

# VETERANS' VOICES<sup>®</sup>

**The Life Saving Power  
of Poetry**

*By Tina Hacker*

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**Promise**

*By Daniel Paicopulos*

**Christmas '87 in the DMZ**

*By Joseph Harman*

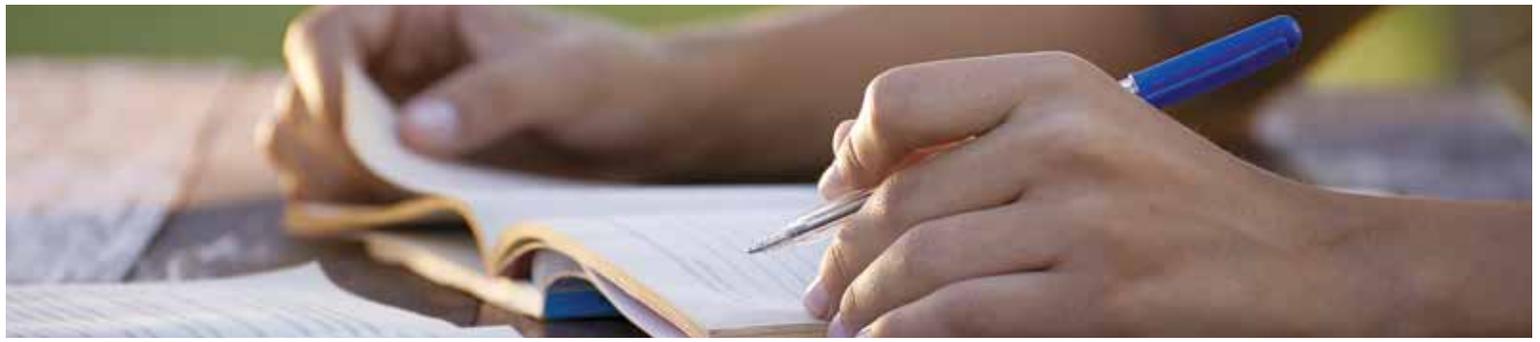
**Me: in Public and  
in Private**

*By Rhonda Chavez*

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# The Lifesaving Power of Poetry

By Tina Hacker

Poetry saves veterans' lives. That's a very bold statement, but it doesn't come from me. Rather, it comes from veterans through their writing for *Veterans' Voices*. As a poetry editor for the magazine for more than 30 years, I have had an up-front seat to this. Veterans often reveal that they have considered or attempted killing themselves. But this stopped when they discovered an alternative: writing about the emotions and experiences that prompted their suicidal thoughts. Very often, they write poems. More important to many than the writing itself is the chance to share their feelings with other veterans, encouraging them to reconsider their actions. A vet writes, "Let me help you; you're not alone."

Through writing poetry, veterans may evoke hopes and fears they have never declared before or to anyone. One vet writes, "We are left to care for each other." This sharing is a way of unburdening emotions that have haunted them for decades. Quoting a famous axiom, a vet writes "Courage is not the absence of fear" adding, "but rather bringing your fear into submission,/taming the lion within."

Some veterans express wonder at how young they were when they were drafted. One recalls that he was called to fight, "Only twelve months before/we had dates for the prom." Others write about injuries, recovery and health. Poetry gives injured veterans the ability to walk or run without legs or arms. Poems about mental health offer veterans the chance to talk about topics they may not be comfortable discussing in person. Of course, PTSD is a problem in all the services. "Not all wounds are visible," one vet writes.

Coming home and leaving home—the transition between military life and civilian life—are major concerns. Sometimes the reunion is joyous; sometimes it's not. A vet asks, "Who am I?"

There is much concern about commemoration with many poems about the Vietnam Wall, national cemeteries and how loved ones remember soldiers who fell. Veterans write poems about the need for the government to better recognize and honor the fallen, while other poems express appreciation for government measures to preserve the past.

The subject of race occurs frequently. Equality is often emphasized. One vet writes, "Brown,

Black, Asian, Indian or White are all in this battle of survival." Another's poem explains, "As soldiers we were all brothers;/we did not see different colors in our skin."

Women veterans often write about topics that are unique to them. Even today, there are poems sent to *Veterans' Voices* about sexual harassment and abuse as well as treatment not equal to that of men.

But women have the same experiences and emotions as men and repeatedly write about the importance and impact of their service. One vet writes, "Do not pigeonhole us./We are survivors."

Veterans explore subjects they care deeply about such as the flag, family, freedom, spouses and sweethearts, nature and religion. They also offer opinions about subjects they dislike, sometimes intensely, such as war, bullies, corrupt leaders, and injustice in the government or military. Often they describe unique experiences—like riding a Harley Davidson! But what counts most isn't subjects. It's the veterans themselves and how their poetry plays a healing role. It helps veterans thrive, cope, and, of upmost significance, push away thoughts of suicide.

This essay originally appeared in the weekly column, "Poetry from Daily Life" in the Springfield News-Leader from Springfield, MO. The column is produced by David L. Harrison, Poet Laureate of Missouri. All the quoted material comes from *Veterans' Voices*.



*Tina Hacker began writing poetry in her sophomore year at the University of Illinois. This led to a career editing and writing for a major corporation. She was honored as a Muse of The Writers Place in Kansas City and is a four-time Pushcart Prize nominee. She was a finalist in New Letters and George F. Wedge competitions, won the prestigious Matrix Honor Award, and was named Editor's Choice in two literary journals. Tina is especially proud of the Clarion Award she won for her work on Veterans' Voices. She has authored three books of poetry: Cutting It, Listening to Night Whistles, and GOLEMS.*

# Veterans' Voices®

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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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## Magazine Guidelines

Manuscripts, photographs and artwork submissions are accepted online. Follow the guidelines on pages 65 and 66 of the magazine or as listed on the web site.

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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.



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# Veterans' Voices®

Fall 2024 Vol. 72, No. 3

<b>The Lifesaving Power of Poetry</b> .....2 <i>By Tina Hacker</i>	<b>Submission Guidelines</b> ..... 66
<b>Mail Call</b> .....63	<b>Kansas City Veterans Write Joins Veterans Voices</b>
<b>Thank You</b> .....64	<b>Writing Project</b> .....67 <i>Press Release</i>
<b>Special Prizes for Writers</b> .....65	<b>Heal Through Visual Art</b> .....67

## Prose

<b>Pursuing Wisdom, Finding and Fearing God</b> .....8 <i>By Aaron Weyant</i>	<b>A Veterans Day Reminder</b> .....40 <i>By H. David Pendleton</i>
<b>Dance of the Waves</b> .....10 <i>By William L. Snead</i>	<b>Trusting in God's Love</b> .....41 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>
<b>Extra Duty</b> .....10 <i>By Erik Von Wiser</i>	<b>Best Christmas Gift Ever</b> .....43 <i>By Dan Yates</i>
<b>A Different View of PTSD</b> .....13 <i>By Arthur Ball</i>	<b>The Last Walk</b> .....47 <i>By Richard Wangard</i>
<b>Heartland Honor Flight</b> .....16 <i>By Louise Eisenbrandt</i>	<b>Wheels Up, 1973</b> .....49 <i>By Zachary Space</i>
<b>A Fox Tale</b> .....18 <i>By C. Nemeth</i>	<b>Christmas '87 in the DMZ</b> .....50 <i>By Joseph Harman</i>
<b>Goodbye My Love, Goodbye</b> .....19 <i>By William L. Snead</i>	<b>The Chicago Marathon</b> .....51 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>
<b>Prelude</b> .....20 <i>By William M. Greenhut</i>	<b>Try Being One of Us</b> .....53 <i>By Janice Walker</i>
<b>A Chicago Story</b> .....25 <i>By Gilbert Weiss</i>	<b>Glory</b> .....54 <i>By Frances Ann Wiedenhoft</i>
<b>Had To Come Back</b> .....29 <i>By James Janssen</i>	<b>Support for Veterans in Crisis</b> .....56 <i>By James Janssen</i>
<b>A Tribute to a Great Man</b> .....29 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	<b>My Promise to Myself</b> .....58 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>
<b>Was a Grunt</b> .....31 <i>By Gerald Augustine</i>	<b>Peacekeeper (?)</b> .....60 <i>By Melvin Brinkley</i>
<b>Me: in Public and in Private</b> .....36 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>	<b>Plowshares to Swords, Swords to Plowshares</b> .....62 <i>By Erik Von Wiser</i>
<b>You Have To Live It To Understand It</b> .....37 <i>By John Wesley Bruce</i>	

## Artwork

<b>Makin' Magic</b> .....33 <i>By Ty Andrews</i>	<b>Mo-Pac-trail</b> .....35 <i>By Kirsten (Hesterberg) Vallinmaki</i>
<b>American Moon Moth</b> .....33 <i>By Gene A Groner</i>	<b>My Heart My Stomach My Mind</b> .....35 <i>By Diane Wasden</i>
<b>A Yellow Flower</b> .....34 <i>By Daniel Strange</i>	<b>Through the Snow</b> .....35 <i>By William Shepherd</i>
<b>My Spot</b> .....34 <i>By David Ludlow</i>	<b>Two-Ladies</b> .....35 <i>By Jack Tompkins</i>
<b>Train to Nowhere</b> .....34 <i>By Daniel Strange</i>	<b>Baby and Daddy</b> .....35 <i>By Kenny Trujillo</i>
<b>Recline Away</b> .....34 <i>By Frank Mattson</i>	<b>Me: in Public and in Private</b> .....36 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>

## Poetry

<b>Service Buddy</b> .....7 <i>By Arthur Ball</i>	<b>The Coming of Day</b> .....17 <i>By Tanya R. Whitney</i>
<b>The Elderly</b> .....7 <i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>	<b>In Plain Sight</b> .....18 <i>By Lawrence W. Langman</i>
<b>It's the Little Things</b> .....11 <i>By Tim Brady</i>	<b>Instrument of Peace</b> .....19 <i>By Anthony Franco</i>
<b>Courage</b> .....11 <i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>	<b>A Nurse's Dream</b> .....19 <i>By John E. Jones</i>
<b>Two Definitive Death Days</b> .....11 <i>By Arthur Ball</i>	<b>Marriage: I Do and I Get To</b> .....22 <i>By Norman L. Jones</i>
<b>Haiku Poem for Hope</b> .....11 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	<b>Through the Night</b> .....22 <i>By Dennis O'Brien</i>
<b>PTSD</b> .....12 <i>By Alexandra Brown</i>	<b>I Believe in Hope</b> .....22 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>
<b>I Am Grateful</b> .....12 <i>By Janice Walker</i>	<b>Legal and Deadly</b> .....22 <i>By Levell Taylor</i>
<b>Bunker Mentality</b> .....12 <i>By Mark Fleisher</i>	<b>Empty Boots</b> .....23 <i>By Paul David Gonzales</i>
<b>Leather and Lace</b> .....13 <i>By Lawrence W. Langman</i>	<b>Children</b> .....23 <i>By Levell Taylor</i>
<b>Storm Inside</b> .....14 <i>By Gene Bryant</i>	<b>Music and Time</b> .....23 <i>By Paul David Gonzales</i>
<b>My Dreams</b> .....14 <i>By Dan Yates</i>	<b>Ocean's Sky</b> .....23 <i>By David Ludlow</i>
<b>Wading In</b> .....15 <i>By Daniel Paicopulos</i>	<b>The Anger Within Me</b> .....24 <i>By Karen Green</i>
<b>March 1919—Letter Home</b> .....15 <i>By John L. Swainston</i>	<b>Merry Christmas</b> .....24 <i>By Kimberly Green</i>
<b>Tulips and Roots, My Cycle of Life</b> .....15 <i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>	<b>A Prayer for Peace</b> .....25 <i>By Larrie Green</i>

<b>By My Own Hands</b> .....26 <i>By Kim Gwinner</i>	<b>Wake Up! It's Only a Dream</b> .....46 <i>By Diane Wasden</i>
<b>Waiting</b> .....26 <i>By John Tidwell</i>	<b>The Resourceful Light</b> .....46 <i>By John E. Jones</i>
<b>No Victory Parade</b> .....26 <i>By Johnny L. Martinez</i>	<b>A Simple Stone</b> .....47 <i>By Tracy E. Etheridge</i>
<b>Unpeacefulness</b> .....27 <i>By Norman L. Jones</i>	<b>My Parole</b> .....47 <i>By Karen Green</i>
<b>I Am a Survivor</b> .....27 <i>By Allyson Hargrave</i>	<b>This Is Not Goodbye</b> .....48 <i>By Diane Wasden</i>
<b>Holidays as a Soldier</b> .....27 <i>By Nina Herron</i>	<b>Average People</b> .....48 <i>By Tanya R. Whitney</i>
<b>Allhallows Eve</b> .....28 <i>By Lawrence W. Langman</i>	<b>The Pentagon</b> .....48 <i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>
<b>Love</b> .....28 <i>By Kenny C. Trujillo</i>	<b>If Only</b> .....52 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>
<b>Never Forget</b> .....28 <i>By Kimberly Green</i>	<b>My PTSD and Me</b> .....52 <i>By John Tidwell</i>
<b>My Pen, My Story</b> .....28 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>	<b>Who Said It Was Simple</b> .....52 <i>By John L. Swainston</i>
<b>It's Better</b> .....28 <i>By William L. Snead</i>	<b>Anything vs. Everything</b> .....52 <i>By Norman L. Jones</i>
<b>The Happy Days</b> .....29 <i>By Michael Pride Young</i>	<b>When Is Enough—Enough?</b> .....53 <i>By Alex Wulff</i>
<b>Revelation</b> .....30 <i>By Jerome Moore</i>	<b>Trust in Me</b> .....57 <i>By Michael Pride Young</i>
<b>Neck Bones</b> .....30 <i>By Lynn A. Norton</i>	<b>The Tribute to Michael Jackson</b> .....57 <i>By Michael Pride Young</i>
<b>To Louise</b> .....30 <i>By Michael Kuklenski</i>	<b>My Girl</b> .....57 <i>By Loleta Totton</i>
<b>Stop! Not a Prisoner of War</b> .....31 <i>By Elvis Miguel Machuca</i>	<b>My Little "Faith"</b> .....57 <i>By Janice Walker</i>
<b>What Will It Take?</b> .....32 <i>By Lenny Ellis</i>	<b>Success</b> .....58 <i>By Wayne G. Goodling</i>
<b>Evil Demon</b> .....32 <i>Nina Herron</i>	<b>Love Is Forever</b> .....58 <i>By Allyson Hargrave</i>
<b>Battle Buddy</b> .....42 <i>By Tracy Sellers</i>	<b>End Child Abuse Now</b> .....59 <i>By Diane Wasden</i>
<b>Boy</b> .....42 <i>By William L. Snead</i>	<b>"Dear John"</b> .....61 <i>By Michael McBroom</i>
<b>Promise</b> .....44 <i>By Daniel Paicopulos</i>	<b>Joe</b> .....61 <i>By Paul David Gonzales</i>
<b>I Found Your Medals at Savers Last Night</b> .....45 <i>By Kimberly Green</i>	
<b>Depression Check-in</b> .....45 <i>By Michael McBroom</i>	

## Service Buddy

By Arthur Ball  
—Manchester, NH

I look down from heaven and what do I see?  
A body on the battlefield that looks just like me.  
Body parts are missing; there is blood everywhere!  
The scene is so ghastly that I can only stare.  
Now the memory returns. I freely gave my life  
in a fight to preserve democracy  
for my children and my wife.  
As I was walking with my service buddies,  
I spotted the grenade and quickly dove upon it.  
What a price I paid! Next I see the military funeral,  
with people gathered 'round.  
The mournful sound of Taps as they lay me in the ground!  
Then the crowd is all dispersing from the cemetery, fast.  
Workmen cover me with dirt and top it off with grass.  
At least all is quiet now, no sound of bursting shell!  
That man was right on target when he said, "War is Hell."  
Advances, patrols and skirmishes make for quite a fuss.  
The object is to kill the enemy before he can kill us.  
So now it is Memorial Day, and I wait patiently to see  
if anyone comes around to remember me.  
I see the flags and flowers placed on graves so near,  
yet no one visits me. I'm alone again this year.  
Surely my family hasn't forgotten the sacrifices made,  
or has their desire for freedom slowly begun to fade?  
Well, I guess they've got ballgames and picnics and yet,  
I see someone coming toward me—in uniform—a Vet!  
He stops and ponders thoughtfully as he reads my stone,  
"Although I did not know you, you shouldn't be alone."  
With a quivering voice and a tear in his eye,  
he continues, "Thanks for being there." I, too, want to cry.



"It's true I fought my own war, and no bullet took my life.  
But America is still great because you sacrificed.  
And I am truly thankful for everything you did.  
Even though, at the time you lost your life, I was still a kid.  
But I've met your buddies, those whose lives you saved.  
So I've brought a flag and flowers to lay upon your grave.  
No greater love has any man than to die for his friends.  
And if you were a Christian, you entered life at the end.  
Your family may have forsaken you and forgotten where you lay,  
yet as a brother Christian, I'll greet you on that day.  
Until then, know you're appreciated because you did your part.  
Thank you, service buddy, from this grateful heart."  
As he rose to leave, I thought with a smile, those tender  
words of gratitude seemed to make it all worthwhile.  
Yes, I was a Christian; and now I'm with my Lord.  
See you later, service buddy!  
Continue steadfast in His Word.

## The Elderly

By Jason Kirk Bartley  
VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

Some people look at the elderly  
with impatience and bother.  
I see someone interesting,  
a grandmother or father.  
Some people think  
they are dazed and confused.  
I see them full of knowledge  
and easily amused.  
Many will not come and visit them;  
their outcome seems so bleak.  
I see a person who's been through it all,  
and, in their pain,  
they still smile and kiss you on the cheek.  
Some people see frail  
and on their last leg.  
I see beautifully aged.  
To shake my hand,  
they do not have to beg.  
However you see them,  
still respond with loving care.  
Someday it may be you sitting  
in that wheelchair!

# Pursuing Wisdom, Finding and Fearing God

By Aaron Weyant

VA Medical Center— Philadelphia, PA

**The first installment of this story appeared on page 10 of the summer issue of *Veterans' Voices*. The author tells about a trip to visit religious sites in the Middle East and the difficulties he encounters on his trip home.**

God was truly protecting me on that flight. On landing, the attendants tried to have me arrested by the Indianapolis airport police. The police had a nice chat with the pilots and I was free to go. The cab ride back to my apartment was not a nice experience. It was cold and snowing. This was Nov. 21, 2012, way too early for snow. I arrived at my apartment only to be greeted by local police. The flight attendant was hell bent on sending me to jail. The police yelled at me and told me to go to the VA Hospital the very next morning. I told them I would do just that, and I did. I stood up all that night thanking God for bringing me back to Indianapolis safely without being arrested. The next morning I checked my bank account statement online to find out the cab company cleaned out my bank account's roughly \$5,800. I called the bank, and the bank clerks told me it would take a week to retrieve those funds. I told the bank clerk that I had enough to get me by for a week. I lied to them, because I didn't. So, I headed out the door to check myself back in to the VA hospital, only to be greeted by a police officer who personally escorted me there.

The psychiatrist at the Roudebush VA Hospital was glad to see me alive and well. I was again a broken man at this point. I had no money, no food and my rent was overdue. I checked myself into the mental health ward because I tried cutting my wrists. I was a complete failure. I was in the mental health ward until my parents arrived all the way from Shanksville, Pa., to pick me up and to go back to Shanksville with them. This time I listened to every suggestion the doctors gave to me. I was put on psychiatric medications. I still wasn't stable enough to leave alone. but the

doctors let me leave with my parents. I was home back in Shanksville before Christmas. I lived with my parents for over a year. At home, I felt that I failed God and my family, and still think that to this day. Doctors from the Altoona VA Medical Center agreed with the schizo affective disorder diagnosis with moderate depression. I applied for an 80 percent disability rating, up from 60 percent. With this money I got myself out of debt, and the doctors cleared me for employment. I couldn't find a job as a robotics technician. I couldn't find work, period. I managed to land a part-time summer job at the school I graduated from, Shanksville Stony Creek School, as a janitor. This job was only for three months but it lifted my spirits a bit. I felt I had purpose once again.

After completing the job I was again unemployed and my mental health took a turn for the worst. It took me years to get over the "End of Days" delusions I was experiencing. My family life took a turn for the worst. I felt that I was a heavy burden on my family. I ended up moving out of my parents' house and lived with my younger sister Nikki. I lived with her for several months until she kicked me out for using marijuana and for being a drunk. I stopped taking meds because I believed that marijuana was better than any medications the VA ever offered me. I was wrong again. I used marijuana and alcohol in order to achieve a euphoric effect to experience the Creator, only to experience the Devil. I ended up forsaking God for eight long years. I strongly feel when I pick up a drug or a strong drink that I am saying no to God and yes to the Devil.

In those eight years I traveled from the Altoona VAMC to Philadelphia VAMC

to Pittsburgh VAMC and back to the Philadelphia VAMC. It was in Philadelphia that felt I could start over. In 2018 I was happily engaged but I was still doing drugs and abusing alcohol. I started out smoking marijuana and ended up using crack and other illicit street drugs. At this time I was four years off prescribed medications. My health started to deteriorate. I listened to no one and reported to no one except me. I was too busy doctoring myself. My fiancée had enough of my drinking and drugging. She told me to leave and not come back until I was clean and on medicine. I left her in 2018, and I took a Greyhound bus to West Virginia to go to the Morgantown VAMC.

I never made it to Morgantown. I made it to Wheeling, where I was using crack and getting drunk. A friend helped fund me to go back to Pennsylvania, where home was and always will be for me. I ended up taking a Greyhound bus to Somerset, Pa., where I was coming down from a high the day before. I found myself staying at a local motel until my credit card maxed out again. I had to leave the motel, and I tried to walk to my grandmother's house in Stoystown, Pa.

I made it half way there until a man pulled over and offered me a ride to my grandmother's house. He dropped me off in the driveway of my grandmother's house, thanked me for my service in the military and wished me all the best. My grandmother welcomed me and cooked me a meal. I told her the truth. I became an addict and a drunk, and I was still high off crack cocaine. She told me she knew because I looked like a walking corpse. I was dying on the inside. I had abandoned the Creator, and I failed my family. My grandmother called my mom,

and she stopped by after work. She and my aunt Michelle drove me to Somerset Hospital because I was suicidal. I was interviewed by the doctors, and the doctors and I felt it would be best if they transported me to the Pittsburgh VAMC.

I arrived to the Pittsburgh VAMC within the hour in an ambulance. Once checked in I was transported from the emergency room to the mental health ward. I was in the mental health ward for a month until I was stable enough to attend a detox program in Pittsburgh. It took me seven months to detox off the drugs and alcohol and to be mentally stable on new psychiatric medications. I felt that seven months in Pittsburgh were enough, and I returned to New Jersey to be with my fiancée.

Samantha was happy to see me better than what I was when I left. I then checked into the Philadelphia VAMC to continue receiving mental health care. It's been three or four years since I have been back to the Philadelphia VAMC. This time I am back for good. No more running away from my problems. This time I am a better man than what I was in 2015-2016.

My life seemed to be going well until Covid broke out early in 2020. I got Covid twice within three years. I was treated and I slowly recovered. Within three years I had spent all the money I had saved by helping Samantha's sister with all her addictions—shopping being her biggest addiction. She took all I had which was \$530,000. Nine months ago I was diagnosed with gastrointestinal problems. Samantha's sister took me to the Philadelphia VAMC ER several times when I couldn't stop throwing up. The last time, she again left me with nothing except the clothes on my back. No wallet, identification, no money and no credit cards. She didn't want me to contact her or her sister ever again, and I haven't.

