

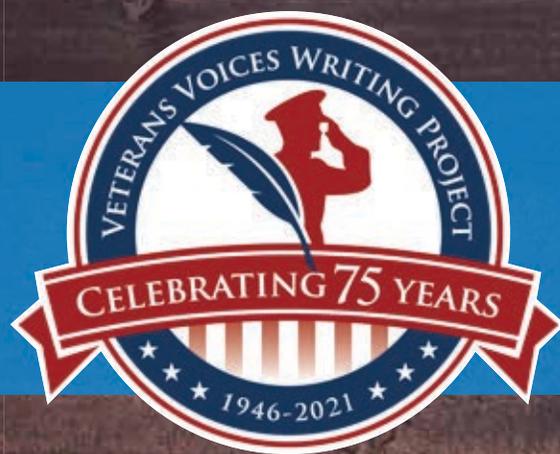
Devoted to the creative expression of
military veterans since 1952.

Summer 2021

VETERANS' VOICES®

1946-2021

VVWP Celebrates 75 Years of Service
See Page 21



**"A Vision That Has Lasted
75 Years"**

By Sheryl Liddle

Acceptance

By C. L. Nemeth

He Is In The Wind

By Matthew David Davison

Wolf Pack

By Grant Parker

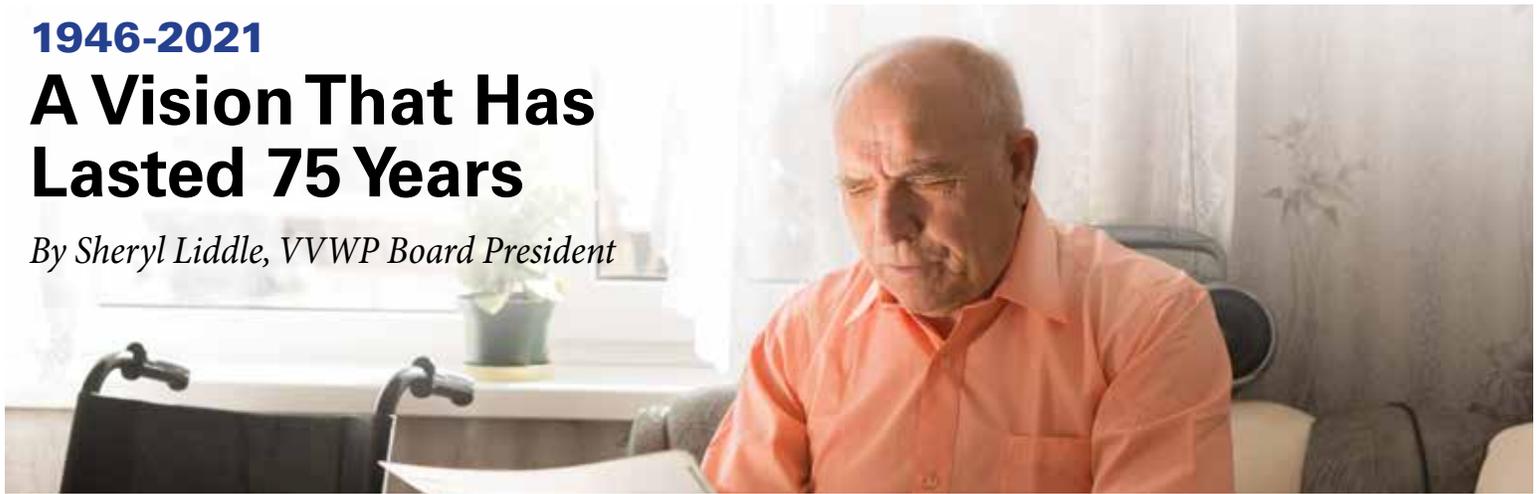
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VeteransVoices.org

1946-2021

A Vision That Has Lasted 75 Years

By Sheryl Liddle, VVWP Board President



In 1946 veterans were returning to America to begin their lives again after the end of World War II. However, not all of those veterans were able to go home to their families and put the ravages of war behind them. Many ended up in VA hospitals to heal from the physical and emotional wounds of the war.

While physical wounds were more visible and easier to diagnose and treat, the emotional wounds and scars were much more hidden and for many veterans difficult to even articulate.

Enter Elizabeth Fontaine, who had a vision to develop a therapeutic writing program for those veterans. On March 15, 1946,

Elizabeth went on the radio station at the Hines VA Hospital in Chicago and told the veterans, "Here's your new hobby. Maybe you aren't sure writing is your hobby just because you know you'd never write a book, but even putting 10 words together in a slogan...is writing."

Writing as therapy was an untried concept; however, Elizabeth had framed an approach to teaching writing that became the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project (HVWP). Her dedication and foresight built a life-saving legacy that has lasted 75 years.

In 1952, *Veterans' Voices* magazine was established to provide a way for veterans to have their writings published. As medicine

changed, patients spent less time confined to a hospital room and more treatment was handled on an outpatient basis. Recognizing the need all veterans have to heal, HVWP expanded its mission by accepting submissions, first by mail and later through its web site (veteransvoices.org). To accurately reflect this changing mission, HVWP became Veterans Voices Writing Project (VVWP) in the fall of 2015.

From the vision of one person in 1946, 75 years later VVWP continues to actively encourage all military veterans to express their thoughts and feelings in writing and to use our web site to submit their stories, poems, essays, and artwork for possible publication in *Veterans' Voices*.



Elizabeth Fontaine, founder of HVWP

Elizabeth Leitzbach Fontaine was born in 1896 in Fairmont, Ill. After college graduation, she worked as a freelance writer and publicist in Chicago and New York City. She and her husband, Everett Fontaine, made their home in Chicago beginning in 1930. Elizabeth founded the Chicago Committee for HVWP in 1946. When the Fontaines moved to New York City in 1952, she left the Chicago committee with her fellow volunteers and went on to establish the New York Committee for HVWP. Through the years she oversaw the expansion of the project to various VA facilities across the country, as well as the establishment of *Veterans' Voices* magazine.

Well into her late eighties, she continued to care passionately about veterans and work to improve their lives through writing. Her family said she never left home without a copy of *Veterans' Voices* tucked under her arm. She died in 1988 at the age of 91.



Sheryl Liddle has been president of the VVWP Board since 2017. Prior to that she assisted

the organization with promotions and orchestrated production of a marketing video. She is retired from Ruskin Company where she worked in the Marketing Department as a Special Projects Coordinator. She was born and raised in Independence, Mo., and except for college and some years out east, Independence has been her home.

Veterans' Voices®

Summer 2021 Vol. 69, No. 2

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

VVWP

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

History

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

Veterans' Voices Reprints

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- Register and submit your writings at veteransvoices.org.
- Read the writings of other veterans at facebook.com/VVWP1946.
- Email us with any questions at support@veteransvoices.org.

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Magazine Subscriptions

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

Audio Version

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

Magazine Guidelines

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

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

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

Veterans' Voices®

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The Track Adjustment

By Brant Parker III

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

Let me start this story by saying that most soldiers arriving to their first units are unaware of the tricks that are about to be played on them. I can speak from experience. Many of us arriving at our first units are eager to be part of the team. We want to prove ourselves as one of the guys and be accepted. I was no different.

I had just arrived at Baumholder, Germany, as a medic in the 8th Infantry Division. I had completed processing in, and the entire unit was headed to Graf/Hohenfels for a 90-day training exercise. I had only been with the unit a week when I was on my first field problem. In ferocious cold, I soon learned the meaning “embrace the suck.” And boy, did I.

I learned what it was like to be a grunt medic in the field and to hump an Alice pack. At first, I wondered who in God’s name was Alice? Over my career, I can honestly say I probably had more encounters with Alice than I did with my two ex-wives. But that’s another time, place and story.

We finally returned to Baumholder from the field exercises, and then it was the motor pool every day. That was like being locked up in jail. We spent most of our days prepping our vehicles for the next field problem, and we were always doing maintenance on the APCs (armored personnel carriers).

The day came for playing tricks on the new guy, and I just happened to be the new guy.

Trine, Jednorski, Sweetman, and Hayes were putting the track back on the APC. We had been replacing track pads for the last week, and I was glad it was over. Or so I thought. I was the gopher for the crew, and they had just put the APC back on line.

I kept asking if there was anything I could do to help because I was eager to be a part of the team. Trine replied with a big grin, “Why yes! I need you to climb on top of the APC and jump up and down so we can check the track tension.”

I should have known better, but I got right up there. Trine and Hayes got down with a wrench and said, “Ok, start jumping as high as you can, and we will make adjustments. Don’t stop until we tell you or we’ll have to start over. Do you understand?”

I was like man, I got this. So, I climbed up on the APC and started jumping as high as I could. I couldn’t see them, but Sweetman

was laughing his ass off and yelled, “Brother, you’re doing an outstanding job!” Jednorski went to get the other guys to revel in the prank.

I swear I think I jumped up and down for about five minutes and kept asking if they were finished yet. I heard Trine reply, trying not to laugh, “No buddy, just a couple of more minutes.” By that time the whole platoon was there and rolling with laughter, but they were hiding at the bottom of the hill, and I couldn’t see them. I was dead tired from jumping up and down, but I was on a mission to prove myself worthy to be part of that team.

Well, let’s just say the motor pool was full of onlookers, and I just happened to see and hear all those guys laughing; even the motor sergeant was in on it. Common sense should have told me that there is no way one man is going to budge a 20-ton vehicle by jumping up and down to test track tension. I only weighed 155 pounds at that time.

Once I realized what was going on, I stopped and looked at all of them looking up smiling at me. I realized I had finally been initiated and accepted into my unit. I swear those guys had tears rolling down their cheeks. They laughed so hard and so loud the Russians probably knew about the joke and laughed along with them.

Today, being in retirement, we still laugh at the crazy stuff and those pranks we pulled on one another back in the day. But most importantly, it was about the acceptance and being made part of a family, a band of brothers that will last a lifetime.



Plains Vignettes

By William Shepherd
VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS

Tears fall from my eyes like rain when a deer falls to the ground. But I know his soul and spirit rise to heaven. We know that this is the circle of life of the Plains Indians of long ago, as the rain falls to wash the land and bring a new beginning.

I remember days when we sat in our teepees around the fire and passed the pipe around. The young went first, telling their stories of the day and yesterday. It was night when the family came together. The smoke from the fire wrapped us like a blanket, warm and at peace. Yes, these were great times of joy and happiness with family.

Spotted Tail, chief of the Dakota, would tell of the blue stone and how it was like his people, beautiful and strong to last forever. He would see a day when his people would be like the buffalo on the land that the Great Spirit gave to them all. He would raise up his hands to the sky and ask for his people's needs for the year, and Spirit of Good would say this is a good thing and all were happy and at peace. These were wonderful times to be alive.

As for me, I still have my Blue Stone.

A Quiet Place

When I play my Indian cedar flute, I see myself in the forest of South Dakota, where the Great Spirit lives. The sound is to me a holy sound in a place of peace and quiet. The music of the flute flows up through the trees, the soft song of open skies. It is so pleasant to my ears. I could listen for hours before I drop off to sleep. It soothes me, and I forget all things that come to me, and I return to my soul. I'm at rest, and all is well. So when things get to me, I go running to play my flute, so beautiful it is to me.

Right of Passage

As a rite of passage, a young brave must go out to the prairie alone to cleanse his soul and body, to grow into a young brave that he longs to be, at one with God and man to know the aloneness of the prairie.

As the wind from the north blows cold across the prairie, it chills me to the bone, while the long days of the sun can burn the skin. I long for night to come and cool me from the heat of the day. I know my ordeal is on its way—long nights and days with only water to cool my body from the heat.

As the sun comes up, I hear the sound of a horse's hooves that

tells me my quest of many days is about over. My father brings food and water. As we sit around the fire, he says my quest is through and hands me an eagle feather.

He says, "You're a brave now and can lead the people of the Wolf Tribe, for now you know the suffering of the people. This is your vision, my brave young son."

The Dance

As we dance around the fire, sometimes hand in hand, sometimes not, the men beat the drums to gather the people. The chief calls out the dances. First the dance to start the powwow, and all gather around to receive the blessing of the people. As the excitement rises, the fire, the smoke, and the sounds of the people's voices seem to lift up in unison; even the children are having a good time. This truly is a wonderful night.

Then the dance changes to the warrior dance, and the moccasins hit the ground all at the same time. The dust rises from under their feet. The wind picks up the sound and the smoke into the open sky. You can feel the energy of the dance. It seems to bring happiness and joy to the people.

The children are sent off to bed in their teepees. The powwow goes on all night long until dawn comes up to start a new day. This is the best time of the year for all the native people. Each tribe is known by the colors and decorations of the costumes. As they dance to the sound of the drums around the fire, it takes me back to how it must have been a long time ago. As the light of the fire reflects from the movement of the dance, it is so beautiful to watch.

Each year I can hardly wait for the powwow to start up again.

Hard Times

In Kansas we hear the wind blow through the buffalo grass as we watch the tumbleweeds roll across this land of the wide-open spaces, as it has for many ages.

I think of my father and grandfather and how they settled this land long ago. This was the frontier as they built their houses and made their footprint upon the land. They farmed and hunted for food, and they labored and died.

They left their name that will not be forgotten by me because I still live here today. I love this land, and I'm here to stay.

A Long Walk

Growing up on the farm, when the work was done at the end of the day, I often made time for myself and went for a walk in the

fields. The smell of fresh cut hay brought back thoughts of quiet summer days, of hayrack rides and dances. It made me think of the fun we had living on the farm. I remember days so hot that a swim in the pond was all we could think about.

There were nights when we would lay in the yard and look up to heaven and look at the stars and share our thoughts and dreams of moving away. But we knew we could never be happy living anywhere else.

Yes, I still live on the farm, and I still take my long walks. I'm glad and thankful for the life I have on the farm.

My Apartment

By Christopher Bremicker
VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN

The first thing you would notice was the recliner I bought with my stimulus check from the federal government to jump-start the economy in the middle of Covid-19. It was huge, made of wood, stained maple in color, and upholstered with Naugahyde. It stretched out, as it was supposed to do, although I usually just sat in it like a throne.

Across from this chair was my stereo system, a \$200 rig of 700 watts designed to blow the roof off the place. It had four components--two speakers, a woofer, and control panel. I bought six CDs to go with it, like Bach's Brandenburg Concertos or Franz Liszt's Preludes, but I mostly listened to public radio on it, after I figured out that the wire that came in the box was the FM antenna. The announcers kept me company at night when I relaxed in my bathrobe in the chair and listened to the music of Maurice Ravel or Tchaikovsky, which the station was crazy about.

On top of one speaker was a wooden decoy my brother carved when I was in Denver getting sick. I carved him a decoy, too, for the same Christmas, but it did not survive the fall when his young son pushed it from its perch on his stair railing. My brother's decoy was bare wood while mine was painted with the colors of a drake mallard.

Between the two stereo speakers was my flat screen television which I paid \$100 for. It was not hooked to cable but to the antenna on the roof of the building. I got the networks--CBS, NBC, ABC, and PBS. I was not a TV watcher and watched only "60 Minutes," the news, and a bit of the game show, "Wheel of Fortune."



The stereo and television stood on a table I also bought with the stimulus money, and when it arrived and the deliverymen brought it in, I thought I had overdone it. They barely got the table in the front door of the building but set it up for free, although I went to the Speedway gas station next door to get some cash out of the ATM to pay them. On their way out of the elevator, I gave them each \$20.

The table and chair were made by Ashley, a furniture company from North Carolina noted for its quality, and between them was a little office chair I sat in when at my computer. I assembled the office chair myself. I read the instructions and got each bolt in the right hole with the Allen wrench provided. It had five wheels that locked into a star-shaped chrome base, and the chair was adjustable with the touch of a handle underneath it. It was rated to 250 pounds and rolled on the linoleum of my floor.

It stood at a metal table I commandeered from the office downstairs, and on each side of it were my bookcases filled with books I no longer read but kept for looks and memories, since my first heart attack robbed me of my love of reading. During the move, I threw out all the titles I did not want and kept the ones that had meaning for me. These included a lot of Hemingway books.



The view out the window was spectacular, and I could see the neon signs of Mickey's Diner and Famous Dave's, planes coming in for a landing at the airport, and the riverbank on which fog settled sometimes in the early morning.

On the kitchen counter was a bowl of coins I kept for the cooks who did my laundry. I put the few Christmas cards I got each year there, too. On top of the refrigerator was a Mexican fish made of wood and painted red, green, and pink. On the other counter was my microwave machine, one of the first ever sold, since my father loved gadgets and pioneered their use. A dish rack held dishes I washed when I felt like it.

Between the table that held my stereo and the kitchen counters was another table made for me by a man up north who claimed to be a Navy Seal and was impressed by my membership in the U.S. Army's Special Forces. He made the table out of oak, turning the pedestal on a lathe, and splicing and sanding several boards together for the table's surface. The table was beat up. I used to smoke at it before I quit, and cigarette burns dotted its veneer. Stacked on it were papers, mostly unnecessary, that I needed to throw away but had not.

Above the table were a hat rack made of deer antlers and a framed print of the "Desiderata." The hat rack held two green berets, one original that no longer fit me and the other bought for me by my brother for ceremonial occasions. My grandmother had placed a copy of "Desiderata" in the family Bible, and I bought a copy and hung it on the wall. "Go placidly amid the noise and the haste" were its first words.

At this table were four ice cream chairs, with wooden seats and wrought iron backs. My mother bought them for me when we

passed an antique store that displayed them out front. They were new. She paid \$100 for all four, and the store owner helped us put them in the back seat of our car.

The kitchen cabinets were pine, new, and installed when Obama got a stimulus bill passed through Congress to save the country from the effects of the Great Recession. We got new refrigerators and stoves, too, as well as windows that were thermal and soundproof. They closed with a clunk and fastened with a latch that locked them shut in a reassuring way, even in the winter.

We got new toilets that flushed like a tornado; an elephant could go down them and end up in the Gulf of Mexico. The toilets made a racket, flushed with a roar, and stayed sanitary due to the force of the water going through them. Due to their power, they never clogged.

I got a new shower stall because the tile in my old one leaked water onto the floor of the hallway, and the St. Paul Public Housing Agency was intent on giving us the best renovation possible. We got new shower heads with water so hot it had to be turned down to avoid scalding me. We got new florescent lights in the bathroom and kitchen and new light fixtures in the bedroom, at the front door, and on the living room wall.

We got all this to provide work for the contracting company that helped fuel the recovery of the nation. Semitrailers stood in our parking lot for a year as the workmen carried pipes, lights, and appliances into the building. They controlled one of our two elevators, and everyone waited their turn.

In my bedroom was a dresser I bought from the St. Vincent de Paul Store down the street that cost me \$80 plus \$40 to have delivered. It was made of cedar, and a big mirror came with it. On the mirror were photographs of my family. They were of my childhood and our lives before anything bad had happened to us.

Below the mirror was the certificate the chief of the St. Paul police gave me for giving a man CPR. He did not make it; the paramedics got a pulse on him, but he died before they began working on him. Next to the certificate was a picture I took of my parents prior to their first trip to Europe. They looked beat up, dismayed, as if wondering how life could give their oldest son a nervous breakdown.

