

VETERANS' VOICES®

**Writing Enables You To Help
Yourself and Others**

By Jim Tritten

**A Conversation with a
Korean War Veteran**

By Terrance Hammons

**How One New Yorker
Remembers 9/11**

By Will Beck

Bataan Death March

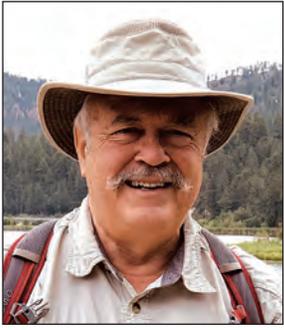
By Kimberly Green

Vol. 73, NO. 1
ISSN 0504-0779

VeteransVoices.org

Writing Enables You To Help Yourself and Others

By Jim Tritten



Veterans, you have a unique opportunity to join a supportive community and embark on a journey of creative writing

at your local VA Medical Center. This VA-sanctioned Recreation Therapy program, held periodically at most VA hospitals, is more than just a writing session. It's a safe space where you can share your stories, engage in 'classroom' exercises, and feel a sense of belonging under the guidance of an experienced volunteer facilitator.

For example, every Thursday, I seize the opportunity to bring in my short stories, essays and portions of longer works. I share my experiences with my fellow vets, allowing them to glimpse the struggles I've faced and the demons dwelling inside my mind. Writing has become a powerful therapeutic outlet for me, a beacon of hope that keeps my mind focused on something other than the disturbances that brought me to the VA. It's a relief, both for me as a writer and for the reader, to escape the grip of trauma through the power of words.

One of the symptoms of PTSD is the same activity as one of the coping skills used to deal with PTSD. Keeping my brain busy is a PTSD symptom when the activity is undertaken to avoid dealing with

the diagnosis or prescribed treatment. Alternatively, keeping my brain busy is also a coping skill if done as part of an overall treatment program and is done constructively.

With the guidance of VA counselors, social workers and medical professionals, I've learned to explore the full spectrum of human emotions. As an alpha male, I am well-versed in anger and humor, but it was through the treatment at the VA I truly understood the depth of other emotions. Writing became my tool for self-expression, a way to convey these emotions in a way the reader can 'feel' themselves what I felt in similar situations. It's a journey of self-discovery and growth that I hope will inspire you to embark on your own.

Creative writing also prepares veterans to seek treatment in VA Exposure Therapy programs. These emphasize re-living traumatic memories, feelings and situations until they learn that trauma-related memories and cues are not necessarily dangerous and need not be avoided.

Another benefit for veterans engaged in creative writing is the opportunity to participate in the annual National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. This prestigious event, held at a different location each year, showcases the artistic talents of veterans from across the country. Each year, the

staff at most VA Rec Centers distributes applications for a creative writing contest that might get the author a ticket to the festival. Survivors of the review process go on to the nationals. I have won seven national-level medals including two golds for first place.

I am also on the board of directors of the Military Writers Society of America (MWSA), an organization with a mission to help veterans, military and their families tell their stories. We have been conducting veteran writing workshops since 2015 in conjunction with our annual conferences and in various locations across the country. As a nonprofit, our all-volunteer team instructs and facilitates groups of writers ranging from first-time writers to published authors in what we now call our Write Your Story workshops. We have reached hundreds of veterans over the years and heard many stories of how the pen to paper helped them unlock thoughts previously buried deep inside.

I hope I have enticed you to take the first step in penning your thoughts and learning skills that can help you help yourself and others. Perhaps you will find yourself being recognized for excellence in creative writing. Maybe we will witness the launch of a new writing career by someone who took their first steps one morning at their local VA Medical Center or by attending an MWSA Write Your Story workshop. I will be there. Will you?

Jim Tritten retired after 44 years with the Defense Department, including duty as a carrier-based naval aviator. He holds advanced degrees from the University of Southern California and formerly served as a faculty member and National Security Affairs department chair at the Naval Postgraduate School. Dr. Tritten's publications have won him 72 writing awards. He has published 13 books, and his work has been translated into Russian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. He lives in Corrales, N.M.

Veterans' Voices®

Spring 2025 Vol. 73, No. 1

Volunteer Staff

Publisher

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

Editor-in-Chief

Margaret Clark

Poetry Editor

Tina Hacker

Prose Editor

Ted Iliff

Art Editor

Tracy Cheng

Treasurer

Pris Chansky

Office Administrator

Amaan Mims

VVWP

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

History

VVWP was established as Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project in 1946 by **Elizabeth Fontaine** with the support of the Chicago North Shore chapter of Theta Sigma Phi 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.

Veterans' Voices Reprints

Reproduction of material published in *Veterans' Voices*, in whole or part, is welcomed. Full credit must be given to the author or artist as well as the magazine. By submitting material for the magazine, authors and artists agree to this policy. Those who reprint material must forward a copy of the reprint to the office administrator at the VVWP address below.

Contact Us

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

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

Donations

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

Magazine Subscriptions

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

Audio Version

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

Magazine Guidelines

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

The editors reserve the right to edit copy for grammar, clarity, accuracy, style and length, as well as cultural and personal sensitivities. The editors will not publish AI-generated writing. By submitting writing for the magazine, authors and artists agree to these conditions.

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



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

Veterans' Voices®

Spring 2025 Vol. 73, No. 1

Writing Enables You To Help Yourself and Others2 <i>By Jim Tritten</i>	Special Prizes for Writers 65
Mail Call63	Submission Guidelines 66
Thank You64	Heal Through Visual Art67

Prose

Who the Hell Is Doc?7 <i>By Richard Bryan Rex</i>	One War, Two Generations (Twice in the Same Family) 30 <i>By H. David Pendleton</i>
Veterans Appreciation Day at the Clay County Fair8 <i>By Loren G. Flaugh</i>	My Talks With Timmy, David and God37 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>
Presidential Visits10 <i>By Mark Fleisher</i>	Why Is American Legion Good for America?38 <i>By Jeffery Shockley</i>
Sticks and Stones11 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>	The Holy Bible42 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>
Lien Xo12 <i>By Bill Perry</i>	Duty Officer44 <i>By Steven Miller</i>
Grandma Ada, Grandpa Henry13 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	A Veteran's Tear47 <i>By Arthur Wiknik</i>
Always a Veteran14 <i>By Jerome Moore</i>	RA1276021848 <i>By Hartley Barnes</i>
A Day of Service: Lasts a Lifetime16 <i>By James E. Steddum</i>	Upside Down in the Foxhole50 <i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>
A Liberator of Dachau18 <i>By Les Goldberg</i>	Spud Dud52 <i>By Wendell C. Smith</i>
A Trip to Big Piney20 <i>By Richard Wangard</i>	Purpose54 <i>By Jerome Moore</i>
House Wrens: Home at Last22 <i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	The Incarcerated Veteran56 <i>By Jeffery Shockley</i>
A Conversation With a Korean War Veteran24 <i>By Terrance Hammons</i>	How One New Yorker Remembers 9/1158 <i>By Will Beck</i>
Gardening for the Soul26 <i>By Jerome Moore</i>	Helping With a Veteran's Cross to Bear60 <i>By Shon Pernice</i>
Photo Album28 <i>By Dale Eikmeier</i>	

Artwork

The Heart Remembers33 <i>By Michelle M. Jackson</i>	Deep Thinker34 <i>By Gema Gabriela Benavides</i>
Beginning and Ending of a Career33 <i>By Lea-Ellen Whitt</i>	The Eyes Have It35 <i>By Ty Andrews</i>
Moonlight33 <i>By Gema Gabriela Benavides</i>	Exit Strategy and War Games35 <i>By Daniel Combs</i>
Alone34 <i>By Alexandra Brown</i>	Trust36 <i>By Ty Andrews</i>
Pax huic domui34 <i>By Richard Mjos</i>	American History Chinese Laundries36 <i>By Lucy Wong</i>

Poetry

To Widows of Their Fallen Soldier 11 <i>By James Janssen</i>	Time to Play My Hand 23 <i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>
That Right Person 11 <i>By Michelle Nicole Martin</i>	One Day at a Time 25 <i>By Hartley Barnes</i>
My Reason 12 <i>By Lawrence W. Langman</i>	One 25 <i>By Mark A. Bigham</i>
I Almost Turned Twenty-Two Today 13 <i>By Derrick Iozzio</i>	Dishonorable 26 <i>By Arlin Buyert</i>
Me 14 <i>By Charles Ray Hood</i>	Crawl 26 <i>By Bruce Valrey</i>
War 14 <i>By Kenneth C. Trujillo</i>	When I Get to Heaven 27 <i>By Nina Herron</i>
Always Your Battle 15 <i>By Stephanie Marie Latham</i>	Easter Told by the Little Ugly Rabbit 29 <i>By Diane Wasden</i>
Roses 15 <i>By Kim Gwinner</i>	Caramel Oblivion 29 <i>By Tanya R. Whitney</i>
The Soldier in Search of Ataraxia 19 <i>By Frank Boback</i>	Loyal to Myself 31 <i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>
Heart of a Soldier 19 <i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>	Square Peg Puzzle 31 <i>By Penny Lee Deere</i>
Lying Real Still 21 <i>By Kimberly Green</i>	The Line Between Death and Life 31 <i>By Norman L. Jones</i>
Not Cool 21 <i>By Daniel Paicopulos</i>	St. Patrick's Day Enjoyed by All the Ages 32 <i>By Diane Wasden</i>
Broken Through 22 <i>By Tracy Sellers</i>	66489 32 <i>By Carl "Papa" Palmer</i>
Permission Granted 22 <i>By Michelle Roxanne Johnson</i>	Sacrifice and Surrender 37 <i>By John Priestley II</i>
Get Gone 23 <i>By Kyle Hanavan</i>	Thaw 37 <i>By Stephen Fournier</i>

Be the One	38	I Just Want To Be With Christine Marie	51
<i>By Karen Green</i>		<i>By Michael Pride Young</i>	
Not in Too Many Words	39	A Rare Moment	51
<i>By Paul David Gonzales</i>		<i>By Paul David Gonzales</i>	
An Outcast	39	If I	51
<i>By Levell Taylor</i>		<i>By William L. Snead</i>	
The Lingering	39	Incoming	51
<i>By Richard Wangard</i>		<i>By Carl "Papa" Palmer</i>	
Bataan Death March	40	My Friend, the Enemy	52
<i>By Kimberly Green</i>		<i>By Levell Taylor</i>	
My Seven Days of Dieting	40	The Oak Tree ^{By}	52
<i>By Melvin Brinkley</i>		<i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	
My Secret Place	41	Diary of Dr. Destruction	53
<i>By Jason Kirk Bartley</i>		<i>By Mike Irwin</i>	
They Say	41	Thankfulness	53
<i>By William L. Snead</i>		<i>By Charles Ray Hood</i>	
Who Will Hear Their Pleas	41	IT'S ALL ON YOU!	53
<i>By Dan Yates</i>		<i>By Michelle Nicole Martin</i>	
Eccentric	41	The Sands of Time	55
<i>By Dwight D. Jenkins</i>		<i>By Lawrence W. Langman</i>	
She Longs	43	Resist Change	55
<i>By Tanya R. Whitney</i>		<i>By Rhonda Chavez</i>	
Quiet Is the Night	43	Bag of Bones	55
<i>By Allyson Hargrave</i>		<i>By Dan Yates</i>	
Prey	43	Every Rose Has Its Thorns	55
<i>By Dylan Bless</i>		<i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>	
Whether Weather: Haiku Sequence	43	Daughter, Sister, Mother	57
<i>By Lynn A. Norton</i>		<i>By Stephanie Marie Latham</i>	
New Book	46	Re-acceptance	57
<i>By Daniel L. Paicopulos</i>		<i>By Norman L. Jones</i>	
Sacrifice	48	Healing	57
<i>By Anthony Franco</i>		<i>By Nina Herron</i>	
I Miss	48	Beachside	61
<i>By Tim Brady</i>		<i>By Thomas Walk</i>	
Lady Giggles	49	The Golden Rule	61
<i>By John Tidwell</i>		<i>By Gene Allen Groner</i>	
Bittersweet Recipe	49	Becoming a Veteran	62
<i>By Scott Sjostrand</i>		<i>By Jerome Moore</i>	
Breathless Beneath the Tide	49	Color of a Rose	62
<i>By Sean M. Dopp</i>		<i>By Allyson Hargrave</i>	
Sunset	49		
<i>By John L. Swainston</i>			
See Me	50		
<i>By Michelle Roxanne Johnson</i>			

Who the Hell Is Doc?

By Richard Bryan Rex

—Albion, IN

I'll solve the mystery right away. About Doc. See, my name is Richard Rex. I was, I am and I will always be Doc. I know this because for many years, everywhere I go, someone shouts, "Hey Doc," and they're looking at me. I must be Doc. Now, while I just told you I am Doc and I assure you it's true, why would I lie this early in the story? Still, Doc is not Richard Rex. Ok, I know it's a little confusing but work with me here. I am Doc because for 30 years of my life, I was a Navy Hospital Corpsman (medic). Now, in other military branches, if I were a Medic, I might have been called Doc by some, but it wouldn't be the same. If you wanna know why just ask any Marine.

I would rather have been a psychiatrist. Then I could have been called Doctor. Sadly I came to recognize that I had too many issues of my own. I also was noticeably lacking in the motivation and dedication which would no doubt be expected to survive four years of college, four years of medical school, a two-year internship and four-year residency. So, I joined the Navy and became Doc. By the time I might have been finishing year one of college, I was already treating patients and performing minor surgeries! I call it the fast-track to practice.

Doc is more than any individual person though; he is a universal personality. He wasn't born Doc. He was born John Smith, He was born Tom James. He was born Richard Rex. In the early years he was just like any other child. He enjoyed the things of childhood. Then after a lot of growth and training he somehow became Doc. When Doc comes home from his many adventures, he gets to be John Smith again. He gets to be Tom James again. He gets to be Richard Rex again, but only for a short time. Soon, he is

called upon to again go where Doc goes and do things Doc does. It is in those times that he again becomes Doc. It is his total change in persona that enables him to endure the experience that is his life. As an 18-year-old kid, Doc was sent off to live and survive in places that would make a buzzard puke. He successfully treats wounds that would cause an experienced physician to throw his arms in the air and just walk away. If he survives and keeps his head straight long enough, then he will be forced to accept the guilt of sending younger less experienced men out to participate in the same carnage that he will never be able to forget. That is the life of Doc.

Today, due to the ravages of time and age, I am retired but Doc is still out there doing what he has been called to do. He has not, cannot and will not retire, ever. He was there, crawling in the mud long before I came along and will still be there, only living to save just one more life long after I have returned to the dust from which I came. Any Marine will tell you that the Marine Corps definition of a Doc is, "Usually a long-haired, bearded, authority hating sailor with certain medical skills who would crawl through the very bowels of hell to bring aid to one wounded Marine."

Doc is also an ornery son-of-a-bitch who enjoys a steamy good time, a stiff drink and an occasional fight to top off a night of fun. Normally that "occasional" is shortly after any steamy good time and a few of those stiff drinks. He also takes great pleasure in telling the stories. Sometimes the stories are just for fun. Other stories can be tragic. Some of the stories are for a good laugh. Other stories, only after a lot of drinks. Some of the stories are real events exactly as

they happened. Other stories are moderate embellishments of an event that probably did happen. Then a few of the stories are pure unadulterated bullshit, but they're still good stories! I caution you here though, Doc writes as he speaks. If he talks like a sailor, well, he is a sailor. Don't think too badly of him though, he's really a pretty OK guy, despite his raw vocabulary. There are the stories of his childhood, before he was Doc and of adult life. First and foremost, they are the stories of the life of Doc.

Sometimes late at night when I sleep, there is a knock at the window of my mind. When I get up and check, it's Doc coming by for a visit. I invite him in, and we sit in the dark and share a drink or several. We laugh a lot about the stories we've told and the things we would never ever tell. We weep some over the very difficult situations that will never be heard by anyone. We sigh for the many years that we were truly one in the same and we grieve that time and reality will never allow us to work together again.

Then I awake and Doc has gone. I know he will be back. He is never far from me. I turn, and there at my side sleeping, is my best friend in this world. She was by my side before me and Doc met. She put up with us both through the years that Doc and I were one. She is still there now that Doc has gone on and I have been left behind, an ordinary mortal after all. She knows how nearly we are the same and to my utter amazement she not only tolerates us but she loves us both.

Sleep well my Lady and wherever you are tonight Doc, be safe and stay in touch.

Veterans Appreciation Day at the Clay County Fair

By Loren G. Flaugh
—Primghar, IA

When the Clay County Fair was initially conceived in 1917 six weeks prior to the Armistice of World War I, nobody could've ever imagined how well known, how well attended and how well honored this celebration of rural Iowa life would quickly become. With a nearly completed race track in the spring of 1918, preparations were already underway for hosting that first Clay County Fair that fall.

That 1918 event was the largest County Fair held in Iowa that year with more than 30,000 people attending. Fair attendance in 1919 swelled to an estimated 48,500 fairgoers. Already in 1920, the area news media dubbed it "Iowa's Greatest County Fair."

Crowd sizes grew yearly and rapidly and in 1928, an estimated 110,105 people from a growing area journeyed to Spencer. After that successful 1928 fair, the fair's slogan was changed to what it is today, "The World's Greatest County Fair."

Nowadays, more than 300,000 fairgoers can typically travel from the surrounding states to take part in the 9-day run of this widely recognized event. It's common for families to pack the car and drive from as far as 100 to 150 miles away in southwest Minnesota, southeast South Dakota, northeast Nebraska and the northwest one-third of Iowa to head to Spencer and enjoy a fun-filled family outing.

Clay County Fair, the Early Years

The Fair Board decided in 1931 that a new grandstand was needed to replace the original one to accommodate the ever-growing crowds. A new all steel and concrete grandstand was built at a cost of

\$35,000 for seating 5,000 people. That new grandstand that's still in use today was one of the more ambitious undertakings ever attempted by any other county fair across the nation. What's more, all the contracts were issued to local building contractors. Beneath the grandstand was a rest area for fairgoers with the south side enclosed in 1934 at a cost of \$4,500.

Entertainers who performed in front of large crowds in the 1930s and 1940s included the Osmond Brothers, a young Pat Boone, Anita Bryant, Paul Revere and the Raiders, Glen Campbell, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette and Jimmy Dean.

In 1975, Bob Hope, Tommy Cash, Tennessee Ernie Ford, the Oak Ridge Boys, Johnny Cash, Charlie Pride, Mickey Gilley, Conway Twitty and Leslie Gore were just a small fraction of the big-name performers that entertained in front of the packed grandstand crowds,

As the turn of the millennium arrived, here came Chubby Checker, Kenny Rogers, my favorite duo the Righteous Brothers, Three Dog Night, Jay and the Americans and Huey Lewis & the News. In recent years, Herman's Hermits, the Oak Ridge Boys and Foreigner journeyed to the Clay County Fair's outdoor stage. Due to Covid 19 in 2020, the Clay County Fair was forced to cancel all activities. But in 2021, Herman's Hermits, Gary Lewis and the Play Boys and the Bellamy Brothers came back.

Veterans Appreciation Day

Monday is typically reserved as a day to honor our veterans and appreciate their personal service to our country and their

sacrifice. Regretably, perhaps, in all too many instances, the ultimate sacrifice was given.

Former Clay County Veterans Affairs Director Joan Waller says Veterans Appreciation Day dates back to 2003 when this special day was conceived and initially inaugurated. Waller spearheads this yearly day to pay tribute to America's veterans. Gate admission costs are suspended for all veterans.

When replying to a question, Waller said that back in the early years, they tried twice to get Sioux City native, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War and United States Air Force veteran George "Bud" Day to be the honored guest speaker. But, it never worked out for him to attend. Day was awarded the Medal of Honor, the Air Force Cross and four Purple Hearts for his heroism and sacrifice.

On August 26, 1967, Major Bud Day was flying an F-100 on his 65th mission over North Vietnam just north of the DMZ. Day's F-100 was hit by 37 mm antiaircraft gunfire and he was forced to eject. Day was captured, but he quickly escaped and for the next 15 days he evaded his captors. Unfortunately, he was recaptured by a Viet Cong patrol on the south side of the DMZ no less. Quickly hustled back into North Vietnam, Major Day was taken to the infamous Hanoi Hilton POW prison where he became a cellmate with future Arizona Senator John McCain.

On March 14, 1973, Major Bud Day was released after enduring five years and seven months of harsh treatment in a North Vietnamese POW prison. Day

lived in Shalimar, Florida, later on in his life. Day passed away on July 27, 2013. Posthumously promoted to Air Force Brigadier General, Day was buried at the Barrancas National Cemetery at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida.

U. S. Senator John McCain said of Day's passing, "He was the bravest man I ever knew."

And his fierce resistance and resolute leadership set the example for us in prison of how to return home with honor."

2022 Veterans Appreciation Day Ceremony

With the Iowa Army National Guard Spencer unit providing the Color Guard for the 2022 Veteran's Parade, this yearly tradition began in front of the Fairgrounds Event Center. Several cars carrying the parade marshals followed behind the Color Guard with the Spencer High School band marching along while playing stirring music. Fairgoers all along the parade route stood in reverent observance as the flags, parade officials and veterans passed by.

Manned by veterans, numerous area American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts either marched past the observant crowds or rode in their restored vintage military vehicles along the parade route. One post had even acquired an old military howitzer to pull behind their camouflaged combat parade vehicle. Once the parade participants arrived back at the Event Center, the parade was disbanded until the time arrives to hold the 2023 parade.

Everyone began to file into the Event Center Ballroom with Kevin Tlam serving as the master of ceremonies. With a seating capacity of 500 people, the venue filled quickly with every seat occupied while some people had to stand along the sides and back of the room.

After the Spencer Army National Guard unit advanced the colors to each side of the stage, Tlam introduced Sioux Central High School senior Elise Rusk to the capacity crowd.

Rusk sang the theme song for each service branch as Veterans from that branch stood and were recognized by the crowd. Tlam then introduced featured guest speaker United States Marine Corps Sargent William Horsley to the capacity crowd.

