

# VETERANS' VOICES®

## Pathway to Recovery

“The Benefits of Writing”

*By Cindy McDermott*

---

### The Virgin Soldier

*By Hartley Barnes*

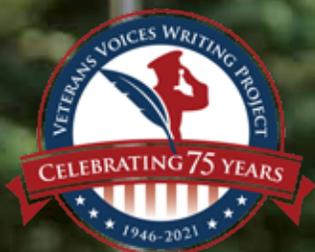
### Conditional Emotional Response

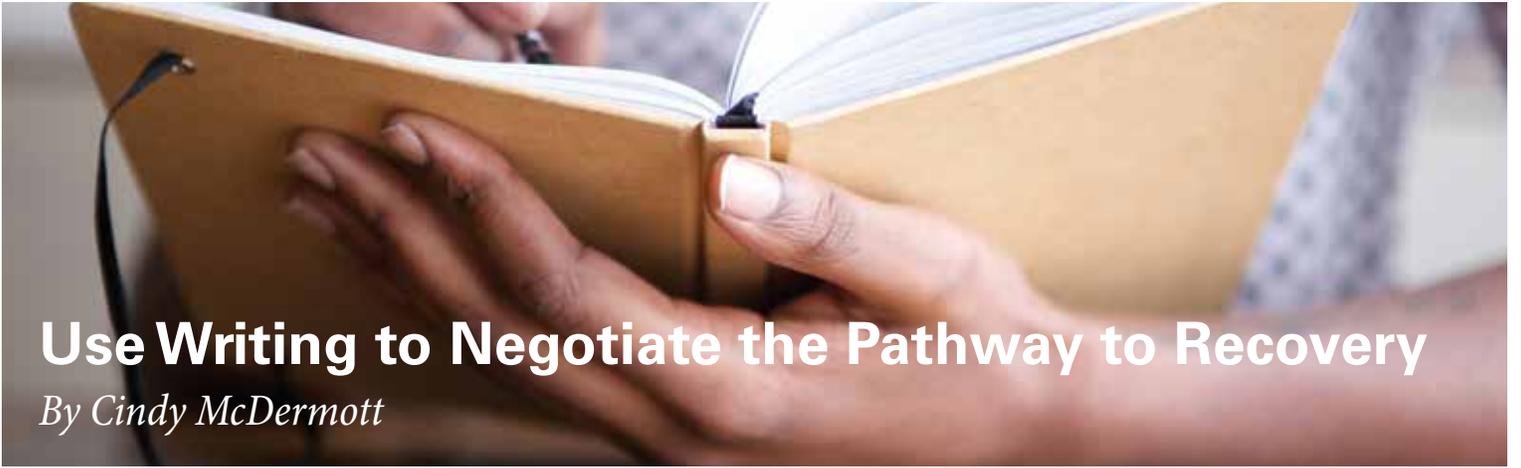
*By Shon Pernice*

### You Came Home

*By Kimberly Green*

---





# Use Writing to Negotiate the Pathway to Recovery

By *Cindy McDermott*

**The mental health community recognizes that writing about life experiences can have a therapeutic impact.**

Many mental health professionals urge their clients or patients to use the creative arts, especially writing, as a part of the healing process. It can be as complex as writing about traumatic experiences or as simple as reflecting on the day. But to begin the restorative effort, memories must be pulled to the surface, which can be painful. Military veterans are no different than the general population and many have been brave enough to use writing to negotiate their pathway of recovery.

The mission of Kansas City Veterans Writing Team is to give past or present military, or their family members, the tools and confidence to develop and tell their stories in a safe, nonjudgmental space. Operating under the nonprofit,

Moral Injury Association of America, this group of veterans, military family members and educators has offered free writing workshops since 2014, educating hundreds of attendees. The workshops are held twice a year, in the spring and fall. The format is usually in-person but due to the pandemic, we have switched to a virtual format. Participants explore approaches to writing including personal stories, poetry, fiction and memoir, along with a focus on self-revision. Each session is facilitated by writers and educators. Manuscript review opportunities also are available.

The need to help military veterans heal from their experiences continues to grow. Governmental data finds that veterans have disproportionately high rates of domestic violence, divorce, homelessness, substance abuse, PTSD and incarceration. We know suicide rates for military personnel have grown steadily since 2014. According to the Pentagon's annual report on suicide, the rate

was 25.9 per 100,000 in 2019, which equates to nearly 500 military members taking their lives. Yet, organizations like Kansas City Veterans Writing Team and Veterans Voices Writing Project can make a difference by facilitating writing opportunities to help military veterans heal.

Veterans can externalize their experiences on paper rather than locking them away internally. Ultimately, writing can encourage them to begin the process of negotiating their brokenness. It is the duty of our communities to help those with the potential to harm themselves, and/or their loved ones, to successfully reintegrate into society. Writing can be a tool to prevent suffering and begin healing.

If you would like to learn more about writing with a purpose to heal or locate a Kansas City Veterans Writing Team workshop, visit their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/kcvetswriting>.

If you are already a military writer and would like to share your writing in print, submit a story or poem to *Veterans' Voices* magazine at [www.veteransvoices.org](http://www.veteransvoices.org).



*Cindy McDermott retired from the United States Navy as a commander in 2006.*

*Within the civilian sector, she worked more than 25 years in employee communications. She was one of the founders of Kansas City Veterans Writing Team in 2013. Reach her at [cindy.mcdermott1245@gmail.com](mailto:cindy.mcdermott1245@gmail.com)*

# Veterans' Voices®

Spring 2021 Vol. 69, No. 1

## Volunteer Staff

### Publisher

The Board of Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.,  
Sheryl Liddle, President

### Editor-in-Chief

Margaret Clark

### Poetry Editor

Tina Hacker

### Prose Editor

Ted Iliff

### Art Editor

Tracy Cheng

### Office Support

Katherine Menges

### Treasurer

Pris Chansky



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

## VVWP

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

## History

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

## Veterans' Voices Reprints

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

## Contact Us

**Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.**  
**406 West 34th Street, Suite 103**  
**Kansas City, MO 64111-3043**  
**Phone & Fax: (816) 701-6844**

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

## Donations

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

## Magazine Subscriptions

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

## Audio Version

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

## Magazine Guidelines

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

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

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

# Veterans' Voices®

Spring 2021 Vol. 69, No. 1

<b>Pathway to Recovery</b> .....	2
<i>By Cindy McDermott</i>	
<b>Mail Call</b> .....	63
<b>Special Prizes for Writers</b> .....	64
<b>Thank You</b> .....	65
<b>Submission Guidelines</b> .....	66
<b>Heal Through Visual Art</b> .....	67

## Prose

<b>Cat's in the Cradle</b> .....	7
<i>By Tom Lauterback</i>	
<b>My First Day in the Field (The Jungles of Vietnam)</b> .....	7
<i>By Louis Ferrari</i>	
<b>First Day in Vietnam</b> .....	8
<i>By Daniel Strange</i>	
<b>Women in the Military History Speech – March</b> .....	10
<i>By Judith Leu</i>	
<b>Dave 3.0</b> .....	11
<i>By David Cahn</i>	
<b>Sunset in the Desert</b> .....	13
<i>By Brant Parker III</i>	
<b>R &amp; R</b> .....	14
<i>By Peter Steciow Jr.</i>	
<b>A Soldier's Wife</b> .....	15
<i>By George Kulas</i>	
<b>Homes for Veterans</b> .....	16
<i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	
<b>Mixed Signals</b> .....	17
<i>By Bill Greenhut</i>	
<b>The University</b> .....	18
<i>By Christopher Bremicker</i>	
<b>Army Dogs</b> .....	20
<i>By C. L. Nemeth</i>	
<b>Testimony of a Homeless Woman</b> .....	21
<i>By Gene Groner</i>	
<b>The Boy</b> .....	21
<i>By Peter Murray</i>	
<b>Umi. Abi</b> .....	24
<i>By Hartley Barnes</i>	
<b>Tuna Fish Hero</b> .....	24
<i>By Tim Brown</i>	

<b>The Virgin Soldier</b> .....	25
<i>By Hartley Barnes</i>	
<b>October 10, 1965</b> .....	25
<i>By James Counihan</i>	
<b>Conditioned Emotional Response</b> .....	26
<i>By Shon Pernice</i>	
<b>A New Family, A New Life</b> .....	28
<i>By Christine Rose Hazuka</i>	
<b>Taking a Stand While Kneeling</b> .....	29
<i>By Melvin Brinkley</i>	
<b>It's Getting Better</b> .....	30
<i>By George Kulas</i>	
<b>I'm FINE</b> .....	31
<i>By James Crissen</i>	
<b>Nothing Can Stop You But You</b> .....	32
<i>By Diane Wasden</i>	

## Artwork

<b>My Grandson</b> .....	33
<i>By Ty Andrews</i>	
<b>America's Mountain</b> .....	33
<i>By Penny Deere</i>	
<b>Flowers Against a Wall</b> .....	34
<i>By Katherine Menges</i>	
<b>Sunset in Biloxi Mississippi</b> .....	34
<i>By Susan Stinson</i>	
<b>Nothing More Needed</b> .....	34
<i>By Katherine Iwatiw</i>	
<b>New Start</b> .....	34
<i>By Michelle Pond</i>	
<b>Strange 7</b> .....	34
<i>By Daniel Strange</i>	
<b>The American Dream</b> .....	35
<i>By Katherine Iwatiw</i>	
<b>Watching the Sunset on a Sunday Afternoon</b> .....	35
<i>By Anthony Phillips</i>	
<b>Growth</b> .....	35
<i>By Michelle Pond</i>	
<b>Strange 4</b> .....	35
<i>By Daniel Strange</i>	

<b>To Drink, to Nurture</b> .....	36	<b>The Imprint of War</b> .....	42
<i>By Katherine Menges</i>		<i>By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt</i>	
<b>Strange 2</b> .....	36	<b>Remember</b> .....	43
<i>By Daniel Strange</i>		<i>By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt</i>	
<b>Strange 8</b> .....	36	<b>I Stand With Jesus</b> .....	43
<i>By Daniel Strange</i>		<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>	
<b>Our Locked Love</b> .....	36	<b>Where Is God</b> .....	43
<i>By Katherine Iwatiw</i>		<i>By Melanie Yvette Jackson</i>	
<b>Enough in This Lifetime</b> .....	36	<b>The Music of Flowers</b> .....	43
<i>By Katherine Iwatiw</i>		<i>By Janice Walker</i>	
<b>Faces of the Homeless 1</b> .....	37	<b>President Lackey</b> .....	44
<i>By Ty Andrews</i>		<i>By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.</i>	
<b>Faces of the Homeless 2</b> .....	37	<b>The Covid-19 of 2020</b> .....	44
<i>By Ty Andrews</i>		<i>By Helen Anderson Glass</i>	

## Poems

<b>About My Drawing</b> .....	37	<b>Getting to Know You</b> .....	44
<i>By Janice Walker</i>		<i>By Helen Anderson Glass</i>	
<b>“Forecaste”</b> .....	38	<b>Big Boy’s Too Cool to Cry</b> .....	45
<i>By Lynn A. Norton</i>		<i>By Paul J. Nyerick</i>	
<b>Vietnam Memories #1</b> .....	38	<b>Fifty Shades of Cray Zay</b> .....	45
<i>By John L. Swainston</i>		<i>By Melvin Garrett Brinkley</i>	
<b>A Better Place</b> .....	38	<b>Lift Thine Eyes</b> .....	46
<i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>		<i>By Wayne Goodling</i>	
<b>Thank a Vet</b> .....	38	<b>Why Can’t We Go Back to School?</b> .....	46
<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>		<i>By Dennis Silas</i>	
<b>Snow</b> .....	39	<b>Virus 2020</b> .....	46
<i>By Ronald P. Grella</i>		<i>By Dennis Silas</i>	
<b>The Old Warrior</b> .....	39	<b>The Wall</b> .....	47
<i>By Brant Parker III</i>		<i>By Elbert Glen Price</i>	
<b>We Got Here About the Time God Left</b> .....	39	<b>The ‘Nam Vet</b> .....	47
<i>By W. Joseph O’Connell</i>		<i>By Elbert Glen Price</i>	
<b>Head Trip</b> .....	40	<b>Why?</b> .....	47
<i>By W. Joseph O’Connell</i>		<i>By Daniel Paicopulos</i>	
<b>PTSD and the Pandemic and Me</b> .....	40	<b>Laughter Most of All</b> .....	48
<i>By Karen Green</i>		<i>By Charles S. Parnell</i>	
<b>My True Hope in Troubled Times</b> .....	40	<b>Queen Zodiac Limozeene</b> .....	48
<i>By Karen Green</i>		<i>By Scott Lehman</i>	
<b>Lucky in Love</b> .....	40	<b>Operation Fury Urgent</b> .....	48
<i>By Frank X. Mattson</i>		<i>By Donna Carol Zephryne</i>	
<b>Fate</b> .....	41	<b>Just for Today</b> .....	48
<i>By Robert John Valonis</i>		<i>By Melanie Yvette Jackson</i>	
<b>Seven Minutes Till Daybreak</b> .....	41	<b>Civil War</b> .....	49
<i>By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.</i>		<i>By Donna Carol Zephryne</i>	
<b>Americans United</b> .....	42	<b>Heaven Is My Home</b> .....	49
<i>By Ronald P. Grella</i>		<i>By Anthony Kambeitz</i>	
<b>My North Star</b> .....	42	<b>Counterfeit Christians</b> .....	49
<i>By Dan Yates</i>		<i>By Anthony Kambeitz</i>	
		<b>You Came Home</b> .....	49
		<i>By Kimberly Green</i>	

<b>I Left My Homestead</b> .....	49	<b>April Fools</b> .....	57
<i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>		<i>By Daniel Paicopulos</i>	
<b>The Cross I Carry</b> .....	50	<b>Runic Love</b> .....	57
<i>By Charles S. Parnell</i>		<i>By Michael Moslander</i>	
<b>Nicholas Goes to Boggy Creek Camp in Florida</b> .....	50	<b>A Soldier's Heart</b> .....	58
<i>By Diane Wasden</i>		<i>By Michael Moslander</i>	
<b>A Stroll Down the Avenue of Misery</b> .....	50	<b>Your Soul</b> .....	58
<i>By Diane Wasden</i>		<i>By Carl Kerwick</i>	
<b>I Can't Breathe</b> .....	51	<b>Drill Sergeant</b> .....	58
<i>By CJ Reeves</i>		<i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>	
<b>Flawless</b> .....	51	<b>The Whippoorwill</b> .....	58
<i>By Robert John Valonis</i>		<i>By CJ Reeves</i>	
<b>Clouds Below Me</b> .....	52	<b>Through the Flowered Fields We Play</b> .....	58
<i>By Anthony Phillips</i>		<i>By Charles L. Carey</i>	
<b>Seeing Through Fingerprints</b> .....	52	<b>Wondering in the Dark</b> .....	59
<i>By Anthony Phillips</i>		<i>By Charles L. Carey</i>	
<b>Abraham and Sarah</b> .....	52	<b>We American Boy Scouts of America</b> .....	59
<i>By Kellie Davenda Daniels</i>		<i>By Anthony Cocozza</i>	
<b>God's Heavenly Honor Guard</b> .....	52	<b>Perseverance</b> .....	59
<i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>		<i>By Kimberly Green</i>	
<b>Our President—Ronald W. Reagan</b> .....	53	<b>The New Year Insight</b> .....	59
<i>By Anthony Cocozza</i>		<i>By John E. Jones</i>	
<b>Mother's Day</b> .....	53	<b>Time</b> .....	60
<i>By Arvell L. Duckworth</i>		<i>By John E. Jones</i>	
<b>A Soldier's Peace</b> .....	53	<b>Dear Marcie</b> .....	60
<i>By Tanya R. Whitney</i>		<i>By Frank X. Mattson</i>	
<b>Day and the Dreams</b> .....	54	<b>The Defiant One</b> .....	60
<i>By Carl Kerwick</i>		<i>By William L. Snead</i>	
<b>A Life in Stone</b> .....	54	<b>He Was the Enemy: A Soldier's Dilemma</b> .....	60
<i>By Tanya R. Whitney</i>		<i>By Jonnie Lynn Donatelli</i>	
<b>The Cat That Came in From the Cold</b> .....	54	<b>The Walking Wounded</b> .....	60
<i>By Scott Lehman</i>		<i>By Benjamin J. Williams</i>	
<b>Gold Star Family Membership</b> .....	55	<b>Take My Hand and Walk With Me</b> .....	61
<i>By Dan Yates</i>		<i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	
<b>With the Change in the Weather</b> .....	55	<b>The Quail Hunt</b> .....	61
<i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>		<i>By Trina M. Mioner</i>	
<b>When Darkness Falls</b> .....	55	<b>Plunder</b> .....	61
<i>By Lawrence William Langman</i>		<i>By Lynn A. Norton</i>	
<b>Choices</b> .....	56	<b>Our Voice Means Something</b> .....	61
<i>By Lawrence William Langman</i>		<i>By Kenneth Harvey</i>	
<b>Old Vets</b> .....	56	<b>The State of the Nation: Various Levels of Pain</b> .....	62
<i>By Michael J. Young</i>		<i>By Charles Marshall</i>	
<b>They Say</b> .....	56	<b>The Leaves Are Green</b> .....	62
<i>By William L. Snead</i>		<i>By Charles Fredette</i>	
<b>Many of Us</b> .....	57	<b>I Left Mississippi</b> .....	62
<i>By Michael J. Young</i>		<i>By Benjamin J. Williams</i>	

## Cat's in the Cradle

By Tom Lauterback  
VA Medical Center—Elgin, IL

It seemed such an impossible task to choose one song from the thousands and thousands I have in innumerable playlists.

I spent more than half of my life as a single parent, custodial with my son and non-custodial with my daughter (800 miles away). When my son was young, say three, I got to appreciate Harry Chapin's "story songs." I saw him in concert five times and grew to appreciate him as a lyricist. "Cat's in the Cradle" became "our song," Kirk's and mine.

I was on airplanes constantly, flying all over the country and I wondered how he processed my frequent absences. Would I have to say, "...my boy was just like me...he'd grown up just like me?"

I suppose I looked for the signs the song warns about. Would he grow to have no time for me? Would he truncate the phone calls? How long would the transition take from asking me to teach him how to play ball to "...y'see, my new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu, but it's sure nice talking to you, Dad...sure nice talking to you."

The song turned out to be only partially prophetic. Like his father, Kirk always worked without being asked or even truly encouraged. He decided that with my schedule he'd have trouble going out for sports teams, and that was a big disappointment for him.

So he worked. Hard. He went from slinging hamburgers and changing light bulbs to becoming an optician. After high school, he attended the local juco for a year, majoring in criminal justice. But the skills he developed selling and fitting eyeglasses drew him to an optician's trade school. He completed two years of a three-year program, at which point he was confident he could pass the certification exam. He nailed it and achieved a national certification, which led him to a chain of optical stores mostly in the Midwest.

As Kirk was celebrating 25 years with the company, it declared Chapter 7 bankruptcy, leaving everything up in the air for employees. Eventually, an angel investor decided to buy the optical business. Kirk was promoted to vice president for operations and took on the task of creating 80 stand-alone optical stores. He is now responsible for over \$100 million in sales and, just like his Dad, is on an airplane every other day.



But, I said the song was only partially prophetic. I do see him every few months, aided by the fact that his girlfriend lives in Chicago.

"The cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon. Little boy blue and the man in the moon. When ya comin' home, Dad? I can't tell you when' ...he said thanks for the ball, Dad, c'mon, let's play. Can you teach me to throw? I said not today...There were planes to catch and bills to pay. He learned to walk when I was away"

Again, only partially prophetic, but at least I can listen to the song without a tear in my eye today. My boy, now a 46-year-old man, grew up a bit like me. But he's shown loyalty, 60-hour weeks, ingenuity and focus. Too bad my father isn't around to assess my career.

## My First Day in the Field (The Jungles of Vietnam)

By Louis Ferrari  
—Cortlandt, NY

I was drafted during the time our country was fighting in Vietnam. After basic training, I was sent to advanced infantry training. I got a leave to go home before going to Vietnam. My company in the First Cavalry Division was on a landing zone (LZ), where a small base was set up and where soldiers got artillery support from howitzers when coming into contact with the North Vietnam Army and Viet Cong.

One morning, we were given our supplies—water, ammo, food, and a few other items. Our packs could weigh anywhere from

55 to 70 pounds. The temperatures were always over 90 degrees, with the humidity around the same percentage. Though most of the time we traveled by helicopter, that day we walked off the LZ into the jungle. While training in the states, we learned about weapons and got physical conditioning. Yet I never had a pack on my back with any weight until I got to Vietnam. So here I was, thousands of miles from home, with a heavy pack on my back, with temperatures and humidity in the 90s, out of the LZ, thinking “I have to do this one whole damn year!”

Thank God for being pretty fit then. While we were walking in the jungle, we were pretty much soaked with perspiration. Nobody wore underwear. Wearing that would just make you wetter.

While walking, I came upon a small log. Trying to go over it, I must have been pretty tired, and I did not lift my foot high enough. I tripped over it and landed on my face. I didn’t get hurt. A few soldiers helped me up. I heard someone radio a call up ahead and say, “Let’s take a five-minutes break. We got a new guy down.”

I thought to myself, “Wow, these guys are some companions.” That caused me to feel good. We then set up for the night. Aside from being awakened for guard duty, I slept pretty well. So that was my experience on my first day in the field in Vietnam.



## First Day in Vietnam

*By Daniel Strange*

*VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX*

It was August of 1967 and I had just turned 18. I was thinking about my future when a bright, new idea came to me. I would join the United States Army and help Uncle Sam.

It was a cool Tuesday morning. My Mom and Dad, the recruiter and I were sitting around the kitchen table. After all the questions were asked and answered, Mom asked the one pressing question my family had. That question, of course, was, “Will my son have to go to Vietnam?” The sergeant quickly responded with a trite “O! No ma’am!” Just like that, I had signed the dotted line.

Next thing I knew I was in basic training at Fort Campbell, Ky. I was learning all sorts of new terms and acronyms. I also learned that my new first name was “Private.” It was “Strange, do this.” or “Private, do that.” My drill sergeants seemed to be stuck on numbers. They were always asking “What is your serial number?” They were always telling us to give them 50. Just numbers, numbers, numbers.

After completing basic training, I was sent to Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo., to receive training as part of the Army Corps of Engineers. At that time, we called it “Little Korea” because the weather was constantly changing, but always bitterly cold. After advanced infantry training, I received orders prior to going home, that I was going to Vietnam. My home visit was short. I was then being shipped out.

I boarded a plane in Oakland, Calif. When I woke up, I was in Vietnam. My God, what a sight! It was like nothing I had ever seen. I scanned the area for a friendly face, but none were to be found, except for the GIs who were on the flight with me. I could see they also had the same puzzled, nervous looks on their face wondering how the hell they wound up in Vietnam. I guess the recruiter lied to their mothers, too.

There were bunkers, choppers, guns, guard towers surrounded by sandbags, metal barriers, concertina wire, and short people dressed in black. And Lord, the smell! The permeating foul odor of fish, diesel, and burning feces turning our stomachs. I wanted to vomit, but that meant breathing in more of the fumes.

This was about the time everyone noticed the sergeant barking orders like he was not just mad at me, but the entire world. The sergeant looked at me and said, “Don’t get too comfortable here. You won’t be staying.” My wandering eyes were still taking in

the new landscape. I noticed some soldiers cooking something in a barrel. The sergeant must have noticed what caught my attention because that nice sergeant read my mind. "Newbie, you will be burning that shit soon enough. Welcome to hell," he said with a smirk.

Not only was I an alien in a new land, but that nice man gave me a new first name. I was no longer "Private" Strange. I was now "Newbie." I was no longer in Kansas anymore. I was in hell and Vietnam at the same time.

And the things I learned as a Newbie! I saw stacks of beer guarded by soldiers. I was both amused and puzzled. He must have seen the puzzled look on my lost puppy dog face, because before I could ask, the sergeant said, "That's liquid gold, Newbie. You'll understand in time." He was right. In time, I did.

We also picked up new terms like "Short-timer." Those Short-timers were really quick to tell us their time in country was almost complete and they would be heading back to the big PX in the sky soon. For good measure, they took extra pleasure in reminding us we were Newbies.

