

The Harsh and The Heart Patriots Dream

a Silver Boomer Book



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Dedication:

To those who serve
overseas, at the homefront,
in the home waiting without
end. To the heroes.

Thank you for your service.

Foreword

The tenth anniversary of September Eleventh 2001 inspired this collection. While the horror of that day touches the pages, the warriors in armed services uniforms dominate, and that's more than appropriate. Ten years ago we met the malicious terrorist attacks with waving flags and indomitable spirit, united, of one mind.

For a moment, we shared the fervor of those serving in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, National Guard, and Merchant Marines. Many left the comfort of home to join up, finding themselves now in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and other military bases.

The subjects of these stories and poems stand in a long line of heroes who have put our freedoms ahead of their own safety since the nation was founded. In these pages you will meet men and women who have served in uniform through almost a century of armed conflict. A few stories come from America's allies, and several pieces celebrate the role of sweethearts, spouses and family members who also serve by sharing the lives of their loved ones with the rest of us.

Many of the authors are sharing true stories. Others have crafted fictional representations of experiences true to the culture of military life. Some pieces celebrate the bittersweetness of the unique world of the armed services and some probe the aching reality that this is, more than most, a

job that calls men and women to lay down their lives for others. The Silver Boomer Books editors invite you to read along with the dreams of our patriots to a deeper understanding of the “harsh” and the “heart” of military life.



I Have a Cat

Maggi Perkins

Friday, May 30, 2008

I have a cat. I have three huge gold fish in a small bowl. Yesterday I had none at all. My neighbor's husband died in Iraq one week ago. She came to me, apologetic and trembling to ask if I could watch over her pets while she went to Colorado to plan a funeral. In the six days since she asked me, we have become friends. And the idea that all I can do for this precious woman is care for her pets breaks my heart. She probably would not have come to me if she had not been desperate for an animal care giver. How many other women are mourning silently, weeping behind closed doors because there is no one to notice, and no pets to force them to be seen? I know that it is a private thing, that grief coming and going in waves leaves you so raw that public seems like salt and lemon, but I feel it is a crime that we all keep so much to ourselves. I want to be or do more for her. But, there are no words or actions which I own that could mend this. Not that she acts broken. Oh, far from it. She has seemed like some Greek goddess of strength to me. Still laughing with her kids, telling stories of his flaws as well as his greatness, and finding joy in those shared moments that make a family. I have only a glimpse of who she is, but I am awed by the strength I have seen in her. So I will cuddle her cat, and feed her fish, and hope that in doing that I can spare her some bit of stress that

would otherwise burden her. Even the strongest need strength lent to them occasionally.

Goodbye

Becky Haigler

Even without
an etymology lesson
military families know
the meaning, feel
the heart's contraction
with each lifting of a hand
to wave farewell.
They know the word
is really a prayer —
“God be with ye.”

Uncle Donny

Mary Krauss

Unfortunately, there have been many wars since WWII but that conflict seems to be the most vivid in my memory. Perhaps because it was my first war. My brother Terry and I were swept up in the routines of wartime – collecting cans, air raid drills and rationing stamps for everything from gasoline to shoes. Many people had “Victory Gardens” in their front yard, and Terry and I were proud to have our names printed in the paper as members of the “Clean Plate Club.” In the backyard sandbox we would construct buildings and drop clumps of sand on them shouting, “Bombs over Tokyo.” We were only three and four years old and had no idea what bombs did or where Tokyo was, but somehow we were getting the bad guys – just like Roy Rogers.

I had never seen a soldier in real life until my Uncle Donny came to our house. He was the youngest of Mom’s seven brothers and she celebrated his new mission by sending Terry off to the bakery for a chocolate cake. Donny wore his new army uniform and told us he was going to be a bombardier. That meant he would fly in a plane. We were very proud and excited for Donny. Mom gave him a long hug when he left.

Over the next few years I would ask my grandparents about Donny and look at the large world map on their kitchen

wall. There were colored dots to mark all the places he had been. I thought he must have a very exciting job.

One winter evening, our phone was ringing and relatives kept coming over. Mom told Terry and me that Donny was missing in action. She asked us to say a special prayer for him. Mom went back to the relatives and I knelt at the side of my bed to make up a prayer. She came up later and asked if I had prayed for Donny. I proudly told her my prayer: “Dear God, please make Donny happy in heaven.”

“No!” she shouted.

“Why, Mom?”

“I just don’t want you to say that prayer,” she said quietly.

I never knew why my mom didn’t like my prayer.

I also know I never saw my Uncle Donny again.

Last Move

Marian M. Poe

Prophets cry in dreary tones

“You can’t take it with you.”

“Good!” reply my weary bones,

“no more packing to do.”

Dear Gunny,

Peg Russell

You asked for stories about the Moving Viet Nam Wall, so this is mine. My three volunteer shifts at the Wall were Thursday night, Sunday, and Monday morning.

Thursday night I worked security from midnight to four in the morning. Because the power company came out and put up an extra pole and more lights just hours earlier, it was bright enough to read each name on the wall.

The other volunteers said that when the Wall came to Murphy, from seventy to one-hundred-and-fifty motorcycles escorted the truck. Other motorists treated the run like a funeral; traffic on the four-lane stopped for the parade, and people lined the streets.

On Sunday morning, my shift began at the volunteer table. When we looked up a name for the visitors, besides writing the name and its location on the Wall, we wrote all the information including birth and death dates on the paper, knowing that the narrow piece of paper might later be stuck in a family Bible or provide genealogy information.

The other volunteers passed on the story of the flute player. About three in the morning, a woman came alone. She sat on a bench in front of the Wall and played a flute. As she was leaving, she told the volunteers that she'd been playing her son's favorite songs.

Sunday afternoon I was out beside the Wall trying to assist visitors. My main contribution was to approach kids who walked along looking bored and show them the symbols beside the names. A diamond means confirmed dead; a cross meant missing and could be changed to a diamond if later there was confirmed death, or the cross would be converted into a circle if the missing person came back alive. It was fun to then watch the young people point out and explain the symbols to their families.

One of the veterans explained to me that the ace of spades playing cards tucked into the cracks in the Wall were an intimidation technique used in Viet Nam. When the enemy came upon a body with an ace of spades tucked into the pocket, or in a remote area the card was found stuck to a tree, the message was, "We were here and may still be around." Some of our soldiers carried a pack of cards made up only of the aces of spades.

One visitor, a rough, mean looking man with tattoos all up and down his arms who wore a black leather vest attracted my attention because he stood motionless, absorbed in his thoughts, staring at one section of the Wall for more than half an hour.

Later when I glanced over, he was kneeling with his head in his right elbow, praying.

If someone had asked me to guess which visitor would kneel down and pray, the rough looking guy would have been at the bottom of my list.

Finally, I watched him take off his black beret and put some beads and a paper into it. He left it at the bottom of the Wall panel where he'd been praying. I decided, then, that the enormous task, all the volunteer energy, and whatever the cost of bringing the Moving Viet Nam Wall to Murphy, had

all been worth it. The man who prayed was the one person the Wall came for.

Some of the visitors seemed too fragile to be out that Sunday afternoon, I thought. Some were pushed in wheelchairs (Pee Wee had rolled the sandwalk so it could be used by wheelchairs), and other older men and women limped slowly along with walkers and canes. When I offered to bring over chairs for them, they all refused.

I copied a list of our Cherokee County names and their locations for a Boy Scout who was volunteering. His class would be visiting the actual Viet Nam Wall in Washington DC later in the year. The young volunteers included Boy Scouts and the football teams from two local high schools who came and erected and then dismantled and repacked the Wall.

Monday it rained so hard that the program with a band was canceled, local football games were canceled, and schools visits to the Wall were supposed to have been canceled. But the students and their teachers came anyway.

At the welcome tent the second-graders carefully and slowly printed their names, the later third-graders were faster, the seventh-graders were quite fast, and every one signed in. My friend Susie on that shift held umbrellas while the students signed in and then she lent other kids her umbrella, my umbrella, and a few more umbrellas (I had no idea where they came from).

Other visitors joined the students in the pouring rain.

Later, one of our writers said, "As moving as the Wall to me were the pictures and items people left there." He was right. The pictures of those handsome, very young men, the aces of spades, the worn pair of boots, the caps, the notes, flowers, the bottle of beer, and the beret with its beads and note were all very personal and moving. The flowers were

perishable, but all the other items were packed up and sent to be added to a museum.

The slender, well-dressed older woman who stopped by our table on her way out and said, “All the names on the Wall seemed familiar,” was right, too. All the names were familiar. They all belong to us.

A Soldier's Soldier

C.B. Anderson

Her bristly edges were the end-result
of deeper bruises, which lay hidden well
below the surface of her skin. No fault
of hers, that inner traumas did not swell

and raise themselves like medals on the scarred,
dismembered veterans who had served a hitch
in Baghdad. Typically she made it hard
for men to like her -- they just saw the bitch,

and nothing else -- but little did they know
of the belittlement she'd suffered through
while young: at first, because she didn't grow
at all for thirteen years; but then she grew

so quickly that her large ungainly feet
became the butt of constant ridicule...
until the rest of her caught up. Complete
in all her parts, she took her peers to school
and taught them what it meant to toe the line

she'd drawn across the sand. The Spartan gift
accorded them made sure they'd never whine,
no matter how much pain. Her hand was swift
to render punishment, which served her well
when she commanded her own regiment
years after: Soldiers whom she put through hell
would learn to see her praise as heaven-sent.

Out of the Kitchen - Haibun

Carl Palmer

Expressing my desire to learn how to throw a wicked
curve ball Mom says without hesitation, "You'll just have to
wait until the baby bottles finish boiling. If you're in such a
big hurry you can help by taking them from the kettle." She
hands me the tongs, "Put them on the counter to dry while I
get Dori from her rocker and dressed to go outside."

The little league coach, Mr. Temple, praises my winning
performance, says I'm his new star pitcher. "What a great
curve ball, Ace. I bet your dad is really proud."

game ball
placed atop
folded American flag

An Army Brat Learns Not To Cry

Katie O'Sullivan

Before army horses were traded for tanks,
Sergeant Harris, late of the cavalry,
taught us kids to ride around the rim of his world,
infused of earth, manure, horse breath
and fear.

When he ordered, "Mount your horse," we mounted.
When he ordered, "Walk," we walked.
When he ordered, "Trot," and my small feet beat in vain
against the side of a sulky horse,
Sergeant Harris cracked his whip and horse and I bolted,
and when I fell, bruised, ready to cry,
his stern voice commanded, "Remount your horse."
In tight formations, we jumped hurdles,
single or in pairs.

We galloped within unbroken lines as if in battle drill
until the arena thundered with horses' hooves.

Sometimes, after the order to dismount,
Sergeant Harris would walk over,
snapping his riding crop against his boot ,
and give me a pat on the back.

From under his wide brimmed army hat,
I would hear the gratifying, gruff,
brass-bound words,
"Well done."

A Desert Chill

Brandon Robers

Patrick Baumgartner was cold. He woke up shivering, arms wrapped across his chest, gripping his shoulders trying to keep whatever meager store of heat his body retained from slipping through his fingers. He had tried to pull his knees up into his chest in his sleep, but his feet had caught in the bottom folds of his sleeping bag and he had succeeded only in snarling his legs in the fabric and pinning his lower body in an awkward, half-extended position. His sleeping bag. Three separate shells of insulation that could be fitted one inside of the other like polyurethane layers of some matryoshka cocoon and that could, if the bag's label could be believed, keep a man comfortable through an arctic winter. It could not. Before swaddling himself in the three useless layers of army over-engineering, Patrick had put on his long poly-pro bottoms, a tight wool undershirt, two pairs of mid-calf socks and his grey army PT sweat suit. And yet, like most of the nights since leaving Germany, he was freezing.

In Germany he had been excited, but nervous enough to pack everything that he had even imagined he could need. He had talked at length with everyone old enough to have been deployed in '91. The advice had all been the same: beware the heat, the sand, the bugs, and the sun. He had bought and carefully packed what seemed like a thousand items and struggled to haul them 2500 miles. As it turned out,

January in Kuwait was still January. He was prepared for everything but the cold.

He brought his hands, and then his arms, out of the small opening at the top of the bag, wriggling his upper body free like some desert moth emerging to find that winter had yet to lift. He pushed back on his elbows, and then sat upright on the narrow cot that had been his bed for the last several weeks. It was too close to dawn to go back to sleep, and too cold to enjoy even a minute's reflection before starting the day.

Patrick swung his legs out of the bag and off of the cot. He stood slowly, muscles stiff from the cold night, and took care not to hit his head on the tent's canvas roof where it tapered to a low wall near the head of his cot. His eyes adjusted slowly to the darkness. The tent was large, perhaps 60 feet long, and fashioned of expanses of off-white canvas supported by large wooden center poles. To Patrick the setup had the feel of a low budget carnival exhibition hall. A plywood floor, hastily built and unpainted, kept the two rows of cots that stretched the length of the tent off of the ground. The space was large, easily big enough to accommodate 50 men, but it was almost empty.

On the only other cot in the same corner of the tent, Reggie was snoring in the dark under a fleece blanket he had wrangled from some overpriced souvenir shop on Camp Doha. The light from a full moon snuck in through the half-drawn flap at the tent's end.

He crept carefully out of the tent, pulling on his Gortex jacket as he moved. The sand was soft and deep and gave easily under his stocking feet. He never bothered to put on boots at night, not even for the 100-yard walk to the nearest latrine.

The camp was the first of a truly remote string of outposts in Kuwait's Al Jahra governorate that stretched from outer environs of Kuwait City north to the border with Iraq. To the

west of Kuwait City, past Al Jahrah and the sixth and final of the city's ring roads, the modern highways ended. Between there and the Iraqi border some 39 miles to the north were a series of American military outposts floating like the lonely pads of a desert lily on a desolate, ruddy sea. Camp Virginia was the southern-most of these and was really nothing more than a patch of sand and earth, indistinguishable from its barren surroundings except for the double ring of earthen berms pushed up around its perimeter.

Most units that had come to Camp Virginia to participate in the large and satirically named "Operation Lucky Warrior" in the northern desert had departed several weeks earlier. Those who had brought their own vehicles or heavy equipment with them, rather than using prepositioned gear, left a few soldiers behind to babysit things until they could be sea-loaded for the return trip sometime after the New Year. A few others were on longer term assignments to meet the minimum staffing needs of the camp. Like many of those held over through the holidays, Patrick and Reggie had spread out and staked claims to large portions of the abandoned tents.

Patrick made his way around the side of the tent to a small heater concealed under a tarp stretched across the tent's guy ropes. A few days earlier he and Reggie had taken the heater from one of the supply Conex's left by his unit before they had returned to Germany.

They had cut a small slit at the base tent side and run a short length of ducting through the canvas wall and between their cots. The heater was small, but it was enough to keep the space in the corner of the tent that they called home livable, at least while it was running. To keep the heat coming throughout the night the five gallon fuel can had to be changed at least twice. Reggie always said that he would alternate trips outside during the night, but the cold never woke him up. No reason for them both to suffer.

Patrick opened another can of fuel, the same diesel kerosene mix that ran every truck, tank, aircraft, and space heater in the Army. He quickly pulled the siphon from the empty can, dropped it into the full one, and pushed in the rubber stopper that held it in place. A quick flick of the ignition and the heater came back to life. It would be a few minutes before the freezing air around the cots was sufficiently tempered.

He stepped between two of the tall concrete barriers that were arranged around the perimeter of the pad of 12 identical tents that had been his thinly populated home for the past several weeks. He leaned back against the barrier, lit a Marlboro with a match from the previous evening's MRE accessory kit, and let the early morning smoke energize him.

Though dawn couldn't have been more than an hour off, the night sky was still a perfectly black backdrop to the brilliant exhibition that shone clearly between the horizons. He sat down on the T-wall's knee high rectangular ledge before slowly lowering himself onto his back. This had become his favorite part of the day, his few minutes alone to smoke, to dream, and to marvel at the singular, unexpected beauty of the desert's broad night sky.

Patrick gazed upwards in awe, only the drifting smoke rising from the cigarette between his fingers grounding him to the physical world. *How did I get here?* This had been a recurring mantra in his thoughts over the last two years. He knew, of course, in the most literal sense, how he had arrived in Kuwait. He had approached every day of his life in the Army with enthusiasm and could recall with astonishing clarity the days that lead up to his current assignment. His experiences since entering the service stood in stark contrast to the routine of his boyhood life in suburban Maryland. He took every day, every task, every casual conversation as a

chance to build on his merger experience. This, more than anything else, including his still immature sense of patriotic obligation, was why he had joined the Army. From the day he had sat in the passenger seat of his recruiter's worn Impala, backing down his parent's driveway with his contract in hand and only the slightest hint of a sentimental sheen in his eyes, he had embraced every opportunity to absorb his surroundings. His service was, above all, a pursuit of experience and an escape from the monotonous, if comfortable, life he had known before. He had not been disappointed.

He brought his fingers to his lips, inhaled, and slowly expelled an evanescent cloud into the otherwise unblemished night sky. Just three days after leaving home he had stood, weary in his sweat soaked uniform, and absorbed the abuse of an especially enthusiastic drill sergeant under a humid Georgia sky. He had known exactly how he had arrived at that over-trodden parade field, but he had been amazed nonetheless. His early experiences had been exciting, yet safe. His training took him places so far removed from the ways of his old life that he had scarcely recognized the world around him. But these were places where a million men had walked before him, where generations of young men had the idealistic reverie of their youth shaken out of them, and had left stronger, but with their world views fundamentally intact. For Patrick, and for every man who shared that time with him, this all abruptly changed just two weeks before the end of their stay at Fort Benning.

They had been in the field, digging foxholes and laying wire on some not-so-remote bivouac that the previous class of recruits had left only the night before. They were sweating in the early morning, frantically preparing for some made-up battle in a fantasy war undoubtedly designed more to torture them than to teach them anything of practical value. All work

came to a halt when the senior drill sergeant called the company around him in the center of their half-finished outpost.

Two planes had hit the World Trade Center in New York. Both towers had collapsed, the country was in chaos, and it was almost certainly only the opening shot in what would be a long and grueling war. If any of them were still clinging to the idea that this was some sort of grown-up summer camp – a few weeks of playing games and forming memories to embellish for their friends at home, they had better change their attitude. The country was at war and everything they were being taught could, and likely would, mean the difference between life and death. He was passionate, chanting on and on about patriotic duty, about his love for America, about his obligation to impose discipline and knowledge on his beleaguered charges and, in the end, even shed a tear. Not a man believed him.

The company had rushed back to its work, eager to avoid any further entanglement with this newest bit of melodrama. In quiet conversations some wondered if it could be true. They asked each other if it were possible they had the misfortune to have joined the army only weeks before some modern incarnation of Hirohito took the stage, but it all was whispered with the air of children old enough to know better debating the existence of a globetrotting philanthropist in red garb. The consensus was that they, like every class before them, were being fed some terrifying fantasy meant to reinvigorate them in the waning days of basic training. It was simply too convenient to think that some maniacal warmonger would choose the very morning they had broken all contact with the civilized world to launch his campaign. Still, the guys with family in New York were anxious.

In the early afternoon the cadre called for anyone from New York or New Jersey, or that had family in the city. They were trucked back to the barracks to inquire after family and friends. In their absence the anxiety built among the men left at the bivouac. Would the cadre really be so cruel to a group of young men simply to convince the whole company of their tale of impending Armageddon? That evening the group from New York returned. They had repeated the same story that the drill sergeants been telling all day, but from their mouths it was believable. Any remaining doubt was erased by a single color photo ripped from the front page of the afternoon **replate** edition of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

That night the company went on a long march through some of the more remote areas of the training range. In the fading minutes of twilight they were caught in a fierce thunderstorm. It was one of those eerie cloudbursts that come on suddenly and cast the sky in shades of crimson and green.

They ran from an elevated clearing into a low grove of pine and squatted back on their haunches, trying to get as close to the ground as they could without letting anything but the rubber soles of their boots actually touch the earth. Patrick cowered, soaking wet, clutching his rifle and praying for just one more day of life. He was at once terrified and in awe. Perhaps he was simply caught up in the day, but at that moment he was sure that storm was meant as a sort of punctuation to the day's story, and as a tiny terrifying glimpse of the future. And he thought, *how the hell did I get here*.

Since that night he had smoked a thousand cigarettes under a thousand night skies. Life's currents had carried him quickly from Georgia, through Kentucky, to Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Grafenwöhr, Drawsko Pomorskie and a collection of other European field sites, and eventually to Kuwait. All of this experience had been colored by the

constant background noise of the building war on organized terror. Through it all he had been aware of the major events propelling his actions, had understood the mechanics of his movements, and had seen the trajectory events. It wasn't difficult to understand, and at times foresee the steps in the world's slow walk towards armed conflict. Yet each time he stopped to reflect on the circumstances of the world, and his place in it, he couldn't help but wonder how exactly he had arrived there.

But even as chaotic as it might sometimes seem, there was some order underlying everything in the world. Even a turbulent river is governed by the laws of nature. It flows towards something larger and carries everyone in it along. There is structure and design to everything. Structure is what allows for beauty, and it was the profound beauty of the world that made him sure that it all had some meaning, some reason to be beyond random chance. He was sitting there, under the beautiful desert night sky, because, for good or ill, he is *supposed* to be there.

He sat up, ground the butt of his cigarette into the sand, and moved back towards the tent. Maybe he was sentimental. It wasn't as if he tried to be. Most times he was so caught up in the chores of military life that he never stopped to consider just where he was going. No one around him really seemed to care. Most days he was content to occupy himself with the mundane banter and griping of an enlisted man's life. But when he wasn't busy, when he wasn't engaged by some minor task or conversation, his mind tended to drift into reverie, and sometimes even towards the slightest fear of what might come. Yet, despite the rather abstract threat of violence he was excited to be here, amazed at where his life had taken him in the last two years, in awe of the world. He was happy. Or at least he would be, if it wasn't so damn cold.

Navy Seal

Kevin Heaton

*I proclaim his service faithful, the blood
within him blue. Many fathoms take
a measure of this man—Poseidon*

Saltwater flows inside his veins,
filtered through life's sifting
sand into freshwater streams
of competence and cohesion. Tough,
yet gentle enough to cradle
a child's broken body in arms
of benevolence, or extend a pensive
hand in friendship.

Grit and resolve are his hallmarks,
defended by razor-sharp, bull shark
teeth clenched in righteous
determination.

An everlasting flame of truth
broadens his reflection, casting
a lighthouse beacon; illuminating
clear, safe passage to lost ships
hazard bound.

Sitting with 642

Janine Surmick

The vice president smiles like a 1920's gangster
in the frame hanging on the wall.
We wait on salmon cushion chairs
at the Pittsburgh VA Hospital
for the pharmacy to dispense
Adavant and Vicadin,
to you and other vets.

Numbers scroll down a TV screen.
You scratch your numbered card
against my arm and drag
your sneaker across the linoleum,
untangle my hoodie zipper.
The secretary of the state peers
from his frame beside the hanging
American flag from the ceiling.

The hum of fluorescent lights fills the quiet.
I remember you in bed this morning,
head buried in the pillows.
"I had another nightmare."
#642 scrolls across the TV screen
and you return with your anti-anxiety script.

I flip a peace sign at the president's
white teeth as we leave the building.
I fumble with the orange pill bottle;
you hold out your open palm.
"The dream was terrible.
I reenlisted."
I say nothing as we drive home.

The Black Wall

Joanne Faries

carefree boy lost his spirit in Vietnam
he wandered the jungles, even when
deer hunting in Texas. Ghosts haunted
in another language. He worked, loved
cheered Cowboy football, embraced friends
despite survivor guilt steeping his soul
his name wasn't carved on a memorial
in Washington D.C. It's now etched in
family memories. Grown man passed
too soon. Still the boy who earned
a Purple Heart

Boots

Joyce Frohn

Always hated them Army boots, especially in boot camp. All them officers teaching stuff. How to tie shoes. I learned that in kindergarten. How to polish my boots. Hated that. Officer's boots looked too clean. Especially the Captain's.

We were all sure the war would be over in a few weeks, months at the most. We all hated him for still sending us on patrol, at Christmas time, yet.

Then it happened. The old man had been right. The war wasn't over. Seemed like snow and bullets all mixed together.

After it was over, I had to clean him up, fix his boots and stuff. I couldn't let them put him in the sack looking like that. He'd a seen anybody in our unit with their boots all crooked like that, he'd a yelled at them so loud, Hitler woulda freaked.

I wasn't going to let anyone see him like that, not with one boot pointing up and one down.

Cheekers

Mary Deal

“I joined the Air Force, Mom,” he said, sounding surer of his decision than at any other time.

