side of beef and two cases of beverages. I had none of these things and I outranked him by two grades. I was not his supervisor, so I kept my mouth shut about his luxurious field accommodations. I used to wonder how he would bring all of his creature comforts with him to a real battle where the ability to maneuver quickly could mean life or death. Evidently, he never wondered about that.

While out in the field one evening, I smelled grilling meat and heard the sexy siren call of a beer bottle being opened, "Psst." These sensual delights were coming from Wonder's bivouac area. I toyed with the idea of swallowing my pride in KISS along with some hot juicy steak and then washing down the last bit of my pride in being a simple soldier with a nice cold beer. Instead, I crawled into my tent and grumbled, "I thought we were preparing for World War III, not going out on a picnic." Then I scarfed down my cold can of beanie weenies and had a miserable night dreaming about being stoned to death, except without primitive stones, but with cold cans of beer and frozen steaks. The next day, I mused that a fitting inscription on my tombstone would be: "Here lies Mel the Martyr. He gave his life for KISS."

Later in my career, my faith in KISS took another direct hit. I had a boss who loved PowerPoint so much I suspected he cuddled with the projector when no one was looking. I called my boss

“L. C.” He liked that because he was a Lieutenant Colonel and he thought I was honoring his rank by using an abbreviation, but what I meant by L. C. was Liquid Crystal, as in “liquid crystal display,” the technology that allows for projecting computer images. Honestly, it was my coping mechanism, albeit a slightly passive aggressive one. After months of not getting the point of his PowerPoint presentations, I privately suggested to him that he consider the “10/20/30 Rule” which strongly suggests that an effective PowerPoint presentation should have no more than 10 slides, last no longer than 20 minutes, and use no font smaller than 30 points: a classic KISS concept. My boss hissed that the “10/20/30 Rule” did not fit his work ethos, to which I jested, “L. C., did you know the Geneva Convention outlawed the weaponization of PowerPoint in 1954, but made an allowance for the demilitarized “10/20/30” version for peacetime purposes only?” That’s when he called me sophomoric, which was a word I had to look up later.

I don’t think his rank or his colossal vocabulary justified him cramming every 50 dollar polysyllabic word he knew into his PowerPoint slide shows, which lasted for hours on end. His slides were so wordy, I had to use a pair of binoculars to read them. During his reign of terror, I realized that “Death by PowerPoint” is not some jokey office jargon. It definitely has the potential to kill—a career, at least—as I learned later during my Performance Review. KISS does not mean dumbing down the lowest common denominator, what you are presenting. I firmly believe that a speaker who does not take the time to make their presentation understandable deserves the title, “Chairman of the Bored,” another zinger I used that had hidden meaning: For My Eyes (and Ears) Only.

Since KISS is too loaded with bad baggage, I have come up with a new mantra: SMOOCH, which stands for, “Systematically and Methodically Optimizing the Obvious as a Competent Human.” Consider this futuristic problem for our upcoming Space Force troopers: “In space, no one can hear you scream,” which is from the iconic science fiction flick “Alien.” By Optimizing the Obvious, future Space Force troopers will be able to deduce the reason no one is responding to their distress calls. Once they have “Optimized the Obvious” by checking their equipment, they can then scream with the confidence that comes with the real possibility that someone might receive their distress call: that is if anyone is listening. Problem solved.

May the SMOOCH be with you!



Leon

By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center – Albany, NY

Once, I had an interesting conversation with a new hairdresser. You know how frequently hairdressers tend to be talkative. They act like they are interested in your life, but often they are not!

As our conversation progressed he found out that I was retired Army and was in Desert Storm. He told me he was in the first Gulf War, interesting I thought. I began to get so excited about having a conversation about this time in my life.

He proceeded to tell me what it was like for me in the war. Things went downhill from there! He told me, because I was a woman, I was not out in the field! I must have been posted in town because women have periods and animals would be able to detect our scent, thus giving away our force’s positions. Oh my goodness! This guy must have been transported from the Dark Ages! He was so clueless, I almost lost it!

I recalled that when I first arrived at the Persian Gulf some wanted women to wear black hoods on our heads and refrain from driving vehicles. The U.S. Army said that women soldiers were equal to male soldiers. To Leon and others like him. “Like it or not we are going back, you won’t fight a war without us.”

This former soldier was given the wrong information or was reared to have archaic ideas about women in general and women in the service specifically. I hated this conversation. It left me very frustrated. I tried to set him straight without success. In the end, he was not worth me getting upset. He was yet another ignorant soul.

Mindful Care for Veterans Who Share

By Kenneth Harvey
VA Medical Center – Richmond, VA

It seems plausible veterans can receive mindful care and prompt administrative service from Hunter Holmes McGuire Veterans Medical Center, Richmond Va., through sharing in the process. Action-sharing is essential if patients are to receive the care they need.

Mindful care is the shift to better care for all because of veterans who share. There are errors made by both the patient and the staff (although not always intended) that impact medical appointments.

Consider how failure to cancel appointments will not allow staff to reassign canceled appointment times to other veterans.



Professionals like Dr. Gourley and Dr. Hudax in polytrauma; Dr. Fox; Dr. Miller's eye clinic; Dr. Smith and Dr. Drake's pain clinic; Dr. Jaffe in neurology and Dr. Lehosit demonstrate this care. The Parkinson Clinic along with, Ms. Freda, Ms. Hope, Ms. Paulette, Ms. Kyle, and Mr. Mark are the glue that keep 'mindful care' in check and show a superior desire to provide expert care.

To be prepared for your appointment be ready and on time. Also, check with your VA to learn more about the companion program that has been recently put into place to help veterans who need assistance with transportation and lodging for appointments. During a recent experience with the companion program both the service provider and the veteran coordinators did an exceptional job of setting everything up so I could arrive at the appointment on time. The local hotel for lodging provided excellent service and shuttled me back to the hospital to pick up my car. As the Coordinator mentioned, "When the veterans and their service have all the information to ensure a smooth transition very few things can go wrong." Thanks to McGuire's coordinator program, first rate service had been provided.

If unusual wait times occur, use your time wisely while on a medical appointment. The staff's goal is to get you back to see the doctor, the scheduled appointment, yet, emergencies happen. What can you do to reduce the tension and ensure you are ready for the visit when your turn comes. One example, write a concise list of ailments and rate them one through five in order of importance. Care is improved if the patient can express his concerns.

Our veterans' medical professionals treat hundreds of patients daily, so mental fatigue can set in with them. You are stressing for care and they are tired due to "diagnosis fatigue." Think of yourself sitting two hours in an algebra classroom where you need to find answers to the equations. You have 20 of 50 problems left to answer and you begin to experience "brain fatigue." Yet after the test is complete you report to your next class. How do you feel? Not feeling bushy tailed for sure. Do you really think your doctor is going to be spirited after visiting with a scheduled list of veterans for 20 to 30 minutes each, addressing their ailments?

The point is for you to understand your care. To share for care requires teamwork and controlled expectations."Patience is a virtue" comes to mind when you let slip that you are tired of waiting for service. We know in advance the schedule can get stalled, yet we insist on blaming the failures on the doctor and the staff when you are ready for treatment. Anyone think of bringing along a book to read, or the checkbook to balance? Preparedness is just as much our responsibility as anyone else's.

Staff at Hunter Holmes McGuire Medical Center has demonstrated they are in caring for you.

Mom

By C. L. Nemeth
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

What can I tell you about Mom? She was born in 1897 on a collective farm in Austria to Hungarian parents who were working there at the time and although she was brought to the United States at age three she still talked about the old country. When met by her father at the pier in New York City she was given a banana, something she had never seen before.

Her memory was sketchy about living in McKeesport, Pa., where her father worked in the steel mills. There, unknowingly, granddad was recruited, along with others, as a strikebreaker and transported to Trinidad, Colo., to work in the infamous Ludlow Coal Mines. Mom told us about living in a canyon, and going to school near an arroyo that would flash flood at times sending everything in its way to destruction. Grandma ran a boarding house for miners in Engleville, Colo., now a ghost town.

Then, Mom's family left Colorado, and moved to near South Bend, Ind., where friends and relatives had settled. However, her stories about Colorado, instilled in me a love of the mountain West. I remember cold winter mornings when she would put our clothes on the open oven door to warm as we dressed in front of the stove. In the meantime, school lunches were already made, and breakfast was on the table. In the summer we woke up early, and Mom already had picnic lunches made. We were going berry picking in the woods on grandpa's farm. Although we helped pick, such as it was, she picked all day while keeping us occupied, fed, napped. Returning home, she would be up into the late hours canning berries and making jelly.

Mom took in laundry; I remember the yard full of clothes on the line. She did housecleaning several times a week. We were poor but never hungry, and always in clean clothing.

She sewed; I still can hear that old Singer sewing machine treadle being pumped up and down while she sewed humming all the while. She crocheted, making intricate patterned doilies and table cloths. She could look at a piece of crochet in a magazine and copy it exactly. She hooked throw rugs from cloth strips.

She also had her questions at times. Once she borrowed Uncle Louie's Ford coupe and lost control in a rainstorm, hitting trees on both sides of the street. She drove it home and put it in our

garage. When they came to pick it up it could not be driven. How she got it home is still a mystery. She did not drive again for over 25 years. When dad could no longer drive she calmly took the entire test again, received a license and drove until we finally convinced her to quit at 89.

Mom was a devout Catholic, but she never let her religion interfere with her humanity. I brought my wife to visit her late in life. We both had been divorced. NO problem. Mom embraced Gloria at the door and one would never know that she had not seen her before, let alone that she disapproved of divorce.

Finally, the day came. All of us came back to South Bend for the funeral. There was a luncheon/reception after the service in the church hall, a wonderful meal. When I asked my older brother what my part of the expenses would be he shocked me."Mom paid for it all," he said, "She planned this years ago, arranged the funeral and paid for it. We do not have anything to pay for." Just another gift from our caring Mom.

Mom has been gone for some years now and I am approaching later years myself. Two of my brothers have also gone, just sis and I are left. But the memories of Mom and her love and devotion remain. They will always be there.

Out of Darkness - Into the Light

*By Helen Anderson Glass
VA Medical Center - Tucson, AZ*

Throughout the ages in education, it has been the goal for students to learn and teachers to see that they are taught.

Often, it seems we take the teachers in our schools for granted."They get paid to teach. What more do they want?" And taxpayers resent paying school taxes when they do not have children in school. They forget someone paid taxes when they went to school and when their children attended school. It's the career they have chosen so what if the pay is minimal. The teacher is blamed if children fail. The child who attends school because they have to or attends to be with friends and have fun fooling around doesn't take the blame. But there are students out there who want to learn, and parents who want to make sure they do. There are those unsung hero teachers who truly want to teach and enjoy doing so.

Dedicated teachers set their goals high to see that they succeed in educating their pupils. They revel in their success when they see a student's face light up because they finally understand what it's all about.

This is the kind of teacher I saw in Don Dickinson, an award-winning history and economics teacher today at University High School in Tucson and previously at Ironwood Ridge High School in Oro Valley, Ariz.

I had first-hand knowledge of his outstanding methods when I took part in his project "Veterans Heritage." Students, regardless of their grades, ethnic backgrounds, or status in life, have to commit to the project because it is not required. The students who participate and are taking part in the Veteran's Heritage program give of their time freely. It is time consuming and takes dedication and sacrifice on their part. They're not only involved during school hours but after school and even on weekends and holidays, especially Memorial Day, Veterans Day and Patriot's Day. This is true dedication and these special students and their teacher are to be commended for their loyalty to the project. Our country has a marvelous and interesting history of veterans service from the Revolutionary War to the present time. These students have been made aware of this through this program and are eager to learn more. Patriotism begins in home and school. Who is more deserving of praise than the veterans who laid their lives on the line serving their country to ensure our freedom?

Dickinson's methods have his students listening, comprehending, understanding and wanting to learn more. This project requires the students to interview veterans for stories of sacrifice, bravery, heroism and even fear. Transcribing the veteran stories, the students learn English, spelling, and vocabulary. They become published authors and their books are then presented to The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., for future generations.

I have a saying, writers and poets become artists when what they write forms a picture in your mind's eye. My generation grew up reading books and listening to the radio. We had to picture what we were reading or hearing. We also had to memorize literary passages, poetry and music thus exercising our brains. That is what is happening to these high school students—they are seriously exercising their minds, storing memories and learning as they do so.

The project has come a long way through the dedicated efforts of Dickinson who took on the project in Tucson, Ariz., after it was established in 2004 by Barbara Hatch, Cave Creek High School history teacher.

Matching the students with the veterans is a rewarding aspect of the project. The veteran gets to meet and appreciate, and the student learns about the unique aspects of veteran service. All the branches of service are represented and service ranges from World War I to Afghanistan with Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf War included.

The Statue of Liberty holds a torch on high. It is said to be a beacon, "to enlighten the world to freedom." I once had a teacher in high school in New Jersey, 1938-1941, who inspired me like Dickinson has, and I have carried the respect I had for her over to him. She, like Dickinson, had a special method of teaching that I still remember to this very day. If I, at 94, can still be inspired by learning, I am sure the students of today that are under the influence of Dickinson's teaching can achieve even more than I have in my life time. My eyesight and hearing are fading but my

mind is clear, my memory is excellent and I still want and am eager to learn. I believe this is because I had good teachers, grew up in the Depression, learned to take care of and appreciate what I had and I loved going to school, believe it or not. I am now a published author of two books of poetry about men and women veterans. Education is a powerful word for a child from the first day they attend school as they progress through middle and senior high school and beyond through higher education. It has been said that education can be a passport to many things, “a key to success, an investment in the future and a powerful weapon to change the world.” Perhaps some of these Arizona students are destined to help do just that.

During the many days I was fortunate to take part in the history project, as a speaker or class member, I saw that Dickinson had the ability to, “light a fire” or “bring out the quest for knowledge” in his students. He is confident his students will carry that torch of knowledge throughout their lives. He does it out of his love for education, not for glory or praise to which I feel he is truly worthy. Don Dickinson takes that extra minute, that extra time, gives students that extra push, support and confidence. I am certain they have a great deal of respect and admiration for him not only as their teacher but as their mentor and friend. “A friend is like a four-leaf clover – hard to find and lucky to have.” Don Dickinson is a loyal friend to his students and veterans.

Pages of Remembrance

By Lowell Hayes

VA Medical Center – Iron Mountain, MI

My First Day

On October 16, 1952, A Company, 32nd Regiment, 7th Division received reinforcements. The company was on the Iron Triangle. After dark we were guided up the hill and each of us were put in bunkers. We were shelled all night.

As dawn was breaking, we were told to fall in a column; we were changing positions. I climbed out of the bunkers just as a shell came in. It was long. A few seconds later a second shell fell short. I fell to the ground as I looked for a depression or hole, anything for cover, then all went blank.

When I came to, the sun was high and my dog tags were missing. My T-shirt was soaked in blood. I had been unconscious for four to five hours. I was extremely relieved to find my legs in good shape.

An officer sent me to the aid station. From there, it was on to hospital care and then Osaka and Nara, Japan. I rejoined A Company the day after Thanksgiving. Much later, the company commander told us that after five days on that hill there were only 14 of the original company that walked off.

Korea Never Turned Off

The Columbians were having a party, and the Chinese overtook their party time. We walked up there and I wanted to go to sleep, but we had no sleeping bags. The only sleeping bag had a dead Columbian soldier in it, so I took him and the sleeping bag to the top of a hill, rolled him out, and climbed in the bag.

The next day, I was in a trench where dead Chinese and Columbian bodies were laying thick in the trench. I saw a Chinese observer, so I tried to shoot him. Our first sergeant asked who was trying to shoot, and others pointed toward me. He said not to do that because I would give away our location. But he said, “I like your spirit.” That’s how I was promoted to sergeant.

The following day, I was in a bunker cleaning my rifle, making sure it was ready to go. Another soldier was nervous, talking with me about needing to leave. He was looking out the window, and he stopped talking mid-sentence. I looked up and he was still standing but had been shot right between the eyes by the Chinese. The next day, we gathered in a bunker to depart. We were required to take a weapon with us as we left, with 10 yards of spacing between people. Someone took my rifle, so I picked up a machine gun and ran. I passed two guys carrying rifles. I was a miler.

Culvert

When they told me I was rotating, I started heading down the road to the trucks when we came under Chinese fire. The only available cover I could locate was a tin culvert. When I got halfway in, I got stuck. It took me a half hour to wiggle back out!

January 1953 - Korea

During the last half of January 1953, while I was walking toward my bunker on Hill 100, a large Chinese shell came very close to me, exploding approximate 50 yards below where I was standing. I was not hit, but lost complete balance, falling into a trench. As a result of this attack, my legs would not support me so I crawled to my bunker and reported sick. Two days later I returned to normal duty.