I was heartbroken. I felt this was payback for all these years I was on drugs. I felt

everyone had enough of my shenanigans, even God. This was nine months ago. I was taken from the ER to the mental health ward, and I spent over a month catching up on taking my psychiatric medications.

While in the hospital, I rekindled my relationship with God. Ever since I have stopped drinking and drugging and started pursuing wisdom. My life is slowly coming back together. God has blessed me once again. I started to regain my sanity at the Philadelphia VAMC. I made a promise to God that I will never go back to the mental health ward. That's enough; no more hiding and no more running away from my problems. I will achieve this by taking my psychiatric medications continually. And no more being homeless.

In 7 East, I received the best health care and love from the doctors and staff and all of the chaplains at the Philadelphia VAMC. Each and every one of them saved my life. In the past I let everyone down, but never again will that happen. That's a promise. As I grew spiritually my mental and physical health changed drastically. In the month when I was at 7 East the chaplains taught me how not to fear God but to revere Him. I decided to do just that. I decided to seek wisdom and revere God.

It has taken me a lot longer surrendering to God than it has taken me to revere Him. I had a few ups and downs on 7 East, especially when I was forced to leave Samantha after six years of being engaged to her. Depression hit me hard, and through lots of prayer and repentance God came to my rescue and filled my empty heart with love.

God never stopped blessing me ever since I decided to stop drinking and drugging and started to seek Him out once more. God presented me with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I got two interviews to attend a recovery program in South Philadelphia Snyder House. This is where

I am right now writing my story. I have been a resident of Snyder House for months now. God has given me more than what Satan—aka drugs and alcohol—has taken from me. I got my identification back, money in the bank, a roof over my head, and three great meals a day. I get to attend classes that will help me be a better person once I leave here. I really enjoy attending Alumni Night where graduates of Snyder House talk about how being here changed their lives for the better. I have met nearly every treatment goal since I started here.

Being inspired drives me to be a better person today than I was the day before. I read my Bible every day for inspiration. Also, I look up to the veterans and staff at Snyder House. They all accepted me when I had absolutely nothing. Each and every person I meet here has a story to share and each story inspires me to strive for great things in life. The residents and staff at Snyder House along with the doctors of the Philadelphia VAMC and the chaplains of Hero's Chapel are my everyday heroes. I still seek wisdom and look up to God to help me gain just a little bit of it every day. I actively seek God in the most mundane things. I still feel ashamed of what I did to God in the past. I even make sure to call my mom on Sundays to keep her informed of my successes at Snyder House. God is helping me right now rebuild my relationship with my family that I abandoned so many years ago.

I now pray that my story somehow shines a light in the midst of darkness in someone's life. I pray to continue to seek God in all things and to revere Him to learn the very beginning of wisdom. Finally, I pray to live a long and productive life free from drugs and alcohol and to keep this love story alive for as long as I live.

# Dance of the Waves

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

The dark, grey giant shot up in the air. It appeared to dance twice, then fall back into a dark moody sea. This stormy wave belonged to the restless North Atlantic.

Standing on the fantail of the General Maurice Rose was not like standing on the corner watching all the girls go by. To my left rear as I looked out to sea was the starboard side of the ship. With the North Atlantic wind at the height of its tempest, I could see a huge, dark swell off the starboard side. The Maurice Rose began, as if in a dance, to rock from side to side.

The monstrous swell rolled all the way into us, shimmering and skating toward the side of our vessel. It put us up, up in the air and then down in a choppy, blackened valley of sea. Up and down, we went on a roller coaster ride that was unrelenting and unforgettable.

In the near distance, the familiar call of the gulls could be heard. But the dark, forbidding North Atlantic sky masked any clear view of birds in the air. The wind was sharp, and I decided to leave the main deck and go down to my own compartment.

After an hour, I went back up to the main deck, and much to my surprise, the sun had come out. I headed to the rail of the starboard side and saw five delighted dolphins swimming alongside the bow of the ship. The sea at times was blue-green mixed with a deep azure. And there they, the gulls, were shining brilliantly white in the sun, calling, and calling their song of the sea.

And as I looked to my rear, to the fantail of the ship, a blue giant rose right up as if to touch the sky. It danced twice then descended into a lush valley of a blue-green North Atlantic.

And so, I would remember the lushness of the dancing waves. Also, I would remember how wind in those white caps would make the waves of the North Atlantic dance. And just to take with me the memory of white shining gulls endlessly calling in the splendor of a North Atlantic sun, I was quite justified to be quite satisfied.

# Extra Duty

By Erik Von Wiser

—Conneaut, OH

While serving in the Marine Corps back in “the day” (1988-1994) at Camp Pendleton, Calif., as part of weapons company, 2nd battalion, 9th Marines, I had the honor of getting arrested in Tijuana, Mexico, on the last day of a four-day pass with two of my battle buddies. For reasons not worth mentioning, all three of us sat in a 10-by-10-foot cell with concrete bunks and a hole in the ground for a toilet. We knew that this was the beginning of the end for us because we had to be back on base in the morning.

When Tuesday morning rolled around, we heard a voice from down the hall asking if there were any Americans inside. Immediately all three of our ID cards were in our outstretched hands for whomever might be asking. A Navy shore patrol officer came in, took down our info and walked away without a word. A few hours later a guard opened the cell and had us follow him into an office, and there stood our platoon leader. Lt. I-forget-his-name. After he paid our \$35 bail, off we went in his car. \$35! We easily had a couple hundred between us and could have bailed ourselves out, but I guess that wasn't an option. To make things worse, he didn't say anything except “Get in the car,” and we had to listen to classical music for the hour drive back to base.

Immediately after getting back to Pendleton, we were told to get into our class-A uniforms and report to the company commander. We were charged with absent without leave and being in Tijuana after curfew hours, which cost us 14 days extra duty and 14 days' pay. Could have been worse.

So, every day for the next 14 days we would report to our first sergeant, and he would give us our extra duty after duty hours which went until 2100. On Day 1 he handed us two five-gallon buckets of yellow paint and a two-inch paint brush and had us go out to a guardrail that ran the length of the battalion area. He looked at us and said “Paint” and walked away. He was a Marine of few words and so were we at that point.

On Day 3 we reported to the first sergeant all high and mighty, thinking we had accomplished the impossible. Walking the length of the guardrail, he stopped where we had started and said, “Looks good.” All three of us let out a sigh of relief, even though we still had 11 more days to go. Then he stepped over the guardrail and looked at us and said, “What about the backside?” As he started walking away, all we heard him say was “Paint!”

To this day almost 25 years later, no matter what I paint or stain, I still completely cover whatever it is and still hear his voice saying “PAINT.”

## It's the Little Things

By Tim Brady  
—Brookville, MD

(For Maisie—A Very Good Girl 2010-2014)

It's the little things,  
The head up on your lap.  
It's the little things,  
Her times to take a nap.  
It's the little things,  
A paw up on your leg.  
It's the little things,  
That look across her face.  
It's the little things,  
Her snoring in the night.  
It's the little things,  
A wet nose at first light.  
It's the little things,  
She always thought you were right.  
It's the little things,  
Her leash still on the hook.  
It's the little things  
All stored within your heart.  
It's the little things  
That say we'll never really part.

## Courage

By Jason Kirk Bartley  
VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

“Courage is not the absence of fear,”  
but rather bringing your fear into submission,  
taming the lion within  
while you pursue an ambition  
or complete a task.  
It does not mean one  
will not go through some pain.  
It does not mean one  
will not go through some period of sorrow.  
It does not mean one  
will not find a thousand excuses  
why he should “give in.”  
It just means he clings to the one excuse  
and holds it close to his heart  
of why he shouldn't.  
Courage.

## Two Definitive Death Days

By Arthur Ball  
—Manchester, NH

I awoke early that day in '44;  
Firing guns wouldn't let me sleep any more.  
So I brushed the sand out of my eyes,  
Looked o'er the Channel, and, oh, what a surprise!  
Saw more ships than ever before  
And men trying to reach my little French shore.  
Many were killed out beyond the beach waves,  
While others expired with none there to save.  
Some were caressed by my tender sand  
As their life oozed away through their head or their hand.  
Oh, the chaos continued all day and all night,  
Yet somehow I knew the invaders were right!  
They had arrived to give Europe new life,  
But it required another year and a half of intense strife.  
Now this area is serene and at peace.  
At least in this spot, the war finally ceased.  
My neighbors quietly abide 'neath rows of white crosses,  
And yearly, folks come to remember the losses.  
You may ask exactly whom I might be;  
I gratefully reply, “the Beaches of Normandy.”

In another place and at an earlier time,  
Only one man was doing the dying!  
He came to reveal our Father in Heaven above.  
And this plan was so He could show us His love!  
Jesus came to a sin-filled earth  
Through the miracle of virgin birth.  
Thirty years later He willingly died,  
So that we and the Father could be reunified.  
There was only one grave that is empty today.  
For access to God, Jesus is the only way!  
He's knocking now at the door of your heart.  
Invite Him in and your eternal life will start.

## Haiku Poem for Hope

By Gene Allen Groner  
—Independence, MO

Stone is rolled away  
Angels sing “He is risen”  
Hope is born again.

## PTSD

*By Alexandra Brown*  
—East Amherst, NY

Trapped by imagined arms from behind  
Holding, squeezing  
Life, withdrawing  
Running  
without moving  
Pulling  
Fighting.

Awareness  
Seeing everything  
Knowing everything  
All corners, everyone around.

Doctors  
Psychiatrist  
Therapist  
Delving into what was  
What happened  
to me  
Can't talk about it  
Too painful.

Labels  
Hypervigilance  
Post  
Traumatic  
Stress, stress, stress  
Shrinking  
Who am I  
What am I  
Why am I?

Friendship lost  
All friends lost  
Pain  
Revealing, admitting, realizing  
the path through  
is the path of seeing  
not turning away.

Reaching out  
Tentative steps forward

Hearing the words  
that help  
of compassion  
Pain, but different  
Cleansing, releasing  
Healing, finding my heart  
Seeing your heart  
We are together, understanding  
Art, writing, words of freedom  
Hope.

Love? Yes, even that  
Wholeness  
Grabbing a hold of therapy for all it's worth  
Grabbing a hold of friendships  
Support  
Reaching out, I can help  
I am here, I understand  
Being the strong one  
Pulling off the arms that bind you  
We are one, we are the same.

Liberation.

## I Am Grateful

*By Janice Walker*  
—Macon, GA

No need to wait 'til Thanksgiving to give thanks.  
To me it is everyday gratitude,  
blessings we take for granted,  
things we long for but get taken away.  
Thankful for love and joy and peace.  
With my being creative, in a sense,  
sharing God's glory, greatness and love.  
Time with our creator, earth and heaven above.  
Grateful for shelter, income, help with others.  
I am blessed.  
Grateful for all the good in life  
and any time needs were met.  
Grateful for all the freedom that we share.  
Grateful for God's life, eternal through faith.

## Bunker Mentality

*By Mark Fleisher*  
VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

A helluva way to die,  
wondering if I'd see  
my next birthday,  
huddled like a rat  
in the damp dank darkness  
of a bunker reinforced  
with sandbags and steel plates,  
hearing the mortar shells  
overhead, praying short rounds  
do not test our protection.  
Yes, praying, because there are  
no atheists in foxholes or  
in bunkers for that matter.

So much for the New Year's truce.

Bullets whizzing about,  
ricocheting off the walkway  
leading from my hootch  
to the latrine, sent me  
scrambling to the bunker.  
Praise the Lord and pass  
the ammunition. Only there  
is no ammo, no weapons.  
We are non-combatants  
or so we are told. Tell that  
to Victor Charlie with  
the AK-47 and his pal with  
the RPG launcher.

So much for the New Year's truce.

An eternity passes before  
the welcome staccato chatter  
of machine guns rakes  
the tall grass bordering  
our living quarters. Then  
the whoosh of rockets  
destroying the mortar tubes.  
Cobras spitting their venom,  
assuring these invaders  
will not live to fight another day.

*Tet January 1968*  
*From Tan Son Nhut Air Base*  
*Happy New Year to all.*

# A Different View of PTSD

By Arthur Ball  
—Manchester, NH

Like many young men, I grew up in a small town. I was born a scant five years after the end of World War II, so most of the men I knew locally were recent veterans. The tenets of patriotism, loyalty and morality were deeply instilled into my being. I knew military service was an expected part of my life, as education was. Following my dad's boot tracks, I planned to join the Air Force. Then Vietnam reared its ugly head. Some American lads opted to move to Canada to avoid military service. However, this option was never comfortable for me. So I applied for and received a college deferment. As my college time was waning, I had to re-apply for an extension or face the prospect of being drafted.

I appeared before my draft board and really laid it on thick about having deep moral convictions when it came to killing people. Yet I knew it was a lie. My "convictions" were probably no deeper than any other draft-age kid, and also like that kid, I didn't relish being killed on foreign soil. I was, however, willing to serve in the military; that presented no problem to me. Well, the board made its decision, and I was classified 1-A-O, which meant I was available for military service, but the U.S. government was prohibited from placing me in any combat position, either career field or battlefield.

So, I shoved my deceitfully created CYA shield in my pocket and shipped out to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, for basic training and Sheppard Air Force Base, also in Texas, for tech school before arriving at my permanent base for all four years, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Ariz. My duties consisted primarily of mowing grass and trimming trees on base. My "war stories" consist of chasing road runners and Gila monsters and avoiding too many tacos. During my tour at D-M, I did become a true born-again Christian. Then I began to regret

my lying to the draft board and fabricating my own status. Many of my military brothers and sisters were discharged with a type of PTSD in which they wonder why they survived the war while their buddies perished. I was discharged with a form of PTSD (a.k.a. shame) for the way I had manipulated my circumstances. Ironically, as I continued my walk with Christ, I came to realize that had I truly believed my plea, I would have been able to place the matter in His hands and let Him lead as to whether I went to Nam or not.

After my discharge, I went to work for the U.S. Postal Service for a 40-plus-years career, and I found many combat vets also working there. As I came to know them better, I began to apologize for my lying. In my mind my dishonesty was only one step above that of those deserters who had chosen life north of the border. But to a man, they said I had nothing to apologize for because I had also worn the uniform. They considered me no less a vet than they were. With their compassion, acceptance, much prayer and the slow passage of time, I realized God had truly been directing my life, even way back then, and He orchestrated my draft status, not me. And although in my mind, Nam vets deserve more honor than I do, I no longer shy away from "thank you for your service" comments or from having an occasional meal bought for me. And I often do likewise when I'm able to do so.

I hear much discussion of PTSD and combat vets, and I believe it needs to be talked about. But how about shame-filled vets and the darkness of soul they have endured from Nam and all wars? I write my story to encourage others. You wore the uniform; you are also a veteran. There is hope available. Please speak up and stop suffering in silence.

## Leather and Lace

By Lawrence W. Langman  
—Portage, IN

I heard your voice  
upon the wind,  
a cherished memory  
that begins.

Like an old-time  
picture show,  
rewind again,  
then play it slow.

Like a burning fire  
in the night,  
your embers flaming  
oh, so bright.

Those memories  
I long to cherish.  
That warmth you gave  
shall never perish.

All I ever have to do  
to see those eyes,  
drop to my knees  
and look to the skies.

I miss those arms that  
held me oh, so tight,  
that warm caress  
of your hands at night.

Your smell of which  
I long to breathe  
would bring my aching  
heart to seize.

I can feel the rain  
rolling down my face.  
I'm longing for your  
sweet embrace.

So please think of me  
and I'll be there.  
Eternally I shall  
always care.

I'm a better person for  
knowing your grace,  
for I am your leather  
to your lace.

## Storm Inside

By Gene Bryant  
—Lexington, SC

There's a storm brewing,  
brewing inside of me.  
I don't know what to do,  
but it's not hard to see.  
I keep hearing the cries  
for all who die.  
The tears of a mother  
who will never see her child.  
The heartache of a father  
with only memories.

There's a storm brewing,  
brewing inside of me.  
If I shall surrender my life,  
It will be for the whole world to see.  
I wish to be with my family,  
my brothers and sisters  
who have a place for me.  
Yet still, I choose to live  
on this roller coaster ride  
called "Life." But what is life  
without the ones you love?

There's a storm brewing,  
brewing inside of me.

I know what I must do  
to live my life for those  
whose checks came due.  
Freedom comes at a cost  
that most dare not take.  
Those that do,  
we must respect,  
for "We The People" never suspect.

There's a storm brewing,  
brewing inside of me.  
My reason for living  
Is because I don't want  
to cause any more pain.  
PTSD is not something  
that just goes away.  
It's an everyday occurrence  
for those that stay.  
Is this the life I chose?  
I guess it is, I suppose.

There's a storm brewing,  
brewing inside of me.  
It's not hard for you to see.  
Stay away, stay away from me.

## My Dreams

By Dan Yates  
—Blue Springs, MO

You know that I can see you when I close my eyes.  
Even when you're in a crowd, wearing a disguise.  
I tried to put you in the past, start my life anew.  
You are not someone I know, but someone that I knew.

Now I see beyond your games and your petty schemes.  
I wish that I could ban you from my nightly dreams.  
There was a time you were welcome in my everything.  
That was long before your words left a deadly sting.

I cannot control my thoughts once I go to bed.  
That's when you help yourself and play inside my head.  
Your silky voice will whisper that you're forever mine.  
A lie I did believe 'til you didn't walk the line.

I gave my love to you; you said you gave yours back.  
But your promise once so bright, has faded into black.  
When I'm awake I can fight the doubts and your deceit.  
Yet I fall prey every night my body hits the sheets.

Your love just came to visit, your memory to stay.  
The pain that I've endured hurts in every way.  
Daily I repair my heart's thin and threadbare seams.  
So if you've any mercy, stay out of my dreams.

# Share Your Story In Prose, Poetry and Artwork

*Veterans' Voices* is published three times a year and devoted exclusively to the creative expression of military veterans. Published contributors receive a small honorarium. Open to any military veteran or active service personnel.

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## Wading In

By Daniel Paicopulos  
—San Diego, CA

*Writer's Note: I fell out of a five-year remission, took my new, daily chemo pills, added a dash of CAT scan for good measure, signed on for a poetry prompt, which was "trees," then wrote.*

Stepping out where  
the waters are deep and dark,  
I paused, oak tree still.

Knowing which way  
the stick floats,  
I paused, oak tree still.

The river grew whitecaps,  
bred rushing sounds, and  
I paused, oak tree still.

My walking stick at the  
ready, forked and down,  
I paused, oak tree still.

Smelling the blooming  
of the trees near the shore,  
I paused, oak tree still.

## March 1919—Letter Home

By John L. Swainston  
VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

The war is over—now occupation.  
Life is dull as ever.  
Nothing much to tell you.

Living with a German family.  
They are always gone.  
Don't think they like an American  
solider in their home.

Life is dull as ever.  
Need to find a way to put on the dog.  
Nothing much to tell you.  
Setting my sights on coming home.

Your brother Gene

## Tulips and Roots, My Cycle of Life

By Penny Lee Deere  
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

I hope to capture the tulips through my lens,  
with the peeping out of a much wanted spring.  
Yes, they are slowly appearing.  
But I came across a tree.

What I noticed was its root system. Strangely  
a fair amount of the roots laid above the ground.  
I suppose that is what every root system looks like,  
each branch struggling to find its space,  
so they can get their share of nutrients and water.

This amazing root system can be seen  
surviving with the clear water.  
Now this is Albany, New York, not Albany, Georgia,  
where you might see Cypress growing in a swamp.

It tries its best to survive or to maintain life.  
Similar to myself—trying to maintain life  
in search of stillness in my mind.  
I have been told that still minds do exist!

The roots seem like me—trying to find balance  
in my life or maintain balance if found.

So often I go overboard on something and get mad  
at myself for being overwhelmed, tired, frustrated.  
And it is all what I started and created.  
Then I tend to lose interest in it and move on  
to something else that will never get completed.

It is a cycle I do like those roots.  
Turn right then left then up to the sun;  
grow deep for a water source.  
A cycle! When does it end or maybe  
this is what makes me—me like the roots.  
They are beautiful!

It all just is!

# Heartland Honor Flight

By Louise Eisenbrandt

—Leawood, KS

On Nov. 7, 2023, my grandson's high school had just finished celebrating those of us who are veterans. As I stood near a statue in the school's entrance honoring a young veteran who had been a student there and lost his life in Afghanistan, I noticed a gentleman standing next to me wearing a bright blue T-shirt emblazoned with the words "Heartland Honor Flight." I inquired as to whether he had taken part in the program. When he answered "Yes," I admitted that I had been wanting to participate in an honor flight for a long time but had not been chosen. "I'm in charge of the program," proclaimed another voice. "When would you like to go?"

Fast forward three months. Having completed the necessary paperwork, I was well on my way to realizing the dream of being part of an honor flight. For nearly 20 years in 129 cities throughout the United States, participating veterans have been given the opportunity to visit monuments in Washington. Each must be accompanied by a guardian under the age of 70 and who is not the participant's spouse. My daughter, a teacher, seemed the obvious choice and gladly took on the role. As for me, I promised to attend a couple of required meetings in the upcoming two months. Unique to the program was the time frame. We visit several monuments, all in the same day. It is a long day of about 16 hours. But what a day! While I was fortunate to have made visits to Washington in my past, some of the veterans on this trip had not. For them, this trip was truly memorable.

For our May 1 trip, my daughter and I left home at 3 a.m. to meet up with the other 83 veterans and an equal number of guardians at Kansas City International Airport. Even at that early hour, large trays of burritos, donuts, juice and coffee were available to nourish us as we started our

journey. Everyone received a bottle of water as well, the first of many provided to us during the day. At 5 a.m., having been given color-coded hats and lanyards, we boarded a plane decorated in red, white and blue. As we pulled away from the gate, we were sent off with a water cannon salute. The three-hour American Airlines flight offered time to cat nap, chat with our seat partner or get caught up on a favorite book.

Arriving at Reagan Washington National airport, we received a hearty welcome from dozens of well-wishers who greeted us as we exited the plane. Included in the group was a friend of my daughter and me who took time that morning to be there. As we stepped out of the terminal, we were met by three buses with each of us assigned to a specific bus—red, gold or blue to match our hats. It was clear that the volunteers were definitely going to do their best to keep track of us as the day went by. They assured us that they had not lost a veteran in the past and had no intentions of doing so today.

Beginning our journey, we passed the Jefferson Memorial and then the Capitol building in the distance. It soon became apparent just how we were going to be able to visit so many monuments in just one day. The answer: a cadre of nine policeman and Secret Service gentlemen on motorcycles snaking around traffic and blocking off intersections. We effortlessly made our way to our first stop, the World War II Memorial where we took advantage of the open space to gather for our first group photo.

With its spiraling water fountains and stately marble columns representing each of the states, this memorial was indeed impressive. Many in our group sought out specific columns, namely Kansas and Missouri, as a background for their

individual photos. We were treated to an honor guard presenting the American flag and individual flags representing each of the branches of the military. As in all of our stops, school children greeted us shaking our hands and thanking us for our service. A heartwarming gesture! Blue skies and white fluffy clouds foretold that we would have perfect weather for our visit to our nation's capital.

Our second stop was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, dedicated in 1982, where my daughter and I chose to first visit the women's statue that was added in 1993. It depicts three nurses tending to a wounded soldier. The statue became a reality only after 10 years of constant petitioning of Congress to allow the statue to be made. Some members at the time opposed the monument, claiming, "If we honor the nurses, we have to honor the canine and the equine corps as well." We women were aligned with the horses and dogs!

Those in our group who wanted to remember someone whose name is on the wall first shared that name with the rest of the group. We then did some pencil rubbings of those names. I sought out Sharon Lane's name, one of eight women listed on the wall. She was killed at my hospital four months before I arrived when a rocket hit the hospital. As I searched for the correct panel, I was once again aware of the hushed tones used by those visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall.

