

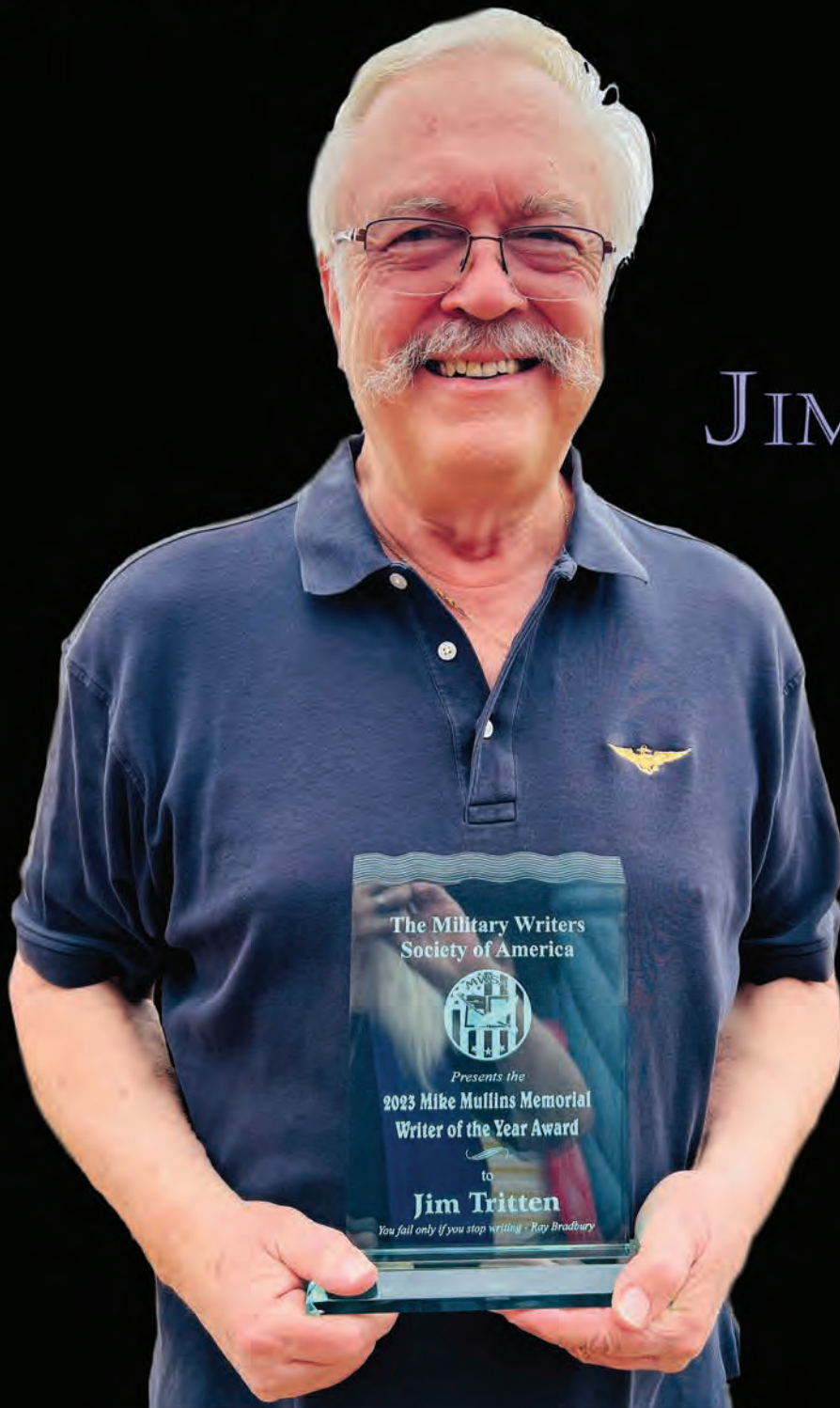
DISPATCHES

MILITARY
WRITERS
SOCIETY OF
AMERICA

Saving History One Story at a Time
www.MWSAdispatches.com



FALL 2023



MEET
JIM TRITTEN

MWSA's
2023
MIKE MULLINS
MEMORIAL
WRITER OF
THE YEAR

The Military Writers
Society of America



Presents the

2023 Mike Mullins Memorial
Writer of the Year Award

to

Jim Tritten

You fall only if you stop writing - Ray Bradbury



DISPATCHES

SAVING HISTORY ONE STORY AT A TIME

DISPATCHES

SAVING HISTORY ONE STORY AT A TIME

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FALL 2023

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2023 CONFERENCE

Kathleen Rodgers & jim greenwald

FACES OF MWSA (MILITARY WRITERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA) ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

September 19, 2023|



MWSA VP Valerie Ormond with her hubby, Jaime Navarro, named an Honorary Member for his spirit of volunteerism. [Photo credit Kathleen Rodgers]

FOR 2023, WE GATHERED IN New London, Connecticut for our annual conference. We come seeking different things. Some come to learn more about the craft of writing or to polish their skills at marketing and promoting their work. Others come to get inspiration or to begin the writing journey after years of living with a story locked away deep inside their souls.

We come from all walks of life. Some have served in the military and others are civilians. Some are established writers and some are beginners.

Each time I attend an MWSA conference, I try to soak in all the writer stuff, but mostly I come to connect with others seeking truth through storytelling. I come to see old friends and to make new ones. I love those magical moments when two strangers meet at a conference and instantly connect through Story.



L-R: VP Valerie Ormond and Awards Committee Chair Betsy Beard. [Photo credit Kathleen Rodgers]

I hope you enjoy these sample photos from this year's conference.

<https://kathleenmrogers.com/blog/faces-of-mwsa-military-writers-society-of-america-annual-conf>



Neal and Linda Kusumoto moments after Neal received a Gold Medal for his book, **Navy Dog**. [Photo credit Kathleen Rodgers]

MWSA PRESIDENT’S “AFTER ACTION REPORT” 2023 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING/CONFERENCE

1. The MWSA 2023 Annual Membership Meeting/Conference was held on Sept 14th - 17th at the Holiday Inn in New London, CT.

2. Thirty-eight members attended the full conference, four only attended the half conference, and fourteen award winners and their guests attended the banquet.

The event was promoted in Dispatches, our website, and in multiple eBlasts.

Awards committee members, John Cathcart and Betsy Beard, completed yet another successful awards’ ceremony during the banquet. [John is still searching for MWSA Headquarters.]

3. The conference was financially a success—breaking even is always good. Conference registration fees were higher this year due to high inflation, and will continue to be so in the near future.

4. Bob Doerr spearheaded the *Write Your Story* program, held at the Submarine Force Museum and Library. We ended up with a class of eighteen. The program is well worth the effort.

Special thanks go out to Matthew Burnside, owner of *The Rolling Tomato*, who supplied lunch at no charge. Also to Bob Doerr who stepped in for Dane Zeller. [Dane was unable to attend.]



Kathy Maresca, also a presenter at the conference, speaks about her gold medal-winning novel, **Porch Music**. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]

Continued on page 6



2023 MWSA Awards' Winners gather for a group photo. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]

5. The conference opened with an ice-breaker reception on Thursday evening at 6:00PM. Friday, the prerequisite annual board/membership meeting was held. The remainder of the day was devoted to professional development.

We brought back the Buckaroo Auction this year. Special thanks to Randy Beard and Jamie Navarro for emceeing the fun.

The conference culminated with our membership banquet, which included the annual awards' ceremony. The banquet was deemed an overall success.

Many members deserve thanks for their help, presentations, and the little things they did behind the scenes. I personally want all to know they are appreciated, and I thank each of them.

To those who missed the conference, you missed a great one—comedy, auction, dancing, singing, oh and education!

Hope to see you all in San Diego in 2024.

jim greenwald, President [MWSA]



Kathleen Rodgers with MWSA President jim greenwald. [Photo credit Tom Rodgers]



L-R: Annette Langlois Grunseth, VP Valerie Ormond, & President's Awardee Ruth Crocker. [Photo credit Annette Gunseth]



Bob Every accepting his gold medal for A Day Like Any Other. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]



Wes Hillstrom reads from his work in progress at Open Mic Night, hosted by Sandra Linhart. Miranda Armstadt looks on while she awaits her turn at the mic. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]



MWSA 2023 Book Award Winner Robert Dvorchak entertained members with a stand-up comedy routine at Open Mic Night. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]



Janette Stone regaled the audience with her beautiful voice singing at Open Mic Night. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]



2023 BOOK AWARDS

MWSA Review & Awards Committee



Creative Non Fiction - Gold

Stewards of Humanity

Robert Seamus Macpherson

The US Navy's On-the-Roof Gang: Volume I - Prelude to War

Matt Zullo

The US Navy's On-the-Roof Gang: Volume 2 - War in the Pacific

Matt Zullo

Historical Fiction - Gold

Doolittle's Men: A Novel of the Air Raid on Tokyo

Paul D. Burgess

Loving Summer: The epic love story of our time (Return to Nam Book 4)

Carole Brungar

The Giant Awakens (The After Dunkirk Series Book 4)

Lee Jackson

The Hunt for the Peggy C: A World War II Maritime Thriller

John Winn Miller

When Heroes Flew: The Roof of the World

H. W. "Buzz" Bernard



History - Gold

Defenders of the Rock

Tim Deal, Spencer Huyck, Ashley Deal



Red Markers: The Rest of the Story

Gary Willis

Women of the Blue and Gray

Marianne Monson



Literary Fiction - Gold

A Day Like Any Other (Love Intrudes Book 1)

Bob Every

Moss

Joe Pace



Porch Music

Kathy Maresca

Memoir/Biography - Gold

100 Days Smart

Karin Tramm

Connected Soldiers

John Spencer



Navy Dog: A Dog's Days in the US Navy

Neal Kusumoto

Continued on page 10

Mystery/Thriller - Gold

FNG (Black Spear Book 1)

