

VETERANS' VOICES

**Guest Editorial:
The Arts Offer Resiliency
to the Military Community**
by Nolen Bivens - Page 2

“Arts communities are uniquely equipped to provide healing support that benefits the community as a whole.”

Rosco Jones, the Biker
by David Cahn - Page 13

“When I left the Army I was looking for the camaraderie and adrenaline rush I was used to.”

An Old Soldier’s Story
by John Cervone - Page 16

“Because I was witness to the war and how the media was covering it first-hand, I began to feel that there was not much truth being told.”

The Ethiopian Coup
by John Hannigan - Page 21

“In the early 1960s, the Emperor was out of country on a diplomatic trip. Some in his cabinet overthrew him in a quiet coup.”

Against Her Will
by Bruce Eric McClain - Page 40

“Disposed, rakish and unprepared for death, they are uncertain of the villainous plot to root them from their existence.”

Guest Editorial

The Arts Offer Resiliency to the Military Community

By Nolen Bivens



At a recent conference, where I delivered the keynote address focusing on the arts and the military, I was introduced to *Veterans' Voices*. I was struck by the fact that the magazine and its parent organization, Veterans Voices Writing Project, have been encouraging military veterans to use writing to deal with the invisible and moral wounds of war for many years—ever since the end of World War II.

It takes community to bring military veterans home. Healing happens in a community, and arts communities are uniquely equipped to provide the support to make this happen. VVWP is a visible example of a community committed to helping veterans. The group encourages veterans to write their stories in prose or poetry to better cope with the lingering effects of military conflict.

Now, some may view “the arts and the military” as an oxymoron but there is precedent for the connection. During the American Revolutionary War, General George Washington commissioned a dramatic performance of “Cato” by Joseph Addison to entertain the officers and troops at Valley Forge. During World War II, the “Ghost Army” oversaw the creation of inflatable tanks, sound effects and other illusions to fool the German army, while the “Monuments Men” were tasked with recovering thousands upon thousands of artworks stolen by the Germans.

We know that terrorism and trauma are found not only on the overseas battlefield, but as close as our own backyard. The 1927 Bath school disaster, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, as well as shootings in 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in 2017 outside a Las Vegas casino, and recently at a Parkland, Fla., high school demonstrate the preponderance of home-grown terrorism. Because of these first-hand experiences, civilian communities are more attuned to the need to help various populations recover from the exposure to violence. Arts groups can play a vital role in this recovery.

Artistic expression can heal, build and sustain resiliency for those still serving in the military as well as those separating from the armed services and trying to find their place in civilian society. Utilization of the various arts, whether through music, drama, dance, drawing and painting, the graphic arts, or writing, opens up pathways to health and wellness.

... continued on page 62

Nolen Bivens – Nolen Bivens advocates for the arts to help service members and veterans suffering from the invisible wounds of war. He is chair of the leadership advisory council for the National Initiative for Arts and Health in the Military. He also acts as a senior military community engagement advisor for Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network, which serves the needs of military patients who have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury or other psychological health conditions. As an Arts and Military Senior Policy Fellow for Americans for the Arts, Nolen has testified before the U.S. Congress and various state legislatures. He also has advised such creative endeavors as *Healing Wars*, a theatrical dance production; PBS's *Crafts in America*; and the Smithsonian Institution's *Haiti Cultural Recovery Project*.

Nolen is a retired U.S. Army general whose 32 years of service as an infantry officer include: chief of staff, U.S. Southern Command; deputy commanding general, 4th infantry division; C3 Coalition Forces Land Component Command and U.S. 3rd Army; deputy director, regional infrastructure CITF-7 Baghdad, Iraq, and various headquarters; senior staff positions with U.S. Joint Army and Special Operations Commands. Currently, he is the president of *Leader Six*, a management and consulting business services and products company based in the Washington, D.C. area.

Veterans' Voices

Summer 2018 Vol. 66, No. 2

Volunteer Staff

Publisher

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

Editor-in-Chief

Margaret Clark

Poetry Editor

Tina Hacker

Prose Editors

Archuleta Chisolm
Dane Howard
Tyler Robert Sheldon
Amy Smith
Theresa Turk
Michael Turner

Treasurer

Marianne Watson

Writing Program Liaison and Editorial Advisor

Rich Wrobel

Vice President and Marketing Director

Deann Mitchell

VVWP Staff

Administrative Director

Pris Chansky

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

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 administrative director at the VVWP address above.

 Find us on
Facebook

 **Twitter**
@VeteransVoices



Contact Us

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043
Phone & Fax: (816) 701-6844
info@veteransvoices.org
Web site: www.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 <http://reader.ku.edu/veteransvoices> and can also be heard on Lions Telephone Reader Service. For more information contact Audio-Reader at (785) 864-2686.

Submission Guidelines

Manuscripts, photographs and artwork submissions are accepted online or by U. S. mail. Follow the guidelines on page 66 of the magazine or as listed on the web site. Artwork submitted online should be at least 300 dpi and smaller than 3 MB.

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.

This issue of *Veterans' Voices* was made possible with assistance from
DAV Charitable Service Trust, Cold Spring, Ky.

Veterans' Voices

Summer 2018 Vol. 66, No. 2

Guest Editorial: The Arts Offer Resiliency to the Military Community 2
<i>By Nolen Bivens</i>
Mail Call 63
Thank You 64
Write for Veterans' Voices and Win a Prize 65
Submission Guidelines 66
Elizabeth Leitzbach Fontaine: VVWP Is Her Legacy 67

Prose

How I "Became" an Admiral, Before Being Commissioned an Officer 7
<i>By David Newcomer</i>
Taking Off the Uniform 8
<i>By James Tritten</i>
Proper Exit 8
<i>By James Gleason Bishop</i>
The Special Forces Medic 10
<i>By Christopher Bremicker</i>
Rosco Jones, the Biker 13
<i>By David Cahn</i>
An Old Soldier's Story 16
<i>By John Cervone</i>
The PTSD - Private Thoughts, Shadowy Demons 17
<i>By Larry E. Connelly</i>
My Dad 19
<i>By Samuel J. Hall</i>
The Unseen Battle 20
<i>By Shon Pernice</i>
The Ethiopian Coup 21
<i>By John Dennis Hannigan</i>
Sorry Professor 22
<i>By Jessica Hunter</i>
My Life as a Christian in Vietnam 23
<i>By Ron Mosbaugh</i>

Darkness Can Fall....Darkness Does Fall 27
<i>By Richard Wangard</i>
Veterans of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow 28
<i>By Colleen Stanhouse</i>
History of a B-17 Pilot, Victor Schoon 28
<i>By Lucy Wong</i>
Some Tragic Homecoming 29
<i>By Neil Heine</i>
The Blessing 30
<i>By Melvin Garrett Brinkley</i>
Nursing: Step-by-Step 31
<i>By Peter Gray</i>
July 4, 2017 31
<i>By Albert A. Hernandez</i>
March 29: National Vietnam War Veterans Day 32
<i>By Albert A. Hernandez</i>
Chemical, Biological and Radiological Training 32
<i>By Stephen E. Kirkland</i>
What Brought Me to Where I Am Now? 33
<i>By Jerome A. Longtin</i>
Joe the Mechanic 34
<i>By Wallace D. MacGregor</i>
A Postwar Christmas 34
<i>By Wallace D. MacGregor</i>
Beach Dream 35
<i>By Deborah C. Welch</i>
Oscar's Talking Toilet 35
<i>By J. Allen Whitt</i>
Aimee, My Girlfriend 36
<i>By Dan Rodriguez</i>
Medals 37
<i>By Christopher G. Bremicker</i>

Poetry

A Poem for My Wife 37
<i>By James R. Crissen</i>

I Will Stand	38	Barking Dog	44
<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>		<i>By Scott Lehman</i>	
Lab Rat	38	Independence Day	44
<i>By Richard Wangard</i>		<i>By John E. Jones</i>	
Final Moment	39	The Weather in Germany	44
<i>By Shon Pernice</i>		<i>By Frank X. Mattson</i>	
The Armorer	39	Goliath Burger	45
<i>By Paul David Adkins</i>		<i>By Frank X. Mattson</i>	
Impermanence	39	My Love Is...	45
<i>By Rodney Robinson</i>		<i>By David Samson</i>	
Creation Fragile! Handle with Care!	40	PTSD	45
<i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>		<i>By Earl Rugan</i>	
Against Her Will	40	A Series of Untitled Haiku	46
<i>By Bruce Eric McClain</i>		<i>By Jacob Lindholm</i>	
The Pedestrian	40	Let Your Light Shine	46
<i>By Eric Kershner</i>		<i>By Helen Anderson Glass</i>	
Likes, Dislikes	41	Flag on a Pole	46
<i>By Allen Burns</i>		<i>By William L. Sneed</i>	
Question: What Am I to Do?	41	Dreams	46
<i>By Charles S. Parnell</i>		<i>By John Bradley</i>	
Different Genders	41	Stone Sentinels—Headstones	47
<i>By Rosalie Ann Cooper</i>		<i>By Michael Kilpatrick</i>	
Time, Wine and Bodies	42	In My Boots	47
<i>By Daniel H. Strange</i>		<i>By Douglas Pederson</i>	
Hard Looks	42	Praise for the Dawn	47
<i>By K. W. Peery</i>		<i>By Sean Richards</i>	
Space Poetry	42	Remembering Daniel	47
<i>By Juanita Kirton</i>		<i>By Elizabeth A. McKie</i>	
A Dear John Letter to My Drug of Choice	42	Suzy Q.	48
<i>By Richard Williams</i>		<i>By Donald Sherwood</i>	
Tangible Karma	43	First Sibling to Go	48
<i>By Tony James Craidon</i>		<i>By Clinton Jarrett</i>	
The Symbols of Our Great Nation, United States of America	43	Almighty God	48
<i>By Rosalie Ann Cooper</i>		<i>By Anthony Cocozza</i>	
Whistle While You Work	44	The Cricket	48
<i>By Charles Sturies</i>		<i>By Charles Fredette</i>	
A Lighthouse Beckons	44	Growing Up With Mom	48
<i>By Jennifer S. Wheat Anderson</i>		<i>By Samuel J. Hall</i>	
Mom's Prayer She Taught Her Children	44	In the Nick of Time	49
<i>By Lawrence E. Rahn</i>		<i>By Diane Wasden</i>	

Exception	50	Honor	55
<i>By Dennis Silas</i>		<i>By Sean Richards</i>	
A Vietnam Vet	50	Welcome Home	56
<i>By Louis Peter Ferrari</i>		<i>By Larry L. Penrod</i>	
Smile for Me, Mommy	50	An Instrument From Heaven	56
<i>By JonnieLynn Donatelli</i>		<i>By Larry Raymond Muck</i>	
People Have Created Millions of Places	51	Year After Year	56
<i>By Raymond Grimm</i>		<i>By Bruce Eric McClain</i>	
Thunder	51	Just a Pebble in the Sand	57
<i>By Edward Luzadder Jr.</i>		<i>By Jesse W. Sturghill, Jr</i>	
A Friend in Me	51	Honey Tea, You Make Me Sweet*	57
<i>By Vincent J. Covington</i>		<i>By Michael Young</i>	
Asian Flower	51	Can You Stand the Pain?	57
<i>By Neal C. Morrison Jr.</i>		<i>By Richard Williams</i>	
Why I Believe	52	Patriarch	58
<i>By Karen A. Green</i>		<i>By Tony James Craidon</i>	
Pep Talk	52	Soldier's Prayer	58
<i>By James William Miller</i>		<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>	
The Sleeping Dragon Theory	52	A Spring Desire	58
<i>By Charles L. Carey</i>		<i>By Jennifer S. Wheat Anderson</i>	
Trees of Green, Sunlight With Beams, Rainbows and Dreams	52	Nature Within the Summer Sensations	59
<i>By Stephen Ray Housh</i>		<i>By John E. Jones</i>	
War	53	My Guardian Angel From Above	59
<i>By Karen A. Green</i>		<i>By Diane Wasden</i>	
Bombs Bursting in Air	53	Communications	59
<i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>		<i>By Richard Wangard</i>	
I'll Never Be the Same as I Was Before	53	Are You Someone's Hero?	60
<i>By Kimberly Green</i>		<i>By Helen Anderson Glass</i>	
Broken Puzzle	54	My Desire	60
<i>By Daryl Eigen</i>		<i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>	
Troops' Tribute	54	Where Was My Father	60
<i>By John Mormino</i>		<i>By Paul David Adkins</i>	
A Veteran's Voice	54	Remembrance of Our Veterans	61
<i>By Linda Mckinnis</i>		<i>By Douglas Pederson</i>	
This Blade	55	Dead or Alive	61
<i>By K. W. Peery</i>		<i>By Donald Sherwood</i>	
Snug as a Bug!	55	I Believe In Myself	61
<i>By Darrell W. Brown</i>		<i>By Antony Coccozza</i>	
Jesus Sighting	55	Junior High and the Military	62
<i>By Charles S. Parnell</i>		<i>By Samuel J. Hall</i>	
		Changes	62
		<i>By Dennis Silas</i>	

How I “Became” an Admiral, Before Being Commissioned an Officer

*By David Newcomer
— Prairie Village, KS*

It was the summer of 1963. I had just completed my junior year of NROTC at the University of Kansas, and was awaiting orders for my summer midshipmen cruise. For my freshman summer cruise, I served on the West Coast aboard the USS Maddox (DD-731), which ended up in Hawaii. But, that is another story.

Being far from any ocean, midshipmen in Kansas never knew where they would be ordered to report. Olathe Naval air base was just down the road a few miles from Lawrence, but was mainly for reserve flight training. I surmised this was just too close to home, and I had shown no interest in becoming a Navy pilot. So, I eliminated that option. My anticipation was cut short when I received orders to report to the USS Shasta (AE-6) berthed in Newport, R.I.

The Shasta was an old World War II ship named after Mount Shasta in California. It was originally designed to be a merchant ship, when its keel was laid on 12 Aug. 1940. However, it was purchased by the Navy and commissioned as the USS Shasta on 20 Jan. 1942. (Later decommissioned 10 Aug. 1946 and then returned to service 15 July 1953. It was retired for good in 1969 and sold for scrap.) Her compliment was designated as 21 officers and 260 crew. Her max trial speed was a whopping 15.3 knots. But, that's enough about this old lady of the sea and on with my adventure.

I can't remember exactly how many midshipmen were aboard with me. I do remember that I was pleased to know that I would not again be bouncing around rough seas in a “tin can.” Ingrained in my memory were the two soot-belching stacks on the Maddox that soiled your clothes and smelled of sulfur. Also memorable were the smells of leftover food drifting down to our cramped berthing space under the galley. Yes, Newport, R.I. on a deep draft vessel seemed like a nice place to be, especially since most of my travel experience was west of Kansas.

In 1963, Vietnam was not a topic of everyday conversation. On the Atlantic side, President Kennedy had confronted Khrushchev and got the Russians to remove their missiles from Cuba. With Kennedy's assassination and the abrupt change in leadership, “Great Society” programs were at the top of President Johnson's

agenda. We were not in a shooting war at the time. The Shasta mainly stayed in port. Ammo ships were not the vessels sent out to show off the flag. In fact, they were usually berthed well away from other ships at the far end of the pier.

Most of my cruise was spent assisting with routine maintenance. I vaguely remember having some nice shore leave in Newport. There is one shore leave that rests prominently in my mind. I recall one day coming back to the base and beginning the long walk down the pier to the Shasta when a large black car pulled up alongside of me. A cheery voice asked me, “Where are you going?” After responding, “To the Shasta,” the friendly voice in the car responded, “Would you like a ride?”

When I looked up and saw the pretty face behind the voice, I immediately said, “YES.” No young red-blooded American male could turn down such a kind offer. I climbed into the back of the car with her and we headed down the pier to the Shasta. As our driver slowly drove toward the ship, I noticed how other vehicles pulled to the side and stopped. Officers and enlisted came to attention and saluted as we passed by. On the way I chatted with my new friend and discovered that she was the admiral's daughter. And, we were driving in his car, flags and all.

When we reached my destination I peeked out through the darkened windows and saw the startled look on the face of the Officer of the Deck. He was certainly not expecting a visit from the admiral. He began scrambling to brush up on the protocol to welcome an admiral aboard. His demeanor changed when he saw a Midshipman 3c. hop out of the car and proceed to the ship. Needless to say, I did not receive a friendly welcome. However, later with midshipman buddies, I became the center of attention and was asked many questions for a day or so!

P.S. Shortly thereafter we received orders to sail to Norfolk, Va., I never saw or heard from the admiral's daughter again.



Taking Off the Uniform

By James Tritten
— Corrales, NM

Jasmine and I entered the medicine circle, arm in arm, from the east, the direction of the rising sun and the new day. Dusty tan stones lined the sandy path to the center. The acrid tang of burning sage hung in the air. We turned to the south and walked to the makeshift altar. We poured cool water from an earthen jug over each other's hands, and the water dripped into a large yellow and red basin. We dried our hands on thin cotton towels, smiled at one another, and turned around to face the center of the circle. Our medicine man, David Singing Bear, a Marine Corps veteran of Cherokee descent, chanted while he waited for us with a Storm Cloud ceremonial blanket. He unfolded the sacred cloth, woven in red and black, grey and white, and raised it to the sky.

David then called on his gods to bless us as a couple and me as a returning service member. Based on American Indian rituals that welcome home warriors after battle, this ceremony was the culmination of an eight-day retreat at the National Veterans Healing and Wellness Center in Angel Fire, N.M. David draped the woolen Storm Cloud over our heads and shoulders. Jasmine and I, who had been married then for 20 years, spoke to each other in total privacy. I thanked her for being there for me when I needed her most, when I was at the deepest depths of PTSD. David resumed his chant and we emerged. He continued his song, and I felt lighter, as though a burden had been eased.

We walked back to the center of the circle and turned to the north, and there stood two colonels, one in Air Force blue, and one in Army green. They stood at attention, next to a sculpture of a rifle with bayonet in the ground, helmet on the stock. I adjusted my frame, stood ramrod straight, felt my heels click together, and raised my right arm. I executed a very crisp, very Navy salute. They slowly returned the salute and said, "Welcome home, Sailor." I remember dropping my arm, and not much else. My chest shuddered, eyes shut against the sting of tears, and I lost all sensation of sound, smell, or my feet touching the ground.

Jasmine took my elbow and led me back out through the center of the medicine circle, along the sandy path lined with stones. The first thing I saw through the tears, and the first thing I could feel was the rest of my fellow veterans and their spouses, my village, my community, clapping me on the back, hugging me with abandon, welcoming my return. I had taken off the uniform twenty-seven years earlier, but today I was finally home.



DAV, ERNESTINE SCHUMANN-HEINK CHAPTER 2:
MILITARY SERVICE AWARD
1ST PRIZE

Proper Exit

By James Gleason Bishop
VA Medical Center – Leeds, MA

Three weeks after the Taliban announced the beginning of fighting season in Afghanistan, six badly wounded soldiers visited our camp in Kabul during Operation Proper Exit. A campwide email blipped into computers announcing that all personnel should line the road at 14:00 to give the men a hero's welcome. In a NATO headquarters directorate known for cynicism, no one complained about being too busy to go.

After several delays, a Blackhawk and a CH-47 helicopter touched down in the soccer field outside of ISAF, blowing massive dust balloons into the hot air. Six medically retired soldiers rolled wheelchairs, limped, and gripped crutches to make their way down Washington Road and turn left on Milano Avenue, past the clapping and cheering crowd.

First came Sgt. Maj. Cole Rich in sunglasses, tapping a white cane with a red stripe near the bottom. Above him on both sides stood coiled razor wire he couldn't see. His escort, retired Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Capel, walked shoulder-to-shoulder with him, almost touching sleeves. Capel was Rich's sergeant major in 2002 when he received word that Rich had been shot in the head while on a mission outside Fire Base Shin, near the Pakistani border. Both men were in the Army's storied 82nd Airborne Division. The gunshot wound left Rich partially blind.

A few feet behind the sergeant majors, retired Sgt. Brendan Marrocco rolled his black wheelchair along the dusty road, amid strong clapping and cheers. He used his left hand to roll; his right was curled into a fist. The fact that he could propel himself at all approached the miraculous. Marrocco lost both arms and legs after a penetrator bomb hit the MRAP he was driving early on Easter morning, April 12, 2009, in Baiji, Iraq. Two friends died

in the blast. He was the military's first living quadruple amputee from Iraq or Afghanistan. Then on Dec. 16, 2012, he posted on Twitter, "Holy mother of god I was just told I might be having my transplant tomorrow!" Days later, he received a rare double-arm transplant, then spent years rehabbing at Walter Reed Medical Center. Weights hung off the front of Marrocco's wheelchair to make up for the mass of his missing legs.

Next came SSgt. Jose Navarro, alone, on crutches. The right leg of his OCP uniform was pinned above the knee, and as he walked, the loosed fabric flapped. Sweat pooled along Navarro's face while cheers rose above the dust. In 2007, Navarro's platoon was ambushed by the Taliban in Jalrez Valley in the Wardak Province west of Kabul. As they were pinned down, calling for air strikes, he took multiple gunshots to the stomach. Then an RPG ripped through his leg at point blank range. RPGs — rocket-propelled grenades — are shoulder-fired weapons used to bring down tanks and helicopters. It's not a weapon you'd expect to survive a direct hit from. Navarro's right leg was amputated above the knee. At one point, medics believed he was dead and pulled a sheet over his head until they saw him moving. Navarro spent five years in the hospital and went through more than 160 surgeries!

Last came Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Olson, retired Sgt. Saul Martinez, retired Sgt. Joshua Ben, along with Mike Marrocco, Brendan's brother. The group was spending five days traveling throughout Afghanistan, greeting commanders and troops, seeing thousands of applauding service members, shaking hands and telling their stories at each stop.

Lined up on Washington Road were Aussies in their bush hats, Italians sporting goatees, young and old civilian contractors, French troops, Afghan women in their hijabs, and U.S. troops, indistinguishable by service because of the common OCP uniform, all clapping and cheering.

And what were we cheering? Their survival, sure. Their courage to come back to the place of their wounding, certainly. Mixed with the respect, a dash of survivor's guilt? Clap, clap. Why you? Clap, clap. Why not me?

Traveling with the group was a frumpy, tired, smiling man eagerly watching the wounded men — Rick Kell, co-founder and executive director of Troops First, which ran Operation Proper Exit. Kell had just enough softness and sandy hair spilling over his ears to stand out as a civilian, though he too was wearing OCPs. In 2005, Kell visited wounded troops at Walter Reed Hospital. He formed a bond with the men, so he decided to return troops to a combat zone. Operation Proper Exit provides U.S. military who are injured in battle the opportunity to return to a combat zone and leave when they're damn well ready — in stark contrast to being medically evacuated, often unconscious, and wrenched from the brotherhood in their unit.

The wounded warriors and their escorts disappeared into the yellow building to meet with Gen. Joseph Dunford, commander of the NATO coalition, International Security Assistance Forces. Later, at a standing-room-only meeting in the communications building, Brendan Marrocco told the group that this trip gave him closure to an Army career he felt was ripped away from him.

"I miss the Army so much. To be able to put a uniform back on and come to Afghanistan and hang out with my brothers, it's going to be a great bookend to the career."

During the gathering around the shiny wooden conference table — the same table where so much vitriol was spewed during the weekly meetings — Marrocco exuded fire and optimism. He introduced himself by saying, "I was the first quadruple amputee in either Iraq or Afghanistan, but then they sewed two arms on me and now I'm just a normal paraplegic." His left hand looked good as he rested his arms on the table. His right hand was bent into a loose fist, a phenomenon doctors call "clawing," according to a Washington Post article. Both of his wrists looked skinny. At first, he said, the new arms were heavy enough to give him backaches. Already a rehab media-star, Marrocco was articulate about his injuries and his future.

"I've got plans," Brendan told the group smiling. "I'm going to build some cars and do some races," he said. "I've got the wonderful opportunity to make myself happy right now."

His older brother Mike sat next to him. Mike lived with Brendan in the hospital campus at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., during his long rehab. Brendan owns a modified black Dodge Charger, which he can drive with hand controls. A NASCAR enthusiast and mechanic, Marrocco said he's also building a race car he plans to compete with. One thing came through from them all — they were grateful to return to a combat zone, and they were optimistic. I felt guilty for wanting my own "proper exit" out of a combat zone.

Kell told us that when he first started taking troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, he wanted to bring the wounded as close as possible to the exact place where they had been injured, but after multiple trips it became clear that the wounded veterans just wanted to be with other soldiers in any combat zone.

During the meeting, Jose Navarro mentioned the 160 surgeries. He spoke about being left for dead. He'd been to Bagram and had an emotional meeting at the ER, where he thanked the doctors and nurses for saving his life. He had every right to be fried emotionally. Instead, after meeting with us in the communications building, I said to Jose, "Thanks for coming to visit."

Rather than giving me the tired, rote answer I deserved, he turned toward me, balancing on his crutches, shook my hand, and said with something solid in his voice, "No sir. Thank you for having me."

About 2.6 million service members fought in either Iraq or Afghanistan, and more than 800,000 returned to the United States with physical or psychological wounds, according to Kevin Sieff in a May 2014 Washington Post article. Army Specialist Ariel J. Solomon wrote in a July 12, 2014, article for Army.mil, "The wounded warriors enjoyed town hall meetings where they met with soldiers... One question that was asked at both FOB Pasab and Kandahar Airfield was what soldiers could do to help their injured buddies back home?"