We strolled past the Lincoln Memorial, still under renovation to make it accessible to wheelchairs. Looking to the left, the peaceful waters of the mall reflected the majesty of the Washington monument. Some vets strolled to the nearby Korean memorial symbolized by larger-than-life-sized soldiers bearing heavy coats, helmets

and guns. Having viewed the Korean monument in the winter with a covering of snow, I opted to not go the extra steps, as my daughter was pushing my wheelchair. I preferred to remember it as I saw it some years ago, with a covering of snow making it more realistic to its time in history.

Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknowns beckoned us. We stood quietly by at the changing of the guard. I was especially honored to be among four veterans from our group who participated in the laying of a wreath. The changing of the guard goes on without end 24 hours a day, rain or shine. It is one of the most solemn ceremonies to honor those who died for their country. The amphitheater provided another opportunity for a group photo of all of us who were part of this really unique experience.

From there it was on to the Marine Corps War Memorial, also known as the Iwo Jima Memorial. I had not gotten very close to the monument on past visits, and it was quite impressive. Dedicated in 1954, it portrays six Marines raising the American flag on Mt. Suribachi during World War II.

The Air Force Memorial was one that I had not visited before. It is among the youngest of the monuments, having been constructed in 2006. It is located on a bit of a hill above the Pentagon. The three stainless steel spires slicing into the blue sky make it easy to picture the “bomb burst” maneuver. It also suggests that absent a fourth spire it depicts “the missing man” formation. We were told that, had it been erected prior to the assault on the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, the plane that was flown into the Pentagon would have hit the spires of the Air Force Memorial thus preventing the direct assault on the Pentagon. It makes one ponder the power of timing.

Back on our buses, we approached the entrance to the Pentagon. This 9/11

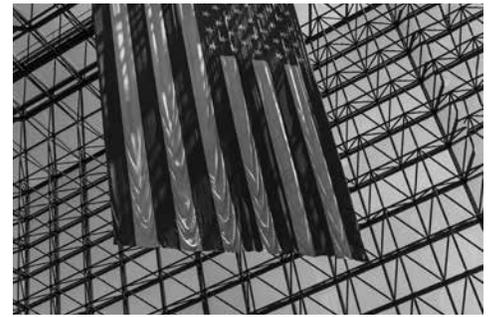
memorial, with its individual streams of water and bench-like seats for reflection, evokes the feeling and tone of the Vietnam wall. Each of the individuals who was killed in the Pentagon attack that day is represented from the youngest, a three-year-old in the nursery, to a 71-year-old man. The dates are all carved in the individual seats, providing a perfect way to quiet one’s mind and reflect on what we had seen.

We made our way back to the airport to catch our flight home and enjoy a box dinner. Little did we know that our adventure was not quite over as each of us was given a large envelope signifying the mail call that we anxiously awaited during our time in the military. Relatives, friends, even strangers were encouraged to send a letter or card to the honor flight staff. One of the volunteers had sorted through all the mail to make certain that everyone on the plane got some pieces of mail. Lots of eyes welled up with tears as we read the good wishes the folks had sent us.

As the wheels of the plane touched down in Kansas City, we strolled off the plane to be greeted by musicians, banners, welcome home signs, bagpipers and hundreds of friends and family. For many of us it was the welcome home that we did not get over 50 years ago. It was truly amazing. A local TV station covered our return, seeking a few words from those of us who were tired but delighted. A month later we all gathered again for a reunion and sharing a video presentation of our trip. For us, it was indeed a dream come true.



*Lou Eisenbrandt is a member of the Veterans Voices Writing Project's board of directors and a frequent contributor to Veterans' Voices.*



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## DORIS COBB MEMORIAL AWARD

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### The Coming of Day

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

White fluffy contrails crisscross  
the azure blue skies above.  
People move across the  
vast cosmos of space and earth,  
traveling to places of  
refuge far from the rat race  
of their daily mundane lives.

The orange flames of the sun  
peek above the horizon,  
its colors reflected on  
vast stretches of sea and earth.  
Silhouettes of ships and rigs  
appear in the haze of dawn,  
starting their work for the day.

Nature unfolds in fragrant  
blossoms with the rising sun,  
drinking its manna and warmth.  
Life begins to wake and stretch  
with the start of a new day.  
Birds call in the dawning sky  
to each other with delight.

The world awakens with joy  
heralding the coming day.  
It shines in the golden light  
until once more the blue skies  
become dark, and gentle sleep  
descends upon the earth and  
the heavens as night begins.

# A Fox Tale

By C. Nemeth

VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

She heard the three querulous barks, several louder whines, then a scream. Then silence.

Her first response was to crawl out of the den and go to help her mate. But the four whelps born some 12 hours ago were her first responsibility. So, she lay with the little ones, who cuddled to her as she whined. He was no doubt in dire trouble, and she readily accepted that he was most likely dead.

They had been together for almost three years, and she found him to be a devoted mate and a dutiful father. He had just the past day supplied her with a rabbit, three moles and a young pheasant. She would have enough food for the next few days. After that she would have to be careful not to be away too long from the pups and still be able to satisfy her hunger. In several weeks she would be regurgitating food for the pups and would need a steady supply of sustenance. The pups nursed every two to three hours. She would leave them as soon as they were satisfied and look for food. She remembered an old rotten log rife with grubs. She would resort to the grubs if she was unsuccessful hunting. Spring was now well along, so she also found some early berries and tender grasses.

The pups, now with eyes open, were growing quickly, and she soon took them out of the lair. It was on one of these excursions that she noticed a fox some 50 yards across the meadow, watching her and the pups intently. It was a male red fox, and her first instinct was to fend him off. Males sometimes kill a litter of pups so that they can mate with the mother. But when she rushed at him, he laid down instead of running. He made no effort to protect himself. This confused her, so she herded the pups back into the lair, leaving with a threatening growl.

The next time she brought the litter out, she found him again watching. Since he made

no overtures toward her pups, she soon ignored him. This changed when the male pup began to explore, and she had to round him up and bring him back to his sisters. One day she failed to watch the male pup, and he soon spied the male fox. The pup bounded to him. Before she could react, he was jumping on the male, growling, and biting. The male responded with growls but made no effort to stop or hurt the little pup. She now approached; the male wagged his tail. They sniffed each other while the male pup kept up the roughhousing. She grasped the pup by his nape and carried him back to where his sisters were playing. The male followed but stopped when she put the pup down. She herded them into the lair.

The next morning, she found a freshly killed rabbit lying at the entrance to the den. The male was sitting nearby. With tail wagging, he whined his happiness at seeing her. Soon she was also whining as her tail beat a rhythm. They began to frolic, then the mouth biting started. The pups meanwhile, had come out of the den and soon all were playing and chasing each other. He made no effort to enter the den. Like most adult foxes, he preferred to sleep in the open.

A few days later he took charge and was soon leading them on a hunt. When the male pup charged ahead, the leader chastised him sharply. The pup must have had some inner signal that this was no game. He began to mimic the male's movements and proved to be an excellent hunter. Soon they were all busy eating a den of rabbits they had searched out.

And so, the summer went. In early autumn the now fully grown pups, one by one, left their home and went out into the world. She and he lived another 10 years before she was killed by a stray dog. By then well past his prime, he never attempted to mate again.

## In Plain Sight

By Lawrence W. Langman  
—Portage, IN

Out of the darkness  
a child appears.  
His little sister  
brings up the rear.

No shoes to walk in,  
no food left to eat.  
Mother and father  
dead on the street.

Nowhere to run to,  
no place for peace,  
out in the cold  
in search of heat.

“Step into this store,”  
an old man beckons.  
“I know you are cold;  
stay just a few seconds.”

Scared, they comply  
seeing TVs around.  
Watching as they warm,  
they both start to frown.

A commercial starts.  
It's asking for donations  
to send overseas  
for their needy populations.

Tears start to flow  
upon the children's cheeks.  
Anger ensued as the man  
sees all are meek.

He says, “What would it take  
to care for our own?  
We spend thousands of dollars  
to talk on our phones.”

In boxes and crates,  
on stairways and stoops,  
they are not invisible  
from children to troops.

## Instrument of Peace

By Anthony Franco  
—Montrose, NY

Black sky spitting down  
staccato red flashes,  
hitting the sand,  
leaving neatly spaced wounds  
along the shore.  
Heat so intense  
it would boil bottle bourbon.  
Nighttime guard duty  
and Graves Registration.  
Rats the size of cats  
that even now,  
some twenty years later,  
I wake hearing their scratching!  
And rain so heavy  
you could lose your hand  
in front of your face.  
A short-timer's calendar  
anxiously marked,  
a line in each place.  
One, wake-up. Then Saigon.  
Then back to the States.  
Kennedy airport  
full of bra-burners  
and draft-dodgers  
who spit in my face.

## A Nurse's Dream

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

Nurses know truly what caring means;  
Warmth and concern to all they bring.  
With faith they work for each life's sake,  
Determined to heal as long as it takes.  
Too many wounded, each day is a test;  
The weather may change but never the stress.  
Their feelings for patients grow and grow,  
But empathy is all they ever show.  
They reach out to each and every one,  
and work until every problem is won.  
They endure hard times, the very worst,  
Part of the job of being a nurse.

## Goodbye My Love, Goodbye

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



It was hot on the 14th of August, back in '64.

Kim and I left Yong Ju Gol in a taxi and headed for Kimpo Air Base. It was time for me to leave for the States and then go on to a second tour in Germany.

Specialist Bals sat in a chair across from Matt's Passenger Service. Bals had dark, wavy hair and a friendly smile you could not help responding to. Bals was a career trooper. He'd won a Silver Star back in '53 in the old war.

"I see you brought a pet with you," Bals said.

I made no comment in response. I just looked at him.

Then I turned to Kim and said, "Kim, I'll always love you."

I headed past the open entrance to the field away from Bals to Matt's Passenger Service. I showed my orders that read "1st Cav Division to 1st Brigade Berlin."

I returned to sit with Kim on my left and Bals on my right. The hell of leaving her here would stay with me

forever. The Army and its policies were certainly controversial. They'd always use the excuse that the girl might be a spy or perhaps a North Korean agent. Paperwork delays, tie-ups and prolonged investigations kept a lot of the marriages from happening. One thing was for sure: neither the Army nor a lot of South Koreans cared much about soldiers marrying local girls.

Kim, Bals and I sat in the hot sun. The only shade was across the air base entrance at Matt's Passenger Service. It was already past 1400; we'd leave at 1430. I then noticed an old transport prop job running its motors.

I held Kim close to me. The feel of her closeness was always my blanket of escape. Realizing now how much I did love her was small consolation for all those empty years that would follow.

A big MP was now motioning for us to get on the plane that would take us back to the States. I held her close one last time and said, "Goodbye my darling, goodbye."

As I left for the plane she was crying, and so was I.

# Prelude

By William M. Greenhut  
—Ossining, NY

The Army, from day one, suppressed individuality but provided the infrastructure for one and all — the location, the food, the bed, the clothing, the transportation. You were told where to go, what to eat, when to sleep, and what to wear. But there was no control over the internal life of the mind.

How successfully can you substitute the thoughts you tell yourself— remain calm, remain calm, remain calm—for the immediate external reality of someone who has free rein to scream in your face? Does it work? Do you become confident or more afraid? Can you function or do you want to hide in the latrine? Do you anticipate things getting better or do you dread what is to come?

Before the military, I hadn't traveled extensively. For the most part it was wherever I could drive within a few hours. Upon induction at 22, the Army sent me first to South Carolina in May of '66, and the following autumn to Columbus, Ga., for Officer Candidate School. More recently, I had a sojourn of a few days in the Pacific northwest at Fort Lewis, about 60 miles south of Seattle, where boredom fought with anticipation while I waited for a flight assignment.

The military determined every destination and the mode of transportation from place to place. But it did not control the impact of how all you saw, and all you experienced, affected you. Are you curious, anxious, terrified? Do you analyze? Are you alone with your thoughts? Does anyone sympathize? Are you amazed? Dazed?



Self-doubt was far behind me, smoothed out as the Army intended, at the tail end of a combined 16 weeks of basic and advanced infantry training, culminating with those six months in Georgia at Officer Candidate School. I was ready for adventure.

Now, I may as well be on a different planet. Words in print have not prepared me for what my senses are experiencing. I have crossed the international dateline, and the Army bus from the airport that is transporting me and my fellow passengers to the replacement depot has its windows open, and the odor of feces is everywhere.

And I am fascinated. Not by what I can smell; in this impoverished country, what would otherwise be referred to as human waste is an essential nutrient so that rice, the staple of the national diet, will sprout from the wet, fertilized ground and grow tall by harvest time. But I am engrossed in what I can see wherever I look; under a warm May sun and a cloudless sky, vast flatlands stretch to distant hills on both

sides of the road. In open fields, men and women in white clothing with baggy pants rolled up to the knees are lined up five or six abreast. Stooped over, they shuffle backward, embedding green chutes by hand into the dark muck.

Built atop widely separated large dirt mounds, clusters of wooden shacks with roofs of straw are elevated above the wet fields. Low, narrow earthen dikes and shallow canals section the land into rectangular plots. Higher, wider dikes define subdivisions and,

moving along them, wooden ox-drawn carts that hold the manure and short nascent rice plants travel between roads and fields.

We spend the weekend at the replacement depot awaiting transportation to our final destinations. I walk around the compound and am attracted to the barber shop by a sign posted beside the door that states: "Haircut 25 cents, Shave 35 cents, Massage 25 cents." This is a different planet indeed. I take advantage of all three.

On Monday morning, our bus arrives, the driver's rifle propped beside him and his armored vest draped over the back of his seat. I have a brief, troubling thought about security. We pass through the capital city, its streets crowded with buses, taxis and military vehicles streaking noisily from one traffic light to the next. A ceaseless flow of pedestrians, some in modern dress of muted colors, others in billowing traditional white, cross the wide boulevards on narrow overhead bridges wrapped in a haze of diesel exhaust. The side streets

carry the odor of fumes and fish. There are few civilian cars. In the right lane, men on foot strain to pull wooden carts laden with furniture piled this way and that, and merchandise covered with tarps. They look straight ahead and seem impervious to traffic speeding past to their immediate left.

A ring of mountains encircles the city, hovels packed precipitously on the lower slopes. The main route north, designated by the U.S. Army command as Main Supply Route 1, courses through small villages. The road is slightly higher than the abutting rice paddies so that rainwater, instead of flooding the surface, will flow off to where it is needed for the crops. Houses are constructed of dull gray cinder blocks, the surrounding walls topped by barbed wire and shards of colored broken glass. Connected to a water source, ditches snake through the villages. Beside the road are a few small shops with sliding wooden doors containing panes of glass. Those that we pass near the American Army compounds have signs in English with names such as Texas Bar or Hollywood Room.

The day is hot, and I transfer at division headquarters to an open jeep with a driver that has been sent for me. We soon reach the regional center. It is a small-town occupying about a quarter mile of frontage. Here is an abundance of two- and three-story buildings constructed of the same kind of cinder block I see almost everywhere. There are many shops and pedestrians moving from place to place.

We enter on blacktop, slowly pass through and head further north on dirt. The road is uneven and our jeep creeps along. Young men, idle at mid-day, squat beside the road, almost equidistant from one another as if planned that way. Expressions impassive, they look at me. Going by I can almost reach out to my right and touch them. Why are they there? What is their intent? I am unarmed. Are we safe?

Every few minutes my driver pulls over and stops, making way for trucks transporting troops and supplies and armored vehicles raising low clouds of dirt, engines roaring and tank treads squealing. Their presence is comforting. When I begin to wonder if it is possible to travel any further and still be in the south of the country, I reach my destination.

The jeep pulls up at battalion headquarters and I step out. As with anything new and unfamiliar, I have a mild feeling of uncertainty. I walk in and am directed to the battalion commander's office. I knock on the door and hear "Enter." I step before his desk, come to attention, salute, and say, as is customary, "Sir, Lieutenant Greenhut reports." He returns my salute and welcomes me with a smile, and speaking louder than is necessary replies, "Relax lieutenant." He is a lieutenant colonel and a World War II and Korean War veteran. His narrow, craggy face is well weathered, and a short thatch of gray hair hangs down on his forehead. He tells me I will be assigned to one of three rifle companies and explains the battalion's mission, then has someone show me to my temporary quarters.

I go out to explore. The mechanized battalion (meaning its mission is achieved with the use of armored personnel carriers) occupies two compounds with a short walk between. The three rifle companies have approximately 250 men in each, and headquarters company has a similar number. Each company has its own mess hall, supply room and motor pool. The enlisted men's club is on one compound, the officers' club on the other. There is an industrial size laundry, post exchange and



rifle range in one of the compounds. All the buildings are Quonset huts, their curved corrugated metal painted green. It isn't long before I move in among my peers of Bravo Company, three other second lieutenants including the company commander who greets me as a welcome addition. Imagine what it is like to meet my platoon, 40-plus young men who I now command at age 23. They are all unknown to me, but it does not matter that I am a stranger; the Uniform Code of Military Justice requires them to acknowledge the bars on my collar and obey any lawful order I choose to issue. But that is only ever a last resort.

I walk confidently into the barracks to meet them. Still, I'm wondering what they are like and what they are thinking. It will take weeks of interaction before I know.

You would assume it will be most difficult getting used to the soldiering before me—the minefields, the barbed wire, the searchlights, the explosions, the gunfire—and adapting to operating in the monsoon rains, the fog, the sub-zero winter and freezing wind, and you would be right. This country, this Korea, will be my home for the next year plus. If I last that long.

## Marriage: I Do and I Get To

By Norman L. Jones  
VA Medical Center—Columbus, OH

I get to have a depleted appetite;  
I do weights to avoid family fights.  
My wife is a full-packaged fox;  
I've housed enough pets to fill Fort Knox.  
I do dishes and laundry so I don't go hungry.  
I get to provide for my spouse's kids.  
Used to have a patented polishing gig.  
My stay at Camp Lejeune made me sterile;  
Poetry is my outlet and so is the comic book world.  
I'm delivered from alcohol and smoking trees;  
I also contracted degenerating joint disease.  
I get to take out the household trash;  
I do have major arthritis in my back.  
I get to empty and secure my pet's crap;  
I also get to regulate some of the cash.  
My life is somewhat serene  
Because I once served as a Marine.

## Through the Night

By Dennis O'Brien  
VA Medical Center—Wilkes-Barre, PA

Got a fresh cup of coffee, so I'm good to go.  
Is your mind moving fast as can be, or is it moving slow?  
It kind of makes my day, happy and carefree,  
knowing there's a way to share camaraderie!  
It's nice when you say, "Goodwill to you, Vet."  
You know it hits home; still, there are many we forget.  
To let peace be ours, what can be known?  
Can civilians understand the price paid by many a soul?  
It was our course across each land.  
Walls came down through self-control.  
All people have a right to say,  
"It's about time that we care."  
Empathy can share the light of day,  
not afraid, our kindness to share.  
Being kind does not mean we're weak.  
You know we served for what was right.  
In life, there are answers to the questions you seek.  
Try to have peace of mind through the night.  
We pray for peace to come!  
Yes, we pray for peace to come!

## I Believe in Hope

By Gene Allen Groner  
—Independence, MO

There's hope in the morning sunrise  
When the first light of day shines above,  
And I hear the song of the meadowlark  
Fill the air with joy and love.  
*I believe in hope.*

There's hope when a new child is born,  
When the daffodil blooms in spring,  
When leaves newly form on the maple tree,  
And I hear the songbirds sing.  
*I believe in hope.*

There's hope in an act of kindness,  
Helping a child who is lost,  
Holding the hand of a friend in need,  
Giving not counting the cost.  
*I believe in hope.*

So when I'm feeling all alone  
With memories that haunt me,  
I think of all the good I've seen.  
Then I choose the better memory.  
*I believe in hope.*

## Legal and Deadly

By Levell Taylor  
—Battle Creek, MI

Beer, wine and whiskey.  
Walk into any liquor store door;  
See the variety and start your party.  
Seems to be fun for the old and young.  
For some, but not for all,  
Deadly is alcohol.  
Get so drunk, on my face I may fall.  
You ask the question, "Did I do it all?"  
Your actions you have doubts about  
Because you were in a drunken blackout.  
Loved ones complain; you are always drunk.  
Every day you go too far.  
An alcoholic, yes you are.  
But there is hope—  
In God you can stop and finally cope  
Before it's too late  
For alcohol is an ugly fate.

## Empty Boots

*By Paul David Gonzales*  
*VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM*

Empty boots stand tall—all in a military row.  
They're absent of anatomical heels and toes.  
Some have remnants of polish from those toes;  
Who she was only heaven knows.  
Others have odor of feet unwashed.

Men and women stood hour after hour,  
High in that tower.  
All have marched to a military band  
With rifle in hand.

The boots are dirty and lost their form;  
Wear and tear is what they bear,  
Rubber heels and soles worn and tired.

Those boots once marched with precision  
To the cadence of one, two, three, four.  
Now they stand motionless in their place,  
each pair evenly spaced.

Soldiers' feet they no longer house.  
Let's bow our heads with shedding tears.  
Their memories will last for eternal years.

## Children

*By Levell Taylor*  
*—Battle Creek, MI*

By the blessings of God  
And the love of woman and man,  
Children are born into this world,  
Every boy and every girl.  
Children are filled with love,  
An agape love from God above.  
Curious by nature,  
Children learn for their future.  
Children go outside to play and have fun,  
So carefree while still young.  
Mothers and fathers burst with pride,  
Seen in parents' loving eyes.  
As children grow,  
Soon to enter into life,  
Parents wonder what will be in their lives.  
Children let go of the parent's hand  
To become the woman, to become the man.

## Music and Time

*By Paul David Gonzales*  
*VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM*

Like musical notes arranged on a scale,  
perfect sounds of rhythm and rhyme,  
so is the passage of time.  
Each note bellows the tune  
from January to long past June.

The Maestro, with each wave of the baton,  
carefully signals the instruments' sounds.  
Early in life string instruments softly play  
the gentle joys with newness all around.

Then the trumpets and horns  
usher in the wonder of life.  
Each note lends itself to our transitioning year,  
sometimes laughter—sometimes a tear.

The orchestra of life continues to play;  
not one note lingers to stay.

When the drums begin to thunder  
to emphasize the wonder  
of life's progressive movement,  
the Maestro waves the baton in a vigorous motion,  
directing each instrument to bring forth its sound.

Life is a symphony  
with each movement carefully composed,  
and the Maestro creates every note.

## Ocean's Sky

*By David Ludlow*  
*—Angola, NY*

The spirits of lost loved ones visit us at night.  
They go unnoticed because there isn't any light.  
They try to tell us secrets unsaid before they died.  
They hover over us to revisit the tears they cried.  
But soon our guests must leave, and so they say goodbye.  
And the surface of the water becomes the ocean's sky.

# The Anger Within Me

By Karen Green

VA Medical Center—Las Vegas, NV

A pressure cooker  
is how I sometimes feel  
when people tell me  
that my past is no big deal.

I've been told  
to forgive and forget and to get on with my life,  
but this  
only adds to the strife.

People say,  
“It happened so long ago,  
you'd be better off  
if you'd just let it go.”

People say,  
“You're feeling sorry for yourself” or “snap out of it.”  
They don't understand  
why sometimes I just want to quit.

When I was growing up  
with the bad turns I was dealt,  
I was not allowed then  
to express how I felt.

I know it's not healthy  
to hold this anger inside,  
but I've got years of experience  
of making my feelings hide.

Sometimes  
my chest feels like it's about to explode  
because I carry  
such a heavy load.