Patrol Voices

During February 1953, I returned to the 2nd Platoon of A Company, 32nd Regiment, 7th Division after my second wounds. Being a little nervous, I walked around the top of Hill 100; there were only two men awake. I volunteered on the first patrol. This helped calm my nerves.

My bunker was on the right point of the hill. Although a man was assigned with me, when it got dark he went to the hill to be with his friends. I was alone. One night after being on patrol, I woke up to strange voices. My first thought was, “I will be dead in a few seconds.” They were South Korean workers fixing trenches.

Mind Trick

In late February of 1953, our platoon officer sent me to regiment headquarters. He said they had a better job for me. After listening to this officer for three or four minutes, it struck me he was a psychologist. I promptly told him that there was nothing wrong with me and walked back to our hill. Nothing was said.

Machine Gun

In April 1953, I was Dog Company machine gun sergeant. We moved up the large hill that faced Baldy on the left and Pork Chop on our right front. A company commander showed me where to put the machine guns. One gun was to be put on the left side of a tank, which would fire at Pork Chop. The problem was that the tank drew fire. The previous machine gun crew had been killed on the spot and there was blood everywhere. One night under heavy fire, I positioned the crew close in a relatively safe spot and stayed by myself with the machine gun all night. A man must live with himself.

The Rescue Mission

*By Wallace D. McGregor
VA Medical Center – Boston, MA*

I found shelter from a winter storm one day at a place I would eventually call home. It was two years to the day before I was trusted with the keys to the Veterans' Center. It was the day I first spied Guy Joiner Cross sleeping on a chair in the recreation room.

He was impeccably dressed in his Navy "Cracker Jack" bell bottoms and blue shirt with three stripes on the left sleeve. His "Dixie Cup" hat rested neatly on his lap and his peacoat hung on the wall. He was clean-shaven and his hair was closely trimmed. He was outstretched, as though on a bed, completely absorbed in some reverie personal only to himself. He was at home here. It appeared to be a safe and warm place for him.

Over the next two years, I came to the Center each morning, arriving just as the front door was unlocked at seven-thirty. My friend was always there before me, sitting in his chair, fully dressed in his working uniform, eyes bright and eating from a bag of potato chips.

I sometimes questioned how he got there before me. I didn't mean to pry but when asked he always replied, "I've got nowhere else to go." It was such a lonely statement. My only reply was, "I don't have a home either."

We spent many days on the subject of belonging in a place where every button and dial on the stove was known blindfolded. Where one could count every step to the snack machine or knew where the subtle stumbling rises on the tile floor were located. He knew how much hot water was left for the shower. He taught me about the intimate nature of the Veterans' Center.

But, against the pleasure of his warmth, there was something hidden about him. Something so lonely, a distance so profound, that I was overcome with sadness at his sense of privacy.

By the end of my second year, the Veterans' Center had become such a home to me that I was given the task of opening the doors each morning. Determined to fulfill my duties well I arrived at

six-thirty on the first day. When I got to the recreation room I found it bolted from the inside. An uncomprehending, slow roll of concern overcame me as I heard the bolt slip and stood in horror as the door slowly opened.

Guy Joiner Cross peered out the crack with bleary eyes. He stood there, hunched over, hair disheveled wearing only a T-shirt and boxer briefs. His clouded eyes seemed not to recognize me. In an uncharacteristic whisper, he told me to wait a moment.

He returned sometime later clean-shaven and impeccably dressed. He drifted past me with his duffel bag in hand and stood with a forlorn look in the middle of the lobby.

"I guess I'll be shoving off, now," he said with resignation.

In the following weeks, I did not see him anymore. It was as though his secret had been violated with revelation. I would have asked him where he would go but I knew the answer. "I'll find the home I know I have."

The Veterans' Center became all the more precious to me after that. I took up residence on his chair and spent the rest of my days in this familiar community. It was the place where I lived and called home. It had become a place where I belonged.

The Road Goes Forever

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

Yes, I have hitchhiked a lot. Once I decided to go from Lancaster, where my grandma and grandpa live, to go to Youngstown, Ohio, to see my father. Before I got halfway there I stopped and bought a 40-ounce beer.

I'll never forget the weather. It was beautiful and I didn't know at all where I was. But, every time a car drove by, I would wave and smile. Finally, a car stopped and they asked me if I had any pot! They told me how to get back on the right road and let me out.

Yes, I have had many adventures. Always wondering what is over the next horizon. Like browsing through a maze of smelly cheese. I just can't stay put, even when I meet great people and places.

I didn't know where I was half the time, but I kept on going. It was like hiking the Appalachian Trail without any necessities, but my 100 dollar pure white leather coat. My pride and joy and it was haphazardly left in a Greyhound bus locker.

Instead of waiting for a bus I jumped the slowest train going anywhere. Hopping slow trains isn't hard. But when you get out of the city... I bailed out before they were going breakneck speeds. Fortunately, I didn't bounce off something hard. At least I had

a wool full-length coat to keep me warm as I tried to get a little shut eye next to a tree.

When I woke up my goal was to find where I was so I climbed a hill to get a better view. Well, low and behold I could see steam billowing out of Three Mile Island. Just like Bible times. I made a beeline to the Susquehanna River. I walked and I walked down the railroad tracks. I knew if I kept going south I would come upon route 30 and be able to walk across the bridge to York County.

Then this van stopped and I got in. They were all drunk and shouting, waving this pistol around. I was scared to death. The guy with the gun asked me if I was having fun!

“Yea! Yea! I’m having fun!”

He said I didn’t look like it. So they opened up the side door and threw me out.

Choices

*By Kenny C Trujillo
VA Medical Center – Phoenix, AZ*

Good choices assist us to be personally strong and helpful toward one another. To make it through each day, good choices help us embrace love, satisfaction, and laughter. Making good choices throughout life helps us listen to God as He gives us a free will to use to help ourselves and others. The choices we make will make or break us.

The Veteran

*By Sean Richards
VA Medical Center – Fort Worth, TX*

Some claim that war is seen through rose colored glasses. I on the other hand tend to think that war is seen through the smoke and haze of history’s fog coated goggles. Most historians make the participants out to be heroes with a rosy clarity of purpose. While in reality the hero is just a man called upon to make a key decision in history’s violent throws.

This decision is made of necessity usually in spite of that man’s better judgment. Even the heroes of today will tell everyone who will listen that they don’t deserve the medals that upon their chests glisten.

These men claim that these ribbons and badges belong on the tombs’ and crosses of those whose greater sacrifice came with a marble stone upon which only dew now glistens. So remember next Memorial Day and Veterans Day to not only honor the

living in their parades, but also the dead, with at least a somber moment of silence and attention for these shades of our past. After all, we can only hope that these casualties will be our last!

The Voice

*By John Muza
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO*

The Lord has spoken. Not to listen breaks the will of God. Shadow cast on all humanity. Life to this day has eroded with exceptional deterioration. The voice, silent like the wind. A challenge to adversity. There are 10 principles, guidelines to live by and to be followed without exception: the Ten Commandments.

The first four show love and praise to the Lord. Love for one another. Keep holy the Lord’s day. Your body is the temple of God made holy at birth with a free will. The last six commandments consist of the ruling and law of God with forbidden and severe consequences. God’s warning: sin with vengeance saith the Lord. The wages of sin result in death without everlasting life. Etched in stone, the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, God’s faithful servant, for all humanity to live by.

God created this earth, and he blesses men for obedience to his laws and punishes those who are disobedient. Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God. Jesus reminded us again and again about this vital relationship as in, “Why do you call me Lord and not do the things which I say?”

The Bible states, there is only one law giver who is able to save or destroy. Sin is the transgression of the law. Sin is breaking God’s spiritual law, the Ten Commandments.

None will keep God’s law perfectly. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides has the Father and the Son, and the Holy Trinity. Blessed be the name of the Father, Son, the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness is being humble in his presence. Pray for his grace and mercy. Amen.



Transitions

By Roger G. Chagnon, Jr
VA Medical Center – Westfield, NY

In 1972 I passed my qualifications to become a second class petty officer as a signalman in the United States Navy. Unfortunately, at this particular time, President Richard Nixon issued a wage freeze—in addition, all military promotions were frozen until further notice. So, I remained a third class signalman. After the wage freeze for military personnel was lifted, I reported to the ship's office to accept my advancement to second class. The officer in charge of personnel then informed me that I needed 12 months on my current enlistment contract in order to be advanced to second class. As it turned out, I had only nine months on my contract. I had set a goal for myself at the start of my enlistment that I would work as hard as I could to make second class. Therefore, I requested an extension to my then current enlistment contract of three months. The personnel officer called me to the ship's office, and I signed the advancement. Very soon I was informed that I could now wear the second class insignia. I then converted all of my uniforms over from third class to second class signalman.

I was scheduled to go home on leave and travel from San Diego to Westfield, NY until my ship and squadron were called on very short notice to deploy to Westpac and Vietnam. We were to help defend South Vietnam from a new attack from the North Vietnamese forces. This deployment was very intense and most interesting. While there, we exchanged artillery rounds with the North Vietnamese on many occasions, and we performed our mission in admirable fashion. To this day I still have a piece of shrapnel from a North Vietnam artillery round that exploded close aboard. That piece was very ragged and sharp and would have left a deadly wound.

As a signalman my duty station was on the signal bridge. The signal bridge is the highest continuously manned station on the ship. The sound of an artillery round passing close overhead is something that you are never prepared for. Training has no way to simulate the sound and the shock of being fired upon with heavy artillery by someone who wishes you great harm. Our ship, the USS Hanson DD-832, was the last ship to enter and leave Haiphong Harbor prior to it being mined.

During one mission on targets near the coast of North Vietnam, my watch mate, Alex, and I observed three muzzle flashes from the shore off our starboard quarter. We saw the flash, yet we never heard the sound of the rounds. That made sense because we were several miles from the shore. We knew that artillery rounds were directed to our ship. We were not sure where they would land. Very quickly we heard two detonations in the sea. Alex then turned to me and said "look at that stuff." Alex did not actually say "stuff" however this is a "G" rated story. You get the picture. Right then we received a close aboard explosion on the starboard

side amidship. The Hanson received many shrapnel holes and Alex and I were spared serious injury by the starboard flag bag. The flag bag on a ship is a bit misleading in title. On my ship the flag bag was a steel, rectangular box located on both sides of the signal bridge containing all of the naval signal flags and pennants needed for visual communication using flag hoist. Such a very close call. If the round had detonated 50 feet further forward, Alex and I would surely have been killed or very seriously injured. I had then, as I have now, no desire for a Purple Heart.

My shipmates and I spent many nights on watch listening to Armed Forces Radio and the DJ "Wolf Man Jack" on tape sent from Mexico with a 100,000-watt signal and with his classic howl. If the ship was actively using the air search radar located and rotating 30 feet over our head, we had no radio reception at all. To our good fortune we had many nights to enjoy the songs of the day with no operating air search radar. When we were on watch every other day from 11:30 p.m. until 7:00 a.m., the best thing that we had to make it through the night was our music. Of course, we always maintained a very alert and critical visual watch while listening to the music. That was our duty, first and foremost. When a ship called us on the signal light we responded immediately. When I became the senior signalman watch stander I insisted that we maintain a very taut watch. On many occasions we called the aircraft carrier that we were shadowing for plane guard duty and they routinely did not answer our flashing light calls. On a number of nights, we had to ask the officer of the deck on the bridge of our ship to voice call them so that they could notify the signalman to receive an incoming visual message. Not the best way to stand a visual watch on Yankee Station Vietnam. Clearly not the way that we stood watch.

To this day, I remember many of those songs and the time spent on watch during quiet and stand down times. Our ship, along with all of the other ships deployed in Vietnam, had some quiet times and also some very, very intense times while exchanging fire with the North Vietnamese, and acting as plane guard units operating 1,000 yards astern in the wake of the many aircraft carriers deployed on Yankee station. In light of the recent collisions involving Navy ships, we were constantly concerned about the high volume of ship traffic on Yankee Station. At one point there were four aircraft carriers (Constellation CVA 64, Enterprise CVA 65, Kitty Hawk CVA 63 and Hancock CVA 19) plus their plane guard destroyers, numerous support ships, and, of course, the Russian so called trawlers that were obviously spy ships all maneuvering in the same area. On several nights when I was not on watch, I returned to the signal bridge, loaded up on coffee and chatted with my guys standing watch. If something bad happened, and it never did, I would at least be able to see and react to it.

Upon our arrival back in San Diego, I requested the leave I had missed earlier because of our quick deployment to the western Pacific. I was granted 20 days leave starting immediately. I gathered my leave papers, and informed my division officer and

my first class, packed a small travel bag, called the airport for tickets, and signed out on the quarterdeck on my way to western New York. This was to be a significant transition point in my life. My flight left at 11:55 p.m. and arrived in Buffalo, NY at 8:45 a.m. after a layover in Chicago. My brother met me at the airport and we drove to Westman Drive in Bemus Point, N.Y.

It was the holiday season and Christmas was just a few days away. My brother asked me if I would like a date during this holiday time. I said, "What do you have in mind?" He said that the sister of his good friend next door might be available for a date. We were nearly the same age so I said, "Set it up, I am interested." My brother let me know that my prospective date was Debbie Bowen and she lived nearby in Westfield, N.Y. I called her and we set up an evening for dinner. She suggested that we go to a restaurant in Dunkirk, N.Y., by the name of Rusch's. I called Rusch's and made reservations for our dinner.

On the evening we were to enjoy a night out I drove to Westfield, parked on the street in front of her house, and began my walk up the sidewalk. Suddenly, a very large and beautiful German Shepard bounded from the bushes in the front of the house and ran directly toward me. I had been raised with German Shepard dogs and I knew that they could detect the smell of fear on humans. He should have had a significant noseful. I did the best that I could to not appear afraid and I held my hand down for this gorgeous dog to smell. He then knew that I was a friend, and he actually escorted me up the front stairs to the house. I was much relieved that this date was now on a positive track.

Upon arriving at the front door and ringing the bell, a very nice gentlemen answered the door. I asked if he was Mr. Bowen and he informed me that he was Dick Wilson. He then let me know that his wife was Debbie's sister and that they were upstairs getting ready for our date. Dick then informed me that Debbie's father passed away in 1968. Very soon she came down the stairs and I was stunned at how beautiful she was. We had some conversation and then we left for our dinner date. Dinner was very nice and when we were finished with our meal Debbie took me on a tour of the State University of New York at the Fredonia campus. We had a great ride and then we proceeded back to Westfield and her home. We saw each other a few wonderful times before I had to return to my ship in San Diego.

Within a few short weeks after returning to my ship, my personnel officer came to me and asked me if I would like to re-enlist. He asked me if I had any duty stations that I would want to be assigned to. I said that I would like to be an instructor at the signalman school in San Diego. He looked into that and then told me that there was a long waiting list for that assignment. I was very puzzled because I had a few months left on my enlistment and so I asked why. He said that I was highly recommended for re-enlistment, and I was also recommended for an early out. Somehow these two options did seriously appear to be

diametrically opposed. He then informed me that the Navy was reducing enlisted personnel levels near the end of the Vietnam conflict. He asked again if I was willing to re-enlist. With Debbie strongly on my mind I said, "No thank you, I will go home."

I returned home to be reunited with Debbie and plan for the future. Soon our relationship would move to the next level. Our great feelings for each other blossomed to the point that we were soon engaged and then married on June 28, 1975. We continue to be best of friends and lovers to this day. We have two wonderful children: Heather and her husband David who make their home in Santa Rosa, Calif., with their children Caroline and Rachel, and Roger and his wife Jackie who make their home in Westfield, N.Y., with their children Ella and Roger IV. Our life has become a marvelous journey in comfort, experiences and monumental happiness. When I look back on my decision to transition from the U.S. Navy to civilian, married life, I clearly realize that I made the best decision possible.

Tribute to George Barner

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



Photo submitted by Penny Lee Deere

My name is Penny Lee Deere. I'm retired after serving 20 years in the U.S. Army, as a SFC. I joined the Army in 1975 in the Women's Army Corps. I am an advocate for women veterans. With issues in the news today about military sexual trauma, women in combat, etc., I'm very interested in following these and other activities related to women veterans. I should say though, I am not political in the least!

I spent 12 of my 20 years in what was West Germany during the Cold War. One of my jobs was watching the communists in the Warsaw Pact countries, also referred to as those behind the Iron Curtain. I was there when solidarity took hold in Poland setting off a chain of events! I was there when the Berlin Wall came crashing down and when the USSR dissolved in 1991. Amazing stuff! And who even remembers it now!?

During my 20 years on active duty, I went to Desert Storm and Desert Shield during the 1990s. Not unlike the battle fatigued soldiers returning from Vietnam, these people were not the same when they returned. They might look normal on the outside, but the mind, the body and the spirit are broken. It is estimated that one third of the first Iraq War veterans are now coming down with unexplained illnesses, rashes, children born with birth defects, or even death from exposure to something they came in contact with there during the conflict (possibly depleted uranium, oil field smoke, biological or chemical agents, the use of PB tablets or something else). Say nothing of the PTSD cases.

