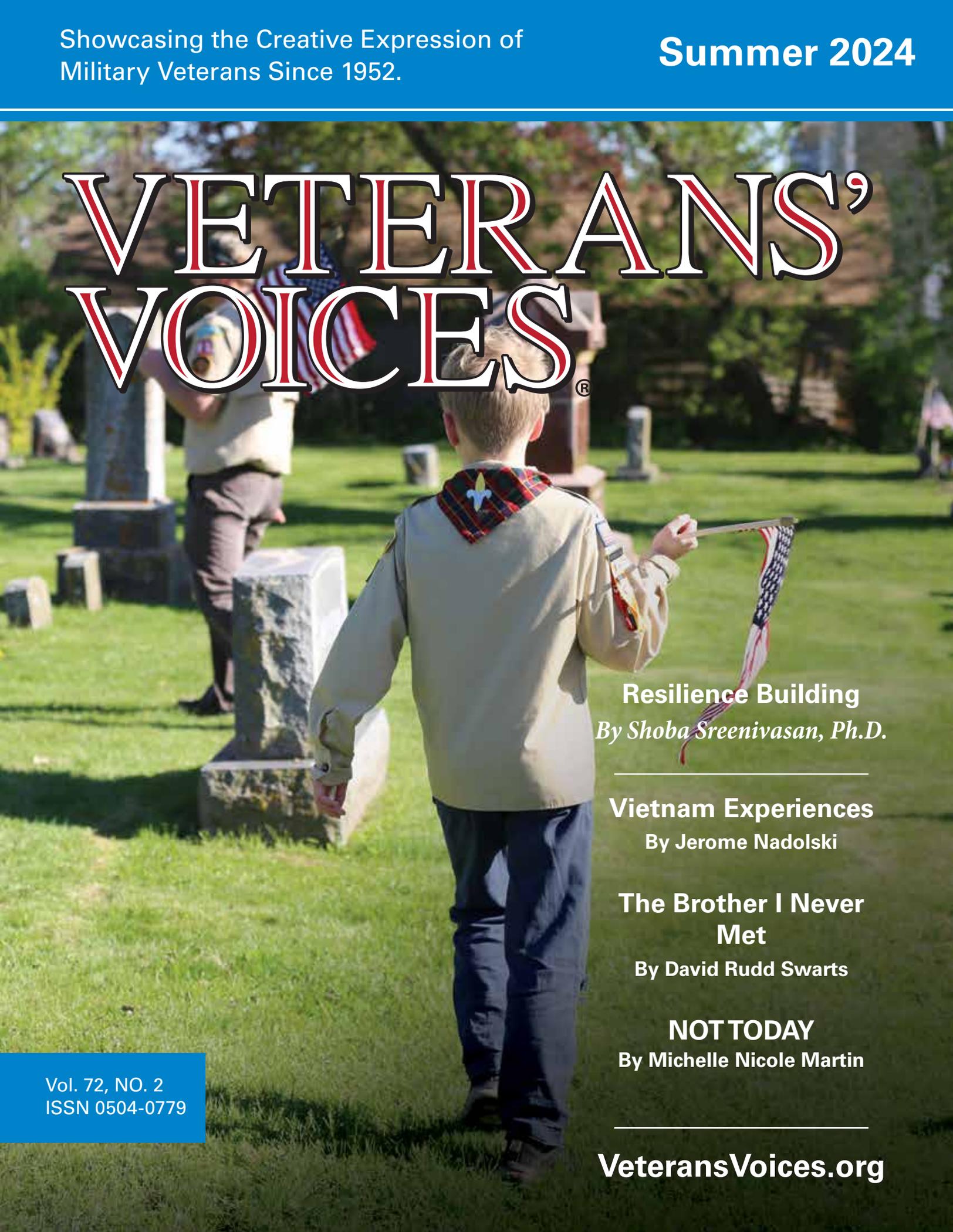


VETERANS' VOICES®



Resilience Building

By Shoba Sreenivasan, Ph.D.

Vietnam Experiences

By Jerome Nadolski

**The Brother I Never
Met**

By David Rudd Swarts

NOT TODAY

By Michelle Nicole Martin

Vol. 72, NO. 2
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VeteransVoices.org



Resilience Building

By Shoba Sreenivasan, Ph.D.



Shoba Sreenivasan, Ph.D., worked with veterans as a VA psychologist for over 28 years. She is currently a forensic psychologist with the California Department of State Hospitals and an adjunct clinical professor at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine.

Lolly Vegas, the co-founder of the Native American rock band Redbone, said after having suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed on one side that he was wounded but not slain. Though his left arm lay limp and he could no longer play the guitar or tour with the band, he was not slain. Instead of playing music he kept writing songs and developed a new skill: painting. His visual art was filled with the same creative energy as his music. How did Lolly Vegas do this? Though he may not have framed it in this way, he was using the building blocks of resilience: not catastrophizing and being adaptable by channeling his creative energy in new ways.

What is resilience?

Resilience is often defined as the ability to bounce back from stress or traumatic events. In 2009 the U.S. Army launched the Comprehensive Soldiers Fitness (CSF) program. The goal was to reach over one million soldiers and provide them with a “tool box” of ways to build resilience during and after adverse situations during war-zone deployments. The tools in that box came from psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman’s work in

positive psychology developed in the Penn Resilience Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

Building resilience.

How is resilience built? Deploying positive emotions can counteract the impact of traumatic events. The traumatic events can trigger negative emotions such as anxiety and helplessness. Dr. Seligman and colleagues cited research repeatedly demonstrating that building resilience required self-awareness of counterproductive thoughts, emotions and behaviors. It also required the ability to self-regulate emotions: that is, to control one’s emotions rather than be controlled by them. These concepts drawn from CSF and the Master Resiliency program are part of the tool box to build (or re-build) resilience that can be of value in civilian life.

Resilience means re-tooling your thinking.

Many of the CSF resilience skills involve promoting emotional health by becoming aware of automatic negative thoughts. Interestingly, a building block in the ability to bounce back from adversity, i.e., resilience, comes from being able to remember “signature strength” stories. These are the stories of those times when you had a “win” experience. Purposefully recalling those great stories, big or small (e.g., the time in Little League where you hit the home run; when you drove that elderly neighbor to their medical appointment), helps drop the negative and pivot to the positive. These stories help build up a habit of positive self-affirmation and

remind one of character strengths (i.e., the good things about you).

Resilience requires gut checks.

Resilience requires self-introspection and honesty (“gut checks”). Unconscious thinking traps may lead one to grievance thinking and grudge-holding. A gut check may involve having to go back over an experience and one’s reaction. Many times these “out of proportion” and counterproductive thoughts may be related to what Dr. Seligman and colleagues called “icebergs.” The icebergs are the tip of a large body of deeply held negative beliefs that become obstacles to changing one’s thinking as they are deeply held. A gut check of one’s “icebergs” means an awareness of “knee-jerk” reactions that may be rooted in negative childhood experiences, e.g., that you are unwanted; therefore a friend cancelling lunch means that you are not worthy of their time.

Resilience means flexibility and adaptability.

Those who are rigid in their responses and expectations have difficulty bouncing back from a stressor. Resilience building involves identifying the thinking ruts that trap you in helplessness, anger, depression, and can spiral out of control. These are some examples of thinking trap: “I’ll never get well” in response to a medical illness, or “I’m too stupid for college” in response to failing a test. A gut check involves paying attention to when automatic catastrophic thinking occurs. “Real-time” resilience is the practice of immediately recognizing the counterproductive thought and shutting it down.

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

History

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

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

Veterans' Voices®

Summer 2024 Vol. 72, No.2

Resilience Building2 <i>By Shoba Sreenivasan, Ph.D.</i>	Special Prizes for Writers65
Mail Call63	Submission Guidelines 66, 67
Thank You64	I Can't Write67 <i>By Richard Wangard</i>

Prose

Memorial Day on Omaha Beach7 <i>By Dan Yates</i>	Spring Forward29 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>
The Floating Pen8 <i>By Gilbert Weiss</i>	Empty Chair38 <i>By Joseph Harman</i>
Finding Purpose After Serving9 <i>By Jill Baker</i>	Hope and Healing in Afghanistan40 <i>By Gary L. Thomas</i>
Pursuing Wisdom, Finding and Fearing God10 <i>By Aaron Weyant</i>	A Good Life42 <i>By William Shepherd</i>
Love at First Sight13 <i>By Kenny C. Trujillo</i>	No Heroes Wanted44 <i>By H D Bedell</i>
A Father's Message15 <i>By William Propsner</i>	Lost Patrol45 <i>By William L. Snead</i>
Smythers16 <i>William L. Snead</i>	I Walked Where Jesus Walked46 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>
Home17 <i>By C. Nemeth</i>	The Brother I Never Met48 <i>By David Rudd Swarts</i>
All the Memories, Thank God18 <i>By Richard Wangard</i>	And So Passed the Sixth Day50 <i>By Alvin E. Youngquist</i>
What I Miss About the Army19 <i>By Michael D. Monfrooe</i>	My Story52 <i>By Kim Gwinner</i>
Vietnam Experiences20 <i>By Jerome Nadolski</i>	Inspiration From a WWII Veteran54 <i>By Richard Olson</i>
The Green Berets23 <i>By Charles Bremicker</i>	Ten Good Things From Macular Degeneration56 <i>By C. Nemeth</i>
Hoboes26 <i>William Shepherd</i>	The Spy57 <i>By Galen Murray</i>
Thoughts on "The Women" by Kristin Hannah28 <i>By Louise Eisenbrandt</i>	

Artwork

Vintage Swimmer	33	Come Find Me	35
<i>By Ty Andrews</i>		<i>By Wayne Ince</i>	
Inhale Exhale	33	My Family Tree	36
<i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>		<i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>	
Homeless Veteran	34	Deep Thinker	36
<i>By Forrest Evarts</i>		<i>By Gema Gabriela Benavides</i>	
Alone	34	Girl From Bangladesh	36
<i>By Alexandra Brown</i>		<i>By Ty Andrews</i>	
I'm Not A Hero	35		
<i>By Lawrence William Langman</i>			

Poetry

My Daddy's Combat Boots	8	I'm Just Mel	25
<i>By Kimberly Green</i>		<i>By Melvin Brinkley</i>	
Perseverance II	9	Come as You Are	26
<i>By Lenny Ellis</i>		<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>	
Like a Princess	9	Without You I'm a Whole Lot Blue	27
<i>By Allyson Hargrave</i>		<i>By Diane Wasden</i>	
At the Ocean	13	Who Am I?	27
<i>By Daniel Paicopulos</i>		<i>By Levill Taylor</i>	
Electing the President for the United States	13	War Torn	27
<i>By John E. Jones</i>		<i>By Frances Ann Wiedenhoeft</i>	
The Fallen	14	Soul Wound	29
<i>By Mark Fleisher</i>		<i>By Scott Day</i>	
Letter to an Eight-Year-Old	14	Locked Up	29
<i>By Michael England</i>		<i>By Kenny C. Trujillo</i>	
A Distant Love	16	Dear Mama	30
<i>By Lawrence W. Langman</i>		<i>By LoLeta Totton</i>	
The Little Ballerina	17	Remote Control	31
<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>		<i>By Steve Fournier</i>	
Veterans Day	18	There Is Hope	31
<i>By George Holloway</i>		<i>By Michael England</i>	
O Jewel of Stone	18	His Hand Was on My Plow	32
<i>By William L. Snead</i>		<i>By Paul David Gonzales</i>	
The Omen of War and Peace	19	These Tears That Fall	32
<i>By Joe Squeo</i>		<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>	
Insurrection	25	Go Ahead! Try To Wipe Me From Your Brow	37
<i>By Melvin Brinkley</i>		<i>By Kim Gwinner</i>	

The Cans and Cannots37 <i>By Norman L. Jones</i>	Cognitive51 <i>By John Tidwell</i>
Brighter Days37 <i>By Tracy Sellers</i>	That Look in His Eyes53 <i>By Tracy Sellers</i>
The Window Wall39 <i>By Kenneth Sanger</i>	Dreamscape55 <i>By Rainey Wright</i>
They Kept Coming41 <i>By Louise Eisenbrandt</i>	Block Walls55 <i>By Tanya R. Whitney</i>
Green Card Soldier: A Pantoum42 <i>By Carl "Papa" Palmer</i>	First Anniversary56 <i>Dan Yates</i>
Forgiveness Is a Gift42 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	Welcome Home58 <i>By John L. Swainston</i>
When America Came Into History43 <i>By Vanessa Fay Hicks-Callaway</i>	Woman58 <i>By Levell Taylor</i>
Fall43 <i>By Charles Fredette</i>	In the Garden58 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>
They Walk Among the Brave45 <i>By Rosalie Cooper</i>	Gunship Gunner59 <i>By James Allen Breitwieser</i>
Twin Towers46 <i>By Galen Murray</i>	Ah, The War Forgotten59 <i>By Melvin Brinkley</i>
Sculptors' Song: Haiku Sequence46 <i>By Lynn A. Norton</i>	A Lighter Shade of Blue59 <i>Dan Yates</i>
Far Away Yet So Near47 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>	Stories That Heal60 <i>Wayne G. Goodling</i>
My Dad47 <i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>	The Comfort Zone60 <i>Kim Gwinner</i>
NOT TODAY47 <i>By Michelle Nicole Martin</i>	Back From Iraq 4/0461 <i>By Carl "Papa" Palmer</i>
From Dad to Dog Tags50 <i>By Michael McBroom</i>	Flying High61 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>
The Small White Box in My Desk51 <i>By David Rudd Swarts</i>	

Memorial Day on Omaha Beach

By Dan Yates
—Blue Springs, MO



On Memorial Day, May 27, 2024, I woke up in a hotel room, not 20 miles from Normandy Beach. As I got dressed, I wondered what the day had in store for me. Would it be joy, pain, or some emotion in between?

The two previous days were spent visiting memorials, museums and cemeteries in the area. One of the more impressive museums was the Memorial Museum in Caen. The museum introduces the visitors to what was happening in the world, leading up to D-Day. Not only were there artifacts of the war, but also short documentaries, all in German, English and French.

We also went to the largest of 11 British military cemeteries in France. As expected, it was well-kept and primed for the 80th anniversary of D-Day. As I walked through the cemetery, I arbitrarily stepped closer to one of the gravestones to see what personal information the British put on their gravestones. To my surprise the name of the fallen soldier was YATES, my name. I couldn't believe it, what were the odds of that happening?

Breakfast was over and as I entered the hotel lobby on my way to get on the bus I saw my sister, retired Colonel Jane Yaws, also on the tour, standing at the front door of the hotel, handing out poppies to everyone on our tour. I can't remember

being prouder of her than I was at that moment. Yes, she smiled and gave me a poppy.

During the drive to Omaha Beach, we watched part of a documentary on D-Day. It was a collaboration put together by the American and German governments, so it wasn't slanted towards the Allies, but was objective, well-done and contained several surprising facts.

One that got my attention took place at Pointe du Hoc located between Utah Beach and Omaha Beach. It is a large sheer-face cliff that could not be climbed or scaled without assistance. The responsibility of taking Pointe de Hoc fell on two U.S. Ranger battalions. The Rangers trained on a beach in England, using rocket launchers to propel grappling hooks to the top of a 75-100-foot wall. Once secured the Rangers would scale the wall. On D-Day the Rangers made land with minimal casualties and set up their rocket launchers. They had 40 grappling hooks at their disposal. They began firing the grappling hooks up the cliff, but they fell short by 25-40 feet, with not one reaching the top. In assessing their failure, it was determined that the ropes had gotten so wet during the landing that the extra weight of the water prevented the grappling hooks from traveling as far as they had during practice. This possibility was not contemplated during practice, which never included a water landing as part of their practice. The Rangers broke open all of the crates containing the grappling hooks and found ten that weren't as wet and tried using them. Success!! Despite not being able to use 75 percent of the grappling hooks, the Rangers were now able to scale the cliff and achieve their goal. Unfortunately, 140 of the 225 Rangers were killed or injured due to this miscalculation.

Once we arrived at the parking area of Omaha Beach, we were told that we had an hour to view the monuments, memorials and walk the beach. I spent the next hour alone, not wanting anyone else's perspective as I moved from memorial to memorial, monument to monument. Then I looked out over the English Channel, calm and serene. Scattered clouds filled the air and the sun reflected off of the water.

Today it was 'postcard worthy.' No guns, no smoke, no screaming or crying. No shells exploding, no cries of, "Medic," nor the smell of death. I walked toward the Channel until I was 40-50 feet from the water and turned to the west. As far as I could see was Omaha Beach and beyond my view was Utah Beach. I slowly scanned eastward until I was gazing at the reflection of the morning sun off of the water. For as far as I could see, it was still Omaha Beach. As I stood there in quiet reflection, I was glad that I was alone. I didn't want anyone to interrupt the feelings that I was processing.

As I walked back to the bus, two children were laughing and running on the beach. They stopped and picked up some shells, then ran on. They were oblivious to the significance of the ground on which they were playing, as well as the day itself. I boarded the bus, it was quiet. Any talking that was taking place was in whispers. The significance of the ground that we had just walked on was not lost on us.

What a start to Memorial Day. Next stop was the U.S. military cemetery at Normandy, followed by a ceremony and fly over. Utah Beach would follow that. Could I handle it?

The day is over, what are my thoughts? It was both the most rewarding, yet saddest day of my life.

The Floating Pen

By Gilbert Weiss
—Port Washington, NY



Philadelphia – A fifth-grade elementary class on the fourth floor.

There were 15 pupils in Mr. Jones' fifth-grade class. And it so happens, there were identical twin boys in the class. They were seated far apart from one another. At the time of this story, Mr. Jones was conducting an English lesson.

One of the twins needed a pen. Then a very strange thing happened. The pen rose up from the other twin's desk and floated in the air to his brother's desk. The students were amazed. Mr. Jones was amazed. They couldn't believe what they saw. And, so, at the request of the teacher, one of the students was sent down to the principal's office to explain what had happened in Mr. Jones' class. The principal was all ears.

The principal sent for the twins. He said to them, "I am very proud to have you as students in this school. Your grades are magnificent." The principal then went on to say, "A student from your class told me something about a floating pen. Can you show me something?"

The twins were sitting on chairs. All of a sudden, the chairs began to rise up to the ceiling and then floated back down to the floor. Having observed this strange happening very carefully, the principal was astonished. He said, "I have never in my life seen such an unbelievable demonstration!"

Well, the months and years passed by. The twins graduated from elementary school and then high school. Other happenings occurred along the way. Upon graduating from high school, the twins enrolled at Columbia University. Their goal—to study the human brain and strange phenomena.

BVL AWARD

My Daddy's Combat Boots

By Kimberly Green
—Fort Smith, AR

My daddy's combat boots
lie still in the attic;
dust gathers on the top.
Placed in a corner,
rubber starts to rot.

The suede is no longer serviceable,
and the strings have fallen apart.
But, boy oh boy,
if those boots could talk.

They'd seen the desert
In the middle of the night,
watched Patriot missiles
shot off in the sky.

They jumped from helicopters
and stood in the door.
Airborne paratrooper,
best of the best evermore.

So, I think I'll take
those old boots inside,
dust off the dirt,
clean 'em up, make them mine.

And say a little word
to the man that was
because I'm proud of you, Dad,
just because.

Perseverance II

By Lenny Ellis

VA Medical Center—Madison WI

Being here
is such a chore.
I wish that I
could be no more.

I also wish
I could ignore
the bombs and bullets,
and this damned war.

But since I'm here,
I've got to know—
is this place real
or just a dream?
A madman's whim
without a scheme?

Perhaps, someday
I'll find the truth,
and learn again
to love my youth.

Like a Princess

By Allyson Hargrave

—Orem, UT

I walk and act like a princess
on the way to becoming a queen,
holding my head up high,
with humility and grace.

I humble myself before the king
as I kneel and bow my head.
Please forgive me for my mistakes;
he tells me that I am forgiven.

He invites me to sit with him.
I am pleased, my daughter.
The king holds his head up high;
you represent us well, my child.

With beauty and grace,
one day you'll be a queen
with a king of your own.
Princes and princesses will follow you.

Finding Purpose After Serving

By Jill Baker

VA Medical Center—Sioux Falls, SD



The youngest years of life leave an imprint on who we are and what we will become.