Sometimes  
when the anxiety seems to be taking its toll,  
I'm afraid if I express my anger  
I'll lose control.

So I stay quiet;  
I don't shout.

I hold it all in;  
I don't let it out.

The anger I feel now  
I keep stuffing back down,  
and I get depressed  
and have flashbacks and hear voices all around.

I am so angry  
at the people who did these things to me,  
but I stuff those feelings  
so nobody can see.

I wish I knew a way  
I could tell them how angry I feel,  
and maybe then  
I'd begin to heal.

## Merry Christmas

By Kimberly Green

—Fort Smith, AR

Merry Christmas to me.  
I no longer lead a life of glee.  
Lost my legs in a roadside attack,  
Just another day in Iraq.  
In recovery I so want to believe.  
Merry Christmas to me.  
So I spent the next few years  
Holding back the tears.  
And then one day I awoke,  
Realized I'm alive. I didn't croak.  
I had living to do—a goal to reach my destiny.  
Merry Christmas to me.  
I worked out every day,  
Went back to college the GI Bill paid.  
And I became the man I am today,  
Helping other veterans walk the path we paved.  
Brothers and sisters in arms—a slow salute from me.  
Merry Christmas. Freedom is not free.

# A Chicago Story

By Gilbert Weiss  
—Port Washington, NY



A Korean War vet with pen in hand tells this story.

The year was 1956. The city, Chicago. It was a sizzling hot day, Aug. 21. It was so hot you could fry an egg on the pavement.

A man walked slowly along Michigan Avenue. His hair was disheveled, his clothes ragged and torn. He appeared to be confused and he smelled like a skunk. People had to hold their noses when they passed by. Soon a police car stopped. Two policemen got out of the car and approached the man. The cops asked him what his name was. They also asked him where he lived. He didn't seem to know what they were talking about.

They noticed he had a crushed dog tag around his neck and thought perhaps he might be a lost veteran. They escorted him to the nearest police station where they attempted to question him further, but he could not answer any of the questions. The policemen then began to form a picture of a veteran with amnesia.

At that point, they called the Bureau of Missing Veterans in Washington and made contact with investigator Johnny Johnson. Johnson, one of

the main investigators, immediately made arrangements to bring this lost veteran to D.C.

A few days later our lost veteran arrived at the bureau. Johnson and colleagues questioned him intensely. They soon decided to admit him to a local hospital where he would receive shock treatments, hoping to revive his memory. He also was seen by a psychologist specializing in war traumas. The team at the bureau decided to place a photograph of the veteran in the Chicago Gazette.

The sessions with the psychologist were ongoing, and several weeks later, investigator Johnson got a call from the veteran's wife. She conveyed to Johnson that as soon as she saw the photograph in the paper, she recognized him. In fact, she showed the photograph to her two children and said, "Look! Here is your daddy!"

The veteran's team made another critical decision and took the veteran home to Chicago, to his home where his family resided. They told the veteran's wife to give her husband time, to be patient and he would regain his memory.

## A Prayer for Peace

By Larrie Green  
—Columbus, OH

Heavenly Father,  
I come before you all humble  
as the day of your arrival nears.  
Blessed be that day  
for it brought change to the world.  
It's by your hand  
that strife in this world will be stilled.  
These are troubling times, Lord,  
for the world is at war with itself.  
Parents kill their children,  
children kill their parents,  
race against race, country against country.  
The world needs your intervention.  
I ask you, Lord,  
to pass the Hand of God over all of us  
so that peace becomes the order of today  
and every day that follows.  
This I ask in your precious name;  
let this be your will  
for with you all things are possible.  
Heavenly Father,  
touch all of our hearts  
so that enemies become friends,  
and the world you gave us in which to live  
returns to how you intended it to be.  
Each and every one of us is nothing more  
than a small piece of your everlasting plan.  
Show us all the errors of our ways;  
Remind us that by you, and only you  
can we ever reach the Promised Land.  
Turn all the ugliness back into the beauty  
that you intended it to be.  
Father Almighty,  
let us all remember that you sacrificed your  
only Son in payment for our sins.  
We know that peace in the world needs  
only the wave of your hand.  
This I ask in your precious name.  
Amen.

# By My Own Hands

*By Kim Gwinner*

*VA Medical Center—Cincinnati, OH*

By my own hands, I wanted to die.  
Ready to say goodbye.  
What exactly does that mean?  
It was planned, not unforeseen.

But since it was planned,  
I could save myself beforehand.  
It took strength and courage to stop that thought.  
I was severely distraught.

But I was able to reach out  
before I could check out.  
I'm thankful that I was able,  
because I was so unstable.

Suicide is final; there's no coming back.  
On myself—that's the most evil attack.  
How could I disregard my life so?  
I had become my own foe.

I'm still struggling but that's life.  
Yes, I'm feeling my strife.  
I'm up for this challenge; I am.  
This is my life's plan.

I will become strong

# Waiting

*By John Tidwell*

*—London, OH*

Perched on my bunk, my mind's eye searches my soul.  
The depressions have sunk deeper and deeper down  
where there's not one other living soul.  
If my lucidity is to be easily found,  
can one hope what's left of my life to do?  
That this nightmare was only a perilous dream.  
There's only truth; other people never have a clue.  
Friends and family await at Heaven's Gate.  
It's true for all beings; not a soul escapes.  
My turn will come as I sit and mentally wait,  
praying my mental soul was in better shape.

and once again feel as if I belong.  
But where to start? I need to know.  
Where's my shield, my ammo?

It's inside; I need to dust it off  
and get ready for the playoff.  
No, this is not a game.  
I am worthy; I have a name.

I am Kimmer!  
I possess more than just a shimmer.  
I can be what I want to be.  
Just watch; you'll see!

By my own hands, I will heal.  
That's what I truly feel.  
I do have what it takes  
no matter how much my mind and body ache!

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## SALLY-SUE HUGHES MEMORIAL 1 OF 3

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# No Victory Parade

*By Johnny L. Martinez*

*—Spanish Fork, UT*

I watched a documentary.  
The narrator interviewed a Vietnam veteran,  
asked the difference  
between World War II soldiers  
and those that fought in Vietnam.  
The old guy was wearing a Vietnam cap;  
he spoke with a graveled voice and said,  
soldiers in World War II came home  
to roaring crowds cheering them home.  
They arrived with the unit they left with,  
the brothers they fought with.  
He then wiped his wet eyes  
and with a choked voice said,  
when 'Nam soldiers came home  
they arrived alone.  
Some were accosted and spat upon,  
treated like a thief.  
We were afraid we'd be arrested.  
He lowered his voice  
and almost in a whisper said,  
nobody cared.

## Unpeacefulness

*By Norman L. Jones*  
*VA Medical Center—Columbus, OH*

Not receiving any chance,  
Bullies rantin' and ravin',  
No room to establish a dance,  
Little kids misbehavin'.  
Lacking sleep and rest  
CAN ONLY BE UNPEACEFULNESS.

Not enough funds to pay rent.  
From roaches and bed bugs,  
Always exhausted and spent.  
Withdrawal from alcohol to drugs,  
Recovering through a city blackout,  
Stuck in a freeway traffic.  
Natural disasters deciding to nest  
COULD EXPLAIN UNPEACEFULNESS.

A debate you can't possibly win,  
Constantly fighting for a friend  
Enduring the seven deadly sins.  
Helping a bad apple of the family,  
Years seem like eternity,  
No light in darkness.  
Being useful when it's useless  
IS THE PATH TO UNPEACEFULNESS.

## I Am a Survivor

*By Allyson Hargrave*  
*—Orem, UT*

I have faced difficulty with love of others.  
At times I felt alone; others prayed for me.  
I was in the dark; nurses helped me.  
I don't remember most of the things.

I almost died but I survived cancer.  
When the darkness left me, I could see  
Others supported me.  
Seeing their positive light

Brought amazing joy, seeing a new day.  
I survived through the help of others,  
Remembering that support of others  
Helped me become alive.

## Holidays as a Soldier

*By Nina Herron*  
*—Staunton, VA*

Instead of planning exciting parties,  
I'm planning dangerous missions.  
Instead of donning festive attire,  
I'm wearing my tattered uniform.  
Instead of wrapping beautiful presents,  
I'm packing my tactical gear.  
Instead of enjoying delicious food,  
I'm opening my MRE.  
Instead of sipping hot cocoa,  
I'm drinking water from my canteen.

While others are polishing silver,  
I'm cleaning my weapon.  
While others are visiting loved ones,  
I'm pulling photos from my pocket.  
While others are dodging snowballs,  
I'm dodging bullets.  
While Santa is carrying his big pack,  
I'll be lugging my ruck sack.  
While others are "decking the halls" with garland,  
I'll be "decorating" with camouflage netting.

As others are baking holiday cookies,  
I'll be baking in the hot desert sun.  
As others stand before a Christmas tree,  
I'll stand on watch for the enemy.  
As others are "nestled all snug in their beds,"  
I'll be ever vigilant and watchful instead.  
As others wish their kids to be "calmer,"  
I'll hope I don't see a suicide bomber.  
As others don't really have a clue,  
my squad has quietly stopped a coup.

I choose to defend our nation,  
so that they may continue their celebration.  
There are many happy moments that I will miss,  
but the dangers I meet will be endless.  
I'm hoping to go home after this tour,  
but for PTSD there is no cure.  
When I'm having a lonely day,  
I always bow my head to pray.  
Not for protection just for me,  
but mostly for my family.

## Allhallows Eve

By Lawrence W. Langman  
—Portage, IN

Silence is the night when  
echoes come to call.  
Shadows dance in rhythms  
on forsaken walls.  
Branches scrape the shutters  
like talons, razor sharp.  
Cries in the darkness  
as wolves devour parts.  
Deep inside this swamp  
evil hides within.  
The devil paid his dues  
with ego, greed and sin.  
Hidden deep inside it calls out;  
its vile mouth it claims.  
The smell of flesh does burn,  
surrounded by heat and flame.  
Wretched are the wicked;  
dire is their cause.  
Angels cast lightening  
as faith takes its pause.  
On this hallowed evening,  
when destiny finally breaks,  
veils between our worlds  
have forsaken all at stake.

## Love

By Kenny C. Trujillo  
—North Las Vegas, NV

Love is so very important;  
Love is pure to the heart.  
Love is forever;  
Love is very giving.  
Love is forgiving each other;  
Love is building understanding.  
Love is so touching;  
Love is Godly.  
Love is pure to understanding;  
Love is needed for the world.  
Love is patient;  
Love is for receiving.

## Never Forget

By Kimberly Green  
—Fort Smith, AR

He tottered, he teetered,  
He fell a few times.  
Boy, it sure was hard  
For him to climb.  
They ignored him  
When he went to Sam's.  
People looked at him  
Like he was just another old man.  
Just a burden on society,  
I'm sure people might think.  
After all, what good was he,  
Muttering to himself? I bet he stinks.

What they didn't know,  
Perhaps they didn't want to know  
if given the chance,  
Was that he survived the Holocaust.  
He was alive not by circumstance.  
He saw his fellow comrades  
Shoved over the bluffs.  
Saw them stand outside naked,  
Water thrown on them while in the buff.

He witnessed people he loved  
Shot, gassed and beat.  
Witnessed the starving,  
For himself no food to eat.

This old man was liberated  
By the American GIs,  
Battle-hardened soldiers  
Who found it hard not to cry.

This old man, the one who couldn't hear,  
Joined the United States Army,  
Making it his life,  
Making it his career.

There aren't many more left.  
In a few short years  
The survivors of the Holocaust  
Will all but disappear.

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DAVA STATE DEPT. OF  
FLORIDA AWARD

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## My Pen, My Story

By Rhonda Chavez  
—San Antonio, TX

I have control of the pen now;  
It's firmly in my hand.  
I need to rewrite my life story  
And draw a line in the sand.  
No one but me has access to this pen;  
I'm the author of my new story.  
From now on, I plan to live my life  
To its fullest glory.  
Others' words and actions are  
No longer my concern.  
Only positive words will be used,  
But even those I have to earn.  
I cannot let others' negativity  
Continue to rule my life.  
They couldn't have hurt me more  
By cutting me with a knife.  
I'm not going to rush my new story;  
I want to take it slow and steady.  
For now, I'll write chapter by chapter  
And save the ending for when I'm ready.  
Right now, it's like a puzzle  
That needs to be solved.  
But at this point in my life,  
I'm not sure how the end will evolve.  
I know it won't be without struggles,  
But at least I now know,  
After years of all the suffering,  
I'm the one finally in control.

## It's Better

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

It's much better to write a letter  
than to use your talk  
as an excuse to squawk!  
When you rap  
all the time on the phone,  
crabby from your nap,  
you'll surely hit the wrong bone.  
So keep on singing your song,  
and keep from going wrong.  
It's much better to write a letter.

# Had To Come Back

By James Janssen  
VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS

Had to come back. Quit writing because of increased repercussions from TBI and PTSD, but my brother and sister veterans are everything to me.

A couple of days ago I suffered a severe flashback that paralyzed me. The pain and sadness of the memory put me in an immediate suicide mode. Had to stop my truck. Couldn't drive any longer. Out of desperation I called the VA trying to reach my counselor. The call center answered and immediately put me through to the suicide hotline. Then my phone went dead. The few words I heard kept playing over and over in my mind, words of support, encouragement and strength.

Anyway, I called back the next day for further direction and the formulation of a plan of action that got me out of the crisis. So please, please make the call should you suffer from any malady. So glad I did or I wouldn't be writing right now.

# A Tribute to a Great Man

By Gene Allen Groner  
—Independence, MO

Once in a lifetime you meet someone who changes your life for the better. That was Lewis. We met at church one Sunday, and I liked him immediately. He was kind and compassionate, and I grew to admire him greatly. He was truly a great man and my hero.

Soon we were teaching the adult church school class on the Bible. Lewis was very knowledgeable on the scriptures, and he became my friend and mentor. We studied together, broke bread together and even learned a few things together. I know that I learned a lot from him anyway.

Lewis was a good steward of his time and resources. He taught me the value of caring for others the way Jesus cared for everyone. There was never any prejudice or pride or deceitfulness. He was honest and completely trustworthy.

When I became a financial advisor, I looked up to him for guidance, and he was soon my best client. I trusted him, and he trusted me. We always knew we could count on each other whenever the need arose.

I miss Lewis. He has gone to heaven to be with the Lord now, and I know he is looking down from his new home and keeping an eye on me. I can feel his presence even now. My life is much richer and more meaningful just because Lewis was my friend. Truly, he was a great man.



# The Happy Days

By Michael Pride Young  
—Fond du Lac, WI

We used to be so happy together;  
life for us was always better.  
It was like the beautiful weather.  
The things we did were always better.  
You told me what I wanted to hear;  
you stood by me.  
You were always near.

Now you' re gone;  
you did me wrong.  
You left me alone to go and roam;  
now you see here that my life is a fear.  
It ain't nothing without you;  
life ain't the same.  
It ain't no big thing;  
it ain't nothing without you.

Now if you come home,  
I won't be alone,  
and that's the way it should be.  
You used to be so happy with me,  
and that's the way it should be.  
Life with you is all I want,  
and I just like being with you.

Let's get together and make everything better.  
I just want you with me.  
Now, Baby, it's time to come and be mine  
'cause I just love being with you.  
Honey, be mine one more time  
'cause I just love being with you.  
Baby, be mine 'cause I just love being with you.

## Revelation

By Jerome Moore  
—Forest, VA

Standing upon the bow of my battered ship  
in the roughest and deepest of waters,  
I stood at the mercy of fierce winds  
and the sound of thunder above my quarters.  
There I stood alone with the raging sea  
whispering relentlessly for my demise.  
And I, this man with the will and strength,  
all failed to uplift me from my troubling cries.  
With no light to guide me from the wakes  
of useless hope and despair,  
I turn to thoughts of my Lord, my savior  
as I was fading from his divine care.  
Dismayed and daunted with no answers  
heeding my beckons and sobbing calls,  
I felt defeated with nothing left  
but to succumb to this squall.  
As my mind began to fathom  
the outcome of my fate,  
I began a journey of overwhelming distaste.  
Beaten and spent beyond all means of reasoning,  
I stood tirelessly, dazed and unsure  
of what I was feeling.  
Then, with the certainty of death  
pouncing upon my being,  
I began to disenchant all of what I was perceiving.  
As my revelation began to challenge  
the lost faith that I once had,  
I became as I once was—the boy, the lad.  
And on this disquieting night,  
upon my knees I fell with all my might  
to pray to God to rid me of this plight.  
Then all that what was once  
beyond my grasp of belief,  
formed into a revelation  
that cast my fear and fright into defeat.  
And that which had cloaked my eyes  
from such a welcoming sight,  
slowly and undauntedly steered my ship  
toward a faint and glorious light.  
As I uttered the last words of the Lord's prayer,  
my ship, my soul was now in the hands of my savior.  
And now as I stand, renewed, upon my ship aboard,  
I travel onward with God—forever my Savior, my Lord.

## Neck Bones

“Instead of the cross, the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.”  
—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

By Lynn A. Norton  
—Leawood, KS

“Say that word again and I'll wring your neck.”  
Shit, Grandma means business! Having witnessed  
an execution destined to become savory dinner  
an hour before, I feared for my own slender tube.

Column of bone and sinew, conduit of blood and  
nerve, vulnerable nexus of head and body, worthy  
of protection. Leather neck, red neck, bull neck,  
pencil neck, all dangerously exposed to peril.

“Stop riding your bicycle with no hands. You'll  
break you neck.” Always the neck! The warning  
grabbed my scruff like a feline mother, quashed  
the perilous experiment, probably saved my neck.

“You're being a pain in the neck. Go play outside.”  
Seeking adventure, I wandered into unfamiliar  
territory. “Hey kid, what do you think you're doing  
here? Not from this neck of the woods, are you?”

“What's with the Albatross?”

## To Louise

By Michael Kuklenski  
—Rowlett, TX

I was a Corpsman;  
You were a Nurse.  
I was in the field;  
You were in the hospital.  
I rescued after hearing, “Corpsman up!”  
You saved after hearing, “Momma.”  
We did what we had to do  
regardless of the circumstances.  
Many lived, many died  
and we continue wrestling  
with the memories  
of each one.

## Stop! Not a Prisoner of War

By *Elvis Miguel Machuca*  
—Bronx, NY

*“The word ‘Stop,’ being a universal language  
has continued to save lives.”*

It takes great courage to pull the trigger  
and even more courage not to do so.  
What would I have gained or done after this tragedy?

All the good work a soldier does  
for the unit, the nation and the country  
would have gone all to repairing what would have been lost.  
The life of an individual over the credit of toil.

A detail that began by taking men to the burn pits  
along with my Battle Buddy and my M16.  
We drove to the burn pits where many stories are told  
of bad orders and rotten food,  
and even unexploded ammunition—  
that would do no good.

In the middle of nowhere,  
I stuck to the Humvee, trying to force my hand out  
when inadvertently a local national  
attempts to grab my weapon.  
My hand wouldn't come free.

A signal asking for help to free my hand  
was finally heard.  
The Humvee moved forward;  
my hand was freed.

I insisted,  
and the local national wouldn't listen.  
I exclaimed,  
“Stoppppppppppp!”

Drew a line with my left foot,  
cocked the weapon  
and it stopped.

That's the glory of the story.  
Not prisoner of war.  
Today I am a veteran.

# Was a Grunt

By *Gerald Augustine*  
—Middletown, CT

I served in the U.S. Army in 1965 through 1967 in two combat units, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade and the 4th Infantry Division. I was drafted during summer break while attending the University of Connecticut. I didn't question my induction because I felt it was my duty to serve.

During basic training at Fort Devens, Mass., my fellow inductees, and I always did the best we could when called upon to perform the tasks at hand. When spring finally arrived in 1966, the 196th Brigade decided to have a post track meet. It probably helped with the morale of all the soldiers because it was the eighth month of training, we were going through waiting to see where our upcoming deployment would take us. We were constantly told we were heading for “police action” in the Dominican Republic.

It seemed as if everyone was in great shape. Why not? We were constantly being trained physically as well as mentally. I was chosen to throw the javelin because I threw a hand grenade far beyond the limit of the range. I was fortunate to place first at the battalion meet and third overall at the post meet. That experience prompted me to continue my physical training while I served out my tour in Vietnam.

When July of 1966 arrived, we finally received our orders for our deployment. The 4,000 of us were heading to build our combat base camp at a place we never heard of, Tay Ninh, Vietnam. Now things were getting serious. The first month while there, we built the Tay Ninh base camp. We also began “search and destroy” missions, helicopter assaults and ambush patrols.

As to sports in Vietnam, 90 percent of the time an infantry unit was serving in the jungles chasing “Charlie.” We never got the chance to participate in any games or sports. Our physical activity amounted to humping through the jungles and digging foxholes. I would also include performing hundreds of push-ups when the time allowed.

Some 84 percent of those who served in Vietnam were behind the lines, and most had the opportunity to enjoy team sports.

It wasn't to be for me.

# What Will It Take?

By Lenny Ellis  
—Madison, WI

I wish I could do more and help us to live,  
help my fellow man by sharing food,  
not just praying and, after our bodies heal,  
giving a helping hand.  
You'll see our smiles and hear our laughter.

Ease his anguish born of relief and gratitude,  
suffering and pain, hunger and thirst.  
But, for now, cries for rain.  
Bloated bellies—parched lips.  
We're still starving.

I hear him cry out and, rotting in the sun,  
pray to God with his pleas.  
"Why must we suffer  
from death and disease?"  
Stop the misery.

Fill some people's needs is all we ask,  
only simple things by merely sharing  
food and water, clean sheets and medicines.  
Such a simple task. It's truly a shame.  
Why do others hoard so much?

Do they see a proud chieftain weep  
as food, drugs and liquor are wasted at feasts  
while some of us,  
with apparent bony ribs and shallow breaths,  
literally starve to death?

In his villages, hungry children  
look up into their mothers' faces.  
There's got to be a way to end this strife.  
Children with sorrowful eyes cry themselves to sleep.  
After all, isn't sharing the supposed way of life?

It's appalling to know  
that there's so much food  
wasted and rotting away,  
while those with full stomachs sleep,  
and starving children weep.

What will it take  
to move the heart  
of my fellow man?  
To make him understand  
we need a helping hand?

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## GLADYS FELD HELZBERG MEMORIAL AWARD

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### Evil Demon

Nina Herron  
—Staunton, VA

You evil demon!  
How dare you steal my friend from me?  
Why did you lead her to despair  
when she was a leader to us all?  
How did you convince her she was worthless  
when she was valued by so many?  
What hateful lies did you tell  
that made her feel abandoned and alone?  
Why did you paint a smile on her face  
when she needed to scream for help?  
How did you cram so many negative thoughts  
into her brain while it was full of education?  
How could you extinguish her brilliant light  
when she was such a beacon of hope?  
Who gave you permission to destroy so many lives  
while she was a wife, sister and mother?  
Where was I when you slowly ripped her heart to pieces?  
Why didn't I see the pain behind her smile?  
How could I not hear the loneliness in her voice?  
What heavy burden was she carrying  
that I could not fathom?  
All those answers went with her.

SUICIDE, you evil demon!  
Go back to the depths of hell from where you came!