I have a learning disability, which means for those who don't know, even with average intelligence, in my case, I have trouble writing and understanding written communication. I had this issue all through school; I was one of those children who slipped through the crack, as it went unrecognized. So my heart goes out to the children struggling in school and I strive to help when and where I can.

What I'm saying is I look out for the underdog; that defenseless little child who might have trouble learning, the female or Gulf War veteran, anyone who might need a helping hand. So again, I have chosen to be an advocate for any one of several platforms!

I am active on social networks, talk to newspapers, and even took part in a live play. Additionally, as part of my healing process I recently took part in a creative writing and photography workshop and started music therapy. I joined the Stratton VA Chorus where I not only enjoy myself but find it beneficially healing! There are veterans from the World War II era, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, and Gulf War. I consider myself very fortunate to have the opportunity to "hang out with history."

It was while participating in the chorus that I met George. He is one the many people I have met on my journey of recovery. I would like to introduce you to George William Barner. I am very impressed with George and I think you will be, too. You see there is something about George that makes me feel that he and I have some sort of connection! Some might think of it as 'karma,' or as one of my counselors (mentors) suggested as serendipitous. I believe there was a reason I met George, and vice versa. I'm not sure that we have not met somewhere else before, truth be told! I know, I say that at the risk of sounding "off my rocker." Although George was born in Virginia, he and his family moved to New York City during his early years. George served in the Army during the Korean conflict as an artillery section chief for two years. George wears his hat proudly reflecting his time in the 2nd Infantry Division. By the way, George, my daughter, just got back from the DMZ. Still, after all these years, our soldiers are manning that gate to keep communism at bay where you once served! Thank you George!

Following his discharge from the service, George completed his master's degree in French from Columbia University where he later taught journalism. Can you imagine how hard it is to get into Columbia? And, then he chose French as a major! George I

would love to hear more about how you have used your language skills over the years.

He began his career as a police reporter, reporting about drug trafficking. This led him to become a traveling reporter. The work included following and reporting directly on Martin Luther King's Civil Rights movement for over four years. He had opportunity to converse with Thurgood Marshall, the first black associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Did any of you know Martin Luther King Jr. was stabbed by a deranged woman in 1958? I didn't. George interviewed her.

As an acclaimed civil rights reporter, his newspaper writing was picked up by a multitude of papers but he primarily wrote for the New York Times and the New York Amsterdam News. There is no way I can tell you about all George's writing, but two articles, "Newark Riots: July 1967" and "We Ain't Taking No More" appear in a two-part book, "Reporting Civil Rights: American Journalism 1963 to 1973."

Another fact I found very interesting was that among his writing George refers to an African garment known as a dashiki. With this introduction the public became aware of this article of clothing – you might recall Percy Sledge (Soul Train) wore a dashiki. The term began appearing in print at least as early as 1967. Reporting on the 1967 Newark riots in the Amsterdam News, an article by Faith Berry in the New York Times Magazine includes the term on July 7, 1968. Several years after that, the word appeared for the first time in the Webster's New World Dictionary and George had introduced us to the term!

George also wrote a chapter in the book, "Harlem Theatre." George enjoyed his time in Harlem which allowed him to see many performances by well-known jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Louis Armstrong and many others. He also had the pleasure of interviewing Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and others.



I feel as though George and I are “old souls!” We both look out for the underdog! George took his talents and wrote about history as he lived it! He did his part as a minority to record the annals of civil rights dissension, just as I try to do my part as a minority, a retired woman vet from the Gulf War. Thank you George for brightening my day!

I have to admit, some days I feel as if I am a fossil. I don't feel sorry for myself though and I welcome you to pick a piece of life, any piece, and make something of it! Look around you. Get to know the people. Start with your parents, or grandparents, talk to them! Discover what you can learn from them. Explore their world; discover their history... which is also your history. Is there an opportunity for ‘serendipity’ you have not discovered? Maybe take an oral history – write it down! We have truly amazing history everywhere, let's seize the moment to learn more.

Underwear

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



Photo submitted by Lucy Wong

When I was five my entire family's wardrobe was basically what we wore on our backs. My older siblings and I donned the same thing every day for school, which did not help our self-esteem. None of us had more than one pair of shoes and I can remember going barefoot most of the time. And yes, my feet were extremely dirty! Dad had two pairs of slacks and a few work shirts. Dad wore his clothes like they were his uniforms. He tucked his short sleeved shirt into his trousers; a belt cinched his waist and he looked neat and clean despite not having any hygiene items. Mom dressed in a simple blouse over culottes and wore socks inside her sandals. Also, we did not have towels, toothbrushes or shampoo. My whole family had bad breath and rotten teeth.

One day before I started kindergarten, my four older sisters and I walked from our family's Chinese Laundry to Boy's Market. It was

a short walk, four blocks heading north on Hawthorne Boulevard. We crossed over the railroad tracks, and then crossed the street onto Broadway and Hawthorne.

We passed by the fabric store, Winchell's Donuts, White's Bakery, Safeway market, Golden Phoenix restaurant and a Thom McAn's shoe store on the corner. We crossed 120th Street by the car sales lot next to a Fosters Freeze, a fast-food hangout with the best burgers, even today.

Soon, we saw Boy's Market, which now is a Ralph's Market, across the street from Chip's restaurant. We crossed the parking lot and entered the Boy's Market through the left entrance. There was another entrance on the opposite side. While my older sisters shopped for a birthday cake for Lou, I saw these little underpants for sale near the produce section. They were my tiny size.

My sisters were never given an allowance, because our parents could not afford to and had no idea what it was. My sisters used spare change they found in pockets, and they definitely did not offer to buy me anything. I needed another pair of underwear, because I had only one and was wearing it. Quietly, my hand grabbed one off the rack; the packages hung low enough for me to reach, and I hid them in my tiny hands. Acting like no one saw me, my skinny legs took me out the other entrance, and not the one I had entered earlier. Standing outside next to a mailbox, my hands pushed the underwear under my dress. I was so nervous about stealing them, but I was desperate. My sisters joined me and we walked back to the Chinese Laundry to serve the birthday cake for Lou.

War Veteran to Minister

*By Albert A. Hernandez
VA Medical Center – El Paso, TX*

Very few people know or recognize me as an ordained minister and even fewer know me as a theologian. I don't advertise this credential or title very often, but I have been a student of the Scriptures for many years since my spiritual conversion to Christianity. I have served in the various churches, both Protestant and Catholic. I was officially ordained back in 1994 by a non-denominational Christian church who accepted my Profession of Faith. They did not judge or reject me; they just accepted me according to my faith and personal testimonial. I want to share with everyone, especially my fellow vets, my spiritual conversion. I was not spared in the Vietnam war for nothing; God had a plan for me. I have to believe this because after what I saw and went through over there, my name could have easily been on the “Wall.” But it's not. I'm still here, today, writing these words. Writing is my passion, my mission. It is also my personal solace. Somerset Maugham said: “Writing is

the supreme solace.” The written word has power. It can change a person’s life. So, please read my testimonial and story. It is especially for you.

I’ve served as a Sunday school teacher, a counselor, a deacon, and an associate pastor. I’ve been through what I call “The Religious Mill.” I call it that because of the different churches and their theologies. I’ve earned a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies and Doctor of Divinity degrees from bona fide and accredited schools. These had their price in more ways than one.

My main ministry was the “Border Immigration Detention Center Ministry” in El Paso. I was the minister, pastor, and to some, even their “priest!” It was a thankless ministry in terms of lack of support and recognition, as well as a very difficult and risky ministry where very few dared to minister. I ministered to men from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Guatemala, Cuba, Africa, Germany, Russia, Poland, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. One Sunday morning, to my great surprise, five Muslims attended my service. After hearing my sermon, one came forward and wanted to accept Christ. There were about 450 men there that day, the maximum the room would hold. It’s a day I’ll never forget in my service to the Lord. Unfortunately, the other four Muslims did not agree with this, and didn’t return the following Sunday. They did not show up because they had threatened the one Muslim’s decision to become a Christian. I was later told by officials that I could no longer preach to people of the Muslim faith. I told the officials it was not my place to keep anyone from hearing the Word of God. They didn’t understand. It is the politics of our nation that is destroying us, not the Muslims. But that’s a subject for another time.

Nevertheless, I served in that ministry from 1993 to 2005. I was there every Sunday morning depending on the circumstances of the day, a commitment I made in my service to the Lord. I believe I saved many souls, bringing thousands of men to Christ and performing many baptisms. In fact, after many men returned to their homeland, they would write to me. One nice and humble man from Africa actually started his own church and told me that my sermons inspired him to become a pastor. The last time I heard from him, he told me his church had grown to about 300. There were other men who would write and tell me how their experience at the Detention Center changed their lives. In their letters, they merely asked me to pray for them and give them advice. These were men who were hurting and desperate. They had families. They came from extremely poor countries with practically no laws or civil rights. They were destitute, struggling for a better life. They came to our country searching for hope. It was heartbreaking to see such men, men who were just trying to make a living. I used to get home and cry over them. Sometimes I think maybe that’s why I was spared in the Vietnam War. God had a divine plan for me. You never really know the lives you’ll touch when you serve God. You never know where the ministry of the Lord will take you.

After the 9/11 attacks, things grew much more difficult at the Detention Center. Security measures became so bad there were times I wasn’t even allowed to enter the facility and religious services were canceled. I even had to present documentation verifying my status as a citizen. Then came that fateful day when I received a certified letter from the Catholic priest in charge telling me that I was banned from giving anymore services there because of my “preaching.” I was preaching the Gospel. I was teaching the TRUTH. I fought back with a stern letter to the director of the facility, but to no avail. He, too, was Catholic. I had to accept the possibility that maybe God had closed that door for me, as things were getting dangerously ugly at the Detention Center with riots and officers getting hurt. The men were questioning why wasn’t I showing up, but this is what happens when they defy a man of God. Despite all this, I am reminded in Romans 8:28 that everything happens for a reason to those who love God. I’d saved the souls needing to be saved. I’d done my duty. I had to let go and leave the rest to God. Yes, sometimes you just have to let go of those things you don’t have control of, and leave them to God Almighty. He will deal with them.

I don’t know what the future holds, as things look really bleak these days. I just know that the “end” is very near. I say this because I know the Scriptures and I see the signs. A man of God sees things others can’t. Those not in the Spirit are blind. Knowing all this, I pray every day. In fact, my wife and I pray at the dinner table every evening, giving thanks and praying for everyone and our country. The dinner table is our altar. I pray for God’s mercy for us all, because the truth is, we’re all sinners, no matter who we are.

You see, prayer is the direct life-line to God, because when you pray, he listens. We don’t need all that religiosity, and it’s not our church or our religion that saves us or makes us holy. It’s the blood of Jesus Christ on that painful and bloody cross, where he died for our sins and our salvation. It’s a love I’ll never fully



understand, and no one really does. But you know what? I believe it and I accept it. It's the only real hope I have. This is what I tell people who I know need spiritual guidance, especially some family members who are very "religious" but don't really know the Lord. I tell them: Did you know that you can know if you have eternal life? "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13)." And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." (1 John 5:20).

I cited these because there are many "religious" people out there who do not know their eternal fate. This is really sad, I think. Just one private and simple prayer, confessing one's sin to God in the name of Christ can save a person's soul. You know why I'm still here, after war and all the adversities of life? Because of God. I give all the praise and glory to him, for his mercy and blessing. In the day of judgment, I can only plead to him to remember the good that I did in this world, in this life. That's all I can do, for I am only a sinner who believes in God.

Today, I'm retired and living as comfortably and as simply as I possibly can. My ministry is myself; if I don't nurture my spiritual life and my body, what good am I to others? Then comes my wife. I am to love her as Christ loved the church. And finally, the godly principles I stand for. I minister wherever and whenever I can. I am free from all that legalism that religion throws at us. I don't like it. That way I can walk into any church that invokes the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and worship with a free spirit.

From a war veteran to a minister, I have learned a lot, gone through a lot. I have realized the reason I'm still here. My own VA doctor recently told me I am here for a reason. She's read some of my writing and *Veterans' Voices*. I have told people and the churches that I am a walking miracle. I am. How do you survive a war, in brutal combat, as a medic, and come back without even a scratch? Mentally, that's another story for another time.

Being a minister is not easy, especially as a war veteran. Preachers have questioned my spiritual conversion and my qualifications. Well, I'm a preacher and I've got my credentials, too. They live in their own little world. I've lived in the real world. Big difference. You can't be a true minister of God until you've suffered as one. Jesus had to suffer as a man so he could know what we as mortals go through in life." God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son..." you know the rest.

But being a minister can also be a very rewarding experience. You touch people's lives, change many. I have performed funerals and weddings, preaching the word of God; it's actually the best time to reach people. And I will preach at any church that invites

me. That's about all I can handle nowadays. You see, I've learned to realize my limitations. I do not want to end up like some men I've known, who died before their time. And God knows I've seen many men die before their time." "Do not be foolish... why should you die before your time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:17).

Who would have thought that someday I would be teaching and preaching the word of God, especially after such a roller coaster way of life? I sure didn't. But that's how God works. He calls you when he wants you. Your life is not your own. The apostle Paul was knocked to the ground by the Lord when he was called. His name was Saul before his conversion. He was a tax collector and persecuted Christians. But he became one of the Lord's most faithful and dedicated servants, establishing many churches and bringing thousands to Christ. Sometimes we have to be knocked down for God to get our attention. I know I have been.

There's a lot more to this testimonial, and I have already written about my Vietnam experience as a combat medic. All I know is, I was spared for a reason." A fighter fights, a preacher preaches, and a writer writes." I'm all three of these. I am a war veteran turned minister!

"...but His word was in my heart like a burning fire, a fire shut in up my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not." (Jeremiah 20:9).



SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL AWARD

Reflections

By Jay Albrecht

VA Medical Center – Montrose, NY

Hill autumn sun brights this day.
Town's low hum twines ochre trees,
Breezes through dappled thoughts.
What's to come in my years left?
More hours wringing meaning
From clinging fears and conflicts?
Weighing words, birthing ideas,
Seeking worth, paths to karma?
Wiping away dark whispers?
Sunday nearness to sweet faces,
Hands and souls touching warmth.
Learning, relearning ways to love.

SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL AWARD

War Is More Better

By Donald Szurek

VA Medical Center – Bay Pines, FL

All that is left for me to do
is tie my shoes.
It could be a costly mistake
before I am corrected
by jibber-jabber question
marks on paper???

My doctor can read
my palms, he said.
Instead, he reads my feet.
But he can't read the part
when I wiggle my toes.

An interpreter is brought in
from the Philippines.
A well-trained consultant.
An expert in the science
of feet, fairy tales and religion.

Religions seem to agree
to disagree with each other
by agreeing to go to war.
Is a commandment really broken
if religion agrees to kill
only when God is napping?

I choose only intelligent religious warriors
to choose
between peace and war

between religion and religion.
Once again
religion agrees to agree.

War is just more better.

DAVA STATE OF FLORIDA AWARD

Unsung Valor

By Joseph Donald Gunderson

VA Medical Center – Wichita, KS

He rode into battle on a horse made of steel,
Sword on his belt and spurs on his heels,
Pistol on his hip and rifle at the ready.
His nerve was rock solid, his purpose ever steady.
He led charges through gunfire, through smoke
and through flame.

He never did falter when the time came to take aim.
He did as he was ordered, and gave orders to his men.
They'd follow him to Hell and back and then do it again.
He was respected among his comrades,
every squad knew his name,
But he was there to do his duty and never sought fame.
The medals and the accolades were never his goal.
All he wanted to do was save as many men's souls
as he possibly could through the hellfire that was war.
And he would risk life and limb if it meant
protecting one more.
To the men, he was a guardian,
the strongest of the strong.

To the enemy he was a devil,
his battle cry, their death song.
And, yes, he killed many; in war it is expected.
But on Sunday he would bow his head
as he calmly reflected.
He spoke to his God, prayed for the strength
to soldier on,
Then looked to the sun as it rose up at dawn.

He would sling his rifle over his shoulder
and nod his head in understanding.
Whatever the Almighty had given him,
he gave it to him in plenty.
For he never did fail, and he never did fall.
He stood ready to fight even if it meant giving his all.
His presence gave the men what they needed, too.