His words went in one ear and out the other, searing a scar through my brain. “Oh?” I asked, the word coming out more like a painful grunt.

“I won’t be leaving for three months, though. I took delayed entry.”

“Delayed entry?” I asked. What else could I have said that wouldn’t sound like a reprimand? I’d always encouraged him to take charge of his life. Though sudden, this was evidently how he chose to begin.

“Yeah, I decided to stay home for the summer to help you adjust to the change.”

I’d been both mother and father to him. We struggled through the years and the effort produced a boy developing into a fine young man; a mature, caring young man.

And an empty nest.

We had always been close. From infancy, his were the puffiest cheeks and he hated having them pinched. His name was Dean, but Dino stuck. We invented names. Beans became beansos, noodles became niddlers, and his chubby cheeks became cheekers.

To avoid hurting him, instead of pinching his cute little face, we began the habit of pressing our cheeks together.

Anytime one of us wanted to get close, show affection, we would say, “Cheekers!” Then we’d hug and press our cheeks together. I came to know that more love passes cheek to cheek than through any stinging pinch. We grew up together doing cheekers. Cheekers before we went apart. Cheekers when we came together again. Cheekers anytime one of us needed reassurance.

Three months of preparing for separation passed too quickly. I found him packing. “I have to be down on the street at five in the morning,” he said. “Can we hug a lot now, so when the recruiting officer comes to pick me up, we won’t keep him waiting?”

That from a son who was so close we felt each other’s pains? Nothing happened to either without the other knowing. Who was he kidding? We hugged our hugs, cried our tears, and stayed up all night talking.

After a pre-dawn shower and breakfast, I dressed in a new soft-white business suit. I wanted to look my best on this day, the last time we’d see each other for a while; leave a beautiful memory in my son’s mind. He joked about leaving me alone saying, “Oh well, nobody believed you had a son this old, anyway.” I must have looked good in white.

Fifteen minutes early, Dean and I stood on the sidewalk in the San Francisco fog talking about how, when the sun would come up, the haze would burn away.

Then, right on time, a blue-gray sedan pulled to the curb. I held my breath. My son reached for my hands as the uniformed driver watched through the windshield. I wanted to hug my son, but when I moved toward him, he tightened his grip.

“I love you, Mother,” he said, but he wouldn’t let me get close. Perhaps he thought showing emotion would look immature to his new peer waiting in the car.

“I love you, Son,” I said, knowing he wanted to be viewed as a man and not as a boy leaving home. I had hoped I wouldn’t cry if we exchanged one last hug. Still grasping my hands, not allowing me to throw my arms around his neck and wallow in sorrow, my son was going to make sure tears didn’t happen... to either of us.

He picked up his nearly empty regulation size suitcase. “Goodbye for now, Mom,” he said. “Remember what we talked about – about getting on with things?”

“I’ll remember,” I said, as my throat glugged with emotion.

“Won’t forget?”

“I won’t,” I said. “And you stay awake today.”

He let go of my hand. I hadn’t noticed when the numbness began setting in, but now I couldn’t feel my legs beneath me. Strange that summer fog never affected me that way before.

My son climbed into the nondescript sedan and closed the door. The car immediately rolled away from the curb. His expression was solemn, with a twinge of sorrow. He waved like a salute. I could barely make my legs turn my body around to watch the car take him from me. Then the swirling fog closed in behind them and erased even the glowing tail lights.

I don’t know how long I stood there. Finally, I was inside our flat and hadn’t felt myself climbing the stairs. I don’t know how I spent the next two hours before leaving for work, whether I sat, whether I stood. I think I walked into his room... more than once. I do remember a lucid period,

however. During that time, I glanced at my watch and, realizing I was running late, promptly set the table and cooked breakfast for the two of us. I began to shake when I remembered we had already eaten.

Then it hit me. Out on the street when we said goodbye in plain view of the recruiting officer, we hadn't had a chance to do cheekers. My heart sank even further. After eighteen years of nurturing my child, loneliness and an empty nest was to be the reward.

Before going to bed each evening I stood looking into his room. In those quiet moments, I remembered that oftentimes through the years I had yearned for the time my son would be grown so I could participate in activities that eluded this doting parent. Simultaneous sadness and glee left me confused. Days and weeks arduously dragged past. Then, one day as I sat reminiscing over his childhood and the special bond we had, I realized he had grown wise beyond his years. He had felt a calling to do his part to help protect our freedoms. That was what he and all our military fight for and he wanted to be a part of it. Suddenly, I knew I wouldn't waste another minute in sorrow but would concentrate on the glorious memories that child has given me to last a lifetime.

Finally, he came home on leave. As soon as I saw him at the airport, he looked different. He stood taller and proud. The military had brought out the man in him. We rushed into each other's arms and pressed our cheeks together and held tight while my tears flowed. At that moment I knew he had been right all along about me getting on with my life. I would, but not at that moment. Just then, I couldn't stop staring at and admiring this new person who would always be my son.

The Angel of Marye's Heights

Pat St. Pierre

Confederates, four abreast
hidden behind a stone wall,
held their fire and waited.

Union soldiers marched
across the open green fields
of Fredericksburg confident
they would find the enemy
and win a victory.

At the bottom of Marye's Heights
unseen Confederate soldiers
delayed their shooting.

When Union soldiers were close by
Confederates fired like lightning from the sky.

As the wounded Union fell,
painful wails erupted in the countryside.

Moans were heard
across Marye's Heights.

A young Confederate moved
by the distressed cries of the
Union soldiers, risked his life
to bring canteens filled
with water to help save these men.

Hence, his name for all eternity
"The Angel of Marye's Heights."

Hawaiian Imperial Operation

Sheryl L. Nelms

he was there
the morning of December 7, 1941

a teen-ager
in the Navy

stationed at Pearl Harbor
on board the *Arizona*

one of four ships

sunk when the
preventive action

began to fall
on the Pacific Fleet

from the 353 Japanese
planes overhead

said he thought those bombs
would never
stop

coming down
and down and down

couldn't remember exactly
how he survived

as explosions burst
his eardrums

smoke burned
his lungs

and the ocean
washed red

around him

Green Card Soldier

Carl Palmer

seasonal migrant worker
unwed mother in Arizona
temporary work visa expires
sent back across the border
she allows her teenaged son
a chance to have a better life
than his first eighteen years
to stay and join the U.S. Army
he fights to become an American
becomes an American fighting man
offers his life for this country and
becomes a citizen...posthumously

Korean Echoes

Tom Sheehan

My turn had come;
Billy Pigg, helmet flown
lost, shrapnel more alive in him
than blood, free as air,
dying in my arms.

Billy asked a blessing, none came
his way since birth. My canteen
became his font. Then he said,
“I never loved anybody.
Can I love you?”

My father told me,
his turn long gone downhill;
“Keep water near you, always.”
He thought I’d be a priest before
all this was over, not a lover.

The “Greatest Generation”

And their legacy to the outdoors

Rick Fowler

The State of Michigan, indeed the nation, is losing hundreds of outdoor resources daily, and neither the EPA nor the DNR can do anything to rectify the situation. These valuable assets are the men whom Tom Brokaw refers to in his book as those who fought for country and freedom in WWII, and the “greatest generation.” He writes, “No block of marble or elaborate edifice can equal their lives of sacrifice and achievement, duty and honor as monuments to their time.” What a powerful tribute to millions of Americans who fearlessly defended their country during the Second World War. He further states, “They answered the call... They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. It was a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventures, love, and the lessons of the workday world.”

Maybe because they were a generation used to sharing and working together, many remained friends after the conflict. Some would begin fishing and hunting traditions that would continue for decades. A lot of them became avid outdoorsmen who plied the woods and waters for game and game fish, learning through trial and error what worked, what worked better, and what didn’t work. As they aged their knowledge became finely tuned. Though many would not

discuss their battles in the fields, on the sea or in the air, they were more than willing to offer stories and tips from the local waters and forests where they spent much of their time.

My father was a member of this distinctive club. Thus it was, packed with provisions and gear I headed to Drummond Island, Michigan, in 1985. Along with my dad and I were two friends of mine and three of his, local buddies, all WWII navy men, and a new boat from which to fish for pike and bass. The resort we stayed at was conveniently located near the Potagassining River, and our success was hit or miss the first day. However, at the evening campfire I learned a lot of history and heard many stories of guts under fire. Though each had been on separate ships, the camaraderie they shared was evident as the conversation eventually shifted from fishing to who had the best crew, whose ship had come under fire, and how useless the survival fishing rigs were if they had been cast adrift on a life raft for an extended period of time. Though not explicit in their story-telling about life in the war, at least in my presence, the emotions they felt were shown in the body language used in their descriptions.

That first trip to Drummond was followed by two more island vacations in the following years. With each trip I learned more and more about my father's experiences and those of his friends. For instance, two of them, after being discharged arrived home and decided to fish for specs just outside of Soo, Canada, in 1946. Forty years later they were still making the trek across the border. My father's first job after coming home from the South Pacific was at Mackinaw City, Michigan, loading vehicles onto the ferry boats that ran to St. Ignace. Often, he and other crew members would stay on the Upper Peninsula side for the weekend and dip smelt from Nunns Creek or fish for white fish from the city docks in nearby St. Ignace. From these Drummond Island trips I

also learned how to tie a true sailor's knot, filet a fish without a single bone showing in the steaks, and practiced tying a simple fly recipe used for specs in Ontario.

Eventually, my wife and I purchased a lakefront cottage in the UP. Then, rather than head to Drummond, we headed to the lake with dad, his buddies, my pals, and now my father-in-law also joined the mix – another sailor. As the annual 'to the lake' trips went on, fishing became more of an afterthought for me. Sure I wanted to catch fish, find fish for my guests and actually have a meal or two of fresh fish caught from our lake. Yet, as the summers passed, I wanted even more to hear stories, learn more secrets, and relish in the tales these seamen could tell. I learned that my dad's first deer was taken with a .22 long rifle, lever action, that he had traded a shipmate for who in turn received a Japanese soldier's rifle from my dad. One of two he brought home; the other is now in my gun safe. I found out that my father-in-law a cook on a carrier suffered a compound break in his fingers after some cargo shifted in the galley and his hand received the brunt of the force. He was off duty as a cook for awhile but not off off duty. He was still expected to do his share of watch time. He also explained that he and his crew were responsible for one of the mid ship guns. One of them readied it, another loaded it, and one of them fired it! Then they went back to cooking. When he and his brothers returned from the war they headed north to the Higgins Lake area, hunted and fished for a few years and then bought lots just up from the lake. Joe has hunted and fished in this area for over forty years. He is a veritable walking history book full of tales. He knows some fantastic hunting areas and where and how to fish the Higgins, and is not averse to sharing his knowledge with those who will listen. Ah, there's the rub!

Are there enough listeners?

If I hadn't listened while with these men, I would never have known how to make cow bells for trolling lakers, crawler harnesses, reloading shot, distinguishing the difference between a coyote track and a dog print. I wouldn't have experienced the thrill of smelt dipping, smelt cleaning, and smelt eating. I would never have learned how to attach a tippet, listen for the drum of a partridge, the snort of a buck and emulate the call of a turkey.

Every June from 1985 to 1997 I listened as members of the 'greatest generation' told their tales of successes and failures in the forests and on the waters. I had invited them to the lake to fish. Little did I realize how much they would bring to the table. In 1998 the summer lake trips came to an end with my father's illness. The group of friends has now dwindled with his passing and the passing of others. It is disappointing to me that this mixture of generations can no longer share what had been learned over decades of outdoor experiences. Those who remain show sadness too. That years, illness and death are starting to take their toll on this exclusive society, this 'band of brothers', if you will.

Their legacy can be defined with this quote from a soldier in Brokaw's book, "I lived a good life. Not with riches or money. I love to teach. I love to help people." With hunting and fishing interest declining, with video games, TV, and iPods as competition, those soldiers and sailors who remain are a direct link to what's right, wholesome and humane about pursuing a love for the outdoors. As another generation, we need to realize that thousands of libraries are closing everyday. We need to tap into them, have them teach us while we listen before it's too late.

A theme in the fishing genre as of late has been, "Take a kid fishing"; let's add, Take Grandpa fishing – we need their legacy. They are proud men who needed few accolades.

Indeed they are ordinary people, but yet, the foundation of the American way of life.

Listen to their stories.

Learn from their experiences, and know, what they teach needs to be passed on to another generation of hunters and fishermen.

My Life's Plan

Marian M. Poe

There is a Plan, I've realized,
though I do not approve.
Each time the house is organized
orders come for us to move.

War Souvenirs

Sheryl L. Nelms

that Kansas farm boy
went to war
learned what a grenade could do
was taught to stab
and stab
to kick and slice
hand to hand
fought in Bougainville
and New Caledonia
and Guadalcanal
and when the war was over
he came home
with his
mementoes
said he'd let the others take
the Japanese guns
and knives
and flags
and ears
he liked his cases
of tropical butterflies
better

Mother's Day

Pat Foldvary

I have lain awake much of the night. What day is this? Is it Mother's Day morning so soon? I shuffle into my slippers, inch open the blinds and peer through the window facing my front porch. The sidewalk is wet after a night of rain and high wind and it is still drizzling. There she is, nestled in the cradle of twigs she has woven to hold her four blue eggs. It rests securely on the porch's wooden crossbeam at the base of the bracket holding my American flag. Odd that she has chosen that spot. Occasional gusts blow the flapping flag within inches of her nest. Yet she is trusting and fluffs her feathers, doubling her size, to keep her eggs warm and dry. I have observed her vigil for more than a week.

This Mother's Day morning my son was deployed to Iraq by the Army for 400 days. How I envy this bird mother the control she has to protect her young. My time for that is long past. I feel the pangs of a mother's longing to keep her child safe each time I see the flag waving over that nest.

Soon, when I peek through the blind I will see the feeding mother perched at the edge of the nest poking her beak rapidly down toward tiny hatchlings. I know what the next few weeks will demand of her. A continuous feeding cycle will call her to respond faithfully to the small open beaks thrust upward for her attention. Her mate, even now lingering close by, will take his turn feeding the youngsters and tending

the nest. They both scold me when I cautiously retrieve the contents of my mailbox. They have claimed my front porch as territory for the raising of their family and guard it diligently against all intruders.

I am helpless to protect my son from harm or to relieve the misery he is enduring - wearing 60 pounds of body armor in sandstorms and 110 degree heat - but I storm Heaven daily with prayers for his safety. Meanwhile, I will watch the bird parents as they nurture their little family, admiring and remembering the purposeful devotion of raising young, until the nest is empty.

incoming

Carl Palmer

daughter pops bubble wrap
laughs as Daddy dives behind the couch
while on mid-tour leave from Iraq

Pearl Harbor

Sharon Lask Munson

His first new car
was purchased from a dealership
near Woodward and Second —
on a bitter cold Saturday
December 6, 1941.
An economical sedan
stripped down, two-door
green Plymouth.
During the war years
he'd stop at bus lines
streetcar tracks
any corner a serviceman waited
with a thumb extended.
He'd cruise downtown
picking up sailors,
war weary soldiers, marines
home on leave
use his prized gas rations
for those fighting —
drive them to a mother's arms
lonely barracks, or a local USO
contributing in the only way he knew
for owning the last car sold in Detroit
till the men came home.

Homecoming, Newark Airport

James Keane

I don't know what you went through
(or went screaming through you)

over there. But all appears forgotten
in the walkway from the plane. Your

family beaming, still as you stride up
a steady hill to the WELCOME HOME

someone (all of them?) committed
to cloth just knowing you were coming

back. And here you stand.
Back. Smiles and silence

all around. A hug, patiently,
for your mother. A shove, playfully,

for your sister. Then all there is
is your father. His tight grip. Tightening

grin. Branded with a savage
kiss on both sides o f your neck.

A Taxing Topic

Terri Elders

*I like to pay taxes. With them I buy civilization.
~Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.*

As a girl I believed that “beware the Ides of March” related to figuring out income taxes. Back in the early ‘50s, when March 15 was tax deadline, for Daddy it was the worst day of the year. Why he put off his computations until the very last minute still puzzles me. Once the dreaded return actually had been dispatched, my parents positively savored their debates about how they’d spend their expected refund.

“Maybe it’s time for an automatic washer,” Mama would suggest at supper, ladling cream gravy over Daddy’s favorite chicken-fried steak. Or maybe she’d hint that we all needed new shoes.

“No, no. The Chevy needs a new carburetor,” Daddy would respond, smearing margarine on his corn. Or perhaps he’d complain that his mower blades were so worn out that they left our lawn corrugated.

Daddy enjoyed helping me with my algebra homework, so it couldn’t have been toting up the columns of figures that irritated him so. Nonetheless, on tax day he always acted peeved.

At the last possible minute, he would sprawl at the kitchen table, glare at his W-2 form, flip through the pages of his booklet, and gnaw at his yellow Ticonderoga No. 2 pencil.

Mama plopped a plate of oatmeal cookies, fresh from the oven, at his elbow, and hovered with a coffee pot.

“Dang government robs a man blind,” he’d growl an hour or two later, slipping his completed forms into an envelope. He’d grudgingly affix a three cent stamp, glance at the clock, and then toss the packet to me. Daddy would never waste gas driving to the post office when he had a preteen daughter lingering nearby, eager for a chance to be helpful.

“Don’t just shove it in the mailbox! The Slauson office only stays open until six. Be sure to get the envelope postmarked or they’ll subtract interest for a late filing!”

“Don’t worry, Daddy. I’ll ride my bike.” And I’d fly down West 59th Place, pigtails flapping in the breeze, musing on Daddy’s baffling attitude.

In my social studies class I’d studied how income taxes originally were levied in the United States to fund the Civil War, and later, World War I. During the Great Depression, taxes began to support programs to put the country back on its feet. In Sunday School I learned that even Joseph and Mary had traveled to Bethlehem to pay taxes. It was clear to me that Daddy, by dutifully filing his taxes on time, despite the furrowed brows and scowls, ensured that our family could hold up our heads with pride. We were solid, albeit somewhat reluctant, citizens!

Later, as a newlywed, I witnessed my husband duplicate Daddy’s antics, practically frothing in panic come income tax day, now April 15. Though Bob had a whole month more to fume and fidget, like Daddy he still waited until the deadline was nigh. Then he’d slouch on the couch, sigh, and then slowly hunch over the coffee table to spend the next several hours scratching away with his Eversharp.

Though I brewed coffee, I didn’t bother baking cookies. By now I’d studied enough anthropology to wonder if this

income tax angst simply was a crisis of manhood, some secret long-standing initiation rite handed down from father to son, akin to thrusting a hand into a glove filled with bullet ants or hurtling from a 100-foot tower while land diving in Vanuatu.

“You know, I’d be glad to do the taxes. I can add and subtract,” I offered. Bob had clutched his papers and forms to his chest, mouth agape, staring at me as if I’d proposed he trade his gray flannel suit for my bolero-sleeved dress with its pencil thin tubular skirt.

“I’m the head of the household,” he blustered. “This is a man’s job.”

Scrupulously honest, Bob fretted about tax cheats, and never claimed a dishonest or questionable deduction. Still, he treated me to heated diatribes over the legality and immorality of the 16th Amendment, outlining most of what the IRS and the federal courts now term “frivolous arguments.”

Years later, single once more, I finally filed my own taxes. I’d prepared for the worst, laying in a supply of chamomile tea and peppermint lozenges. To my astonishment, the process proved relatively pain-free. Weeks before the deadline I simply sat down, toted up the figures on my hand-held calculator, twice to ensure accuracy, and sent off the completed form.

To celebrate, I phoned my father.

“Guess what? I just filed my taxes and I’m getting enough on my refund to take a trip to the Bahamas.”

“What did you have to pay the preparer?”

“Not a cent, Daddy. I did it myself.”

At least a minute elapsed before he replied. “You probably made a lot of mistakes. Don’t be surprised when the IRS knocks at your door.”

Eventually I learned that it's not male or female outlooks, per se, that causes anxiety. Rather it's more a matter of basic attitude. My second husband had no qualms about delegating me to handle the paperwork in our household. Nor did Ken ever fret about parting with a buck, if he felt that it was well spent. I always paid our bills, so it felt natural to fill out our joint taxes. He'd gladly barbecue a ribeye for me on tax preparation day, and serve it up with a glass of a peppery red Shiraz.

"How'd we do this year?"

"We did just fine. We paid enough to keep the nation's highways paved and to ensure that hospitals will remain open for our veterans. We're not getting much back, but we don't have to send any more in, either."

"I'll drink to that," he'd say, tilting his glass before digging in to his steak.

Widowed last spring, I poured through my tax forms last week and learned I'd be able to file a joint return, claiming my late husband in figuring the standard deduction. I didn't have to prorate.

"How generous," I thought, electing the simple 1040A, rather than itemizing.

Even so, because of earnings from my freelance writing and editing, I had to enclose a check for the U.S. Treasury. Fortunately, I'd allowed one of my tiny annuities to accumulate in a savings account all year to cover this anticipated bite.

I stuck the envelope in my roadside mailbox, and flicked up the red metal flag so the carrier would be certain to stop and collect it. Then I strolled back to my house, reflecting on how curiously comforting figuring my taxes always has proved for me.

I just consider myself blessed, I guess. I spent a decade abroad, working in developing countries. I'm grateful that I roamed the world, from Mongolia to Mauritius, protected by my American passport. I'm grateful that when I retired I drove from Washington DC to Washington State on relatively well-maintained highways. I'm grateful I don't live in a dictatorship. I'm grateful I can continue to support my country, even on income tax collection day.

For poet T. S. Eliot and reluctant taxpayers, April indeed may be the cruelest month. Me, I welcome those April showers. I just keep on looking for a bluebird and listening for his song.

My Uncle Hank

Rose Perante

When he flexed his forearm, the tiger tattoo sprang to life
A reminder of his days as a Marine
When he smelled the whiff of smoke he was on alert
A reminder of his days as firefighter
When he heard the roar of a crowd he sprung to attention
A reminder of his days as a police officer
When he saw a priest, he thought of the church,
A reminder of his days as a deacon

Once a firefighter, once a police officer, once a deacon,
Always a Marine.

In tribute to my uncle, Henry Perciaccante

Memorable Combat Experience

Donald Long

It was 15 May 1967. My unit was the 176th Aviation Company (Minuteman), 14th Aviation Battalion. Warrant Officer Roy, Specialist Hawley, Private First Class Washington and I, Captain Long, were working insertions for soldiers of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. After a “C” ration break we flew about 25 kilometers NW of Duc Pho, heading west into Song Ve river valley. We picked up troops and delivered them in a hail of machine gun, rifle, and mortar fire. At the controls on the first trip in, I was so focused I blanked out the wall of green tracer fire in front of us and concentrated on the touch down – good training did work.

While soldiers off-loaded, many were shot a short distance from the helicopter. At first we thought they might have been running in front of our M60’s. We learned that was not the case but it was an indication of how “hot” the landing zone was. As soon as troops were off, a full load of wounded were placed aboard for evacuation. Those who were able urged us with hands, eyes, and voices to “go, go, go!” It seemed the normal reaction of wounded soldiers wanting to get to treatment quickly. We didn’t know then that they weren’t concerned with “getting to” somewhere but rather “getting away from” that particular valley. It soon became clear. As we departed, the door gunner and crew chief were

calling out, “Machine gun 2 o’clock; machine gun 10 o’clock; machine gun left; right,” etc... about 8 in all. We weren’t sure whether we were hit going in or coming out, but our instrument check showed all “in the green” so we kept flying. We took wounded to the aid station, picked up another load of soldiers, and went back.

On our way back we saw the platoon leader’s helicopter flying our way, leaking fuel. Major Kettles had been in the LZ right after us. His helicopter was shot up and the door gunner severely wounded. We were to team up with another ship which had ammo for the next approach. We led the way with WO Roy at the controls. The second ship was at right echelon so unloaded ammo would be as close as possible to troops in the tree line. After the soldiers dismounted, we noticed those who were supposed to put wounded aboard were not moving, due to the heavy fire. Just as on the first trip, many of the soldiers jumping off to join the fray were being hit before making it to the tree line. Because of this, we had to wait until the second ship had off-loaded ammo, loaded wounded and departed before we could relocate. It seemed like an eternity with all the bullets and mortars.

The second ship reported taking many rounds, some through the cockpit but again, miraculously, without injury to the crew. Finally, we were able to hover closer to the tree line to minimize the soldiers’ exposure so they would load the wounded. In doing so we maximized our own exposure. After lacing us with machine guns, the enemy got us dead center with a mortar round. After the bright flash, not sure if we were damaged, I checked the instruments and all were still “in the green” so I pulled pitch to get us out ASAP. That was a big mistake since the mortar round had made several alterations to the helicopter, including making one rotor blade

somewhat shorter than the other. We flipped one way, then another, stopping upright on the skids.