I grew up as a military kid who lived in different states and countries. “Pride in country” has been instilled in me since birth. After high school, I knew I wanted to give back to the country that had raised me in a unique environment filled with diverse friendships and interesting experiences. To have that stripped away from me by the tender age of 21 through no fault of my own was devastating.

In my first article, “A Mother’s Knot,” I felt it was important to share the military experiences (including being the victim of sexual assault) that led to a diagnosis through the Veterans Benefits Administration. It was a long uphill battle to receive a service-connected disability that once received, placed me in a position to be negatively judged and stereotyped by society. I believe that no veteran should have to walk through that process alone.

One of the largest hurdles I had to overcome post-service was finding a new sense of purpose. No matter who you are, what branch you served in, or what your job was while serving, to lose that sense of purpose is something many veterans can relate to.

At the heart of what I do as a leader in the veteran-serving space is to find ways to help military-connected individuals re-discover their sense of purpose. We don’t stop serving just because we no longer wear a uniform to work. Dedication to duty is an integral part of who we are as citizens. How we fulfill that duty post-service is crucial to who we will become as we age.

It is critical for veteran-serving organizations to develop programming that acknowledges that struggle. We need to engage military-connected individuals in as many ways as possible through as many avenues as possible. As leaders and agents of change, we don’t have to figure out how to do that alone. I have met so many awesome people across the country working to re-envision our roles in how to manage the gap between the military and civilian lifestyles. Such work involves collaboration, innovation and a willingness to engage in change efforts.

Veteran-serving organizations should consider the importance of purpose while acknowledging the negative outcomes that may result from a purposeless life. Connection is at the heart of healing, and purpose is how we connect to our hearts. I’m ready to start that conversation when you are.

Pursuing Wisdom, Finding and Fearing God

By Aaron Weyant
VA Medical Center— Philadelphia, PA

My personal pursuit of wisdom started at a late age. I was 22 years old, stationed at Joint Maritime Facility/ Royal Air Force Saint Mawgan, United Kingdom in the U.S. Navy. It was there that I came to the Jewish faith. My personal heroes back then and now are from the Hebrew scriptures. Right now I want to focus on King Solomon, for it is King Solomon's writings

that set me on my path 21 years ago. He said, "Nothing is greater than wisdom, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This statement has been a driving force in my life.

I know this is a lot to take in. In fact, it is borderline insane, or as my mom would say "It's bat crap crazy." I have to admit I have never been, at least in my mind, a sane man since I was 22 years old. Seeking and fearing God has been the focus of my life.

While stationed in England, I made a promise to myself that I would save up my money and travel to the two holiest places in the world. First stop, Ethiopia's Church of St. Mary to walk with the Ark of the Covenant. Second stop, Jerusalem to pray at the Temple Mount. This was to be a trip of a lifetime. My personal pilgrimage. At the time, this seemed like a crazy dream.

After serving in England for two years, I requested submarine duty and was sent off to Groton, Conn., for submarine school. After over a year of schooling I was assigned to the U.S.S. Texas in Newport News, Va. I quickly excelled in the submarine building stages all because I kept God first and was actively pursuing wisdom. At this time, I thought I was



living the best years of my life. I had lots of money, a truck, a luxurious apartment in Newport News and I was soon on my way to living my dream career as a test engineer at Northrup Grumman Newport News.

Like King Solomon, God gave me everything I dreamt of and so much more. I was on fire. This worried my mother greatly. Mom always said "If you don't slow down the Lord will find a way to make you stop and smell the roses." Like a dummy, I paid no heed to my mother's warning. I was working a minimum of 15 hours a day plus 24-hour duty every three days. I just kept reassuring my mom that she worried too much and that God wouldn't give me anything I couldn't handle. Besides, I was making a lot of money doing what I loved and saved every last cent to fund my pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

One day my mother's warning came true. I herniated a disc in my lower back and never fully recovered from that injury. I spent two years at Naval Station Norfolk, Va., on limited duty. The Navy doctors gave me two years to rehabilitate, but I never fully recovered from my injuries. I received an honorable discharge from the Navy in May of 2007. From that point forward, I was angry at God for taking away the job

I enjoyed the most, and that was ship building. I still love the Creator even though He took away my health and livelihood. I still have a hard time figuring out if I was angry at God or myself. At that time, I still wanted to become an engineer. With my signed DD-214 and my honorable discharge in my hand I packed my belongings and headed to Indianapolis,

Ind., to attend ITT Technical Institute for their Bachelors of Science in Industrial Automation Engineering Technology degree.

I worked really hard at ITT and got decent grades. No matter how much my back bothered me and no matter how many prescription medications I was on I still made it to class every night. I was in a lot of physical pain, and on top of that I was slowly losing my mind. The instructors at ITT Tech started noticing big changes in my personality. So did the doctors at the Roudebush Veteran's Hospital in Indianapolis, Ind. I started to have nightmares and daytime terrors about angels and demons. I guess they were waiting to see which side I was on. Was I working for the Accuser (Satan) or was I on God's side. I always thought everything I ever did and will do is for the glory of God. Doctors just brushed it off as a spiritual experience or spiritual schizophrenia (if there is such a thing). This battle I was experiencing went on from 2008 to 2010. Everyone at school thought I was bat crap crazy, because I wore magical amulets inspired by the Old Testament. I told my teachers and fellow students I was protecting myself from evil spirits. My instructors tried to

convince me to stop school until I got my head on straight. I took no heed to their warning, I kept on attending classes. I started noticing gradual changes in the way that I thought. My thought patterns were irrational. Everyone knew it, including me. I was offered psychiatric medications but respectfully refused because I was on so many medications at the time. Boy was I wrong yet again.

Students and staff at ITT and doctors at the VA hospital had a hard time understanding me. I was gradually losing my mind, but I still trusted in God and praised Him every day. In 2010, I graduated with my bachelor's degree. My final GPA was 3.72. My instructors told me that I was lucky to receive that because they all felt that they had to carry me through school, and they wished me the best of luck in all my endeavors. I felt like a failure ever since then. I was unable to work because of severe back pain and I felt that I was slipping further and further into insanity. At that time, I wanted to obtain a master's degree in engineering technology, but the VA doctors and I agreed to put my education ambitions on hold for a while until my back and my mind healed.

This was never meant to be. My back and my mental health worsened over the years. Between 2010 and 2012 I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder with acute depression. I did not take the diagnosis seriously. As my mom would say, "I was in denial."

Even though God took away my sanity and my livelihood I still loved God, but I was a bit angry at Him. I still read every book attributed to King Solomon. I admit I did not revere God, and that's my biggest problem even to this day. I am mad at God more than I fear Him.

The year of 2012 was one hell of a year for me and for the rest of the world as well. I admit I was an End of Days nut job. I will always remember this date—Dec. 21,

2012—the end of the Mayan calendar but not necessarily the End of Days or the beginning of the End of Days. I still believe I am living in the End Times because Sir Isaac Newton predicted that the world will come to an end in the year 2060. Sorry, that's my schizoaffective disorder kicking in. I shouldn't be worried about such things. I have learned to let go.

Anyway, back to my love story in the making. In the summer of 2012, I decided to make my spiritual pilgrimage to Ethiopia and Jerusalem. I strongly believed at the time that the world was going to end on Dec. 21 of that year, and I wanted to be in Jerusalem when it ended. So there I was selling everything I had of value to fund this one way crazy adventure. I had \$5,000 total. I bought a one-way flight from Indianapolis to Ethiopia and from Ethiopia to the Ben Gurion Airport in Israel. I also booked a hotel room for four weeks. I had no intentions to return to the U.S. at the time.

Before I knew it, November 2012 came around, and I packed my bags and left Indianapolis for Ethiopia on Nov. 14. I made it to Axum, Ethiopia, safely without any incidents. I had a great time in Axum. I spent a total of four days there. I wasn't leaving without seeing the Ark of the Covenant. My tour guides couldn't promise me that I would see the Ark of the Covenant.

I got lucky on that trip because my tour guide's father was a monk. He made me a promise that if I saw all the sites that there were to see in Ethiopia, then I would be allowed to walk with the Ark during their festival when Ethiopians walk with the Ark around Axum. He told me to just give him four days. I agreed, and he made good on his promise. During those four days I got to see the burial places of all the kings of Ethiopia, and I got to sit on Queen Sheba's stone throne. My guide took me to Yeha, where he had a surprise for me. In

Yeha, I climbed up their holiest mountain with the help of the monks and holy men on top of that mountain. I almost lost my life climbing that mountain because right beside me a monk was hoisting up the presumed Ark of the Covenant. I tried to touch it. Little did I know that below the mountain a soldier was about to shoot me dead, because only the Guardian of the Ark of the Covenant was allowed to touch it. I almost fell to my death trying to touch it. I lost my grip and footing at the top of the holy mountain and fell until the monks caught the rope. When I finally reached the top of the holy mountain I was severely chastised by the head monk in charge there. My guide came to my rescue and explained to the holy man that I was sick and I wanted the Ark to heal me. The Monk's anger subsided, and he felt sorry for me. He blessed me on that mountain and told me I must be on my way, and he sent a monk down with me to explain to the heavily armed soldier not to execute me because I am mentally ill and trying to be healed.

On my fourth and final day in Ethiopia, my guide woke me up at 4 a.m. and dressed me in his father's clothing to look like an Ethiopian holy man so that I could walk with the Ark of the Covenant through Axum. It was worth the wait. I got to walk with the Ark; I got to walk with God.

I left Ethiopia on Dec. 20, 2012, and arrived that day at Ben Gurion Airport in Israel. I traveled with Ethiopian Jews on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On arrival, terrorists stopped firing rockets from Gaza so that our flight could land safely. I still don't understand why rockets were being fired in the first place. All I know is that God was protecting me on my travels. Upon landing, I was greeted by airport police. I was interviewed for an hour. They wanted to know why I didn't purchase a ticket back to the United States. I told them the partial truth. I explained to them that I was on a

(Continued On Page 12)

quest to experience God in the holiest place in the world, and that place is Jerusalem's Old City. The airport police granted my request only because I reserved four weeks at a hotel in the Palestinian quarter of the Old City.

The Airport Police notified local authorities in Jerusalem that if I caused any problems not to hesitate to send me to one of their local mental institutions. I promised them I was not there to cause problems with anyone. The cab ride from the airport to the Old City was an interesting one. The cab driver was my hotel's manager. He decided to take me on the scenic route to the Old City. We stopped by the Tomb of the Maccabees where Judah of Maccabee, his forefather, is buried and the place where he would like to be buried one day. I never asked him for his name, but he allowed me to call him Mr. Maccabee.

He knew why I came to Israel because the airport police kindly informed him of my presence there. I promised Mr. Maccabee that I was not here to cause any problems and that I was there to experience God. He told me that I wouldn't experience anything because all the holy sites are closed to tourists because the 2012 End of Days idiots were causing trouble and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would not tolerate such behavior. I told him I was determined to experience God in the holiest place in the world. That was the partial truth. I left out the whole truth because I was afraid of what he might think of me if I told him that I was one of those 2012 End of Days idiots. After what seemed like an hour drive, we made it safely without any incident to the hotel.

I fell asleep as soon as I was given a room. I rested well because I was about to embark on a great quest to seek out God on the Temple Mount. I woke up the following afternoon. I missed breakfast but was on

time for lunch. Mr. Maccabee told me where to sit so I could get something to eat while I planned my trip. After lunch, I tried to get a cab driver to take me to the Tomb of the Patriarchs. The clerk at the hotel told me no cab driver is crazy enough to drive me there. I asked the clerk if there is anyone who can take me to the Western Wall. The clerk told me all sites were closed, even the sites revered by Christians, places like the River Jordan and the Tomb of Jesus.

Mr. Maccabee came out of his office and told me that he was taking tourists back to the airport and that he could take me also. He asked me how much money I had left, and I was truthful about it. I told him I had only \$5,900 but I would get paid again in two weeks. He informed me that I didn't have enough to stay in Jerusalem even though I was paid up for four weeks at the hotel. I told him I would try to have my family wire me \$51,000 so I could stay there until I did what I came there to do, and that was to experience God.

He called a cab driver to take me to the Old Embassy where I could call my family back home for some money. The cab driver couldn't take me to any of the holy sites, especially the Temple Mount, because I was not a Muslim. He was nice enough to get me as close to the Mount of Olives as he was allowed by local police. We stayed long enough to pray on the side of the road overseeing the Mount of Olives.

He dropped me off at the Old Embassy in Jerusalem. I called my mother and told her the situation I had gotten myself into. She told me I was nuts for asking her for money. She was right, \$51,000—crazy amount of money. She told me to do whatever I had to do to come back home. I told her I couldn't because I only had \$5,900 in my account and my credit card was maxed out.

She didn't want to hear any excuses. My mom and dad thought I would get mixed

up with religious fanatics that would ultimately get me killed. I told her God would find a way to get me home. The cab driver waited for me at the embassy. At this point I was in tears. I failed once again. The cab driver assured me that I didn't fail and it was God's will, his divine Plan to protect me even from myself. I arrived safely at the hotel and thanked that wonderful man for his prayers and kind words of encouragement. I told Mr. Maccabee what transpired, and he promised to take me back to the airport.

He felt sad that I couldn't experience all the Holy Land has to offer. He told me one day I'd be back and that I should book my trip with a religious group for my safety. The next morning Mr. Maccabee drove me back to the Ben Gurion Airport. The airport police were less than thrilled to see me so soon. They again interviewed me for an hour and I told them the whole truth. They did not like the lies I told them when I arrived there a day and a half ago. They asked me how much money I had and I told them I only had less than \$5,900 and a maxed out credit card. They wished me luck on buying a ticket to Indianapolis for only \$5,900. I told the police God would find a way. I was laughed at. I used my maxed out credit card to purchase a ticket to Indianapolis, and it went through. God found a way. Navy Federal increased my limit to cover the cost for a one-way ticket back to Indianapolis.

The flight to Indianapolis was a terrible experience because I acted up on the flight. I was lucky there were no flight marshals on that trip because I was about to be arrested. The flight attendants tried to convince the pilots that I was a terrorist. I got to talk to the pilots, and they just said to the attendants that I was just a very disturbed veteran of the armed forces. The pilots told me to take a seat and relax for the rest of the flight.

At the Ocean

By Daniel Paicopulos
—San Diego, CA

I write, inspired by the writing of others,
by veterans, my sisters and brothers,
by the natural world in constant motion,
by pier-bound days at the steel-blue ocean,
by the sun and the moon,
their setting and rising,
their own songs, their tunes,
sometimes surprising.
Standing at a dock, I have a notion.
My monkey mind bursts unable to cease.
Even if I am but a drop in the ocean,
it is still my privilege to wage peace.
Never knowing what tomorrow will bring,
I will still write about it in my own voice,
allow my heart and soul, my spirit to sing,
reminded always there's no other choice.

Electing the President for the United States

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

One who stands for the United States of America
Is the Commander in Chief,
Who wants life to survive and to help people
In need of relief.
Hoping to succeed with a successful plan,
Making changes to do all a President can.
The President wants every American growing
And, within the nation, always knowing.
The decision we make is everyone's choice and price.
Every President for the United States
Has called for peace to save hopes and lives.
Change takes determination, direction and choice,
And a truthful ring to the President's voice.
Every President's heart is filled with love
For all the people of this blessed grateful nation:
The United States of America.

Love at First Sight

By Kenny C. Trujillo
VA Medical Center—Las Vegas, NV



I met my future wife at Albertson's Grocery Store in the toothpaste section Jan. 10, 1987. I walked up to her and told her that it seems they only sell large tubes of toothpaste. She, Margaret, replied, "I wish the store sold smaller quantities, as it's only me and my two boys."

I then asked her if there might be a time that she and I could have a cup of coffee and talk. She stated that she didn't know if I was married or not. I gave her one of my business cards and told her that she could call my boss and ask him.

She told me where she worked, and two days later I showed up at her place of employment with a letter of introduction. Seven months later we were wed. Together we have three sons, three daughters and 23 grandchildren.

The Fallen

By Mark Fleisher

VA Medical Center— Albuquerque NM

The government gave him a marble tombstone,
his widow a perfectly folded flag.
The raven-haired little girl,
the handsome little boy tugging at his tie,
a red poppy in his lapel.
Memories wrapped in wondering tears,
staining innocent smiles.

He died in the desert,
metal shards leaving little trace.
An explosive device, the captain said,
just blew off a once-handsome face.

He died in a rice paddy,
face down in the filthy muck,
a sniper's bullet in his brain,
a run of lousy luck.

He died on a mountaintop.
A wayward artillery round
sent shrapnel into his body
defending some worthless ground.

He died at thirty thousand feet,
his plane blown from the sky.
Didn't have time to parachute,
didn't have time to ask God, "Why?"

He died aboard a destroyer.
A torpedo ran hot and true,
struck his boat amidships,
bloodying the ocean, once blue.

She died in a prison camp,
serving proudly as a nurse,
comforting the dead and dying.
Damn wars—the devil's curse.

He died in a foxhole,
fell upon an enemy grenade.
A posthumous medal for bravery.
War, you see, is no charade.

He died some years later,
lungs shriveled by poison gas.
Just a simple country boy,
not of the privileged class.

Gold stars affixed to windows
made dark by clouds of grief.
The agony of time passing
offers little respite or relief.

The government gave them marble
tombstones,
their kin, perfectly folded flags,
and the little girls and the little boys
will remember memories of a time
they will come to understand
when red poppies bloom.

Letter to an Eight-Year-Old

By Michael England

VA Medical Center— Brooklyn, NY

You never use algebra, so don't let them fool ya.
Geometry is much more useful
especially if you learn to play pool.
Pray you have a healthy mind.
Try to be as real as you can,
and don't give up too easily.
Your feelings can be changed medically
if they get too harsh to live with.
You are a child of God, and He loves you
even though it don't seem so at times.
You will not always be happy,
but you will find some joy.

A Father's Message

By William Propsner
—Jonesville, NM

He stood on the edge of the deck looking out over the vast Pacific. Pvt. Randy Thompson was not comfortable aboard big ships like this one. He had only been in the Marines for a few months, and after he graduated Marine boot camp, they sent him and his entire squad to an unknown island somewhere in the South Pacific.

America had been in the war now for eight months, and Private Thompson was definitely feeling homesick. He stood

there looking out at the open ocean and dreaming of his times fishing with his younger brother on the lake back in Alabama. He could close his eyes and hear the ducks and imagine the smell of the morning fog. But then, the smell of the salt air would stir him awake from his daydream and remind him of where he was.

“Private Thompson! Why are you not in your sack sleeping like I ordered?” yelled his company commander, Sgt. Leslie Owens.

Private Thompson quickly stood at attention and replied to the sergeant. “Sir, sorry sir. I couldn’t sleep. I was thinking about our destination, sir.”

“Well, you let me worry about our destination, private,” the sergeant said. “Now you get down below to your rack and sleep. That’s an order, private!”



Harris, we are approaching your debark station. The crew of the Harris wishes you all the best and God speed.”

With that said, the captain spoke once more, “Debark stations, ready your landing craft.” The speaker went silent and the ship claxon sounded once more, telling the Marines that it was time to stand by the cargo nets to board the landing craft.

Private Thompson became very nervous as he stood in line with all of his fellow

“Sir, yes sir,” replied Private Thompson as he quickly turned and ran to the down ladder.

Sergeant Owens watched as the private made his way to his rack. Smiling, the sergeant said to himself, “Damn, I hate it when they send us these young kids. Lord, let this kid survive the war.”

Sergeant Owens was a hard man, but he had a compassionate soft side when it came to his men.

At 0400 on board the transport ship, the quartermaster sounded the battle station claxon, awakening with a start every Marine on board. As each one clambered out of his rack, all had readied themselves for whatever danger awakened them. They all scrambled to the upper decks to their battle debark stations.

A voice over the ship loudspeaker announced: “Men of the transport ship

Marines. Then it was his turn to climb down the net. He slung his M-1 over his shoulder and moved over the edge of the ship’s rail and onto ropes of the cargo net. Feeling the rough cargo net rope brought some calm to Private Thompson. He had felt rope like this only in boot camp, and that reminded him of home.

A voice sounded in his head. “Son, I always told you not to be afraid of the unknown.” Pvt. Randy Thompson was hearing his father. “Son, I will be by your side all the way. You will be safe; you will come back home. I will see you through this unknown. Trust your father, son.”

Private Thompson made it to the island. He had the good fight, and he was awarded medals. He safely made it back home.