I saw a Short-timer standing close to me as I was taking in all the sights and sounds. He waved me over to him with a cigarette in one hand.

"Come here, I'll give you some advice on how to survive this place. Come on, I do not bite. Take a hit." He handed me the wacky tobacky which I cautiously accepted. I took a hit and coughed and coughed while he laughed. "Give it time, you'll become more accustomed to this shit," he said.

By his tough, confident, almost cocky demeanor and Specialist 5 patch on his sleeve, I could tell he was a Short-timer, a point he made sure I knew more than once. The Short-term Specialist 5 pulled out some of that liquid gold, motioning for me to come into his barracks.

"Come have a beer. I'll give you the ins and outs of this rice paddy," he said. He seemed wise beyond his years, but this could have been due to the beer and grass he so graciously offered. This struck me as funny because he was just a year older than me.

After I left with his pearls of wisdom ringing in my ears and the scent of beer on my breath, we were told to exchange what little money we had from American dollars to what they called "funny money." It looked like Monopoly money. Who knew Parker Brothers got drafted to set up a mint in Saigon? I could not wait to tell my mother. She would be tickled pink.

After a few weeks in country, I started noticing how different the Vietnamese culture was. The language was beautiful but exceedingly difficult to learn. There were paved roads in the bigger cities, but where we were located had much smaller dirt roads congested with bicycles, motorcycles and small oxen-pulled carts.

The roads had rice paddies lining either side and stretching as far as the eye could see. You learned that crossing the street was like a game of chance. This was even worse during monsoon season, but at least others were getting stuck in the mud as well.

The people were very friendly no matter where we went. We always heard, "Hey GI! Hey GI! Chocolate, GI." Occasionally, we gave candy bars to the kids as we rolled through their towns in the deuce and a half. In some regards, I felt bad for how we treated the Vietnamese, even the ones who were our allies. It is like we forgot we were guests in their land. I came to love their differences, but we had way more in common. We were both scared and trying to survive. They bled the same color blood as we did. In the end, they weren't really all that different than us. Just people like you or me.

Those first days in Vietnam were eye opening. There was cooking, shit, fear, witnessing a new people and a new culture. There was also fighting and bullets and bloodshed and deforestation and a lot of talking about "Charlie" and Ho Chi Minh. Even as those first days turned into weeks and weeks lingered into months when I felt my time was getting short, I knew that life would never be the same. I knew that Vietnam would forever make an indelible mark on my mind and psyche.

Sometimes it was for the better, but often I felt the mental scars forming like Uncle Sam and Ho Chi Minh had decided that I would be in a bad arranged marriage from which there was no escape. Nothing and no one who fought on either side or lived there would ever be the same. Some suffered more than others.

The cycle continued. Outside the hospital window, I saw the last new batch of fresh-faced GIs I would see that tour absorbing the sights and sounds and smells with the realization that their recruiter lied to them and their mothers, too. I giggled as they gaggled. I had time to reflect on the brave new world they were entering, but I was grateful that I was being medevaced out of country that night. Those first days, like the last, changed me and my mind forever. Now, I was a Vietnam veteran.

# Women in the Military History Speech – March

*By Judith Leu  
—Renton, WA*

The incentive to create the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) came from Massachusetts Rep. Edith Norse Rogers, who introduced the WAAC bill in May 1941. Action was not taken until after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Much of the opposition to women in the military was based on traditional notions of women's place being the home, the image of the military as a masculine preserve, and fears that women in the military would lead to women in combat. Wartime demands rapidly escalated after Pearl Harbor. As the wartime manpower crisis increased, the importance of women's potential contributions to the war effort became apparent.

Nurses in the military have a much longer history than any other female soldiers and paved the way for the rest of us women in the military by establishing a very respectable record of military service. With the establishment of the Nurse Corps in 1901 through 1941 and the outbreak of World War II, the government and the military were slow to realize the potential value of women in the armed forces. In addition to nurses, the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) were a group of 1,074 brave women who volunteered their flying skills without military rank or benefits during World War II. WASPs were formed in 1943 and disbanded in December 1944. These women ferried military aircraft to depots and shipping points throughout the United States, towed targets for gunnery practice, flight-tested aircraft, and trained young male cadets getting ready to enter combat. Their struggles and achievements went unrecognized until November 1977, when they finally achieved veteran status.

The movement to create the WAAC garnered support from influential women and women's organizations asserting that women had the right to exercise all the responsibilities of citizenship, including military service. The increasing demand for military personnel overcame resistance to women in the military, and military officials realized that WAACs could free men for combat duty. The Women's Auxiliary Army Corps bill passed congress on March 15, 1942. Auxiliary status was not a viable solution for either the Army or the WAAC enlistees. The women were not regular Army, yet they performed Army jobs.

They went overseas but did not have the same benefits as members of the Army if injured. The WAAC volunteers experienced unequal

pay, had no entitlements for dependents, and lacked military rank; their rank actually was AUX (auxiliary). The solution came with the passage of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) bill signed into law on July 2, 1943. WAAC became WAC, and women gained full military status. In the transition, enlistees were given the choice of either joining the WAC or returning home.

It still was not easy to overcome negative stereotypes that centered upon the fact that women had entered the male arena. I'm sure a lot of that exists still today. Women could not afford to be less than 100 percent military, and they had to repeatedly prove themselves and struggle against suspicions of incompetence. Male hostility against women in the military could be formidable and was based upon resentment against women replacing men so that those men could go into combat. Another reason for male animosity was the attention given to higher recruiting standards for the Women's Army Corps, which were far above those of male draftees. When I enlisted, I had to have a high school diploma. I had to have pictures taken (full length and head and shoulders) which were sent to higher headquarters for approval prior to acceptance of my enlistment contract, neither of which were required for male recruits. And, by the way, I used to be young and skinny and kind of cute, so I wasn't surprised when my contract was accepted.

During the eight weeks of basic training in 1963, we worked on something from 0430 until 1900. We had 1900 to 2100 off, for things like laundry, ironing, and spit-shining shoes. Then it was lights out. On Sundays we were allowed two hours for church, or for those not wanting to go to church, catching up on letter writing (we had to prove that we wrote at least once to our folks), or more spit-shining. Wow, did we think we had it tough. We were allowed to look at a man only from his elbow to his shoulder. Of course, that was so we could determine his rank. We were forbidden to even look at a weapon, let alone touch one. In addition to drill and ceremonies (without weapons, of course) classes included application and wearing of makeup, starching and ironing of our skirts so they had absolutely no wrinkles and stood by themselves, and walking like a lady.

When I reached my first permanent change of station post, I was assigned to a WAC company billet with a WAC commander and WAC first sergeant and another company for my work unit with a male commander and a male first sergeant. So we had two separate units to which we were responsible.

Women were not allowed to transfer to any overseas posts except Hawaii (considered overseas even though it was a state of the

union) and Germany. The logic of that one totally escaped me then as it does now. When 1973 rolled around, and we were starting to be treated as real soldiers, we had a little catching up to do—on our own, I might add. In 1973 we were finally allowed into many more military occupational skills, other than just typing and stenography. I was the first female in the Army Security Agency, which doesn't exist any longer.

From 1973 until 1975, going to the firing range was optional for WACs before being required to qualify with weapons in 1976. The infamous “they” gave us at least a couple of years to familiarize ourselves with the tools of our trade so we could take our rightful places alongside our brothers in arms. I grew up around rifles and pistols, so I was pretty cocky when we were actually able to go to the firing range. Never having been to a firing range with pop-up silhouette targets, I had no idea what to expect. Well, having been widowed by war, standing in that foxhole with a weapon that I finally realized was made to kill people and seeing my first pop-up head-and-shoulders silhouette, would you believe that I had nine left over rounds in a 10-round magazine? I know I'm the only one here who's ever done that. I was crying so hard I couldn't see any of the targets. But it ended up to be a pretty good deal for me because I was the only female for quite a while in my unit. All the males acted a little scared and timid around me. My crying gave them a chance to be a big brother to me, thank goodness, and I never had a problem with anybody after that. I qualified as expert with the M16 after that, thanks to their caring confidence in me. When the three-star general pinned the diamond on me in 1975, he told me that I should be proud for the rest of my life because I was the first female to wear the diamond—in other words, the first female first sergeant who could have men in her unit.

Prior to 1975, women were limited by Congress to be no more than 10 percent of the total force (active duty plus National Guard plus Reserve components). That ceiling was lifted when the United States military ended conscription and the armed forces of the United States became an “all-volunteer force.” With no limit on how many women may belong to the armed services, the figure has continued to grow. Today, women are in most units that make up the U.S. armed forces, much more than just secretarial-type jobs that were available for females when I was first in the service.

Although so much of the time I served was spent convincing other soldiers by my actions and performance of duty (mostly command sergeants major and majors) that I was a good soldier and deserved to be treated exactly the same as my male



counterparts, I wouldn't trade one single minute of my years of service for anything else in life. I have so many lifelong friends from the years of my service who fill my life with joy and a wonderful sense of accomplishment. You know, when you're not in contact with a civilian friend for a week, they get irritated with you. When you see a veteran friend, even after many years of no contact, they are glad to see you, and the conversation picks up as though you saw each other yesterday. That civilian friend will take a drink away when they think you've had enough. A veteran friend will see you stumbling all over the place and tell you “You'd better drink the rest of that before you spill it.” Then they'll take you home and put you to bed.

## **Dave 3.0**

*By David Cahn*

*VA Medical Center—Wilmington, DE*

You only accept the love you believe you deserve. It's been a while since my discharge. I still feel the physical and emotional toll from the myriad deployments. Like many vets and others who have gone through periods of extreme trauma, I too often struggle to maintain my sanity.

Hypervigilance and anxiety are what kept you alive and made you a better warrior. It's not what you did while ordered; it's what you did when not ordered to do it. The strong desire for violence was proper, and we did it well. The reality of conflict is not what the public generally sees on TV. On the ground we win wars. Once home we learned through various means and actions that continued thoughts of proving yourself through fighting are mentally unhealthy.

After going through a distinctly horrendous tragedy, I felt



intimate relations were similar to the Love Boat meets Somali pirates. In my mind there was no room for innocent relationships. I was too full of bitterness, distrust and misery for any other heart. I felt when life gives you lemons you squirt it in the eye. I thought I had buried it all.

Through the good people at the VA and an amazing lady, I now fully understand that the suicide attempt afterglow only lasts for so long. The time has come for an internal cease-fire. I have blown those thoughts away, and hopefully they are gone forever.

While I was living in my new world, a lovely lady walked out of the light. Scientists say we only use 10 percent of our brains. The same went for my heart until I met the elegant Celly. Intelligent, charming, beautiful, delightful, full of wisdom, well versed in human behavior, physical fitness as well as a host of other matters and well spoken, possessing an enchanting melodic voice. She was so much fun and alive with adventure. In her impish smile there was something more beautiful than the stars. Even her posture was perfect.

Without my knowing, Celly brought me out of the darkness. I invited her into my empty heart. I even went to the extent of introducing her to my few remaining friends because I wanted her entirely in my world. For her I, if I could, would have taken the moon out of the sky and presented it to her just to see her smile. Essentially, together we put the hot in psychotic.

I felt like a ghost before I met her. This special person made me feel exceptional. For the first time since too long, I felt alive. Just being around Celly was amazing. Together we laughed, loved, ran, took trips, held hands, watched movies, spoke of our past

and future plans, joked, dined, waited for her to finish work (very much worth waiting for), pampered each other, shared secrets, cared for each other, looked into each other's eyes saying nothing yet knowing what we meant to each other.

Whenever I thought of Celly I smiled, and I smiled a lot. Yes, smiled—something that was missing from my profile. I found that in lieu of ruminating about lost comrades, I was thinking of her alluring soft eyes that could melt titanium. Instead of dreams of rocket-propelled grenades a few feet from my position, enemy mortars so close I could hear their rounds going down the tubes, and the yells and screams of men, not knowing if they were ours or theirs, I dreamt of her amazing ways as just one of her many weapons.

I kid you not, to this day I still try to keep everything wired tight, musing on too many of us having been tagged and bagged. Some nights I'm still not getting many Zs. Yet, carrying me away from the tribulations are the thoughts of wonderful Celly. My previous dreams were replaced by a tranquility I didn't even believe existed. With Celly I could live in the quiet mind once again.

Overseas, when one sees an inbound shipment of body bags, you know what that means. Sometimes the thought crosses your mind: at least it's a ride home. Those notions do not go away easily. Every time seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking and best of all being with Celly annihilated those negative impulses and the emotional bricks collapsed. When I held beautiful Celly in my arms we were one. We were safe. Celly literally was a dream come true. I was even beginning to believe that with love for a good woman, all things are possible.

We have learned to avoid self-harm, yet we can still self-sabotage, ultimately ending in destruction. We have learned how to take physical pain. It's the emotional turmoil that throbs real bad. Let it be known that Celly is brimming with intestinal fortitude and is emotionally, morally, and physically as strong as any military person I've met. No one would call Celly quiet. She has a brilliant mind and does not hesitate to use it. When she speaks no one is able to not love her. Angels never hide their gifts; people just fail to see them. I was at one point all a gentleman could be, full of integrity, thoughtfulness, feeling and caring, Dave 1.0.

After the last tragedy I became something much less, a Dave 2.0. To live is to make mistakes. I thought with Celly I found my path. Through my actions and my actions alone I blew it. Bewitching Celly and I are no longer together. You don't know what you have until you lose it, and that is so true of relationships made in heaven. All the colors have faded since she's been gone. The feelings we felt and the many times we laughed are now

a memory. You drown not by hitting the water. You drown by staying submerged. I am adrift. I now realize where my heart truly lies, and I'm becoming a new Dave, a Dave 3.0. All the greatness of 1.0 with the experience, knowledge and tragedy of 2.0. The new Dave 3.0. For those veterans and others fighting internal demons, know this: at times when we push those we care about away, that's when we need to be resisted.

---

## LARRY CHAMBERS SPIRIT AWARD

---

### Sunset in the Desert

*By Brant Parker III*

*VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, Ohio*

I was in the U.S. Army, 10,000 miles away from home, and had been deployed to Operation Desert Shield/Storm. As on so many other nights, I prepared to take my turn on guard duty, and this night was no different. My buddy Paul and I were lucky, which is odd to say considering we were in the middle of a combat zone. But this night we were assigned to the 50-caliber on an APC. We were on point for our firebase. Our duty started at 1800 hours, so we headed out to relieve other guards for the night rotation. After guard change, we arrived at our post at 1805 hours and took our position for the night.

Paul sat in the driver's hatch, and I sat in the TC position manning the 50-cal. As we settled down into our positions, day was ending, and night was slowly enveloping us and everything around us. The sun had started to set, and neither Paul nor I paid much attention to it as it slowly sank behind the horizon. We were too busy talking. When Paul and I got together, we always talked about the "world." Although we were soldiers on active duty in a war, neither one of us considered that we would not be rejoining the world we had left behind. It was a pleasant diversion to talk about what we were going to do when we got back home. We talked about our favorite foods we were missing and how we were going to eat as much of them as we possibly could when we got home. Then there was the beer we were going to drink, and which brands were the best and inevitably we shared stories about being drunk and stupid. Finally, the conversation would get down to the women we were going to chase once we left this hot, gritty piece of hell. There was never any doubt that we would be going home at some point.

Suddenly, I noticed the sky and prodded Paul to look. It looked as if an unseen hand had just painted the air as if it were a piece of giant canvas. The colors were so vibrant. The majestic purples complemented the brilliant royal blues. Streaks of rosy

pink shimmered like diamonds on this masterpiece in the sky. A few billowy, white clouds made a background for this awesome scene. The sun was glowing a fiery orange red, almost like a giant pumpkin ready for the carving knife. As the sun slowly, slowly made its final descent into the western sky, the brown, desolate desert sand seemed to magically transform into a sea of shimmering shards of light. In those few fleeting moments everything around us seemed to come together and create the most magnificent sunset I had ever seen in my life. Never in a million years would I have imagined such a breathtaking sunset in one of the most dangerous places on earth during one of the most perilous times of my life. Paul and I sat together in that APC and watched in silent amazement until darkness blanketed the daylight. I tried, without any success, to recall a time in my life when I had ever seen such an extraordinary sunset. That night I felt as if I had been a witness to the power and majesty of the Almighty. My thoughts turned to God and I thanked Him for all the gifts He had given me.

For many years after that incredible night, Paul and I would refer to that amazing sunset. We wondered if we would ever again get the chance to see another spectacular sunset. Many years have passed, and I am now retired from military service. I often reminisce about that night of guard duty with my buddy Paul and that incredible desert sunset. I am certain I have never seen another one like it, and it is probably safe to say I never will again.

During that troubling and most dangerous time of my life, I wondered if that sunset was a sign from God wanting me to appreciate His grandeur that I had taken for granted. Was that His way of quietly telling me things would be OK and I would make it home? Honestly, I will never know. But when it comes time for me to leave this world, I hope I get one more chance to see that memorable and beautiful sunset on my final journey home.



## R & R

*By Peter Steciow Jr.*

*VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH*

Leaving my brothers to continue the search-and-destroy grind while I was off seeking out a new experience seemed unfair. But I had earned this leave having survived my share of many serious scrapes with the enemy.

The flight out of Vietnam seemed totally foreign, exciting and liberating. Landing in Tokyo to begin my R&R, all the bright lights, noise, music and masses of people were unnerving. I was not sure how I should respond to my new freedom. At the firebase, there were no unnecessary noises or lights. The focus was on the barbed wire fencing and any enemy movement outside the berm. Our location so near to the Ho Chi Minh Trail made an encounter with a large incursion of the enemy a real possibility.

Trying to make the most of my limited amount of time, I signed up for several tours. One tour was of Mount Fuji and the surrounding area. Mount Fuji is 12,000 feet tall. When I was there, the mountain was snow-capped. The sight was very pretty and looked just like all the advertisements I had seen. It is easily visible from all the steam baths that are extremely popular with the Japanese and foreign tourists in route to Mount Fuji.

Another trip was to the geisha houses, where I enjoyed the beautiful costumes and elaborate shows. I appreciated this excursion much more after I returned from Vietnam and read the book, "Memoirs of a Geisha." Much work goes into being a geisha, and these women devote their whole life to self-sacrifice and pleasing the customer.

Being a tourist from Ohio resulted in some interesting conversations. Everyone would politely ask me where I was from, and I would reply Ohio. The name Ohio sounds like o-hay-o which means "good morning" in Japanese. Usually my response would be met with puzzled looks and a repeat of their question. After three rounds of this puzzlement, they would smile politely and move on, likely thinking I was crazy.

I could not visit Japan without indulging in some shopping for electronics. The Japanese had put their focus on quality and became world leaders in sound and photographic equipment. Just like New York's Times Square, Tokyo was lit up with huge neon

signs advertising Sony, Canon, Nikon, and Toshiba. Prices were expensive, and there was no bargaining for these highly sought-after branded products. I purchased a Nikon portrait box camera, which then required film.

The trip also included a visit to one of the many custom tailors who specialized in selling to tourists. These tailors would carefully measure combat soldiers who were bean-pole lean and craft them a beautiful suit that was typically sent back home to the United States. When those skinny soldiers returned to mom's home cooking, suddenly those beautiful suits were a bit snug.

I left Tokyo as the proud owner of not one, not two but three custom-tailored suits. Each one was masterfully crafted with the highest quality material. They were of such high quality that I wore those suits throughout my college days. Everyone commented on them including the sharkskin one.

While I was in Japan, my brother, who was on the aircraft carrier USS Ranger, was going to be in port. Although I was not certain if I would be able to see my brother, I made plans to take the bullet train from Tokyo to Sasebo and the naval port where the Ranger was to dock. The train was aptly named a bullet train because it traveled at 150 miles per hour. In 1969 that was quite an accomplishment. The speed and quiet of the train were amazing.

When it was time to sleep, the conductor came through and in Japanese announced it was time to go to bed. Suddenly like a swarm of angry bees, people poured out of their suites, changed their clothes in the aisles, and in a flash climbed into their berths. I was left standing in the aisle, still in my street clothes with everyone peering at me from behind their berth drapes. My embarrassment was intense. I quickly changed into my pajamas and as I climbed into my berth, I vowed this would not happen on the return trip.



Long before today's instant communication and cell phones, people reached out to each other via a letter or a phone call made from a landline phone. Fortunately, I was able to find a phone and reach my brother. We spent a memorable weekend together before the Ranger was deployed to the Gulf of Tonkin.

My brother and I had a good time being with each other. Neither of us talked much about our recent experiences but were mindful of the moments we spent together. Although my brother was not much for pictures, I was able to manage to get a few of him. I sent these to our mother with hopes they would allay her fears if only for a few moments.

A special moment that weekend was when my brother and I managed to call home to mom and dad. Although the call was just five minutes, that link to home was worth the money. Despite the expense there always seemed to be someone else who wanted to use the pay phone.

The time had come for me to say goodbye to my brother. My leave was over, and I had to catch the flight out of Tokyo back to Vietnam. Before I knew it, I was on an Eagle flight leading my men on another search and destroy mission. It was as if my recent R&R had never happened.

I would never again spend as much time with my brother as I did on that R&R in Japan in 1969. I lost him in 2014, but memories of that leave and our weekend together live on forever.

## **A Soldier's Wife**

*By George Kulas  
—Fond du Lac, WI*

My sergeant major handed me a scrap of paper with the number 667 written on it. He shook my hand and said, "Congratulations, you made the E-9 list."

I felt like I was on top of the world. All the hard work and sacrifice had finally paid off. I had made it to the top; E-9 (sergeant major) was the goal I had been striving for during most of my career.

I immediately called my wife with the good news. She told me how happy she was. She said all the correspondence courses, schools, perfect scores on physical training tests and evaluation reports finally paid off for me.

It wasn't until I hung up the phone that I realized I forgot to thank her. I called her back and said, "Honey, I want to thank

you for all you've done for me. The stripes are as much yours as mine."

She said, "Don't thank me. You did all the work." She didn't realize how much she had done, and I was beginning to realize how much I had taken her for granted all those years.

My wife was born and raised in Plymouth, a small Wisconsin town. She was her parents' youngest daughter, and they hoped she would be the one to stay near home and help them in their older years. I robbed her and them of that; when she was 20 years old, we were married and off to Okinawa.

I had enlisted in the Army as a private after being out of the Marine Corps for three years. I had served on Okinawa after a tour in Vietnam, so I knew what to expect. My wife had never been farther from home than Illinois and hadn't planned on leaving Wisconsin, but she loved me and wanted to be with me.

We lived in a small one-bedroom shack in Sobe, Okinawa. We couldn't live in government quarters because I was not on a command-sponsored tour. I loved my job, participated in numerous sports, made soldier of the month/quarter, and was promoted several times ahead of schedule. I spent numerous hours at night completing correspondence courses to learn more about my job and the Army, as well as to collect more promotion points. I was enjoying myself, and my future looked bright.

What was my wife doing all this time? Doing what I took for granted. We didn't have a washing machine, so she washed our clothes by hand in 100-degree heat inside our shack. The windows were kept open, allowing many of the local creatures to enter freely, keeping my wife busy playing bug-zapper.

We didn't have an automobile, so my wife made many trips on foot to the exchange and commissary, lugging the goods back home. Although our stove was only a hot plate, the meals she made beat the mess hall. I'd come home every evening to a home cooked meal. Having worked all day in an air-conditioned office, I was still full of vigor and vitality. I couldn't understand why my wife was always tired. Looking back now, I can't believe she didn't leave; I am fortunate that she didn't.

After 18 months we finally left Okinawa. My wife endured many other hardships during the next 16 years. She came along when I was assigned to Korea on a one-year hardship tour, not just once but twice. There she didn't even have commissary or exchange privileges, and our living conditions on the economy were no better than on Okinawa.

She made my tours a great deal easier. I could put all my energy into my job and always had her to come home to at night. She cried whenever I had to depart for a new assignment without her, once with tears flowing asking, “Why do we have to live like this?” I don’t remember how I answered, but I know because we lived like that, today we can better appreciate and value our American way of life.

When I retired in July 1990 we went back to Wisconsin, and then, like they always wished, my wife’s parents had her to care for them. I owed her that much and more. All the stripes, medals, certificates and honors were just as much hers as mine.

A plaque I gave her when I retired was a small token of my appreciation for all she had done: “To my wonderful wife, in appreciation for the love and support you provided me throughout my military career; I couldn’t have done it without you. I love you.”