I believe we all set a record at that point “un-assing” the aircraft. In fact, Ron Roy and I both went between the pilot and co-pilot seats at the same time and do not remember touching each other. SP Hawley and PFC Washington went to the far side of the LZ but were able to dash back later without injury. All of a sudden we were infantrymen, firing at the enemy from behind our burning helicopter.

Fortunately, even though the helicopter was destroyed, I was the only crewmember wounded. The adrenaline was working so good I didn’t know shrapnel had hit my lower right leg until I hit the ground when I jumped out.

It wasn’t long before flames got to our machine gun ammo which sprayed everywhere, forcing us to move to tree cover to continue the ground battle. Eventually our gunships had to depart. “Fast movers,” or jets, were brought in to drop “daisy cutter” bombs and napalm – close enough that some shrapnel hit the ground behind us. After an hour or so they left, followed by our C & C or command ship. As the “wop, wop, wop” of those Huey blades faded in the distance and there were no more gunships or “fast movers,” it became so quiet that for some reason it was frightening. No birds chirped, no wind rustled the grass or trees, and water in the stream in front of us ran quietly.

A tower of smoke rose from our helicopter marking its demise. The smoke changed colors as the flames devoured different-colored smoke grenades...red, yellow, green...but eventually changed to black when the flames found the fuel. A low haze smelling of gunpowder, burning helicopter, and burned flesh, reminded us that it might be quiet but it was not over. No one moved for fear of making noise and drawing attention from the enemy. We later learned that there were

only 44 Americans on the ground against a much larger well-trained force on the other side of the stream and 40 of us were wounded or dead.

Around 1830 we heard the faint sound which told us helicopters were coming. We looked to the east and there in the sky, as beautiful as could be, were six Hueys on approach to our LZ to get us out. It was wonderful to know we were not forgotten or abandoned. We knew we were greatly outnumbered and had already proven helicopters on approach in the LZ were sitting ducks. Leading the rescue flight was our platoon leader, Major Charles Kettles. Since Major Kettles already had one chopper shot to pieces around him (over 40 bullet holes, plexiglass shattered, rotor blades badly ripped) and his door gunner severely wounded that day in the same LZ, he had every right not to be in the sky coming back to get us, but he was.

I later heard that Commanding Brigadier General Matheson was against the rescue because we were so badly outnumbered. He wanted to wait until morning to attempt an extraction because of the losses already suffered that day in both manpower and helicopters. Our helicopter and crew weren't the only ones hit that day, just the only ones hit by a mortar round and therefore, the only ones who did not leave the LZ. Besides killed and wounded ground forces, there were other wounded Minuteman personnel.

I thank God Major Kettles argued for and got the helicopters needed to come back. Everyone knew what it would have meant to be left there overnight, outnumbered and with most people on the ground wounded. I'm sure no one in the LZ at 1815, with the sun heading for the horizon, will ever forget that we were rescued because Major Kettles came back.

In the end, everyone was extracted from the landing zone that day, including the dead, amidst a withering hail of fire. WO Roy and I instructed the infantrymen to run with us to the furthest helicopter. Because of my leg, two soldiers had to get on each side of me while I carried their radio, etc. As we ran we approached a wall of mortar and small arms fire but kept going. Amazingly, just before we got to the area where the firing was concentrated, it stopped for a few seconds. When we got to the helicopter, firing resumed behind us. I don't attempt to explain it but am thankful it occurred.

Five of the six rescue helicopters were so badly damaged they never flew again – too many repairs needed. The helicopter flown by Major Kettles, his second of the day, suffered over 40 hits from small arms fire and severe damage from mortars. Amazingly, on the second trip, neither he nor any of his crew were wounded. Another amazing thing is that the one helicopter not hit during the rescue was the one Ron Roy and I were on. And that, of course, was sheer luck.

Though many of the infantrymen we ferried were killed that day, by the grace of God our unit only suffered wounded personnel. We did lose 13 helicopters (temporarily or permanently) to battle damage. My helicopter, which had performed brilliantly to the end, became a pile of ashes, a mechanical martyr marking the battle site. Later, after the seriousness of the situation wore off, our buddies began calling the area “Chump Valley.” Since the enemy hit us right on top, it would seem we landed on their mortar registration point, and only “Chumps” would be dumb enough to land on such a spot. Our crew did take some ribbing about that.

To put this in perspective, I don't believe the 176th ever had a day quite so bad after that. I know that they had not had one close to such intensity up to that point. Having been “in

country” only 3 months, it was the unit’s first big encounter and to that point the biggest battle participated in by 14th Aviation Battalion personnel, though the battalion had been operational in Vietnam for approximately two years. Our helicopter was the first in the 176th totally destroyed in combat and I was the first unit member wounded severely enough to be grounded.

It was clearly not a “win” day for our side. I guess somebody and some helicopter had to be first. The hospital at Qui Nhon filled up that day. After my initial treatment, as I was being readied for evacuation from the 101st Medical Aid Station, I was told there was no room for me and I would be treated as an outpatient. I was grounded approximately three months, mostly due to constant infection and not the initial wound.

I know my experience in Vietnam is equalled by many others who served. I’m thankful to be here to remember it. I’m only able to write of my memorable experience because of a memorable person, Major Charles Kettles, a great human being and valiant soldier.

Without Him

Nola Whirlow

My high school sweetheart and I married in November, 1968. We traveled with his job on a pipeline company for a year before Nixon's draft lottery. Roger's number was 9! In only a few weeks he had his draft notice and went to basic training in California, Advanced Individual Training in Oklahoma, and then enjoyed a two-week break before being sent to Vietnam in June, 1970.

Roger was an exceptional person. He adapted to Army life well since he could take orders and work harder than any man I have ever known. He was in Vietnam nearly six months when he put in for R and R in Hawaii. It was one of the most beautiful weeks of our lives.

I'll never forget the sad parting on Thanksgiving Day, 1970. But my suitcase was full of Christmas gifts we had purchased for family members and I was full of hope. My only son was conceived in Honolulu. I received tapes from my husband telling me how overjoyed he was at the prospect of becoming a dad and offering suggestions for names.

Roger saw little violence in the war. It was winding down by then, but he was sent as section chief of an artillery piece to a place called LZ Judy in March, 1971. The place was overrun by sappers in the middle of the night on March 28th. In that attack, 33 men were killed – one of them my precious soulmate.

I'll never forget the survivors' assistance officer coming to inform me of Roger's death. I was in the middle of my pregnancy and the baby had first kicked that week. I remember trembling and sitting stunned on the sofa, consciously numbing myself to the sorrow. It was simply too much to feel at that time. I did cry all day, then got on my knees that night and said, "God, help me." I instantly felt the grace of God and knew in my heart that my husband's soul was safe and serene, that the baby and I would be fine. But the hole in our lives continues to this day...40 years later.

I went to college and enjoyed a 30-year career as a special education teacher. I have had so many friends who helped me along the way. I went to Tough Love meetings during my son's adolescence and found the great value of support groups. I earned my Masters degree in 1990, the same year my son graduated from high school.

Over the years I stuffed feelings of sorrow, never really grieved properly and secretly raged at the injustices of life. I finally realized I had to grieve. In 2002, I got out the box of letters from Vietnam. As I read each one, I finally began to feel the deep sadness of my loss as well as the fullness of joy I had experienced in being loved so deeply by another person.

Today I am retired. I continue in support groups. I belong to a health club and enjoy exercising. I journal about happenings in my life and I write out my gratitude for God's blessings. I attend church and participate in service opportunities. I do my best to live each day fully and to allow my loved ones to live without meddling from me. I have pets who adore me as I adore them and I am enriched by caring for them. I am grateful that I was led to work through numbness to feel the sorrows and joys of life. My action plan is to put one foot in front of the other and step hopefully into each day.

Stand Down Soldier

Maggi Perkins

Tuesday, March 06, 2007

My brother-in-law Andrew died in Iraq two days ago. We are all heart broken, and my hub is coming home for two weeks for the funeral, if you would put us in your prayers I would really appreciate it. I plan on doing a tribute post in the next couple of days.

Saturday, March 10, 2007

Well, I have stopped crying, except when I am... I am not so good at the emotion thing, wish I could skip right over it. Andrew told me when he was at my house last summer that I was his sister and he felt like the kids and I were his responsibility, so even when he was in Iraq he would call and ask how we were. He wouldn't let me worry about him, or tell him what a HERO he was. Instead he wanted to know if there was anything he could do for us.

I called him Superman because he wanted to fix everyone. I don't do well with new people; usually I act like a big dork for at least two years after meeting someone. Andrew was different. After six years of not seeing each other it only took minutes for us to be friends. I guess, as corny as it sounds, that we recognized something in each other. He spent three days at my house last summer while Aaron was in

boot camp. He made a tent in the kitchen with my kids and read to them under it. He wrestled with Daniel who loved him on sight.

Andrew never failed to make me feel like the most important person to him... something I think his loving nature did for everyone. One night he called me way after my mother-of-two bed time and said, “Sweetheart, I know it’s late, but I am about to jump out of a plane, and nothing is going to happen, but I just want you to know I love you.”

I of course responded with something like, “You freak! You are supposed to call me when you are safe on the ground not before!” He called back later to soothe my nerves – all he got on that jump was a bloody ear.

He was supposed to be coming home on mid-tour leave in the next six weeks. On Saturday he emailed to say he would tell me dates as soon as he knew. Damn it, I am so mad that we don’t have that time with him. But I am so proud of him at the same time. He was our front line. He and so many boys like him. It kills me that they are doing this stuff everyday and we don’t even think about it.

Well, not anymore. To all of our men out there who are fighting, through your fear, we love you. Thank you so much for the sacrifices you are willing to make. Thank you. Andrew, you will not be forgotten. You are a hero, a man among men, and I am sure Jesus met you at the gate to say, “Well done, good and faithful Servant. Welcome home.”

Thursday, March 15, 2007

Stand Down Soldier
Rest Easy
Your Mission is Complete
Sgt. Andrew Caine Perkins

The Department of Defense announced the death of six soldiers who were supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. They died March 5th in Samarra, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated near their unit during combat operations. They were assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C.

A memorial will be held for him today in Amarillo and his funeral will take place in Roswell on Saturday March 17th.

Sgt Perkins was a highly-decorated grenadier with the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 3rd Brigade Combat Team. His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Army Achievement Medal with one oak leaf cluster, the National Defense Service Medal, the Iraqi Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Humanitarian Service Ribbon, the Army Service Ribbon, the Combat Infantryman's Badge, and the Parachutist's Badge.

He is also being recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic actions in trying to saving his fellow soldiers. Andrew was killed while saving a soldier injured in the first blast that hit his convoy.

Our Soldier...Our Hero...Our Brother...Our Friend.

Monday, May 14, 2007

Grief hits you at the weirdest moments, and long after the world around you has started to slowly rotate again. I am a hoarder. I hoard my feelings until it I have to let it out or explode. So today I got all crazy and decided to clean house.

The only thing that will keep me motivated to clean is some good music. I decided that I was ready, so I put in my James Blunt CD.

Now, let me be totally fair to Andrew's memory – I don't know if he liked James Blunt, but I do know that the last day we spent together we sat on the couch for four hours talking, and he let me play that CD on repeat without a single complaint. He might have hated it, but he was too kind to complain. So I am singing along with the CD, leaning in my closet to pick up a shoe, and sorrow hit me in a wave. You know the sort of sorrow that you can feel right up under your rib cage? That leaves you sucking for air because the tears can't get past the middle of your throat? That sort of sad.

I never broke stride though, I cleaned and sobbed, and sobbed and scrubbed for about an hour. I know that it is not healthy to hold your emotions in... yeah, yeah, I have heard all that before. But how in the hark do you keep from doing that? And what if I am out in public when it takes me over next time? It could be humbling for sure. So now I am all puffy eyed, and mad at fate, and my head hurts from tear dehydration. Great.... and the really fun part is this... I can already feel the heaviness where I hide all that. So the build up has started before relief ever had a chance to set in. Ahhhhhhhh. So, sorry that there was no funny here today... I appear to be all out.

November 01, 2007

Andrew's company is coming home from Iraq. It makes me incredibly sad to imagine them all getting off the plane to the waiting arms of their loved ones, and to know that he won't be. I am feeling a little maudlin thinking about it, so I decided to get it out here instead of stuffing it in (something my friends tell me I do way too much).

There is just so much I didn't get to say to him, like, "I love you," one last time. I guess, though, there is never a last "I love you" that feels like it should be the last. I know that he is with Jesus, and I know that means much better than here with us, but dang it, it doesn't make the ache any less strong. My sweet husband is always comparing himself to Drew now, and it breaks my heart.

So I guess what I am saying is, "Hey Andrew, I love you, man, and I wish we were meeting you at the airport. You would be all tan, and bursting with stories to share, and you would hug me in that embrace you are famous for. I wish that I could watch you play with my kids again. I wish that we could just sit and talk. Oh heck, I would even watch 8 Mile with you again, and we know that movie sucked. Thank you for being a hero; you are missed!"

Wednesday, March 05, 2008

It is one year today since Andrew died. It seems to have colored everything. Each big event, conversation, my relationships with my husband and in-laws, and the way I feel about the army. When grief touches you it leaves marks on your skin, aging you like sun damage. There are places in me that will never be the same, that will always be visible to the discerning eye. I will always be prone to easy tears at the mention of someone giving their life for the freedom of our country... or another.

I see these same aspects in everyone affected by his death, and I imagine there are similar families everywhere, holding their pride and their sorrow close...mourning for heroes that went to fight and never came home. Strange how much more a part of you they become when you can no longer touch them. I guess that is what people mean when they say, "They will always be alive as long as we remember them." In our memories they become bigger and better, stronger and braver

than life allowed, and we aspire to become like them. We carry a part of them on. In this I am proud to do my part. So thank you to all of you brave men and women who are willing to risk life and limb for the freedom that I so enjoy. And thank you to the families that support and send them out.

Cold War

Jeffrey T. Spinazzola

Today I stayed home from work,
reading a newspaper from last fall.
The war continued in Iraq,
options on Afghanistan were discussed.
It could have been today's news.
I stayed home from work
while the snow melted outside.
A cold front had ended
after an almost dry winter.
By evening I could see puddles on the rooftops.
Time moves quickly, or hardly at all.

So Long Ago and Far Away

Judy Nickles

About a million letters in the gold foil Schrafft Chocolates box. That's what Sandra thought anyway, until she counted them. Only one hundred and forty-seven, all of them on thin V-mails except for seven regular letters on the stationery she'd given him after he left for Camp Payne. She re-tied them with a frayed pink hair ribbon, the one he said made her hair look like cotton candy, and laid them back in the box.

About a million men. That's how many they said stormed the beaches at Normandy that day. Pete was just one of them. He wrote to her later about how the Channel was so rough that the nets they used to climb down into the landing craft were almost parallel with the water. "I thought I wasn't going to make it into the boat, much less to the beach."

He'd made it in and even off the beach and onto the road leading inland among the hedgerows. That's when the real trouble started, he said. That's when he said he knew he wasn't going to make it home in one piece, and he was right. "It's rough, Sandy," he wrote. "I'm glad you'll never know just how bad it really is. If I get home, don't ask me to talk about it, because I won't."

Sandra opened the box again and put her hand on the letters. It had taken her three days to read them all again, but she wanted him to be fresh in her mind before she made this

trip. He was as real to her now as he was the day he squeezed her one last time before making a dash for the train which was already beginning to move along the platform. As long as she lived, he'd never be older than he was that day—just twenty-two. She was seventeen.

“You’re in love with love and a uniform,” her mother said. “You’ll get over him.” She was wrong. Yvonne, her older sister said she’d wasted her life, but she was wrong, too. Two degrees and thirty years at the local junior college didn’t count as a *waste*. A lot of Petes sat in her classes. She watched them go off to other wars and wondered how many came back, though she never knew. She tried not to think about it. It was enough to know the lessons of history: Men fought wars. Men died. Nothing changed.

Leaning her head against the crisp white cloth on the headrest of the train seat, she closed her eyes and thought about the first time she ever saw Pete. He was living at the CCC camp just outside of town. A lanky cotton-headed boy, his fair skin sunburned from working outdoors. He winked and called her a *cute kid* when she sat down beside him at the soda fountain where Yvonne worked.

She could tell he was interested in Yvonne, and it was equally plain that Yvonne wasn’t interested in him. She had bigger fish to fry, like Milt, the captain of the high school football team that had just won the state championship. When Yvonne snubbed him, Pete turned his attention to Sandra, but in a brotherly sort of way. She was only twelve then.

He came into town every Saturday afternoon, always alone and with a willing ear to listen to her adolescent problems. He said he had a little sister of his own back home in west Texas. Yvonne tattled on her, and Mamma said it wasn’t a good idea for Sandra to sit in the back booth at Bramble’s Drug Store every Saturday afternoon with an older

boy from *that place out there*, but she did it anyway. When the camp closed, she felt like she'd lost part of herself.

It was funny how things worked out, running into him again four years later on the same stool at the soda fountain when he came back for basic training at Camp Payne. "You've changed," they both said at the same time and then laughed. He didn't even ask about Yvonne who was married to Milt by then and had two kids.

She cajoled Mamma into asking him for Sunday dinner. He even showed up early and went to church with them, helped with the dishes, and then asked her mother if he could take her downtown to the movies. They went to see "Holiday Inn" with Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire and danced all the way to her front door afterwards. Mamma heard them laughing and came out to see what was going on. When they told her, she said they were being silly.

The next time they met at the drug store, he asked about her father. "He left when I was a baby. That's why Mamma's the way she is."

He didn't say he was sorry, just, "I wondered." Then he told her about his parents and kid sister and scribbled their names and address on a napkin. "I'd like for you to meet them someday." She still had the napkin, and she'd met his family eventually, but he wasn't there.

The day he took the jewelry box out of his pocket, she knew what was coming. Not a proposal. They'd talked about that and agreed it wasn't the right time. What he'd bought her at Clemmie's was a locket, a heart that opened with places for their pictures. Then they went to Woolworth and spent a quarter in the little photography booth so she could cut out their faces for the locket.

Without opening her eyes, she touched the heart beneath her blouse and smiled. She'd worn it every day for the last

forty-five years and left instructions with the funeral director that nobody should take it off. Yvonne or one of her know-it-all girls would try if someone didn't watch them.

She felt the train stop and opened her eyes on the green French countryside. It wasn't so beautiful when Pete saw it, but she'd enjoy it for both of them now. The porter, who'd been surprised at the fluent French of *le americaine*, appeared to help her with her luggage and explained that a car would be waiting to take her to the pension the travel agency assured her was within walking distance of what she wanted to see.

She found the information correct and the pension comfortable. After a night's sleep, the best she'd had since she began the trip, and a substantial breakfast of hardboiled eggs, cheese, croissants, and strong coffee, she changed into her walking shoes and slipped into the all-weather coat the travel agent assured her she would need, even in June.

About a million graves, she thought as she paused to take in the white crosses and Stars of David spilling across the green, meticulously-kept grass. Well, maybe not a million, but too many. One too many anyway. From her purse she extracted the slip of paper with the exact location of the one she'd come to see.

All the graves faced west, toward the United States. It was as close to home as these soldiers would ever come. If they were to be reunited with their loved ones, it would have to be here. So now she was here. Not to say goodbye. Not to find the *closure* that seemed to be the buzz word today. None of that. She was here to keep a promise to herself.

By the time she stood by the grave marker, she could feel the strain of the long walk. Holding to the top of the cross, she lowered herself to the damp grass. "Well, Pete," she said, glancing around to see if there was anyone close enough to overhear, "I came. I always said I'd visit you someday."

With the tip of one finger, she traced the letters of his name. “I’ve had a good life. I guess you know that. We’d have had a good life together, too, but things just didn’t work out that way. We talked about that, how things might not work out. But it’s still all right.”

Sandra shifted her thin legs into a more comfortable position. “I’ve always felt you were a presence in my life. Yvonne said I lived with a ghost, but you’re not a ghost.” She traced his name again. “I’m not staying for the anniversary ceremonies next week. I wouldn’t want to get all weepy over the music and the speeches. Besides, this is just between us.”

She looked around. A million men and the grief of the women left behind, a million shattered dreams. But not hers and Pete’s. She hadn’t let that happen. She put her lips against the cold stone. “Years ago I shed a million tears, Pete. I’ve told you a million times that I love you.”

It was harder getting up than getting down, but she managed, though her breathing came raggedly with the effort. “And I lived a million days just for this one.”

My Life’s Plan

Marian M. Poe

There is a Plan, I’ve realized,
though I do not approve.
Each time the house is organized
orders come for us to move.

The Sounding of the Knell

Alice King Greenwood

Youths, uniformed
in government-issued confidence,
make hasty promises
and hurried marriages,
kiss fearful families goodbye.

And then the long wait.

Churches bulge
with negligent pray-ers,
finding time at last
to plead God's mercies.

It is the fear,
everyone admits eventually,
that overwhelms --
bacterial warfare,
suicide bombers,
enemies not playing by the rules,

and body bags,

those lumpy bags seen before
only in movies
and TV news reports.
(Oh, God, must there be more

gold-star flags
weeping in dark windows?)

As though summoned by some
primeval propensity,
young soldiers amass,

poised on the edge of
Armageddon.

What's Really Missing

Wynne Huddleston

I see a young man in line at the drug store. Dressed in fatigues in a wheelchair, he has no legs. My heart reaches up to grab a fistful of pity, gratitude, and guilt, then crams it down my throat like a chicken bone. I watch him roll through the crowd, alone, give his prescription to the pharmacist. Is he bitter? Is he proud? Is he resentful? What music of his generation plays in his head? Or can he even hear it anymore? Is his mind filled with flashbacks of war—blood and dread, exploding bombs, gunfire... people lying dead? Would he smile if I spoke up and said, Thank you, or would he rather I look away, pretend I don't see him, let the chicken bone choke me, and say nothing, as if sacrificing one's life and limbs for others' freedom, my freedom, means nothing at all?

Old Fort Scott

Kevin Heaton

High atop the Indian Nation,
where Mill Creek tapped
Marmaton's shoulder; Winfield's
infant drew breath and learned
to walk. Dragoons pointed pioneers
west to spin a wheel of chance, labor
gave birth to a town, and bidders
cast lots for an empty bastion.

Then the prairie bled.

Crimson swords turned gray to blue.
Sunflower petals fell to fertile loam.
Final grains of sand filtered through
an hourglass covered with dust.

Cheyenne, Charlie Company Sweetheart

Sara Barnard

It was a rainy, windy, winter day in southern Helmand Province. This was Jerry's third deployment as a soldier with the United States Army; his second to Afghanistan. He had been in country three months and missed his wife, children, and dogs very much.

As Jerry watched the icy wind blow the endless stream of debris across the dirt street in front of his supposedly-bombproof vehicle, a particular piece of trash caught his eye. He hopped out to investigate. And there, huddled against the wheel of his vehicle, cowered a shivering handful of muddy puppy, only weeks old.

Terrified by the hulking, armor-laden soldier, the starving dog dashed to join her brothers and sisters nestled under a box-car sized storage container. An hour of coaxing and prodding and one very muddy uniform later, Jerry returned to his Forward Operating Base with the frightened black-and-brown puppy tucked into his poncho.

Back at his F.O.B., Jerry left the messy puppy in the care of comrades while he put in a call to his wife and children back in Texas. He excitedly told his family the story of finding the orphaned pup and ran through the list of needed supplies. Puppy chow, flea and tick preventative, something to treat mange in case she came down with it, worm medicine

should he need to treat her, and anything else his wife, Sara, could think of to send.

"I'll go shopping and get her first American care package in the mail tomorrow," Sara promised.

Jerry laughed. "I will send some pictures of the pup soon ... Oh, and one more thing. Could you check ...?"

"Already checking," Sara interrupted. "Looks like there is an organization called Operation Baghdad Pups that is going to be our best bet in bringing her home with you."

Jerry laughed again. Sara hadn't heard him so happy in quite some time. "You know me too well," he said.

By the time Jerry returned, the soldiers looking after the pup had christened her "Cheyenne," because of her timid nature.

Cheyenne's initial shyness was quickly replaced by spunky puppy attitude. She could usually be found playing outside the tents with one of her numerous soldier friends. To Jerry's amusement, no matter how long Cheyenne had been outside, she always came inside his tent to pee on the floor before returning to her fan base outside. Even when Jerry went on patrol, he knew if Cheyenne had been in his room thanks to the tell-tale puddle and tiny paw prints leading outside. He couldn't help smiling as he gladly sacrificed one of his Pampers baby wipes to clean up after his girl. *Feels like home*, he thought.