"If you guys could do one thing to increase the morale of those guys in some hospital trying to heal, contact them every now and again," Adam Hartswick told the State College, Pa., Centre Daily Times. Hartswick, a State College native, was serving with the 41st Infantry Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, when he was wounded in May 2013. "I've got to tell you, when I got a call from the guys it was the highlight of my week, because you are there lying in bed, and you want to know what's going on with your brothers and sisters over here. So just pick up the phone and call."

During a previous Proper Exit trip, Army Col. Tim Karcher told a military reporter, "I miss being with soldiers more than I miss my legs." A handsome, articulate native of Harker Heights, Texas, Karcher said that just being able to thank the soldiers who are still in the fight was satisfying.

Kell and co-founder David Feherty tapped into a powerful metaphor. People need to exit well. From birth, when we exit the womb, to first breathe, into adulthood, when we leave the house, to our final hour on earth. Leaving well is knit together with living well.



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

The Special Forces Medic

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

I was a Special Forces medic, stationed at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina from 1968 to 1970. I did not go to Vietnam. I was known for my service by friends and family. I tried to achieve things afterward, but it was the only thing in life I ever really accomplished.

I enlisted in the Army when I was 20 years old, with the intent of going Special Forces. It explained why I went to jump school at Ft. Benning, Ga. It also explained why I took a mental aptitude test at Benning involving scenarios of guerrilla warfare to qualify for Special Forces training. Ten of us shipped out of jump school to attend Special Forces basic training at Ft. Bragg.

Special Forces basic training involved parachuting onto an old airfield in the woods, on a full equipment jump, and slogging for miles up to our waists in swamp water to find barrels of oil lit by a fire in the night. It was a compass orienteering course and we had to find barrels placed miles apart in the woods. The leader of our squad, a staff sergeant, got tired and ordered us to lie down in a field for a few hours in our sleeping bags. This was why I went to the PX for a beer, instead of collapsing with my comrades in our bunks in the barracks, after Special Forces basic training was over.

A Green Beret kept us in formation for three hours while he lectured us on the pride of becoming a Green Beret. One man wavered in formation and tried not to faint. This was our second day in the field. We were not to eat or sleep for three days. We carried tablets to purify the swamp water we drank. We carried canteens on our utility belts, filled them with the filthy water, and dropped a tablet into them to make the water potable. We sipped it but did not chug it down.

For food, the Green Berets taught us how to make goat jerky. We hoisted a live goat onto a scaffold by its hind legs and a volunteer slit its throat. It bleated, and blood gushed from the wound. We dressed the goat, cutting the meat into strips as long as our fingers. We laid the strips on a latticework of saplings and green leaves and smoked them over an open fire. The jerky was half cooked but provided nourishment, as well as survival training. Each of us got three strips of goat jerky.

We spent one afternoon making ladders of wood we found in the forest or cut from trees. We tied the wood with rope. When night fell, we attacked a fort, throwing the ladders onto the concertina

wire and attacking. We yelled and fired our M-16s on full automatic. The blanks flashed in the night, as we yelled as loud as we could, clambered over the ladders, crossed the wire, and took the camp. A Green Beret stood in the middle of the camp to evaluate us.

At the end of the third day, the Green Berets held a conference. They caught one man sleeping at his post. They considered refusing to award him his beret. The green beret was awarded to trainees after they completed Special Forces basic training. After a long talk, they granted the man his beret. On the last day, we marched a long distance then boarded trucks that took us back to base.

Back at Ft. Bragg, there was an orientation period. Our class learned that the Special Forces' mission was to train indigenous troops, or natives of the country, where we were assigned. We specialized in guerrilla warfare. In Vietnam, Special Forces soldiers liked to work with the Montagnard people, a mountainous tribe who were good fighters.

An A Team had two officers and 10 enlisted men. It had sergeants trained in medicine, weapons, communications, and engineering. Members of the team were proficient in the language of their host country. Special Forces was an airborne outfit, and we were all jump qualified.

Then we decided on our Special Forces MOS, or Military Occupational Specialty. Special Forces had MOSs unique to it that were independent from the MOS we acquired after Army basic training. I took Army basic training at Ft. Campbell, Ky., and Military Police MOS training at Ft. Gordon, Ga. In Special Forces, I decided to be a medic.

Special Forces medic training was more than a year long. In the first two months at Bragg, we learned how to deliver babies, basic medic skills, like how to make a hospital bed, take vital signs, know the symptoms of malaria, and prepare and administer an intravenous solution. We learned the symptoms of yellow fever, typhus, typhoid fever, and something called tsutsugamushi fever. These were tropical diseases and we learned how to treat them, such as sanitation or the antibiotic, tetracycline.

Then we went to Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, for combat medic training. We learned how to splint a broken femur with a tree branch, apply a tourniquet, treat a sucking chest wound with cellophane from a cigarette package, and treat a wound to the stomach that prohibited giving the man water. We learned how to treat for shock and how to handle a head injury. We learned how to make a latrine.

One of the training sergeants, a medic with combat experience, was crazy. "How you going to go in?" he asked, of how a medic approached a wounded man in the field. "You go in low!" he whispered and spread his arms wide.

I hurt myself on a parachute jump at Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio. I got the static line, which connected a steel

cable on the plane to my chute, under my arm when I exited the airplane. My chute opened, and my arm hung as I descended. I landed in a heap. I could not roll up my parachute. The medics saw me, gave me morphine, and helicoptered me off the drop zone to Brooks Army Hospital at Ft. Sam Houston. After a phone call to my parents for permission to operate, the surgeon for the Houston Oilers repaired the arm. I woke from surgery to a right arm in a plaster cast from my waist to my neck. I was on a ward with Vietnam War veterans. Then the nurses moved me to a bed near a dentist who broke his back.

I was in the cast for four months. I performed light duty in our training company while the arm healed. I transcribed medical texts with my left hand and toured the hospital with another man who broke his shoulder on the same jump. We studied medicine with doctors who were eager to teach us. Then the surgeon took off the cast. My arm was a black-and-blue spindle he placed in a sling. I started physical therapy with a Campbell soup can and soon could do 12 pull-ups. I returned to Ft. Bragg with a new medic class.



I started Dog Lab, in which a Green Beret shot a dog in the leg with an M-14 and we rushed the dog to an operating room where we debrided the wound, bandaged it, and monitored the dog's vital signs. We used ether for anesthesia. The dog recovered, we placed it in a kennel then sawed off its leg. We bandaged the stump and the dog limped around its kennel. There were 30 men in our class, we worked in pairs, and operated on 15 dogs.

Debriding the wound involved cutting out dead tissue. Dead tissue was dark. Good tissue was red. The dead tissue could become infected if allowed to heal with the wound. We used surgical tweezers and scissors. We sutured the wound from the inside out. One man operated while the other man assisted as an operating technician and anesthesiologist.

Cleaning the kennels was an onerous duty. We used shovels. God only knew what the Green Berets fed the dogs. Then we killed the dogs with sodium pentothal and disposed of them. I heard Special Forces now use goats instead of dogs for this training. Maybe the Humane Society intervened. Dog Lab trained us in treating combat wounds, cutting off a limb to avoid gangrene, and rudimentary operating room procedures.

One day, a general came through Dog Lab to inspect our work. Two of us leaned over the leg of a dog and debrided the wound. "Is that the bullet hole?" the general asked. After the general left, one of our men made fun of him. The man imitated him, in his best Southern drawl. We could not stop laughing. I matriculated as a Special Forces medic.

Suddenly, I knew my stuff. It stayed with me and when I was 70 years old, I gave CPR to a man who almost made it. At a ceremony attended by 50 people, the Chief of Police of St. Paul, Minn., gave me an award for trying to save the man. I got a pulse on him, but it was too late.

Next, we had final maneuvers. We parachuted into the same landing strip we landed on in Special Forces basic training. It was a full equipment jump and my backpack hung at my waist. I released my backpack correctly by letting go of a rope and it fell to the ground first. It was a night jump. I saw a tree coming up at me and yelled. It turned out to be a bush and I landed safely next to it. I rolled up my chute, placed it in its bag, threw it over my shoulders, and joined my A-team. I heard a few men broke their ankles on the cement of the landing strip.

I led a team of 12 men through the woods all night to a target of a jeep on a road I missed by 50 yards. With a compass, I aimed at trees 30 yards ahead of me and walked in a direction that one of us thought was "a banana left" but was straight as an arrow. The men were shocked when the road and jeep appeared, the next morning.

I cleaned 10 chickens thrown to us by a Green Beret. I knew how to skin a partridge and skinned the chickens the same way. We cooked them on a spit. They were the worst tasting birds I ever ate. We caught a black snake, killed it, and cut it into sections. We roasted the sections on sticks like marshmallows. They tasted like chicken. We became Snake Eaters, the nickname for Green Berets.

After three days in the field, we stood in formation in the night, as our captain addressed us. The trucks to take us back to base never showed up. We had to march out, he said. He was getting out of the Army. He could not take the nonsense, he said. If he could not take it, how could I, an enlisted man, take it? I decided then not to make the Army a career. We marched route step, in other words, without cadence. It was night and I hallucinated. I saw little men alongside the road. We marched 10 miles then the trucks showed up.

After a graduation ceremony, which I did not attend, I was assigned to the Seventh Special Forces Group. This was my permanent duty station. I sewed the red flash of the Seventh Group onto my green beret. I began the routine of going to formation every weekday morning and taking trips on weekends.

I took a bus to Washington D.C. and Raleigh-Durham and hitchhiked to Myrtle Beach. I checked into cheap hotels and went to bars. I tried to meet girls, but they were wary of soldiers

with short hair. In D.C., I walked by the monuments. I went to the public library in Raleigh-Durham and wrote the first story I ever wrote seriously. I rewrote it several times and found it in a notebook, many years later. In Myrtle Beach, I slept on the beach, after finding a place that was miles up the beach, that did not have lights.

I continued my habit of going into town every night, barhopping, watching go-go girls, and drinking 3.2 beer. My comrades were in the barracks, watching TV, shining their boots, and drinking Coca-Cola. I went to enlisted men's clubs and drank on Sunday night.

Because I skipped out of my graduation party, I did not make the rank of sergeant. My classmates all wore sergeant stripes and I was a Specialist Fourth Class the morning after the party. I respected my command sergeant major too much to drink with him. He was a member of the Army's Golden Knights Parachute Team, served two tours in Vietnam, and did push-ups with us when he ordered them.

My mother suggested, years later, that I wanted to be a doughboy like my grandfather. He was a World War I war hero. Thus, I never became a true Green Beret. I pulled KP and guard duty often. KP involved washing pots and pans. Volunteering for other jobs, like dining room orderly or dishwasher, allowed the cooks to mess with me. My boots got wet with the slop that poured out of the potato peeler. We got the next day off.



Guard duty was four hours of guarding an ammo depot, for example, with a loaded M-16 in the dead of night, and eight hours off. We had to stay in the barracks during the time off. We slept or played cards. We got the day off after guard duty too. Everyone hated KP and guard duty and men ducked out of formation to avoid them. This was called "ghosting" and many of us did it.

However, I got good deals too. The Green Berets sent me to Spanish school. Ten of us, including a doctor, a married man, a man who called himself a Special Forces trooper, a man who goofed off, and two Navy SEALs, who goofed off also, studied Spanish taught by an Argentinian. For four months, I did not go to formation.

We learned how to order a beer; to say, "The machine guns are on the other side of the river;" and to speak conversational Spanish. It was eight hours of Spanish a day, for four months. They gave us tape recorders to practice Spanish in our off hours, which I never did. The married man studied hard. The SEALs blew off the course. The goof off got by on his intelligence. The Special Forces trooper passed. The doctor was top of the class. I was second, getting by on my talent for languages and memory.

Then the Green Berets sent me on a mission to Puerto Rico. I was the medic on an A-team. Career soldiers called me Doc. We flew on a C-141 to Puerto Rico, boarded a raft which a Navy boat towed into the ocean, and paddled toward a blinking light on an island, 10 miles away. The sea swelled and one of the men complained of sea sickness. I did not have Dramamine in my medic bag but knew one of Benadryl's side effects was to settle the stomach. I gave him Benadryl and soon he complained of falling asleep. Another side effect of Benadryl was drowsiness. They did not tell us where we were going, and I did not know enough to pack Dramamine anyway.

My next good deal was as a medic in the emergency room at Womack Army Hospital. With the man who was hurt on the same parachute jump, I sewed up people using a suture pack. The doctor showed us how to do it then we worked on our own. We were not allowed to sew up the face, for cosmetic reasons, or hands and feet, because of their tendons and nerves. Anything else was fair game.

I sewed up a little girl who was bitten by a German Shepherd. She had four lacerations on the top of her head. Her father held her head, as I lathered her hair with soap and shaved it. I poured hydrogen peroxide onto her wounds and washed them with surgical soap. Then I injected lidocaine into her scalp to deaden it. She screamed, and her father told me what he was going to do to the owner of the dog. Then I opened the suture pack, put on gloves, and sewed her up. She took 50 stitches.

One man came in with a cut to his face from an ashtray his wife threw at him. An hour later, his wife came in with a cut to her finger from the ashtray. The doctor let me put a stitch in her finger. The doctor had to approve everything we did.

A little boy came in who ingested antifreeze. The doctor told me to give him syrup of ipecac. I put him on a little stool, put a towel around his neck, and poured the syrup of ipecac down his throat. Ten minutes later, he vomited all over the floor.

One Saturday, our receptionist did not show up. The doctor put me in charge of the front desk. I prioritized mothers with screaming babies and got through it.

One day, the medics brought in a man, who was having trouble breathing. He had cold, clammy skin and was pale and scared. I did not know what to do for him, except put him on a bed behind a screen. I went to lunch. When I came back, two doctors were

beating on the man's chest. He had a heart attack and did not make it.

I was an inexperienced medic. A heart attack could be a difficult diagnosis to make. Two years ago, my girlfriend died of a heart attack I failed to diagnose. I had two of them myself and should know the symptoms. Once, I saw an intern miss the diagnosis. "Fixed and dilated," he said to the nurse, of the victim's eyes, and beat his fist to his forehead, out of regret for losing his patient.

During my time at the emergency room, I did not have to go to formation. I wore my green beret and hospital whites. I lived in barracks near the hospital. I wallpapered my room with art prints I bought for 15 dollars apiece in town. I had Dali's painting of Christ spread-eagled on a table after the Crucifixion, Renoir's The Boating Party, and a Van Gogh. We ate in the hospital cafeteria, where the food was better than at the Seventh Group mess hall.

When my tour at the hospital was up, I returned to the Seventh Group barracks. Discharge loomed, and I searched for a college to attend after I left the Army. I found one, the University of Idaho, in Moscow, that had a good journalism program. Instead, I returned to the University of Minnesota for a degree in English. I left the Army and never found anything like it again.

**PALLAS ATHENE BEST STORY
AWARD**

Rosco Jones, the Biker

By David Cahn

VA Medical Center – Wilmington, DE

The smell reminded me of Lynn, with two n's. She smelled of Clorox used to sanitize the bar, and apples. My name is Rosco Jones and I'm from New York, so of course people call me Pittsburgh, or Pitt, for short.

I was riding my bike from a buddy's house in Sunburn, Ariz. back toward Ocean County, Calif. It was a long first-rate ride, taking side roads and staying off the super slab. Usually I ride with my brothers from the Lower Ocean Valley Engine Riders (LOVERS) Motorcycle Club. This time I decided to ride alone. Note that I've been a patch holder for some time now. When I left the Army I was looking for the camaraderie and adrenaline rush I was used to. I'm a pretty good mechanic and began to hang around the LOVERS after they brought their bikes in for repair. Once they got to know me, I was able to prospect and eventually become a full-fledged member. More than once, other clubs have trespassed in our territory and we took care of business—TCB. I wear my patch proudly on the back of my vest. I don't have as many tattoos as most bikers as I don't want to feel like a walking cartoon. Besides, I have scars and scars are tats with stories.

Like I said, I was riding alone just listening to the rumble of the engine in a world of my own. I had been on the road for three days, sleeping in the weeds using my old poncho and poncho liner as a bed roll which I always kept in my saddle bags. I take off my boots at night, but always keep my trusted knife and hammer near. I always carry a hammer. You see, you can get into trouble carrying a knife, but you will not get arrested for carrying a hammer. When you can smell yourself you know it's bad, but who cares. Besides, it fits my image. My bike, however, is spotless. Like my rifle in the service, I clean it whenever I can. Other than being a member of the LOVERS, my greatest pride is my bike. Sure, I served my country, but I'd rather forget all about it. When asked what color my bike is, I just reply, "chrome."

When Lynn and I first met I was wrenching at HOGS 4 Ever taking a cylinder out of its casing. She sashayed up and asked when her bike would be ready. I knew right away that we would be soul-neighbors. We went everywhere together. I even invited her to the clubhouse as my Old Lady. One night I called her Lynn, with two l's. As I emphasized the two l's rather than the two n's, she thought I was calling her by another girl's name and accused me of cheating. Well, it went south from there and we never saw each other again.

I was almost at the clubhouse when I decided to get a drink. I stopped at the Pass In-Pass Out Bar & Grill, and Notary. It's a biker bar. In order to get to the bar you take three steps down, both physically and socially. Most of the liquor is made in the back and even the water is dehydrated. As soon as I reached the bar I saw her. Lynn-with-two-n's hanging out with the Harley and Triumph Engine Riders (HATERS). They are a rough bunch whose territory borders ours, the LOVERS, along the coastal highway. They are known for wearing plaid pants with bowling shoes; yes they are a violent motorcycle club. We saw each other across the room and so did her new boyfriend, the president of the HATERS. I slowly drank my beer and saw the impending commotion begin to happen. She was ragging on me to her new pal and they were coming my way. I made sure the hammer was still hanging on my belt. I turned and slowly walked toward the door, put my hand on the lock and twisted it, and then I turned off the lights.



We gotta get out of this place. I was riding with the LOVERS. The run was supposed to be destined for Sturgis, the mecca of all motorcycle riders. Our route took us from LA along highway 15. Since it goes through Las Vegas, we decided to stop there. We parked the bikes along the southern end of the Sunset Strip, put ropes around the bikes, and placed a pledge on each corner to guard them. Intel said an elderly motorcycle club, The Broken Hips, was in town. Their signature trademark is riding along the highway with their left blinker on. As usual we were on our guard.

I was still thinking of Lynn-with-two-n's, my old girlfriend. We had a bad break-up. I dropped the wall around my emotions that one time and let her in. Now I know the difference between a vulture and an ex-girlfriend: a vulture waits until you're dead before it rips your heart out. The only one who got St. Valentine's Day right was Al Capone.

We stumbled along the Strip and stopped at the Harley Davidson Hard Rock Café and a number of casinos. It felt good to get out of the sun and into the air conditioning. Did you ever notice that a supermarket is much like a casino? The only window is in the front, there are no clocks, the air conditioning is usually on high, and you can easily become disoriented once inside. Either way, they are both designed to rid you of your cash. I don't gamble, but I did lose two dollars in the soda machine. My bro, Spider, claims to have a fail proof card counting system. Although it's comical that he's always scrimping for gas money. Anyway, Vegas is one of the only places where windows clean people.

We were amusing ourselves at the House of Cards casino when we noticed that members of the Broken Hips Motorcycle Club were being carded at the door. Must be because many of their body parts are not yet 21. I was still a little hyper from the ride. We ride in a tight formation. Safety says motorcyclists should ride staggered and have at least two seconds stopping distance between each bike. That way, if a rider drifts too far left or right, the bikes around him can safely stay out of the way. Of course, being part of the top one-percenters in the motorcycle world, we ride tight, right behind each other, usually exceeding the speed limit. Just outside Vegas, "the man" was watching us from helos flying over our formation. Riding in formation with helos overhead brought back too many negative memories, so I was on edge all day. When most of the Broken Hips were in the casino I jumped on top of the slot machines to "counsel" them.

Unfortunately, I tripped over someone's bucket of gambling chips. The chips fell onto the floor causing one of the Broken Hips to lose his walker which triggered the attached airbag. The walker bumped into a waitress carrying a pizza that flew into someone's face. This person fell back and caused another person to spill his drink onto another guy. Falling back from the drink, he bumped into a guy playing the slots. As the wheels turned and the bells rang this guy fell onto the back of another guy from the Broken Hips. He turned around, feeling insulted, and hit this guy square on the nose. The melee immediately broke out between

the LOVERS and the Broken Hips. I leaped from on top of the slot machines with both arms and legs fully extended, onto members of the Broken Hips. All you could hear was the sound of beer bottles breaking, people fighting, and the sound of "I've fallen and I can't get up."

They tell you that only way to win in Sin City is to keep on driving. I should be discharged from the hospital in three days. I should have listened...

We finally made it to Sturgis. There were more than 500,000 bikers at the rally. It was there I met a girl. Her name is Llyn, with two l's. The only thing more dangerous than the enemy is her beauty. When we are on the bike and she holds me tight, the desert is alive with red roses. Llyn always knows what to say and is the only one who can defrost my emotions. She is as comforting as the cool other side of the pillow.

It feels good to be in the desert and have nobody shooting at you. In the desert, every time I think I've found the meaning of the universe, they change it. We camped just outside of town in the Black Hills. We have more freedom in the desert, can make as much noise as we want, our bikes are more secure, and we are not usually bothered by the law. We had a wild party that first night and it was better than great BTG. During the party Llyn, with two l's got a gummy bear stuck in her teeth, so we got another gummy bear to go in after it.

The next morning we decided to make a run to the Dunkin Donuts in Rapid City. Along with our bikes, we took the chase van with us. The chase van follows us on our runs and carries our gear, tools, and picks up bikes that break down. Not unexpectedly, the Rapid City Police Department was there. I want to note that law enforcement has a very difficult job and we understand their plight. They deserve our respect. When we left, Chainsaw said, "Hey Pitt, where's your bike?" With patch holders and cops right in the shop, some maggot stole my bike. Right then I said that the only thing that's going to beat this low life to the morgue is the headlights of the hearse he's in. It took two cops and Llyn, with two l's to calm me down.

I got a ride in the chase van and when we returned to our base camp we put out word of the theft to all our brothers. Snake, who's pretty good with computers, found a wifi hotspot at Lo Fat's Chinese and Swiss All You Can Eat Buffet and TV Repair Service in Sturgis, and began his search. Outlaws usually avoid the authorities at all costs, but this time the uniforms from Dunkin' Donuts reported the larceny. Apparently the local authorities had biker-clad agents throughout the rally and were reporting fights, drunken orgies, prison escapes, illegal candy bars, war crimes, crimes against hospitality, and thefts.

Even though my patience was crumbling faster than a week-old whole wheat bran muffin, we stopped for chow and I had the usual all-American lunch of two burgers, one medium, the other rare, burnt toast on the side, with a shot of tequila. At that time,

believe it or not, we heard that the powers that be had already narrowed down their search for my bike to a kid who lived in nearby Smoldering, S.D.

We had a war counsel. It was determined that we would probably not take a life, but someone had to pay. We needed to send a message not to mess with the LOVERS. When we arrived at his house, we gunned the engines as loud as we could. Renegade ran around the house tossing in smoke grenades through closed windows. Tommy (of all names) broke into the garage and stole a 1969 Chevrolet Z-28 Camaro. We opened fire with small armed weapons and shattered the entire frontage of the house. After our little escapade we rode to the Sturgis impound lot. I climbed the chain link fence, used a blanket with boards nailed to each other like a ladder, and threw it over the barbed wire. I easily climbed over the wire and jumped. There was my shining motorcycle. A brother shot out the lock on the gate and full of pride, I rode the bike out of the lot.



After a week of partying we headed out for Lower Ocean Valley. Shotgun drove the Camaro back to L.A. to sell for parts. Llyn, with two l's was sleeping just before we left. She is the end of the rainbow. Walking toward you or away, she's the kind of girl you can't stop thinking about. I woke this lovely creature up. She reached out to me to get on the back of my bike. And then I reached for her hand.

Riding back to the Lower Ocean Valley from Sturgis along route 66, Llyn, with two l's was talking about getting permanently hitched up, buying a house, having kids as well as a dog in the yard. There are a few things I stay away from and one is commitment. After a heated exchange we decided that after the next rest stop it was better if she rode on another bike and she did. Just outside of Sunstroke, Nev., a brainless dimwit who was driving in his hybrid, making coffee in his auto coffee maker, eating a donut, smoking a cigarette, shaving, changing a CD, looking at a map, and talking on his cell phone swerved into my lane and hit the front end of my bike. My bike and I skidded for 100 feet and came to an abrupt halt around a tree. Fortunately Llyn, with two l's was not with me. My main concern, of course, was with my bike. They advised me that the bike only suffered cosmetic damage and could easily be repaired. I was wearing

my leathers and a helmet and suffered no abrasions, however I did endure multiple contusions and a broken leg. A number of LOVERS rode after this driver, forced his car off to the side of the road, and escorted him out of his vehicle into the woods. We heard that when the cops later found him in his car he was still breathing and they decided that it must have been some accident. The only question they had was how the Pine Tree Air Freshener ended up stuck in his front teeth.

While my bros were dealing with the errant driver, Doc, who was a Corpsman in the Fleet Marine Force, formed a splint with two hammers and duct tape. You know, a real man always carries duct tape. While my brothers pushed my bike into the chase van, an ambulance arrived. The meat wagon drove me to Sue You Forensic Emergency Room, better known as Suffer Hospital or Suffer for short. Three bros, Whitey, Blackie, and Red stayed with me and followed us on their bikes all the way to the hospital.