Benjamin Spada



Justice (The Curtis Chronicles Book 3)

Joseph Badal

Terror's Sword: A Kyle McEwan Novel

Kevin Kuhens

Picture Book - Gold

When We Are Apart

Becca Johnsey

Poetry Book - Gold

Heart Songs

Dennis Maulsby

Romance - Gold

Before the Snow Flies

John Wemlinger



Historical Fiction - Silver



Escape from Ukraine

Ward R. Anderson

Life Dust: A Novel

Pam Webber

Saigon Spring

Philip Derrick



The Cut

John Wemlinger



History - Silver

Disaster on the Spanish Main

Craig S. Chapman

Moms In The Military

Patricia Qaiyyim

The Golden Brigade

Robert J. Dvorchak



The Original Jeeps in Pictures

Paul R. Bruno



Continued on page 12

Memor/Biography - Silver

Dispatches from the Cowgirl

Julie Tully

He Charged Alone

John Strasburg

Hogs in the Sand

Buck Wyndham

Lady of the Army

Stefanie Van Steelandt

Life Lessons From the Color Yellow

Patricia Walkow

Operation Tailwind

Barry Pencek

Raging Love

Jim King and Lori Ann King

Stories from the Front

Col. Lisa Carrington Firmin

The Marine Corps Experience

J. A. Clark

Where The Light Enters

Leland Austin Gagnebin



How-to/Business/Self Help - Silver

Look to the Warriors: 12 Perspectives to Cultivate Inner Peace

Lee L. Kelley III

Mystery/Thriller - Silver

Intrepid Spirit

David Tunno



Payback

Joseph Badal



The Hawk Enigma

J.L. Hancock

Picture Book - Silver

Peachy Possums

Nancy Panko

The Skunk Who Lost His Cents

Nancy Panko

Reference - Silver

Conduct in War

David B. Land

Romance - Silver

The Return

Carole Brungar



Continued on page 14

Young Adult - Silver

A Girl's Guide to Military Service
Amanda Huffman



History - Bronze

The Boys of St. Joe's '65 in the Vietnam War
Dennis G. Pregent

Washington's War
Donald J. Farinacci



How to/Business/Self Help - Bronze

Mom Hugs for Entrepreneurs
Raquel Gladieux

Memior/Biography - Bronze

Flight
Neil Graham Hansen

We Had to Get Out of That Place
Steven Grzesik



Picture Book - Bronze

Taking Flight With Captain Mama
Graciela Tiscareño-Sato



Mystery/Thriller - Bronze

Advance to Contact: 1980 (Soviet Endgame Book 1)
James Rosone and Alex Aaronson

An Imperfect Plan: A Novel
Addison McKnight

Friendship Games
Mark James

Shadow Tier
Steve Stratton



Poetry Book - Bronze

Life Sentence
Joshua Colenda



Young Adult - Bronze

Ashur's Tears (Cypher, 1)
Bill Riley

JIM TRITTEN

MWSA's Mike Mullins Memorial Writer of the Year 2023

NATIONWIDE PROGRAMS SUPPORTING CREATIVE WRITING AND THE MILITARY

IN 2023, NEW MEXICO ARTS (NMA), a division within the state's Department of Cultural Affairs, started a program of mini-grants that supported arts organizations and collaborating veteran-focused groups. The program creates and expands opportunities for military-connected populations (veterans, active-duty service members, family members, and caregivers) to engage with the arts.

Proposals were accepted from non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations that manage a program that creates and expands arts programming for military-connected participants or, would be used to build organizational capacity towards the goal of creating and expanding opportunities for veterans and active-duty service members to engage with the arts. Creative writing is considered within the scope of "the arts."

In 2019, MWSA partnered with SouthWest Writers (SWW) to run a joint in-person conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Since then, SWW has expanded its state-wide efforts to engage the military-connected population to tell their stories in a published form.

Holes in Our Hearts, funded by two grants from NMA in 2023, was published



by SWW. The book included ninety-five individual entries from fifty-five New Mexico veterans and military members, their family members, and their caregivers. Eight contributing authors had never been published before; another dozen might have published a letter or book review. Two now-published veterans still do not own computers, and one is legally blind.

Members of the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center Creative Writing Group and SWW members assisted in getting these authors published. Copies of the completed anthology are being sent to every public library in the state. Regional book launches and readings

were held in Santa Fe, Albuquerque and smaller rural communities.

The National Initiative for Hearts & Health Across the Military has an informative website with a searchable National Initiative Directory. Today, some forty-two states have registered advertising they have similar programs. As an example, the link to New Mexico is outdated but still provides the name and contact information for the organization in those states where MWSA members can search for similar grant opportunities in their own states.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/the-national-initiative-for-arts-health-in-the-military/national-initiative-directory> [page 41]

The grant process is not particularly difficult, and NMA staff provided

webinars and written guidance on how to fill out all required forms. I encourage you to investigate if your state has a similar program to support creative writing and then find an organization that meets your state's requirements to apply to help veterans and their families use creative writing to heal.

SWW has submitted a 2024 mini-grant proposal to provide online instruction for veterans who want to learn how to get started writing a memoir.

SWW plans to apply to NMA in 2025 to produce another anthology using the memoirs produced during their instructional course. What creative ways can you find to get financial support for military-connected writers?

If you have any questions, please contact the author of this article, Jim Tritten at jimtritten@comcast.net.



Awards Director John Cathcart, the Master of Ceremonies, announcing MWSA's Mike Mullins Memorial Writer of the Year for 2023, Jim Tritten in absentia. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]

COMMUNICATIONS

Gary B. Zelinski ~ Communications Chair

LETTER FROM THE COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR

WE CAME, WE SAW, WE had a great time. It was my first Military Writers Society of America conference. It won't be my last.

As a new member, I found the mix of informative panel discussions coupled with a relaxed agenda allowed for the perfect blend of education and introductions. All of us on the writers' journey encounter the same problems of improving our prose, finding an editor, refining our prose, and publishing.

It was great to meet others on this journey who were successful navigators of these stormy seas. Thank you, MWSA, my Rolodex overflows with the names and emails of MWSA notables willing to help.

Finding myself trying to assist MWSA to improve communications and publications, I've had but one simple goal, find enthusiastic volunteers with the necessary skills to help. MWSA has a host of initiatives tailored to help our military writing community be more successful. I view communications and publications key to supporting all our efforts.

Today, I'm here to report—we've got a great team.

Now, items published in *Dispatches* magazine are under the watchful and careful eye of our content editors—Nancy Panko, Sheila Grimes, Nancy Wakeley, and Patricia Walkow. Sadly, even I, your Communications Chair, won't be able to slide in an article or two with my creative use of passive voice or flowery adverbs.

Joining this team of content reviewers are two managing editors, Dane Zeller and Lillian Zelinski. Their role is to ensure all the items needed to produce a magazine are in place. With our editorial team organized, we can now better provide a magazine with the ingredients needed to produce a signature product.

To submit articles, advertisements, and author interviews to *Dispatches*, please follow this link. <http://www.mwsadispatches.com/dispatches-magazine>

Also, at that link, you will find our style guide and submission guidelines. For articles, please limit them to 1500 words or less. For poems, please limit these to a single page.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Dispatches*. I welcome your comments, concerns, and any suggestions you might have. *Dispatches* is our magazine, by members and for our members. You can reach me at communications@mwsa.co

FOUNDER'S & PRESIDENT'S AWARDS



Kathleen Rodgers accepting the 2023 Founder's Award on behalf of H.W. "Buzz" Bernard. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]



MWSA Secretary Ruth Crocker surprised by winning MWSA's President's Award for 2023. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]

REMEMBERING MOON

Valerie Ormond, Vice President, MWSA

MILITARY WRITERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA MEMBER MIKE MULLINS' REMEMBRANCE

MEMBERS OF MWSA MET FOR a remembrance of longtime member Mike "Moon" Mullins at his memorial brick placed at the U.S. Submarine Force Museum and Library in New London, Connecticut.

President jim greenwald, a co-author and friend of Mike's, acquired the brick and had the opportunity to share it with other MWSA members immediately following the 2023 *Write Your Story* event held at the museum and library.

Members reminisced over Mike's contributions as one of the first MWSA members, an MWSA officer, member of the board of directors, a Vietnam veteran, and a multi-award winning writer, poet, and audiobook voiceover actor.

In 2017, MWSA renamed the former MWSA AUTHOR OF THE YEAR program the MWSA MIKE MULLINS MEMORIAL WRITER OF THE YEAR program to honor him and presented the first award posthumously to his wife Phyllis Mullins at the Annual Membership Conference in Charleston, South Carolina.