One day, while playing with Johnny, one of Jerry's subordinates, Cheyenne felt the need to relieve herself. She marched proudly into Johnny's tent, did her business on the floor, and trotted back out with her trademark puppy-pee prints trailing behind her. Jerry returned from the phone center just in time to witness an incredulous Johnny shout obscenities at Cheyenne before whacking her fuzzy, black-muzzled face. He bent to snatch Cheyenne by the scruff

of her neck when a low cough from Jerry made him freeze. "Ahem."

After Johnny had knocked out fifty push-ups, Jerry figured he ought to ask Cheyenne for forgiveness himself. On his hands and knees, Johnny faced Cheyenne and apologized for his outburst. Cheyenne loved having her friend at her level and wiggled all over before slurping Johnny's face with her pink-and-black tongue. It was customary with Cheyenne that all was immediately forgiven and forgotten when it came to her beloved soldiers. The same didn't hold true for Afghani.

Cheyenne blossomed into a beautiful German Shepherd-mix infantry dog. She went on patrol with Jerry and his platoon and her loyalties were never questioned, as her loud, angry bark was reserved for any Afghani men passing by.

Though she preferred to go on patrol with her soldier Jerry, Cheyenne willingly assumed the point position of any other Charlie Company platoon that happened to be going out. Returning hours later, an exhausted Cheyenne would sneak through her special hole in Jerry's tent and hop onto the cot with him to catch some zzz's.

One night, Cheyenne had trouble finding a comfortable spot as Jerry hogged the sleeping bag. When she finally got situated just right, one leg flung over Jerry's chest and her head on the pillow beside his, Cheyenne began to snore. Jerry wiggled a bit to find more room on the less-than-twin-sized cot. Cheyenne opened one eye, glared at him sleepily and growled. Chuckling softly, so as not to disturb "Sleeping Beauty," Jerry snuggled up to his dog and fell back asleep.

Cheyenne proved her salt while helping lead a patrol through the neighboring village the following day. She dashed ahead, which wasn't unusual, but as her platoon grew closer, she began to bark and run back and forth between

Jerry and a particular spot in the dirt road. Jerry tried to ignore her and focus on the hands of the Afghani passersby, some of whom had dropped whatever they had been carrying, retreating quickly into the maze of mud huts that lined the street.

Determined not to be ignored, Cheyenne grabbed hold of Jerry's uniform leg and planted her rear end firmly onto the packed earthen road with a low growl. Jerry called his men to a halt just as a dust devil kicked up in front of them, revealing a wire that led to an improvised explosive device, planted in the road only meters ahead. After calling the Explosive Ordinance Disposal unit to come blow the I.E.D., Jerry gave a special ear-rub to Cheyenne, who had saved him and his men from certain death or dismemberment.

Life became complicated when a new Battalion Commander was assigned to Jerry and Cheyenne's unit. Along with other changes, the B.C. announced the removal of all dogs from camp. Jerry asked if Cheyenne could stay long enough for Operation Baghdad Pups to get her to the States and his family.

"No dogs in camp, Sergeant. They carry disease."

Jerry explained that he understood, as most of the dogs in camp were mangy and flea-bitten, but Cheyenne was healthy, on preventative medication, and only one rabies shot away from being cleared to fly to Texas.

"If I see that dog, I'll shoot her on sight. Get rid of her now."

So, Cheyenne was smuggled to the neighboring, dog-friendly F.O.B. where she wasted no time in assuming "command" of patrols with her newest group of soldier friends. Whenever Jerry's platoon went on patrol, it was not uncommon for them to meander by the neighboring unit and give a special whistle, which would bring Cheyenne on the run. She

settled into the new routine famously.

When it was determined that there had been an increase in I.E.D.'s planted near the F.O.B.'s, platoons from both bases were sent on a ten-day mission to take out the criminal insurgents. Due to the hasty nature of the mission, Jerry's platoon was unable to make the short walk over to acquire Cheyenne, so she went out with soldiers from her new base.

While the two squads patrolled parallel to one another in early twilight, a deafening explosion came from the direction of Cheyenne's platoon. Jerry felt the ground quake. He kept his eye on the thick, rising column of black smoke and rushed to the radio to wait for news of what had happened.

The radio crackled to life with the voice of a soldier from Cheyenne's platoon. "I.E.D. No human casualties, thanks to Cheyenne," he reported stoically.

Thank God, Jerry thought. That one would have taken out half the platoon, maybe more.

The radio crackled again. "Cheyenne was on point. She didn't make it."

The Long Road Home

(A Sestina)

Lt. Col. Robert B. Robeson, U.S. Army (Ret.)

I will always remember him there, cyclic*
In hand, our chopper rumbling like spring thunder —
Waiting on the landing pad for a mission.
Vietnam, sixty-nine, a land shrouded by tears
An era past, yet memories tend to linger
Far beyond that ghastly Asian plot of blood.

John Ball, former marine, had seen lots of blood
In skirmishes around our globe. With cyclic
Stick in the neutral position, we linger
A while longer, impatient for action. Thunder
Resounds from artillery nearby. Out there, tears
Are common. They called for this urgent mission.

Like those hundreds of others, this medevac mission
Will test our skills. Enveloped in pools of blood,
Our medic strives to save lives but, instead, tears
Often take the place of life. Pull the cyclic
Back and climb away from death. Escape the thunder
Of enemy fire. It's not safe to linger.

John drops off our load, there's no time to linger.
More calls come in, more soldiers hit. This mission

Never ends. War can't tone down distant thunder.
That's its heart, its soul, its spirit and its lifeblood.
Holding on to hope, faith and also the cyclic
Stick is all we have left. There are no more tears.

Our next assignment is West Germany. Tears
Have been replaced with joy. We do not linger
Over dead bodies anymore. We hold our cyclic
Sticks casually. Our only urgent mission
Is a patient transfer or a hospital blood
Run. John soon retires. He hears no more thunder.

April nineteen, seventy-nine...the thunder
Returns. John Lee Ball dies in Montana. My tears
Don't do him justice. His crash brings back the blood.
I'll be the one to age. He did not linger.
Logging by chopper was his final mission.
His last moment came while holding a cyclic.

At forty-two, no more thunder. I linger
With my tears. There won't be another mission.
John's blood was shed. It's me who holds the cyclic.

*The cyclic control in a helicopter is usually located between the pilot's legs and is commonly called the cyclic stick or just cyclic.

A Soldier's Salvation

Barbara B. Rollins

Jesse's combat boots
stand at attention
beneath the bunk's
mattress perched on
broken wire.
Over paper-thin soles
leather long scraped of
shineable surface dries,
still stained with the day's
encounter with Georgia mud
except where the hole lets
an old broken toe breathe.
The sharp clap of a slamming door
drives Jesse to the floor.
He shakes his head at the power of
fears half a century old,
straightens the boots,
and kneels, praying to
his sponsor's higher power
that this army lives up to its name.

Unable to Fight

Sioux Roslawski

Whenever Ollie Kortjohn gazed at pictures of the Iwo Jima sculpture, he traveled to somewhere faraway without even shifting in his Lazy-Boy chair. As a young girl, I was clueless. Who were these men straining to raise the flag? Did the scene the soldiers depict – frozen in bronze – happen in real life? And how did my dad fit into the puzzle?

It was clear Dad had been a Marine. There were the same jokes he'd repeatedly tell us, and compared to the Army or the Air Force, the Marines always came out on top. On family trips to Florida or even to Grandma's house (which was just twenty minutes away) he'd break out into a rousing "From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli..." and we'd have to sit in the back of the station wagon and listen. Over and over again. And at the far end of his closet was even his uniform, which we'd get to see occasionally.

So it was clear to my brother and me: Dad used to be a Marine. We assumed he had gone overseas, somewhere, and probably had some unforgettable and awful experiences. We figured *that* was why he didn't really talk about his years of service. Of course, as too-young-to-know-any-better kids, we didn't think to inquire. And as we grew into disinterested teenagers and then adults ourselves, we got too entrenched in creating our *own* history to be curious about Dad's. And then it got too late. My father had Alzheimer's for fourteen

years and right before Christmas 2010, he passed away. And when we lost him, the last opportunity to hear him tell his stories also slipped from our grasp.

But hearing my mom tell his stories was almost as good...

My dad went to Chicago when he was 17 as part of the V-12 program. He appreciated the chance to learn new skills, but there was a time for standing off on the sidelines and a time to stand up and fight for what was right. And in my dad's eyes, there was nothing more right than America.

Frustrated, he talked to his superiors. Going to classes was obviously not what he wanted to be doing. Going overseas and serving as a soldier – that was why he had enlisted in the first place. And sitting in classrooms wasn't going to make him into a soldier.

"There are only two ways to get out of V-12: drop out or flunk out," he was told. So he obliged them. He stopped going to classes, and was sent off to a California Marine base. Soon he would be heading off to fight.

Never having served in the military, I can only conjecture. I imagine that when faced with going into battle and possible death, moments of leisure are sweeter in the minds of soldiers. A casual game of ball becomes a precious moment frozen in time. Playing basketball one afternoon, his ship-out now scheduled, my dad blew out his knee. It was a serious injury. The doctors removed most of his cartilage; a medical discharge followed.

His hopes of ever serving his country overseas disappeared. Ollie hitched back to St. Louis, went to the University of Missouri-Rolla, got an engineering degree on the GI Bill, and went to work for McDonnell Aircraft for \$2 an hour.

If he had not gotten hurt, my dad would have been among the first replacements headed to Iwo Jima. He would have

gotten the chance to tread on the same soil and fight the same foes as Ira Hayes and John Bradley and Rene Gagnon had done before him.

Instead, Ollie sported a thick circular scar around his knee, he worked as an engineer for the next thirty years, and retired to a senior community in North Port, Florida.

But whenever he saw the famous photo of the Marines atop Mount Suribachi, he traveled far from Florida. For that moment, he was right alongside those men, straining with all of his muscles to raise the flag up.

Alchemy

Barbara B. Rollins

The pictures stenciled on my heart have squelched
ten thousand thousand words. Unspeakable
destruction haunts me. When the towers belched
they spewed forth malice, infinitely vile.
My spirit joined with countless kindred souls
to mourn, to cry, to contemplate a state
of evil foreign, new, where none consoles
and each confronts an omnipresent fate.
Despair to anger shifted as the pain
too ponderous to bear alone forged knots
between the folk whose parallel mundane
existence melted. Heart to heart responds.
In unity we stand as evil fails.
The ultimate result is good prevails.

Departures

Janice Medin

The day my father left for Viet Nam,
we watched gulls fly to Catalina.
Wind wrapped our legs in kelp,
our toes anchored in sand.
A sea bass drummed its body
on rocks, tangled in sea oats
before he tumbled back in water.
Like wind, my father's laugh
bumped my body as he carried me
over rock ledges. There
we counted boats leaving the dock.
I remember his stiff clothes ribboned
with patches, khaki pants, his face
with my eyes and thin mouth. If possible
his eyes focused beyond boats,
the water, his lips creased tighter.
I felt his quietness,
this sudden turn inside him.
Empty, my hand made the motion
of waving. Then I touched his lips
to make certain he hadn't stolen mine.

Filling the Gaps

Ann Marie Byrd

Only 22 years before the Army grudgingly accepted women, the 19th Amendment granted them the right to vote. Pearl Harbor ensured the passage of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps bill. Congresswoman Edith Norse Rogers of Massachusetts had introduced the bill earlier in 1941, but it languished.

Most of Congress and the military opposed women in the Army. The floor of Congress was awash with protests: "A women's Army to defend the United States of America! Think of the humiliation. What has become of the manhood of America, that we have to call on our women to do what has ever been the duty of men?" "Take the women into the armed service, who then will do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself?"

After Pearl Harbor, the country faced a dilemma. As men rushed to volunteer or were swept in by the draft, the Army worried that some combat-ready men idled in support services. They needed women. Congresswoman Rogers reintroduced her bill, and this time she had the support of Army Chief of Staff George Marshall and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. President Franklin Roosevelt signed "An Act to Establish the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps" on May 15, 1942. Because of the lack of faith on the part of the military,

Congress and the public, the operation had to hit the ground running.

But the word “Auxiliary” made an enormous difference. The women were not part of the regular Army. They received food, clothes, housing, medical care, training and pay. The law denied them death benefits, medical care as veterans, retirement or disability pensions, overseas pay, or the Geneva Convention protections if they became POWs. Female officers had no command authority over men, and earned less than men with comparable Army ranks. Harsh as those conditions sound, women flocked to the recruiting stations. Their reasons for wanting to enlist varied: patriotism, the desire for adventure, travel, or escape from abusive or alcoholic homes. The following year the Army changed the name to Women’s Army Corps and absorbed the women into the Army. Their pay, protection and privileges matched the male soldiers.

The opportunity to serve came with accompanying cautions from family and acquaintances. From his cathedral pulpit Bishop James E. Cassidy warned that the WAACs ran counter to the “teachings and principles of the Roman Catholic Church.” The WAACs selection of a patron – the pagan goddess Pallas Athena – provided further proof. The Brooklyn diocesan newspaper declared that a women’s Army was “no more than an opening wedge, intended to break down the traditional American and Christian opposition to removing women from the home and to degrade her by bringing back the pagan female goddess of desexed, lustful sterility.”

Major Oveta Culp Hobby, Director of the WAACs, said, “The gaps our women will fill are in those noncombatant jobs where women’s hands and women’s hearts fit naturally. WAACs will do the same type of work which women do in

civilian life. They will bear the same relation to men of the Army that they bear to the men of the civilian organizations in which they work.”

Carefully selected women recruits soon boarded trains that steamed from hometowns to basic training camps. Fort Des Moines served as the first women’s training center. Colonel Don Faith and his staff had less than two months to prepare for the first female recruits.

Janet Stilt Youngblood, 92, offers recollections of an Army in transition. Beyond the daunting demands of turning a cavalry fort into a training camp for women, the Army soon found their facilities, food, clothing and military culture unprepared for women.

I arrived in Des Moines July 20, 1942, the first day that WAACs came to the Fort. The newspaper devoted pages to our arrival. Lots and lots of pictures. One newspaper reporter had me get back on the steps of the train and pose. I pretended to wave at someone so he could take my picture.

Basic training. Oh my God. My whole family, we were night owls, and getting up in the morning was always a problem. I had to do it at the Fort, of course, but I had no idea what it would be like to have a whistle blowing and lights in my eyes at an early hour. So many people, no privacy, but I adapted pretty quickly. There was no alternative. I looked at those narrow cots and thought I’d fall off the bed but I didn’t because I’d be exhausted. The worst part was getting so much done so early. You’d get up, get ready – you had to do your space, march to breakfast. It was like doing a full day’s work before you marched off to class. By 7:30.

Of necessity, men trained us. The enlisted men and officers were all men. That was an experience. For formation we had a very hard-boiled, old, regular Army sergeant. He had been told to clean up his language. He was in total frustration when he talked to us, trying to keep his language polite. His name was Paine – Sergeant Paine. He pretty much succeeded, but he'd get red in the face from trying so hard.

As a member of that first group, I saw that the men were not used to having women in the Army. Talk about resentment. When I picked up my sheets, I heard it from my supply sergeant. I'm young and flip, and said, "What's the matter sergeant? Don't you like having women in your Army?" Oh boy. "A women's place is in the home." He slammed those sheets down.

The Army tried to prepare women and did an awfully good job up to a point. They ran out of toilet paper. Women use more toilet paper than men do. Sergeant Paine announced at formation that we would be limited to four sheets of toilet paper per day. Four little squares of toilet paper a day. We stood at attention in ranks, but the minute we left – Are you kidding? We kept on using the paper – we tried to be sparing with it – but no way can you get by with four little squares per day.

They still had urinals in those buildings. I thought they were for washing our galoshes. I didn't know. I'd never been in a men's room before. I said, "Wasn't

it thoughtful of them to put these in so we can wash our galoshes?" The others must have thought I was the greenest pea they'd ever seen.

When we were first allowed off the post in Des Moines, to go into town, civilians looked upon us as an oddity or a novelty. As taxpayers, they felt they had every right to come up and feel the sleeves of our uniforms.

As the war progressed, Janet quickly moved up the ranks. She became an officer and transferred into the field.

Lieutenant Stilt, they really need you badly at Fort Benning, Georgia, at the infantry school. With your experience and skills, and with all this training, they are eager to have you there."

I thought they looked forward to having me and needed me badly. So I went, all flags flying, down to Fort Benning. Reported for duty to the adjutant. Direct! Oh my God. He told me they were not expecting me and they didn't want me. They didn't know what to do with me. I was a First Lieutenant with lots of rank, and if they took me in they would keep one of their male Second Lieutenants from a promotion. So I was about as welcome as...you name it.

We were out in the sticks and they had no place to put me. They trained male infantry officers, the "Ninety Day Wonders," away from the main post, out in the wilds because they needed lots of space for the firing range and the three-month training they had to go through. For my first three days I sat and wrote

personal letters. They didn't know what to do with me. Finally they decided they were stuck with me and put me across the road in the personnel office, reporting to that same male Second Lieutenant who resented me 100 percent plus. I was keeping him from getting a promotion.

I was his superior officer but that didn't make any difference. I was a woman. Army ground forces were notorious for being the last to accept women as equals. The old foot soldiers, the ones with the bayonets, they faced the enemy one-on-one. They were the last to admit we could do anything.

I Who Lost a Brother

Tom Sheehan

and nearly lost another
remember the headlines, newsreels,
songs of bond-selling, gas-gripping,
and movies too true to hate.

The whole Earth bent inwards,
imploding bombs, bullets, blood,
shrieking some terrible bird cry
in my ears only sleep could lose.

Near sleep I could only remember
the nifty bellbottom blues he wore

in the picture my mother cleaned
and cleaned and cleaned on the altar
of her bureau as if he were the Christ
or the Buddha, but he was out there
in the sun and the sand and the rain
of shells and sounds I came to know
years later moving up from Pusan.
I never really knew about him until
he came home and I saw his sea bag
decorated with his wife's picture,
and a map
and the names
Saipan, Iwo Jima, Kwajalein,
the war.



Found in Translation

Carl Palmer

She raises her hand as something is
announced on the radio, motions me
to listen as she turns up the volume.

Being in her country, not at all fluent
in her tongue, no trace of comprehension
as I stare between her and the radio dial.

Turning the volume back down, she repeats
slowly, distinctly the same words heard,
yet, still I fail to understand their meaning.

She tunes the dial to an English-speaking
station. I hear the report that in America,
the city of New York is under terrorist attack.

Our tears speak a language we both understand.

Farm Boy in France

Alice King Greenwood

Glenn Greenwood grew up on a farm near Stephenville, Texas. Like many young men, he and his brother Earl volunteered for the armed forces when America was drawn into World War I. Being the son of a doctor and having worked in a pharmacy, he was assigned to the Medical Detachment 32nd Engineers in Europe.

Glenn was attached to Camp Hospital 66 in St. Sulpice, France. When the armistice was signed, many troops remained overseas for several months before being sent home. His frustration in the delay is seen in a letter written to his family on January 6, 1919.

Well, Daddy, Earl and I have done our bit. There are some two and a half million boys over here who are crazy to get home, and as we are simply here doing nothing and our fathers, mothers, and sisters still sacrificing for us, we can see no reason for staying longer. While the war lasted we were raring to stay, but now that it is over, we as a whole are raring to get home. If we could see any reason for remaining here, you wouldn't hear a murmur from an American soldier. We enlisted for the duration, and it is no disgrace to want to get home.

Glenn was particularly touched by the Christmas box he received that January.

The Xmas box came and I've just gotta write. I am as tickled as a farmer boy with a new pair of shoes. Everything is just what I wanted. The candy, especially the divinity and caramel, was simply sublime. The handkerchiefs didn't come any too soon and have already seen service, for as I explored that little box, I would laugh and cry at the same time. The cigarette case is the prettiest in the army, and any officer would be glad to have it. Only I don't smoke cigarettes but made a bit with the officers, giving them the cork tip cigarettes. And the little book, I wonder whose idea that was. It is great. The razor blades are very essential, but the thing that hit me below the belt was the fruit cake. I didn't believe it could be done. That must have been Mother who did that.

I never thought a Christmas gift could mean so much to me. Everything was sacred, and I am saving every little piece of paper. I can't begin to express my heartfelt thanks. I am going to send you a photo as that is about as much as we are allowed to send. Most everything 'French' has a duty on it that surpasses the purchase price.

Glenn was homesick for the farm and his family. The letter continued:

I had a long letter from Hoke [an older brother] telling about all the big rains, the beautiful grain, and the oil boom. He had the nerve to say he was eating ham, eggs, sweet potatoes, sausage, milk, and butter.

Dad, see if you can persuade Hoke to hold on to the farm a while longer until the oil boom takes a more definite root. In case the oil boom failed, it wouldn't lessen the present value of the land, and to sell and have the other fellow strike the oil would be 'suicide.' It might be the means of making us rich or at least put us on Easy Street. It seems the situation on the farm is very favorable for a good grain crop, and I wish so much that Earl and I could be home.

Three weeks after the first letter, Glenn wrote his sister:

Daddy asked me to bring him a German Luger pistol, but although I told him I would do my best to get one, I have been able to locate but one, and they wanted two francs or \$20.00 for it. I haven't seen twenty dollars since I left home, hardly. I only draw \$11.00 per month, and it takes every cent to keep me going. Do you still get my allotment, and is it still twenty?

Ironically, some of his allotment checks were misplaced, and it was not until the 1940's that they were found and delivered to him. Glenn was discharged and returned home in June, 1919. He never talked about his war experiences, but his letters give a glimpse into the mind of a homesick farmer boy serving his country in France.

Tank

GINNY GREENE

a tiny woman, wears her
Air Force jumpsuit
as lightly as she bears
that antipodal moniker
conferred on her by
crewmates. She teaches
terse words, concise, spare
crucial words, strips sentences
of their fat, pares them to the
bone
for
tight
effective
life-saving
wartime
emergency
communication

Heart in a Can

Michael E. Gaston

Too many people gathering too close and making entirely too much noise, caused the bum to peek out from his home in the alley. For him, the day held no significance. For the contributing members of Mt. Windsor's society, it was the Fourth of July.

The bum crawled from the lean-to that was constructed of wooden pallets, cardboard, and trash. He staggered as he stood. Greasy hair hung down concealing features that his mustache, beard, and an accumulation of dirt didn't. Straightening to his full slump-shouldered height, he blinked bloodshot eyes against the brightness of the world around him.

He brought his right hand to the brim of his sweat-stained cap to make sure it was still in place. Then he verified the tin can was where it belonged – in the grimy grip of his left hand.

But he didn't value the can. His concern was for what he kept inside it. And judging by the can's weight, the object was still there. Or was it? To be sure he peered inside to find the ball of newspaper just the way he had left it. Satisfied, he pulled the cap down tighter on his head and secured the can in a two-handed grip.

Movement made him remember what had roused him. People. Too many people. The mouth of the alley was now

completely blocked by them standing three deep on the sidewalk.

Fear grabbed him. Then he realized the people were facing the street, not looking at him. As fear's grip loosened, a man turned from the crowd and started walking toward him.

The bum dove for cover. Clutching the can to his chest, he belly-crawled back into his home.

"Aww, c'mon. I'm just trying to help." The man looked inside the hovel. All he could see was the whites of two wide open eyes. "I'm not here to hassle you. Word is you're new in town. I wanted to make sure you know about the shelter. I volunteer there sometimes."

There was movement near the opening.

"That's better," the man said, bending closer. "See, I'm not so bad. Anyway, the shelter is near the courthouse. They'll feed you, clean you up, and help you dry out."

The tin can emerged from the opening.

"Not quite ready for the drying out part, huh?" The man looked around as he dug in his pocket. "Well, it is the Fourth of July." He tried to drop a ten in the can, but the bum pulled it back.

"Don't put n-nothing in my can."

"Sorry. I thought that's what it was for."

"Something's al-already in it."

"Oh, yeah? What?"

"My heart."

"Right..." He shook his head. "And I'm trying to give you money." He pitched the ten inside the lean-to. "Sleep it off. Then use that to get yourself something to eat. You know, food? It has to be chewed, not drank."

Before the man turned away, the can reappeared from the opening as if the bum wanted him to look inside.

The man dropped to one knee. “Why not? It’s not every day you get to see somebody’s heart in a can.”

“Greg. M-my men used to call me...”

The can was blasted back inside the lean-to by a marching band exploding to rhythmic life.

The man sprang to his feet. “Sorry, Greg. Maybe another time. Parade’s starting.”