With him at their side it was just like they knew
He was the greatest of soldiers, a real machine of war.
But one day, it finally came; peace was restored.
They had all fought so long and so hard for their country.
Many a man didn't quite know how to exactly
Go back to normal, be the men they once were.
Those lives seemed so far in the past,

those memories such a blur.
But not this hero. No, something about him was different.
Even with all he had been through,
he hadn't changed the slightest bit.
His first Sunday back home he walked into his church.
He sat down before his God
and he uttered these words,
"God, you gave me the strength,
but now I just need some peace.
If you can find it in your heart,
can you just grant my heart this release?
I am burdened with what I have done,
but I know I wasn't wrong.
You saw me through that awful Hell,
so will you help me to move on?"

"I'll live the rest of my days in peace;
I'll never harm another man.
All of this I pledge to you, if you'd only understand."
And this once mighty warrior,
while kneeling before his God,
Tears rolling down his cheeks, was overtaken by awe.
He felt the weight he had carried in his heart
be lifted with his breath.

He felt as though he could stand tall again;
his heart beat strong in his chest.
He stood and nodded toward the cross,
and sent his love on high.
He walked outside of his small church
and gazed up at the sky.
From that day forth he was no warrior,
but the gentlest of men.
Just as he was before the war,
he managed to be once again.

He lived until a ripe old age
helping any and all that he could,
From showing others to the Lord
to chopping down firewood.
He even raised a family,
and they were all with him when he passed.
His wife, children and grandchildren
were all there
when he took his final breath at last.
He died a peaceful and loving man;
no one could say anything more.

No one even knew of what he had done
during those years at war.
But when he was laid to rest, he was laid
among his brothers,
Those he had fought and bled among
and countless others.
On his modest stone read his name,

but everyone there already knew it.
What came as most of a surprise
was the medal carved into it.
A sash draped down from the top,
an inverted star with a wreath.
Above the star was a sprawling eagle
with only one word inscribed underneath.
"Valor" it said, as if commanding respect
for a man who asked for nothing.
But on the day that he was laid to rest,
to all who were present, he was really something.
And he never told a single story
from those years before he came home.

But everyone remembers him now.
He was the hero that they were allowed to call their own.

BVL PRIZE: SERVING MY COUNTRY AWARD

Memorials to Heroes

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

The war memorials are truly a sight to behold.
Our stories of sacrifice and service must be told.
From large cities and small towns,
we went, rich and poor.
For our love of our country,
we went off to war.
The horrors of war, so quickly
we would learn.
The reality of war
showed many a friend would not return.
The reasons are many,
why nations go to war.
Perhaps our leaders will learn,
and there will be no more.
Millions come to the Capital each year,
to visit and sightsee.
What better place for memorials
than Washington, DC?
Tributes in marble and stone
aren't just for those that died,
but also for those that lived, that mourned,
remembered and cried.
We haven't won all our battles,
but as Americans we had to try.
"Duty," "Honor" and "Country"
are words that allow our flag to fly.
As you look upon these tributes
honoring those that did their part,
remember why we served,
remember in your heart.

Speed of Life

By Robert John Valonis
VA Medical Center – West Palm Beach, FL

From black, pitch black,
And darkest of dark,
The void is quite large,
The image is stark.

A tiny red flicker
In the center of thee,
Igniting a flame
That then is set free.

Ever so quickly,
It begins its advance.
It bends left, then right
In a flickering dance.

Illuminating the dark,
It takes final form
With beauty and brilliance
In a contrasting storm.

It's vibrant and bright,
In a large sea of black
With prominent colors
It previously lacked.

Red, orange and yellow
With tinges of blue,
And glimpses of white,
And violet, too.

As quick as it came,
As if it's hell-bent,
Back into darkness
It begins its descent.

Smaller and smaller
Toward whence it came.
Again a red flicker,
No longer a flame.

Lessening now,
A receding red dot
Back into darkness,
Until it is not.

All that is left
Is smoke and some grey
Which soon will be gone
At the end of the day.

A Nurse's Lament

By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt
– Overland Park, KS

I was young yet they were younger.
We left behind families, most of us,
Parents, girlfriends, buddies.
They aged into men, some overnight.

The choice was not theirs.
Strangers had planned their future.
From every state they came
Just hoping they would return.

But fate intervened.
Life dealt them a cruel hand,
Yet they could not object,
Just pray and hope.

I saw the fear in their eyes
As the blood flowed freely.
No bandages could halt it,
Their wounds too severe.

So where are they now?
Names on the Wall, shivering under a bridge,
Still married, long divorced,
In a wheelchair or a hospital bed?

I sense their presence,
I can hear their pleas.
They remind me each day that
War solves nothing.



Photo submitted by Louise Diane Eisenbrandt
Receiving & Evaluation at 91st Evac in Chu Lai, 1970

Soul Sister

By Laura Lee Mahal

VA Medical Center – Fort Collins, CO

When I opened my eyes, a mask obstructed my vision.

Oxygen, pure as life, energized me. I could breathe, whereas last I remembered, I was gasping, and no air came.

Wanton joy filled me, but I knew not to sit up, as then, horses' hooves would descend upon my shrunken, concave chest.

So I turned onto my side, taking tubes and face mask with me.

My roommate was IV-free. Her spine curved toward the window like a cast-off bit of bark. Not alive. Not oxygenated. Not human.

Except she coughed once, and the silence was not to be the same. She was fierce in her aloneness.

Walled in an invisible leaded curtain. I knew this aloneness. I wanted to share my oxygen with her.

A female soldier on an all-male squad— no possibility of buddy checks— the ticks embedded deep under my breasts, my bikini line, nothing to do but to wait while medics picked out the body parts.

The ticks, fat & somnolent, but I, parts puffy & inflamed, still whole.

My roommate was no longer whole but dismembered.

A brown recluse spider had burrowed into her battle dress uniform, leaving a hole, which had widened, hemotoxic venom infecting the area, necrotic arachnidism rotting her body.

My lungs would heal, and I would go back to the rifle range in a day or two.

She would be mustered out.

Her leg left behind, her life separated into Before and After a brown recluse hunted for food in her flesh.

And she stayed silent. Unwilling to undress before men.

In this way, she remained my soul sister.

Keep Silent and Really Listen

By Helen Anderson Glass

VA Medical Center – Tuscon, AZ

When the troops come home,
perhaps a member of your family,
greet them with open arms
and words you say meaningfully.
Then take a step back and listen,
let them take the lead.
It may be slow for them,
just let them go at their own speed.
Some won't open up
and say what happened over there.
Just be patient and understanding,
they'll know you really care.
That day will come
when they start to vent it all on you,
knowing then that being silent, listening,
is what you have to do.
Hugs and a bright smile
and perhaps clasping their hand
are silent gestures from you
they'll accept and understand.
Never say, "I know how you feel."
They know you never will.
They know what it is to be shot at
and always prepared to kill.
Listen to our *Veterans' Voices*,
now speaking loud and clear.
Each telling wonderful stories,
so all the world can now hear.

And Then a Smile

By Donald Szurek

VA Medical Center – Bay Pines, FL

The judge has just started painting with the words, "You have been found guilty of failing a digital rectal exam. You are hereby sentenced to watch channel 7 on Tuesdays and sometimes Thursdays. Do you have anything to say?" I remind the judge, "We only have this room till 3:15 today."

My sleepy old Mall just can't help staring at me emptying a beer bottle walking out of Red's Place. A nearby drunk asks, barely standing, "Why are you so angry with apples?" I explain to him that his question sounds better in Latin?

I earn a Doctorate Degree in the Rhythms of Dithering. I am forced to take another digital rectal exam in a secret language. But I tell God, "Anyway, I notice the world will not fit inside my head."

Suddenly, here comes the judge. I become angry and declare I no longer believe in Santa Claus. Without warning, my alarm refuses to stay quiet and I awaken.

22 a Day

By Kimberly Green

VA Medical Center – Fort Smith, AR

He dialed for help.
The VA said to call,
So he picked up the phone
Wishing to tell all.

It rang and rang,
He was put on hold
Until he gave up.
He hung up the phone.

He didn't want to die
Or did he? He didn't know.
He hurt so bad,
So he pulled the trigger and let go.

Let go of the pain,
The hurt inside.
His combat injuries
With him all the time.

22 a day,
Dying each day.
Stop the dying.
Don't let our veterans slip away.

A Painting Still

By Dean Glorso

VA Medical Center – Denver, CO

On pallet the blend of love begins, but I'll never bring you back to
life. The beautiful face I remember well,
Eyes cast down with a rose in hand. A reflecting glass duplicates
your dignity.
Your complexion too fair for words to express,
So I blend and fuss to try to make it true.
Let the color rest as I ponder more,
The beautiful niece I miss so much.
I defend this act of love
On a canvas that has no life.
A being violated by a man of hate,
But your beauty still lingers in our minds.
An attempt to fetch your life, I add more tone.
The true highlight, detail and blush
Brighten you for my sister, your mom,
And for your kin.
From your uncle with love,
I ponder you, a painting still.

A Question of Peace

By Michael D. Hager

VA Medical Center – Ft. Collins, CO

Do we think that bravery and sacrifice can cast a cleansing light
over the long, dark shadow of war?

Do we believe the tears of a mother's loss will wash away the
emptiness ravaging her heart?

Is our fear and hate more powerful than our empathy for our
fellow man?

Are we sure the quiet voice of reason can be heard over the
thunderous roar of the battlefield?

Are we naïve enough to believe our salvation lies in the arms of
the victorious?

Have we forgotten that the suffering of all humankind is etched
in furrows of each of our faces?

Is the desire for true compassion and understanding the last
frontier for the true believer?

Are we sure that one step in the direction of reconciliation won't
translate into the road to redemption?

Should one voice of dissension be ignored over the angry cries of
the majority?

Does the privilege of freedom always have to be defended on the
frontlines of the political discourse?

Is there no one willing to hold the banner for hope for those that
have forgotten their dreams?

Are we truly prepared to face the responsibility of giving up on
any chance for lasting peace?

Early Jade of Morning

By Frank X. Mattson

VA Medical Center – Spring City, PA

Frolic
In the
Sun
The
Mist
All my
Friends
On
A happy
List
Early
Jade
Of
Morning.

A Soldier

By Rodney C. Keckler
VA Medical Center – Carlisle, PA

In uniform at the end of the battlefield,
After it all has come to its end,
This is what was seen as the sun started to set:
One soldier who was kneeling into his rifle,
Resting his head into his hand
Just as the smoke started to clear,
Others sort of stop in their steps standing still.
All at once a calm silence falls over the whole field,
With everyone just listening to the words
that were being said
That seemed to go something like this:
Lord, please let us come to understand some day
Why all of this had to come to be,
The killing of others as well as my brothers
and sisters in arms.
I know what they all have been telling me
about why it had to be.
From those who were here before us this day—
That what we all have done won't ever go away,
That with the passing of our days to come
We'll all be reliving this very day.
So, if you please, try and do this for us all some day.
Lord, in some small way, give us the strength
To be at peace with ourselves,
To live a good life with others
Till the day you come to take us home
To walk with you in heaven some day.
Amen.

A Patch of Home

By Tanya R. Whitney
VA Medical Center – New Orleans, LA

A small square in a parched land,
Lovingly cared for by so many hands.

A brilliant green amidst the dull browns,
It continues to grow in this foreign ground.

A packet of seeds sent from one's home
To add a touch of color to the bland monochrome.

Tenderly maintained as when it was first planted,
Passed on from unit to unit, a legacy is granted.

A small patch of green grass from a tiny envelope.
Revered by all who pass by, it brings one hope.

Year after year it's still there like a sacred site,
A reminder of beauty in this desolate land of blight.

Each year it has grown stronger with deepened roots,
A reminder of home never to be trod on with boots.

Before Veterans Day

By Pedro Sotelo
– Weston, MO

I thought I was proud of it,
My identity is lost.
One look in the mirror,
How misunderstood.

On passing people gaze
On my hat. There is a name,
An era known to me,
A memory that lives and breathes.

In a box my uniforms live,
A place where time stands still.
In there peace and war embrace
My mind, just the same.

I am ashamed I quit.
War pictures look back at me,
The future erased.
Only the past has worth.

I look at myself once again,
Today it will all end.
My identity lost all worth,
Not even a number but just a man.

Faces

By Charles Sturges
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

High cheek bones,
pixie nose,
the kind look,
the amused look,
the angry look,
the lost look,
the rebellious look,
beauty marks,
the protective look,
the gullible look,
the sinister look,
big eyes,
bedroom eyes and
seductiveness,
the sensual look,
the befuddled look,
the wise look,
the arrogant look.
So many kinds of faces!

Glimpses of America

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center – Pittsburgh, PA

I have seen the great American desert at Death Valley, with its
solitude of sand and sky.
And more than once I saw the noble Gateway Arch of St. Louis,
standing there proud and firm.
When I looked at the Grand Canyon one summer morning,
I was awed like never before and realized how truly small I am.
Oh America! How great my Country!
To have seen a sacred and holy sunset from a beach in San Diego
was a vision like no other, all the beauty of colors and shapes.
In Chicago I have seen downtown highways and thoroughfares,
so busy and bustling.
I have driven America's Route 66, at times not knowing my
destination.
Oh America! I belong in your midst.
The monuments and statues in D.C. leave a lasting and peculiar
numbness in me.
And the view I see of that great city from the top
of the Washington Monument proves to me that America is of a
great design.
The meeting of the three rivers in my hometown of Pittsburgh is
singular, beautiful and mine now, once again, at last.
Oh America! How I love you.

Feelings

By Pedro Sotelo

– Weston, MO

Do I feel
Can I feel
My heart emptied with a shiver
The indifference of life born and lost
Why should I feel
I don't care anymore
I used to feel
I used to care
I wanted to feel
But in a split second all was gone
It was fast
It was quick
I am numb
Even my fingerprints are gone.

Get Out and Vote

By Dennis Silas

VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

White, Black, Hispanic,
whatever our origin might be,
Year 2018 should be on a 100 percent for sure note.
That's why we all, young and old,
Fat, skinny, short, tall or bald
Should put our iPhones down,
Put that powerful book down,
Put that beer down,
Definitely put the guns down,
And take five minutes and vote.
We represent everyone.
We are all children of God,
And there's nothing holding us back.
We need your vote
So we can be certified,
Bona fide, materialized, spiritualized
People.

Gitche Gumee

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center – Iron Mountain, MI

As the reddening sun
Rises out of the east,
A slick sheath of ice
sparkles, crackles and breaks
Beneath a great blue sea.
An emboldened bald eagle
Floats high in billowed
White clouds and peers over
Gitche Gumee, on guard
For any movement that stirs below.
As dark shadowed vessels
Slip across the watered blue,
Enthroned lake trout
Appear as busy gulls hover above.
Beneath the great blue bounty
Explorers discover
The Edmund Fitzgerald.
Scenes of whispering waves
With wind in the whitecaps
Ten feet high are ever in the eye
Of the eminent bald eagle.
Gitche Gumee reflects
Her noble name,
And no other lake
Can challenge such astonishing
And astounding fame.

Guide Me

By Jason Kirk Bartley
VA Medical Center – Chillicothe, OH

Guide me, precious Lord.
I cannot afford to lose your spirit in this fight.
Guide these eyes of mine, eagle sight we'll find, discerning as I go,
walking to and fro.
Guide my precious little feet.
I'll never wave a white flag of retreat.
Victory we will find, precious Lord of mine.
Take control of my hands to work the Master's plans with his
mighty angel bands.
My lips will praise thy name, body will do the same, setting my
heart aflame,
All for Jesus' name.
Guide me on.

Green and Gold

By Scott Sjostrand
– Hallock, MN

The green and gold
Represents a peacekeeping force
That's highly trained and bold.
With over 200 years of history
Their success is no
Mystery.
A lot of their leadership comes
From West Point cadets.
Can they do the job?
You bet!
They've had "5 stars"
Like Dwight.
With him in charge,
You could sleep safely at night.
Army leadership is tried, tested,
Proven and true.
Some become elected officials
When their hitch is through.
They look at the big picture
And they can handle stress.
These "green suiters"
Have cleaned up
Many a mess.

Grappling With the Duality

By Frank X. Mattson
VA Medical Center – Spring City, PA

The sun clings
Bombing
In
My
World.
I am
Schizo.
I am
Two
People
Good and
Bad.

Growing Pains

By Phil Hosier
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ

Never an easy road when boys become men.
We don't always know how, but we always remember when.
We march in unison, and to the flag we salute.
It's with pride we do these things.
So much to learn for a new recruit.
We found manhood and are soldiers now, one and all.
We know nothing of our future, but hope we can stand tall.
Our supplies are great, and imaginary lines are drawn.
The enemy is in front of us,
And we wish to never be used as pawns.
Whatever happens next, time will surely tell.
Many men will survive, but some are sent straight to Hell.
Whatever happened to our youth? We think and we ponder.
It's gone forever with the fire, blood and smoke out yonder.
We return to our families,
And they see us with a jaundiced eye.
We talk as before, but it is not the same.
They wonder why.
The child has left; they knew him so well.
We try, but cannot explain it to them.
All we know is we've returned from Hell.
Home is not the same as it used to be,
So time moves on and so do we.
We live the life that is handed to us,
And that's how we take it in stride.
If we're lucky enough, we'll walk through life
With our brethren and with our bride.