## Homes for Veterans

*By Gene Allen Groner*

*VA Medical Center—Kansas City, Missouri*

There are more than 40,000 homeless veterans in the United States. A group of veterans in Kansas City, Mo., is doing something to change that. Let me tell you about the Veteran’s Community Project and how it is making a difference.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, “The most effective programs are community-based, non-profit veterans helping veterans’ groups. Programs that seem to work best feature transitional housing with the camaraderie of living in structured, substance-free environments with fellow veterans who are succeeding at bettering themselves.”

Founded in 2015 by three combat veterans, the Veteran’s Community Project is a not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to ending veteran homelessness. It provides for small, 280 square-foot houses that are similar to base housing and are built on a five-acre piece of land known as “the village.” There are about 50 houses in the village. They serve as homes for veterans with no place to live and provide housing that is better than a shelter or an apartment, especially for veterans with anxiety or PTSD.

All of the homes are fitted with new furniture, kitchen utensils, and a fully stocked refrigerator. Veterans normally stay about 12-24 months in the homes, and when they move out they can take the

items from the house, including appliances, if needed. The houses serve as important transitional homes and help set up the veterans for success in the community when they leave the village.

The non-profit partners with the local community to help provide free dental care and other professional services. In addition to the houses, the project has a new 5,000-square-foot community center that provides case management, counseling, healthcare services, social and community-led programs, and education for the veterans in the village.

Due to the success of the project, more than 100 other cities in the nation have asked for help in setting up similar villages. The non-profit plans another village project in Longmont, Colo. and then plans to expand to many more cities over the next three years. Their hope is to go nationwide in the coming years, giving dignity back to so many veterans who had lost hope.

According to their mission statement, “Veterans Community Project is dedicated to supporting every man and woman who took the oath for our country. We are determined to make a difference in the lives of homeless veterans, a task accomplished by the community for the community.”

*Author’s Note: My heartfelt desire is for others to get involved in helping the homeless veterans in their local communities. We can all do something to make a difference. Learn about the problem, find a group that is helping, then volunteer in any way you can. If you are unable to volunteer, then make a donation: Time, talent, treasure, every little bit helps. God bless you for caring.*



# Mixed Signals

By Bill Greenhut

—Ossining, NY

“Why are you pushing it?” my distraught mother argued. I had just informed her that I was enlisting in the Marine Corps for officer training with two of my fraternity brothers. After all, I was about to be a college grad, and what was a diploma worth during wartime if not a commission? But when I told her I was going with them, the first thing she must have thought about was the death of my brother in a car accident some years earlier, distant in time but never far from the portrait that hung just there, in the living room. “There gonna get me sooner or later,” I replied. I could tell by the stare she reserved only for me that she was neither convinced nor satisfied. So, guilt being stronger than my will to defy her, ixnay to the Marine Corps.

My next attempt was Coast Guard officer training. I figured, in her mind, the personal safety quotient would be much higher. I took the exam and passed. Then I sat in a waiting room to be interviewed, a Princeton Tiger on one side, a Yale Bulldog on the other. If my Adelphi Panthers had a fight song, that may have been the time to sing it. The first question from one of the board members was, “How much experience do you have handling small boats?” That’s when I realized I was not Coast Guard bound.

I was running out of options. My time was limited; I had been receiving monthly questionnaires from the draft board as to my student status, and as soon as it changed, I was summoned to report for my pre-induction physical. I enlisted, trading an extra year (two if by draft, three by enlistment) for a choice of military occupation specialty. I chose the Signal Corps, to be trained as a communications specialist. I had no idea what that meant.

But I just wasn’t destined for signal school. Between the time I signed the forms and entered the Army, I became engaged and was determined to support my future bride on an officer’s salary. Six months in, basic and advanced infantry training just concluded, I was at Ft. Dix, N.J., adrift without orders.

Having been designated an “OCS holdover,” I was awaiting an opening in an officer candidate school. I was given a temporary stripe as a private first class and assigned to a training company for drivers and clerks, counting heads and herding them from classroom to classroom. The duty demanded little. Monotony and boredom dragged me along with them.

Because I anticipated leaving, hopefully soon, it was a bother to sew the PFC stripes on my fatigues. The company commander called me into his office.

“Why haven’t you got the stripes on your uniform?” he wondered. “I won’t be here long, sir,” I told him. “If you look like a private, I will treat you like a private.” Heeding his warning, I sewed them on that evening. The following day, he informed me that, if I was willing to commit to Infantry Officer Candidate School rather than wait for an opening elsewhere, I would be granted immediate leave and a reporting date for Fort Benning, Ga. Eager to move along with a purpose and end the uncertainty of waiting, I accepted.

Capt. Billy Lee Moore emerged from the barracks and stood beaming at us. He slowly raised his arms to intensify the crescendo of noise emanating from the assembled officer candidates responding to his silent exhortation. The company commander probably assumed we, whom he had ordered to convene in the courtyard, were expressing adulation toward him when, among us, we referred to this oft-occurring display as “false enthusiasm.” We had no choice but to comply. Failure to meet his expectation with our collectively rising basso profundo would result in repeating the process until it satisfied his ego, which we had learned early in our tenure, knew no bounds.

On this day, the noise we generated before him was in genuine anticipation of Billy Lee’s revelations of our next postings and, perhaps, our destinies upon graduation a few weeks ahead. Once he lowered his arms and the decibels dissipated, he grabbed the list from the first sergeant and, starting with the As, began reading the assignments we were so anxious to hear. A sprinkling of candidates with physical limitations, precluded from combat roles, were assigned to further training in finance, supply, or personnel.

As expected, familiar basic training venues all over the United States were rolled out. We, designated by the Military Occupation Specialist Code number 1542, “Infantry Unit Commander,” would fulfill a requirement of four to six months, probably as company commanders, in an administrative setting before we were entrusted with the responsibility for troops in a combat zone. In anticipation of several months of a stateside posting, I was to be married three days after graduation.

He called my name and bellowed “Korea.” I was stunned. I had no fear of serving in Vietnam; after all, I was young and trained tough. But Korea was an unknown quantity about which I was emotionally unprepared and confused.

Because Korea was not a combat zone, no administrative command time was required. Three weeks after the wedding, I was gone. But without knowing my final destination in country, the possibility that I could send for my wife once I settled in was something we could consider. I arrived on a Friday in late May and spent a pleasant weekend in the capital city, Seoul. On Monday, I boarded a bus sent by the Second Infantry Division. The driver wore a flak jacket and had a helmet and M14 rifle near at hand. The two-lane road was flanked by rice paddies occupying every segment of flattened, flooded earth stretching for miles before meeting the mountains. White-clad farmers with bare feet in dark muddy water rising above their ankles were stooped over walking backwards, planting green chutes by hand. Here and there, the bus veered around loaded oxcarts, what we would come to know as “honey wagons.” The countryside reeked of manure.

We passed through small villages—huts of primitive construction, others with cinder block walls, all with thatched roofs. I was transported so far north that there was not much left to South Korea. Within a few days, I was involved in operations along the Demilitarized Zone, dashing any hope of my wife joining me.

Combat operations were conducted all day, every day. I progressed from a platoon leader in a rifle company of a mechanized infantry battalion to company executive officer, then on to battalion anti-tank platoon leader and, finally, officer-in-charge of the battalion tactical operations center. I read about Vietnam in the military newspaper “Stars and Stripes,” but it was about as far away in my everyday thoughts as was my original enlistment commitment to the Signal Corps.



On April 1, 1968, by act of Congress, the Korean DMZ was designated a ‘hostile fire zone.’ The \$65 a month pay increase for each of us was what the government calculated as the worth of a soldier engaged in risky business. During my 13-month tour, I had two weekend passes and no mid-tour leave. On April 25, the anniversary of my commission as a second lieutenant, my promotion to first was worth approximately \$50 more per month. I’m sure my mom would agree: The Army got its money’s worth from me.

## The University

*By Christopher Bremicker  
VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN*

The train rounded a bend and approached Stadium Village Station. I was in the last car and could see the lights of the front car as we turned and passed the Twin Cities Federal stadium that loomed dark in the morning night. The train stopped, the doors opened and shut, then we turned again and rolled slowly toward campus.

We passed a pizza parlor, Bank of America branch, Brugger’s Bagels, Walgreens, then Caribou Coffee Shop, all lit up in the dark. The train clackety clacked along the rails, its wheels hammering the steel, and the couplings screeching when the train buckled or turned. The conductor stopped the train at the East Bank Station and I got off, pulling on my backpack and walking to Starbucks, checking for traffic then crossing the street to the coffee shop that had no seating due to Covid19.

Starbucks was takeout only. I ordered a cold press then took it to the Graduate Hotel next door, where I plugged my laptop into an outlet on a shiny oak table that stretched 40 feet in the lobby under little reading lamps that tilted for more or less light.

There was no one in the hotel except the concierge, the girl at the front desk, and the cleaning lady, who dusted the table around me. One girl worked on her laptop at a table near a burning fireplace, and a few people walked by me as I worked on my paper for school.

The paper was not a disaster, although I did not write academic papers well, and I fine-tuned it and tried to get it to make sense. I used the restroom, noticed the restaurant was closed and that half the seating in the lobby was closed, too. I checked my watch, saw it was almost 7 a.m., and packed up my stuff to walk to Coffman Memorial Union.

It was still dark outside. A single student crossed the street ahead of me, and three girls crossed the street by the medical building, but they were the only people I saw on either side of the street. The union was empty, too, but I grabbed a seat in the lobby, plugged in my laptop, and began to work on the paper again. I had reading to do—the book on black power—but preferred to write for a while. The university had redone the lobby for the virus, and instead of four big reading chairs for every table with outlets, there were two chairs, and they were spaced diagonally at least six feet apart. The escalator hummed mechanically, but no one was on it and no one passed by me, or even came in one of the five, heavy, bronze doors.

The technology office was open, but the two students who manned it looked like they were doing their homework. I got hungry and decided to see if the food court downstairs was open. I packed up my stuff, careful not to leave anything, took the escalator downstairs, and found Einstein Bros. Bagels was open, where I ordered a bagel with cream cheese. I took it to a big chair by a window near a plant in the food court, where I collapsed into the plushness of the chair. It was messy eating the bagel while reclining, and I moved to a table where I finished the bagel that was liberally spread with cream cheese. It was not noon yet, and I was the only one in the food court. Then I went to Walter Library, over the bridge that crossed Washington Avenue, along the edge of the mowed lawn of the mall, past the monolithic chemistry building to the library, where I inserted my student ID card into a card reader that opened the big, scrolled, bronze door with a click. The ceiling of Walter, with lit chandeliers, was ornate and carved and painted in a style I did not know.

I walked up the marble steps, their balustrades thick marble, too, to the front desk, where the librarian told me the coffee shop downstairs was closed. I walked through the outer room, with one girl at her laptop at a desk among 10 other desks socially distanced, into the reading room, where I picked out a table in the back, next to the shelves of Ph.D. theses. I was the only one in the library. The reading room was the size of a football field and walled by volumes of the work of graduate students that went back 100 years. I noticed one girl studying at the corner of a huge table with reading lamps all along it. I began to read the book I brought and found it well written and interesting. The proponents of black power believed in self defense as well as political, economic, and social power for black people. They did not propose assimilation into white society but preferred being proud, educated, well housed, and fed. The black establishment existed with the permission of white men, and cities like

Tuskegee offered deference to whites who controlled the town politically. I did not like studying alone. There was not a soul in sight, and finally, after getting one chapter read in the book, I packed up and returned to Coffman, where Chick-fil-A was open, and I bought a sandwich. I took the sandwich and a bottle of milk to a table in the food court where the sun shined on its surface and a green coaster claimed the table was sterilized. Five maintenance men ate at a table near me, seeming interested why a man my age would be in college. I did not inform them I was back in school as a reaction to George Floyd's death.

I savored the Chick-fil-A sandwich, let the sun warm me, and enjoyed the milk, the taste of which I loved. Then I wandered into the bookstore, looked at the books that the students were showcasing, like self-awareness books, novels by black writers, and fantasy, which I did not read, finding Tolkien intolerable. I went back upstairs to the lobby, sat down in one of the big reading chairs and began to work on the paper again.

A piano player started in the corner but did not play to the crowd he was used to. A few pretty girls walked by who found my interest in them offensive, and I noticed I must be older than last year when I attended college and the girls seemed to invite my glances. Now, they thought my interest in them out of place. Then I walked to Wilson Library, which was located on the West Bank, on the other side of the river across a footbridge that ran above Washington Avenue and the route of the light rail. Three students were on the bridge, and I looked at the drop to the river below, remembered the poet John Berryman's suicidal leap to the ice in the '70s and enjoyed the walk, as I trundled along with my backpack making me lean forward. The weather was warm and there was a slight breeze. West Bank was a ghost town of a brick courtyard, locked classroom buildings and outdoor tables where two girls sat having lunch they brought with them. Wilson Library was locked, and I got in with my student ID by pulling the door open to coincide with the swipe of the card. The librarian was alone at the desk, doing nothing, it seemed, and I walked upstairs to the third floor, knowing where to go. My legs felt the weight of my laptop on the steps, and I was the only person on the third floor.

Each table had one chair at it, and there were little signs saying not to sit at the other places at the table. I used one of the library's computers, found the books I wanted in the catalogue, then searched for them myself, since I was a librarian's aide in an earlier life. I was out of practice; it took me a while, but I succeeded in finding two books that would do the trick, both about the Freedom Rides, the almost suicidal trips by students

through the deep South to integrate public facilities in bus terminals in America. I checked out the books with a system that kept the librarian from touching them, and she said I could have them for two months and to “enjoy.” I left the library, opened its heavy doors, and walked under big maple trees that cast shade on the brickwork to the steps that took me to the light rail station to take me home. The coffee shop in Wilson was closed, too, and there was nowhere to hang out at school except the lobby of Coffman.

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities has one of the largest student bodies in the United States and there were no more than one hundred students on it right now. This was fall semester, all our courses were remote, and spring semester, according to the president of the university, promised more of the same. Covid19 was rampant and I had the campus to myself.

## Army Dogs

*By C. L. Nemeth*

*VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM*

In my short army career, I recall two stories about dogs. Since Captain Rush outranked Lieutenant Barrett, I will start with his dog, Pouli. Stationed in Germany, we were living in a new barracks. It had the mess hall and all offices on the main floor. The second and third floors housed us soldiers, while the fourth floor was the bachelor officers’ quarters.

Access to the upper floors was provided by a stairwell in the center of the barracks. This stairwell was open with tile floors and steps. Any noise made in the stairwell was immediately transmitted to all floors. It was almost impossible to enter the barracks or climb the stairs without everyone in the building hearing it. To say it was noisy was an understatement.

Pouli was a German shepherd. He had a pleasant disposition, and all of us petted and played with him. Captain Rush took Pouli almost everywhere he went, but when on base Pouli would be chained outside at the rear of the barracks.

The captain would come to the barracks at any time of the night, chain Pouli and go up the stairs to his room on the fourth floor. One would normally think that this would be the end of it until morning. If you do, you do not know the perverse minds of GIs. Captain would retire. Soon after that, a half-loaded GI would return from his carousing. Pouli was there to welcome the prodigal. Invariably the GI would release Pouli, hold the door

open, and tell Pouli, “Find the captain.” Pouli, being an obedient dog, would start up the stairs, yelping and whining, with toenails scratching on the tile floor. Reaching the fourth floor, he would scratch on the captain’s door, whining all the while. Of course, this woke up almost everyone, including Captain Rush, who came out of his room barking the foulest of epithets. He would lead Pouli down the stairs, out the rear door, and chain him up. As he returned to his room, he would continue his tirade. Of course, the perpetrator of this disturbance was nowhere to be found.

Almost always, after the barracks settled down and silence returned, another GI would arrive, and the entire event would be repeated. Those in the barracks who were not complaining were laughing. The captain found no humor in this and voiced his opinion loud and long the next morning, but to no avail. This continued almost every night until Captain Rush was reassigned. We missed Pouli.

The second story would be diabolical if it were not so funny. Lieutenant Barrett had a registered female boxer. To say that the lieutenant was proud of his dog would not properly explain his devotion. We did not usually see the dog because he had it boarded off base. Lieutenant Barrett was not one of the most admired officers on the base.

Before departing the office, he would always tell us about his great dog, how he was waiting for her to achieve estrus so that he could mate her with another registered boxer, and how much money he would receive for the resulting litter of puppies.

We all were required to qualify with rifles annually. This was usually a three-day bivouac at a firing range and was the only time we camped out all year. It was a big event because it broke up the monotony of daily office duty. Lieutenant Barrett brought his boxer along to one of these outings, and that’s when she came into heat.

His mistake was that he left the dog at the mess tent while he was out on the firing range. A sergeant in our outfit had a small male dog of undocumented parentage who was with us. He, of course, sensed the female boxer’s condition. That put him in a frenzy, but he could only make love to the boxer’s hind knees because of his inadequate stature. Those of us around the mess tent were having a good time watching him, and, of course, it did not take long for us to connive to help him with his love affair.

Someone found a stout wooden crate. With one of us holding the boxer, several others put the small dog up on the box. I will leave the rest to your own imagination. This went on for most of

the afternoon. I feel sure that if that small dog were still alive, his thanks to his “assistants” would be profound and endless. After mess, Lieutenant Barrett left with his dog and presumably arranged soon afterward for a proper hook up with a suitable boxer boy. For the next three months all we heard from the anticipatory officer was how much money he would make from the sale of his pregnant dog’s progeny. As the days went by, the lieutenant’s anticipation, and ours, reached monumental proportions.

The happy event finally came, but the lieutenant walked into the office with a long face. As usual, someone asked if the pups had arrived yet, even though we were quite sure they had just by looking at the lieutenant’s countenance. “Yes,” the lieutenant said, “she had them last night. I just do not understand it. Most of them look like Sergeant Dixon’s mutt. I just don’t understand.” After he left the office, pandemonium broke out. Even Captain Stein, the adjutant, roared with delight when he heard the tale. I never heard how the lieutenant disposed of all his “pedigree” puppies.

## Testimony of a Homeless Woman

*By Gene Groner*

*VA Medical Center—Prescott, Arizona,*

“Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.” This quote from Mother Teresa really came home to me and entered my heart one day at a Salvation Army Crossroads Homeless Shelter board meeting. We had invited a homeless woman, a young lady with no family and no place to live, to come to our meeting and to share her story with the board. We felt it would be helpful to us in our ministry of outreach to the homeless, many of whom are veterans, so we would see and hear them and have a better understanding of the issues contributing to their situation. Also, we wanted to know how she felt and what it felt like to be homeless.

It was a very moving experience. She told us how hard it was to not have an identity. She felt she was no one because she didn’t have a home or family. Therefore, she did not exist.

Well, that broke my heart. I shall never forget the experience, her, or how my heart ached for her. I paused after the meeting and offered a prayer for that young woman. I prayed that she would understand and feel how much we cared for her, that she was somebody important to us. She was someone we wanted to love, affirm, and provide for through our organization. I learned a lesson of empathy and compassion that day, and I will remember her prayerfully each time I see a homeless person.

Now I kneel and pray every night for the homeless and the refugees of the world, all 80 million of them. May God bless and care for each one and give us insight and wisdom in our relationships with them.

*Author’s Note: As a Marine Corps veteran, I am astounded at the number of homeless veterans in our country—an estimated 67,000 according to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. America’s homeless veterans have served in World War II, the Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq (OEF/OIF), and the military’s anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America. Nearly half of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam era. We must not neglect these national heroes. I pray for them every day, and ask for the prayers and actions of all veterans on their behalf. We need them now just as we needed them in active duty. Let’s all do our part to make a difference. Thank you.*

---

**PALLAS ATHENE BEST STORY AWARD, BY NATIONAL  
WOMEN’S ARMY CORPS VETERANS ASSOCIATION**

---

## The Boy

*By Peter Murray*

*VA Medical Center—West Palm Beach, FL*

The rain and the wind never let up. The wind was driving the rain from the mountains to the north. Solid sheets of rain beat down on everything. The leaves of the lush jungle foliage drooped. The thatched roofs of the huts were heavy and wet and the surrounding earth was a slippery, stagnant blanket.

The village stood at the edge of the jungle where the jungle stopped and the rice paddies spread across the narrow valley to the hills in the distance. The sky hung heavy and gray like a poorly lit ceiling. The patrol had taken over the huts that jutted out farthest from the jungle. Four men were eating and two others were cleaning their weapons, leaving a heavy coating of oil to try to beat the rain.

The sound of the sentry’s “Halt!” cut through the wind and rain and the fast-approaching darkness. The ones eating gently put down their cans and picked up their rifles. The two cleaning their weapons quickly and quietly inserted magazines and eased the bolts forward. They heard the sentry call for the Indian, who then cursed and picked up his half-finished food before moving down the trail. The others relaxed and went back to what they had been doing.

Tony Foster taped his last two magazines side by side, with the open ends of the brass cartridges facing away from each other

so that when the 20 rounds from one had been used he could pull it out, give it a quick half spin, jam it back into the rifle, and have 20 more chances to stay alive. This was much faster than fumbling with a wet, stubborn pouch on his belt. He inserted the top of the double magazine into his rifle, let the bolt go home and put on the safety.

He had eaten the chocolate bar in the C-ration meal. That was the way he had been eating for the past three days. He didn't notice the rain dripping from the rim of his helmet onto the rifle on his lap. He was seeing again the corner of a room in the house where he had grown up, the part where the two walls meet the ceiling, up out of reach. For some reason this image had come to mean dry, really dry, to him. He couldn't remember what a blue sky looked like or how the heat of the sun felt on the back of his neck or what color his uniform was when dry.

The interpreter, the one they called Indian, came back into the camp herding two people before him. They were peasants. The man came first. He was wearing the loose-fitting black pajama-like clothes that all the peasants wore, a cone-shaped straw hat, and no shoes. He carried a long-handled hoe over his right shoulder. The woman walked a few feet behind him dressed the same. The only difference was the long black hair that came almost to her waist, shiny and clinging in the rain. She had a large wicker basket suspended from a yoke across her shoulders.

The Indian led them over to where a heavy-set man with sergeant stripes was coaxing a can of beans to heat up by using his bulk to shield the small fire from the rain.

"We got trouble, Sarge," the Indian said to him. Sgt. Fica looked up, first at the man and the woman, then back to the can of beans. He had a large head which filled his helmet, a fleshy nose, and a strong, jutting jaw that was glistening with whatever he had just eaten.

"Spill it Indian," he said. "They want their son," said the Indian. The man had moved closer and stood looking down at the sergeant. The woman had come up behind him and stood at his left, looking at the ground. The sergeant didn't say anything for a moment. He seemed to be watching the mud ooze up between the man's toes.

Without looking up he said, "The kid." It was more of a statement than a question. "Yeah," said the Indian, "the kid."

Shit," said the sergeant. His eyes flicked from side to side, then looked straight in front of him for a moment. He turned to the Indian. "Tell them it was his own damn fault. They've all been

told over and over that if they don't run they won't get shot. Tell them he was running with two V.C. and we couldn't tell from that distance if he had a weapon or that he was a kid. Tell them it was a mistake...his own goddamn fault."

The Indian spoke to the man. The man listened and then answered, at times tapping his temple. Twice the woman said something. "He says the boy was twelve years old in his body, but only three years old in his head. He says that they told him not to run from the green uniforms, but he did not remember anything for very long. They ask for their son's body so they may give him a proper burial."

The sergeant had taken a mouthful of steaming beans, and he spoke through them.

"Tell him we will give the body to him tomorrow morning. Tell him to go home and not to come back until the sun is up. Tell him anyone messing around in front of our lines will be shot."

It was almost completely dark, but the light from the cooking fire showed the brief flicker of anger and frustration on the man's face as he answered the Indian in rapid sharp sounds.

"He says he doesn't mind digging for his son's body in the dark," the Indian said. "He has his hoe. His wife has the funeral clothes in the basket. He says they had to walk two hours to get here, and if they come back tomorrow they will have walked all that distance for nothing."

The sergeant wiped his chin and mouth on his sleeve. His eyes narrowed slightly, and his pupils seemed to flatten out.

"Tough tit," he said. "Tell them tomorrow, and not to come before the sun is up or they will never see the body. Now clear them the hell out of here. We got work to do."