As the man stepped out of the alley, two boys ran into it. One boy pitched a string of firecrackers on the roof of Greg’s home. The other boy struck a match.

The machine-gun blast of explosions transformed the alley into a warzone. A scream that sounded like it was ripped from the maw of a maimed animal wailed in protest.

Once again the man and the boys moved in opposite directions. He ran down the alley as the boys ran out of it. As he closed the distance to Greg’s home, the drumroll of explosions slowed and stopped. The maimed animal quieted. Then it seemed to go into its death throes.

“Greg, are you all right?”

The lean-to rattled, banged, and shook. A piece of cardboard fell away allowing enough light inside to reveal Greg was not all right. He was convulsing.

The man reached in, grabbed a kicking foot, and dragged Greg out of his home. He used his cell phone to call 9-1-1 while he cleared everything from around Greg’s bouncing body.

The convulsions ended as the ambulance arrived. While the paramedics lifted Greg onto the stretcher, the man looked at his slack face and into the most startling blue eyes he’d ever seen.

Greg’s cap was no longer in place. So when he turned away from the man’s gaze, the back of his head was exposed.

The man first noticed the bald spot. Then he noticed how it was caved in and spider-webbed with scars.

After the ambulance left, the man peeked inside Greg's home. He expected to find it full of empty beer cans and wine bottles. Instead, he found Greg's cap, a tattered Army field-jacket, and the tin can.

Sitting with his back against the lean-to, he put the can on the ground between his knees and removed a balled up piece of newspaper. He slowly straightened it out and saw the top of a picture. In it, an unrecognizable person's head was wrapped in bandages. The person had the most startling blue eyes he'd ever seen.

As the man quickly unraveled more of the paper to expose the caption beneath the picture, he didn't see or hear the object fall and land with a muffled clink on the crusty remnants inside the can.

An approaching band began playing a festive rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner," drowning out the man's words as he read the caption: "Hero! Sergeant Matthew Gregory, Iraq combat vet, awarded Purple Heart."

Edward Jones

burst mortar shell
drowning thunder overhead -
somewhere, a cough

Flesh and Blood

Craig Douglas

Some of them were going to be dead by the morning. I could sense their calmness when they spoke to me, humbled by their first violent engagement. The Company had been here for a day and their time was short. Some had already made their peace; kneeling with the padre ready to find some closure before the battle. I swear that if I could, I'd hide them all to keep them safe, but I knew that wouldn't help the situation much.

I'd been in Port Stanley when the Argentineans came. Their big black trucks thundered up the main road, soldiers were pulling all the key people out of buildings and questioning them. I thought they were going to shoot everyone at first. It didn't help when we found out that one of their top brass was originally British anyway. I mean the cheek of it. How could you do it, to your own country folk? It's just not right. They tried issuing us with pesos to spend as the new currency, this went down like a lead balloon. The economy hadn't really got off to the new regime yet, and rumour had it Maggie was sending help. We decided to sit tight and wait out the storm.

James, my only son, had wanted to join the Defence Force for as long as I can remember. His dad would have been proud of him had he been around. At first James simply said, "Mum, it's time I left to fight the Argies." What could I

say? That was just so typical of a boy to say such things. I didn't say anything I just burst into tears. I told him not to be so stupid. A 10 year old boy couldn't fight, not at his age. He was fascinated by the Army and had often gone into town with me on weekends to see the soldiers based there. We only went there on odd weekends: the roads were bad and the Land Rover had problems.

It had only been a few days ago when I got that knock at four in the morning. I had a funny feeling it would be our boys – they'd taken Goose Green and the helicopters were flying everywhere. When the Company came in they looked haggard. You could see in their eyes that something wasn't right. They were troubled with that nagging, tormenting demon replaying the nightmare.

My kitchen had been turned into a hostel where these shambling men would fill their metal tins with soup. I let one of the guys kill several sheep the first day to make a mutton soup with potatoes, a kind of Irish Stew. The guys loved it, they'd been on chocolate bars and tinned army food. The men had foot complaints from the long march – they'd marched about 80 kilometres across marshy bog land. My back yard had been big enough for a couple of sections to pitch their ponchos. The attic had become the HQ.

They brought this guy in who'd lost his foot to a mine. The medics flopped him onto the dining room table, where we have our breakfast. He looked like the next dish; all bloodied and black. I found his foot in a plastic bag in the sink. That was the first and last casualty they brought to our dining table. I said they could use the living room by all means as a medic station, but leave me my kitchen. I don't think I ate much that day.

One poor soul always had a smile for me. I think his name was Derek. He always had a joke and poked fun at James.

“You got a man then?” he asked while I brought an axe down on some wood.

“I might. Why d’you ask? Interested?” I thought that a bit silly of me, but I think he knew I was teasing.

“Nah. Saw your young ’un. Nice kid. Wants to join the Army don’t he?”

“He’ll be a sheep shearer like his father.” I forced a grin.

“He’ll make a fine soldier. Do you proud he will!”

“Whatever he’ll be, he’ll make me proud anyway.” He pulled out a photograph and rubbed at it with his thumb. I frowned at it, that couldn’t be him! He pointed to himself. I pretended not to notice.

“Sharon, me and Jennifer. Jennifer’s gonna be a star one day.” Derek’s face changed ever so slightly. It was Derek the Decorator, or Derek the Bank Clerk but not Derek the Paratrooper.

Some would show me photos of their loved ones and name them, there were too many to remember. They were always laughing. That must have been their way of dealing with it – the killing I mean.

I barred the men from using the toilets. The smell was unbearable. Captain Kelly made them dig toilets out in the back yard to my relief. I think I felt guilty at doing that. I mean they were here to liberate us from the bloody Argies weren’t they? But, enough’s enough. When there’s a queue of them waiting and it’s passed the front door with that winter chill coming in, it’s not good for James. The smell was goddamn awful and you got a whiff of it in the kitchen.

When I found out they were to take the mountain I felt like crying then and there. The mountain was occupied and I knew some would be killed. I can see them now smoking away and chatting trying to forget the inevitable, trying to enjoy the moment without those feelings they must have.

“Miss.” It was Derek. He looked uncomfortable, like he was going to ask me out. He paused, put his hand in a smock pocket and pulled out an envelope. *Surely it’s not*, I thought. “I’ll come and get this back off you in the morning.”

I took the envelope. It was addressed to his wife and daughter in England and I can remember not saying a word. He looked at me, “If I don’t come back, post it for me will you?”

Sixteen more soldiers gave me envelopes. I wondered why they never gave them to the Padre. They were queuing up, a line of sniffing beggars waiting for their soup. I used to work in a kitchen in London before I met my late husband, that’s how I remember the homeless. I suppose these were homeless and though they looked distraught at times I could sense anticipation when they were together.

They weren’t livestock, they were family men, fathers, husbands and sons: and soon to be forgotten about when this was over. Each man here touched the hearts of at least a handful of people back home. When they go, the pain must be excruciating. There’d be remembrance parades and “We shall remember,” but in the end some would be forgotten, either in their graves or on the streets as most of them will end up. A lot of people in the soup kitchens were ex-services, who couldn’t adjust to normal life.

I turned and held onto the sink, tears dripping onto unwashed dishes. James had brought a bucket of water and I held him, the rattle of battle in the background. I squeezed him and thanked God he was only ten.

“The RAP’s on a forward slope...” I looked up to see the padre, identifiable by the crosses on both collars of his battle smock. “Oh. That’s the medic. I mean I’m at the first aid post. RAP Regimental Aid Post. We’ll be slightly exposed to the Argies. You best hang onto the letters for me now. I’ll be back

down to collect them in the morning – hopefully I’ll be giving them all back. You can get the kettle on when we get back, eh?”

His blurred image faded from my kitchen and I wiped my eyes. He did come back, but didn’t give all the envelopes back to their original owners.

The sounds of battle drummed into the night: artillery, aircraft and machine gun fire. Orange light flashed through the windows, shadows danced on the wall and I held onto James until he slept. I don’t think I slept, but James drifted off during a lull from noise and I was thankful for whatever had caused it.

In the morning my usual routine was to make coffee and porridge for James. I had carried on as normal as if the Paras hadn’t come at all. James came in wide-eyed, though I could see surprise there was a mild sadness in his voice. “Mum, come and see.” He dashed into the back yard hopping over the bungee cord of an abandoned poncho. I could hear it rattling away, but I couldn’t help but stare into the backyard.

A couple of soldiers were carrying long bags into the garden, they then lay the stretcher down and rolled the bags onto the garden next to the others. Some of the bags folded in the middle

How naïve can you get? I mean I thought they were carrying soil into the garden. I just wasn’t thinking straight. Why would stretcher bearers be carrying bags of dirt? Then the smell had me gagging; burnt flesh and the coppery scent of blood.

“Miss, ahm sorry. We’re gonna have to leave them here until the choppers arrive to pick them up,” a corporal said to me outside. He wouldn’t look at me, he just stared at my little boy. He smiled at James, eyes glistening and turned away

hobbling to a wall. He took off his helmet, then sat, lit a cigarette and cried.

I noticed Derek, he had come loose from the bag and was resting on the arm of an Argentinean like a long lost friend, or maybe lovers. An obscene group of bodies, unashamed and equal in their flesh were unceremoniously dumped. Couldn't they have segregated the dead men? Other bags had ripped from the journey down the mountain. I could see a Bandsman heaving, stooped over by the corner of the house, his mate patting his back. I look back now and realise that in the end they were the same, Argentinean and British alike. All flesh and blood. Derek was one of many and I still get letters from his wife. I wrote to her after the war. I thought it right I told her about his last two days. How he made James laugh. How, in his death he made me understand what we were.

Pearl Harbor: Homefront Memories

Ann Marie Byrd

The bombing of Pearl Harbor reverberated in every town across the country. Boys enlisted, factories ran nonstop, farms produced more with fewer laborers, mothers prayed into the night, and lives changed forever. Pearl Harbor ripped a hole in the nation's heart and seared a memory that lasted a lifetime.

I was still in graduate school. My roommate was from Hawaii where her father served as chief of staff at the hospital. He had sent her back to school in Indiana 'cause that's where he had his medical training. That December the 7th we were both in the sorority house at Bloomington. It was days before she could get any information about her family, poor thing. It was kind of hard to believe, Pearl Harbor. I guess in those days we felt like nobody would attack the United States. Her house overlooked the harbor where all of the action took place. Her family lived through it, but there was no way to communicate at all.

Helen Glenn, 92, Georgia

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, I was in Phoenix that Sunday morning. I had come down for breakfast. We heard the announcement on the radio. *Where is Pearl Harbor?* We didn't know where that was. But that marked the turning point.

Janet Youngblood, 94, California

My husband-to-be was stationed at Camp Blanding, Florida. That's where I met him. Our very first date was December the 7th, 1941. We loved the movie. It was Nelson Eddy and Jeannette MacDonald and I still remember it because they sang "*Sweetheart, Sweetheart*." We came out of the theatre and the paperboy on the corner was shouting, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it. Pearl Harbor bombed." So Jim said, "Goodbye," and headed for the bus station.

Martha Burt, 89, Florida

We had been to Sunday school and church. As was my custom after lunch, I would sit there in the living room on the sofa and listen to some program that I liked on radio. A lot of music. While the music was playing all of a sudden they interrupted and said they wanted to announce that Pearl Harbor in Hawaii had been attacked by the Japanese. I went running into the other part of the house. I asked my family if they had heard the news and they hadn't. They couldn't believe what I was telling 'em. And with that they got on the phone to call some of their friends to ask them what they had heard about it. It really scared everybody to death.

Edith Cook, 92, Georgia

My brother wanted to join the Army in 1941 – before Pearl Harbor. He was 17 and it was a very, very sad day for my mother. He needed a parent's signature and they finally gave in... We heard about Pearl Harbor on the radio and were totally shocked. We knew that my brother would be going overseas.

Louise Byrd, 89, Florida

I'll tell you what happened on the day they bombed Pearl Harbor. I had a new dress and I went to church... Mr. Hathaway was building cabinets all the way across our kitchen...he came in that morning and mama had the coffee pot on as I was leaving to go to church.

"Well, what's the matter, Mr. Hathaway?" she said.

"Something's wrong and I just don't feel good. I've never felt like this before. I'm really worried."

"I wonder what's wrong? Are you sick?"

"No, I'm not running a fever or anything. I just feel like my world's gone. If I hadn't've promised you, Mrs. Estelle, I wouldn't be here."

I went to Sunday school and then church. I come home to put slacks on, all hot to go to the beach. We were goin', a whole bunch of us, in a truck, 'cause the Duncan boy and two others had joined the service. A lot of boys were dropping out of school and joining the Navy and the Army. And I come home and mama was crying and Mr. Hathaway was really upset. They had heard about Pearl Harbor on the radio. His boy

was at Pearl Harbor, so Mr. Hathaway just went home.

Kathleen Smith, 85, Florida

By day's end, that catastrophe left 2,350 dead and 21 ships in the American fleet severely damaged. But it galvanized the country, propelling every citizen to join the war effort either on the home front or in the military. It pushed women into crucial tasks and breathtaking opportunity, at least temporarily. By joining the newly created women's branch of the Army, these women discovered an amazing world very far from their own isolated communities. They set in motion a demand for social and economic rights that exploded decades later.

Last Respects

Sharon Lask Munson

She packs for overnight
dreading airports
crowds of strangers
the necessary flight.

She folds her seldom worn black dress
arranges it carefully
pins a small flag
on the white collar.

Before closing the carry-on
she slips in three objects —

a small leather diary
edges worn
its last few pages blank

a framed photo of a girl on a horse
the reins of the animal held
by a handsome Marine

a child's handprint in plaster of Paris
yellowed and cracked,
wrapped carefully in tissue.

Tears spill down
as she turns off the lights
draws the drapes
before walking out the door
to meet the escort
waiting patiently by the curb.

Edward Jones

burst mortar shell
drowning thunder overhead —
somewhere, a cough

In Memory

Sharon Ellison

Son
Daughter
Soldier

Flag
Casket
Grave

Salute
Taps
Memories

Tears
Tears
Tears

Pilgrims

Becky Haigler

Winter sun was already a memory. The first cold stars shone in a purple sky. Like a chicken fluffing itself in the nest, the town settled into the lap of night as the couple approached. Carrying meager belongings packed behind them, they moved with a certain air of resignation. They had traveled over a week and were very tired. Besides, the woman was pregnant, large and heavy.

Few people moved through the streets but yellow light flickered from windows as the couple searched for lodging. Finally, they stopped in the courtyard of a dark inn and approached to ask entrance. They knocked until the querulous innkeeper called to them from an upstairs window.

No, we weren't Joseph and Mary, but a military family, moving from southern Spain to southern Germany in the winter of 1969. We left our home in Sevilla carrying everything we owned in a little red station wagon. The first night, we tried to find a room in every hotel in Córdoba. It was the eve of some local holiday and there was nothing. We drove until two in the morning and finally napped a few hours at the side of the highway. We were able to spend the following nights in hotels in Madrid and Barcelona. The car was so packed that in city traffic I had to check behind us

from my side window and give reports to my husband at the wheel.

Eastern France in wintertime is a gray place. We spent a few nights in ugly, unknown, indistinguishable cities, paying outrageous prices for basic rooms and food, although we never encountered the famous French cuisine. In a bank, a teller tried to cheat us in a simple exchange of dollars for francs. We were glad to reach the German border.

Our reenactment of Christmas Eve took place in Zweibrücken, our destination in Germany. There, too, we tried several hotels, unable to find a room. The owner of the *gasthaus* was rather irritated at being roused after her other guests were all settled for the evening. She called down, asking what we wanted. “*Was wünschen Sie?*”

I was the family linguist and so responded with the request for a room for two, which I practiced from my new German phrase book for the last hundred miles of the trip. “*Haben Sie ein Doppelzimmer, bitte?*” I wondered what the woman thought, looking down at two pitiful travelers in the winter night, the woman pregnant. We did not see any star leading us to that *gasthaus*, but I remain convinced that God guided us there and directed the circumstances that followed for our benefit.

The town of Zweibrücken in southwestern Germany hosts troops of the armies of Germany, France, the United States, and, at one time, the Canadian Air Force. After the Canadians abandoned their base, the United States purchased the property and was beginning to reestablish an air base there in the last weeks of 1969. The base where we were stationed in Spain closed and many of the personnel were transferred to Zweibrücken. It was hardly a “decree from Caesar Augustus,” but the town was full of strangers seeking

lodging. My husband was a first-term enlisted man and we were not eligible for base housing.

We received a list of addresses, potential rentals, and went out every afternoon looking for a house for our enlarging family. There was nothing available. Most of the houses were already rented by the time we arrived. Others had no furniture. Some apartments were hardly more than a closet with a bed.

The town began dressing itself for Christmas shortly after our arrival and the bells of the church next to our *gasthaus* played carols. We felt ourselves more than ever in the same urgency as Mary and Joseph. One Sunday morning, looking down at the cars parked around the church, we noticed a car with plates from our base in Spain. We awaited the end of the service eagerly to see if the car belonged to anyone we knew. Although we didn't recognize them, my husband went down to meet the couple and see whether they had found a place to live. They took pity on our situation and offered to help us in our search.

The next afternoon, the couple arrived along with the owner of the house they were renting and drove us around in their own car, making as diligent a search as if they were looking for a place for themselves. We visited four or five addresses with no more success than we had found on our own. Some were places we had already investigated. I was ready to give up hope.

The German landlord began to think out loud, making big smoke rings with his pipe. He recited some directions to the driver of the car. We left the town on a dark road through a forest that obscured the comforting stars. Tired and confused, I rested on my husband's shoulder without talking or even thinking. Finally, we passed a sign for the village of Oberauerbach and stopped in front of a house where the

landlord got out. He returned a few minutes later with another man who accompanied us to a different house.

Nummer zwei, Sonnenstrasse. Number two, Sunshine Street, was a big, old house with a yard. The rent the owner was asking was very reasonable, and we rejoiced even more at the inside of the house. It had four large rooms, including two bedrooms. And it was furnished in the German style—with curtains and carpets, kitchen utensils, even sheets and featherbeds for the huge wooden bed frames. And, most wonderful to us, the second bedroom had a cradle, a crib ready to receive the little girl who would soon be born to us!

After that night, we never again saw those (Dare I say it?) angels who guided us to the perfect house. I've never seen a picture of an angel smoking a pipe, but I wouldn't be surprised! And since that time, I have always been able to believe with confidence that God provides for His children, what we need when we need it.

Postscript to Veterans' Day

Tom Sheehan

I saw them one day at Riverside Cemetery, almost invisible in their khaki color atop grave sites at the Veterans Section; small plastic soldiers not much more than an inch long, decorating many sites, small enough that the eye has to search them out in the midst of fallen leaves, brown grass, natural detritus. They were small enough to catch at my heart, small enough to say a great big thank you for what had here transpired, and transpires daily. Small enough and big enough to catch up memories.

I like to think it's some youngster, perhaps nine or ten years old, who accompanies his father or mother or grandfather or grandmother, locked up by memories, into the Veterans' Section of our Riverside Cemetery and who has grasped a most remarkable sense of where he is and what this flag-waving is all about that surrounds him, where each gravesite is decorated with a small Star Spangled banner. I like to think it's that youngster who, in his own way and of his own choice, has decided to add his specific decoration to each grave site, a youngster who has apprehended a sense of devotion and duty that calls for obligation and thanks.

I picture him at recess in one of our schoolyards, or at class, or thinking of people he has never met but knows all about. I picture him growing strong and brave and never having to know the weight of a rifle on his shoulder, a trigger

at his finger, a deadly craft in his hands, but ready if he is called.

As the veterans' names were being read at the memorial in front of the old high school site on Veterans' Day, I thought of him as comrades and teammates and classmates by the dozens were announced to those who had come to pay their respects. I projected this youngster onto Stackpole Field, World Series Park, the Kasabuski Brothers Memorial Rink in a few year's time, getting stronger, becoming proficient in his efforts, being ever a part of our town of Saugus, and still remembering what had impelled him to graveside decoration.

Again today I thought of him, and then, in a still moment, wondered if it was some old man, older than me, who in his special way was saying hello again to old friends, old teammates, old comrades.

Either way, he's a winner.

Edward Jones

somewhere in the cold
in a mess of wounded men —
pair of shiny boots

Consider The Poppies Of The Field

Madonna Dries Christensen

Americans dedicate two days a year to honoring our military forces. Veteran's Day, originally called Armistice Day, commemorates the day an armistice was signed ending the Great War, "the war to end all wars." The ceremony took place at eleven a.m. on the eleventh day of the eleventh month – November 11, 1918. The anniversary remains stationary on November 11, but tributes are focused on veterans rather than the armistice itself.

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, dates to the Civil War, when women decorated the graves of fallen soldiers on May 30. Today's remembrance of those who lost their lives in service to their country is held on the last Monday in May.

During my childhood in the 1940s, Decoration Day was also called Poppy Day. As the daughter of a World War I veteran, I was recruited by the VFW to sell red crepe paper poppies on the street corner on Decoration Day and Armistice Day. By the time I did my homefront duty, World War II was in full swing and my two oldest brothers were in the Navy. The names of all those from the county serving in the military were inscribed on a billboard erected in a park along the town's main street. A special panel of the board listed those who had died. Some were sons of my parents' friends and

neighbors. The parades on those two holidays marched to the courthouse and paused at a granite memorial to World War I veterans. My father's name is on the marker, but he had no war stories to tell. On the day the armistice was signed, he'd been aboard a troop ship bound for overseas. It never sailed. He returned home to farm, marry, and raise a family.

Years later, I wondered about the poppies I'd peddled. What was their significance? I learned that during the Great War on Europe's Western Front, farmland had become battlefields. The soil contained thousands of dormant seeds of what was commonly called the corn poppy (*papaver rhoeas*), a weed that flourished in cornfields. Disturbances caused by trench digging, shells, and shrapnel plowed up the seeds, where sunlight caused them to germinate and thrive. The delicate blooms lent a silent beauty to areas of destruction. Soldier folklore said the vivid red flowers had been nurtured by their comrades' blood.

An area called the Ypres Salient, near Flanders, Belgium, became noted for its abundance of poppies after three horrendous battles there in 1915. The Germans had experimented with chlorine gas, which brought an enormous number of Allied casualties. Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian doctor, wrote in his journal that it was impossible to get used to the suffering, the screams, and the blood. He added, "I wish I could embody on paper some of the varied sensations of those seventeen days. Seventeen days of Hades."

A young friend of McCrae's had been killed. After officiating at the funeral, McCrae sat in an ambulance watching poppies wave in the breeze amid a makeshift cemetery near his first-aid station. To ease his sorrow, he recorded the scene in verse. Unsatisfied with the composition, he tossed it away. A fellow officer retrieved it and sent it to

newspapers in England. It was published on December 8, 1915 by *Punch*, under the title “In Flanders Fields.”

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

The story goes that three years later McCrae was wounded and taken to a hospital on the coast of France. On his third night, he sat looking over the sea toward the white cliffs of Dover. He said to the doctor, “Tell them, if ye break faith with us who die we shall not sleep.” His death that night was attributed to pneumonia, not battle wounds.

Maira Michael, from Athens, Georgia, was so impressed with McCrae’s poem that she wrote a reply titled, “We Shall Keep The Faith.”

Oh! You who sleep in Flanders’ fields,
Sleep sweet, to rise anew;
We caught the torch you threw;
And holding high we kept
The faith with those who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valour led.
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders' fields.

And now the torch and poppy red
Wear in honour of our dead
Fear not that ye have died for naught
We've learned the lessons that you taught
In Flanders' fields.

Michael, who worked for the YMCA, conceived the idea of wearing a poppy in remembrance of the war dead, and she instigated calling Memorial Day, Poppy Day. Three days before the armistice was signed, she hosted a meeting for wartime secretaries from other countries, at which she spoke about Doctor McCrae and his poem. When the guests gave Michael a small monetary gift for her hospitality, she declared that she would spend the money on poppies. She sold some of the flowers and gave the money to a fund aiding ex-servicemen.

French YMCA Secretary Madame Guerin adopted the idea and made artificial poppies to sell to benefit war orphans. The idea caught on elsewhere. In November 1921, the British Legion and Austrian Returned Sailor's and Soldier's League sold poppies for the first time. The Legion adopted the poppy as its emblem. Their annual Poppy Appeal raises funds to support ex-servicemen and their dependents by selling small paper or fabric poppies in November. Each Remembrance Day the Legion lays a wreath on John McCrae's grave, and British citizens wear poppies to show

support to the memory of victims of all wars. Poppy Day is also held in New Zealand and Australia.