"I have a very interesting perspective for what it means to be a U. S. Veteran for all of you are truly unique. At one point in your young lives, you stood at attention, raised your right hand, swore an oath and pledged to this great nation, your community and most importantly your people to protect them. Less than seven percent of our population today has earned the title that all of you have. We need to wear that as a badge of honor forged in blood, sweat and tears. That's something that I hope and pray that you wear with the utmost pride," Horsley began.

"Like so many of you, I grew up on a family farm here in Iowa where long hours, sweat equity, core family values and hard work were important. My family instilled in my brother and me a work ethic. We knew that every morning we would get up, clean the barn, wash the stalls, walk the soybean fields in the summer and throw small square bales all summer long.

"I'd like to have you think about the men and women you have served with. I may be biased, but I believe the Midwest has produced some of the best and finest fighting forces that our country has ever seen," said Horsley, to a loud round of applause.

"While growing up, we also learned about the past history of our older family members who entered military service. This can be traced back to the European battlefields during World War I, the Marine Corps battles in World War II, Army operations in frozen Korea, more recently

the hostile air space over Vietnam and my brother's and my service in the Middle East and Iraq."

"Like so many veterans of my generation, the events of Sept. 11, 2001, dictated who we were, the calling we were to answer, how we would train and how we would fight in the future. When I think back to those attacks on Sept. 11. I think of where I was, who I was with, the emotions and raw feelings that emerged. I was fortunate at that time to be with my brother, Sargent Jess Horsely, and the Marines and Sailors of 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Division," Horsley reflected.

"Serving with the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines later on, we were called to duty in Iraq in the summer of 2005 in the Ramadi area. We ran combat operations for seven months and were very successful," said Horsely.

"When I think about sacrifice, I think about the 105 men that were wounded and the 15 fellow Marines who were killed in action and did not make it back during my deployment. I think of those men and women who did not make it home for they are the true heroes.

"On my deployment and throughout my military service there is one quote I think about that has always resounded in my head. Any time, when I needed some motivation or that pick me up, I would recite that quote in my head. It really is quite simple. The one thing necessary for evil to triumph is when good men do nothing," Horsley concluded.

And finally, the Clay County fair set an all-time attendance record during the 2022 event when 325,585 people walked through the admission gates. Almost \$3,000,000 was spent on carnival rides, all kinds of delicious food and the many specialty concession stands located around the fairgrounds.

Presidential Visits

By Mark Fleisher

VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

Tucked away in the southeastern corner of the Buckeye State, Ohio University had not seen such excitement since the 1960 football team won the College Division National Championship with a 10-0 record.

The hill country surrounding Athens and the university sat in the economically disadvantaged region of Appalachia, no better setting for a speech delivered by the President of the United States centering on the recently declared War on Poverty.

Word spread quickly through campus. Lyndon Baines Johnson on the West Portico of Memorial Auditorium at noon on May 7, 1964—two days after my twenty-first birthday by the way. For three or four days prior to the big event men with military style haircuts who looked uncomfortable in their casual dress sat in bars and restaurants on the lookout for any talk of disruptive activities. Secret Service agents for sure.

On the morning of May 7, Air Force One landed at Lockbourne Air Force Base near Columbus and the President and his party transferred to helicopters for the 75-mile trip to Athens where they landed on the grass at Don Peden Stadium.

A motorcade brought the President to campus where an audience of several thousand students, faculty and townies awaited. The crowd was so thick at least one onlooker brought a ladder to better view the President.

LBJ spoke for a half hour, his speech interrupted several times by applause. While I was interested in his words, I could not help but notice the black sheets covering the wrought iron railing along the balcony of Memorial Auditorium.

A professor who was involved in the arrangements later told me there were weapons and other paraphernalia behind the sheets. I figured as much because there were several Secret Service agents surveying the crowd from their vantage point on the balcony. I recognized Rufus Youngblood, best known for using his body to shield then-Vice President Johnson during the November 1963 assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas.

Little did I know that balmy Spring day I would again cross paths with the 36th President.

Fast forward to a few days before Christmas 1967. I was an Air Force journalist, my three stripes denoting the rank of sergeant, and assigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base on the outskirts of Saigon, capital of the Republic of South Vietnam.

I barely had time to finish a morning coffee when Major Ed Johnson, the second ranking officer of the Combat News Division of the 7th Air Force Directorate of Information told me and Sergeant Steve Sprague to pack a bag for a few days out of country.

When we boarded a C-141 Starlifter aircraft, Major Johnson outlined the mission: The President of the United States was stopping at Cam Ranh Bay up the Vietnamese coast before heading to Korat Air Base, Thailand, to deliver a Christmas message and present medals to Air Force aircrew members. We would cover the Korat visit, reporting the President's remarks, interviewing medal recipients and making sure the ubiquitous hometown news release forms were completed.

"Get some rest," the major advised, "because Air Force One arrives around 3 a.m. and we

need to be on the flightline by 2."

Sure enough, Air Force One arrived on time. I found myself in the center of a U-shaped formation of military journalists and others assigned to greet LBJ. Before I knew it, the President – all six feet four of him – stood before me. A hand the size of a first baseman's mitt thrust outward. Instinctively, I reached out and we shook hands like two old friends who had not met for some time.

The President looked at me, determined my rank, and this conversation ensued.

"Where y'all from, Sergeant?"

"New York, sir."

"New York...New York, mighty fine state. I'm from Texas, you know."

"Yes sir, I've heard that."

The President moved on, asking the same question of the next fellow down the line... and probably the next and the next...

Fast forward again, this time about 45 years. During a visit to Austin, my cousin Ellen took me to the Johnson Ranch. Ellen, myself, a young couple and a park ranger were the only people at the ranch that morning. I had told Ellen the story of my conversation with LBJ and she insisted I tell the others.

I did and they were impressed by the 24 words exchanged between the President and me, a snippet forever deposited in the memory bank of my mind.

To Widows of Their Fallen Soldier

By James Janssen
—Wichita, KS

From a gentle breeze to the rolling thunder,
Memories of the fallen veteran's widow
Wane from the pinnacle of love in her heart
To the empty caverns of finality.
Tumultuous thunder reverberates in her soul,
While, through the clouds in her mind,
Appears, like a comforting gentle breeze,
A strong sense of unshakeable pride.
A pride imprinted in her heart and soul
From the price of loss she paid,
As a mighty roar of God's thunderous voice
Informs the world of his heroic sacrifice.
May the widows of our fallen warriors
Be showered with our blessings.
And may God give comfort to their souls.
Coming now, as a dedication and comfort
To our very special widows,
Are the words to a song by Ferlin Husky called,
"Wings of a Dove."

That Right Person

By Michelle Nicole Martin
—Summerville, SC

There are a lot of people in this world.
However, at times you need to find that right person.
That right person for the job.
That right person to listen.
That right person to understand
and direct you to where you need to go.
That right person might just be for one specific task,
or that right person might be able to do a lot.
It just depends!
You don't ask a doctor to cut your hair,
and you don't ask your electrician for a pedicure!
You need that right person for the job.
The list goes on and on!
Depending on what you do and where you go
will depend on the people you meet.
There are many people that you will meet,
but sometimes all you need is to find one person,
that right person!

Sticks and Stones

By Rhonda Chavez
VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX



Have you ever heard the phrase "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me?"

I wish that saying was true.

If you were ever emotionally abused with words, you will know where I'm coming from

I've had broken bones... yes.... they were painful, but, with surgery, rehab, rest, heat, ice and/or medications, they healed and I can use those bones for their intended purpose without pain.

I've also had words hurt me more than any broken bone I've ever had.

For me, words have not only hurt me, but paralyzed me, kept me stuck in isolation and darkness for way too long.

Words cut deep; they shatter your soul. They affect a person's entire being, thoughts, feelings, actions... Words don't break bones, but they sure do break hearts and leave a lasting scar.

Lien Xo

By Bill Perry
—Prescott, AZ

As a Navy pilot flying out of Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay Air Force Base in 1968-69, I was restricted to base for security reasons and the only Vietnamese I met were women near the beach filling protective sandbags. When, thanks in part to John McCain, the U.S. travel ban to Vietnam was lifted on December 31, 1991, my wife and I saw it as an opportunity to meet some Vietnamese and see what that storied country was really like. We were there within a month and discovered almost no other Americans.

Lacking hotel reservations, we spent our first night in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) at the Rex Hotel, expensive, but historically famous. The next morning, we ventured out into the city and a neighborhood with trees shading the streets. No sooner did we turn down one block when we heard some teenage boys ahead, upon seeing two tall white people, angrily begin chanting something like "Lean Show, Lean Show, Lean Show!" Confused and a little intimidated, we returned to the Rex to find out what we had just experienced.

There we found an elderly Vietnamese man who spoke perfect English and who just laughed when we told him our story. He said that "Lean Show" is really "Lien Xo," the Vietnamese words for "Soviet." The only white people regularly seen here since 1975 were probably Russian advisors—who were not very popular with the Vietnamese people. It seems that they were not only arrogant and racist and didn't blend well into local culture, but their food was terrible, the trucks they left behind had cooling problems and their air conditioners were worthless.

On the other hand, the man said (to our delight) that the Vietnamese remember Americans very fondly: we were friendly, often dating and even marrying Vietnamese women; we were generous with our money and tasty food (pizza!); we had great music; the equipment we left behind in 1975 still worked and our air conditioners would actually cool a room. He continued, "There's a reason the boat people moved to the United States instead of Russia. Tell those kids that you're American ("My," pronounced "Mee")."

Suitably reassured, my wife and I left the Rex and went back to the street with the angry boys. Walking up to them, we interrupted their chant by waving our arms and pointing to ourselves, saying, "No Lien Xo, My." After some thought, they got the idea; we were Americans! The effect couldn't have been more dramatic. One boy broke into a smile, pointed his thumb in the air and said, "My numbah one, Lien Xo numbah ten," pointing his thumb at the ground. Thank you, kid! We heard similar sentiments several times during our three-week trip through the country.

Today, the U.S. and Vietnam are close allies in trade and against our common threat, China. There are two-million-plus Vietnamese living in the U.S, both immigrants and native born. As Vietnam veterans, we should be proud that despite the war, things have worked out very well for that country and its admirable people.

My Reason

By Lawrence W. Langman
—Portage, IN

I see that twilight
within your eyes.
Your smile, your wit
are in disguise.

I've held your soul
in nature's grips,
enraptured in heavens
of immortal lips.

I hear the call
of nature's force,
desired madness
in a preplanned course.

Drawn toward a beacon
from a signal above,
destined to have begun
an undying love.

Hidden inside chaos,
an immortal shield,
I surrender my heart.
My loyalty has kneeled.

Your halo is tainted
from a past once in fire,
which only entices me
and lights my desire.

I sense your magic within
like a body beheld,
two bodies in motion
simply propelled.

Like butter I melt
into your loving arms,
emitting madness,
the essence of my charm.

Never shall I stray away
from all that you give.
You're my reason to breathe,
my desire to live.

I Almost Turned Twenty-Two Today

By Derrick Iozzio

VA Medical Center—Pensacola, FL

I almost turned twenty-two today;
It's not what you think,
No, not the usual way.
There was no cake,
No candles or gifts.
The demons showed up;
All they brought were rifts.
My life, they wanted to take;
They wanted to stay
To celebrate their day.
The game of life they tried to play;
I tossed, I turned,
I tried to ignore what they say.
It was me they wanted to slay;
They almost won, their victory was near,
But, at the right time, I called on a peer.
Those demons seem mighty and bold;
They can't be beaten is what I'm told.
I was given some renewed strength
Because my peer will go to any length,
And spoke those words I needed to hear,
Stay in the fight; your victory is near.
We can defeat those demons;
I am your peer.
I'm covered with sweat and my skin glistens,
But I am here and they listened.
They heard my cries and my doubt;
They listened until I got it out.
Then my peer stood by me near
And whispered confidently in my ear,
When you find yourself in this fix,
Remember your peer—We Got Your Six.
You see, it isn't the day of my birth;
I will live another year on this earth.
Those demons wanted me to be
A statistic, the twenty-two, you see;
So just for today, I will not turn twenty-two
And I want you to hear
My words that are true.
This world is better because of you!*

*If you are in crisis, call 988. Reach out and ask for help.

Grandma Ada, Grandpa Henry

By Gene Allen Groner

—Independence, MO



Grandmother Ada: Allow me to say something about my Grandmother Ada. I grew up in her home, and I firmly believe she must have known just about everything there is to know about love.

She lived it every day of her life. Ada never learned to drive a car—she didn't have to back then, since the wives all stayed home, cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children. That's the way things used to be. She was a faithful and generous mother and grandmother, and the lifetime wife of my grandfather Henry Spohrer.

Ada, at times, had a difficult life to live. She faithfully took my mother and her boys to church every Sunday and Wednesday, where she served for many years as the women's leader of the congregation. She kept an immaculate house, was a fantastic cook, and she thoroughly loved and enjoyed her children and grandchildren. She brought three young boys and their mother into her home, at the age when most women were delighted to be living with just their husbands.

Ada cared for the four of us as if she had given birth to us—well, she actually did give birth to my mother Dixie. Ada lost one of her daughters to a premature death, but that didn't shake her faith to the best of my knowledge. I loved my grandmother, and there was never a doubt in my mind that she loved me in the same way as Jesus loves me—she did that without any hesitation.

She taught me a great deal about love—her love for me, her love of my mother, her love of her husband, Grandpa Henry (he snored loudly every night, so I'm sure it wasn't easy for her) and her love for her family as a whole.

Always a Veteran

By Jerome Moore
VA Medical Center—Lynchburg, VA



Awakened by the sound of Reveille before the dawn of the morning sun, I stood at attention ready and willing to sacrifice my life for the honor, respect and freedom for my country and the world. This was the beginning of me becoming forever part of a new extended family that then and later would create a lifelong network of support, assistance and understanding.

No longer was I a civilian with concerns about how my day would go, or what I was going to do that day. I was a soldier prepared to sacrifice my life so that other civilians would not have to make the same sacrifice.

Even today after so many years, I still remember those days and nights without regrets. After all, the military provided me with the tools to accept and work through challenges. Furthermore, my experiences in the military prepared me for life by sacrificing my expectations and in working through those unexpected moments that life has to offer.

There will be times when sacrifices will arise, and those sacrifices you believe in will be in the best interest of something far greater than yourself. Given your

ability and your bond to your fellow soldier and country, you inherently have a greater responsibility to be depended upon.

Eventually, you will become a survivalist, and there will come a time when your thought process supersedes you as a person and transforms you back into a soldier. Because of your understanding of commitment, diligence, and training, you will have the capacity to diffuse injurious situations. Whatever you have learned as a soldier will benefit you in the future.

There will be occasions when you will blend into the civilian world unnoticed as a veteran, and there will be times when people will recognize you as a veteran.

More importantly, veterans do not be discouraged, or feel dejected when you feel invisible in the civilian world. Have the courage and pride to represent yourself and all the other veterans. Be proud to be a veteran and of your sacrifices and stand again at attention to defend our nation against all domestic and foreign aggression.

Because you are—the few and the proud.

Me

By Charles Ray Hood
VA Medical Center—Columbia, MO

Man of the house
Strength of your mother
Brooding child
Gifted learner
School Bully
Choir Bass and performer
Bass drum enthusiast
Football beast.
Leader of men
Mongrel Dog
Attempted suicide
Mistake that should have never happened
Pathfinder for the lost
First among Rangers
Blade
Bully to the less fortunate.
All of these
Names of me
Called by others
Parents and those called friend.
I call me Husband
Father
Christian
Veteran.

War

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

War is not good,
but it has been around forever.
Make love not war.
It seems like we are always
the “Big Brother” to the world
and the world hates us for it.
War is unnecessary in so many ways.
It causes lack of understanding
and causes us to hate.
War is no good for any of us.

Always Your Battle

By Stephanie Marie Latham

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, MO

From the start I was there for you,
from learning the correct way to stand, walk and march.

I was there, helping to pull you through the sand
while live rounds exploded all around us.

I was there for every step on the trail,
every reach we had to take to climb to make it
over the new obstacle in the way.

I was there for every leap of faith we had to take
when we had to jump and fall.
And every hard breath,
sweat bead, blood and tears that we shed.

I was there, locked to you for every meal
we had to eat and stay alert.

I was there when it was time to go home.
I am still here.

I am still here while you struggle to come back whole,
and while you heal.

I am here for every late night you scream while still fighting.

I am here with you while you grieve what you have lost.
And for every early morning coffee.
You need to talk through it
or every late night we'll have a glass of wine and silence.

I am here as your shield while you fight every battle
against your fears, addictions and battles.

No matter the finish, I'll always be there—
for your battles.

Roses

By Kim Gwinner

—Cincinnati, OH

A dozen roses painted black
Means it's over; I ain't a-coming back,
So enjoy the ones of color while you can.
They're daily reminders that I'm your biggest fan, (Your man?)
While our relationship is blooming,
And our arms around each other is soothing.
When our eyes meet, it's love that I see.
And when you smile, it just takes over me.
It's so hard for me to believe
That together we have so much to achieve.
You fill me up with inspiration.
This is a lot more than admiration.
A dozen roses, naturally red,
Hidden in the back of my flatbed,
Only to be exposed on this day that I have planned,
A romantic picnic somewhere in our Dixieland.
A dozen roses painted black
Means it's over; I ain't a-coming back,
So enjoy the ones of color while you can.
They're to remind you that I'm your biggest fan. (Your man?)
The day has come where we are no longer one.
With you my life was so damn fun!
I loved you with all of my heart.
It's gonna be hard while we're apart.
But death is just like that
As my six-foot hole is being dug by a bobcat.
I want you to know
As they lower me in the hole.
A dozen roses painted black
Means it's over; I ain't a-coming back.
But I hope you enjoyed the ones of color
Because I always loved you like no other.
A dozen roses painted black
Means it's over; I ain't a-coming back.
A dozen roses painted black
Means I loved you like no other...
You were my perfect lover.

A Day of Service: Lasts a Lifetime

By James E. Steddum

VA Medical Center—Fort Rucker, AL

“May the 4th be with you” took on a new meaning this year at Fort Novosel, Alabama. John Wiley Brock VFW Post 6683 of Enterprise, Alabama, and its adopted unit, the U.S. Army Warrant Officer Career College (WOCC), joined forces to demonstrate community service, esprit de corps and stewardship. About 20 members of Post 6683 and District 7 came together to support the area maintenance and beautification of the main campus of the WOCC. The members then turned to serve the necessary hydration to keep the over 150 members of the staff, faculty and students working in the hot, humid Alabama sun! Using a generous Veteran and Military Support grant from the VFW Foundation, over 150 plates of food and 35 gallons of bottled water and Gatorade were served to the hardest working group of retired, active, reserve, guard and future warrant officers ever photographed.

District 7 Commander Tommy Stephens, a Post 4388 Red Level member, participated in the district recruiting event because the faculty and staff of Fort Novosel span several counties in Alabama. Many Posts support the greater Fort Novosel community, like Wiregrass Post 3073 of Dothan, Francis J. Ballard Post 6020 of Daleville, the Eufaula Memorial Post 5850 and, of course, John Wiley Brock Post 6683 of Enterprise. This National Day of Service inspired seven veterans and service members to join the VFW and others to renew or transfer their memberships.

Post 6683 Commander Robert Schmidbauer coordinated the event with Colonel Kevin E. McHugh, Commandant. Colonel McHugh has focused on modernizing the warrant officer education continuum for the past two years. Today,

Colonel McHugh says, “...the National Day of Service is about building bonds, partnerships and pride in our prestigious academic institution for the Warrant Officer Cohort. Today we have 125-150 members of the staff, faculty, TAC Officers, students from three courses, Army Civilian Professionals, family members and our VFW partners. We have all come together to put blood, sweat and tears into this place we call the Warrant Officer Career College. I joined 27 years ago to serve something bigger than myself; [today] is a great day!”

Commander Schmidbauer, a retired warrant officer, was spotted pressure washing and chatting with students aged 18 to 50. In his closing message to the College, he emphasized that authentic and relevant history is taught in the halls of the VFW and similar organizations. Activities like the National Day of Service demonstrate how the instilled service mindset does not disappear when we remove the uniform.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jeremy Norman, Department Head, Military History Department, served as the officer-in-charge of the activities for the WOCC. He said that the partnerships with the community are invaluable to the Army because those serving and those #StillServing are members of the same greater community. He said the veterans who came before us “sacrificed so much, and it is my generation’s time and responsibility to give back.” Many others echoed the same concept of giving back. Warrant Officer Candidate Rodreka Fuller, an aspiring Cyber Warrant Officer, stated that serving her community is one of her purposes in life and that serving others is a special feeling. Huntsville, Alabama native Isaac Oliver is an aspiring medevac aviator. He

has served as a nurse and wants to be able to serve others in an advanced role. He says that the National Day of Service was an excellent opportunity for him to give back to the College that has taught him what it means to be a warrant officer. Aspiring Military Intelligence Warrant Officer Steven Waslo stated that the National Day of Service is important because it is about seeing that we are all working together. After all, we are a part of the same profession.

The Candidates receive excellent mentorship, counseling, and coaching from Training, Advising, and Counseling (TAC) Officers. Once feared by candidates, modern TAC Officers take a much more complex role in modernized education. While they still enforce rigorous standards, TAC Officers are more than trainers. They take ownership of the acculturation of new warrant officers and their significant responsibilities as technical experts. By trade, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Lequisha Stephens is an ammunition technician. However, she currently serves as the Operations Officer for the 1st Warrant Officer Company, USAWOCC. She stated that “giving back” is an excellent opportunity to work together and learn from one another.

Similarly, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jeffrey Henry, Candidate Course Director, says, “The National Day of Service is a day to give back, but it also sets an example for the community. We are all leaders and we should all want to set the example for those we are bringing up to serve behind us. Additionally, the veterans that are out here—that is what it is really all about. Service does not leave us.”

Army Civilian Professional David Skinner, Quality Assurance Evaluator and 33-year veteran of the Alabama National Guard, stated that giving back to the country is deeply instilled in our profession. He said that we demonstrate that #StillServing characteristic on days like today. Chief Warrant Officer 4 Chuck Davis, Department of Strategy and Doctrine, stated, “We cannot just take—we must give back and community service should be important to everybody. When I was told we need to clean up our institution, I thought I could be in the field for 10 days at Fort Stewart, or deployed to Poland, so cleaning up for a few hours in the place I serve every day is not a bad deal.” CW4 Davis went on to say that this was a special day and “we do not get enough opportunities to all come together and work with veterans, students and cadre.”