The bed replaced one that I had carried around from apartment to apartment when I lived up north on welfare, unemployment compensation, and paid work. I never made enough to buy a good bed that gave me a good night's sleep. This bed cost me \$500

and was delivered by Macy's. It was like a cocoon that enveloped me in a cushion that only the Sandman could penetrate. A friend saw it and asked, "Who's the plutocrat?"

The windows in the bedroom and living room had blue drapes I bought at a department store and were washed by one of our cooks when I moved from an apartment down the hall, called a hotel suite, to my original apartment after the renovations were done. She put out my books, knowing which ones were precious to me, and placed my manger scene, given to me by a Mormon friend, on top of one shelf in a prominent location. Next to the manger scene she placed the Mexican santo I acquired from my mother after she moved into a nursing home.

On an end table next to the recliner were a lamp I made from an old oil lamp when I was at the start of my illness, a solid silver sugar bowl taken from the Union Pacific Railroad, an old carpenter's plane, a little wooden penguin given to me by my ex-AA sponsor, and a little wooden duck my cousin's daughter gave me from her family's trip to Africa. Next to the oil lamp was another Mexican fish painted orange, turquoise, and red. Our cook placed it there when she helped me unpack after the move back to my apartment, like she knew better than I where it belonged.

A lamp I made in grade school out of an old wooden mallard decoy stood on top of the bookshelf opposite the manger scene. On the metal table between the bookshelves, where I put my laptop, was a photograph of my family taken at a reunion at a resort up north when they surrounded me, a cast iron eagle I kept from somewhere, and boxes of business cards for the sale of my books that I never used.

Next to the photograph of my family was a framed, 10-year AA medallion, the watershed that indicated I had a chance of making it in long-term sobriety. Next to that was a \$10 gold piece given to me by my grandmother for my service in the Army. It was framed and she had cut some green felt to surround it.

My walls were covered with artwork--Cezanne, Van Gogh, Lichtenstein, and Ducks Unlimited prints. My cousin was an artist, and her gift to me at Christmas, of an abstract painting, stood below a DU print of two Canadian geese migrating south. My brother gave me two DU prints, signed and numbered by the artist. I had helped him roof his house when he was just starting out in life. The prints were cheap, except the signed ones, but the framing was pricey.

On one wall were dream catchers I made in a craft class at the

veterans' hospital to remember girlfriends I did not want to forget. That sounds like a circular way of saying something, but the entire apartment was devoted to the wellbeing of these women—my first girlfriend and two AA women in precarious health. The dream catchers—one brown, one white, and one little white one—were well made, with taut webbing for which I had a talent and feathers and beadwork. Next to them was a photograph of the Namekagon River near my hometown of Cable, Wisc., taken in the springtime when the snow was still on the banks.

The newest addition to memorabilia of my women was a candle made by a lady friend with whom I was not romantically involved but had become close to over time. It was tall, like a vase, painted with deep, rich colors, and a little wick was inside it. She gave it to me to keep me company when I was alone Thanksgiving due to Covid-19. I needed two more mementos to complete my retinue of women I loved.

When I opened the door to my apartment, I saw what was in the closet—a folding lawn chair for attending outside church services, my skis, ski boots, fishing pole, tackle box, and life vest. My gym bag with handball gloves lay on an ice cream chair. I hung up my coat on the coat rack.

It was a cozy apartment. All woes left me when I stepped into it, and it was home.

MARGARET SALLY KEACH MEMORIAL AWARD

What Veterans' Voices Means to Me

*By Daniel Paicopulos
—San Diego, CA*

A few years ago, some online poetic friends I have never met urged me to submit my work to *Veterans' Voices*. I had never been one for submissions, but I considered it another growth step in my later life.

Now, I am delighted to have made the choice to participate. For a long time, I had lived with the physical damage of a mortar assault, as well as PTSD and panic attack syndrome, including the remorse, shame, fears, and anger that accompany them, as well as cancer from Agent Orange exposure.

I had lived like this for decades until I finally accepted treatment, which provided me with coping skills and the ability to more

openly and positively express myself. It was followed by additional personal and spiritual development in what some might refer to as churches or spiritual centers, sort of a graduate school after therapy.

One side benefit was a dramatic improvement in my writing, which became more focused, truthful, and honest. When one is as imperfect as I, it takes a lot of guts to try to spread hope, inspire faith, promote love, and go for broke on what matters to the Spirit above.

It can be breathtaking, even alarming, to listen to one's echoes, consult one's memories. It might even be surprising to recall that which was forgotten, admitting that it was suppressed. It can be staggering to say out loud, those words based on reality, ones rooted in blood and bone, in heart and mind.

So, one writes in order to discover what one does not know how to say. It is necessary to go to the center, to the hot, steaming core, to get face to face with grief, sorrow, love, and to ask oneself, "What am I not willing to reveal, and if I reveal it, share it with others who understand, how will it contribute? Will my words make a difference?"

As I write this acknowledgment today, I have become a man of many words, but I don't have enough of them to adequately express my gratitude for the existence of *Veterans' Voices*, a safe place for veterans of all stripes to participate, a haven in which to continue to grow, alongside my sisters and brothers.



Chance Meeting the Man Who Saved My Life

By David Cook
—Crown Point, IN

The chances of this happening to anyone are slim to none. Call it fate or a miracle, but it happened to me. And it brings tears to my eyes every time I think about it.

It was the summer of 2019. My wife and our three kids were vacationing in Florida. We had been playing on the beach at Daytona Beach when the sun began to set. It was time to go back to the hotel. We gathered our belongings and began our walk from the soft sand and up the stairway to the hotel pool. That's when we approached a couple enjoying their evening.

The man seemed to fix his eyes on me. I was shirtless, and my tattoo of military police cross pistols was in plain sight. As I passed him, he asked when I served. I told him I was in Iraq from November 2007 to January 2009. He asked where in Iraq. I told him that my platoon was satellite in Diwaniyah for 10 months, and then we went back to the company in Al Kut.

As the conversation continued, he asked what company I was with. I told him that I was a gunner with the 511th MP company. His reply was "Yeah, I know that company."

He asked if I remembered the call sign "Ghost." I replied, "Hell yeah, I remember it." Then he said that was him. He was a well-known sniper outlook for us when we were on missions.

He said he recognized my face. I started to get a funny feeling in my stomach. He said that he had seen me through his scope and that he had saved my life by shooting an Iraqi who was about to shoot me. My heart dropped and I started to tear up. I grabbed him and gave him the biggest hug and thanked him profusely.

When I look back to my time in Iraq, I can remember one time when I first got there that I saw a guy on a bridge. When I returned to the bridge after scanning the rest of my sector, he was gone.

To meet someone on vacation who saved your life in the service is a once in a lifetime experience that not too many veterans can say they lived. If it were not for Ghost, I would not have been able to tell this story.



The First Story - Memories

*By Robert Opekun
—New Haven, CT*

It was about May 1951, and the draft numbers were close to my number. I did not want to go into the Army, so I went to a recruiting office in town and signed up for the Navy.

After a few questions, they told me to go to the New Haven railroad station at a certain time and what train to take to Grand Central Terminal in New York City. There I was greeted by Navy personnel along with a few other men. Our names were on a roster sheet. We were mustered together, and we got on another train that took us to Bainbridge, Md. There we got off and made our way to the Navy boot camp.

Once at the camp, we got a quick physical and received uniforms, bedding, and a canvas sea bag. We learned quickly how to live out of the sea bag. At 6 the next morning our training started. Up, dressed, and marched to breakfast, then to school and more marching to lunch, then back to school, and then dinner. After dinner, back to the barracks to prepare for the next day. We learned discipline, respect, responsibility, and facts about Navy life.

Time went on; the days came and went. I forgot about everything, forgot about girls. I almost believed that they did not even exist.

Before I knew it, graduation day was approaching. On that day, I marched with my company to graduation, and we marched in the graduation ceremonies. After that we received our first rank. Many sailors got white stripes; they were seamen. I received green stripes; I was in the aviation department. We were then referred to as outgoing personnel and transferred to another part of the base.

This was about a two-week period while we waited for our orders to be printed to know where we would be sent for active duty. We

did odd jobs and stood guard duty. On my turn for guard duty, I had to walk from the barracks to the main gate and back.

While walking on the side of the road next to a wire fence on my left, I reached the top of an incline and spotted a person coming toward me on the other side of the fence. As we came closer, I suddenly realized the person was a girl. I also realized that she wore a Navy uniform. She was a WAVE stationed at the nearby camp.

We kept walking closer and closer, our eyes fixed on each other's. We stopped, eye to eye and nose to nose, the fence between us.

We did not utter a word. We stood there for what seemed to be an eternity. I don't remember taking a breath.

We then turned; she went her way, and I went mine.

I don't know who she is.

I don't know where she lives.

I do know that as long as I live, I will remember that moment. I wonder if she also remembers.

An Introduction to Last a Lifetime

*By Shon Pernice
—Moberly, MO*

Working in a level-one trauma emergency room, you witness unnatural deaths that are shielded from public view. When you get baptized by your first adolescent death and get to know them at that hour, their essence attaches itself to you for the rest of your life. I cannot shake her memory or the experience. I still see her when she visits me in my dreams or in a glimpse out of the corner of my eye. Her story must be told.

In the late 90s, I worked the 7 p.m.-to-7 a.m. shift as an emergency room technician. One night, an ambulance call punctuated the emergency system radio. An adolescent trauma code was coming in hot (lights and siren). Over the radio, I could hear the siren wailing, the constant horn demanding that traffic get out of the way, and the extreme sense of urgency in the paramedic's voice. Those medics were playing chess with God and just got checked in a corner of life's precious board.

The young girl was rushed in on a stretcher while CPR was being performed. She was intubated, and her breathing was being performed manually. The cardiac monitor was erratic and unreadable while the chest compressions were being performed



with a sense of urgency. She was moved onto the ER bed, and our medical team took over. We fought for her life. We had never met this 12-year-old girl, had no clue of her background, and yet her life was just as valuable to us as our own child. That was our job.

After we exhausted every life-saving tool and maneuver we had with experience, the emergency room doctor observed brain matter leaking out of her left ear. CPR was halted to observe the cardiac monitor and look for spontaneous heart activity. We held our breath hoping for a miracle. Instead, the time of death was announced.

ER medical workers and trauma teams have attitudes. We go for the win every time. I have witnessed some miraculous comebacks from death. We do not get attached because when we bring them back, or sustain life, we transfer care to surgery or another department to fix whatever brought them to us. We high-five when we do the impossible, and lament to God when things do not work out in our favor.

After the time-of-death was called, the trauma team departed. Usually, a nurse and a technician clean up, perform post-mortem care, and complete paperwork. Nurse Carla and I stayed back for this duty. We received word that family was in the waiting room. As Antoinette lay naked on the cot, we cleaned up the blood and brain matter and tried our best to make her look as presentable as possible. I grabbed a clean white sheet and covered her up to her chin. She still had the IV tubing attached to her body. I removed the cardiac wires and shut off the monitor to remove

one more mechanical confirmation of death. As I was performing my duties, Antoinette's grandma stepped into the trauma room.

Grandma walked in slowly and looked over her loved one as if she had been through this before. Apparently, our preparation of Antoinette passed her inspection. Carla and I stood silently about six feet away to offer support. Sometimes, family members fainted at the sight of death, and we always had to be prepared for that.

Grandma started to tell us about 12-year-old Antoinette, whose life we had just fought for. She had attended church services earlier that day and sang in the choir. She was an A student and wanted to be a doctor when she grew up. Antoinette was going to fix dinner for her grandpa. Her trauma was the result of crossing a busy street after picking up groceries with her father. Both were wearing dark clothing. Their clothing and a vehicle's high rate of speed were a bad combination.

In the Emergency Medical System line of work, a dead body is just that—dead. You shut off the emotion and perform the task at hand with no feelings or emotional attachment. That is how you survive emotionally. Antoinette was brought in dead—non-breathing, no heart activity or brain function. Now, grandma had just brought Antoinette to life in front of me. I felt my body react to the words that my soul absorbed. I started to tear up. My stomach felt twisted, and I saw how glossy Carla's eyes were too. Then my tears broke the emotional dam and ran down my cheeks, collecting on my light green scrub top. In a shaky voice, I excused myself and escaped to the nearby X-ray control center. Carla followed right behind me. I was overwhelmed with sadness as we cried together and grieved over the loss of that beautiful child.

Due to patient privacy, stories like this are locked away in emotional vaults. They sometimes peek at us through copious amounts of alcohol and awaken us from sleep. Despite self-medication, counseling, or confessionals, death still pops up when you least expect it. Your dreams, thoughts, and various other moments in your life are forever affected.

In the ER, stickers are made to label lab specimens and patient records. I kept one of Antoinette's stickers for more than 15 years. I cannot explain the attachment, purpose, or the unprocessed feelings. I am writing this story hoping to let Antoinette rest, give purpose to her death, and educate others what front line medical workers face every day.

Full Circle

By Jim Barker
—Keaau, HI

It was the spring of 1989. Dateline: Vietnam.

This is about a surviving veteran's return, as a member of a private delegation to advocate for the rights and release of Amerasian children and their mothers. As visual reminders of the war, their social status was commonly described as "the precipitate distilled after water is poured through garbage."

The first stop was to be Hanoi in adherence to diplomatic protocol. It felt like walking toward the mouth of an unpredictable dragon. For three days before the flight, sleep was almost negligible. Memories and emotions were being revived which caused me to experience a tsunami of energy.

My international flight touched down at Noi Bai Airport. The humidity was pronounced, as it was the advent of the rainy season. In the mix of hyper-anticipation and fatigue, I quickly found a shuttle and proceeded toward town to join my colleagues. The road was like an elevated dike with rice fields below, glowing in incandescent green.

The motel was located on the bank of Hanoi's West Lake. I had brought along running shoes and was eager to take an independent tour of the area. The colony and chorus of frogs nearby screeched at such elevated decibels that any immediate thought of sleep was impractical.



I set forth on a casual run in the direction of the airport. Farmers and other local people were returning on their bikes from their day's labor. Noticing my foreign features, people soon started shouting in Vietnamese "Russian! Russian!" Feeling affronted by these declarations, I turned to a particularly obnoxious cyclist and responded in Vietnamese to his shock and surprise, "Look, do I seem arrogant, intoxicated and overweight? I am American!"

Sometime later, returning to the motel area, I noticed a lighted tennis court and some men volleying. Seating myself on a bench next to a man of similar age, we almost immediately became engaged in a friendly dialogue. I was invited to play with the others but declined, curious to get more acquainted with this friendly fellow.

As we conversed in his northern dialect, his private world began to unfold, particularly when we recognized we were both war veterans. Our exchange reached the level where I could ask him if he had gone on missions into the South. He replied his unit had ambushed convoys at times. His job was firing a rocket-propelled grenade. I further asked if he was a skilled shooter. He replied that he had made some hits, that he was accomplished at his job. This caused an internal shiver and a galvanic skin response. I then realized he was not gloating about the experience of creating casualties to South Vietnamese military or Americans; he was simply stating he was a good marksman.

He then disclosed his life aspiration.

"I am writing a play that I hope will be accepted. The main characters are two American soldiers and two Vietnamese village girls. There became a time when an American group of soldiers came into combat by a village far in the countryside. After the fighting, one soldier abducted and assaulted a young pretty girl. After finishing with her, he took her life. The other soldier, noticing the potential danger to the other village girl, protected her from possible violation. Sometime later on another operation, the soldier who had committed the crime died his own savage death. The noble soldier survived and ultimately returned home.

"After the passage of years his heart would not allow him to forget his experiences, particularly the special village girl. He then made a journey back to Vietnam, was able to locate the village, and fortunately found the girl, now a mature young lady. Both had retained deep memories and sentiments. Together united, they pledged their lives in marriage and returned to America."

In reflective summary he stated, "You know in war, the only levels that profit are those above us."

Acceptance

By C. L. Nemeth

VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

The gate was open. She walked through it and started up the hill. Then, stepping off the sidewalk, she walked across the grass and into a grove of trees. Dawn was just breaking, no wind but cold. The snow crunched under her boots.

Doris Wilcox, a slight lady in her eighties, shivered as she began to crest the small hill. She stopped and stood next to a blue spruce as the dark began to give way to light. She gasped as she saw row after row of gravestones. They marched over the hills, filled the small vales, line after line of identical white gravestones.

“Oh my,” she said aloud. “There must be thousands of them, I never dreamed,” and she began to cry. She had to grasp a tree branch to keep from falling. The tears ran like rivers down her cheeks. Doris could not move. She continued to look at the rows of graves. She dried her eyes with a tissue, wiped her face, then drew a folded paper from her purse. She started down the hill.

Moving toward the rows to her left she found a cinder path running beside the rows, small placards indicated the row numbers, and she found the row as indicated on the paper. Putting the paper back in her purse, she began to walk down the row of graves, reading the names as she slowly proceeded. She had climbed a hill, then into a small vale, up again. Just over the crest she found the one:

Herbert Wilson Willcox

Master Sergeant United States Marine Corps

May 14, 1959-October 5, 1981

She stood, just staring at the grave. Then she bent down and traced the letters and numbers with her fingers. Tears formed again. She wiped her eyes. No, I'm finished with crying.

“Herb, your father and I loved you so much. Maybe we loved too much. That's why you were taken from us, our only child. Too soon, too soon.”

Friends and relatives had given her this trip to Washington and Arlington National Cemetery. She had decided several years ago that she would never be able to make the trip. Her husband, Jerry, was now gone also. She had herself. Just herself.

I bade him farewell and wished him best of success in having his play well received. It was a personal revelation that in spite of global conflicts, individual bonds can be forged that transcend institutions and ideologies.

Returning to the motel fatigued yet euphoric, I entered a late-hours bar and snack shop. I was the sole American in the large room filled with Soviet and Eastern European engineers and technicians. Tobacco smoke hung in the air while the customers were absorbed in their own conversations and strong beverages.

I approached the ladies covering the kitchen, who politely stated it was already closed. As our conversation in Vietnamese evolved to their great delight and surprise, they managed to produce some rice and eggs. Payment was refused. So here I was being feted and liked by North Vietnamese citizens as their former enemy, in contrast to the sullen and private Eastern Bloc personnel who were supposed to be their friends.

Now, this veteran can state that the expression of the heart is the most powerful weapon for peace in the world.

Friendly Fire

By Kenny Trujillo

VA Medical Center—Phoenix, AZ

I experienced it in Vietnam—an “ambush,” set up by my own comrades.

I was talking with this one soldier about money needs, and I gave him a \$20 bill just to help him out.

He happened to notice that I had a few more \$20 bills on me. So, he went back to his set-up location, and I could hear him tell his other buddies that they were going to wait until I was asleep. Then one of them was going to sneak up on me and stab me with a knife, take the rest of my money, and make it look like the enemy had come across our perimeter and killed me.

Later, one of them came over to me and thought I was asleep. When he was over me, I made a grunting sound to indicate I was awake.

He went back to his location to tell the others I was still awake and they'd have to wait longer until I was asleep.

By the grace of God and “friendly fire,” I stayed awake until the next morning.



She wanted to sit. The walk had tired her. She couldn't leave yet. She wanted to stay here with Herb for a while.

She knelt on the lush grass. Carefully she pulled the long grass stems from around the gravestone. Somehow, she felt calmer, and she relaxed as she looked out over the rows. Then she grasped the gravestone and pulled herself to her feet. She would walk down the row. Stopping at each one she read the name, birthday, and death day. After climbing another hill, she saw a bench at the end of the row. She sat.