McCrae's poem is probably the most recognized prose to arise from wartime experiences. Most of us probably could not name the author if asked, but when his timeless words are read at patriotic rites around the world they never fail to stir emotions and powerful images.

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow, between the crosses,
row on row...*

WWII – Victory Across The Ocean

Olivia Arieti

Among bombs
And rockets
A sudden whirlwind
Lifted all sailors' hearts
From the sinking ship
And scattered
Their brave ashes
Across the ocean,
Infinite sparkles
Of glory
Forever gleaming
Over its blue.

Winter Prayer to Afghanistan

Aleta Hacker

It is snow-quiet on my mountain this morning;
Winter white, deep sleep, soul-quiet this morning.
No whisper of war; no tread of time; no hint of history
Just grey light sky meeting slate light earth...quiet.

I wonder, is it snow-quiet on his mountain this morning?
Winter wonder, deep dream, holy-quiet this morning?
No wail of war; no thunder of time; no howl of history?
Just silent sentries, somber soldiers, as snow sighs to
earth...quiet?

My prayer soars with the snowflakes, from my mountain to
his.
Soft, weightless words of love and hope
Swirling away on the winds of war
To be a blessing, as a kiss on his brow
When he slept as a babe.

The Rain Just Kept Falling

Angelo Dalpiaz

The rain just kept falling – stinging rain – warm straight lines of water that streaked the landscape. I had never seen rain like this before. It started slowly, but with force, each drop almost a small puddle by itself. Slapping against my steel helmet, it quickly become a loud drumbeat with a wild rhythm. It filled ditches and hung in the air like a shroud. It rusted metal and softened wood, and it made life miserable.

The sound was deafening.

“Hey McCarthy,” I shouted, “does it rain like this all the time here?” McCarthy had been in-country for nine months, and because of his experience, a lot of us looked up to him. He rarely smiled, but he was wearing a broad smile today.

“They usually don’t bother us when it rains like this,” he said, “not ground assaults anyway. Three more months of this rain would be just fine with me.” His smile faded as he scanned the wooded hillside trying to focus through the wet prism.

I shuddered as rain dripped down my back, “That would be a lot of rain.”

His attention slowly returned to me, the smile was already gone. He was my age, twenty, but he looked older. His eyes were dark, and empty, worry lines had already worked their way into the corners. His wet hair slashed straight black lines on his forehead.

“Yeah, more rain, but less bullets coming at us.” Pulling his poncho over his head he lit a cigarette, smoke rose from the sides like steam from under a car hood. I wanted to ask him where he was from, but his poncho fell over him, ending the conversation.

I had been in Vietnam for three weeks, and as I looked around, I wondered how anyone was expected to live here for a year, especially after having seen the boxes at the airport in Saigon.

If there is a good place to die, this isn't it.

After three days in the bedlam of Saigon, I was trucked with twenty-five replacements to Pleiku, a small mountain outpost in the Central Highlands. It was quiet when I arrived, but it didn't stay that way. I was assigned to a bunker with McCarthy, a short, American Indian whose profile reminded me of the one on an old nickel. He was given the order to “keep him alive” by the platoon Sergeant, an old man of thirty-five, whose calm seemed out of place here. I wondered what it would be like to be thirty-five.

My first night in Pleiku was noisy. I felt the jarring force of the rocket as it exploded behind us. McCarthy was already three steps into his sprint for the bunker when he grabbed a fistful of my shirt and pulled me along.

“Come on New Guy, those are in-coming,” he yelled. Another blast rumbled nearby and I understood.

As we peered over the low, sandbag wall of the bunker, small eruptions of sand began to plume around us. As I pulled up from a crouch, McCarthy's voice was urgent but controlled.

He spoke quickly, “Watch the left flank, don't let anything move.”

Stress pulled at his face, and without another word he twisted right, and I heard the staccato sounds of his shooting before I realized what he was doing. My own shooting was frantic, quick and scattered, the invisible bullets silent to my ears. The blur of noise, smoke and frenzied radio voices subsided, long before my accelerated heart rate did.

A fog of gunpowder hung in the air.

“You did good New Guy” McCarthy said, “that your first time?” With a shaky hand, McCarthy passed me a lit cigarette – with a shaky hand, I smoked my first one.

“Yeah, I can’t believe how long it lasted.” A general tremor settled over me as I mentally counted how many days I had before rotating home.

“Long?” he shouted, “that was only a couple of minutes...three tops.” The question was on his face before he asked it. “You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine” came out, followed by last night’s Celebrations.

For weeks we didn’t have any ground action, just like McCarthy had predicted. The peppering of rockets continued nightly, with only a few minor casualties. The rain became something we celebrated.

One morning, McCarthy ran into the bunker shaking a handful of papers at me and shouted, “I got my orders...I finally got my orders. Man, I can’t believe it, I’m going home.”

His excitement caught on, and everyone was dancing around the bunker, celebrating McCarthy’s rotation home.

The celebration continued, and so did the rockets, but no one was shooting at us. McCarthy had been right.

I helped him pack the morning he left. He handed me things he didn’t want.

“If you can’t use this stuff throw it away.”

On a day that should have been joyous, his eyes turned down, he didn’t smile and he said little. I carried his bag when we walked him out to the helicopter pad. The rain soaked us, but we hardly noticed. We were a quiet bunch of guys who were happy to see him going home, but afraid inside, now that he would be gone.

I threw his bag into the belly of the aircraft and watched as he said good-bye to everyone. When he got to me, we stood in the drenching rain, just looking at each other. He put something in the palm of my hand.

“A token of our friendship,” he said.

Opening my hand, I saw the gold ring he wore during his tour.

“Look New Guy, you’ll do fine,” then slapping my helmet he yelled, “I hope this rain keeps up for you.”

We stood in the torrential rain and hugged for a long time, and then we watched as his helicopter lifted off and headed south...he was gone.

Back at the bunker, we all fell asleep. I woke up at 10:30, and I stepped out into a brilliant, sunny day, with a cloudless blue sky. Lighting up a cigarette, I looked up into the hillside and wondered.

What would it feel like to be thirty-five.

The Sniper

Justo Guadalupe Herrera

To kill, or not to kill? That is a question not many individuals have to ponder, but for sensitive, kind-hearted Carlos Rodriguez Suarez, custodian of P. S. 183 in Brooklyn, this was a daily preoccupation back during the Tet Offensive in Quang Tri Province, Viet Nam. The Purple Heart was tucked away in the underwear drawer and Operation Green Turtle was a reality still stamped TOP SECRET.

“Did you kill anyone in the war, Carlos?” asked his co-worker Rob one day during lunch. Rob had that gnawing feeling of not having served, of having stayed behind.

Carlos stopped chewing and took in the question, then continued, swallowed hard, and looked at a balding, pot-bellied Rob and said, “Are you nuts? What’s this all about, Rob? Do you think I would tell you, even if I had done it?”

“Hey, it’s a thing of the past, and you know I wouldn’t comment about it to anyone. It’s just that, you know, I feel kind of bad I could have gone, but didn’t. I’ve always wondered what that was like, you know, shoot a man. Hunting deer is not the same; heck, the deer cannot shoot back at you,” he said and chuckled.

“Shit!” was Carlos’ last word on the matter. He remained very quiet the rest of the day, fulfilling his custodian duties at the school, making sure everything was running smoothly

and that his workers did what they were supposed to do, but his mind was not quiet.

Why did Roberto have to talk about that? He had the problem of not going to war, in turn he himself suffered from having been there, taking care of business, crawling in those mosquito-, snake-, and mice-infested jungles. Yeah, no one mentioned the mice, jungle mice, millions of them he supposed, swarming between your legs when you could not move and give away your position. He had to be so still they probably thought he was just another log. Shit, he wasn't sure what was worse, the Viet Cong or the mice. At 5:00 p. m. when the school was tidy he put his coat on and took the L train home.

His wife Rina welcomed him with a warm kiss on the lips; the kids hugged him; he messed a few heads of hair. Sixteen-year-old Argelia asked for five bucks (Please, Daddy!). Yolanda, the mother-in-law, made her rocking chair screech (Carlos, you have got to fix that!); and they considered an airline ticket for grandmother-in-law to visit folks in Santo Domingo (Only \$385 dollars, Carlos!). He watched Channel 4 News, browsed the *El Diario* newspaper and stopped at the comics. He read his favorite, "Lorenzo y Pepita." After dinner, a plate of Rina's *sancocho*, there was some quiet time. The *merengue* music came from the neighbor upstairs; a dog barked in the park across the street; there was laughing at the corner *bodega*, and when Carlos sat in Yolanda's rocking chair he made it screech. The curtain of dusk had fallen over the asphalt jungle outside and Carlos thought of another jungle.

"Coming to bed soon, Dear?" Rina asked from their bedroom door. She was already wearing the see-through gown he had bought for her last month not thinking the garment would be a let's-get-it-on signal for his wife.

“Wait for me in bed, honey; I’ll wake you up. I need a shower. *¡Estoy apestoso!*”

“*¡Así me gustas!*” she said. But no, he knew she would not like the way he smelled or the way he felt inside that night.

He could not stop thinking about that young Viet Cong of long ago. He closed his eyes and saw the boy’s dark eyes in the scope of his rifle. The Viet’s eyes turned to him without seeing because he knew the boy, maybe 18 or 19 like Carlos, saw only the bush he had become; so still he was he wasn’t even breathing. Above the dark eyes was the forehead and in it the exact place where he would send his bullet to nest. But this boy had a really nice face, a friendly one; he wished he could stretch his hand and just tickle the kid, and they would both laugh, maybe even become friends, corresponding later throughout the years about their hobbies, their loves, and their respective families. But he had to kill him in order to help his comrades-in-arms.

It was late enough, so he got up and went to the closet near the kitchen where he had everything prepared. Everyone slept and Armando, the oldest, would not come back for another couple of hours from playing racket ball, or so he said. He took out the case and extracted the Daisy BB gun. He put on the black shirt, the black pants, the black boots, and the black cotton gloves. He fitted the black hood over his head until it reached his neck, and then he tucked the remaining cloth inside his shirt. He then loaded the rifle with the pellets.

He kept thinking about the Viet Cong boy. He walked into the dark kitchen, almost as dark as the jungle; he was still nimble enough to climb high on the kitchen counter. He had calculated every detail; the ceiling was high enough that he could stand erect on the counter and not have to bend his head

or his knees. There he was, a dark man, in the dark kitchen waiting for a damn dark mouse. He knew he would get the critter he hated so much.

Tonight you take the last stroll in my kitchen, buddy, he thought. You elude my traps, eat my baits, bore deep into my fruit, but tonight I will put a bullet in your head in a way I did not have the balls to do to my friend the Viet Cong. All my medals were really given to me by him, and strangely, I owe him this kill. I'll wait for you to come out, he told himself.

He waited with the gun at the ready, just like he did many times before in Nam, but that particular day was different. The boy lifted his binoculars and again looked in the direction of Carlos. Damn, he saw something!

The kid brought the binoculars down, and then back up again in front of his face and Carlos, a good 500 yards away, thought he'd seen that move in a war film once. Another second and the American and the Vietnamese were looking at each other through their respective instruments.

Did the kid have parents, brothers and sisters? Was he married? Was everyone he knew dead, maybe killed by men in Carlos' sniper squad? Carlos felt strange, just holding time still, looking through his scope, being looked at by the Viet Cong. There came, out of the corner of his mouth, the slight upturn of a smile, and Carlos couldn't help smiling back. Shit! Were they becoming more than enemies? Had they crossed into an unknown territory of which neither was willing to let go? Carlos' trigger finger relaxed and the bullet dedicated to kill another Viet Cong fell asleep in the chamber. The young Vietnamese boy lifted two fingers in a V sign and disappeared in the brush.

To interrupt Carlos' thoughts, the mouse showed up as he expected and immediately the sniper had him on his rifle's sight. The rodent's dark coat made a contrast against the

terracotta colored kitchen tiles. He sniffed here and there, moving slowly in a zigzag from one spot to another. Rina was a neat lady so the kitchen floor was spotless. There was nothing to eat for Mr. Mouse.

Carlos knew where the BB would enter so there was no question of him surviving the shot, not even him going to die and rot somewhere out of reach. Instant death is what Carlos had for him. Then, finally, at fifty-something Carlos would become a real sniper.

He saw the Viet Cong kid for a second time. His platoon had had a fierce fight and there were about five wounded men around Carlos and he was doing his best to tend to them in spite of his own wounds until help arrived. They were downhill in a very bad position, covered only by low bushes and a few ant hills. The whole place smelled of blood and Carlos was applying a tourniquet to the leg of another soldier. Suddenly at the top of the hill he saw the enemy; they were about twelve and the sun shone on their weapons. Before Carlos could get ready to shoot the young man in front raised his hand in a V sign and shouted, "American!" It was the Viet Cong in Carlos' scope of a few months before. Now they were looking at each other directly; the same sets of eyes, the same slight smiles.

The man waved his arm to his group and gave an order: "Ho se chet so'm, chung ta khong lang phi dan du'oc cua chung toi. Chung ta hay di!" and they retreated, disappearing over the hill. The young leader stayed the last and again made the V sign. This time Carlos signed the V back to his friend. Carlos was given the Purple Heart for bravery and sacrifice, but he knew it was a small gift from the Viet Cong kid.

The mouse had found some scrap of food and ate it while Carlos' trigger finger relaxed. Then the mouse disappeared under the stove. Carlos sighed and came down from the

counter top. When he had put away the uniform, unloaded the rifle and put it in its case he went into the shower. There he cried, like a baby or a soldier a long way from home. He let the warm water run down his body not caring about the bill. A few minutes later he got into bed, naked, his body still firm and agile after all those years.

“Rina, I’m here,” he whispered, and then they embraced.

Changing Cadence

Sheila M. Hanrahan

Old Larry,
crisply uniformed in
khaki pants and a
short-sleeved dress shirt,

Highlights his bimonthly copy of
Ireland of the Welcomes
and leaves it in our door with a note --
“Pass along to Brennans when done.”
Then he
walks (two, three, four),
a proud Marine,
upright and tall,
to the market.

Other times,
Island music drifts
from his two-car garage,
the door half raised and

Larry's feet visible
as he pretends to tinker.
Instead, he raises toast after toast
to his survivor's guilt,

and mourns
the deaths of the
should-be old men
who never came
home.

Army Wives

Linda O'Connell

While their buddies sweated in the jungles of Nam,
our soldiers shivered at the Army Arctic Test Center.
We scrubbed their woolen fatigues by hand,
prepared ground beef thirty ways every thirty days.

We clomped around at minus fifty in inflatable, white
bunny boots,
survived winter darkness illuminated by the constellations,
our distended abdomens wrapped in olive drab woolen
Army blankets.
When the sun reappeared, fields of fireweed erupted pink
as our newborns' blankets.

Sheila and I departed as best friends forever, changed.
We've never been back to that remote Alaska town
where moose, buffalo, and we roamed freely.
But frequently we traipse those winding paths, walking side
by side.

Duty, Honor and Country

Lt. Col. Robert B. Robeson, U.S. Army (Ret.)

*Death is not extinguishing the light;
it is only putting out the
lamp because the dawn has come.
—Rabindranath Tagore*

I won't forget those moments I spent with you during your final days on Earth. The saying "Old men die, no matter how great, and young men die in combat, no matter how brave," is true. Some of us referred to war, back then, as the "ultimate contact sport." It was a lot like surfing. You got up on the board and stayed there as long as you could. None of us dwelled on the possibilities of drowning or the potential for shark attacks. It took a while for new guys to realize that incoming mortar rounds, booby-traps and mines weren't particularly personal. They were more of a "To whom it may concern" form of communication. But even our opposition had loyalties and, like them, we were merely targets of opportunity, too. Combat showed us the tragedy of death and reminded us of the sanctity of life. It was a battleground where love of comrades and country – in that order – comes before concern for self. Seeing war take its toll on those around us wasn't easy. But we kept pouring our youth into the effort where so many were tasting life for the last time. We trusted each other with our lives and learned what sacrifice is all about. We lived by the ideals of duty, honor and country

during that trial of adversity in jungles, rice paddies and mountains in places few people knew much about. We also observed the countless ways that a soldier could die and sucked-it-up when the stakes were lethal, when suffering surrounded us. Touched by the “Angel of Death,” multitudes were never guaranteed another breath. Yet most of us learned to be at ease on the brink of this abyss. We lived on the ragged edge of existence amid continuous chaos and confusion. With fear gnawing at nerves, we proved our mettle in the heat of battle and made peace with our Maker. Those unforgettable campaigns are over. Our fallen friends are now sleeping in...forever. We did all we could. I stand here today in this hallowed garden of stone, with its ruler-straight rows, and search the common graves for your names. For these moments I’m living in the presence of the past. That muster roll on high is a written pledge of honor redeemable at the gates of heaven. It’s an endless list of patriots that has lasted long after the lone bugler’s echo has faded. May eternal dawn have witnessed the arrival of your heroic souls being welcomed home by a loving God.

Suds and Solace

Terri Elders

On September 11, 2001, I had just opened an HIV/AIDS seminar for Peace Corps Volunteers in a shabby hotel two hours north of Port-au-Prince. We paused that morning to stare in silence at a generator-powered television set in the adjacent bar, tears trickling down our cheeks. Several of us joined hands and whispered The Lord's Prayer. The Haitian counterparts would be arriving the next morning, many walking miles across rugged rural terrain to bus stops. We prayed for strength to get us through the week.

Incredibly, the training went forward without mishaps, and US Embassy and Peace Corps managed to get me aboard my scheduled return flight to Miami the following Sunday. Even more improbably, American Airlines had rerouted an extra flight to Dulles, given that Reagan National, my destination, was closed for the duration. They assigned me the one remaining seat left on it.

As soon as the taxi dropped me off in Silver Spring, my husband and I hugged, shared our concerns about the safety of our nation, and then addressed an immediate question. Should we or shouldn't we cancel our postponed honeymoon?

In our sixties, we had a millennial wedding the previous summer, but since I had to begin immediately my new job in Washington D.C., we waited to schedule a honeymoon until

I accrued vacation time. When I asked Ken where he'd like to go, he chose Germany. He pined to revisit the towns he'd lived in during his Air Force service in the '50s, and wanted to take in one more Oktoberfest.

"This would be my fourth, and the best, since you'll be with me. And I want you to learn to love German beer, just as I do."

Never much of a beer drinker, nonetheless I had agreed.

But now I hesitated. We were scheduled to fly out on September 22. Would we be safe? Would we be foolhardy to travel at such an uncertain time? On the plus side: our rental car would be waiting at Franz Joseph airport in Munich, and Ken remembered enough German to ask for directions as we headed for Neuweire, the Black Forest, Meersburg, Garmisch and all those other magical-sounding towns I'd heard Ken describe. On the minus side: new travel regulations were in effect and airport security lines would be long and arduous.

"Let's do it," Ken finally said. "We'd probably be safer in Germany right now than we are right here in the outskirts of the capital. Plus you've been working hard, and really deserve a break."

So we went. And on October 1 we finally settled in at Oktoberfest's Hofbrau Haus, socializing with young people from New Zealand and Australia, raising our litre mugs as we sang along with a brass band that pounded out "Stop in the Name of Love" and "Roll Out the Barrel." We ate salted radishes and pretzels as big as our heads, and toasted every English-speaking nation on earth, including Belize, Guyana and Seychelles, countries that would have gone overlooked if I hadn't a personal Peace Corps knowledge of them. Then the Aussies and Kiwis joined us in a chorus of "Blame Canada" when a trio from Ottawa asked to sit with us.

Ken and I listened appreciatively as our new friends poured out their sympathy for our country, and accepted their gracious good wishes for a safe return home. We left Oktoberfest carefree, flushed with lager and love.

A few days later, though, we learned that the United States had begun to bomb Afghanistan, and that all American citizens abroad had been warned to contact American embassies and consulates. We heard talk of terrorist attacks against tourists in European countries. I began to shiver.

“Should we try to return home early?” I asked my husband.

“I don’t want to leave Germany until you’ve seen Andechs,” Ken replied, shaking his head.

As he explained it, Andechs Abbey, just an hour south of Munich, is a Benedictine monastery housed in a castle that dates from the twelfth century. Its brewery or *kosterbrauerei*, produces lagers with an alcohol percentage ranging between 11.5 and 18.5, some as strong as fortified sherries.

“We need to sit in the beer garden, have a basket of the fresh-baked dark rye bread and monastery cheese, and heft a beer and contemplate the frescoes and stuccoes. We’ll get some perspective on historical awareness at Andechs,” he insisted.

We drove along the eastern shore of Lake Ammersee until we spotted the castle looming on a hill. For more than half a millennium it had been a cherished destination for pilgrims, and now as we headed up the hill that frosty morning I felt as if we, too, were on a pilgrimage.

The beer proved just as delicious as Ken had promised. Then after lunch, we toured the ground floor of the church and I sat for a while in the Chapel of Sorrow, praying for the United States, for Washington D.C., for peace, and for our marriage. I especially prayed for a sense of serenity. As soon

as I asked the Lord to instill peace in my heart, I felt an enormous sense of relief. The fear had vanished.

This chapel, originally consecrated in 1470, houses the grave of Carl Orff, the 20th century composer of “Carmina Burana.” Then we crossed to the St. Anthony Chapel, with frescoes by 17th century artists. I reflected on how past and present seem to come together at Andechs. As we prepared to leave I picked up a brochure that quoted the Andechs’ Abbot, Dr. Johannes Eckert, on the purpose of the monastery. One phrase hit a chord: “to relish the present and the moments which go by so quickly, yet indeed not forgetting that which went on before.” Exactly what I had been thinking.

Then I remembered that September day in Haiti, when we all decided to move forward, to avoid becoming paralyzed with fear. As we strolled to our rental car I turned to Ken. “In the chapel I asked the Lord for help in giving up fear,” I said. “There’s no room for it on our honeymoon. My prayer seems to have been answered. I feel more peaceful now.”

“Good decision,” he replied. Then he grinned. “But don’t ask Him to make us give up German beer.”

I agreed that I wouldn’t. Suds and solace seemed perfect mates. Just like us. And like America and the dream of peace on earth.

Soldiers On The Front

Olivia Arieti

With blood too young
And tears unripe
You have crossed
The foreign fields
And walked
The enemies' trail,
You have unfurled
A thousand sails
Towards the deadly
Horizon
To lead us,
Step by step,
On the miracle mile
Of freedom.

Mechanisms

Larry Lefkowitz

A photograph in the National Geographic:
A young woman and a young man
He with an artifical arm and artificial legs
Formed of spindly rods
Like the legs of a machine
Built to explore Mars or the moon
In ironic contrast she in shorts
Is fleshly long legged
Praised for staying with him
She replies, That's what love is
His limbs the latest in prosthetic devices
Constructed from alloys stronger perhaps than the girders
Of the Twin Towers
Whose collapse sent him to Iraq
And to us
Via a photograph and caption in a magazine

But there is something else here
Which sits uneasy in our thoughts
Perhaps it is the breaching of the interface
Between matter and flesh
Or, if you will, spirit
(Evoking science fiction
Or Mary Shelley)

Yet at the same time
A lifting beyond the confines of any structure
Man made or man inhabited
Of the spirit supreme
(Evoking the psalms)

One Life

Mary Deal

Before you were born, I longed for you and wondered whom you'd be.

After you arrived, I celebrated by bronzing your first pair of shoes. You were everything; loving and precocious at a very young age, and couldn't learn fast enough.

You went through school with all the usual ups and downs. Mostly ups. You graduated Summa Cum Laude.

"I'm taking the world by storm," you said.

I couldn't expect anything else. That's what you'd done all along.

I suffered an empty nest so you could build the life you wanted. You never let me be sad for long, though, never forgot, as my life hung on receiving your mail.

You were my world. Now, those tiny booties and your picture that sit on the shelf in front of your Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, and Medal of Honor, represent all that you can be forever more.

Home from Karbala

Janine Surmick

When you get too drunk
you pass out on the couch
or the reclining chair
or the bathroom floor
and shout numbers
and names from your sleep.
You call out the wounded --
McGill and Danny
135 71 490 --
friends and strangers
you watched die
in the desert.
You see his face,
the gun you held
against his wrinkled cheek
while his family huddled in the corner.
72 hours of Red Bull
and caffeine pills,
they were all just orders
when your finger pulled the trigger.