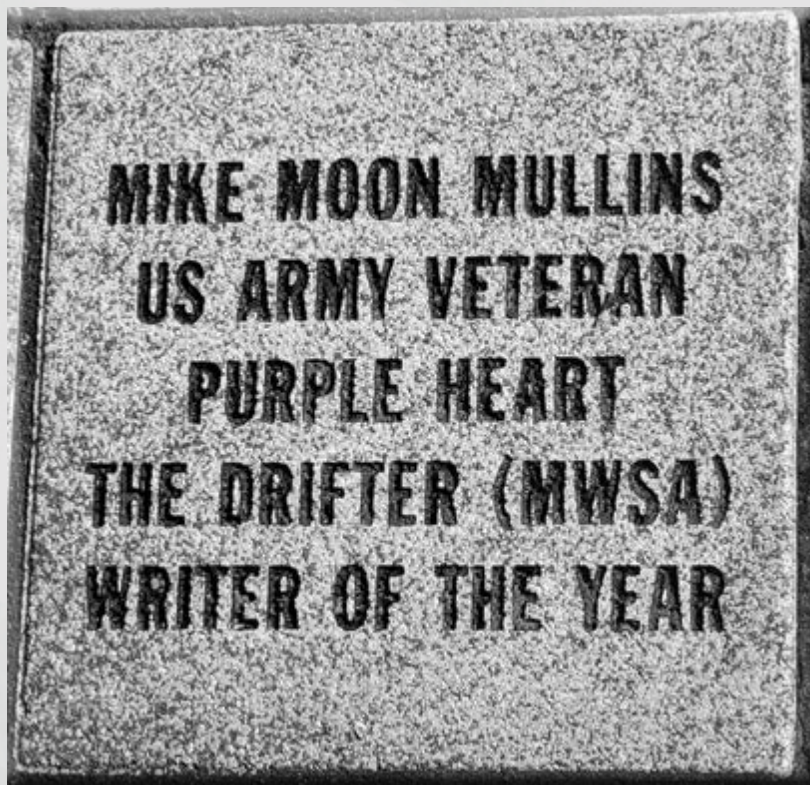
In his own words from his former *Dispatches* column, *Moon's Mutterings*, he had this to say about MWSA:

Our membership forces me to think about what I do. I doubt I will ever be satisfied. I doubt anyone here will be. We push each other at the same time we offer a word of support. It is a pretty good deal for a few bucks a year.

Thank you, Mike. We remember you.
And we have the watch.



Members of MWSA at the Mike Mullins Remembrance at his memorial brick, U.S. Submarine Force Museum and Library, New London, CT. (L-R) Past President Bob Doerr, Neal Kusumoto, Secretary Ruth Crocker, Annette Langlois Grunseth, Vice President Valerie Ormond, President jim greenwald. [Photo by Terese Schlachter]



Close-up of Mike Mullins' memorial brick. [Photo credit Valerie Ormond]



*MWSA members gather for the Mike Mullins remembrance following the New London **Write Your Story** course. (L-R) President Jim Greenwald, Secretary Ruth Crocker, Annette Langlois Grunseth, Neal Kusumoto, Vice President Valerie Ormond, and Past President Bob Doerr. [Photo by Terese Schlachter]*

THE BEAT, PT 3

Gary B. Zelinski

A Major Blaine Mystery ~ In three parts

BACK ON THE STREETS OF BALTIMORE



PHILIP MARLBORO NO LONGER HAD a badge or a uniform. He was just another cold, hungry veteran thrown back into civilian life. The Baltimore police couldn't hire him back, and he was too old to retrain. Retrain to do what? Carry a nightstick, fight crime—these were the only things he knew. The only things he wanted to do. I suggested he start his own business. A business he could do. One that was right up his dark back alley. Welcome home, Marlboro. From now on, it would be Philip Marlboro, Private Eye.

Being a private dick came easy to Marlboro. Marlboro could handle it. He set up shop back at his old haunt above the *Trailways* bus terminal. A small apartment above the call girls, pimps, and winos who hung out waiting for the johns to arrive from Philadelphia. All the johns from Philly had money and were easy marks.

The buses from the Eastern Shore didn't bring much trouble. The chicken-neckin' johns from the Eastern Shore were all alike; driving across the Bay Bridge

was like escaping from the world's largest penal colony. The toll on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge kept the riff-raff in or out, depending on your perspective. Nothing to get out of the Eastern Shore but four bucks to get back in. Mostly they headed for the Hippodrome to bet on the mollusk races. Once a month, the bus from Crisfield would bring a load of easy marks for the bivalve races. Life churns slowly on the Delmarva, and betting on your oysters and rooting them on is excitement enough.

Nope, the easy marks came from Philly, down from the Main Line. Philly johns were looking to mainline the Baltimore girls, crack, and worse. The johns from Philly brought the currency that fueled the economy of the Baltimore lowlife. Marlboro took their money too.

Soon the cases piled up. So did the cash. Marlboro dealt only in cash. Your standard missing person brought a couple of C-notes. A cheating husband brought more. "Of course, they're cheating," he'd tell them, "you just need the pictures for your divorce lawyer." He took to pinning the more salacious shots on his wall. "That one looks like my husband," many a wife would say.

"Save yourself the trouble, take the photograph."

"It kind of looks like him."

"The judge won't know—won't care. Your husband won't deny it."

He took in lots of cash.

He bought himself a new suit. His two-toned wingtips looked like he stole them off Al Capone. His double-breasted suit was hand-tailored by the Korean boxer who worked down the street. The suit fit like a glove, but something in the directions got lost in translation. Someplace between Marlboro's mumbling and the tailor's broken English, the stripes flowed east to west instead of north to south.



He didn't replace his old fedora though—the one he'd bought in France. Now stained and frayed, it was his trademark. His reminder of the time he almost died. Shot because some jilted dame thought he was her no-good double-crossing ex. She saw him out of her left eye, her glass eye. She shot, missing his head by less than an inch. His beloved fedora was wounded, forever marked by a wronged woman.

Continued on page 24

Continued from page 23

His last case was an easy one, like the hundred before. She had an ex. She hated him and wanted him dead. Marlboro hated him too, but he wanted her money more. He didn't hear her come in. She didn't knock. He didn't see clients until after two in the afternoon. The morning didn't exist, and then he needed time to sober up. By three, he'd be sober, but by five, he'd be drinking again. She walked into his office at two—his head still pounding.



His office was small, and it smelled like a distillery. The pictures on the wall were faded, the blinds permanently closed. Still, when she entered the room, the sun broke through. She took off her coat to reveal the shortest, smallest dress

he'd ever seen. A postage stamp had more material. Her body was slight but curvy. The kind of curves that signaled 'danger ahead.' Instantly, his headache gone, he offered her a chair. Given her dress, sitting was awkward. Marlboro didn't mind. Noting her discomfort and him ever the gentleman, he handed her a napkin. She tried covering herself. Not much was left to the imagination. Not a paper towel kind of napkin to add to the dress's lack of real estate, but a cocktail napkin for the iced tea he offered. As I said, Marlboro was, after all, a gentleman.

Sally wanted him to find her lost love. Her ex was in the past, and she was glad he was gone. But, no, it was her true love, her rebound of joy, that had gone missing. The love she cherished. The only true love she'd ever known. She needed her love, whatever the cost. Marlboro was her last hope, her only hope. It seems that a week ago, her love just up and left. No word, no explanation, just gone. "*Can you help me?*" Her words were difficult to hear. She was crying, her words muffled by her sobs. Not your soft fake cry that other dames did to get a few dollars off Marlboro's bill. Marlboro always fell for the phony cry; those women got a discount. Unfortunately, for this one, he'd have to charge full price. Honesty will do that.

Marlboro called her Sally. Her name, of course, wasn't Sally, but he didn't want to get too close. Close can get

you killed in the private eye business. Marlboro pulled his standard missing persons form from his desk. The form lay at the back of the drawer he used to stash his rye—a drawer like all the other



drawers. You can never have enough drawers or rye, Marlboro would say.

The top drawer was an exception. That drawer was locked. A long-ago faded picture of his own lost love lay locked away in the top drawer. He only took it out when he needed it. He only took the picture out when he drank too much. He took the picture out most every night. Honesty will do that.

Against his instincts, he and Sally were bonding. Bonding over a lost love. A bond, not like the weak covalent bond you studied back in high school chemistry, but an ionic bond—the deeper kind of bond you learned in physics. Neither of them knew it at the time, but their bond would be all about physics.

A very physical bond.

Moving on to the form, Marlboro tried to get down the basics. Sally was still crying. Tears ran down her cheeks. A small snot bubble blew out of her left nostril. *This is not like in the movies*, Marlboro thought.

“Hand me a Kleenex,” Sally said.

The stack of missing person forms was a gift he got from the Private Eye Benevolent Foundation. The foundation for retired private eyes. The foundation gave a scholarship to some

member’s daughter one year, and she made the forms as a thank you.

Well, anyway, the daughter took the money and went off to one of those liberal arts colleges in the Northeast. The kind of school that pollutes your mind with that me-ness, one-ness, you-ness crap.

The form was a masterpiece in fairness and inclusion. It valued diversity and extolled the virtues of democracy. It sported a flag on the top. A flag with rainbow colors and the slogan “Save the Whales” ran diagonally across the stripes.

Sally completed the form and handed it back to Marlboro.

Continued on page 26



The Kinder, Gentler Missing Person Form

Please describe the missing individual in the greatest detail possible

Name:	<i>N/A too personal</i>	Leave Blank
Gender:	<i>N/A Confusing and inappropriate given LGBTQ+ sensitivities</i>	Leave Blank
Race:	<i>N/A aren't we all humans after all?</i>	Leave Blank
Ethnicity:	<i>N/A see above</i>	Leave Blank
Height:	<i>N/A upsetting for short people</i>	Leave Blank
Age:	<i>N/A upsetting to both young and old</i>	Leave Blank
Description of the missing:	<i>N/A upsetting to ugly people</i>	Leave Blank
Distinguishing features:	<i>N/A see above</i>	Leave Blank

“Thank you,” he said, “this helps. I’ve got enough to go on. Coffee? Want to get a cup of coffee?”

Sally looked up; her tears now gone. “Yes,” she murmured.



They left his office and walked past the bus depot. Just then, the Crisfield bus full of drunken bloviating bivalve groupies drove by.

Better hurry up. It’s nine pm, and the Delmarva’s in bed by ten. See you next month.

The wind blew, and the rain came down in buckets. Marlboro wrapped Sally beneath his coat. The diner was just two blocks away. She felt safe. She also felt warm and could sense the bulge of Marlboro’s revolver. Things were moving fast in Baltimore that night.