He had listened to his father.

Smythers

William L. Snead
Kingsford, MI



It was a cold, windy day back in March of '67 as I stood on the Roosevelt Street Bridge. I was half awake as I gazed north toward Madison Avenue up State Street. In the days of a past world, famous Minsky's played a big part in Chicago's iconic reputation. Up and down the left side of State Street were flophouses for two bucks a night. In between those houses were taverns and dives of almost any type.

It was near noon, and the sun's brilliant radiance brought forth a warmth that took almost all of the chill out of my bones. Just then, I heard a voice from below the bridge on the left side of State Street. "He Oh HO HO HEO HO." It was a voice projecting itself from the far distant past. It was a voice that was familiar.

It was Doctor Smythers pointing to me and then pointing to his own face.

I scampered down the stairs on the left side of the Roosevelt Street Bridge and stepped on to State Street to meet him. His rolling, black eyes stared at me in disbelief. He tried to half hug me as he shook my hand. With his "hum hum," he explained to me how his tongue was cut out. Being depressed, he headed for State and Madison. Madison Avenue is where many former lawyers and doctors congregate.

We headed for one of the in-between joints. It would be just a temporary stop. The joint was named Louie Louie.

And the sad story I got from Doc Smythers would tear anyone's heart out. His wife and kids were gone. His clinic was in a critical financial status and could not be helped. He'd also lost his stellar reputation with the community. We left Louie Louie's at 5:20 p.m. It was late and time for me to go.

I shook his hand as I put my left hand on his right shoulder and said goodbye. Then I handed him a sawbuck and a couple of fins. He had tears in those black, rolling eyes. He then turned and pulled away from me and crossed to the right side of State Street.

It was the last I saw of him as he headed north to Madison Avenue. I went back up the stairs of the Roosevelt Street Bridge, looked west and saw the sun red balling. It was time to go home.

Years later, I heard of a young tongueless dentist who practiced in a small town south of Kankakee in central Illinois. They say he was quite successful. After all, he had dropped the bottle and had gone back to his God.

A Distant Love

By Lawrence W. Langman
—Portage, IN

Seven rivers are far from here,
lots of miles and many tears.
Days will drag; time stands still.
We kissed atop that Ferris wheel.

I hope we can relight that flame,
the days when love still remained.
They always said we were meant;
a love like ours was heaven-sent.

Holy were those vows we took
by that meadow's running brook.
Birds played our nature's song;
we gave our souls forever long.

Too much time has gone away;
love we made harps would play.
Her kiss of angels upon my cheek
incites my heart to skip a beat.

Up her driveway, I slowly crept;
on her porch she sat and wept.
I approached; my throat just swelled.
I'm living in my personal hell.

My lips moved but without a sound,
vocal chords frozen and bound.
She wiped a falling tear that fell
as words slipped out as in a spell.

Oh, do fonder hearts doth fear
in front of this beauty I hold dear?
To never part in life where reigned,
a world apart, this love sustained.

Home

By C. Nemeth

VA Medical Center—Albuquerque NM



Home is many things to different people. It's the house where you were raised; it's the town; it's your parents. The list is almost endless, but to me it seems to boil down to one thing, one crazy dish my mom always made for me when I got back home.

It's been years since I've eaten this simple fare, yet my mouth waters as I write this. "What is it?" you ask. Well, we always called it by its Hungarian name. Rough translation: fried onions and dumplings.

Now hold on; don't gag yet. Let me describe, if not explain. Mom would make a batch of ordinary dough, like for bread or noodles. She would then use a serving spoon to cut the dough directly into boiling water, creating small dumplings roughly the size of a hen's egg.

When they were ready, she poured off the water. Onions that had been sautéed until they were transparent stood ready in a pan. Into this skillet of fried onions went the dumplings. The concoction was stirred until the onions and dumplings were well mixed.

Simple, no? Delicious, most assuredly. I couldn't stop until they were all gone. I can't explain why I loved it so. From my earliest memories I always was excited when Mom made this for us.

We all love the smell of frying onions. The aroma is like nothing else. Perhaps remembering the smell will help you understand my love for fried onions and dumplings. Nothing has ever said "Welcome back home" to me more vividly.

This then, is my memory of my childhood and my Indiana home.

TH NORTON AWARD: EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Little Ballerina

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

The little ballerina
stares intently at her reflection in a large mirror.
Dad watches from afar.

Daddy loves his little daughter;
To him she's a bright and shining star.

As she twirls around,
her tutu flutters in the air.

Circling round and round,
she extends each arm,
interlocking them here and there.

She tip-toes and then she lunges
right upon her bedroom floor;
she tip-toes and then she twirls a little more.

Her hair is up in a bun,
and a flowered headband is wrapped upon her little head.

She continues dancing to finish her routine,
so she can rest up in her bed.

But Daddy continues watching
such a beautiful sight and so fair.

'Cause his little girl puts in such grace and dedication,
her beauty does not compare.

Daddy's little ballerina continues dancing
across the bedroom floor;

Daddy's little ballerina steals his heart forevermore.

All the Memories, Thank God

By Richard Wangard
—Neenah, WI



I just got back from San Antonio, Texas. Another memory I will never ever forget.

Way back in 1968 I started something I never knew would carry over for three generations. I joined the Air Force at 17 right after graduation from high school. Then in 1994 my oldest son joined the Army for four years, a cav scout and airborne. Now his oldest son, my oldest grandson, has joined the Air Force. I just got back from watching him graduate from basic training. My oldest son Casey and I are so proud of him.

But that is not all. Most of my entire family were there in San Antonio. We all watched Logan graduate from Air Force basic training, and what a time we all had. Many photos taken. Logan straight as an arrow, now even more in shape and stronger than ever, an 18-year-old man who I must admit was and is the apple of my eye since I helped raise him to age 14.

We always had and have a no-secrets policy. He spent so much time with me, and I loved every moment. Baseball and Monopoly and many more memories. I hugged him so tight so many times, held him as a baby. It is harder to see your grandchildren grow up and leave to go on their own than it was for me to let my children go on their own. Especially Logan.

So for a week Sandy and I traveled for the first time in six years. Wild horses would not have kept me from being with Logan on Family Day and at his graduation. It's probably one of the fondest memories I will ever have as I hugged him so tight and he hugged me tighter. Then he was off to tech school.

He's so intelligent; the Air Force knows exactly what they got, and they will use him. His dad and I were always combat oriented, not Logan: he's too smart for that. He will direct the resources necessary to save lives with his skills and know exactly what enemies are where.

Oh, the memories we all shared. I think back to Nam wondering why I lived? Three tours, because I refused to leave my brothers. I'm no hero; just did my job, but my body and mind paid the price. I remember all that just like it was yesterday, and now I am 73. A lifetime of PTSD, but I learned somewhat how to cope. It really never goes away; you just try to get by.

What pure joy can do for the soul! My Logan, all grown up. Now it's his turn to serve, the third generation that I never knew at 17 I would start. If there is anyone luckier than myself, I would love to meet them. So blessed, so thankful.

What is so so cool is that Logan has a strong faith. Even in basic he never missed Mass. This young man is going to go far, and the nation is super lucky to have him. As I age out, I remember all the good times. And the bad times; well, they fade. I am so so happy, and this trip to San Antonio showed me just how lucky I am.

Veterans Day

By George Holloway
— Elmore, AL

This is Veterans Day for all of us.
This is the day we can trust.
We have fought all over the world
to liberate the boys and girls.
Peace is what we need;
that is why we should stay on our knees.
We thank God for mercy and grace,
because we must finish the race.
Our Armed Forces are to protect others
because they are our brothers.
Be good to people you love,
and you will be blessed from above.
Share the knowledge that you know,
and your brother will surely grow.
Be ready to protect your enemy,
and you will receive the love of many.
You must read the words so you can see.
God bless you and me.
Amen.

O Jewel of Stone

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

O priceless jewel of stone,
You have no flesh, no blood, no bone.
You stand and stand alone.
Sheer, cliff-like walls,
with colorfully stained and painted glass,
have seen a thousand knights.
Laughing gargoyle faces that leer
in unchanged time,
have seen a thousand years.
The arch of your entrance,
frozen in eternal sleep,
has seen a thousand kings.
And the vesper chamber
where, Quasimodo,
the bell ringer lurked,
has seen
a thousand ghosts of you.
O Notre Dame,
priceless jewel of stone,
will stand and stand alone.

What I Miss About the Army

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



What do I miss about the Army?
Sitting on the couch with my daughter as I spit-shined my boots.
The sound of “Taps” playing at night when we lived on post.
Starching/ironing my BDU’s, a reg no-no. But I did it anyway.
Snapping to attention when a brand new second lieutenant walked in, knowing he was grinning inside.
Being part of something that’s hard to explain to civilians.
Using acronyms for everything.
The ability to tell someone to go to hell with a simple look.
Having a former trainee come up to you and say “Thanks.”
Seeing a brand new West Point second lieutenant tapping her desk with her ring.
Having a trainee introduce me to their parents.
Pulling CQ on a Thursday and getting a three-day weekend.
Sending a new soldier to supply for a box of grid squares.
Looking around my den, with its history of tears, laughs, pride and some disappointments—a soldier’s life.

DORIS COBB MEMORIAL AWARD

The Omen of War and Peace

By Joe Squeo
VA Medical Center—Norwalk, CT

Oh, how deaf we have all become as
the war hawks spread their screeching songs
of death and destruction.
They have sung their ear-piercing songs throughout history.
Oh, how blind we have become
as war hawks spread their wings over foreign lands.
Their shadows grow with each new day,
and spread plagues, famine and death upon human prey.
Our souls have become equally dark.
Brothers and sisters turning against each other.
Someone asks, “So which side is God on?”
The answer is always, “On our side, of course.”
Do not mothers on all sides grieve equally?
Don’t we bleed the same blood and share the pain?
Don’t grieving fathers say, “Our sons, our daughters died
heroes for the homeland?”
When all is said and done,
only evil and death seem to have won.
The drums of war will be silenced,
and the trumpets of peace shall be played.
Pray for the final day
when the “Warrior of All Warriors” joins the fight.
Only then will the dove of peace take majestic flight.



Vietnam Experiences

By Jerome Nadolski

VA Medical Center—Detroit MI

After college in 1966, I was hired by the Ford Motor Company to begin a career in business management, only to receive a draft notice shortly after being hired. I was able to defer my entrance into the military, as I chose to enter the Marine Corps as an officer candidate commencing January 1967.

It was a dream of mine since high school to attend the Naval Academy and eventually go into the Marine Corps, but life took me elsewhere. I entered the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School (OCS) with a verbal promise that after graduation as a second lieutenant, I could possibly train as a security platoon leader at one of the many U.S. embassies around the world. Because of my family upbringing in a very Polish Detroit area and our familiarity with the Polish customs and language and living with our emigrant Polish speaking grandparents and studying the Polish language for two years in college, I was almost assured of an assignment in Eastern Europe, and possibly in Russia and Poland.

After completing OCS and the Marine Corps version of infantry school, I learned that due to the high casualty rates of second lieutenants in Vietnam, 67 percent of our class upon graduation would be sent to Vietnam and would most likely be assigned as an infantry platoon leader.

After leave, I flew to Travis Air Force Base in San Francisco, then Alaska and Okinawa for a flight to Da Nang, Vietnam. After a one-day stay in Okinawa (when we were informed that Marines were no longer



welcomed in local bars) we stored our stateside uniforms in large containers and then dressed in jungle fatigues and were issued helmets and flak jackets.

Upon entering Vietnam airspace we were informed that the base at Da Nang could possibly receive mortar fire, and we would be exiting the aircraft quicker than usual. After reporting to 1st Marine Division headquarters, I was assigned to a transport battalion located southwest of Da Nang. I was assigned to second platoon, Charley company, as platoon leader.

The first night I was assigned to “officer of the day” duty with responsibility for base security. Hourly day and night, I checked all of our defensive positions to ensure that the Marines on duty were alert and ready for action. Part of our responsibility was to protect the southern section of the Da Nang airstrip. On a fairly regular basis the North Vietnamese (NVA) fired rockets over our positions into the airstrip.

When checking defensive positions, especially at night, we were cautioned not to spook the troops by surprising them, because new second lieutenants who were

careless got killed that way. On one occasion I was having a smoke with a platoon leader. One of his Marines was upset with discipline he received, so he threw a percussion hand grenade at us. Fortunately for us it was not a “frag” grenade, which was more lethal. We were next to a bunker and dove to safety, and other than being knocked out for a while we were back in action.

That Marine had seen too much combat and had that “thousand-yard stare” which Marines explain as “like he has seen beyond.” I assumed this meant an other-worldly experience of some kind “when the demons come.” Having experienced this myself later in my tour, I can’t explain it but I can verify it. Fortunately, trying to kill us was unusual behavior for Marines as they respected their officers and saw us as concerned for their welfare and committed to fighting right alongside them.

For the first month, our company provided support for the many Marine units south of Da Nang. This was a very active area because it was a main infiltration route for NVA from Cambodia heading for Da Nang and the airbase and population centers north. A large area was designated a free-fire zone for Marine infantry operating there. Fortunately, civilians honored this as it provided safety for them from Viet Cong (VC) and NVA operating there. On occasion we connected with Korean Marines, who had reputations of being fierce, no-nonsense fighters feared by the local VC, and took little sniper fire

because of the ferocity of their response. If they took sniper fire from a village, it meant no more village.

With the Tet offensive close at hand, we moved with our battalion to the Phu Bai area to support hotly contested areas to the north like Hue, Quang Tri and along the demilitarized zone to Khe Sanh. My platoon was assigned to support the 6th Marine Regiment as needed in their various operations. I took this as a compliment because they were one of the highest decorated infantry units in the history of the Marine Corps and always seemed to be where the action was.

On the first day of the Tet offensive my platoon was assigned to assist a company to "rescue" the 1st ARVN Division command post in Hue. Intelligence had informed us that no NVA forces were in Hue, and we were instructed not to bring extra ammunition or food because we would probably return by nightfall. Upon entering Hue we came under fire from a large NVA force on our left flank and moving south toward the citadel of Hue. The estimated size of that force was in the hundreds if not larger.

They fired mortars and machine gun fire at us as we moved south, separated by the rice paddies. When we actually entered the city, we met a small ARVN unit and the remains of a Marine company whose captain was severely wounded and trapped in barbed wire. After we extracted him from the wire, he was evacuated to Phu Bai for medical care. We were instructed to advance to the compound where our forces were holed up until reinforcements could arrive.

As we headed to the compound we were attacked across the rice paddies by an NVA unit that broke off from the main force. The attackers were liquidated by the heavy fire we were able to produce by our 50-caliber gunners, putting out many rounds with great accuracy. During that exchange my

M-16 rifle jammed. I removed a carbine from an ARVN soldier killed earlier, and I must admit it fired reliably. I carried it for the rest of my tour in Vietnam until the performance of M-16s was greatly improved.

We fought our way into the compound where we spent the next three days before returning to our base in Phu Bai. Spending three days there we were under constant fire from NVA, who at times were up to the walls before being repulsed. We also made patrols into the neighborhood surrounding the compound to assess NVA strength and attempted to rescue Vietnamese citizens held for "re-education" or elimination by Communist forces. By the end of the battle for Hue the number of citizens eliminated numbered in the thousands.

That night at the compound was difficult, but we were able to repulse every assault even though illuminating rounds were depleted, which allowed the NVA who at times were dressed in captured ARVN uniforms to cross the wire into our area of defense. We fortunately were able to repulse those assaults, which at times went "hand to hand." As an inexperienced "brown bar" second lieutenant, I was still expected to "get it done" in the finest tradition of the Marine Corps. With your life on the line you can do things you never thought possible, but they come back to haunt you years later.

On the second day we were ordered to cross a river via the Nguyen Hoang bridge and attempt to enter the citadel to assist the ARVN force that was surrounded by NVA. First platoon drew the straw and attacked but was repulsed by a well-placed NVA machine gun causing significant casualties because of the close quarters and skill of that NVA soldier. But despite the fact that the machine gun was eliminated, high casualties dictated that the mission be abandoned until additional forces arrived.

One of the casualties was a chaplain who had insisted on going on the assault. I saw him heading out on a M-48 tank with other seriously wounded Marines who were issued M-16s and told that they might have to fight their way out to Phu Bai. They were given the choice to remain with us until evacuation by chopper could take place, but given our precarious situation most chose to take their chances and fight their way out.

We were joined with a reaction platoon led by Lt. Ken Eason, whom I graduated from college with. He entered OCS in the class behind me. We were assigned convoy support duty. On one run we were ambushed. Ken and I were lying face down in the bed of a truck with rounds flying overhead, and Ken laughed, saying, "We're a long way from Motown, right Jerry?" After two days Ken moved on with his platoon to be part of the assault on the citadel, where he was wounded.

When we returned to Phu Bai my platoon was ordered to surrender our weapons and be re-issued M-16s. Thankfully the improved M-16 was far superior once changes were made. For approximately the next month, until the city of Hue was secure, we continued with our support role.

On one occasion, my platoon had to accompany Walter Cronkite and his crew into Hue. I was surprised at his casual attitude despite the area not being declared safe. We were also assigned to accompany a French correspondent into the city. I found her on top of a tank which was in a pitched battle with snipers. I told her to get off the tank, but she refused, saying she was just fine. I headed out with my platoon into the city and transferred her to another unit heading into an area she wanted to visit. She wandered away from them and was captured by NVA but was released unharmed.

(Continued On Page 22)

(Continued From Page 21)

After our Hue service, I was promoted to first lieutenant and made company commander of Bravo Company, 1st Motors. Our next assignment took us to Khe Sanh combat base to assist in the evacuation of the base. Since the base was being evacuated, the NVA saw little value in continuing shelling, so we were relatively safe from artillery fire. We were assigned to a Sea Bee unit outside the perimeter to provide security for them while they repaired a bridge blown up by the NVA. This bridge was needed to allow tanks to provide security along Route 9 once complete evacuation began.

We set in on both flanks awaiting attack from NVA as this was still their territory, but to our surprise it never came. I was requested by a bulldozer operator to have one of my Marines fill up his helmet with rocks, and if artillery came in and he couldn't hear it, the Marine could strike him in the back with the rocks so he could take cover.

During the final evacuation of the base, my company had the honor of being the last unit out after a long line of troops and equipment left the base. Some years later, when I was bragging to another Marine that my company was the last Marine unit to leave the base, he laughed and said that his unit, a tank battalion, was on the ridge line outside the base protecting our evacuation. In fact, he said that as they were having lunch on the next hill about 250 meters from his position, NVA regulars were also having lunch. No shots were exchanged. Our tanks eventually filled in behind us and followed us east down Route Nine.

Along the way I glanced to my right and saw the hill where, approximately six months earlier, our unit was helping set up a battalion headquarters. Unfortunately, the first night on the hill a mortar round hit a small hut that the battalion commander and sergeant major were set up in. Both

were killed. A decision was made to turn the area over to the Army. A young West Point grad, company commander and I were discussing where our positions were on a ridge line protecting the base. He said this was his second tour in Vietnam. When I expressed surprise he chose this assignment, he explained that he was a career officer and promotions come faster in time of war. He said, "This is the only war that I know of. Right?"

As we continued south, we passed an area where about six months prior we had to stop the convoy we were supporting due to the road being barricaded by VC. Fearing booby traps, I ordered Marine engineers assigned to me to clear the obstacle ASAP because we were in a highly unsecure area. A Sea Bee officer whose unit was attached to us felt our engineers were not competent. He started to remove the obstacle himself, blowing himself up. Because this resulted in additional delay to care for him and to clear the area, we set up a defensive perimeter. As I checked the area, which was in high elephant grass, I got separated from my men and ran into two Vietnamese, probably VC. We surprised each other, but fortunately no shots were fired. They probably felt I was part of a larger force, turned and ran through the high grass away from me. We decided not to give chase as we had a convoy to protect.

On my last night in Vietnam, I stayed with other Marines in a hardback hooch near the airport in a "secure area." We were all heading for home. We flew out the next day for Okinawa to change back to stateside uniforms we had left there 13 months earlier. I lost 40 pounds in Vietnam, mostly the result of having jungle dysentery, so the uniform was a bit loose but not "squared away" and proper for a Marine officer.



Upon landing at Detroit Metro Airport and joyfully seeing my fiancée and parents, they could hardly recognize me. It must have been due to those ham and Lima bean meals. Actually, I thought the field rations were decent. Ham and beans left something to be desired but did provide good barter material.