How Much

By Jerry D. Cunningham
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ

How much pain is too much pain?
When a good day is an “8” on a scale of “1-10,”
How much pain is too much pain?
When a bullet to the head sounds better than another day of pain,
How much pain is too much pain?
When the days are filled with off the chart pain and the nights
(if sleep comes) are another type of pain—the pain of the
past—the source of the pain,
And you say to yourself, “How much pain is too much pain?”

Have You Seen Me?

By Anthony Coccozza
VA Medical Center – Los Angeles, CA



Photo submitted by Anthony Coccozza

How many children have been taken from their parents?
How many loved ones disappear each day?
How many more? When will it end
To put a stop to it every day?

Is this a new kind of war against children,
Or is this the work of terror loosed on the street?
We are not aware of what has been going on, indeed.
I suspect terror is on every street.
All children must learn self-defense
To protect themselves against attack.
Fight terror. Put it to an end.
Children of America, fight back.

Have you seen me?
Every day, a boy or girl is taken away from their home.
Have you seen me?
In every piece of news, in distress.
Have you seen me?
In a wake-up call at home.
Have you seen me?
Hello, hello?

He Was a Vet

By Dan Yates
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

August 11th, he took his last breath, as he made the journey from
life to death. With family in the room, mom by his side, reality hit
as we all cried.

He was a dad and a husband, but lest we forget, in his heart he
was more. See, he was a vet. He served his country, so it was easy
to choose when we laid him to rest he'd be wearing his Blues.

The service was over, we got in our cars, and drove to the
cemetery. It wasn't too far. Damming those tears up sure was hard
when the procession was led by the Patriot Guard.

This wasn't their first; they knew the route. Drivers pulled over,
got out to salute. Though they didn't know him they knew what
he'd done. For their freedom he carried a gun.

We turned in the gate; there was one last prayer. Twenty-one guns
would fill the air. Said our final goodbyes then Taps was played.
Among his brothers in arms his body was laid.

I've been back many times to see that stone. As sure as the wind
blows he's not alone. It's been a full year, yet I'll never forget
besides being my dad, he was a vet.

Author's Note: My father served in WW II and Vietnam as part of
his 26 years of service. This is my tribute to him on the anniversary
of his death.

Forever Vigilant

By Bryan A. Moore
VA Medical Facility – Leavenworth, KS

I did not get a chance to say goodbye.
I did not have an opportunity to grieve.

I died with my friends.
Each took a piece of my soul from me.

It robbed me of my soul,
Replaced it with guilt.

I am forever taken.
It crushed what God built.

Art is the light that God shines on me.
Art is the path my journey freed.

Piece by piece it connects me
Back to the soul that was taken from me.

Forever vigilant will I be
With the art that God has given me.

How Can I Be Me?

By Tony James Craidon
– Maple Grove, MN

How can I be me after the decisions I've made?
My moral compass points north, but I'm facing west.
The rigid genetics of time refuse to run backward.
Why do the qualifications of honor become less and less?
The ground I have been rooted in becomes dry and brittle.
I'm no different than anyone pursuing godliness.
But I keep guarding my patch of dust because it is mine.
Definitions of perfection remain undefinable.

The closer I examine the human condition, the lonelier I become.
Altruism is a mask for selfish motives.
Evil can be demonstrated only when the righteous is ignored.
It's a fascinating subject when I'm not the subject.
Divide by zero and I can't compute ethical boundaries.
Truth, it seems, cannot be objective.
My interpretations cannot be proven wrong.
Perhaps it's all a matter of perspective.

Will it come crashing down like a mountain on a sinkhole?
Or like a Jurassic pet caught in a tar pit, slow and permanent?
A disease becomes self-aware, conflict of survival.
It's time we kill the sound; God is in the stars.
The only way out of Hell is on foot.
Can we fix it if we recode the human genome?
Will I still be me if memory is reprogrammed?
Or will I suffer these moral injuries
until I become something else?

Imaginary Dragon

By Daniel Adjei
VA Medical Center – Orlando, FL

My imaginary dragon lives
Within the shadow's deep.
Fiery thunder and lightening meet
Way down a slumbering shade.
My imaginary dragon lives
Beneath a giant mountain train.
A knight with strong muscles tenses
Way down the slumbering deep.

My imaginary dragon lives
Protecting the infinite wisdom that came.
The breath of fire shields
The inner scum's sleep.
My imaginary dragon lives
Breathing eternal fire

My soul to purify.
The fire cleans and grants fate.

My imaginary dragon lives
Pointing toward the firmament deep.
The dragon wakes me from sleep
With dreams of war and love.
My imaginary dragon lives
Far away, a center
Where thunder and lightening meet.
My imaginary dragon lives.

I've Lost My Mind

By Melvin Garrett Brinkley
VA Medical Center – Tucson, AZ

I keep a close watch on this blog of mine,
I keep my eyes wide open all the time,
I read my postings till I'm almost blind.
I've lost my mind, somewhere online.

When I'm wooing my lady late at night,
I keep my smartphone in my line of sight,
Which makes her mad, and then we have a fight.
I've lost my mind, somewhere online.

In some tweets that I've sent I might have lied.
It gave me cause for hope I cannot hide,
But the Net won't forget and let it slide.
I've lost my mind, somewhere online.

When I star in my YouTube videos,
I get a thrill from my head down to my toes,
But I'm still just some guy that no one knows.
I've lost my mind, somewhere online.

I've been programmed to click on Instagram,
Which makes my head feel like a traffic jam.
This scamming spam ain't worth a tinker's damn.
I've lost my mind, somewhere online.

As I posted my selfies late last night,
It dawned on me that something is not right.
Is there an app to help me find "The Light?"
I've lost my mind, somewhere online.

Just One You

By Karen A. Green

VA Medical Center – Las Vegas, NV

When you feel your life doesn't matter, remember you're an heir of God's Son so true, and that there's just one you.

Your life was paid for by the blood of the Lord. He paid it all at a cost you couldn't afford.

You couldn't pay for the price your freedom cost, for the blood Jesus shed or our soldiers we have lost.

But there's just one you. Nobody can take your place when your life is through.

So remember the sacrifices that were made for you, and that your life counts, too.

I See You

By Kenneth Harvey

VA Medical Center – Richmond, VA

In the spirit of this moment you fly, but I see you.

There is beauty in your curious eyes. I see you.

There is no way I will ever say goodbye. I see you.

Through and through, always on my mind, I see you.

Time and time again, you seek to evade me. You are my soul; aren't you bold? So much untold between us, I am never cold. I see you.

It is never impossible to believe in you. I see you.

Love is my bounty. I see you.

No way will I snooze and lose. I see you. In my mind for a lifetime, it is Valentine! I see you.

You are everything and my will. I want you to be still. I see you. Believe me, I see you.

My Friend Dan

By Daniel Paicopulos

VA Medical Center – San Diego, CA

It was natural and easy to tell him how I felt while he lay dying. It'll be harder now, but not impossible.

Still, it's only been a day and already I am losing the truth of his gaze, the wonder of his face.

Li'l Deuce Coupe

By Donald Sherwood

VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

Vroom!
Vroom!
A burst
Of speed.

Stoplight
To stop
Light.
Bike's cute,
You know.

She can
Run. She
Can fly.
A real
Cream puff.

A dream cycle.
Driver's
In the groove.
First place
And award.

Memorial Day

By John E. Jones

VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI

We remember our loved ones on Memorial Day,
Visiting cemeteries where in graves they lay.
Soldiers who lived yesterday made sacrifices for tomorrow.
They served with honor; we share our sorrow.

Our esteem for them rises from the soul.
Even memories can't make us entirely whole.
With great courage, they battled to stay alive.
At unexpected times, a soldier didn't survive.

We're tranquil now, the sights and sounds
So peaceful here upon cemetery grounds.
We remember loved ones, gone in their prime.
They defended our lives and nation all the time.

Through the wars they battled wherever a threat.
Their ultimate sacrifice we'll never forget.
Our nation's flag they carried, now at half-mast,
Shows respect for their honor will always last.

I'm Wearing the Mask

By John C. Bradley

VA Medical Center – Nashville, TN

If you seek truth in me, look not upon my face.
Integrity is not always reflected by what appears there.
Like the Paul Laurence Dunbar poem,
Like the Maya Angelou poem,
It's a mask that I wear, too,
commonly, like black people living in America do.
My six or seven decades living here
confirm it's a wise thing for black people to do.
One summer, when I was a child, I came to Russellville, Ky.,
to visit with our relatives.
My mama was born and grew up there.
That trip, from St. Louis, Mo., my hometown,
required me and my mama to travel hundreds of miles
on the Greyhound bus. It was a first trip for me,
but my mama had made such trips many times before.
Her reports of her trips to me were always incident free.
That sounds cool to me. Of course,
each of us must decide what "incident free" is to be.
I had never traveled into the Deep South before.
Frightening stories about the place I had heard many times.
These stories could sound garish. Many such stories galore
were often told by my Banneker School playmates
that were members of families who, I will say,
had relocated just to get away.
These stories were told to me before the time
of the Emmett Till tragedy. A teenage boy from Chicago, Ill.,
Emmett Till visited the Deep South of Mississippi.
There, his alleged facial expression
was the cause of his murder—a horrible tragedy.
Here is a rhyme/ditty made up by us kids
And heard in the Banneker schoolyard
Rather frequently as I grew!

"Po li'l Emmett Till innocently had a smile on his face.
Some mean ole cracker down in Miss-is-sip-pi
Thought it was out-ta place
'Cause ah white woman was standing somewhere around.
So deys ole crackers beat dat po li'l boy to death.
Den deys hid his body where no-body could find,
Deep down under the grouuuuuuuund.
Po li'l Emmett Till."

Thank you, Lord above, for lifting his soul up to heaven,
where he now rests peacefully.

While my mama and me were visiting in Russellville, Ky.,
my mama thought Nashville, Tenn., a few miles away,
would be a nice place for me to see. I said "yes" eagerly
to go farther down into Tenn.,
the Deep South where I had never been before.
After all, everything had been, so far, incident free.
So with a wide smile on my face, my mother and me
took the local bus south to Nashville, Tenn.
Everyone who looked at my face could see
it reflected, truly, the happiness in me.

I wore no mask of duplicity! I was yet a child, you see.
In Nashville, Tenn., my mother and me
stood waiting by the sign marked "Public Bus Stop" patiently.
Riding on a public bus in Nashville, Tenn.,
would be a first-time adventure for me.
I routinely rode the public bus
in St. Louis, even by myself, always incident free.
At the bus stop there were no other passengers to see,
only my mother and me.
So I was satisfied there was no one else competing with me.
To entertain myself, I made up a game in my head.
I would be the first one on the bus, no matter what!
My mother always let me be first. The bus pulled up on time,
just as the posted sign said it would be.
When the front doors opened widely,
I pulled away from the loosely held grip
of my mother's hand holding me.
I bounded up the two steps.
The first person on the bus from our stop,
just as I planned in my head, was me.
I continued running past the driver
because I knew my mama would pay my fare if it were owed,
and bounded two or three rows from the front door
that I had just run through. WOW!
Fortunately, most of the seats were empty.
What a break for me!
I bounced into a seat, went all the way to the window,
leaving plenty of room for my mama to sit next to me.
Two things happened at about the same time,
or maybe even at the same time.
But it was one of them that really puzzled me.
My mama walked right past the seat on the row
I had left open for her right next to me.
Instead she looked down at me
with a nondescript expression on her face, nodded her head
and made a gesture that told me that the seat
I was sitting in, as well as at the seat I had reserved for her,
were not the places for us to be.
Instead, I should get up and follow her
as she continued walking on that public bus
toward the seats at the back of the bus
that were fully occupied, no vacancies,
that bore only people of the same skin color
as my mama and me.
"What's going on," I thought.
It was then that the second of the two things that happened
became clear to me.
I realized the bus had never started, never moved
because the bus driver was hovering in the aisle,
his face contorted, his skin glowing red.
The decibel level of his voice exceeded the noise
of the running motor.
I don't recall the exact words he shouted into my ear,
but his snarling, repetitious use of "Boy" remains
memorable and clear in no uncertain way to this very day.
My mama had taken notice of the driver,
but more importantly, of me! At that time in my life,
when I was in trouble—and at that point I was—
I looked to my mama for help. Exactly what I did!
I saw her, in mid-stride, execute a reverse pivot

that would have brought an exclamation,
 “Right on, Sister” from Kareem.
 Still in motion, my mama had returned to a space,
 though it was narrow,
 between the verbally belching driver and me,
 further exhibiting, when necessary, her dexterity.
 With her hand, this time gripped firmly around my arm,
 she began leading herself and me
 out of the seat I had occupied, into the aisle
 and through the still open front doors of the bus.
 Now I can recall and visualize that sequence of events
 better than when they happened even though I was there.
 I have often been amazed by the abilities,
 both physical and mental, demonstrated by my mama.
 But this was exceptional!
 Off the bus, standing on the sidewalk, my mama and me,
 hand in hand, I want to talk at a rapid pace. I don’t.
 Instead I look at my mama’s face. I’m sure she will know.
 I’m confused. My mama will know what I should do.
 My mama was reared in the Deep South,
 emigrated to St. Louis and eventually I came.
 In the instant she left the bus
 and stood beside me on the sidewalk
 holding my hand, my mama became composed.
 She could now display a smile, if need be.
 Like Paul Laurence Dunbar, Maya, my mama and now me!
 All in America, know to wear the mask to be free!
 If you seek truth and want to find it,
 look not upon my face.
 It may not be reflected there.
 My mama taught me
 that in America
 wear the mask, if need be!

Leaves (A Poem of Hope and Beauty)

By Gene Allen Groner
VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ

Leaves are falling from the trees,
 Leaves of gold and red.
 Yellow and amber, here they come,
 A harvest that is not dead.

Living beauties gliding down
 To Mother Earth below,
 Their beauty never covered yet
 Until we see first snow.

When howls the wind much faster they
 Fall blowing in the air.
 Never has been a lovelier sight
 To view these leaves so fair.

And after all have sailed away,
 My heart will hold most dear
 The loveliness I see today
 Until the coming year.

Leadership

By Richard Wangard
VA Medical Center – Appleton, WI

What is it?
 Where is it?
 It is not dead!
 Is it?
 Locked up in politics
 Do nothing Congresses.
 Is the military the only ones
 With their heads screwed on straight?
 Knowing what it is all about!
 Caring for one another
 Having the other person’s back
 No matter the rank!
 Seems hatred rules the day
 Really just very civil
 Civil war.
 Don’t ask me!
 Just a very old wolf
 No longer an Alpha.
 I run alone
 Still eat
 Really don’t chase much prey
 Tired
 Many wounds
 From a hard life,
 But proud of the
 Leadership
 I tried to provide my country
 My family
 My friends.
 No, leadership is not dead.
 Maybe people just have to revisit
 History to relearn
 About great leaders!
 We ignore history
 At our own peril,
 For when ignorance is bliss
 Laziness can set in.
 Easier to run than it is
 To fight,
 But you cannot fight
 Ignorance
 Only evil
 And what you know
 In your heart
 That is wrong!

Isaac's Horse

By *Stu Carlson*

VA Medical Center – Salt Lake City, UT

Some families hide disasters, others brag of kin long gone. My folks ne'er shared this story that languished much too long.

His name was Isaac Wilcox, had unfettered footprints strong, a Kentuck' rugged woodsman whose deeds would vest in song.

Isaac's one great claim, so prideful, 'twas the legend Daniel Boone, that Cumberland trailblazer with blood ties back sev'ral moons.

This Nelson County teenage lad ne'er ducked the call-to-arms. In 1812, that plea went out 'cross inland woods and farms.

Detroit soon fell, defenders died, our nation sought strong souls. Soon fifteen hundred horsemen pressed north to rout the foe.

Young Wilcox rode with vigor, totin' squirrel gun, tarp and knife. Those mounted woodsmen sought revenge, ne'er fearin' loss of life.

But, Sandusky was a downer when then told to leave their steeds. Chagrined they floated Erie's Lake to render combat deeds.

Once put ashore they sought redcoats. Cruel Shawnee did there hide. Later clashed on foreign soil, their win then turned the tide.

Those backwoods guys did thus prevail 'longside the River Thames. Tecumseh's plague there ended when bruised Brits fast fled in shame.

That ragtag outing took nine weeks, militias then came home, secure on friendly bluegrass turf with tales soon widely known.

But elsewhere Jackson sought fresh men to keep Gulf Brits at bay. Isaac joined again with gusto for a flatboat trip one way.

Frontiersmen barged Ohio's flow that joined the Mississipp'. They drifted for a month, rain drenched,'til New Orleans they hit.