Just then, they saw it. It was rounding the corner and moving toward a Philly john with C-notes dripping out of his pockets.

“That darn cat,” Sally said.

“That darn cat left me before it left you,” Marlboro said.

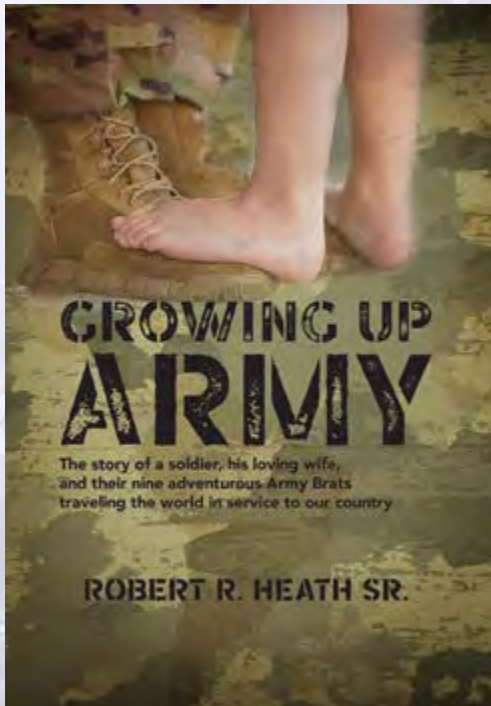
In an instant, the two-timing cat was gone. Looking for a john from Philly’s Main Line.

Marlboro and Sally would shack up and eventually marry.

“We should get a pet.”

“Not a damn cat.”

“How about a dog?”



Growing up Army

by Robert R. Heath Sr

Format(s): Hardcover, Paperback

ISBN-978-1960146540

Warren Publishing, Inc



Experiencing the differences in how other people lived has always been one of the great benefits Brats express when talking about growing up Army. When Dick Heath proposed to Jinny, his girlfriend of two years, offering to provide her with her own kindergarten-sized family if she quit teachers' college to be his wife, he wasn't kidding. As the nine members of said kindergarten arrived in several places around the US and the world, they proved to be an Army Brat platoon of curious, energetic, and fun-loving Brats. None of the foreign places to which Dick was stationed slowed down the Brats' adventures, even as they witnessed historically significant events. In this hilarious and engaging military memoir, Robert R. Heath Sr. recounts his time growing up as the third of nine Army Brats and learning that survival comes in many shapes and sizes.

15 SECRETS, PT II

Dawn Brotherton

A SUMMARY OF 15 SECRETS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT TIME MANAGEMENT, PART II

THIS IS A CONTINUATION OF the lessons I learned when I read Kevin Kruse's *15 Secrets of Successful People Know about Time Management*. I highly recommend this book. It has helped me feel more in control of my busy days. Kruse outlines fifteen suggestions to help you get—and stay—organized. Here are the next five in the list.

6. NOTEBOOKS

In my twenty-eight years in the Air Force, I saw many Army officers carrying notebooks. And not any notebook; it was typically a green hardback that fit in their cargo pants pocket. I never understood the draw. Kruse finally explained notebooks in a way I could understand.

Writing something down will help you act on it. If you think of something clever but don't write it down, you may not be able to remember it when you need it. Many famous people swear by journals or notebooks.

I have always preferred lists that I can line through and move on. Yes, I'm the type of person who writes something down just so I can cross it off. (Of course, now I put things on my calendar



instead, at Kruse's suggestion.) I never understood the point of retaining all those notes that I don't need anymore. But, as I worked my way through this book, I decided to give it a try.

I still catch myself jotting things on the back of scrap paper (a trait my subordinates hated when I was in the Air Force), but then I take the time to transcribe them into my notebook. When I have moments of downtime, I thumb through my notebook. I find things I thought were a good idea and reflect on them. Now that they've had time to stew in my brain, I can either add to the thought, schedule it for action, or

dismiss it as not workable. I still like to cross things off, but now I keep them to remind myself what I've done and what I've learned.

In some respects, it also acts as a diary of sorts. As I read back through the entries, I can see what I was working on at a particular time, who I met with, what meetings I attended. I'm not in the military anymore so I have opted for catchy covers that make me happy when I look at them, rather than the olive-green, Army-style. It sure beats having little pieces of scratch paper all over my desk.

7. MASTER YOUR EMAIL

Email is a constant battle for me. In the Air Force, I switched jobs every two years or so. Every time, I was able to start with an empty inbox. It was a nice feeling. When it was time to move on, I spent days sorting through well-over 2,500 emails in my INBOX to determine what was important to pass on to my replacement and what I needed to take with me. That doesn't include the multiple folders that I had already established and filled. But then when I signed in to my new position, I had a clean slate.

Now that I'm Air Force-retired, I don't get the chance to start over every few years. I am trying to follow Kruse's suggestion about mastering my email. The first step was to unsubscribe from newsletters I don't read. I have signed up for so many that I'm sure would be

great if I had time to read them. Instead, they clutter my inbox and make me feel guilty that I haven't gotten to them yet. So, I took the time to scan a sampling of newsletters and only kept the ones I thought would help me the most. The rest I unsubscribed from. But now, if a week goes by and I haven't read the newsletter I saved, I delete it and move on with my life. No more guilt from that corner.

The next step was vital—turn off your email notifications. You know, those pop-ups you get when an email comes in, no matter what you're working on. I can be on a roll, typing away, and I get that pop-up window. My eye tracks it, my mind reads it, and I've lost the train of thought of what I was working on. It takes time to get back to what you're doing. Even if it's only sixty seconds, that's one minute times every email you get. It adds up quickly.

There are many more nuggets of wisdom about email, but I'll let you read the book. I don't want to give you too many spoilers. I added one myself that goes along with the Theme Your Days (we'll get there later); I have it on my calendar to clean sweep my email once a week. That's my double check, in case I didn't follow all the suggestions as the emails came in. It gives me thirty minutes to keep my email under control.

Have fun cleaning!

Continued on page 30

8. MEETINGS

Most people don't appreciate meetings. I hated them when I worked at the Pentagon. It was a matter of running from one to the next. While it was great to be able to gather the information, there were so many that it was hard to get work done.

For that reason, I've always been good at making the most out of meeting time. I still run meetings for various volunteer organizations I'm a part of, and I'm a stickler about time. We can chit chat after the meeting. I start on time, and if people come late, they can catch up as we go along or ask questions after the meeting.

I try to set up an organizational chart, so I only have the key people at meetings and let them coordinate with their subordinates. Works great in the business world—not so much with volunteers. I follow up all meetings with really good notes, so the notes can be shared via email rather than drive another meeting.

Having an agenda prepared—and sticking to it—is key to making the meeting flow smoothly. When attending meetings run by others, I ask for the agenda in advance, so I can plan the most appropriate time for me to bring up a certain topic. I don't like having my meetings derailed, and I try hard not to do that to others. Plus, by asking for an agenda in advance, I'm prompting them

to be prepared for the meeting that I'm taking time out of my day to attend.

With my business, I try to schedule all my appointments for Thursday so I can plan to be out and about that whole day, instead of breaking up productive time with meeting interruptions.

If you run your own company, consider shorter daily meetings, rather than longer weekly ones. You might find that getting things answered quickly will save time and keep things moving, rather than holding items for an extended meeting.

9. JUST SAY NO

You've heard busy people just keep getting busier? Or that 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people? That's because people who get things done are the first one someone thinks about when something needs to be done. That's why we need to learn to Just Say No.

Kruse reminds us that every Yes to something is a No to something else. Choose wisely. Just because your schedule is clear three weeks from now, doesn't mean, as time draws closer, that it won't fill up with the same types of things you have on your calendar this week.

A quick coffee or a five-minute telephone call rarely end up being just that. That doesn't mean you shouldn't meet for coffee—just carefully consider your options. Set your priorities and try



to be true to them. Time for relaxation should definitely be included in your scheduling plans but keep everything in balance.

If you're struggling with how to say no politely, Kruse has a few suggestions worth investigating. I love the one when he says he's only available at two in the morning, as that's the only time he has free. No one has ever taken him up on it. Check out his book for more ideas.

Although my husband teases me endlessly about not being able to say no, I really have tried to cut back. What I've discovered is that I feel less hurried, and I have time to say yes when the opportunity comes along, I really want to take advantage of it. I also try things and then move on. For example, I will agree to help with a committee for one year, rather than taking it on until I'm burnt out. That way, I'm getting to help multiple organizations, try out new skills, and make new connections.

It's okay to say Yes sometimes. But make sure it's for something you really want to do.

10. THE 80/20 RULE

Let's look back at the Just Say No section. The 80/20 rule is called the Pareto Principle, named after an Italian economist. One way to focus your workload is to analyze where you're spending most of your time.

Look at your client base. Who are the 80 percent of least profitable clients? Of the things you sell, what are the 80 percent that make you the least amount of money? Where are you spending your time? You can gain some time back by cutting out the least profitable actions you're taking and focus that time and energy elsewhere. I was relieved to hear those suggestions count for social media as well. You don't have to be on everything. Pick the venues that work best for you and your customers and spend your time there.

Your entertainment choices might also be taking up more time than you really want to invest in them. If you have a boat, it has to be taken in and out of the water, maintained, serviced, cleaned, winterized, etc. How often do you really use the boat? If you use it often and enjoy it, it's worth it. If you hardly have time to spend on it, why are you maintaining it? Same goes for a summer house.