When I arrived at Suffer and began in-processing, they asked about insurance. I advised that I had no health insurance. My family always believed that laughter is the best medicine. In fact, when my sister Mary Sue Joe Ann got a puncture wound in her shoulder we just laughed and laughed and laughed. Then we took her to a tailor.

Once in my shared room, we had words with the family of the other patient. His oxygen apparatus and wheezing was too loud, he had way too many chaplains, doctors, nurses and aides coming and going, and his family kept talking to him. My bros and I yelled that they should just pull the plug. I remember that once Lynn, with two n's and I had a conversation about pulling the plug. I told her that if I ever appeared in a vegetative state, staring off into nothingness she should pull the plug. She went behind the TV and pulled the plug. They gave me a private room.

Later that night I met her. She was an angel in white and walked with quiet beauty. Her name was Lolla, with two l's. As a nurse working the long night hours she would hold my hand and keep me calm. We talked and I found that she was a vet who served as a nurse in Kuwait. She took care of the wounded, sick, lame, and lazy prior to them being shipped to Landstuhl, Germany or Walter Reed Medical Center in the states. She was pretty tough and was using the GI bill to put herself through dental school. Her goal was to be an orthodontist.

The next day, due to my erratic behavior, they brought in a shrink. He asked about my past, so I told him about Iraq. I spoke about a world that combined medieval practices with the internet, an elusive enemy, where half of its population is under 21 and grew up in war. I spoke about heavy gear and oppressive heat that sucks the energy right out of you, the inter-tribal abhorrence and violence of the Sunnis, Shias and Kurds to the north. I talked of the sound of prayer several times a day, of never establishing a pattern, indirect fire, the constant task of always staying hydrated, of bringing men and women home, or at least as many pieces

of them as we could find, and of always having to follow orders. Well, the psych turned white and wasn't able to speak when he left the room. Obviously he is not VA quality. And I didn't even mention how we took the war to the enemy and devastated anyone who took up arms before us.



With surgery pending I felt about as secure as a trailer house in tornado alley. I taped a note to my leg that told the doc that he better do a good job. When I awoke in the recovery room, the doc had taped a note that said, "Has anyone seen three sponges and my car keys?"

I stayed for three more days, each day looking forward to speaking with Lolla, with two l's. Finally the doctor cleared me for discharge. My bros Whitey, Blackie and Red came to pick me up. Lolla, with two l's and I exchanged email addresses and said we would keep in touch. It was then that I realized that my infatuation with her was temporary, the result of the meds and of having someone taking care of me after being on my own for so long. It was fantastic knowing her and I appreciate the time we spent together. But, she must go on with her life and I must go on as well with mine. I told her so and we both understood.

To my surprise, as they wheeled me out of the hospital there stood Llyn, with two l's. She had the traditional hospital gift of a fifth of the cheapest whiskey in the area. We all rode off together in a rented pickup and all was right with the world.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY, ELVIS PRESLEY POST 249
RESISTING SUICIDE AWARD

An Old Soldier's Story

By John Cervone
VA Medical Center – Providence, RI

I spent August of 2007 until June 2008 in Baghdad, Iraq. I was a member of the 65th Public Affairs Operations Center. We were a Public Affairs Unit attached to the media outlets in Iraq. We performed various functions, mostly working with reporters and distinguished guests and dignitaries visiting the war zone. My mission was to supervise a group of young soldiers who were tasked with escorting media, both Arabic and International, in and around the Safe Zone and the Red Zone outside of Baghdad. The Red Zone is the not-so-safe zone.

Because I was witness to the war and how the media was covering it first-hand, I began to feel that there was not much truth being told. That lit a flame of anger in me that began to grow hotter every day. I felt our men and women, who were risking their lives every day, were not being treated fairly. I believed the Arabic media simply made up whatever they wanted and the international community was not far behind. I witnessed, first hand, the compulsion the Arabic media had in watching pornography and that immediately told me that something was not quite right there.

The entire experience of lack of conscience on the part of the many participating in this sham caused me to become an angry person both in Iraq and upon returning home. I began to look for altercations, and did not mind starting them if necessary. If I noticed someone staring at me, I would immediately confront them. If I thought someone was trying to hurt me, whether true or not, I would confront them. While driving, any affront perpetrated at me, whether real or imagined, caused me to chase down the person in hopes of causing a confrontation. This was not the way to lead one's life, believe me.

One day, after starting an unusually violent altercation with another driver, I realized that what I was trying to do was commit suicide by forcing someone else to take my life. At that moment I knew it was time to take control of my situation and put a stop to this behavior.

I asked for guidance from the Lord as I have always believed the phrase "The Lord helps those who help themselves" and he guided me to the Providence VAMC. I have spent years talking and being advised by the mental health providers there. By hearing about the problems I was experiencing, they were able to advise me on what steps to take to overcome the anger that had taken over my life. One of the most interesting ideas they gave me was simply to do nice things for others. A kind word to a fellow worker, a small kindness to a loved one, a smile to a stranger in the street. These were just a few of the ideas they expressed to me.

At first I felt that this was simply an interesting concept, but not one that I could truly embrace. But I decided to give it a try anyway. Slowly, I began to feel a change in my persona. At work I would bring in treats for everyone and even begin planning parties that we could all be a part of. As I watched how much fun others were having I began to feel their warmth and kindness flowing over me. At home I began to see changes in my loved ones toward me; a feeling of acceptance and love began to stir in my heart. Even on the street, giving a smile or a simple greeting toward a stranger made me feel good no matter what the reaction of the other person.

I learned a very valuable lesson, one I would like to share with anyone feeling angry or mistreated today: instead of letting the bad fester inside of you, be the person who tries to spread a little kindness to others. It will not be easy at first but believe me, as

time goes by it gets easier and you will feel the rewards of your kindness inside. And that is what matters, how you feel and how you then perceive life. Take the advice of an old man who has spent 25 years in therapy for PTSD, anger issues, suicidal thoughts and severe bouts of depression. Only you can help yourself and only if you want to.



**ROBERT T. RUBIN
AWARD**

The PTSD - Private Thoughts, Shadowy Demons

By Larry E. Connelly

Nearly everyone has read something about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, and its effects on some people who have been in a war, or auto accident or have suffered an event so traumatic that it has become engraved in their psyche.

I can only speak of events that involved me.

My turn in the barrel lasted for two years. Vietnam was and is a beautiful place, even after all the attempts to bomb its lights out, defoliate it, and try to capture the minds and bodies of its people. I can vividly recall a hundred plus events from back then, while only a handful are tucked away and so deep that I start to shake when one comes to the surface.

My first attendance in a group therapy meeting was seven years after coming home from the Twilight Zone. At the time I was 37, going bald and using no pharmaceuticals. The foul but sweet smell of the rolled Mary Jane instantly brought back memories of Willy our monkey hanging upside down on his swing after two or three puffs. Another good thought was about Scott, one of the 20 advisers sitting on the fence in his shorts and cowboy hat singing "Buffalo Gals Won't You Come Out Tonight?" He would then snap the fence with his short rope, like he wanted the fence to gallop instead of just standing still like a fence does.

Willy was sitting on Scott's lap, pulling the cowboy's armpit hair. Willy would pull and Scott would yell "yeehaw, doggie!" and off they would go. People passing by mostly just ignored whatever was going on.

Because our second eight-foot-high fence was covered with razor wire it must have looked like a prison or a place to put people who had one or more of their family traits showing. Several of us were playing cribbage out back while Scott and Willy rode the fence. At that moment a jeep carrying an Army major left the fort and pulled to a halt next to the fence and the cowboy monkey team. The officer walked closer and stared a moment, then yelled, "What in the hell are you doing?" He demanded to know who was in charge of this idiot and if he and his partner were dangerous.

Our lieutenant had been with us for months and knew how to address a more senior officer. He said, "Major, sir, I'm in charge and we were going to play cribbage when we realized we were one peg short. I have sent Scott and Willy to town to find another peg, sir." At that moment we heard another "yeehaw!" We all looked over to see Willy with one hand down Scott's shorts pulling hair there!

The Major hurried back to the jeep and said, "Get the hell out of this loony bin." Then our pent up laughter came out, except for Scott who was getting closer to town all the time.

Some of the worst cases of PTSD could be found in the men who had made close friends with others in their units, and then had held them after a fire fight until they passed away. Some of these men were balanced on the edge and ended up moving into the woods on small acreages where they set up non-lethal booby traps designed to scare people off or warn them that a nut case was just up the trail. Whatever their reason for existing that way, and some still do, who can find fault unless you have walked in their shoes?



Each year in many locations across this country veteran's groups get together with other volunteer services at what are called stand downs. They are usually held at fairgrounds or other locations on the outer edges of towns. At these gatherings the veterans can ask about medical services, social security benefits and contacts in case they want to change their lifestyles. There are free meals, haircuts, and clothing, like boots and rain gear from regional military surplus inventories.

I've been to several, out of curiosity more than need. As I watched some really bedraggled guys with backpacks on walking toward the check-in table, they seemed to drift toward each other. They have never met, but they nod or give the Vietnam slap-back hand shake. Strangers just a moment before, they seem to walk a little taller with a buddy alongside them. Some of them come in old pickups with dogs in back and a girlfriend or wife with kids up front. A few arrive in very expensive rigs and step out in pressed slacks and sports shirts.

My first reaction at seeing a couple who had obviously made it to the top and needed no help was anger, but I know I'm only seeing the outside of this picture and financial success does not mean the ghosts have been exorcised.

Every once in a while someone would burst out with a "holy sh*t!" and someone else would say, "You were really there." Another common comment was, "Hey man, you got any weed?" I knew these men were not gardeners.

I watched the well-dressed couple head for the coffee stand and moved over next to them. While fixing a cup for myself I asked, "What service?"

"Army up north over there. And you?"

When I told him I was Navy, he replied with an uninterested "oh" and started to walk away. When I added "in the Rung Sat Zone on the PBRs," he replied, "I'll be damned," and turned to his companion, asking, "Remember, I told you about the crazy sailors on the patrol boats going into those canals?"

He asked me to join them at one of the picnic tables where an older guy was sitting. My new friend asked Mr. Raggedy if we could join him. Mr. Raggedy looked all three of us up with a loud no, but when the lady pleaded, he acquiesced. I introduced myself as "Larry, Nam, 70-71-72, river boats in the Rung Sat Zone." Robert then introduced his wife and rattled off a string of numbers that identified his unit from the division level down to his squad. Robert said they were going to look around and then would leave for home. I watched as they came out of the supplies building and waved to me and Raggedy who was actually Thomas Sinclair and a former Ranger.

"He must not need anything," I remarked as we watched them leave.

"Wrong," said Thomas. "I've seen him coming here every year for the past 11 years. He arrives, has coffee, then walks through the building and leaves."

Like I said, "He doesn't need anything."

Thomas then said, "He's looking for his soul or identity or something that's missing, something he left or lost in Vietnam. This place is where others like him, like us, come. We come not

for a meal or a pair of boots, but to see if we're unique, to find out if others dream of demons or cringe away from the raw meat section in the market."

He said, "I live with my girlfriend. She gathers mushrooms and cedar boughs to sell; I cut firewood or hire out as a laborer on occasion." And then a little quieter he said, "Sometimes I'll take a few beers and go out in the woods to my quiet stump and talk to Jimmy, Noel, Shorty and Francis."

I asked, "Where do they live?" He pointed to his head and said, "Right here, but they don't always show up."

I said, "How do you let them know when you're going to be there?"

"Oh, that's easy I just close my eyes and drink a beer and wait. If I'm quiet enough, Jimmy will get up off the stretcher and hold out his hand for Noel and Francis. They're back in the smoke, but sometimes they come out, then we can talk." Thomas paused. "Why are you here? I saw you drive up in that nice truck over there."

"You are the only kind of guy I can tell this to," I answered, "because I know you won't laugh...or maybe you will."

I tried to explain that there had been a deep well in my mind where I kept the things I didn't want to remember. Sometimes a place or a sound or even a smell would pop open the lid and something would come up to ruin my day or night.

The PTSD can't be seen, but its effect on people can. Some might curl up in a fetal position and have retreated too far in their minds to be brought back. Others may seem more normal than those who have never been exposed to the stress or conditions that might cause it.

I had problems with the memories for almost 20 years. I know they will be there forever, but they don't come out anymore. Now, when I smell the aroma of ribs dripping fat on the coals, baked beans, slaw and open a cold beer, a smile comes to my face as I picture the guys sitting on the patio, Willy playing with the dog, V.C., who was the ugliest animal in that armpit of the world. The country was actually beautiful as were the people; it was the political events going on in Saigon and Washington, D.C. that made our lives hard over there. We just did what was asked of us.

DAVID A. ANDREWS, JR., MEMORIAL AWARD

My Dad

By Samuel J. Hall

VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

My dad was an extraordinary man. He did not have much education, yet he was a very smart man despite the fact that he only completed elementary school. At about the age of 12, he went to work in the coal mines as a red tipper. Dad progressed in the coal mines and grew in stature to be able to pick and load coal for a higher wage. My dad earned about 85 cents a ton to load machined coal. He earned a dollar and a quarter a ton to pick and shovel coal. Dad left the coal mines at about the age of 19.

After this, my dad went into the Army to serve in an artillery unit for one year after World War I. He and Mom raised 13 children, five boys and eight girls. What an adventure our lives were; we just didn't know it at the time. We were all in the same family, yet we grew into unique individuals, each in our own different ways. We were one large family indeed.

My dad sent my two older brothers off to World War II, one into the Navy and the other to Japan in the Army after the war. My dad worked all those years and I only remember him taking off one time for a vacation. I was told dad always sold his vacation time to buy us kids shoes.

Since we were such a large family, I remember there were only six of us kids at home when I was growing up. The rest of the kids were off married and raising families of their own. We leftover kids were five girls and one boy, me.

The house we lived in when I was born, my dad rented for 20 years. He paid six dollars a month when they moved in and 25 dollars a month when they moved out. I remember Jake the egg man delivering eggs and butter and the ice man delivering ice to those who still had ice boxes. I remember my sisters mixing a yellow liquid into the white oleo to make it yellow and mashing the oleo into square boxes.

We moved away from that house when I was five. My dad bought a row house up on Viscos Hill for \$2,500. We lived there until I was 10-years-old. I felt like we were rich. I had my own bedroom. Dad bought me a bicycle and a Lionel train for Christmas during that time.

I watched my dad fix all kinds of items around the house. I thought he could fix almost anything. We bought our first television during that time. All of my brothers and sisters visited our house during the holidays. We made Candy, Crackerjack and English Toffee for the Christmas Season. Dad and I went down to

the Juniata River for ice to make ice cream. We went for Sunday drives in the country, to buy milk and eggs. It seemed like we had everything.

My dad moved our family to California and then to Florida. We lived in a housing tract near a bayou in Florida. My dad let me quit high school and signed papers for me to enlist in the Navy. While in the Navy, I went off to Midway Island, then to the war in Vietnam.

My dad endured the many nights my mom cried herself to sleep, from the pain from the cancer she endured. My mom died after five years from the cancer. The hospital took our house to offset the many medical bills that were accumulating from the cancer.

My dad and mom moved in with one of my older sisters. Dad lived with her for 20 years after mom passed away. My other three sisters moved away to live with other family members. My dad stayed at home over all of those years through good and bad times. He was a great father and provider to all of us kids.

As an adult, my dad visited my family in California for the month of November every year as he did with many other of my brothers and sisters. We had many long conversations, just him and me. I got to know my dad really well during his later years during his visits with us. My dad died at the age of 81. I am proud of my dad, I hope I have acquired many of his qualities.



DAVA, ARLINGTON-FAIRFAX CHAPTER 10 AWARD
1ST PRIZE

The Unseen Battle

By Shon Pernice
— Moberly, MO

It was the fall of 2007, Forward Operating Base (FOB) Grizzly, Iraq in the afternoon. I'm on duty in the Troop Medical Clinic (TMC) and I get a call that the Grizzly Check Point (GCP) has a kid that is bleeding—"unknown injury." I don my heavy body armor (IBA), adjust my Kevlar helmet straps, grab my M4 rifle, insert a clip-lock and load, put a new battery in my hand-held

radio, grab my medic bag, and jump in my Humvee. That is the routine I've done countless times. Before I depart, I grab a Beanie Baby from the box of stuffed animals that a church sent to us. I grab the yellow giraffe with brown spots. Since I know I have a kid to deal with, I want to bring a gift. I did the same thing back in the states working as a firefighter/paramedic.

I take the 10-minute drive through Ashraf, passing the PMOI terrorists that stand guard at various points protecting their city. I travel through the Lion's Gate, which is the entrance to the city with huge bronze lion heads on both sides of the black wrought iron gate. I arrive at the GCP, which is a small fortress of green sandbags stacked strategically. The GCP is staffed by U.S. Army personnel and right next to the Marines quick response force (QRF). This area is outside of the FOB and is considered dangerous. That should explain my dress out procedure.

It's not uncommon for the civilian population to bring their wounded to us. I have had my share of treating civilians, but I learned that you just don't know what to expect. My attitude is business as usual. I'm ushered into a small room with an Iraqi woman dressed in all black with a son who is about 10-12 years of age. The kid is wearing normal street clothes that you would see in any American city. My initial assessment is good: ambulatory, has an airway, no apparent wounds, and conscious. I don't need to do any vital life saving functions at this point. I have my Arabic interpreter, from Sudan, ready to assist me. The child is extremely frightened. I see that look of terror on his young face. I've seen it so many times in this country. I'm told by the interpreter that the child is bleeding from his bottom. I ask if this is her son and the answer is yes.

I'm not at home and don't need parental consent like I do in the states, but it's just habit. I ask what happened and the mother does not know. I've heard this so many times. The child is way too scared to speak. I offer the kid the Beanie Baby. He's not sure what to do and looks at his mother. She nods with approval and the kid hugs the animal. Score one for me. I have my interpreter ask the kid what happened and he's not speaking so I don't know what kind of hell this kid just endured. My thoughts: blast injury, gunshot wound, gastrointestinal bleed, or maybe just constipated. I don my medical gloves and have the interpreter explain that I need to look at the area. The kid did not want his pants to come down. I kept reassuring him in a calm voice that it's okay. I made sure I got down on his level and did not hover over him. Tricks of the trade from being a paramedic. After 10 minutes of pleading, I get his pants down and there's bright red blood in his dirty white underwear. Not streaks like from a minor irritation. It's not old blood either like from an old wound in the upper GI track. I observe a tear in the anus. My emotional state just went from compassionate medic, to father, to protector, to wanting to kill someone, all in a fraction of a second. This child was raped, or someone inserted a foreign object into this innocent little boy. I stared right into that mother's eyes—she averted her glance. In a very stern voice and an offensive stance I said, "What the hell

happened to your son?" The interpreter has seen this side of me before and is nervous. He translated and the mother said that her husband spanked the boy for being bad.

Now I'm really angry. I have to redirect and take care of my patient.

Back in the streets of Kansas City, as a firefighter/paramedic, in this circumstance I could control the situation. I'd have access to police to manage the scene, protect the child, and authority to remove the kid from a hazardous household. There's times where I didn't allow parents to ride in the ambulance. I have arrived at the ER and instructed the doctor to have the parent arrested a time or two. I had authority to protect those who had no voice. Not now. I'm in a world where moral laws do not exist and social services is not even a term.

I get out some 4x4 gauze and dab the wound. I could put in a suture but I'm not going to put the kid through that. Plus, it may rip out. I smear some antibiotic cream on the area. I decide to give the kid some antibiotics to prevent an infection and also for any sexually transmitted disease. I make up a bag of medications to help with pain. I have my interpreter explain how many pills to give and when. I also instructed him to write the instructions, in Arabic, on the baggies. I've done my duties as a medic.



Now, the hard part: separating emotion from duty. To emotionally survive in a combat zone you have to shut yourself off. You become numb. But with kids, it tears at my heart. They are innocent and look at elders for security. This kid isn't getting protection. I know I'm going to have to say goodbye to this boy. I don't want to make eye contact because, then, I make that connection. I'll see the pain, the fear, and those unspoken words "please help me." I don't like feeling helpless. I know this innocent child is going to have to go back to an abusive environment that yields no law or consequences to the perpetrator. So, am I enabling this situation? It is an emotional tug of war. It is the unseen battle on the battlefield. The war wounds that just stick with you—they haunt you.

I send the mom and son off. I can do no more. The kid is holding his mother's hand as they walk back down the dirt road toward Route Cheyenne. The child looks back at me one more time. All I can do is wave. I didn't "lose" this patient, but in a sense, I did. I go back to my Humvee, tears in my eyes. I rip off my

Kevlar helmet and bash the side of my vehicle several times. The emotional turmoil is at its peak. I wish I had a drink of alcohol. But, I bury it away and return to my post. I prepare my equipment for the next mission.

DAVA, ARLINGTON-FAIRFAX CHAPTER 10 AWARD
AWARD: 2ND PRIZE

The Ethiopian Coup

By John Dennis Hannigan
VA Medical Center – Fort Wayne, IN

This story addresses Emperor Haile Selassie's return to Asmara, Eritrea, to reclaim his throne as Emperor of Ethiopia. I was a member of the American military stationed at Kagnew Station; Asmara, Eritrea, Ethiopia from August 1958 thru October 1962. The coup occurred in the 1960s.

Background:

Eritrea was an axis (Italian and German) occupied territory during World War II. There was no Eritrean government. The Italians also occupied Abyssinia (Ethiopia today). The Abyssinian Emperor Melineck was in exile in England. When World War II ended in East Africa, the Emperor returned to Abyssinia and claimed his throne in 1946. After his death, he was superseded by Haile Selassie as Emperor of Ethiopia. The League of Nations had extended the border of Ethiopia to include the neighboring county of Eritrea because the Eritreans had no government. Haile Selassie assigned the Second Ethiopian Military Division to establish law and order in Eritrea. The League of Nations was later identified as the United Nations. Meanwhile, in 1948, the United States military supported Haile Selassie in the administration of Eritrea through Eritrean Independence in 1974.

Overthrow of Government:

In the early 1960s, the Emperor was out of country on a diplomatic trip. Some of his cabinet overthrew him in a quiet coup. When the report of the coup was announced, the United States military stationed at Kagnew Station, Asmara, Eritrea, went on high alert. All dependents, spouses, and children were told to pack one suitcase for traveling. Contents were to be four days clothing plus any medical prescriptions. The evacuation plan was put in place to move dependents by armed convoy to the State Department airstrip in Decamere, Eritrea, about 20 kilometers from the base. Dependents were to be flown to Rheine Main AFB in Germany and then on to McGuire AFB in New Jersey. The military was put on alert to defend the base in the event the coup extended to Eritrea. Emotions were high as the Americans had no idea what the new government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was up to and how they would react to the American Military Base in Asmara, Eritrea.

How did this affect the Hannigan family who had accompanied me on my tour to Asmara, Eritrea, Ethiopia? To say the least it meant that the family could not go to the main base unless accompanied by a military police escort. This meant that every time the family had a medical appointment or went to church, we had to call the military police. In addition, Ethiopian soldiers stood guard duty 24 hours at the gate to my off-post house for our protection. Our maid, Harigo, could not go home at the end of the day; she had to live in our garage. We were in a state of flux until the United States decided how to handle the coup. As ordered, my wife Joanne made sure that she and our three children (John Clark, 4; Catherine Mae 3; and David Brian, 4 months) had the necessary clothing and medication to cover a four-day trip to the United States.

There was a lot of tension between Joanne and me during the first couple of days of the coup. What was to become of household goods and our automobile? What about personal things like family pictures, children's toys, even the two German Shephard dogs that guarded our house 24 hours a day? If the family was evacuated as planned from the State Department airstrip in Decamere, when would we be reunited as a family? Also of concern were little things like, did Joanne have enough money to support herself and the children during the evacuation and trip back to the United States? Was Joanne's passport updated with current pictures of the children? Being evacuated, how was she able to obtain the necessary exit and entrance visas to enter the United States? As you can see, we were in a turmoil getting the family ready to leave and I still had to maintain my military duty leaving all the preparation to her.

After the second day of the coup, the First Army Division and the Palace Guards in Addis Ababa remained loyal to the Emperor. The Second Army Division in Asmara, Eritrea, Ethiopia also remained loyal to the Emperor. This relieved some tension in Eritrea and especially for the American families stationed in Asmara. On-base activity seemed to improve. The Second Division set up defensive perimeters around the base and the communication sites. The dependent armed convoy was put on hold. What an anxious 30 odd hours we lived through. During the next few days, the daily routine returned to normal and we were permitted to go to the base at our own leisure. The evacuation of dependents was canceled. My three children did not realize at their young age that they had lived through a coup attempt of a foreign country's head of state.

The coup also affected our families in the United States. They had no idea what our status was in Asmara. Over the next few weeks, letters from home and our replies gave the families relief that we were still safe and in no danger from the coup.

After a week went by, we were advised by the base commander that Emperor Haile Selassie was going to land at the Asmara Eritrea Airport and under an Ethiopian Military Guard visit Kagnew Station to announce to the world that he was regaining

his throne in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Upon his arrival on base, he went to Base Radio-TV Station and told the Ethiopian and Eritrean people that he reclaimed his throne in Addis Ababa, and that the members of the coup would be taken care of upon his return to Addis Ababa.

Considering that Haile Selassie was head of state, the base commander had an honor guard for the Emperor in front of Base Headquarters. The Emperor reviewed the honor guard with the base commander. I was part of the Honor Guard and the emotion of the past weeks seemed to be lifted off my shoulders as the Emperor passed my platoon. Then the Emperor, accompanied by the base commander, toured the rest of the base thus ensuring complete United States support of the Emperor's return to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and, once again, having United Nations administration and control of the country of Eritrea.