CW5 (retired) Ken Donahue, a Vietnam veteran who served as a Cobra and Apache pilot, says, “Community Service is great; you have to give back.” He served 28 years through multiple tours to Vietnam, Germany, Greece, Fort Rucker and Fort Bragg. He and Robert Skinner, another Vietnam pilot, were presented coins by the Commandant for their service today and their continuous service to the community and the college. They conducted a lot of interviews with senior students who were

studying the Vietnam conflict. Ken and Robert rarely miss a VFW Post 6683 event!

Several senior students also participated in the event. The Warrant Officer Intermediate Level Education (WOILE) course prepares Chief Warrant Officers 3 and 4 for roles in operations at Brigade and Division level echelons. The Warrant Officer Senior Service Education (WOSSE) course for Chief Warrant Officers 4 and 5 helps to prepare officers for strategic and joint positions at echelons above the division. Chief Warrant Officer 4 Kimberely Windmiller, a WOSSE student who belongs to Sanford, North Carolina VFW Post 5631, has served in the Army for nearly 30 years. She states, “service is incredibly important to me. My grandfather served in World War II, my dad was in Vietnam and the Gulf War, and my brother and I have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Service is deeply ingrained.” She further stated that events like this are essential for the young and the old to come together to show that we still have that common bond.

John Wiley Brock VFW Post 6683 is a community service-focused

organization. Its 335 members work to maintain their 14-acre property in rural Coffee County, Alabama. Nestled between Enterprise and New Brockton, Post 6683 participates in numerous community events every month, including its popular Community Service meal, which is open to the public once each month. They organize a massive Army-Navy food drive to support their area food bank, and they work diligently to support local businesses that provide Thanksgiving and Christmas meals to Fort Novosel and surrounding communities. These, among the chartered activities of the VFW, are just a few examples of how John Wiley Brock Post 6683 is #StillServing. To see more photos of Post 6683’s Day of Service, go to <https://facebook.com/VFW6683>.



Finally, food is served by Post 6683 thanks to generous grants from the Veteran and Military Support grant and the VFW Foundation. This group sure does deserve it!



Staff, faculty, students, and volunteers work around the two main buildings of the Warrant Officer Career College on Fort Novosel on the 3rd Annual National Day of Service.

A Liberator of Dachau

By Les Goldberg
—Santa Ana, CA

In the days and weeks following D-Day, waves of American and allied troops would continue to storm into France, fight their way toward Nazi-occupied Germany and ultimately put an end to World War II in Europe.

Nobody anticipated the arrival of those soldiers more than the surviving prisoners in Nazi concentration camps where millions of Jews, Poles and other Hitler-designated “undesireables” had already been killed or left to die. And nobody could have a more vivid memory of the liberation than the GIs who were first on the scene at infamous places like Dachau, Trebleinka and Auschwitz, to name a few.

One of those heroes was the late U.S. Army Pvt. Ed Royce, a former mayor and councilman from Stanton, Calif., and father of now retired U.S. Congressman Ed R. Royce of Fullerton who served as chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

A few years back, I had the honor and privilege of interviewing the senior Royce at American Legion Post 555 in Midway City, Calif., across the street from his final resting place in Westminster Cemetery.

At age 89 at that time, Royce’s memory was still vivid as he described the horrid scene more than 70 years ago. Throughout the war, he was assigned to General George Patton’s Third Army. His division was one of the first to arrive at Dachau on April 29, 1945.



“I could hardly believe my own eyes. I saw heaps of clothes in front of the building with “bad” – German for bath – painted on the door. The room was filled halfway to the ceiling with naked bodies. Another room contained the ovens where bodies were burned. I also saw the shower heads where the deadly gas supposedly was used to kill the prisoners. However, that is a misconception. In actuality, the gas came out of pipes in the floor,” he said.

“There was an entire trainload—hundreds of emaciated bodies piled into boxcars—on a nearby rail spur. Evidently, they had starved to death on the train. I heard that one of the prisoners was still alive. In addition, there were hundreds more prisoners housed in the barracks who were so starved their survival was questionable.

“I remember when we captured some German prisoners, they were all lined up and ordered to snap to attention before being marched to a nearby POW cage.

Most were hungry and didn’t seem to mind being caught. Before we arrived at the Dachau camp, American soldiers had killed all of the guards who were members of the SS,” he added.

“This was one day at one camp—and there were many such camps scattered throughout Germany and Poland. So, when I meet people who doubt the Holocaust, I show them the

photos I took that day,” said Royce.

Royce was later honored with the Simon Wiesenthal Center Distinguished Service Award at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles where he met one of the Dachau survivors, Morris Price, a native of Poland who also is now deceased.

Royce said Price told him that the arrival of his liberators was “a happy sight...we knew the American Army was close... we just didn’t know if we’d still be alive when they got there.”

As we concluded the interview, Congressman Royce added:

“My father has always been a reminder of the crimes against humanity that occur when free people don’t reject evil soon enough.” He added that his father’s service and the photos he took during the war “are constant reminders to me that our great country must be vigilant in standing up to tyrants and dictators around the world.”

The Soldier in Search of Ataraxia

By Frank Boback

VA Medical Center—Brockton, MA

—The Home Front

When I was seven or eight,
The fixed bayonets on those
Plastic, olive drab miniatures stood sturdy,
Submachine guns polished,
Sidearms readied,
Postures taut.
They were neophytes,
Surviving plastic, ersatz wars,
Their hard-fought battles, cartoon clean.
At night, platoons marched home
Under cover of darkness to Thom McAn shoeboxes,
Bodies, minds and souls unscathed, wounds healed.
I never once lauded those grunts,
Never once played Taps for those heroic icons,
Never built them monuments.
I never once shed tears for those plastic beings.
They were nameless. Had no families,
Have none now.
They never took incoming,
Waded through rice paddies or were spat upon.
There was no Agent Orange, no Napalm, no Kim Phuc!
Their deaths were fleeting,
Swift, without curdling screams.
Until next morning when orders summoned,
Those troops slept safely, soundly nights
In those portable cardboard sarcophagi
Secured by elastic bands.

—In Country

The monsoons cry slanted tears.
Their whispers lull me forward.
The sounds echo
Like Fourth of July firecrackers
On a warm Boston summer's night.
The sky, a kaleidoscope of fireworks,
The din, mightier than Krakatoa,
And then—darkness.
I stiffen,
Listen to the swaying of bush,
The soft cracking of brush beneath their feet.
I hear foreign voices, nearing,

Echoing something I cannot understand,
And I freeze in this hot land, praying for the Huey.

—The Aftermath

I awaken, listen for crackling brush again,
Then watch unblemished snow
Fall outside Huntington Ave.,
Plastering the chipped, cracked sidewalks,
Hiding ubiquitous imperfections.
Harpocrates' presence haunts me.
It infiltrates the stone, the glass.
My clothing drenched, like snow-soaked winter mittens
And warm as urine.
The Xanax and RIs manipulate somewhere—
Somehow above my neck.
My head strikes the pillow again.
Until the next day's battle,
I often ponder where those
Strac, ersatz soldiers now sleep.

*In memory of WO1 George F. Barry Jr., killed in action
in Vietnam: May 23, 1970. George was a crew member of
U.S. Army B Company, 158th Lancers, Assault Helicopter
Battalion, 101st Airborne Division.*

Heart of a Soldier

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

The heart of a soldier
beats so strong and so brave.
The flag of our nation
in the wind still waves.
All due to the action of each soldier,
mighty, who saves.
Their commitment unmatched
by the most patriotic of them.
His life is a sacrifice,
the blood, sweat and tears
to be directed by "Uncle Sam"
through most of his years.
The eagle soars high as a symbol of our strength—
"one nation under God."
Each soldier goes to any length,
to protect and to serve,
to secure our freedom and our way,
so we can walk freely each and every day.
The life of each soldier awaits a toll
that each soldier pays with his heart and soul.

A Trip to Big Piney

By Richard Wangard
—Neenah, WI

Dedicated to: Greg and Amy Bell, a couple of Top Notch Educators who put students first!

Funny how things work and work out! I am on my Facebook when I notice a history teacher from Wyoming asking what should I teach my students about the Vietnam War? Facebook explodes with hundreds of answers from Nam vets. Everything from soup to nuts! All things covered all good suggestions!

Years ago when I was very involved with Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 351 in Appleton, Wisconsin, I did presentations with a few other Nam vets here in local high schools. I gave the Air Force perspective, but I knew too what the Army, Navy and Marines did. We are all brothers! THE BEST!

So I had some experience and I started up a conversation with Greg Bell, the history teacher in Wyoming. You see, being a plank owner of Chapter 351 when it only had 50 members was great and we did great work. However, when VVOA dropped dues to \$50 for lifetime membership the chapter exploded to over 300 members and rules changed. Unfortunately, my PTSD does not allow me to do rules. I have not attended a meeting in years and the pandemic really shut it down and now the age of Nam vets does, too. The chapter gave *Veterans' Voices* about \$600 over six years out of a treasury of \$50,000. A real sore spot for me, but I wish not to complain or disrespect



the chapter. They believe in keeping all the money local and they do good work for local vets. They just don't understand about national suicide rates for vets and the problems rural vets face. They try hard to do the right thing and honestly that is all that counts. Just a different perspective and philosophy between them and me. I see that much when I write people all over the country and ask for support of *Veterans' Voices*. Ah, ah, ah gee, Richard we have a different model here in so and so someplace in America and we give vets money for such and such.... sorry!

It's okay—I disrespect nobody! Just sick of the lack of my ability to persuade but I have succeeded somewhat over the years. I will forever support *Veterans' Voices*. You see, *Veterans' Voices* is my lifeline and I love all the stories and poems in it. What talent by gifted artists and writers! All veterans!

So Greg and I talk over Facebook, then we started messaging. I ask Greg would you like me to come out and present to your high school juniors and seniors in your

history classes? It is late March and weather is an issue, but now I have a super new all-wheel-drive car and I am from Wisconsin, so I do know a little about winter driving. The weather is good all the way out and all the way back. About 3,600 miles I put on my new car.

Wow and double wow! What a great experience! Greg and Amy Bell welcomed me with open arms and the school set

me up in a nice motel in Big Piney! This is God's country! Reminded me of growing up in rural Wisconsin in the '50s and '60s. about 80 miles south of Yellowstone and Jackson Hole. Big Piney and sister Marbleton are two very small towns just a couple miles apart and so cool surrounded by ranch land and animals everywhere!

Greg and Amy showed me all around! So gracious and so nice! We went out to eat and they took me to Jackson Hole and I saw the Grand Tetons. I ate supper at their house and enjoyed a great Shepard's pie.

All this was great, but the best part was the kids at the high school! So polite, so welcoming, so kind and attentive. You don't run into these kinds of students that often anymore. I mean, what high school student at age 16 or 17 is going to give a real care about some war that happened 50 years ago? These students did, as I passed around a few basic artifacts from the war. They asked great questions honestly interested and I love sharing history with them all. You see, for me it was just like

yesterday and somehow, I can make it all come alive. Honestly, brutally, complete with government and business issues, the story of the return for Nam vets, how we survived and how so many did not. Greg allowed me great freedom and I told him before I ever came out there I would not sugarcoat a thing. Greg is cool, very cool! His students know it, I know it and this guy has been teaching for a long time and is a Master teacher! A truly great person and could be at some big university making more money. In my estimation, a National Treasure! Proud to call him my friend! If he ever wants me to do it all over again, I will be there with bells on. Get it? Bell? Ha Ha! The students gave me one of their

high school shirts. They are the Punchers in keeping with their heritage as cowboys and rodeo riders! It is indeed a great place to live, so filled with nature and yet so many leave as it gets smaller and smaller. The schools are excellent with no expense spared. Students are bussed from miles and miles around, taking much time just to get to school! This is huge ranch land.

I talked with one high school young lady in Greg's class. She had signed up for the army as a medic. Going in right after graduation. One impressive young lady. I shared more with her. She knows what to expect. She knows the Army will steel her up strong and she will become confident and a

natural leader. You get what you put in. This girl has much to offer! I saw it in her eyes. Determination!

So, the trip was great in every way possible and so glad I went. For just a few days history once again came alive and Nam lives on in a new generation and for me. Well, it just never stops, but talking about it, writing about it, sharing it and having people who respect it and the vets who lived it, all of that matters and helps me cope and be a productive and compassionate citizen. Thank you so much, Greg and Amy Bell!

Lying Real Still

By Kimberly Green
VA Medical Center—Fort Smith, AR

He was lost,
didn't know where his company was.
When he heard more gunfire,
he threw himself in a ditch,
laid real still,
didn't move, didn't twitch.

When at that moment, in that space,
he heard a small voice.
"I can't breathe; get off my face."

That's when he realized
he had jumped into a death trench.
Surrounded by the dead,
his body felt like hot lead.

"They shot my family,"
the small voice said.
"I wish I too was dead
but here I am. I live."

They waited until nightfall
to push the corpses out of the way.
Still silent, neither had nothing to say.

Together they pulled themselves
from the pit of the dead,
made it to the wood line
when one of them said,

"You know I'm a Jew;
we are hated worldwide.
We are considered inhuman;
they want us all to die."

They both looked at each other,
then they bowed their heads.
In unison they recited
the mourner's *Kaddish*.

When finished the American soldier said,
"I am Jewish as well;
We are here to send
Hitler and his Nazis to hell."

A small light appeared
in what were once dead eyes.
"You have given me a renewed strength.
I too shall fight for I live. I am alive.
It is not my time to die."

Not Cool

By Daniel Paicopulos
—San Diego, CA

The world is aflame
with malefic direction
alarmingly aimed at itself.
Hotly armed people,
unafraid of detection,
freely pursue
their end.

Sitting quietly
in cool observation
seems scarcely
enough,
yet sear or burn,
any hope to extinguish
has forever
misfired.
Lighting one candle
with pacific intention
feels hardly
sufficient.
Still, the sum of the lights
provides the best protection
for our dreams, our future,
ourselves.

House Wrens: Home at Last

By Gene Allen Groner
—Independence, MO



We have a family of house wrens living in a birdhouse on our deck. They are brownish above and somewhat paler below, with strong legs. Their short rounded wings and frequently cocked tail have a dark barred pattern. The flight is direct and buzzing, sort of reminding us of the hummingbirds we see from time to time.

For about two weeks I watched the male wren carry nesting materials into the house, and I hoped that he could attract a female wren to nest there. At last, she came around to check it out and see if it met her standards. It is said that a male wren needs to build up to seven different housing sites in order to get a female to approve of one. She can be very particular.

After careful inspection, she gave her approval and began settling into their new home. Soon, she laid her eggs and the two of them took turns keeping the eggs safe and warm. Last week I noticed them beginning to bring small insects to feed their chicks. I don't know how many chicks there are, but I read that there can be as many as four little ones in a nest. I don't know just how many eggs she laid, but I hope to find out when I see the chicks eventually leaving the nest. I'm really looking forward to that day.

The male and female are very busy now, taking turns bringing insects to feed the little ones every morning and every evening. This will continue for up to 12 weeks before the young birds are ready to leave the nest and be on their own. It's very exciting to watch all the activities of this wonderful wren family. God is truly amazing, creating and caring for nature and all her magnificent creatures. And we are so fortunate to live in a wooded area where the wildlife is abundant. Thanks be to God.

Broken Through

By Tracy Sellers
—Troy, OH

I see the light; I see it there,
but it goes away when I stare.
The darkness is back; why is it here
for I asked you to stop coming near.

Me and my soul, me and my heart,
know it's time; it's best we part
our ways so I can grow and heal,
part ways so I can feel
emotions I've been hiding away,
emotions I don't even show when I pray,
emotions I keep way down inside.
They try to come up but I continue to hide
from the world, from my life,
from my family, from my wife.

I've been gone too long; I don't know my way back.
I feel every step I take. There will be an attack
on me and in my soul.
There's just so much I want you to know.
I wasn't always like this; this wasn't always true.
I used to be "normal." I used to be like you.

Come back I say; come back to me now.
I just don't know how I got here, how
I need you here. I need you with me.
There's so much life left to live, you see.
It's time to live rather than survive,
so I can, in this life, thrive.

But when? When does this occur?
This pot within I don't want to stir.
It hurts too much. Will it end?
It hurts so bad; will my heart ever mend?

Permission Granted

By Michelle Roxanne Johnson
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

All she ever wanted
was to ask for forgiveness.
Permission granted.
Forgiveness granted.

Get Gone

By Kyle Hanavan

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

Get gone. At times I felt folded and crumpled like foil,
not feeling royal,
letting you shadow and plague my soil,
my internal temperature reaching a boil.
Paralyzed by this overwhelming turmoil,
I attempt to stay gentle and loyal—
I say nothing, trying to contain the pain and maintain,
smile and not complain
until I uncoil and once again, it's I who looks insane.
These same silly games I'm stuck in with the same rewards.

Get gone. I'm getting bored reading this smorgasbord
of broken cords, praying to the good Lord
to bless me and for you, possibly, rid me,
convince me that you will change later but not quickly.
Gullible, optimistic but my gut says, "Are you kidding me?"
Patience is a virtue, but it's not one I'm fond of.
Years flow by like passing doves
with kind gestures showed and unrequited love.

Get gone. So many pearls before swine—
a self-sabotaging crime.
Words, time and resources of mine sublimely wasted.
Too many bitter tears tasted.
Dreams not chased and confidence displaced.
Now disgraced, I sat with a dumbfounded face
hiding from the world with my manhood in a locked case,
left to embrace the now empty space.
A decade of chaos and letting the darkness take territory
over light. Too scared to live or die in this purgatory
full of sighs and now dry eyes. I'm not gonna lie;
I'd be at a loss if not for His Story.
To God goes all the glory.

Get gone. I don't need your unsolicited advice or to tell me
what's wrong with me.
For many years you were allowed to ruin my serenity.
Shattered and snared, I was too scared to face reality,
a fracture in the continuum of causality.
Consuming every presented fallacy unquestionably.
Bon Appétite. Eventually it dawned on me magically
that I chose to live unhappily. I look back at the old me
and it's sad to see how many years I lived in apathy.
A true tragedy to be a prisoner in my own mind,
unrefined and visualizing ways to die.

Countless nights letting the booze numb the internal cries,
not surprised only to wake up to the same inevitable demise
at sunrise. I'm no longer in the market to buy your lies.

Get gone. I don't need your fake love and kindness.
You walked in the dark so long with permanent blindness.
I'm done unpleasantly catering to Your Highness.
I don't need anything from you but silence.
Perish the thought, I don't want any tributes.
The moment I accept a gift, it becomes a dispute.
If I quit giving you ammo, you can't shoot.
But I see they're made for walking—those boots.
Not on me anymore. Get gone with the Piper and take your flute.
That song, that smell and that smile are no longer cute.

Get gone. I can't grab the future if I don't let go of the past.
We've been on this ride full of slips and slides
and at the end is a crash.
I'm going on my own path and don't want to be rash,
but It's quite obvious we clash. For some air I gasp.
I am done getting smashed under your unrelenting grasp.
I can't tolerate your debts and insults anymore,
lest I collapse.
Best to cut and run before my time has elapsed.

Time to Play My Hand

By Rhonda Chavez

VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX

I have been sitting on the fence too long;
it's time to take a stand.
I have been holding decent cards;
it's time to play my hand.
Until now I've only been thinking,
but the answers have been too long in the making.
Time to take action and show my cards;
it's a chance that deserves taking.
Through all these years
I have done what I could
to attempt to do
what I thought was good.
We all need something to believe in;
we all want to be free.
I think I can have both of these
if I would only believe in me.
(For David)

A Conversation With a Korean War Veteran

By Terrance Hammons

VA Medical Center—Houston, TX

In the final years of my father's life, diabetes had taken his vision and caused his kidneys to fail. Dementia slowly eroded his mind, transforming him from a kind, patient man into someone who was verbally abusive and paranoid. My mother bore the brunt of these attacks, accused of a wide array of offenses, including infidelity, theft, and witchcraft.

His vision began to fail while I was in high school, and he had to stop working. My mother convinced him to apply for disability. "He hated having to go to that office. He complained the whole way there and back." His doctors became too expensive, and he had to transfer his care to the VA. "Your dad didn't want anything to do with the military, including the VA," my mother recalled.

As illness ravished his body and mind, glimpses of the kind, loving father occasionally broke through, like the sun peeking through on a cloudy day. Despite his struggles, he continued to provide, even buying me a car during my senior year. There were strings attached. I was tasked with taking him to his appointments. We would spend countless hours in the VA, and in my youthful ignorance, I thought time was being wasted. I listened to his stories, hoping time would hurry, not noticing the ticking away of missed opportunities.

When I joined the Army, he was legally blind, and my mother had had enough. She divorced him and moved in with her sister. My uncle moved in to help with my father. My father expressed concern over my enlistment and began to give me advice, filling my sails with the wind of his wisdom before I set sail into the world.

By the end of my enlistment, he was in hospice and died two years after I got out.

I now work at the same VA where I spent hours with my father. When I enter the building, I think of him.

One day, as I waited for the elevator, I finished a text to my wife. The elevator door opened with a soft 'ding' and I entered, giving a cursory nod to the other passengers. When three of them exited, an older gentleman remained. "What's wrong with them Astros?" he asked.

"Struggling," I said, "hopefully it's just a slow start."

He wore polished leather shoes, pressed jeans, a Houston Astros polo, and a Korean War veteran cap. He looked like the men I had grown up with: uncles, neighbors, coaches, and my father. Men who mentored me during my time in the Army. I instantly felt a sense of camaraderie.

"Did you serve," he probed.

"I did, Army." We were on the first floor now. "Are you going to the lobby?" I asked, trying to keep the conversation going.

"Yeah, I'm waiting for my niece to pick me up," he said, strolling with a slight lean to the right. Cool.

"I see you're a Korean War vet," I noted. "My dad was in the Korean War, too."

"Well, you know he went through a lot. It was hard to be a black man in the military back then," Charlie, my elevator partner, replied. His tone heavy with understanding.

"He never talked about it. Wish I had asked him about that time," I said.

My father had no problem expressing his opinion on the role race played in America.

In college, I took a course about the Korean War, which described the racial oppression African Americans faced while trying to serve their country.