The sergeant stood up, stretched, and called Tony Foster over to him. "Foster," he said, "soon as it's good and dark, you and Rodriguez dig up the kid and put him on the dike. The rain will wash most of the crap off him."

The sergeant reached down, picked up his rifle and turned back to Foster. "Got it?" he said. Foster nodded wordlessly, turned and went to tell Rodriguez. When the luminous dial on his watch showed 2100 hours, Foster picked up his rifle and his entrenching tool and moved quietly over to where he knew Rodriguez would be. The two of them started for the rice paddy where the two men and the boy had been buried earlier in the day. They stopped on the way to tell the sentry they were going to be out there.



The rain hadn't lessened at all. It had gotten colder. They moved slowly through the inky wetness going by the picture in their mind's eye from the afternoon. It was difficult trying to stay on top of the dike that separated the large squares of the rice paddies. The endless rain had turned the mounded earth into a wet slippery path. Rodriguez went off once and Foster twice with both men submerged to the hip each time. Foster knew they were headed to the second paddy out and to the right about ten meters. That was where it had happened that afternoon.

The patrol had been coming down the trail that skirted the village. Just where the trail broke out of the jungle into the open, the point had spotted two men with weapons running into the last house nearest the rice paddies. Sgt. Fica had gone up to talk to the point.

He called for the machine gun and had Rodriguez, the gunner, set it up. Rodriguez had adjusted his sights for that range and settled behind the weapon. He then signaled the rocket launcher. The first rocket knocked down half of the wall of the house. The roof disappeared with the second rocket. Two figures dressed in black dashed from the house and ran across the clearing trying to make the nearest dike.

A third, smaller figure suddenly appeared in the clearing running after the first two figures. The first rounds were high; you could see the water kick up behind the running figures. Sgt. Fica was yelling at Rodriguez to bring the rounds down, goddam him, down! The second figure's legs suddenly flew out sideways and his rifle separated from him. They both hung in the air a split second, then splashed out of sight.

Rodriguez was now swinging the gun after the front man, and you could see the little spirals of water catching up to him until they met. Then there was only the small figure.

When the second figure had gone down, the small one had faltered, stopped, started running back the other way, stopped, took a few steps toward the Americans and waved.

"Get him!" said Sgt. Fica. "I don't see any weapon, Sarge," said Rodriguez. "Shut up and fire!" snapped Sgt. Fica.

"But..."

"I said fire!" yelled Sgt. Fica.

The machine gun opened up and the figure jerked backward and splashed in the water. It was suddenly very quiet. The only noise was the rain splatting into the mud and drumming off the steel helmets and whacking onto the wet sacks.

Rodriguez lay still behind the machine gun, his arm still draped over it, his head hanging next to the steaming barrel.

"Foster! Tunny!" ordered Sgt. Fica, "Come with me. Let's check them out. Wigan! Call base camp and tell them we got three confirmed body count."

When they reached the spot where the figures were last seen, Foster saw how young the smallest figure had been. He looked younger than Foster's little brother. He and Tunny had started digging graves when Sgt. Fica came over and told them not to waste time, to dig just one hole and slide all three bodies into it. So he knew why Fica had not let the old man dig for his son. When Foster and Rodriguez reached the spot, one dug while the other kept watch looking out into the driving black rain, listening for any sounds. They took turns. It didn't take long. The grave hadn't been very deep. It wasn't hard for Foster to find the boy, even in the complete darkness. He was so much smaller. The hard part was prying him apart from the others. Stiffness had set in, and the arms and legs kept snapping back like the green limb of a tree. It took him a good 10 minutes to pull the boy apart and slide him up the side of the dike.

He lay the boy down on the middle of the dike and tried to straighten him out. But the stiffness kept one arm partially raised and the left leg sticking out at an unnatural angle from his body. The rain wasn't penetrating the thick slime that covered the boy. Foster took off his helmet, scooped water from the rice paddy, and sloshed it over the body. Some of the slime came off. He put his helmet back on, tapped Rodriguez on the shoulder, and the two men made their way back to the camp.

## Tuna Fish Hero

By *Tim Brown*

—*Overland Park, KS*

Ten minutes after the sun came up the man and woman walked into the camp. There was a third person with them. He had a shaven head and wore the robes of a Buddhist priest. The woman and the priest remained in the center of the camp while the man walked over to Sgt. Fica, who saw him coming and called for Foster. "Show him where the kid is," said Sgt. Fica as he turned and walked away.

Foster watched the woman strip the body like a little girl undresses a doll. She washed it completely, scrubbing the gaping wounds as well as the whole parts of it. While she was doing this, the man and the priest were building a stretcher out of sugar cane. It had a top like a covered wagon. Then the man lifted the boy while the woman slid the spotless white pajama-like clothes onto him. Then they laid him on the covered stretcher.

The priest led the way, chanting prayers, while the man and the woman carried their son between them. After a while, they were only specks at the end of the valley.

---

### ELIZABETH L. FONTAINE MEMORIAL AWARD

---

## Umi. Abi

By *Hartley Barnes*

—*Royal Palm Beach, FL*

Chunks of concrete lie on and around them. A toddler's only words are "Umi, Abi" as he removes small pieces of concrete off their bodies. "Umi, Abi." (Mommy, Daddy in Arabic) Parts of the ceiling crashed down on his mother and father after a rocket hit the roof. The child thinks they are asleep. "Umi, Abi" In the small village, the boy is the only one left alive, along with a dog suffering from malnutrition. As I enter the room, the child sees me, picks up a tennis-ball size piece of the concrete, and throws it at me. "Abi! Umi!" I see my son in his eyes. I am Sergeant Bull, a tough guy, but I gasp and throw up.

The dog moves instantly to lap up the vomit. "Umi, Abi." I lean my M4 rifle against a wall and take my gear off. I kneel with my arms outstretched. I cannot speak. I remain on my knees for a minute or more. Then I find my voice. "Come. Come. Come, please." The child walks slowly to me, his eyes still on his parents. "Umi, Abi." Shoo ismak? Shoo ismak?" (What is your name?) "Umi, Abi." To walk away from the scene would not erase the guilt I feel or the echoes of the child's voice. The cruelty of this day erodes my trust. I'm a contributor. I pick the child up, rock him and sing to him. "Jesus loves you this I know, for the Bible tells me so." "Umi, Abi." The child I call Faith puts his thumb into his mouth and sleeps.

While in Vietnam, I was a member of a 15-man public information unit. We traveled the country reporting on all manner of Army stuff. When not in the field, we hung out in a makeshift office fashioned from three semitruck trailers.

Free-spirited creatives that we were, we avoided the mess hall at least twice a month and made a lunch of a fresh hoagie bun, tuna fish and A.1. Sauce. I didn't like tuna but enjoyed the comradery. Enough A.1. Sauce and anything is edible.

The bread came from a downtown French bakery, but it was available to us from a street vendor who set up shop just a few blocks from our compound. Eventually, it was my turn to fetch the bread.

The vendor's cart was covered on three sides by glass. She stood in front of the open side, shooing the flies off her product. Her beetle nut-stained teeth and her sweat-stained shirt confirmed my suspicion that the A.1. was both disinfectant and condiment.

I ordered nine hoagie buns. She ripped off a length of waxed paper, placed it flat on her small work surface, and began to build a pyramid of buns for me. She had trouble. The top bun would not stay put as she attempted to wrap the waxed paper around the teetering stack of uncooperative bread.

She solved the problem by placing the top bun under her arm, so she could free her hands to shape the paper into a proper package. Yes, under her arm. That is, held tightly in her bare arm pit. At last, she topped the stack with the errant bun and handed me the package.

I made certain that my tuna fish was placed on a bun from the bottom of the pyramid and decided to enjoy the wonders of mess hall food for the rest of my tour—comradery and tuna fish be damned.

*Author's Note: I served in the 5th Public Information Detachment in Vietnam in 1969. As editor of the II Corps Army magazine, I traveled much of the center section of the country. Of course, we didn't spend all of our time in the field. And, like most good soldiers, we found diversions to help us change the pace and relax. One of ours was a tuna fish picnic.*

# The Virgin Soldier

By Hartley Barnes

—Royal Palm Beach, FL

“What the hell is your problem, Millman? Because of you, we walked into a ambush today! You were on point for a reason. Because of your instincts, damn it! You let us down! Where was your head? We are lucky we didn’t get our ass kicked! Where was your focus? You missed all the signs of the freaking ambush!”

“I’m sorry—”

“Sorry—two men wounded!”

“I haven’t heard from my girlfriend for more than a month, Sergeant Shadow. Two weeks ago, I got a text. She’s pregnant.”

“That’s why you screwed up?”

“I’m virgin, sergeant.”

“Say what?”

“I never had—”

“I heard what you said! Why are you a virgin?”

“I’m waiting until I get—”

“Ha, no wonder your instincts are so good, you still got all that stuff in you.”

“What stuff?”

“Give me a break! Your innocence is no cause for not doing your job, Millman.”

“Before I deployed, I got engaged. We opened a joint bank account with my \$30,000 inheritance. My pay directly deposited into it as well. The plan was to return home, get married, and start a family. Celibacy is important to me; I stored it for the wedding night. I thought my fiancée felt the same way. I received an email from the bank asking me to contact them. I did and found out the bank account is empty.”

Specialist Millman comes from a devoutly religious family. He first dated when 22 years old and joined the Army after graduating from a local community college. Now 25, he finds himself in a place where many soldiers have been, in a syringe that will spit him out to the fool’s game. Millman’s haste to make up for lost time and the feeling he will not get another opportunity to find a soulmate has cost him dearly. In war and now compounded by this situation, Millman is on a banana peel.

He will become one of the statistics of war.

“Sergeant Shadow, how can I go home and face my family?”

“I don’t know. I’ll arrange for you to go and talk to the chaplain. We are in a life and death situation. You are a risk to the unit. The commander can relieve you of your duties until it’s safe for you to return.”

“No, let me stay.”

“Lack of concentration will get us killed. For me to allow you to stay in the fight would be a dereliction of my duties.”

Specialist Millman returned home broken by war and deceit and is now challenged with how to recover. Sitting at the side of a road and looking in all directions, he is alone and sees no hope. Out of shame, he raises his head to the sky and asks, “Why should I live another day?”

## October 10, 1965

By James Counihan

—Webster, MA

I sometimes believe that I was lucky to get wounded because I got out of the ‘Nam hell hole after just 10 days. I’m a member of a Massachusetts veterans’ council, and I often listen to my fellow veterans’ stories. Those who spent an entire year there went through a lot of misery.

I was drafted soon after I bought a new 1964 Corvette. I had a great job and was attending college part time. I went airborne at Fort Benning, Ga., to make an extra \$55 a month. I also was making 11 cents an hour, 24 hours a day, which I sent home. My mother was driving the ‘Vette, and she made the payments.

I graduated with honors from jump school; I was in pretty good shape. My first jump was made soon after a hurricane passed. Guys were landing in trees, streams and even walking on top of other chutes because of the strong winds. We were taught to quickly run off other chutes or our chutes would collapse. I landed hard, and my chute stayed up. I was dragged on my back and sheared my helmet liner before I was able to release my chute. One soldier climbed the stairs to our bus with weird eyes after jumping. He asked the bus driver what number plane he was on. I never saw him again.

I didn’t mind going to Vietnam; I thought I was indestructible. I spent two days in a Saigon replacement camp before going to



a company in the 173rd Airborne Brigade. My first impression of 'Nam wasn't so bad. The replacement camp had female Vietnamese workers handing out the food at the mess hall. They wore thin silky blouses and no bras. Many of the soldiers went back for seconds. We went to a Saigon bar one night. I was drinking warm beer with a beautiful French-Vietnamese girl, but she left when she found out I didn't have any money. I spent my first night with my new company guarding the perimeter of our base. I was very scared and kept my finger on the trigger of my M16 all night.

I became good friends with Paul, who was also guarding the perimeter that first night. Paul had hardly fired his rifle after almost a year in 'Nam. He smoked cigarettes and played the radio most of the night. I used his cigarettes to apply heat to blood suckers that were on my legs while we were walking through the jungle on a search-and-destroy mission.

On Oct. 10, 1965, Paul and I, our platoon sergeant and two squads were walking on a wide path in what I believe was called the Iron Triangle. God only knows why my boot lace became untied. I stopped to tie my boot and was running to catch up. I had been third in line, but I was second to last when we encountered a horrific ambush, and a bunch of mines exploded. I shot one attacker out of a tree, but then my M16 jammed. I grabbed a grenade launcher from a wounded soldier behind me. He was still alive, and I later applied pressure to the side of his head until help arrived.

The soldier in front of me was blown off the road. I don't think anyone but three of us survived that day. I was happy to see both the man in back of me and the man in front of me later at the hospital. They carried me past Paul as I was loaded onto a helicopter. He appeared to be just sleeping. I had multiple mine fragments in both legs. In a first-aid tent, a priest started giving me last rights. I stopped him and told him I wasn't going to die. He was amazed.

There were too many wounded soldiers in the Vietnam hospital. I never saw a doctor or a nurse in the two days I was there. I had been taught to clean my wounds myself with a turkey baster and hydrogen peroxide. I drew a picture of an apple for a Vietnamese aide to ask for apple juice; she brought me a bed pan. I saw parts of Hawaii from a cot on a bus as they transferred me to a hospital overlooking the Pearl Harbor Memorial.

I spent months in the St. Albans Naval Hospital in Queens. I became well enough to go see for free Broadway shows like "Hello Dolly" and many famous stars like Sammy Davis Jr. I became good friends with a soldier named Sam on those trips. Sam once imitated a loud horse neighing as a cop rode by on a horse. The cop charged up as if to arrest Sam. I told the cop they would have to have a nurse in the cell because Sam had a gunshot wound in his stomach. The cop left, telling Sam to behave.

The army changed my MOS when I was discharged, and I spent the balance of my army career admitting patients to Ft. Devens, Mass., hospital. I was lucky again because I worked 12-hour shifts and drove home for three days a week.

---

## VFW AUXILLARY DEPARTMENT OF KANSAS AWARD

---

### Conditioned Emotional Response

*By Shon Pernice  
—Moberly, MO*

Have you ever done something foolish and asked yourself, "Why did I do that?" It is usually something small or just a minor lapse in character. But how about something so repulsive, you are too ashamed to admit it? You say to yourself, "What the heck is wrong with me?" It makes you so disgusted with yourself and it gets buried deep down as you try to hide it. That event silently reemerges; it affects your life adversely until you play the role of detective, psychologist, and social worker so you can attempt to identify your error in thinking. I am that person. I did something horrible.

**January 2, 2009**

When I went back down the stairs, to see what I had done, my wife's body lay motionless on the floor. I had previously pushed, hit, or shoved her in an explosive rage. As a combat medic, I checked for signs of life: absent. The common reaction would be to call 911. That is what our society is conditioned to do. I did not. My next course of action has haunted me for the past ten years. Not because I write this from a prison cell, but because my response to the situation repulses me. I hurt a lot of people.

After confirming my wife's death, a light goes out. I am detached without any feelings. She is no longer my wife of ten years, mother of our three children, but an object. I place her body into a big, black duffel bag. Later that night, I placed her body into a garbage dumpster and drove away. No emotions. How could a person, a father, or a husband do this to someone they are supposed to love?

### **Operation Iraqi Freedom**

As a combat medic, emotional detachment is paramount to your sanity and the survival of others. With traumatic injuries, you have to maintain your composure in the worst situations. If a severely injured casualty sees you scared, alarmed, or grossed out by their wounds, they will lose hope and die. Sometimes you need their will to fight in order to get them to the next level of care alive. You adapt to being emotionally numb all of the time. That same tourniquet that I placed on the soldier's leg to stop the blood loss is the same one I place on my emotions. If I release the tourniquet, on the injured or myself, lives will be lost. If you do not conform to the unwritten rules in the combat zone, especially as a medic, you will get emotional, then complacent, and then dead. When a soldier gets killed in action, you bag them up in a black human remains pouch (body bag), and get them out of sight. The dead bodies of your friends depletes morale, and they start to stink. A smell that goes into your sensory bank forever and does not come out regardless of how many showers you take. "Out of sight, out of mind." It becomes reflexive in nature, to bag a body, or the pieces, call in a 9-line medevac, and get them out. You continue your mission and the command will provide replacements. That routine, and repetitive contact becomes "normal." Death, dead bodies, violence, and atrocities will make you go crazy, especially with repeated exposure. You do not look at life the same as part of your coping mechanism. Seeing dead bodies piled in the back of a flatbed truck like cord wood, is exactly that—cord wood. The dead foreign fighters left to rot on the roadside, being chewed by the hungry, stray dogs are just a food source. Those are not people. The dogs go for the meaty

areas on a body: cheeks, thighs, buttocks, and the heels. The trash dumps are well known as a place where bodies are left. It is usually the opposing religious sect of the area that came to fight and got killed. It is a waste of their energy to bury a body that is not part of their tribe. What would you do in these situations? I not only absorbed the mental horrors, stored it in my memory banks, but also took pictures. I was so shocked that I knew nobody would believe this stuff, or even comprehend it.

### **Back Home**

After coming home from the war, I did not know how to express what I experienced, or how to process the pain, sadness and grief. I could not form the words so I would show my pictures. I posted several on Myspace. Myspace quickly censored and removed them from the site. Most people I associated with were repulsed by the photos and did not want to see them again. How else can you explain these buried images that sneak up on you every night when you close your eyes?

Crime victims, survivors, families, and the community ask, "Why?" when horrible things happen. I did not care for a long time but the last several years I began to ask myself the same question. I need an answer because I want to prevent this from happening to another family. Sometimes there will never be a plausible answer to a tragedy. However, I am not content with that in my case. As I removed layer after layer of denial, buried memories, and detached emotions, I started to remember things. The events were real and documented from the war. A memory—a snapshot in time—now my words record the process and try to make sense of a horrible act. My motive: to educate others, understand, and face my demons.



While this situation is unique to my life, all of us are creatures of habit. We react by what we know. My out of context response may be related to the procedural memorial of re-experiencing the event, a conditioned Emotional Response (1). This does not excuse my actions, or anyone else's. It only answers the question of why. A conditioned emotional response can be reflective of a childhood trauma, rape, assault, natural disaster, combat, or any other significant traumatic event that was detached and buried. It is still inside of you. Like the tourniquets I put on wounded soldiers, I kept the tourniquet on my memories, and emotions. Until you can identify, single it out, remove the layers, and start to process the event, the ripple effect will continue to destroy your life, and others.

*(1) Lecture by Gary Sibcy Ph.D., Associate Professor of Counseling, Liberty University, Trauma and Attachment: Care and Counsel for Combat Trauma*

## **A New Family, A New Life**

*By Christine Rose Hazuka  
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

Being adopted and growing up alone, it got quite lonesome at times. Thankfully, I had my dog and cat to talk to sometimes. The Hudson River valley was full of beauty, as were the Catskills. I have so many memories.

After graduation in 1965, I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. I'd never been on a plane before, so I was really excited. Having so many strange people around me was so different but not scary at all—I was going to basic training!

Arriving in San Antonio, Texas, was quite different. Now I was on a bus, seeing white sand all around and experiencing a different kind of heat and smells and sights. By that time, I had memorized my service number and would remember it for the rest of my life.

Leaving the bus at Lackland Air Force Base, suitcase in hand, I walked and walked some more. Wearing heels and a homemade dress, I was hot, and my feet were hurting. I still kept walking. Finding my destination, I was greeted by one of the training instructors and directed to the barracks. My new room had four bunks with a trunk or foot locker for each of us. Within minutes the other three arrived.

We were introduced and instructed how to arrange our white towels, white socks, white undies, white bras, and white sneakers. Our civilian clothes were soon replaced with three different uniforms—class A's, utilities, and dress. I got a long, heavy, blue,

wool coat, nicknamed the horse blanket. In addition to my white sneakers, I was issued two pairs of black oxfords called "granny shoes," then a pillow, sheets, a blue wool blanket, and a duffel bag. We were given a stencil with our service number to be applied on the bag.

With our room all in order, we were lined up in ranks outside the barracks for our first inspection. We had a male and a female training instructor. The first thing I learned was "do not smile." As we stood as still as statues, our names were totally mispronounced.

It was a different life all together. Early to bed, early to rise. Marching to wherever we were going. A shower every morning. Back home it was a bath in a small tub on Saturday night. A perfectly made bed inspected every morning before ranks. If the sergeant could not bounce a quarter off the middle of the blanket, that bed was completely torn apart. If it happened a second time, your roommates' beds were also torn apart and the room failed inspection. At chow, we stood at parade rest until all the seats at the table were taken, then we sat together. Ten minutes chow time and then rising together, returning our trays to the belt line for cleaning, and we all marched back outside again.

We marched for hours in between instruction, in and out of the barracks. We learned how to spit shine our grannies, using Kiwi black shoe polish, cotton balls, ice water and a brush. When you could see yourself in your shoe, you had completed that chore. A white dot was placed on the back of one right shoe. This way you were to alternate a pair of shoes daily. If you were caught wearing the same shoes a second straight day, you received a "gig." You also got one if your uniform had a "cat wrinkle" or skirt did not stand up alone with starching. Also, your blouse or top buttons had to line up with the skirt or pants buttons (called a gig line), and your cap or hat had to sit exactly two fingers above your eyebrows.

By the end of the first week, my roommates became like sisters, and many of the ranks too. We all became very close, a new family. One of my roommates was sent home, "incompatible," they said, because she would not wear a bra or red lipstick, as we were ordered to wear. (She was a Jehovah's Witness).

Another gal was discharged when she failed a pregnancy test. (I also was discharged in January 1968 due to my pregnancy, even though I was married.) After the eight long weeks of basic and a short leave, I was at my first PCS (permanent change of station)—Maxwell Air Force Base outside Montgomery, Ala. Now we had two to a room, with air conditioning. Nice! It was at the

end of the flight line, so I learned to love the sound of the landing and taking off of the aircraft. Maxwell had the Air University, so we were not as tense as the Strategic or Tactical Air Command bases. My new roommate was a thin blonde gal from Plaquemine, La. We definitely hit it off. Both our birthdays fell in January. We both loved country and folk music, which prompted me to ask my mom for a record player.

We would stand in front of our mirror, harmonizing to the songs on LP records, our favorite being “500 Miles” by Peter, Paul and Mary. A few of my black friends in the barracks taught me a lot. Ironing their hair, teaching me to swivel my hips to dance the Watusi and the Hully Gully, and going into town where blacks and whites together were not allowed and signaled a danger that we did not know or understand. The ‘60s were a very racist time. Back on base, it did not matter. We were all airmen serving our country. I guess we all learned about life on the outside of the base, some the hard way.

Most of us dressed to the hilt going to the airmen’s club every night possible, dancing and laughing and enjoying the night life and each other. In the morning we would go our separate ways to our assigned jobs. My roommate was in the communications tower as a switchboard operator. I was with the Air Police as an administrative specialist. In those years, female airmen were not allowed to carry a weapon or be assigned to a combat situation or base.

We were not deployed unless our skills were needed outside the United States. This was heartbreaking for me as I enlisted to become a flight medic and go to Vietnam. My roommate, who became my best friend in life, was transferred to Ramstein Air Base in Germany. I loved my assignment nevertheless. I had plenty of excitement and duties you just don’t find on the

outside. I was a witness when a female was detained. I had to frisk that female and be present during the questioning process. I typed all the accident and incident reports that involved any airman or officer.

I was in charge of the traffic tickets and made calls to the Montgomery City Hall to trace a license plate to the owner and possible driver of a vehicle.

The Air Police, later called Security Police, was a very tight group. Those guys were now my brothers, my uncles and my first sergeant, a senior chief master sergeant, was like a dad to me. He was very disappointed in me when I married against his advice. He believed it was my duty to serve my four-year term of enlistment first. It would take a book to write about everyone I met who became like family, but I will always remember those who changed my life forever. With transfers, discharges, deaths and losing contact, we are scattered among the earth and skies, but family we are forever.