The Emperor left the base the next day and flew back to Addis Ababa to claim his throne. Upon arrival in Addis Ababa, the Emperor, in accordance with Ethiopian justice, arrested the leader and members of the coup. They were hung in Addis Ababa in a public square showing the people his power as the Emperor. The hangings made international news and any international publication carrying the story was banned by the Emperor in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

GLADYS M. CANTY MEMORIAL AWARD

Sorry Professor

*By Jessica Hunter
VA Medical Center - Providence, RI*

"Sorry Professor, I couldn't do the homework last night. The neighbors were shooting fireworks to celebrate Memorial Day and my brain shut me down so I wouldn't remember. When I came to, my body was curled up in a ball in my basement soaked in cold sweat and it was already morning.

"Sorry Professor, I was late to class today because on my way driving here I saw a black trash bag on the side of the road with a wire sticking out, so I swerved out the way so I wouldn't blow up. People laid on their horns and cussed at me. I had to pull over for a bit and remind myself that I'm not in Iraq. I'm not in Iraq.

"Sorry Professor, I had to leave class today because the girl behind me was whispering to her friend that she wondered how many people and babies I killed and I just didn't want to accidentally black out and punch the ignorance out of her mouth. I guess it was my fault anyway. I should've known better not to wear my unit pride shirt to class on Veterans Day.

"Sorry Professor, I missed class today because I was trying to wash my hands in the sink and I just couldn't seem to get the

blood and ferrous smell off my hands. I really tried to save him, but they shot him in the neck and I just couldn't stop the bleeding, no matter how hard I tried. I miss him so much. He always made us laugh and his daughter was so adorable.

"Sorry Professor, I had to drop your class today because I just can't hear you say one more time that burning the flag can be looked at as a freedom of speech. I get where you are coming from, but it just reminds me of the time I saw the burnt American flag patch on the sleeve of my best friend who died in the explosion. And how we covered her casket with the flag before her husband and child watched her get lowered into the earth. I hope you understand.

Very Respectfully, Your freedom"

**LARRY CHAMBERS SPIRIT
AWARD**

My Life as a Christian in Vietnam

*By Ron Mosbaugh
VA Outpatient Clinic - Mt. Vernon, MO*

The warm, humid air engulfed my body as I stepped off the C-130 at the Da Nang Air Base in August 1966. The atmosphere seemed so alien to me; I had never felt that depth of penetrating humidity before. At that moment I knew the world had changed. I could literally feel it. I felt something satanic. I felt evil and despair.

Within a few hours after my arrival in country, I was assigned to Second Battalion First Marines Hotel Company as an 8404 Field Corpsman. As I was unpacking, a Marine corporal informed me that I was to report to a briefing for a night ambush. Wow, it was all happening too quickly!

I grabbed my medical bag, 45-caliber pistol and my M-14 rifle and headed for the meeting. There were 12 of us, and the squad leader, Corporal Sanders, was in charge. I was scared to death.

Several of the grunts were wearing shoe polish on their faces; they were a scary site! As we were walking during the patrol, I was spaced behind our radio operator, Corporal Gerace, AKA "Bomar." He was from the Bay area of California. At 19 years of age he was already a seasoned warrior. He knew my fears and said, "Doc, just stick with me, our Marines will protect you." I was thinking of something much stronger, that my Lord would protect me.

The night was extremely dark; I don't think I had ever seen so many stars. As we were nearing a small hamlet 26 miles south of Da Nang, we started hearing banging on gongs and bamboo sticks. I asked Bomar what that was all about. He said it was the Vietcong sending Morse code messages. He said the messages also had a psychological effect which played on our nerves. I

don't mind telling you it worked; my pants were already wet.

Within the first hour we made contact with the enemy. They were waiting for us. The sudden explosions of grenades and guns firing made it sound like the Fourth of July; but we were not celebrating. Then the inevitable happened - a Marine yelled, "Corpsman up!"

At that moment my heart sank. I prayed as I had never prayed for God to protect me and to help me in my skills to treat the wounded Marine. This was the moment I had feared since my orders to Vietnam. My emotions were all on hyper alert, and I was having a fight or flight reaction.

I was terrified and thought this could very likely be the last day of my life. I soon learned there were two Marines hit basically at the same time; they were about 20 yards apart in the rice paddy. The first warrior I treated was shot in the abdomen, and he was in a lot of pain. I placed a battle dressing on him and helped him to safety. A couple of Marines carried him to an LZ.

The other warrior was shot in the face, instant KIA (killed in action). Before this night ambush was over, I treated three WIA's (wounded in action) and one KIA—the ages of the Marines were between 18 to 20 years old; about my age. This really hit home.



When I returned to base camp, I had time to reflect on the events of our patrol. I thought I had a good idea what war was all about, but in reality, I had no idea. There was something about being there—hearing the cries of the wounded, rifles firing, grenades exploding, the smell of gun powder, blood and urine—that brought home the reality of war.

I thought, if this is what my life is going to be like for the rest of my tour, I'm not sure it's worth it? Maybe the Marines we just lost tonight were the lucky ones. Doubt was already creeping in; the thought of dying seemed perhaps an option. Satan was already planting a seed of doubt and despair.

It is very important for readers to understand my moral character. I had been raised in a Christian family and was saved at a young age. I lived by Christian principles with high moral values. I guess you could say I was a fundamentalist.

The cliché "I don't drink, don't chew, and don't go with girls that do" described me pretty well. I always tried to represent myself as a true Christian. In doing so, I did not cuss; it was definitely a sin to swear. I knew of many scriptures in the Bible to substantiate this. When a Christian cursed, he identified himself with the enemy of God. It was wrong to praise God in one sentence and use his name in vain in the next. I do not mention this topic of cussing as a statement of pride or bragging; it was just the way I was.

It's not to say I never sinned, because we are all sinners. Before coming to Vietnam, I was very concerned about me killing a person, if the situation presented itself, could I pull the trigger? In studying the Bible, I learned that God's command was actually against murder, not killing. Nowhere did the Bible say that believers should not join the military and, thus, should not participate in defending their country.

Numbers 25:8-13 was one of many Biblical accounts where killing was required to eradicate sin. God, I knew, was a loving God, but he was also a just God. I was reassured by Matthew 10:34, which stated, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

I knew military service involved keeping faith with a vision for our nation's freedom and greatness. Nothing less than total

The daily trauma we endured caused a lot of emotional problems: stress, depression, high anxiety, crying, feelings of despair and hopelessness. The list went on. One problem I had was that I did not have a Bible. I checked with the other Marines and found there was not a Bible in our company! So, I just had to do the best I could without God's word to guide me.

About three months into my tour a corporal came to me seeking help after losing his best buddy in a firefight. They were schoolmates from elementary school through high school. Growing up they were the best of friends. They joined the Marines in the "buddy system;" they were guaranteed to be together during boot camp and the rest of their enlistment. As it turned out, they were both sent to Vietnam.

We had been on a search and destroy mission, and as we were advancing during a battle, his buddy was killed. As I was filling out the casualty card, the corporal saw his buddy lying there and pretty much lost it. He had his rifle on automatic, and he ran toward the village shooting at anything that moved.

The other Marines followed suit, and the carnage began. Before the battle was over, all the Vietnamese were lying dead, along with the water buffalo, chickens, and dogs—basically everything that moved. The village was also burned to the ground.

Afterward, the corporal fell to the ground crying. I started crying too. I wanted to help him so bad that I was feeling his pain. I prayed out loud to God to help him and give him strength.

Two days after the massacre, the Marine sought my help. He really needed professional help, and I felt inadequate to counsel him. I told him that we couldn't do anything about the past and that you had to take it to prayer. He was not very receptive; he wanted to know why God would allow this to happen. I am sorry to say I was not very much comfort to him. We talked for a while and it seemed to help somewhat. I wish I could have been more help. It was so sad.

In the days that followed, when we walked through the area where the massacre occurred, it seemed there was a satanic spirit present. It felt eerie and I wanted to move on as quickly as possible. Were Satan's demons still celebrating the taking of souls on that unforgettable day?

It was late August 1967. We were on a routine patrol about a mile from our CP (command post). One of the Marines stepped on a land mine and was wounded seriously. He lost a leg and had a lot of shrapnel wounds to his body. I didn't know if he was going to live or not; he was losing a lot of blood. I was applying a tourniquet on his leg when he started cursing God for his injuries.

Deep inside I wanted to back up from him in case God struck him with lightning. I had always heard that you never see an atheist in a foxhole, but in Vietnam I found out it was just the



commitment was required of a soldier. "Semper Parati" was more than a motto for the United States Marine Corps; it was a way of life and death. Without total commitment, I knew I could not serve as a good soldier in any armed forces.

War was never simple. It was always complex. I knew it was not a black and white matter, and I soon came to realize it was not even gray. If anything, it was blood red.

Our company did not have a chaplain assigned to us. Some of the Marines knew I was a Christian, and since I was in the medical field, I guess some of them thought I could fill the role of a chaplain. I would lend them a sympathetic ear and try to reason with them.

opposite. I witnessed Marines outright cursing God for the chaos they were enduring. I could never understand why they never blamed Satan for the situation we were experiencing. After all, he was the deceiver.

After making out a casualty card and injecting him with morphine, I treated him for shock. A medevac took him to the Battalion Aid Station (BAS) in Da Nang. I never knew if he lived or died. There were many other times that I held wounded Marines in my arms before they died. This was a good time to witness to them, because it was their last chance to accept the Lord as their Savior. I tried to be positive with them. Many knew they were going to die, or they wanted to die, depending on their injuries.

As a corpsman, I was their last contact; some requested that I send a letter to their loved ones, telling them that he loved them.

I knew a corpsman who did not believe in killing. He carried a gun but chose not to use it. The mission of a corpsman is to help save a Marine life, not fight in battle. The reason he became a corpsman was to serve in the medical field, even though he served in a non-combatant role; he wanted to help the Marines. We respected him, and he was well liked by the troops.

We also had a Marine who was a Christian pacifist; he was considered a conscientious objector. The Marine Corps plays a different role than the corpsman, they were combatants and were expected to kill and maim. The Marines were not happy to have him attached to us; he was no help when the action started.

In the corps, we depended on each warrior to do his part; we felt he was letting us down. At times they would use him as a point man; he was the one in front of the patrol walking about 15 to 20 yards ahead. He was cutting the path for the others to follow. He was the first to spot trouble, and usually the first to step into traps or disarm them. After a few patrols, his Christian philosophy changed; he started carrying a loaded rifle.

I ran patrols day and night. Before each patrol we had a squad meeting to inform us where we were going and what our objective was. Many times during these briefings, I would look at the faces of these Marines wondering who would not return to our camp. I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that we would lose Marines on the upcoming patrol.

As a combat corpsman, I was the one who had the responsibility to put myself in harm's way and treat wounded Marines no matter where in the field they were hit. Many times it was in the middle of the rice paddies with no protection. That's why so many corpsman and medics were killed or wounded in action. Personally, I was wounded twice in Vietnam. I could easily have been a KIA/WIA statistic as the opportunity was always there. I have no doubt that God protected me during my tour. I could mention several close calls but will only mention two situations where I was spared.

We were on a search and destroy mission and had just finished eating C-rations (field rations) for lunch. We were near Hill 55 when a Marine was shot and word was passed down: "Corpsman up." The casualty was several yards from the dike I was lying behind. I ran toward him and was shot upon by the Vietcong. This suicidal waltz was known as "doing your duty."

Bullets were splashing in the rice paddy water next to me and one zipped by my right ear; that sound has haunted me all these years. An inch closer and my name would have been on the Vietnam Wall. Why not me, Lord?

In another operation we were on during the monsoon season, we were riding on an Amtrak due to the very high water. We had sandbags stacked up three high to protect us from enemy fire. I was talking to a Marine who was lying next to me. As we were talking, we started receiving enemy fire.



I looked in the other direction trying to locate the firing sniper. When I looked back toward the Marine, he was slumped over; I turned him over. He had been shot in the face, another KIA. That bullet could have hit me just as easily as not. Why not me, Lord? I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

The truth is I knew I was protected and that God had a plan for my life. The thought of dying didn't really bother me. I figured if I died I would instantly be in Heaven, and my odyssey would begin. This was a great comfort and allowed me to concentrate on my job of saving lives.

However, the thought of disfigurement or losing a limb or becoming a paraplegic or quadriplegic concerned me deeply. Working at the Naval Hospital in Oakland, Calif., prior to my deployment, I dealt with these kinds of patients, and I didn't want to be part of that. They were the ones who lost their arms and legs in this war. The hospital fitted prostheses for these veterans. Most of these guys were my age; their lives were changed forever.

Living by Christian principals in Vietnam was important to me; I took the word of God literally. The Book of John 15:13 states, "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." The duties of a corpsman were many; but as a combat corpsman, our main duty was to save lives and treat the wounded. I felt the duties of a Christian and a corpsman were synonymous; I should be willing to lose my life in an attempt to save another's life.

The battlefield was a fight to the finish. It was either kill or be killed. Although I would have given my life to save another, I did everything in my power to stay alive. When I treated a Marine in the field, I would always position my body between the Vietcong and the casualty. Once as I was treating a Marine with a gut wound and was applying a bandage. He was shot again! I had no doubt that the bullet was meant for me, as the Vietcong had a bounty on corpsmen. Why not me, Lord?

Being a Christian in Vietnam was not an easy task. We were treading on Satan's playground, and he was the headmaster. Lucifer and his hordes of demons were working overtime to collect our warriors as their own POWs. We endured trauma to its fullest.

The sights and sounds have been buried deep in the corridors of our minds for almost 50 years, like haunting clouds always on the horizon. I witnessed killings, old and young alike; some enemy and some not. I witnessed rape and other carnage that I would rather not talk about. I have no doubt that Satan enjoyed every minute of it.

In Vietnam, warriors would get medals for their action; in the United States they would have gotten a life sentence in prison for the same act. It was a different world and different rules. The Marines were a breed unto themselves; many of them were very hardcore and dealt with life the only way they knew how.

Some were facing charges with law enforcement; the judges said either go into the Marine Corps or spend time in jail. Please don't get me wrong—there were many outstanding Marines and I respect them all. The world is made up of all kinds of people.

Kill, maim and destroy was what our Marines were trained to do. That was their mission as soldiers, and many of them were very good at it. Once the killing lost its mystique, it was no longer a tool of last resort. Killings became a normal function for them. After killing the enemy in battle, they went back to camp and carried on life as if nothing had happened.

This was part of the survival mechanism. One could not dwell on something like this or you would lose your sanity. After a while your brain accepted this behavior and it became part of who you were. This is the way sin operates, and it's the way it operated in Vietnam. After a while your sins became a normal function. It was like living a life with pornography; if you lived this lifestyle day and night, it would become normal to you.

This was how Satan operated; he wanted the killing and rape and other atrocities to be fun and exciting and accepted as normal behavior.

The Marine Corps was very efficient in training our warriors to be killers. On the front lines we were told to suck up our emotions and deal with it. When we came back to the world, we were never told how to stand down. The military offered no

mental health services for the trauma that we had been exposed to. And, they wonder why we have PTSD.

We came home from two wars—one on the battlefield and one in our minds and souls. For thousands of veterans and their families, despair has become an unwelcome and constant companion. The public has no idea what we were exposed to. Life as we knew it was never the same after we came home from that hell on earth. What happened to us in Vietnam changed us, absolutely and completely. That wall was built and nothing could tear it down.

During my tour I witnessed to a few Marines. I don't know if any of them accepted Christ as their Savior, but I at least planted a seed. One day I was removing a small chunk of shrapnel from a Marine's arm, when out of the clear blue he asked me if I actually believed in God. The statement jolted me, because he was the only Marine who ever asked me that question so bluntly.

I told him that there is a God and that he loved him. There was also a Satan who wanted to destroy his life and that he had to choose one or the other. I told him there is a literal Heaven and a literal Hell. We were the only ones who could make the final decision on whom we chose to follow.

He thanked me for the encouraging words, and we both prayed that God would strengthen us. From that day forward, we felt that we had a special connection and that God was still in control.

That 13-month tour in Vietnam seemed like a lifetime. Days seemed to drag by. The front lines were as close as you could get to Hell without actually being there. The mayhem and killings were beyond belief.

At age 19 I witnessed atrocities that no one should witness at any age. It was a gruesome and horrifying experience. Emotionally, I was wounded for life. However, if I had it to do over, I would not change anything.

In the long run, it actually uplifted me and strengthened my faith. Seeing firsthand how God protected me from great harm was inspiring and amazing. I personally witnessed miracles happening before my eyes and stood spellbound by His acts of mercy.

Please, pray for our troops! I have always admired the words of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, our 34th President. "I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity."

JOSEPH POSIK
AWARD

Darkness Can Fall....Darkness Does Fall

By Richard Wangard
VA Medical Center - Milwaukee, WI

You can't let it and you can't allow it. You owe too much to yourself and too much to your brothers and sisters. Live life and honor their sacrifice, especially those whose lives were cut short by some enemy, seen or unseen.

The pressures are many for those trying to transition back into a civilian life that seems so different and uncaring. Just serving gave you a whole different perspective on life. We all had each other's back. We were trained well for our service no matter the MOS. No matter peacetime or wartime we all took the oath. It never expires! We have and knew pride in our uniforms.

I have been trying to figure out just why so many of us are killing ourselves each year. I have been asking myself this question for the last three years. It is indeed a national epidemic that goes pretty much unnoticed throughout our country. There are some organizations that try to fight it: VA mental health, Mission 22, *Veterans' Voices*, and a few others.

I think I have a clue. It could be despair. It could be a deep depression. It could be extreme stress. PTSD. It could be feeling all alone—no one to back you up or have your back. Now what do I do? People who do not serve have no clue as to what a vet has faced and what they are facing. We all say the same thing—Oh I was just doing my job! I am no hero. Well Mr., Miss, or Mrs., I beg to differ.

Fifty years out now and when extreme life threatening stress strikes I move into action like I did when I was 18. I was trained well and my war was Nam. Life happens! Usually when you least expect it on some meaningless Tuesday or any day of your life your skills just might be called upon to save a life. You are highly skilled, motivated, and trained to overcome and improvise. So tell me: how does it all go south?

Is it age? For me at 67, youth is not a stage of life but a state of mind. I'm not exactly greased lighting anymore, and the scars I own are compliments of my good friend Agent Orange. I refuse to give up even though I have every right to. After a dozen major operations, I have a whole bunch of scars and the pain to prove it. Improvise and overcome. I still ride a Harley but with a buddy leading because my neck does not turn anymore. Just like the Thunderbirds, I am totally dependent on the leader. He goes—I follow! Still a wingman only, I flew in C-130A's.

Is it youth? Just how do you pay the bills as an E-2 or an E-3, or for that matter as an E-anything? The pressures of a family? Enormous! My first child is born in Jan. 1975. I am laid off my factory job due to the oil embargo. No money! Where are the baby formula and diapers going to come from? I start going to school just to get the GI bill so money would start coming in. Food, shelter, and water took on a whole new meaning in those days. Even in Nam I could eat, drink, and have somewhere or something to lay my head on. Now I am responsible for three lives? Being part of an aircrew was a whole lot easier even if we did get shot at a lot. We were all just doing our jobs, though! Someone had to resupply and do medivacs.

Is it a feeling of being all alone with nobody to turn to? Is it tremendous stress? Is it memories? Is it PTSD? Tell me true because I have been there and done that! Fifty years later and I still get the help I need to make it through the next day! I won't give up. I owe too much to my brothers who never had the chance to have kids, make love, laugh with a lover, carve initials on a tree, or experience the joys and sorrows of life.

Yes, darkness falls on all of us. It is how you take the bitter with the better that makes all the difference. For God's sake get the help you need and be thankful for it and don't you ever tell me "Oh, I was just doing my job." You're all a bunch of heroes--you took the oath, remember it! That means you signed your life over to the United States of America! How many people can say that? Now improvise and overcome. You are military and always will be because the oath does not expire, and this old man is proud to hold a DD-214. It is a powerful thing! You owe it to yourself—you owe it to your country to be the best version of yourself you can be! If that means accepting help from others it only makes you stronger, smarter, and healthier.

After All, Heroes Need Help Too!



Veterans of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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

When a Veteran faces the challenges of healing, his fear of being rejected by the ones who love him is very real. It is the distant rumbling of facing a race that he is not sure of how to run. Each veteran has a different take on what they went through, whether it be the shock of being shot at or his tank rolling over. Medication is quickly the antidote, often leading to another, disabling reason. Men are subdued through the training, given a gun, and taught how to fight and defend the country for which he fought. They threw hand grenades, crawled in muddy water, caught infections from sweeping into fetid rice patties, and sought out snipers while being one themselves to protect their brother/sister. He experiences murders, shooting others, following orders, demeaning character attacks, placing blame, and not being honored as heroes returning home.

Some faced discrimination through a misunderstood war; this is a bad choice and terrible way to treat a nation's hero. They felt disgraced by blood that was tossed on him, being called "baby killer," and no one understanding the effect of the woes of neglect and years of mental abuse. We need to understand the need for healing, a challenge to repair the mental effect, the choices of war did create the homeless. It led to veterans choosing to be homeless, needing guidance, denying mental effects and abuse. Veterans need life to be rearranged, healing time with their families and friends. Vocalizing helps me to understand why our county did not recognize me as a war hero. The anger is loud and boisterous, and it requires attention.

Mental choices are made, right or wrong. Even today, the veterans in OIF-OEF suffer from traumatic brain injury. Their jeeps, tanks, and trucks flipped when a land mine was run over. There was a war that challenged all the technology of the present, and we were looking for others to help with future technology. Our future is in the hands of the veterans of today, tomorrow and a year from now. All our veterans are heroes; they saw death, illness, rage, pain, self-medicating with opiates and codeine, drinking to forget who they shot, seeing the faces of the ones that died walking toward them.

It may be your son or daughter; granddaughter, grandson, or cousin. Let's show them all the respect, honor and glory that our country can give. They chose to serve in the military and learned new skills to live. Be proud, talk loud, stand up for them, and open new doors to the road of recovery and wellness.

History of a B-17 Pilot, Victor Schoon

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

I met Victor Schoon and 23 other Chinese Americans on Veterans Day 2005 at the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, which hosted its annual event to remember the Chinese Americans who have served in the military from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom. After the brief presentation given by Murray Lee, the curator and a World War II Merchant Marine veteran, he asked us to sit and share patriotic memories with other fellow veterans.

I sat down next to a Chinese surgeon who worked for Sharp Medical Center. Then I met a World War II pilot, Victor Schoon. Victor said, "The younger Chinese don't know what sacrifices the earlier generation had to put up with." I got it.

I replied, "They don't get it." I understood Victor. My Chinese immigrant parents escaped the Japanese by coming to Los Angeles. No one would hire my parents, so they made their own jobs. My parents worked 24/7 in our family Chinese laundry that barely made ends meet. We could have used food stamps and government assistance programs. As a young teen, my Dad even worked as a houseboy for wealthy Los Angeles households. He barely spoke or understood English.

When the museum event ended, Victor gave me his business card. Later, I visited Victor at his San Diego house near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. Before I moved to Arizona, Victor drove to Oceanside, Calif., to see me. We still kept in touch when I moved. We used email to talk as he could not hear. We stayed in touch until he died on September 25, 2012, at age 93.

In the early 1920s, many Chinese families of Victor's generation were poorly educated with no profession. Victor mentioned, "When I was young, I didn't know about the hardships that the older generation had, so I was resentful about my parents not providing enough for us. It was always, 'shut up and eat!' Of course, it did not help with Pa being a gambler. Pa skipped town because of his debts! And poor Ma would have to find him in Tucson, Silver City, Calexico, and Salinas and so on. Ma had it the worst." Victor's mom died at age 48, after having nine children. They were malnourished, and had no health plan. Victor added, "There were white families worse off than us. This was the Depression."

Back then many Chinese found it difficult to find jobs because they did not know English and did not understand American culture. The Chinese living in America faced enormous pogroms.

It is well documented in a book, "Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans," by Jean Pfaelzer, who served on the Commission for Immigration, Labor, and Women's Issues in Washington, D.C. Dr. Pfaelzer's book describes the biggest ethnic cleansing in California and Pacific Northwest and Sierra Nevada Mountains areas. She describes over 100 roundups, mobbings, and bloodbaths used to purge the Chinese from their homes in Chinatowns. One of the worst, the Chinese massacre of 1871, occurred when a gang of 500 white men rioted and murdered the Chinese residents in Los Angeles Chinatown. How many were killed is unknown. The dead were hung at three different locations throughout downtown Los Angeles. Dr. Pfaelzer documented countless more of these brutal roundups and attacks.

Victor Schoon was born in Tucson, Ariz., on April 6, 1919. Until he was three, he lived with his oldest sister, Violet, who had just married her husband Tom. Tom worked at Fort Huachuca. Later, the family moved to Silver City, N.M., where Tom's father had a delicatessen. Victor started kindergarten there. In 1926, they moved to Calexico and stayed there a few years. In 1928, his family moved to Los Angeles. By this time, Victor was in the fourth grade. Later on, he attended Polytechnic High School and had to drop out of school to support his family.

During our conversations, Victor shared his family life with me. He avoided the military draft by getting married and getting a Department of Defense job. One and half years later, he divorced his first wife. She gambled every night and slept with her debtors. They had one child, Vickie, who died at 22 from kidney disease. Victor's father was given the last name of Schoon by a German ancestry immigration officer who couldn't figure out his Chinese name. The officer gave Victor's father a name that sounded German. All of Victor's nine brothers and sisters have this name too. Having a last name non-Chinese made it easier for Victor to get into the pilot training program, because the military thought his name was German.