In the lobby, Charlie took a seat. I stood, knowing that sitting could open the floodgates to a river of long-winded tales. "People don't like hearing about Korea. America's not proud of it, so vets don't like talking about it. I don't mind," he said. He smiled and I took a seat.

Like many other African Americans, he joined the military, hoping to escape the de jure segregation of southern cities. Others looked to escape the de facto segregation of northern ones. "A couple of guys from Detroit and Chicago were in our platoon. They had a hard time adjusting to life in the South. I was used to it."

There have been countless books, documentaries, and movies about the heroism of those who served during World War II. Vietnam has received more negative coverage, but coverage nonetheless. The Korean War, sandwiched between the two, has been called the "Forgotten War."

"We showed we could fight when given a chance," Charlie said.

"It's like being forgotten twice—once for the war and then for the things we experienced trying to fight the war," Charlie reflected.

I was grateful I sat with Charlie that day and listened to his stories. His narrative, like those of many veterans, is a crucial part of our history that should not be overlooked. I hope Charlie and other Korean War vets share their stories before it's too late—before we regret not asking.

One Day at a Time

By Hartley Barnes

—Royal Palm Beach, FL

A day in the jungle:
The jungle smells of fragrances I don't recognize,
gentle scents that say, "Take it one day at a time."
Droplets of water, crushing of leaves,
bushes, live and dead trees,
canopies of vines, singing birds.
Insect mating calls sync into a melody;
humid air dances around me,
drawing salted sweat that cools my skin.
It makes love to me like placid fingernails.
Each step I take is a new venture toward the unknown,
my sanity kept in check with the syncopation of danger
and the soothing of Nature's instruments.
It's a day to love;
sharp teeth prowl the darkness though the sun is bright.
Pausing,
I scan for what could turn my day into a nightmare.
Leaves trickle silently to the ground to sleep.
Reminds me of my baby girl cradled in her mother's arms.
She was born on this day two years ago.
I am at peace in the jungle for the moment.
Its beauty, vibrant with life, speaks to me with calm words.
"Live," it says. "Dream of tomorrow and a better place."
War is a way of life for many.
it's not for some.
It's not for me.
A bird's nest sits on a low branch with new and hungry lives.
I wish to be them,
not to know the cruelty of man and the sigh of death.
This day shows promise.
The breeze against the leaves emits a lullaby
saturated with warm words of confidence.
This day has the potential to be free of blood.
The menagerie of life beneath my feet
is interrupted by my steps,
not by the explosive treachery of man.
This day is good.
Facial muscles relaxed,
I smile and radiate the joys of days past.
Droplets of water find a place on swaying leaves,
free to evaporate and rejuvenate to sustain life,
not take it.
Man can learn from the process—one day at a time.

One

By Mark A. Bigham

—Northport, AL

As I walk down these pilgrimed halls,
I see the diplomacy of our independence walls.
Consecrated by those gone before,
Some of which lay down their lives to war.

My oath to them was the same,
My ode to them was clearly pain.
"Some gave all and all gave some,"*
They played it all on the battlefield to One.

One purpose, one plan,
One nation under God.
One mission, one stand
To fight for the United States of America.

I see many worn, many tired.
I see independence in their eyes,
Proud of all that they did
And didn't complain about the suffering.

None in shame,
Nor in blame,
They fought each one for their home towns
And for the American flag's reputation.

As much of the dust has settled,
All of them should receive medals.
Some were a part of U.S. military history,
Some weren't able to fight, but still family.

All proudly wore the uniforms,
All a solemn oath they performed.
Proud to call those my sisters and brothers in arms
In this world for which we were formed.

Godspeed into the eternal light,
Walk in Christ and in His life.
Continue on in your flight,
Prepare, for over the horizon we shall fly.

*Quote by Howard William Osterkamp

Gardening for the Soul

By Jerome Moore
VA Medical Center—Lynchburg, VA



Gardening for the soul gives us time to cultivate and unearth the root of our problems and arrive at tangible and meaningful resolutions. Sometimes a quiet moment to reflect upon who we are, and how we fit into the design of our purpose helps us to absorb, understand and grow into something incredibly beautiful, rich and full.

Working together in harmony and peace sets the tone for a perfect union of placating and complementing how we go about interacting with each other in such a diverse garden of diversities. Our role in how we assimilate with people and events that we impact on any given moment, makes for a picturesque canopy of resolving, appreciating and respecting differences of opinions, behaviors and actions that affects how our Garden of Eden emerges.

In the garden, our shoulders bear no weight, and our troubles are no more. We all share the same breath of fresh air, tranquility, happiness, timeless moments of love and peace within ourselves, or with someone that we love. The tall trees and emerging plants embrace our troubles, and the cool and soothing feel of a stimulating fragrant breeze sweeps our despairs, troubles into oblivion, and directs our thoughts into peaceful and definitive solutions.

While we look forward to achieving satisfaction in our efforts, we will often take the time to smell the roses and smile with a sense of resolve at what we have created. More importantly, our mind and heart will say thanks not in awe but acknowledge to ourselves with sincere gratitude and appreciation that what we have just accomplished was not so difficult, but good for the souls of us all.

Dishonorable

By Arlin Buyert
—Leawood, KS

Before touring Vietnam,
one week of POW training
in the mountains of Maine.

Almost Heaven:

Majestic peaks, deep-breath air,
slithering streams, September leaves,
quiet trees.

Almost Hell:

“Pretend prison” for thirty officers,
no food for the week, all dressed down
to bare naked, then every man in turn
crammed into a wood box, lid closed to the dark,
forever it seemed,
to be greeted by a snake’s forked tongue in the nostril.
Cmd. Ramsey screamed and quivered to the ground.

The guards made a deal:

“Kill the naked, wrap it around your neck.

On your hands and knees, like a dog,
for the rest of the week.”

So it was.

Dishonorable Discharge.

Crawl

By Bruce Valrey
—Menlo Park, CA

Saw the bright side and reveled
Even if I did struggle to get to it.
Oblivion was not for me
Even if I was born in it.
In the light, evil was leveled,
Reduced to rubble, to dust.
My soul could now shine
Even if marred, through rust.
Remember, the sun does go down
And the night comes for us all.
It ended up finding me,
Collapsed the floor, caused my fall.
The memory of that bright light
Gave me strength, restored control.
I broke free, began to crawl
To the horizon, sanctuary of before.

When I Get to Heaven

By Nina Herron

—Staunton, VA

Hey, Lord! It's just me. I have a few questions.
Does Heaven have a dress code?
You know I prefer comfy clothing.
I could wear my t-shirt that says "Angel" on the front!

How about when we arrive in Heaven?
Will that be Judgement Day?
Will it be a private meeting with you?
Or will everyone else be watching?
I will be so ashamed,
even though I know you've forgiven me.
Will there be long lines to the Pearly Gates
like the entrance to Disney World?
I'll just slip a "Benjamin" to St. Peter and skip the line.
"Ain't nobody got time for that!" Is he a kind soul?
He probably gets short-tempered by the end of a long day.

Will our family members be holding up signs
so we can find them?
I especially can't wait to see my mama again.
I'm sure she's kept you busy!
I can't wait to hear how she has tested your patience.
Do we get our wings right away?
Or do we have to wait ninety days?
Are they all the same? Or a variety to choose from?
I'd like to have color-changing fiber optics
embedded in my wings.
I've always loved those wings on Christmas tree angels.

Oh, my goodness! I almost forgot! Will I get a halo?
Will it be a bent coat hanger like in our Christmas pageants?
Or a "heavenly light?"
I would prefer the "light" version if that's an option.
It's bound to weigh less. Ha! Ha! I made a funny.
I'm sure that made you chuckle!

Now let's talk about my robe. Does it have to be white?
As you know, I'm a hot mess and won't be able to keep it clean.
Maybe a nice stained glass pattern would work.
Get it? Stained? I crack myself up sometimes.
Thanks again for giving me a sense of humor!
You, faith and humor have helped me through life's challenges.
Oh, but back to my robe!

I would also like the fabric to be "stretchy."
You said you would "prepare a table before me"
and I want to be prepared!
I've been practicing at more buffets than I care to admit.

What about the housing situation?
Are there really going to be mansions?
Will mine be like a Victorian mansion
or more like Downton Abbey? I like both.
Either way, I'm going to need a housekeeping staff.
You know very well cleaning is not my strong suit.
I would hate for someone to stop by my forever home
when it looks like a wreck!
Also, I'm hoping that all my pets will be there waiting inside.
I've missed them all so much,
but I know they've been well cared for.

I'm hoping there will be Hershey's milk chocolate in Heaven.
It's okay to have a variety, but that is my favorite!
I also require Peter Pan Peanut Butter
and Kraft Macaroni and Cheese. I usually buy two percent milk.
However, I would love to have whole milk!
My favorite steak is a medium rare rib eye. Hint! Hint!
Freshly squeezed lemonade and McDonald's sweet tea
should also be available.

I am hoping that fat and calories will be banned.
They are evil! They belong in Hell with Satan.
He deserves them!
While you're at it, throw out the kale.
I'm not really a fan of tofu either.

Please have plenty of toilet paper!
It's been on short supply down here.
Most people prefer the Charmin brand,
but I'm guessing you'll have Angel Soft.
I think that's about it! Wait! One more thing—
under no circumstances will I be wearing a mask!

Photo Album

By Dale Eikmeier
—Lansing, KS

Opening an unlabeled green photo album one sees carefully written calligraphy on the inside cover that reads, 'Major Dale Eikmeier Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm December 90 – May 91.'

The first page displays three photos: A four year old, wearing his dad's desert camouflage uniform and helmet. The shirt reaches his ankles. There is a two year old, also wearing her dad's helmet. The helmet's sides resting on

her shoulders. Another photo shows the family in front of a stone building. A dad, in his uniform, is now wearing the helmet. His wife with the two children stand next to him. The page is titled, "Departing Fort Riley, Kansas, home of the Big Red One."

There is the family Christmas letter that explains the irony of peace breaking out in Europe while the Persian Gulf is set for war. It discusses life on the home front and how supportive the local Kansas community is while the troops are gone. The mother feels no need to take the children home to her family in California. Kansas is where they want to be. Dale's addendum letter explains what his duties will be and includes his mailing address, should anyone wish to write.

The rest of the album contains a mix of mementos including, letters, news



clippings, and a Doonesbury cartoon where DB's girlfriend wonders how he is spending Christmas. Perhaps with a 'Foxy Saudi girl' she thinks. Dale wrote in the margin, "If there are, no one has seen any." There is a soldier's prayer book next to the menu from a Christmas dinner that includes beef, turkey, ham and four kinds of pie. There is the Corps Commander's holiday message telling soldiers to, "Take care of each other." At the back of the album is a collection of letters to any soldier. Many from school children, but the most poignant are those from adults. They write about flags and yellow ribbons on light poles, and businesses with signs saying, "God Bless Our Troops."

Naturally there are more photos organized chronologically and by theme. There is the deployment from Fort Riley, the arrival and unloading of Abrams tanks

and Humvees in Saudi Arabia, movement to the desert with a line of trucks on the dusty Tap Line road. The start of the ground war has photos of tanks, Apache helicopters and infantry fighting vehicles along with burned out Iraqi tanks and trucks. The occupation section shows burning oil fields and soldiers playing on a makeshift basketball court. Sprinkled throughout are photos of the kids back in

Kansas playing in the snow and enjoying an Easter picnic. The last photo is the homecoming where a suntanned dad is holding both his smiling children.

The carefully selected mementos, embellishments and the artful calligraphy are a testament to the love of a wife and mother and the time she spent assembling the album, not only for her husband and children, but for those not yet born or unknown.

This album may stay in the family for generations or end up in the hands of a stranger at an estate sale. Regardless they will have a piece of history that depicts an Army family separated by war but united by love.

Easter Told by the Little Ugly Rabbit

By *Diane Wasden*
—*Millen, GA*

Once while I was walking alone,
down the path to where the water flows,
caterpillars were getting prepared to wake up
from their long winter nap,
breaking free from their cocoons,
becoming colorful butterflies sweeping the skies.

I was admiring the daffodils
flowing among the tall Georgia pines.
I noticed a little rabbit peeking out
from behind a tall pine tree.
She steps out and in a very loud voice
for such a little rabbit, she has words with me,
“I was born the little ugly rabbit;
the much bigger and pretty rabbits
have nothing to do with me.

“But I make sure they remember me,
for I know I must never be shy and always kind.
I’m glad I’m the little ugly rabbit
for no one has to wait on me.
I’m always ahead of the game anyway, you see,
coloring Easter eggs all day long and even into the night.

“Being big and pretty, you miss out on all the fun,
always worrying if the color dye will get on your fur.
So that’s how come the job was handed down to me.
It’s the struggles in life that make us—US—
and pretty won’t get it down!

“The morning glories blink at us with drowsy eyes,
but the big and pretty rabbits keep passing us by.
When the red breasted robin sings his song of cheer,
you will know without a doubt springtime is here!

“Life is very delicate,
but yet has so much power.
Please try to treat it with love and respect,
like a butterfly on a flower.

“There’s a labyrinth you must take;
it’ll take you to a hill where you can hear
a weeping willow cry.

Here’s your basket made out of twigs, sticks and vines;
you must look and find my colorful eggs
that the big and pretty rabbits hid to find your way.

“On the hill you will find a cross,
a cross where Jesus was hung.
The day when the sky turned the darkest of blue,
the clouds, wind and rain let them know that God
was on his way. And Jesus said,
‘Father forgive them for all those who have sinned.’

“After all was said and done,
and the wind and rain had diminished,
With his last dying breath Jesus said,
‘Father, it is finished.’”

They placed Him inside a tomb
and rolled a huge stone across to seal it.
When Mary came back on the third day,
she was surprised to see an angel sitting on the stone.
“Behold, He is not here. He is in Heaven,
sitting on the right side of his Father
who is sitting on His throne.

“But He left on earth a helper to all and to everyone.
It’s the Holy Spirit.”
The little ugly rabbit was happy that I found my way;
you just have to be willing to find all the colorful eggs.

Caramel Oblivion

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

He sat at the bar, drink in hand,
waiting for her to come around.
He slowly sipped the caramel color
diluted from the melting rocks of ice.

She walked in, hesitated for a moment,
then crossed the worn wooden floor.
He set the glass down as she approached
and waited for the words he knew by heart.
His life had become a senseless cliché,
trying to escape the memories of life
in the bottom of a cocktail glass.
But the only way to get through the night.

One War, Two Generations (Twice in the Same Family)

By H. David Pendleton
—Lenexa, KS

My Pendleton ancestry line has a history of military service to this country. My great-great-great-great-great-grandfather was Brian Pendleton. He settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony before 1628. Brian Pendleton served as a major in the Massachusetts militia. America's National Guard traces its history back to this militia.



My father and paternal grandfather continued this military tradition. Both father and son served in World War II. This was not the first time this happened in the Pendleton line from Brian Pendleton to me. Colonel William Pendleton (23 March 1704-23 August 1786) served during the French and Indian War as well as in the Rhode Island militia during the Revolutionary War. His son, Captain Joshua Pendleton (6 May 1744-9 April 1824) was a Master Mariner and served 50 years at sea. He also served in the Westerly, Rhode Island militia reaching the rank of captain while serving in the Revolutionary War.

My grandfather, Jay Howard Pendleton, was born on 7 January 1898 in Havana, Montgomery County, Kansas. On 18 May 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Selective Service Act to draft men for World War I. It required all men from the age of 21 through 30 in the United States to register for the draft beginning on 5 June 1917. There was a 99 percent compliance rate.

Since Jay was a farmer and under the age of 21, he did not have to register. The next

year, the U.S. Congress expanded the draft for all men in America between the ages of 18 and 45 to register. Jay Howard registered as required by law and in September 1918, he passed his physical exam for induction into the military. The armistice occurred on 11 November 1918 and Jay never served in the Great War.

In 1940, the U.S. Congress passed a law that all men between the ages of 18 and 64 must register for the draft. Over thirty-six million men registered initially but number eventually reached 49 million men. The Selective Service selected 19 million of them and inducted 10.1 million of them ranging from the age of 18 to 45 years.

The Selective Service drafted Jay when he was 44 years of age. He could not obtain any deferments. Jay had no dependents as he was divorced and his only son was over 21 years of age. As an insurance salesman, he also did not have war related work.

Jay went through basic training and the Army transferred him to serve in the Army Air Force (AAF). He trained as an aerial

reconnaissance photographer at Lowery Field near Denver. Jay Howard then deployed to the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater. Technical Sergeant (TSGT) Jay Howard Pendleton spent almost three years in the CBI flying photo recon missions over the hump.

After the war in the Pacific was over, the AAF released Jay to return to civilian life. He rarely talked about his time in the service. One story Jay did tell

was that when he was on a bus with other airmen and he was seated, he would say, "I'll give up my seat to anyone older than me." Jay never had to give up his seat.

My father, Howard Dwain Pendleton, was born on 10 August 1920 in Tyro, Montgomery County, Kansas. In 1937, at the age of 17, he joined the Missouri National Guard. Dwain, as he was known, served in the national guard while attending Central Methodist University in Fayette, Howard County, Missouri. Due to his poor eyesight, he could not receive an ROTC commission.

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The Missouri National Guard including my father was immediately activated for active duty. He had graduated from college the previous spring. Dwain failed the physical exam due to his eyesight and the Army discharged him from active duty.

By March 1942, Dwain's eyesight had improved or the Army was desperate for men. He was able to reenlist for active

duty, but the Army would not deploy him overseas due to his poor eyesight. The Army sent him for training in the Kansas City area and in Arkansas before sending him to Florida. Corporal (CPL) Dwain Pendleton served on a radar installation in the Miami Beach area for the remainder of the war.

After World War II ended, Dwain enlisted in the Nebraska Air National Guard while working for Western Airlines. He served in the Air National Guard, Army National

Guard, or the Army Reserve for the next 27 years. In 1968, Dwain was the First Sergeant of the 1011th Quartermaster Company in Independence, Montgomery County, Kansas. The Army activated his unit in May 1968 after the Tet Offensive. First Sergeant Dwain Pendleton served 19 months on active duty during the Vietnam War.

It is rare that a father and son both fight in the same war. I have two sets of ancestors that did so. Col. William Pendleton and his

son, Capt. Joshua Pendleton, both fought in the Revolutionary War. Tsgt. Jay Howard Pendleton and his son, Cpl. Howard Dwain Pendleton, both fought in World War II. It is no wonder that I served in the Army for over 23 years and that three of my siblings also joined the Army. While I am proud of my service, I am even more proud of the service in my Pendleton line back to at least 1628.

Loyal to Myself

By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

Loyal.
Are words loyal or are the loyal words
written by the one who wins the war?
Words can be shaped like clay,
manipulated to make the foe
look better than he deserves.
The enemy is inside the wire.
He is a “Friendly,”
but he is a predator.

She has the courage to speak out,
but is condemned,
this victim, the prey.
The system is broken—
like it is her fault.
Words given to her are:
“dishonorable discharged”
with “special service codes”
and mental health diagnosis.
Then kicked to the curb.

Who is loyal to her?
All of this indecency
swept under the rug
with no punishment.
He gets promoted,
allowed to retire
with no repercussions.
But she is a survivor,
loyal to herself.

Square Peg Puzzle

By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

Here I am a square peg
where they are trying to place me
in a round hole.
Don't you love how they try to pigeonhole us?
One size fits all—NOT!
The world is like a puzzle;
we search for the next piece,
that right position to be placed,
that perfect soul mate.
But we are people; we have hearts.
Seems like I am doing a mean two-step
while others waltz their way.
Maybe 'cause I beat to my own drum,
dancing down a path of life.
I don't walk the party line;
I refuse to be a sheep.
Our brains are ours to be used:
take in information, process, evaluate,
accept or decline.
Not to just believe propaganda
and half of what we see.
It is up to us to question and find the truth.
Think about it.
Can you be placed in a slot?
Do you fit just right?
What beat do you dance to?
Or are you an individual, wanting to be heard?

The Line Between Death and Life

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

She begins learning to give;
he starts burning to take.
She brings love to live;
his lust unleashed is awake.
Their upbringing is of strife,
forming the thin line between death and life.
The boy is always in the man;
it's the purity of innocence.
The girl is the spirit in the woman
that empowers her independence.
Mankind's endurance without plight
is the thin line between death and life.
Seekers live for a goal
from a place of this earth.
Players shall never be whole
from the ignorance of their curse.
Knowledge of living in God's light
Is from the thin line between death and life.
Religion is the soul of science;
hope can be the belief for chance.
Science is the labor of religion.
Survival is society; it's the true night
for the thin line between death and life.

St. Patrick's Day Enjoyed by All the Ages

By Diane Wasden
—Millen, GA

I remember my days of innocence;
I was young and naive.
I had no worries,
no responsibilities.

I used to run in our backyard;
I used to sleep all day.
I used to laugh with joy;
I used to joke and play.

The early morning rain left as quick as it came;
“out came the sun to dry up all the rain.”
I woke up and found myself in the serious
mysterious land of Ireland.
And as I looked about, everyone was wearing green.
It was St. Patrick's Day!

Then I heard it, a wee little voice laughing.
I briefly caught a glimpse until finally he came into focus:
a three-foot tall leprechaun dressed up all in green,
holding a four-leaf clover, smoking a pipe.

He was a happy little guy, running circles all around me.
He seemed harmless.
Across the sky above, I surprisingly saw
a beautiful palate of color,

it was an original etching, “A Rainbow“
which seemed to have no end.
Pastel colors of orange, yellow, green, blue and purple,
an array of splendor painted by God's own hands.
Than it happened!
Out of nowhere that little leprechaun kicked me
in my shin with his tiny black boot.

“Tag, you're it,“ he yelled. “Race you to my pot of gold
at the end of the rainbow.“
Being a competitive person, I love a great challenge.
I told him I would gratefully accept his challenge.
He then handed me his four-leaf clover and said,
“Good Luck! You're gonna need it!”
And just like that, POOF, he was gone.
I couldn't find him anywhere; where did that little rascal go?

I had no time to waste and time was ticking.
I was walking up the arch of the rainbow on my quest.
The leprechaun jumped in front of me,
telling me I must move faster than this.
Again, POOF, he was gone like a genie in a bottle.