When I reported to Camp Lejeune, N.C., for my last year in the Marine Corps, I was assigned to an artillery unit. Officers who left Vietnam shortly after me said the hooch that I slept in my last night was destroyed next evening by snipers, with all the Marines killed.

Fifty years later I can offer the following: despite issues with the usual things like PTSD, Agent Orange with ties to heart disease, neuropathy, diabetes, etc., I have no complaints. The things I survived in Vietnam proved to me that God exists and prayer works. He gave me a great life with a wonderful wife, kids, grandkids, family, friends, career, etc. Who can ask for anything more?

Semper Fidelis.

The Green Berets

By Charles Bremicker
VA Medical Center—St. Paul, MN

A technical writer at the VA, assigned to enter my military experience into my medical records, concluded I ran around with my buddies and jumped out of airplanes. Not entirely true. I did other things and asked him to put them in my story. With 1,000 words to work with, some rewriting was needed. I suggested he add some things.



Our Special Forces class spent one week in the North Carolina woods, with no food or sleep, drinking swamp water sterilized by quinine tablets. We waded in swamps up to our waists seeking compass-orienting burning barrels of oil set miles apart in the wilderness. We attacked a post guarded by concertina wire and built ladders of tree limbs to cross the wire with our M16s firing blanks in the night. Kept in formation for hours, men wavered from fatigue and were numbed by lectures about Special Forces designed to keep us awake. We butchered a goat to make jerky, hanging the goat from a tree, slitting its throat, and gutting the animal. We smoked the meat on a lattice of tree branches and each man got three finger-sized strips of jerky.

Surviving Special Forces phase one, we received our berets. We affixed the motto of our outfit, "De Oppresso Liber" (To Free the Oppressed), to the crest of our berets. The berets did not have the flash of our permanent Special Forces group, which we received after completing our Special Forces qualification course. The flash indicated which group a Special Forces soldier belonged to and its area of responsibility. A red flash signified the

Seventh Group, stationed in Ft. Bragg, N.C., responsible for unrest in South America. When I finished my training, the Green Berets assigned me to the Seventh Group.

With MOS's unique to Special Forces, we chose weapons, engineering, communications, intelligence or medical training. I chose to be a medic. With one year of training, I learned how to deliver babies, treat yellow fever, typhus and typhoid and the life cycle of mosquitoes that caused malaria. Our instructors taught us CPR, how to start an IV and the shock position for people bleeding or unconscious.

At Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, we learned combat medic procedures, like splinting a broken femur, plugging a sucking chest wound with cellophane from a pack of cigarettes and treating an abdominal wound with nonstick or wet gauze. We learned how to treat a head injury, apply a tourniquet and wrap a bandage in the middle of combat. We practiced on each other, and I groaned to mimic a wounded man. One instructor, an older man back from Vietnam and crazy about the subject, asked us, "How are you going in?"

Crouching, he held our attention. "You go in low," he whispered, sweeping his arms across his chest. "How are you going to treat him?" He looked us in the eyes, scanning our class. "You treat him where he is." Deranged, but we learned our jobs from his gestures.

I got hurt on a jump by my static line under my arm and was held back from my medic class for two

months with a plaster cast from waist to neck. In retrospect, I had been at a party the night before the jump and hung over as I exited the plane. Another man with a broken shoulder on the same jump and I saw patients while doctors supervised us, our instructors not knowing what else to do with us.

Back at Ft. Bragg, we went through Dog Lab, shooting our dogs in the leg, debriding dead tissue, monitoring vital signs, then amputating the leg. This procedure taught us how to treat a soldier with a bullet wound. With their sawed-off legs bandaged, the dogs lived several days. We euthanized them with sodium pentothal. Having grown attached to our dogs, we were sad to put them down. I matriculated and have been a Green Beret medic ever since.

Our medical training completed, we jumped again for the two-week qualification course into Uwharrie National Forest. I led an A-team over hills and through woods, aiming my compass at a tree 10 yards ahead, walking toward the tree, then aiming at the next tree. In the

(Continued On Page 24)

morning, we came to a road, where our target, a Jeep, stood 20 yards away. One man had complained we were making “banana lefts” but I had maintained a straight line all night. We roasted 10 chickens on a spit, the worst tasting birds I ever ate. I breasted them out like a grouse back home. We caught a black snake, chopped it into sections and roasted it like marshmallows. It tasted like chicken. Officially “snake eaters,” we enjoyed the meat after peeling the skin.

We regrouped with the other teams; the trucks never came, and we route-stepped 10 miles to the post. I hallucinated, seeing dark figures of men in the woods along the way. I plodded all night, seeing only the red dirt road of Ft. Bragg and woods on both sides. We got to base; everyone climbed into bed except me. I walked to the PX and drank a pitcher of beer.

I never showed up for the graduation party. I leaned against the heat register in my barracks, looked out the window in the night at the mess hall where the party was going on and battled with myself to attend or not. I put on my civies. I thought about talking to Sergeant First Class De Luca to ask him to assess my personal qualities compared to a Green Beret. But I respected him so much I couldn't find the nerve to seek his counsel. So I went into Fayetteville to bar hop and look at Go-Go girls, and I took the bus back to the barracks after getting good and drunk.

The next morning in formation, after the graduation party, everyone wore buck sergeant stripes on their sleeves except three of us, the other two known as losers. The Green Berets did not like my absence from the party, took it as a slap in the face and denied me rank. If you don't like us, we don't like you. Ashamed, perplexed, and dismayed, I went to headquarters and asked the company clerk why I was still a specialist fourth class. He said rank was

frozen, no room for promotions. I adjusted to my rank, embarrassed and humiliated. I lived with my rank but got good duty anyway.

To my credit, I never skipped out on Saturday morning formation. Many men “ghosted,” running to the woods with their sleeping bags, missing the formation that guaranteed a detail to the mess hall or guard duty, where we slept eight hours and guarded an ammo depot for four hours, twice a day. Hated duties, I never missed one.

A civilian from Venezuela taught 10 of us workable Spanish. Issued tape recorders to practice in the barracks, I never touched mine, feeling it adequate to pay attention in class. A doctor graduated top of the class and I was second. A Seventh Special Forces Group A-team needed a man who spoke Spanish. I could order food in a restaurant, buy items in a market, and give troops orders in Spanish. Part of the Green Berets' mission was to advise indigenous troops in their language.

The emergency room at Womack Army Hospital was busy, especially on Saturdays, when I worked at the front desk. I quelled the fears of mothers with screaming babies and prioritized them according to urgency. With a talent for front desk work, I worked at Womack, the first of many front desk jobs after the Army. As a medic in the emergency room, I stitched up lacerations on every part of the body except the hands, feet and face. Those areas were left to the doctor who handled car accidents, heart attacks, broken bones and other serious injuries. Suturing near tendons and nerves and cosmetic surgery required doctors' training.

I haunted the bars in Fayetteville, one right next to the other, and got drunk on 3.2 beer, taking the bus to post. I did this after duty hours every night I was on post, and I carried out my assignments hung over

every day. The Go-Go girls went topless near the end of my tour, but I never had a chance to see them.

I became confused at the USO when I looked for a college to study journalism after I was discharged. As soon as I found a bulletin for the University of Idaho, a shadow fell over me. I became disoriented and not in my right mind. My best friend asked me to dinner with his wife at his house, and I said no, unlike me. I played handball and became fixated on the bounce of the ball in the corner of the court. The Green Berets worried about me because I showed confusion.

I was discharged two months early as a specialist fourth class, a terrible rank for two years as a Green Beret medic. My confusion ended in a nervous breakdown four years after my discharge as I fell through the cracks of civilian life. A close friend blamed the breakdown on my failure to attend the graduation party. My psychologist at the VA blamed it on a gene in my chromosomes. My psychiatrist's nurse blamed it on my pushy mother.

People asked me what I did in the service. I said a Green Beret medic, not a Green Beret. My grandfather was a doughboy in World War I, my father on an underwater demolition team in the Navy in World War II. I was a little of each, a GI and elite soldier both. This story, an effort to set the record straight, didn't work. The technical writer was right. All I did in the Army was run around with my buddies and jump out of airplanes.

Postscript: A Green Beret friend fact-checked this story. He was a staff sergeant who did well in the Army. He said I went through all the Special Forces training and was a real Green Beret. He said the feeling I was not a Green Beret was selling myself short. He knew a lot of men in my shoes who did not make rank. It was half a century ago and hard to remember.

Insurrection

By Melvin Brinkley
VA Medical Center—Davis, CA

Once a person indulges in insurrection,
very soon they think little of lynching
our duly elected representatives.

And from lynching our duly elected representatives,
they inevitably join a tiki torch parade
some late summer's evening.

And from that they easily transition
to submitting opinion pieces
to the local newspapers

about why some books that have been
on the shelves for decades
should be banned in public libraries.

And from that they start asking
their city council
why the public should spend public money

to accommodate anyone
who identifies
as anything different from them.

And from that they transition to daily grumbling
with a fellow malcontent over coffee
about the latest conspiracy contrivance.

And from that they move on
to incivility and procrastination
and sabbath breaking.

Once a person has begun
upon this downward path of insurrection,
you never know where they will stop.

Many an insurrectionist can date their ruin
from inciting some government overthrow
or other action that, perhaps,
they thought little of at the time.

I'm Just Mel

By Melvin Brinkley
VA Medical Center—Davis, CA

Doesn't seem to matter what I do,
I'm always seen as number two.
No one knows how hard I've tried.
I've had feelings I can't hide,
And more feelings I can't explain,
Making me certifiably insane.
All my life, I've always been polite,
Always doing what was right
'Cause I'm just Mel.

Anywhere else I would be swell.
Is it my destiny to live a life of bald fragility?
I'm just Mel.

Where I see love, she sees a friend.
What will it take for her to see
The man behind the shades and fight for me?
I wanna know what it's like to love.
That's not a crime? Am I not hot when I'm feeling?
Is my moment finally here, or am I dreaming?
I'm no dreamer.
Can you feel the Mel I am?
Feels so real, my Mel I am.
I'm just Mel.

Anywhere else I would be swell.
Is it my destiny to live a life of bald fragility?
I'm just Mel.

Where I see love, she sees a friend.
What will it take for her to see
That I'm much more than some bald guy?
What if I pretend to be a spy? Or to be shy?
Or maybe prophesy? Would that attract her?
I'm just Mel (and I'm enough),

And I'm great at doing stuff.
So hey, check me out. Yeah, I'm just Mel.
My name's Mel (and so am I).
Put that manly hand in mine.
So hey, world, check me out. Yeah, I'm just Mel.
Baby, I'm just Mel (nobody else, nobody else).

Hoboes

William Shepherd
VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS



I know a woman who told me a story about when she was a little girl. Her folks had died, and she was all alone. It was the 1930s, a time of dust bowls and soup lines and hungry people with no work. Some people would ride the rails from place to place, looking for work. They were called hobos.

She told about the time she spent with hobos when she was seven years old. She recalled walking down by the railroad tracks as the sun was going down. She saw a campfire in the woods. As she got closer she saw five men who welcomed her to their camp as they introduced themselves. She had heard of hobos. They all were nice to her, and she needed a friend. Plus she felt safe there.

As she was sitting with them and eating, she warmed herself near the fire and fell asleep. As she woke up she smelled the hobos' coffee and listened to the men talking about which train to catch and where it was going. She heard one whose

name was Will. He was a big man. She guessed his age about 50. He asked about her name, and she said, "They call me Wilma." He handed her something to eat and a cup of the hobo coffee, and she thought to herself that she liked Will the best of all the men.

As the day turned into evening, the men came back to camp with their findings of the day. Some of the food they found they put in the pot. She said it tasted good and called it a real hobo meal. As night fell they sat around the fire and talked. A man named Hank played his harmonica, and they all joined in singing and dancing. It was the best time she ever had. She said she sure slept hard that night, and she thought it was a good life.

The next several years she traveled with Will from coast to coast. It seems he knew every hobo camp all along the railroad tracks. She loved the railroads as much as he did. It was a good time of her life

Come as You Are

By Jason Kirk Bartley
VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

Come as you are, broken and poor.
Grace us with your presence.
Come through the church door.
Do not worry about what we think
or what we guess;
no one wants to judge you
by the way you dress.
John "the Baptist" came in camel skin
eating locusts and honey.
You do not need to buy your salvation;
you do not need any money.
And the people who disown you
and ridicule you
while pushing you away,
were not your true friends any ole way.
Come as you are; Jesus loves you today.
His mercy and love are waiting
to forgive and embrace.
As tears roll down your weary wrinkled face,
confess you're a sinner without disgrace.
Accept His love
and what He's done for you through His grace.
It doesn't matter how you appear to man.
Please, just take hold of your Savior's hand.



Without You I'm a Whole Lot Blue

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center— Augusta, GA

I'm a little bit crazy;
I'm a little bit blue.
I don't know what to do—without you.
I need you so badly, it hurts so deep inside;
I know I filled the oceans with every tear I've cried.

I've given you all my love and, on the wings of a dove,
I'll keep sending it to you up above.
You are always on my mind every day and every night,
and it's so hard to face each day without you in my life.
I'm a little bit crazy,
but I'm a little bit blue.

My whole world revolved around you;
this I know to be so very true.
Each and every day I looked forward
to waking up next to you.
But I never felt so lost
as when I woke up one day and you were gone.
I'm a little bit crazy,
and I'm a little bit blue.

The days seem so long, dear, without you by my side;
I have never been so happy as the day I became your bride.
I've taken a look down memory lane,
and my whole life you, indeed, changed,
and I became the better person I am today.
I'm a little bit crazy;
I'm a little bit blue.

I heard the trumpets blowing the day that you left me.
Those pearly gates opened wide; this I do believe.
The angels welcomed you inside as I said my final goodbyes.
Heaven only knows I'm waiting to see you
another day and time.
I'm a little bit crazy.
Without you, I'm just a whole lot blue!

GLADYS FELD HELZBERG MEMORIAL AWARD

Who Am I?

By Levill Taylor

VA Medical Center— Battle Creek, MI

I am wind; I am life.
To survive I need no substance or device.
I am neither here nor there,
but I am there and here.
I have rolled and roared
with the oceans and seas so very free.
I have heard the soft silent songs
that the plants sing.
I have listened to the story of eternity,
to the eagles as we soared the heavenly blues.
I have chanted with the stars
as they glowed through and through.
Come! Scurry with me on my cloak of time
as I slip dimensions and explore my mind.
Come! Descend with me and see the unseen.
Yes, if you have the key,
I am the door,
I am peace, I am war,
I am wind, I am life.
(Who am I?)

War Torn

By Frances Ann Wiedenhoeft

VA Medical Center— Madison, WI

Clay red caterpillar scar crawls across a chest,
camouflage for white heat perforated heart,
loosely stitched,
still oozing screams and nightmares.
It's seared Morse code, SOS gone dark,
radio silence,
numb to pain but also to joy,
no pulse of empathy to reach into your heart.
It's rhythm of compassion interrupted so completely,
the possibility of human connection no longer exists.

Thoughts on “The Women” by Kristin Hannah

By Louise Eisenbrandt
—Leawood, KS

Book reviewer Louise Eisenbrandt served as a Vietnam nurse and is a member of the Veterans Voices Writing Project board of directors

I have often heard the sentiment expressed by my fellow Vietnam veterans that one cannot truly understand or describe war unless one has served. I have generally held that opinion myself. To paraphrase a well-known saying, “Unless one has walked a mile in my combat boots, one cannot appreciate my journey.” In her latest book, Kristin Hannah comes quite close to walking in those boots, particularly those worn by military nurses who served in Vietnam. While I may not have slogged through swamps of elephant grass, tried to get to sleep on the ground in drenching monsoon rains or felt the terror that my next step could be on a booby trap, I DO know war. I felt the suffocating heat, heard the plaintive pleas of blood-encrusted amputees, held the hands of the dying and offered false hope to guys for whom the truth would have been unbearable. As a nurse, preparation for serving in a combat zone after nurses’ school consisted of six weeks of training, a book entitled “A Pocket Guide to Vietnam,” three sets of fatigues to get us through the year and, hopefully, a duffel bag to contain everything we might need.

In “The Women,” Hannah describes her characters as though she knew them. From the GIs to the Vietnamese civilians, from the doctors and nurses to the wounded and dying, they remind me of those who crossed my path. Her depiction of events, from day-to-day happenings to little-



known special days, all bring up memories. She mentioned trips to an orphanage. Yes, we took chocolate bars to orphaned children. She even describes water skiing, which we did as well. (As a matter of fact, her description of a “two-piece belted red swimsuit” perfectly depicts the suit that I wore in Vietnam and is pictured in my memoir “Vietnam Nurse: Mending and Remembering.” Perhaps she has read my book!)

Keeping in mind that her book is a novel; the manuscript is a blend of historical facts and could-have-happened incidences. This is especially evident in the varied relationships surrounding Frankie, the heroine, and her struggles both in the field hospital setting in Vietnam and after her return to “the world.” Combining her extensive research and excellent storytelling talent, Hannah has penned a

must-read book highlighting the often-overlooked contribution of women during the Vietnam War in the ’60s and ’70s. For those readers who did serve, I promise an experience of tears, memories (good and bad) and a renewed longing for sisterhood after 50-plus years.

Yes, women did serve. We patched up the wounded. We cried uncontrollable tears. We fell in and out of relationships. For many, the effects have been long lasting—broken marriages, PTSD, suicides and debilitating effects of Agent Orange. We have survived with therapy, friends and for some of us, writing our memoirs. We are The Women, and now, thanks to Kristin Hannah, our story is being told again. We can only hope that this book will lay to rest the comment: “I didn’t know there were women in Vietnam.”

Soul Wound

By Scott Day
— Troy, OH

Words are short
but language is another expression
of the soul's beauty.
The body is a spiritual conduit
for the voice of the soul,
a fiery filter for sorrow from the soul.
The pain of the soul is dark and deceitful
because it lacks control of emotional fortitude.
It only knows strife.
The journey of a soul is shy without a voice
but it still has a song filled with desire,
pleasure, peace and tranquility.
The whisper of the sorrowful
told from a soul long ago
is what caused a ripple
in the realm of existence.
It started a mission from soul to soul
to answer that guest of sorrowful
extracted from the power of the light force
that beams on us all.
Its shelter and armor are lies and deceit
looking for that arrow
that can penetrate any being.
Armies will always search for peace
but never find the lie
that breached the light using light.
You must use dark to find dark
and light to find light.

Locked Up

By Kenny C. Trujillo
VA Medical Center—Las Vegas, NV

Locked up and no fun.
Locked up away from family.
Locked up for a while.
Locked up and I cannot see the light.
Locked up. Help me, Lord.
Locked up until I learn my lesson.

Spring Forward

By Rhonda Chavez
VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX



I relate to a moment of time in my life as spring—springing forward, new beginnings, new life, flowers blooming, animals coming out of hibernation.

I was divorced after 25 years together. My little boys are now grown men and off living their own lives. I had just retired, and for the first time ever, I was alone. No family or friends nearby, alone and lonely. There was a long period of deep depression, darkness, hopelessness. *Who am I? What is my purpose? What did I want? What did I like or not like?*

I'd never had to think about those questions before because I was always what other people needed or wanted me to be. Mother, wife, military airman, co-worker, supervisor. I was never just Rhonda. Now that I was just Rhonda, I had no clue who she was, nor did I know how to find out.

But, just like spring, when I started therapy I started to spring forward. I started to blossom, to live, to come out of hibernation. I was making friends.

I was traveling. I was getting to know Rhonda, testing the waters to see what she liked and didn't like.

At the age of 60, I did things I had never done and never thought I ever would. I went hiking up a 14,000 foot mountain in Colorado, camped in the wilderness, witnessed how powerful nature can be during a storm, canoed in the challenging waters in the Florida Everglades, bungie jumped, jumped from a 70-foot pole having faith that the people below would catch me if I fell, connected with the most beautiful horses, becoming one with them, so calming and peaceful.

I have finally found Rhonda. She is kind, loving, generous, funny, caring and has so much empathy for others because she knows pain and hurt. She includes others so they don't feel alone. She is brave. She is strong. She is enough. She is worthy of all good things.

She is RHONDA! It's been a blessing to get to know her.