# 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*



**Makin' Magic**  
By Ty Andrews  
— Lincoln, NE

**American Moon Moth**  
By Gene A. Groner  
— Independence, MO





**A Yellow Flower**  
By Daniel Strange  
— San Antonio, TX



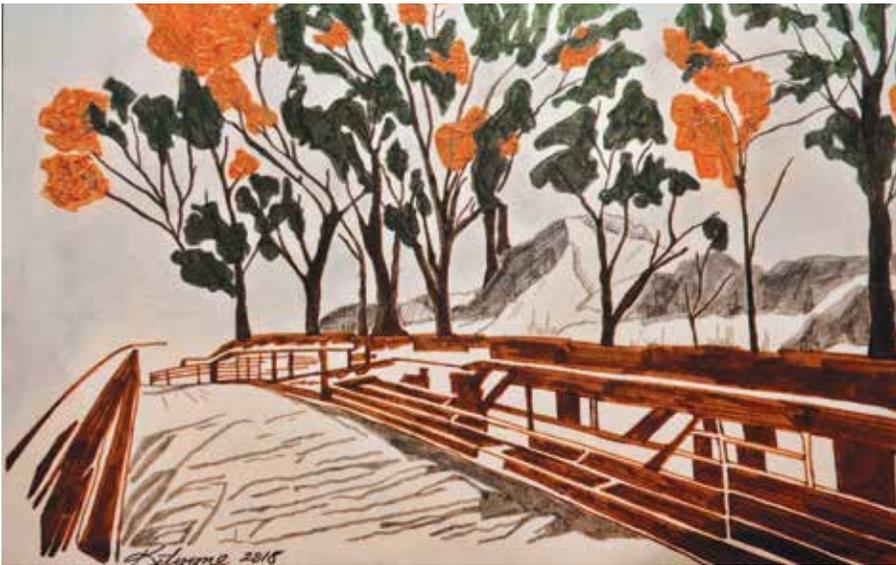
**My Spot**  
By David Ludlow  
— Angola, NY



**Train to Nowhere**  
By Daniel Strange  
— San Antonio, TX



**Recline Away**  
By Frank Mattson  
VA Medical Center— Valley City, PA



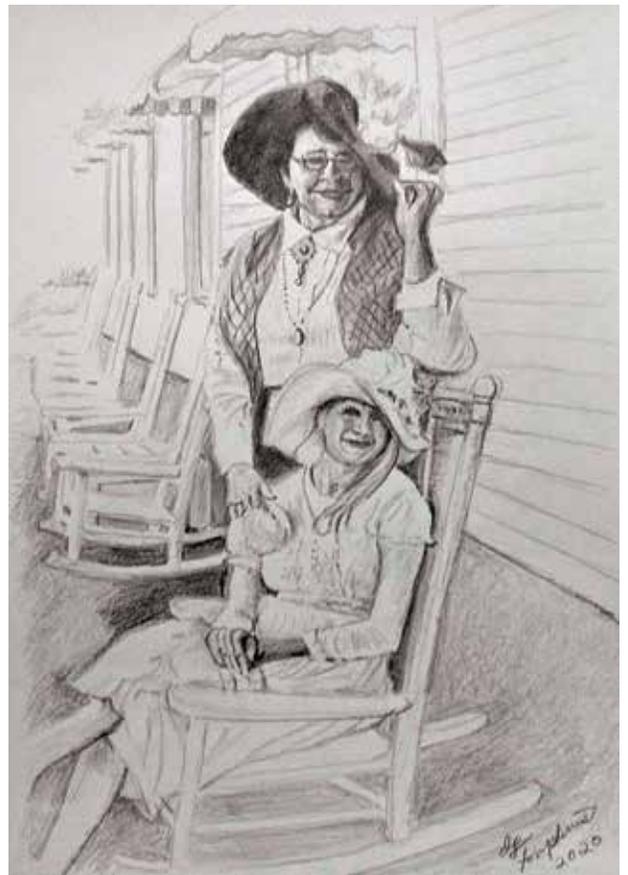
**Mo-Pac-trail**  
 By Kirsten (Hesterberg) Vallinmaki  
 — Pleasant Hill, MO



**My Heart My Stomach My Mind**  
 By Diane Wasden  
 — Millen, GA



**Through the Snow**  
 By William Shepherd  
 — El Dorado, KS



**Two-Ladies**  
 By Jack Tompkins  
 — Marshalltown, IA



**Baby and Daddy**  
 By Kenny Trujillo  
 — North Las Vegas, NV

# Me: in Public and in Private

By Rhonda Chavez  
—San Antonio, TX

I wanted to show how invisible wounds can hurt just as much, if not more, than physical wounds. What I allowed people to see, they would think I was the picture-perfect example of physical, emotional and mental well-being, however, on the inside, I was a prisoner of my own mind, paralyzed with self-doubt, shame, guilt, disgust, just to name a few. My traumas lived deep within my soul; they fed off each other like a virus. I was tormented and suffocating in my own body. They were eating me alive. I wanted to create something where I could show how deep, ugly and debilitating these invisible wounds can be. They destroy everything from your mind, body, soul, innocence, joy, hopes, dreams, confidence, self-worth, faith... basically, they destroy your life. I used a variety of techniques in making these masks.

ME – In Public, I used No. 3 Medium to show a shiny glow, I used yellow, which says “bright, happy, joyful.” I let the public believe I was all those things. I used bright shiny diamonds in my eyes to show I was full of life and happiness, with rosy, red cheeks and a big smile. I used sparkling diamonds, a colorful patch with love hearts and beautiful flowers growing from my head to show I was someone who loved herself, was surrounded by love, was positive and confident, planting only positive thoughts in my mind, like fresh flowers blooming. The big pink bow to add a little jazz, I finished it off with a nice white ribbon, a final attempt to reiterate to the world that I was all these happy, positive things, all wrapped up in a nice package.

ME – In Private, I used No. 5 Coarse to show the grittiness/roughness of my world. I used several colors to represent my invisible wounds, what I hid from the public. The colors are my life, my traumas, my invisible wounds, my truth. Red: Shame and Chaos, Black: Destruction, Gray: Loneliness and Emptiness, Dark Blue: Sadness and Isolation, Dark Yellow: Depression, Love, Self Esteem, Green: Guilt and Disgust. I constantly felt like my head was going to explode from all the negative thoughts/emotions and there was always a dark cloud over me. The wheels are the negative thoughts continually grinding, getting stuck on repeat,

the chain and lock represent being a prisoner of my own mind. I was a wild tornado inside with shame, guilt, disgust, unworthiness, being unlovable, being broken, being insecure, just swirling around making me so dizzy. The mirrors in my eyes represent what I saw looking back at me when I looked in the mirror, the salty tears running down my cheeks, the zipper on my mouth is because I had no voice, when I tried to use it, it was ignored, challenged and/or dismissed, so I kept it zipped since no one was listening anyway. The pieces of glass are the shattered parts of me, my innocence, heart, body, soul, spirit, faith, hope and dreams, and the puzzle pieces are a reminder that I am not whole, pieces of me were stolen and I fear I will never have unity, harmony and peace within myself.

Creating this artwork brings me a sense of pride knowing I have finally been able to show the world my true self. I’ve hidden my traumas, suicidal thoughts, negative self-talk, lack of worth for so long, not wanting the world to know my pain because I was embarrassed and didn’t feel worthy of being seen or heard. I suffered in silence for over 50 years; I feel lighter, free and ready to actually live my life, not just exist. I put my inner most, real, raw feelings, emotions, and thoughts into these masks.

When I look at them, I can see and feel the pain I was in. It has helped me to heal by being able to express my trauma through art.



*Me in Public and Me in Private*  
Acrylic painted mixed media mask  
on canvas in 3D

# You Have To Live It To Understand It

By John Wesley Bruce  
—Kansas City, MO

July 1968: I received my draft notice to be inducted into the armed forces. The letter read, "Greetings, you will be inducted into the United States Armed Forces. You will report on Thursday 15 August 1968. Time to report 0600 hours at the Military Entrance Processing Station, South Broadway, Kansas City, Mo.



I reported as I was instructed, as were so many of us who had received draft notices. We were directed to an area for physicals. Once that process was done, around noon, they fed us lunch. After that we were loaded onto Continental Trailways buses. Our destination was Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo.

The trip lasted about five and a half hours. That was the longest bus ride I had ever been on. We arrived around 0100 Friday. Ft. Leonard Wood was better known as Little Korea because it gets really cold there. I was glad that it was summertime when we arrived. Some of us slept on the bus while others talked about being away from home.

We got off the bus and were met by sergeants wearing park ranger hats, like Smokey the Bear. They were called drill sergeants. They looked really mean as we got off the bus. The drill sergeants barked out orders at us and called us all kinds of names I had never heard before. We were marched to the barracks.

The first week was called Zero Week because all we did was paperwork (life insurance, next of kin, spouse if you had one, plus haircuts, uniforms and boots.)

Basic training started the following week. Sixteen weeks of solid training—weapons training, physical training, hand-to-hand combat, map reading. Once you passed all of those qualifications, you graduated.

Immediately after graduation, we were given orders to report for advanced individual training, better known as AIT. There were many different schools, such as infantry, artillery, cook and map readings. I was ordered to Ft. Sill, Okla., to artillery school for eight weeks of training. I would be training on a 105 howitzer. The howitzer had a range of seven miles. This weapon shot different types of rounds. HE was high explosives. BeeHive contained darts and nails. Firecracker had little grenades that exploded on contact. White Phosphorous (or Willey Peter as it was known to the artillerymen) was a dangerous chemical that burned through the skin. The last type of round was an Illumination round, which would light up the area, allowing troops to have better vision at night.

We trained both day and night for many hours to become proficient with our weapon because we were to be shipped to Vietnam. I had heard about Vietnam while

attending Olathe Senior High, in Olathe, Kan., a small community. The local news stations gave an update on the war every day. I wasn't interested in following it because I had no idea where Vietnam was. That was 1966. Little did I know that three years later I would be in Vietnam, fighting a war that I knew nothing about.

Once I graduated from AIT, I was given a 30-day leave to visit family. While there I married my childhood sweetheart on Jan. 4, 1968. Shortly thereafter I received my orders to report to San Francisco, where there was a holding area for troops going to Vietnam. We were only there for a week to get jungle fatigues, etc., before shipping out.

Once our processing was over we were bused to Travis Air Base, Calif., where we boarded our flight for Vietnam. It was a long flight, lasting about 20 hours. We landed in country in January 1969. We were then taken by truck to a training facility for a week. It involved live ammo, and we were each issued a M-16 automatic assault rifle. I had never seen one before; we trained on M-14s in basic training.

We were then assigned to our units. I was assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, 2nd/321st Field Artillery. They had three batteries, and I was assigned to B battery, gun number four or Section 4. Each battery had six guns and each gun had a name. Ours was Boa Constrictor. My first job was to load the shells in the breech before firing. After two months went by the assistant gunner

(Continued on Page 38)

rotated back to the world (United States). I then became the assistant gunner.

A Section was made up of a section chief, gunner, assistant gunner, loader and ammo bearers. The section chief would receive orders to fire from the fire control center then give the direction to the gunner. He would also give the distance and elevation to the assistant gunner; that was my job. I would be the one who pulled the lanyard to fire after the command was given.

For my first fire mission, the infantry that we supported got into a heated battle with the Viet Cong guerrillas (farmers by day, fighters by night). A CH-47 helicopter flew right into our fire mission. We were unable to check fire in time, and the bird was hit at least three times. There was a great ball of fire and debris was scattered over a four mile radius. There were at least 20 soldiers on the downed helicopter, and to this day I feel that I had a part in their dying. I will never forget what I saw that horrible night.

My next mission was a few weeks later when our infantry ran into a regiment of Viet Cong and North Vietnam regulars. Our battery was on the top of a hill where we could see the firefight. The other batteries had also been called in, and we could see the tracers from small arms fire. There was Spooky, a Douglas AC-47 plane that carried mini-guns or Gatling guns. It was also shooting tracers. The Bell AH UH-1, better known as the Cobra, was firing rocket launchers and mini-guns. All hell broke loose. We were firing; they were firing. This battle lasted more than 20 hours. There was screaming from both sides, hollering from soldiers. It was horrible. Our guns were so hot from continuous firing that we had to pour water down the tubes, or they would not operate properly and could injure the crew. The temperature of the weapons exceeded 114 degrees.

Artillerymen were like firemen. When a mission came down, you had to be ready no matter what you were wearing. That night all I was wearing was my underwear. The mission lasted into the next day, and when the ceasefire was given, my body was soaked in sweat, and I must have lost eight pounds. Some of the wounded were brought to our medical staff; some could not be saved. I thought to myself, "What am I doing here, and why?"

I never thought that I'd be in a combat situation, seeing soldiers get killed or burned alive. I couldn't take it anymore and wanted to go home. I was scared to death and wondered when it would be my turn.

Things slowed down for a few weeks, and one day I was in my bunk, located underground, when I heard a loud explosion. My section chief came in and said they needed volunteers. A pilot had been shot down and crashed into a village. We needed to get to him. I jumped up, grabbed my M-79, and we hopped on trucks and headed to the crash site. Once there we secured the area. The infantry was called in, and they swept the area for the pilot. We found him alive and then tried to clean up the village as best we could. There were dead bodies everywhere. Adults, children, babies, many burned beyond recognition. The jet fuel and the smell of burned flesh caused some of us to throw up. It was horrible, indescribable. I guess this is what war is all about—death and destruction. You have to live it to understand it.

We later received orders to move farther north. We set up our location near a river



that was one of the nastiest, dirtiest, filthiest rivers I'd ever seen. We set up bunkers, a mess hall, guns, mines and a fire control center. We also had our howitzer. It took all day to set up.

I remember one day a Navy boat was coming up the river. They were patrolling the river and stopped to talk with us while we had some down time. They offered some of us a ride, so we got on, but without weapons. That was a no-no. As we went up the river, we began to take small-arms fire from both banks. I could hear bullets whizzing past my head. Boy, was I scared. We escaped unharmed, but I was glad to get back to my location.

Oct. 8, 1969, our final battle. I will never forget this date for as long as I live. My first child was born on this date. We were hit with mortar rounds falling all around us. Our mess hall was destroyed, and several vehicles were damaged. Once again, we were caught off guard. We ran to our duty stations, but I was hit with a piece of shrapnel in my knee. My sergeant tried to get me some medical attention, but I refused it, thinking it was a minor injury. This skirmish lasted about two to three hours. During this firefight my lieutenant came running over to me, and when he finally reached me he stood up and said, "Corporal Bruce, you are the father of a six-pound-seven ounce baby girl." The fact

that he ran through the bullets to tell me was shocking. But I couldn't react as I had a job to do and needed to focus as lives were at stake, especially my section. I did not want to be responsible for getting any of my team injured or killed. That would have haunted me for the rest of my life, and I already had enough on my mind.

Finally, we got the ceasefire and assessed the damage. There was plenty, but no injuries, no casualties. I was told that I would be receiving a Purple Heart, but I said I didn't want it, I only wanted to get out of Vietnam. I did speak with my battery commander and told him what my lieutenant had done. He confirmed this with the lieutenant, chewed him out and then transferred him elsewhere.

In November 1969, President Nixon ordered withdrawals of some of the combat forces. The 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne was one of the first to go. I returned to the United States Nov. 30, 1969.

My experience in Vietnam seems like a bad nightmare. It just didn't seem real, the thought that I was there in combat. For my actions in Vietnam I received the Bronze Star, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with three stars (each representing a major campaign) and the Army Commendation Medal. Our unit was awarded the Vietnam Presidential Unit Citation, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, and Republic of Vietnam Civil Actions Unit Citation.

Some people called me a hero, but I am not a hero. The 58,000 men and women who gave their lives, those who are missing in action, those severely wounded and the families that stood by their loved ones while they protected the rights of people in a far-off land, those are your real heroes. They deserve a big salute.

The American people back in the United States were protesting the Vietnam war, and Congress told them that it wasn't a war

but rather a conflict. The protesting resulted in soldiers being mistreated when they returned home. They were spat on and called baby killers. Thank the media for that and giving false reports about the war in Vietnam. Many stories were made up to make the government look good to the folks back home. What amazed me was that the body count was misleading. If they killed 20 enemy soldiers and then found body parts such as a hand with fingers detached, they would count that as five dead. I believe that they did this to pacify the Defense Department and the American people, as well as the politicians who got us in that mess in the first place.

American soldiers came from all over the country. Most were drafted like me, but some did join to serve their country. Then there were rich kids who fled to Canada because they were afraid of getting hurt or killed. The only ones who profited from the war were the beer companies, soft drink companies, distillery companies, weapons manufacturers, tobacco companies, toy companies and of course our politicians.

A friend of mine from my middle school in Olathe died in Vietnam. His father was in the Navy, stationed at the (now closed) Olathe Naval Air Station. His name was James Calvin Ward. His family moved to Milwaukee after that school year, but he enlisted in 1965 and was only in-country three months before being killed in October 1965.

Just think of the 58,000 who gave their lives so another country could enjoy freedom. To this day I don't believe we won that war. You take a 17- or 18-year-old male who has never been outside of the United



States, train him to kill or be killed, and they wonder if they will ever see their loved ones again. It's a hard pill to swallow. To see soldiers get blown to bits, I don't wish this on anyone.

I have left out a few other incidents that I witnessed because they are too difficult for me to describe, and they bring back memories that I'm trying to forget.

Back then the draft was in place because, in my opinion, they could not get enough young men to join the military and fight a war that never should have happened. The soldiers who returned home from Vietnam never got the welcome they deserved for putting their lives on the line. Today they have Wounded Warrior programs for soldiers from Desert Storm, Iraq and Afghanistan. It is sad that the United States turned its back on the Vietnam soldiers.

Fifty years later Americans are now telling the Vietnam vets "Welcome home." It's a little too late to acknowledge us for fighting in a war that didn't make sense. We Vietnam vets have a bad feeling about the Vietnam war that still haunts us years later into the 21st century. We are bitter toward the government (1965-1975) and about all the wasted equipment, money, time and many lives that the war cost us. We are still paying for it today.

# A Veterans Day Reminder

By H. David Pendleton  
—Lenexa, KS

*(Excerpts from a speech by the author on Veterans Day 2021)*

Veterans Day has been one of my favorite holidays and one of my earliest memories. I grew up in a small town in southeast Kansas called Caney. When I was young, Caney always had a Veterans Day parade and the town would swell to twice its normal population. A big parade would come down Fourth Avenue—the main street in the town—with more than a dozen local bands from the area participating. There were floats and groups of veterans, mostly men, representing the various conflicts they had served in since World War I.

The activities were great, but the reason I enjoyed the holiday was it was one of the two times of the year that my paternal grandfather from Denver would come to visit. He and his wife enjoyed traveling and always took slides of his latest visit to Ireland, London, or some other exotic place. While his slide show bored most of my family, I enjoyed his beautiful photographs and dreamed about visiting the places my grandfather traveled.

Later, I found out that my grandfather had learned to be a photographer while serving in the Army. In 1942, he was drafted at the age of 44. The Army's maximum draft age for World War II was 45. The Selective Service would not give him a deferral because he was divorced, his lone child was over 21 years of age, and selling insurance was not considered essential wartime work. After training at Lowry Field in Denver, my grandfather spent three years as an aerial reconnaissance photographer in the China-Burma-India theater for the Army Air Force.



My father also served in World War II. He enlisted in the Missouri Army National Guard in 1937 at the age of 17. When his unit was mobilized in December 1941, my father received a medical discharge due to his poor eyesight. By March 1942, either my dad's eyesight had improved or the Army was more desperate for soldiers. My father spent almost three years manning a radar facility on Miami Beach, Fla., during that war. He served until 1973, retiring as a master sergeant.

While my father never actively encouraged his children to join the military, he never discouraged us either. Eventually, four of his five children served in the Army. Two were enlisted with one primarily on active duty and one in the National Guard. Two of us are retired officers—one from active duty and one from the Army Reserve.

I went to the University of Kansas on an Army ROTC scholarship and received my commission in 1981. I served over 23 years in uniform, starting in the infantry and ending up in civil affairs.

A few years ago, I found a list of the 627 service members with a Kansas home of record who died in the Vietnam War. I am a numbers person, so I wanted to see where they were all from. I put the information into a spreadsheet based on their hometown and then on a map of Kansas by county. Almost every county in Kansas lost at least one service member in Vietnam. I did not know what I was going to do with the information at the time.

Earlier this year I ran across my old spreadsheet. I asked myself what I could do to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation in Vietnam. The answer to my own question was that I would try to do a mini-biography on each person and post it on a Facebook page called "Kansas History Geeks" because their lives are Kansas history.

By looking at several websites, I was able to piece together the basic information of each member's service, especially during Vietnam. For some individuals, I found many pictures and more information about them. I tried to weave any information I found on each hero into a short story that would give the readers a sense of the individual—both in the military and even before they served. A few relatives of these fallen heroes have reached out to me and provided additional photographs and information. After my posting on Facebook, some other family members contacted me to thank me. I want to make it clear that I was not seeking any recognition but just wanted to provide our fellow Kansans a little snapshot of the heroes who had lived among us.

My project has helped me learn even more about the Vietnam War than I already knew. I have taken a couple of history classes on the Vietnam War but they were long ago and were mainly at the strategic level. History is different from each individual combatant's perspective, and most of what is written about war is superficial. My research has shown that all 627 Kansans killed in Vietnam were heroes in some way. Hundreds of selfless acts of courage took place daily in Vietnam. Each service member knew that each day they woke up, they were one day closer to going home. Instead of trying to protect themselves from harm, time and time again those heroes went out of the way to help their buddies who were in danger.

The remains of 41 of the 627 Kansans killed in Vietnam have still not been located, repatriated or identified. Oscar Hammerstein wrote in the musical *Carousel*, "As long as there's one person on earth who remembers you, it isn't over." Let's make sure that we remember the Vietnam veterans who served so it is never over for them.

But this day is not only for us to honor those who served in Vietnam. Veterans Day is for anyone who has ever served. This could be a service member from World War II, Korea, Panama, Grenada, Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Afghanistan, Iraq or all the other campaigns that have taken place over the years. It includes those service members who never left the United States or served in a combat zone. Any veteran is in an elite group.

We all must remain vigilant to any person or group that promises us security in return for sacrifices of our freedoms. Benjamin Franklin said, "Those who surrender freedom for security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one."

Let us all guard against all encroachments on our freedoms.

# Trusting in God's Love

By Gene Allen Groner  
—Independence, MO



Not long ago, I was in a Christian bookstore in —Independence, MO. Looking through the displays, I noticed a book written by Mark Batterson titled "Draw the Circle." The title was catchy, so I picked it up and looked through the pages until I fell upon a particular page where the author issued a challenge. I was intrigued, so I read on.

The challenge read as follows: Pray on your knees at the same time every day for 40 days and watch for the miracles that come to you. Wow, I thought. I have prayed all my life, but not on my knees, so I thought I might give it a try and see what happens. I was in one of those down cycles that Christians get into from time to time, and I needed a boost, a spark in my heart that could ignite a flame of passion for life once again, a direction and a purpose.

That night as I was preparing for bed, I remembered the book and the challenge. So, I took off my shoes—Moses was told to do this in the Book of Exodus out of respect for God—and I knelt beside my bed to pray. I said, "Dear Lord, I am accepting this challenge, and I ask for your perfect will to be done in my life. May I once again feel the flame of passion and purpose in my life. I am willing to do whatever you want me to do. In Jesus' name, amen."

For the next 40 days, I prayed this same prayer, in the same way and at the same time. On the morning of the 41st day, I awoke early with the thought in my mind to write a book. I had never written a book before, so this would be a new experience for me. Believing it might be the Lord who planted that idea in my mind, I went to my computer and opened Microsoft Word to begin.

As I continued writing I felt that I was guided by the Holy Spirit. When the book was finished, I had written 264 pages of my autobiography, filled with my personal experiences with the Lord and my testimonies of the love of Jesus. The book is now complete, and I named it "Journey of a Disciple." I give God all the credit because He is the one who showed me what is possible when I trust in Him.

# Battle Buddy

By Tracy Sellers

—Troy, OH

I'm up again; I toss and turn.

A good night's sleep is for what I yearn.