I began to feel guilty trespassing on God's artwork.
I was starting to feel like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz,
following the yellow brick road.
And my man behind the curtain was a three-foot leprechaun
pulling my strings.
I had to stop and pull myself together;
he wasn't gonna let me take his pot of gold.

I wondered how many others he suckered into this.
Then I woke up to my mom telling me to get my butt out of bed.
“If you don't want to get pinched,
put on something green. Hurry up!”
Got to get to the parade in Savannah,
the biggest St. Patrick's Day Parade in our country.

St. Patrick's Day is wonderfully played out
for all the ages to enjoy along with many other holidays
or folklores. Life is too precious to waste.
Keep all folklores alive; let that child in you come out
and pass it on down to your children, and so on.
HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY! CELEBRATE!
Don't forget the green or get pinched!

TH NORTON AWARD

66489

By Carl “Papa” Palmer
—University Place, WA

Wheel-chaired into the lobby
from his assisted care room,
the elderly Jewish gentleman
squints into bright camera lights,
accepts the lottery check,
smiles at the television crew.
The newspaper reporter asks,
“Was this a computer pick
or did you already have
some numbers in mind?”
He focuses on her microphone
as his hand rubs the sleeve
of the frayed gray sweater
covering his faded blue tattoo.

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



The Heart Remembers

By Michelle M. Jackson

VA Medical Center—Houston, TX



Beginning and Ending of a Career

By Lea-Ellen Whitt

VA Medical Center—Murfreesboro, TN



Moonlight

By Gema Gabriela Benavides

VA Medical Center—Miami, FL



Alone

By Alexandra Brown

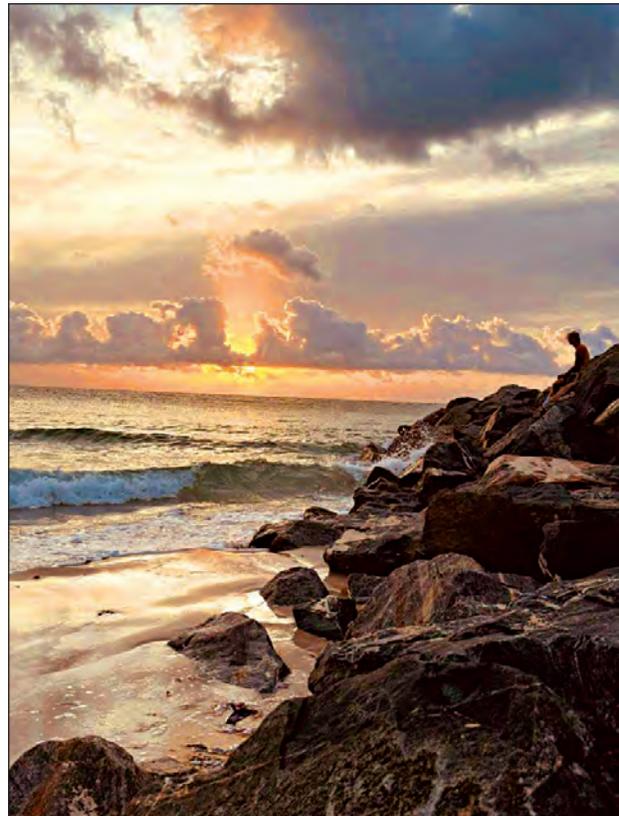
VA Medical Center—Buffalo, NY



Pax huic domui

By Richard Mjos

VA Medical Center—Nashville, TN



Deep Thinker

By Gema Gabriela Benavides

—Hialeah, FL



The Eyes Have It
By Ty Andrews
—Lincoln, NE

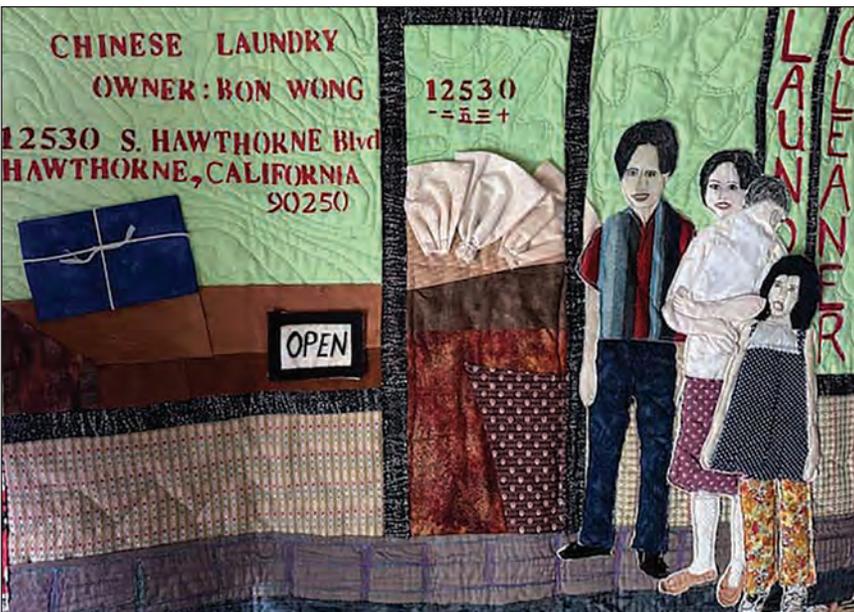
Exit Strategy and War Games
By Daniel Combs
VA Medical Center—Mesa, AZ





Trust

By Ty Andrews
—Lincoln, NE



American History Chinese Laundries

By Lucy Wong
VA Medical Center—Phoenix, AZ

My Talks With Timmy, David and God

By Rhonda Chavez
VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX



On my walks in nature, I talk to God a lot, along with my brothers Timmy and David, who have left this earth way too soon. I ask them all to watch over me, help me to not stress over things I cannot control because when I stress over these things, it ultimately leads to anxiety, depression, insomnia and so many unhealthy reactions.

This morning, I was so stressed that I begged God to let me chose to stay here so I can see my boys, Derek and Nathan, along with my grandson Desmond, live their lives. As much as I want to be closer to David and Timmy because I truly believe they are at peace, I'm not ready to leave this earth yet. But, it's a fine line sometimes. I know I want to be here, enjoy life, travel, enjoy my family, watch my boys live their best lives and watch Desmond as he grows. He's my number one reason for staying. I'm not going to lie. My boys are grown men, I'm sure they love me but they don't need me.

Desmond needs his Rho Rho in his life and I know for sure I need him in mine. When I see a picture of him, I want to hug him so badly. Thank God for facetime because that's my favorite time of the week no matter what else I have going on. That boy is my heart and soul. I love watching him grow, learn, explore, be silly, even when he's mad, he's so darn cute. Getting on the floor on his hands and knees with his forehead on the ground just crying. Sometimes it's real and lasts a little bit, but other times he's just being silly and will eventually start to laugh, especially when I start to cry with him or daddy starts to tickle him. I'm taking it day by day, sometimes minute by minute, having a variety of health issues with no resolution is frustrating but when I stress about it, they only get worse. So, one step at a time, deep breathe, focus on the positive, facetime with Desmond, talk to David and Timmy, but most importantly talk to God. Every night I Give It to God and Go to Sleep.

Sacrifice and Surrender

By John Priestley II
VA Medical Center—Huntington, WV

The recruiter promised I could choose any rating;
I followed in the footsteps of my father.
The Krishna kids at O'Hare were a bit of a bother,
lack of companionship sorely grating.
It's sacrifice and surrender for a solitary man.

I left the Isles for Lindbergh Field,
Aloha sunshine giving way to late-night dark,
dimly illuminated flagship eerily stark
against the inky waters softly sealed.
It's sacrifice and surrender for a solitary man.

The two weeks in Taipei were loads of fun,
like a carnival after the austerity of Seoul,
renewing friendship and relaxing the goal.
No one to meet me when the return flight was done.
It's sacrifice and surrender for a solitary man.
I arrived at Yokota across the Japanese Sea,
one of the few sailors on the military flight.
Alas! No sponsor anywhere in sight;
a fortuitous shuttle delivered me.
It's sacrifice and surrender for a solitary man.

I rode skipper's P3 to Bay Area home port
after three months of foreign deployment.
The homecoming yielded little enjoyment,
my girlfriend's absence exceedingly poor sport.
It's sacrifice and surrender for a solitary man.
I became a frequent flier
seeking to shorten the four hundred miles
connecting the brave, stoic smiles
and eyes that were temporarily drier.
It's sacrifice and surrender for a solitary man.
I always did the best I could
to endure the sadness and honor the good.

Thaw

By Stephen Fournier
VA Medical Center—Hartford, CT

Of the many mild solstices I can remember,
I do not recall so morose a December,
With rustling leaves whispering rumors of war
As crows rudely squawk, "Nevermore. Nevermore."

Why Is American Legion Good for America?

By Jeffery Shockley
—Belleville, PA



As an older adult today, I can remember as a child seeing my great Uncle Raymond, my maternal grandmother's brother wearing his military uniform. The pride in it was so strong it made me want to go into the military.

I mention this trip through memory lane because the American Legion played a major role in our community because it gave the old soldiers a gathering spot; it was a place that supported the community by sponsoring our Boy Scout troop and I can remember the Friday Fish Fries. These are just some of the things the local American Legion Post did to support anyone who wanted to be involved in positive lifestyles.

The American Legion is good for America because it honors those who have fought in the various military branches across the world, men and women who have sacrificed so much in honor and pride—willing to serve others, uplift and support each other through very difficult times. Their memories of tragedy and loss far outweigh anything my young life has ever experienced. In the words of the National Commander Vincent J. Troiola, "The American Legion's common denominator is the bond we share through service in the U.S. Armed Forces."

I would like to say that the care and concern of the American Legion does not stop or

remain limited to those who have served. By their example of humanity and pride collectively and individually, each member does impact another and gives me hope that in whatever situation I may find myself there is another who cares that I exist.

As we go through the difficult times of today, politically, spiritually and financially, America is exceptional in its capacity for self-criticism which leads to self-correction. Time has demonstrated that we are losing the younger generations at an alarming rate. The American Legion reaches out to give hope and pride to those young enough to make a difference in their lives and positively impact the community. The many older men and women that tell stories of heroism, facing unparalleled odds that had me sitting wide-eyed and hanging on every word are fading away. They taught about history not found in any school book.

If we fail to remember our history, we disgrace the legacies and traditions of the many who make up the American Legion. The American Legion works to keep our history alive and relevant, instilling pride in who we can be no matter what we have come through. That is why the American Legion is good for America.

Be the One

By Karen Green
VA Medical Center—Las Vegas, NV

If you see someone who is sad and alone, they may be hungry or without a home. If you know someone who may be depressed, they may need to talk to feel their best. Just someone to listen to what they have to say could mean a lot to change their day. Merely listening to what they think could pull them back if they are on the brink. They may feel that no one cares, or that life's not fair. Don't be afraid to make a call: you may save a life after all. If you haven't heard from someone in a while, they could be upset or going through trials. Someone may be being bullied or been cast out; it could make them feel worthless or in doubt. Be the one to check; it could be the difference between life and death.

Not in Too Many Words

By Paul David Gonzales

VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

Dear Sons,

I want to tell you about my life
and my innermost thoughts.

I want to say how much you mean to me;
I want to say how proud I am of you.
But not in too many words.

I want to say how fulfilled you made my life;
I want to say how happy you made me
when you sailed and charted your own life's course.
I want to say how I love to hear you call me, "Dad."
But not in too many words.

I want to say I tried hard to provide;
I want to say I did my best to pass the test.
I want to remember the fun times.
But not in too many words.

I want to remember the day you came into my life;
I want to remember when you shed your diaper
for big boy pants.
I want to remember your first shave.
But not in too many words.

I want to say, "I love you."
But not in too many words.

An Outcast

By Levell Taylor

VA Medical Center—Battle Creek, MI

In many eyes I am called an outcast;
many judge me by my past.
Many won't see me in my present,
and refuse to see my destiny.
Through Jesus I have a blessed future.
Oh, yes, what a beautiful picture!
At one time I was spiritually poor;
Then Jesus opened a new door.
Many still hold my past against me;
the new life they refuse to see.
I have God,
and only God do I wish to please.
God has forgiven all my sinful deeds.

The Lingerin

By Richard Wangard

—Neenah, WI

There is a train track
in my brain.
The engine never runs out of fuel
as it goes round and round.
It pulls some boxcars,
same name on each one:
PTSD.
In one, the faces of the brothers I lost.
The ones you save, you never remember,
only the ones that die before your eyes
during a medevac as you do EVERYTHING
humanly POSSIBLE
to keep them until you land at the hospital.
But I failed!
A jet engine mechanic
had to learn to become a medic.
Double duty and I would not have had it
any other way.
There are side tracks off the mainline in my brain.
One goes to isolation,
another to inappropriate behavior,
another to anger,
another to guilt.
And after 55 years the train still runs!
What have I learned about the LINGERING?
A wife of over 50 years that has been in Vietnam
more than I have?
PTSD group counseling that is the next best thing
to writing.
All Nam brothers, but the group changes much.
These days as my brothers die
from Agent Orange,
old wounds,
just plain age,
we pass into history. The LINGERING
will stop;
I don't know when.
Cope?
That is nothing but a cruel joke to any Nam vet!
Not On My Watch!
THE LINGERING WON'T LET IT!

Bataan Death March

By Kimberly Green

—Fort Smith, AR

How I learned about the Bataan Death March:
“Excuse me, do you mind if I bum a smoke?”
I looked at the man
who looked like he was at the end of his rope.
His hands were weathered.
His face had wrinkles to the extreme.
He looked hardened and a little mean.
“I don’t smoke,” I said politely as I tried to pass by.
But just then I stopped.
Something inside of me said, “Listen. Just try.”
“Are you hungry?” I asked.
And his face lit up.
“I know a little place around the corner;
you and I can eat and talk.”
I walked with the old man;
he was unsure on his feet.
I wondered what I got myself into
as I escorted him to his seat.
We both ate a good meal;
he ate like he hadn’t eaten in years.
I asked him what his life story was;
he looked taken aback.
“No one’s ever asked me that; you’re the first.
Usually people look at me like I’m a piece of dirt.
You know I served in the army.
I was drafted; I didn’t just enlist.
I was afraid to die; I was just a kid.
I was captured in the Philippines
a long time ago.
I endured the Bataan Death March.
Now I walk real slow.”
The Bataan Death March?
I’ve never heard of that.
I was of a younger generation
who usually didn’t give a rat’s ass.
He enlightened me of the brutality of war.
How 70,000 American and Filipinos
never wavered in what they stood for.
Force-marched for miles and miles,
starved, beaten and ill.
He said, “falling out on the march

was like being buried alive in an anthill.
We were marched to a prisoner of war camp
some 64 miles away.
Those who couldn’t walk or fell out were shot
or bayoneted immediately along the way.”
We sat for a long time in that little place.
I listened to his story for hours,
tears freely rolling down my face.
I’m in my 80s now.
I think back to that time and place,
when I met a little man
who told me things I’ve never had to face
like struggling to survive a march of death.
No, I will never forget that man
who taught me of the Bataan Death March.

My Seven Days of Dieting

By Melvin Brinkley

VA Medical Center—Davis, CA

On the first day of dieting my true love sent to me:
A packet of pear puree.

On the second day of dieting my true love sent to me:
Two carrot tops and a packet of pear puree.

On the third day of dieting my true love sent to me:
Three French fries, two carrot tops and a packet of pear puree.

On the fourth day of dieting my true love sent to me:
Four apple cores, three French fries, two carrot tops
and a packet of pear puree.

On the fifth day of dieting my true love sent to me:
Five onion rings, four apple cores, three French fries,
two carrot tops and a packet of pear puree.

On the sixth day of dieting my true love sent to me:
Six pretzel sticks, five onion rings, four apple cores,
three French fries, two carrot tops and a packet of pear puree.

On the seventh day of dieting my true love sent to me:
Seven stalks of celery, six pretzel sticks, five onion rings,
four apple cores, three French fries, two carrot tops
and a packet of pear puree.

On the eighth day of dieting I found a NEW true love
who doesn’t think that diets ever work.
Hallelujah!

My Secret Place

By Jason Kirk Bartley
VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

When you are burdened down with troubles
and despair,
you look to your right and to your left,
but no one seems to care.
I resort here often,
when my trials seem too hard to face.
It's my peace,
my comfort.
I call it my secret place.
Sometimes when life hurts,
and it often will,
troubles pile up.
They're too hard for me still.
No one knows where I will be,
for I resort hither for my sanctity.
Every secret place is different,
to each man his own,
many seeds are sown.
As I pray and pray up to God's throne,
on my knees is where I win my fight.
I pray and pray till I see the light.
I can feel His close presence,
as close as I can be.
He has spoken to my heart and set my burdens free.
When burdens and problems I seem to face,
I always resort to my secret place.

They Say

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

“Nothing's as lovely as a tree,”
but what's lovelier is the wind in the tree,
flitting through the dark, bronzed leaves
as it prances o'er dancing branches.

In and out it curls,
picks up road dust then swirls
onto the next tree,
then billows in the willows.

And for a fleeting moment floats in an oak,
rushes through a maple
where with a hush it becomes stable,
slowing to a stilled and lulling silence.

Who Will Hear Their Pleas

By Dan Yates
—Blue Springs, MO

Deployment was a word she had grown to hate.
Its meaning plain and simple, months without her mate.
He told her she was able, assured her she was strong,
but this recent tour had her thinking he was wrong.
She had no Basic Training, nor any AIT.
She had no Battle Buddy; he was overseas.
She wore no BDUs, no dog tags 'round her neck.
That lady in the mirror was looking like a wreck.
The children, no longer toddlers, challenged what she'd say.
Added to the stress at work, her nerves began to fray.
What would she do; where would she turn? She felt all alone.
Tension raced throughout her body, cutting to the bone.
She couldn't call her parents for fear they'd say she's weak.
To her closest friend, her doubts she couldn't speak.
She looked around for some support; how could she endure?
To make it through another day, this time she wasn't sure.
Whenever they would skype, she'd hang on every word,
but when the call was over, it's as if she never heard.
How could this have happened; he's the one in danger?
Yet everyone she meets, she keeps them as a stranger.
Her world is getting smaller; it's not supposed to be.
His absence has created serious anxiety.
Though combat zones can damage any soldier's brain,
their loved ones back at home also suffer pain.
PTS has been reserved for the soldier overseas,
but the loved ones still at home, who will hear their pleas?

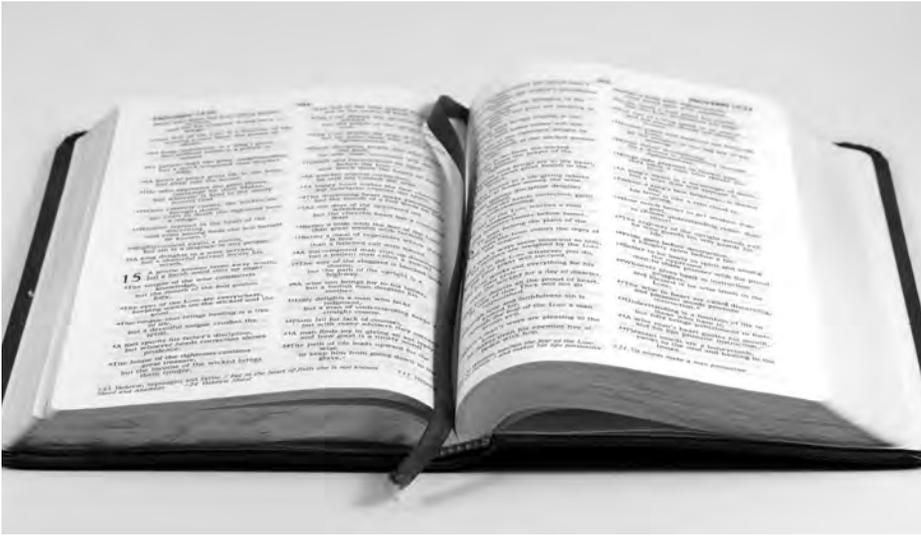
Eccentric

By Dwight D. Jenkins
—Rensselaer, NY

I change the oil in my car every day;
my meat, I eat burnt late at night.
I drink quite a bit but never imbibe;
I don't bark, I don't bay, but I bite.
I won't turn on TV until Cronkite comes back;
I watch reruns of wars on my phone.
Carson's still king of my late dinner hour
“cuz it's better than eating alone.”
Life as I've lived it consistently awes;
I can't wait for it all to be done.
I'll return a Millennial stuck on himself
and watch newer wars air as reruns.

The Holy Bible

By Gene Allen Groner
—Independence, MO



Having read hundreds of books over my lifetime, and written and edited numerous books and articles, I have never seen or heard of any book to compare with the Holy Bible. An estimated 5.6 billion copies of the Bible have been purchased worldwide. It has been translated into 698 languages and sold in over 100 countries. Each year approximately 100 million Bibles are purchased throughout the world. You can now have access to the Bible in braille, in audio version, and in digital formats. The Bible is by far the most widely read and easily accessible book ever written.

I received my first Bible from my grandmother Ada Spohrer (see story on page 13). She gave me a set of the three standard books of the church upon my high school graduation from Marshall High School in Marshall, Missouri. I still have them and cherish them in my library today. I never tire of reading them, for in them I have encountered God and Christ through the Holy Spirit many times. Their value to me cannot possibly be measured in material terms. Each time I pick up one of these books, I remember vividly my grandmother and my mother. They faithfully brought me to church twice

a week, just one of the many ways they showed their love for me, for our Heavenly Father and for our church. It was in their home that I first read the Saints Herald, and I've been reading it ever since. I learned from my mother and grandmother, what it means to value and to love family, friends, church, and most of all God and Jesus Christ.

Today I have a number of different versions of the Holy Bible. I find it useful to compare readings from several of them, as clarity and readability vary from one to another, especially when I am studying and preparing to speak or write about a particular scripture or theme. By reading from various scriptures, I am better prepared, and I find it easier to understand the underlying message. Knowing the scriptures also strengthens my faith and fortitude whenever temptation calls. Jesus, when tempted by Satan in the wilderness, was able to resist temptation by quoting scripture, so I have learned to memorize various passages as a means of gaining the upper hand whenever the need arises. I believe this not only helps me, but more importantly it pleases my Father in heaven. I recommend the memorization of

scripture from an early age and throughout our life here on earth. After all, Jesus gave us the perfect example, as recorded in Matthew 4:1-11 NIV, when Jesus was tested in the wilderness:

1. "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
2. "After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.
3. "The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'
4. "Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'
5. "Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.
6. "'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'
7. "Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'
8. "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.
9. "All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'
10. "Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'
11. "Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."