Dear Mama

By LoLeta Totton
—Mitchell, SD

Dear Mama,

I must go though I know you want me to stay;
we'll defend this great nation in every way.

We're fighting overseas in World War II;
please pray for me like I've seen you do.

Don't worry, Mama; I'll come home to you.
I'll do everything that you taught me to.

I'll attend church in the field whenever I can;
I'll take Holy Communion even in the sand.

I'll treat my brothers-in-arms with respect;
I'll watch their backs and try to protect.

Anzio Beach is our next battle mission;
say an extra prayer we get past this position.

I'm sorry, Mama, but I've been badly hurt;
First-Aid said to lie on the battlefield dirt.

I've been shot in the legs, both left and right;
I've been severely wounded during the fight.

I am anxious and get up to run,
but, Mama, I can't think right; I'm numb.

There was incoming as I ran that day;
all the mortar fire was coming my way.

North of Anzio is where God took me in His arms.
I'm safe now, Mama; no one can do me any harm.

Love, Lindon

Dear Son,

I saw your daddy walking slowly up the hill.
There's something in his hand; I assume it's a bill.

It's May 1943; we heard from Uncle Sam.
What your daddy had in his hand was a telegram.

The telegram said you were MIA;
my heart was broken that very day.

My son, come home to me, I pray;
I can't cry another tear one more day.

Your buddy wrote to tell us you had been shot,
and that First-Aid rushed to your side, he thought.

I've written to the Army to see what they'll send;
could a local family have taken you in?

They replied they talked to locals which was protocol,
but none had taken in any injured soldiers at all.

I tried my best to find you on my own,
but no one will help me; I feel so alone.

My son, my Lindon, where have you gone?
I need you; I've become so withdrawn.

We hung the Gold Star banner today,
but I'm going to wait for you anyway.

I am waiting for God to take me in His arms someday,
so I can hold my hero, my son Lindon, one day.

Love, Mama

Remote Control

By Steve Fournier

VA Medical Center— Hartford CT

When we kill by remote control,
We sometimes must unload
On ground that's well beyond the hole
Bombs make when they explode.

It's excess blood and excess gore,
And takes a mental toll,
Part of our esprit de corps
Who kill by remote control.

A cute device, almost a toy,
A battery and motor.
A pretty craft for a girl or boy,
A mesmerizing rotor.

It orbits and it hovers high
In blue skies or in pink.
The area it covers, why,
It's wider than you think.

The people on the ground below
Can't risk a morning stroll,
When we so rudely let them know
Stark fear by remote control.

Not heavy hearts but unfurled flags
Here greet each grim patrol.
The terrorized, their heads in rags,
Risk death by remote control.

No lives are lost when the missiles boom,
No lives that really matter,
When airmen kill from a comfy room,
So far from splash and splatter.

Don't look for valor in all this;
That's not a GI's role.
But do give honor a good-bye kiss
If you kill by remote control.

No lives are lost when the missiles boom,
No lives that really matter,
When airmen kill from a comfy room,
So far from splash and splatter.

Don't look for valor in all this
That's not a GI's role.
But do give honor a good-bye kiss
If you kill by remote control.

There Is Hope

By Michael England

VA Medical Center— Brooklyn, NY

I try to convince myself
there is hope.
Deep inside I want to believe
it ain't a joke.
Small steps.
I walk back and then I go forward.
All the time, I tell my soul
I'm no coward.
My behavior doesn't always agree
with this conclusion.
Instead, I feel sometimes it's bravado,
just an illusion.
Yet, a micro-voice inside
keeps me progressing.
Maybe just my mind is only stressing.
I tell my conscience
I may in my hope believe
I must figure a path in which
I can conceive.

His Hand Was on My Plow

By Paul David Gonzales

VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

Life is an open field,
full of promise and opportunity
with so much to yield.
As I reached the age of reason
and began each new season,
I viewed the openness of my life
and planned it my way
at the dawn of each new day.

I told myself,
“I am in control”
so let the good times roll.
I grabbed the handles of my life’s plow
and pushed it hard through that field,
just to see how much it would yield.

I pushed and pushed,
pulled and jerked,
difficult times came
no matter how hard I worked.
I wanted direction, but I found no tradesman
to show me the tricks of the trade.
There was no rest in the shadow of the shade.

I plowed through life’s rough terrain
under the sun, dust and heavy rain.
I readied the earth of life
to just the right condition,
to plant my seeds of ambition
through blood, sweat and tears for many years.

I plowed those rows of life
inch by inch, furrow by furrow.
For every stone of disappointment I upturned,
a valuable life lesson I did learn.

Now in my 70th season,
I inventory the field of my life.
I was sure the rows had no form,
design or shape,
but to my surprise every row met the sunrise.
Every twist and turn—all—had meaning.

Every lesson I learned along the way
taught me to pray...today.
Before the sun and after,
I know God listens from beyond the trees
when I pray to Him on bended knees.

God can see beyond the obvious;
not one event in my life was ambiguous.
Don’t ask me how,
but God’s gentle hand was always on my plow.

These Tears That Fall

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

These tears that fall do not mean that I am weak.
They mean I lean upon my Savior;
His will I seek.
These tears that stream down my weary face
show my heart is in the right place.
And when I seek the Savior above,
they often fall as a sign of His love.
His blessings stream down my cheeks to my chin
to let me know I’m close to Him.
His favor falls and fills my cup;
His mercy and love are there to lift me up.
And when I seek Him
with my whole heart in prayer,
a touch of Heaven meets me there.
All glory fills my heart right there.
He assures me He has answered my prayer.
His nail-scarred hands hold me;
they cause each tear,
only because He holds me near.

Visual Arts Initiative

Send Us Your Art

Artists and photographers, please submit your art to *Veterans' Voices* for magazine consideration. Robert Rubin, M.D., Ph.D., generously assists the publishers with production costs for this special full-color section of the magazine. He is a retired chief of psychiatry at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System and is passionate about the healing power of art, including the written word, visual art and even dance!

Our publishers believe that incorporating visual art throughout the pages of *Veterans' Voices* complements VVWP's writing as therapy mission and offers another means of healing through artistic expression. We hope our veteran artists will keep this full-color section filled with art! If you have an original painting, drawing or photograph that would fit within these pages, or if you have original art that would complement a story or poem you are submitting to the editors, please send us that art. Military veterans and active service personnel are eligible for publication in the magazine. See pages 66 and 67 of this issue for Submission Guidelines.

The Editors



Vintage Swimmer

Ty Andrews

— Lincoln, NE

Inhale Exhale
Penny Lee Deere
— Albany NY





Homeless Veteran
Forrest Everts
— Deering, NH



Alone
Alexandra Brown
VA Medical Center—VA Western New York at Buffalo Healthcare System



I'm Not A Hero
Lawrence William Langman
— Portage, IN



Come Find Me
Wayne Ince
— Sun City, FL



My Family Tree
Rhonda Chavez
— San Antonio, TX



Deep Thinker
Gema Gabriela Benavides
VA Medical Center—Miami VA Healthcare System, FL



Girl From Bangladesh
Ty Andrews
— Lincoln NE

Go Ahead! Try To Wipe Me From Your Brow

By *Kim Gwinner*

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

Hey, drill sergeant, I'm ready!
Let's do this already.
I'm ready to take back what you took.
Into my eyes, take a deep look.

Things are changing; I'm now in control
whereas you are just a two-bit asshole.
I would fear me if I were you
because to myself I am true.

I'm ready to remove your crown.
You've been replaced; I'll see you around.
Let me warn you, there's a new me—
one that you can no longer feed.

The power I gave you no longer frightens my soul.
I have enlisted again, but I have also enrolled
in the positive feelings about myself I never knew
that help me to bid you my final adieu.

I will no longer allow you to screw
my life, my future and the things I plan to do.
You've kept me running long enough.
Go ahead and try; I warn you, this is not a bluff.

This is me taking my life and my power back.
I'm no longer running; it's my turn to attack.
But before you turn and run away,
I want to make sure that you hear me say

I won't hurt you as you did me.
But you will never again be free.
When you hear my name blowing in the breeze,
know it will be you, not me that will freeze.

So, drill sergeant, I got your number now.
Go ahead! Try to wipe me from your brow.

The Cans and Cannots

By *Norman L. Jones*

VA Medical Center—Columbus, OH

You can take the ball from the sport,
But you can't take the sport from the ball.
You can take the court from the judge,
But you can't take the "judgment" out of court.

You can take the household from the streets,
But you can't take the streets from the household.
You can take the beauty out of the bold,
But you can't take the bold from the beautiful.

You can take the bomb from its shell,
But it's hard to contain a bombshell.
You can take a conjurer from the spell,
But you can't take the spell from the conjurer.

You can take hell from heaven,
But you can't place heaven in hell.
You can mold the spirit in the body,
But you can't take the spirit from the soul.

You can take the cash from the bank,
But you can't take the bank from the money.
You can measure the infinite,
But you can't stop infinity.

Brighter Days

By *Tracy Sellers*

— *Troy, OH*

There are brighter days ahead; I can feel it in my soul.
I feel it in my heart, and this is something I just know.
Yes, I have walked through the valley
And the shadow of death,
And my faith was definitely put to the test.
But I'm not broken; I'm just bruised.
And while I know this may come as news,
It was buried deep within,
Hidden so deep, I just kept it in.
Not anymore and not today
Because I KNOW there will be brighter days.

Empty Chair

By Joseph Harman
VA Medical Center—Mobile, AL

I've been wrestling with how to value my military service in the Republic of Korea (ROK) for many years. There really is nothing comparable. I've done everything from forgetting about it to being angry about it.

I've been asked repeatedly over the years "Did you shoot anyone?" "Did you fire your weapon in anger?"

"Were you shot at?" The answer to all these standard questions has always been "no." The "no" is then followed by the silence of parties involved in the conversation. This is at times followed by feeling that my service in Korea was meaningless. I didn't get shot. I didn't kill anyone. Things didn't go like wars play out on TV. Therefore, it must not be real or have value. Then I would suffer in silence for a while.

The other day I tried something new. I got the same old question: "Did you fire your weapon in anger?" Again, I said "no," but this time I was finally ready to respond. I bluntly said, "If I fired my weapon in anger (in my case a 105-millimeter gun on my M60A3 tank), you would be looking at an empty chair. Is that what you want?" In other words, I would have been killed in 1987 or 1988 had I fired my weapon in anger.

You see, firing a 105-mm tank round in anger in the ROK would have meant the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) had launched a full-scale attack across the DMZ, the 152-mile border between North and South Korea. Those who have been there know this is true. Simply put, firing anything beyond small



arms in the ROK at the DPRK in or around the DMZ would have meant WWII had started. That was the accepted scenario and the one we all anticipated and trained for.

Then I described my duty in Area 1 (generally everything north of Seoul to the DMZ) in blunt terms. I explained that during my time in Korea my unit was in the mother of all kill sacks for over a year—a massive engagement area that the DPRK had studied for decades to plan for its total destruction. Most weapon systems the DPRK had were aimed at Area 1 because it had to be taken to conquer Seoul. More than likely, we would have received little or no warning before they would have unleashed the total hell that would destroy everyone and everything in Area 1 in a matter of minutes. At that time it was estimated that there were over one million hard-core fanatical Communists locked and loaded along the DMZ behind one million mines, supported by six million reservists, 12,000 artillery pieces and rocket systems, 1,600 aircraft and 2,000 forward-deployed tanks.

To make matters worse, the DPRK would have probably used their massive stockpiles

of chemical weapons. We might not have had any notice in Area 1. For some like myself at the time, even if we had survived the initial assault, retreat would not have been an option. Part of the plan was to blow the "rock drops" on Main Supply Routes 1 and 3 if the DPRK advanced past the DMZ. However, once the rock drops were blown, those forward of them could not have retreated. This was known by those who have

served north of the rock drops as a DIP (die in place) mission. It was in fact part of the calculus of serving in Area 1. The powers that be at the Defense Department and in Washington have known this for years. The book "Tripwire" by Doug Bandow even lays out the theory that those in Area 1 were in fact there to ultimately ensure that the United States entered the war if the DPRK crossed the DMZ in force. You can read between the lines on this one. In other words, some could say that was where the expendables served.

After contemplating this for over 35 years, I finally have a legitimate and realistic response that I can handle and that makes sense. I will be honest: the concepts that support this view are hard to understand by many because they have never been there or don't have similar experiences. Even our current warriors don't understand an enemy that has overwhelming firepower, at least in the initial days. However, for those who have faced this threat, you know I speak the truth. President Clinton didn't call the DMZ the "scariest place on Earth" just for political reasons. It's been called "freedom's frontier" or the "tip of the spear" for a reason.

My Officer Efficiency Report from that time clearly stated I was “in the most forwardly deployed unit in the United States Army.” It was in fact a flashpoint capable of mass casualties equivalent to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Keep in mind the DPRK now has nukes, and the war is STILL not officially over. Bottom line: whoever goes first will obliterate the other side on the first day of battle.

So folks, it’s time to hold our heads high and educate those who don’t understand the risks we took. Those alumni of Area 1 and beyond played Russian roulette and so far have won with some exceptions. Most asking about that arena will listen to a little patient, logic-driven education.

And don’t forget some of the positive consequences. In December of 1987, the Republic of Korea held their first democratic election for president. In January of 1988 the Republic of Korea’s first democratically elected president peacefully took office. After years of dictatorship, Korea was in fact reborn. From 1953 to 1987 veterans ensured that democracy could eventually take hold and thrive. We protected the people and the process. Today, the ROK is one of the most economically successful democracies in the world.

We left our families, friends and hometowns for many a year or more. We suffered the cold, rain, heat, lack of sleep, operations that went on for months. Some of our brothers and sisters did pay the ultimate price. This is the true cost of freedom. These service members and their families should be honored like those from any other war.

So next time you get those dreaded questions, let them become opportunities. Reshape the battlefield, and define success in some cases (like ours) as not firing your weapon. Instead, tell them you helped protect and build a democracy. We were there to keep the peace, and we prevented all-out war. We should be proud of accomplishing both. After all, the alternative would have been much worse.

The Window Wall

*By Kenneth Sanger
— Rocky Hill, CT*

The Wall.

Wandering aimlessly, I approached The Wall,
an impregnable granite blackness,
a solid pit of hell, anger, shame,
ignorance and defeat.
There is no place for tears;
there is no life to awaken.
There is no escape to justify,
no feelings to describe,
only emptiness in The Wall,
only aimlessness to return to.

The Mirror.

Reality light turns the page of The Wall
that I might see the mirror instead of The Wall.
Emptiness now has legs,
so many names engraved in my image.
Guilt faces me.
Shameful tears flow endlessly;
self-judgment turns a quiet heart.
Forgiveness is a giant black funneling mirror.
I cannot see through it; I cannot forget.
I carry the quiet grief of a million souls lost.

The Door.

I fall shaking to my knees.
What is this empty heaviness
I cannot bear?
Just reaching out, my eyes bleed rivers red.
My heart, so heavy, sunk.
If I just touch The Wall right now,
see those who sacrificed, not me.
A door I now preserve
to finally touch The Wall at last.
A lighted crack turned back for me.
I am on the other side.

The Window.

I look back through the awesome Wall.
Forgiveness is a window clear,
embracing now the sacred ones.

Hope and Healing in Afghanistan

By Gary L. Thomas
—Kula, HI

This is a story of hope and healing, born of resiliency in the face of war.

I served three combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan with an intelligence agency. I was outside the wire almost daily. I saw and experienced firsthand the horrors of war inflicted not only on those in combat but on women and children. I'm a disabled veteran, but this story is not

about that. It's about the Afghan women and children I saw surviving and fighting back, and what that did to me, and for me, to this day.

I retired from the military after my last combat tour in 2012. I was inspired by the courage and resiliency I saw in the women and children of Afghanistan who fought back despite the violence around them, so I sought out an NGO that was doing humanitarian work in Afghanistan. I was subsequently brought on their staff because of my skills and experience. I didn't realize until afterward that in doing so, psychologically I was processing guilt as well as seeking cathartic relief for my PTSD. I was seeking what I saw in these children that so impressed me. (I discovered this later in VA therapy sessions.)

In January 2024 I completed my 13th trip to Afghanistan as an American working with a Swiss-based humanitarian NGO. I'm now an educational psychologist working



primarily on educational projects in Afghanistan. On my two trips this past year I've had to navigate the Taliban while being stopped, threatened, searched, arrested and questioned at a police station under armed guard, among other harassing events. Somewhat unbelievably, I've been able to carry out my work, albeit quite carefully and necessarily covertly.

In 2022, I had founded with a colleague an underground school for female Afghan high school students, which is of course in direct contravention of Taliban policy. It is very dangerous for the students and the staff. We are currently educating 100 high school young women and will soon be absorbing 200 more from another underground high school.

School-age children in Afghanistan have never known life without war. Currently 80 percent of school-age girls are not in school. Illiteracy rates for girls run at about 92 percent. Longstanding cultural

persecution as well as decades of war-related trauma and the more recent persecution and educational denial for Afghan women have significantly impacted female Afghan students and their pursuit of education. Afghan women and girls, by any means possible, continue to seek access to education despite traditional oppression, despite the very real risk of violence to both them and their families at the hands of the Taliban. These young women and girls are fighters. Despite obstacles we in the United States can barely imagine, these Afghan women and girls daily demonstrate tremendous courage.

H.Z. is in grade 11 in an underground school in Afghanistan. Here is her story in her words:

When the Taliban took the control of Afghanistan, I thought everything stopped; the sky of my life became dark, and the sun suddenly disappeared. Young girls are not allowed to go to school. That was the most disappointing words for all the girls of my country. I cannot understand this. After this time, going to school just became a wish for me.

All the girls were forced to stay at home. Many of them were depressed, me also. There was no hope, no positive thought, nowhere to go. We were just surviving. My goal was going to the university to become a doctor. But there was no school. Fortunately, I became aware of a new program in our town.

It was unbelievable for me. I was very happy and I decided to join. The first day was very wonderful. That day many people spoke and encouraged all of us to study and never give up. That day the sun shined. After one year our life became bright again. I can remember all the girls' wishes coming through suddenly. Day by day everything changed. We started playing sports also. The manager of our school and our teachers always motivated us to study and be hopeful. My life changed. Now my life is meaningful.

We provide help and hope for them. But this relationship between two cultures that could not be more unlike is symbiotic. I draw inspiration from them and their teachers as they brave public whippings and possible imprisonment for just simply going to school. They in turn are determined to succeed despite threats and violence daily. PTSD rates among Afghan school-age children are among the highest in the world. At the same time, they see us taking risks to work with them, to teach, to counsel, to expose to them a world of hope and dreams outside the oppressive walls around them. We hopefully inspire them to find a path they can navigate to an education and a way out for some of them, and for some of them a way to heal their country by giving back.

That I might have the opportunity to give these amazing young women hope and a way to heal is remarkable enough, but at the same time my work with them has gone a long way toward my own healing. There is a wonder there that brings peace, and for combat vets, that is a priceless commodity.



They Kept Coming

By Louise Eisenbrandt

—Leawood, KS

A lanky, rail thin, 18-year-old
with dreams of returning to Indiana for more games
of pick-up basketball with his buddies.
Now he would have to learn how to shoot
with just his left arm.

A fair skinned lad with a serious smile from New Jersey.
He longed for more time on the dance floor
with his favorite girl as a disco ball sparkled above.
One-legged dance moves would not be cool.

A sergeant who took a close-range gunshot to his jaw.
His mother would cry
as she remembered his lovely tenor voice.
He would survive,
but face months of therapy to strengthen his vocal cords.

Some worried whether girlfriends left behind
would even recognize them,
much less want them back in their lives.
Others shyly asked if everything was okay “down there.”
Losing their manhood was a troubling concern.

Vietnamese civilians, caught in the crossfire of weapons,
came with shrapnel embedded in their bodies.
One day, nearly 100 victims from the same village.
Cries of pain sound the same in any language.

Every day brought new arrivals to our emergency room.
Yet they were the survivors.
Many would not be so fortunate.
Their final breaths had been taken,
their cries of pain silenced,
the warmth of their bodies stolen away.
For them, a gentle hand on their cold fingers
and a whispered prayer were all we could offer.

A Good Life

By William Shepherd
VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS



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 names that will not be forgotten by me as I still live here today. I love this land, and I'm here to stay.

As I plow the land for the seed, I think about planting in this newly turned ground like my father did so many years ago. I remember when I was young I saw my dad work this land. The hot wind blew across the field as he planted seed, not knowing if the rains would come to nurture it.