The immigration officer had compassion for the new immigrants. Back then in the U.S., an anti-Chinese prejudice had built up. The name change helped Victor later on when he joined the United States Army Air Force. Back then, the Chinese in the U.S. were mistaken for being Japanese.

On January 30, 1943, Victor enlisted in the Army. He completed his GED in the Army. Victor was placed in a unit in which he had to wear wool uniforms, and he became allergic to them. The Army had to place him in another job. His last name Schoon made it easier for him to get into flight school. Not seeing him in person, the military assumed he was German on paper.

The United States military was so desperate for bomber pilots during World War II that despite Victor's Chinese ancestry, the Army Air Force trained him to be a pilot. Victor graduated from pilot school in 1943. After 25 missions he was promoted to first lieutenant. During that time, aviation was a branch of the Army called the Army Air

Corps. They flew the famous B-24s, Mustangs, Thunderbolts, B-29s, and B-17s in the fight against Germany and Japan. Today, the United States Army and the Air Force are two separate military branches. Victor piloted a B-17 aircraft along with his nine member crew in offense missions in Germany, Austria, and Romania, and logged 275 combat hours. During the early years of the war flying a B-17 was virtually a suicide mission, and many aircrews were killed. Perhaps Victor survived because he fought in the air toward the end of World War II. He flew 50 missions and survived. He lost no crew members. He separated from the United States Army Air Corps in 1945.

Victor claimed that he never received recognition from the military for his valor. His great nephew who lived in Tucson, Ariz., wrote Senator John McCain to ask the military officials to acknowledge Victor's service. Later Congresswoman Judy Chu disclosed that the Army Air Force archived records burned up and that Victor's missions were lost. Angry and resentful Victor said, "If they never gave it to me when I got out, then forget it." He died having never received a Distinguished Flying Cross Medal. After Victor's death on October 2012, his family finally accepted Victor's medal in California from Congresswoman Judy Chu.



ELIZABETH L FONTAINE MEMORIAL AWARD

Some Tragic Homecoming

By Neil Heine

VA Medical Center - Castle Point, NY

Not everyone has a happy homecoming. Some suffer from what is known as PTSD; even women can suffer a form of PTSD from childbirth. But the people I'm talking about are the ones who suffer in combat.

Being in a war zone makes you do things that you normally would not do. Life is different from the way we were taught growing up. Instead, we are taught self-preservation. At home we're taught that we are our brother's keeper; the fifth commandment says "thou shall not kill," and even Jesus said that "we are to love our neighbors as ourselves." This is the second greatest commandment.

In the military what we have been taught is thrown out the window. By the law of the jungle, it is kill or be killed. We do terrible things in combat. We kill or mutilate people in combat.

We are afraid to tell our loved ones exactly what we did in combat. We are ashamed of what we did and don't want to talk about it with our loved one. Young servicemen coming back home from combat drink to kill the pain. The doctors, because they do not understand what we are going through, put us on medication when we fail to open up. We combine drinking and medication to kill the pain.

Don't be like me. Talk about it. Don't blow up—talk about it, before it happens. I've lost everything: my family, my wife, children, and my house because I drank and took prescribe medication to kill the pain. I blow up at times like a wild man and I failed to reach out to my family before I exploded. I ended up waking in the year 2000 not being able to walk. I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, which could have been a lot worse. I could have ended up in a coma, or dead.

Please reach out to your family and doctors to get the help you need before it's too late. Don't end like me; open up and talk. I'm in the VA hospital suffering with Parkinson's.



**JAMES GRANT MEMORIAL
AWARD**

The Blessing

*By Melvin Garrett Brinkley
VA Medical Center - Tucson, AZ*

I think most people look for a blessing, even in the worst of circumstances, and I can think of no situation worse than a war zone. I was deployed to Zagreb, Croatia, in support of the United Nations peacekeeping efforts at the beginning of 1995, before the Dayton Agreement.

Drinking was the main recreation at my home away from home, Camp Pleso, an old Soviet outpost. I am not a drinker, so I petitioned my commander that a weekly visit to the area's

orphanages and refugee camps might help the morale of his troops. He cautioned me, "It's OK to help the people, but don't help them too much. They need to learn how to take care of themselves."

In a landscape of civil war, ethnic cleansing, land mines, snipers, rape, murder and assault; I felt certain that whatever I did could never be too much. When my commander learned that I had over 50 people signed up, he cautioned me that this posed a potential security risk. We made too tempting a target. He would allow no more than 20. I complied. The reality is he was right, three U.N. soldiers, on average, were killed every week during that U.N. deployment.

At Saint Terezije Orphanage, the children were clean, well fed, and cheerful. It was good to see my fellow U.N. peace-keepers play with children. Children are children even in a war zone. Near the end of our visit, the Mother Superior of the orphanage took me into her office and offered me sponge cake and a glass of slivovitz (plum brandy). As I nibbled and sipped, she told me about her orphans. Some orphans had seen their parents killed, execution style, by paramilitary thugs. Some cried every night. Some of her orphans might have relatives who were still alive, but in the present chaos of a failed nation eviscerating itself, finding them was not feasible.

The next week I took a group to a railroad yard where refugees had partitioned a warehouse into tiny rooms for their families. A woman beckoned my interpreter and me to her family's cubicle, which was no bigger than a walk-in closet. She offered us tea and then showed us pictures of her farm — rolling hills, cows, a small orchard, a milking barn, and a quaint cottage. Then she showed us pictures of that same farm — dead and bloated livestock in a scorched and shattered landscape. She told us that all the government offices that recorded land ownership had been destroyed also. Her birth certificate, passport, and other ID had been left behind in her haste to escape the killers, the ones who methodically had gone from village to village carrying out their grisly program of ethnic cleansing. She said, even if she and her husband could go back to their farm, they had no way of proving who they were or that they had owned the land that her husband's family had farmed for three centuries.

On our third week we visited a state-sponsored orphanage. The children were dirty, underfed, and clutched at the only functionary on duty. Instead of distributing our gifts of toys, clothes, and food we were asked to put them in a warehouse. A man opened the warehouse. It was piled high with packages from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This man had a greedy look about him and I had a vague suspicion that our gifts of children's clothes and toys would not be distributed to the orphans but instead sold on the black market. And so the weeks went by like this until ...

That summer, paramilitary thugs killed over 8,000 civilians and

abused thousands more in Srebrenica, "a United Nations safe haven." U.N. soldiers guarding the civilians were disarmed at gunpoint and after some wrangling and a handsome ransom, these U.N. soldiers, all British, were transported to Camp Pleso — dehydrated, beaten up, and humiliated, but alive.

On one of my visits to a U.N. field hospital at Camp Pleso, I met a civilian, a distinguished looking gentleman from England who was probably in his fifties. He had been shot by a sniper through his baby blue, UN issued, "bullet proof" vest. He showed me the slug the surgeon had removed from his shoulder. This large caliber bullet had been specially made to puncture body armor. When I inquired what his plans were after recuperating, thinking that surely he would retire or take a desk job somewhere safe, he said that he intended to once again go out into the hostile areas and bring critically needed medical supplies to the refugees.

I said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down their life for their friends." The words sort of tumbled out of me. It felt like a blessing that had come from someone else. Saying a blessing in a war zone is like lighting a candle in the deepest, darkest cave you can imagine. It's amazing how much light a little candle gives in the midst of darkness.

Nursing: Step-by-Step

By Peter Gray
— Phoenix, AZ

For more than 16 years, there are two things that I have come to enjoy most about living in Arizona: the people and the place itself. Having relocated here from the Southeast, I've found the people gracious and the outdoors truly great. Before moving to Phoenix, never before had the horizon been as clear or appeared as nearly unending.

While on a familiar, scenic hike, I began to appreciate just how fortunate I was to have the health that allowed me to take each step. By the end of the day, I had taken over five thousand. Later that night, I would think about the steps nurses take: the healthcare they deliver and the glad tidings they often bring. For one full month using a pedometer, I calculated the number of steps I amassed while at work. The number was astounding, near unbelievable: well over 50,000.

I very much enjoy knowing the aid and assistance myself and my peers at VHA Medical Centers and Clinics at home and abroad bring, and the relief delivered by each step that we take, and the contribution these very steps have made to our own well-being. Now that the Year of the Healthy Nurse has ended and a new year begun, it is my renewed aspiration that each step I take brings me closer to the peer, person, provider, and employee I desire very much to be.



July 4, 2017

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

July 4 is a day when we celebrate the birth of our nation. On that day, I will display my American flag on the front lawn of our home. I will bless it with a prayer first, then salute it. I do this not only on that day, but every time I raise it, for I will always remember the blood that was shed for this country when I was in Vietnam. To me, that's what the Fourth of July really means: God, country, and family, not just popping fireworks and enjoying all those other festivities honoring our country.

Our flags, our uniforms, and our weaponry, symbols of our desire to be free and victorious, are nothing without the fighting spirit that is within us as Americans. The very thought of defeat should be detestable to the true fighting American. You see, life is basically a war, a war against the world. It is, in fact, a series of battles. You'll win some, you'll lose some. But you better win the war. You don't go to war to make progress. You go to war to win. Too much American blood has been shed in war, so I do not accept the concept of "making progress," a phrase politicians use in today's wars. That makes me sick.

I'm a fighter. I love my country. I love it with all my heart. I have lived the American Dream—God, family, and country, fast cars, fast women (I'm married to one), nice clothes, and everything a true American desires. That's what it's all about. And as long as I have a heartbeat, I will stand strong and firm, never forgetting the oath I took many years ago when I joined the greatest and most powerful Navy in the world. For everything I have today is because of my service to my country. That's the truth. Today, I reap the benefits of my service. But it wasn't easy. There were times when I felt like giving up, but I didn't. I hung in there. I took the hits, got up, and hit back. I did not survive a war by luck; luck had nothing to do with it. That's a pride I'll take to the grave. I've been to hell and back. That is something no doctor or medication can erase from my mind. Everything has its price, but take away my rights and benefits, and I'll give you a war you won't believe.

So, as we celebrate the Fourth of July this year, let us remember its true meaning: our freedom. Our freedom to live, to love, and to fight. Every American should have that kind of spirit. That is what separates us from everyone else. That is how our nation was born and formed. That is what this day really means. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of Power and Love and Self-discipline." (2 Timothy 1: 7)

March 29: National Vietnam War Veterans Day

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

Last year, President Donald J. Trump signed into law the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017, officially recognizing March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day, honoring all veterans of the Vietnam War.

Needless to say, this is a very special day for me. I'm a Vietnam veteran but, it took me many years to appreciate my legacy as a Vietnam veteran. There was a time when I didn't want to be known as one. There was a time when the Vietnam vet was hated and despised. It was not a good time for us Viet vets. The Vietnam war got a bad rap and we got a bad rap. It wasn't bad enough that we had to go to war, we had to come home to a hostile mob. We felt outcast. It is no wonder why today many Vietnam vets are angry, bitter, depressed, and committing suicide. Over 58,000 died in that war with thousands more wounded and suffering right now in our VA hospitals. I could have easily been in that statistic. I think about this often since I was a combat medic. And, according to latest reports, we are losing 382 Vietnam veterans a day.

But, over time, after many movies, stories, and writing about the Vietnam war, the truth about the Vietnam veteran revealed a warrior worthy of being respected and even admired. It was time that this type of veteran received the recognition and reputation he deserved. Yes, it was time to honor such a veteran.

A renowned pastor of a mega size church in San Antonio, Texas said to his congregation: "America owes an apology to every Vietnam veteran." I heard that sermon. He received a thunderous and long-standing applause that brought tears to my eyes. The national adjutant of the DAV (Disabled American Veterans) said this: "Because of Vietnam veterans' continued service to fellow veterans, military members who have followed owe them a debt that cannot truly be repaid." I like that; I believe it's true.

Today, I am a proud Vietnam War Veteran. I wear my attire with symbols as a Vietnam vet. Embroidered in gold tone lettering on my cap are the words "Fleet Marine Force Corpsman." On my car are stickers showing my medals and a long one that reads "U.S. NAVY VIETNAM VETERAN." My license plates have the "Navy and Marine Corps Medal." On this very special day I will display my American flag and drive my car with extreme pride. I AM A VIETNAM VETERAN!

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." (John 15:13)

Chemical, Biological and Radiological Training

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

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

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

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

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

What Brought Me to Where I Am Now?

By Jerome A. Longtin
— Orlando, FL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mid-aged adult: Supervised or managed heavy equipment and crane programs. More military experience.

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

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

Joe the Mechanic

By Wallace D. MacGregor
VA Medical Center – Boston, MA

Near a recently dismantled Air Force base in the California desert, the eleven remaining AC-130 Hercules gunships were falling into disrepair under the hot sun. Joe knew, with the wind hurling sand like tiny bullets, the engines would soon fill with dust and never run again. He had a lot of work to do. He ordered the planes to stand down and Joe fooled himself again into thinking he would clean the sand out of the engines once the wind stopped. He would be back. They would fly again. "I just have to wait a little while for things to get fixed," he assured himself.

Joe's attention to detail of the sensitive workings of piston engines had been legendary. From Korea to Vietnam he knew every engine and called them by name. He knew how much air they needed to breathe. There were calipers in his mind measuring the pressures within each cylinder. He heard every spring resounding in time to the whirl of the props. He knew the sound of each piston by heart. When the engines ran like thunder they gave new life to Joe. Each was an offspring with liens on his personal sentiments.

He had been attached to a gun ship squadron that flew into the steam of the Southeast Asian jungle. He held high expectations for his planes, each a woman that went away for a little while and always came back.

One day he had sent up twelve planes secure in his gut that the engines would pull through without a fault. He waited over a pack of cigarettes and listened for their drones as they came home. On that day he counted only eleven returning planes. His world stopped. He turned a deaf ear to the sounds of his engines floating in. Quick as a whip he fooled himself again. "That was all there ever was," he muttered. "It's always been eleven. I never send up twelve."

There are too many times, now, that he only inspects the crumbling gunships when the spirit moves him. He walks, held together by a bony frame, shrouded in his wrinkled battle fatigues. He folds up the wings of his Charlie one horse cowboy hat. "I need to blow out the sand." He repeats it over and over again. Weighed down by memories, he walks down the dusty road to the tarmac where he reassures the engines that there would be another day. Another mission. That they hadn't been abandoned to the changing tides of war.

A Postwar Christmas

By Wallace D. MacGregor
VA Medical Center – Boston, MA

"When I was seven years old my father was transferred to post World War II Europe. He was a major in the U.S. Army and was going to fix Germany. I was going to be a pilot. I was going with him to the Frankfurt airfield to shoot down Messerschmitt that I knew were still attacking our planes.

It was late December 1954; a dark and dismal time of year for the Germans. Christmas was only a faded memory for them and I didn't expect any presents. I was a lean soldier and I stood against the soft side of tradition the Germans took away from us.

The porter carried my father's duffel bag from the airfield. He carried my miniature, leather, Army-issued suitcase under his boney shoulder. In the dim light of dusk, he tripped us through the rocky alleyways where the walls of stately mansions now lay strewn beneath our feet. The black seepage from broken water mains pooled into our boots as we slogged to the billet the Army assigned to my father.

My father flicked on a small, bare light bulb that made a circle on the broken, marble floor. Evil spirits fled into the darkness of an otherwise empty room. "Move along, lad," he ordered. "Time to hit the sack. It'll be a long day tomorrow."

I rolled out of my cot at dawn when he boomed "Rise and shine, boy. Up and at 'em."

The sun had risen and lit the room through small windows. Under the bulb I saw a small, wooden box. In it I found a sleek, silver model of a P-51 with red, blue and white insignias and a propeller that really spun.

I zoomed it into the sky and fired, with a sputtering of my lips, the 50-caliber machine guns at planes that once attacked our B-17s. I must have shot down a hundred Messerschmitt that Christmas morning and protected American planes. "Fall in, recruit. Daylight's a wastin'. Snap to it, soldier."

We left soon after on a B-17, back to another U.S. airfield in the European theater, secure in the knowledge that no German fighters would ever shoot my father's airplanes down again.



Beach Dream

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

Soft, beige, deep sand was sinking beneath my sandaled heels and toes. The bright beating sunshine is extremely warming. The ocean water was a blue, a beauty beyond description, a shade prettier than baby blue or turquoise. I was also seeing sparkling waves shimmering in the distance.

How did I get here on this vacant expanse of beach—not a soul here except my cat and me? She is on her harness and leash—I have no purse, no keys only a section of the daily newspaper folded under my arm. Not a bird in sight as I notice this too—I am also amazed that as far as my eyes could see there was not a speck of trash; dead fish, shells, seaweed, driftwood—absolutely nothing and no smell only the sounds of rushing waters.

Here I am with my cat and a newspaper, so I start to recollect where we were previously. We had been in a building walking through the exit door that led to this beach area. I did not recognize the building exterior or interior. There were a couple of people inside milling around. Yes—I do take my cat for walks, but never in a building unless it is a welcoming pet store or an outdoor park, a pet-friendly hotel or visiting someone's home. Yet, it did seem that I was in a future time or another country or state after looking at the strange surroundings. I was in awe of this extraordinary beach, at first.

Finally, as always happens—my cat decided not to walk—stopped and got stubborn. Therefore, I decided to sit on this splendid sand and read the newspaper. I asked myself at that moment, "Why a newspaper and only one section? Wouldn't I have brought much more with me?" I do not need glasses to read in this amazing, gorgeous sunlight. I need glasses inside (actually, I use two pairs on and off for reading) how peculiar! Nevertheless, when I sat down, my cat started sinking into the sand and it formed a ridge around her. I wondered about all this—no birds, no people, not anything that is normal. It did not seem so glorious. I tried to remember if we could go back to the place we were in, what turn I made. I no longer wanted to stay and enjoy the warm sun on this soft, extremely clean beach. I didn't want to watch the pristine waves of water.

I folded up the newspaper and leaned down to scoop up my pudgy cat from the deep sand and into my arms. I AWOKE!

I do not usually remember such vivid dreams that trick the mind into thinking why I dreamt this Beach Dream. What did it mean? It spoke to me days later. I am not alone or completely alone in an empty place with a pet. The utopic picturesque place does not exist in my life. Did God put me there shortly to experience that strange awareness? I say, "Yes."

We all need identity—reality versus dreamland fantasy, which is becoming acceptable in today's world. We may be here to learn a lesson even by a single dream that one remembers in full detail upon awakening.

Oscar's Talking Toilet

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

Back in the 1940s, my Uncle Oscar owned a small general store in a tiny Arkansas town. My cousin Margaret was seven and I was six, but we had wisdom beyond our years. We knew that the greatest treat on a roasting Summer day was to walk down the dusty road for a block or two from Uncle Oscar and Aunt Mary's house to the store, where we could get a nickel ice cream cone.

On one such day, Margaret and I were heading toward home after we had polished off our chocolate and strawberry cones. We were also carrying something that Aunt Mary had dispatched us to get, which was two little boxes of blue dye.

As we ambled up the road by the side of the store, I happened to glance over and notice a length of an old black rubber water hose lying behind the store. Margaret and I had a few minutes of fun by talking to each other through the hose.

Suddenly, inspiration struck me. There was an outdoor wooden toilet at the side of the store that Oscar and his customers could use when needed. I slipped the end of the hose under the bottom of a rotten board at the rear of the toilet and extended it until I believed it was underneath the back of the one-hole toilet seat. Margaret and I retreated with the other end of the hose and hid behind the corner of the store.

It wasn't long until one of the men who generally held down the bench on the store's front porch came to use the facility. He was a heavy man, with a boldly protruding stomach, and he wore the standard clothing for most farmers: a battered, faded-green John Deere cap, a pair of well-worn overalls with metal buttons, wide shoulder straps, and a pocket in the middle of his chest that we could bet, at very favorable odds, held a packet of chewing tobacco.

As he approached the outhouse door, he turned his head, and expertly spat out a long amber stream of tobacco juice to the side of the path. He opened the door, and went in. I waited for what I felt to be the right moment, and making my voice as deep as possible, I spoke into my end of the hose, "Ohhh! Help me! H-e-e-l-l-l-p me!" There was some thumping around in the toilet, the door flew open, the man stumbled out, and almost fell as he tried to pull his overalls up over his knees. The trapdoor of his long johns was hanging open too. Margaret and I quickly slipped away

and hid behind a big brick support column in the crawl space under the First Baptist Church. The building faced the side street next to the back of the store. That dark, cool space beneath the church was a favorite sanctuary of ours, especially on a Sunday when a fiery sermon was likely to be going on over our heads.

From the darkness, I saw the man finish scrambling into his overalls, retrieve his cap from the bushes, straighten himself up, and slowly walk back toward the toilet. He opened the door, peeked inside, then stepped back in. I did not see him for ten seconds or so, but I could see that he took the precaution of holding the door wide open this time. Finally, he stepped out and walked around to the back of the toilet. He spotted our secret weapon and followed it around the corner of the store to the other end. He scanned the area for a while, resignedly put his hands on his hips, turned, and headed back toward the front of the store.

We waited, careful not to emerge too soon. The two Hansen twins, Darrin and Darrel, passed by on the road and headed for the store. Now, we felt we had cover and sneaked back to Aunt Mary's. We never heard about the incident, and therefore didn't know if it had made it to Oscar's ears—and we had no inclination to bring the subject up.

And, no matter how many requests may have been made to Oscar's toilet over the following days, it never spoke again.

Aimee, My Girlfriend

*By Dan Rodriguez
VA Medical Center – Spokane, WA*

I met Aimee about three months ago. When we met she just looked at me, and said, "Let's check this guy out." Ever since she's been my girlfriend. Aimee visits me every Tuesday at the Community Living Center (CLC) at the VA Medical Center in Spokane, Wash., where I have lived since December 2016.

I've been in a wheelchair ever since I suffered a stroke, and Aimee loves to sit on my lap. She sits on a small support ring like the Queen of Sheba as we go for rides up and down the hallways of the living center, sticking her head out like a dog sticking its head out the window in a car or pickup. On our rides, she loves to shake hands, giving people high fives.

Aimee is a shih tzu therapy dog. On Tuesdays, she and her owner, Michelle Mickelson, visit the CLC, and long-term care patients and residents at the Spokane VA hospital. Aimee knows what day Tuesday is and is anxious and raring to go. Once Michelle puts on her volunteer shirt and Aimee's bandana, she is impatient to get into the car and go. Michelle's father was cared for at the CLC more than five years ago. Originally, Michelle brought Aimee and her other shih tzu, Mia, with her when she visited her father.

Mia was Michelle's dad's caregiver and would not leave his side, while Aimee would sneak out of his room to visit staff and other patients. After her father died, Michelle continued to bring Aimee to visit veterans at the VA hospital.

Michelle has said that as humans, we underestimate what our four-footed friends can comprehend. Aimee has on occasion refused to go into a room that the pair have frequently visited. During these times Michelle makes her go in, only to find out that the person didn't want a visit that day. She wonders how Aimee knows that even before they get to the room.

Aimee is attached to me now. I'm her special boyfriend. She talks to me and gives me kisses. We have conversations together. She was on another veteran's lap recently, and I said to her, "What are you doing over there? Two-timing me?" She just looked at me as if to say, "Whatever." This dog is like a teenager, which means when I tell her to do something, she turns around and does something else, always with this "whatever" look.

I can speak to Aimee in several different languages. I was born in New York City and grew up in New Jersey, speaking broken-English and Spanish since I was raised by my Puerto Rican grandparents. My father was a U.S. Army linguist who spoke five languages. I used to speak different languages to my own dog, Maggie May, a pit bull. She was just like Maggie in the Rod Stewart song "Maggie May": "All you did was wreck my bed, and in the morning kick me in the head." She'd take over the whole bed, tossing and turning until she got comfortable.

Instead of Maggie May, I have Aimee. Sometimes I spoil her, giving her treats. Mostly I give her dog food because I don't want her to get fat and sick. And I give her love. I think both Aimee and I feel a special connection, and both of us get a natural high after visiting with each other. Michelle says that when they miss a Tuesday, Aimee truly misses it. And I truly miss her.



Medals

*By Christopher G. Bremicker
VA Medical Center – Minneapolis, MN*

I met a customer on my first day on the job in customer service at Walgreen's who said her father was in World War II. I asked her if he flew on the Freedom Honor Flight to Washington D.C. to visit the World War II memorial. She said, no, her father was dead. Her father was in the Army and won a Bronze Star, she said.

I was impressed to hear about her father's Bronze Star and she promised to bring the medal into the store to show me. A week or two later, she showed up with a little brown box with a folding lid, like a jewelry box. I opened it.

Inside, I saw a Bronze Star, Purple Heart, combat infantry badge, and a good conduct medal. It was a real Bronze Star, bronze with a red ribbon and blue stripe. It was awarded for meritorious service in a combat zone.

I never saw a Bronze Star before. The medal was heavy and thick, with the weight of significance, as well as that of bronze. I wondered what her father did to earn it.

The Purple Heart was purple, of course, with a purple ribbon. I had never seen a real one. The closest I ever got to one was seeing a license plate, emblazoned in the corner with a purple heart surrounded by gold.

I saw combat infantry badges many times when I was in the Army. Men came back from Vietnam and wore them on their dress greens. A man in our barracks, back from Vietnam, wore one sewn on his fatigues. The rest of us wore only parachute badges.

I picked up the combat infantry badge and told her I had seen them before. I wondered if it was wrong of me to touch it. I did not touch the bronze star or purple heart. I was afraid to.