She Longs

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

She longs for the day
when a uniform was worn
with pride and dignity for all to witness
that a warrior stood before them.

She longs for friendship
born of teamwork and esprit de corps
in training and on the battlefield,
knowing someone always had her six.

She longs for the nights
pulling duty and guarding others
in the peaceful slumber of darkness,
watching for danger and threats of harm.

She longs for a time
when her confidence and vast knowledge
led the way for others to follow
in her footsteps leading to safety.

She longs for a purpose,
not just a life's career cut short
by physical and emotional wounds
that severed her usefulness and worth.

She longs for respite
from the aching pain and loneliness
that inhabit each day's existence
lost in nightmares and thoughts of the war.

She longs for the day
to wear the uniform once again
with brightly shined medals and gold stripes,
with the flag she served upon her grave.

She would track him down each night,
begging him to stop and get help,
to return to the man she had raised
before he left to go to war in the desert.

He was beyond caring anymore.
The man she had raised had died
long ago on a bloody battlefield
in a place where life had no value.

As she turned and walked away,
he signaled for another shot of oblivion.
For a moment he saw her in the mirror,
wearily heading for the world outside.

His only solace now was in a glass
of caramel colored liquid that burned
as it traveled down his throat on its way
to giving him peace and a numbing death.

Quiet Is the Night

By Allyson Hargrave
—Orem, UT

The night is very quiet
as I look up at the stars.
I wonder what meaning the night brings?
Peace and comfort deep inside me.
I notice a star
brighter than the other stars.
Watching this star, I wonder what it means?
Peace and joy develop in my soul,
begging me to follow it.

From morning to night, I see a manger
beckoning me.
Rejoicing, I see a baby sleeping
and his loving parents.
Crying, I realize I see the son of God.
What joy had come. Rejoice, rejoice!
Tears are rolling down my face.
Hallelujah! Our Savior is here.
Again, peace reigns in my heart.

Prey

By Dylan Bless
VA Medical Center—Phoenix, AZ

Outskirts nearest the edge of the light,
Shadowy graveyard spirits take spite.
A ravenous raven with a beak shaped of scythe,
And lewd, lavished lizards with poisonous tongues
Conjure together amidst Hell's pounding drums
To watch do-gooders sunbathed in Christ.
Their anointment exhaled thy cherished air.
But all the critters exhaled despair.

Whether Weather: Haiku Sequence

By Lynn A. Norton
—Leawood, KS

spring showers
soft patters announce dawn
green panorama

raging thunderstorm
atmospheric tantrum
petulant sky child

tornado funnel
lawn furniture thief
gifts for neighbors

blistering heat
cloudless horizon
mouth cotton

wispy leaves
abandon naked stalks
autumn peepshow

freezing rain
power outage
shiver in darkness

blizzard warning
empty grocery shelves
don't forget beer

polar vortex
slumber below zero
dream of spring showers.

Duty Officer

By Steven Miller
—Holly Springs, NC

In January, 1971, Gordon Kensie graduated from the U.S. Army Field Artillery Officers' Basic course and to his relief, instead of heading for Vietnam, was assigned to an artillery battalion stationed at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. As a second lieutenant, he was to be the assistant executive officer of Firing Battery B.

The Battalion Headquarters was required to be responsive to any and all contingencies 24 hours

a day. This meant that someone, namely one officer and one non-commissioned officer (NCO) had to be on duty in the headquarters all night. In the battalion, all non-field-grade officers (lieutenants and captains) had to serve as duty officer on a rotating basis. New lieutenants were usually exempt for the first month, but then were added to the roster. Kensie's name came up early in his second month.

After completing his normal day, he reported to Battalion Headquarters at 1700 hours. The battalion executive officer (XO) spent about 15 minutes giving him a quick overview. The job basically meant staying in the headquarters and answering any telephone calls and attending to any business that might arise. He assured Kensie that he should not be too concerned; nothing ever happened, and he would be sharing the duty responsibilities with Staff Sgt. Lopez, an experienced NCO. Kensie left the XO's office and wandered into the main part of the office where he met Sgt. Lopez, who was from Battery A.



Lopez was friendly, and knowing it was Kensie's first time as Duty Officer, attempted to put him at ease. "Don't worry, Lieutenant," he said. "I've done this many times, and nothing ever really happens."

He showed Kensie the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) Manual. He also pointed out that there was a cot in the hallway where they could take turns getting a little sleep if they wanted. By around 1830, the headquarters had emptied out and everything was quiet. Lopez was shuffling through papers and then took out a couple of magazines. Kensie settled into another chair and began to read a paperback book he had been smart enough to bring along. Hours ticked by slowly. He eventually began to nod off, so Lopez suggested that he stretch out on the cot for a little while. Kensie was not really comfortable with that; being the ranking officer there, he insisted that Lopez get some sleep and he would man the phone. Lopez reluctantly agreed and shuffled off down the hallway.

Kensie tried staying awake by walking around in the quiet office and sipping on some really bad coffee. He finally sat back down at the desk and tried to read some more. Around 0200, he felt himself nodding off, when the telephone rang. He shook the cobwebs out of his head, looked at the phone for a second and started to reach for it. Sgt. Lopez came hurrying out of the hallway. "Why don't you let me get it, Lieutenant," he said, and reached across the desk

for the phone. It occurred to Kensie that the Duty NCOs were really the ones in charge and the duty officers, especially young second lieutenants were just there because it was required. Lopez picked up the phone.

"Headquarters, First of the Nineteenth Field Artillery, Staff Sergeant Lopez speaking." Kensie saw Lopez's expression become serious as he sat down in the chair and picked up a pencil. He wrote down a few notes, then said, "Wait one. I'll let you speak to the duty officer." He held the phone out to Kensie, but slid a pad in front of him where he had written, "Lawton Police Department."

Kensie took the phone from him slowly, uncertain of what to say. "This is Lieutenant Kensie speaking."

"Yes, this is Sergeant Edwards of the Lawton Police Department."

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

“Lieutenant, I’m afraid we have a dead soldier down here, and we believe he’s one of yours.”

Kensie didn’t know what to say. Apparently, Edwards sensed that and continued. “One of our patrols saw a vehicle sitting in the park with the motor running. When they investigated, they saw a hose running from the exhaust into the rear window on the passenger side. There was someone slumped over the wheel. They yanked the hose out and jimmied the door open and pulled him out. There was no pulse. The officers tried to revive him and called for an ambulance. It was too late. He was gone.”

Lopez could hear the conversation and was writing on the pad, “What’s his name?” Kensie asked Edwards.

“His ID says William Sheffler. We called the post headquarters and found out his unit and called you.”

Kensie was in a minor state of shock, not sure what to do next. Lopez was mouthing words to him, telling him what to ask. Kensie nodded. “Where is he now?” he asked.

“Since he’s Army, they took him to the base hospital. You can call over there and ask for the Morgue. His vehicle is in the Impound Lot. We’re going to have to go over it in the morning for any evidence, then we can release it.”

There wasn’t much else Edwards could tell him, so he took Edward’s number and thanked him. As he started to hang up, he heard Edwards. “Lieutenant?” he said. “I’m sorry about this. He was just a kid.” Then he hung up.

Lopez checked the battalion roster and determined that Sheffler was in Battery C. He told Kensie they had to get hold of the C Battery First Sergeant (1SGT)

and inform him, as well as the Battery Commander (BC). Kensie looked up the home number for 1SGT Thomas and called. After a few rings, he picked up. Kensie told him what had happened. He was instantly alert. “Call the BC,” he said. “I’ll be at the Battery in 20 minutes. I’ll meet you there.” He hung up.

Kensie called the BC, Captain Synowski, and informed him. “Did you notify Top?” he asked. “Top” was how the battery First Sergeant was addressed. Kensie told him that 1SGT Thomas was on his way. “I’ll be along ASAP,” he said.

Kensie left Lopez at the Battalion Headquarters and walked down to the C Battery building. It was quiet, with only the orderly awake in the office. 1SGT Thomas arrived right after he did. Senior NCOs like Thomas are used to taking charge, and Kensie was happy to let him do it. “We need to open his locker and inventory it, Lieutenant,” he said. Since Sheffler was a Specialist 4 (SP4), he was not in the main barracks, but in a small room he shared with another soldier. Top knocked on the door, and since he heard no response, used his master key to open the door. Sheffler’s roommate was not there. The orderly, who had followed them to the room told Top that the roommate was on leave.

Top sent the orderly back to the office to wait for Captain Synowski to arrive. He then opened Sheffler’s locker and began writing down the items on a pad he had brought with him. When he lifted some T-shirts off one of the shelves, a plastic bag dropped on the floor. Top picked it up and examined it. It appeared to be some ground up leaves. Top looked at Kensie out of the corner of his eye. They both knew what it was. They were quiet for a moment. “What do you want to do with this, lieutenant?” he asked.

“I don’t know what is in that bag, Top.”

“Neither do I,” he replied. “But, Sheffler was a good soldier, and I think his family will be dealing with a lot of grief. I don’t think we need to make it worse.” In 1971, Marijuana was still illegal, especially on a military base.

Kensie thought for a minute. “Let’s flush it.” They took it to the latrine and Kensie watched as Top emptied the contents of the bag into the toilet and flushed it. They returned to Sheffler’s room and continued the inventory just as Captain Synowski arrived. Top looked at Synowski. “We’re about finished, sir. Nothing out of the ordinary.”

Synowski turned to Kensie. “You can head on back to battalion, lieutenant. We’ll take it from here.”

Kensie was allowed to take the next morning off, and when he arrived back at the battery office in the afternoon, it was business as usual. As expected, the word of Sheffler’s suicide had spread throughout the battalion, but no one was talking about it. The next day, they were told that a memorial service would be held at 1100 hours the following day.

The next morning, the entire battalion cadre filed into an auditorium. On the stage at the front was a podium and beside it, on a small table was a pair of boots with a helmet resting on top of them. After a few minutes, the battalion commander mounted the stage and the entire room came to attention. After everyone was seated, the battalion commander began to speak. He spoke of the tragedy of a young life so senselessly lost. He asked, rhetorically, why Specialist Sheffler felt he could not bring whatever his problems were to his battery’s leadership. Or didn’t he have any close buddies he could turn to? In the end, the battalion commander left the entire battalion feeling as if they had somehow failed this young soldier.

(Continued on Page 46)

In World War II and other wars, units often trained together, and were sent to battle as a unit. And they stayed there and fought together until the war was over. The soldiers developed strong bonds and friendships. They fought beside each other and for each other as much as their country. Vietnam was different. A unit was sent to Vietnam and stayed there. Soldiers had 12-month tours, and then went back to the States. They joined units as replacements for soldiers who had finished their tours, were wounded or were killed. They didn't know any of the guys who were already there. The replacements were called the "FNGs" (Fucking New Guys). They fought alongside guys they didn't know and, in many cases, would never get to know. Coming home was the same. When their time "in-country" was up, they would board the "Freedom Bird" and fly back to the States. They were then assigned to a stateside unit full of strangers to serve out the rest of their enlistment until it was time to go home. Most had little interest in forming close bonds with the other men, especially those who had not experienced Vietnam. Sheffler had no close friends to confide in.

A couple of days later, Kensie was at his desk in the Battery XO's office on the second floor of the building. He couldn't stop thinking about Sheffler. Over half the men in the battalion had been to Vietnam. They had survived 12 months in harm's way, and were back in the States, happy to be alive and waiting for their enlistments to be up. And, here was a young man who had not been sent to Vietnam, was basically "home free," but ended his own life. And there was no "buddy" there to stop him.

The battery clerk, SP4 Adams, entered to drop some paper work off. As he started to leave, Kensie said, "Adams?" He stopped and turned around. "Close the door for a

second, would you?" Adams quietly closed the door and approached the desk.

"Can I help you, sir?"

If anyone knows everything that goes on in a battery, it's the clerk. Kensie leaned forward. "So, what was the story with Sheffler? Why did he do it?"

Adams looked at him for a minute, considering how much to say. Finally, "He had a real problem, sir."

"What kind of a problem?"

"It seems he got a local girl pregnant. She was giving him a real hard time."

Kensie sat back in his chair. "I'm sure this is not the first time this has happened around this post. He could have found a way to work it out."

"Well, sir, that was not the big problem."

Kensie looked at him, waiting.

"It seems he has a girl at home he was engaged to marry when he got out of the Army. She was from a prominent family in his town. He couldn't face her or her family. Or his."

So, that was it, Kensie thought. This 22-year-old boy decided that this best escape route was to leave this world. He would leave behind parents that would never recover from the loss, and a young woman who would never understand completely why he left. And he would leave another young woman in Lawton alone with a child and no help.

Adams left the office and Kensie stood looking out the window across the street toward the motor pool. The trucks and howitzers were parked in neat lines on the gravel lot where they were supposed to be. Soldiers moved around, going about their duties as usual. And life moved on.

New Book

By Daniel L. Paicopulos
—San Diego, CA

There is this book which has been following me around for weeks now. Actually, not following so much as accompanying, fitting nicely in my hand or atop my desk, in the room I sometimes share with a cat. The book is important; that's why I bought it. It is about hope and also about the mind, about laughing at but not making an enemy of the latter. I say that's what it is about, but I don't know for sure, only what the dust jacket blurb says. I can't seem to get by the introduction, not in my room nor outside, heck, not even at the library even though it's open again. My core seems obdurate in its resistance to change or growth. I will say that, even with pages unread, that book seems still to be having an impact. I think about hope all the time. A good thing since I have forever friends who will not see year's end. In the greater scheme of things, I'm a mighty small fish in a very big pond or, at most, like one of those salmon, returning to their place of creation, encountering resistance at every turn. I hope this hope thing is not overrated. The book is heavy, the thoughts, too, sometimes.

A Veteran's Tear

By Arthur Wiknik
—Higganum, CT

During a Memorial Day ceremony I attended as a youngster, I noticed an old soldier proudly dressed in his uniform, standing alert and erect, as if he were still on active duty. Not making eye contact with anyone, he stared into the distance, as if for that moment he was in a different time and place. As the roll call of the war dead was announced, the old soldier's emotions overpowered him. His lips trembled as several tears

slowly ran down his cheek, but the old soldier never called attention to himself by wiping them away. Instead, he regained his composure and continued to stand tall as if nothing had occurred.

I had no idea what had affected him. I always believed that war veterans were the most courageous men in the world but now that image was doubtful, for I had witnessed a sign of weakness. Or had I?

Years later, while serving as an infantryman in the Vietnam War, I had the unpleasant experience of watching young men die horribly in combat. When I came home and began attending Memorial Day ceremonies as a war veteran, I understood how that old soldier felt. The solemn drumbeat, the lonely sound of a waving flag and the rifle fire from the honor guard had stirred my emotions as well. Without realizing it, I had become one of those veterans who are sometimes haunted by the memories of the most intense period of my life. The sad tear that a veteran eventually sheds is not a sign of weakness but instead represents the soul of our youth and the confronting of the ghosts of the past.



The general population which was unaffected by military service, often expect returning veterans to resume civilian life as if nothing significant has occurred. But it is naive to think that anyone exposed to war would not be changed in some way. After all, a lifetime of extreme ordeals had been crammed into a relatively short period of time, stealing our innocence and psychologically scaring us in the process.

The most unfortunate but undeniable result of war is death, but when a fellow soldier is killed in battle, there is no wake or funeral and no time to grieve. In combat there are more important things to think about, like keeping oneself alive. Emotions are instead suppressed under the cold thought; "I'm glad it wasn't me." To cope, wartime soldiers try not to take death too seriously, either joking about it or brushing it off as routine. However, the relief of escaping death, when others did not, often carries with it the burden of survivor's guilt from the absence of a proper farewell.

In addition to the threat of being killed or wounded, soldiers endured miserable living conditions such as extreme heat or cold, a

frequent lack of supplies, an absence of creature comforts and the deterioration of values. Soldiers also suffered through the realization that, while his former life was in a holding pattern, life at home continued as if his absence had little or no affect. Missing social events such as weddings, picnics and holiday family gatherings only added to the loneliness of being at war.

As bad as these difficulties may seem, serving in the military during wartime was not pure hell from start to finish. Most servicemen fought proudly and demonstrated courage, principle, kindness and friendship; almost none cared about heroism or glory. War veterans also developed a unique bond and perspective on life that is best reflected in a soldier's quote made famous during the Vietnam War; "You have never lived, until you almost died. For those who fought for it, life has a flavor the protected will never know."

In the aftermath of war, the country looks for ways to ease the pain and guilt for the miseries we inflicted upon ourselves. As a part of the healing process, cities, towns and villages build war monuments to publicly honor those who served. These monuments are not intended to glorify war but are instead necessary reminders that the true cost of protecting our freedom, or the freedom of the oppressed, is the highest cost, life itself. For without proper remembrance, the sacrifices and disruption of lives would be meaningless.

RA12760218

By *Hartley Barnes*
—*Royal Palm Beach, FL*



I sing to myself, hoping to have the strings cut that manipulate my life. The songs I hear leave echoes that call for simplifying my voyages into the path of death. Clarity is fog by sounds, cries, and the absence of melanin. The turbulence I ride on has no safety belt; I could fall off at any moment.

This journey started with the search for unconscious understanding —my river runs around too many rocks. Faces stare at me, and queries are made. Where is he going? Whose glide path is he on? Submerged in a batter up to my neck, panic is close as I fight to extricate what's left of me.

My number was RA12760218, government issue (GI). The U.S. Army is a place with many flavors, fragrances and a cesspool for turning things upside down. A place where ignorance of the future will eventually get you—as it got me. I no longer march in cadence or wake up to the sound of reveille. I move about in an avalanche of uncertainties and no dictation of what to do next. The pins that struck me were dipped in pepper to keep me off balance.

All traces of who I used to be hide in wait for discovery. I wet the bed, fearing going to the bathroom late at night. Caution leads me into each room of my house. What could be in them?

The curtains are drawn, doors are locked, and happy sounds frighten me, and I stand

with my back to the wall. My security has vanished and replaced with ideations of my demise.

The reporter stood on the hotel's roof. In the background, under the night sky, is the city of Kyiv, Ukraine. He's reporting on the present situation when the first explosion of the Russian invasion started in the distance. I felt his fright. It was as if I was there and not in my family room watching CNN. His expression changed to fear, and my heart beat rapidly. Visibly shaken, he struggled to put on his helmet and body armor. I was in his body as I flashback to when I flirted with death. Tears came to my eyes. I identify with him.

His eyes ask, should I take cover or keep reporting? It's safe to say his life has been altered; he doesn't know that yet.

A father rushes to a hospital to find his wife, son and daughter dead on the sidewalk. An elderly woman witnesses her husband's head explode and drop to the pavement in a pool of blood. A pregnant woman is hit by shrapnel, dies, and her baby perishes inside her. We see these images, and putting them in the category of atrocities to be investigated will take time. Meanwhile, they decay into sores that ooze the pus of war. Yes, the reporter reported and became a victim.

Sacrifice

By *Anthony Franco*
—*Montrose, NY*

The cammie-clad Marine
lovingly cradled
the baby in her arms.
The infant, safe in her innocence,
immune to the chaos and conflict
around her.
A moment shared,
two souls entwined.
This act of Providence
too short-lived.
One life saved,
the other lost.
How dear the price
this sacrifice cost.
I rant! I rave! I cry!
I grieve and I ask why?
But it is only God that knows,
of course.

I Miss

By *Tim Brady*
—*Brookville, MD*

I miss the step,
so soft and so light,
of the cat come to snuggle
late in the night.
I miss the dog,
nose cold and wet,
saying our play
is not done yet.
I miss the fur,
the smell and the feel
of our friends we call pets
and our hearts they will steal.
I miss them all—
the cats and the dogs
who loved me in life.
I miss them all.

Lady Giggles

By John Tidwell
—Conneaut, OH

She has giggled her way through high prices,
starving the poor and Americans on a fixed income.
She has giggled her way through high gas and oil prices,
killing the poor that can't afford to heat their homes.
Their choices are food or gas and oil.
She has giggled her way through high home and rent payments,
creating more homeless on America's streets.
Why should she care? She's rich!
She has giggled her way through open borders.
She has giggled her way through the never-ending deaths
of hundreds of thousands of children and young adults
from criminals and fentanyl,
poisoning due to illegal open borders.
She has giggled her way through and during
wars in three countries, killing sons and daughters
of honest people just trying to survive.
She has giggled her way through the deaths
of our own soldiers
and left stranded many Americans in hostile lands.
She has giggled at the many foolish people
who believe in her lies of fantasy.
She giggles on! Who is she, one shall ask?
All Americans should know to whom the giggles belong.
She is not our Lady Giggles. We incarcerated veterans
have a different Lady Giggles for the most part.
Ours is Lady Liberty.

Bittersweet Recipe

By Scott Sjostrand
—Hallock, MN

My life's bittersweet recipe
was almost the death of me!
The pain of love lost
was still worth the cost.
Dreams of Joseph invade my sleep.
If true, I'll own many herds of sheep.
To manage a nation
would be a working vacation.
D.C. would be a nice place to call home.
I'd be like Caesar in ancient Rome.
If only Tracy would return,
I'd finally overcome my heartburn!

Breathless Beneath the Tide

By Sean M. Dopp
—Frazeyburg, OH

The environment silent and cold;
the air was ominous and eerie.
The taste of salt from the sea filled the mouth.
Small heavy waves crash on each side of the boat
as the body rocks back and forth.
The closer the body gets to the sea,
the darker the water becomes.
The heart pumps blood faster as each wave hits;
the body shakes internally and sweats down the skin.
Breathing quickens as each breath becomes heavier.
Clothes become heavier
as the sea water rushes from the head to chest.
Upper body floats and fights for survival,
reaching and grabbing white rags.
Fish swim toward the body and away
when the sea currents take them.
As hands reach for legs and arms reach out,
memories of life flash in the mind.
Friends. Family. Animals.
Flashing like a timeline.
More taste of salt as the sea enters the lungs
while oxygen escapes.
Reaching and grabbing for life,
cold air enters the lungs; hands reach the body.
Captain's mind wonders as yelling erupts
and hands wave back and forth.
The environment silent and cold;
the air ominous and eerie.