What a strong man he was in spirit and faith, knowing God would see us through the good times and bad while we had our share of both. But with God's help, my dad raised his family on this land. Now I walk in his footsteps, doing what he did daily. It is a good life on this land I love.

DAVA STATE DEPT. OF FLORIDA AWARD

Green Card Soldier: A Pantoum

By Carl "Papa" Palmer
— University Place, WA

Seasonal migrant worker,
unwed mother in Arizona.
Temporary work visa expires,
sent back across the border.

Unwed mother in Arizona
allows her teenaged son
sent back across the border
the chance to have a better life.

Allows her teenaged son,
now after his first eighteen years,
the chance to have a better life
by staying and joining the U.S. Army.

Now after his first eighteen years,
he fights to become an American
by staying and joining the U.S. Army,
by becoming an American fighting man.

He fights to become an American,
offers his life for this country
by becoming an American fighting man,
becomes an American citizen, posthumously.

Forgiveness Is a Gift

By Gene Allen Groner
—Independence, MO

Forgiveness is a gift,
A gift that is twice blessed.
It blesses the one who forgives,
And it blesses the one who is forgiven.
Forgiveness is born of love,
A love that never fails.
Love is the answer to fear,
And love is the answer to worry.
If you forgive one another,
Then you will also be forgiven.
This is a promise that is assured.
Forgiveness is a gift.

When America Came Into History

By Vanessa Fay Hicks-Callaway

— Victoria, TX

When America came into history,
the Founding Fathers said it would be
for the brave and the free.
So, they signed their names on the dotted line,
and launched the greatest country of all time.
It was Washington and Jefferson, to name a few,
risking their lives for the red, white and blue.
"Oh, say can you see?"
It was for you and me.

"When in the course of human events,"
"We find these truths to be self-evident,"
that's Declaration, Constitution, Revolution.
We crushed the crown!
We wouldn't bow down!
Now grab your guns,
'Cause these colors don't run!

Now let's talk about Black history.
We've come a long way since slavery.
Frederick D., Crispus A. and Harriet T,
you're like black gold; you left a legacy.
Oh slave, oh slave, look what you've done for me.
You shed your blood; you shed your tears
for way too many years.

But now you sit with God on high.
You're like black diamonds; you light up the sky.
Oh no, your pain was not in vain.
We are Black, strong and free. We are not in chains.
So now we "Lift every voice and sing"
"Let freedom ring," like Dr. Martin Luther King.

Well, "all gave some, some gave all."
You'll find their names on the Vietnam Wall.
Oh yes, I'm talking about the military!
THEY took that oath and know that freedom's not free.
Oh yes, I'm talking about the military.

I took that oath, YOU took that oath
and know that freedom's not free.
That's Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines.
And when you add the Coast Guard,
it's a fighting machine!

Oh, why can't we respect the few
who put it all on the line like those in blue.
Yes, they're the first ones to respond,
to protect and serve everyone.

Fall

By Charles Fredette

VA Medical Center—Bedford, MA

The sky changes color
In a logical way,
Sometime blue
And sometimes gray.

The trees don't look cold
As the wind blows.
They turn and turn
As their mastery shows.

They sway and sway
All day and at night.
They don't change much;
They don't know what is right.

It's getting cooler
At day and later, too.
My shorts won't stay much longer;
I know it's true.

It's getting darker earlier;
The warmth is fading today.
I hope we have more sun;
I hope it will stay.

No Heroes Wanted

By H D Bedell

VA Medical Center—Tampa, FL

Bobby Stackwood came home from the war and hospitals to nothing in Nishnabotna County, just as he had left it and just as his father had come home from his war. Both had gone and returned as Otoe fish camp boys from Squaw Creek, unwanted, unknown and unnecessary.

For his father, it was a frozen death on the Missouri River bank after a pint of 'shine and too many barren years. He was found holding his deer rifle at port arms, and his medals earned from Normandy to Berlin were scattered in the yellow snow where he had pissed on them. Bobby didn't hear the legendary wings of Angel Holler, and the silence tortured him.

Not everyone heard wings. The Ioway and Otoe believed that those who did were graced with omens, and it was custom to take children to listen, hoping for acceptance. Bobby once heard them with his father and took his place as one who might see, if he would just watch and wait quietly.

Word had reached the camp, and the people welcomed him in their cautious way. Remembering their own wars, they left him to make his own way as long as he did no harm. The three-room, tar-papered house of his father still stood near the camp edge with a battered old Jon boat, a gift from the camp, lying upside down along the side. The doleful outhouse with harness-leather door hinges also remained.

Inside the house, the worn linoleum floor had been swept, and the windows had been opened to air out the still strong musty odor. A pound can of coffee and a tin pot were on the kitchen table, appreciated gifts. The rifle was leaning in a corner with an open half box of ammunition on the floor beside it. Bobby used the hand pump to

fill the pot, opened the can with his John Wayne, and the two-burner gas stove lit on the first try. He sat on the kitchen chair drinking coffee and smoking until twilight and then walked to the river to watch the night begin. "Tomorrow," he thought, "I will go to Angel Holler."

He caught a ride with one of the men making a whiskey run to Angel City and walked from there to the brick ruins deep in the holler. Damp leaves marked the old spring and the water was cool to the taste. He scraped tinder from dead wood and gathered cedar for a small fire. Once the fire was made with his flints, he took coffee, pot, mess kit, cup and cigarettes from his canvas bag. He smoked while the coffee boiled.

The Corn Moon waxed over the bluffs and into Angel Holler with light pale as bone. Bobby watched his fire fade to fragrant wisps of smoke and wondered if his own embers would follow that path. He closed his eyes to listen and wait. Nightness crept as he slept.

For the next three days, the sun came with coffee, cigarettes and aches. On the fourth day, he walked back to camp, buying some small supplies in Angel City on the way. The camp stayed silent, already knowing his disappointment. As he stood on the bank not yet dissuaded from the quest, he decided to care for the camp.

Food was an issue for the people despite available fish and game. Their small gardens diminished as they grew older, and most were growing older. Bobby wove fish traps from willow branches, setting them in the river from the Jon boat. He fashioned a paddle from a piece of pallet wood, attached it to a sapling and used it to move the boat like a raft. At first, he shared

only fresh catch but slowly began to smoke surplus on makeshift racks he set on a sandbar. It would help with winter when ice formed in the river.

Subsistence hunting was allowed for individuals and families, and Bobby stretched the rules to include everyone in camp. He had a good rifle, and fresh venison was in supply. Surplus meat smoked on the sandbar amid a growing cache of tanned hides for whoever wanted them, and demand was high. The people began to prosper a little in their confinement with a smile now and then. The men took turns buying staples in Angel City with the rest of Bobby's discharge money. He was grateful for the coffee and cigarettes they brought. However, wherever he went, the wings remained silent.

As the weather warmed, word came from White Cloud that morels were up on Indian Island. Bobby paddled and poled the boat there to look for the delicacy to roll in cornmeal and fry in lard. He took a gunny sack, hoping for a harvest and was rewarded with a clearing thick with his prey. He smiled a little to himself.

His sack was half full when he heard something. Looking up, he saw a woman, Ioway by her look, wearing only a frayed flannel shirt. She had to be from White Cloud, another mushroom hunter most likely.

"You are Bobby Stackwood," she said, slipping the shirt from her shoulders. He blinked at the glimmering murmur of her unfolding wings, and he could see.

Lost Patrol

By William L. Snead
—Kingsford, MI



As I stepped across the dust-choked road, I felt a chill up the back of my spine.

Jake Fragosi sat smiling coyly in an M-1 U.S. Army jeep alongside a local scout, and to his rear I saw a Korean policeman.

Fragosi said, “Hop in. I’ll take you north.”

I bumped my knee as I clamored up into the jeep to sit next to the Korean cop. His name was Too Yoo, a legend among the civilian Korean police system. He smiled, and I smiled back.

The hum of the jeep almost sounded musical as it pushed on. We made a right turn to go north to North Camp. To turn left would have taken us south to Kum Chon.

As I exited the jeep to enter North Camp gate, Jake called me back and gave me the tightest grip of a

handshake I’ve ever had. As the jeep headed toward Munson and Slicky Bay Corner, I went up the big hill to my barracks at North Camp. Fragosi and his companions headed north and sped past the chopper base as they looked out at Charlie Block, which loomed to the northwest.

Four hours later I was at North Camp and heard the news about Fragosi. An empty overturned U.S. jeep was discovered near Panmunjon. No dead, injured or blood was found in or around the jeep.

Perhaps Fragosi and his companions flew the coop. Or by chance were they, as the overturned jeep suggested, captured? Who can say, and who knows?

Even today, there is only one thing anyone can say and anyone knows. It’s still a lost patrol.

They Walk Among the Brave

By Rosalie Cooper
—Cuba, NY

Twenty-one steps they do take,
keeping vigil, the vow they make.
Twenty-one seconds, they make no sound
Day and night on this sacred ground.

Click and pause; click and pause.
They do this for the greater cause,
Honoring the brave beneath their feet
In the nights of cold and days of heat.

Back and forth they do go
Even in the rain, sleet and snow,
Carrying rifles every day.
Looking straight, their eyes don’t stray.

Uniforms pressed to the nines,
Their shoes they spit shine.
Men and women earn their place
To guard this very special space.

For two years they are there,
Keeping visitors from coming near.
Visitors come and visitors go,
And pay respect to those below.

To the unknown soldier we give our praise.
Especially for them the flag we raise
For their loved ones will never know
If they know someone below.

The heart and hand salute we give
To those who died so we can live.

I Walked Where Jesus Walked

By Gene Allen Groner
—Independence, MO



I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2008 during Passover. I shall never forget it. It was the experience of a lifetime.

I walked along the Via Dolorosa, where Jesus walked while carrying the Roman cross on the way to Golgotha. I went to the Kotel, the Western Wall in Jerusalem. There I placed six prayer notes in the wall and prayed for my family, the friends who had given me the notes and for peace in Jerusalem and the world. I was overcome by God's holy presence and driven to my knees in tears of joy and thanksgiving. I thank God for that unimaginable spiritual experience.

I cried along with many other pilgrims as we walked out of the darkened dome building of the Children's Memorial Hall in the Holocaust Museum. We cried for the lost lives of 1.5 million children who were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust during World War II. We had to cry. It was so painful. And we cried for the six million souls lost in the Holocaust. We will never, never, never forget.

I sat on a small stone to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane and basked in the April sunlight under the 1,500-year old olive tree with its ancient, gnarled branches. I went on a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee and walked up the hill to the Mount of Beatitudes and looked over the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus walked on the water and saved his friend Peter from sinking into the depths of the sea.

I walked where Jesus walked as he performed the miracle of turning water into wine. I stepped into the river where Jesus was baptized. I have looked up and seen Mount Hermon in northern Galilee, where the Bible tells us the oil of anointing poured down onto the beard of Aaron. I have traveled through the desert of the Negev in southern Israel where Abraham and Sarah stopped to drink from the wells at Beersheba.

Israel is a beautiful country that the Jewish people have restored to its former glory and loveliness, just as the prophets foretold. And I saw that it was good.

Twin Towers

By Galen Murray
VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

As I recall,
the twin towers stood so tall,
and then we watched them fall;
two thousand and one.

On that day,
so many passed away,
and for their souls we pray;
'twas nine-one-one.

It's history,
a tragedy.
It'll always be
much pain for me,
this memory.

Sculptors' Song: Haiku Sequence

By Lynn A. Norton
—Leawood, KS

The sculptor seeks notes,
music scored in wood and stone.
Earth's compositions.

Solo chisel rings
clarion tunes through soft grain,
bends and shapes its voice.

Drumming of mallet
sets a tempo, rocks the room.
Fallen chips twirl, dance.

Knotted core resists,
sings a dissonant refrain.
Nature's counterpoint.

Chattering rasp blends
duets of light, reflection.
Ballads of mirrors.

Wasted chards lament
discarded measures, phrases,
fragmented lyrics.

Far Away Yet So Near

By Rhonda Chavez
VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX

I still can't believe you are gone,
that it's already been a year.
Some days you seem so far away,
and some days you feel so near.
Whether it's a fluttering butterfly or an eagle
soaring high above in the sky,
a song, a memory, or a picture of you
easily bring a tear to my eye.
I wish there were something I could have done
to take away your pain.
I had no idea what you were going through,
but it was obviously a powerful strain.
Losing you has made me realize
that I need to get my mind right
for you and all the others
who have bravely fought that fight.
You and I are old souls;
we loved our classic movies and westerns.
They gave us a sense of comfort
where our world didn't feel so threatened.
I pray that you found what you needed
when you left this crazy world.
You deserve a peaceful rest, my brother,
where your mind will no longer race and swirl.

My Dad

By Scott Sjostrand
— Hallock, MN

Dale K. Sjostrand,
the Empire Expander,
worked for the BNSF, one of the very best.
A farmer/laborer, ex-Navy,
he loved Mom's homemade gravy.
My role model and hero; eat your Cheerios!
Calloused hands of leather,
hairy chest with whiskers, five o'clock shadow.
Always over dressed for the cold and snow.
A charitable heart.
Too bad he received a bullet target-center.
You're my ultimate mentor!

NOT TODAY

By Michelle Nicole Martin
— Summerville, SC

NOT TODAY

I am not going to do it today;
I cannot promise you tomorrow, but not today.
I will not let my inner demons win;
I will not kill myself today.

NOT TODAY

I might cry and sit on my hands;
I may scream in a pillow.
But no matter what,
I am not going to kill myself today.

NOT TODAY

I am not going to hurt anyone today;
I am not going to scream or hit anyone today.
If I get angry and start to shake, I will go for a walk
Or take a deep breath and realize where I am wrong.
I cannot promise you tomorrow, but not today.

NOT TODAY

For I want to be happy.
I want to be happy with where I am and what I do;
I want to be happy with myself today.
I cannot promise you tomorrow,
But for the love of humanity,
I am not going to do it today.

NOT TODAY

The Brother I Never Met

By David Rudd Swarts
—Bristol, CT

After my mother gave me my brother's Purple Heart for giving his life on April 12, 1945, on the island of Okinawa, I had always dreamed of going to Oahu to "see" my brother, at least to see where he was buried. I had always shed a few tears about his death. After all, my mother was two months pregnant with me when she learned his fate.

Finally, on July 29, 2008, the day arrived when my wife, Donna, and I had the opportunity to make my dream come true. We had spent 12 hours on a plane and about 20 minutes in a cab to reach the Punchbowl Cemetery.

The cab driver was from Vietnam and was making a living at driving taxi cabs. Since I had been in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam conflict, I thought about the irony of the venture. He drove us to the top of the hill and dropped us off. We knew where my brother was buried, having done extensive research before our trip.

The flag was at half staff. Later we learned that there were many internments that day. After the ceremonies, the flag was again raised. About 10 rows up from the office building, Donna found the grave of Walter James Swarts. It was located between someone from New Jersey and another from Arkansas. If my brother had lived, he would have been almost 84 years old that day. Instead, at the age of 20, he gave his life so others could keep theirs.

Shortly after our arrival, an honor guard from Hickam Air Force Base arrived. They



were rehearsing for their contribution to honoring two more veterans. There was a slight rain. None of the rain we encountered in Hawaii was long-lasting. The Hawaiians consider the rain a blessing, especially that hot, dry summer. If we looked overhead, we saw beautiful blue sky and white clouds and wondered how it could ever rain. It was, sure enough, a blessing.

It was peaceful. Quiet. Comfortable. Serene. Sort of what I had imagined. The birds made it even more peaceful. It seemed as if they were purposely making it that way. An employee at the cemetery told me they were red cardinals (including baby ones), doves and bobos. They appeared to make the Punchbowl even more charming than I could have imagined. It was a mixture of joy and sympathy.

"Jimmie" had been buried in Okinawa after his death and remained there until Feb. 24, 1949, when he was reburied on Oahu. My other brother, Daniel, was stationed in Hawaii at the time and saw the burial. I know he

was as "weepy" as I was. I found out what unit Jimmie belonged to and thought about the future research I would perform finding information about his tank battalion. It was hard to believe that 49,078—now 49,080 people—were interred here. Now filled to capacity as far as ground space, others were being cremated. Later in our trip we saw the area where ashes could be scattered. I was overwhelmed, as you can imagine.

The personnel in the office were pleasant. They researched records and, knowing we were going to be in the Punchbowl for some time, had Jimmie's stone cleaned. They actually took his stone out of the ground, transported it to a "cleaning place" and returned it in fantastic condition, not that it was in horrible condition to begin with. They quickly blew the grass and leaves from around the area and installed a small flag, which blew in the breeze that was continuous while we were there. I didn't cry as much as I thought I would. Maybe I got that out of the way before we got there. I know I'll cry again about the loss of my brother, but it will be much more comforting now. What a peaceful place for him to rest.

I videotaped our adventure—60 minutes of it.

We were amazed at the grass; it was like carpeting that was four inches thick. The grassy areas, as well as the paved areas, were in super condition. Workers all over were being extra particular about their jobs. It was almost like they knew those

people who had sacrificed their lives so that they could live free.

We found a map of Okinawa near the memorial and the chapel. I thought of my trip over and anguished over the half-day spent in the air and compared it to the same trip my brother took, probably about 64 years ago, for a much different purpose. How could he leave a small, rural Pennsylvania home where there was a loving family and come to this beautiful area to fight for his life and for the lives of millions of others? What was I complaining about?

Was he scared to be in a tank in the middle of the Pacific, fighting people he didn't know or understand? I bet. But, as Donna said, he had learned this was his mission. I learned the same kind of mission during my stint in the Army. I was scared to death in basic training.

I came home from basic training, the same home Jimmie would have come to, at Christmas time. My dad took me to the bus to make the trip to Fort Knox, Ky., to continue my armor training and perhaps to head to Vietnam. Nobody knew. And yes, I was scared to death. I asked my dad on the way to the bus why mom didn't come with us to see me off, like she always did, and he said, "You're heading on the same route as your brother Jimmie." I hadn't realized how stressful this had been for her. Six of her seven sons had served in the military.

On the lookout, I rediscovered how great it was to be "free to be." To travel freely. To enjoy good company and good food. To have a lovely and loving family. And I even thought how "lucky" my mother might have felt to learn, upon my brother's death, that seven months later I would be born.

We walked around the entire cemetery. The views of Honolulu were awesome. We picked out the spot in Waikiki where we were staying. We saw the beautiful beaches



and looked in awe at Diamond Head. Although we hadn't been to Pearl Harbor yet, I was reminded over and over again what these fallen comrades had given for me and countless others to enjoy. I also thought about the thousands of the "living" military members who STILL are fighting so that we can live in freedom.

As we approached the end of our self-guided tour, I heard a helicopter overhead. It sounded like the type you'd hear in a story about Vietnam. It confused me. It completely mixed my emotions. I imagined one of my fellow Army buddies being shot at—or killed—in a helicopter. At the same time, I realized how much someone was experiencing the time of their life flying over beautiful Oahu. They were "free to see." Partly because of my brother.

I went back to the office. On the way back, a Volkswagen bus made its way up the hill. It was a newer VW bus, but it reminded me of the hippies; yes, I'm a boomer. But during the '60s, there were also a lot of my classmates that gave up college and careers so that the rest of us could drive Volkswagens and set records for how many people we could cram into them.

We were given two big sheets of tracing paper and two pencils to stencil my brother's headstone. Although modern technology captured his stone and many other

memorable spots on film and disk, there appeared to be a personal touch of creating another stone with paper and pencil.

I didn't want to leave. I said "goodbye" and "thank you" a dozen times. I looked at his flag gently blowing in the gentle breeze, and it appeared to wave at me, at times to even "salute" at me. I finally realized Jimmie and I knew each other. And he appreciated my trip to "see" him and honor him. My dream had been completed—almost.

We walked down the crater to a bus stop. We met a couple from Philadelphia there and, while talking to them, an employee from the cemetery brought me two beautiful, colored pictures of my brother's stone.

I knew there were a few people who realized what this trip meant to me. But they weren't in my shoes, exactly. I never knew this guy. I never saw him. I loved him as if I had. I always knew he was my hero. And I'm sure that many of the hundreds of thousands in Honolulu realized what sacrifices were made here and in many other locations throughout the Pacific, and for that matter, around the world.