These PTSD symptoms keep me awake;

I just want to sleep for fuck's sake.

And then it happens; my eyes close.

I'll try to sleep, I suppose.

But the horror doesn't stop there;

it's the same place I go when I stare.

A deep, dark hole sunken in,

making me feel like I can't win.

It consumes me in the night,

ignites my fight or flight.

No doubt, it's due to the nightmares within,

the things I see and what could've been.

The darkness is there; the darkness can see

that this person I am is not me.

I used to be full of energy in life

and now that's changed; I'm full of strife.

Who am I now and where am I meant to be?

Right here, right now is what I say to me.

Right here, right now in this treatment center.

A new door is opening; it's time to enter.

It's time to begin to grow and heal;

yes, it's time to let God take the wheel.

I will make it; I will survive.

And in this life I will strive

to be a better version of me,

so the whole world may see.

Then, this info I will share with my buddies in battle,

helping them like I was helped,

so their bodies don't rattle.

Make a change is what I'll do

and this new path is what I'll pursue.

Hand-in-hand with my buddies in my left and right

help me find my sight.

I'll be there for them like they were for me;

then we can all laugh and let it be.

Let yesterday go and push forward evermore.

I promised my friend, you will soar

to higher heights, to a new place within,

and I'll always be there letting you know

you can beat this. You can win.

You can be you again; you can be free.

You can heal just like me.

So take my hand as it is time

to make this great big world yours and mine.

Godspeed.

## Boy

By William L. Snead

VA Medical Center—Iron Mountain, MI

There he is—

my little boy—a Gull

with black-tipped wings,

and he even sings.

What a joy it was

to watch him fly into a sun-filled sky

as heavy traffic hurried on by.

I fed him and all the flock

and savored each time.

He'd be there with his pals

each and every time.

But now I've grown old;

it's tough to get out in the cold.

But today he followed me home

and I heard him call.

He flew down and sat in front of me.

Then with a flutter of wings was gone.

# Best Christmas Gift Ever

By Dan Yates  
—Blue Springs, MO

“What’s the best Christmas gift you’ve ever received?” That just might be the most often asked question posed at informal gatherings in December. Everyone seems to have an answer, ranging from something very expensive or romantic to something that they had coveted for many years and finally got. For me it was none of these. It was something I never expected to get and a source I never expected. In fact, the source of that gift never knew they gave it to me at all, but I think of it every December.

In the summer of 1972, I was assigned to a small base in Herborn Seelbach, Germany. We had no American support at this base due to its small size. All transportation was provided by a German unit stationed in the same town. There were fewer than 100 soldiers based there, and half of them were married and lived on the German economy while the single GIs lived in three barracks on post.

Because this was the largest U.S. base within 50 miles any direction, it was the site of the grade school for all of the smaller detachments in the area. Everyday staff cars or vans would bring children to our little town, where a one-story building served as a school for the dependents of the servicemen in the area. There were three teachers, one teaching grades 1-3, another grades 4-6 and the third teaching grades 7-8 as well as acting as principal. A separate building served as a kindergarten.

During formation one day in October 1972, the first sergeant asked if any of us were willing to go to the school later that week to help the teachers during a Halloween party. I raised my hand along with one or two others, and we went to the school to help in any way we could. Things went well, and a good time was had. Similar calls for help came for their Christmas party and Field Day the following May. I was 20 years

old at the time and saw the children as younger brothers and sisters; they seemed to adopt me as an older brother.

The following year I did the same, and in anticipation of Halloween I asked one of the American wives if she knew how to make popcorn balls. I told her that I wanted to take them to the school for the kids. She said that she did and sat down and figured out how much of the ingredients it would take

to make that many popcorn balls. We spent an evening up to our elbows in one big sticky mess, but we got it done, and I had a popcorn ball for each child that year.

In May of 1974, children in the seventh and eighth grades were going on a four-day class trip to Luxembourg and Trier, and two male and female chaperones were needed. Two of the teachers were husband and wife, while the third was a woman. The school asked the fathers of the participating students if any of them would volunteer to chaperone, but none would. With the possibility of the trip being cancelled, the students asked if I could be the second male chaperone. The principal asked if I was interested, and I agreed. A strong bond had developed between the children and me.

December came around, and my enlistment was ending. I was due to leave Germany the last week of December, and the Christmas party was going to be my last time together with the kids. I wanted to do something for them to show how special they were to me. I got the class rosters from each teacher and went to the PX and bought each kindergartner a gift and wrapped it. For each child in grades 1-8, and there were 88 of them, I bought several boxes of Christmas cards. I sat down on the floor in my room at the barracks, wrote a personal note to each student and put a \$1 bill inside each card.



On the day of the Christmas party, the first room I visited was that of the first through third graders. We played games and had refreshments, and then I handed out the cards to the children, telling them that they couldn’t open them until I told them to do so. Once I gave them permission, they tore open their cards and began running around the room, out of control, waving their dollar bills in the air. I had never seen their eyes open so wide in the two and a half years that I was there. They were hollering at each other and showing the teacher what they had—a dollar bill.

The teacher looked at me, and there were tears in the eyes of this 22-year-old man. I had never experienced such genuine happiness in my life. I may have given them each a dollar, but the spontaneous joy that they gave me was beyond value. It was unexpected, priceless and something that has remained fresh in my mind and heart, still 50 years later.

A few weeks later, back in the States, I received a package. Inside it was a plaque of appreciation from the principal and teachers. I’m now retired and have a large bookshelf in my office. On that bookshelf, proudly displayed on the second shelf, is that plaque. It reminds me of the best Christmas gift I’ve ever received, the joy of a child.

## Promise

By Daniel Paicopulos  
—San Diego, CA

She asked about the blue mirror  
we packed and moved a few times  
but never used for anything.  
So I told her the story of how,  
from the time when I was four or five,  
my mother would put it  
on the four-by-five cedar chest we used  
as an end table.  
But at Christmastime, we'd put  
fake snow and little people on it  
to make a festive scene.

I'm 79 now and, through the years,  
a lot of stuff has disappeared, like  
lamps, photos and baseball cards.  
People, too.  
I've lost dogs and cats, some car keys,  
the home I grew up in,  
even my mother  
who died suddenly one September.  
We didn't have Christmas  
after that for a long time,  
what with sadness,  
and later, for me, war.  
I never lost that blue mirror, though.

Then I met her, and I had very little stuff,  
but I had her. That was more than enough.  
Her family was big on Christmas,  
so after we returned  
from our December honeymoon,  
we went to her growing-up home,  
watched her baby sister  
put the ornaments on their tree,  
the round ones made  
with a glue stick and glitter,  
the ones with everybody's names on them.  
We were the last ones to go up,  
smack dab in the center front,  
apparently a place of honor,  
to much oohing, ahing and smiling.

My dad was there,  
our first Christmas in forever.  
It was cold, really cold,  
but our hearts melted.  
So, the blue mirror, remember?  
After we moved to a town with lots of folks,  
one where we could have visitors,  
we started to decorate excessively. Too much  
was still not enough, with wreaths and  
themed trees and garland and such.  
She said we should bring out the blue mirror  
and make a scene. So we went looking for  
fake snow and little trees and people.  
Then Department 56 happened,  
and a train set happened,  
and more Department 56 happened,  
and I built display tables and drilled holes  
and did dangerous, overloaded wiring.  
It was big and grand and good,  
and all of our friends loved it,  
and more Department 56 happened,  
and a storage locker to hold it all happened.

I think I mentioned that I'm 79 now.  
Those boxes and tables got heavier;  
that wiring got more painful to connect.  
We've lost a few more people,  
actually a lot more, and now  
there's this talk about voluntary simplicity.  
Still have that blue mirror, though.  
We thought we'd soon start a new tradition,  
borrow from the past, bring out the older,  
garage-sale, the newer.  
Then, like dancing lessons from God,  
our crazy old world demanded even more simplicity.

So, what to do?  
Kringles accessories,  
all the Santa ornaments,  
and the clowns,  
and the reindeer,  
and the snowmen,  
and the angels,  
and, oh, what the heck!  
We can't just sell them on Ebay,  
even as old friends stopped stopping by,  
stopped being in their bodies.

Well, we found our Christmas spirit,  
donated much to charities hurt by the plague;  
and they sold them to support their good works,  
gave them to the children in their lives.  
Then it occurred to us that young families  
might start their own traditions,  
find the spirit of their own blue mirror,  
so off went much of the remainder.  
Just down the street though,  
so we can visit and see their joy.  
The mom wants to pay us for our generosity,  
but we'll have none of that.  
We've already been paid,  
by the thoughts of children  
and their imaginations.  
After all, we kept the blue mirror,  
the one in the closet,  
and the one in our hearts.

## I Found Your Medals at Savers Last Night

*By Kimberly Green*  
—Fort Smith, AR

I had heard that you had died.  
Little fragments of a life that once was.  
So, I bought them just because.  
Brought them home, kept them out of sight.  
I found your medals at Savers last night

I found them again as I cleaned out a drawer,  
medals from the time you were at war.  
Liberation of a nation when you were young,  
when you once had healthy lungs.  
You fought a good battle despite.  
I found your medals at Savers last night.

They buried you in your Army best;  
the National Cemetery became your final rest.  
I took your medals to your grave,  
thanked you for the service you gave.  
Rest easy, soldier; enjoy the light.  
I found your medals at Savers last night.

## Depression Check-in

*By Michael McBroom*  
—Sheffield Lake, OH

I get asked the question,  
When it's time to rate your depression.  
Is this a feeling I am feeling from feelings,  
Or should I simply answer with an expression?

Hey, Doctor, are you going to take a minute to listen?  
If I start to explain myself without an empty objection,  
Am I strong enough today to testify  
Or to give a good enough reason why?

First let me try to explain my case.  
I am here mingling in the first place  
To learn about myself and why my mental health is at stake.  
Do you know the fight it took to leave my safe space?

The day-to-day patrols of Iraq I play over in my head.  
That leads to the feelings of guilt and shame before bed  
That turns into nightmares and reliving of death and threats  
And puddles of blood turned to sweat that is then shed.

I get awakened by my wife's lovely touch  
Reminding me, "Dear dreamer, you're home; it's a bad one.  
Go back to sleep; it's okay, I promise."  
She's not intentionally being dishonest.

I awake in the afternoon totally tired and unfocused.  
Carpe Diem, yeah, not happening.  
As the weight from the blanket shifts to my shoulders,  
I can already feel the burden begin to linger and smolder.

But I'm here, "Hooray!" I've made it to today.  
Small miracles even amaze the masses.  
I cannot say the same for my brother  
As suicide took him to meet our maker.

So, Doctor, I will answer your question.  
I will say my depression today is, perhaps,  
maybe, possibly low.  
If I would have to rate my depression from past deployments,  
my suffering, my journey—  
Now that is altogether a different story.

# Wake Up! It's Only a Dream

By Diane Wasden  
—Millen, GA

He hit me for the very last time.  
I was no longer gonna lay down and take it.  
My eyes are wide open; I'm not blind.  
He just has to go—forever!  
I had to do something about it, make a disappearing act!

It was fall and the leaves on the trees were falling down.  
The air was crisp and felt real nice  
following a very hot long summer.  
I asked him if he would take me  
to my parents' old homestead.  
The place was left to my sister and me.

He was grumpy and argumentative but finally agreed  
after thinking how the trip could benefit him.  
Fishing—he loved to fish  
and there was a pond on the property.  
We decided to make a weekend out of it.  
The property was located up in north Georgia,  
very country and quiet.

Memories flooded my mind  
of all the great times I had growing up here.  
The house seemed bigger than I remembered.  
There were four large barns  
and huge fields for crops or livestock.  
It had a great-sized pond which was well stocked.

He pushed me out of his way and grabbed  
his fishing tackle, leaving me to unpack the car.  
Living with him was a living hell!  
He scurried off like a rat with a chunk of cheese.  
It was dark when he finally came back  
with about ten good-sized fish.  
He smelled awful and still had to clean those fish.

Instead, he came into the house, big and bad,  
threw the fish in the sink and told me  
to clean them and fry them up for tomorrow's dinner.  
I stood my ground and said, "No" and walked away.  
He followed me like I wanted him to and he met his end!

I got the deer cart and loaded him up;  
down the well he went.  
That's as close to hell as I could get him.  
In the back of their minds, people knew  
I had something to do with his disappearance,  
But no one could prove anything.

They walked all around the homestead,  
but he wasn't buried in the ground.  
They checked every nook and cranny in the home.  
Every barn was cleared, no body anywhere.  
Only thing I can guess is that everyone assumed  
the other checked the well!

My life was great until I awoke the next day  
and he was lying next to me.  
It was only a dream, a dream come true,  
but I'm still stuck in this living hell with him.  
First thing he yells is, "Where is my breakfast?"  
I don't think things will ever change,  
but at least I have my dreams to dream upon.  
I wonder if they can arrest you for murder  
because of a dream.

## The Resourceful Light

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

Living every day within the Resourceful Light,  
The radiant sunshine returns so bright,  
Opening my way to being tranquil and sound.  
Deep thought holds me where nobody's around.

Walking provides me stability again.  
Over and within me, my soul can mend.  
Uplifted each day, people discover the way.  
Jesus Christ, our Savior, is within us every day.

To discover the way through writing is all right.  
The spirit of Jesus Christ is within us, His light.  
The child came to be so everyone can see,  
Moving us within, both you and me,  
Leading us on our way and providing for us every day.

# The Last Walk

By Richard Wangard  
—Neenah, WI

In a few days I turn 74. I am one of the lucky Vietnam vets. Still kicking. But why? I have cheated death at least 10 times over. I don't know God's plan for me or why He keeps me on earth, and that is OK. He has given me so many chances and gifts.

I am disabled both physically and mentally. PTSD is so much worse than 20 different operations. So, God gave me something to help me cope and survive.

First it was Wags, a corky-golden retriever mix, sweetest dog in the whole world. A rescue. Wags was so good. She lived to be 16 years old, giving all that unconditional love only a dog can. I was a complete slobbering idiot the day I had to put her down. I will never ever let any animal suffer. You see, I saw enough suffering for any human being to last 100 lifetimes. Wags was the greatest dog in the whole world.

There was only one way to fill the void after Wags. Sandy (my wife) and I took another trip to our local animal shelter and found Jazzy. Jazzy was already two years old and very active. She is a walker coon hound and half tall beagle mix. Our second dog. She too is so sweet. She'll lick you to death. You always know she's around because she has a loud bark and wants her treats. Let's see now—I think she is on her 1,596,000th bag of treats.

Jazzy now is going on 17 years old. The vet calls her Wonder Dog. All those years. Please tell me; where did they all go? Jazzy is super slow now, and her time grows short. You know what? So does mine. That is Ok too, for although I am not a churchgoer, I have a very strong faith. I have to. There is no reason whatsoever for me to be alive other than the will of God.

So, I will become despondent and a blubbering idiot again when I have to take Jazzy in to the vet and say goodbye. What besides a dog gives you unconditional love? She's there to soothe you, love you, give you sloppy kisses no matter what. What an incredible blessing for a guy with PTSD and in physical pain much of the time.

All Wags and Jazzy ever did was love me, ease my pain. I just got done walking Jazzy in the park. There will not be many more. Soon, very soon, it will be her last walk, and you know what? I wish I could go with her, for all dogs go to heaven.

## A Simple Stone

By Tracy E. Etheridge  
—Colorado Springs, CO

In a grove of oaks it stands alone,  
An old faded tombstone.  
A forgotten soldier from a forgotten war  
Laid to rest years before.  
A simple stone that says a soldier lies here  
Tells his name, an occupation and year.

It doesn't tell if he died of wounds he received;  
It doesn't tell how his family grieved.  
No mention of a wife he left brokenhearted  
Or of their broken dreams that never started.  
Simply a soldier that time forgot,  
Just a simple stone that says a lot.

## My Parole

By Karen Green  
—Las Vegas, NV

In my mind I hold a key  
which I know can set me free.

I've been imprisoned for many years,  
holding inside all the pain and fears.

I could be paroled from this guilt any time.  
After all, I never committed any crime.

The suicide and guilt feelings can go away;  
I can allow myself to feel any day.

The time of my parole is up to me;  
only I can decide when it will be.

I've served my sentence for all too long,  
especially since I did no wrong.

So why do I wait? I do not know  
if I free myself, I won't feel so low.

How much longer; when will it end?  
If I free myself I could be my own friend.

When I free myself from this guilt and strife,  
then I'll begin to see a new meaning to life.

## This Is Not Goodbye

By Diane Wasden

VA Medical Center—Augusta, GA

God gave me the sight with which to find  
the most wonderful man there could ever be.  
He's good; he's kind and very thoughtful, too.  
He's my best friend and husband;  
I never thought I'd meet such a man.  
I sometimes wondered if he was an angel  
sent down from God to guide and watch over me.  
We shared a very special kind of love.  
I could never put this kind of love in someone else's hands.  
For every someone, there is someone else they need,  
a whole other soul who's very special, indeed.  
You will know when you find it  
because your heart is like a dinner bell and it will ring.  
Why him, not me, Lord?  
How could this be; he was taken from me.  
I was willing to lay down my life for our country  
by joining the military. So why not me, Lord?  
He was my whole world and more.  
If for only one breath of air, I'd give him all of mine.  
I will dry my eyes; I will not cry.  
When I looked up, I saw a crack in the sky.  
We gather here with heavy hearts,  
our minds filled with wonderful memories of Charles.  
There's a picture of you, my love,  
etched in the back of my mind.  
It will forever keep your memories alive!  
“ Don't push me so hard, Lord.  
A little nudge would do, Lord.”  
Charles, you've earned a one-way ticket to Heaven.  
The angels wept and mingled their tears with mine.  
To feel the hurt is such painful sorrow,  
knowing that this feeling will be there tomorrow.  
Each and every day, I will miss you more and more.  
God whispered your name and the angel came  
and took you away through the crack in the sky.  
Oh, how I hated to see you go.  
But I sincerely believe that this is not goodbye.  
You live on in our hearts.  
Charles is gone but he is now at peace.  
I know you are looking down on me,  
so I'll try very hard to be the best that I can,  
and how you'd want me to be!  
XOXOXOXOXOXOXO

## Average People

By Tanya R. Whitney

VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

Abject loneliness takes over  
as a formidable horde of people  
gather around in societies of  
arrogant and pompous cliques.

A hand flip brushes you away  
like crumbs falling to the floor,  
left for someone else to clean  
or sweep away under a rug.

Hunched and hiding in plain sight,  
silently pleading for acknowledgment  
of any small grain of worth given  
to recognize your value in this world.

Fashionably dressed Barbie dolls  
with their designer clothes and shoes  
rebuff the wallflower amidst their  
beautiful bouquets of lovely people.

Bubbly, blonde and brainless baubles,  
they rely on their looks to get ahead and  
utilize sarcastic praises to gain favor,  
their plastic bodies enhanced to hide flaws.

Those less endowed with natural beauty  
are set aside, hidden in the bowels so as  
not to infect others with drab mediocrity  
and ordinary existence as though diseased.

In a world of mainly average people,  
reality continues to be a daily struggle  
of competing with the phoniness and  
feelings of being rejected and invisible.

## The Pentagon

By Scott Sjostrand

—Hallock, MN

The Pentagon?  
The “Penta” is still here  
Even after 9/11's fear.  
A five-sided beauty,  
Representing our nation's call to duty.

# Wheels Up, 1973

*By Zachary Space  
—Columbia, OH*

We were super excited to rotate back into the real world. We called overseas home for the last four years. All the fear and pain combined with the hell we lived through would soon be behind us. It was only one last, long plane ride home.

We called that big plane "Freedom Bird." My stomach iced with anticipation of the unknown. Personnel were maneuvering, trying to get a seat, any seat, as long as it was leaving today.

Someone shouted orders: "Stow any unsecure bags."

As we settled down, it got scary quiet. Maybe it was prayer time. It certainly was for me. Please just get me home.

I heard the massive engines rev up. The plane jolted once, then again. My heart pounded. We were moving. It was happening, I was going home. O God! I was going home! Our liftoff was abrupt. We still needed to clear possible ground fire from snipers. With engines screaming we climbed high above the war below. The landing gear growled, folding into the belly of the plane. I heard the ding of the overhead seatbelt light go off. We were wheels up. It would be an uneventful trip except for the occasional air pocket turbulence.

From my seat I watched the day fade away into a darkness filled with stars, a sight left unappreciated until now. Several hours later the darkness began to slip off the floor and pulled out through the window, giving way to a pale blue sky.

We slept a lot; we just ran out of talk. Anyway, we were dreaming of home. I could almost see it. Yup...almost.

I didn't know how long we'd been flying. Although the view was wonderful, you can only look at clouds for so long. I would have been happy to watch a spider spin a web.

I was falling asleep again when the whole plane erupted in cheers. Some of the guys were openly crying. Others, surprisingly, started singing "Home on the Range." We were so full of joy to see the coastline of our beloved homeland America. We were thankful, our hearts full of hope. Home was in sight. Seeing our families was all we could think about. That, and hamburgers. I was hungry for a good hamburger. I could almost remember how it smelled.

As we heard the landing wheels grind down and lock, everyone cheered again. The plane rumbled down the runway. The engines hit reverse thrust. We came to a stop, there it was, the terminal of Sea-Tac. As we prepared to off load, it was quite a nervous kind of quiet. The plane was hushed. The seatbelt light went out. No one spoke.

"Single file!" someone yelled from the front. The door opened and we cheered again. "We are down," yelled another. As we exited the plane, something felt wrong. There was no one to welcome us. We walked into the terminal. Someone was lining us up to search our luggage. I shrugged it off, thinking they must have found contraband in the past. We were searched by hand then passed to the line to exit the terminal.

We were ordered, "Get straight on the bus waiting outside." What we were not told was we would have to walk through a gauntlet of insults and shouts of hate as people spat at us. I was pelted with cups of water; at least I hope it was water. I had no idea we were hated so much. What happened to the America I left? My God! Did we land in the wrong country?

Our joy was gone, I was devastated to see the America I loved so much, the land I'd just spent four years of my life defending, now hated me. It crushed my soul. I cried inside so they couldn't see how they affected me.

We brought home duffels full of emotional and physical baggage. Our tours left us scarred and broken. Now this thing we would endure.

"No Johnny-come-marching-home, hurrah!" for me or anyone else. No, not now. Now we were vilified as horrible monsters, the killers of innocents. We were outcasts in our own homeland. We sat on the bus, stunned, staring into space, I wished I could go back.

A voice from the back of the bus yelled, "Let's get off and kick some ass." A young lieutenant in the front stood up. "Stay in your seats. You are the real Americans. You served with honor. Don't let them see they got to you. No matter what they say, we did our job, even for them. Look strong, look proud." Still, the pain was real, How could we move on now?

It took a week to separate. It was still too much to deal with. I knew I couldn't go home now. I went to stay with one of my guys. I drank and slept for three weeks before I could get myself up enough to go home and see what might be there for me. The family was waiting for me, but I just didn't know. I did not want to face any more of this. I couldn't face them.

I don't know about the others, but the next two years found me living with my folks, helping out on the farm, keeping to myself. Eventually I went out, found a job, met a girl and restarted my life. The day of my homecoming remains a ghostly specter in my life forever. To have pure joy ripped from my heart and replaced with despair, embarrassment and isolation is a memory that doesn't die easily.

Even now after so many years have passed, I still dream of the sheer joy I felt as we went "wheels up."

# Christmas '87 in the DMZ

By Joseph Harman  
—Fairhope, AL

As you get older at least two things happen – you forget a lot, and some things come back to haunt you as clear as the day they happened. Sometimes the haunts are blended with some good, which should not be forgotten.

During the summer of 1987, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was coming unglued.