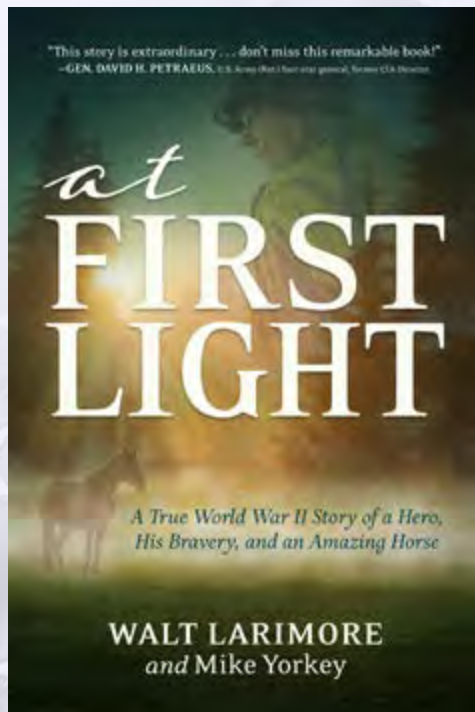
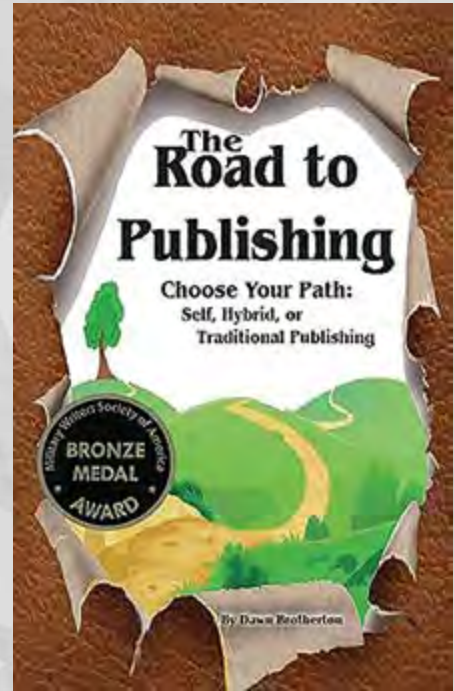
Continued on page 32

Continued from page 31

Kruse recommends doing the most profitable or important things exceptionally well, then settling on good enough for the rest or dropping them all together. Don't try to master everything. Figure out the 20 percent that means the most to you or are the most profitable to you and focus your time there.

This totally fits in with the work smarter, not harder attitude.

TO BE CONTINUED...



At First Light

by Walt Larimore and Mike Yorkey
 Format(s): Kindle, Hardback, Audio
 ISBN-13 : 978-1642939590
 Knox Press

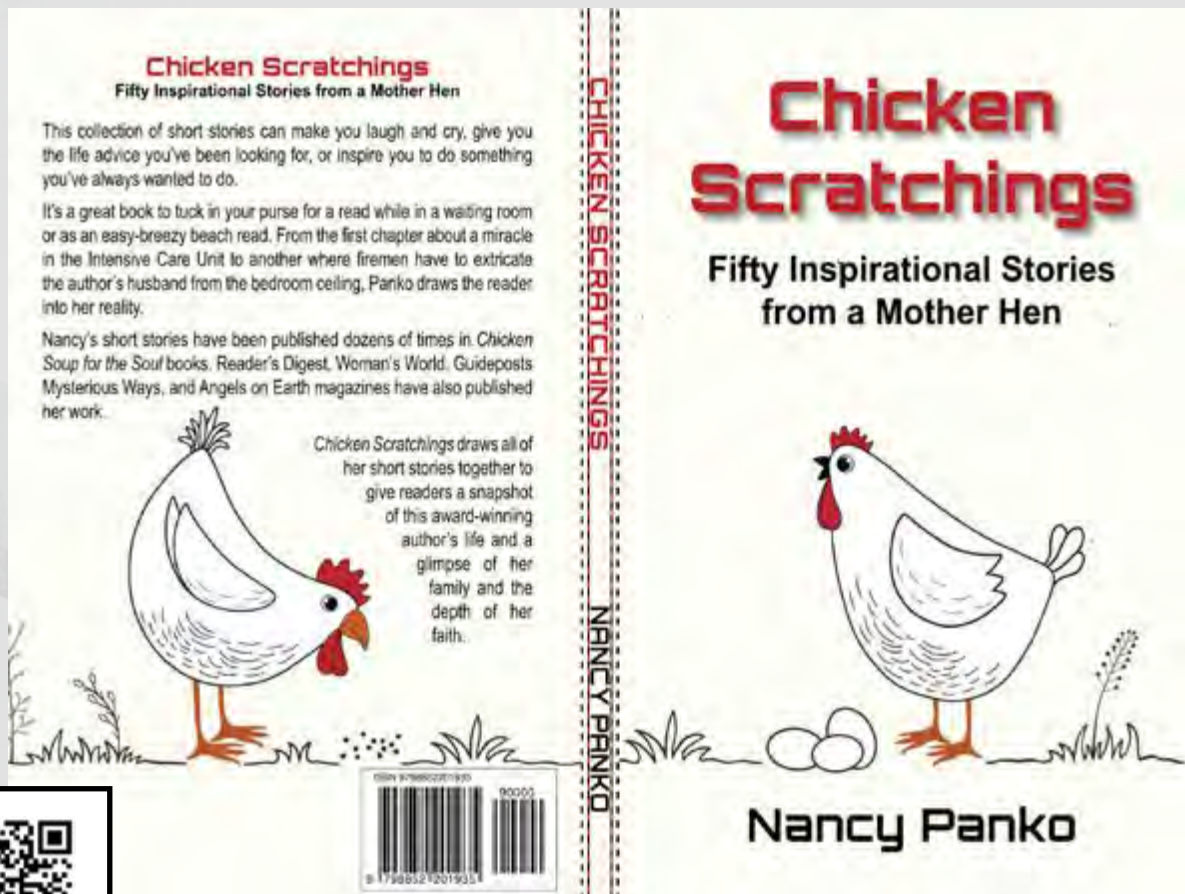


Growing up in the 1930s in Memphis, Tennessee, Phil Larimore is the ultimate Boy Scout—able to read maps, put a compass to good use, and traverse wild swamps and desolate canyons. His other great skill is riding horses.

Phil does poorly in school, however, leading his parents to send him to a military academy. After Pearl Harbor, Phil realizes he is destined for war. Three weeks before his eighteenth birthday, he becomes the youngest candidate to ever graduate from Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Fort Benning, Georgia.

An emotional tale of courage, daring, and heroism, *At First Light* will remind you of the indomitable human spirit that lives in all of us.

PRESS RELEASE: August 7, 2023



Fuquay Varina award-winning author, Nancy Panko, is pleased to announce the release of her sixth book, *Chicken Scratchings*. It's a great book to tuck in your purse for a read while in a waiting room or as an easy beach read.

In her humorous story, *Stuck in the Ceiling* - Chapter 14, Panko lauds three men from Fuquay Varina Fire Station #2, Marty, Jonathan, and Brandon, who save the day by extricating her husband from the ceiling of their bedroom.

This collection of short stories can make you laugh and cry, give you the life advice you've been looking for, or inspire you to do something you've always wanted to do.

Nancy's stories have been published dozens of times in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books, *Reader's Digest*, *Woman's World* magazines, *Guideposts Mysterious Ways*, and *Angels on Earth* magazines.

Chicken Scratchings is available on Amazon in paperback or ebook.

FROM PROBLEMS TO PUBLISHED

Becca Johnsey

WITH TEARS STREAMING DOWN MY face, my author journey began sitting next to my sleeping toddler. I barely made it through another day of food-throwing, tantrums, and meltdowns. My husband, an Army Reserve officer, was away again on duty. Our toddler was letting me know, in every way he could, that he was not okay with it.



Married in 2018

The Army Reserve life, after a short respite from travel, came back in a big way. Our toddler was nearing two when my husband started traveling again. Being apart after so long together was a shock for all of us, but especially for our son. In searching for ways to help him, we found that prepping him for

whatever was coming helped ease the raw edges of his reactions.



Travel resumed in 2020

Part of preparing him was being deliberate with our communications. We wanted him to know the facts and not be surprised, allowing him to anticipate what the days ahead may be like.

One of the greatest ways to show him what was coming was with books, but we couldn't find a book that resonated nor one that addressed short, frequent trips away.

So, sitting next to my finally sleeping toddler, I gathered some paper and started writing.

My first draft had rough illustrations and a very disjointed storyline. In the morning when he was missing his dad

again, I read him the story. I had been telling him all the same messages, but when I showed him through the lens of a story, he took a slow deep breath, his shoulders lowered, and he visibly relaxed.



Waving Goodbye in 2022

By golly, it worked! So, I took the leap and signed up for a weekend writing course. I was fascinated by the intricacies of storytelling that had to fit into so few words. In short, I was hooked.

I completed in-depth training, submitted my manuscript, and was published. It's amazing how one sentence can sum up so many endless nights of work, but brevity is the soul of wit, or so they say.

I am now the published author of *When We Are Apart*. I am so proud of this book and what it has given to my family and so many others. It helps children name their feelings, cope with their emotions, and navigate through them while reminding them that they are loved unconditionally. I truly hope that this book can be as impactful for your family as it has been for my own.



Published in 2023

And to leave you with one piece of unsolicited advice: If you are missing your spouse, don't forget that hot, delicious pizza is only thirty minutes away. You've got this!



CALL FOR ARTICLES

Military Writers Society of America

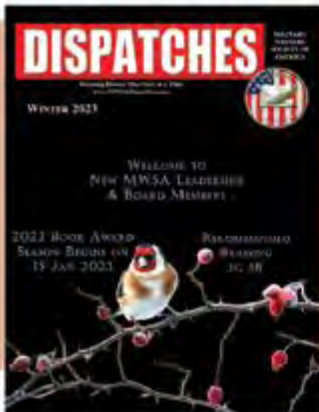


FALL 2023

Dispatches magazine is the official publication of the Military Writers Society of America. We are actively seeking articles. As active duty service members, veterans, family members and those who have a story to tell, let *Dispatches* showcase your unique contribution to America's fabric of freedom. Our core principle is a love and respect for the men and women who defend this nation and a deep personal understanding of their sacrifice and dedication.