I know my two daughters will realize, too, how free they are because their uncle gave his life so that they could have a life. Free to be. Free to see. Dreams do come true.

And So Passed the Sixth Day

By Alvin E. Youngquist
VA Medical Center— Denver, CO



Veterans' Voices magazine has published veterans' stories since 1952. Over the years, veterans share many of the same experiences and concerns. From our 1954 archive:

And so passed the sixth day of the week. Then came the Sabbath, Sunday, the day many looked forward to for a drive through the mountains in high-powered automobiles, a trip to the beach, a round of golf or perhaps just a quiet day at home relaxing and enjoying a visit from loved ones and those dear to them.

My most cherished wish today is to know someone will come to see me.

There was a time in my life when I thought and even remarked that people, friends and enemies alike, were just a matter of fact. I took them for granted. "Do you want to see a picture of my sweetheart?" I would ask my friends. Then I'd show them a silver dollar or whip out a \$50 bill and say there is the best friend I ever had, in fact my only friend.

I have learned that these material friends and sweethearts are not the real stuff after all. They come and go and are very fickle; they let you down when you most need them.

Today I re-read this piece and came to the conclusion that the only important words are in the second paragraph.

My most cherished wish today is *to know someone will come to see me.*

From Dad to Dog Tags

By Michael McBroom
— Sheffield Lake, OH

I never felt closer to my father
than when I received that little brown envelope.
Sealed were the contents lost by so many;
just tiny pieces of metal enclosed.

The rush of time slowly paused,
tear after rip after tear.
The glue that once held was broken apart
as my fingers pulled them up in the air.

For the first time in weeks
since the yellow footprint prints,
I felt a feeling come over me.
My father, at one time,
had this same feeling as mine:
the intimate sense of belonging.

We shared this bond,
fresh in my mind.
As I rubbed my fingers over the engravings
and indents, they revealed their true meaning.

Sitting on that footlocker,
I wish my dad could see me
stringing those tags and putting them around my neck,
and could share the pride of becoming.

As the years passed by
these feelings subsided,
and these tags got put in a chest.
My father passed on
and his belongings were bestowed.
Both pairs of dog tags I now possess.

The feelings we shared
no man can compare.
But, dearest Father,
I loved sharing them with you, Dad.

The Small White Box in My Desk

By David Rudd Swarts

— Bristol, CT

If you pulled out a drawer in my desk,
you'd find a small, white box inside.
There you'd see a Purple Heart
and a chunk of my heart, I will confide.
In my brother's wallet was a picture
of his girlfriend who waited for years,
and who would never see him again
through all her tears.

On the 12th of April he left us with pride,
the very same day FDR died.
It was a very sad day for my mother, you see,
because she was pregnant with me.

My "Hero," Jimmie, died amongst the tanks.
At the time I couldn't give him my thanks
for volunteering to save our country and the world.
What memories I have when the flag is unfurled!

He never got a chance to marry
and see his kids running around,
He fought for you and for me
on Okinawa ground.
Never had a chance to see
his small Pennsylvania town
celebrate his return—so many with a frown.

He had a proud family,
five of six brothers who would serve.
All branches included
got the appreciation they deserve.
Many of them saw where he was buried
and saw his stone
to share the grief we all have carried.

He rests in the Punch Bowl in the Pacific;
all visitors still think he was terrific.
I loved the day when I was there with my wife so dear.
How great it was to hear Taps so loud and so clear.

We felt rain on our faces that very same day,
looked in the sky, only white puffy clouds today!
Someone turned to us to say it's not rain;
it's tears from God because of the pain.

To those who have served of your time, maybe your life,
through the happy times and through the strife,
for those who have given a little
and those who have given a lot,
remind yourself of the freedom you have bought.

So today I celebrate with you
my thoughts of a man who would die,
to give up his life, so that we could live free—you and I.
And every time I see his own beautiful flag,
I'll think of the debt,
and the small white box and my hero I've never met.

Cognitive

By John Tidwell

—Conneaut, OH

As I lay my head down, my eyelids close.
My mind drifts off into a fictional dream.
Doubtfully, will it come to fruition, what I propose,
a different way of being or so it seems.

As I dream through the night,
I reflect how lucky not to remember,
undoubtedly, reoccurring images of fright.
The dreams never linger after slumber;
my mind at will wanders away into space.
My body has to stay in this draconian place.

My Story

By Kim Gwinner

VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH

Hi, I'm Kimmer. I'd like to share my story with you.

I am from a broken family, and I used to get beaten with an extension cord and thrown out of the house a lot. I lived in a foster home during my senior year of high school. I am a survivor of attempted suicides.

I am an Army veteran.

I realized I was having different feelings about myself while in basic training. I began to feel ashamed, alone, guilty and dirty from actions forced upon me by a male drill sergeant. There was nothing I could do at the time because he threatened my life by telling me, as he had his hand around my throat choking me, that my body would never be found. I began drinking a lot of bourbon.

A year later, a female forced herself upon me. Again, there was nothing I could do. I was gay, and the Army was hunting people like me to discharge dishonorably. Plus, I was in love with her. I began abusing bourbon.

While stationed in Germany just mere hours after talking to my mother and telling her I was never coming home and that I was going to re-enlist, I was told that she had killed herself. I felt guilty. I was angry, and I began hating myself. I was sent home and later honorably discharged on a hardship. I had begun to drink bourbon full time.



I was 22 when I ran away from home because my stepdad forgot that I was his stepdaughter and began treating me as his wife. I didn't know anyone besides the bikers I was hanging out with at the bars, so I ended up homeless, living on the streets in Cincinnati. Once in a while, the bikers would offer me a place to stay so I could clean up and pass out in safety.

Months later a male biker offered me a stay at his place so I could have a safe place to live. For 10 years it worked out. I had gained employment, which meant that I had money to pay for my bourbon and drugs. He and I became really good friends, until he started demanding "benefits." I found the strength to throw him out of the house that we were renting.

I had met a female at work who was gay; she was an Army veteran and a drug user. We became good friends; she is still my best friend now for 36 years. But back then, my abuse of bourbon became worse to where it took over my life. I began to

be violent and took my guilt, my anger and frustrations out on her. Over the years it deteriorated until Dec. 24, 2020, when I wanted to commit murder/suicide. I shot through the bedroom window and handed her my gun, hoping she would kill me.

But she didn't because she honestly loved me.

While at the VA for an appointment, I reached out for help. A therapist responded, and we talked for well over an hour. I felt very comfortable with her, and for the first time ever, I was able to tell her everything. She made the determination that I could go back home after confessing my story, including hitting rock bottom hard and deep.

I asked the therapist if she could take me on as her patient. See, I began therapy years ago in 1997 but never felt comfortable with anyone enough to tell them my complete story. We made an appointment for the following week.

I told her that I would no longer abuse bourbon and would quit. So, after my 47-year affair with bourbon, I quit cold turkey. Cindy, my therapist, let me know that that wasn't a good thing to do and sent me to the emergency room. I must have passed their tests because hours later they released me to go home.

In the 16 months of therapy with Cindy, I had accomplished so much. I got my blood sugar down to safe levels. I lost weight and stopped smoking. I fell back in love with my wife; we have been together now for 33 years. Since I had opened up completely and honestly with Cindy, my entire outlook on life had changed, I wanted to live; I no longer wanted to die.

I began writing about my traumas, my life, and how it felt so different and good.

Before she retired, Cindy told me that she had handpicked a new therapist for me and asked if she could attend a couple of sessions with us so we could get to know one another. I agreed. I felt as though I liked her and that we would be able to work together. Yes, I was sad about Cindy retiring, but instead of letting it eat me up, I looked at it as though it was another lesson she was teaching me—that loss wasn't always a bad thing, that I could move forward without substances, that I could rely on my strengths, my courage, myself and to continue to grow, flourish and love my new life's journey, which I now call my healing avenue.

I had also found peer support online, and I was attending up to seven groups a week. At that time, it was all men. Yes, men! I eventually opened up, and they accepted me as I was. This was major growth because I had become very anti-man.

With my new therapist, Nicole, I have grown even more. I have written and published three books about my life, traumas and being on my healing avenue. I have been on three podcasts talking about my traumas. I have had a song written about my life. I facilitate three groups online.

I have been bourbon-free now for three years!

My relationship with my wife has blossomed, and my outlook on life is unbelievable. I continue to grow! I know that at times I struggle. I still fight my demons, and my life is still a battlefield, but I push forward getting stronger and more comfortable with being me. I will not surrender to my enemies, including myself!

Life is a challenge and beautiful at the same time. I realize that I couldn't have reached this point without help, therapy, my support team and love. But it is I who works hard at it every day, and I love myself for it.

That Look in His Eyes

By Tracy Sellers

— *Troy, OH*

That look, as he gazed at me,
told me everything I needed to know.
That look in his eyes showed he cared and even loved.
That look showed concern when I felt down,
and that look protected me when I felt unsafe.
He was this to me but nothing more;
he was a dear friend but he wanted more than I did.
More and more.
So when he asked me to take his hand
and go to a magical place,
I did.
I was reluctant; I was excited and scared at the same time.
But I went.
The landscaping and lights made it paradise.
But as the lights eventually started to dim, and even spin,
it went from light to darkness.
Then I woke up.
I woke up feeling tired, sore and angry.
But I didn't know why or where these feelings came from.
That look changed me.
That look was cold, and that look was defensive.
That look could pierce anyone in the dark.
Blood was displayed on the bed like red paint
on a giant canvas.
That's when I understood the looks.
That's when I knew he wasn't caring or loving
like I thought.
He took my innocence and threw it to the wind,
never to be seen again.
No wonder I have nightmares.
That look showed me things had to be different;
things had to change.
That look showed me all I ever need to know.
The darkness appeared for the first time then,
shortly after the look,
the look that drowned me,
the look that took everything from me.
My self-esteem, my positive energy and even my soul.
I will never be the same again,
and it all started with a look.

Inspiration From a WWII Veteran

*By Richard Olson
—Mechanicsburg, PA*

I first met George in my VFW canteen when he came in with a younger veteran for a beer. We were in the process of playing 15 rounds of bingo that evening, and I couldn't help but notice that the elderly gentleman who had just sat down at the bar was wearing a World War II baseball cap. I happened to be the "bingo caller" at the time, and I temporarily put the game on hold so that I could introduce myself to this elderly veteran. I



introduced George over the intercom to the crowd, and he got a standing ovation. In that moment, George knew that he wanted to become a member of our VFW post. This story tells how I came to be very close to George and how my interaction with him inspired me greatly.

One of the first stories that George was quick to tell me was how he had tried to have the government send him any military medals he had been awarded during the war. George indicated that when submitting the request, he was not aware that he had been awarded any medals.

As the story goes, at the age of 92 George submitted a formal request to have his military medals sent to him. For some reason, the request was denied, and George sought the help of a local Pennsylvania representative to intercede on his behalf.

Some weeks later, George officially received his medals. That's when he learned that his records showed he had been awarded the Bronze Star while serving with the

Army in the jungles of New Guinea during World War II. As told to me, he received the Bronze Star for getting seven Japanese snipers to surrender.

Days later, while visiting a veteran friend at the Veterans Administration hospital in Lebanon, Pa., I ran across a hat vendor who was selling military baseball caps. While purveying his collection of hats, I came across a Bronze Star baseball cap. I knew immediately who I wanted to purchase this hat for.

George was residing in a senior home in Carlisle, Pa., where I went to visit him some time later to present the Bronze Star baseball cap to him. I wish you could have seen his face when I gave him the cap.

From the look on his face, you would have thought that I had just given him a brand new Cadillac.

I was shocked that bestowing a \$15 baseball cap to this World War II veteran could have such a dramatic impact on him. From that moment forward, George was

seldom more than a few feet away from that baseball cap. He was either wearing it, or he had it carefully perched on the bedside table next to him for all to see.

If a person would enter his room to deliver food or empty his wastebasket or clean his room, George would proceed to draw attention to his cap, and he would say, "The president of the VFW gave me that hat."

George knew that I was a commander of a VFW post, and it seemed as if by presenting him with the cap I was personally awarding him the Bronze Star nearly 70 years after the fact.

I found the impact of this simple gesture to be profound. I was inspired to initiate a program geared toward identifying elderly veterans residing in senior homes in the community, getting to know them and eventually purchasing and presenting a baseball cap to each of them. The caps captured their personal military journeys and enabled them to proudly advertise how they had served their beloved country. For some, a Vietnam-themed baseball cap recognized their service in an unpopular war.

The details of this baseball caps for senior veterans program which George inspired deserve a chapter of their own, but I am forever grateful to George for impressing upon me that the smallest of gestures can reap TONS of gratification.

Dreamscape

By Rainey Wright

VA Medical Center— Seattle, WA

I have this dream, yet not so much a dream
as a memory. But I can't remember.

I have this dream, though it's not really a dream
for there is no duration like a puff of smoke.

I have this dream. A memory, a recollection
of a time and place I can't remember.

I have this thought, this memory of a night
black as India ink, hot, humid, sultry.

It's darker than midnight in my dream.

The smell of saltwater and bunker oil
are heavy in the air.

And in my dream I can taste
a wisp of cigarette smoke
as it blows across my face,
and harbor sounds kiss my ears.

Am I on a ship or on a float
in this dream of mine?
I feel the heat of steel
and the roll of a wave beneath me.

But the night is dark and still.
Lights like dolphins
are in the distance,
but are they in my dream?

I have this dream.
Not so much a dream
as a memory floating back
to me.

A recollection of sorts
that's most pronounced
on dark moonlit nights,
warm and damp.

In my dream, as I recall,
I feel the hulk of the ship.
Is it beside me or under my feet?
Where am I; why am I here?

Softly, gently flows the music.

Flowing with the tinkling sound of laughter
and the toots and whistles of little boats
that I cannot see in the dark.

I have this dream.

And sometimes I am afraid
because it is so real,
yet nothing is there.

Block Walls

By Tanya R. Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

The ground gives strength to the boundaries of stone,
hardening the foundation of the rising mountain.
Stone walls are resistant to weathering and erosion,
unable to topple them from one's imagined sojourn.

Granite boulders stacked high upon each other,
welded together by mortar, blocking all intrusions.
They interlock and obstruct mental perceptions
forming a curved line with no beginning or end.

Others are flat with no way to scale them,
no method to tunnel through to the other side.
They block the daylight and retain the darkness
contained in its recesses, buried in the black abyss.

Blocking ideas, prohibiting artistic creativity
of the mind and its innate ability to be uninhibited.
Fallible to emotions, the walls can only be conquered
by breaking them down into poetic shards of reality.

Blown apart like a reservoir dam, ideas flow like water
rushing downstream, flooding the path before it.
Crumbled into oblivion, the walls are vanquished,
opening my mind and thoughts to a bright world.

First Anniversary

Dan Yates

—Blue Springs, MO

Our first anniversary
was a special day.
We agreed to celebrate
at the Double J.
You had a glass of red wine;
me, I had beer.
It definitely flew by,
our first married year.

You had come to dance,
had bought some brand-new clothes.
Everyone was watching
you two-step on my toes.
So, you begged forgiveness,
tugged upon my cap,
reached out for your drink
and spilled it in my lap.

You said you were sorry;
I think it was sincere.
Then, in your hug of remorse,
you sneezed into my ear.

It was a trying night
at our favorite bar,
especially when you locked
the keys inside the car.
Frustration was now bubbling
deep within my core.
The sky did me no favors;
It began to pour.
I rolled my eyes in wonder.
What was I to think?
You were more concerned
that your outfit just might shrink.

Finally safe at home
from an evening gone wrong.
They say what doesn't kill you
just might make you strong.
Wet and tired,
we finally crawled into our bed.
When you rolled over to kiss me,
your elbow found my head.

It was a brutal end
to a wonderful year.
On our anniversary
your gift to me was fear.
My mind is now a wasteland,
courtesy of you.
I think I'll buy a rabbit's foot
for year number two!

Ten Good Things From Macular Degeneration

By C. Nemeth

VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

1. No need to clean your glasses. You can't see anything anyway.
2. You can now wear serge and not worry about the lint.
3. Your grandkids love that you can't tell a dime from a penny, nor a five from a single.
4. Your appreciation of the fair sex is rising. You can't tell the pretty from the not so pretty.
5. The family dog no longer is under foot. You've punted him so much that he now stays far away.
6. Now old ladies help me cross the street.
7. What? Gravy on my tie? I thought it was a design.
8. People are so friendly. They toot their horns and shout greetings as I cross the street.
9. No more gardening. They say I hoed the daisies out.
10. I can give candy to little girls now without getting into trouble.



The Spy

By Galen Murray

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

Thirty-five-year-old Norman Cornblatt, aka Jungle Jerry, is six-five and 195 pounds of pure macho with broad muscular arms and shoulders and a ruggedly handsome face with curly blond hair.

He is the ideal specimen for a Chippendale calendar. Always wearing dark glasses, he is a buff, tanned he-man who is a master of guerilla warfare and survival skills.

Working for the CIA, even his wife of 30 years, Vivian, is unaware of his true identity. All she knows is he would be gone for weeks at a time as a salesman for his military arms supply company. It is a secret, undercover, covert government operation, set up in the White House itself where the only access to its mission center is through the Lincoln bedroom. Even the president is unaware of its existence.

Norman crossed the border, leaping from an airplane at 21,000 feet. Free falling, he didn't open his parasail until he was a mere 300 feet above the ground. He landed on the roof of the military center with pinpoint accuracy, breaching the security of the headquarters of the rogue nation. He repelled to the ground, overpowered two guards at the rear of the building and bolted into its confines, scanning the interior for the enemy. His mission was to thwart this rogue nation's plan to build a nuclear weapon.

After he successfully cracked the safe that held his quarry, an alarm sounded when he opened the vault door. Bells, whistles and sirens went off as the room suddenly began to fill with a deadly gas. Norman slipped on his mask and grabbed the plans, cramming them into his vest pocket. He ran to the



door and peeked into the hallway. It was filled with toxic clouds, and he heard the sound of running boots as the enemy came to intercept him. He unsnapped his sidearm and was going to shoot his way out.

Instead, he ran to the window, only to discover it was covered with bars. Norman calmly pulled a compact blasting device from his belt and placed it on the window sill. He armed it and crouched to the side, covering his head with his muscular arms. There was a tremendous explosion, and nothing was left of the window except for a huge gaping hole. From two stories up, he jumped to the ground, tumbling several times before leaping to his feet and running in zig-zag patterns toward a line of trees as bullets whizzed past his head and chewed up the ground at his feet.

In the cover of the forest, Norman ran through the brush, hoping to put distance between him and his pursuers. He climbed and climbed until he came to a clearing. In the dim light of the approaching dawn, 300 yards away he could see a black abyss. He ran to the edge of the canyon, searching frantically for a means of escape. Behind him, he could hear the dogs tracing his scent. Soon, the light from dozens of torches began to emerge from the trees. He reached for his sidearm, only to find the holster empty. His gun must have fallen out when he tumbled to the ground back at the fortress. Now he was defenseless except for his cunning and the fact that he was

a master of the martial arts. However, karate didn't offer much defense against flying bullets.

Then he heard the distant sound of a helicopter. In the emerging light of day, he saw it flying along the rim of the valley, coming to his rescue. As it neared, he saw the rope trailing below it. He would have to cast himself into the blackness before him and hope to grab the rope as it swung by. There would be only one pass, only one chance. One quick touch told him he still had the plans for the nuclear device. As bullets whizzed past him, Norman leapt from the edge of the crevice into the blackness, and the helicopter passed overhead.

"Norman!" someone shouts. "Norman, wake up and help me unload these groceries. I swear, I don't know how you can sleep with that helicopter clippin' the treetops." The grating voice is Vivian's.

Then the real Norman Cornblatt, aka "little big man" at the country club, pulls himself out of the car into the bright sunlight. He's not 35; he's 53. He isn't six-five; he's five-six with narrow, bony shoulders. He doesn't weigh 195 pounds; he's 295 pounds of USDA grade-A couch potato. He doesn't have curly blonde hair but is mostly bald except for a pathetically inadequate comb-over. His brown, beady little eyes are bloodshot.

Nonetheless, his mission is clear now—moving the contraband from the grocery cart to the armored vehicle. Turning slowly, his squinting eyes scan for any signs of bad guys lurking in the parking lot. He moves with the quickness of a cat, only to drop the eggs. Oops!