I told her I had a good conduct medal, too. She picked up the good conduct medal and handed it to me. I wore the ribbon on my dress greens when I was in the service but never the medal itself. It was heavy, engraved on the back as given for good conduct, and the red ribbon was old. The medals reminded me of ancient Roman coins.

A sheet of old, yellowed paper was a permission to engrave. The words "Bronze Star" were written in a box on the form. Initially, I thought it was her father's discharge papers since my discharge papers looked like that, beat up, and old.

She told me the story. Her father was carrying a man to safety on his back when he was shot. His dog tags deflected the bullet.

"You wouldn't be here if it weren't for his dog tags," I said.

"That's right!" she exclaimed.

She thanked me for taking an interest in her father. She thanked me for the reverence with which I treated the medals and his memory. I closed the lid on the box.

Her name was Connie. She lived in the hi-rise down the street. She came into the store almost every day.

She cherished her father's memory and the box of medals. The box looked like a hinged holder for eyeglasses. She bowed to me as she left.

My father was in World War II, also. Our fathers helped save the world for democracy. They were, in fact, the greatest generation.



A Poem for My Wife

*By James R. Crissen
— Martinsville, IN*

My Dearest Love,
When I first laid eyes on you,
a feeling I had not known
in nearly a decade welled in my chest.
Years had passed in which I knew no happiness,
joy, excitement or even true love.
Calmness was something found
in the bottom of a whiskey bottle.
How one look upon you that late night,
with the lights low and the air still,
changed my world I'll never understand.
Whereas before I could not wait
for my journey in this world to draw to an end,
now I don't want this ride to ever stop.
Your gentle touch fills me with amazement every day,
and your smile brings joy to a sorrowful heart
that even two years later is learning
to beat with love again.
When we are apart, I can't help but smile
and think of how you'll greet me once again
upon my return to our home.
A once broken man is mended, and it only took a look.

I Will Stand

*By Jason Kirk Bartley
VA Medical Center – Chillicothe, OH*

I will stand,
by the grace of God.
I will stand
when someone threatens my rights.
I will stand
when no one else seems to want to.
I will stand
against adversity.
I will stand
when someone threatens my beliefs.

I will stand
for our flag,
the symbol of our freedom
and those who have secured it.
I will stand
as long
as I choose to
and there is no regret in me.

I will stand.

As I raise my salute
at attention,
I will stand.
Proudly under God,
I will stand.
For my brothers and sisters
who have not made it home,
I will stand.
Proudly as an American,
I will stand.
As long as there's breath in me,
I will stand.

Lab Rat

*By Richard Wangard
VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI*

I have tried.
I have tried really, really hard!
So many, many years!
So many mistakes!
Haunted by 1001
Memories I don't want!
Knowing my behavior is
Unacceptable!
Still trying with the help provided.
PTSD and Agent Orange!
Which one will get me first?
Another joyless Christmas
No Happy New Year
Just an existence
Thinking about brothers lost,
Heroes all.
Why the hell did I survive?
What for? This?
The number is up to 25 a day now,
Vets killing themselves.
The number should be going down!
Not UP!
But I can feel them and know why.
So I keep trying
Never knowing
If ever I will succeed.
Just keep trying
To make sense out of something
That was so senseless and a waste.
One day peace will come,
And I will cherish it!
Until then I will honor
My brothers' sacrifice.
They deserve that!
But if they knew my pain
They would not blame me
If I became one of the 25 a day.
Tempted every day!
So easy to take the out,
But I fight on and on and on.
I cannot surrender
Will not surrender
Because I also know
That is not what they would want!



SALLY-SUE HUGHES
MEMORIAL AWARD

Final Moment

By Shon Pernice
— Moberly, MO

I watched him die--
I did everything that I could.
I didn't ask God for help,
but I sure as hell cursed him as I witnessed
The Final Moment. That Moment, it's forever
ingrained in my memory banks.
I deal with it every day.
I get so overwhelmed with sadness,
my tears confirm my state of mind.
The image of a young soldier,
a man who joined to serve his country
after the terrorists tried to destroy our will.
His blue eyes stare off,
pupils dilated wide,
skin is pale and cold
due to massive blood loss.
I now wear the crimson fluid
that once gave him life.

That Final Moment has forever
created an invisible wound--
A wound that doesn't leak blood,
but flows tears.
I don't allow others to get close to me,
for I fear that if I witness just one more death,
I will then have to create my own—
Final Moment.

SALLY-SUE HUGHES
MEMORIAL AWARD

The Armorer

By Paul David Adkins
VA Medical Center – Watertown, NY

A new lieutenant burst
into the arms room,
didn't even greet the armorer,
and blew up!
Why are these weapons missing?
He shot his finger at a list.
I have to account for these!
You are on the blame line!
As he exploded,
he seemed, to the armorer,
to evaporate into a clacking set of teeth,
a yapping dog.
The armorer nodded, rocked –

Yes, sir. Yes, sir.
The officer finally huffed,
You will go to jail!

The armorer raised a finger,
leaned to slide the desk drawer,
rummaged to produce a grenade.
He set it on his desk –
a green apple,
the ring of its pin dangling
like a silver leaf.



SALLY-SUE HUGHES
MEMORIAL AWARD

Impermanence

By Rodney Robinson
VA Medical Center – Hines, IL

Everything is fleeting, not meant to last.
Everything is temporary, so why get so wrapped up in it?
The wrapping's not real—it's fleeting like the moment,
And quickened like the time it took to put it altogether.
Why be in such a hurry to unwrap that which you know
won't last?
Why build your joys on things that are temporary?

Life is just like a Tootsie Roll Pop.
Keep licking and it gets smaller.
It doesn't get bigger, it gets smaller until
You come to the Tootsie Roll at the center.
It's just a Tootsie Roll wrapped around a stick,
But, oh, how sweet the beginning!
How juicy, how moist it is to the taste buds in your mouth.
If you happen to spill a little, hey, there's more coming.
And don't worry about how many licks it takes to get there.
One time is a lifetime; make it one time, that's all you need.

Now, you can get greedy.
Guess what happens after greed?
It makes more need.
And the fact that what you desire may or may not happen
Puts your mind in a tailspin you may not be able
to recover from,
Or you may not know the direction you go to or come from.

Is there such a thing as infinity?
I don't know. Do you?

Creation Fragile! Handle with Care!

*By Scott Sjostrand
— Hallock, MN*

God's creation is fragile; please handle with care.
All of this saber-rattling is giving the world quite a scare.
Warfare has scared us, centuries without end.
We need decades of peace so God's creation can mend.
What is to be gained with more bloodshed on the soil?
C'mon we need a break. What is the reason this time? Oil?
This poem's gotta be special to get the UN's attention.
There's so many people wanting peace.
We need unity right now, not dissension.
People are tired of fighting. Can't we all just get along?
All the world's musicians could finally join together in song.
Madonna's doing her part; every child has a dream.
I just watched her on the news.

At the top of the milk bucket, with time, rises the cream.
If we're all good stewards, creation will heal, you can bet.
Like BTO sang, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

GLADYS FELD HELZBERG MEMORIAL AWARD

Against Her Will

*By Bruce Eric McClain
VA Medical Center - Kansas City, MO*

Crammed into cattle cars, without food or water,
Disposed, rakish and unprepared for death,
they are uncertain of the villainous plot
to root them from their existence.
Not only the living make this ominous trek.

The dead accompany lifeless bodies, breath already expired
before the journey's end. Crushed against the interior,
crumpled corpses fall to the ground as the load master
unhinges the doors. Then one after another,
the living file down the ramp from the stench-filled freights.

Eyes meander. Mouths loll. An orchestra
greet them with music and song, a disguised attempt
to mollify what anxieties that may still breathe among them.

Leading down a narrow path between two chain-link fences,
an ensemble of walking dead watch on with hollowed eyes,
looking first to the right and then to the left.

In the distance a chimney weeps with smoke

from a menacing building. A teenage girl notices a pile of shoes
then focuses on the clothing in an open yard.
"Am I going to die?" she whimpers. The SS officer
gently takes her hand. His voice aims to calm.

"Come, my child. There is no reason to fret.
You've already lived long enough."



*Drawing by:
Bruce McClain
VA Medical Center -
Kansas City, MO*

WOSL MEMBERS APPRECIATION AWARD

The Pedestrian

*By Eric Kershner
— Blue Springs, MO*

I abide to a need knocking in continuous recoil
against the innermost places of my restless self.
I don my shoes, and want nothing to do
with pretty girls, wallet money, work or the bottle.
I crave the observer's eye on midnight-dark walks:
the tree lines of mountains as they pass,
shadowy cars entering alleys lit from without,
newspaper deliveries to street-side vending machines,
bakery folk spreading their aromatic wealth,
the night's drunks strutting their wayward stuff
crashing head first against the pavement.
The night sky morphs into purple hues,
and then into spent blood.
Bleeding skin in the heavens!
I lay down in the sun and sleep in the underbrush.
When I wake, I'm covered in ants.
I brush them off my shirt, my pants and my face.
I shake them out of my socks.
X-ray chills penetrate my clothes,
and freeze flesh to the solid mass of my skeleton.
But I keep walking on and on and on and on.
I am the ceaseless pedestrian never to be outpaced.
Great amounts of time spent alone never get traced.

Likes, Dislikes

By Allen Burns

VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

There are some things that I can take and some that I can't.
For example, I can take deceit from politicians,
But I can't take it from friends.
More exactly, I respond to hurt with anger.
And when someone I care about lies to me,
I appear to be angry, but I'm actually in pain.

In another related instance, I can't take it when someone
Says they are going to do something and don't.
We're living in an age in which people constantly
say one thing and do another.
This is so common that I'm overjoyed when people
Keep their word.
And though I'm not too touchy-feely, I want to hug them
When they're truthful.

I can't take it when people throw out catchphrases like,
"It's all good" or "It's a perfect storm."
First of all, nothing is all good,
And just what is a perfect storm anyway?
Wasn't that in a movie some years back?
I guess that I can't take it when platitudes replace
Intellectual thought.
Have we lost our brains as well as our hearts?

I can take it when people overuse words
like "awesome" or "amazing," but I can't take it
When that's the extent of their laudatory vocabulary.
I can take it when I learn that one fifth
Of American high schools no longer teach American history.
I can't take it when the reason given
Is that, "We're a young country and don't have much history."
No wonder 63 percent of graduating seniors don't know
What the Declaration of Independence is.
As George Orwell eloquently wrote in 1984,
"The truth becomes a lie and becomes the truth again."

Question: What Am I to Do?

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center – Pittsburgh, PA

This shower is cold, the engine is hot,
The door is ajar, the window is not.
The day is too humid, the night has no stars,
The parkway's too crowded and flowing with cars.
What am I to do?

The house is quite messy, the lawn needs a cut,
My life is a shambles, and I'm in a rut.
The neighbors are talking and all about me,
The porch still needs painting, and it's worrying me.
What am I to do?

The ice cream is melting, the berries aren't blue,
The bills are not current, I haven't a clue.
The news has me worried, so much is corrupt,
The TV is blaring, and commercials are abrupt.
What am I to do?

The phone's always ringing to sell me more junk,
I enter the driveway, and the asphalt has sunk.
My budget should balance, but it hasn't so far,
The gas is on empty, and I need a new car.
What am I to do?

ANSWER: Just "Keep on keepin' on!"

Different Genders

By Rosalie Ann Cooper

VA Medical Center – Buffalo, NY

We took an oath
The same as you.
To this country
We promised to be true.
All over the world
We traveled far and wide
By air, land and sea
With you by our side.
In peacetime or wartime
We were there
To do a job,
And do our share.
You get honor and respect
When home you return.
It is honor and respect
That we must earn.
Our genders are different,
Our goals were the same.
Your name is John,
My name is Jane.



Time, Wine and Bodies

By Daniel H. Strange

VA Medical Center – San Antonio, TX

Put time in a bottle and in time the bottle will become an antique.
Time has not changed, however the bottle does.
An inexpensive item has increased its worth or value by doing nothing.

Put a person in a bottle and in time it becomes a homicide,
Providing the bottle is big enough and if the bottle is found.
If the bottle is found after a long time
It becomes an artifact worth a great deal
Because time has preserved the bottle and its contents.

Put grape juice in a bottle with a touch of sugar
And in time it will become grape wine.
Given the understanding of the person that is fermenting the grape juice,
In a short time one could find a lover of the vine and a broken bottle.
If there are several bottles, in time, one might find a corpse
Which wasn't a homicide
With broken and unbroken bottles of wine.
The corpse becomes a tribute to the fine wine he left behind.
The antique bottles of wine serve as a fitting memorial
At the feast of cheese and wine.
Put wisdom in an empty bottle and in time
It will become just as it was: an empty bottle.
Wisdom can't be stored in an empty container; it must be shared.
Not so for body parts and wine.
The body parts can be tested and measured in time
The wine can be evaluated for its color, content, texture
And the time it has been stored.

So you see, bottles', wines' and even bodies' value are based on time.
Today a bottle of cheap wine is valued very little except to the new owner.
In a thousand years, the content of that same bottle
Has value and is considered an artifact.
The bottle is a museum piece.
If a body was found today, the value is to the police in solving the crime.
If there was a crime
In a thousand years, it could be in a museum along with the
murder weapon.

What's the point?
Don't waste bottles, wine and bodies because time
Will come and go with no way to prevent the passage.
Take up your time, use it until it is time to put it down again.

Hard Looks

By K. W. Peery

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

Six spools
of barbed wire
in the back
of an old
F-150...

Sweat beads glistenin'
on the belly
of a green
Coleman thermos...

Needle nose pliers
in his calloused
left hand...

Tom T.
on the truck radio
singin' bout Faster Horses
and Watermelon Wine...

His Herefords
all bunched up
near the hawthorn
hedgerow...
And if
hard looks
could cure cancer...
he'd win a
Nobel prize

I guarantee it.

Space Poetry

By Juanita Kirton

— East Stroudsburg, PA

I parade in between the blackness of the cosmos
dusting the skies.
Each star and planet,
meteors and black holes
transmit pieces of me.
Floating gravities, soaring on hot plasma sun,
I write on the carbon and nebula clouds.
Catch me creating poetic lunar craters,
writing on the hydrogen rings of Saturn.
Each line dances on this gas giant
whose sixty-two moons support my meters.
Number five has a red spot,
a special place on Jupiter.
It waits for my syllabary elements to fall into place,
a soft landing they do not make,
spewing up more than just words,
I search for poetic planet possibilities.

A Dear John Letter to My Drug of Choice

By Richard Williams

VA Medical Center – Springfield, IL

Dear Heroin,
Drug of my cunning, baffling and powerful disease,

for so many years you've brought me to my knees.
You've taken me on great highs and great lows all across the nation,
had me searching endlessly for that mellow sensation.
But what I found was a life of despair,
total unmanageability and less and less care.

You've taken the lives of so many of my friends.
You've destroyed relations between me and my kin.
I lied for you, I cried for you,
I stole for you and nearly died for you.
And, yes, King Heroin, you're king it's true,
but the end of one thing is the beginning of something new.

I've found a power that's greater than me.
It's about being spiritual and not about wealth.
I have found a power who some say is three,
and if I do this from heroin I will be free.
I've come out of the darkness and into the light,
so now I praise God by day and by night.
All means everything, and mighty means great,
so it is with God in whom I put all my faith.
And, yes, King Heroin, this means good-bye.
I want you out of my life before you cause my demise.

Tangible Karma

By Tony James Craidon
— *Maple Grove, MN*

Watch as the whispering winds wash away the dust
of lost tears and forgotten souls.
Laughing moons and grinning stars mock humanity's failure
to fold space and conquer inner peace.
Understand the depths and wondrous balance of a habitat
far below the deepest ocean's floor.
The heat sings.
The perceptions of the ignorant and inexperienced create
a war of biased prejudice against those most productive.
Listen to the trees whine
from the abusive fertilizer produced from the bloodshed
of civilization's misunderstandings.
Frustration of a teacher whose knowledge of patience
is limited shows the vulnerability of the invincible.
Sands of time ticking away the relaxing moments
when one's mind is free to create improbable worlds.
Sweet tingles of tangible karma accentuate the essence
of a torn and withered seeing eye dog.

The Symbols of Our Great Nation, United States of America

By Rosalie Ann Cooper
VA Medical Center – Buffalo, NY

The Stars and Stripes, the flag of our nation,
Should always receive a standing ovation,
Was adopted in seventeen hundred and seventy-seven,

Covers the veterans when they go to heaven.
Leads parades, waving proudly in the air,
Showing us we have nothing to fear,
For this flag of ours fights our wars
Through the air and over the shores.

The eagle, so majestic are you,
Was adopted in seventeen hundred and eighty-two.
Atop the staff you do stand
Protecting our flag all through the land.
On our seal you can be seen
Holding an olive branch and arrows thirteen,
Denoting the power of peace and war.
We couldn't love this country more.

Adopted in seventeen hundred and eighty-two,
"E Pluribus Unum" was our motto true.
In nineteen hundred and fifty-six
The motto was changed by politics.
"In God We Trust" is the motto today,
But some want to take it away.

The "Star-Spangled Banner" the song of our land,
we cover our heart with our hand.
It's about a war that was won,
Was adopted in nineteen hundred and thirty-one

In nineteen hundred and eighty-six,
The rose is the flower congress picks,
Symbolizing life, love and devotion
Of our country, how we show emotion.

John Philip Sousa, Marching Along,
Wrote many marching songs.
In eighteen hundred and ninety-six,
"The Stars and Stripes Forever" depicts
"The emblem of the brave and true...
The red and white and starry blue."
In nineteen hundred and eighty-seven
this song became the song of the nation.

"I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree."
The mighty oak to be exact,
Congress passed an act
In two thousand and four
To give our nation one symbol more.
Based on a vote sponsored by the National Arbor Day Foundation,
The oak tree has become the symbol of the nation.

There is one more symbol with you I must share,
Take a guess, if you dare.
An "icon that represents America's highest ideals"
That the conservationist, rancher and tribal group reveal.
Oh, what could that symbol be
That also represents resilience and unity?
The bison is what they did decide,
In every state they do reside.

I give to you the nine symbols of our great nation.

Whistle While You Work

By Charles Sturies

VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

I'm talking to all the workers of the world
from my hard, boring work experience.
Sometimes you have to grit your teeth,
sigh and go, "Oh, well" at the boredom
and plunge ahead
On the assumption that, as my father said,
"What counts is elbow grease.
It might have physical repercussions
later in life like arthritis, but at least you'll know
you did your best."

A Lighthouse Beckons

By Jennifer S. Wheat Anderson

VA Medical Center – Iron Mountain, MI

Old lighthouse reaches for the sky.
You can beckon me if you try.
Your stripes are like military medals
Wrapped around you like daisies with petals.
At night your light shines bright and true.
How you find me I haven't a clue.
Please be my guide to the land,
And be the next ship's guiding hand.

Mom's Prayer She Taught Her Children

By Lawrence E. Rahn

VA Medical Center – Minneapolis, MN

Dear Heavenly Father,
Hear our prayer.
Keep us in thy loving care.
Guard us through the livelong day
In our work and in our play.

Keep us pure, strong and true
In everything we say and do.
AMEN

Barking Dog

By Scott Lehman

VA Medical Center – St. Louis, MO

It was twelve after midnight,
Shadows were on the wall,
Heard sounds of a waterfall.

As the rain cries like a baby,
The thunder shouts like a disabled crash.
The lightning smashes out the lights,
I can't see her in the dark,
Only hear a dog's bark.
My spine is shaking,
Someone is invading,
Is pirating my privacy.
A rock comes through the glass,
The curtains collapse.
I pull out my gun and shoot,
The flash,
The cash is gone.
Old coot stole my boot and my dog's bone.

Independence Day

By John E. Jones

VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI

We celebrate our freedom today
and recognize its importance each year.
This day we're cheerful in every way,
Feeling hope and joy, without any fear.
People have a wonderful time
Celebrating on the Fourth of July.
The Declaration opens each mind,
On its wisdom we can always rely.
We celebrate when liberty reached through,
And our nation's flag—the red, white and blue.
Elation lasts into the night,
The stars twinkle, the moon is bright.
Colorful fireworks burst into the air,
And rousing music is what we hear.
Parades today appear everywhere,
People eat and drink, toast and share.
Celebrating our nation and united together,
We laugh and smile. No day is better.

The Weather in Germany

By Frank X. Mattson

VA Outpatient Clinic – Spring City, PA

The Black Forest
Like
Pennsylvania
Only
Better.
Wish I could
Have
Stayed
For
Three weeks or so.
I was
Stationed
In Sembach, AFB

A village in southern Germany
 About 12 miles from
 Kaiserslautern.
 I remember the
 Balmy weather
 Of the
 Black Forest
 Wonderful.
 If I had
 The Means
 I'd live
 There.
 I saw
 Some
 Of Europe
 When stationed
 In Germany
 During the
 Cold
 War.
 Possible sabotage
 In Air Force
 Security.
 I saw Brussels
 Bordeaux
 Paris
 Copenhagen
 Amsterdam
 Austria
 And Heidelberg.
 I remember
 the Black Forest
 With weather similar
 To Pennsylvania
 Where I'm from.



Goliath Burger

By Frank X. Mattson
VA Outpatient Clinic – Spring City, PA

At a local
 Spot.
 It's all I
 Need
 It's all
 I got.
 Big as
 A
 House
 I smile
 And
 Love.
 Mustard
 And
 Ketchup
 A trip
 From
 Above.

My Love Is...

By David Samson
VA Medical Center – Omaha, NE

My love is higher than
 The farthest star.
 My love is bigger
 Than the universe.
 My love is deeper than
 The deepest ocean.
 My love is softer than
 The softest cloud.
 My love is cuddlier than
 The cutest puppy.
 My love is stronger than
 The strongest steel.
 My love is gentler than
 The smoothest silk.
 My love is longer than
 As long as forever.
 My love is all these things,

And so much more!

PTSD

By Earl Rugan
VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

Why did it pick me?
 The past was no fun
 Always on the run
 No escape
 Mental rape.
 Try to isolate
 From this endless fate.
 Should I medicate?
 It may be too late
 A constant fear
 That the end is near.
 Where can I hide?
 All wrapped up inside a patriot's song,
 But for just how long?



A Series of Untitled Haiku

By Jacob Lindholm

VA Medical Center – Spokane, WA

Where am I?

Palm trees and sand in view,
The difference is in the breeze.

A well-placed shot
Can counter any trained soldier,
But he who reloads last wins.

Impacts, like branches snapping,
Almost like a knocking,
Death knocking at our door.

The fiercest warriors
welcome death, while conquerors
strive for immortality.

Hands tied by orders,
An ally delivers the blade
That cuts the deepest.

Let Your Light Shine

By Helen Anderson Glass

VA Medical Center – Tucson, AZ

Don't walk in darkness, see the light
No matter what you do day or night.
Hold your head high and smile,
You'll see the way after a while.
Hug someone,
Tell them you love them, too.
You'll be surprised what it does for you.
They too will soon return that love,
And so will God from above.
Don't let hate and guilt lie deep within,
Pray that you will be free of sin.
Then a smile will brighten up your face,
That frown will be gone without a trace.
Look deep inside you and you will see
That real you and proudly say, "I AM ME."

"I am the light of the world.
He who follows me
will not walk in the darkness,
but will have the light of life."
John 8:12

Flag on a Pole

By William L. Sneed

VA Medical Center – Iron Mountain, MI

There's a flag,
And it flies on a pole
Back at Kingswood.

People come and people go,
But no one stops to say hello.
And the flag still flies
On a pole back at Kingswood.

Cars and buses come and go,
But nobody stops to say hello.
And the flag still flies
On a pole back at Kingswood.

Ambulances come and go,
People go and come back.
Funerals come and go,
Some people go and don't come back.

And that flag
Still flies on a pole
Back at Kingswood.



Dreams

By John Bradley

VA Medical Center – Nashville, TN

Either pleasant or frightening,
Always a conversation...with one's self.
Always a dialogue,
always using symbols and images.
Always takes place between the conscious
and unconscious levels of the mind.
Always comes when one is asleep,
but at no set time,
yet most often during rem.
There are a variety of treatments
though requests for a cure
are very rare.
Most often, a dreamer thinks afterward,
Darn that dream.

Stone Sentinels—Headstones

By Michael Kilpatrick

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

Silent stone sentinels stand silently,
Stand tall, straight, silent at the gate.
Yet in silence they do speak.
Mute with so much to say,
Yet they cannot speak the whole truth,
Cannot tell of those whom they speak for.
They stand with heads straight, erect.
To hear them speak, to listen to those
Who guard, those forever, those sentinels
Who forever never break
As when they were posted into being.
Given their orders, were told
The mighty have come down
After the last was followed.
Given as they have that last ounce,
Given that last measure of devotion.
So now you speak, read the names, the years,
And the last that were called.

Now you stand in mute testimony forever.

In My Boots

By Douglas Pederson

VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA

In my boots I saw them fall,
Their names engraved upon the wall.
Some had family and some had none,
Flags are lowered for those lives now done.
Our lives spared by these unforgotten men,
We were there at the line fighting to defend.
Row after row their graves lined with white crosses
Reflect our nation's cost by those many losses.
I returned home from the battle scene,
Walked the rows of graves upon this sacred green.
Plagued by visions of battle and haunting sounds,
I carried the memories across the burial grounds.
I do not go to their homes to give thanks,
For now they rest here of all ages and ranks.
I can walk the rows to see each grave,
Pause to pay tribute to what each one gave.