The magazine is published four times a year and provides our readership a national platform for short stories of less than 1500 words, articles, poetry, and art. Please keep content suitable for a large audience and titles to three words max.

MWSA DISPATCHES MAGAZINE



WINTER
OCT-DEC

DEADLINE FOR
SUBMISSIONS
15 DEC



SPRING
JAN-MAR

DEADLINE FOR
SUBMISSIONS
15 MAR



SUMMER
APR-JUN

DEADLINE FOR
SUBMISSIONS
15 JUN



FALL
JUL-SEP

DEADLINE FOR
SUBMISSIONS
15 SEP

‘Valley of the Shadow’ is Set for a New Marketing Campaign.

Published book shares a historical narrative of the fall of Corregidor and the lives of American POWs as experienced by Col. Nicoll F. “Nick” Galbraith

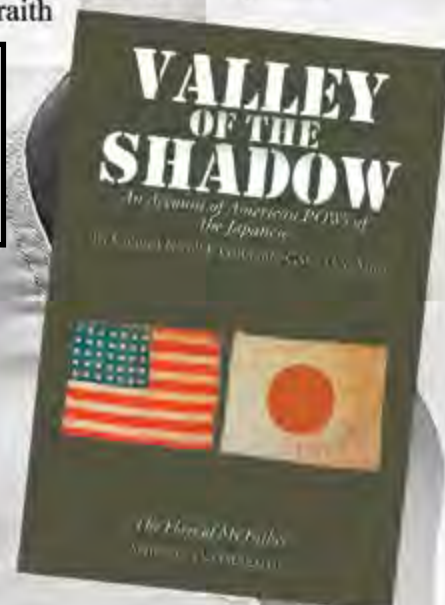
COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – As the family amalgamated Colonel Nicoll F. “Nick” Galbraith’s extensive prisoners of war archive containing over 1,100 handwritten flimsies that was dragged out from a deep family shelf, his younger son Whitney H. Galbraith began to understand, page by page, what their family had and what his father sacrificed to fight for freedom and peace.

Set for a new marketing campaign, *Valley of the Shadow: An Account of American POWs of the Japanese* in June 2018) presents Col. Galbraith’s historical narrative describing his three and a half years captivity as a prisoner of the Imperial Japanese Army from the surrender of Corregidor Island in May 1942 until August 1945. At that time, he was rescued/released from Camp Hoten, in Mukden, Manchukuo/Manchuria, at the hands of a six-man OSS team and Russia’s Red Army, which had just entered the Asian war.

This book was written in the third person, using pseudonyms for the characters. The principle five men Col. Galbraith personifies represent a composite of his associates while on the staff (G-4, Logistics) of General Jonathan M. Wainwright, commander of United States Forces in the Philippines (USFIP) and his various “roommates” during their years of captivity. This third-person narrative form enables Col. Galbraith to offer a psychological, emotional, and moral matrix to help readers interpret the challenges and personal behaviors of incarcerated American prisoners who suddenly had been deprived of their normal social and physical lives as officers, colleagues, husbands, and fathers.

“This book offers a substantial addition to the history of the fall of the Philippines and American POW life that deserves to be remembered,” Whitney says. When asked what he wants readers to take away from the book, he answers, “Modern American generations need to be alerted as to vital American history, including its wars and to hopefully participate in or national defense and gain further respect for those who do participate.”

Valley of the Shadow: An Account of American POWs of the Japanese
By Whitney H. Galbraith



WHAT MAKES A VETERAN?

Clifford L. Carter

WHAT MAKES A VETERAN A VETERAN?

VETERANS COME FROM FAMILIES BIG and small all across this great country. We come from sprawling cities, farming communities, and everything in between.

The one thing we all have in common is the decision we made when we were called to serve our country—whether that call came as a draft notice or the only way out of a hard life, or to God and country.

We accepted the responsibility with all we had, with all that we were, and with all that we could be, knowing full well our decision could lead to our own death.

Many of us would be forever changed. We accepted the responsibility, knowing our country, our families, our loved ones, our friends, and our neighbors would continue on a path of freedom.

We did not ask. We only acted. Whatever the situation called for, we followed orders and acted. Put ourselves in harm's way when it was necessary to protect.

Whether in times of peace or war, we were called on to respond with one thing in mind: the safety and security of The United States of America and its citizens living at home and abroad.



Some of us would not return, and some of us would return ever-damaged by what we saw, heard, and experienced.

Our damaged souls would live with these horrors every minute of every day.

We hold onto the belief that somehow we made a difference in *your* life, in your ability to feel safe in this world, in your ability to raise your children in a safe place, free of oppression.

We hold the images of war, so you don't have to.

We stay inside our homes, afraid to go out, so you don't have to.

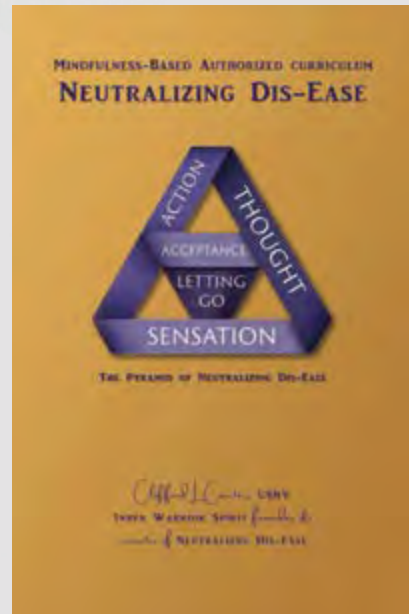
We take medication to ease our pain from the terror of war, so you don't have to.

We wait for our appointments, month after month, at the VA Hospital so we don't burden your private healthcare system.

Many of us can't hold a job because we can only think of keeping you safe, even though it's no longer our job.

It takes a village to heal our wounds.

Be part of our village. Help us heal our wounds.



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BE SOCIAL

Gary B. Zelinski, Communications Chair

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEER Ms. Rebecca Johnsey we have an expanded, enhanced and lively presence on Facebook and Instagram.

She must be doing something right because over the last month we've had a 270% increase in the number of times our posts have been viewed and a 117% increase in the number of likes we've received.

Over the last several weeks Becca has been busy posting all our MWSA news as well as giving big shout-outs to all our 2023 Book Award Winners.

When not volunteering for MWSA, Becca works as an engineer and project manager in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she was born and raised.

A graduate of Vanderbilt University, she is married to an Army Reserve officer, and they have two wonderful and rambunctious children.



If all this isn't enough, Becca is also an MWSA 2023 Gold Medal Winner for her debut book, *When We Are Apart*.

Check out the Military Writers Society of America on social media. Like, comment, and message your thoughts.





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GRIMSHAW VET

Dane Zeller

AUTHOR RECOVERS FROM NINTH GRADE ENGLISH CLASS; SUFFERS ANOTHER LESSON

MISS GRIMSHAW, MY ENGLISH TEACHER, beat me in our 9th-grade classroom. Metaphorically, of course. I stood defenseless at my desk as she slung words at me, like, “prepositional phrase” and “dependent clause.”

Furthermore, she applied large red “X’s” to the places where I had randomly put commas, colons, and semi-colons in my paper. She held up the blood-stained essay for the whole class to see.

She beat me because I could create an appositive in my writing but could not name it. Independent and dependent clauses appeared in my essay, sometimes in the same sentence—but I did not know it.

Decades later, when I learned to write without fear, I joined a small critique group that helped me with my punctuation.

After reading my first piece, they said, in unison: “You need to get an editor.”

They could not help me.

I outsourced my punctuation. Through this process, I learned a few things. Now, when I read a newly published novel, I detect when the author uses two



complete sentences joined by an “and” or a “but” without the required comma. I know immediately I have discovered an unpolished writer, someone who is not very diligent, and somebody not clever enough to find some anal-compulsive friend to detail their book.

I survived Ms. Grimshaw’s attacks and published a novel. People came up to me at my book signings and complimented me.

“Good punctuation,” they said.

I flew high, writing clever notes as I autographed my book, inserting a semi-colon here and a colon there.

An elderly lady walked up to my book signing table. She had a cane, and her coat gave off an odd chemical odor, like magic marker. A red, magic marker.

She opened one of my books. She read for a minute or two, and then spread the open book out in front of me.

She swung her cane in a counter-clockwise motion over her shoulder until the tip of the cane slammed down on page sixty-three, third paragraph.

“Young man, you’ve created an appositive and have not flanked it by commas.”

I said, “I hired an editor to do that kind of detail work. It’s not my fault.”

“It *is* your fault,” said the lady, slapping her cane on the table, a little too close to my hand. “Do you write songs?”

“No.”

“Thank goodness. I bet if you hand wrote the lyrics of a song, you’d hire a temp typist to create the melody.”

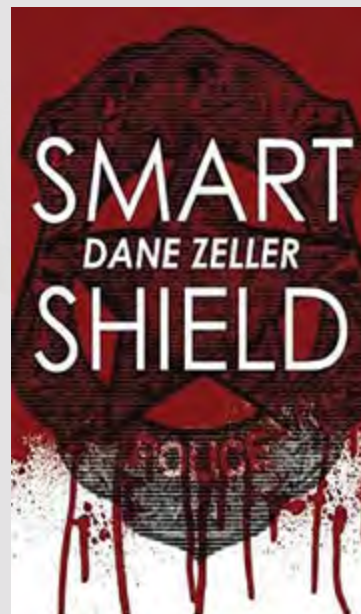
“Not sure I understand.”