Sunset

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

Sun about to set
Flag about to be lowered
Stand and salute
Not duty—honor.

Upside Down in the Foxhole

By Penny Lee Deere

VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

August 1990, I learned that I would be leading my command of 30 soldiers to Saudi Arabia in support of Kuwait. To prepare, I went to a deployment seminar with 300 other soldiers. We sat in a large auditorium and were instructed about what to expect. They tried to prepare us to go to the Middle East to support an anticipated war.

That seminar did give me a glimpse of what to expect: harassment: sexual harassment from my peers. I stood up in that auditorium and someone grabbed my ass. Me a 15-year veteran Sergeant! I turned fiercely; my first instinct was to fight. I saw a soldier with a big smirk on his face. I was shocked, enraged. I commanded a number of soldiers who respected me, who knew I was not a person to clash with. This smirking soldier was different; he was a menace.

From that day until we left for the Middle East in November, I endured many more incidents of sexual harassment from this person and others.

I didn't know who to confide in. If I said something, if I reported the incidents, it would fall on deaf ears. I knew they wouldn't have my back. Nothing would have been done. They would no longer respect me. They would blacklist me. I would be exiled since I was a weak.

I left for Saudi Arabia thinking, "Am I really safe? Are other female soldiers really safe?"

I worried I would find myself upside down in a foxhole. I felt vulnerable. Who might make unwanted advances or would I be attacked. I went to war; I left my home in the company of men I did not trust.

I served in Operation Desert Storm for five months. We went out on guard duty. We dug holes in huge mounds (berms) of dirt and waited there for the Iraqi forces to attack. I knew what to expect from the enemy. I was prepared to do my job; I was not afraid, of them!

When I confided these events to my peer, his response was, "If you don't report it, you're gonna end upside down in a foxhole."

What I feared was that one of my soldiers would come out in the middle of the night and attack me. I didn't know what to expect from my comrades. Those who were there to support me, those I was bound to, were those I was most afraid of. I had a 50 cal. and my own M16 machine gun that I could have used to protect myself. Somehow, that didn't matter. There was a threat. The not knowing terrorized me. I didn't know who the friend was and who the foe was. I lived that way for five months. There was an underlying threat; I didn't know if I was safe in my own compound.

These words were dramatized in a play "on her shoulders" in the summer and fall of 2013. I am one of nine female veterans who told their tale of military service. We veterans were played wonderfully by high school students. I feel validated and I'm no longer silent.



See Me

By Michelle Roxanne Johnson
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

Please do not see me
with eyes that have been tainted
by the world.
Instead, see me with your heart
which should be filled
with compassion and loving kindness.

I Just Want To Be With Christine Marie

By Michael Pride Young
—Fond du Lac, WI

I just want to be with Christine Marie.
She is the one meant to be with me.
I never wanted to be like Jesse James.
I never wanted to be like John Dillinger.
I never wanted to look like “Pretty Boy” Floyd.
I never wanted Christine Marie and me
to be like Bonnie and Clyde.

I just want to be with Christine Marie.
Some people say I sing like Charley Pride.
I wanted us to sing together
like George Jones and Tammy Wynette.
A woman told me I look like Steve McQueen.
Another woman told me,
“You are going to be somebody one day.”

That’s all good, but I just want to be with Christine Marie.
She shadowed my dreams to be with her,
and left me for an old rich man for his money.
I will never be as rich as Warren Buffett.
She thinks she is better than me, but she is not.
I just want to be with Christine Marie.
She is the one meant to be with me.

A Rare Moment

By Paul David Gonzales
VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

I stood in a place
“where the ocean kissed the sky.”
I said to myself, “Oh my, oh my.”
Suddenly, an angel came flying by.
His wings were spread far and wide;
they touched the earth from side to side.
I saw a glow on his face
as he hovered over this beautiful space.
He looked directly into my face
with a smile; I felt his Grace.
I felt no fear as I gazed in a stare;
the smell of lavender filled the air.
In that moment I hadn’t a care;
I awoke to a moment so rare,
knowing Jesus was there.

If I

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

If I were, never again, to write a story or poem
or know the freedom of being on the roam,
it would be a closed door to the real world.
This world is so emblazoned with awe:
to touch, to smell, to feel,
to bring to life its splendid beauty.
What a privilege to paint God’s world with a pen,
and to make it move, even spring to life.
Walking down Pa’s pasture
on our old farm back in Lemont, Illinois,
“The House of the High Hills” certainly instills memories.
The smell of crack fresh cowpies in the midst
of a west wind awakens my senses.
I hear the squawk of frenzied chickens
from the little brown hen house.
This brings me to full alertness.
In the near distance one can see and smell
the majestic pine trees
and pollen carried along by the strong west wind.
I hear the awk and screech of a chicken hawk!
She’s still in my memory as I peer down
the south end of the pasture.
I see her once again; I see her raise her head to look at me.
She’s my beautiful freckled fawn.
Here is where her memory is frozen forevermore.
The geese will soon be on the move again.
Their honking and haunting sounds are an enigma
as to what their destiny is and where they go.
Bill Holden once said, “Love is a many splendored thing.”
If so, then this morning on a faraway river,
two otters embraced and kissed. Their world stood still.
And I said, “Let it be! Looks like I’ll keep my pen handy!”

Incoming

By Carl “Papa” Palmer
—University Place, WA

Daughter pops bubble wrap,
laughs as Daddy dives
behind the couch
after his tour in Vietnam.

Spud Dud

By Wendell C. Smith

VA Medical Center—Battle Creek, MI

Do you like potatoes? I don't. If you do, you're a Spud Dud. As a child I loved potatoes, au gratin, french fries, mashed; any way you prepared them, I would eat them. Potato chips were my main staple. I lived and breathed for the chance to eat them again. That is...until I joined the Military.

In the Army they have a punishment called K.P., Kitchen Patrol. A thing I was unaware of until I committed what the Sarge said was insubordination. What the heck that was, I did not know. All I said was, "Sir, this private can't do anymore sit-ups or push-ups, I'm sore!" I had been at it for over an hour because I tripped the squad during drill practice causing a minor catastrophe. Sarge personally drilled me with a grueling set of exercises. I tried to explain it wasn't my fault, I was born with two left feet.

I inherited them from my dad's side of the family. Mom was a great dancer. However, she would always get upset when he'd refuse to dance to their favorite song playing over the radio. Reluctantly dad would eventually give in. After a few bruises to her feet, being slung into the stove, and into the kitchen table in pain, she would shout, "Why don't you learn to DANCE!" Frustrated, dad would always storm out of the room. He would try and make up by scheduling dance lessons with Arthur Murray. After a week of kicking the shins and damaging the toes of some poor instructor, he would give up. It's quite evident I received my father's club feet.

The drill sergeant instructed me to report to the kitchen, promptly at 0600. Following orders I arrived on time. I was met by a 6'5" mass of solid flesh with hands the size of baseball mitts.

Cookie—his real name is Balsam—I learned while introducing myself by shaking his hand and feeling the strength in his powerful glove. By all rights he should have been in the bush toting a 60-caliber I noticed how strong he was when he picked up a 100-pound burlap sack of potatoes with two fingers and placed it next to the chair where I was seated. He proceeded to slide a 50-gallon pot over to me with one foot, while lifting the same sized container filled with oatmeal onto the unlit pilot of a gigantic stove. Cookie had had 100-pound sacks and 50-gallon drums lined in an endless procession of torture. I started peeling and quickly my index finger and thumb reddened and blistered. I cut all day, filling pot after pot with scalloped, diced, julienned. Every way you can cut a potato, I did it.

When the week was over, I reported back to regular duty. Balsam expressed his regret for my departure, claiming I had been one of the best slicers he'd known. I sympathized with him, but what he didn't know is the fact that I had grown to hate potatoes! At night, with the help of a few platoon buddies, I sharpened my drill skills to prevent K.P. from ever happening again and even began to dance some. In the end I became a real stepper—the pride of my entire brigade. All I needed was confidence in my ability to do it and the experience of working with Cookie. My mother's genes for dance were inherent. Now I have a profound fondness for dancing... and a strong dislike for the starchy vegetable and anything associated with it. So, I ask you again, do you like potatoes? If you do, you are a Spud Dud, and I want nothing to do with you.

My Friend, the Enemy

By Levell Taylor

VA Medical Center—Battle Creek, MI

I have trapped myself again
because I relied on an old friend.
To this friend, I devoted my time and life.
All that brought was misery and strife,
made me, at times, wish for an end to my life.
Again and again,
I would turn to this friend.
All I got were darkness and gloom
when it came to the end.
So I stopped and began to fight,
and, through it all, I see a light.
I stood my ground;
away from this friend I turned around.
Through my Lord, strength I found.
Upon that day, when I pray,
from this friend I turn away.
Be gone, my friend,
so I can live again!

The Oak Tree

By Gene Allen Groner

—Independence, MO

Beneath the branches of an old oak tree
I find my greatest peace.
A peace beyond eternity,
A peace beyond what one might see.
The tree itself is very old,
Ancient and lovely to behold.
Its leaves, they reach up to the sky;
All the way to Heaven they grow.
Leaves of wondrous green and gold
Against the clear blue sky,
Gently moving with the breeze,
Move my soul in ecstasy.
Of all the trees I've ever seen
And all the places I've ever known,
There's no place quite the same as this.
This oak tree is my home.
Leaning upon this friend of mine,
A sense of peace I feel,
A peace more wonderful it seems
Than any I have ever known.

Diary of Dr. Destruction

By Mike Irwin

VA Medical Center—Omaha, NE

Just bought an old Ford Fairlane 500.
It's sittin' in the driveway gettin' ready for the derby.
The glass is all gone; the numbers painted on.
She's ready for destruction come Saturday night!
The flag went down; the junkers spun around,
crashing into one another, calling one another a "mother."
The guy from Spink hit me head on;
I'm ready for destruction come Saturday night!
The stands were crowded and all the fans shouted
for the one they wanted to win;
But my chances look pretty grim.
You see, there's steam comin' from my radiator;
I'm nearing destruction come Saturday night!
Through the smoke and confusion, I'm having the illusion
that I'd be the winner, take my wife out to dinner.
But I've got double vision from that last collision;
I'm closer to destruction come Saturday night!
My dreams were all shattered when my left side was battered
by an orange Plymouth wagon whose tailgate was draggin'.
Now I'm sitting here fresh out of luck,
waitin' for the junkyard tow truck.
But I'll be back next year;
I'm the Doctor of Destruction come Saturday night!

Thankfulness

By Charles Ray Hood

VA Medical Center—Columbia, MO

Family all smiling, eating well,
The love of a child who has lost more than most,
Friends who are always there.
Memories of a Christmas in a war zone,
A Captain you would follow anywhere,
A medal not given,
Forgiveness that was never earned.
A cross many years ago,
Three nails painfully placed,
Love that will not be deserved,
Eyes that adore even when you fall short.
Warm cuddle from a loving dog,
Having all you need,
Loving all you have,
Being loved by those around you.

DORIS COBB MEMORIAL AWARD

IT'S ALL ON YOU!

By Michelle Nicole Martin

—Summerville, SC

If you want something done,
you have to be the one to do it.
If you want a beautiful garden,
you have to be the one to plant the seeds.
If you want your house to be clean,
you have to be the one to clean it.
No one is going to do it for you.

IT'S ALL ON YOU!

If you want a great job done,
you have to be the one to do the great job.
If you want lots of money,
you have to be the one to make the money.
If you want to experience the finer things in life,
you have to be the one to experience life.
No one is going to do a better job for you than you.

IT'S ALL ON YOU!

If you want inner peace,
you have to be the one to find the peace.
If you want to quit an addiction,
you have to be the one to quit the addiction.
If you want a better life,
you are the one that has to work for it.
No one is going to save you except you.

IT'S ALL ON YOU!

If you want a happy life,
you are the one that has to be happy.
If you want a fulfilled life,
you have to be the one to fulfill it.
If you want to leave a great legacy behind,
you have to be the one to create it.

IT'S ALL ON YOU!

Purpose

By Jerome Moore

VA Medical Center—Lynchburg, VA

As yesterday's time elapses into today and eventually into the present, we tend to question the significance of our past encounters, action undertakings, and how they relate to one's purpose in life. We question if the measures we have taken have served a purpose. There is no sure way of knowing what our purpose is, but we tend to believe that all we have achieved has been executed in good faith.



events unfolded, because your purpose in life is simply what it is.

What is my purpose? I have no inspirational idea. I think we will never know our purpose, but we can cite many different instances where, if we did not pursue an idea or were not present at some unforeseen appointed time, then probably the outcome of an event would have turned out differently.

However, for those who wish to be selfish and intolerant of others, they seem to not care about the results, so long as they reap the benefits. They often tend to lose sight of how important and relevant our existence is, or the lack of it, and how it has a significant effect on the dynamic of something happening or not. It can be suggested, and proven, that our existence has some significance to someone or to something.

Nevertheless, for some people, we often shrug off events that we cannot touch, or even understand. But know this, our purpose is intended, and has significant meaning beyond the conscious minds of ourselves.

Although you have not or cannot realize your purpose, it still exists. More often and unbeknownst to your immediate realization, you have a purpose. Your purpose can change, alter history, or make events happen, but be not distraught about one's purpose in life, or how these

unexpected events are revealed, because your purpose in life is simply what it is, an event in life that has a profound and significant purpose.

Good or bad, your actions lead to the beginning and unfolding of purposes somewhere entirely beyond the confines of your optics or understanding. So, take a rest, a momentary pause, because your purpose in life at times will be transparent to you, but relevant and intended for other purposes beyond your conscience.

Purpose could be defined as a knowing or unknowing action that is created for the sole purpose of creating a desired action and outcome for a meaningful situation.

Strangely, purpose is an ongoing process that over time can evolve, and change based on certain circumstances. Consequently, on your journey of reconciling your purpose, one must be on notice to observe and react to the indicators that are in accordance with your intended goal. Be not distraught about one's purpose in life, or how those

I believe your purpose changes depending on the situation, and that we have encountered purposes that have already occurred and are waiting for others to occur. When your purpose happens, you will know that that was your purpose at the time.

Everybody has purpose(s).

Sometimes it means you have done something for someone or as an interloper, your impact is unbeknownst to you. The beginning or the outcome of an event could be influenced by you just making contact somehow.

We tend not to believe in anything that has no merit or instantaneous meaning, but often your influence will not be known, nor is it intended that you could know.

My definition of purpose rests with the thought that what may happen, or not, is your purpose.

The Sands of Time

By Lawrence W. Langman
VA Medical Center—
Portage, IN

I sat awed across
from this ancient tomb;
the hieroglyphics
filled the entire room.
I thought about
the lives once beheld
by bygone pharaohs
who once marveled.

Those days of mighty armies,
hence of recompense,
with palace walls waiting,
forcing high defense.
His chariots now shone
all ornate and bold;
lavished in his linens
were emeralds green and gold.

In his hand he wields
a composite bow
of birch and horn;
you reap what you sow.
The sands run through this
glass that stands for hours;

Resist Change

By Rhonda Chavez
VA Medical Center—San Antonio, TX

People resist change,
avoiding pain and risk.
You need to face the painful truth,
shed the burdens that are holding you down.
Write a story worth hanging on to;
this is all about learning who you are.
What was I afraid of losing if I told the truth?
You need to understand yourself,
get clear of what you want.
Keep going;
you haven't even scratched the surface yet.

his scepter high was carried
by gods for their true powers.

Strong was his might
like the Sphinx's facade;
a devil was he, rising
to capture and enslave.
Enraptured by anger,
enraged like the fires,
he quenched his thirst
and his bloodlust desires.

Concurring lands growing
so that his empire would reign
were written upon an obelisk
throughout his domain.
His sarcophagus was ready
to send him to the afterlife,
transporting his soul between
worlds of anguish and strife.

Through the stars his essence
shall fly upon its wings;
he's destined to live forever
in a field made for kings.
All his riches donned the walls
of his tomb, all encased;
the gods upon their thrones
opened arms in full embrace.

BVL AWARD, SERVING MY COUNTRY

Bag of Bones

By Dan Yates
—Blue Springs, MO

The emcee called his name; he shuffled down the aisle.
Though he's eighty-three, he shared a youthful smile.
He didn't look the part, his body old and flawed.
They thank him for his service, stand as they applaud.
He slowly makes his way to the microphone,
tells a story that he wishes he had never known.
The crowd was quiet as he talked about his constant pain,
that today he always knows when it is going to rain.
he said he was the leader of an eight-man squad,
that he had a punji stick embedded in his quad.
A tripwire had been missed; there were screams and cries.
When he woke up, bandages covered both his eyes.
“Why I lived I'll never know; in my mind I should be dead.”
Then he took a deep breath and this is what he said.
“I know I'm just a bag of bones; that is all you see.
My body is bent and bowed, but my spirit's flying free.
What's inside this weathered shell is standing straight and tall.
For my love of country, I would give it all.
I may no longer 'double-time,' drop and give you ten,
but if America needs me, I'll be there again.”

Every Rose Has Its Thorns

By Scott Sjostrand
—Hallock, MN

Every rose has its thorns!
I learned that the day I was born.
Stuck with a safety pin
while changing my cloth diaper,
I cried out, “I won't surrender!”
Thought it was painful
like other lessons in life.
It wasn't as painful as losing my wife.
Other events that also hurt
were forced psych and injections
with disabling squirts!
All of that pain is a thing of the past.
Finally, I'm free at last!

The Incarcerated Veteran

By Jeffery Shockley
—Bellefonte, PA

Can we the condemned inside these confines agree we all have lived in moments where the darkest days come after the brightest moments of time? Enduring in this life can give hope to others who struggle as we did yet may never see eye to eye because of the strength they wish to see in themselves. It's a battlefield in hell.



injuries past. Dare we prove them wrong and remain stronger than anyone thought we could, even where society is never desiring of us being let free from this space we apparently were destined by injurious acts some will never forgive or forget.

Time spent will never replace time spent, but hope springs eternal, and since we are soldiers, we endure and keep hope alive within our hearts

and minds. Rewind the times that remind the world we are veterans and live as such.

Can we see this life is not about us but about the grit of us given to society beyond the reality. Yesterday was filled with possibilities not taken advantage of either physically or financially. Now, spiritually we try to rectify those acts of selfish respite.

Within that, each person might see we can be more than what is thought of us collectively or individually. In spite of what is said of us, read of us, because of us, still we try to be that better version of ourselves beyond the yesterday that got us here.

Without strengthening mind, body and soul, what would remain but the same pains and strained relationships? What would be gained by this? Or likewise, with half-opened eyes what is left of the very changes we've created in the time done in this forever changing, painfully remaining game of correctional duplicity? If we live uselessly in its history and not in the redeeming equality of who we are trying to become, our life is futile.

Some would say it won't be done, could not be for some who hold old wounds from

I am a veteran. I have seen and done things you may not understand. I am a warrior, I will never accept defeat. I will never leave a fallen brother or sister behind. If I can't carry them, I will drag them. I will help them face their enemies, to include the demons from within. They are, we are our brothers and our sisters. I am a veteran!

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.

Daughter, Sister, Mother

By Stephanie Marie Latham

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, MO

I am more than just a SOLDIER.
I am someone's daughter.

I am more than just my uniform.
I am someone's sister.

I am more than my rank.
I am someone's mother.

I am more than just a daughter.
I am your daughter's battle
and will lay down my life for her.

I am more than just a sister.
I will take arms with all of my brothers,
no matter their mother.

I am more than just a mother.
I will care for each and every soldier,
no matter their race, gender or age.

Re-acceptance

By Norman L. Jones

VA Medical Center—Columbus, OH

Fakers accept you for what you do;
forgivers respect you for who you are.
Rejectors can play the fool
where discerners stay up to par.
Associates have a passing chance
for a future friendship from "re-acceptance."
Admiration of specific qualities
can trigger a special rapport.
Actions recognizing commonalities,
are needed for companionship to score.
The heart and mind shall dance
from the purity of "re-acceptance."
Any kind of unity is a must
for a free-for-all in romance.
Intimacy requires total trust
from the compassion of "re-acceptance."

Healing

By Nina Herron

—Staunton, VA

Healing is a natural part of life,
whether it be a physical
or an emotional injury.

Physical injuries,
such as scrapes, bruises or broken
bones,
heal on a fairly specific timeline,
like wearing a cast four to six weeks.

Emotional injuries,
such as a broken heart, abuse or
trauma,
don't heal by a calendar.
They may linger for a lifetime.

Sometimes you think you're past the
hurt;
then a "trigger" comes along.
BAM! It's like ripping off a scab.
Like blood, the emotions start to flow.

All those feelings that you've pushed
down
are welling up like lava in a volcano.
If the pressure is not released,
you will explode sooner or later.

What is your trigger?
Is it a love song?
An angry voice?
A crowd of people or loud noises?

No matter your trigger,
your protective brain reacts.
Your immediate response
happens without thought.

You may start to cry,
cringe in fear,
freeze in your tracks
or run for cover.

Others may not understand.
They may stop and stare
or sadly shake their heads.
They can't know the war deep within
your soul.

Your next step is important.
Do you let this moment define you?
Do you give into your fear,
letting those old feelings take over?

Or do you realize you're safe
in the present,
and realize the past can't hurt you
unless YOU let it.

Whether you let this wound heal
or you slap a band-aid on it till later,
it's all part of the healing process,
the process that YOU choose.

No matter what choices
you make in healing,
scars will remain.



How One New Yorker Remembers 9/11

By Will Beck

VA Medical Center—Tulsa, OK

On September 11, 2001, I was stationed in Upstate New York in a unit focused on training the National Guard, as well as supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) whose purpose was to deliver Department of Defense support in case of a national emergency. But we should probably start with that morning...

The physical fitness session ended, and I was all sorts of sweaty (early to mid-September could still be hot and humid in upstate New York) sitting at my desk looking over some busy work as I procrastinated jumping into the shower. We worked out of old, World War II-era barracks with two long main floors, and a “communal” shower at the end of the structure. One of my teammates hurriedly ran down the stairs and yelled for everyone to come upstairs as something important was on television. I was the only one on the first floor at the time, and simply ignored her. A couple of minutes later, another teammate, Captain Kathleen Jacobson came down and more urgently communicated to get up there. Begrudgingly, I pushed away from my desk, the sweat somewhat dried off, but still definitely foul to the smell. As I reached the second floor and moved toward an open area where the TV was, I saw the iconic images many of you can still vividly bring to mind. The first tower of the World Trade Center (WTC) was ablaze seemingly mid-structure.