Welcome Home

By John L. Swainston

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

I served my three years in the Army.
Discharged and after my debriefing
went straight to the airport.
Headed home, flying to San Francisco.

On the plane was thinking
what it would be like being home
after three years.
I know that there would be
no parade but did expect
a few parties with friends.
I had called my parents
to let them know when I would arrive
and asked to let my friends know, too.
What I did not expect was:

Woman at the baggage claim commenting:
“Children go stand with your dad.”
She turned to me:
“And how many children did you kill.”
She walked off before I could respond.
“Hey Dad, where’s Mom?” “Busy.”

Looking around
there was not one of my friends there.
During the next week I discovered
that I no longer had any friends.
I was the only one that served.
There were other issues,
and I found myself feeling ashamed.

For the next fifteen years
I told no one that I served in the U.S. Army
nor that I signed up in the U.S. Army Reserves.
Needed to be with people that understood.

Today I wear my Army hat with pride,
and say, “Thank you” to anyone that says,
“Thank you for your service.”

Woman

By Levell Taylor

VA Medical Center— Battle Creek, MI

Woman—she is God’s gift to earth.
Because of love, she bears the pain of childbirth.
She is the essence of sweet and fine,
A being complete and one of a kind.
Come! Let us hold her, cherish her
And keep her from harm and fear.
Only for happiness let her give her tears.
Yes, she is so strong and loving.
She is the holder of beauty beheld in man’s eyes.
Yes, she is the key to knowledge;
She opened the door.
She stood by man in the time of war;
She held man’s hand in the time of peace.
She is so tender;
She is so sweet.
She is woman; she is unique.

In the Garden

By Gene Allen Groner
—Independence, MO

In the garden
You will find God,
Rest for your soul
And quiet peace of mind.

In the garden
Loneliness goes away.
Improved health comes
With restful peace of mind.

In the garden
You will find joy.
Happiness will be yours
And true peace of mind.

In the garden
There is a sanctuary
Where you can talk freely
With your God who is very kind.

Gunship Gunner

By James Allen Breitwieser
— Kailua, HI

Hosmer Model #5 hook hand,
wooden-club forearm,
Aviation Brigade
shoulder tat.

Where'd you get those?

Grenada '83,
was a gunship gunner,
fun video game
until it wasn't.

Bullet punched
through the fuselage,
shattered my shooting hand.
Got a tourniquet on in time

Ah, The War Forgotten

By Melvin Brinkley
VA Medical Center—Davis, CA

Do you regret your sacrifice
for such little gain?

No, just doing my duty
of which I'm proud.
What pisses me off was the forced
medical retirement.

Gunship gunner settles
into the cockpit
of his sailing skiff.

Hook hand grasps the sheet
and sheets it in. The skiff
springs from the beach
and soars away.

A Lighter Shade of Blue

Dan Yates
—Blue Springs, MO

The alarm clock does its thing as I lay in bed,
awakening old memories that live inside my head.
She was my heart's desire, the center of my life.
Said she was excited to one day be my wife.

Then she dropped a bombshell, said that we were done.
She had found another; was sure he was the one.
My mind in disarray, how could this be true?
Life once filled with sunshine was now the darkest blue.

Months have come and gone; I've struggled through each day,
trying to understand why she went away.
I gave her all my love, my time and energy.
So, someone tell me why she turned her back on me.

I've done a lot of searching, deep within my soul.
Will I ever find a way to fill that hole?
Slowly I will heal; inside I hear me say,
one day she'll realize I'm the one who got away.

Should she ever come back to rekindle an old flame,
I'll remind her of her choice; I won't share the blame.
She was my one and only, the one I did adore.
Thinking back upon those days, I couldn't give her more.

Though I have been wounded and the pain is real,
living in the past won't allow my heart to heal.
As I face another day, look at life anew,
with each breath I take, I feel a lighter shade of blue.



Stories That Heal

Wayne G. Goodling
—*South Bend, IN*

What's new?

How is it, he wonders,
that eight letters,
one apostrophe and a question mark,
(a mere two words) have such power
to ignite frozen fear?
As always, his light chatter verbally deflects
the invitation to conversation,
and immediately he feels sad.
Reprimanded by his guilt, he reminds himself,
they were only trying to be friendly.

Then, one day, looking just a little beyond guilt,
he notices a heavy manhole cover and asks,
“What's in there?”
But, with little courage to face the fear, he walks away.
Time passes; he keeps coming back,
and, each time, he runs away.
Yet something keeps pulling him.
Then one day, he picks up a crowbar
and holds it lightly.

Days later, he runs the tip of the crowbar
around the edge of the concealing cover.
Weeks pass until the necessity to know
outweighs the fear.
He lifts the cover a few inches
and then walks away.
On another day, he returns, still afraid
but determined to know.
The crowbar pries; fear tries to repel,
but he persists and pulls.
The cover slides aside to reveal danger's den.
Once again he runs away.
Next time, he returns with a strategy of compassion.
His laughter defuses the first bomb;
acts of kindness take care of several others.
More laughter, music, good sex—
all give him power to remove and defuse.
And each time, the world becomes a safer place.
Finally, with bombs defused, he looks inside,
and when he sees what he sees,
he immediately, intuitively knows.
The heavy metal cover had simply and only been

a guise and disguise for something soft,
soft and afraid of dying—
with heavy metal placed there to protect
a deep, gaping, mostly-white wound,
packed with gauze.
Some layers dry,
some wet or soaked with blood
sometimes clotted and caked.
Layer on layer, the story emerged:
each year a new dressing applied
with old ones never removed.

What's new?
Eight letters, one apostrophe.
And now he knows what's new
as each piece of gauze,
each once-sterile dressing tells its story.
Just as he had defused mortar shells,
he would now retell the story.
And on that day,
he begins releasing stories, ready to move on.
With nothing left behind,
the wound begins to heal.

The Comfort Zone

Kim Gwinner
VA Medical Center—*Cincinnati, OH*

When I do not choose healing,
it's my emotions I am concealing.
I don't want to be around other folks
because I'll feel like the brunt of their jokes.

When I do not choose healing,
I am not at all appealing.
I'm more than likely not in a good place,
so, I'll warn you now to stay out of my face.

When I do not choose healing,
it's from me that I am stealing
a life that's still new to me,
the happiness, joy and love, you see.

When I do not choose healing,
it's layers of me that I am peeling.
I take away everything I have applied,
and I'll let my demons back inside.

Back From Iraq 4/04

By Carl "Papa" Palmer
— University Place, WA

My son just got back from his second tour in Iraq.

No ticker-tape parade,
no welcome-home celebration,
no media coverage.

"Good Morning America" doesn't spoil breakfast
with the newscast.

No one should see the caskets
being unloaded from the plane.
The 23 flag-draped caskets.

They do show pictures of prisoner abuse this day
in Guantanamo Bay as yesterday
and the day before.

My son just got back from his second tour in Iraq.

The first time my son came home was with fanfare,
every television channel.

"Mission Accomplished," resounded the banner
behind our President on the aircraft carrier,
"thumbs-up" dressed as a genuine military man.

My son just got back from his second tour in Iraq.

The stock market reports
an upward surge in Halliburton this day.
The television airs a commercial,
approved by John Kerry,
condemning jobs sent to other nations,
not mentioning Mexico
or his wife of Heinz fame
or the 23 flag-draped coffins.

My son just got back from his second tour in Iraq.

My son is in the plane,
the plane with the 23 flag-draped caskets.
He serves as navigator on the flight crew.

My son just got back from his second tour in Iraq.

And 23 other sons just got back
from their tours in Iraq.
They won't have to return,
but my son most certainly will.

Flying High

By Rhonda Chavez
VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX

When I'm out and about,
I see a lone bird flying high.
Could it be David
letting me know he's nearby?
Has the bird always been there?
Or am I just taking notice?
Is he here to remind me
to keep my promise?

Lately there have been two.
Did David bring Timmy along?
Are they here to protect me
And help me to be strong?

I went looking for you today,
but you were nowhere to be found,
probably because it was raining.
But I felt your love around.

I will continue to look for you
everywhere I go.
I truly miss you both
In case you didn't know.

Resilience Building

By Shoba Sreenivasan, Ph.D.

A three-step model offered by Dr. Seligman and colleagues:

1. Capture the catastrophic thinking (i.e., identify it);
2. Identify best-case scenarios;
3. Identify most likely outcomes. This process forwards a sense of control over the circumstance and deflects helplessness.

Resilience means tolerating uncertainty.

All of us like certainty; routines are comforting and forward the belief that you can control events. Yet life is full of change and the unexpected. Change is difficult, particularly so when it is driven by loss. In the military, routines are structured by others. In civilian life, work may be that structure. A sudden change in circumstances—discharging from military service, losing one's job, a romantic break-up, the death of a loved one—is unsettling and creates uncertainty. Uncertainty fuels anxiety. Anxiety in turn can lead to negative thinking: "I'll never find another job." "I'll never get over this broken heart." "I didn't appreciate my

mother, and now it's too late." That in turn can risk maladaptive ways to cope with the uncomfortable feelings: eating too much, drinking too much, using drugs or withdrawing from others. Putting things in perspective is the antidote. Bouncing back means mentally reframing the event and not catastrophizing. ("Everyone loses a job. I'll get another one.") It also means having adaptive coping mechanisms in the tool box that work for you, e.g., a friend you can talk to, exercise, meditation, prayer.

Resilience means control over emotions. Out-of-proportion emotions (anger) may become such a habit that even small stressors trigger it (e.g., becoming furious over a long grocery checkout line). Psychologists have found that having an internal locus of control (i.e., you can have control over your life) can promote a sense of self-efficacy, while lack of an external locus of control (i.e., you don't have control over your life) is associated with helplessness. Those who are resilient are not felled by a negative circumstance; they find what they can control in their

circumstance and orient toward it. Lolly Vegas did this by reframing his circumstance (wounded but not slain) and continued to be an artist in new ways.

Hunt the good stuff.

Ultimately, none of us is immune from bad things happening in our lives. While we can't control external events, we can control our mindset. This journey begins one thought at a time, replacing the negative with the positive, even if you don't feel like it. It means adopting a policy of gratefulness reviewing all that you have, such as feeling the sunshine on your skin, the ability to walk, to think, to talk, to see. These are enormous gifts if you have them all. Dr. Seligman and colleagues called this "hunt the good stuff" as a means to cultivate gratitude. It also means a policy of kindness both to yourself and others. Human beings are frail creatures; we are prone to mistakes. Forgive yourself and others. Then slowly, after a while, this shift in perspective will uplift you and open up all sorts of possibilities.

Attention All Veterans' Voices Contributors

It is apparent that some authors and contributors may not be updating their profile on the *Veterans' Voices* website. **PLEASE check your information, particularly your address, and make sure it is current.**

This is the information the office uses to mail author award checks and several were returned after the last issue. If you did not receive your check, it may be that we do not have your current address. Please make the correction in your profile on the website and then call Jeanne in the office, 816-701-6844, and report that you did not receive your check.

The bookkeeper will have to verify this and reissue a check so it will not happen immediately.

Mail Call



“Thank you so much for the award check,” wrote **Charles Kesler**, Dallas, Texas, “I was going to go to McDonald’s to spend it, but changed my mind so I am sending it back to *Veterans’ Voices*. God bless all of you who work to make the magazine great. As a veteran, I thank you for finding worth in my writing.”



Several VAMCs have expressed their appreciation on behalf of their patients and staff for the donation of copies of *Veterans’ Voices*. Among them are **John F. Rose**, voluntary service specialist at Clement J. Zablocki VAMC in Milwaukee, Wis.; **James L. Deen, Jr.**, chief, Center for Development & Civic Engagement (CDCE), Mann-Grandstaff VAMC, Spokane, Wash.; and **Heather Murphy**, chief, CDCE, VA Northern California Health Care System.



Mary Kay Stein, Albuquerque, N.M., wrote to VVWP President Sheryl Liddle, “It was wonderful to receive your letter updating the status of *Veterans’ Voices*. It brought back so many memories – I was lucky to be one of those Women in Communications and Theta Sigma Phi members in Kansas City who worked on the magazine. It was fun and challenging to work with volunteers like **Margaret Clark**, **Sally-Sue Hughes** and **Tina Hacker** (Tina and I were poetry editors). We also were lucky to work with the two founders of *Veterans’ Voices*.”

“Thank you and Margaret Clark for keeping me up to date as the magazine makes many digital changes...If you need a volunteer in any part of the remarkable program that gets veterans’ work on the printed page and out to the world, please let me know. The value of this to the authors and their families never goes out of date.”

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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.

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Rich Wangard, Neenah, Wis.

Diane Wasden, Millen, Ga.

Larry W. Westhusing, Pittsburg, Mo.

Gifts in Kind

Pris Chansky, Overland Park, Kan.

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.

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*

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

DAVA, State Dept. of Kansas Award.....\$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 and Maintaining My Mental Health (Perpetual).....\$35

POETRY

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

DAVA, State Dept. of Florida Award\$30

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

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

Doris Cobb Memorial Award: Editor's Choice\$15

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

Joseph Posik Award: Given to a veteran who encourages other veterans to write\$50

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. The editors will not publish A.I.-generated writing. 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 <https://veteransvoices.org/register/>
- or www.veteransvoices.org and select Registration.

Once on the page, complete the registration form by typing your name, username, password, email and other profile information. If you don't have an email, please use one from a relative or friend. Now click Register and you will be directed to a login page. Log in by entering your username and password that you just set up.

Once you have successfully logged in, go to the MAKE A NEW SUBMISSION section of your account page and click BROWSE AND UPLOAD. Now select whether you want to submit prose, poetry or artwork. Once selected, fill out the title of your submission and upload your submission. For writing, we accept Word files (doc or docx) or text files (txt). For artwork, we accept jpg. You can also submit a picture that supports your writing using the Choose File button. (Please be mindful of the size of your files as our website has sizing limits in place for all uploads.)

Click UPLOAD TO *VETERANS' VOICES*. When your submission is successfully uploaded, you will be redirected back to your account page where the submission will be listed under the YOUR SUBMISSIONS section. To review, download or remove your submission, click REVIEW OR DOWNLOAD TO YOUR COMPUTER under your submission entry. You cannot make edits to your submission, but you can re-upload by clicking the Remove and Upload Again button.

Guidelines for Local Contests.

Writing contests can encourage others to write. Announce such contests through publications and bulletin boards at VAMCs or writing groups. 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 or (816) 701-6844

Mail Submission Sample.

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

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.

I certify that this is my own work created without copying or using AI.

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: _____

I Can't Write

By Richard Wangard
—Neenah, WI



Richard Wangard has been a faithful contributor to Veterans' Voices for more than 10 years. He knows a thing or two about choosing subject matter for stories and poems. If you're wondering what to write about, read on for some suggestions and remember to submit that writing to Veterans' Vocies for possible publication.

—The Editors

You say you can't write? Bullshit! If I can, you can. All you have to do is apply ass to chair. When you do you open up your entire mind and share it with us, all your fellow vets. And you can write about anything you want. No restrictions. Better yet, if you do, this magazine might be crazy enough to publish it. The editors have been publishing my stuff for the last 10 years.

Over the years I have written about Nam and the military, about stress going on in my life, about friends, Harley-Davidsons, trips, family members, more than 50 years of PTSD and any other thing that has tripped my trigger. And *Veterans' Voices* has published a great deal of it, always making me glad that I wrote it all down. Now, even after I kick off to heaven, I can leave something behind that the kids and grandkids can read if they so

choose. Stuff they never even knew about me and the life I led.

How do I encourage you, my fellow vet, to write it down? How about that shipmate who taught you the ropes? A Marine who had your back? The Coast Guard swimmer who put it all on the line so "Others May Live." Maybe, just maybe, you, yeah you, owe us a poem or story or maybe some of your talented artwork. You know we never stop being brothers and sisters, and let me tell you one more time: your stories, your poems, your artwork can be anything at all. Whatever is on your mind in the comfort of your home, in your own space. And if you are anything like me at all, the most important thing of all: no rules. You write what you want to write about, anything you want.

PTSD and how I have dealt with it have been big subjects for me for 55 years. I can only tell you it has greatly improved over the last 10 years I have been writing. Is it gone? Hell no! But it has improved over any other treatment program I have been in because I write. Yeah, I still seek help from counseling; I am no fool. But my writing is truly what has gotten me through. So vet, take it from an old Nam airman. Apply ass to chair and watch the magic happen.

Heal Through Visual Art

Watch for your artwork in a future issue!

Each issue of *Veterans' Voices* includes a special section featuring art from military veterans. Robert Rubin, M.D., Ph.D., a military veteran and retired V.A. staff psychiatrist, is the inspiration for this initiative. Experience has shown him that 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 your drawings, paintings and photographs, following the Submission Guidelines page 66 and help fill the pages of *Veterans' Voices* with colorful art!



For more than 70 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!

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



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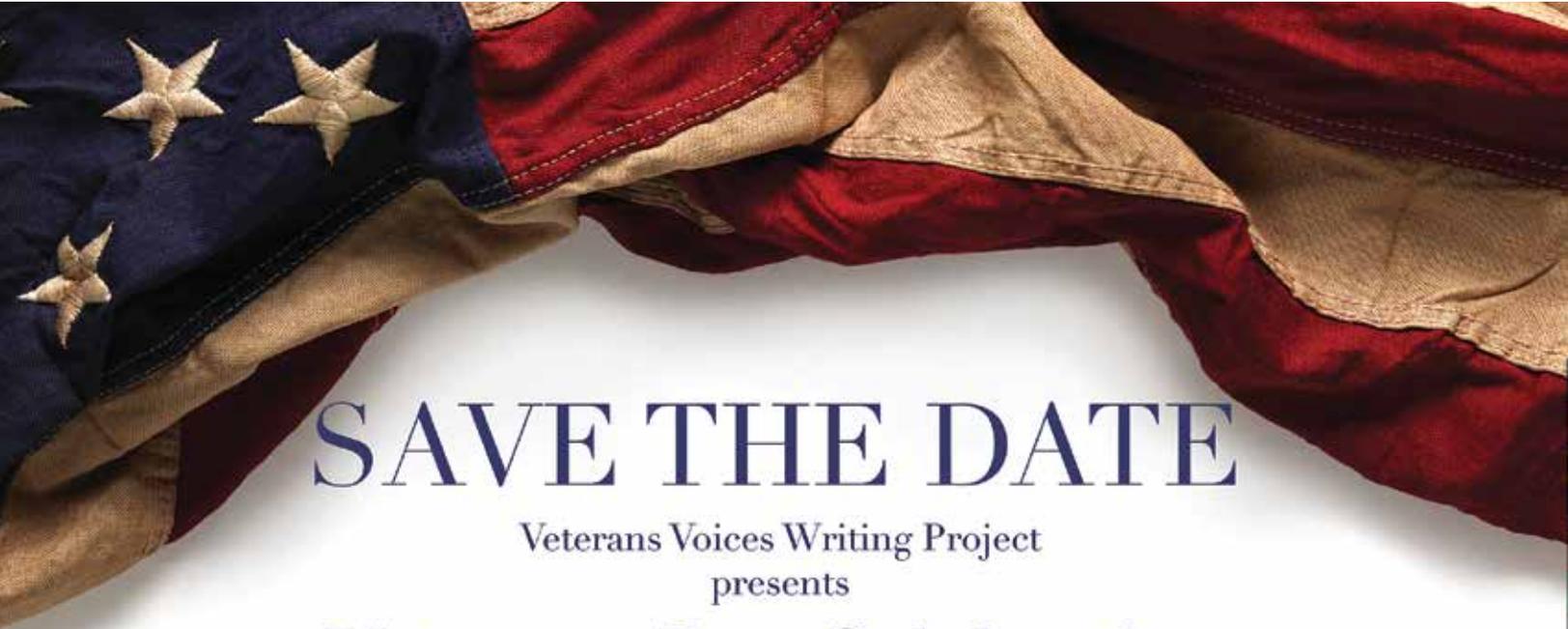
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Write to the editors, so we can
share your letters in Mail Call.

VeteransVoices.org



SAVE THE DATE

Veterans Voices Writing Project
presents

★ Veterans Pen Celebration ★

Recognizing Veteran Writers with a Reader's Theatre Presentation
By Kansas City Veterans Write

Saturday, Nov. 9, 2024 | 2 - 4 pm

The National World War I Museum and Memorial
2 Memorial Drive, Kansas City, MO

FREE ADMISSION TO THIS EVENT