“Young man, punctuation matters to your story. It constructs the rhythm of your writing. It determines the pauses in your sentences, your paragraphs, your chapters. The reader’s voice rises and falls to the writer’s beat.

“The period gives finality to a thought, a scene, a chapter. It gives certainty to a writer’s voice.

“The comma pauses, sometimes to give an aside to the reader by lowering the writer’s voice. The comma stretches the sentence out, allowing for several clauses to create a pleasant riff. The semicolon is a period stacked upon a comma, telling the reader he can roll through the stop sign. The colon is made up of two periods, a sure stop with an expectation of what is to follow.

And then she leaned toward me, and in a lowered voice she said, “punctuation marks aren’t rules to follow; they’re notes to hit.”



THE PICTURES SEEM SO REAL

A Tarnished Knight

Staring out my window
The rain is pouring down
Lighting flashes in the sky
There's thunder all around

My dog she lies beside me
By the fireplace we rest
Always been my best friend
To that I can attest

She never asks too much
Just a pat upon her head
Always there to comfort me
When a tear or two I shed

My eyes gaze upon the mantle
As the fire dances in the night
Two pictures in wooden frames
How they cast an eerie light

One of a blue eyed boy
A cleft upon his chin
Almost seems to come to life
But does not, to my chagrin

Other of a red haired beauty
In a wedding gown of white
My heart still beats with passion
When I think about that night

Those pictures are so real
Their voices too I seem to hear
It's just the crackling of the fire
That is whispering in my ear

Both no longer with me now
Only visions in my mind
A photo of a blue eyed boy
Is all that's left behind

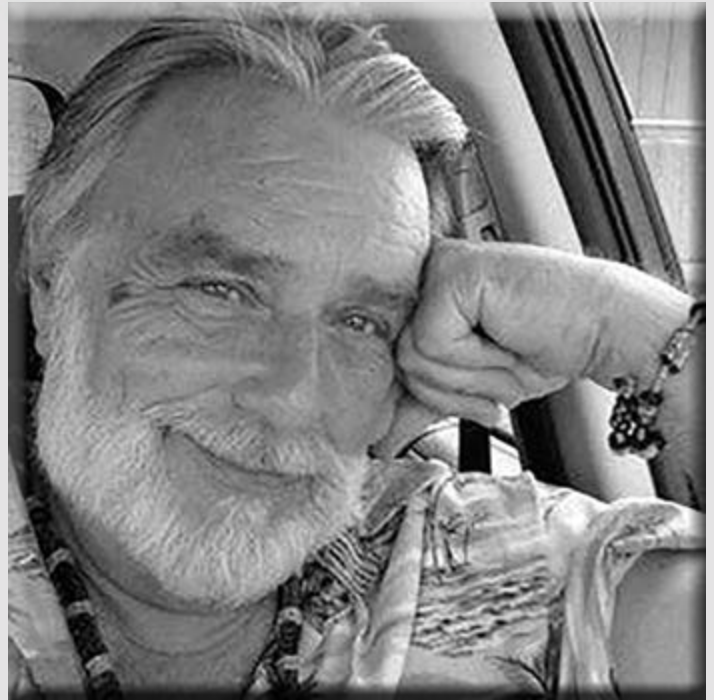
And that red haired beauty
With eyes of emerald green
Now too rests upon the mantle
She'll always be my queen

The fire is slowly dying now
No shadow dancing on the walls
Pictures in the wooden frames
Now, seem not so real at all

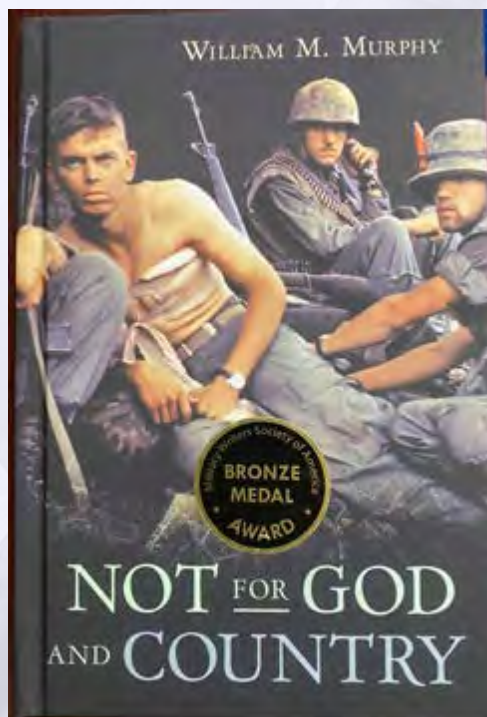
My dog she looks up at me
Then gets up rather slow
Puts her head upon my knee
I believe it's time to go

Tomorrow night I shall return
Hope to have another chance
To see those photos come alive
When the fire begins to dance.

THE TWO PEOPLE IN THIS story are, or should say, were real... The blue-eyed boy was my son, and the woman, now deceased, was my wife as well as my best friend. There's much weaving truth with fiction in this poem but, in essence, is real.



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Not for God and Country

by William M. Murphy

Format(s): Kindle, Hardcover, Paperback

ISBN-13 : 978-1646632732

Koehler Books

Not for God and Country is a true and definitive war story written by a decorated Marine who survived some of the harshest combat of the long, cruel Vietnam War.

Learn why young Americans were sent to fight and die in a distant land because of decisions made before most of them were born. Experience the daily physical and emotional battles faced as an unlikely mix of young Marines are turned into battle-hardened brothers and heroes in the unforgiving reality of nontraditional insurgent warfare.



PHIL'S 60TH BIRTHDAY

Janette Stone

UNLIKE THE BALMY SWEAT OF August, the tropical cool of February cuddles Florida into a rare wintry comfort. It's just the opposite in Australia where February blazes and August chills.

On February 9, 2008, at a popular Key West restaurant, Carol Hogue pulled off a surprise party highlighted with an informative slideshow of her husband's life. A table laden with seafood and salads on one end and fruity desserts on the other tempted eager guests.

Bottomless drinks ensured martini, wine, and beer glasses weren't empty for long. Smiles, chuckles, and expressions of admiration complemented the occasion when slides projected Phil as a wide-eyed baby, a curious child, and a teenager on the verge of his next adventure.

SLIDE: FEBRUARY 9, 2008, KEY WEST, FL

Phil appears in his military gear, left hand draped over a helicopter door-mounted M-60 machine gun. The ammunition belt is loaded. Phil's about to go on another mission.

His face and loose stance reveal to the camera and those in the room his reservation about returning to the jungle, the fields and rice paddies.



PHILIP B. HOGUE, SPEC 4, CREW CHIEF, JOURNAL: FEBRUARY 9, 1967, BIEN HOA, VIETNAM.

Yesterday was my first day in country. They put me in charge of the ammo dump while they processed my orders to the 1st Aviation Brigade.

After in-processing and squaring away my gear, I was ordered to guard duty at the perimeter and spent the night hunkered down in a bunker.

Out of nowhere, VC rockets lit up the sky. People grabbed their helmets and guns and ran to their positions, screaming because their sleep was interrupted again.

*The tracers made a spectacular display. I celebrated my twenty-first birthday with the best fireworks in town. In the morning I sang **Happy Birthday** to myself.*

When they did their rounds, they thought I'd lost it, but if I am going to see my twenty-second birthday, I'll have to find a way to make the most of it.

**PHIL'S JOURNAL: FEBRUARY 16, 1967,
VIETNAM**

One week in country and I hate this place. I already feel like I've been here a year. Today, we flew the slick into Hobo Woods. I lost count of how many times, but I could check the log.

We hauled in ammo, water, and supplies, but because the medivacs couldn't keep up, we brought back wounded and body bags.

We fired our machine guns into the jungle. Rotor blades reverberated in a roaring howl. Our tracers bounced off the ground. Charlie's tracers came back.

We unloaded metal and loaded flesh in a hot LZ while the guys on the ground yelled all kinds of shit we couldn't make out in the thick of machines, guns and people moaning. Finally, we'd done all we could. No more missions today.

I cleaned up the slick and prepared it for tomorrow, while my gunner cleaned and checked the weapons for worn springs and broken parts. I threw in water bucket after water bucket and scrubbed, but the

blood wouldn't come out. The sight and smell of it finally got to me. I fell out of the chopper and threw up in the dirt. Three hundred and fifty-eight days to go.

SLIDE: FEBRUARY 9, 2006, KEY WEST, FL

Phil is on R&R wearing a gray suit and matching tie. A Christmas tree dangling with handmade ornaments replaces the helicopter in the background of an earlier shot. It is Christmas Eve, 1967. His brilliant blue eyes sparkle. He smiles with an adolescent shyness. A girl dressed in a navy-blue velveteen A-line dress with fanned sleeves stands beside him. The hem stops just above her knees. The girl is me. I am seventeen.

CHRISTMAS EVE, 1967, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

"I wonder if he lost the address," I say when Phil is half an hour late.

"Can you get hold of him? What's his phone number?" Mum asks, sipping her third glass of wine.

"I don't know where he's staying. I forgot to ask."

"What do you know about this bloke anyway?"

"Not much. Just that he's a really nice guy. He's..."

"He's late is what he is. You can't trust these blokes. Here today, gone tomorrow. You'd better start watching yourself or you'll end up in all sorts of trouble."

Continued on page 48

Continued from page 47

PHIL'S JOURNAL, JANUARY 5, 1968, VIETNAM

Everyone's picking up a lot of movement. The VC and the North Vietnamese are all over the place. All the outposts are getting hit. Something big is about to happen.

A mortar just went off and blew a pen and notepad out of my hands. I'm supposed to leave in a week, but they've decided no one is going home until this thing is over. It looks like the NVA has planned a coup to coincide with Tet, Charlie's New Year. We're flying almost twenty-four hours a day, resupplying ammo, carrying troops, and evacuating wounded. I'm so short, I just hope and pray I make it out of here alive.