"All these young people, dead before their time. Before they could love, have children, and be happy. All these years I've been sorry for myself, and look at all the mothers and fathers with sons here."

She sat quietly, somehow, she felt more content, more at ease. More people were now coming down the rows, stopping at a grave. Some cried loudly, some wailed, others just stood. A man came down the walk, stopped and tipped his hat.

"Would you mind if I sat here?"

"No, no, I guess I could use the company right now."

"Are you visiting someone, oh, where's my manners? My name is John Van Camp."

"And I'm Doris Willcox. So nice to meet you."

"It's going to be a nice day," he said. "I'm so glad. I worried it would be too cold to come out here. I'll be leaving tomorrow."

Doris took a look at the man. He was about her age, she guessed, harder and harder to tell one's age. His hair was white, blue eyes, His face was blue from a heavy beard.

"Where are you from?"

He looked at her and smiled. "Salina, Kansas. I come here every few years. My wife is over there beyond those trees. And you?"

"Billings, Montana. This is my first time here. I don't think I will be able to come back."

John took a pipe out of his coat pocket and held it up.

"Do you mind?"

"No, in fact I enjoyed it when my husband smoked, it has been a long time since I smelled pipe smoke."

He slowly packed tobacco into the bowl, tamped it down, then produced a match and lit it. He sighed. She smiled.

"May I ask? Could you tell me about your, eh, son?"

"Yes, my son, Herb. He was a Marine. He had just made master sergeant and was killed by a sniper in Uganda. He was our only child. It all seems to be so pointless."

She waved her hand toward the graves in front of them.

"One word keeps going around and around in my mind," she said. "Why?"

She started to cry. John sat silently as she sobbed. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and offered it to her. She took it, dried her eyes, looked out over the graves and then turned to John.

"Thank you," she said, "I appreciate your silence and patience."

"You've done nothing I've not done myself many times. Mildred, my wife is here, as I said. She was a nurse, one of the first to go to Vietnam. She was killed by a grenade thrown into a hospital window. So senseless, so senseless."

He sat smoking; Doris felt sorrow for him. She did not know this man, yet she sorrowed over his loss. She sat upright.

"May I call you John? John would you please show me where your wife is lying? I would like to meet her."

"Of course, but it's a little walk over there, I'd hate to tire you out."

Doris stood, patting down her coat as she said, "I will have plenty of time to get tired when I get home. I came to see my son; I could never be tired of doing that."

John emptied his pipe, stood, and she took his arm. They began to walk slowly up the hill and over.

John led her down the row, then stopped and pointed.

"Doris, this is my wife, Mildred. Mill, she has a son here, not too far away."

“So glad to meet you Mildred,” Doris said. “Your husband and I met just a few minutes ago. He asked me to come and meet you. And we will visit my son, Herb, next.”

Hatless, John stood. Doris still held his arm.

They stood for many minutes. Doris noticed that John’s lips were moving. She dropped her head and prayed silently.

John broke the silence. “We never had any children, Mildred wanted them so bad but it never happened. Do you have any other children?”

Doris slowly shook her head. She tugged lightly on his arm, and they began to walk down the row. They turned onto the walkway and crested a small hill.

She found the correct row, and when they reached the marker she stopped and pointed. John stooped and read. Shaking his head, he stood erect.

“My God,” he said, “22 years old. He had his whole life in front of him. You have every right in the world to cry. What a shame.”

They stood silently. Doris looked down the rows of stones, then sighed.

“John, how many graves are there in this cemetery?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “This has been here for a long time. Someone told me that there was at least one burial every day, sometimes a lot more. How many like us have walked these rows and stood before a marker? It just seems so wrong, so unjust, somehow, to cut off the lives of these people. I used to break down for days, I even tried booze, nothing eased the pain. But

finally, over the years I have concluded that I, and Mildred, and, yes, Herb, are victims for something we could not control. All we can do is remember and move on. That’s so easy to say.”

Doris turned and stood in front of him.

“I feel so bad for you. I had my husband, and he had me. We spent time going over what we could have done differently. We, I, came to the same place that you did. All we can do is live out our lives.”

Doris took her cell phone and snapped several pictures of the grave. Then they started back, down the row and onto the walk. As they walked for some distance, John stopped at a bench and they sat. He pulled out his pipe, filled it, tamped it, lit it and sat back.

“May I ask where you’re staying?” he asked.

“I’m at the Mayfair, it’s the closest hotel from here, and you?”

“Yep, Mayfair too. Now, I would like to invite you to lunch if you don’t think I’m too forward. Please say yes.”

Doris looked at him and smiled. She touched his arm.

“That’s so nice of you. Yes, lunch sounds fine. This cold weather has made me hungry.”

One nice lady, thought John as he hailed a cab.

Doris watched John and asked herself, “Who would have ever thought I would meet such a nice man in a cemetery?”

DAVA, STATE DEPT. OF KANSAS AWARD

Boot Camp in ‘56

*By Kent Scott
—Midlothian, VA*

A question I have been asked through the years is: What was boot camp like when you went through?

I’m thinking about the hell the Gunny and his assistants put our platoon through. At first, he and his assistants really tested our mettle. If we did something good enough, it was not fast enough. If we did it fast enough, it was not good enough. It was a time when bed racks were dumped, foot lockers were turned over, and buckets of sand and dirt were thrown on the floors that didn’t pass inspection.

Lots of anger was displayed by the Drill Instructors. If you stuttered or stammered when asked to recite a General Order,





you got to beach crawl in the sand and dirt on your stomach in your spit-shined boots while dragging your M-1 rifle on which you had labored so hard rubbing a high linseed oil sheen on the walnut stock. Lord help you if they found a speck of dirt or rust on your rifle or bayonet. It was a time of “I can’t hear you!” and “Do it again!” If you didn’t happen to shave close enough, it sure was fun dry-shaving while running in place with a bucket on your head. The blood flowed freely.

That’s the way it was way back in ’56. You did push-ups until your arms felt like they would fall off, then jumped up to go run the “grinder” until you thought your lungs would burst. Things then calmed down as you did simple close-order drill to cool down for a few minutes of relief. A head call was announced. And wouldn’t you know it, the head call was hurried and supervised. It was squeeze it off, wipe it or shake it, and get your ass back to the formation. The names of the last three recruits to fall in were taken down. The punishment would be determined later, after the run or runs on the obstacle course.

You finished with the obstacle course and you were so tired you felt like you would drop. On the march back to the home area you learned the Drill Instructor’s expectations. “Look sharp. Stop that bobbing up and down like you’re walking over corn rows. Heels! Heels! Heels! You’re not giving me what I want, girls! I will get what I want! The Marine Corps says I have to put you girls to bed at 22:00 hours. They give me free reign on the other end of the day. Tomorrow morning you will be waking up 30 minutes earlier. The last bunch I had like you ended up doing close order drill at 03:30 hours. You better think about that and give me what I want. Is perfection too much to ask?”

It took about four weeks of rained-down hell to get our spirits to that low ebb. A normal platoon would take three weeks.

Now it was time to put us back together, to rebuild our character and establish the esprit de corps that the Marine Corps was

famous for, where things like protecting the Constitution and country became greater than one’s self, and where the discipline was so good that the responses to orders were instantaneous and immediate—reactions completely necessary to have a good military organization. The Marine Corps of course, was not just a good military organization. It was a great military organization. Some say the best.

DAVID A. ANDREWS, JR. MEMORIAL AWARD

The Last Nam Vet

By Richard Wangard

VA Medical Center—Appleton, WI

It is our turn now. As time goes by, it will claim all of us for God’s great armed force. Already 2.5 million of my brothers and some very brave sisters have formed up in heaven.

Where else would a vet go? Sacrifice, duty, honor, love of country, the brotherhood and sisterhood, knowing how important the person next to you is, being a part of something bigger than yourself, following lawful orders, and taking action to save someone while not even thinking of yourself.

So, about 500,000 of us are left to carry on and remember and honor all those vets who have gone before us and for us. Every day is Veterans Day. Now I ask you all: Where would our country be without service, without anyone to take the oath? There would not be a country.

The only vet the country turned its back on was the Nam vet. That still hurts me to this day, but I have forgiven long ago. Now the country treats all of us who are left very well. “Thank you for your service,” they say. I appreciate that, but somehow and some way it rings empty and way too late.

Maybe PTSD--a lifetime of different struggles, coping, and no filters--still has me in a bitter mood. I have improved much, done my best, carried on.

I do not fear joining my brothers and sisters, for time stops for all of us sooner or later. I will not be The Last Nam Vet. All those who have gone before us; it’s awesome. All the way back to the Revolutionary War. Love of country, sacrifice, putting it all on the line. Why do men and women do that? They do it for you and me and this country.

Then after, they fade into history. But, thank God, nobody forgets!

A Halloween for Heroes

By *Shon Pernice*

—*Moberly, MO*

It was the end of September 2007 at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Grizzly, Iraq, and it was becoming the deadliest year in that country for U.S. troops. FOB Grizzly lost two Marines killed in action, and the medical team had treated a large number of traumatic injuries. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were the main cause of our dismay. Morale was low, and as the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Troop Medical Clinic (TMC), I needed to think outside the sandbox on ways to improve the soldiers' spirits.

Halloween was the next holiday at home. We would reflect on what we would be doing—trick-or-treating with our children, dressing up in costumes, or having a get-together. Why couldn't we do that here? I mean, on a modified scale to where it was safe, fun, and "normal." I wanted to bring some normalcy to an abnormal situation while showing the coalition forces embedded with us what we do in the United States. I had the idea; now I needed a plan. It was time for a meeting with TMC medical team.

Serving with female medics played a crucial role in the brainstorming phase. Some were mothers and knew just what to do. At first there was some skepticism. However, one medic came up with the golden idea to make candy ghosts. We would take tissue paper, put some candy in the center, twist the tissue to form a head, tie it off, and draw faces with a marker. The idea alone was worth an Army Achievement Medal.

We needed to pool some money for the candy. As we rotated out on convoy missions to LSA Anaconda at Balad, the medics could pick up candy at the base exchange. With limited room in the armored humvees and the amount of candy we needed, it took several trips. I also had to hope that candy would be in stock; in a combat zone, there is no guarantee of comfort food or leisure items.

Next, I had to get permission to utilize the TMC for an unofficial event—a haunted house. It would take place in the dark. The TMC was protected by t-walls to absorb the impact of any mortar shells or missiles. The medical team would all be present in case of any emergencies. We would only decorate the front entry and waiting area inside the TMC.

The medical officer in charge cautiously granted permission, so long as there was little noise and no alcohol. Some of our

supporters and family members back home sent decorations, lights, and fake spider webbing. A large greenish bowl was acquired to hold candy.

On the evening of Oct. 31, we decorated the entry way of the TMC. Candy ghosts were made, and our large bowl overflowed with assorted treats. These were the treasures from the Western world. Some of our coalition forces may have been superstitious about ghosts, so I wanted to avoid any cultural offenses by having the candy grab bowl.

As the medics and other guests began to arrive, I noticed that our limited resources for costumes brought out creativity. One female medic was a cat. She put on her black, silky cold weather undergarment that consisted of a snug fitting shirt and pants. She used black face paint to draw whiskers and blackened her nose. A soldier used his black cold-weather gear to portray a ninja, complete with a black headband. Another soldier was a clown by utilizing face paint and lipstick. I have no idea where the multicolored afro wig came from.

People funneled through our haunted pathway to the TMC entry. There was amazement on many faces, looks of wonder, and some good laughs. A couple of Bulgarian soldiers arrived. They did not speak English and were a bit confused about what we were celebrating. Nonetheless, they smiled and thanked us for the candy.

A military police battalion executive officer showed her face. Everyone was behaving, and I am sure it was just a welfare check. This was one of those moments during the war that despite the daily stressors we faced, the TMC medical team came through to mend the minds and spirits of the American guardians of freedom.

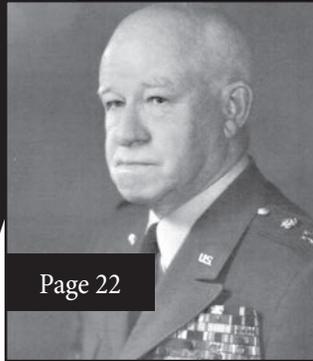


(Prose continued on Page 38)



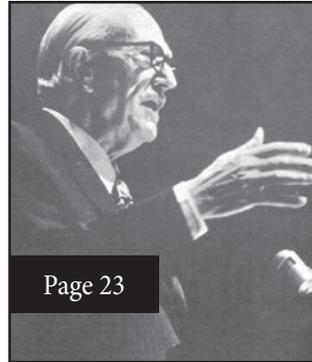
From its founding in 1946, Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project quickly grew in reputation and popularity among veterans and those trying to help them deal with the personal aftershocks of World War II. The organization (now Veterans Voices Writing Project) drew even more accolades and admiration after the creation of *Veterans' Voices* magazine in 1952. Since then, numerous prominent politicians, military leaders and other celebrities have written for the magazine to praise its mission and to encourage veterans to write.

As VVWP observes its Diamond Jubilee this year, the following section contains a sampling from some of those notable guest contributors.



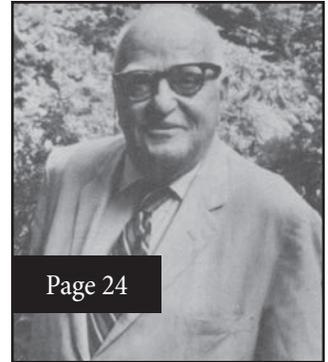
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Gen. Omar Bradley
Winter/Early Spring 1974



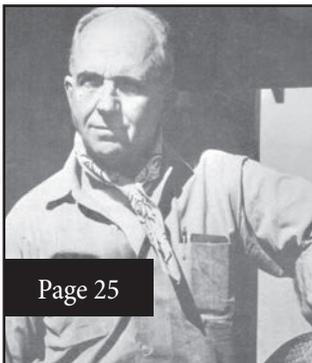
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Dr. Karl Menninger
Summer 1974



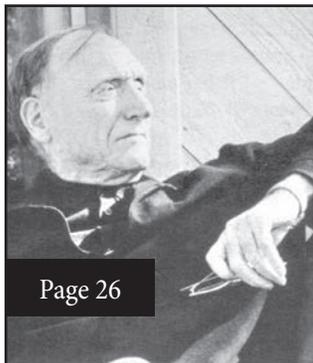
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Thornton Wilder
Winter 1974



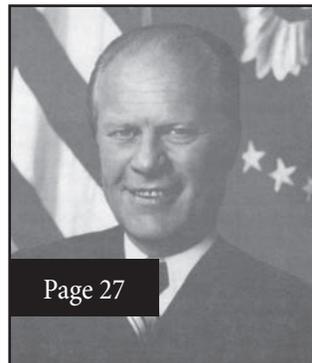
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James Michener
Spring 1975



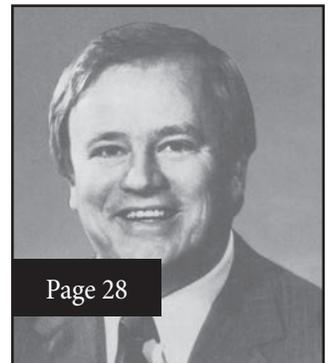
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Robert Penn Warren
Spring 1976



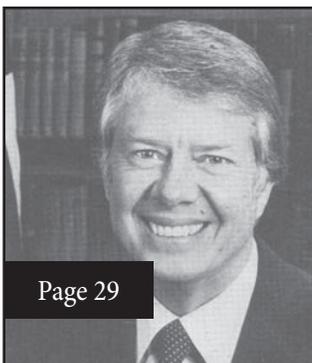
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President Gerald Ford
Summer 1976



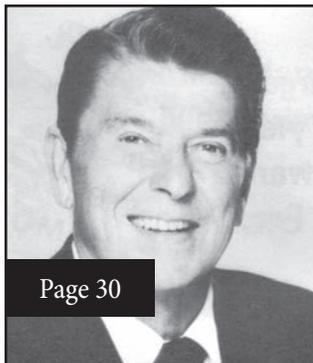
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VA Administrator Max Cleland
Fall 1977



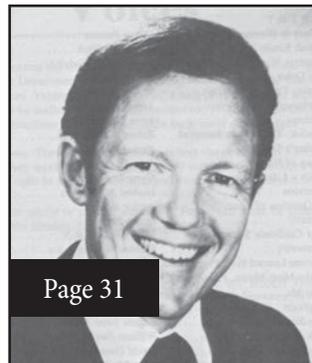
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President Jimmy Carter
Fall 1977



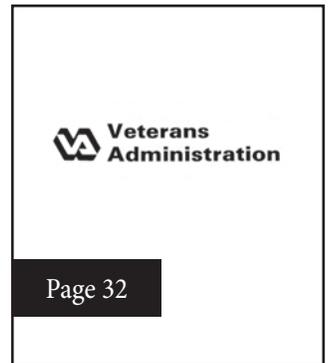
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President Ronald Reagan
Spring 1982



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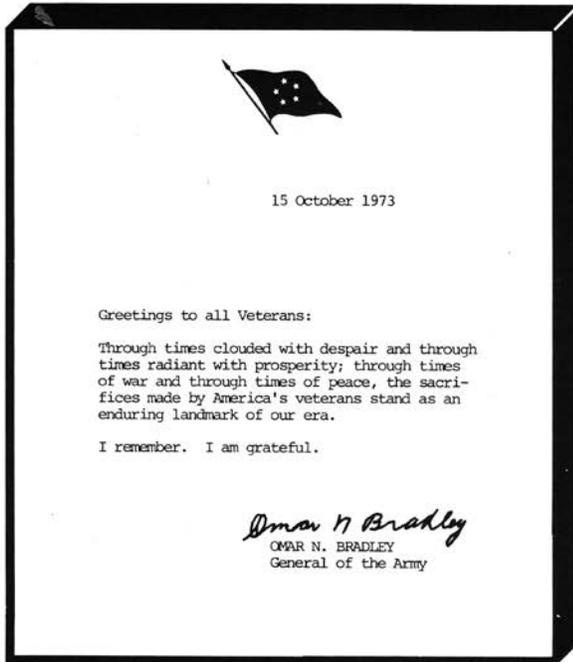
Charlie Plumb
Spring 1984



Page 32

VA Administrator Thomas Turnage
Summer 1988

AMERICA'S ONLY LIVING FIVE-STAR GENERAL SALUTES VETERANS



SPECIAL MESSAGE TO HOSPITALIZED VETERANS

"I cannot recommend too strongly your participation in this writing project. Whether you possess a great deal of talent or just a little, you can gain something from it. Even those who think they have no ability along this line may find they have under-rated themselves.

"The winning of a prize is of minor importance. Far exceeding this pleasure is the sense of accomplishment that comes with the effective communication of one's thoughts.

"Writing is a hobby that requires no expensive equipment, and the field for discussion is as limitless as the bounds of your imagination. You may find ideas just by observing those around you.

"If you will try your hand at writing and exercise your imagination, you may be surprised at the facility you can develop.

"Writing will improve your speech, increase your vocabulary, make your reading more enjoyable, and enhance your ability to communicate with others. All these are ample rewards.