The ROK was not a democracy like it is today. Since World War II the ROK had been governed by a series of dictators who were supported by the United States and its allies. All these leaders had to do was be tough on communism. “Tough” took the form of oppressing the ROK’s citizens to stamp out any form of communist insurrection. To make matters worse, the enemy, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), had operatives all over the ROK planting their seeds. The ROK had due cause to be extreme at times. From June to October 1987, large crowds were rioting and protesting across the country at any given time. The people wanted democracy, and the government wanted security. The government feared democracy would take the form of communism, like the misleading “D” in the abbreviation DPRK. To be clear, the DPRK has nothing to do with “democracy.” They were, and still are, hardcore communists, period.

I arrived in Seoul on Sept, 25, 1987. Seoul, the capital of the ROK, was at the epicenter of the riots. The U.S. Army’s reception base, Yongsan, was at the center of Seoul. Because of our support of the ROK



government, all Americans were considered allies of the current regime. We were dead center in the middle of all the chaos. There is no term to use for this environment other than to call it a war zone. When citizens, police and soldiers are shooting, beating, bombing and killing each other for five months straight, what else do you call it? The 2017 Korean film: “1987: When the Day Comes” reflects the magnitude of those times.

Meanwhile, to the north, on the DMZ (ironically called the demilitarized zone) we were experiencing multiple infiltration attempts. Firefights were frequent. We had casualties. Things were tense. The DPRK was doing its best to destabilize the ROK from all avenues. They worked the DMZ while the rioters disrupted everything else throughout the ROK.

After leaving Seoul, I arrived in Area 1 just south of the DMZ in early October 1987. By the end of October, I was at Camp Howze, the closest tank base to the DMZ. I was on the most heavily fortified border in the world. There was not a day during that time I rested easy.

After a month at Camp Howze, my company returned to Camp Casey. Although still in Area 1, Camp Casey was off the DMZ around 15 kilometers. I felt a little safer being located between the two hot spots, Seoul and the DMZ. Life was getting better.

On Dec. 23, 1987, my tank battalion deployed to the north. We all wondered and complained about the timing of this exercise. We occupied a gunnery range

just south of the DMZ called “Nightmare Range.” We fired our guns from dusk on Christmas Eve until dawn on Christmas Day. Then we started all over again on the morning of Christmas Day and fired until dusk. Politically, it was a transition period for the ROK government, a time of weakness. They were preparing to install their first democratically elected president at the beginning of the new year. The democracy movement protests and riots had paid off.

Meanwhile, we wanted to put the fear of God into the North Koreans and to remove all doubt. What better way to send this message than to have a tank battalion unload thousands of rounds toward the DMZ for two days and nights? We never slept. We didn’t eat. It was freezing. Normally this was time off for our forces, even during wartime, if possible. But keep in mind the North Koreans liked to attack during or right after holidays (Chosin, for example). Once again, the North Koreans did not come. We did our job. South Korea was shielded as they transitioned to the world’s newest democracy.

Once again, last night, I had a dream about this. It all came back as it does at times. I got up and cooked a hot meal for my wife as a thank you. You see, the most important event that happened during that time was about to happen. On Dec. 25, 1987, at the end of the day, after all the rounds were fired, I had a Christmas meal on the front slope of my tank at Nightmare Range. It consisted of homemade cookies from a sweet, beautiful young lady named Becky from Mississippi, whom I had met earlier that year. She sent them to me for Christmas. Somehow, although hot chow didn't make it to us, which was the norm, the mail did. I opened her box of cookies

and set them on the front slope of my tank for me and my men. Most of them got nothing from home. I was the fortunate one. I placed Becky's cookies by a small Christmas tree mailed to me by my mother. Although it was small, it was a fine tree. It had a couple of ornaments, tinsel and a base that my mother had made. I still remember how it all looked and how I felt sitting there under a 105-millimeter tank cannon that was still hot. My commander came by and joined me and my men. He loved Becky's cookies. It wasn't the first time. He would thank her later in person. If I had a picture, it would speak volumes, but all I have is words.

My men and I had our brief Christmas dinner alongside a Christmas tree on Nightmare Range. We were grateful, as is a theme of the holiday. Once again, the North Koreans were kept at bay. There was peace through strength, as President Reagan would say. The new year would bring another democracy into our world with only a few shots being fired. And the world would go on while silent sentinels protected them all on the edge of freedom's frontier.

Merry Christmas, and may God bless you all.

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## The Chicago Marathon

*By Gene Allen Groner  
—Independence, MO*



We gathered at the Daley Plaza Center in downtown Chicago. The time was 7:15 a.m. and the sky was clear that chilly October morning. There were runners along with dignitaries and the Chicago Municipal Band. This was a big event—the fourth largest marathon in the world and one of the six World Marathon majors.

Today, the race has as many as 50,000 runners, but when I ran the Chicago Marathon in 1989 there were fewer than 6,000 finishers. After a few speeches, the band started playing. As the starting gunshot drew nearer, the runners lined up about 20 abreast and prepared for the start. Just before the starting gun went off, hundreds of helium-filled colorful balloons were released into the blue sky above. What a sight it was!

The opening shot was fired, and the race had begun. The runners were lined up according to our qualifying times, and I was a little over halfway back in the pack. This was by far the most interesting and exciting race I had ever run of all the 26.2-mile marathons I successfully completed.

What was most interesting to me was running through all the ethnic neighborhoods of Chicago—Greek, Little Italy, Chinatown, Mexican, Polish—and ending up in the German neighborhood of

Lincoln Park. Each neighborhood had its unique sights, sounds and aromas. Some race aficionados cooked their local cuisine, while the children stood along the race route to swipe our hands as we ran by. Also, we ran past world-famous Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs baseball team. It was all very fascinating.

The finish line featured lots of excitement as each runner was greeted by family and friends. My eldest daughter hugged me and gave me a big kiss after the race. Then we sat down and enjoyed the refreshments distributed by the race volunteers. Afterward, my daughter and I walked toward downtown, where we were staying. On the way we stopped in at the Hard Rock Cafe for a light lunch before heading on to the apartment provided by my company.

This was a marathon trip I will always remember – a truly unforgettable experience in Chicago, Illinois.

## If Only

*By Rhonda Chavez*  
—San Antonio, TX

My life has been like a puzzle,  
Something to be solved.  
I no longer try to force pieces to fit  
And just let things naturally evolve.  
I've always felt something was missing  
But could never figure out what.  
I realized it was "ME" that was missing;  
I knew it in my gut.  
For the first time ever, I live alone;  
I love the peace and solitude.  
I'm not walking on eggshells  
And dealing with bad attitudes.  
Even though I live alone,  
I'm really not that lonely.  
I'm learning to accept myself  
And wonder to myself, "If only."  
If only I made myself a priority,  
If only I used my voice,  
If only I didn't beat myself up,  
If only I felt like I had a choice.  
Maybe I would have experienced life more,  
Maybe the years wouldn't have flown so fast,  
Maybe if I hadn't constantly doubted myself,  
Maybe my life would have been a blast.  
Looking ahead is what is important now.  
No time to waste looking back,  
No time for would haves/could haves/regrets.  
Time to live, appreciate what you have, not what you lack.

## My PTSD and Me

*By John Tidwell*  
—Cincinnati, OH

My life as a veteran is not okay, indeed.  
Too many failures in life with my PTSD.  
I've tried my best, not knowing what to do.  
PTSD needs to feel; it does not have a clue.  
The hypertension, metabolic syndrome, kidney disease,  
atrial fibrillation and depressions bring me to my knees.  
I give it all to my PTSD; I'm tired of living with it all.  
Oh, that don't help; my PTSD is just me before I fall.

## Who Said It Was Simple

*By John L. Swainston*  
VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

Who said it was simple?  
Run the Tropic Lighting mile  
that was three miles long.  
Walk thirty miles in eight hours  
with 50 pounds of gear.  
Crawl under barbed wire on your belly.  
Stand in a room full of tear gas.  
Take cover on the side of a hill  
full of bugs and baby tarantulas.  
Qualify as expert with an M-14  
and a .45 pistol.  
Who said it was simple?  
Not Me.

## Anything vs. Everything

*By Norman L. Jones*  
—Columbus, OH

Take love, receive anything;  
give love, get everything.  
Take hate, know sorrow;  
give hate for no tomorrow.  
True dependence gives everything;  
co-dependence takes everything.  
Companionship makes the heart sing  
from anything vs. everything.

Blessings are from anything;  
curses take everything.  
Temperaments are from anything;  
patience takes everything.  
Passion gives anything;  
compassion takes everything.  
Unity is for anything  
from anything vs. everything.

Romance is from anything;  
security takes everything.  
Intimacy is from anything;  
respect takes everything.  
Trust is for anything;  
loyalty is for everything  
from anything vs. everything.

# Try Being One of Us

By Janice Walker  
—Macon, GA

As I look back over certain times in my life, I can recall much suffering and pain. I have experienced so much; no one would ever believe it. It came before and after the military. About this time many years ago I was in the Eisenhower Army Medical Center in Georgia.

I never went overseas to be directly in combat. For years within me a war was going on and still is—schizophrenia, PTSD, physical problems and illness.

It takes courage just to join. When they would swear us in there was a phrase that states I am willing to die for my country. I became disabled while on active duty. Much of my suffering is 100 percent service connected. All my past and present challenges move my mind to thinking it is a big deal to be classified as a veteran, combat or not. It takes a lot just to join.

It is amazing all the work the military does. We all want peace, yet I am thankful for those in harm's way, fighting and standing to protect us and hoping to preserve our peace and freedom in our country and others as well. I love my country. I appreciate work by the government, military and lawmakers. Those who work for our military. Those who work for our freedom, rights and divine justice. It's all so amazing what the armed forces have done in the world and are doing.

I am so thankful to be as a disabled veteran having benefits and income. I am also aware how my life has changed. It is not the same since the military and becoming disabled. I gave it my best shot and came out with an honorable discharge service connected.

My thoughts go out to my military and veterans for all they sacrificed, endured and suffered. Some gave their lives or limbs in the line of duty. It is totally different once you serve. At least it was for me. How precious is the land of peace without war, but sometimes duty calls us. People have to leave the comfort of homes, jobs and loved ones to serve. I am thankful for America for all its rights and freedom that I have. I thank God for my survival and all the military veterans who served. Some became disabled, but my scars are not visible.

I used to not think much about being a veteran. Now I realize it is a great privilege and honor. Serving stateside and overseas is not a cakewalk. It makes its mark that lasts a lifetime. Not that I am bragging; I am thankful for being a woman and for the VA privileges that I and others have, all because others before and after me have served. My heart goes out to those in dangerous war zones, those who are engaged in combat, standing up for our rights. I want to give honor to those who have served and are serving still. It can be a dangerous job. Try being one of us.

# When Is Enough—Enough?

By Alex Wulff  
—Connenaut, OH

*Veterans' Voices.* Since 1952? Whew! Who knew?  
That's 30 years before I screamed for the first time,  
And 56 years before I wished I could hit rewind.  
Now fast-forward 16 years and I'm still alive.  
A couple of suicide attempts just didn't take.  
I guess ya can't kill someone with a life sentence.

Without repentance,  
Somebody tried to take what was mine.  
And I let him have it.  
Not literally...but figuratively.  
OOPS! Dammit!

Ya see, in the Corps, they train ya how to kill.  
You can do it for them, and you know the drill.  
But when you're done,  
And you're home and on your own—  
You defend what's yours and you're all alone,  
Trying to decide what's right and wrong  
As you watch your life become a country song.

Now my ears are ringing constantly.  
I fight and kick and walk in my sleep.  
I want to cry, but I can't.  
I want to scream, but who would listen?  
This poem is the voice of a veteran in prison.  
I think I'm better than I used to be.  
I think I'm starting to get used to me.  
But I kinda feel like I got used, for free.  
Can anybody find a use for me?  
Can you help me find a key for these cuffs?  
I'll say I'm sorry! I'm begging! Please!  
When is enough—enough? Geeze!

# Glory

By Frances Ann Wiedenhoeft  
—Madison WI

Is there any oxygen in air this cold? What will they do if our feet freeze to the ground? These and other random thoughts flitted through my brain as I stood in formation and waited for what would come next. I pictured the whole Combat Support Hospital (CSH) of 350 soldiers fused into the frozen arctic landscape of Fort McCoy, Wis., until spring.

“Hey Franny.” Maj. Lyle Wernimont, a friend from my Desert Storm days, interrupted my contemplation of our frigid state.

He slid into the back of formation so quietly that the soldier to the right or to the left was never quite sure when he appeared or how long he had been there. It was a good thing his last name didn't begin with an A. Any place at the front of the formation wouldn't have fit with his unobtrusive nature. The only thing he ever wanted to be noticed for was hard work.

“I hear we're going to Afghanistan.” His voice was so cheerful you would have thought he was saying, “Let's go down to the Officer's Club for a beer.”

We weren't at attention, so I looked at Lyle's face for clues on whether this information was rumor or fact. He wore his characteristic smile. One side of his mouth turned up in a cheerful grin. The other side tapered to a slight droop. He looked like a man who, despite some enthusiasm, wasn't quite ready to commit. His eyes were unreadable.

Lyle was tall, thin and walked with a slightly stooped posture from years spent leaning over an operating table giving

anesthesia. His form, walking down the sidewalks of Fort McCoy in his woodland green camouflage uniform, caused my grandson to call him “Lyle the crocodile”. Lyle loved the name, and he loved children. When my grandson came to hang out with us at the fort, Lyle played basketball with him or took him to a training area. They practiced buddy aid, stretcher carries and the obstacle course. My grandson basked in the attention from being treated like one of the guys.

The Afghanistan deployment was real. Lyle and I idled along at the back of the pack with the rest of the Ws, enduring the usual rounds of briefings, pre-deployment physicals and vaccinations. That was where my war started. For a small number of troops, the combination of vaccinations, including those for smallpox and anthrax, was deadly. I was more fortunate, but I developed a constant suffocating pressure in my chest, like the throbbing of a hand forced to stay in a too-tight glove. Medications the sick call nurse practitioner gave me helped a little, but I was having trouble keeping up.

The only person who knew I was sick was Lyle. I loved to run and normally kept pace with the head of the pack. When Lyle saw me falling back on every morning run, he said, “What's up Franny? Trying to make sure the rest of us slackers don't look so bad?”

His tone was more concerned than joking, so I told him what was going on. He didn't say much, but I could tell he was watching from a respectful distance, just far enough to acknowledge my need to be a strong asset to my team, but close enough for me to know he had my back.

We left for Afghanistan in the middle of some vaguely remembered night about a week later. We had a blur of a stopover in Germany for refueling, and then we were in Afghanistan. There was no intermediate step in Kuwait for additional training like troops got who were headed to Iraq. We were just there, walking out of the belly of a plane into a blinding sun and heat so forceful it seemed to compress your body.

Within hours we had taken over operation of the hospital from the outgoing CSH and were receiving patients. By the third day, life back in our civilian hospitals was only a hazy dream.

Early one morning, while the sun was only a hint of orange over the Hindu Kush mountains, I went to the operating room to take over for Lyle, who had been on night call. He was stooped over a toddler who was swaddled in blankets on the operating room table.

I pulled my fleece tight around me and zipped it up to my chin. The operating room module for this kind of Army tent hospital was basically just a large tin can with doors bolted onto each side. We baked through Afghanistan's scorching days and shivered through the bitter nights.

“I couldn't wake him up Franny, and now everything's going to shit.”

The hint of panic in Lyle's voice didn't alarm me as much as the fact that Lyle swore, something I never heard him do.

“I had to give him a little blood, but no blood warmer and now...I didn't want to wake you up...”

Even though Lyle anesthetized hundreds of kids a month at home at his small rural hospital, he was convinced he couldn't do pediatric combat trauma.

"Hey, have someone come and get me anytime," I said. "You know, sometimes it takes two."

I pulled a fleece cap out of my pocket and popped it on the little boy.

"Plump, well-nourished child I see," I said sarcastically as I wound the blanket back around his head.

Lyle made a noise that was halfway between a snort and a groan. The boy was malnourished, almost emaciated, like most of the children we saw during the beginning of 2003. No body fat meant no insulation. Under anesthesia they got cold fast.

"A cold child is a dead child." I said, "Just like at home but without the blanket warmers and blood warmers."

I peeked under the lower half of the blanket to see what we were dealing with.

"Caught in the crossfire?"

The boy's stomach and leg bandages were beginning to show a faint pink tinge. Blood still oozed from the wounds.

Lyle nodded. "Human shields."

We occasionally heard from the medics who brought civilians in that women and children were being used as human shields. Even if this wasn't the case, small children were often victims. They hadn't yet learned to get out of the way in a firefight.

"I'll be right back," I said as I walked out the door leading to the operating room control station tent.

We might not have had warming blankets, but we did have hot water. I pumped out a

large metal bowl of almost scalding water from our limited supply. I carried it back to the room, wound a long portion of the IV into a spiral and immersed it in the water.

"Poor man's blood warmer." I said.

For the first week he called me for advice on every patient, then only for children. Within two weeks we shared successes and challenges equally, pooling our collective knowledge and experience with the other anesthetists. It was all a matter of exposure.

Lyle had so many strengths. He was quick to smile; he had a heart of gold and a "give you the shirt off my back" attitude. No matter what my complaint was, he'd say "well look at it this way" and find a way to approach the situation that always left the glass half full.

He only had one weakness that I ever noticed. He hated talking about anything that had to do with feelings. He could tell stories for hours, talk about our deployments to Germany for Desert Storm, to Afghanistan or about world affairs, but any whiff of emotion and he'd get quiet and eventually slip off.

One day I noticed Lyle at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) tent sitting at one of the computers which were generously donated by groups back home. His eyebrows came together, and his face sagged.

"Trouble at home Lyle?" I asked, "Everything ok?"

"Oh," he said, "My wife wants me to write to her, and I don't know what to say."

I searched my mind to think of anything that would be helpful. It was true; we couldn't really write about our days filled with shredded limbs and burned bodies. "

"Just tell her you love her, Lyle, and you can't wait to see her again." It seemed like a sure bet.

"Nuts." Lyle said in a cheerful tone, "Satellite's out of range, it'll have to wait."

I looked at the frozen screen and laughed.

"Lucky for you, Lyle." I said and let it go at that.

Lyle changed the subject. "Let's go over to the veranda and wait for a medivac."

"Did you hear of anything coming in?" I hadn't.

"Isn't there always something coming in?" He smiled and nodded in the direction of our makeshift veranda which was located down by the flight line. It was crafted by our orthopedic surgeons out of packing crates and camouflage netting.

Neither of us said anything for a few minutes. Then faintly, from the other side of the long flat plain, which was home to Bagram Air Base, we heard the heavy mechanical purr, metal on air, of a medivac helicopter.

I stood up, but Lyle put up his hand, gesturing for me to hold off for a minute. In seconds the back door of the hospital opened, and Sergeant Bloom stepped out.

"Major Wernimont, Major Wiedenhoef, we need you," he called out in all directions across the hospital compound.

After several more heartbeats Lyle stood up and headed toward the helipad. I headed the opposite way back up across the rocky path to the hospital.

"There's a mission, you're up!" the commander yelled, rushing past as I walked into the operating room control station, "Hurry up, get your gear."

(Continued on Page 56)

(Continued from Page 55)

I hesitated for the briefest moment, digging deep to push past the wearying pain in my chest. My heart hadn't quite recovered from the reaction to the vaccinations.

"Get going! You're up." The commander gave me a hard look to see if I was trying to evade my duties.

"Yes sir." I turned to collect my gear. As the only woman, I tried never to show pain or fear. The combined weight of the web gear, weapon and ammunition, body armor, Kevlar helmet, 30-to-50-pound anesthesia field pack and extra water sometimes came close to outweighing me. I felt like an ant.

The "missions," going to the edge of a firefight to treat the wounded while under enemy fire, were a dreaded but necessary part of anesthesia's role in Afghanistan. We all shared the job equally. Like Russian roulette, we each took our turn at danger.

Before I got as far as the anesthesia storage locker, Lyle came out of nowhere with the field pack in the same way he always managed to slip into formation right at the perfect time.

"I'm up sir, it was my turn."

I watched Lyle jog out the door after the medivac crew, shouting over his shoulder to me, "They need you more back here." He was gone before I could contradict him.

In that selfless act, I knew that Lyle was one of those people who would take a bullet for me or dive on a grenade to save his team. He was the kind of person I always wondered if and doubted that I could be.

I tried to tell Lyle how grateful I felt to him for braving bullets and RPGs to give me a break for my heart to heal.

Lyle laughed it off and said, "You know Franny, I never really thought about it." I never mentioned it again, but instead I held my gratitude in my heart. Lyle had his own quiet fearlessness, his own brand of glory.

*In Memory of LTC Lyle Wernimont 1950-2011*

# Support for Veterans in Crisis

*By James Janssen  
VA Medical Center—Wichita, KS*



We come from all walks of life. Collectively, we live or exist in a home, a box or on the street in anywhere USA. Our individual needs are varied, be they physical, financial, emotional, mental or spiritual. We come from all walks of life, but we do share one thing in common. We are veterans. We are united in a huge family of brothers and sisters who had the fortitude and guts to serve our great nation, to preserve the constitutional democratic way of life and most of all to protect every American from all enemies foreign and domestic. For that we stand tall. Each and every veteran should feel proud.

But, now let's talk about the needs we have that have not been met. There are many homeless veterans. There are many veterans who don't know where their next meal is coming from. There are many veterans who suffer from PTSD. And I'm sure there are many other issues veterans are facing.

Okay. Now I'll stop the rhetoric and get down to brass tacks. At 77 years old I have experienced all of the above and much more but won't bore you with that information. What is important is informing any veteran who will listen that there is help for all issues. It is highly recommended to **call 988, then press 1**. That starts the ball rolling for all issues. They have a mountain of resources to support you. You earned it; you deserve it.

Best of luck and my very best wishes. Oh, and one last thought. Ask the responder to place a consultation with your VA. They will respond with many more forms of assistance and aid. Just please make the call. Nothing happens until you do.

## Trust in Me

*By Michael Pride Young*  
—Fond du Lac, WI

Now the day that I met you,  
a shining star brightened the future for us.  
You came into my world; you gave me your heart  
with your trusting mind and loving nights.  
Now the baby has come along,  
a shining star you gave to me.  
Now I just want you to trust in me.  
Honey, I think of you every day.  
Baby, I know it is going to be okay.  
You're a shining star, Carol, in my life.  
And that's the way I want it to be.  
You came into my world; you gave me your heart  
with your trusting mind  
and loving nights you held me close.  
Now the day that I met you,  
a shining star brightened the future for us.  
Don't be a big baby; don't cry to me.  
A shining star brightened the future for us.  
Now I just want you to trust me.

## The Tribute to Michael Jackson

*By Michael Pride Young*  
—Fond du Lac, WI

*To rock and roll pop singer, Michael Jackson,  
we proudly, with honor, dedicate this poem to you.*  
We speak to millions of your fans and loved ones  
throughout the entire world, made by the honorable God,  
who honor, respect and treasure you and your music.  
We are proud your fans are in all colors and ethnic groups.  
We know you have left the stage, but your music plays on.  
You are the music man who worked magic on the stage,  
who had the unique voice of many super music men,  
who danced and twisted around as fast as a 747 jet,  
who worked super magic on the music stage  
that caught the attention of many millions of eyes.  
We speak to the millions of fans and loved ones you have.  
You have left the music stage; this hurt your fans.  
The good thing is that your music will still play on.  
You were on the Ed Sullivan show as a kid.  
Oh, how Ed Sullivan praised you and your music skills,  
you, the music man who worked magic on his TV show.  
You, super, unique, magic music man—Michael Jackson.