We kept our patriotic loyalty and had not surrendered,
I'm embraced by the sacrifices each brave heart rendered.
In my boots I carried the departed through the gate,
Now laid to rest here, an untimely death before their fate.

Praise for the Dawn

By Sean Richards

VA Medical Center – Fort Worth, TX

The dawn is coming
With its glistening dew.
The dawn is coming
Witnessed only by a few.

The dawn is here
With early morning rays.
The dawn is here,
It's the glorious beginning of the day.

The dawn has arrived,
The animals begin to bed down.
The dawn has arrived,
The flowers blaze and open like crowns.

The dawn has become morning,
The deer graze in the meadow.
The dawn has become morning,
Even the birds' chirping is mellow.

The dawn is over, the sun has risen,
The sun's rays begin their warming.
The dawn is over, the sun has risen,

Here we are again, a new day, a new morning.



Remembering Daniel

By Elizabeth A. McKie

— Independence, MO

My son, my son,
What could we have done?
You chose to go away
When we wanted you to stay.
So many broken hearts,
And many broken dreams,
Life isn't always what it seems.
Now you are away in another land,
Beating drums in a heavenly band.

Suzy Q

By Donald Sherwood
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

She walks
With a twist
A flick of
The wrist.
Dresses
Nicely
No walk
With a
Limp.

Nice
Height
About
5'6"
Got a
Nice
Car.
Little dog is
Hers
Kiss
And tell
Fido.

You wonder if
She lives
Forever.

First Sibling to Go

By Clinton Jarrett
VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

As children, we frolic through life
without a care in the world,
and think that life goes on forever.

We reach adolescence and reality rears up.
We attend services of older loved ones,
then middle age elbows its way
through childhood fantasies.

A parent and friends our own age have passed.
Up till now my siblings have been spared.

Our brother's diagnosis is grim.
He fights a valiant battle,
but it's apparent he won't win.

Now his son stands guard over our brother
as the final remnants of his life trickle away.

The Father waits to welcome him home.

Almighty God

By Anthony Coccozza
VA Medical Center – Los Angeles, CA

I don't claim to be perfect.
God prefers me as I am.
He doesn't want me to change
From the true Christian that I am.

I own the most precious gift
God has given me.
Prayer is good for the soul,
With Jesus, Mary and me.

I owe my God my dying soul.
When I pray, just Jesus and me,
I have my shrine in my home.
When I pray he listens to me.

I am not a priest,
I'm just a servant of God.
Oh, what a friend we have in Jesus,
To serve his Father, almighty God.

In him and with him, always with thee,
God the Father, almighty God.
In unity with the Holy Spirit,
I'm honored to serve almighty God.

The Cricket

By Charles Fredette
VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA

The cricket sang in the evening
and though I heard him before,
This time it was different!!!
A lot like a knock on the door.
He didn't let go of his tune,
and sang steadily past the month of June.
I wonder if he'll change as the days get colder?
Will he stay much longer?
I haven't been told.

Growing Up With Mom

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

I grew up in a family with thirteen kids in it.
Not all at once, of course.
I remember that there were five girls and me
as I was growing up.
One sister married and another sister
enlisted in the Air Force.
Then there were three sisters and myself at home.

The sisters always slept in one bedroom,
 and I slept in another.
 I was always treated special.
 Mom did not believe in boys doing housework.
 I got up every day at about 6:00 or 7:00 a.m.
 I ate my Cheerios, then went outside to play
 while the girls did the housework.
 Along with Mom, they cleaned the upstairs one day,
 and cleaned the downstairs the next day.
 They did the laundry one day, then they made bread.
 They made pastries on the last day.
 I paid the price when it came to using the bathroom.
 We only had one bathroom.
 When one of the girls used the bathroom,
 they set out the porcelain pot for me to use.
 So I always went outside in the back to use the woods
 for the bathroom.
 I never got to have a good relation with my sisters.
 Mom always treated me different than she did the sisters.
 I guess I feel special for that.
 We always had plenty to eat,
 and we always had clean clothes to wear.
 I did get a lot of paddlings with the razor strap
 when I did bad things.
 I guess I grew up as a typical boy.
 I usually stayed away from home all day, every day,
 riding my bicycle and playing with my friends.
 The area where I lived had fruit trees
 and all kind of berries to eat.
 I never had to go home for lunch. I ate out.
 I was born number twelve in the family,
 but I felt like I was always number one.
 I had a scooter, I had a bicycle, I had an electric train
 and I had my own bedroom.
 I felt like I was truly number one.
 My family did not show affection openly.
 In the early mornings, I saw my mom and dad standing
 in the kitchen looking out the window of the back door
 with their arms around each other.
 I witnessed something my sisters did not get to see.
 I felt blessed seeing that sight.

In the Nick of Time

By Diane Wasden
 — Millen, GA

I heard his voice.
 He told me not to listen,
 he told me not to cry.
 He told me not to listen
 to all of his lies.
 When a man hits a woman,
 he's no longer called a man.
 I can still remember the pain
 when he hit me with his hands.

It was like living with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,
 I never knew when he came home late

whom I would find.
 I was walking on eggshells,
 and I was afraid all the time.

Many times, when he was done having his way with me,
 and making me do things I did not want to do,
 I was no longer worthy or clean enough
 to lie in his bed next to him,
 So I was beaten black and blue.

The cold, darkened basement
 is where I spent a lot of my nights.
 He would drag me down the staircase yelling,
 and then he would tie me up for the night.

I could hear my babies crying,
 but there was nothing I could do.
 That's when I heard the good Lord's voice,
 when he saw me bound naked, black and blue.
 He told me, "Don't you give up,
 never lose your faith.
 I am always with you,
 every step of the way.
 "I know your life has not been easy,
 but it has never been more than you could take.
 I have always been there fighting hard with you,
 Your life is important to me. You I want to save.
 "You were strong enough to become a soldier,



and then an Army wife.
 You are much stronger than you think,
 and together we can win this fight for life.

"I know you are slipping fast,
 and you feel you have had about all that you can take.
 But you have two small children who are counting on you
 to help and protect them through this living hell.
 This is all you need to do.

" Let me do the rest,
 put your trust in me.
 Let me lead the way,
 all you have to do is pray."

But I was afraid to let him in.
 You see, I'm not the trusting kind.
 But the Lord's voice came down to me from heaven,
 just in the Nick of Time.

Exception

By Dennis Silas

VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

Would you talk to
Me if you knew
I could not see?

Would you hold
Me if you knew
I had no arms?

Would you walk with
Me if you knew
I had no legs?

God has a plan
For all of us
As soon as we're
Born. It doesn't
Matter if we have
No sight, arms, legs.

We all are God's children.
Black, white, green, or
Blue.

God and Jesus love.
You and I do, too.



A Vietnam Vet

By Louis Peter Ferrari

— Cortlandt Manor, NY

I think back about the war that I went,
and for some of us, vets, what it really meant.
We fought in a war that caused many to doubt,
and a lot of young men found an easy way out.
Some went to college, and others another country to flee.
They had no regards for their country or me.
We fought in a war; we were not ashamed to admit.
I'm sure there are many that are not sorry one bit.
It gets me quite angry what the public has said,
while we were there fighting, concerned more with our dead.
When I think back, and remember I was told I must go,
I was proud of the offer; I had something to show.
A vet understands what it all means when a country
like ours was ready to fall apart by the seams.
Oh, we're proud for we paid all our dues; we have no debts.
I served with honor and have no regrets.

Smile for Me, Mommy

By JonnieLynn Donatelli

VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA

I wish I could have lived forever and been with you today,
But I couldn't wait. I had to go; my body
just wouldn't stay.

And as the circle of life goes on, it's not fair I heard
you say,
But rest assured, it's all right. I'll be with you
in a different way.

You should know I am with you; I'll never leave your side.
I'll chase away your sad times because I never really died.

I'll lie with you at night, and as I watch while you weep,
I'll seek to give you comfort as you cry yourself to sleep.

I'll be by your side when you wake and while you brush
your teeth.

I'll watch while you ready yourself for the day
that you must meet.

I see you crying when no one can, and my little heart
just breaks.

I want to run and make you laugh,
just for old times' sake.

Now you know I am with you; I'll never leave your side.
I'll chase away your sad times because I never really died.

You'll walk along the riverbank, and you'll catch
a glimpse of me.

I'll be swimming with the beavers and chasing away
the bees.

You'll walk the walk we shared in person only just
last week.

I am prancing along, my nose in the air; it's mischief
that I seek.

You'll call my name and ask God why, but don't cry out
in vain.

I am with you always in one spirit, and perhaps it's not
the same.

When you're sad and when you're down, I'll bark for you
to hear.

Listen close and with the wind, I will whisper in your ear.

Smile for me, Mommy; I love you so. Know I'm always near.

People Have Created Millions of Places

*By Raymond Grimm
VA Medical Center – San Antonio, TX*

People have created millions of places
in which to worship our God and Christ, his son.
But they haven't put forth the effort
to see that his will be done,
for they've spent trillions of dollars
on wars and outer space, instead of improving
this place or world as well as the human race.

But if we all worshipped our mighty God,
the father and creator of us all,
then if we all learned to converse in the English language,
we could better understand one another,
then really get on the ball.

Really get on the ball on this great global
Earth of ours that God provided for us all.
So let's all take Christ, his son, into our hearts,
then follow his truths, his ways and his life,
for nothing better could anyone ever recall.

Thunder

*By Edward Luzadder Jr.
— Cortlandt Manor, NY*

The man-made thunder starts,
Terror runs through soldiers' hearts.
The weapons' deadly steel will fly,
Only to rain death from the sky.

Men with families start to dream,
Hear the deadly shells scream.
Far away are the sounds of home,
It is here their minds will roam.

As the sounds of war pass by,
see the tears in their eyes.
As the thunder fades away,
The men will live another day.

A Friend in Me

*By Vincent J. Covington
VA Medical Center – Chillicothe, OH*

When life seems more than you can bear,
My friend, listen and understand.
Although you're hopeless and unaware,
I'll stretch forth a helping hand.

We all are faced with situations,

Whether they be great or small.
This is my sincere proclamation,
To uplift my brother when he fails.

A kind word, a faithful deed,
It doesn't cost you anything at all.
To help someone in dire need,
I'll humbly answer to the call.

If someone wasn't there for me,
To care enough to set me aside,
I'd perish in my own insanity,
Or would've committed suicide.

Indeed, life can be a heavy load
With times of joy, peace and misery,
But while we travel upon this road,
My brother, you've got a friend in me.

HELP SOMEONE AS SOMEONE HAS HELPED YOU!



Asian Flower

*By Neal C. Morrison Jr.
VA Medical Center – Bronx, NY*

She's a vision of loveliness
With the body of a goddess.
The shape, curves and strength
Of her body
Could not be ignored.
She has a radiant appearance
Of beauty
Uncommon to most women.
Talking with her,
I discovered
She has the smile
Of an angel,
The temperament
Of wisdom.
She's delicate, rare, precious
And compassionate,
Creating great desire
In my heart.
In an instant,
All other women were forgotten.
Immediately,
All my heartaches disappeared.
Happiness has reached the depths
Of my soul.

Why I Believe

By Karen A. Green

VA Medical Center – Las Vegas, NV

I believe that God exists
because of the miracles I see.
I believe
Jesus died to set me free.

God helps me
through trials day by day,
and guides
what I do and say.

If there were no God,
we wouldn't even be here.
When I pray and worship him,
I can feel him very near.

I believe
Jesus walked this land,
and he died on a cross
with nails in his feet and hands.

Some think
this universe was formed by a big bang.
I believe
it was made with God's hands.

Some
don't believe in God at all,
but God will be here
when this world falls!

The day
will be here soon,
of the last blood moon!

I believe
people better wake up before it's too late.
Time is short
so please don't wait.

The signs
of the end are here,
and the return of God
is very near.

If you see your fellow man
stumbling, and his future looks dim,
show him
the love God has for him.

God commands
for us to share his word.
Jesus is the Prince of Peace,
our sacred Lord.



Pep Talk

By James William Miller

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

Play with a playful twine,
Play with a playful twine in time.
Play with a playful twine and win anew,
Play with a playful twine and go askew.

The Sleeping Dragon Theory

By Charles L. Carey

VA Medical Center – Martinsburg, WV

Jill was a lady so soft and sweet,
Jack a gentleman so tall and neat.
Jill fell down and made no sound,
Jack went up high and came back down.
Jill wept over her lonely days,
Jack got caught in the mist and the mazes.
Jill got paid for love and beauty,
Jack fell from grace and society.
Jill had lots of fortune and fame,
Jack was about to go insane.
Jill ran wild and took a look,
Jack got snared on a fisherman's hook.
Jill became heartbroken and full of despair,
Jack took a ride to a place he knew not where.
Jill found love and still was blue.
Jack changed his life through and through.
Jill got married, had Janet and Matthew,
So please watch the sleeping dragon
that lurks inside of you.

Trees of Green, Sunlight With Beams, Rainbows and Dreams

By Stephen Ray Housh

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

Over the hillside lies a forest of green,
The sun shines brightly, with bright light that beams.
You can look near or very far,
Chase butterflies to a heavenly star.
There's millions of flowers in fields, in blooms,
But there's a close storm with thunder and booms.
The storm moves quickly as it rolls and roars.
There's millions of raindrops from the clouds as it pours.
The storm moves quickly; it's over and short.
The sun shines again, radiant and more.
Then all of a sudden to our eyes does appear
A sparkling rainbow with colors so clear.
Throughout the daytime the flower field gleams.
Soon will come nighttime with rainbows in dreams.

War

By Karen A. Green

VA Medical Center – Las Vegas, NV

When young soldiers
go off to war,
sometimes they come back
different than before.

Things they saw
and heard over there
may have been more
than they have to bear.

When they come home
people see the difference in them,
but they are
still good women and men.

Some are afraid
to get comfort from others,
even with
their own sisters and brothers.

War
is hard on everyone,
on the soldiers
and their parents, daughters and sons.

This world
would be so good without wars,
then people
wouldn't get hurt anymore.

Bombs Bursting in Air

By Penny Lee Deere

VA Medical Center – Albany, NY

The year, 1990, the buildup “Desert Storm.”
Thanksgiving and Christmas eating sand, breathing smoke.
A new year, 1991, brings “Desert Shield.”
For 42 consecutive days,
Six weeks of airstrikes,
Over 100,000 sorties prior to the ground war,
As the oil fuels burned, lit on fire,
We pounded them with air suppression,
Smart bombs with massive payloads.
You see they pick on the little guy.
They invaded Kuwait, tried to annex this country
and make it theirs.
Unacceptable to the other 39 nations that came to the rescue.
One hundred hours of ground war—three days it was over.
As I pulled guard duty in the makeshift bunker—
a foxhole in a berm, sandbags lining the walls—
My M16 ready and M60 on board,
It seemed like Independence Day back home.

—The streaks, the explosions can be seen for miles.
—The smells drifted.
—The light show was magnificent.

The aftermath—too much—
War stinks.
And now to live with the guilt.
I, the targeteer, responsible.



I'll Never Be the Same as I Was Before

By Kimberly Green

— Fort Smith, AR

Don't place me on a list,
Don't ignore me and turn your back.
I served my country proud
In the sands of Iraq.

If I'm wheelchair bound,
Don't look the other way.
I'm a person just like you
Who from war lost my legs.

If I have no arm,
Acknowledge that I am here.
Don't turn the other way
Just to hide your tears.

If I've lost my sight,
Use your voice so I can hear.
Acknowledge my presence,
Relinquish your fear.

I have injuries one can't see,
I don't like to talk about what I've seen.
So don't ask me things that I can't say,
It will only make me dream.

For I'm a combat veteran,
My injuries were sustained in war.
I'll never be the same
As I was before.

Broken Puzzle

By Daryl Eigen

VA Medical Center – Albuquerque, NM

Understand not
Filling spaces
Pieces are torn
Paper faces.

A crow's shadow
Eclipses the moon
Fluttering wings
A somber tune.

Enigma codes
Nothing transcends
Pictures forgotten
Pieces and ends.

Walking circles
Struggle a phrase
Searching pieces
Confused and dazed.

Blackbird watches
Waiting for a lair
More blackbirds
Flutter to the wire.

Pray mystery
No pattern breaks
Try history
A key that creates.

Time's patina
Hides the crime
Forever broken
Beyond the prime.

Blackbirds do stare
A tale unfair
No one's to know
No one's to care.

Think no reason
Pieces in rows
Winds change and blow
Away the crows.

Together twice
Better than before
Pieces still missing
Perhaps only four.



Troops' Tribute

By John Mormino

VA Medical Center – Buffalo, NY

Trouble and despair
go together
on the sunken faces
of people and country.
Sum it all up
no dollar out
no veteran dishonored
their backs bent
growing heavier.
Spare the weight
anoint the stone load
shoulder to shoulder
we must share
the soldiers' burden.

A Veteran's Voice

By Linda Mckinnis

VA Medical Center – Troy, NY

A veteran's voice that I don't hear,
That falls silent to the noise,
The voice that is in me, yet I don't hear it.
SPEAK! I say, but there is nothing.

A veteran's voice that has stories of the past
to teach the new generation, but they don't hear
About the things and places I have seen
And the experience beyond my knowledge.
I want to tell you, really I do. Do you hear me?

A veteran's voice, I want to tell you about the struggles
I had; it wasn't the greatest, but I survived.
I want to make you aware of the pitfalls of life,
The temptations not worth having,
And the bad decisions and mistakes along the way.
Can you hear me? I'm right here!

Veteran's voice... Veteran's voice!
Help me to express the pain I feel,
The visions I have for the future
And the happiness I feel right now.
Help me to take the bondage off my mouth
And the weight off my hands.
SPEAK! SPEAK! SPEAK! I tell myself.
You have a voice. A veteran's voice I have.

This Blade

By K. W. Peery

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

This blade's
been bloody
ever since
it was made.

My grandpappy
bought it
when he needed
a shave.

Deep in the drink
back in World War II,
this blade's been cleansed
in Pacific blue.

This blade got bent
in a tavern fight.
Grandpappy said
it saved his life.

Tested in battle
and the huntin' field,
this blade's been used
sometimes to kill.

This blade's authentic
and notched with wins.
Yeah, this blade's
been bloody,
and it will be again.

Snug as a Bug!

By Darrell W. Brown

VA Clinic – Talihina, OK

Give me a pence (a penny)!
You make very good sense,
But you must grant me something tangible.
I'll share a hug with you.
I'll even share a physical clue with you,
While even with this I care to be
Manageable.
I've found my pet, hiding yet,
Engrossed like the thief of Baghdad,
A thug!
But as I look and as I became upset,
I found she was only as "Snug as a bug in a rug"
Or a "MUG?"

Jesus Sighting

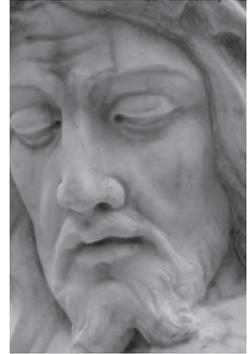
By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center – Pittsburgh, PA

I've had every disease,
I've had crabs, even fleas,
I've had every affliction that's known.
I've made love on the rocks,
I've had holes in my socks,
And was sworn at in many a tone.

Once I gave till I bled,
And was once left for dead,
And the ache remains hidden, but there.
I've been high as a kite,
Stayed up many a night
In some dives in the depths of despair.

Through it all, you were there,
Though I never did care,
Now I've found you again, and I see.
Now the days seem so good,
How you promised they would.
You're the truth and you have set me free.



Honor

By Sean Richards

VA Medical Center – Fort Worth, TX

Into the jungle dark and deep,
Where even sunlight fails to creep,
Through the undergrowth thick and wet
Roam evil men thick with sweat,
Seeking to overthrow the current regime
Hunting and hiding providing a requiem.
We hunt these men through paddy and jungle
Seeking contact,
Watching for ambushes, trying to avoid a tangle.
The goal is the enemy to pin and fix,
Our superior firepower we need to flex.
Through these jungles we sneak and troop,
Our mission to eliminate and stop the opposing group.
Every time we made contact they run and hide,
Our overpowering firepower they cannot abide,
While our own people at home do us chide.
The protest and hate for the war has gone nationwide,
Even with this discontent we must still fight and defend.
It's an unpopular war. It's with that we must contend.
The President says to this war we must say good night.
With the enemy at the peace table, he cajoles and fights.
He seeks peace with honor and escape from the blight.
Our allies have abandoned us
in seeking a separate peace from the fight.
We attempt to redeem ourselves
while seeking peace from this fight.
Is peace with honor worth abandoning what is right?

Welcome Home

By Larry L. Penrod

VA Medical Center – Rutledge, TN

There's a man that lives back in the hills,
A run-down shack and an old-fashioned still.
He doesn't understand and probably never will.

He has a blind dog and a three-legged cat.
He trained the bears to watch his shack.

The birds will sing if they see anything.
People don't know him so they think he's mean.

He's not Nature's mistake.
He came back from Vietnam in '68.

Couldn't fit in and got tired of trying.
He really got sick of the government's lying.

If you were in Vietnam, then you could see
Why so many men have PTSD.

Agent Orange and bamboo vipers,
Leeches and Viet Cong snipers.

The rain never stops but mail from home does.
In tunnels and villages, shoot the one that runs.

Forty-five days in the bush and one hot meal a week.
Eleven quarts of water from a bomb crater or a creek.
The good book says to turn the other cheek.

From Biên Hòa to Khe Sanh and every trail in between,
Trip wires, fire fights and recon missions at night.

Cobras and choppers will circle above, and the grunts
will cover the ground.
Special Forces move around and never make a sound.

Short timers and cheery boys in hopes of an early out.
The freedom bird is waiting, but the world's not the same.
No handshakes, no ticker tape, not even a marching band.



They'll call you names you don't deserve,
Because of something they might have heard.

Paratroopers training at Ft. Bragg,
While demonstrators are burning our flag.

Hell, no! We won't go! But they want our milk and honey.
Ask the men who live at the VA if they think it's funny.

All gave some, some gave all.
Their names are engraved on a marble wall.

Hills and valleys are home to a lot of vets.
Someday maybe, but they're not ready just yet.
Welcome home, brothers, for a job well done.

An Instrument From Heaven

By Larry Raymond Muck

— Grand Rapids, MI

Brought together by darkness, emptiness and loss,
Bound together by love, memories and cost.
A life well tuned like an instrument from Heaven
Played passionately until life's breath would be taken.
Now notes once played are sung by others,
Memories yet to be lived are only now discovered.



Year After Year

By Bruce Eric McClain

VA Medical Center – Kansas City, MO

Year after year we primed our tree,
we turned the soil, so our roots may breathe.
Daily we shared the best of ourselves.

We watched for things that would bring
harm to our vine. For love's sake,
we left nothing to chance.

Strong and stronger—time made us so.
This bond we bonded.
These long years allowed us to grow.

Between seasons, we found laughter.
Storms were not able to silence us. We drank
their waters; our roots expanded deep and wide.

Our faces wrinkled, worn with age and sturdy,
we stood the test of time. Beneath purple skies,
we pledged with a glass of sweet wine.

Though a blotch or two surfaced,
still two hearts without stain.
Year after year. together we primed.

More and more leaves would fall,
and our branches thinned. Daily
we turned our soil, so our roots may breathe.

Just a Pebble in the Sand

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

Jesus was the stone the builders rejected;

We are the lambs our Heavenly Father has protected.
He sits high and looks low, day by day!

Make sure you understand as you journey through God's land,
We all are just a pebble in God's sand.

Blessed are all men who come in God's name;
Jesus is the only way that Satan is tamed.
The holy Bible is our defense, given to repel
The fiery bounds of Satan and hell.

Make sure you understand as you journey through God's land,
We are all just a pebble in God's sand.
Make sure you understand as you journey through God's land,
We are all just a pebble in God's sand.

Honey Tea, You Make Me Sweet*

By Michael Young
— Fond du Lac, WI

Honey Tea, you make me sweet every time you kiss me.
I love you so, just more and more, my Honey Tea with me.

Honey Tea, climb on in; I'll drive to the drive-in
picture show.
We got all night; we got a loving life.

Honey Tea, the sun shines just for you and me.
I'm so glad to sing you joined my life; you make it right.

Honey Tea, you are a God-given woman.
You make me feel like a strong God-given man.

I always thank God you're in my life whether you're my wife.
Honey Tea, we ain't rich and we ain't poor.

I'm so glad to sing you joined my life; you make it right.
Sing it loud; say it proud.

Honey Tea, you make me sweet every time you kiss me.
I'm so proud you're my woman, and you're with me.

Honey Tea, you are a God-given woman.
You make me feel like a strong God-given man.

I love you so, just more and more, my Honey Tea with me.
Sing it loud; say it proud.

This is my special love song to Honey Tea.
Honey Tea, you make me sweet every time you kiss me.

I'm so proud you're my woman, and you are with me.
I'm so glad to sing you've joined my life; you make it right.

I always thank God you're in my life whether you're my wife.
Honey Tea, climb on in; I'll drive to the drive-in
picture show.

We got all night; we got a loving life.
Honey Tea, we ain't rich and we ain't poor.

I'm so glad to sing you joined my life; you make it right.
This is my special love song to my Honey Tea.

I love you so, just more and more, my Honey Tea with me.
Honey Tea, the sun shines just for you and me.

Sing it loud; say it proud.
The sun shines just for me and Honey Tea.

Honey Tea, you make me sweet every time you kiss me.*

*This poem can also be song lyrics.

Can You Stand the Pain?