Andrew mustered his mixed army there to face King George's best. They dug a trench for cover, fightin' skills they'd shortly test.

'Side cotton bales and earthworks, testy pirates joined thin ranks with Cajuns scrounged from bayous, native warriors on their flanks.

Andrew Jackson won his battle as our hist'ry books so note. Yet I fail to read how Isaac got that bullet scar he'd tote.

Reality soon faced this man. He might run out of wars. Midwestern life would shape his fate far from that delta shore.

With a pair of noted shootouts in a two-year span of time, such a grass-roots test of valor forged his legacy sublime.

He'd seen his share of bloodshed, fearsome facts he'd wisely hide. Then o'er forty years he labored with spouse Nancy by his side.

Deep soil he turned and planted under Indiana sun. But one final battle festered, an entitlement yet won.

A lolling U. S. Congress 'round that 1850 year, belatedly did pass a bill vexed vets would loudly cheer.

Intrepid troops who'd faced down foes in 1812's dire war, if still alive could claim domain their nation held in store.

Wife Nancy was the lightnin' rod with paperwork submitted. For 160 acres earned, a test of ink remitted.

The feds denied her timely quest, they claimed no war facts found. But lawyers based in Galesburg would gain sought patent ground.

The Wilcox clan then viewed their prize. Illini prairie fast. Knee-deep, untilled grassland, a treeless landscape vast.

Our patriarch went into shock, so said his fam'ly band."Why, no self-respectin' woodsman would homestead barren land!"

Scribe Nancy won her decade duel in that paper-shufflin' fray. But Isaac later swapped their sod for one bay horse, they say.

Bein' well into his 60s, Isaac saw our country grow. After playin' such a hands-on role, his hist'ry we should know.

And, while that stalwart from our heartland could nary read nor write, he fathered fourteen offspring provin' some things were done right.

Ms. Lorraine Hall – My Grandmother

By *Ronald Hall*

VA Medical Center – Lebanon, PA

To begin I truly confess
My grandmother was undoubtably the best.
She had a heart of Gold,
So this story must be told.
From the time I was born
My clothes were never torn.
They were always new
From my head to my shoes,
Nothing ever was previously used.
I don't know how she managed
To do what she did.
Ever since I was a kid
She gave me love beyond explanation.
Why can't it be throughout this nation?
There were six of us that she raised,
My brothers and sisters were also amazed.
My mother wasn't around,
But she still stood her ground.
Whatever was needed for us,
She did without any fuss.
Some people thought I should be spoiled,

However, I knew how she toiled.
 Sometimes I thought it was too much to bear.
 I was proven wrong; she was always there.
 She was so blessed to Give, Give, Give,
 So that my siblings and I could Live, Live, Live.
 She taught me what not to do,
 And what I should do, too.
 Sent me to church every Sunday,
 Started my school week every Monday.
 She said, "Thank God" at every meal,
 She also taught me not to steal,
 Respect my elders all the time,
 And God would be ever so kind.
 When a compliment is due,
 Give it to them,
 They'll feel good,
 And you would, too.
 She was so good to me,
 To make me see what I should be.
 I can't express enough
 How she taught me to be tough.
 She said life could be bad,
 Cherish good times you had.
 They are few and far between,
 And sometimes never seen.
 She taught me all of this
 That without her I would've missed.
 As you can see,
 She was valuable to me.
 The love she gave
 Just makes me rave.
 On and on till the break of dawn,
 Mental stability I did learn
 And her great love I miss and yearn.
 I never have this love anymore,
 If I did my heart's an open door.
 Think you've heard about her best?
 There's so much more,
 I couldn't write the rest.
 I'm paralyzed now on my left side.
 She taught me to deal with such issues with pride.
 She even taught me how to cook
 Without the use of a cookbook.
 Venture out and remain strong,
 And with this frame of mind you never go wrong.
 With this set of principles instilled in me,
 I couldn't miss the man I should be.
 Derogatory statements, let them pass,
 Think more of joy that will last.
 There's only one life that we'll live,
 Be humble, my son, whenever you give.
 She was mostly right, seldom wrong,
 I was blessed to know her before she was gone.
 Thank you, Grandma, for what you gave
 In teaching me how to behave.
 Enjoy Heaven as I know you will,
 And, yes, Grandma I'm paying my bills.
 I love you so much, so much, so much,
 In my prayers I'll keep in touch.
 I'd better stop now
 Because there's a tear,

And I wouldn't want
 My writing to smear.
 In total memory of Ms. Lorraine Hall,
 Only for now,
 That's all, y'all.

No Dreams

*By Rickie Lynn Musgrave
 – Peoria, IL*

Have you ever had long periods of time
 where "no dreams" ever came into your mind?
 Some in the daytime but none in the night.
 Some are from superficial war scars,
 some make you wake with cold sweats
 and, once in a while, hot flashes that give you frets.
 There is no cure for the thousand-yard stare
 which some of us have,
 and only does God care
 about love thy neighbor and thine enemy, too.
 Isn't it God's will that we love one another
 like God loves us, too?
 He will never leave us,
 but we may go a different way
 until we get on our knees and pray
 for a forgiving life.
 Only he can change our lifestyles
 for the positive living
 we all need for the greatest day
 of our lives with him.

Muhammad Ali

*By Greer Bradley
 VA Medical Center – Detroit, MI*

There's not a man today who can beat Clay.
 Not today, maybe next week, you'd find a man
 who can beat Cassius Clay.
 Ali stopped Quarry in three,
 Bonavena in fifteen.
 Ali is steel, the king.
 There had to be a test so everyone could see
 Who would be victors between Frazier
 and Muhammad Ali?
 Frazier knocked Ali down in the fifteenth round,
 and won the match.
 Ali didn't accept defeat.
 He won the second fight with quick speed
 and a devastating right.
 Only one left
 who held the Heavyweight Belt,
 Mr. Devastation, whom the press said
 would do a thing on Ali's brain.
 Ali knocked Foreman out in eight,
 and it wasn't too late, as he regained his
 rightful title and fame.

Oh, Faithful Soldiers

By Robert John Valonis

VA Medical Center – West Palm Beach, FL

Welcome home, oh, faithful soldiers.
Your time has come now to an end.
Some are whole, some are wounded,
Some afflicted and some are dead.

Is it a kind and grateful nation
That will greet you at the door,
Or will you be forgotten
Like soldiers from before?

Will church bells ring out loudly
And crowds honor your return,
Or will the youth again disdain you
And mimic what they've learned?

May the sun shine down upon you
And all your dreams come true.
And may you be forgiven
For the things you had to do.

So welcome home, oh, faithful soldiers.
Your time has come now to an end.
Some are whole, some are wounded,
Some afflicted and some are dead.

The Old Man's Friendship

By Peter Rompf

VA Medical Center – Syracuse, NY

Sinatra sings "Summer Wind."

The old man slowly walks in.

Cigarettes and dollar bills on the bar, the shot glass and beer, his
companions are not far.

No one, no one knows he is there.

(Sinatra singing)

"And still the days, those lonely days, they go on and on
And guess who sighs his lullabies through nights that never
end..."

Looking at his glass he sighs,

"My fickle friend."

Customers walk by like he is not even there.

The attention he gets is when his glass is filled with air.

The newspaper is turned page by page, the wall mirror shows his
true age.

Another pupil sits on the stool present for the establishment's
night school.

Running his fingers through his hair with his shaking hand, he
waves the glass in the air.

A smile and a laugh come from his face, he sits alone in this
crowded place.

Looking at his empty hand he clinches a fist, the anger he feels
from life he has missed.

Picking up the remnants of what he had placed down, he leaves
the change, he looks around.

Downing what is left in his glass, his acquaintance assures him
their friendship will last.

He gets up and slightly staggers to the street, the silence of the
night is the only one he is destined to meet.

Stopping and leaning against a pole, he hears the turn signal
telling him he may go.

On the long walk home, he can see his breath.

The acquaintance assures him, at home there is friendship left
(Sinatra singing)

"Then softer than a piper man one day, it called to you.
I lost you to the summer wind."

Author's Note: "Summer Wind" lyrics by Hans Bradtke, Henry
Mayer, Johnny Mercer.

That Walk

By Rodney C. Keckler

– Carlisle, PA

Quiet, not a word spoken, nothing but nature's sounds
As I walked the sacred ground
where my brothers that walked beside me lie now.
Names never spoken, but at every cross their faces were found.
As my footsteps took me through every row, up and down,
Not one cross was passed that a face was not found.
A sky so clear without a trace of a cloud,
With only the sounds of footsteps
in the grass and nature's sounds
As I took that walk with the footsteps' sound,
With me passing through the sacred ground
Where my brothers that walked beside me lie now.
I go on that walk with those footsteps' sounds
With a heavy heart that's beating out loud.
At every cross passing, a tear would come down.
For the moment, remember the faces that were found
As I stand in the middle and look all around
At nothing but crosses in the ground,
Remembering all the old faces that I have found
On that walk that I took when no one but they were around.
With nothing but those footsteps' sounds,
And the grass bending as my foot came down,
I walk at the end of town,
The place where all the crosses are found.

Politics

By Scott Lehman

VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO

So much bickering and mud slinging.
Will you be my running mate?
Money for the campaign
For \$500 a plate.
He who sits in the heavens shall
Laugh.
The Lord shall hold them in derision
Mass confusion.
He who sits in the heavens shall
Laugh.
Who's winning, who's losing?
My reflection about this election:
Going nowhere fast without
Any direction.
He who sits in the heavens shall
Laugh
About our selection.
Let all the woman for their candidate
Vote.
Like a wise man told me a long time
Ago, "It all comes out in the laundry.
And if it doesn't, I'll fix it."
Everything will be all right.
This is America
And Americans don't give up without
A fight.
This election will be tight.

Prayer

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center – Iron Mountain, MI

He prayed
And they were made Apostles
And could teach
And would preach
And outwardly reach
The uttermost parts
Of the earth.
From down the mountain
He came.
He called to each one by name:
Peter, Andrew, James, John,
Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew,
Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas
And Paul
And sent them into
Everlasting fame.

Recovery

By Charles Fredette

VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA

From magical London to the 13th floor,
The horrors of a hospital,
Where I couldn't fit in anywhere.

And then I entered my second halfway house.
From the humbling that I endured,
To the hope of the program,
And the lessons learned,
I found I could be my own best friend,
And sometimes have more electric days.
Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Putting Together a Week

By Daniel Paicopulos

VA Medical Center – San Diego, CA

No alcohol crossed my lips,
and I stayed away from chips,
eating mostly vegan food,
which helped elevate my mood.
Daytime protocols I kept,
as more peacefully I slept.
Enjoyed my first art class.
It really was a blast.
Spent a day at a monastery,
which left me feeling very
calm, in fine mental health,
not bottom, nor middle, but serene top shelf.
So there's your weekly total, a pretty decent score,
I liked it a lot. Please, sir, may I have more?

The Black Cat

By Charles Fredette

VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA

The fluffy cat on the stairs
didn't turn around
and didn't need awareness.
He, in his blackness,
strove to find ease.
He stalked like a tiger.
How many times,
I couldn't say for sure.
He was on the stairs
and didn't seem to play,
but rather continued on his way
on this particular day.

Returned

By Phil Hosier

VA Medical Center – Prescott, AZ

Sleeping in alleys with discarded refuse, bottles and cans,
What I've become doesn't even resemble a man.
Running the streets and knowing it all,
Nothing can hurt me. I'm bulletproof and 10 feet tall.
The booze and drugs help me with all the stress and strife.
I'll do what I want; after all, it's my life.
No amount of reasoning makes any sense.
Who I was and what I would become are all past tense.
I stumble through life and hide all my fears
Until one day, it all came crumbling down
When God suddenly appears.
I fell to my knees, ashamed and weak as a pup.
He calmly said to me, "Take my hand, I'll lift you up."
When I touched his hand, my deadened soul began to glow.
As I listened to his words, his unending love I began to know.
This man-made Hell and evil place
I've have left forever when I found his Grace.
Where once I thought I was in charge,
Through him, I know now I'm truly living large.
Learning his word and living a new way,
I feel alive and thankful for each new day.
Knowing his love that's come into my heart,
I've parked that devil, now that God's given me a new start.
I'm so alive since there's newfound Grace in me.
What a glorious feeling to be blessed by thee.

Author's Note: *Inspired and dedicated to my friend Richard, who lived in Hell with the devil and now is found and gladly serves the Lord forever.*

Runnin' on Empty

By Scott Lehman

VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO

I like to gamble
Just a little bit.
They say you have to play to win.
I used to play the daily numbers.
Somehow I picked a number off
Of my head.
I walk into the store
And to my surprise
Was my number right before
My eyes.
I had won \$500!
Just like that.
I was off and running
Just like that.
But the weirdest time happened when
I was walking down the highway
On the median, and I stopped

To see where I could panhandle enough
For a cup of coffee.
I looked all around but my prospects
Were looking thin.
As I stood there
I looked between my feet,
And there was something sweet.
A twenty-dollar bill.

She Sings the Blues

By Benjamin J. Williams

VA Medical Center – Biloxi, MS

With lyrics
Both haunting and sad,
Ending on a low note
Of poor, poor me.

She tries in hard times
To make ends meet
Until her baby,
Her soul mate,
And true love
Comes home,

And brings happiness
Back into her world,
So she won't
Go insane
Very quietly
Or screaming louder
Than any banshee.

Drawing by

Kenny C. Trujillo

VA Medical Center – Phoenix, AZ



Sir, Yes, Sir

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center – Chillicothe, OH

Oh, boy! I'd already signed the papers,
taken the oath.
I was Uncle Sam's for a few years,
right out of high school,
cream of the crop.
No facial hair yet,
my voice was squeaky like Mickey Mouse.
I was a kid in a man's world,
styling my Florida Gator's shirt that was two sizes
too big for me in Texas
of all places.
I tried to take Dad's advice
and play it low-key, off the bus,
but it was not happening.
The drill instructors
were not Florida Gator fans
any more than I was a Texas Longhorn fan.
Things were not going well from the start.
I told them I happened to like the Gators.
That was not good.
They started to call me "Beetle Bailey."
I was pegged right off the bus.
What else could happen?
Maybe if I was nice they would send me back home.

Some Alone Time

By Joel J. Bowman

VA Medical Center – Richmond, VA

What if our world would behave with character based on love?
Would we have less division, increased unity, divinity
from above?
Is the mind separate from the heart?
Has technology set us apart?
Phones, iPads, laptops.. our brain these replace.
Would our character change if we spent more time face to face?
Our reflection of humanity— would it be one of meditating
on caring?
While alone... benevolent plans for the purpose of sharing?

Strangers

By Benjamin J. Williams

VA Medical Center – Biloxi, MS

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

The Other Side

By John E. Jones

VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI

I still can't find the other side.
I'm certain there's something I haven't tried.
My reason to explore and see
Is knowing my life is lived for me.
By searching the answer did unfold,
The elusive Spirit comes from God.

The things that bring us joy and pain
Are sometimes made of sunshine and rain.
This force within keeps me striving,
And where I am going, God will be driving.

I don't know what tomorrow will bring,
But in my heart the Spirit is everything.

Time is eternal. This we all know,
But what I am looking for is likely to show.

The Duel

By Sean Richards

VA Medical Center – Fort Worth, TX

Once again they dance the dance of death.
The young men spend hours to come to grips
With flying miles above an emerald green earth.
They make every effort to protect on these trips.

The big heavies are their charges,
Protect the bombers as they make their runs.
The enemy comes from all directions,
Tiny specks grow into fighters from out of the sun.

A combat can last from seconds to minutes,
Terror incarnate is what these men encounter.
The hammer of cannons, the bang of machine guns,
The gray outs of high-G maneuvers, the smell of cordite.

From miles up to down on the deck, the combats rage.
Like a rat race the opponents turn and chase
Until a victor and a vanquished have left the stage.
It's man against man, ace against ace.

For one a flight home, for the other a long walk home or a
smoking hole.

To the victor go the spoils and another mission.
To the vanquished a long recovery or a funeral.
No matter which, all that changes is the war
and the opposition.

Surviving Survival Guilt

By John Henningson

VA Medical Center – West Haven, CT



Artwork by John Henningson

Survival Guilt is a common cause
Of PTSD which gives reason to pause.
How to overcome the sense of loss
For brothers past on a riddled cross?

Their faces are forever ingrained
With a fiery stencil upon my brain.
The list is long but there are four
Which will stand out to me forevermore.

Lt. Brown, who was a leader first-rate,
Was carried off to an unknown fate.
He was wounded by an IED,
But he will always be a brother to me.

Next was Lt. Harrison who had an easy grace,
But an NVA sniper shot him in the face.
We made every effort to save him from his fate,
But within two days, he went through the Gates.