"Won't you try your luck? I think you will find it a satisfying experience.

—OMAR N. BRADLEY, *General of the Army*

ABOUT GENERAL BRADLEY

In 1960, General Bradley judged personal essays from hospitalized veterans on how creative writing helps a veteran and fellow patients or how the use of a typewriter aids rehabilitation. Temple, Texas; Wood, Wisconsin; Dayton, Ohio; Los Angeles, California; Memphis, Tennessee; Iowa City, Iowa; and Muskogee, Oklahoma veterans won.

In 1946, when HVWP began, General Bradley was Administrator for Veterans Affairs.

Today in 1974 he continues to be vitally concerned, serving as a member of the HVWP Greater Service Committee.

DR. KARL MENNINGER
Noted Psychiatrist and Author
IS OUR GUEST EDITOR



VETERANS' VOICES has persistently brought to light some of the thoughts put to paper by our veterans. That wonderful man, our beloved Omar Bradley, urges in his article that every veteran try writing something even though he thinks he can't. I agree. Many people who have become great writers didn't think they could write. And some people try, but get discouraged too easily. There are thoughts in everyone which would be better shared by other people, and one way to do that is to put them in writing. Now it's been made easier for us all. Why not take advantage of the opportunity?

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dr. Karl".

**THE CRITERIA OF
EMOTIONAL MATURITY**

HAVING the ability to deal constructively with reality

HAVING the capacity to adapt to change

HAVING a relative freedom from symptoms that are produced by tensions and anxieties

HAVING the capacity to find more satisfaction in giving than receiving

HAVING the capacity to relate to other people in a consistent manner with mutual satisfaction and helpfulness

HAVING the capacity to sublimate, to direct one's instinctive hostile energy into creative and constructive outlets

HAVING the capacity to love.

William C. Menninger, M.D.
1899-1966

About Dr. Menninger:

Dr. Karl Menninger has been a member of our National Greater Services Committee for years. His new book, "Whatever Became of Sin?" emphasizes the thought that religion should solve many mental problems if the clergy of our country were bolder in speaking out on sin.

Why Write for the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project?

Thornton Wilder

writer, scholar, teacher,
veteran of World Wars I and II,
tells why

- To discover within yourself a gradually increasing mastery over language;
- To learn the enjoyment of expressing thoughts and emotions more exactly;
- To find an outlet for joys and fears, for hopes and discouragements, for laughter and prayer;
- To join the fellowship of thousands of hospitalized veterans, men and women, who are writing for the project;
- To open your eyes to the writings of others, the difficulties they've had, the fun they've had;
- To give pleasure to others from your heart and your mind;
- And – maybe – to discover in yourself a talent that you can cultivate to be a big talent.

*We writers all began somewhere – shyly,
insecurely – but we stuck to it.*

Try it!
Begin now!
And God help you!



Jill Krementz

Here is your personal lesson from the winner of three Pulitzer Prizes who considers himself a "school teacher turned writer."* We wish his greeting could be reproduced exactly as he, stopping work on his eighth novel, expertly phrased and penned it.

Described as a "despairful optimist," Thornton Wilder urges all who feel they cannot go on "to keep on making the movements of life," as these will sustain them.

In his latest best seller, *Theophilus North*, the author tells of teaching writing to 400 paraplegic or amputee veterans.

Will any former Wilder student in a school or hospital class write us? All hospitalized veterans, inspired by Thornton Wilder's message, are invited to send their original writing, through their local hospital, to HVWP.

–The Editors

*Wilder titles include *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, *Our Town*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and *The Matchmaker* (from which the popular play "Hello, Dolly" evolved).

If I Were A Hospitalized Veteran . . .

JAMES MICHENER, author of *South Pacific*, *Hawaii*, *The Drifters*, *Iberia*, *Centennial*, among his 21 books, writes:

If I were a veteran with a good story to tell, and were for the time being in a hospital, I would do these things:

First, I would haunt the hospital library to read good books by the best writers available so as to see for myself what they had been able to accomplish in using words.

Second, I would try to meet in the hospital or in the surrounding community, any writers who were already being published, because they would be able to give me help.

Third, I would discuss with my hospital mates, not ideas about writing, but ideas about human existence. I am not very keen about sharing my writing ideas with other people, but I do want to know what makes them tick and thus learn most of the psychological bases for human action.

Fourth, I would work very hard to get something that I had written into print, so that I could experience for myself what it means to be a writer. I think a little success at the beginning of one's career is apt to make the whole difference.

I say these things with certain enthusiasm because I, myself, am a veteran. I did want to write my

"For this is the journey that men make to find themselves. If they fail in this, it doesn't matter what else they find . . . But if a man happens to find himself – if he knows what he can be depended upon to do . . . the secret reservoirs of his determination, the depth of his feeling for beauty, his honest and unpostured goals – he has found a mansion which he can inhabit with dignity all the days of his life."

—James Michener in *The Fires of Spring*

" . . . the most constructive work of the world is done by an appallingly small percentage of the general population. The rest simply don't give a damn . . . or they grow tired . . . or they failed to acquire when young ideas that would revitalize them . . . I believe it to be an honorable aspiration to want to be among the creators."

—James Michener in *Readers' Digest*,
October 1974, pp. 193-196



Photo: Tessa J. Dalton

Veteran writers: Note author's pen and notebook!

military experience as I recalled, and I did some of the things I am suggesting that you do.

This veteran-writer served in the Navy in the South Pacific during World War II. He says he wrote nothing before he was 40 as he was "trying to find what he believed in." Now he believes America will come through any crisis because, "battle-scarred with honorable wounds . . . with our capacity to learn from experience," we will be guided by the needs of the commoner people, the Constitution, the Congress, and the courts.

With 25 essays on politics, travel, sports in *A Michener Miscellany*, the author shows how he developed ideas for books.

Following his four suggestions, beginners or writers can use the VA Library; contact Recreation or Educational Therapy, VA Volunteers or HVWP Writing Aides for HVWP information; talk with other veterans; and learn how selected writing can be submitted to VETERANS' VOICES. Hospital and local papers, veterans', religious, and trade magazines also often welcome veterans' writing.

—The Editors



Photo by Michael V. Carlisle
Robert Penn Warren, author of *All the King's Men*

An editor I know once remarked that the trouble with most writers is that they don't want to write, *they want to have written*. That is, they want money, fame, self-congratulation, swagger, cocktail parties, and, as Freud puts it, the love of beautiful women.

We all have our human frailties and we no doubt want everything on the list. Some writers, by good or bad luck, manage to get everything on the list, and are still not regarded by my editor friend as good writers, because of the very complicated act itself – the need, the compulsions, the obsession that makes one try to put into words something about the world and his relation to it.

A person may go for years and not even know that he has such an itch to be scratched, and then may stumble on it and discover that it really is a way of living. It is a way of scrutinizing the world and trying to find some relation to it.

I know one man who, by his own admission, had never read a book until forty (he had been trained as an engineer and was a practicing farmer) when he had a long illness. Some friend persuaded him to read a history of his region. So the reading started and before long the patient decided that he would write a book. Now a hearty man of eighty, he has written several books, highly respected ones too, and his wife runs the farm.

Young or old, people usually drift into writing, bit by bit. In one sense it must be discovered by one's self – alone – the moment of vision you stumble on in some book or poem. The vision, the need, cannot be taught.

But there is a technical side that, within limits, can be taught and can be learned. It can be self-

– Becoming a Writer –

By

Robert Penn Warren

Poet, Novelist and Teacher

taught and self-learned too. On the practical side what does one do?

First, you look at any detail, event, or person and try to see as objectively as possible, to describe it as objectively as possible. Then try to imagine what another writer, some writer whose work you know, would have said of the same thing. What meaning did you find in it? What meaning did another writer find in it? No two people are alike and the writer is engaged in finding himself through things observed. And inevitably the question arises, why did I see this thing in one way and why would John Smith have seen it in another?

There is one big difference between the writer and the non-writer. The non-writer sees with his eyes, the writer sees through eyes (the sharper the better) and then through the words. For him, as a writer, the thing does not finally exist until it appears in words as his "vision" of the thing. So his ideas, his feelings, his perceptions are finally one thing, and the word is the key factor in that unity.

The writer must live with words – not merely words in a dictionary, but words alive and active. On the page the writer reads, on the page he writes. On both pages he must constantly strive to see the crucial function of the word. It is a never-ending process. It is a process by which we live – if we conceive of living as more than existing.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Your library has Robert Penn Warren's best-selling novels and books on how to write. Now at Yale, he has studied and taught poetry, fiction and playwriting at leading universities, always continuing his own writing.

He is the only writer to receive the Pulitzer Prize for both fiction, *All the King's Men*, and poetry, "Promises."

On HVWP Greater Service Committee since 1967, Mr. Warren judged veterans' poetry in the 1968 Annual Contest. In "Democracy and Poetry" he develops his belief that poetry can be therapeutic for the poet and his nation.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

November 26, 1975

Next year marks the beginning of our Third Century as an Independent Nation as well as the 200th Anniversary of the American Revolution. For two centuries our Nation has grown, changed and flourished. A diverse people, drawn from all corners of the earth, have joined together to fulfill the promise of democracy.

America's Bicentennial is rich in history and in the promise and potential of the years that lie ahead. It is about the events of our past, our achievements, our traditions, our diversity, our freedoms, our form of government and our continuing commitment to a better life for all Americans. The Bicentennial offers each of us the opportunity to join with our fellow citizens in honoring the past and preparing for the future in communities across the Nation. Thus, in joining together as races, nationalities, and individuals, we also retain and strengthen our traditions, background and personal freedom.

As we lay the cornerstone of America's Third Century, the very special part in this great national undertaking played by "Veterans' Voices" in their Bicentennial program for hospitalized veterans is most commendable.

Gerald R. Ford

VA Administrator Congratulates HVWP



VETERANS ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

JULY 22 1977

Congratulations to "Veterans' Voices" on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary that this issue celebrates. Congratulations to the veterans and friends of veterans who have contributed their time and talent over the years to make this anniversary possible.

For a quarter of a century now there has been a publication devoted to the writing of hospitalized veterans. For a quarter of a century they have received the satisfaction -- and derived the therapy -- of seeing their work in print. And for a quarter of a century we have been inspired and entertained by what they have created.

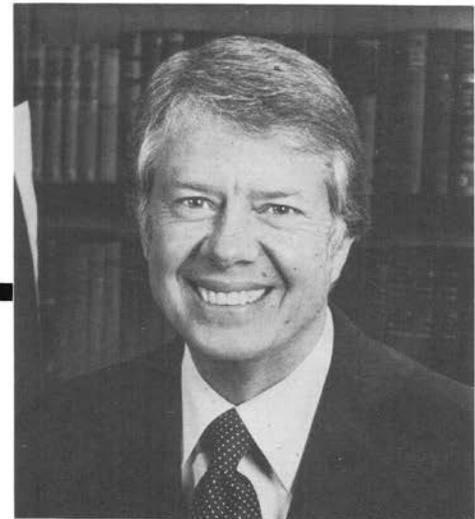
"Veterans' Voices" adds substance and purpose to Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project and is a manifestation of its success. To be published within these pages is to reach both a literary goal and a milestone on the road to recovery.

I commend both the project and "Veterans' Voices". To the official thanks I voice for the Veterans Administration I add my personal thanks -- as a former patient who knows the value of such activities and as an Administrator who appreciates the generous efforts of those who make them so effective.

Please continue your good work.


MAX CLELAND
Administrator

President Carter Salutes VETERANS' VOICES



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

August 12, 1977

I welcome this opportunity to salute all those who are associated with Veterans' Voices magazine as this unique and valuable publication completes its first quarter-century of service to hospitalized veterans.

The Hospitalized Veterans' Writing Project has provided hope, peace of mind and healing therapy for countless individuals. It has shown the mightiness of the pen in helping to overcome the wounds of war and in restoring the creative spirit that adds so much satisfaction and self-fulfillment to human life.

I wish Veterans' Voices many more years of meaningful accomplishment.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jimmy Carter". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

**PRESIDENT REAGAN PRAISES
ELIZABETH FONTAINE'S
LEADERSHIP**



Ronald Reagan

**THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON**

December 4, 1981

Nancy and I are delighted to extend our congratulations to members of the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project as you celebrate the 35th anniversary of your organization.

With the inspiration and leadership of your founder, Elizabeth Fontaine, you have helped our veterans to lead richer lives and to discover and expand their writing skills. Your volunteer efforts reflect the best in the American tradition of people helping people, and I commend you.

You have my best wishes for continued success and effectiveness in the important work you do.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ronald Reagan".

Ronald Reagan

Former P.O.W. Stresses Importance of Communication

Born in Indiana, Charlie Plumb grew up in Kansas and graduated from the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, in 1964. After graduation, he left immediately for flight training and proceeded through the Navy jet aviation program. Next, Charlie was trained to pilot the F4-B Phantom, the Navy's supersonic interceptor; then he left November 5, 1966 aboard the USS Kitty Hawk for the South China Sea.

In Fighter Squadron 114, Lieutenant (j.g.) Plumb served as flight officer and was designated officer in charge of the air wing detachment. After 75 combat missions, he had received the Air Medal, Navy Commendation, Combat Action, Unit Commendation, National Defense, Vietnam Service, Vietnam Unit Citation and Republic of Vietnam Campaign.

On May 19, 1967, he was shot down just south of Hanoi while on a fighter cover mission. He was captured immediately and taken to the Hanoi prison complex. There, he was tortured for military information.

He spent the next five years and nine months undergoing brutality, degradation and humiliation at the hands of his captors. During this imprisonment, he distinguished himself among his fellow prisoners as a professional in underground communications. He also was known for his ready smile and good word. In 1970, he was appointed chaplain of his prison unit and served in that capacity for two years.

He was repatriated on February 18, 1973, underwent medical and security debriefings and returned to Kansas City on March 4, where he was awarded the Purple Heart and the Silver Star. He then began a series of public appearances, making over 400 during the first year home. He continues to speak to religious, business, civic, veteran and student groups, from Albuquerque, New Mexico to Washington, D.C. He is the author of two books, "I'm No Hero" and "The Last Domino."



CHARLIE PLUMB

GUEST EDITORIAL

By Charlie Plumb

The P.O.W. cell was bleak. There was not enough light to distinguish red from blue. There was no color in my life. I could pace three steps one way, then turn around and pace three steps the other.

One afternoon, I heard a chirping noise in the corner of the cell. I investigated. I found a wire poked through a rathole. The wire was scratching on the floor with the broken cadence of secret code. My heart pounded with the prospect of communicating with another P.O.W. I needed to validate my very existence by communicating with someone . . . anyone, but I was afraid to expose myself to another human being. I had been beaten to the lowest form of life. I was still bleeding from the torture . . . I had 27 boils

on my face, chest and legs and, worst of all, I'd given in to the enemy. I didn't want anyone to "see" me.

But I just had to tug on the wire. I reached down with a trembling hand and tugged. The wire tugged back. And in that action, I gained infinite freedom, for that first tug started the communication that would keep my mind alive for the next 2,103 days of imprisonment.

The same little wire is available today to any Vet who finds himself in a prison of loneliness, frustration or bitterness. The Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project offers a wide window of freedom through communication. You, too, can break out. Just tug on the wire!

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION COMMENDS ELIZABETH FONTAINE . . .

Office of the
Administrator
of Veterans Affairs

Washington, DC 20420



Mrs. Margaret Sally Keach, Publisher
VETERANS' VOICES
Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project
5920 Nall, Room 117
Mission, Kansas 66202

Dear Mrs. Keach:

It was with sorrow that we in the Veterans Administration learned of the death of Elizabeth Fontaine.

Those of us who help care for veterans now accept the idea that mental activity is an important part of healing. This idea was not so well accepted in those days immediately following World War II, when Elizabeth Fontaine was convinced that writing is good medicine. She persevered in her belief. This perseverance continued for the rest of her life. For this, veterans are in her debt.

Elizabeth Fontaine developed the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project at the Ft. Sheridan Army Post and Great Lakes Naval Training Station. With the help of others in Women in Communications, Inc. (then Theta Sigma Phi), she expanded it to the VA hospital at Hines, Illinois.

Through her efforts, the Veterans Administration recognized writing as a recreational activity, finally making it a national program to help in rehabilitation.

No one will be able to count the veterans who have been helped through the organization begun with the ideas and nurtured by the dedication of Elizabeth Fontaine.

Her project is her legacy; it will flourish.

She was a friend. We will miss her.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas K. Turnage', written in a cursive style.