I started to go into shock. Literally. Time paused. I couldn't tell you how long I was standing there, eyes glued to the



TV set when another plane struck the second tower. It wasn't until I finally heard Kathleen, along with a shrug on my shoulder “Will, are you okay”? I snapped back into reality and instinctively said yes as I realized tears were rolling down my cheeks. I wasn't okay. I couldn't explain it. So many emotions at one time overloaded my ability to respond coherently: shock, disbelief, sadness, rage, frustration with a feeling of helplessness. Fortunately enough, this catastrophic event is exactly one of the reasons the unit I was in was established. Unlike the rest of the military, I would be part of the initial response to the terror attacks of 9/11.

By early afternoon, the first vehicles of our team headed south and we ended up at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, an uncomfortable 95-minute drive to Manhattan. Rightly so, the NYPD and FBI weren't allowing traffic into the city at that point, and we spent the night and the next day establishing contact with our FEMA teammates. We couldn't make our way to the island on Wednesday

either, but by Thursday, my boss, a few soldiers, and members of FEMA were able to get up the west side highway. We were about four miles from Ground Zero. We quickly set up 24-hour operations and ran 12-hour shifts. Once completed, those members going off-shift would get in vans and make the trek down to debarkation points and get into the lines of folks who were hauling the rubble and debris from the WTC site. I remember that time to be quiet. Solemn. There were whispered, two- or three-person conversations throughout our time there, but

the volume always remained relatively light. It hadn't been declared yet, but in reality, we were working on a graveyard, and we approached our work accordingly.

The majority of the requests during the four-week period were logistics-related, with quite a few for aerial reconnaissance and VIP transport. Some of the unique requests included a device that was emplaced at the WTC complex that shot laser beams at existing nearby structures to determine their structural integrity. Other resources were robotic devices of all shapes and sizes with varying types of wheels, treads, and belts, as well as those camera devices we see in spy movies today in an attempt to identify survivors, but in reality, were used to find remains of fallen victims in the debris. Lastly, as you may imagine, the size and girth of the cluttered debris pieces would range from a couple of feet to more than 30 yards long. The torch in use could get through a block that long in about an hour. In the preceding five or so years, two Army engineers developed

a hybrid mixture for a torch that could burn and cut the same piece in under five minutes. We flew them from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and West Point respectively, and they assisted the NYFD in recalibrating their torches to cut faster.

About halfway through our deployment there, we switched shifts to give each member a different timeline, and I moved to the 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift. The Headquarters was pretty quiet when the sun went down and I received a call from a captain about 9:30 p.m. asking if I was there, and then who I was. I responded without thinking, "Of course, I'm here, I picked up, didn't I? This is Capt. Beck." I quickly realized this was an older-sounding gentleman, and that he was a 06 captain, not a 03 like me. "So, this is Capt. Beck? Capt William Beck?" I changed my demeanor a little, and said, "Yes sir." He said thank you and told me not to go anywhere for 10 minutes, then hung up the phone.

In exactly 10 minutes, the phone rang again, "Capt. Beck speaking." I was more professional this time. "Is this Will?" the other side asked, the voice a little older, more grizzled. I said, "Yes sir!" He introduced himself as Gen. Buck Kernan, the Joint Forces Command commanding general, an organization now disbanded, but then was the 4-star headquarters in charge of all things within the continental United States. "I'm calling to see how you're doing, Will." "I'm fine sir," I shot back immediately. "No, Will, how are you really doing?" I was stunned...for almost three weeks I hadn't thought one bit about how I was doing, and Ranger'd up a third time "Sir, I'm doing great." "Will, I know you're from New York and I know there is a lot of stuff on TV and the media saying that we are all New Yorkers now...but that's not really true. How are you?" I lost it. Tears welled in my eyes. This four-star general called me around 10 p.m. on a Friday to ask how a young army captain from New York

was doing. He knew my name was Will, not William. He knew I was from New York. We found out later that our commanding officer provided brief bios of everyone on the team. This general saw I was the one member from NY and made it a point to call me. He didn't check a box and hang up the phone. He made the effort to connect with me and that meant something.

I tried to be cool, but snot-answered back with "I'm going to be ok, I am right where I need to be." He said "Don't forget that, Will. You and your team are doing exactly what needs to be done right now. Thank you. When this is over, we'll be asking you to do some other things for us," and I knew exactly what he meant. He ended the call by saying "great job" and to tell the rest of the team how much they are appreciated. I hung up the phone, still somewhat stunned. I lowered my head, and without even thinking of it, I called my parents, two New Yorkers themselves, and cried for the next 30 or so minutes with them.

So, why do we pause to remember 9/11? At our ceremony this morning, Alex recalled the timeline and history of the day. If we aren't careful, we will begin to miss the opportunity of remembrance ceremonies in the first place. As we hit the first-month mark of our fall semester, I realize this will be our second or third graduating class that was not alive when 9/11 occurred. To make me feel even older than I am, I've realized that we are almost to the point where my birth until the end of World War II matches the difference between our students to 9/11. For most of us, we don't have a "9/11 story" to share. And that's okay.

It is a responsibility and an honor to share our experiences with those who come after us. Not for some sense of "back in my day," but as an opportunity to connect. My encouragement to the younger folks hearing this has two parts. First, call your folks, your grandparents, older siblings,

and family friends, and simply ask them what they remember about 9/11. You may find out they really hadn't thought about it much these past two decades, and it affords them an opportunity to...heal. Second, as you make your way to class, ask your (much!) older professors about 9/11. This may afford an opportunity for a deeper discussion in your session than usual.

As I wrap this up, I'll share that the day itself is really not about 9/11. In some ways, of course, it is. But for some of you, you're like "Will, this is great, but over the summer, grandma was diagnosed with Parkinson's," or "I made it to campus this fall, but I have no idea how I am going to make it financially in the spring," or "I have an appointment with my lawyer and the court date for my divorce is later this month" (all true events from our ORU "military" family.)

These are YOUR 9/11 moments. We all have them. When we do, it is important we turn to Him, and to others. I am encouraged by the prophet's remarks "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone; the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars" (Isaiah 9:10). Isaiah speaks ultimately of our salvation, that only comes from Christ Jesus. After submitting to Him in prayer, it is also important to "heal" through the company of fellow believers.

I don't know what 9/11 moment you are enduring right now, but I do know you have a Father who is walking this with you and a family that wants to be there with you. Don't be silent about it. We were meant to go through life together.

Don't do 9/11 on your own.

Helping With a Veteran's Cross to Bear

By Shon Pernice

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, MO

Everyone has a cross to bear. Some crosses are heavier than others, and sometimes one cannot escape the umbilical cord to past situations. Toxic cycles of mental anguish and addiction can prevent a person from getting ahead in life, and many of the men and women who once protected this great nation from all enemies,



both foreign and domestic, should never be forgotten, regardless of the circumstances they faced. This is where Veterans Community Project (VCP) takes the lead in helping veterans overcome the many barriers that have been restricting their success. This is how Veterans Community Project saved me from a path of self-destruction.

I served as a combat medic in Operation Iraqi Freedom during The Surge of 2007. That was the deadliest year for U.S. troops since the Vietnam War with 899 U.S. personnel killed in action. During this deployment, I treated horrific injuries and witnessed the unnatural deaths of my friends. The Army trained us for eight weeks to prepare to go to war. Part of that training indoctrinated us to the fact that allowing feelings to occur can get you killed in a war zone. Disassociation is a survival skill, unbeknownst it followed me back home to my family. Upon coming home, there were several days of turning in equipment and medical evaluations before quickly reentering society. Coming back was tough, but leaving the Army proved to be even more difficult. My transition back

into the civilian world was unsuccessful. I was not prepared to deal with the emotional overload and my life began to spiral out of control. I brought the war home with me.

My behavior led to a lengthy prison sentence of 13 years. There is no one to blame but myself. Incarceration allowed me time to do some soul searching, however the same post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) that contributed to my bad behavior would not be treated in the prison setting. Those symptoms of mental health disorders are going to follow me out of prison and may have possibly become much worse than when I went in.

My first stop after being released from prison was the Kansas City Veterans Administration Transitional Residence (KCVA-TR). This process allowed me to slowly start to adapt to normal life again. It was much better than a prison cell and I began to work on socialization skills. The TR is a very nice building but is located in an area of town where gunshots are heard frequently. Even just looking at the bullet

holes in the black metal fence posts reinforced my hypervigilance and sense of impending doom. Right in front of the building is a shrine honoring someone who was gunned down just before I moved in. With my head still in battle mind mode, it was difficult to progress forward.

As soon as I was able to purchase a somewhat reliable vehicle, I drove down to Veterans Community Project. I had heard of the “tiny homes” for veterans but knew nothing else. When I first walked into the VCP Outreach Center, I was warmly greeted by the other veterans hanging out and the staff on duty. It was a good feeling, but I was cautiously optimistic. When most people hear that you have been incarcerated, the stigmatization stings like a leather whip. The barriers to housing and employment that I had already experienced left me embarrassed and ashamed. I did not know how much longer I could go on with rejection after rejection. Suicide was suddenly on the table.

I started to visit the VCP Outreach Center frequently. It was my reprieve to pick up food, snacks, relax, and enroll in the various services that are offered only to veterans. I decided to take a risk and tell Carol, one of the case managers at VCP, that I had been incarcerated. We talked about different places where I could find employment, but I was too embarrassed to tell her that they would not hire me because I have a felony. But when I told Carol about my past, she



looked me dead in the eyes and said that the only thing she cared about was the veteran standing in front of her. That began to erode my cautiously optimistic ideology to a warm sense of inclusion. I think I may have found a place where I belong.

As I began to befriend the many veterans that visit the Outreach Center, one of the residents in the tiny homes asked me if I would like to see his house. Curiosity got the best of me, and we walked down to The Village where an entire veterans' community existed. I was mesmerized by the 49 tiny homes of various pastel colors, well-kept grass, dog park, green house, labyrinth (meditation area), and the Veteran Village Center. On top of that, it was quiet and serene. Now my interest piqued on what I needed to do next: fill out an application for housing.

After two extensive interviews I was accepted into the VCP Residential Program. My first stop was at the Veteran Village Center to meet my case manager, take a urine test, and sign some final authorizations. Next, I was guided down to my new home for the next two years. When I entered the 240 square foot dwelling, I could not believe my eyes. There was new furniture, a bed that was made with a navy-blue comforter, real paintings on the walls, a white desk with a padded chair, television mounted on the wall, and enough food for two weeks. The initial feeling was shock. I could not believe that people did this for me. The disabled, homeless veteran. The

felon. The "unsuitable" guy. Those were my labels of rejection. Now, all that I felt was love. Tears ran down my cheeks as I tried to hide them and the only words that I could produce was a crackled, "Thank you."

Now that I am temporarily housed at the VCP, the work begins. This is not a program where you just sit back drinking coffee all day and watch soap operas, you must better yourself. Goals are set and monitored at least monthly. I meet with my case manager, Darcy, weekly. While she is much younger than me and stands about 5'2," do not let her tiny stature fool you. She is direct and passionate about the program and her clients. If you slip up, Darcy is going to correct you. But I have never had a person advocate so diligently for me. When I need advice, support, or a letter of recommendation, Darcy goes the distance to help me succeed.

The journey at Veterans Community Project is unique to each individual. A person's history of hurts, habits, and hang-ups can better be explored when they are in a safe place and are surrounded by people who genuinely care. While I work on PTSD and other afflictions, some of my goals include: improving my credit score, paying off debt, utilizing resources to overcome barriers to employment, and eventually securing permanent housing. We all have choices, however, VCP empowers the veteran to be successful. It comes down to his or her choosing how to utilize the precious gift Veterans Community Project offers.

Beachside

By Thomas Walk
VA Medical Center—Battle Creek, MI

These pebbles lying in the sand
are swept away by the ocean tide,
over and over again.
The tragedy of my PTSD,
like these pebbles' fight with the sea,
I feel tossed around on a whim,
like I'm drowning with no way to swim.
In the picture these pebbles seem
much larger than this space.
In truth they are just tiny things,
ill equipped to change their place.
In the picture these pebbles seem
forever cast in perfect beauty.
In truth this is just a tiny view,
the only fragment you can see.
The beauty of my PTSD,
unlike these pebbles' fight with the sea,
I can learn to swim and survive,
and I can even learn to thrive.
And unlike pebbles in the sand,
I will not be controlled by the tide
ever, ever again.

The Golden Rule

By Gene Allen Groner
—Independence, MO

I wonder how the world would be
If we lived the "Golden Rule"
And walked with God each day
And talked with him in prayer.
O, how sweet the sound would be
With music everywhere,
Hearts filled with love and joy,
With peace on earth
And love to spare.
The world in perfect harmony.
We touch the heart of God,
We see the stars.
God holds our hand,
We walk with God in prayer.

Becoming a Veteran

By Jerome Moore

VA Medical Center—Lynchburg, VA

Awakening long before the rise
of the encroaching early morning sun,
I stand tall and undisturbed in solitude,
contemplating the years that have come.
It is nothing new for me to ponder the years over and over,
for it is simply a time for my mind to be at peace
and to be sober.
A time long ago, I traveled a road of honor and glory,
and as a soldier, I harden myself not to worry.
With arms in hand and body trained to defend,
my duty was to guard this nation against foes or friends.
While in the company of others,
who became my sisters and brothers,
my life was there to bequeath like the others.
Always ready to defend this nation against aggression,
the whole of my body bore no concessions.
Like a lone leaf in the fall
that thirsts again for the springtime morning dew,
nothing harmful to my country would ever ensue.
Now that my time as a soldier has come to an end,
I still protect my country like a soldier, but now as a veteran.

Color of a Rose

By Allyson Hargrave

—Orem, UT

I visualize a red rose,
meaning love deep as passion.
I see a white rose,
symbolizing innocence.
Deep inside myself,
I find a deep purple rose,
showing that we are all royalty.
I am given a sunshine yellow rose
that shows we can all be friends.
Next to the yellow rose
I behold devotion to my Savior.
An orange rose shows fascination
with the word of God.
The two colors create a peach rose,
embodying my thanks for the gratitude
and blessings I have in my life.

Memorial for Teresa N. Raydo



Teresa (Tess) N. Raydo, treasurer of Veterans Voices Writing Project for more than 25 years, died Nov. 8, 2024, in Olathe, Kan., at the age of 100. She was a remarkable woman. She was a wife, a mother, a businesswoman

and a volunteer and she did all those things well. She was born in Nazareth, Pa., on Jan. 12, 1924. She married in 1943 and after living in New York City and Wichita, Kan., she and her husband moved their family to suburban Kansas City. In addition to her work for VVWP, Tess also volunteered for her church, the March of Dimes and the Landlords of Johnson County (Kan.). She was predeceased by her husband, John. She is survived by four children, seven grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Tess was an inspiration while serving as treasurer on the VVWP Board of Directors from 1987-2014. She was a fierce advocate for VVWP's funds. She knew down to the penny the amount in the treasury, looked for the bank with the best interest rate and closely monitored expenses. She was as loyal to VVWP's mission as Margaret Sally Keach, who had invited her to join the organization and asked her to serve as treasurer. Tess continues to inspire. Her dedication to veterans and VVWP serves as a benchmark for today's board members. As her daughter wrote at the time of her death, "Mother was honored to be a part of VVWP for so many years." The Serenity Prayer found on Tess's funeral card hints at how she lived a life that enabled her to be true to self, her family, her career, and still find time and energy to serve others, including military veterans.

Mail Call

William of the Tribute Foundation writes, “I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest admiration and heartfelt gratitude for the invaluable work your organization is doing. Your unwavering dedication and compassion are truly inspiring. The countless lives you’ve touched and the meaningful changes you’ve fostered stand as a testament to your remarkable efforts.

“In a world filled with challenges, organizations like yours reignite hope and remind us of the immense power of collective action. Your relentless efforts not only uplift communities but also inspire others to believe in the possibility of a brighter and kinder future. Please know that your hard work does not go unnoticed—it shines as a beacon of hope and possibility for many.”



“Thanks to you all and the veterans who tell their stories!” said **Karen I. Johnson**, Westwood, Kan. “Some are difficult to read. I can only imagine what it took to put it to pen!”



Gema Gabriela Benavides, Miami, Fla., “I felt very proud and happy about seeing my photograph, “Deep Thinker,” published for the first time.” She is looking forward to submitting more artwork and writing for *Veterans’ Voices*.” Gema is a Navy veteran and served during OIF/OEF 2001-2005.



Joseph L. Harnan, Mobile, Ala., writes, “I do write for therapy and believe in its ability to heal. Thank you for publishing my piece, ‘Empty Chair.’ What a fine magazine you have!” He is an Army veteran who served in South Korea and during the Cold and Gulf War eras.

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



Wayne Gooding, South Bend, Ind., said, “Thank you for all the work you put into *Veterans’ Voices*.”



“I really appreciate all the staff at VVWP for publishing my writings, wrote **Gene Groner**, Independence, Mo. “It means the world to me. God bless you,”



Among those thanking *Veterans’ Voices* for copies of the magazine are: **Shana Marie Shatzer**, CDCE Chief at Northern Arizona VA Health Care System VAHCS; **G. Michael White**, CDCE Chief, and **Barbara Forsha**, Executive Director, Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center, Clarksburg, W. Va.; **Jason V. Gray**, Kerrville-South Texas HCS; and **Jeffrey Wendling**, CDCE Specialist, Sioux Falls VAHCS.

Print Delay

Technical problems delayed printing this issue of *Veterans’ Voices*. To our readers and contributors, please accept our deepest regrets. Look for the next issue of the magazine in September and another in November. —The Publishers

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. Gifts are listed through March 31, 2025.

– VVWP Board of Directors

Gifts of over \$20,000 or more

Beets Charitable Trust Fund,
Kansas City, Mo.

Gifts of \$3,000

Anonymous, Kansas City, Mo.
James Eisenbrandt, Leawood, Kan.
Robert T. Rubin, Oxnard, Calif.

Gifts of \$1,000 or more

Anthony Cordero, Bronx, N.Y.
Douglas Iliff, Topeka, Kan.
Thomas E. Platt
Thompson Family Foundation, Shawnee,
Kan.
In memory of Sally-Sue Hughes

Gifts of \$500 or more

Chris Iliff, Stillwell, Kan.
Meadowbrook Ladies Book Club,
Prairie Village, Kan.
In honor of Lou Eisenbrandt
Richard Wangard, Neenah, Wis.

Gifts of \$400 or more

Marianne Watson, Wheatland, Mo.

Gifts of \$200 or more

Thomas C. Clark, II, St. Louis, Mo.
Loren Flaugh, Primghar, Iowa
Emily & Lars Kirkegard, Closter, N.J.
In memory of Elizabeth Fontaine
& William Anderes

Joseph Morris, College Park, Md.
Dianne Render, Spicewood, Texas
VFW Auxiliary 1432, Salina, Kan.
VFW Auxiliary 3343, Clyde, Ohio
Katherine Watts, Springfield, Mo.
In memory of Ronnie Millard

Gifts of \$100 or more

American Legion Auxiliary 153,
Olathe, Kan.
M. Ballard
Fern Barnett, Sorrento, La.
Boyd Burke, Canon City, Colo.
Carleton (Swede) Beckstrom,
Shawnee, Kan.
Priscilla Chansky, Overland Park, Kan.
In memory of Tess Raydo
Cure of Ars Catholic Church,
Leawood, Kan.
In honor of Lou Eisenbrandt
DAV Auxiliary State Dept. of Mo.,
Kansas City
Deborah Dribben, Independence, Mo.
Karen I. Johnson, Westwood, Kan.
Patricia Kranzow, Countryside, Ill.
M. Kuczmarski, Independence, Ohio
Robert Lofthouse, Kansas City, Kan.
In memory of LTC Gordon J. Lippman
R.D. Nelson, Uniondale, N.Y.
Lynn Norton, Leawood, Kan.
Daniel Paicopulos, San Diego, Calif.
Andrew Siebert
In memory of Cecil R. Siebert

M. Marta Sipeki, Denver, Colo.
Dottie & Ken Snow, Lee's Summit, Mo.
In honor of Sheryl Liddle
VFW Auxiliary 1370, Charleston, Mich.
VFW Auxiliary 5951, Bossier City, La.
VFW Auxiliary 7743, Osborne, Kan.
VFW Auxiliary 9059, Dartmouth, Mass.
Lawrence Waite, Onalaska, Wis.
Kathryn Walery, Fair Oaks, Calif.

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.
Chris Williams, Weir, Kan.

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 and select Registration.

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

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

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

Guidelines for Local Contests.

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

SUBMIT ONLINE:

www.veteransvoices.org

SUBMIT BY MAIL:

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

QUESTIONS:

support@veteransvoices.org or (816) 701-6844

Mail Submission Sample.

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

Author Name _____

VAMC Name _____

VAMC City, State, Zip Code _____

Author's Permanent Street Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Branch of Service _____

Conflict or Era _____

Approximate dates served _____

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

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

Date Submitted to *Veterans' Voices* _____

Title: *Example: What America Means to Me*

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

Writing Aide: _____

Typist: _____

Heal Through Visual Art

Watch for your artwork in a future issue!

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

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

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

Instructions for Artwork Submissions

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

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



Submit Today!
For a Future Issue

Calling for
Photographs,
Drawings and
Paintings



Artwork Submissions

Online or By Mail

www.veteransvoices.org

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

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



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

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

PERMIT NO. 1115
Kansas City, Missouri

Technical problems delayed printing this issue of *Veterans' Voices*. To our readers and contributors, please accept our deepest regrets.

—The Publishers

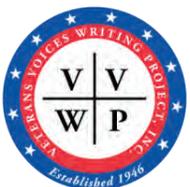
**Share
Your
Story**



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.

Send submissions to www.veteransvoices.org.



Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.
406 West 34th St., Ste. 103, Kansas City, MO 64111-3043
816-701-6844 | www.veteransvoices.org