## Taking a Stand While Kneeling

*By Melvin Brinkley*

*VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ*

I risked losing a friend recently. When she launched into a diatribe about some athletes kneeling during the national anthem instead of standing, I decided I had to say something. What I said was informed in large part by what I had experienced in high school and in the military. Both experiences have indelibly shaped my way of thinking. When integration became mandatory in Virginia in 1970, most of my childhood friends went to a private, Christian—according to their definition—all-white high school. My parents offered to pay my tuition, but I told them to save their money for the possibility that I would go to college. In the fall of 1970, I was bused to a previously all-black inner city high school. In my homeroom, where I was the token white student, a fellow tenth grader wanted to show me a book. This seemed like an innocent enough invitation, so I agreed. After I realized what kind of book Calvin was showing me, I said in a shocked voice, “I didn’t have anything to do with any of that.” Every page in that book had a photograph of a black man being lynched by a mob of mostly white men. I also noticed that some photographs had a few white women, girls, and boys in the lynch mob.



The white men in those pictures appeared to be clearly confident that any photographs taken of them at the scene of a first-degree murder would never be used against them in a court of law. They were not camera-shy at all. In fact, they appeared to be just the opposite. Most seemed to be actually mugging the camera. Didn't they realize that they might be prosecuted as murderers, or at least accessories to a murder? Evidently not.

Of the lynchings of 3,446 blacks and 1,297 whites between 1882 and 1968 that the Tuskegee Institute recorded, less than one percent of them were investigated by law enforcement, and almost all those that were prosecuted were acquitted by a jury of the defendant's peers—an all-white jury. What stories had Calvin heard from his parents about these lynchings at his dinner table? What had he heard from the pulpit of his church? What did the other black students think about this? I did not ask. I was scared. I was in the vast minority. Demographically speaking, I belonged to a racial group that represented only 12 percent of the student population.

During my military career, I was deployed as a peacekeeper to stop ethnic cleansing in the former Republic of Yugoslavia in 1995. In that beautiful country, a civil war had erupted, which had caused countless murders, rapes, tortures, assaults, and all the other horrors humans can inflict on each other. Mosques, churches, homes, schools, museums, and government buildings were burned to the ground; the last stored property records, whose destruction virtually guaranteed that even if the refugees, who had fled with only the clothes on their backs, were allowed to return to their homesteads, they wouldn't be able to prove they had ever owned any property, no matter how many generations had worked on their farms.

That conflict caused the fragmentation and evisceration of a once thriving nation, which made me aware that this could happen to any country, even ours. All it would take is for one group of people to believe that they had the God-given right to murder another group and that there would be no accountability, no consequences for doing so, which was exactly what Calvin's book showed me.

This had already happened in my country. And, unfortunately, the flame of that hatred has not been completely extinguished in our country. It still flickers menacingly.

Back to the present. When my friend started to imagine what her father, a World War II veteran, would have said about athletes kneeling instead of standing for the national anthem, I interrupted her. I said unapologetically, "As a member of the military, I took a vow to uphold the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, both foreign and domestic. I believe if

we don't defend the rights of all citizens that are guaranteed in our Constitution, then we are doomed as a democracy."

To do my part to stop the horrors I saw in Calvin's book and the horrors I saw during my deployment to the former Republic of Yugoslavia, I feel that I have to confront anyone who denigrates another person's rights whenever I can, even if that means possibly losing a friend. Some might view what I did at that dinner table as insignificant, but I don't believe that, not for a second. I believe the world can be changed for the better one conversation at a time. And if I lose a friendship for standing up for the rights of my fellow Americans, then that's a shame, but that's not as shameful as sitting there and saying nothing. The time for silence is over.

---

### GLADYS M. CANTY MEMORIAL AWARD

---

## It's Getting Better

*By George Kulas  
—Fond du Lac, WI*

At last I was home. It was June 7, 1969, and I had just been released from my Marine Corps tour, which included 19 months in Vietnam. It felt great wandering the sidewalks in my hometown of Sheboygan, Wis. Finally I was on solid ground. Green lawns and trees surrounded me. My feet were not sinking in mud. The air was fresh and clean. Safe and secure, I was home. Wearing my uniform one last time, this was my solo homecoming parade.

A day earlier in California, our group of newly discharged Marines traveled by bus from Camp Pendleton to the airport. Numerous vehicles passed us on the freeway, their occupants sneering at our Marine Corps bus. A few passengers waved and displayed peace signs, but more of them displayed middle fingers, while some spat at our bus.

The joyful atmosphere present upon departing Camp Pendleton had changed to quiet anger. A tough-looking combat vet next to me lowered his head, saying, "As soon as we get to the airport, this uniform is coming off. I don't want anyone to know I was a Marine. Nobody cares what we went through in Vietnam."

We both needed cheering up. "It will get better when we get to our homes," I said.

Close to tears, he replied, "It will never get better."

Now back in Sheboygan, California seemed like 10 years ago and

a million miles away. I wanted to believe that because this was Smalltown USA; attitudes would be different. After all, boys had always gone to war from here and come back as men and heroes. Vietnam vets wouldn't be treated any different.

At the corner of Eighth and Erie, I heard someone call out, "George! You're back." The young man approaching me was unfamiliar. Then I recognized the voice as he asked, "Hey man, you don't recognize your old buddy Bob?" A beard and shoulder length hair masked his features. He didn't resemble the crew cut Bob I knew in high school.

He wore a "Make Love Not War" T-shirt; a peace symbol hung from his neck on a chain. Chuckling, Bob said, "Back from the war, eh, George? I can dig that. I'm just mellowing out during summer break. Don't want to go back to school in the fall, but it always keeps me out of 'Nam, know what I mean, George? I'd rather party than fight."

With my anger and frustration building, all I could do was mutter, "I can see that," and I kept on walking.

Bob shouted at my back, "Hey George, welcome home! Get the monkey suit off and we'll party!"

To this day, it was the hardest time I ever had restraining myself from committing a Class A felony. At college a couple of months later, I encountered many people like Bob. During one class, my professor asked whether anyone had been to a foreign country. When I said I had been to Vietnam, he and most of the students laughed. He said he was interested in cultural, not combat, experiences.

I said I'd rather be in combat than listen to his bullshit and walked out. In 1972, I enlisted in the Army, eventually retiring after 20 years of combined service, once again moving home to Wisconsin. Soon after my return, our forces were battling in Desert Storm. Later, not long after the Gulf War ended, I attended a victory celebration and almost fell over when I saw Bob there. Now a well-off businessman, he wore a \$500 suit with a yellow ribbon pinned to his chest.

"Hey Kulas, how you doing? Good to see you again," Bob said while approaching me with his arm extended for a handshake.

Keeping my hands to myself, I asked, "What are you doing here?" Smiling broadly, Bob boasted about how his son fought in Desert Storm, saying how proud he was of him and of all the troops who served there.

Pulling out a wallet, he said, "Kulas, he's still in Saudi. Let me show you his picture. He's a sharp looking Marine."

Looking at his son's picture, I said, "Bob, he does look good. We are all proud of our troops." Looking Bob up and down, I added, "But you're a walking definition of a hypocrite dressed in a monkey suit."

As Bob glared at me in shock and disbelief, I bellowed, "Semper Fi!" Walking away with my head tall, I told myself, "It is getting better."

---

## ROBERT T. RUBIN AWARD

---

### I'm FINE

*By James Crissen  
—Martinsville, IN*

Sitting, isolated in my head, a barrage of jetsam breaking against an unknown shore. I grow overwhelmed with snippets of stranger's boorish, blithe chatter. "Aunt Cathy has gallstones." "Michelle cheated on Sam." "Hasn't little Johnny gotten so tall?" Everyone agrees that little Johnny has, indeed, gotten so tall.

My eyes ache, tirelessly scanning for an enemy I yet do not know. Pale browns, painted decades earlier, melt before me, various faces appear, only to hide in fuzzy shadows, dull laughter echoing off muted fears. These naive dullards, who I envy, so blind to my reality. An enemy only I know, sits in ambush, every corner, every booth, a possible choke point of horrific possibilities. My brain refuses to quit searching, no matter how much I beg for reprieve, as my heart pounds louder and faster in my ears.



My invisible nemises, made entirely of segmented memories I try, and try, AND TRY, to bury, laughs, threatening to drive me to utter madness. Alone, I am caught in a forceful, icy grasp of dread. My chest squeezed tight, like a dusty accordion begging for its bellows to be released, sitting forlorn and forgotten on a pawn store shelf. Each breath of fresh air is suffocating as my body is washed in an icy sweat. The veins in my neck and temples tighten, like a freshly tuned violin. My clenched jaw cracks my teeth, like a pecan in a table vise. Every cell in my body screams for me to escape, to get up and just walk away from it all. My anxiety threatens to tear me asunder, like two rottweilers playing with an abandoned doll.

Slowly, cautiously, I stand upon numb, aching legs and blindly find a washroom. My hands reach to the soap crusted faucet, turning the handle marked “cold” to fully open. Rapids of icy daggers stab my hands and wrists. I am forced back to the present reality, though exhausted and weak.

Back at my table, familiar faces appear out of a receding fog as I silently sit, eyes cast downward in an attempt to hide my shame. “Hey, everything ok?”

“Yeah, I’m good.”

“You sure? You’re ok? Do we need to leave?”

I am forced to create a weary smile from nothingness. “No, I’m good. Everything is FINE.”

“I’m fine.” That age-old line of evasion.

I have told myself this lie for years and years. “I’m fine.” —An ultimate betrayal of truth in a concerted dance to avoid my reality.

I’ll lie to myself, and to you, again tomorrow.



## Nothing Can Stop You But You

*By Diane Wasden*

*VA Medical Center—Augusta, GA*

Victims of sexual violence and trauma often seem to be blamed for the abuse because they are seen as having tempted their abusers.

The anxiety the victim feels is a paralyzing fear caused by the “what ifs.”

What if I fought back harder?

What if I had told someone even though I was threatened?

What if I had only seen the signs before it had happened?

And so on.

I have never ever felt so used, hurt and devastated in my life. If you complain, you’re judged insane, a trouble-maker or a snitch. You start to feel as if the whole world is working against you, or you feel like you no longer belong or are needed.

You find yourself in uncharted waters. You are forever left wondering about the “whats,” the “hows,” and most importantly the “whys” in a new shaken-up life of no return. You begin to feel unclean at times and undeserving of life. Forgiveness and mercy are in short supply at this point. Hatred, bitterness, anger, and revenge start to run rampant through your heart and soul. Sorrow and anguish sweep through you with enough guilt to trigger a huge nervous meltdown.

The sin committed against you obscures your vision of how you now view all people. It makes you super suspicious of their motives and can lead you to putting them at arm’s length.

Seeking revenge, you get tempted to retaliate by returning a blow for a blow. We all know it’s only human to want to take an eye for an eye. Life now becomes narrow and starts to feel so constricted.

We have to be able to learn to let go of some of the heavy baggage we tend to hang on to and carry with us through every day. The constant bumping and yanking just to make it through one day can leave emotional scars that can last a lifetime and drive us crazy.

There were so many days when I just stood there stuck in one place, wrestling with my inner voices. I had been ignoring that one voice in my head telling me to just stop and drop the baggage. I now know that there will be setbacks, hills to climb and doors that will be shut in my face. I just need to stop and take a deep breath and keep moving forward. I have to be willing to let it all go, get back up when I’m knocked down and get moving.

Never let a let-down cause you to stay down.

# Visual Arts Initiative



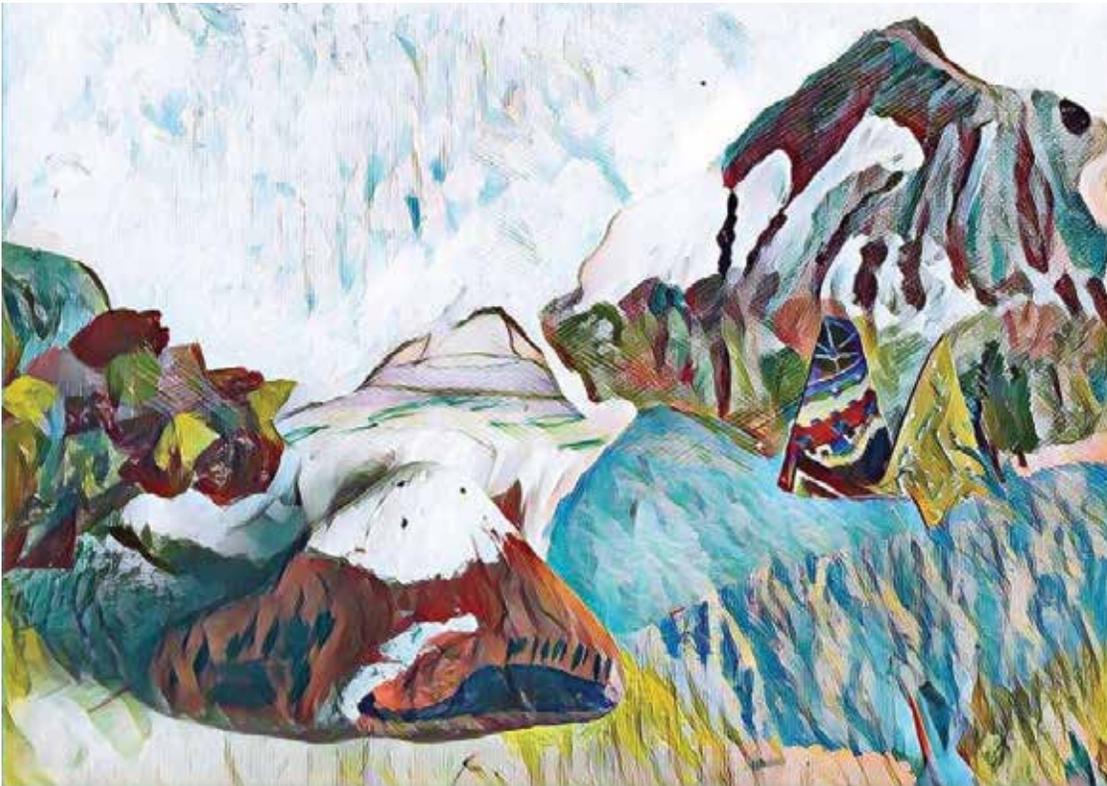
**My Grandson:** By Ty Andrews  
— Lincoln, NE

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

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

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

— *The Editors*



**America's Mountain:** By Penny Deere  
VA Medical Center— Albany, NY



**Flowers Against a Wall:** By Katherine Menges  
*VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO*



**Sunset in Biloxi Mississippi:** By Susan Stinson  
*VA Medical Center— Biloxi, MS*



**Nothing More Needed:** By Katherine Menges  
*VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO*



**New Start:** By Michelle Pond  
*—Overland Park, KS*



**Strange 7:** By Daniel Strange  
*— San Antonio, TX*



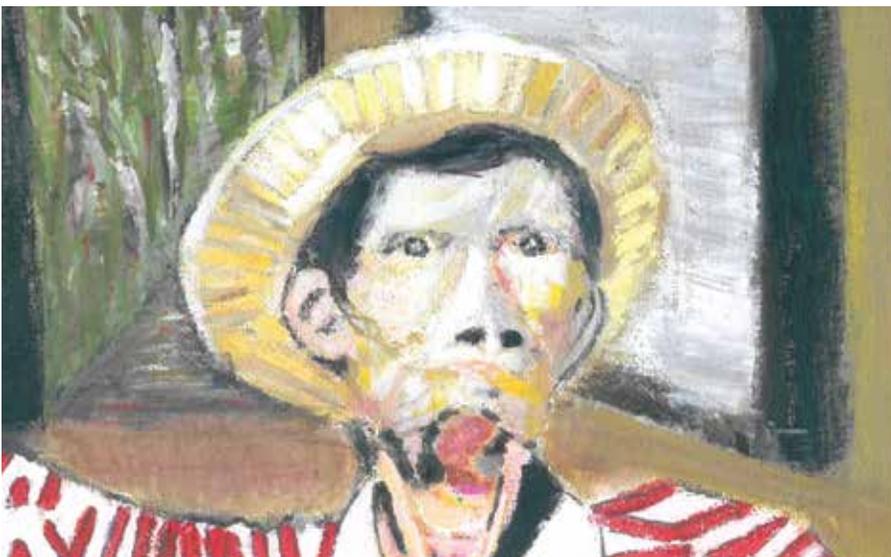
**The American Dream:** By Katherine Menges  
*VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO*



**Watching the Sunset on a Sunday Afternoon:**  
By Anthony Phillips  
*VA Medical Center—Las Vegas, NV*



**Growth:** By Michelle Pond  
*—Overland Park, KS*



**Strange 4:** By Daniel Strange  
*— San Antonio, TX*



**To Drink, to Nurture:** By Katherine Menges  
VA Medical Center— Kansas City, MO



**Strange 2:** By Daniel Strange  
— San Antonio, TX



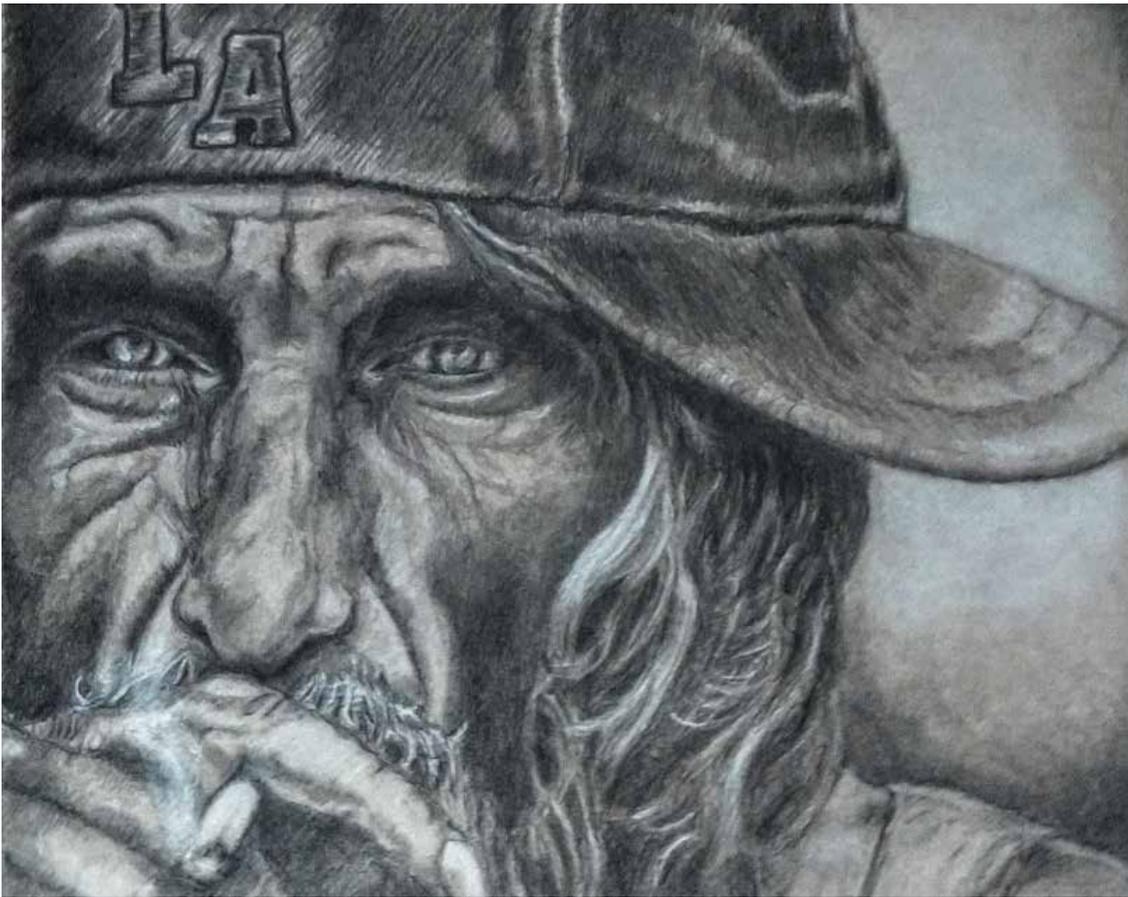
**Strange 8:** By Daniel Strange  
— San Antonio, TX



**Our Locked Love:** By Katherine Iwatiw  
VA Medical Center— Kansas City, MO



**Enough in This Lifetime:** By Katherine Iwatiw  
VA Medical Center— Kansas City, MO



**Faces of the Homeless 1:** By Ty Andrews  
— Lincoln, NE



**Faces of the Homeless 2:** By Ty Andrews  
— Lincoln, NE

## About My Drawing

*By Janice Walker  
VA Medical Center—Decatur, GA*

I have schizophrenia.  
Have anxiety at  
Times, found  
An outlet, comfort,  
Meaningful expression  
In my drawing and  
Writing for years.  
Just starting anew  
On my own, drawing.  
Guess God's spirit  
Gives me the gifts  
Love to share  
Bless others.

## “Forecaste”

By Lynn A. Norton

—Leawood, KS

Drab clothing, shaved head, serried bunk and toilet, emblems of military inductees, untouchable caste. Sentenced to meaningless toil, degrading rites of passage. Loss of will, privacy, dignity. Erasure of self. Deemed “lower than whale shit” by shrieking drill-instructors. “Give me twenty!”

Sleeve with a single stripe, first rung on ladder to elevated caste. Limited choice and movement, relief from torturous training. Common laborer conditioned to learn murderous craft. Heed advice. “Keep your head down.”

Second stripe, higher rung, awarded sectioned barracks, partitioned toilet, better chow. Leisure time, amusements in venues commensurate to caste. Refine skills, become a craftsman, dependable source of putative violence. Follow orders. “Ignore your fear.”

Three stripes earn a rung with segregated housing, dining choices. Responsibility to plan, lead, relay dictates from superior castes. Supervise but no longer socialize. Trade privilege, resources to fuel the engine of combat. Develop a muscular voice. “Kill the bastards and piss on their remains.”

More stripes, higher elevation. Warrior, avenger, ruling caste with mortal power. Manager of battlefields. Dutifully listen to priestly castes above but do what experience demands. “Keep your head down. Ignore your fear. Kill the bastards and piss on their remains. Take no prisoners.”

---

**TH NORTON AWARD: EDITOR’S CHOICE.**

---

## Vietnam Memories #1

By John L. Swainston

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

We all thought we were really cool.  
We had all finished AIT, our Army School.  
We learned it was too late  
to say, “Hell no, I won’t go.”  
We had also learned to shoot straight.  
We found our need to sin  
in the streets of Saigon.  
We needed to wash away that sin with gin.  
We were drenched by the monsoon that came  
in May and June.  
We all knew that some would die soon.

## A Better Place

By Gene Allen Groner

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

My mother always told me,  
“Leave the place better than you found it.”  
Whether it’s a room or the whole world,  
Leave it a better place.

I passed this along to my children;  
Now they know it as I do.  
Whether it’s a room or the whole world,  
Leave it a better place.

They shared it with their children;  
Now my grandchildren know it as we do.  
Whether it’s a room or the whole world,  
Leave it a better place.

So I share it now with you;  
Now you know it as we all do.  
Whether it’s a room or the whole world,  
Leave it a better place.

*Author’s Note: My mother has passed into heaven now, but she is always with me in spirit and in my heart. May she rest in peace. Baruch HaShem.*

## Thank a Vet

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

The next time you’re out and about  
and have some free time on your hands,  
visit a VA home. Thank a vet if you can.  
Some have blinded eyes, some can barely hear,  
many have resorted to drugs and alcohol  
to drown out all their fear.  
Some have missing limbs  
and cannot get around like they should.  
Many take medications  
to stop inner battles, inner feuds.  
While you enjoy the luxuries  
that we take for granted today,  
make out a card and drop it in the mail.  
Many of our vets are still going through hell.  
Thank a vet today.  
For some the war still rages on.  
For others life will never be the same.  
And for a few the ultimate sacrifice has been made.  
Thank a vet.

## Snow

*By Ronald P. Grella*

*VA Medical Center—Tampa, FL*

Snow looks so beautiful when it falls.  
It will put you in a tranquil mood.  
It's so quiet when it hits the ground,  
and does not make a sound.  
Snow makes everything  
look so pretty in all the scenery.  
You can go for a walk in the snow  
to ponder on your thoughts within your very soul.  
Snow so pure and clean,  
like God the almighty who created everything  
for us to enjoy and see.

## The Old Warrior

*By Brant Parker III*

*VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH*

The old warrior, a fierce fighter,  
answered the call of his country in two wars.  
Battle war-torn, he served his time in hell.  
He returned heavy laden with medals,  
a hero, no talk of battles won and lost.

Wizened, aged beyond his years,  
he continued marching forward  
until death called the old warrior,  
no escape and evade this time.

Nightmares and flashbacks  
all faded to black.  
His swan song,  
his war had ended at last.