## My Girl

*By Loleta Totton*  
—Mitchell, SD

Many think their girls are better than the rest,  
but I look at my girl and I know she's the best.  
I'm in love with her, so judge me if you may.  
I'm in love with her and I love her every day.  
I love her and I don't care who knows.  
I love her and I hope that feeling grows.  
My heart aches because I know that she's been hurt.  
My heart aches because she's been drug through the dirt.  
Many love her; her beauty is beyond compare.  
But she's my girl and I'll fight for her, I swear.  
Some embrace her with tears rolling down their face.  
Many would fight to the death for her with no debate.  
To me she is pure and I wouldn't change her.  
She is courageous in the face of danger.  
She watches over everyone whether you love her or not.  
She has respect for all that can't be bought.  
I love her; she can make this woman cry.  
I love her; she flies proudly in the sky.  
The stars in the sky remind me of her.  
She is up there, never to be deterred.  
She represents the land of the free,  
and she's the only girl for me.  
You see, my girl is what some call Old Glory.  
But, to me, she is the U.S. flag and we've got a story.

## My Little "Faith"

*By Janice Walker*  
—Macon, GA

Oh, I am thankful for the little "Faith."  
I thank God for her existence every day.  
She's my great-granddaughter, speaking of Faith.  
She is a beautiful child of love.  
She's smart, creative, artistic, just neat.  
A child of God and grace, so sweet.  
Oh, my little Faith brings all the love I've ever seen.  
My little great-granddaughter, Faith,  
Means the world to me.

## Success

By Wayne G. Goodling  
—South Bend, IN

As impertinent, irreverent death awaits,  
I arm and steel myself with delusion's confusion,  
make myself a moving target which vile snipers  
can never, never contact, hit, nor kill.  
I stand then leap beyond the forbidden entrance.

Death pursues; I evade, evade myself.  
Perpetual movement, lost my bearings,  
running stop signs, never knowing where I am.  
I evade, evade myself.

Find one safe place just to the left.  
But don't you go there!  
It may be just a ruse  
to trap me, lull me, get me to choose  
demolition's detonation of the hidden IED.

Panic pushes, squeezes, presses all my time.  
I cannot walk down a peaceful path,  
for moving targets must keep running.

Crowd, group, congregation assembled here  
to hem me in and hold me fast  
as death approaches.

Stupid bastards! Don't you know?  
Untie me, release me, let me go!  
I can always outrun death.

I'll not let you make me the target.  
I evade, evade myself.  
And, in the end, I shall succeed!

## Love Is Forever

By Allyson Hargrave  
—Orem, UT

Love is forever, my child.  
In times you feel alone,  
I am with you, holding your hand.  
When you cry, I am comforting you.

I hear you laugh; I am very happy.  
When you talk to me, I am listening.  
I miss you, my child.  
I will always be with you.

## My Promise to Myself

By Rhonda Chavez  
—San Antonio, TX



In my life, I will honor my family,  
my fellow veterans and myself by  
continuing to volunteer for those  
in need.

I will be loving and supportive to  
friends and family. I will start by  
forgiving myself for all the years  
of self-neglect, self-doubt, self-  
harm, negative self-talk, missed  
opportunities and not realizing my  
worth all based on the words and  
actions of others.

My self-discovery/self-care journey  
is a process that will be my priority.  
I will “live” the rest of my life, not  
just exist. I will travel, I will laugh, I  
will accept myself as I am and will  
find peace within. I will continue  
to surround myself with other  
veterans who lift my spirit, who I feel  
connected with, who make me feel  
accepted, seen and heard.

I will continue to be the best Mom  
and Gramma to my boys, Derek and  
Nathan, along with Desmond, my  
beautiful grandson. Desmond truly is  
my happy place, my pure joy.

I will honor the memory of my  
siblings Timmy, Denise and David,  
who have left this world way too  
soon. I will slow down, take time to  
be present, see and appreciate the  
signs sent to me.

I will not feel lazy when my body  
needs rest. I will learn that food is  
NOT the enemy. I will realize that my  
body is a temple that needs nutrients  
to function. I will appreciate my body  
for what it has done for me. It has  
given me two amazing children; it  
saved my life when I almost died. I  
will set healthy boundaries.

I will look back at myself as a little  
girl and give her all the love, guidance  
and compassion that she deserved but  
never got. I will remind myself that I  
didn't deserve the traumas I suffered  
starting in childhood, throughout my  
military career and until now. I was  
naïve, trusting; I am not to blame. I  
do not have to carry the shame, guilt,  
disgust with me any longer.

I am a warrior. I am worthy. I am  
enough!

# End Child Abuse Now

By Diane Wasden  
—Millen, GA

It's been a very hot Indian summer.  
School is about to start,  
and James will be starting 8th grade in middle school.  
But for now, Mother is always on the war path;  
it doesn't take much to set her off.  
She always spotted whenever one of us told a lie;  
we were always punished—overkill  
for just playing in the dirt.

There really is no description to tell you how I felt;  
she made me feel like this was a living hell.  
Deep down inside of me, I truly was scared  
of what she would do next.  
It was like walking on pins and needles  
each and every day.

Along came the sadness, and it crept into my heart.  
Things got bad and then worse.  
Mom, you made me sad, you made me mad,  
and I even started, sometimes,  
to feel hate toward you.

As sick as this may sound, I still loved my mom.  
Down deep inside of me  
I felt like there was nothing  
she could do to me to make that change.

Lessons not learned—are they repeated again?  
The answer is yes!  
I always struggled impatiently  
as to why someone or anyone  
had not helped me escape this place I call hell.

Can you spare a smile? Mine has run away.  
I know I must have made her upset  
because she slapped me so hard  
she wiped my smile straight off my face.

I know when something bad is about to take place.  
My breath stops in an instant,  
and my heart takes flight.  
The walls close in on me and start to crush me,  
though the terror keeps haunting my mind.

I see a little hope when my teacher  
sees the signs of child abuse

like long-sleeved shirts in the dead of summer.  
And my grades drop on down,  
and I isolate myself from others.

She reported me to the authorities  
that would help me.  
Mystery and wonder with my innocence  
lost at a very early age.

Eyes always filled with fury and rage,  
I said a lot of crazy things as a child.  
Maybe that's why my soul is twisted and wild.  
I guarantee my mother created  
a one-of-a-kind person.

Just sitting here, I feel like I'm losing my mind.  
The world has shown me that this sickness  
called child abuse is everywhere.  
It's spreading like wildfire.

So many victims just want to give up completely.  
We feel like a failure; Mom always wins.  
Can't cross Mother; her punishment's severe.  
I'm yearning for something lost, but I plan to get it back,  
regardless of the cost.

I'm gonna prove I'm tougher and meaner,  
and I know when I've had enough.  
Mom, you are always pulling me down  
with your verbal abuse about how I'm worthless.  
Well, one day, Mom, soon you'll be caught off guard,  
and I'll be there waiting.  
It'll be like a category four hurricane  
inside this hell of a home.

You see, Mom, I learned from you.  
You should have let those people take us away.  
But now I'm bigger, older and wiser.  
Now, tell me how does it feel?  
Shoe's on the other foot.  
I'm not saying that it's right or wrong,  
but maybe it was the only way!

She made me into the person I am today,  
and the cycle keeps repeating itself.

*End child abuse. Watch for the signs.  
If you see it, report it. Be the voice  
for the many child-abuse victims today.*

# Peacekeeper (?)

By Melvin Brinkley  
—Davis, CA

In 1995, I was deployed as a United Nations peacekeeper to the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) at Camp Pleso, which was located in Zagreb, Croatia. The murders, rapes and torture committed by one ethnic group against another in that region received a coldblooded label: “ethnic cleansing.” While talking to survivors in overcrowded refugee camps and orphanages, I slowly realized this tragedy could happen anywhere. All it would take is for one group of people to believe they had the right to do whatever they wanted to another group of people.

As a chaplain for the 60th Medical Group at Travis Air Force Base, I deployed with 150-plus medical professionals. My job was to provide pastoral care for the entire American contingent otherwise known as Joint Task Force—Operation Provide Promise (Forward) and the United Nations peacekeeper troops convalescing at our medical center.

Over 7,000 Muslims were slaughtered by Serbian military and paramilitary forces in Srebrenica, a U.N. “safe haven” in Bosnia, during my deployment. This happened before NATO’s involvement, which started with the Dayton Agreement. We were rocketed by Serbian forces during that deployment. Our bunkers saved us. Unfortunately, the civilians in Zagreb did not fare as well.

I met some incredibly selfless U.N. staff members and peacekeepers during my deployment. Several of them had been shot by snipers. One older gentleman from the United Kingdom was visited by his wife because of his dire prognosis. When I asked him about his future plans, thinking I would hear him talk about a desk job somewhere safe, he said that he would continue to orchestrate food and

medical runs to the pockets of people who were trapped or cut off from those supplies. He had a gunshot wound that had almost taken off his entire arm. He showed me the specially made steel core, high-caliber sniper round that had punctured his baby blue U.N. flak jacket. I thought at the time that this man needed to be presented to the world as a saint or as a hero or both. Maybe he needed to be examined by a shrink, since he wanted to stay in a war zone after he almost got killed.

The title “peacekeeper” became absurd to me during that deployment. There was no peace to keep in that uncivil civil war. When I returned with the 60th Medical Group stateside, three members of our medical team committed suicide within a year. I officiated at two of those memorials. To the best of my knowledge, one picked up a drug habit while deployed and was caught pilfering some painkillers in the hospital at Travis AFB. One had been caught by the Office of Special Investigation in a problematic relationship, and the last one remains a total mystery to me as to why he self-destructed. I relay these tragic facts as a way of showing that some of our team did not adjust to peacetime when they got back. The vast majority did adjust.

As a chaplain I felt that getting our people away from Camp Pleso and doing some good for the people of that region not only helped the Croatians but also helped us. Camp Pleso had a heavy drinking culture. It seemed like all the soldiers from around the world were in some sort of unofficial drinking rivalry. For instance, one night while not being able to put up with this nonsense any longer, I approached the executive officer of the JTF and asked him when his raucous drinking party would end. I had a worship service to officiate



in a few hours. He had picked the middle of our sleeping quarters for his alcohol-sodden shindig. He told me to put some earplugs in my ears and go back to sleep. I did not bother telling him I had tried that already and it did not work. And then a miracle happened as I trudged back to my cot — silence.

Taking people off the base to deliver whatever-we-could-scrounge “care” packages to refugee camps and orphanages allowed some of us, the ones not so inclined to drink ourselves into oblivion, to get to know the brave and resourceful Croatians. We even participated in a few pick-up games of soccer at the refugee camps. We mostly got beaten by the young Croatians at the camps, but that was part of the fun. The smiles those young Croatians had when they bested the “tough” Americans still gives me a smile every time I think back to those days. Visiting the orphanages helped many of us cope with our heartache from missing our own children, me included. Because we presented a handsome target for the bad actors that lurked about in Zagreb, our numbers were limited to 20 when we went beyond the confines of our camp.

After six months, our contingent of the 60th Medical Group returned to Travis AFB —mostly wiser for wear.

# “Dear John”

By Michael McBroom  
—Sheffield Lake, OH

I was a Wrangler Jean-wearing teen  
who yielded a Skoal Wintergreen back-pocket ring.  
I drove a '73 Volkswagen van,  
and I rodeoed all over this land.  
But I was ready to be her rodeo man.

We both made it through 9/11.  
Her heart was set on Kent State and mine on Parris Island.  
I had a class ring for a wedding band  
and a promise to her already planned  
that I would return from war to my homeland.

Bullets and bad dudes often take the lives  
of our young guys.  
But the plain words that are written in one singular note  
can create more destruction and pain  
than any one person can explain.  
“Dear John,” is her name.

But I couldn't get this woman to marry me.  
It took me going off to war for her to see  
her love carried me past distant shores and palm trees.  
My “Dear John's” name was Carrie Lee.

When my “Dear John” caught up to me,  
I was on light duty from a bullet wound just below my knee.  
No training I ever received  
could prepare me for what I would read:  
“If you die in Iraq, it wouldn't bother me.”

My “Dear John” goes on to say,  
“I no longer love you anymore  
and, on this relationship, I'm closing the door.  
While you have been far away,  
my feelings have ventured astray.”  
Her words left me confused and torn.

While a tiny part of me died inside,  
I knew in a matter of no time  
I would be back on the outside of the line.  
I took “Dear John” and folded her up  
and caught the next convoy truck  
linking back up with Easy Company.

And on that dusty, dirty ride, I did decide  
it would take more than a “Dear John”  
from Carrie Lee to hinder me.  
I have more guts, glory and pride  
than any man she would ever find.  
Screw you, “Dear John.”  
I'm a United States Marine.

## Joe

By Paul David Gonzales  
VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

Let me tell you about my brother Joe.  
He was rough and tough and hard to bluff  
And full of all that manly stuff.

He had a boyish laugh and smile  
That won your heart in a minute.

He joined the Navy and did a tour;  
Southeast Asia he endured.

A Navy Seabee in Da Nang,  
Joe and the Seabee gang.  
Joe sprayed the orange in the bush,  
Kept his buddies safe from ambush.

Joe came home and began anew.  
He was honest and wore the blue,  
A cop with a job to do.

He never wavered on the truth,  
But if you pushed him hard,  
You might lose a tooth or two.

Joe left us very young.  
The orange he sprayed,  
Did him in.  
I never saw Joe cry nor did he deny  
His time had come for him to die.

# Plowshares to Swords, Swords to Plowshares

By Erik Von Wiser  
—Conneaut, OH

Interesting conversation today minus the ones that I have with myself throughout the day. I was talking with a good friend of mine, and an interesting thing happened. While in the military, it was a tradition to not wash our coffee cup, ever. It would be all stained, the inside almost black from years of military

grade coffee being drunk from it. I still don't let my wife Robin wash my coffee cup today. The theory is if we run out of coffee, you can at least add hot water and make at least one cup out of the residue in the cup.

So, as I was talking to my good friend (retired Navy) at his house, I was finishing my coffee that I always have in the same cup, and his wife knows not to wash it. My friend said he only washes the outside of his cup. I immediately felt a tug at my spirit and a reminder of Jesus admonishing the Pharisees and saying that they only cleanse the outside of their bowls and cups and leave the inside dirty and calling them hypocrites. They were always dressed in the finest outerwear, and even though they taught the laws and were looked upon as religious leaders, their first appearances were deceiving because



the inside of the cup was still dirty. They preached and enforced the laws set forth by God, yet they did not follow them as they expected all others to do.

So, I reflected on my situation, which is not the greatest physically or mentally due to alcoholism and my time in service. Then I took a long, hard look at myself. My "cup" is just as dirty, and I am doing my best daily to clean it as best I can inside and out. But it is not easy to wash away 53 years, and I do not think I will ever be where I want to be spiritually or physically. But that does not mean I will ever give up.

I pray. I love. I have faith and reflect before I respond, allowing the Lord an opportunity to direct me in what I should do instead of what my instincts tell me to do. Take a breath, reflect, and respond in such a way

that I would want done to me. Honesty and love go a long way, even if it hurts emotionally. That is being honest and showing love and compassion toward the situation and the individual.

I am sorry to say I failed today with an opportunity to have a discussion with a dear friend

of mine and share the word of God with him. My thought is that an individual can read the Bible every day and go to church every Sunday, but it is what you do with the grace given to you each day in life. Just like anything in life, if you learn something and do nothing with it for the betterment of those you encounter or whom you love, it is worthless, and time wasted. Deeds speak louder than words.

So, after 22 years of military service in the infantry, both Marines (six years) and Army (16 years) and retiring in 2010, I find comfort in the fact that my life can be summed up with the phrase "Plowshares to Swords, Swords to Plowshares." I find peace in my writing and reading each day and have finally put my sword to the fire to heal through the harvest to come.

## 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 the VVWP 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

“We love and appreciate all you do for veterans, writes **Jason and Nila Bartley**, Chillicothe, Ohio. “God bless you all. Please accept this money order. Thank you for making our voices heard.”



**C. L. Nemeth**, Albuquerque, N.M., writes, “I agree with you on the use of *Veterans’ Voices* to express political viewpoints... This, however, should not include writings about our government in general. I realize that this could require some careful decisions... I am pleased to contribute and am always happy to see some of my offerings in print.



“Thank you for printing my inspirations on depression,” wrote **John Tidwell**, London, Ohio. He enjoyed the editorial by Dr. Shoba Sreenivasan (summer issue) whom he described as a “very gracious helper to Vietnam vets. She was the queen bee of our little beehive of Vietnam vets at San Louis Obispo prison in California. She drove hours, regularly to hold her group there... She would be interested to know that I am trying to start another veterans’ PTSD group here. Semper Fi!”



**Michelle Nicole Martin**, Summerville, S. C., wrote, “Thank you for publishing my poem ‘Not Today’ in the summer issue of *Veterans’ Voices* magazine and for placing my name on the cover. That meant the world to me.”



“Thank you for including my two poems in the summer issue,” said **Carl “Papa” Palmer**, University Place, Wash. “I just received my copy. YIPEE! And receiving the DAVA Dept. of Florida Award... WOW! I couldn’t have done this without **Dan Yates** entering these on the website submission page for me... Thank you all so much. I love *Veterans’ Voices*. You are awesome.”

**John Boors**, Bedford, Pa., sent a donation and thanked VVWP for “the service your organization brings to my fellow veterans.” John is 93 years old and among his careers, he has served as a nurse, a state trooper and finished his military career as a senior police advisor in Vietnam. He wrote that the poem, “Drop the Gun Cop,” by Michael Pride Young (Fall 2023 *Veterans’ Voices*) did hit a cord with him and he suggested that the author turn to the Bible for “peace of mind.” John says that he takes copies of *Veterans’ Voices* to the county jail for veteran inmates to enjoy.



“You give so much to vets like me,” wrote **Matt Davison**, San Pedro, Calif. “Here is a little something back,” he said as he returned his award check.



“We are grateful for all that you do,” wrote **The Amazing Graces Board of Presbyterian Women**, Prairie Village, Kan. “Enclosed is a check for \$1,179 as a gift of gratitude in honor of First Lieutenant **Lou Eisenbandt**. This amazing Vietnam nurse spoke at Village Presbyterian Church and we took a free will offering for your organization because Lou said your work was important to her. We are glad to do this as she is incredible and riveting and touches many hearts. May God bless you in all that you do.”



“I would like to thank you for publishing one of my poems in the Spring 2024 issue of *Veterans’ Voices*, said **Karen Green**, Las Vegas, Nev. “This magazine is such a healing tool for the people writing and submitting to it but also for the people who read it.”



“I have been writing to this magazine since 1992,” wrote **Kenny Trujillo**, Las Vegas, Nev. “Thanks for printing my art and stories. You are all the best!” Kenny was known as “Blue” in Vietnam, 1971-72.



**Rich Wangard**, Neenah, Wis. writes, “A most heartfelt thank you for publishing my writing on the inside back cover of the summer issue of *Veterans’ Voices*. It is indeed imperative that I write. Ever since Pris Chansky encouraged me back in 2016, I have found some voice to describe the indescribable and reach out to my fellow veterans to try to encourage them to share their stories and fundraise for the best magazine on planet earth! *Veterans’ Voices*! All done on a wing and a prayer by volunteers... You see writing allows me the best therapy there is! And I have been through every treatment program for PTSD. So tell me how do you erase memories? You don’t! You share them through stories, poems and artwork! You make sense out of the senseless! All because this is your outlet for veterans to share, to express, to process and to explore! There are no

words powerful enough to express my deep appreciation for all you folks do. All I can say is keep it up and I will forever support you until my dying breath! That is how important you all are to the veteran community as all of your awards prove!”



**Boyd Burke**, Canon City, Colo., sent *Veterans’ Voices* a punchstitched VVWP wall hanging which he made to “busy myself and enjoy doing in my spare time. The purpose of my embroidery is to work on my problems and think what I can change for the better...It was my pleasure doing it for you.” Boyd is a Vietnam vet, 1970-74, and served aboard the USS Intrepid (CV-11) and the USS Vulcan (AR-5).



## Thank You



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

– VVWP Board of Directors

**Gifts of \$6,000 or more**

*Moral Injury Association, Kansas City, Mo.*

**Gifts of \$3,000**

*Anonymous, Kansas City, Mo.*

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

*P. Thompson, Yorktown Heights, N.Y.*

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

*Womens Army Corps Veterans, Weaver, Ala.  
Women’s Overseas Service League National,  
Springfield, Ill.*

**Gifts of \$500 or more**

*Tammy Baker, Prairie Village, Kan.*

**Gifts of \$300 or more**

*Bruce Roberts, Knoxville, Tenn.*

**Gifts of \$100 or more**

*Lee E. Bisbey, Phoenix, Ariz.*

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*R. D. Nelson, Uniondale, N.Y.*

*Lynn Norton, Leawood, Kan.*

*Daniel Paicopulos, San Diego, Calif.*

*Andrew Siebert,*

*FWA Auxiliary 2233, Detroit, Mich.*

*FWA Auxiliary 2673, Cody, Wyo.*

*FWA Auxiliary 5252, Pelican Rapids, Minn.*

*FWA Auxiliary 5968, Orange Park, Fla.*

*FWA Auxiliary 8586, Perrysville, Ohio*

*FWA Auxiliary, Dept. of Alabama,  
Scottsboro, Ala.*

*Rich Wangard, Neenah, Wis.*

**Gifts in Kind**

*Ben Cunningham, Summerville, S.C.*

*Dazium Design, Kansas City, Mo.*

*Kansas Audio Reader Service,  
Lawrence, Kan.*

*Rob Kirschbaum, 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.....\$25

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

### SUBMIT BY MAIL:

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

### QUESTIONS:

[support@veteransvoices.org](mailto:support@veteransvoices.org) 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: \_\_\_\_\_

# Kansas City Veterans Write Joins Veterans Voices Writing Project

Kansas City Veterans Write has joined Veterans Voices Writing Project to enhance their joint efforts to help veterans find solace and fulfillment in writing.

Both organizations share a goal of encouraging veterans to write prose and poetry as a form of therapy, a way to archive their life experiences or just to experience the pleasure and satisfaction of sharing their work with others and sometimes seeing it published.

Veterans Voices Writing Project (VVWP) started at a Chicago VA facility in 1946 as a program to aid veterans returning from World War II dealing with physical and mental challenges from their wartime service. Those writings led to the creation of *Veterans' Voices* magazine in 1952. This award-winning publication provides a showcase for veterans' poetry and prose (and art) three times a year. In addition to contributors, donors and subscribers, copies of each issue are sent to VA medical facilities across the United States.

For the past 12 years, Kansas City Veterans Write has offered veteran writers participation in a writing group of peers and mentors. Their monthly meetings in Kansas City feature writers reading selections from their works and receiving supportive critiques from professionals and fellow writers. KCVW organizes writing workshops as well as its annual Reader's Theater.

Virginia Brackett, Ph.D, member of the Kansas City Veterans Write Board for 10 years, thinks KCVW has much to gain from a partnership with VVWP.

"It's a perfect blending of shared goals and resources," she says. "Both groups focus on service to veterans. KCVW assists veterans and family members to tell their stories, and VVWP offers to publish veterans' writing. In addition, we'll be combining efforts to support other activities, such as the VA's Creative Arts Festival, and KCVW's annual writing workshop and Reader's Theater."

VVWP Board President Sheryl Liddle says the addition of the writing group to her organization will add another facet of service to veterans who write.

"VVWP is proud to have KCVW join us as we work together to help veterans put their thoughts and hearts on paper," Liddle said, "KCVW has a history of mentoring and critiquing writings of veterans, and the partnership with VVWP will enhance both programs."



## 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 on 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](http://www.veteransvoices.org)

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



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Kansas City, MO 64111-3043

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