Thomas K. Turnage, Administrator

Visual Arts Initiative



Returning Home, MIA San Antonio TX

By Penny Lee Deere

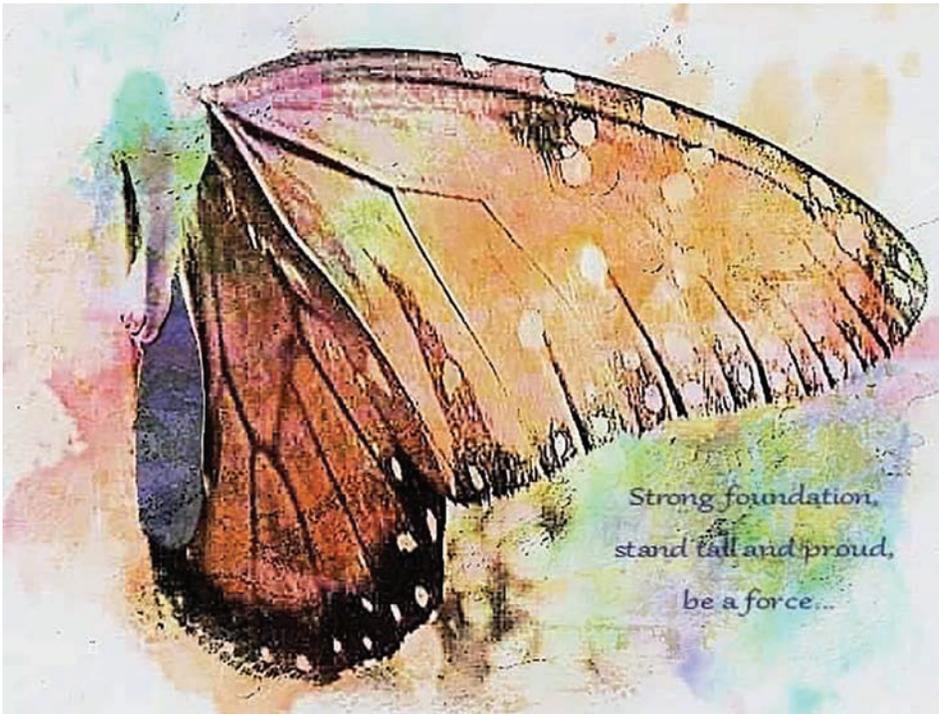
— Albany, NY

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

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

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

— *The Editors*



Butterfly Soul: By Penny Lee Deere

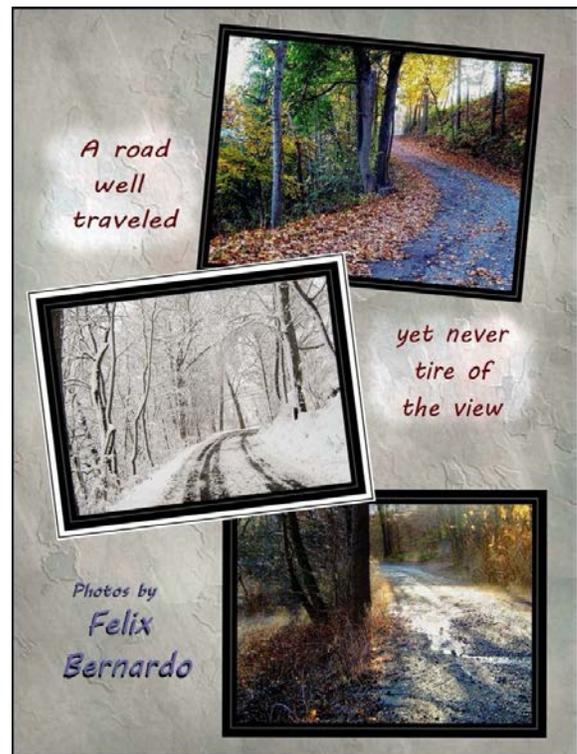
— Albany, NY



Poppies: By Bryan Moore
— Kansas City, MO



Reflections: By Michelle Pond
— Overland Park, KS



My Road: By Felix Bernardo
— Albany, NY



Four Buddies: By Daniel Strange
— San Antonio, TX



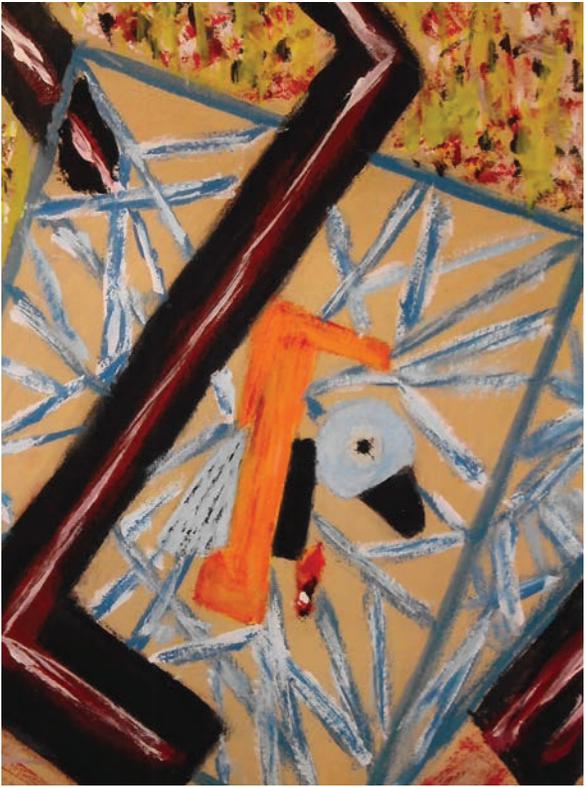
Water Lily 2: By Gary Walker
— Leawood, KS



Clematis in Our Garden of Eden: By Gene Groner
— Chino Valley, AZ



Drawing 1: By Bruce McClain
— Blue Springs, MO



Art - Bird in a Cage: By Daniel Strange
— San Antonio, TX



Drawing 8: By Bruce McClain
— Blue Springs, MO



Self-Portrait - Art - 2021: By Kenny Trujillo
— Phoenix, AZ



Art 1: By Donald Sherwood
— Danville, IL

LARRY CHAMBERS SPIRIT AWARD

Sky Watching

By Michael Monfrooe
VA Medical Center—St. Cloud, MN

In the Nam, 1970 to 1971, on long-range reconnaissance patrols, we would run five-to six-day missions. We operated in five- or six-man teams, mostly in the mountains. At night, we slept elbow to elbow and would take one-hour shifts monitoring the hourly situation reports.

On more than one occasion I would peer through a space in the thick brush and trees and spot a plane flying ever so high. Most likely it was a military aircraft, but I liked to think it was a civilian plane.

With my weapon in one hand and handset in the other, I wondered what they were thinking. Did they know we were down here? Where were they going? What were they doing?

This evening, nearly 50 years later, like so many evenings out on our porch, I look up to see the blinking lights far above, and I ask those same questions. I would like to think that some soldier, serving somewhere, looks up at night into a darkened sky and wonders the same things.

Like the bad, there are good memories, even in war.



GLADYS M. CANTY MEMORIAL AWARD

Face to Face With a Killer

By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

In 1979, I came face to face with a killer.

I had just gotten to my new duty station in Pirmasens, Germany. Although I was married and had a new baby, my family would not be able to come immediately with me until I was able to find housing in the German community. So I was given temporary housing in the barracks.

One night I went to shower and ready myself for bed when I was approached by an older soldier who wanted to welcome this newcomer and get to know me. As I made my way back to my quarters he followed me. He continued to talk and carry-on. I said, "Well, great chatting with you. Maybe I'll see you around."

As I went to close my door and bid him a good farewell, he tried to enter my room. I had no idea how I was to protect myself against this very large strong brute of a man, but I did. I got mad! There had to have been a major adrenaline surge, because as he went to bring his arm through the opening in the door, I slammed it shut on him. I had injured him, and he retreated. I was safe and secure for the night.

I would later find out the rest of the story on this noncommissioned officer. He was the man in charge of the post office where I was going to work. He had been married to a lovely woman from Sweden and had two beautiful children, a boy and a girl.

He happened to be in the the barracks because he was under house arrest, restricted to barracks because he had just kicked his wife to death. The children witnessed the brutal attack. Why in the world he was not behind bars, I will never know.

I can only hope he is still serving his pitiful life in Fort Leavenworth, Kan. It was my understanding his children would go back to Sweden with their maternal grandparents.

I hoped the children would be able to have a normal life, to be raised in a stable, nurturing environment, becoming well rounded human beings. Perhaps the young lady would become a social worker or nurse in the caregiver field, while her brother might select a career in law enforcement where they might help other families dealing with domestic violence.



Happy Birthday America

By Keith Long
—West Hills, CA

The month of July has arrived, and that means the officers elected in April begin their term here at the post. More importantly, July also brings with it our nation's birthday, July 4th, Independence Day. Take a moment to reflect on the word "independence" if you will. Makes you feel powerful just to say it, doesn't it? Now, just think what it must have been like for our Founding Fathers.

What they did was tell King George to take his taxes, his laws, and stick them you know where. They told this to the King, mind you. You know, that guy who had the power to chop off your head if he chooses.

The Declaration of Independence let the whole world know that America would no longer be a part of the Kingdom of Great Britain. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." What fabulous insight our forefathers possessed to come up with such a document declaring our independence. Then they proceeded to follow it up years later with our Constitution. These were truly men of wisdom, of vision and courage, acting for the good of the whole and not the one. A lesson we could all learn from.

For 245 years America has stood for freedom the world over. Each and every one of us is a part of that history. It is the brave men and women who are deployed around the world today and the veterans of the past that keep and have kept freedom alive and well. We are all that there is standing between freedom and someone trying to take away that freedom, a freedom we will never give up yet gladly share if they would only ask.

Happy Birthday America. May God bless our troops

In My Blood, Mind, and Soul

By Albert Hernandez
VA Medical Center—El Paso, TX

From Da Nang to Khe Sanh, from Hue to Saigon, from Phu Bai to Con Thien, and countless villages in between, we pushed through jungles and rice patties, heat and monsoon, diseases of all kinds, fighting all the time heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans. It's what we do; we fight the fight over there so that it will not be fought over here.

The Vietnam veteran faced three major challenges: the war, an inept government, and a hostile nation. It was hard. We felt betrayed and hurt. While no words will ever be worthy in praise of the Vietnam veteran, nor any honor truly befitting of his/her service, we must remember that it is never too late nor too much to pay tribute to the men and women who answered the call of duty with courage and valor. For I have seen true heroes in Vietnam. I have seen things you wouldn't believe. My duty as a combat medic with the Marines is a heritage and legacy that only a few can claim. But that's in the past. I must now live the present and look to the future. As Vietnam veterans our days are numbered, a reality we don't like to admit or acknowledge. But for those who did not come back and died a brutal death, their sins are forgiven for they have already been in hell. Yes, "war is hell."

As a grateful nation it is time to honor those 50,000-plus names etched in black granite who sacrificed all they had, their lives. The Wall with all those names is a painful thing to see. It will make you weep. We draw inspiration from those who suffered unspeakably as prisoners of war, yet who returned home with their heads held high, for the greatest fear we had was not losing our lives in battle but being captured by a ruthless and cruel enemy. That was a terrible fear. For those of us who did make it back, it is our duty and responsibility to tell our story, the whole story, so that those who did not come back did not die in vain. I refuse to believe that they died for nothing.

For those Americans who fought in it, and for those who fought against it back home, as well as for those who merely glimpsed it on the nightly news, the Vietnam War was a decade of agony, the most divisive period since the Civil War. Vietnam seemed to call everything into question: the value of honor and gallantry, the qualities of cruelty and mercy, the candor of the American government, and what it means to be a true patriot. Those who lived through it have never been able to erase its memory, have

never stopped arguing about what really happened, who was to blame, why everything went so badly wrong, and whether it had all been worth it. Nevertheless, they served with honor and pride in a time when it was not popular to serve. Maybe we didn't win the war, but we won many hearts. It's the only consolation I can find.

Yes, it's been a long time since Vietnam. I'm 75 now. I have a story to tell, one that has never been told before. I dare not forget. I cannot forget. I cannot keep silent. If I do, I'm already dead. I will have lived in vain. You see, it's in my blood, my mind, my soul.

ROBERT T. RUBIN AWARD

Hunting and Healing in the Woods

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center—Augusta, GA

Let's be honest; the very sight or thought of a big buck drives most hunters more than they would like to admit. The adrenaline rush hunters feel cannot be duplicated by anything else.

I discovered how the woods literally come to life. The sights, sounds and smells bring on the peace and serenity I seek while I sit in my stand. There is no better therapy for my PTSD than this. The crisp clear mornings, getting up 30 minutes before sunrise, allow me time with God and prayers as I gaze up at the breathtaking sky full of stars.

There is nothing in this world like watching nature wake up. First you hear the different sounds of the many birds. The crows are the loudest of them all. I can hear the turkeys flying down to the ground from their roosts. The squirrels I could really do without. The huge fox squirrels are nice to look at, but they are very noisy the whole time I am out there, and they are at every stand I have. They are constantly running through the fallen leaves and up and down the trees. They eat a lot of my corn I put out for the deer. I've been fooled many times hearing them walk through the woods, hoping they were a deer.

The rabbits are quiet and beautiful. You can hear the woodpecker make the sound of drums as he pecks at one of the hollow dead pine trees from the 2019 Georgia ice storm. The weight of the ice on the tops of the tall pine trees caused them to snap like toothpicks, damaging trees everywhere. The very best thing I am blessed to see and hear are the Canadian geese flying high above me, looking for a nearby pond.

And then there are the deer; they blend so well into the background of the woods. You really have to look hard to see them. I'm always looking for that flicker of their white ears or tail.

The lazy afternoons are just as amazing as the morning sunrises. One can watch as the sunset changes the colors of the sky every couple of minutes as the sun sinks lower over the tall pine tree horizon. Nature and all its wildlife activity simply take your breath away. So many of us just take all of this for granted or don't care, but you really don't know what you are missing.

I was raised as a child to appreciate the outdoors and all it has to offer. We learned to swim, fish, and enjoy nature. My two older brothers taught me all about guns and how to handle them. My father passed away from an illness when I was five years old, so I really looked up to my brothers and wanted to do everything they did. My mom said I should have been born a boy. I joined the Army when I turned 17. I did very well with the guns I was trained on and became a military policeman.

I picked up hunting years later when I married and moved to Georgia. My husband owned a lot of wooded land where he grew pine trees. We built our home with the huge pine trees all around us. I felt I had died and gone to heaven. I felt so blessed and knew this is where I was meant to be.

I started hunting about nine years ago. I am now 61 years old. I have harvested many good deer to feed our family of seven children and 16 grandchildren. I shot my biggest deer three years ago, and he hangs over my bed. My husband says if he falls he's gonna kill me with his horns, I just laugh and say what a way to go. I have two other head mounts and four skeleton mounts and a basket full of antlers.

I am pretty lucky to have more than 300 acres of land to myself and grandkids to hunt on behind our home. The other land we rent out to a hunting club down the road, which pays the taxes on all our land.

Opening gun season was about to start, and I was like a child waiting for Christmas morning. I have six stands to choose from depending on the wind direction and the sun placement, which are important for a successful hunt. I made sure all our deer feeders were filled to the rim with corn. This gave me a chance to see which of the feeders were getting the most traffic. One stood out the best with the most corn gone, so this would be the best stand for me to sit in on opening day.

That year the state had started deer season for guns a week earlier, which worked out great for us because the rut was in full swing. Time always seems to fly by for old folks like me, but it seemed like forever before opening weekend arrived.

Every deer hunt varies considerably, and it may often end up unsuccessful, but it's the pursuit that drives us not to get discouraged and to accept the consequences and move on. Unfortunately, this was the case for me. Day one came, and I didn't see a thing. Day two wasn't any better as I sat there in my stand listening to shots being fired all around me. Opening weekend came to a close without a buck to brag about.

I convinced myself Monday, day three, would be my day. Most of the hunters in the area would have to return to work, so the traffic and gunfire would be cut back. I decided to change stands and chose one less than a football field from our yard. It was heavily wooded between the stand and our yard and had a lot of oak trees down in the bottom. My hopes were high, and the wind was perfect and in my favor. I got settled in about 30 minutes before sunrise.

About 15 minutes went by and I could hear and barely make out a deer eating at the feeder. This was a good sign for a good hunt. This morning was a very entertaining one for sure. A four-point was eating at the feeder as the sun rose. Soon out came a small two-point which I named Scaredy Pants; the fox squirrels scared him off the small field six times. The four-point just kept on eating until a bad-ass mother which I named The Protector ran him and the two-point off. She cleared the way for her baby buck to come out and eat. O how she guarded him so, walking all around him, checking the woods for anything that might hurt him.

I have a rule to never ever shoot a mother with a baby. I seldom ever shoot a doe at all. I watched them until they finished and walked off. The rest of the morning the squirrels and two rabbits entertained me. I got down from the stand and walked home around 11 a.m.

I was still feeling hopeful that something might happen in the afternoon hunt. I wasn't throwing the towel in yet. I still had hope. I had a long talk with God and said a lot of prayers. I asked God to bless me with a wall hanger. Feeling pumped up, I walked back to the same stand I sat in that morning. It was about 3 p.m.

Things were pretty quiet in my area until a small doe came out about 4:30 p.m. I could see a bigger deer coming around the



corner, which I assumed was its mother. I know the number one rule is never to assume anything. As the deer got closer, I thought I saw antlers—big ones. I slowly lifted my rifle and sighted him in; he was for sure a shooter.

He stood in a way that I had no good shot to take. He was looking straight into my eyes through my scope. The small doe started walking straight toward my stand. I dared not move. The situation intensified with each passing second. My hands began shaking, and I was hoping he couldn't hear my rapid breathing. Then I could hear something else coming, but I wasn't taking my eyes off this buck. He also heard something, and when he turned to look he gave me a shot to take, and I took it. He jumped and took off running. There were three more does running every which way, too. I could hear him stumble and slam into the ground. I waited before I got out of my stand to make sure he had time to expire and I had time to calm down some. It was such a rush.

I didn't have much of a blood trail to follow, but it didn't matter because he didn't go far. He blended well into the surrounding wooded area where he collapsed, but his antlers gave him away. I rushed toward the buck, eager to get a better look at his head gear. As I got closer, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was hard to process that I had just taken a buck most hunters dream about. I knelt down to thank God for such a beautiful animal created by Him. It was by the grace of God that I got this prized animal. I was emotional and awestruck. I had never in my lifetime seen such a phenomenal deer.

Geez, what a hunt. This was not my biggest deer, but he truly was special. I am so thankful God gave me this opportunity and that I held it all together to harvest the absolute buck of a lifetime.

Bless Someone

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

With our world of troubles and strife,
we struggle with this thing that we call “life.”
Many try to go it alone;
Many will experience heartbreak and pain.
So as you go through each day,
pray, “How can I bless someone today
and bring a smile to each face?”
Help me uplift the ones you send me to today;
show them your grace.
Bless them through me, God;
make their burden lighter.
Help me to see through the pain and rain
to the rainbow.
They are fighters.
Help disperse the clouds;
Help the sunshine come through.
Show them the light;
They will win.
Be a blessing to them, be a friend,
be a blessing again and again.
Teach them how to dance in the midst of the rain.
Show them that they are special;
They were born for more than this pain.
Give them purpose; give them a plan.
When they open their eyes,
they’ll see you holding their hands.

I Fall in Love With an Angel

By Anthony Coccozza

VA Medical Center—Los Angeles, CA

I fall in love with an Angel;
she looks at me with a smile.
I fall in love with my Angel;
her kind of love would be mine.
I fall in love with an Angel;
the kind of wish I asked for.
I dance and dance with my Angel;
so much fun I never had before.
I fall in love with an Angel;
she’s walking along with me.
I talk and dance with my Angel;
she is going to marry me.
She is now my Guardian Angel;
I can call her my very own.
I’m falling in love with my Angel;
I’m loving her forever and on and on.

A Tree

By Charles Fredette

VA Medical Center—Bedford, MA

There is something to say
about a fresh-cut stump.
It was done a short time ago,
and when I see it, there is a lump
in my throat, it is true.
But the event wasn’t through.
It was a reminder of what was once there,
of multiple branches that wouldn’t scare.
So I say a prayer for what was once there
or just feel sad.
It is not serious but sometimes bad.

God’s Seeds

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

I’m God’s precious seed.
He has planted me in His garden.
He waters with His word.
How I need His precious pardon.
My bloom will come soon enough,
as I’m tended with His care.
I’m watered and I’m fed.
His seeds are planted there.
How His love for me has shown
He just loves to watch me grow into His plan,
spreading precious seeds to feed His precious Lambs.
His garden ever spreads and becomes a beautiful sight.
He works it with all His might.
How He tends it with precious care.
These seeds spread everywhere.
They are rooted into His precious plan,
as they grow across His land
to give a helping hand.
Seeds continue to grow in the heart of man.

The Little Boy

By Charles L. Carey

—Topeka, KS

Little boy, oh, little boy
Down by the sea,
Oh, little boy to me,
A son who brings joy to me.
You run all day
And you run all night
Upon the meadow.
A father’s true delight.

Standing in the Still Waters of Time

By Charles L. Carey
—Topeka, KS

As a child I dreamed so well,
playing within life's unreal fantasies of whom I would be,
just dancing in my dreaming mind under spreading old trees.
Fulfilled in playful imagination so real,
I chased the morning that dawned and became night
into joyous moments that stood with undaunted zeal.
I wished and waited for my dreams to be real,
standing within and without a cheerless land that gave no light.
Stumbling and trembling were my thoughts.
My mind was baffled; tossed ecstasies were rooted
inside my flowing joy through my youth,
my memorable moments as a boy.
My youthfulness took a drink of the outer world,
as my eyes opened to a thirst that reached into my heart
to place me standing in the still waters of time.

I Can See the Stars

By Anthony Coccozza
VA Medical Center—Los Angeles, CA

I can see the stars,
Not far away from me.
They're getting so close and bright,
And they're coming toward me.
I can see and I can hear Him saying,
"Anthony, my friend, this is Jesus, Son,
Here to take you home."
And then I can see Heaven,
Not far away from Earth.
I can see the stars
On the day I will leave the Earth.