I trained Captain Savage as an LNO,
And instead of me to MaryAnn he would go.
They were overrun by sappers one night,
And he nearly lost both legs in the terrible fight.

Captain Anshus also went out instead of me.
He was shot down in a chopper in the DMZ.
We tried all night to keep him from Hell,
But the NVA captured him. He spent three years in a cell.

So I have struggled with the guilt in the aftermath.
Why them? Not me down those awful paths?
There is no answer for the reason why,
But it gives me a mission to continue to try

To help those who are less fortunate than me,
To see the future as opportunity,
To drive on as best I can,
And use my efforts to scare away the boogie man.

Talking With Regina...I Like To Do!

By John Bradley

VA Medical Center – Nashville, TN

Talking with Regina...I like to do! It's too infrequent. It's too brief most of the time. Minutes here! Minutes there! I want it to be more everywhere.

Regina, talking to me, doesn't blush, lower her gaze. She's comfortable. She's composed. She responds, looking straight at me affectionately!

Connecting with Regina, eye to eye, outwardly, my heart is caressed with a large smile inwardly! Each time I hold her hand externally, my pulse rate doubles internally!

Sitting close on our green bench in Centennial Park, an arm's length apart, her beautiful smile appears, slowly widening upon her face. I can't recall or imagine a scene so serene.

Talking with Regina...I like to do! Her gentle voice, warm and vibrant, assures me she is my friend! I don't think it's presumptuous to want our talks to never end.

Talking with Regina...I like to do! Sometimes my words provoke her unique laughter that I love to hear. It feels as though there's a smooth soft feather tickling my ear.

Talking with Regina...I like to do! I wonder at times, does she like talking with me as much?

On our green bench in Centennial Park, her body language is unspoken, yet heard. She sits emotionally, close not distant, not tense, between us no barrier or impenetrable fence.

Her spoken words, her body language, I respond in kind. Two people sitting on a green bench in Centennial Park, smiling and talking, having a good time.

Talking with Regina...I like to do! I believe Regina likes talking and laughing with me...too!

Tomorrows

By Charles L. Carey

VA Medical Center – Martinsburg, WV

As I sit alone,
Within my solitary reflections,
Visions of borrowed brightness
Dance across my lonely room.
I hold on to weakened memories
That drift like brightened shadows
Within my empty home.
I reach within my withered soul,
Needing to want and wanting to become.

The Last Letter

By Michael D. Monfrooe

VA Medical Center – St. Cloud, MN

There are many reasons to go to war—
Patriotism, adventure, the draft, so many more.
I've made some good friends, dear to my heart.
Some shipped home early; each tears you apart.
I've learned early on, there is no glory to be had,
I've seen grown men cry, a scene so sad.
Letters from home, they mean so much,
Remembering friends, Mom's gentle touch.
I think of the parties, the cars we used to drive,
Now a struggle just to stay alive.
It's strange that when I'm tired or overcome with fear,
A calmness surrounds me as I think of home, so dear.
I've only a few days left; I'll be home soon.
No more leaches or this damn monsoon.
I'll hang up my uniform, my soldiering done.
I'll finish this later,
I've one more patrol to run.

The Nation Must See Salvation Comes From the Lord!

By Karen A. Green

VA Medical Center – Las Vegas, NV

In these last days people try to do good deeds, to gain
salvation and obtain their needs.
Maybe they haven't read God's Word to see salvation comes
from the Lord.
They wander aimlessly. For them the truth is hard to see.
They feel their future looks grave when all the time they were
saved.
Some people live in ease, and think they can do as they please.
As nation after nation begin to fall, they need to listen for
Christ to call.
They can't be saved by politicians' words, but must see
salvation comes from the Lord!

The Spirit of America

By Anthony Coccozza

VA Medical Center – Los Angeles, CA

The spirit of America
Is the spirit of the American flag.
We preserve our heritage
For God and country
And do this we can.
The spirit in America

Is the spirit of the lonely wind.
We protect our heritage
For God and country
And we win.
We are proud Americans,
We live in a beautiful country,
We are proud of our heritage
For God and country.
The spirit of America
Is the kiss of the lonely wind
To serve you, my Lord, my Savior.
Have I earned my silver wings?

To My Favorite Nurse

By Sean Richards

VA Medical Center – Fort Worth, TX

She is a tall, statuesque blonde with a heart of gold,
She treats her friends with love and honor as in times of old.
She always has a kind word and a prayer for all,
She is a sun-bronzed farm girl who answers the call.

She makes me see the respect that we should all share,
She never gives a person anything but the utmost in care.
She shares her days with veterans that are in need,
She sees to it that other caregivers are in the know and take heed.

She opens her heart to all, both her patients and friends,
She is this wonderful, down-home farm girl on whom everyone
depends.
She sees things in a little bit different way,
She is my nurse practitioner at my local VA.

Drawing by

Frank X. Mattson

VA Medical Center – Spring City, PA



The Woodpecker

By Charles L. Carey
VA Medical Center – Martinsburg, WV

Pecking on the tree,
Rattle, tattle, tattle tat,
The woodpecker began
To peck.
Feet firmly gripped
The green branch.
The racket echoed
Through our ranch.
He pecked so hard,
So loud, I ran to see
As I wondered
How could a woodpecker
Peck on a plastic tree?

Too Late

By Tony James Craidon
– Maple Grove, MN

I am past my time,
I should've known more.
I should've realized
There isn't any more.

The beauty of nature is to surpass evolution,
A task I wasn't up for.
If only I could challenge Grandfather Time,
I'd fight for those I adore.

I have taken a step back,
A step in need of recovery.
My last wish is to see mine succeed,
To have minds opened with discovery.

It's too late for me,
I hope this isn't my only time around.
I wouldn't carry so much on my back,
If I only had another time around.

U.S. Military

By Kraig Michael Morris
VA Medical Center – Altoona, PA

Our country has been oh so blessed,
Our fighting forces are the best,
Whether land, air, or sea.
Join the service, don't you agree?
See the world so far and wide,
This will make you swell with pride.
Honors, medals, badges, too,
Serve this land and are so true.
Some serve here or in a foreign land,
Those whom they understand.
Each branch is like fingers of a hand
We bring together to guard this land.
We must guard against our foes
During times of highs and lows.
Dogs of war come to our door,
Mess with us, won't do no more.
God of Heaven has blessed us so
With countless blessings, don't you know.
With tired eyes and weary hand,
I'll go to sleep in this land.
God bless all this night,
Those at home, those who fight.
Day is done, now time to rest.
Sleep so well, you've done your best.

USA! USA! USA!

By Richard Wangard
VA Medical Center – Appleton, WI

The shouts
The chants
The victories
The pride.
Constant reminders
Of who and what
We are.
Diversity
Cheering for the underdog
Generosity
Fairness
Men and women freely
Taking an oath
To serve. USA! USA! USA!

A beacon for the whole world
Our light shines bright!
I saw our lady crying.
She lives on Ellis Island.
I cry now, too! USA! USA! USA!

Where did it go?
I don't know!
Babies crying
No due process
Families torn
Cages
Demonization.
Injustice abounds.
USA! USA! USA!

The beacon barely a glimmer.
My skin is very brown
Summer tan
Caucasian
Not Latino.
My own family
With strong Latino roots.
I have seen the poverty
I have witnessed the problems.
Desperation, no chance. USA! USA! USA!

I thought we were better.
Three tours I fought
Trying to help
The downtrodden.
Another black eye
On the USA from long ago.
Mistreatment
Discrimination
Hatred
Injustice
Spit on
Garbage thrown on me
VVA forms and says
Never again will a vet be treated
This way.
Success!
Now?
All over again!
This time against an entire
Race
Prisons
Camps
Of tender-aged
Children, afraid. MOMMY, MOMMY!!!

Tent cities in a desert.
Go ahead, people.
Let me hear you now
Your pride. USA! USA! USA!

Human rights abusers!
No soul
Just a nation of laws?
What law?
My skin is brown
Dark hair. USA! USA! USA!

Walk a Mile in My Combat Boots

By Neal C. Morrison Jr.
VA Medical Center – Hampton, VA

Every soldier swears an oath of office
That is demanded of every government official.
For the soldier
It is like no other ever taken,
For we are sworn
To uphold, honor, protect and defend
The Constitution of the United States
Against all enemies
Foreign and domestic.
It is never said, but always implied
To do so with our life if necessary.
The life of a combat soldier
Is one of sacrifice and commitment.
To accomplish the mission
Is our only purpose.
Intrigue and espionage
Are not the duty of a soldier,
But called upon
We must take action.

What I'd Like, What I Need

By Allen Burns
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

I'd like to get away,
But I won't go without her.
I'd like to hide my head in the sand,
But there isn't any, only concrete and asphalt.
I'd like to have more friends,
But there are too many enemies.
I'd like to be solvent,
But the VA won't give me my money.
I'd like to buy the world a Coke,
But I don't have enough change for the machine.
I'd like to get out of the rain,
But my umbrella leaks.
I need to have focus,
But I'm too distracted.
I need to lose weight,
But I love food too much.
I need to walk more,
But my joints are ablaze.
I need to control my temper,
But I'm fired up.
I need to practice peace,
But war beckons.
I need to love my fellow man,
But he doesn't deserve it.
I need to get things fixed,
And sometimes I do.
I need to know everything,
And it gets me in trouble.
I need to love,
And that I'm doing.

Why I Love the Corps

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center – Pittsburgh, PA

It gave me direction from the start;
Since first at boot camp, I knew my part.
I learned of its history, tradition and drill,
Of shooting at targets, in time, with skill.

With uniform pressed and looking good,
I stood inspections as best I could.
It gave me confidence in many ways,
Which has guided me through the toughest days.

It taught me love for truth and good,
For love of life and brotherhood.
It set a standard to live and die,
And time for fun and for standing by.

It saved me from some nasty “scrapes”
And freed me in some great escapes.
The world seems all so different now.
I love the Corps, and this I vow!

Winding

By Kimberly Green

–Fort Smith, AR

I’m dying, he sighed,
His weapon by his side. Looked around,
Realized he is the only one that survived.

A medic he once knew by chance
Lay to his left, a bullet in his head,
He too was dead. He triaged to his last breath.

Reinforcements came too late
Though requested early on.
Commander’s orders took too long.

A chance at life when he goes home,
A chance to live
Away from a combat zone.

So he began. I’m writing my father now
Trying to explain
How we started with 13 and I am all that remains.

And so the father reads, tears rolling down his face,
Realizing how his son will live as he has,
Memories of war forever sealed in place.

War by Design

By Penny Lee Deere

VA Medical Center – Albany, NY

Design by war told who is your enemy battlefield.

My battlefield might change, desert, woods, mountain weaponry
advance military tactics merged but history repeats time and
time again rebuilt.

We will rebuild what we destroy, the enemy now our allies
distraction of our lives dismantler of our bodies.

Displace our mind disconnect our soul all by war’s design.

Promise Realized: The Glorious 45th

By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.

VA Medical Center – Hampton, VA

The 45th is truly a capable genius.

The effort to make America great again

Has not gone unnoticed.

It’s truly a worthwhile effort.

All can see

That the greatness upon us

Has been activated.

Hundreds of thousands

Are standing in soup kitchen lines,

Hundreds of thousands

Are standing in food pantry lines,

Hundreds of thousands cannot pay bills,

Hundreds of thousands are scrambling

To find any job

Just to put food on the table,

Hundreds of thousands

Of businesses are not being paid

For work and services rendered.

The multitude has drained their bank accounts

For medication and food needed for children.

There has never been a better time

For the wealthy and super rich—

Acquiring businesses for pennies on the dollar

While the masses are suffering

To get food, shelter and medication.

Yet greatness has been achieved;

It’s here right now.

The Great Depression

Has come upon us once again.

America has been made great again.

The 45th’s objective has been realized.

Wrestling With the Bottle

By Scott Sjostrand
-Hallock, MN

Ever wrestled with the bottle?
Alcohol will pin ya; it goes
Full throttle. Why do we drink?
There's many a reason, but there
Comes a time to quit, always
A perfect season. I've seen great men
Be made its slave; some it
Took to an early grave. Women
Are not immune; many people
Start drinking way too soon.
In my times of severe loss,
Alcohol comforted me, but with
Great cost. I've been to treatment,
But I still wrestle on. In
Alcohol's chess game, I am but
A mere pawn. I've got the will,
I've got the desire, sobriety is
Where I plan to aspire.

True Feelings

By Dennis Silas
VA Medical Center - Danville, IL

If someone tells you they love,
Is it their true feelings?
Could they mean they hate you,
And they just want to be
With you?
Is it their true feelings
Or do they just want to have sex with you
When all you need is a "hug?"
Is it their true feelings
To be with you until all of your money is gone?
Is it their true feelings when they're drunk
Or high all the time
And want to "talk you to death" about nothing?
True feelings
Are 24/7 and 100 percent real.
Treat another as you treat yourself
Or be by yourself.
True.

You Survived

By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt
-Overland Park, KS

The shower of rockets at night,
The heat and monsoons during the day,
The fever and chills of malaria victims,
The tears of the wounded,
The green bags for the dead.

You survived...
The pleas of the amputee
Moaning with phantom pain,
The cries of injured children
Too young to understand, wanting only to be safe.

You survived...
Staring in the eyes of the enemy,
The loneliness without family nearby,
Food in the mess hall, powdered eggs and liquid Jell-O,
Sand in your face, on your sheets and your lips.

You survived...
To return home, unbroken,
To fly that Freedom Bird, unscarred.
You survived the war though forever changed
By a silent villain called Agent Orange.

The Curtain

By Paul David Gonzales
VA Medical Center - Albuquerque, NM

A soldier passes through a curtain, from boy or girl to warrior,
that's for certain.

He or she enters that curtain mildly, and with much learning,
exits with keen discerning.

They lose that boyish or girlish grin, straps firmly attached to
each chin. A baseball hat he or she once wore, replaced by clothes
of a warrior and a whole lot more.

Rifles and rounds, boots and net, oh, don't forget your bayonet.

The bayonet is to kill, plenty of blood it will spill. If I had to use it,
I'd use it with skill, for hand to hand is your last stand.

So now I've passed to the other side where guilt and violence
now reside.

Help me, Lord, to leave it alone, and take me home from this
war zone.

My Journey of Life

By Richard David Palmer
– Portland, OR

I start my journey with a single step,
One step, then another and another.
Not long after I start my journey, I find a hurdle.
On the other side of the hurdle
I find a friend, a lover and a brother.
Soon hardship or turmoil shows itself;
It blocks my path onward.
After much trial and error
A life lesson is learned.
Again I stumble and find my progress is blocked
By unforeseen circumstances.
And two doors to choose from stand in front of me,
One a comfortable known, the other a chance.
I now begin to question my journey,
My thoughts, my feelings,
My choices, decisions, accomplishments,
My pitfalls, heartaches and slow healings.
Finally I choose the door of chance.
On the other side of this door
I find a stairway called “Hope.”
I notice that each and every step is labeled;
It is also lined by a single purple rope.
On the first step it says “Imagine.”
I then see the following steps labeled
“Life,” “Love,” “Smile,”
“Believe,” “Trust,” “Confidence,”
“Praise,” “Respect,” “Losses” and “Trials.”
“Health,” “Money,” “Security,”
“Dreams,” “Comfort,” “Right” and “Wrong.”
“Aspirations,” “Patience,” “Longevity,”
“Freedom” and “Family.”
The list goes on and on and on
As the staircase climbs upward.
What do these words mean to me?
How can they help me weather the storm?
How do they give my life meaning
And define my journey since I was born?
I then realize it’s not the words alone that define me.
It’s not the meanings or even the definitions.
It is how I use these words to enlighten,
To make a better tomorrow
And better person in every situation.
A better understanding is the staff that steadies me.
It’s the shoes, the clothing and my attitude.
They give me comfort like no other I’ve ever felt,
So now I have a new-born appreciation and gratitude.

This journey I’m on still has a long way to go,
Unwritten chapters, stumbling blocks and happiness,
More people to meet and love.
I will walk this life with a renewed confidence.
I will enjoy this journey step by wonderful step,
Embracing every new glorious day and lesson learned,
Every hurdle by difficult hurdle with a smile,
For the road to a fruitful long life is not easily earned.
This is my journey of life,
And I will make this journey a memorable one.

Third Country Nationals

By Chad M. Gaydos
– Nilwood, IL

Here they come now, two by two, hand in hand.
Jeers from us soldiers for love of fellow man.
I and my rifle in pics of family.
My presence among them, surely blasphemy.
On that day, ashamed to be a soldier,
I’m their brother.
I give them my shoulder, my hand.

Springtime Is Here

By CJ Reeves
VA Medical Center – San Francisco, CA

Springtime is here dressed in green,
Bordered with dandelions, gold and serene.
High in the treetop, a red robin sings,
Happy for springtime is here.