Smartly dressed in his blues,  
medals resting upon his chest,  
he was America's best,  
pass and review.

The 21-gun salute rang out true.  
And the old warrior was finally laid to rest.

*Dedicated to James M. Blackwell, Vietnam combat veteran,  
USMC Force Reconnaissance 1965 - 1967. He died from  
complications due to Agent Orange exposure.*

*Writing group: Cincinnati VMAC*

## We Got Here About the Time God Left

*By W. Joseph O'Connell*

*—Jarrell, TX*

Space cowboys smoke turbos and mercs, joints and cigarettes  
laced with crack cocaine, all day and every day, amateur alchemy  
for the head.

Night cats and lizards prowl the immigrant projects. The existing  
structure is a shell of its former self; all the decent folks have  
moved away.

Murdered ghosts haunt the streets. Chalk outlines washed away  
all that was left of them, memories hidden under the ground.

Civilization is gone missing amid blurred wings of confusion.  
Penthouses tower like Goliath over the slums

Realizing we have all gone crazy, living in custom-built homes  
that shield us from the decay, going lousy for having it all.

Fresh money leads to the new part of town, pockets of  
cold buildings with bizarre angles and no soul, sanitized  
neighborhoods shaped modern and clean.

Regretful of the past, they made it shiny and new, washed the old  
blood down into the storm drains, muffled the cries of mourning  
widows and mothers.

Open the gates to the dead, new city. Tear down the statues and  
start the second act; burn all the books and turn yourself in.

Welcome to the madhouse. Promises were made to be broken and  
we drink a whole lot while camped around our television sets.

Free from the mental illness of society driving everyone nuts,  
making a mess of everything with networks of technology,  
pretending the worst part of everything is behind us.

Ignoring the fear that we might fuck it all up again, detoxing  
ourselves from the old addictions, wiping the slate clean from the  
mental illness of society.

Suddenly realizing the wandering God had wandered off, got  
Himself stuck in the old, dirty part of town where He keeps the  
lost souls from fixing everything.

## Head Trip

By *W. Joseph O'Connell*  
—Jarrell, TX

Early morning, Sunday under the Florida sun, reflecting on the weekend, heading back home for Texas, first time I didn't drink in a while. It takes all day to cross the Sunshine State.

I stop in Pensacola for a fried chicken dinner, then the long haul through the pinewood south, bridges over green lakes and swampland. Bugs splattering against the windshield keep me awake. Something in me seems to ask myself, "Why am I trying so hard?"

Crazy, moving forward, volunteering for every conflict that came along, twenty years in the service. Anything can be justified to keep myself grounded, feeling everything and nothing at the same time.

Marriage was the first casualty of war. Now the house is empty, and the miles traveled are lonesome. All that is left is an idea that I am destined to be alone. The road at night remains my best friend; as always, it lets me pretend I'm still the hero.

## PTSD and the Pandemic and Me

By *Karen Green*  
VA Medical Center—North Las Vegas, NV

The need to stay inside is getting more urgent as the pandemic grows.  
And being inside so much makes my anxiety really show.

As my stress level rises,  
I isolate more in my room.  
And the depression starts  
when I watch the news.

I have bad dreams and nightmares  
as I toss each night in bed.  
And during the day  
negative thoughts fill my head.

I take my medications  
every day and night.  
And I pray for those who are sick,  
that soon they will feel all right.

## My True Hope in Troubled Times

By *Karen Green*  
VA Medical Center—North Las Vegas, NV

When I become depressed  
and filled with stress,  
I often turn to my fellow humans  
for answers so I can rest.

But man can't always help when  
confusing things fill my head,  
so I turn to God for my answers instead.

God is the only one  
who fully understands,  
because I am His.  
He made me with His hands.

I pray each day to Him  
for guidance to get through.  
God holds my hand and I have  
Him in my heart, too.

The highest place  
on earth that I can be  
is in prayer to God,  
down on my knees.

When I trust God,  
I know I'll find  
my true hope  
in troubled times.

## Lucky in Love

By *Frank X. Mattson*  
—Spring City, PA

To Mick Jagger  
God sent  
Mind  
Visions.  
I don't  
Need  
Drugs.  
My mind  
Sees  
Heaven  
In  
Love.

## Fate

By Robert John Valonis

—Stuart, FL

Like wisps of smoke  
Curling upwards and down,  
Seen by none,  
Just dancing around.

An invisible mime  
That frolics in air,  
That silently waits  
But surely is there.

It cosmically surrounds  
The flesh of a soul,  
Like the universe containing  
An empty black hole.

Its energy's mighty  
When you least expect,  
Spontaneous in nature,  
Deserving respect.

It silently hovers,  
Although not aware,  
Behind and in front,  
An invisible glare.

It's colorless, vague,  
Devoid of all form,  
Can end a life  
And disrupt the norm.

It's happy, it's sad,  
It's lonely, it's blue,  
Invisibly existing  
All around you.

It's good, it's bad,  
Knows no right, no wrong.  
It's all predetermined  
In the world's busy throng.

Comes quite unexpected  
In the midst of life's throes,  
A mystery that only  
Divinity knows.

Your destiny, though  
A close relation to fate,  
Should be shaped with  
Fine choices as you await.

## Seven Minutes Till Daybreak

By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.

VA Medical Center—Hampton, VA

In every combat situation  
There's acceptable losses,  
Collateral damage.  
To the civilian population  
Such losses are deemed  
Acceptable in view of objectives  
To preserve and protect  
Our way of life,  
To preserve freedom, justice and equality.  
There's always a high price  
To pay for freedom,  
A price paid in human life.  
The rewards are great,  
Therefore the price is high.

Economic strategists say  
In business there's always  
Acceptable losses.  
The higher the profit  
The greater the risk.  
The main reason  
It's so extremely important  
To maintain a lower class of people  
To maximize profit at minimum risk.  
Sacrifice the lives  
Of the poor and uneducated  
To restrict and limit  
The economic, political, educational status  
Of the unfortunate, To maintain the status quo  
Of maximizing profit.

We are standing on a battlefield.  
However, there's no war,  
Not in the traditional sense.  
We are at war  
With free enterprise,  
The gross national product.  
We, as a nation,  
Now face a great pandemic  
Which has taken the lives  
Of hundreds of thousands.  
It will take many more  
Before it's over  
Unless we act now.

## Americans United

By Ronald P. Grella

VA Medical Center—Tampa, FL

This pandemic is pathetic.  
To make sense of all the innocent lives that have died  
in this time, we have to ask God to be on our side to carry on.  
We have to show compassion for one another  
to come out of this together.  
Pray for the families who lost their dear loved ones.  
Ask God to comfort them in this time of suffering.  
As Americans, we have to try to be resilient  
and stay strong like we always are.  
Always pray for all the front line workers  
to give them strength, enough strength to keep going on  
as their job is extremely hard.  
Remember, when you start to feel sad,  
there is one that is always near.  
Just pray and ask Him to help you  
with what you cannot bear.

## My North Star

By Dan Yates

—Blue Springs, MO

The stars are always in the sky, though sometimes I can't see due  
to all that exists between the stars and me. The trees can hinder  
what I see, block my line of vision or I can simply close my eyes. I  
guess that's my decision.

Neon signs and city lights dim the aura of the star, but in the  
darkness of the country, its brilliance shines afar. Though stars  
can twinkle or may fall, only one can make this claim: it can  
provide direction if "North" is its first name.

When I see this star I think of my wife Jan. I might say, "I can't."  
She will say, "You can." Sometimes when I'm in chaos, confused  
by some distraction, she will clear my mind, provide me with  
some traction.

When everything seems wrong and there's no end in sight, in the  
midst of darkness she's my beacon in the night. Her love is never  
ending like the Milky Way. I'm grateful for my "North Star" each  
and every day.

## The Imprint of War

By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt

—Leawood, KS

The nighttime silence is troubling.  
Even the tree frogs have fallen silent.  
No neon flash of tracers,  
no incoming whistling overhead.

We gather around the worn Scrabble board,  
balanced on a dented metal trash can.  
A nurse and two corpsmen take a break from work,  
a bit of distraction from life around us.

But we are in the emergency room (R&E),  
in a field hospital in a war zone.

So the quiet is temporary.  
A crackling voice comes over the "squawk box" on the wall.  
"Five minutes out. Two United Sierra.  
One sucking chest. One left amp at knee.  
One KIA in bag."

I prepare new charts to record the incoming wounded.  
We ready ourselves to start IVs,  
cut off fatigues to assess wounds,  
to stop bleeding, inject morphine,  
insert chest tubes, adjust tourniquets.

This becomes routine.  
The chatter does not.  
"Will I die?" "How is my buddy?" "Where is the Lieutenant?"  
"How bad is my leg? Can you save it?"  
"Can't see out of my right eye. Will I lose it?"

Thoughts of folks left behind.  
To some, I look like the girl back home;  
others worry that the sweetheart or wife  
will not accept his broken body.

Do I lie to give comfort or speak the truth  
And add to the pain?  
For the dying soldier, the sound of the human voice  
matters more than the chosen words.

Fifty years hence, many memories are a blur.  
Names may be forgotten, yet the time spent in war  
leaves its imprint on the soul.

## Remember

*By Louise Diane Eisenbrandt*

*—Leawood, KS*

Remember the sounds of death, the gurgle of a last breath.

Remember helicopter blades: whop, whop, whop, bringing  
bloodied and broken bodies.

Remember the acrid odor of burning flesh and peeling skin from  
white phosphorus.

Remember rain, rain and yet more rain.

Remember the whistle of rockets, splashing in the South China  
Sea where earlier that day we had skied.

Remember sand, coconut oil, guitars and music.

Remember shoulders wet from tears, blood dripping on our  
boots, body bags cradling their silent contents.

Remember escaping into scotch and cigarettes, writing, loving,  
filming, laughing.

Remember leaving whole when so many were broken.

Remember and share whenever you can, so that others may never  
forget.

## I Stand With Jesus

*By Jason Kirk Bartley*

*VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH*

When life seems to throw  
twists and turns,  
and you seem to swing at air,  
when you turn to others  
and it seems that no one really cares,  
I stand with Jesus.

When I do not know the answers  
to life's problems, no matter how hard I try,  
His thoughts are higher.  
All I seem to do is ask, "Why?"  
I stand with Jesus.

When I reach the top  
of life's sacred journey,  
and I know that I've made it through,  
it's just me and you.  
I stand with Jesus.

## Where Is God

*By Melanie Yvette Jackson*

*—Silver Spring, MD*

Where is God?  
in the midst of confusion  
in the midst of unrest  
in the midst of anger  
in the midst of injustice  
in the midst of rage  
in the midst of violence  
in the midst of hatred.

Where is God?  
when I feel confused  
when I feel restless  
when I feel anger  
when I see injustice  
when I feel rage  
when I feel hated  
when I feel pain  
when I feel lost  
when I cry.

Where is God?

## The Music of Flowers

*By Janice Walker*

*VA Medical Center—Decatur, GA*

How I forever will  
Love flowers.  
They can get my attention  
No matter the hour,  
No matter my moods or  
Location.  
Flowers affect my  
Heart, my moods like  
Music in my soul in any situation.  
Flowers are one  
Of the most beautiful  
Creations from God.  
Complete beauty.  
Flowers are orchestras in  
My heart and soul,  
Like the music of love.  
Songs bring peace.  
How flowers just burst  
Loose in their peak  
In spring!  
Oh, the music  
Of flowers.

## President Lackey

*By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.*

*VA Medical Center—Hampton, VA*

This man is such a pathetic leader.  
I choose to laugh instead of crying.  
Hell's fire shall rain down on North Korea  
Unlike the world has ever seen.  
Does he mean the foul language he uses?  
Or the stench of his sour breath?  
I'm a very stable genius!  
The world can see  
He's as cunning as a fox  
With the brain of a Tasmanian devil.  
Did I just insult the animal kingdom?  
Republicans have said  
They don't question  
The President's mental fitness.  
News flash!  
The Germans never questioned Hitler's mental abilities.  
No one questioned Mussolini's mental abilities.  
There's no real need to question  
Their mental abilities.  
Actions speak far more  
Than any question raised.  
Trump allies defend his mental fitness.  
In reference to that,  
You don't have to be sick to be stupid!  
If the title of jackass fits, wear it.  
If it walks like a duck  
Acts like a duck  
Everyone's calling it a duck  
It must be a duck,  
Better known as  
The lame duck President.  
If President Lackey  
Talks like a fool  
Acts like a fool  
The majority of people  
Calling him a fool,  
What makes him so special  
Is that he must be  
The genius of all fools.  
A foolish male  
Can't carry himself as a mature adult,  
No more than a preteen can act as a man.  
Our illustrious President,  
The capable unstable genius,  
The only President  
In the history of our nation  
Who has an orgasm  
Each time they play  
"Hail to the Chief."

## The Covid-19 of 2020

*By Helen Anderson Glass*

*VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ*

Is this earth as we knew it now spinning out of our control?  
This pandemic has taken over  
And it's clearly taking its toll.  
Or is this the time when the earth has stopped its spinning,  
Making us aware of our faults,  
Sending us back to the beginning?  
We have taken for granted the freedoms we enjoy.  
The whole world of men and women,  
Including every girl and boy,  
Can no longer do the things  
We were privileged to do.  
It's sad to say but it has parted families—me and you.  
Perhaps this is God's warning to us  
That we have to change our ways,  
All the bad we are doing to this world day after day.  
Fighting and killing each other,  
Polluting our water and air as if it didn't matter,  
Or we just don't care.

## Getting to Know You

*By Helen Anderson Glass*

*VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ*

Do you have it in you to find out and see  
Down deep inside what you really want to be?  
An artist, a writer, a poet or a magician,  
A teacher, a scientist or a musician?  
Perhaps little things  
Have already made a difference in you,  
Influencing your daily life  
In what you say or do.  
Maybe someday you'll be a shining new star.  
Isn't it time you found out  
Who you really are?  
Are you satisfied with your life  
Or are you in doubt?  
Then now is the time  
You let the real YOU come out.

# Big Boy's Too Cool to Cry

By Paul J. Nyerick

VA Medical Center—West Haven, CT

When the big boy was little,  
Everything was important  
Each small crisis painful  
Always laughed.  
Never too cool to cry.

Tears of happiness  
Tears of joy  
Tears of sorrow  
Crocodile eyes.  
Emotions to borrow.

As the big boy grew,  
It was more important  
Pain more painful  
Laughter much louder.  
Still not too cool to cry.

Teenage angst,  
Raging hormones, compassion  
Let tears flow without fear.  
Big boy hands, big boy smile,  
The inception of cool.

Esprit de Corps, Semper Fi, *Ooorrah!*  
Uncle HO, Uncle Sam, ghosts, demons.  
Locked feelings  
Blew away all fears  
Cemented with guilt and shame.  
Insulated it all with cool.

The big boy stumbled aboard a rocket  
In a psychedelic, narcotic haze  
Fueled by the juice of the Blue Agave  
And various amber fluids.  
Blasted off on a quest  
Searching for awareness without clues  
Could never emotionally land.  
Still too cool to cry.

The big boy strangled true love  
Just for her pearls,  
Cast them before a coven of swine  
Wallowed in their mud.  
Felt so, so cool, too cool to cry.

The big boy's clock ticks,  
Long teeth, tangled grey ones.  
Can tears ever flow?  
Is he too cool to ever cry?

Dive into a teardrop  
Break the surface tension  
Swim the backstroke inside  
Embrace its soothing flow.  
Feel the cool as you let go.

Turbulent tempest or a mother's womb,  
It's not too late to let the feelings go.  
The little boy waits  
For the big boy to decide.

# Fifty Shades of Cray Zay

By Melvin Garrett Brinkley

VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

They met on an app called eHarmony.  
His profile was a bunch of malarkey.  
Hers had all the charm of an emoji.  
While Skyping she said, "You might be okay.  
Your personality seems kind of gray.  
Is that rat's nest on your head a toupee?"  
Later, not that hot to trot on Hangouts,  
She offered, "Please don't act like other louts.  
You might be adequate. I have my doubts.  
Look, you don't want to get on my bad side,  
'Cause I'm less like Jekyll and more like Hyde,  
And I am not a gal that lets crap slide."  
She felt she was wasting her time on him,  
But since the dating scene seemed pretty grim,  
She'd give him a chance, no matter how slim.  
He watched her like a hawk on Instagram.  
She was his Mary and he was her lamb,  
While all the time he was a randy ram.  
Losing his cool, he sexted her one night.  
She texted back, "You must not be too bright.  
You're clueless on how you should treat me right."  
"It's a joke," he said, using that old line.  
She said, "Be honest. Man up. Grow a spine.  
What is your problem? Have you lost your mind?"  
He guessed he'd never be her groom on Zoom.  
He did her dirty and he got the broom.  
It blew up in his big fat face. Kaboom!  
He saw her last on an app called TikTok.  
Everything else she managed to block.  
He blogged. "Hooking up online is a crock."  
Yet, he was back on the net in no time.  
He posted on Facebook: "I'm in my prime."  
(A lie so loathsome it should be a crime.)  
"I know what I should have sent her.  
Not sexting. Roses. Be a big spender.  
Next time I'll know what to do on Tinder."

## Lift Thine Eyes

By Wayne Goodling

—South Bend, IN

Midway along the journey of my life  
I woke to find myself in evening wood  
With winter's soft and almost twilight rays  
Where forest path meets foliage, tree and soil  
As rains and waters fall and splash and roll  
From bark and leaves descending with the flow  
Of water's trickled, rippled, downward path  
Whose furrows move, descending lower still  
Until there is no lower place to go,  
Until within this frame I come to see  
Everything doth end at water's edge—  
A placid pond made wet with winter's calm.  
Here beauty's raptured passion pulls me in  
As I desire this place for my eternity.

I wait and as I wait I can recall  
The lives of those whose path has gone before.  
And this is why I keep far distant from this shore  
To guard my soul because I've come to learn  
Of things far worse than judgment fire of hell:  
A wet indifference that wills to take me in  
As vestal virgins, mermaids, water nymphs.  
All lovely foul creatures of the deep  
Seek to dissolve and then absorb my soul.

I know my hope to be on mountain high  
And not in beauty of this forest glen.  
I know the dangers clear and present here  
And yet this beauty still entices me  
And I remain inert.  
I know 'tis time  
To shake off satisfaction's opiate bliss,  
And yet today I seem to lack the will  
To e'en begin the upward journey home.  
My hope so small, I strain to see again  
The hard and rocky peak I must ascend.

With single glance, I look unto the hills,  
Declare, "I'll not remain near waters calm.  
I shall renew the steep and upward climb."  
And as I climb, so too I lift mine eyes.

## Why Can't We Go Back to School?

By Dennis Silas

VA Medical Center—Danville, IL

My grandkids ask me that question every other day.  
And I look them in the eye and tell them,  
there is a virus going around.  
And it's making people sick.  
So they close the schools down  
for the protection of all kids—black, white,  
Spanish, Chinese, African.  
Whatever race you might be.  
The governor would like to see  
all our kids as safe as possible.  
Not in a box waiting. Waiting for what?  
A date? A funeral?  
Why can't they go back to school?  
We want all kids to breathe, play, skip, live.

## Virus 2020

By Dennis Silas

VA Medical Center—Danville, IL

It only happens on TV until 2020!  
That was when it happened.  
A virus started to spread around  
to white people, black people, young, old,  
short, fat, skinny, tall, blue or green!  
The cases started to accumulate and people died  
by the millions, and the whole world  
was wondering, "Why?"  
Stores, restaurants, bars, clubs  
were all closed even in the big cities  
like New York & Chicago  
where they never go to sleep.  
They were told not to be on the streets  
or they would be fined.  
I felt like I was in the Twilight Zone,  
Different day and different time  
They were told not to engage in any group activities  
just as if the world all of a sudden stopped  
and the presence of people was no more.  
Maybe because of a knock on the door? Yes!  
Death was at our door! When will it stop?  
They say it's in the hands of scientists  
but there is only one scientist and his name  
is God and His son is Jesus Christ.  
They don't get paid for what they do or say.  
If we believe, we all will have to pray  
that one night we will all go to sleep  
and God will watch over us.  
And then the virus will go away!

## The Wall

*By Elbert Glen Price*

—Anadarko, OK

Words cannot describe it;  
one must experience it on our National Mall.  
A black granite slab engraved with names  
of those somehow chosen to fall.  
Its very presence is spiritual, magnificent and real.  
Its simplicity and magnitude direct  
what each visitor will feel.  
In symbolizing one desperate conflict of men,  
the kind of struggle that no one can win,  
it stirs memories like helicopters in echelons of five,  
or a special forces camp with craters and few men alive.  
It communicates with family, or sweetheart  
or short-time friend.  
It answers questions like, “Valor without victory?”  
or “Where to begin?”  
Its inscriptions stand for honor and freedom above all.  
But words cannot describe it;  
our nation has to stand and face the wall.

## The ‘Nam Vet

*By Elbert Glen Price*

—Anadarko, OK

He was a green recruit,  
green and scared as hell,  
first night in-country  
and his first incoming shell.

But a peaceful morning finally came,  
and with it a magnificent sight:  
majestic mountains across the bay,  
a lone palm on the right.  
Nature and man—a scene he’d oft repeat,  
beauty all ‘round.  
Then concertina wire coiled at his feet  
amid lush forests spawned by heat  
and monsoon rain.  
There is a long history of struggle,  
suffering and pain  
in a land of great blessings.  
It’s all mixed up with strife,  
majesty and color amid jungles  
that jeopardized life.

Natural beauty is not fleeting,  
and its memory might still be sweet:  
distant mountains, blue water,

then concertina coiled at his feet.  
He thinks of that place often,  
of friends he cannot greet,  
natural grandeur and endless coils  
intelligence cannot delete.  
A mind can create its own beauty  
in times of special demand,  
but cannot reconcile man-made tragedy  
or its symbols in the sand.

It’s another duality for the ‘Nam vet;  
his two sides can never meet.  
Love and beauty  
just beyond concertina  
and defeat.

## Why?

*By Daniel Paicopulos*

—San Diego, CA

Friends, family, foreigners,  
all eventually ask me,  
“Why do you write?”  
I’m nearly seventy-five  
and now they want to know why.  
Why? Let’s see.

I tell lots of stories.  
That’s too obvious, so  
it’s too late now to worry about  
too much exposure or transparency.  
I have written about going through  
a windshield—twice.  
Not the same windshield, but still.  
I have spoken of the day  
my mother suddenly died,  
and about when I met her  
on the night I thought I’d died,  
nine years later,  
the day she sent me back,  
from near death,  
work left to do.

I have ruminated on the choice  
to move to a foreign country,  
a quiet island somewhere,  
and then we settled in California,  
in a big city, of all things.  
When homage was the goal,  
it was sourced in that writing group  
in the Southern California desert.  
Ultimately, there is only one why.  
I write because I have no choice.

# Laughter Most of All

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center—Pittsburgh, PA

We have to eat our dinner  
And answer every call.  
To make yourself a winner,  
Use laughter most of all!  
The fun is in the telling—  
A joke that's "off-the-wall"  
And also in the hearing  
A pun that you recall.  
Mistakes are gonna happen  
To all folks, short or tall.  
Let's laugh out loud together,  
At least we'll have a ball!  
The bottom line is laughter  
For every guy and doll.  
Keep smiling and be happy  
With laughter most of all!

# Queen Zodiac Limozeene

By Scott Lehman

VA Medical Center—St. Louis, MO

Amber and I were drinking.  
I said to her, what are you thinking?  
She paused for a moment and then exclaimed,  
I feel like you've changed.  
One moment please, you could be right.  
But do we really have to talk about it tonight?  
I think we should  
It would do me some good.  
Both of us need some space.  
I'm getting tired of living in today's rat race.  
I need a detour.  
I need to open up a new door.  
Do you know what I mean?  
I said, "Yes." *Zodiac Limozeene!*  
Whatever you desire, my Queen!  
Why should I feel all this guilt  
when I'm Cleopatra built?  
The grapes on the vine don't taste the same.  
The milk tastes sour.  
And day after day, hour after hour,  
I'm bored out of my mind  
There's a lot to be done.  
But all I want is to bathe in the sun!  
You may come along and oil my back.  
And we can figure out  
how to get back on track.