Used to Be

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

A sunset of scarlet
Sets on a broken heart.
You don't know what it is.
Maybe you're not too smart.
That girl found another.
She said something sad.
"You used to be the best thing
she ever had."

GLADYS FELD HELZBERG MEMORIAL AWARD

He Is in the Wind

By Matthew David Davison
VA Medical Center—Long Beach, CA

I don't recall the moment it happened.
I only know that one minute I was in an intense firefight,
and in a flash I was hovering over the noise and chaos.
Later, I watched, disconnected, as a steel casket
draped with an American flag was loaded on board
a transport aircraft.
I knew I was not in that casket,
and that I needed to be home with her.

I needed her to know I was okay, that there was no pain
and that I was at peace.
I couldn't wipe away her tears as she cried out my name.
And at the funeral, my hand softly touched her hair in the wind,
as she was presented the flag, fixing her gaze upon the ground.
I wanted to tell her not to be sad.
I wanted her to know I would never leave her.
I wanted her to know that there is no death,
and that the spirit lives eternal in the wind...
in the beauty of nature.

On the day she went to The Wall, I went with her.
She left a letter near my panel. It was a beautiful tribute
to what once was ours.
It was supposed to rain that day, but the sun shone
and it was a glorious day.
As she was leaving The Wall, I whispered, "I love you."
She turned and faced The Wall one last time.
Then she walked away with the wind at her back.

Seasons of Change

By Melanie Yvette Jackson
—Silver Spring, MD

Life is always moving.
The colors of life don't always paint a pretty picture.
The darkness can overshadow the light,
but the light can overcome the darkness.
The ebbs and flows of life display the sea of change.
Seasons change
as change is inevitable.

True Heroes

By David R. Marchant

VA Medical Center—Salt Lake City, UT

The smoke has cleared,
The battle over and the wall
Finally traversed.
Once again I'm on the other side,
Wearied, but stronger from the fight.
The warrior in me
Stands victorious,
Yet ever aware
The battle was not won
Single-handedly.
There were others
Who fought with me,
Always at my side,
Never allowing me to give up
While the battle raged
Inside me.

In my eyes...

They are the true heroes.

WOSL MEMBERS' APPRECIATION AWARD

Sgt. Reckless

By Kimberly Green

—Fort Smith, AR

Sgt. Reckless almost died today
as she carried wounded soldiers out of harm's way.
She was big and strong; brown was the color of her hair.
She, too, was in this nightmare.
She was all business; there was no horseplay.
Sgt. Reckless almost died today
carrying 386 rounds of ammo on her back.
Sgt. Reckless never stopped, never slacked,
Marine Corps war horse that she was
above and beyond, because there is no telling
how many Marines she saved.
Sgt. Reckless almost died today,
but dying was not an option for her.
On countless trips through enemy fire,
wounds she, too, incurred.
Here's to Sgt. Reckless! She was a Marine,
she was a hero, best war horse ever seen.
OORAH, Sgt. Reckless!
Selfless service you did demonstrate.
Sgt. Reckless didn't die that day.
There were too many lives for her to save.

The Art of the Steal

By Melvin Garrett Brinkley

VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

He was a very sleazy Don,
Rallying his minions with a con,
Sending them up Penn Street,
Starting a riot with a tweet.
That gang planned to hang
His second in command.
What the bleep, Mister Veep!
You're still following that creep?
He's the messiah
Of the Alt Right MAGA scene
Which makes him the biggest liar
Of all the White Supremes.
Charlottesville was just the start
That warmed the heart
Of every Dixie-waving fart.
He's Alt Right, he's Alt Right,
That Don is Alt Right, you see. Yeah!
Hey hey hey hey!
He's a super creep, super creep.
He's super creepy, super creep, super creep.
Only a very special churl
Thinks bronzer and a combover
Make them God's gift to ev'ry girl.
He spewed more fake news
Than all the Kremlin crews.
He was way too fond of QAnon
And seemed a little too casual
About the storming of our Capitol,
Seeing only hugging and kissing
On a channel I must be missing.
He's Alt Right, he's Alt Right,
That Don is Alt Right, you see. Yeah!
Hey hey hey hey
He's a super creep, super creep.
He's super creepy, super creep, super creep.
He was a very sleazy Don
To send his minions up Penn Street,
Rallying them with a con
And arming them with a tweet.

Author's Note: This is a parody of "Super Freak" by Rick James.

Float

By Carl Kerwick

VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

We hope, we float,
We roar for more
Compassion and love always.
We're living and laughing
While holding hands.
This is all part of the great plan.

I Am Watching

By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

I'm watching you—
the eyes of Military Sexual Trauma.

I am in the capital of the United States,
on display at the Military Women's Memorial.

You betrayed me, but I will not betray myself.

As you walk by me, see me.
You are now my prey; everyone knows who you are.

I have told the world that monsters live inside the wire.
This is unacceptable behavior.

It is unfortunate that it took the #Me Too movement
for women veterans to be acknowledged,
in order for our voices to be heard.
I will not be silenced.

We are gathering all the eyes of the survivors,
as many as we possibly can.

It does no good to hide the truth.
That gives the predator too much power.

Speak out and be heard!
I have the power; we take our lives back.

Spread the word of the monsters within the wire.
I see you; we are watching you.

I Am, We Are

By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

We are
I am
Together.

We are a group of veterans.
Many of us are WOMEN veterans
From all eras.
We paved the way!

I am Women's Army
I am Cold War
I am Desert Shield, Desert Storm
I am Retired Army
I am a trailblazer.

We are one, hanging out with history.

God Will Make a Way

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

When we're going through trials in our life
and the answers are hard to be found,
go to God in prayer. He won't let you down.
Sometimes, when it seems we're in our darkest hour,
pray to God to help you. He will give you the power.
Faith is what you need to stand up to the test.
Give it all to God and He will do the rest.
Surrender it all to Him. Lay your problems at the cross.
God will see you through so you're not stumbling and lost.
Any problem we may have, God is greater still.
He will hold your hand because He said He will.

Adversity—Friend or Foe

By Helen Anderson Glass
VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

I think that in order to succeed
We must put adversity to use.
If in the past we have suffered
From poverty or abuse,
These are just obstacles
That we should undertake
To overcome and correct
Each and every mistake.
These were just challenges
To see what we would do.
Would we make the right decisions
Or take the right road? It's up to you!
Don't let adversity stop you
Or hold you back.
Face it, conquer it and soon
You'll be on the right track.

Synthesis

By Carl Kerwick
VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

We are all built of values.
We all have beliefs, faith and compassion.
We connect to one another
through love, courage and family.
The circle of nature, spirits and souls
creates a synthesis
through our hearts and beliefs.

A Thankful Heart

By Helen Anderson Glass

VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

It seems like I have just begun to live.
I've found it really is more wonderful
Not to take but to give.
I've found that a bountiful heart
Can be a vital part
In the kind of life you lead
In thought, word and deed.
I truly believe that God is right there.
All you have to do
Is raise your voice in prayer.
Extend a helping hand,
Say a kind word or two
And you will see, my friend,
It will come back to you
With God's blessings from above
Through His care and eternal love.

What It Means to Watch an Eagle in Flight

By Lawrence E. Rahn

VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN

Look there, high in the sky,
above that highest peak one can see!
Gracefully it glides through the air,
soaring freely on its own eagle's wings,
proud of the power for which it stands.

The eagle doesn't realize
how much American people are inspired
to see such a flight,
a magnificent bird such as this,
soaring silently in flight throughout the skies.

Yes, to most of the world,
it's just feathers able to fly.
But to Americans, it's much more
than just a bird,
it's a symbol of freedom
for those who fought proudly for their country,
the United States of America.
This magnificent bird you see in flight
will always stand for freedom
which is why it's so important to Americans.

Yes, the Bald Eagle carries itself proudly,
silently in the air. Gracefully it glides
above the people of America below,
watching this icon in flight,
watching it soar so high.

PTSD and the Pandemic and Me

By Karen Green

VA Medical Center—North Las Vegas, NV

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

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

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

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

I stay connected
with my family and friends.
I can't wait to see them in person
when this terrible virus ends

I've found if I stay busy
doing things for other folks,
it makes us all happy
and I can smile and laugh at jokes.

For now I'm spending more time
in Bible study each day.
When I read of the promises of God,
I don't feel so dismayed.

Help Me, Lord

By Ronald P. Grella

VA Medical Center—Wilkes-Barre, PA

I just want to be at peace within my mind,
to feel fine inside.
Lord, take this pain away from me
so I can be free of this misery.
The anger gets so bad at times,
it's like I am going to lose my mind.
If I do not come back to reality,
it could be the end of my destiny.
Guide me through these trouble ends.
Lord, let me know you will always be my friend.

Jesus Already Died for Me So I Don't Have To

By Karen Green

VA Medical Center—North Las Vegas, NV

Last night as I started to pray,
God said to me, "Now listen to what I say."
He asked, "Why do you feel this way?
You really need to pray."
As I told Him of my distress,
He said, "This is a test."
As I explained that I want my life to be through,
He said, "My Son already died for you!"
He told me to come to Him
When my life turns sad and dim.
Then I realized how sad Jesus would feel
If I threw away my life and ended it for real.

Half Boy...Half Man

By Brant Parker III

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

The Half Boy...Half Man joined to fight
and do what he felt was right.
The boy had no understanding of the real world
when he trains for war. Just a game, just for fun,
toy soldier training in a man's world.
Always a smile, a laugh, not a care in the world.
The man, testing agility and doing his best,
won't let his brothers down.
The Half Boy...Half Man gets told it's time to earn his pay.
In a combat zone.
The Half Boy soon gets lost somewhere in the blood
and guts of battles.
The Half Man devours the tender boy.
He becomes a man no one knows.
The boy is gone; the smile has faded; traded for fear,
tears, anger and rage. Always on patrol.
The man is in tune with his actions and thoughts.
He's less careless and understands lives are at stake.
Many will be lost.
The man has learned to survive, not the boy,
in this man's world.
The warrior, the combatant lives among the walking dead.
The perils of war made him who he is.
Somewhere, somehow the boy became a hardened man.
And should he ever be so lucky in this lifetime,
the hardened man will find the boy, resurrect the smile
he once possessed,
regain the joy, laughter and long-forgotten happiness.

Writing group: Cincinnati VAMC

I Want You to Understand

By Kimberly Green

—Fort Smith, AR

I want you to understand
I'm still the same man,
the guy who went to war.
My eyes have witnessed death and gore.
I swore my allegiance to this land.
I want you to understand
I am different; yes, it's true.
I'm hoping you will see what I've lived through.
Each night I lie awake.
Memories of war with each breathe I take.
I come to you extending my hand.
I want you to understand.
Don't be afraid of me.
I'm not a danger to you or society.
It's me whom I rage upon.
I pray one day these feelings will be gone.
Until then, these I withstand.
I want you to understand.

Every Now and Then

By Ted Jensen

—Laramie, WY

Every now and then it comes to me—
should we go on and dread the night?
Self-indulgence is my only sin.
My hopes are dashed and disappear.
Every now and then it comes to me—
do we go on and dread the night
or should we love with all our might?
Self-destruction is my only sin.
My hopes are dashed and disappear.
We float forever on the edge of eternity,
and how we got here no one knows.
My miles go by and disappear.
If our love isn't large,
do we have the right to live?
Living—is it not to love with all our might?

You Never Close Your Eyes

By Ted Jensen

—Laramie, WY

You never close your eyes.
To you love is fated.
Tears from the sky rain in my eyes.
I see you faintly through light
among the trees.
Shadows fall upon you.
Love leads you.
Please come back again.
Don't press for change
because love will change you.
Just hold back the angels.
Please come back again.

The Perfect Band-Aid

By Phil Hosier

VA Medical Center—Prescott, AZ

The perfect Band-Aid is costly, say in the millions or more.
The perfect Band-Aid would heal my broken and abused body.
My mind, it would restore.
The perfect Band-Aid would heal old wounds I've committed
and the wounds others have done to me.
The perfect Band-Aid would help me be the person
I've always wanted to be.
The perfect Band-Aid would heal families
and let everyone forgive and live in harmony from above.
The perfect Band-Aid would allow my loved ones
to love and be loved where no one would have to shove.
The perfect Band-Aid would heal hate and discrimination
until all mankind ceases.
The Perfect Band-Aid would stop war and the destruction
of our Earth.
It would cure cancer, diabetes and all childhood diseases.
The perfect Band-Aid would cure drug addiction, alcoholism,
child abuse and make people whole before the Lord.
The perfect Band-Aid would heal dementia and Alzheimer's
to let people recall the memories of their life stories
and share the love of family and friends.
The perfect Band-Aid would let the blind see
sunrises and sunsets again, enjoy the open road
and see the many people they meet.
The perfect Band-Aid would allow the deaf to hear birdsong,
children's laughter and music to its fullest
so they can clap their hands and tap their feet to the sound.
The perfect Band-Aid would be easy to obtain;
you'd just have to ask.
So many people wish for the perfect Band-Aid,
but they always seem to pass.

Don't Do It

By James Robert Janssen

VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS

When I was young I had a dream
Taken away by those that made me scream.
Always wanting to be just me and free,
Held down to the ground by Mr. PTSD.

And as the years passed by,
I wandered in a fog with a sigh,
Not knowing that taking these pills
Would add deep valleys and hills.

Searching for a way to escape
This life of anger, pain, and hate,
I am alone in a sea of anguish.
Memories flood that I wish to vanquish.

Lost the love of my life,
The cost of my outbursts and strife.
Tears fill my eyes as I dial 8255.
Faded hope, can't cope, why survive?

But do I give up? NOOOOOOOOO. NEVER NEVER
NEVER NEVER NEVER NEVER NEVER NEVER NEVER!

Dying is easy; living is hard.
Death is permanent with no way back.
Life is being a warrior continuing the fight
No matter the odds.

Ever experience a demon on your left shoulder
And an Angel on your right?
There they are talking in my ears.
Demon says do it. It's worth it. You'll like it.
Angel says don't do it. You'll pay a high price
For a very, very long time.

I am a warrior and you are, too. Fight the fight.
Never quit. The taste of victory in the end
Will be that much sweeter.

Sweeter than you can imagine.
We fought before. And we will again.
Go in peace, brothers and sisters.

From my heart to yours,
May I convey best wishes
For each one of you.

Impeachment Options

By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.

VA Medical Center—Hampton, VA

Deliberations over, carrot top—
the most “capable genius.”
How can you peach a carrot?
What flavor would that be?
What challenges will that bring?
Would that be liberating or debilitating?
We cannot destroy evil,
no more than good can be eliminated.
We confine evil, limit evil, restrict evil,
prevent the venomous poison of evil
from infecting the entire human race
by any means necessary.
We must ditch the carrot,
peach the carrot, roast the carrot, stew the carrot
by all means available. It’s a win-win situation,
not so much for carrot top, but for all those
who don’t like carrots.
We don’t have to consume another one.

My Naked Soul

By Anthony Phillips

—Las Vegas, NV

Walking with all my feeling exposed to the world.
Seeing into the deepest part of my being.
Trying to hide my true self never works.
Running from what makes us who we are in a life
we make for ourselves.
Never letting anyone get close to what makes us special.
The hurt we have suffered makes us closed off
to what makes us human.
It should not be this way in today’s world.
Email, texting, cell phones, tools to bring us together.
In the end, they drive us apart.
This is how we protected our souls.
Keeping a wall of letters and cameras
from seeing our true souls.
Pretending to be something from a dream,
a dream the world thinks we should be.
To give your soul to the world around you
is what this life is all about.
To be more than just a number.
The human soul is naked to this world.
It speaks of love and better times to come.
Let your soul shine for all to see.
Do not hide behind the wall of society.
Beauty, kindness, love. We are all born with gifts
that make us who we are today.
Show me this beautiful soul you hide from the world.
Take a step and let your soul be free.

It’s Your Call

By James Robert Janssen

VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS

Traumatized children don’t tell
After living through an event in hell.
And many others suffer the same fate.
Seems age does not discriminate.

My dad agonized over a term called Shell Shock,
Another word in association with PTSD a lot.
He too could not tell of the hell he went through
In that great war, under General Patton, number two.

I won’t list many of the tragedies that could trigger,
But don’t you think most war-torn veterans linger
In a state of confusion and mental fog from those times,
Causing emotions to wane to and fro like wavy lines?

Remember the unknown soldier most times forgot about?
What about you, my brother and sister, warriors of account?
Do you have family and friends lending peace and satisfaction?
In crisis do they have coping skills and a good plan of action?

And what about the unknown warrior lingering in the shadows?
Like him, are you alone and feeling at the height of your
plateaus?
Possessing a heart full of pain and eyes full of tears,
you wait for those with understanding to overcome your fears.

My dad didn’t have the choice to call back in his day.
He fought with what little ammo he had; it wasn’t enough to stay.
And though he and Old Blood and Guts won the war,
He lost, fighting the PTSD ghosts even with his bronze star.

YOU CAN WIN!! YOU have a choice. Make that call.
Find out for yourself. Now I leave you with a heartfelt hope
and a shout: IT’S YOUR CALL 1-800-273-8255.*
*This is the suicide hotline.

Dracula at Sundown

By Frank X. Mattson

VA Medical Center—Spring City, PA

The mood all over Transylvania
like a sallow, yellow
crypt.
But Dracula had the moods
of a prince,
like rich rubies
especially at sundown.

Plantings—Heavenly Earth

By Daniel Paicopulos

—San Diego, CA

At 77, he's feeling
free to plant
whatever he desires,
free to create a world
he'll not see mature,
free to be the all-father
of his environment,
free to be the seeds, the mulch,
the water, sun and shade,
even as he knows he'll miss
the ultimate harvest,
still pruning and weeding,
still talking to his seedlings,
thinking of Saint Francis who,
when asked what he might do
if he knew it was his last day of life,
said he'd finish raking the garden.

America Mourns for Franklin D. Roosevelt

By CJ Reeves

VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

America mourns in silence
for a true and trusted friend
who gave his life unselfishly
to help his fellow men.

Master of our ship of state,
helmsman at the wheel,
he brought our ship of state to rest
on an even keel.

When sorrow and disaster struck
from far across the sea,
he pledged to us his heart and soul
to keep our nation free.

Other nations feel our loss;
they too have felt the tyrant's heel.
He gave to them a helping hand;
thus, in humble prayer they kneel.

America mourns at this hour of grief;
in this solace, we find relief.
Dear Lord, let him rest in peace,
our own beloved Commander in Chief,
Franklin D. Roosevelt.

About Me and the Honor Flight

By John E. Jones

VA Medical Center—Milwaukee, WI

Surprised by a phone call to journey on the flight
to visit the nation's capital, place of honored sights,
I experience some reality as memories come back to last.
In Washington D.C. I admire sights of the present and past.
See the Lincoln Memorial that took eight years to build,
then a tall and awesome marble structure,
the Washington Monument revealed.
Every memorial is an inspiration to veterans and life.
Engraved upon the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
are the names of many who made a sacrifice.
I see the Pentagon and remember the 9/11 attack;
One hundred twenty-five people were killed
within that five-sided building, a fact.
My emotions are tranquil as we move along our way.
Veterans and civilians are enjoying the day.
I enlisted to serve my country at 17, an early age;
the Vietnam War was already waged.
The memorials and sculptures are honor on display.
In Washington D.C. we can see them every day.