From the Blog of an Army Wife

Maggi Perkins

Thursday, September 07, 2006

Aaron is now in Korea. He has called me the last two mornings. Of course they are 14 hours ahead of us, so he is on his way to bed when he calls me. Seems to be doing ok though. As soon as I get his APO (meaning some sort of military address) I will give it to those of you who want it. I cried like a freakin' baby at the airport. This may not seem like a big deal, but I can't do that pretty movie-girl cry, so it was embarrassing. You know, the "eyes so droopy you look like you're carrying luggage" cry? Yeah, that is me. A very nice man came up to me and said (after Aaron had got on the plane), "Thank you for serving your country by letting your husband serve." So then I just flat-out had a sob. Yeah, I was feeling very sexy at that point. It is by the grace of God that I didn't have snot and such running down my splotchy red face. Lovely.

Sunday, July 22, 2007

Only 45 days till the man comes home! This year has really gone faster than I would have ever thought possible. On September 5th Aaron will be flying home to me! I am so excited to see him again... for more than 12 days at a time.

The last time we lived together was 15 months ago. I am not sure I really remember how to be a married woman. What will I do with another fully-formed opinion in my space? I have moments when I get a little scared thinking about that.

It will almost be like getting married again. We will have to get used to each other's annoying little traits. (Not that I do anything that even resembles annoying... I am the picture of perfection.) Having to take another person's wants into consideration. 15 months is plenty of time to get stuck into a routine... in my case a pretty lazy one... but a routine nonetheless. Oh, and having someone else in your space all the time.

But, even in those moments where it seems like it might be hard.... I am so excited that I don't care if it is difficult at first. I just want my man back! Someone to smash all the spiders, change the oil, take out the trash (yes, Big Daddy, that is so your job), someone to watch CSI with (stinking show lost its fun when I didn't have Aaron to tell the end to before it happened...man, he hated that), someone to watch the kids grow with. There is so much of life that is better when shared... what fun it will be to share those things again.

Big Daddy, we are counting the days till we see you again. Oh, and could you stop and buy a gallon of milk on your way home?

Sunday, February 24, 2008

Some things you just never think you will see. Aaron is packing for Iraq – slightly different from a business trip to Dallas. I look up from my book (something I do less often than I should) and Daniel is building a train track with gun magazines. Yeah, not gun magazines like Hunter's Weekly, I mean like the large metal ones that hold a bazillion bullets, made to make sure my husband has enough ammo to protect himself. Very weird, strange, unusual life. If you had told me

two years ago either of those things would be happening on a peaceful Sunday afternoon, I would have laughed. The poet/guitar player/artist that I married is now concerned with if his bullet proof armor is the right size, and if his knife will slide out of its sheath if he needs it quick. These are things that make me go, hmmmmm.

Adam's Return to the Garden

Jose A. Alcantara

When the call came just before dawn
That someone had parked at the church
And shot himself in the head
I first thought of you.

There are two camps of people in the world:
Those who have considered suicide and those who have not.

I don't know you very well
Just that you were a Marine in Iraq
And that your camp shirt is wearing heavy.

Kierkegaard spoke of the sickness unto death,
The despair of not wanting to be oneself,
But there is also a sickness unto life.
Kierkegaard called it God;
We call it poetry.

Storm Front

C.B. Anderson

Machine guns rained lightning while cannon thundered
and leveled scores of city blocks. The cries
of frightened denizens caught by surprise
rose faintly through the din as homes were sundered
in dawn's frail light, yet not a soldier wondered
until much later whether it was wise
employing tactics certain to give rise
to more unrest. It wasn't clear who'd blundered:

The general staff who gave the deadly orders,
or crazed insurgents more than glad to wage
a war of terror unconstrained by borders
or martial codes? Whichever camp misgauge
the other's strength of will, detached recorders
shall strike from history's unforgiving page.

Coming Home

Angelo Dalpiaz

I thought about going home every day for the last 362 days. I imagined the scene over and over, but I never imagined it the way it turned out. My orders to leave Vietnam came three days early, an eternity under the circumstances, but with no way to contact home, and filled with quiet euphoria, I went home...an unexpected fear and nervousness increased with each mile.

Stepping off the train, I stood on the same elevated platform where my wife and I said good-bye a year ago. Through tears and kisses she promised her love, and I promised to come home safely – our promises had been kept. *What was I so afraid of?*

Like a giant serpent, the train slid out of the station and disappeared into the night, its rush of air leaving silence in its wake. Walking through pools of shimmering light, small sounds caught my attention: a car door slammed not far away, a gentle breeze blew the pages of a newspaper abandoned on a bench, the distant growl of an invisible airliner as it streaked across the dark, starry sky.

Seeing the phone booth, I hesitated, its white light flickered behind streaked glass...I walked on. I took the stairs and entered a lobby that was filled with the aroma of warm pretzels. The vender, reading a newspaper, didn't bother to

look up. Stepping outside, I saw the high school where my wife and I graduated.

Was it really only two years ago?

As I walked to the corner, I passed the small café where my wife and I met every morning for most of our high school years. Seeing my image in the dark window reminded me that a lot had changed since I last met her there.

The neon buzzed. “The Whistle Stop.” It was the bar I had visited once, on my eighteenth birthday. As I opened the door the twang of country music drifted out into the night. The polished wood bar reflected the reds, blues, and greens of garish beer signs. Dropping my bag, I slid onto a stool, a man and a woman sat across from me, white lines of smoke rose from their cigarettes. A tall, thin man wearing a white shirt and plaid bow tie walked over and wiped the already clean bar with a small white towel.

“What’ll you have, Sarge?”

“A cold, draft beer, please.”

Placing a filled glass in front of me, he asked, “You just get in?” He tucked the towel into his waist band.

“Yeah, I just got off the train a few minutes ago.”

“Where you coming from?” he asked, then added, “or where are you headed?”

“I’m just getting home,” I replied.

“Where from?”

Looking around the bar I hesitated, then quietly replied, “Vietnam.” A friendly smile spread on his face as his slender hand came forward to shake mine.

“Welcome home, soldier. I’m glad you made it safely.”

“Thanks....”

“Phil, my name’s Phil. This is my place.”

“Thanks, Phil.” As I reached into my pocket he waved his hand in front of me.

“No, Sarge, your money is no good here. It’s on the house.”

“Well then, thanks again, Phil.” I tipped the glass toward him and took a long drink, the foamy bubbles popped on my upper lip.

It was a slow night so the owner had a drink with me. Phil talked about his experience in World War II, and I talked about my time in Vietnam. Two veterans, generation’s apart, comparing notes. As we talked, Phil looked at my left hand.

“Everything okay at home?” he asked, but then added, “unless it’s none of my business.”

“No, there’s no problem at all.” I looked at the ring I hadn’t worn in a year. *Nothing shiny at night on patrol.*

“I’m looking forward to seeing my wife...and meeting my son.”

“Meeting your son?” Phil’s brow crinkled, “what are you talking about?”

“He was born four months ago, I haven’t seen him yet.”

“You mean you haven’t been home yet?” He paused, “what are you doing here?”

“I just wanted to stop in for a drink first,” I answered, “I’m a little nervous about going home.”

He smiled as he looked around the bar. “I’ll be right back,” he said as he walked away.

Phil whispered to the woman seated at the bar and then disappeared into a back room. As the woman stood, her loose bracelets slid to her wrist as she stubbed out a cigarette. She smiled at me as she walked behind the bar. Returning with a jacket over his arm, Phil picked up my bag and turned to me.

“Come on Sarge, I’ll give you a ride home.” I turned and looked at him. Putting his hand on my shoulder he said, “Don’t you think it’s time you saw your wife...and met your son?” His smile widened as I slid off the stool and followed him out.

My wife stayed with her parents while I was away, and as we drove there, we talked about my tour in Vietnam. Like a lot of people, Phil wasn’t in favor of the war. Pulling up in front of the house, he put his hand in his pocket.

“Are you okay with money?”

“I’m fine, thanks, Phil,” I said as I got out of the car. Turning, I looked through the open window. “Thanks for the ride, Phil.”

“Stop by the bar while you’re home and we’ll have a drink,” he smiled, “and bring pictures of your son.”

I reached in and we shook hands before he drove off, leaving me standing in the quiet darkness. Looking at the front door, the soft light filtered through the windows and beckoned to me; I realized my fear had disappeared.

I knocked on the door.

The door opened slowly, and I heard the theme music for the Johnny Carson Show playing in the background. Then I saw my wife’s face. Her golden curls covered her forehead, and waves of blond hair fell to her shoulders. The clear, blue eyes I fell in love with so long ago grew wide, along with her smile. The pajamas she wore were too big and looked familiar. Seeing me standing there, she flung open the door and pulled me into a tight embrace. With a not long enough kiss, she welcomed me home.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, her voice filled with excitement, “you’re not due until Monday...”

“I got a three...”

“What am I saying?” she broke in. “It doesn’t matter, I’m so happy you’re home.” She held me tight.

After greeting my in-laws, my wife took my hand.

“Come with me, I want you to meet your son.” She led me upstairs to where he slept.

We stood together in his room, holding tight in a quiet embrace, as I saw my son for the first time. I listened to him breathe as he slept, his soft, supple skin glowed in the light of a small lamp. As my emotions soared, my wife slowly lifted him from his bed and gently placed him in my arms.

“Isn’t he beautiful?” she whispered.

Holding him for the first time, I felt his breath on my cheek, I felt his tiny heartbeat...I felt his life. When I thought my emotions had reached their peak, he slowly opened his sleepy eyes and looked at me.

Yes, he was beautiful.

I turned to my wife and saw her tears. “What’s wrong, hon?” I asked.

“You’re going to want your pajamas back now, aren’t you?”

We stood in the dim light of the little room, my son in innocent sleep in my arms. My wife held me with one arm, with the other, she gently stroked my son’s silken hair as my tears spotted his blanket.

Boston, 1966

Janice Medin

After a year's duty in Viet Nam, my father
returned to the States to notify
surviving kin of dead or missing soldiers.
In his dress blues, he'd appear on doorsteps,
his presence enough to make fathers cry,
mothers wail on the floor before he said a word.
He'd always clear this throat,
"I'm sorry," he'd say,
and they'd shake their fists or heads.
There were no flags waving,
no ribbons around trees,
no stars in windows,
no neighbors to rush over,
and more than once
he saw a father spit on the flag
folded in that puffed triangle presented
by the honor guard.
Some mothers and fathers wanted to talk.
What had he seen in the war?
He told them the only story I heard,
how he'd seen a village of women
and children gunned down by the Viet Cong,
their decayed bodies piled high
as bamboo trees. The children looked

especially fearful, their hands stiff curls
as if grasping dreams of escape. Mothers
had cradled babies' heads and pushed them
toward their breasts, how this position
gave the VC a perfect shot
at the backs of heads. My father cried
every time he told this part.

Earth

TS Rhodes

A Hessian warrior, most feared of all the mercenaries in
Europe
Stood looking over Delaware.
"It's good land," he thought
"Blacker than Germany. A farmer could survive here."
He stayed and prospered, raised sons, grandsons
Who wandered west.
A descendant went back to Germany
Marching against Hitler.
"I wouldn't have stayed," the young man told his friends
when he returned.
"The land's all played out over there.
You couldn't grow nothing strong."

After September

Jayne Jaudon Ferrer

God, my world is not what it was.
How do I face my child?
How do I tell her things will be all right
when they may never be right again?
There has always been evil around us, Lord;
bad things happen in every age.
But I feel so unprotected now,
like there's no safe haven at all.
(Except in my faith, and I have to confess,
even that's been shaken to the core.)
I have to find my courage again:
mothers have to be brave —
have to know all the answers,
safeguard the nest,
make the scary monsters go away.
Help me feel secure in my faith again, Lord.
Help her feel your love despite her fears.
Help us all to turn to you
to find the answer,
to find our way.

Foote Notes from My Father

Terri Elders

"You have served in the greatest Navy in the world." –
James Forrestal

Until recently I knew only three things about Daddy's service in WWII. It was his second Navy stint, he tap danced in a shipboard talent show, and he was the oldest enlisted man aboard his ship. Daddy, a notable yarn spinner, rarely discussed the war.

Since boyhood he had loved the sea, particularly the Pacific, Daddy told me on the evening of his 75th birthday, as we relaxed on the deck of his houseboat moored at Oakland's Jack London Square. Daddy had built the boat himself and dubbed it Surfside Sex, a play on the title of the television series, *Surfside Six*. He particularly loved throwing birthday bashes aboard it.

That May evening in 1983 as we watched the incoming fog gradually obscure the overhead stars, Daddy told me about how he had agonized over his decision to leave my sister and me with Grandma and enlist again in the Navy. It was 1942, he said, and he heard a call to service.

"I first joined when I was 16, after persuading Grandma to fib about my age to the recruiters. Not because I was so eager to serve the country, mind you. It was peacetime. I just wanted to get away from my father. But after Pearl Harbor I felt compelled to go. I was 34, divorced with two little girls,

and knew I wouldn't get drafted. So when Grandma said she'd take you girls, I enlisted."

Daddy took a sip of his birthday champagne and gestured towards what we could still see of Orion's Belt.

"To tell the truth, I was eager to see the Southern Cross." He gave me a wink. "I always longed to see the world and to achieve something."

This year I learned from his widow, Barbara, and through some Internet websites, that he had seen much more than the Southern Cross. My dad, Albert George Burgess, had been chief petty officer on the USS Foote-511, one of a squadron of eight Fletcher Class destroyers that became known all over the Pacific as the "Little Beavers." Under the command of Captain Arleigh Burke, the popular observation was that the crews of those ships would "work like little beavers."

That birthday night in Oakland he didn't say a word about how the "Little Beavers" operated in unison in the Solomon's Campaign to prove that fast destroyers indeed could defeat what was alleged to be a superior enemy force. He didn't tell me about how the Foote took a Japanese torpedo hit to its fantail in the battle of Empress Augusta Bay off Bougainville on the night of November 2, 1943. Daddy never disclosed that the impact threw him high in the air and that he was injured when he plummeted back to the deck.

Instead he described the festive 1943 Christmas dinner the shipmates enjoyed near Espiritu Santos, New Hebrides. "That dinner began with turkey and ended with coffee, cigars and cigarettes. All the courses, including pickles and olives, are on the menu that I still have somewhere. Afterwards we had a talent show and I tap danced."

"I never had much formal education," Daddy continued, "but I wish I could write. I'd like to write about those days. I started a poem once when I was at sea, but never got too far."

He didn't mention that nineteen men lost their lives in that attack, nor that as he lay on the deck, dazed, unable to speak, he overheard two much younger shipmen discussing whether they should leave "the old SOB there or take him along," as they prepared to evacuate to a companion ship. He later confided to Barbara how their words chilled him, and how relieved he was when they finally snatched him up and carted him to a lifeboat.

Instead he laughed about how he tried to explain war honors to Grandma. "Mother never could understand about medals," Daddy said. "She kept writing me that she didn't want me to get hurt, but would be rather proud to be a gold star mother or have me earn a Purple Heart. I tried to explain I'd have to be killed for her to become the first and badly injured for me to get the second, and I that I hoped she'd settle for something more modest." He threw me one of his signature wry looks, and I laughed, too.

Though twenty-five years have elapsed, I still remember Daddy jesting about how he tried to let Grandma know where his ship was patrolling in language that would slip by the military censors. Since he was near the Solomon Islands, he'd ask lots of questions about Grandma's brother, Solly. Grandma didn't get it, though. She'd just write back that Uncle Solly was fine, and she didn't understand all his concern for that particular relative. Didn't he care about Uncle Walter or Aunt Viva? Why was it always Solly, Solly, Solly?

When I asked her about Daddy's war years, Barbara sent me an envelope stuffed with copies of letters of commendation from James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, and Harry S. Truman, President of the United States. There's also a copy of the program for a November 20, 1942 memorial service for the "Little Beavers" who lost their lives on the

Foote, as well as that notorious Christmas menu. Daddy had it right about the cigars. They're right there on the menu.

There's also a letter from Alston Ramsay, the Commander of the USS Foote, himself:

"Now that the smoke of battle has rolled away I salute every officer and man of the hardest fighting division of the hardest fighting squadron of the hardest fighting navy and commend you individually and collectively for a series of victories which have added to the glorious history of our navy."

Barbara also tucked into the envelope a yellowed page from a lined writing tablet. "Your dad wrote this one afternoon as he sat near the bay window in the house in Twin Peaks. He didn't show it to me until he was finished."

I suspect it's the poem that he had alluded to on his 75th birthday, the one he had started at sea during WWII.

Daddy had printed, "To you, O stranger and friend that I may never know, I bequeath one thought...we come from the dark, and into the dark we all must go. So while there is light, love someone, believe in someone, try to achieve something. Men and women are transient creatures. But mankind abides. The flower, the fruit and the seed are one. Cherish the flower, ripen the fruit and spread the seed. O, stranger, I have nothing more to say, except that you are my sister, my brother, and my friend."

When he died, Daddy's ashes were scattered over his beloved Pacific Ocean and the Navy gave him a memorial plaque at the Presidio. He did receive a Purple Heart, Barbara confided, but upon his return to the States gave it to a man who wanted to impress a girlfriend. He presented Grandma with his Bronze Star, though.

I'm pretty certain she was proud of him. I know I am.

Submariners

Joe Massingham

Those that go down to the sea in ships,
these see the works of the Lord.
Those that go down at sea in sub
marines sleep their way to death.
A sleep of blueing lips and
leaden lids as less and less
air slides its way through sighing vents,
with dreams all ringed with rainbow lights
and haloes shaping and reshaping
until the dreamer whirls dizzily
behind blind eyes.
A silence heavier than any breathing,
then only the faint sound of fingers tapping,
accompanying the café small-talk of
those that go down by the sea to play.

September Lullaby

Jayne Jaudon Ferrer

Mommy can turn the TV off,
Mommy can hide your eyes.
But Mommy can't make it go away;
Mommy can only apologize.

Mommy can wrap you in her arms,
Mommy can let you cry.
But mommy's not sure she can explain;
Mommy can only try.

Mommy can hold you close at night,
Mommy can help you cope.
But Mommy can't say it won't happen again;
Mommy can only hope.

Mommy can teach you not to hate,
Mommy can teach you fair play.
But Mommy can't promise peace on earth;
Mommy can only pray.

One County's Greatest Generation

Madonna Dries Christensen

Osceola County, Iowa, occupies only 397 square miles in the Northwest corner of the state. In 1942, like towns and cities across the country, this agricultural community sent its youngsters to fight a war in lands they never expected to see. Barely more than children, they parked the tractor or rose from their school desks and headed for the enlistment office. As green as field corn, they joined friends who'd been stocking shelves at the grocery, pumping gas at the filling station, working as secretaries, or plugging a probe into a receptacle and saying, "Number, please," at the telephone office. Some were in college; others handed over their law or medical practice to caretakers and signed on for an unknown duration. An earlier generation of men who once believed they'd fought the war to end all wars squared their shoulders and held back tears as they put sons and daughters aboard trains and waved them out of sight.

As the war accelerated, Mrs. George Rehms began clipping from the weekly paper any news related to these young people. She and her husband had two sons in the service. The clippings ranged in size from two inch items about a serviceman home on furlough to a long account from a soldier who spent three terrible years in a prison camp in Manchuria after being captured at Bataan. Reverend Leo Berger's eloquent eulogy at President Roosevelt's memorial

service joined reports of Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, and too many headlines reading: Killed In Action.

The letter-writers rarely complained, and often advised Mom not to worry. The most requested items were letters, cigarettes, candy, and socks. Bursting with what might have been false bravado, J.E. wrote:

Sometimes I have to get down in the foxhole as the Germans try and lob a few artillery shells. We've got about all the snipers cleaned out of this area now. The boys don't have much love for snipers. When we locate their position they come out with their hands in the air yelling "comrad." Well, they don't want to come yelling comrad at me. A person can't take any chance with them. I don't believe in taking prisoners.

Later wounded at Normandy, J.E. received a Purple Heart.

Seaman J.D. wrote to his wife:

I see by Mom's letter that you were worried by the Jap's claim of singeing some of our transports and that you went to church and prayed. It's a good thing someone else prayed because I hope to tell you I prayed. I saw a couple of them go down myself. When we left San Francisco we went to Pearl Harbor and from there to Eneivetok, thence to Vliihi in the Carolina Islands and as we passed Yap and Truk we had some Jap planes come over. We got a few of them and the rest of the yellow birds turned tail and ran. We also had a sub attack but our escort destroyers took care of him in a hurry. From Vliihi we went to Okinawa where our outfit got it. The Jap suicide planes are the real thing, as I saw it happen.

We brought Marines back from Iwo Jima and also 300 Jap prisoners which we left at Guam. I got some Jap money, will send it later.

During one period, 13 members of the medical unit of the Iowa National Guard were missing in action in North Africa. They were later found in German and Italian prison camps. Letters from the prisoners kept townsfolk covertly updated on their whereabouts, condition and, finally, their release.

Photos in the paper told their own stories: A woman seated next to pictures of her seven sons in uniform. J.C. Penney's two display windows filled with pictures of men in uniform. A smiling, youthful airman beside a headline announcing he'd been killed in England. On the day word reached his parents, they received a letter from him saying that he was okay and that Christmas packages were coming through.

Near the end of the war, the woman collecting the newspaper clippings received this letter:

Dear Mrs. Rehms:

Recently your son, Technical Sergeant Elmer L. Rehms, was decorated with the Air Medal. It was an award in recognition of courageous service to his combat organization, his fellow American airmen, his country, his home, and you. He was cited for meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flights in the Pacific from December 10, 1944 to April 2, 1945. Your son took part in sustained operational flight missions during which hostile contact was probable and expected. These flights aided considerably in the recent successes in the theatre. Almost every hour of every day your son, and the sons of other American mothers, are doing just such

things as that here in the Pacific. Theirs is a real and tangible contribution to victory and to peace. I would like to tell you how genuinely proud I am to have men such as your son in my command, and how gratified I am to know that young Americans with such courage and resourcefulness are fighting our country's battles against the Japanese aggressors. You, Mrs. Rehms, have every reason to share that pride and gratification.

Sincerely, George C. Kennedy,
General, United States Army, Commanding

Another Osceola County man, George Braaksma, returned home from the war and began farming; he and his wife raised nine children. In 1983, he bought Mrs. Rehms's two to three thousand newspaper clippings at her household auction. He painstakingly glued the pieces chronologically into a scrapbook. He offered to let people stop by his house to see the collection. Interest ran high, and the local printing company produced a short run of copies. They sold out, as did a second printing.

This limited edition book is unpretentious; reproduced the way Braaksma created it, 140 pages, spiral bound and about the size of a U.S. road atlas. Its content, however, circles the globe.

Newspaper Clippings of Osceola County WW II Veterans could be the most thorough record of one county's participation in any war. Knock on any door across America during World War II and you'd find someone touched by the battles raging across Africa, Europe, and Asia. But it's unlikely that another collection like Mrs. Rehms's, preserved in Braaksma's scrapbook, would have been found.

Old Glory

Sheryl L. Nelms

Is there in the red
Of sunset on San Francisco Bay
In the fleet of International Harvesters combining Kansas
 wheat
Is there in a Union Pacific caboose

Is there in the white
Of thunderheads whipped high over the Oklahoma
 panhandle
In the billow of sails skimming Table Rock Lake
Is there in the cotton gins filling Texas

Is there in the blue
Of flax fields blooming across Minnesota
In the towers of Brunner oil wells probing Wyoming
 mountains
Is there in the bunting on the 4th

Makes us American
Makes us Free

New York

Dave Schofield

Like the years first snowfall the delicate flakes suspended
September's blanket of dust covering the city.
A comedy of porridge coloured firemen blinking
Red rimmed eyes, astonished, emptily coughing.

Now I watch footage of it fall every September.
We try to predict, now, no now, any minute...
But when it goes we're still stunned and are silent
Camera darts wildly, focused on legs pumping, shoes
slipping.

That hatched container crushed, backlit and billowing
I remember how many were still inside,
Clinging to the window frames, gasping for air.
With the breathtaking city views watching below

The rolling wall of fog crisscrossing outwards
Like the ripples of a splash, swallowing runners
Choking survivors, blinding diners
The intimacy of underwater silence.

And in the thick night someone stays filming,
The after-wave of choked ghosts stumbling invisibly
Grasp phones and cough over loved ones, desperately
Blue sky opens up, and now expands endlessly.

The Story of an Iowa Soldier

Diana M. Amadeo

Poetry by Jerome J. Schmitt

Like many soldiers, my father seldom talks about his military time. His silence is not due to traumas of war (unlike his brother who served in the Battle of the Bulge) but more because he *didn't* suffer. He leaves dialogue to those who served and survived battles. But serve, he did and did so honorably. My father joined the Army at age 19 just after World War II. His biggest complaint of his time served was being incredibly seasick during his sailing adventure. Saved by the passage of just a few years, Dad served during peacetime on the very place whose attack brought us into the last World War.