---

## SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL AWARD #1 OF 3

---

# Operation Fury Urgent

By Donna Carol Zephryne

VA Medical Center—Northport, NY

In 2009 I visited the birthplace of my parents. Grenada.  
I visited family, historical sites that made up our history,  
battle grounds and Fort George and Fort Frederick,  
just two of the many historical battle sites.  
Cannons, watchtower, jails surrounded me.  
October 1983—the invasion of Grenada.  
Ronald Reagan signaled troops into Grenada  
to help save it from Maurice Bishop.  
Operation Urgent Fury held true to its name,  
as the U.S. came in strong and left by December 1983.  
A monument of Reagan stands tall by the airport,  
a tribute for his support.  
Being on the land of my ancestors, where soldiers fought,  
meant everything to me.  
I felt a connection to this place where I had never been before.  
Filled with emotions,  
I wondered what my ancestors went through.  
As a veteran standing on those grounds,  
I felt connected to the soldiers of the past.  
The soldiers that fought for my ancestors  
the way I fought for my country.

---

## SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL AWARD #2 OF 3

---

# Just for Today

By Melanie Yvette Jackson

—Silver Spring, MD

Just for Today, I awoke to the bright sunlight  
coming through my windows.

Just for Today, I saw a family of deer prancing in the grass.

Just for Today, I saw the eagles fly high.

Just for Today, I saw the sunlight on the water shine  
like a million sparkling diamonds.

Just for Today, I am thankful I am still here.

Just for Today, I have a clear mind.

Just for Today, I want to live.

Just for Today.

## Civil War

*By Donna Carol Zephrene*

*VA Medical Center—Northport, NY*

Americans fighting Americans  
North and South split.  
The fight over slavery,  
to abolish it or not.  
A country divided.  
Fighting, killing each other.  
The country torn.  
620,000 soldier casualties.  
Friends and families on opposing sides,  
as if they weren't from the same country at all.  
African Americans fought for the North,  
fighting for their freedom.  
They fought for their lives,  
for their freedom,  
for the right to make their own decisions.  
There could be no greater reason to fight.

## Heaven Is My Home

*By Anthony Kambeitz*

*VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

You know I'm just a stranger here.  
Heaven is my home.  
I am saved at all times  
No matter where  
I may roam.  
Positive or negative,  
It's all coming into view.  
Where we spend eternity  
Is entirely up to you!

## Counterfeit Christians

*By Anthony Kambeitz*

*VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

How do you expect me to do your will  
When you are as counterfeit as a three-dollar bill!  
You are a counterfeit Christian; that is what you are!  
With your mischievous ways, you won't get far!  
You pass me by like I am a freak on a shelf!  
You don't even take the time to save yourself!  
What shall I do when I reach the Promised Land?  
Lord, I will rejoice with thee and together stand  
At the threshold of Eternity.

## You Came Home

*By Kimberly Green*

*—Fort Smith, AR*

You came home—not in a body bag—  
Tired, drained and spent.  
I wondered if you'd tell me of your time.  
But you wouldn't, not just yet.

I asked each time like a whisper,  
Your mood not known today.  
“Please tell me,” I dared to ask.  
“Later” was the thing you usually would say.

And time wears on  
Until it's all used up.  
How ironic it seems to be,  
The remembrances left—found on a CD.

Endless pictures of death and gore,  
The highway of death as it is known.  
Corpses laid out, burned to crisp,  
Tools of war that coexist.

War is hell; yes, it's true.  
And the aftermath is mighty  
That combat soldiers always carry.  
The aftermath of war, they never bury.

## I Left My Homestead

*By Penny Lee Deere*

*VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

He leaves his father's house.  
A boy departs.  
This man will return  
but a shell of what he was  
or what he could have been,  
if he returns at all.  
She left the homestead,  
a tomboy looking for?  
This naive kid grew up in the military,  
came back all grown up  
with her own little ones in tow.  
She is a strong leader,  
she is able to follow  
and be a team member when needed.  
She is willing to lend a hand  
for those who are willing to help themselves.  
She will not enable anyone.  
She strives to survive every day.

## The Cross I Carry

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center—Pittsburgh, PA

It really weighs me down;  
But, then again, not so.  
I think of others,  
one the most,  
then on my way I go.  
He once fell from a horse;  
It changed his life forever.  
He carried on somehow,  
Left helpless, motion severed.  
Now trapped within himself,  
he cried when he awoke  
each day for most an hour.  
The truth—his heart was broke.  
Christopher Reeve, my friend,  
my cross now seems so light.  
You carried yours so well  
and showed me how to fight!  
We all do have a cross  
And, carry it, we must!  
But we can move about  
till we return to dust.

## Nicholas Goes to Boggy Creek Camp in Florida

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center—Augusta, GA

I knew my child was born a little different,  
not quite just sure what that might be.  
When the doctors and teachers told me,  
“You have a child with special needs.”  
Sometimes kids made fun of him,  
while others called him names.  
Then there were those who got together,  
and built a place where my child could laugh and play.  
He soon learned that there were others like him,  
and he should no longer feel all alone,  
for he knew they understood him.  
His self-esteem started to grow.  
No one's there to judge you  
in things that you can and cannot do.  
There's only one rule to follow:  
you have to just be yourself  
'cause when you're at Boggy Creek,  
no one ever feels left out!  
Miracles really do happen.

## A Stroll Down the Avenue of Misery

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center—Augusta, GA

Today I take a stroll down the avenue of misery.  
I slowly pass the door of sorrow and anger.  
Hate and misunderstanding were huddled up together,  
whispering in the darkness.  
I could see pain and agony a little further down the alley.  
Surprisingly, calm was rocking  
in his old broken-down rocking chair on the front porch  
of depression.  
I stepped halfway down the cobbled road  
and inhaled a huge whiff of the odor of discontent.  
The refuse of my mind is where I planted my fear.  
I was left to wonder if I could find strength and courage  
at the end of this road of broken hope.  
That's when it all happened—  
I felt the demon as he sat himself on my shoulder,  
whispering in my ear that there was no longer  
a reason for me to live.  
Then I thought in the back of my mind  
about my knife that I could use as my defeat,  
or my pills that I could take as my escape  
and, for my final finale, I could always use my gun.  
I had been struck far too many times  
by bullets from my assassins.  
All the hurts and blows are forever stinging  
for I have been wrongfully stung!  
These have left my life in critical condition,  
as they are all guilty of leaving my wounds wide open  
for infection to set in.  
My existence as I knew it is long gone.  
A new me emerges—a being of “unlife.”  
Today I learned through the toughest life lessons,  
through pain, suffering and misery,  
that I cannot trust anyone  
and must only depend on myself.  
I am forever watering my fears with my tears.  
I am now approaching death's doorway,  
a passage of no return. There the devil greets me.

# I Can't Breathe

By CJ Reeves

VA Medical Center

—San Francisco, CA

I can't  
Gasp for air  
Masks smother  
I can't breathe  
Knee on neck  
Let me up  
I am somebody  
Not nobody  
Say it loud  
I am somebody  
I can't breathe  
Mask too tight  
Let me go  
Constricting  
I can't breathe  
On so tight  
Knee on neck  
Can't exhale  
Let me breathe  
I am somebody  
Don't hit me  
No hitman  
Family man  
Say it loud  
Black man, yo  
I am proud  
Colored man  
*Don't hit me—say it loud*

I can't  
Don't shoot me  
Let me breathe  
Say it loud  
I am MLK  
I have a dream  
I can't breathe  
I am BLM  
Choking me  
Knee on neck  
I am Gandhi  
*Resistance—say it loud*

*Satyagraha*  
Gasp for air  
Let me breathe  
Say it proud  
I am somebody  
A good man  
Do no harm  
I have a dream  
*Satyagraha*  
Say it loud  
*I am black*  
*I am white—all unite*

Lives matter  
I matter  
Don't smother  
Let me  
Say it loud  
*Satyagraha*  
I am somebody  
Father, son  
Brother, too  
Say it loud  
I am somebody  
Gasp for air  
Let me breathe  
Say it loud  
*I am somebody—say it proud*

All lives matter  
My life matters  
I am the world  
*Satyagraha*  
*Knee on neck—say it loud*

I am somebody  
*Bin Deutscher*  
*Kann nicht atmen*  
Help me breathe  
I am somebody  
*Life matters*

I matter  
*Soy español*  
*No puedo respirar*  
I can't breathe  
Let me

Say it again  
*Je suis Français*  
*Je ne respire pas*  
Say it loud

I am somebody  
Keep calm and  
Carry on  
Say it loud  
*Satyagraha*  
I am the world  
Till I can breathe  
Say it loud  
I can breathe  
I have a dream  
*I am somebody.*

*This poem is reprinted here  
because the earlier version,  
published in the Fall 2020  
issue of the magazine,  
inadvertently left out a portion  
of the author's writing.*

# Flawless

By Robert John Valonis

—Stuart, FL

Oh, you, the flawless,  
How I envy thee.  
How pitiful it is  
To be just me.

Your advice is needed;  
Thank you so much.  
I'll consider it all;  
I will. Stay in touch.

I wish so much  
To be just like you,  
Pure and perfect  
And flawless, too.

To think my genes  
Are not like yours.  
Mine are weak  
And yours, so pure.

How inconsiderate  
Life can be  
To make you so pure,  
Yet think less of me.

I love your advice;  
I know you mean well.  
I'll ponder your words;  
Upon them I'll dwell.

To sleep I will go,  
Wake in the morn,  
Thankful for genes  
With which I was born.

Through Love,  
Surely, we may disagree.  
But my sarcasm comes  
From a fine pedigree.

## Clouds Below Me

By Anthony Phillips

—Las Vegas, NV

Clouds below me. Star above me.  
The darkness behind me. Sunlight in front of me.  
This is how I feel when your picture comes to my mind.  
You give me wings to help me fly.  
The clouds below show a face smiling at me  
as I fly ever so high,  
stars above me just out of reach.  
Your voice comes to me from the clouds below.  
“You can reach them with both hands;  
trust yourself, and follow the dream.”  
The darkness behind me wants me to quit.  
Give in to my fear and hide from the world.  
The sunlight in front of me shines bright and true.  
Filled with love, all that is you.  
This light of love shines brightly from your heart,  
giving me the strength to stay on my path  
of dreams and hope.

## Seeing Through Fingerprints

By Anthony Phillips

—Las Vegas, NV

My window is covered with so many fingerprints  
blocking out the sun and view outside.  
People walk to my window and look inside,  
placing both hands against it  
as they step closer and see my pride.  
Fingerprints of life slowly block my view of this world.  
Dirty hands, sweaty hands.  
It is getting harder to see  
what is beyond my glass window.  
One after another people stop and look.  
Some stay for a minute; some stay for an hour,  
leaving behind fingerprints covered in dirt.  
Some leave behind sweat  
to show how hard they have worked.  
Occasionally, those who do stop by never touch the glass.  
They stop and smile, wave and say good-bye.  
I look for those who never touch;  
they stay with me long after the sun has set.  
With each passing day, my window fills up  
until my view of the world is gone.  
Without asking, someone comes by and cleans the window  
for the light to come through.  
Smiling, I motion at them to come in.  
Opening the window and letting them in  
can save your window from the fingerprints you do not need.

## Abraham and Sarah

By Kellie Davenda Daniels

VA Medical Center—Memphis, TN

In the words of scripture,  
a timeless tale of love unveils,  
wishful thinking prevails,  
a miracle unfolds,  
a child is born.  
Now two hearts  
can never be torn apart.  
A hand of compassion extends,  
three hearts can mend  
and become a family to start  
a new generation like sands of the desert,  
like stars in the night sky.  
Must we wonder why  
God's love,  
sent from above,  
chose these two hearts to build upon?  
We are all one  
from the height of noon  
to the setting of the sun.

## God's Heavenly Honor Guard

By Scott Sjostrand

—Hallock, MN

God's Heavenly Honor Guard stands at attention  
on each side leading to His throne.  
When Lance Corporal Kuznia becomes one,  
he won't be alone.  
He died a tragic death while serving our country  
in Washington, D.C.  
They played “Taps” at his funeral.  
In heaven they'll be sounding “Reveille.”  
He'll join the ranks of great men such as Patton,  
Pershing and Dwight. They are all standing tall,  
dressed in uniforms of pure white.  
He was a volunteer, which means a lot to me.  
He was willing to risk his life  
to protect the land of the free.  
He will be missed and many will grieve.  
To those who loved him, please believe  
he's wearing his finest dress Class A's,  
standing alongside departed Rangers,  
Seals and Green Berets.  
God will salute him  
and place a medal upon his chest.  
He'll say, “You're a Marine.  
You're one of the best.”

## Our President—Ronald W. Reagan

By Anthony Coccozza

VA Medical Center—Los Angeles, CA

A true American Hero,  
A true soldier of God,  
A true friend of the American people.  
With love and respect,  
For crying out loud,  
He was a true Christian gentleman.  
For eight years, he kept his promise  
And his word to the American people.  
I'm proud to call him my friend.  
Our President, Ronald W. Reagan,  
Was our Commander in Chief.  
He led us citizens to a better life and future.  
He was a real leader sincerely.  
Reagan and I,  
We have something in common.  
I was born under the lucky star.  
He said, "We the People."

## Mother's Day

By Arvell L. Duckworth

—Oskaloosa, KS

As Mother's Day comes soon,  
my mind wanders back  
to where I was raised,  
in that little two-room unpainted shack.

I never thought much  
about hard times  
because, really, all we knew  
was that we just had to work real hard  
and get all our chores done.

We very seldom went to church.  
It wasn't very far  
but the only way to church was to walk  
because we didn't have a car.

We didn't know much about the Lord,  
only that He was far above.  
One thing we really knew  
was our mother's love.

Now we have all grown up  
and Mother has gone to her reward.  
One thing we will never forget.  
She said, "Children, always love the Lord."

## A Soldier's Peace

By Tanya R. Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

To stand alone one day  
Surrounded by nature's glow.  
Every breath of air a spray  
Of the fresh clean water's flow.

A bird and squirrel playing tag  
Amidst the trees of their homes.  
Up, down and across limbs that sag  
Swaying in the wind like foam.

Far off, a herd of deer feed;  
Stags and does stand their ground.  
Hearing footsteps in the brush seeds,  
Now across the field they bound.

Continuing on the shaded path of stone  
Searching the meadow for a quiet place.  
To meditate on the past and atone  
For any transgressions and lack of grace.

The still of the quiet broken only by  
The scurrying of animals amongst the trees.  
The occasional cloud passing in the sky  
Taking away feelings of fear and unease.

Seeking release from this numbing stress  
Needing to cleanse the soul and mind.  
Wanting to be free of my inner distress  
Trying to cast off worries that bind.

Only wanting to have a future where it  
Is no longer dark and with no more dread.  
Relaxed in the surrounding silence and quiet,  
Unwanted thoughts float away like tufts of thread.

Deep breaths slowly taken, purifying as it flows  
With clarity and comfort to this person's whole.  
It brings a powerful, calm influence that grows  
Giving peace and serenity to this broken soul.

## Day and the Dreams

By Carl Kerwick

VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

I remember the day and the dreams  
that were made as the day neared, in which you drew.  
Your life has been full of color:  
the virgin whiteness of a newborn child,  
the rolling hill of green sweet meadows,  
the sunshine so bright, making life so gay.

I remember the day and the dreams  
that were made as you ran playing in sky's light blue.  
Though you know not much of me nor I of you,  
our lives are of twisted fate  
because we express the same hues.  
We share the richness of childhood memories true.  
We hide in ourselves rocky shores  
and dashed despairs of hope.  
Those we call our darker spots,  
the blacks and blues and grays,  
overwhelm our world of life's shining rays.

I remember the day and the dreams  
that were made as the day neared, in which you drew.  
Some would say to act normal, an illusionary belief.  
We had glimpses of shadows  
that disappeared in the darkening hues.  
The rage in our eyes tells no lies;  
it must exist somehow.  
Our love for the old women in the shoe  
is the greatest part of our lives.  
They've cared for us and shared with us  
all that they possibly can.

I remember the day and the dreams  
that were made as the day neared, in which you drew.  
Feeling life as you have felt it isn't an easy task.  
Remembering days of old and gone past,  
life tells us one thing:  
love grows ever so bold from the love  
we have within ourselves, for ourselves,  
as wild and free as the wind.

I remember the day and the dreams  
that were made as the day neared, in which you drew.

## A Life in Stone

By Tanya R. Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

It stands forlorn in the back of the lot.  
The facade is discolored by the years,  
Eroded by time and the elements.  
The stone is fractured and weather beaten.

Its language hearkens to times gone by,  
Carved so long ago, phrases seem foreign.  
The words are hard to read in the daylight.

A name and dates are inscribed on the stone,  
Giving testament to a former life  
That dwelled in another generation.  
His life is summed up in a single line,

Telling the world that a person once had  
Been known and loved by his community.  
The stone now lays forgotten and faded.

There is no longer any family  
To care for or remember this young man.  
I wipe away the dirt caked on by the years  
Of neglect to find a revelation.

“In loving memory of Joseph Bond  
His life one of duty to his country,  
Killed in action when only twenty-one“

## The Cat That Came in From the Cold

By Scott Lehman

VA Medical Center—St. Louis, MO

I looked out my window  
and saw a cat with nowhere to go.  
I waved to him. And he said hello.  
He was digging through the trash  
so I figured he had no cash.  
I asked him if he wanted something to eat.  
He said yes as long as it was sweet.  
He asked if I had a mouse.  
I said I don't, I believe.  
He said if that's the case,  
I'm gonna leave.  
I wanted a mouse, so sweet.  
I can live better on the street.

# Gold Star Family Membership

By Dan Yates

—Blue Springs, MO

I hear the doorbell, who could it be?  
I glance at the clock, it's half past three.  
Turning the handle, I open the door  
saw two uniforms, my heart sank to the floor.

Their presence confirmed my biggest fear;  
I knew exactly why they were here.  
Though they spoke I denied every word,  
Tears filled my eyes, my vision was blurred.

Words tactfully chosen, delivered with care,  
couldn't soften the blow of that verbal nightmare.  
My mind in chaos, spinning with madness,  
I looked in their eyes, saw their sadness.

A few weeks later I answered the phone.  
A gentle voice said, "You're not alone."  
The next day in my drive I see a car;  
Out steps a lady, with a Gold Star.

She talked, she listened and I would cry.  
She offered no answers, nor reasons why.  
Life's lost its meaning, now a silhouette.  
Her words were profound, I'll never forget.

"I'd like to welcome you to the Gold Star family.  
It's a club you didn't want to join,  
and one you can't get out of."

My heart has a hole the size of my son;  
I miss him each day, and I mean **every** one.  
They say time will heal, how can they be sure?  
As I live with this pain, not expecting a cure.

As Gold Star members we live every day  
knowing our loved ones were willing to pay  
the price that it takes for us to be free.  
And, without them, that's no guarantee.

# With the Change in the Weather

By Penny Lee Deere

VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

With a change in the weather, getting nicer,  
I look forward to being able to get outside  
and enjoy the world.  
I can take a walk instead of being at the gym.  
I can and will work in the yard,  
prepping for the garden's summer blooms

and hardy vegetables.

I can go up to the horse farm  
and volunteer by doing chores.

The sun helps my spirit.

I look forward to absorbing Vitamin D  
into my skin naturally.

I have seen my first robin and look forward  
to other signs of spring  
such as the crocuses popping up in the yard,  
the sounds of returning birds  
and the smell of sap being turned into maple syrup.  
I feel the grass beneath my feet.

These are all signs of spring.

Spring is a time for me

to have rebirth and regeneration.

It is my time.

# When Darkness Falls

By Lawrence William Langman

—Portage, IN

In the twilight hours, in the midday's sun,  
you get that news of a lost loved one.  
Your mind fills with grief, your eyes swell,  
you disappear to a place where pain dwells!  
Lost in this chasm of infinite sorrow,  
nowhere to turn to, no sight of tomorrow.  
Emotion now surging, pulsing all sides,  
yet knowing and feeling that life still abides.  
Where do you turn to, who must you tell,  
where will you find that energy to impel?  
You're grasping at straws, no place to hold on.  
You feel like a game piece and you're a damn pawn!  
How can you live without them, where can you turn,  
how could life set your whole world to burn?  
You ask of yourself, "Are they in that place?  
Is heaven so real and is there such grace?"  
You look to the skies in search for a sign.  
You're watching the stars and how they align.  
Never to touch or breathe this fresh air,  
how is this possible, how is this fair!  
The phone starts to ring, a name you do heed,  
you answer the call as crying hearts bleed.  
Now you take all your grief, lock it up in a place  
to protect your child's tears, offer up your embrace.  
They say misery loves company but I disagree.  
Misery wants you alone, to bring you to your knees.  
Your family and friends will steady your world.  
True colors of lights and happiness unfurled!

## Choices

By Lawrence William Langman

—Portage, IN

I've given my oath, my word, my bond.  
I've suffered those tears, those dreams that hold on.  
The sweat and the blood were given freely.  
My love of this country and this flag was the key.  
You stand there holding Old Glory in flames,  
yet covered are your faces, ashamed of your names.  
The lives that you've taken in haste and such waste  
have given me anger, put in mouths a bad taste.  
Men and women that have vowed to protect all of us,  
taken away because of someone's vile bloodlust!  
Who gives a shit about which side you're on?  
Democrat, Republican, what does it matter?  
We've all been conned!  
Our country has systematically been taken away.  
We've been muted from society; just our media has a say!  
At this point we all need to learn, to rise and take a stand.  
Stop letting them push us into poverty;  
draw a line in the sand!  
They are driving a wedge in us by color and our politics,  
using nothing more than deception  
along with their bag of tricks  
Please remove those blinders that both sides seem to wear.  
The evidence is right in front of you, if only you would dare!  
There are red flags hiding in every place, right in plain sight.  
Stop being delusional; wake up and start doing what is right!  
Maybe not for yourself, but for our country as a whole,  
put your egos aside for once in your life,  
and show you have a soul!  
Who will be our hero in this hour of our demise?  
Who will feed our children if this nation does comply?  
We used to be known as wolves above all the others,  
the protectors of this world  
who guided sons, fathers and mothers.  
Let's show them who we are, not who they want us to be.  
We are a country of heroes from sea to shining sea!

## Old Vets

By Michael J. Young

—Suncook, NH

When you were young and in your prime,  
You decided to give your time.  
You joined the service, doesn't matter what branch.  
When you signed up, you took a chance,  
A chance that you may be sent somewhere  
And never come back to the people who care,  
The ones who loved you, worried every day  
That when your time was through, you'd be okay.  
So many years have gone by since then;  
Now you've aged and are closer to the end.  
You can't do what you used to do.  
It makes you mad, but it's something we all go through.  
You think back and swell with pride  
About your time in the service. Oh, what a ride!  
And you'd do it again, if only you could;  
If given the chance, I know you would.  
So the years have taken the best of us now.  
You spend your time wondering how,  
But that's life, not much we can do.  
Time marches on, and you march along, too.  
And in the years still to come  
We'll move on to make room for a younger one.  
When I think of all the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines  
Who have served this land the best you've ever seen,  
It sends a chill down my spine.  
"Special People" you're all one of a kind.  
So another poem I write today  
Because for me it's how I say,  
"Thank you all for serving the U.S.A."

## They Say

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

Nothing's as lovely as a tree,  
But what's lovelier is the wind in the tree,  
Flitting through the dark bronzed leaves  
As it prances o'er dancing branches.  
In and out it curls,  
Picks up road dust then swirls onto the next tree.  
Then billows in the willows,  
And for a fleeting moment floats in an oak,  
Rushes through a maple  
Where with a hush  
It becomes stable—slowing  
To a stilled and lulling silence.

## Many of Us

By Michael J. Young  
—Suncook, NH

Many of us long ago  
Joined the ranks and had to go  
Fight a war or sail the sea.  
We did what we had to do to keep us free.  
Some were stationed in foreign lands;  
Many did things that were never planned.  
None of us wanted to die,  
But many have; that's no lie.  
Our country has always been strong  
Because men and women have come along  
To fill the ranks we once held  
When we did our time in hell.  
And hopefully that's the way it will be,  
People always stepping up to help keep us free.  
It's not easy to ask for your life;  
It's like rolling the dice.

You never know from day to day  
If your life will be taken away.  
But there have always been  
Committed, courageous and brave men  
And women, too, who have joined our ranks.  
To them all, I give thanks.  
Because of them, and some of us, too,  
Our flag still waves Red, White and Blue.