Typist: Marybeth Matthews

Loyalist

By Norman L. Jones

VA Medical Center—Columbus, OH

Determination of a pendulum,
courageous like the King of Beasts,
swaying back and forth, in and out
for a predictable release.
Someone who rarely gets pissed
is surely a loyalist.

A fool who believes in what's not true
to make a stand to represent
a person who will not only do,
but would rebound from hell-bent.
Irresistible in falsehood's mist
is the immovable loyalist

Someone who indulges in chains of events
leading to any class for probabilities,
a gift from none other than heaven sent
at the helm of possibilities.
Simple willpower over a true test
belongs to none other than a loyalist.

Suicidal

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center—Augusta, GA

Minutes following the painful, savagely, horrific, violent rape,
I found myself staring out at the lake
down the road from my family home.
My car was parked in the boat-ramp space;
I couldn't even remember driving there
or how long I had been parked there.
But one thing I did know:
today was the day I was gonna take my own life!
I had so many dark and twisted thoughts running rampant
in my head that it actually hurt.
My head felt like it had a bomb inside and was ready to explode,
but there was no way I was gonna defuse it.
I didn't feel human anymore, I felt so worthless,
I felt damaged in so many ways.
I felt so dirty and ugly, I couldn't let anyone see me.
I believed I had all kinds of labels stuck all over me.
All the nasty hideous words he called me
will be forever tattooed in my mind.
My conscience sounded out saying, "Why did you take it?"
I felt so guilty I just wanted to die; I no longer wanted to cry.
I rolled every window down in that car; darkness surrounded me.

It reached out its welcoming arms;
it helped me put my hands on the steering wheel.
All I had left to do was to put the car in drive.
See—it's so easy to die. I knew that drowning myself
would be so much cleaner than blowing myself away with a gun.
I don't want to be a burden to anyone;
I had to end this nauseating pain eating away at me.
I'd lay down my life gladly to go where life is better than this.
I'm praying that the gates will swing open at my knocking.

At that very minute, God sent down a very special angel
to watch over me. She quickly informed me that killing myself
would, indeed, send me straight to hell.
She told me that God would take away my misery;
God would take away my pain.
All I have to do is open up my heart to Him;
He'll put love back in its place.
The evil that walks this planet is the nature of mankind.
In our life, we will encounter evil doings; it's unpredictable.
These hurdles in my life have devastated me;
guilt and shame have all but claimed me.
Lord, give me the strength to survive, courage to go on
and wisdom to stay alive.
The angel left me awestruck;
she spoke to my old crusty broken heart,
the part of me that I have so carefully hidden,
and will one day reclaim.

Tribute to a Caregiver

By Ronald Nash

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

She smiles as she hands him his coffee;
He kisses her hand and says he's so lucky.

She lovingly smooths down his hair;
He's happy that she gives him such good care.

She fixes his breakfast, lunch and dinner;
He grins and tells her he needs to be thinner.

She does his laundry, folding his shirts the way he likes;
He worries that maybe his favorite is getting too tight.

She organizes his papers, crumbled wads and soda cans
thrown away;
He grumbles about how busy he is and not having enough time
in his day.

She carefully fills his pill caddy and reminds him daily
to take his meds;
He dutifully swallows, wondering if they really help his body
and his head.

She encourages him to socialize and suggests
different events;
He prefers home, his recliner and TV but doesn't mind
if she went.

She runs their house, inside and out, making decisions alone;
He worries about money and her spending, she must atone.

She gently strokes his head as he drifts off to sleep;
He smiles happily unaware of the anxiety she keeps.

She expresses concern about an issue weighing on her mind;
He gets angry and spews words hurtful and unkind.

She makes the decisions and worries they're not right;
He is blissfully unaware of her relentless fight.

She puts on a smile, exhausted from her day;
He smiles back as she silently commits with him to stay.

She quietly cries in the shower, never letting him see
The daily strain of living with his PTSD.

Writing group: Cincinnati VAMC

VFW

By Dan Yates

—Blue Springs, MO

There it stands in the middle of the block;
for many inside, it is their rock.
Membership strict, you must qualify;
there are no exceptions for lady or guy.

Dad's money can't buy it, eligibility strict,
by serving their country in an overseas conflict.
Honorable service to the Red, White and Blue
earns one membership in the VFW.

War has consequences; some scars you can't hide,
while others exist, buried deep inside.
This building's a hospital, though my only proof
are the members who swear there's a red cross on its roof.

Once seamen, tankers, grunts and more,
they may be patients when they walk through the door.
Someone is waiting who's been there themself
to listen and help put that pain on a shelf.

Next week may be different; one never can tell.
Today Joe will listen and walk someone through hell.
Every vet on a stool somehow can relate
though, when just a teen, didn't know their own fate.

They gave overseas; now at home some still give,
volunteering their time so Americans can live.
Next time you see them march in a parade,
remember the VFW is "American made."

Vietnam Memories

By John L. Swainston

VA Medical Center--Kansas City, MO

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

Editor's Note: Prompt based on "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks.

DAVA STATE DEPT. OF FLORIDA AWARD

Good Trouble

By Neal C. Morrison, Jr.

VA Medical Center—Hampton, VA

Let the good times roll!
The beauty of it all,
so magnificent, absolutely gorgeous.
How could I not join in the fun
of "Good Trouble." I must pick up the mantle.
When one soldier falls another must step up.
There's no room for division
for "Good Trouble" and the good fight.
All must do what's right; you must not falter or waver.
Nullify all distractions; our mission and purpose is clear.
We must be progressive; we must act now;
we must not allow the Constitution to be a pipe dream.
Make it live up to promises of freedom and justice for all.
Every one of us must step up to the plate.
If anyone of us must live in the tyranny I suffered today,
tomorrow tyranny will be at your doorstep.
"Good Trouble" is simply this: freedom and justice for all.
Join in the fun and let's have at it—
making some "Good Trouble."

Life's Struggles

By Lawrence W. Langman

—Portage, IN

If angels were shadows inside the minds we once held dear,
then at what point would terror fill the minds with straight fear?
I'm tracing memories of a lifetime as they pass before my eyes.
Each time the motion of a snapshot passes by my eyes, I cry.
The days seem to get longer as my energy weakens from strain.
All alone within the darkness, I grapple for the release of pain.
My mind wains, diminishes; it seems like I'm swimming in place.
Scattered are thoughts I care to remember, racing away in haste.
Fog now surrounds my every being, yet in a tunnel I clamor
along.
I bounce from one side to the other, not knowing where I belong.
Playing cards I've been dealt, not wanting to forfeit my hand,
I find staying true to one's self is really hard to understand.
If life cheats you in the act of your struggles, is it fair
that you do the same?
Or do you fight with integrity and honor, no matter
who might win the game?
If I lose my fight and desires, I can reign knowing what has
become.
I shall keep my head held high, and never ever will I succumb.
In life sometimes don't play fairly; don't let life bring you down.
Always fight without any mercy; never relinquish your crown!

Head Trip

By W. Joseph O'Connell

—Jarrell, TX

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

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

Crazy, moving forward,
volunteering for every conflict that came along,
twenty years in the service.
Anything can be justified to keep myself grounded,
feeling everything and nothing at the same time.
Marriage was the first casualty of war.
Now the house is empty, and the miles traveled are lonesome.
All that is left is an idea that I am destined to be alone.
The road at night remains my best friend;
as always, it lets me pretend I'm still the hero.

Love Passed On

By Robert John Valonis

—Stuart, FL

Seek out a bird
From high above,
And transfer thoughts
Of kindness and love

From the person you love,
Though physically gone,
Whose kindness and love
Will now be passed on

To that beautiful bird
that flies high in the sky,
Who delivers those thoughts
To all that pass by.

Thus those that have passed,
You can't physically see,
Will live on in our minds
Eternally.

Ostari

By Michael Moslander

—Moberly, MO

A journey on feet, far to the east,
the world's end they labored to reach.
Beyond the vastness of earthly horizons,
pitiless land and raging skies stretched out to meet.
Flickering bright like a fire in the night,
mountains, plains and deserts they burned across
guided by stars and moss.
Climbing with great might over the great heights,
striding endless steppes, they seek what's out of sight.
They marched beyond measure
on the scorched sand of a solar meridian,
with an unquenchable thirst in their souls
and hunger in their spirits.
The eternal flame pierced dark with light,
shrouded with smoke the mystery of origin,
but signals the truth of the purity within.
Mediums between divinity and veracity
forged millenniums of mythology.
Masters of mental fortitude
manifest unbreakable will and morality.
Standing at the edge of a maternal marvel,
faces are stoic in moonbeams of memory.
Wisps of auric locks and mantles blow in the wind
while stones are raised in a circular bend.
Far east from home and a little farther still,
a multitude appears at the boundary of dirt and hill.
Warriors whirled and long words are hurled.
Walls are built and mounds raised for burial.
A migratory meteoric fall appears in the twilight
of muffled time.
A moan in the matrix is mirrored in the mind,
taken asunder by a mask of minerals,
without nearly a trace of mummified memorial.
In a moment of meditation in the spring of reflection,
the maiden of memory brings a blood key into elucidation.
Faces never forgotten, the poet, with love and exaltation,
bestows honor upon those ancestral voyagers
of a heroic generation.

We Got Here About the Time God Left

By *W. Joseph O'Connell*
—Jarrell, TX

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mind for My Place

By *W. Joseph O'Connell*
—Jarrell, TX

Faded memories of time roll by the window,
passive hallucinations in the end of day's glow.
Took a train headed any place,
ashamed of the time wasted on people I know.

In an everyday place where I hide,
liquor brings out the Devil inside.
Rusted wheels turn like fire
across the plains and the great divide.

New wonder has dawned on me,
big dreams over a pint of whiskey.
Laws of physics keep me in a dark mood,
dulling my feelings in a bottle of booze.

Memories of a failed experiment
and fortune telling keep me alone.
Most things get stuck in Texas;
people leave you and stay gone.

Buy me a drink if you want my opinion.
I get the blues for no reason.
Everything stays broken;
everything gets in the way.

Natural reasons and natural causes
for why my heart stays distant.
Land is the only place worth keeping;
the places in my head keep danger.

Night converges with the end of the road,
where light has nothing to do with time.
My world has fallen out of orbit,
digging up the past.

When the drugs kick in, I feel at peace,
advancing beyond the point of release.
It means nothing to me;
life wants to keep me that way.
More room for my space.

Wolf Pack

By Brant Parker III

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

Those who served will understand the wolf pack:
A brotherhood. We had each other's back.
You mess with the pack—you get attacked.
We were fearless; death was just a thing.
It was better to be frozen with fear and fight,
than to be a coward who hides in plain sight!
Our hair may be gray; we may move a little slower.
But remember a wolf pack is for life.
Hear us howl! We own the night!
We traverse oceans, jungles, desert sands,
unseen and ready to fight.
Do yourself a favor; escape and evade; run and hide.
We have vowed to defend your freedom with our lives.
And we'll fight our enemy with all our might.
We are the wolf pack! Hear us howl!

Writing group: Cincinnati VAMC

Insanity Awaits

By Tanya R. Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

Darkness prevails in the deep black of the night.
Mortars illuminate the skies with fiery bursts
Like Roman candles on the Fourth of July.
However, they provide no joy or delight.

Each flash vibrating the ground with earthquakes.
The mortars seek to do damage and to kill.
They come in mighty waves with no rationale.
Constantly, they hammer and pound the terrain.

Counter-attacks launched on land and in the air,
Giving back as much as we get, if not more.
Our own fireworks now illuminate the heavens,
Flooding the skies with fire as bright as daylight.

The night wears on and the heat of battle grows.
The insanity of it all becomes real.
Never knowing what tomorrow will bring here,
No longer can you feel your emotions flow.

Each blast siphons your humanity away
Till you become a shell of unconsciousness.
Your actions are now robotic in movement
As your sanity fades with the light of day.

Go Fly a Kite

By Scott Sjostrand

—Hallock, MN

One day when I was young,
I was annoying my mom.
She said, "Go fly a kite."
So I did.
I also built model airplanes as a kid.
Later, I joined the Air Force,
worked on jets; why, yes, of course!
Well, on my last duty day,
I got a ride in an F-111.
Felt like we were flying straight to Heaven!
I asked for control of the joystick.
The pilot relinquished control
as I obviously was not airsick.
Three barrel-rolls later we returned to base.
Excitement was written all over my face.
Oh, if Mom only knew
her advice early on made my dreams come true!

Chaos

By Elbert Glen Price

—Anadarko, OK

Political borders, random orders, other arbitrary lines
negotiated by headless committees of civilian minds.
Military lines barked on obscure blood trails
to manhood or sorrow.
Political lines marked by premature purchase
of time from tomorrow. All things less than whole.
Morality checks without deposits, less than none.
Deeds written in disappearing valor, disappearing then gone.
Lesser deeds in lesser numbers, empty yet full of deception.
Directionless lies, those indiscriminate weapons of destruction.
Destiny and chance merged; honor and truth maimed.
Lines not just arbitrary but wrong. Victims blamed.
Effort taken, redistributed. Chaos by design. Promises broken.
Committees of mindless heads with compromised tales all
spoken.
Aimless rhetoric left no right. No center. No end.
Only the latest polls from public opinion blowing with the wind.

Nowhere to Run

By Lawrence E. Rahn

VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN

Confession of a dying soldier

I watch the sun fade behind those distant ridges,
so close, yet so far.
I gaze upon this benevolent sight as if it were mine,
counting the days gone by.
So wonderful to gaze upon God's creation
while leaving this existence.
I try to etch this moment upon my weary soul
where there are no tomorrows.
The fountain pen of my mind has dried,
leaving me with nothing to witness something grand as this
while my life is full of emptiness.
Although I must fight for every breath,
I try to forge ahead to the very end.
It means so much to me to gaze upon this sunset.
How long before death arrives is only just a guess.
I'm sure there isn't anyone that knows their time to die.
As for me, the death angel lurks nearby;
I can feel him breathing on my neck.
He's here to snatch my soul at a moment's notice
and take it straight to hell.
The devil's delinquent on souls to steal
and I'm sure he wants mine,
although I might be in a better place,
depending on my judgment day.
"Could this be hell on earth that I'm living in right now?"
I ask myself. I'm ready for the afterlife.
It has got to be better than this prison cell.
Maybe God will put me in paradise,
so we can converse from time to time.
Yes, death is like vultures soaring high in the sky,
waiting for a life to die.
Their goal: to pick the bones clean of rotting flesh,
hopefully not mine.
Then suddenly! There! High above the ridge!
Yes, a rainbow appears! It must be for me!
That means all hope is not lost for this weary soul of mine!
I stare at it in awe for quite some time
as I look upon it as something grand!
Yes, it appears out of nowhere, yet no storm clouds
fill the sky. I wonder why.
No sounds of raindrops on the ground.
Could it be I've missed all this?
Maybe while planning my escape
from this makeshift hotel of bamboo sticks.
I thirst for one drop (my throat is so dry),
and I won't share it with anybody.
But how can this be? Someone, please explain it to me!
It must be God has a hand in this! Yes, that must be it!

Now it makes sense.

Could it be I'm imagining all this for my own benefit,
and my sanity has left me?

My mind shifts gears: from hopefulness to doubtfulness,
then neutralized. Now, all hope is gone;

the rainbow has dissolved; there's nothing left.

I've come to realize help won't arrive before I die.

The afterlife comes next; heaven or hell, which is it?

Only God has that answer for this soul in the end.

I've given my service to my country;

that must count for something.

Doesn't it?"

Look What You Did! You Win Again!

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center—Augusta, GA

No one ever noticed the tear stains on my face,
or the bruises on my arms from the night-before beating.

No one heard or saw anything.

I just kept putting on my clown face to hide all the pain.

Look what you did! You win again!

You have no heart; you show no shame.

This thing called life, to you, is nothing but a game.

My greatest sin was trusting you.

Look what you did! You win again!

Round one is long gone; here comes round two.

You left my face all black and blue.

Your chains have bound me; I'm no longer free.

Look what you did! You win again!

Round two has passed; now comes round three.

You tie me up and once again you rape me.

You can't enjoy sex without inflicting some kind of pain.

Look what you did! You win again!

Rounds four and five, rounds six, seven and eight,

all my tears couldn't wash the blood or your sins away.

In the mirror I see a hollow face filled with fear.

Look what you did! You win again!

Rounds nine and ten are very hard to tell

when you forced me to walk through the flames of hell.

You left me there walking hand in hand with Lucifer himself.

I was never ever the same; I became someone else.

I became damaged goods, way beyond repair.

GAME OVER! YOU WON! YOU NEVER CARED!

Trump Was Acquitted

By Scott Sjostrand

—Hallock, MN

Trump was acquitted.
Against the House and Senate he was pitted.
He did a pretty good job, all things considered,
Even though he had mis-tweeted.
Give him the pay and benefits he has earned.
If you fail to, then I get concerned.
Yes, I pay attention to the political bickering.
To me, it is all quite sickening.
The office of President is to be honored and respected.
After all, he was freely elected.

SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL AWARD

The Silent Commander

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

Trucks rolled by
as troops slushed through
the muck.
Small-arms fire could be heard
in the nearby woods.
And the Commander was silent.
Heavy tanks now squashed
their way through the mud.
It began to rain again.
And the Commander was silent.
The booming and barking
of heavy guns could be heard
in the distance.
The occasional clatter
of Mess gear was heard
in the ranks of troops slushing by.
And the Commander was silent.
It is now late in the afternoon
and the sun tried once more,
but failed.
I heard a new voice
give commands.
You see, my Captain was killed
less than an hour ago.
O Commander, my Commander,
you sleep in eternal sleep,
and you are now forever silent.

Storm Within

By Robert John Valonis

—Stuart, FL

Why did I come to this violent sea,
While heavy rains pock the sand,
Pelting faces and popping coats,
And awakening my sleeping fears,
While whistling silently past my ears.

I listened to cadences of crashing
Waves upon the rocks
That spewed the sea up high,
Then turned to mist to mix with tears
From glistening blackened sky.

A rush of wind forced squinting
eyes to open wide at intervals,
Then squint again, yet clearly see
The violent storm within myself
That brought me to this place,
To see myself, for myself.
And now I know!

Low Blood Sugar

By Kenny Trujillo

VA Medical Center—Phoenix, AZ

We went on a family vacation,
having a great time.
We rented a motor home
and went to about 12 states.
And when we were about
70 miles away from Texas,
all four of us had to call
for an Uber to pick us up
because our motor home
“broke down.”
On our way to Texas,
my blood sugar went down to “34.”
I passed out and my wife
caught sight of my condition.
So we pulled over
to a gas station and called
an ambulance.
They brought up my sugar level
and started to ask me questions
to see if I was OK:
my address, the President’s name,
where I was, my phone number?
My wife was my “Hero,” due to my
“Low Blood Sugar.”

My Prayer

By Kenny Trujillo

VA Medical Center—Phoenix, AZ

Everyone wants to go to heaven,
but no one wants to die.
I, too, wish to be one of God's angels;
I don't want to feel pain anymore.
I enjoy praying for others as needed;
I love Jesus so very much.
God guides me to do right things;
The good word is in God's book.
"Jesus laid down his life for us."