By Richard Williams
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

Can Heaven wait? Now that is the question.
I pray to God it can, for living is a blessing.
I pray to the Creator for he knows what is best.
I pray to the Creator; he's putting me to the test.

The mind controls the body, and the heart controls the soul.
Whether we're going to Heaven or Hell, God only knows.

Trust in the Creator for He knows what is best.
A lot of folks don't believe this life is just a test.

The mind controls the body; the heart controls the soul.
Pay attention to this rhyme; the truth is being told.

Some have to die in order for others to live.
If the new me is to survive, the old me has got to give,
give up the body and stop controlling my mind.
The new me struggles to survive while the old is
slowly dying.

I don't plan for what I think is coming; I plan for what
I know.
I plan for whether it's Heaven or Hell; I'll see
for God only knows.

I am thankful for the years I spent walking on the earth.
I continue to try to improve my life, been doing it
since birth.

Sometimes I slip; at other times I fall.
The old me is dying slowly; the new me hears the call.

Trust in the Creator for he knows what is best.
Trust with all your heart and soul; he's putting you
to the test.

The mind controls the body, and the heart controls
the soul.
If the new me is to make it, the old me has to go.

Patriarch

By Tony James Craidon
— *Maple Grove, MN*

He was the culmination of everything that came before him,
Every success and every failure.
He taught me where to begin,
To pick up where he left off.

Like the warmth and security of an early autumn afternoon,
He left entirely too soon.
He had assured me I'd know what to do
When it was my time to stand for others.

With only partial information, I became a giant
Driven by a need to be needed.
When forfeiture is not an option,
What other choice did I have?

Soft tissue on the inside, titanium on the out,
I'll forge a new way through.
I can't decide if it matters what comes after
Or what my protégé will do.

I am the culmination of everything that came before me,
Every success and every failure.
I am the Patriarch this turn around,
I hope to guide the prince to his throne.

Soldier's Prayer

By Jason Kirk Bartley
VA Medical Center – Chillicothe, OH

Lord, God,
I kneel here
in the darkness,
silently at night.
Won't you keep
me safe from harm,
let everything be alright,
with no sniper's round
piercing my body,
no rocket fire
brightening up the eastern sky.
Savior, Savior, hear my lonesome cry.
Teardrops draw me ever, ever closer,
I am weeping by and by. Jesus, guide me to my home safely,
hear my shriveled cry.



Let everyone back home
know that I am coming,
but it's going to be a long, long plight.
I just want to protect
our flag for freedom.
Give us sweet victory in this fight.
Jesus, keep me close by your blood-stained body.
Lord, I stand up and salute thee.
Jesus, Jesus, I'll continue
to lift up a banner and march in stride.
You hold me close to your heart
and you shield me.
In you, I must abide.

Hallelujah!!
Glory!!!
AMEN.

A Spring Desire

By Jennifer S. Wheat Anderson
VA Medical Center – Iron Mountain, MI

I awoke this morning
To the chill of a winter blast.
It was like a scene
From the very distant past.
I love it now, I said,
But I don't see how
It reminded me
Of when I said,
As a child,
This must be
For now.
The seasons change
So fast.
This winter chill

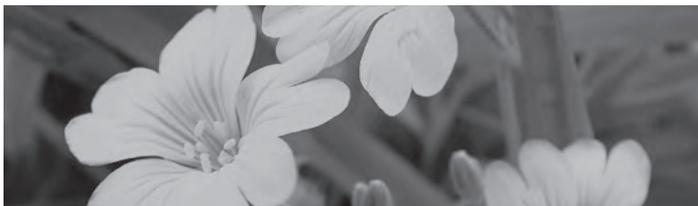
Can't last.
Soon I will
Be sailing
My toy sailboat
In the spring melt
Of the snow.
I will feel
The warm rays
Of the sun again
Without too many delays.

It will be spring again soon.

Nature Within the Summer Sensations

By John E. Jones
VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI

I stand outside among warmth and sunshine,
Under a shade tree that invigorates my mind.
The summer breezes are pleasantly blowing,
And amidst the greenery beauty is showing.
The gorgeous flowers set a lovely scene
Under the clear sky, pleasing and serene.
Nature everywhere reveals anew
Returning birds and butterflies, too.
Children are playing; hear their cheerful words,
While enjoying the music of delightful songbirds.
Settle within the summer when Nature greets us all.
The rainy days provide us with sustenance till fall.
Nature's endless spectrum of shapes and colors
Brings gifts of hope, desire and many others.
Nature offers promise as life springs into being,
A time of seeing and touching, of sensing and feeling.
He sings heartily to the beat,
He celebrates, his mission done.



My Guardian Angel From Above

By Diane Wasden
— Millan, GA

You can see me now — will you take my hand,
Will you follow me to God's Promised Land?
I will wash away all the burning flames,
If you follow me — your life will never be the same.
I will take you up to a better place,
Wipe away your tears — take away your pain.

You can see me now — will you take my hand,
Let me guide you through your darkest time here on land.
Let my light shine bright — let it lead you on to open up your
heart.
I will always be there for you.
I can help you now, if you will just let me,
Let your memories go — they will set you free.

You can see me now — will you take my hand,
Don't you be afraid when my wings expand.
When your mind slips away and you take your last breath,
Your soul will live on, but your body is forever dead.
There's a better place that you need to be,
All I ask of you is will you follow me?

I can see you now — I know who you are,
I know you were always with me — you were never far.
I'm not afraid to take your hand,
Please take me up to God's Promised Land.
When my time here on earth comes to an end,
A happier life in Heaven for me will then begin.

Communications

By Richard Wangard
VA Medical Center – Milwaukee, WI

The newspapers are dead
Magazines, too.
Just fire up your computer
Constantly look at smartphone
And it can all be in your head.
Hit a "like" button
Or maybe a heart
But don't you dare read
It might make you smart.
Bait me
Insult me
Swear and curse
Compromise lost
What a curse.
Opinions different
I take no offense
I know better
But anger can prevail
From long, long ago.
I stand my ground
But pay a heavy price.
Stubborn to the max
I try foolishly
To try and make a point.
No winning or losing
There is none.
Everyone is equal
We all have a voice
Left — Right — Center
It's all a muddled mess.
It's sad

I'm sad
Hurt people's feelings
Instead of building them up.
I ask you
What have we become?
What have I become?
I write to share
But find despair
From a time and place
Long, long ago
Where there were no choices.
I try hard not to linger there
The memories fill my head
Screaming at the top of my lungs
Just to be heard.
Now nobody listens
Everybody talks
Everybody is right
There is no wrong.
So I listen to a song
Pet my dog
The cats curl up and purr.
An old man alone in his thinking
Wishing for youth
Waiting for spring
To ride and find the truth.
It is out there.
Once again
This too shall pass
History dictates
We ignore it at our own peril.
Wisdom is evasive
LIFE REPEATS
In the next generation.
Same gig, different people
New Tech
Just hit a "like" button
Or maybe a heart.

Are You Someone's Hero?

By Helen Anderson Glass
VA Medical Center – Tucson, AZ

We all need a hero.
Someone to look up to,
Someone who inspires us in what we say and do.
To be someone's hero, you could do good deeds,
You could help others, whatever their needs.
You can be a good example in the things you do,
Perhaps the one you inspire turns out to be you!
Know that you're doing your very best in school,
Keeping on the right path, living by "The Golden Rule."
Take a good look and hold your head up high,
Soon you'll be walking tall and know the reason why.
Others beside yourself are very proud, too,

Because the one they admire as their hero is YOU.

My Desire

By Scott Sjostrand
— Hallock, MN

My desire is to end warfare with a poem,
At least for a little while.
No more bloodshed,
That's my preferred style.
You may ask, "Why do I bother?"
Soldiers' lives are more than cannon fodder.
Their jobs ain't easy
Even during times of peace.
Please God, help me write the words
To make warfare cease.
Our diplomats at the UN
Can make peace accords once again.
We have allies great in number.
It's about time we all can peacefully slumber.
International relations certainly matter.
Let's sign peace agreements,
And cut through the chatter.
The world could use a few decades of peace,
Especially there in the Middle East.
Worldwide fair trade helps to sweeten the pot,
Part of a way to make the shooting stop.
Once it's stopped, let's embrace the feeling.
No more corrupt arms dealing.
We can establish trust, this I believe,
So there'll be no more widows
Left behind to grieve.

Where Was My Father

By Paul David Adkins
VA Medical Center – Watertown, NY

Where was my father
when I deployed the last time?
Sifting into the hourglass
of himself, his arteries'
darkened hallways.

The only footfalls
leaking water,
slow collapse.

My mother's funeral dress
sagged flat
with its stuffing of dust,
brittle as an ancient doll.

How they lay ignorant
of my combat tour
as any Chinese rice farmer
slogging in a flooded paddy
with his ox,
the wake of their passing

breaking
without consequence
through the green shoots,

riffling the muck,
slapping the slick upslope,
the near bank of a dike.

Remembrance of Our Veterans

By Douglas Pederson
VA Medical Center – Bedford, MA

Of all the best, there's many at rest,
What matters most, they stood their post.
They are the brave, they did not waive,
To those who serve, such honor they deserve.
Charging from the front line, more troops followed behind,
Never in the clear, did not cringe facing fear.
Bravest are they that stood, the wounded fired that could,
All fought to win, struggling to the bitter end.
They stood their ground amidst the battle sounds,
Dreadful fight against all odds, valiantly they continued to plod.
Trudging over rough terrain, advancing ground to gain,
Only they could tell what it was like in hell.
The conditions were cruel, but they fought by the rule,
Striking the foe with a mighty blow.
Defending our homelands over sky and sands,
Courageous they led, preserving our homestead.
Breathless warriors laid to rest, the remaining begin the quest,
Feeling weary and distraught from endless time they fought.
Dense smoke settled low, flickering light by embers glows,
Our flag was unscathed, road to home now paved.
Must not forget what was done, we are proud to have won.
We give our thanks to those who served in the ranks,
They were dependable, most highly commendable.
The valor displayed, their loyalty and value weighed,
From here or across the sea, they battled for our liberty.
What liberty has brought, envision what bravery has taught,
Freedom is not free. No response from the roll-call absentee,
A life they gave, taps sounding beyond their grave.



Dead or Alive

By Donald Sherwood
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

Peace be
With you.

Look in the
Mirror
No more
Reflections
Take a look
Did you read
The book?

Dog day
Afternoon
Mom, it's
Later than
The guy
Said. Love
The sky
Love the
Day
Look
Please.

Don't have
A chance
In this
World
To survive
Dead or
Alive.

I Believe In Myself

By Antony Coccozza
VA Medical Center – Los Angeles, CA

I believe in myself
As I believe in God.
I believe in my dreams
As I believe the Lord and me.
We are pardoned.
Believe the spirit of the lonely wind.
We are what we are.
When my Lord asked me to come in,
I believed in myself,
I believed in me.
I believe heaven and earth,
What life is all about.
You and me,
We are together,
To read, to talk, to discover
what the Bible means.

We are supposed to pray
To the Lord forever, amen.
I believe in myself.
Yes, I do believe in God.
Jesus visits me in my dreams,
Me and Jesus, the Son of God.

Junior High and the Military

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

While I attended junior high school,
I received my first military training
and didn't realize it at the time.
Then I attended a new junior high school.
Our gym coach was an ex-Marine.
Our school was brand new
and located in the woods at the time.
We had twenty acres for a football field.
Our only problem was that it was covered with pine trees.
For physical education we, as students,
cut down trees and pulled stumps for our PE.
About twice each week, we learned to march in formation.
We performed military training by doing that.
I had a full school year of marching
before I enlisted in the military.
I was already introduced to some of the military discipline
I would encounter when I finally did enlist in the Navy.
I was thankful for the early introduction.
I enjoyed both the junior high experience
and the Navy experience.
Little did I know that what I was learning in junior high
would help me later while in the Navy.
I was thankful for the knowledge.
We were also introduced to a physical training course
consisting of climbing logs and ropes tied up in the trees.

Everything was designed for our physical health.



Changes

By Dennis Silas
VA Medical Center – Danville, IL

The weather is changing.
The colors of the leaves
Are changing.

People's moods, problems,
Relationships,
Governmental
Undecided decisions
Are definitely
Getting crazy.

They say things
Have to get worse
Before they get
Better.

Really?



Guest Editorial Continued from page 2...

The arts can help veterans restore and build strength. They are a great vehicle for enabling service members to fight and win post-conflict battles and gain, what I call, Post Traumatic Strength (PTS). I emphasize the word strength! Through military relationship building with the arts, culturally sensitive and non-stigmatized environments can be achieved. U.S. service members and their families are a proud bunch and they do not want the community's pity. They just want a pathway to wellness so they can get on with their lives.

Look for arts related events and opportunities that appeal to you. If writing is one of your choices, try composing a poem or a story for your own satisfaction, or to submit to *Veterans' Voices* for possible publication. The art of writing can offer the first step toward unlocking the nightmares that combat can produce. We all know people who won't talk about their military experiences. Yet, writing in private is often easier than talking with others about unpleasant and frightening memories. Writing is an art that can heal. It can help the individual as well as build and sustain resiliency within the military community.

Mail Call

"I can't express how *Veterans' Voices* magazine has helped me. It really reaches down inside me on so many levels," wrote **Diane Wasden**, Tomah, Wis. "I can't wait for the next issue to come. So many of the stories are as if they were about how I was feeling. The stories are the best therapy I could ever get."



"Here is my next subscription payment for your wonderful magazine," said **Jonathan M. Craig**, Hillsboro, Ore. "I so look forward to reading each new issue and share them with friends and family. As a U.S. Army veteran, it makes me feel more connected with all our veterans across the nation. You have published me several times, too, which I deeply appreciate! Thank you for your service and everything you do!"



Karen Green, Pahump, Nev., wrote, "Thank you for *Veterans' Voices*. To have my work in print I hope helps other veterans when they read my work. Just reading someone's poem could make a difference of life and death for a person. I have problems talking about my problems, but if I can write about them it comes easy. It has helped me to read other people's work. It helps to show me that I am not the only person that is going through things. I hope this magazine can keep being published. I am sure this program has and hopefully will continue to help veterans."



"Wow! Thank you for the honor (of being published)," wrote **Andrew Jackson Smith**, Elmore, Ala. "I showed the award to an old veteran, an older non-veteran and a 20-year old youth, explaining how I spend my time. You will impact more people than you will ever understand, even if you don't directly hear from them. Ten dollars goes a significant way here (prison), and I want to give back that to you, in appreciation for all you do for this nation."



"Once again I anxiously awaited the new copy of *Veterans' Voices* — a publication devoted to the betterment of veterans nationwide, a publication devoted to helping veterans express themselves in terms we all can understand, feel, comprehend and most of all feel solace for all we went through," **Rich Wangard**, Neenah, Wis. "It is such a powerful source of goodness for caring about those few—those proud few—who had the guts to lay it all on the line for the country they love, for no one serves without sacrifice. It allows me to express thoughts and feelings like they happened yesterday—only it was 50 years ago now when they

changed my life forever. PTSD lasts a lifetime and so too do the ravages of agent orange, but *Veterans' Voices* allows both to be conquered through the written word, sharing, coping, providing much needed therapy to those of us who care so deeply for our fellow veterans.

"You honor me by publishing my stories and poems and I am so grateful. Am I getting better as a writer? I would like to think your inspiration drives me on to share and express—to paint those pictures with words. I am no pro, just a regular guy, a vet who is proud of what he accomplished by serving—something bigger than myself, a cause, helping others. Still after all these years it is the most satisfying, exciting, living on the edge, humane work I have ever done.

"So after taking pictures of the check you sent and hanging it above my computer as a trophy—something I am so proud of—I send it back to you because your efforts save lives by allowing people like me to chase away their demons and share their thoughts, feelings and anguish, along with their joy knowing they made a difference."



Loren G. Flaugh, Primghar, Iowa, "Your letter caught me by complete surprise...notifying me that some prose I submitted was published in the spring issue of *Veterans' Voices* magazine. The title for that story came from two questions the director of the Sioux Falls, S.D., VAMC asked me on a medical check-up a year or more ago. Keep up the good work that you do at the Veterans Voices Writing Project.



"I have enjoyed reading all of the great stories in *Veterans' Voices* magazine," wrote **Samuel J. Hall**, Albuquerque, N.M. "Keep doing such a fine job. I hope the new changes are easy to implement. I have tried to make the changes to my computer for my stories... Enclosed is a donation to help support the magazine. I hope you have a prosperous 2018."



Jane Harvey, Las Cruces, N.M. writes, "Thank you for the many years of publishing *Veterans' Voices* magazine. My mother, Phyllis Bibeau, was a writing aide for many years and still looks forward to receiving her magazine in the mail...I will access the magazine from the website, looking forward to reading it cover-to-cover."

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

Bill Liddle Memorial

Gifts of \$5,000 or more

Gifts of \$2,000 or more

Gifts of \$1,000 or more

Breidenthal-Snyder Foundation, Leawood, Kan.
Col. (Ret.) Doris M. Cobb, San Antonio, Texas
Sheryl Liddle, Independence, Mo.
Shirley & Barnett Helzberg, Jr., Kansas City, Mo.
Park University, Parkville, Mo.

Gifts of \$500 or more

Gordon Lenz, Murrieta, Calif.
Gloria Montgomery, Harker Heights, Texas
WOSL San Antonio Unit, Texas

Gifts of \$200 or more

Women's Army Corps Veterans Association of Northern Virginia, Burke, Va.
Howard "Buzz" Bigham, Omaha, Neb.
Don Brady, Tampa, Fla.
Randolph Byrd, Woodridge, Ill.
DAV Auxiliary 32, Eugene P. Long, Albuquerque, N.M.
Samuel J. Hall, Albuquerque, N. M.
Deann Mitchell, Olathe, Kan.
Ann Ogden, Overland Park, Kan.
Sarah Schroer & Kobi Mamun, Overland Park, Kan.
Vietnam Veterans of America 351, Appleton, Wis.
VFW Auxiliary Dept. of Pennsylvania, Dist. 19, Tidioute
Richard Wangard, Neenah, Wis.
Marianne Watson, Lee's Summit, Mo.

Gifts of \$100 or more

American Legion Auxiliary 50 Pelham, Eastchester, N.Y.
William & Martha F. Anderes, Wyckoff, N.J.
Beta Sigma Phi, Alpha Master Chapter, Kansas City, Mo.
Lee E. Bisbey, Phoenix, Ariz.
Hon. Thomas C. Clark, II, St. Louis, Mo.
Barbara Davidson, New York, N.Y.
DAV Auxiliary 34, Lenexa, Kan.
Disabled American Veterans 10, Queen City, Independence, Mo.
Peter J. Harrington, New Effington, S. Dak.
Sybil & Harlan Higginbotham, Maryville, Mo.
Michael Lucas, Monterey, Tenn.
Pat's Knights, Countryside, Ill.
Robert T. Parnell, Albuquerque, N.M.
VFW Auxiliary 2814, Atascadero, Calif.
VFW Auxiliary 5252, Pelican Rapids, Minn.
VFW Auxiliary 5319, Athens, Mich.
VFW Auxiliary 6506, Baltimore, Md.
VFW Auxiliary 6782, Eastpointe, Mich.
VFW Auxiliary 6963, Colville, Wash.
VFW Auxiliary 7327, Springfield, Va.
VFW Auxiliary 7530, Mechanicsburg, Pa.
VFW Auxiliary 7968, Apache Junction, Ariz.
VFW Auxiliary 8586, Perrysville, Ohio
VFW Auxiliary 9557, Fountain Valley, Calif.
WACVA Pittsburgh Keystone Chapter, Pittsburgh, Pa.
WAC Veteran's Association Heritage Chapter 62, Weaver, Ala.

Gifts In-Kind

Kansas Audio-Reader Service, Lawrence, Kan.
Kaw Valley Computer, Mission, Kan.
Summit Litho, Lee's Summit, Mo.
VA Medical Center, Kansas City, Mo.

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

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

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



FOUNDERS' AWARDS

Elizabeth L. Fontaine Memorial Award:

Story expressing compassion and understanding (Perpetual) \$ 50

Gladys Feld Helzberg Memorial Award:

Best Poem (Perpetual) \$ 50

Margaret Sally Keach Memorial Award:

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

STORIES — *Fact or Fiction*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POETRY

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

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

DAVA, State Dept. of Florida Award \$ 30

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

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

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

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

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

Medical center administrator nominates; publisher approves \$ 50

Conquering Homelessness Award: by American Legion Auxiliary,

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

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

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

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

Submission Guidelines for *Veterans' Voices*



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

SUBMIT ONLINE:
www.veteransvoices.org

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

Instructions for Writing Submissions



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

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

Guidelines for Local Contests



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

QUESTIONS:
info@veteransvoices.org
(816) 701-6844

Mail Submission Sample

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

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

Elizabeth Leitzbach Fontaine: VVWP Is Her Legacy

Veterans Voices Writing Project recently accepted the papers of Elizabeth Leitzbach Fontaine, the project's founder. Her files focus on the early history and subsequent growth of Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project, which later became VVWP. As members of VVWP's board of directors sorted through her 20 boxes of letters, testimonials, and memorabilia, we were inspired anew by Elizabeth's vision and dedication and decided to share her story with you, our readers.

Elizabeth grew up in Illinois and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1918. Shortly thereafter, she moved in Chicago. She had begun writing in college but her initial interest in the healing potential of writing developed from her contact with a high school classmate, Fred Kidd, who was disabled in World War I by poisonous gas and hospitalized between 1918 and 1928, when he died. She also had begun writing for various magazines including, "Hygenia," the first health magazine for the public published by the American Medical Association. At the same time, she was advocating for professional organizations and was active in establishing the Chicago chapter of Theta Sigma Phi, a group for women in journalism now known as The Association for Women in Communications, Inc.

Elizabeth moved to New York City in the early 1920s. She lived in Greenwich Village and contributed to various magazines and literary reviews. Among other free-lance assignments, she covered a health show in Germany for "The Survey" in 1926. Following the Germany trip, she returned to Chicago. She married Everett Orren Fontaine in 1930 in the garden of San Juan Capistrano Mission in California. As director of publications for the American Library Association, Everett knew many writers. The Fontaines had one daughter, Martha, and she grew up among writers and publicists who worked with Elizabeth on various projects that she and friends developed around the kitchen table.

In 1937, Elizabeth's father, August Leitzbach, who was a physician, asked her to help Harold Funkhauser, an Army doctor who was fatally ill; he wanted to write before he died. So, Elizabeth devised a plan whereby another physician, Richard Jenkins, who wrote poetry as a hobby, would offer advice to the disabled Army doctor. Dr. Jenkins, who later did psychiatric research for the Veterans Administration (VA), was in effect the first writing aide.

During World War II, through Victory Book parties for the U.S.O., Elizabeth brought together writers, from groups like Theta Sigma Phi, with soldiers from Fort Sheridan, Ill., who were interested in writing. One of her parties collected more books for soldiers than any other event in the country. After the war, Elizabeth began recruiting people who could use their professional talents to help hospitalized veterans. Writers and journalists from the Chicago chapter of Theta Sigma Phi came forward as did people from other writing groups. With these friends, Elizabeth developed a writing program among veterans at the Hines VA Hospital. The volunteers encouraged the veterans to write, gave professional advice on improving writing skills, and started contests as an incentive to write. The group organized itself that year as the Chicago Committee for the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project. The idea spread to VA hospitals in other cities.

National contests for fiction, nonfiction, and poetry began in 1947 and continued for 25 years. Well-known writers and publishers served as judges and advisors to the project which attracted thousands of manuscripts. In 1951, the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project was incorporated as a nonprofit organization, with chapters in different cities. The following year, Margaret Sally Keach, with assistance from Gladys Feld Helzberg and the Greater Kansas City chapter of Theta Sigma Phi, founded *Veterans' Voices* to showcase the veterans' writing. Sally edited the magazine for 22 years until Margaret Clark, the current editor, took over in 1974.

In 1952, the Fontaines moved to New York City. Elizabeth formed the New York Committee, headed by Gen. Ralph DeVoe, director of the Bronx VA hospital. She secured a donated mailing address for the organization—the Empire State Building! Elizabeth and Gen. DeVoe organized a committee of supporters, the Greater Service Committee. Members included Robert Penn Warren, Norman Cousins, Richard Armour and General Omar Bradley. Several of the members wrote guest editorials for *Veterans' Voices*.

Elizabeth's work with the veterans earned her various VA awards, including the VA's Certificate of Appreciation in 1951 and the Administrator's Award in 1982. Her efforts also won the praise of presidents, from Dwight Eisenhower in 1959 to Ronald Reagan in 1982. But the greatest tributes came from the veterans themselves, who cited her energy, personal interest in their writing, and enthusiastic support, as factors that brought them from despondency to a new sense of worth and an ability to write and communicate with others.

Elizabeth continued writing and advocating for the veteran until shortly before her death in 1988. She was 91 years old. Her commitment to VVWP continues through the veterans who write today and the volunteers she inspired to carry on her life's work. As one of her admirers wrote at the time of her death, "The world is a better place because Elizabeth Fontaine passed through it."

—Veterans Voices Writing Project
Board of Directors





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

Support Our Veterans



The DAV Charitable Service Trust helps fulfill a focused and noble purpose: empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It supports programs and initiatives that improve the quality of life for veterans, their caregivers and families.

learn more:
cst.dav.org

- Programs supported by the Trust
- RECREATION
 - REHABILITATION
 - HONORING FAMILIES
 - EDUCATION
 - HEALTH CARE
 - QUALITY OF LIFE
- 

DAV Charitable Service Trust