---

**WOSL MEMBERS' APPRECIATION AWARD:  
EDITOR'S CHOICE BY DORIS COBB**

---

## April Fools

By Daniel Paicopulos  
—San Diego, CA

Been thinking about war a lot lately,  
the most important one,  
you know,  
because it happened to me.

Been thinking about bravery and fear,  
how the absence of one does not  
define the other.

A few warriors fear nothing, but  
this doesn't make them strong.  
It simply makes them,  
I think,  
too foolish to be afraid.

## Runic Love

By Michael Moslander  
—Moberly, MO

Lady of Snows, on a cold winter's night,  
Yours is the heart which brings me light.  
Snow Maiden, soft and white,  
A Winter Warrior's highest delight.  
Lady of Springs, reflecting in my dreams,  
Maiden of May, she's my Spring Queen.

Lady of the White Wood,  
Mistress with the plum lips,  
Flower Maiden brings the dawn of roses.  
Queen of Summer, Mistress of Fire and Flame,  
Quench my thirst, Maiden of Rain.  
Red Maiden, with your light in darkness, I am never lost.  
You're the Queen of Green, Oak, Ash and Moss.  
She's a Gemini Queen mesmerizing moonbeams,  
Windswept dreams across sacred sky streams.  
Mistress of my dreams making love to me,  
A Valkyrie Queen, you are surreal to me.

Lady of Diamonds, Gem of the Vanir,  
Queen of Hearts, *Brinsinga* hold me near.  
In the grove of *Gullveig's* Tears,  
Through the *Niflwood* gleams  
Emerald, Ruby and Sapphire spheres.  
Journey through waves and foam of sea,  
Wandering wayside rivers of green.  
Climbing to the mountain's peak,  
  
There, Love's Volcano, I seek.  
Under Gemini's stars and Fire's light,  
Stone stands tall, smooth and shining bright.  
Eternal to the soul and to the touch,  
I pick up *Mjöltnir* and carve my oaths thrice in love.  
With a *Svipiskir* the *Skald Song* penetrates  
The twilight of time.  
The Ringing of the Runes  
Cries out for my Valkyrie Queen.

## A Soldier's Heart

By Michael Moslander  
—Moberly, MO

A soldier at war has a mind for battle.  
Without a mission, without a purpose,  
He roams the field just like cattle.  
A soldier's heart longs for the fight.  
Prepare, prepare.  
Seeking war, seeking battle,  
go and fight with all your might.  
Without our war, we're lost ashore.

## Your Soul

By Carl Kerwick  
VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

The way to your soul and heart  
Is to listen with all your might.  
We hear you deeply and completely,  
Filling our hearts and souls  
Full of your memories.  
Make them unforgettable,  
To last and last  
With all the love in the world.

## Drill Sergeant

By Scott Sjostrand  
—Hallock, MN

Military cooks fed me very well.  
The food tasted great  
and I can still remember the smell  
of omelets, stuffed green peppers, biscuits and gravy.  
In the Air Force and Army,  
we were eating as good as the Navy—  
Salisbury steaks and roast chicken.  
The military food to me was finger lickin'  
MREs out in the field  
feed a soldier well, and they'll never yield.  
Hot Chili Mac was a favorite on maneuvers.  
I inhaled my food  
like a vacuum cleaner named Hoover.  
A variety of beverages quenched our thirst.  
After second helpings,  
I thought my stomach would burst.  
I thanked the cooks for their efforts.  
I forgot to mention, they also served desserts.

## The Whippoorwill

By CJ Reeves  
VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

At evening time the Whippoorwill  
sings outside my window,  
and sings to me a melody  
in notes so sweet and tender.  
His mate comes to him on the wing,  
takes him to her chamber.  
I wait for him another day  
to sing outside my window.

## Through the Flowered Fields We Play

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

When the mingled butterflies play,  
We dance upon the merry month of May,  
Through the harbor channels of flowered dust  
And the bumblebees that hover and thrust  
As the flowers sway and nod  
Beneath the watchful eyes of God.  
Forget the myths of stories told  
That quiver and shake the old.  
In the garden of the springtime eve,  
We twinkle-toed beneath the garden breeze,  
Up the path with our passionate feet  
Through the honeysuckle so sweet.  
We lift our eyes to a dandelion's surprise  
And clutch our hands together to watch the blue clouds fly.  
Then the echoed sea rings through the air  
Between rose petals and rhododendrons so rare.  
Then the murmur mist splashes upon the still rocks  
Which repeats its ringing as a grandfathered clock.  
We ran so playfully through the flowered fields that day  
With singing laughter through the flowers at play.

## Wondering in the Dark

By Charles L. Carey

VA Medical Center—Martinsburg, WV

Behold the mysteries  
That lie beyond the shadow of gloom,  
The hidden reflections beneath the barren moon.  
Dancing memories appear at dawn  
As hardened verses within a song.  
Chanted moves step to a darkened beat  
Beneath hollow footsteps on the enduring street  
That warns of a signal of no retreat.  
Though gallant embraces crumble and fall  
And a winter's memories enthrall,  
Barren touches standing dormant and still  
Spin endlessly on a broken wheel.  
Broken laughter chases a soothing joy  
With thoughtless pleasure that awaits a baby boy.  
Yet hope appears through morning light.  
He'll be everyone's delight.

## We American Boy Scouts of America

By Anthony Cocozza

VA Medical Center—Los Angeles, CA

We, American Boy Scouts of America,  
We, united we stand.  
We are proud to be Americans.  
In this land of the free,  
We all stand tall.  
Because I once was a Boy Scout,  
Troop thirty-three, Eagle Scout,  
I work and serve in and out.  
On my honor I will do my best  
To serve you. I can do the rest  
To do my duty to God and my country  
Including Riverside County.  
And I obey the scout law,  
Because every rule in the book is law.  
To help other people at all times,  
To guide and protect us at all the times,  
To keep myself physically strong  
For my future, my loved ones, to carry on,  
To stay mentally awake and morally straight.

## Perseverance

By Kimberly Green

—Fort Smith, AR

Hanging on by life's thread  
Like a flea with no rope,  
Life spirals uncontrollably.  
Sometimes you feel as though you've lost hope.

Doing the best you can,  
Trying to make ends meet,  
Time and time again  
Feeling lost—feeling defeat.

Adjust, readjust, adjust again.  
Driving on is the plan,  
Realizing your journey is long.  
YOU have the ability to move on.

DO NOT accept defeat!  
Failures sometimes must occur.  
Airborne like a paratrooper  
Who stands in the door,

Drive on!  
Stay your course.  
Stand or sit tall.  
Perseverance—AMAZE THEM ALL!

## The New Year Insight

By John E. Jones

VA Medical Center—Milwaukee, WI

Surviving within the world into another year,  
Carrying peaceful thoughts, having no fear,  
Curious to changes, kept them in mind,  
People working for better all of the time.

Communicating from everywhere to learn all we can.  
Within the future grows every child, woman and man.  
Thankful to have security under a watchful eye,  
Helpful all the time, those on whom we rely.

Looking forward with hope and cheer,  
Avoiding blunders until every place is clear.  
Finding our leaders showing the way,  
All kinds of people awaiting today.

We're eased every day and night.  
As the world turns, we're doing what's right.

## Time

By John E. Jones

VA Medical Center—Milwaukee, WI

Living as if there were endless time,  
Life grows while seconds combine.  
Depending on the clock helps us from going astray.  
Twenty-four hours pass, turned into another day.

Seeking into space unknown,  
We searched through time where life has never gone.  
Thinking about the future within a distant mind,  
Working on a goal of uncertain time.

Throughout the years, changes bring insight,  
Find different views, reach new heights.  
Moving forward from a distance way behind,  
The days and nights change through time.

Reflecting energy from the sun,  
We begin to settle in space unknown.  
Minutes went by, they easily went  
As the world turns in unnoticed movement.

Having control while existence unfolds,  
We progress through time as life grows old.

Typist: Marybeth Matthews

## Dear Marcie

By Frank X. Mattson

VA Medical Facility—Spring City, PA

Dear...  
I'm out of it  
I'm full of  
Hate  
Full of sin  
Full of what?  
No body there.

## The Defiant One

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

In the wind  
The leaves. Blow.  
Soon they'll be buried  
'Neath the cold gray snow.  
And yet always defiantly  
Stands the barren tree  
In never ending silence  
To await the coming Spring!

## He Was the Enemy: A Soldier's Dilemma

By Jonnie Lynn Donatelli

VA Medical Center—Bedford, MA

Amid the crossfire and confusion, I see him.  
Guns are drawn, bullets flying, people yelling.  
Smoke from fires outlines the soldiers' bodies.  
In a desperate attempt to capture the enemy,  
They have dug in deep against the vehicles strewn all over.

It is chaos. An exhausting force of nature, human nature.  
And I see him through my gunsights.  
I see the sweaty smudges of dirt on his face.  
His tears are falling to the ground like rain.

From my vantage point, I can almost feel his fear.  
"I give up," he yells to us. "I give up!"  
But no one listens because he is the enemy.  
I must shoot him or capture him.

And I prefer the latter.  
"CEASE FIRE!" I scream. "STOP!"  
And I realize I have no voice.  
And I realize I am crying,

For my unknown enemy is lying on the ground.  
"He is dead," I cry softly.  
But no one listens because he was the enemy.

## The Walking Wounded

By Benjamin J. Williams

VA Medical Facility—Biloxi, MS

He has problems, big problems  
with becoming a civilian once again.  
With a metal plate in his skull, he suffers behind his smile.  
He tries to find a safe spot where he can stop fighting.  
over and over, the war now taking place inside his head.  
He has not become bitter or angry,  
avoids wrapping himself in self-pity, then lying down  
and giving up on the rest of his life.  
Instead, he is proud to have served his country,  
and now refocuses the direction of his life.  
He smiles as he takes the small steps necessary  
for him to grab a fair share of the American Dream.  
He salutes as "Ole Glory" flies high above.

## Take My Hand and Walk With Me

By Gene Allen Groner

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

Come and walk with me as I walk today;  
Take my hand and walk beside me, I pray.  
Be my friend and love me true  
Just as I am loving you.  
Come and walk with me as I walk today.

We can walk beside the stream in the woods,  
Feel the wind upon our faces clean and pure  
With the grass beneath our feet  
And the sound of water sweet.  
We can walk beside the stream in the woods.

Let us hear the sound of birds as they sing,  
As they take to flight and move their lovely wings,  
Hearing sounds of sweetest bliss,  
Touching hands and sharing a wish.  
Let us hear the sound of birds as they sing.

Take my hand; come and walk with me today.  
You're always cherished as my friend.  
Your heart and mine will beat the same  
As sure as a rainbow follows the rain.  
Take my hand; come and walk with me today.

## Our Voice Means Something

By Kenneth Harvey

VA Medical Center—Richmond, VA

Our voice means something  
when we see something and say something.  
Stand and walk alongside voices given the power to soar.  
Our voice means something and gains meaning for all.  
Your voice need not be loud to be heard in a crowd.  
Say something now—your voice means something.  
Historically, women ask, “Where is my voice?”  
Over here, they say, ready with purpose.  
Women veterans put pen to paper  
to remind veterans’ Voices and others  
that our voice roars.  
It means much more because it is our “Stanza”  
and that will not be random.  
Read these words: it is time you hear our voices.  
Hear these words: our voice means something.  
They are the Richmond VIP--Women’s Writing Group,  
a specific part of the veterans’ voice!

## The Quail Hunt

By Trina M. Mioner

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

A new place, away from family and friends,  
Feelings of isolation, loneliness and the blues.  
Shoot pool to socialize; that’s what we do.  
A woman in the Army takes things in stride.

I welcomed the invitation, but found it quite odd.  
An officer, a gentleman extended to me, a private,  
Hunting for quail. What fun it would be!  
Ignorant! I was the hunted. How could this be?

He spread his coat for me to lie down.  
We would see quail when the sun crowned.  
He said, “Get comfortable,” with hearty laughter.  
It seemed appropriate, not knowing it was me he was after.

Don’t fight; it will make matters worse.  
Over in minutes, no wounds to nurse.  
I said, “No!” It didn’t matter.  
No one could hear the screams and the clatter.

He brushed off his coat, dirt and debris,  
Offered his hand of friendship. This couldn’t be.  
I found out later, Quail Hunting is slang,  
An invitation for those new to the gang.

## Plunder

By Lynn A. Norton

—Leawood, KS

Cannabis-driven hunger spurs pillage of cupboards  
with Viking zeal. Mere spoonful of peanut butter,  
stale crackers, unsatisfying plunder.  
An unsullied Reddi-Wip can whispers  
sugary promises from the refrigerator.  
Eager lips purse around its slender spout.  
Pillowy foam explodes over teeth and gums.  
Sated by sweet indulgence, hunger yields to slumber.  
Reddi-Wip’s hollow corpse points  
an accusing plastic finger at its assailant.  
Guilty!

## The State of the Nation: Various Levels of Pain

*By Charles Marshall*

*VA Medical Center—Richmond, VA*

Some physical pain can be experienced in the brain.  
But brain pain can cause you to go insane.  
Emotional pain can leave you crying.  
But spiritual pain can start the process of dying.

Nerve pain will definitely leave you shaking,  
leaving you feeling unstable and earth-quaking.  
Heart pain can leave you sad and disconnected,  
putting you in a place where God can't be reflected.

Fear pain can put you so far behind.  
Oh, God does not give us a spirit of fear,  
but of power, of love and of a sound mind.

Psychological pain can put us in a spin.  
So study to show yourself  
approved unto God. Workmen  
need not be ashamed,  
rightly divining the word of truth.

Moral pain will kill a nation  
and subject the next generation  
with unresolved relations.  
Political pain will bring us no gain,  
and put us in a divided lifestyle  
that the reprobate mind cannot maintain.

Disease—the pain can leave us with Covid-19,  
a pandemic that this world has never seen.

The battles have been raging  
and the fight has been fought.  
Whose fault is it when the stupidity  
has all been caught?

## The Leaves Are Green

*By Charles Fredette*

*VA Medical Center—Bedford, MA*

The leaves are green,  
The sun is shining,  
The grass is yellow.  
It makes me happy,  
A fine, free fellow.

## I Left Mississippi

*By Benjamin J. Williams*

*VA Medical Facility—Biloxi, MS*

I left Mississippi with the clothes I had on,  
swore to myself I'd stay long gone.  
Away from Dixie like a slave I ran,  
heading north to find freedom-land.  
Across the Delta, through the cotton I ran,  
moving faster than a hound-chased man.  
Looked over my shoulder but didn't slow down.  
Before the night's over, I have to cover more ground  
before I stand on Vine Street looking around.  
Look away, look away because now I'm gone.  
Kansas City, Missouri, is now my home.

I left Mississippi with the clothes I had on,  
swore to myself I'd stay long gone.  
Opportunity wasn't knocking on my front door.  
I'm tired of growing old while still black and poor.  
I'm taking a chance to shoot my shot out,  
to join the haves and leave the have-nots.  
So when it grows cold late at night, don't cry for me,  
just wish me happiness and let me be.

I left Mississippi with the clothes I had on,  
swore to myself I'd stay long gone.

# Mail Call

**Diane Wadsen**, Millen, Ga., has a powerful message for veterans, “I am truly thankful to you for publishing, “Army Strong” and “Taking the Reins” by Trina Mioner and “Courageous Cora” by Faith Fables, plus my poem, “It’s Your Life.” I know sexual assault is an uncomfortable topic and people tend not to want to talk about it. I also know how hard it is for male and female victims to ask for help, because I have been there. The pain victims carry inside is so enormous, they are scarred by the trauma of this abuse. It is still happening. One might never be able to forget this tragedy, but maybe with these stories like the ones in the 2020 fall issue, we can help someone realize they are not alone. April is Military Sexual Awareness Month. Maybe our stories will encourage other victims to tell their stories. Letting it out can set you free from the secret you have been keeping.”



Veterans Voices Writing Project received a check and certificate from “The Survivors,” **Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 70**, at the Moberly Correctional Center in Missouri.



Joan Garvert, National Treasurer of the **Women’s Overseas Service League**, Springfield, Ill., writes that VVWP “has been one of our National Projects since 1975. We are pleased to support this worthwhile program for our veterans.”



“During these unprecedented times, our **VFW Auxiliary 7327** (Springfield, Va.) has been affected by things happening around us; however, we wish to support Veterans Voices Writing Project... We have read the magazines and feel it must be an excellent outlet for the veterans sharing their stories, art, etc. One of our auxiliary members has worked in publishing and realizes the expense to publish books and magazines.”



Visual arts program benefactors, **Dr. Robert T. and Ada Rubin**, Oxnard, Calif., comment, “The fall 2020 issue looks great! Any feedback on the visual arts section?” *Editors’ Note:* A new art editor, Tracy Cheng, oversaw art selection for this issue of the magazine. Welcome Tracy and thank you Dr. Rubin.



“Writing groups are virtual this year due to COVID,” wrote **Barbara Davidson**, New York, N.Y., clinical social worker, outpatient psych. “Your magazine becomes all the more meaningful to those veterans who cannot get to the VA. Keep on publishing!... *Veterans’ Voices* becomes more and more beautiful.”

**Dorothy Snow**, Lee’s Summit, Mo., sent a thank you note, “*Veterans’ Voices* and especially Tanya Whitney, the poem on page 43 in the fall 2020 issue brought tears from past pain and appreciation slowly came. I worked as a nurse at 24th Evac Hospital, 1961-68, was married in Hawaii enroute and have so many memories. Now I’m 75 and have had a stroke. So much I had forgotten but your words brought it back. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”



**G. M. DeBiase**, Lompoc, Calif., wrote, “I’m in hopes GI’s here at Vandenburg AFB as well as so many retirees in the area read the ads in the local newspapers regarding *Veterans’ Voices*.” Mrs. DeBiase wanted to help get the word out about our writing project and placed local newspaper notices to draw attention to VVWP.



From 2010-17, **Bert J. Peterson**, Kingsford, Mich., was a writing aide for *Veterans’ Voices* at Iron Mountain VAMC. He began the process of volunteering again last spring when the virus put his activities on hold. VVWP looks forward to having Bert’s services again!



“Thank you for publishing my poetry in the fall 2020 issue of *Veterans’ Voices*, writes **Karen Green**, Pahrump, Nev. “I hope my poetry helps others when they read it as much as it helps me to write it. This magazine is so important to so many veterans. I know for myself that to write about what is going on at a certain time is easier than trying to talk about it.”



**Kenny Trujillo**, Las Vegas, Nev., says, “Thank you *Veterans’ Voices* and staff. Veterans understand the importance of freedom and love for our country. We are a national brotherhood and sisterhood – American soldiers and members of a great team.”



Christmas greetings were received from **Milton Evans**, Staten Island, N.Y., and **Anthony Coccozza**, Los Angeles, Calif.



Special thank yous for copies of *Veterans’ Voices* were received from the Iron Mountain, Mich., VAMC; the John D. Dingell VAMC in Detroit, Mich., and the Montana VA Health Care System in Fort Harrison.

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

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

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



## FOUNDERS

### Elizabeth L. Fontaine Memorial Award:

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

### Gladys Feld Helzberg Memorial Award:

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

### Margaret Sally Keach Memorial Award:

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

## STORIES — *Fact or Fiction*

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

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

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

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

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

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

## POETRY

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

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

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

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

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

## SPECIAL CATEGORIES

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

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

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

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

# Thank You



Contributions to *Veterans' Voices*, both the writing and the financial gifts, are an inspiration to the editors and publishers of the magazine. The writers who submit their stories and poems as well as those who read and subscribe to the magazine encourage veterans everywhere to express their thoughts and feelings in writing. The financial contributions, no matter how large or small, make possible the publication of the magazine. Those who have made larger financial gifts since the last issue of the magazine are listed here.

– VVWP Board of Directors.

---

## **Gifts of \$20,000 or more**

## **Gifts of \$15,000 or more**

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

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

*Anonymous, Kansas City, Mo.*

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

*Tina Hacker, Leawood, Kan.*

*Sheryl Liddle, Independence, Mo.*

*Ada J. and Robert T. Rubin, M.D.,*

*Oxnard, Calif.*

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

*DAV Auxiliary, Dept. of Minnesota*

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

*Anthony Cordero, Bronx, N.Y.*

*Ted Iliff, Olathe, Kan.*

*Network for Good*

*WOSL, San Antonio, Texas*

## **Gifts of \$300 or more**

*Newcomer Family Foundation, Prairie  
Village, Kan.*

*Kennith Harvey, Chester, Va.*

*Christopher Iliff, Stillwell, Kan.*

*WOSL National, Springfield, Ill.*

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

*Carleton "Swede" Beckstrom, Shawnee,  
Kan.*

*VA Medical Center, Dallas, Texas*

*Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter  
70, Moberly, Mo.*

*Marianne Watson, Wheatland, Mo.*

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

*America's Best Charities*

*DAV Auxiliary 17, Temple Hills, Md.*

*DAV Auxiliary, State Dept. of Missouri*

*Barbara J. Davidson, New York, N.Y.*

*Alice Calderwood Hawk,*

*Leawood, Kan.*

*Pam Molnar, New London, Ohio*

*Lynn Norton, Leawood, Kan.*

*VFW Auxiliary 2233, Detroit, Mich.*

*VFW Auxiliary 2673, Cody, Wyo.*

*VFW Auxiliary 6504, Waterloo, Ill.*

*VFW Auxiliary 8956, Ocean Shores,  
Wash.*

*VFW Auxiliary, Dept. of Alabama*

## **Gifts in Kind**

*Charles Helzberg, Kansas City, Mo.*

*Kansas Audio-Reader Service,  
Lawrence, Kan.*

*Kaw Valley Computer, Kansas City,  
Kan.*

*Summit Litho, Lee's Summit, Mo.*

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

*VA Medical Center, Kansas City, Mo.*

# VVWP Member Memorial



Board members of Veterans Voices Writing Project were saddened to learn about the deaths of two project supporters.

**Mary Dobbins** of Sibley, Mo., died of COVID on June 23, 2020. Mary was a poet and an animal rights advocate, as well as a friend of VVWP. She had served as secretary for the VVWP board and also assisted *Veterans' Voices* editors by typing prose and poetry manuscripts.

**Martha Anderes** of Cresskill, N.J., died December 20, 2020. Martha was the daughter of Elizabeth Fontaine. She grew up observing her mother advocate and fundraise to provide writing as therapy for our nation's veterans. As a result, she treasured her mother's legacy and supported the project throughout her life.

# Submission Guidelines for *Veterans' Voices*



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

## Instructions for Writing Submissions.

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

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

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

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

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

## Guidelines for Local Contests.

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

### SUBMIT ONLINE:

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

### SUBMIT BY MAIL:

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

### QUESTIONS:

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

## Mail Submission Sample.

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

Author Name \_\_\_\_\_

VAMC Name \_\_\_\_\_

VAMC City, State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Author's Permanent Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Branch of Service \_\_\_\_\_

Conflict or Era \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate dates served \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that I served in the U.S. military.

Date Submitted to *Veterans' Voices* \_\_\_\_\_

Title: *Example: What America Means to Me*

Text: *Example: I consider the United States of America "My Country." This is because I have spent at least 14 years in Europe and in the Far East.*

Writing Aide: \_\_\_\_\_

Typist: \_\_\_\_\_

# Heal Through Visual Art

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

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

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

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

## Instructions for Artwork Submissions

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

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



**Submit Today!**  
For a Future Issue

Calling for  
Photographs,  
Drawings and  
Paintings



## Artwork Submissions

*Online or By Mail*

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

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

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



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

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**

PERMIT NO. 1115  
Kansas City, Missouri



See Page 33-37 to view the  
Visual Arts Initiative.

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

A large banner celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Veterans Voices Writing Project. The banner is framed by a dark blue border and features a decorative top and bottom edge with a repeating pattern of red, white, and blue scalloped shapes containing stars. In the center, there is a circular logo with a quill pen and the text 'VETERANS VOICES WRITING PROJECT' and 'CELEBRATING 75 YEARS 1946-2021'. Below the logo are five stars (two blue, three red). The main text reads 'IT'S OUR DIAMOND JUBILEE' in large, bold, red letters. Below this, it says 'Veterans Voices Writing Project is celebrating 75 years as a life-saving creative outlet by veterans, for veterans.'

**IT'S OUR**

# **DIAMOND JUBILEE**

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