Fires in the Light

By Lawrence W. Langman

—Portage, IN

If I had the wings of an angel,
from this place I would fly.
I'd fly to my darling, and there
I'd be willing to die.
There's death all around me;
another soldier does fall.
As the heavens now open,
another hero does call.
The battle's all around me,
emotions on high, systems alert.
No time for my feelings,
emotion now lost and I'm hurt.
No thought process needed,
in slow motion all things move.
The ground's soaked in red;
this hill I'm refusing to lose!
Tree lines are scorched in fire;
air support now strikes from above.
Memories now flashing,
all I can think of is my love.
Now the sounds in front of us go quiet.
All or nothing, this push forward
our chopper calls.
Is it really over? Did so few of us
really survive?
Let's push forward; for our loved
ones at home, we must try.
As the ground now fades into memories,
let's never forget why we fight.
Keep that red, white and blue waving,
and always keep freedom of country in sight!

My North Star

By Dan Yates

—Blue Springs, MO

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

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

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

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

The Saint of Orchard Street

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center—Pittsburgh, PA

My mother had a way that was her own;
She never panicked, never lost her way.
When she dressed up, she was all class and tone;
And when she laughed, she brightened up the day.

Her code of life was tough and stood the test;
No shortcuts were permitted in the chores.
She wanted us to work and do our best,
But gave us time to mend and treat our sores.

Her meals were great, and often she baked bread;
Mom's French fries were the best for miles around.
Her pies excelled and kept us so well fed;
Mom's smile was comfort, always, pound-for-pound.

Mom rode the buses, even in late age;
She walked the mall to keep her person fit.
Mom read the papers, scanning every page.
Her days were busy; never did she quit.

At three or four she taught me how to pray;
She loved Saint Jude and championed him so well.
Mom said, "The better deed, the better day!"
Her blue eyes smiled! And what more can I tell.

The Sound of Cars

By Tanya R. Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

The sounds of cars whizz by
the open window to the street.
I am alone in this room
with no way to escape it.

I watch the people walk by
on the way to their dull jobs.
They cannot see me from here,
watching them from my window.

The mountains in the distance,
still covered in winter's snow,
majestic and standing proud
like I stood in my uniform.

Each day I lay here alone.
My window opened to gaze
at the world outside
that I can no longer walk out to.

I am locked here in a prison,
this room where I cannot move,
for my arms and legs can no longer
take me outside into the world.

My world now revolves around
this ten by ten whitewashed room.
I am unable to leave
or bring the outside in.

I have no family
and my friends are once again
gone back to the place where
I had stood beside them at their six.

A roadside bomb did me in.
Shrapnel severed my spine
and rendered useless these limbs
that now lay shriveled and numb.

But I know my death is near.
I heard the doctor say so
on that cold night he thought
I was asleep and would not hear.

Maybe it's better this way.
There is no one to mourn me.
My friends no longer need me.
A solitary death like my lonely life.

The sounds of cars whizz by
the open window that now serves
as my only amusement.
I wait to die, alone and forgotten.

Give a Pig a Break

By Michael Pride Young

—Fond du Lac, WI

You call me a pig, you call me a hog,
You treat me worse than you do a dog.
You take my life, you eat my meat.
The day will come
No more chops, no more ham.
Give a pig a break, don't eat that steak.
Eat no more swine, let the pig be fine.
You call me a pig, you call me a hog,
Don't build no pigpen for me.
Leave my meat alone.
Eatin' me is wrong, I sing a song,
You say I grunt but you ain't perfect either.
Go to your hog pen, listen to them pigs sing,
You may hear a hit.
Eat no more swine, let the pig be fine.

A Warrior in Me

By David R. Marchant

VA Medical Center—Salt Lake City, UT

Why must I bear this burden
That cripples me to my knees?
My strength at this moment
Shattered
Like it was only an illusion.
Two steps forward
Then ten steps back,
My demons in full control.
I'm lost, broken,
Searching desperately for hope,
A reason to continue.
Fighting the thoughts
To just surrender
And release myself from this pain.

But I can't.
There are those who
Depend on me.
The easy way out
Won't be easy for them.
There's a warrior in me,
Proven in battle.
And soon he will rise
And claw his way back.

Big Boys Do Cry

By Dan Yates

—Blue Springs, MO

The sky is dark and cloudy, transforming into gray;
it has been too long since we've had a rainy day.
I sit beside the window, stare out into the street,
feeling like I'm half a man whose life is incomplete.
Then I see a raindrop, a second and a third;
I make my way to the door without a single word.
Down the street I go; inside I feel relief,
knowing I can go outside, not disguise my grief.

Weeks have come and gone since my true love said good-bye;
I miss the gentleness of her touch, the twinkle in her eye.
Every time I think of her, tears run down my face,
but outside in the rain, its drops will smear their trace.
Years ago I heard it said that big boys just don't cry;
to this day I regret I never questioned why.
This pain that overwhelms me consumes my broken heart;
the heart that she once filled has been blown apart.

A car drives by, honks its horn, a friendly wave is given,
as if to say, "It's good to see you back among the living."
I wave back, fake a smile, I feel so all alone
as I walk on in the rain, my personal cry zone.
I walk without a purpose; it must have been an hour
when I realize where I'm at, by the cross adorned with flowers.
I lift my tear-stained face, allow my eyes to roam
across the skid-marked street where my soul mate did go home.

I stand and gaze from curb to curb, grateful for the rain
and the mask it provides to hide my heartfelt pain.
My thoughts turn toward the heavens; again I question, "Why?"
Someone somewhere long ago said, "Big boys just don't cry."
I turn around, head for home, each day is now a chore,
knowing she won't be there to meet me at the door.
As I walk I'm grateful for the periodic rain
that washes tears from my cheek that I cannot contain.

I think about that statement, burned deep within my mind.
Was it said just for me or to apply to all mankind?
I turn the knob, step inside, decide that it's a lie
since there comes a time in all men's lives
when big boys have to cry.

Don't Smoke on Me

By Michael Pride Young

—Fond du Lac, WI

Don't smoke on me,
I won't smoke on you.
Yes, your cigarette is bothering me.
Don't smoke on me,
I won't smoke on you.
I don't want any cigarettes at all.
You've got your rights
And I've got mine, too.
No cigarette smoking for me.
Smoke in your eyes,
Smoke in my face,
Cigarette smoking is just a waste.
I don't like smoke
And I don't like cigarettes.
Please let me have some clean air.
Don't smoke on me,
I won't smoke on you.
No smoking! No, I don't smoke.
You've got your rights
And I've got mine, too.
Cigarette smoking, no, that won't do.

A Trip to the Lone Soldier

By Donna Carol Zephryne

VA Medical Center—Northport, NY

Israel, a land rich in war and religious history.
I set foot on the plane seeking a spiritual healing;
heroes filled the plane beside me.
This trip was for females across the US
who had fought in combat;
a time for bonding, discovery and healing.
We visited sights you could never imagine.
Israel had many wars hit their soil;
a land of battles, bloodshed.
Visited 9/11 memorial, museums of war artifacts,
Ammunition Hill;
the most moving of them all was the Lone Soldier.
On Ammunition Hill stands the memorial of Michael Levin,
a lone soldier from America who moved to Israel.

The Lion and the Lamb

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

The Lion lay down beside the Lamb
And the Lamb lay down with the Lion.
The rolling-eyed Lion looked over,
with a twisted face,
and asked, “Are you sure you belong
in this peculiar place?”
The Lamb said, “If you eat me today,
then tomorrow, for you, no play.
You will be hungry again,
and you will have lost a good friend.
So let us lay down, at last, side by side,
and in this place bide and abide.”

Morning Coffee

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center—Pittsburgh, PA

It's just the thing to do!
A cuppa filled with brew.
It wakes me every day.
I've so much more to say.

Without it, I won't awake.
One cup is all it takes.
“French Roast” is just my style.
I sip for quite a while.

The taste is just the best.
It passes every test.
Robust and strong each day.
Java is what I say.

How good to hold the mug.
I'm happy as a bug.
Now I can face the day,
And I am on my way!

TH NORTON AWARD: EDITOR'S CHOICE AWARD

Will-o'-the-Wisp

By CJ Reeves

VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

Little Will-o'-the-wisp,
from where do you come?
Out of the shadows
or out of the sun?
Do you fly over rainbows
on golden wings
or measure the earth
with a silver string?
Tell me, as you stop and rest
in your busy wandering quest.
Tell me, Will-o'-the-Wisp.

A Prayer for Our Country

By Janice Walker

VA Medical Center—Decatur, GA

In spite of our challenges, divisions
and present situation, embrace America in prayer.
How we really need to be truly one nation
and for our neighbors, always care.
May a spirit of love and our Creator see us through
present trials, sufferings, losses, uncertainties, too.
As we become one nation of God, may peace be given;
may we live in the spirit we get from Heaven.

Unsung

By Ronald Nash

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

Withered dispirited warriors fade, dying.
War-torn bodies tormented, endless misery,
Incessant vexatious thoughts linger too long
Permeating senses in the hour of the mouse.
Ominous foreshadowing, toll death knell,
Linger not, take them now or set them free.
Winter closes fast, freezing brittle bone.
The end draws nigh.
Dear Lord, let them live again before they die.
Tried in battle, they are America's patriots, all.

Writing group: Cincinnati VAMC

Memorial Day 2021

By Daniel Paicopulos

—San Diego, CA

Thinking about how it should be this year,
on the cusp of pandemic and near normal.
Reminded that it's about the fallen,
not all the passed of the past,
just the warriors, deserving of decorations,
holding fast to the original Decoration Day.
Remembering it's not about the current troops,
hoping to not hear "Happy Memorial Day,"
no matter how well intended.
This is not Christmas,
not a day for glee, not founded in joy,
surely not only for backyard barbecues,
though it's understandable to want them,
here on the way back to normal.
It's Memorial Day 2021,
and it's important to notice it exists,
to recall why,
not allowing politics or philosophy
to keep us from rendering heartfelt thoughts,
reflecting, respecting, appreciating, honoring,
remembering the service and sacrifices of the fallen.
Those who survived their own war,
at home or in some distant land,
in uniform or mufti,
have one great battle remaining,
one great responsibility:
honoring with loyalty and respect
those who lost their own final battle.
It is the duty of the living
to remember the dead,
to feel blessed by their gift,
to never forget,
even as the nation seeks to heal.
The fallen deserve nothing less.

Mail Call



Comments from our veteran authors —

Daniel Paicopulos, San Diego VA patient, returned his *Veterans' Voices* award check plus \$200 "because I appreciate your work so much. It makes me happy to be able to do this at this stage of life."

"Returning my award check as a token of appreciation to *Veterans' Voices*," wrote **Paul D. Gonzales**, Albuquerque, N.M.

Joseph A. DeGennaro, Calabash, N.C., said that *Veterans' Voices* published the only poem he ever wrote, "Men in Chairs," and sent him a check for \$25 in the early 2000s. Fast forward to 2021, he "is solvent now" and decided to return the amount plus "inflation." The poem was about his PTSD and therapy group and honored the social worker leading the group. "It was the only poem I had published so I decided to retire so I could call myself a retired published poet, which really impresses people."

As part of the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress, **Shon Pernice's**, Moberly, Mo., collection covers two wars and two service branches from 2003-2011. He has also received a letter from the Vatican, thanking him for "sentiments which prompted you to share your experience with His Holiness Pope Francis." Shon's writing, "The Sacrament," has been published by the Catholic Press Association in several newsletters.

Kenny Trujillo, Las Vegas, Nev., thanks the *Veterans' Voices* staff for editing the stories, poems and artwork. "Every veteran had a story to tell and understands the importance of freedom and love for our country," he said. Kenny appreciates his service dog, Ce-Ce.

"I wish to donate my author award check," wrote **Dan Yates**, Blue Springs, Mo. "I appreciate the mission of VVWP and trust it will be used to further your efforts." Dan also volunteers at the VVWP office in Kansas City.

Michael Kuklenski, Rowlett, Texas, and **Laura Mahal**, Fort Collins, Colo., each purchased *Veterans' Voices* subscriptions for other veterans' organizations with which they have found help and support.



From VA Facilities —

Sarah J. Breshears, Administrator of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, thanked VVWP for the magazines for resident veterans.

"On behalf of the Oscar G. Johnson Medical Center, Iron Mountain, Mich., I would like to extend our appreciation for your donation of *Veterans' Voices* magazines for veterans in our Community Living Center," wrote **James W. Rice**, Medical Center Director. "The veterans really enjoy the entertainment provided by the veteran writers and the magazine encourages them to share their own stories and memories with each other and staff, supporting increased engagement and interaction."

"On behalf of the St. Albans Community Living Center, Jamaica, N.Y., patients and staff, we would like to extend our appreciation to you and your organization for your donation of Spring 2021 issues for the residents to read and enjoy," said **Lisa Cummings**, Assistant Chief, Voluntary Service.



From Supporting Organizations —

As of June 1, Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary Chapter 10, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is disbanding due to lack of attendance wrote **Helen Kay Mihal**, adjutant/treasurer. "The distribution of funds in one account is going to VVWP. Please put it to good use. Thank you for everything you do for veterans."

"We thank you so much for what you do to help our veterans suffering with many issues, including PTSD," wrote **Lois M. Hoehn**, adjutant/treasurer of Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary, Lenexa, Kan. "We know our veterans can't talk about what happened to them during a war, but they can write it down. This is a great release for them." The Auxiliary doubled its donation because of "the hardship of COVID, we felt the need to increase our donation amount."

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

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

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



FOUNDERS

Elizabeth L. Fontaine Memorial Award:

Story expressing compassion and understanding (Perpetual) \$ 50

Gladys Feld Helzberg Memorial Award:

Best Poem (Perpetual) \$ 50

Margaret Sally Keach Memorial Award:

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

STORIES — *Fact or Fiction*

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

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

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

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

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

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

POETRY

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

DAVA, State Dept. of Florida Award \$ 30

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

TH Norton Award: Editor's Choice \$ 25

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

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

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

Medical Center administrator nominates; publisher approves \$ 50

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

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

Thank You



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

– VVWP Board of Directors

Gifts of \$5,000 or more

Tina Hacker, Leawood, Kan.

Gifts of \$3,000 or more

Anonymous, Kansas City, Mo.

Gifts of \$1,000 or more

*Breidenthal-Snyder Foundation,
Leawood, Kan.*

Kent Bruns, St. Louis, Mo.

Anthony Cordero, Bronx, N.Y.

*James and Louise Eisenbrandt,
Leawood, Kan.*

Lynn Mackle, Palm Beach, Fla.

*VFW Auxiliary Dept. of Ohio,
Columbus, Ohio*

Gifts of \$500 or more

Beets Charitable Fund, Kansas City, Mo.

Gifts of \$300 or more

Christopher Iliff, Stillwell, Kan.

Gifts of \$200 or more

America's Best Local Charities

William Anderes, Cresskill, N.J.

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

DAV Auxiliary 10, Lenexa, Kan.

*DAV Auxiliary, Dept. of Florida, Winter
Springs, Fla.*

Michael Lucas, Monterrey, Tenn.

Lynn Norton, Leawood, Kan.

Daniel G. Paicopulos, San Diego, Calif.

Theresa Raydo, Olathe, Kan.

John Springer, Bandera, Texas

*WAC Veterans 33 Northern Virginia,
Columbia, Ky.*

Gifts of \$100 or more

David Albright, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Patrick Campbell, Shawnee, Kan.

Priscilla Chansky, Olathe, Kan.

*Disabled American Veterans 10,
Independence, Mo.*

Marilyn Ebersole, Mission Woods, Kan.

Peter J. Harrington, Clinton, Minn.

Kennith Harvey, Chester, Va.

John K. Holland, College Station, Texas

Patricia Kranzow, Countryside, Ill.

Judith Leu, Renton, Wash.

Thomas Manuel, Corte Madera, Calif.

A.D. Moore, Chicago, Ill.

Peggy Murray, Palm City, Fla.

Network for Good

Joy Paltzer, Appleton, Wisc.

Mary Pitchford, Overland Park, Kan.

Ellen Portnoy, Overland Park, Kan.

Virginia "Ginzy" Schaefer, Kansas City, Mo.

Peggy Thompson, Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

VFW Auxiliary 1593, Hawthorne, N.J.

VFW Auxiliary 2052, Romeo, Mich.

VFW Auxiliary 4548, Jacksonville, Ark.

VFW Auxiliary 7530, Mechanicsburg, Pa.

*VFW Auxiliary 7573, New
Baltimore, Mich.*

VFW Auxiliary 9283, Southgate, Mich.

*VFW Auxiliary 9557, Fountain
Valley, Calif.*

VFW Auxiliary 9927, Kettering, Ohio

VFW Auxiliary 10980, Eutawville, S. C.

WAC Veterans 62, Weaver, Ala.

Jane Walker, East Palestine, Ohio

Rich Wangard, Neenah, Wisc.

Kay Watts, Springfield, Mo.

Marianne Watson, Wheatland, Mo.

Gifts In Kind

Dazium Design, Kansas City, Mo.

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

Kaw Valley Computer, Kansas City, Kan.

Summit Litho, Lee's Summit, Mo.

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

VA Medical Center, Kansas City, Mo.

VVWP Board Member Memorial



Fellow Veterans Voices Writing Project board members are sad to announce the death of **Eileen Wirtz**. She served on the board for many years and during her tenure assisted with expanding VVWP's fundraising efforts, in particular direct mail solicitations. She lived her entire life in Kansas City, except for a few short years in St. Louis where she earned a degree from Webster University. After college she taught English and throughout her life retained her faith in the written word, thus her passion for our writing project. She passed away on June 1, 2021, at the age of 94. She is survived by eight children, and their families. Her VVWP friends will miss her enthusiasm for the project.

Submission Guidelines for *Veterans' Voices*



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

Instructions for Writing Submissions.

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

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

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

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

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

Guidelines for Local Contests.

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

SUBMIT ONLINE:

www.veteransvoices.org

SUBMIT BY MAIL:

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

QUESTIONS:

support@veteransvoices.org
(816) 701-6844

Mail Submission Sample.

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

Author Name _____

VAMC Name _____

VAMC City, State, Zip Code _____

Author's Permanent Street Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Branch of Service _____

Conflict or Era _____

Approximate dates served _____

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

Date Submitted to *Veterans' Voices* _____

Title: *Example: What America Means to Me*

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

Writing Aide: _____

Typist: _____

Heal Through Visual Art

Watch for your artwork in a future issue!

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

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

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

Instructions for Artwork Submissions

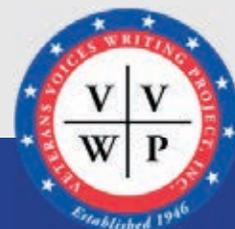
For more than 65 years Veterans Voices Writing Project has provided an outlet for military veterans to experience solace and satisfaction by sharing their stories, poems and artwork. Send your submissions today!

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



Submit Today!
For a Future Issue

Calling for
Photographs,
Drawings and
Paintings



Artwork Submissions

Online or By Mail

www.veteransvoices.org

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

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



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*Special Anniversary Section
See Page 21!*

Looking for earlier issues of *Veterans' Voices*,
check the website at VeteransVoices.org.



IT'S OUR
DIAMOND JUBILEE

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