This humble man from Iowa loved nature, family, faith and the land. He lived simply. He also liked to write poetry. While in the service, an army buddy read some of his poems and encouraged him to submit them to the Army magazine. *The Infantry* was published by *Our Army* in 1945. Another poem *The Story of an Iowa Soldier* demonstrates my father's homey simple style yet direct dialogue.

My name's Jerome Schmitt just Romie will do
My hair is brown and my eyes are blue,
I don't want to brag but I'm proud to say
I'm a native son of Iowa.
Amid rolling pastures and fields of corn

Is the little farmhouse where I was born,
Where I grew up to be real farm hand
And helped my father work the land.
The work was hard but I liked the farm
With the horses and cattle 'round the barn,
I lived on the farm for nineteen years
Then I began my army career

My father is 85 now. His memory is fading as well as his stamina. To help keep his past alive, I made him an army collage filled with photos from the days of his service. The fading black and white photos amidst the shiny Army emblem and rich dark green background are not only visually striking, but memory enhancing. There he is again, 19 years old with a shy smile, standing alone at the base and then with his platoon and finally some candid shots in a Hawaiian pineapple field, squatting to retrieve some fruit.

I went to Arkansas first of all
With basic training during the Fall
I toiled and sweat from morning 'til night
I was an infantry soldier training to fight.
Then I was transferred to the signal corps
And went to Virginia to train some more
For six long months I went to school
Was a radio operator when I got through.
When I left there I went over seas
To the Isle that was bombed by the Japanese
Hawaii, the land where Palm trees grow
And where the ocean breezes blow.

My Dad used to grin about being a member of the VFW. He was a veteran who served in Hawaii. In 1945 it was not yet a state, but was definitely a casualty of world war. Still, my father never invented stories of his military life, changed the dates of service or embellished his record. He served his

time, came back to Iowa, got a job, met his wife, and together they had 10 children. Together with my Mother, he sent all 10 children to college, working many jobs to do so. 60 years later, my parents are still together.

I served in Hawaii until the day
They brought me back to the USA.
I got discharged from the army then
And was happy to be a civilian again.
You can have Virginia and Arkansas too
And the rest of the states I've been through
For no matter where a soldier may roam
There just isn't any place like home.

Indeed. Thanks for being there for your country and your family, Dad. I love you.

Freedom Flight

June Rose Dowis

Five hundred yards from the Air Force base
Squealing children frolic in a swimming pool
Black, white, young and old, they laugh and play;
Every twelve minutes with precision clockwork
A mechanical bird takes flight, to parts unknown,
Man-made thunder captures the air, deafening;
Hands fly up to cover ears, eyes turn skyward
Squinting at the sun, as freedom flies overhead.

WW II Radio Man

Sheryl L. Nelms

War was
a whispered
memory
Dad pulled
from his mind
in tattered pieces
of following General McArthur
through pink coral caves
full of the stink of dead soldiers
writhing with maggots
trudging across mined South Pacific Islands
staccato taps
of incoming messages
the tattooed New Caledonia family
who invited him
to a Sunday dinner
of octopus and grog
in their thatched hut
after his gift of chocolate
a mammoth beetle he trapped under a three-pound coffee can
that crawled away with his can
florescent butterflies
he brought home to display on black velvet
sharks knifing through island surf

as he disembarked, loaded with combat gear
black and white photos of Bob Hope with him
a crumpled picture of a baby, Dad found in the bloated fist of
a dead Japanese soldier

pieces of his life
sliced and diced

on a dusted Teletype keyboard
tucked into an insulated
corner

of the attic

A GI's Gift

Barbara B. Rollins

Olive drab is basic pain,
endless hikes in drizzling rain.
Blue is Christmas TDY,
raucous joy so I won't cry.
Red courage stains on desert sands,
youth drained out in cruel lands,
white-knuckled fear, all fossilize
this PFC with gaping eyes.
That's the gift I give to you,
olive drab, red, white, and blue.

If That Knock Does Come

Maggie Perkins

Friday, May 30, 2008

At Maitlyn's school today I noticed a couple of women in the hallway. They were both dressed in head-to-toe black. One was cradling the other against her side, lending strength, and they were talking in hushed voices that seemed to be carried on breath that had no place to go. I was struck by the strength of the one, and the vulnerability of the other.

It came to me quickly who they were. We have lost several men in the last two weeks, and I am certain that this was the wife of one of those brave men. I know this, because that is how I would look, and I would also be instantly surrounded by women who could be strong and brave while I crumpled.

Maitlyn asked me what we would do if Aaron died. I gave what I think is the answer played out through army posts all over the world. "We will cry, and we will be very sad, for as long as we want to be, and every morning I will get up, and fix you breakfast, and brush your hair. I will hug you, assure you that you are loved, that you are safe, and we will do the things that have to be done."

Like the woman I saw this morning, I would still drop my kids off to school, I would still breathe and talk, and, sooner than anyone expects, I would still laugh. We talk with great truth about the bravery of those fighting. We give them

awards for the way they carry themselves in battle, the way they present the face of the American people. But there is no badge of honor, no silver star, no purple heart for those left at home.

And the bravery here on the home front, the way these women present the face of America, is no less an act of valor. Everyday they get up and do what has to be done, with fear that soldiers will show up at their door to tell them that the worst has come. And if that knock does come, if they do have to face that fear head on, they still do what has to be done, they still carry on. It is an honor to be surrounded by these women, and men, these unsung heroes that battle daily to live a life worth fighting for.

About the Authors

Diana M. Amadeo, award winning author, sports a bit of pride in having 450 publications with her byline in books, anthologies, magazines and newspapers. Yet, she humbly, persistently, tweaks and rewrites her thousand or so rejections with eternal hope that they may yet see the light of day.

C.B. Anderson was the longtime gardener for the PBS television series, *The Victory Garden*. Hundreds of his poems have appeared in scores of print and electronic journals out of North America, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia and India. He lives, eats and breathes in eastern Massachusetts.

Olivia Arieti Daughter of a US Army veteran, high School English teacher, lives in Italy with her family. Her plays were published by Brooklyn Publishers, Desert Road Publishing, JAC Publishing, USA, Lazy Bee Scripts, UK. Her poems appeared in Women In Judaism, The Wanderlust Review, Poetica Magazine, Eye On Life, VWA: Poems For Haiti, Cliterature; her short stories in The Smoking Poet, Enchanted Conversations, Pill Hill Press Anthology

Sara Barnard is a 28-year-old Army wife and mother of three, very soon to be four, terrific children. She earned her B.A. in History from the University of Texas of the Permian Basin in 2006, and she enjoys writing historical fiction. Sara and her family, which includes three dogs and two cats, have called Texas, Italy, and Colorado home and will be moving to Oklahoma soon, where Sara is excited to open her much-anticipated web-based cupcakery. In addition to writing, Sara enjoys baking with her children and most anything outdoors, as long as her entire family is involved!

Ann Marie Byrd's work appears in Flashlight Memories, America in WWII, flashquake, and numerous other publications and journals. She has a yet-to-be-published manuscript of memories of women who served in the newly created Women's Army Auxiliary Corps / Women's

Army Corps during World War II. A Pushcart nominee, she resides in Jacksonville, Florida, with her husband and son.

Madonna Dries Christensen is Editor of *Doorways Memoirs*; a columnist for *Extra Innings*; and Contributing Editor to *Yesterday's Magazine* and *The Perspiring Writer*. She's the author of *Swinging Sisters*; *Masquerade—The Swindler Who Conned J. Edgar Hoover*; *The Quiet Warrior*; and she compiled and edited *Dolls Remembered*, and *Toys Remembered*. The books are available on Amazon or through any major bookstore. All royalties are donated to her chosen organizations.

Patsy Collins lives on the south coast of England. Her stories and poems have been published in a range of UK and Australian magazines including; *Woman's Weekly*, *Candis*, *Woman's Day* and *My Weekly*. She'd like you to visit her blog - patsy-collins.blpogspot.com

Angelo Dalpiaz is a retired Police Detective. He served in Vietnam from 1969-1970. Born and raised in New York City, he now lives with his wife of 42 years on the east coast of central Florida. He has a passion for writing about his life experiences, as well as fictional stories. His stories of war, police investigations, and love, are waiting to be discovered.

Mary Deal is the author of four suspense/thriller novels, is an Eric Hoffer Book Award winner and Pushcart Prize nominee. Upcoming are two sequels to her award winning novel, also an eBook of tips for authors. She also writes short stories and poetry from her island home in Kapa'a, Hawaii. Her website, writeanygenre.com, is a valuable resource for writers.

Craig Douglas has been writing since his school days entertaining friends in the school yard with his stories. He is currently a Sergeant in the British Army and has served in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. Craig has published works in the Radgepacket series and is working to publish an e-book this summer. He is also editing his Afghanistan Diary to prepare for next year when he can release it. He lives with his wife in northern Germany and together they have a son and a daughter.

June Rose Dowis reads, writes and resides in Shreveport, Louisiana. As a church librarian, she is in constant contact with the world of words. Her essays have been published in *Birds and Blooms*, *Byline* and *Appleseeds* magazines. After a year-long stint as a freelance writer for

a local publication, she is currently plunging into the world of poetry.

Terri Elders, LCSW, lives near Colville, WA, with two dogs and three cats. A public member of the Washington State Medical Commission, she received the 2006 UCLA Alumni Community Service Award for her work with Peace Corps. Her stories have appeared in over thirty anthologies, including multiple volumes of the Chicken Soup for the Soul, A Cup of Comfort, Thin Threads, Literary Cottage and Patchwork Path series. She blogs at <http://atouchoftarragon.blogspot.com/>, can be friended on Facebook and contacted at telders@hotmail.com.

Sharon Ellison is a native Texan. During years of singing, playing piano and directing church choirs, she has written and directed several Christian plays. She puts her BBA in Management to use as a physician's office manager, and found another creative outlet by joining the Abilene Writers Guild. She has won several contests and has been published in *Proceedings* and *Nostalgia* magazines and in the Silver Boomer Books anthology *This Path*. Sharon and her husband, Sterling, enjoy being Gramma and Grampa while their son and daughter-in-love raise the grandchildren.

Joanne Faries, originally from the Philadelphia area, lives in Texas with her husband Ray. Published in *Doorknobs & Bodypaint*, *Off the Coast*, *Orange Room Review*, and *River Poets Journal*, she also has stories and poems in *Shine* magazine, *A Long Story Short*, *Up the Staircase*, and *Freckles to Wrinkles*. Joanne is the film critic for the *Little Paper of San Saba*. <http://word-splash-joannefaries.blogspot.com>

Pat Foldvary is having fun in retirement exploring the worlds of poetry and creative writing, choral singing and volunteering at the zoo. Nature and animals inspire much of her work. Her poetry has been published in the *Wisconsin Poet's Calendar* and she is a contributor to *The Sun* magazine. She was guest writer in the book *Anabaptists in Minnesota, Amish, Mennonites and Hutterites* by Richard Lee Dawley. She loves being part of the active lives of her son, two daughters and three grandchildren.

Rick Fowler is currently in his 33rd year of teaching High School English in a small community in NW Michigan. In addition to his teaching career he has also been a freelance writer for the past 20 years with articles printed in a variety of magazines including "Teaching Tolerance", "Fly Fishing", "The Front Porch", and a host of regional outdoor maga-

zines. He and his wife Sue have two college-aged kids who are pursuing education degrees themselves.

Joyce Frohn has been a professional writer for years. She has been published in “Grit”, “ClarkesWorld” and “Writer’s Digest”. She is the mother of an eight-year-old daughter who envies the amount of time her mother spends on the computer. She is married to a wonderful man. She would like to thank her imaginary friends for sticking around long enough for her to write their stories down.

Michael E. Gaston grew up as an Army brat. He was adopted in Germany at a young age by a US military family. His adoptive father retired from the Army after twenty-six years. “Heart In A Can,” dedicated to his memory and years of service, was a winner in Abilene Writers Guild 2010 contest and claimed the 2010 Clem Battye Award for fiction.

Ginny Greene

Alice King Greenwood, who calls west Texas her home, has been writing poetry, stories, articles, and music since taking early retirement from school teaching 25 years ago. She draws her material from multifaceted personal experiences in travel, community involvement, and, most importantly, life with her large family of five children, twelve grands, and eleven great-grands. Her writings have won numerous awards nationally, statewide, and locally, and have appeared in more than four dozen publications.

Aleta Hacker

Becky Haigler

Sheila M. Hanrahan received a B.A.-With High Distinction in English from the University of Iowa, where she was a member of the Undergraduate Fiction Writers’ Workshop. She received her J.D. from the University of Wisconsin. Her short story (“Anything That Sticks”) won first prize in the Wisconsin People & Ideas 2010 Short Story Contest from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters.

Kevin Heaton writes in South Carolina. His work has appeared in over 80 print, and online journals. His latest chapbook: “Kevin Heaton-Breaking Ground,” is published by MLM-The Quiet Press. He is a listed poet at: KansasPoets.com. kevinheatonpoetry.webstarts.com/publications.html

Justo G. Herrera was born in Havana Cuba in 1953. He went to Spain in 1968 and then entered the U.S. as a political refugee. He lived in New York City where he graduated Magna Cum Laude from Lehman College and studied Spanish Literature for his MA. In 1980 he went on a boat to Cuba and rescued his parents in the Mariel exodus. Since 1998 he lives in St. Louis with his wife and children. Mr. Herrera is a member of the St. Louis Writers Guild and writes short stories, poetry, and recently finished a middle grade novel entitled *Drought, Rain*. Mr. Herrera has retired from teaching High School and College Spanish and runs his own translation service.

Wynne Huddleston is a music teacher, a member of the Mississippi Poetry Society and a board member of the Mississippi Writers Guild. Her poetry has been or will be published in *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Stymie Magazine*, *Southern Women's Review*, *The Mom Egg*, *Thema*, *Gemini Magazine*, *From the Porch Swing*, *The New Fairy Tales*, *Enchanted Conversation*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Camroc Press Review*, *The Shine Journal*, *WestWard Quarterly*, *Victorian Violet Press*, *Cherry Blossom Review*, and others. Ms. Huddleston is the 1st Place Winner of the 2010 Grandmother Earth National Contest for Environmental Poetry. For more info please see <http://wynnehuddleston.wordpress.com/>.

Larry Jones

James Keane resides in northern New Jersey with his wife and son and a shrinking menagerie of merry pets. He earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English 100 years ago at Georgetown University, and has made his living in B2B advertising and public relations for the past 30 years. His poems have appeared in the Silver Boomer Books anthology *Freckles to Wrinkles*, the Ragged Sky Press anthology *Eating Her Wedding Dress: A Collection of Clothing Poems*, the *Oak Bend Review*, *Gold Dust*, *The Chimaera*, *Still Crazy*, the *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *Mississippi Crow*.

Mary Krauss is pleased to be a part of this anthology. Her poetry has previously appeared in *Silver Boomers* (2008) and *From the Porch Swing* (2010). She is retired from many years of middle school teaching and is happy to live out Wisconsin winters writing and remembering.

Larry Lefkowitz served in the American and Israeli armed forces. his stories, poetry and humor have been published in many pub-

lications in the U.S., Israel and Britain. He is currently looking for a publisher for his novel manuscript "Lieberman", chapters of which have been published online and in print. The novel concerns a literary critic, his assistant and the critic's wife who, following the critic's death, requests the assistant to finish an uncompleted novel left by the critic. A very literary novel. Blog: [http:// www. larry-antiblog.blogspot. com](http://www.larry-antiblog.blogspot.com)

Donald Long retired from the Army as Infantry Officer and Pilot. He later retired from Federal Govt Service. He writes primarily for family, friends and his own pleasure based on personal feelings and those he observes in others, painful or happy. His careers allowed him to visit, serve in or work in 26 countries to include Vietnam and many European countries. He is a member of the North Carolina Writers' Network West and participates in public readings with the group. He is married with six children and eight grandchildren scattered from Georgia to Florida.

Janice Medin graduated from Ohio University with a Master's in English with Emphasis in Creative Writing. She has had two books published: *Remembering the Truth* (Temenos Publishing Co., 2006) and *Communion of Voices* (Big Table Publishing, 2009). She has had poems published in several journals and just recently one poem was nominated for Best of the Net. Before 2009, her books and poems were published under the name Janice Tatter; since then her publications have been under her married name, Janice Medin.

Sharon Lask Munson grew up in Detroit, Michigan. After thirty years of teaching overseas and in Alaska, she is retired and lives in Eugene, Oregon. She has poems in *Poetica Magazine*, *Punkin Digest*, *Windfall*, *Verseweaves*, *Earth's Daughter*, *Thema*, *Drash: Northwest Mosaic*, *Goose River Press*, *Silver Boomer*, and many others. Her chapbook, *Stillness Settles Down the Lane*, was published in Summer, 2010, by Uttered Chaos Press. It is now in its second printing.

Sheryl L. Nelms is from Marysville, Kansas. She graduated from South Dakota State University in Family Relations and Child Development. She has had over 5,000 articles, stories and poems published, including fourteen individual collections of her poems. She is the fiction/nonfiction editor of *THE PEN WOMAN MAGAZINE*, the National League of American Pen Women publication.

Judy Nickles is a retired teacher with three novels published by

the Wild Rose Press and a fourth recently contracted by Champagne Books. She has been published in several print anthologies and both print and online magazines. She enjoys traveling and genealogical research.

Linda O'Connell is a published multi-genre writer and teacher. Most people realize the sacrifices that soldiers make; few realize the sacrifices their spouses make. Linda and her best friend have maintained a forty year long distance friendship. They both left a little piece of their hearts in Delta Junction, Alaska. www.lindaocconnell.blogspot.com

Katie O'Sullivan is a Houston author who writes poetry, flash fiction, essays and memoirs which have been published in numerous magazines, anthologies and on-line journals some of which are Ascent Aspirations, Damazine, Noble Generation II, The Caper Literary Journal, Texas Poetry Calendar 22005, 2007, 2010, Houston Womens Magazine. She has also had a play produced by Fan Factory Theater, Houston.

Carl Palmer, nominee for the Micro Award and three Pushcart Prizes, from Old Mill Road in Ridgeway VA, now lives in University Place WA. without wristwatch, cell phone or alarm clock. *Long Weekends Forever*.

Maggi Perkins is married to Sgt.(?) Aaron Perkins of the 82nd Airborne, the same unit his brother Andrew belonged to when he was killed in Iraq in 2007. Their children have lived through three overseas deployments by their father since he enlisted in 2006.

Marian M. Poe A native of Dallas, Texas, Marian and her Air Force husband celebrated their first wedding anniversary in the French village of Sissy while their neighbor played a trumpet solo in front of the wood-burning kitchen stove. Numerous churches and cardboard boxes later, they arrived at Barksdale Air Force Base and Haughton, Louisiana.

TS Rhodes is a lifelong student of folklore, who finds magic in the everyday and deeply appreciates the wide variety of humans on this planet. She loves regional accent and personal anecdotes, writes constantly, and eavesdrops without shame. The story of the Hessian soldier is the story of her family.

Brandon Robers currently lives in Washington, D.C., where he works for the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the United States Department of Justice. He is a former Non-Commissioned Officer in the United States Army where he served in Germany and Iraq. He is a

2011 graduate of the Georgetown University Law Center. From 2009-2011 he served as a staff member and editor on the Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics and has several non-fiction credits.

Lt. Col. Robert B. Robeson, U.S. Army (Ret.) is a retired U.S. Army officer/aviator (lieutenant colonel) who served 19 years in Army Aviation and a total of 27 1/2 years of military service on three continents. As a medical evacuation pilot in Vietnam (1969-1970), seven of his helicopters were shot up by enemy fire, two were shot down and he successfully evacuated 2,533 patients. As a writer, he's been published over 750 times in 260 publications in 130 countries. This includes the *Reader's Digest*, *Positive Living*, *Official Karate*, *Vietnam Combat*, *Executive Female* and *Newsday*, among others. He's also been a newspaper managing editor and columnist.

Barbara B. Rollins lives in Abilene, Texas, a judge who writes while waiting for lawyers. Her children's books include a novel *Synco-pated Summer* and a forensic series *Fingerprint Evidence*, *Ballistics*, *Cause of Death*, and *Blood Evidence*. Her latest book, *A Time for Verse*, *Poetic Ponderings on Ecclesiastes*, was published by the Eagle Wings Press imprint of Silver Boomer Books in 2009. Like many baby boomers, she shares her husband with three dogs, worrying about aging parents, two sons, and daughters-in-law. She is a past president of Abilene Writers Guild, 2009-2010 Area Governor in Toastmasters International, and a principal in Silver Boomer Books.

Sioux Roslawski is third grade teacher, the mother of two and the grandmother of a five-year old girl named Riley. In her spare time she blogs, as well as rescues Golden Retrievers.

Peg Russell after retiring to a log cabin in the mountains, Peg's husband Mike became active in the Marine Corps League, which brought the Viet Nam Moving Wall to Murphy, where she was one of many volunteers. Locally she has led classes in mythology and Canterbury Tales at OASIS, is an active NetWest Writers and Murphy Library Writers Workshop participant, and is a Victim Advocate for the Sheriff's Department.

Jerome J. Schmitt WE NEED TO CONTACT DIANA AMADEO FOR THIS ONE.

Dave Schofield is currently completing his Masters Degree in Creative Writing at The University of Bolton, in Lancashire England. He

has taught art at high school, administered first aid at a sports centre, cooked sausage casserole for senior citizens and lived in a tent for eight months. In the future he hopes to exploit such experiences to write successful stories and novels and never have to work for ‘the man’ again. He is thirty one, single and optimistic.

Tom Sheehan served with the 31st Infantry Regiment, Korea, 1951. He has been retired for 20 years, has written 13 books, has 14 Pushcart nominations, the Georges Simenon Fiction Award, included in *Dzanc Best of the Web Anthology for 2009*, nominated for *2010 and 2011*. He has 186 cowboy short stories on *Rope and Wire Magazine* and has appeared in *Rosebud Magazine* (4), *Ocean Magazine* (7) and *Troubadour* 21(+ 160) among many publications. Work also appears in the anthologies, *Home of the Brave*, *Stories in Uniform* and *Milspeak Anthology*, *Warriors, Veterans, Family and Friends Writing the Military Experience*.

Jeffrey T. Spinazzola, formerly an attorney, has recently traded law for fiction and poetry. His previous publications include the story *Newpord*, published by Silver Boomer Books, an untitled piece of fiction in Marisa Murgatroyd’s limited addition art book, *Wandering Boston* (1998-2000), and a poem, “Crows Walking,” as part of Diane Samuels’ *Lines of Sight* (2006). He is a graduate of Brown University and New York University School of Law.

Pat St. Pierre is a freelance writer of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. She writes for both adults and children. She has won several awards in poetry and was a nominee for the Pen-New England/LLWinship award for 2010 for her chapbook “Theater of Life” published by Finishing Line Press. Her work has been published by Lutheran Parenting, US Kids, County Kids, Flutter Poetry, Boston Literary, The Writer’s World, Joyful, The Shine Journal, etc. She is also an amateur photographer. Her photos have been on the covers and included in various places, such as: *Pond Ripples*, *Ken*Again*, *Ramshackle Review*, *The Front Porch*, *Amaanthine Muses*, *The Camel Saloon*, etc. Her blog is www.pstpierre.wordpress.com.

Janine Surmick is a poet living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her poetry appears in Alehouse Press’s *Poetry on Tap* 2009, in the *Shady Side Review*, and in her chapbook, *Tesoro: Reflections on Puerto Rico*, published by BunnyPop! Press. When she’s not shopping for shoes, she’s curled up with her cat reading on their front porch swing in the city.

Thank You For Your Service

The Editorial Ensemble

Barb's dad wrote love letters
from North Africa then
China/Burmah/India theater,
letters from Sam to Mrs. Sam
censored by Sam.
Her uncle Joe memorized
the eye chart to get to Korea,
was shipped home on a hospital ship,
discharged when glasses broke.
Sending a Texas flag to a nephew
at Diego Garcia, books to Iraq,
two of each, ready for sharing,
a murmured "Thanks for your service"
even in the courtroom,
judge to defendant.
Ginny, from a family of girls,
mother of girls, has no familial ties
to armed services.
Becky, daughter of a Marine,
Air Force wife, saw Spain,
France, Germany from base pivots.

Patriots, sure – the easy way,
loving liberty, accepting its gifts,

grateful.

Then sniping escalated,
exploding to unthinkable
as terrorists made weapons
of Americans, as horror came home.

Ten years have passed,
thousands have sacrificed lives,
limbs, sons, daughters, their hearts.

Thanks for your service? Oh, yes.

Simple words, heartfelt words.

Not enough.

But it's what we can do.