A tall, stately lily nods her white head
To daisy and buttercups asleep in bed.
Wake up, lazy daisy, the white lily said.
Wake up, springtime is here.

A clump of sweet lilacs dressed in full bloom
Shed a fragrance of richest perfume.
The honeybee hums her own special tune,
Happy for springtime is here.

The sweet, little violets in their natural hue
Make a carpet covered in dew
For fairies who dance in pale morning light
And happy for springtime is here.

Symptoms: After All These Years

By Jim Fowler
– Charlestown, NH

I recognize the man at the foot of the bed,
can't remember where. I slide out and go to him.

He takes my arm. Light recoils through the room.
Blind, I stumble forward. Do not hit the bed.

Someone shoves me. I drop to my knees.
Eyesight returns. I kneel in the center
of an enraged mob, so leap to my feet.

They toss me around the circle, chant
Baby killer! War monger! Shove, slap.
Killer! Killer! Thrust, slug, elbow.
Spit slaps my cheek, dribbles down my neck.

The man scurries from behind a counter,
snatches my arm, drags me from the throng,
slips me into the VIP lounge, gives me coffee.

My wife pokes me. "Wake up! You thrashed
the covers off the bed. Wake up!"

I stagger to the living room,
stand at the picture window,
stare at my shimmering reflection.

He saved me in December '71,
LA airport, ticket-counter man.
Me, home from Vietnam,
Twenty years old, too young, too naive
to understand what had happened.

My wife's snores echo from the bedroom.
"Good, she's gone back to sleep.
I don't have to make up a story this time."

The First Glad Easter

By CJ Reeves
VA Medical Center – San Francisco, CA

The first glad Easter morning,
On the first day of the week,
Came Mary and Magdalena
To the tomb where Jesus did sleep.

And as they reached the sepulcher
They saw the stone rolled away.
Stooping, they entered the chamber
And saw his clothes where they lay.

Then a man appeared in white garment
Saying, whom came you here to seek?
He is not here, he is risen.
Then Mary began to weep.

What have you done with the master,
And will you not tell me why?
She heard a voice gently say,
"Come, Mary, why do you cry?"

She gave a cry of rejoicing,
Ran quickly to his side.
Pray, do not touch me, Mary.
I am not yet glorified.

I must return to my father,
His blessing, I must receive.
I shall return to you shortly
And teach others they must believe.

Mary, her heart filled with gladness,
Ran telling the news o'er and o'er,
How Jesus the Savior is risen,
And he is alive EVERMORE.

Author's Note: *Easter is the celebration of all things new again,
and how light and birth again prosper after the dark of winter.*

A Holocaust Survivor's Surprise of a Lifetime

(Continued from Page 2)

When a museum art exhibit featured Australian sketches of Bergen Belsen's liberation, Naylor said, his father's story "deeply connected it together" with Sonia's.

Then came the dilemma of how to tell his chat partner of their historical link. After consulting with Sonia's daughter Regina, Naylor decided to keep it from Sonia until they were on stage together.

"It was then that I had all the threads come together," Naylor said. "It was really emotional for me."

Long, private reflections at home centered on how to steer the discussion toward his surprise without siphoning audience attention from Sonia.

"This is not about me," he thought as he prepared. "This is not about my father. It's about Sonia (and) all those who were in that camp."

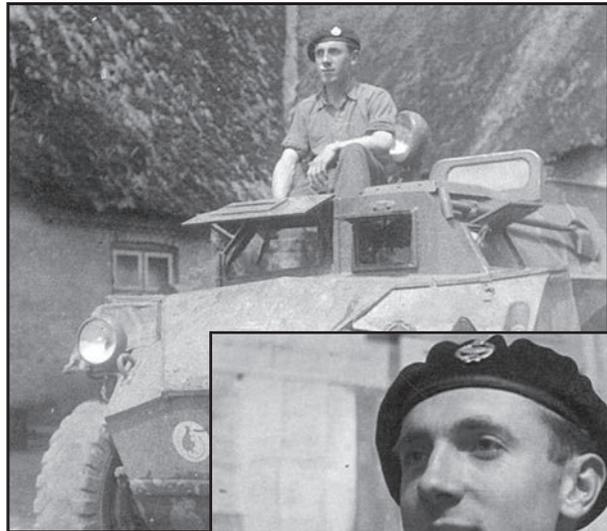
So Naylor meticulously plotted how to guide Sonia through her story in the allotted time while also picking the best moment to unveil their linkage. That came toward the end of the discussion, as Naylor produced a photo of his father in a British Army armored car to spring his surprise on Sonia.

"That moment to me," Sonia later said of Naylor's revelation, "I cannot even describe it. How to be in the right place at the right time...It was just unbelievable."

Audience members still speak of that moment with amazement, sometimes confessing to a rash of goosebumps or even a brief surge of stifled emotion. Most of all, it will always motivate Naylor and Sonia.

"It has been a powerful personal story that connects with people at all sorts of levels," Naylor said. "Because it is a personal story, it has power that carries a different sort of weight. There will be significant learnings which will emerge from this which will give me the capacity to speak and connect with audiences in a way which gives power to whatever I will be talking about. So it will become part of some narratives."

For Sonia, the compassion of Fred and his comrades is just one of several motivating factors that routinely pull her out of the Overland Park tailor shop started by her late husband John and into the community. She gives life to the polyglot message on display at Dachau: "Never Again."



Fred Naylor



It's a role she avoided for many years until hearing radio reports one day of neo-Nazis denying the Holocaust ever happened.

"It was like a thunder to my brain saying, 'Hey Sonia, this is now your duty. This is the reason you survived. This is your answer. You have to go out and speak for those who didn't make it.'"

But on that October day, just a few hours before Sonia and Naylor shared Holocaust stories in a war museum, a gunman killed 11 Jews at a Pittsburgh synagogue.

At age 93, Sonia Warshawski still has plenty of storytelling to do. (The documentary "Big Sonia" is available on Amazon Prime.)

(A video of the entire conversation between Sonia Warshawski and Matthew Naylor is on YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnyM_4JRoII)

Author: *Ted Iliff is a Veterans Voices Writing Project board member and a volunteer at the National World War I Museum and Memorial.*

Mail Call

“Thank you for your work with veterans by helping them express themselves and work through their problems,” wrote **Lori Garland**, WAC Veterans Association, Chapter 56, of Jacksonville, Fla.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

JoAnne Rosseel, Warren, Mich., wrote, “On behalf of my Fraser VFW Auxiliary, we’d like to receive *Veterans’ Voices* magazine.” Their \$35 check was enclosed for a year’s subscription.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Tasha Nienow, psychologist at the Minneapolis, Minn., VA wrote, “Thanks for all the work you do in supporting our veterans’ creative endeavors!” She enclosed a story by a VA patient.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“Wow, such a surprise to see two of my poems published in the 2018 summer issue,” wrote **Diane Wasden**, Augusta, Ga. “I have reached the next level of my therapy by sharing my issues and life stories with others. I have kept all of these memories bottled up inside me for years.

“The story by Richard Wangard, ‘Darkness Can Fall – Darkness Does Fall,’ really spoke to me on so many levels. This magazine really can help in the recovery of our veterans. Thank you for the money (prize award). I am returning it and hope it can help in some way in continuing to get this magazine to all veterans.”

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Deborah Welch, Buffalo, N.Y., emailed, “I enjoyed and learned so much from reading Ron Mosbaugh’s story, ‘My Life as a Christian in Vietnam’ in the summer, 2018 issue. He hit the nail on the head and I sincerely believe the veteran has excellent writing ability and could go further into writing with a book about his experiences.”

And Deborah is right, **Ron Mosbaugh**, Joplin, Mo., has just published a book, “*Marine Down, Corpsman Up (Vietnam and PTSD)*.” It was published by Author House and is available on Amazon books, Kindle Books and Ebooks.

Ron says, “*Veterans’ Voices* published my very first story and many more. You have helped me so much with my low self-esteem which encouraged me to write more stories. My PTSD has created so many psychological problems that I prayed earnestly that I would have a heart attack and simply go away. **Creative writing has saved my life.** There is something about writing your trauma, talking about it and processing it that creates healing.” Ron invites mention and reviews of his book

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dan Yates, Blue Springs, Mo., emailed that he watched the Veterans segments on KCPT and “had a feeling of pride during the portion highlighting *Veterans’ Voices*.”

“In the short time I have been involved, it is easy to see the hard work that Margaret and Pris do. I have told many people.”

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“It has been a while since I have submitted my writing to *Veterans’ Voices*,” wrote **Rickie L. Musgrave**, Peoria, Ill. “I’m going to send you a poem and see if it can be placed in the most special magazine in the world. The VVWP is a very positive way to reach out to veterans suffering from many illnesses. I have a strong belief in Jesus and know that he can change us from negative thinking attitudes to a positive lifestyle.”

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Karen Green, Pahrump, Nev., wrote, “Thank you for publishing my last two poems. *It means a lot to me to have my work in print and I hope my work helps others.*” She enclosed new poems for consideration of publication.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“I’m honored to have my poems published in *Veterans’ Voices*,” wrote **Helen Anderson Glass**, Tucson, Ariz., as she returned her award check to support the program. She reports that she soon will be 96 years old.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Shon Pernice, Moberly, Mo., sent a copy of *Military*, which published a photo of him taken in November 1994, when he was serving with the U.S. Naval Inshore Undersea Warfare Group One-Det Bravo on the Kuwaiti border during Saddam Hussein’s buildup of troops.

Ambassadors Sought

We are looking for individuals to help spread the word about Veterans Voices Writing Project. If you are passionate about *Veterans’ Voices* and want to help tell our story, email your contact information to lkesinger@veteransvoices.org or call us at 816-701-6844 and leave your name and number.

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.

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DAV Auxiliary - State Dept. of Florida, Winter Springs, Fla.

Tina Hacker, Leawood, Kan.

Samuel J. Hall, Albuquerque, N.M.

Network for Good, Washington, D.C.

Ann Ogden, Overland Park, Kan.

VFW Auxiliary 3761, Baltimore, Ohio

VFW Auxiliary 1622, Lomita, Calif.

VFW Auxiliary, Mecosta, Mich.

VFW Auxiliary 10624, Mt. Pleasant, S.C.

Rich Wangard, Neeneh, Wis.

Marianne Watson, Lee's Summit, Mo.

Gifts of \$100 or more

Don Brady, Tampa, Fla.

Hon. Thomas C. Clark II, St. Louis, Mo.

DAV Auxiliary State Department of Missouri, Kansas City, Mo.

Barbara Davidson, New York, N.Y.

Alan J. Foster D.D.S., Blue Springs, Mo.

Maria Kuczarski, Independence, Ohio

Patricia J. Meads, Roeland Park, Kan.

Mary C. Pitchford, Overland Park, Kan.

Ellen Portnoy, Overland Park, Kan.

Virginia A. Schaefer, Kansas City, Mo

John Springer, Bandera, Texas

VFW Auxiliary 1894, Clinton, Mo.

VFW Auxiliary 2224, Puyallup, Wash

VFW Auxiliary 2284, Edwardsburg, Mich

VFW Auxiliary 3057, Westport, Wash.

VFW Auxiliary 3169, Hull, Maine

VFW Auxiliary 4005, Corunna, Mich.

VFW Auxiliary 5252 Pelican Rapids, Minn.

VFW Auxiliary 7327, Springfield, Va.

VFW Auxiliary 7536, Mayfield Heights., Ohio

VFW Auxiliary 7743, Osborne, Kan.

VFW Auxiliary 9963, Walbridge, Ohio

VFW 10624, Mt. Pleasant, S.C.

WAC Veterans Association, Heritage Chapter 62, Weaver, Ala.

Gifts In-Kind

Kansas Audio-Reader Service, Lawrence, Kan.

Kaw Valley Computer, Mission, Kan.

Summit Litho, Lee's Summit, Mo.

The National World War I Museum and Memorial,

Kansas City, 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, artwork or photograph. Published submissions also qualify for special awards made possible by generous donors. Those awards are listed below.

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



FOUNDERS' 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, 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

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

POETRY

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

DAVA, State Dept. of Florida Award \$ 30

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

TH Norton Award: Editor's Choice \$ 25

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

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

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

Medical center administrator nominates; publisher approves \$ 50

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

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

Submission Guidelines for *Veterans' Voices*



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

SUBMIT ONLINE:
www.veteransvoices.org

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

Instructions for Writing Submissions



To submit writing online, go to www.veteransvoices.org/user-registration/ or 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 copying 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:
support@veteransvoices.org
(816) 701-6844

Mail Submission Sample

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

Author Name	_____
VAMC Name	_____
VAMC City, State, Zip Code	_____
Author's Permanent Street Address	_____
City, State, Zip Code	_____
Phone Number	_____
Email Address	_____
Branch of Service	_____
Conflict or Era	_____
Approximate dates served	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> I certify that I served in the U.S. military	
Date Submitted to <i>Veterans' Voices</i>	_____
Title: <i>Example: What America Means to Me</i>	
Text: <i>Example: I consider the United States of America "My Country." This is because I have spent at least 14 years in Europe and in the Far East.</i>	
Writing Aide:	_____
Typist:	_____

Visual Arts Initiative

It is my great pleasure to introduce a new initiative for *Veterans' Voices*, about which I have been thinking for some time. I became acquainted with *Veterans' Voices* about 10 years ago, while I was Chief of Psychiatry and Mental Health at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center. As a psychiatrist, I was immediately impressed with the healing potential of veterans being able to express themselves through poetry and prose. When I learned that donors to *Veterans' Voices* had established monetary awards for the best submissions in various categories, I endowed an award in perpetuity for the best written contributions on the topic, "Restoring My Mental Health." Submissions that have won this award have been thoughtfully written, expressing the deep emotions of veterans who have suffered "the silent illnesses within" and have fought to overcome them.

At the Los Angeles VA, we established several healing programs, including Dance for Veterans and Art Appreciation for Veterans. These programs were well-received, and other VA facilities sought to emulate them. Given the long-standing success of *Veterans' Voices* in publishing veterans' writing, I proposed to the magazine's leadership an expansion to the visual arts, the establishment of which I would support. They eagerly agreed, and thus the "Visual Arts Initiative" begins. This is an exciting expansion of the *Veterans' Voices* mandate to heal and entertain and will provide wonderful opportunities for veterans to additionally express themselves through the visual arts.

As a Vietnam-era veteran, I am deeply honored to help establish the "Visual Arts Initiative," for the benefit of all of America's military veterans. Suitable submissions will be published in the special Fall 2019 magazine and possibly in future issues.

– Robert T. Rubin, M.D., Ph.D.

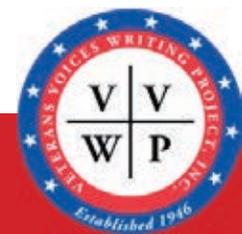


Dr. Robert Rubin grew up in Los Angeles and went to UCLA as an undergraduate. He attended medical school at the University of California at San Francisco, graduating in 1961, after which he returned to UCLA for his residency in psychiatry. He was a LCDR in the U.S. Naval Reserve Medical Corps, 1967-69, during which time he furthered his research on the effects of stress on endocrine glands and hormone systems. Following the Navy, Dr. Rubin returned to academic medicine, holding medical-school faculty positions at UCLA, Pennsylvania State University, and Drexel University. From 2005 to 2013 he was Chief of Psychiatry and Mental Health at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, and from 2013 to 2018 he continued as a VA Staff Psychiatrist. Currently, he is Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

Submission Guidelines

For more than 65 years Veterans Voices Writing Project has provided an outlet for military veterans to experience solace and satisfaction by sharing their stories, poems and artwork. The Visual Arts Initiative that will make its debut in the Fall 2019 issue of *Veterans' Voices*. With the generous assistance of Dr. Robert Rubin, the editors will publish a special centerfold section featuring visual arts created by veterans.

- Entries must be submitted as a digital file, either online or by U.S. mail.
- All art must be original and submitted by a military veteran or active service member.
(List branch of military service and years served.)
- Media may include: acrylic, airbrush, assemblage, casein, charcoal, color pencil, graphite illustration, drawings, ink, oil, pastel, printmaking, tempera, watercolor, and traditional and digital photography.
- An artist statement is preferred to convey the artist's inspiration behind the artwork.
- Image requirements for entries: JPG files (Please try to keep the file size under 5MB to ensure proper uploading). For publication these files should be 300dpi when saved at approximately 8x10 inches (2400x3000 pixels), ideally, and 5x7 inches (1500x2100 pixels) at minimum.
- Submission deadline for the Fall issue will be **August 15, 2019**. After August 15, submissions will be considered on an ongoing basis for subsequent issues.
- If you have questions, contact us at support@veteransvoices.org or (816) 701-6844.



Digital Submissions

Submit artwork as a digital file
either online or by mail.

www.veteransvoices.org

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



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