PHIL'S LETTER: JANUARY 6, 1968, VIETNAM

Yesterday I wrote you a nice long letter, but it flew out the window as we were flying along. I must say again how much I enjoyed being with you and your family Christmas Eve. Even though I nearly didn't make it.

You and your folks made my Christmas one that I shall never forget as long as I may live. I hope your folks don't think too bad of me for being so late. Perhaps I could make up for it by inviting you and your family to have tea with me and my family in America.

When we went to Mass, my mind was filled with all sorts of emotions. I felt sad, glad, good, bad, lonely, and yet I felt that I was with dear, close friends.

It's getting close to the time when I will have to take my turn at guarding the perimeter so I will have to bring this to an end.

Your American Friend,

Phil

PS. I had two hours in Saigon the other day. I stopped by the little chapel they have at the heliport and said a prayer for you and your folks. I am sure a family as nice as yours is well looked after by God but I just thought I'd throw my two cents worth in.

* * *

A phone-call thirty years earlier, seeking Phil's permission to include excerpts of his letters in my master's thesis, triggered a series of events that led me to his party:

"Yes, of course I remember," he said.

"I typed your name into a people finder. When your address and number came up, I thought about it for a few days and finally silenced the voice telling me not to be so stupid. And here we are. I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all, I'm really glad you phoned."

"Do you have the letters I wrote?"

"Not with me, but they could be in a trunk at my mother's." I contemplated the words I might have written in those letters while Phil prepared to reveal something he'd silenced for decades.

"That afternoon I came into your record shop, I was in rough shape. I'd spent the

morning in the bathtub downing a bottle of bourbon.

“I told you I flew on a helicopter. I didn’t tell you I was a door gunner shot down three times. The last time I was the only survivor. Next day I got a *Dear John*. With nothing to live for I decided to extend another year. But meeting you and your family reminded me what life was like before the war and I changed my mind.

“The day I left Vietnam, the guy who took my seat was killed. Every Memorial Day I go back to the bottle of bourbon and toast each of the friends I lost and each of the friends who kept me alive, including you.”

THE PARTY WOUND DOWN: FEBRUARY 9, 2006, KEY WEST, FLORIDA.

The slides revealed more of Phil’s life: his marriage, his role as a protective father, and his love of risk—whether in sport or business. The slide show ended, and the screen went blank. Palm fronds on either side of the screen danced, spirited by the cold front beginning to sweep the island.

As fun and reflection became *goodbye* and *thank you*, Phil and Carol worked their way through the parade of well-wishers.

“I don’t think I wished you a happy twenty-second birthday,” I said when my turn came. “You know, if you hadn’t walked into the record shop all those years ago, I wouldn’t be living here.”

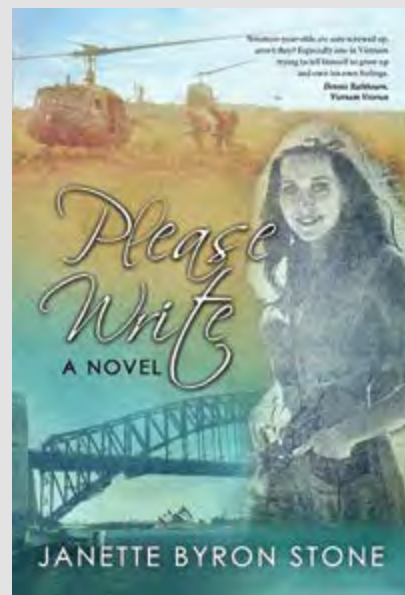
“If you hadn’t been there when I walked into the record shop, I wouldn’t be here either.”

FOOTNOTE: Sadly, we lost Phil to cancer in 2012. Carol loaded Phil’s Vietnam photo collection onto a CD. These pictures are but a few.

Philip Hogue was president of Key West Bank, acquired his pilot’s license, and owned a single-engine plane. He was an active Rotary member and always there to lend a hand.

We can never underestimate how we might influence another’s life. Phil convinced me to purchase a property in Key West. As happenstance would have it, my future husband, Tom, lived around the corner. Phil walked me along the beach to him the day we married.

On December 17, 2022, I spoke at *Books and Books* in Key West. Scheduled the week before Christmas, I anticipated an audience of maybe six, which included Carol, Tom, and a few loyal friends. Fifty people who turned out to celebrate Phil that night walked away with one more piece of the puzzle about those who experienced the conflict known as Vietnam.



CONNECTING LETTERS

Annette Langlois Grunseth

CONNECTING LETTERS AND POEMS FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR

WHAT STARTED OUT AS PRESERVING and publishing my brother's letters from Vietnam for my family became a hybrid of memoir, biography, history, and poetry to honor my brother and all Vietnam veterans. The journey to publishing *Combat and Campus: Writing through War* (Elm Grove Press, 2021) spanned more than five decades.

My brother, Peter Langlois, was drafted in 1967 after graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with a journalism degree. After being hastily trained by the Army and sent to Vietnam, he began writing letters home about ambushes, snipers, and horrific battles while living inside an armored personnel carrier in the jungles of Vietnam. His descriptive letters did not shield us from the danger and fear he experienced in infantry combat.

The letters were not censored. They were even published in our hometown newspaper in Wausau, Wisconsin, unedited. His letters spoke of a war that wasn't winnable and often contradicted news reports we heard at home.

For decades my parents kept the letters in their safe deposit box. Peter never wanted to publish a book of his letters;



it was too painful. He pursued a public relations career, married and had children, then sadly, died from Agent Orange cancer at age 59 in 2004.

My mother's final wish was *to please publish the book*. I became the keeper of the letters, now archived in my safe deposit box. Over the decades, I read those letters so many times I felt as though I had been there, minus the danger and terror.

A potential publisher suggested I add my story to the book about my concurrent UW-Madison experience of antiwar protests and the National Guard

on campus wielding rifles and bayonets outside our classrooms.

How would I bridge his story, written in thirty-six letters, together with my campus experiences, my grief about war, his death, and how negatively our soldiers were treated when they returned home from Vietnam?

I dug in. I gathered up my antiwar poems. My muse kicked in as I wrote poems to cope with my brother's death. In working with the letters, I was even dreaming about them.

Peter's vivid letters became my poetry prompts.

LETTERS AS PROMPTS:

Growing up in the shadow of WWII my brother

grabs a pear from the Green Stamp fruit bowl,

pulls the stem out with his teeth, pretends to throw it

making hand grenade blasting sounds.

He arranges green army men on the floor for attack and retreat,

plays war games in a foxhole dug into the empty lot next door.

The poem goes on to describe how hunting and Boy Scouting from his youth helped him survive in the jungle. The poem concludes:

He tells me, you have it easy

because you're a girl,

you weren't forced into war, or that kind of fear.

Maybe I have it easier, but whenever I eat a pear

I feel his burden—my guilt ignites

as the taste of pear explodes in my mouth.

I had finally written about my survivor's guilt about the war, the draft, and being exempt because I was a girl.

In Peter's October 1, 1968 letter he wrote,

Each day we keep adding sandbags to our bunkers in anticipation of a mortar attack on the battalion logger site. Everyone is tense and dog-tired. The sun burns daily and torrents of rain make the landscape muddier every night. This is Vietnam at present. A muddy stinking hell.

This paragraph prompted the poem, "The Arrival," about the stark contrast between his first days in Vietnam and my first days at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Vietnam—my brother's first letter

Stinking

Steamy

No privacy

No doors

Continued on page 52

Continued from page 51

*No locks
Barracks
Bunkers
Few possessions
Nothing to gain
Everything to lose.*

*Madison—me on campus
Freshman
Cool autumn air
Red and yellow trees
Marching band
Football
New faces every day
Dorm room
My own door with a lock
Good roommate
Textbooks
Notebooks
Everything to gain
Nothing to lose.*

In Vietnam, it was obvious to Peter the war was not winnable. This sentiment was also at the heart of the antiwar protests at home. Secretary of Defense

McNamara in Washington was still telling us we were winning—because he focused on enemy body counts. What about American deaths? This dichotomy was my prompt to write “Measures of War”: *Walter Cronkite, in our living room every night, /...half a million boots on the ground in Vietnam. / Secretary of Defense McNamara / ...must measure progress of this war. / What can he count on to confirm success?*

I countered that with, *My brother writes of combat, jungle sweeps, ambushes, / his buddies dying, grief pouring out like blood. / He asks, why are we here? What’s the objective?” The poem ends: “The common denominator is death, / where every body counts.*

The muse nudged deeper. I thought about the negative treatment of our Vietnam veterans, Peter’s war-related cancer, his death, and the three-day funeral honoring his life. In “Irony of it All,” the grief of his life and my grief poured out. It had taken decades for me to process how this war changed our family forever.

*Three days and three nights
of prayer and pomp,
flag-draped casket,
military medallion on his granite stone.
Welcome Home, Brother.*

Welcome Home, Brother, the universal greeting Vietnam vets give to each other is their unique bond. When they returned, there was little or no welcome home, so they continue to welcome each other this way, even today.

Peter died too young; I miss him every day. Writing poems in response to his letters has kept his memory alive for me as well as our family.

I laid out the manuscript on the dining room table, interspersed poems with the letters, rearranging them to fit the storyline. I envisioned how the book might help others find closure and a semblance of meaning out of the madness of war.

A faded slip of paper from Peter's 1998 visit to the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, was tucked in the back of his Vietnam photo album. Out of curiosity, I Googled the name of Peter's much-admired commanding officer who was killed in Vietnam, Capt. David R. Crocker, Jr; his name was on that slip of paper. From that search, I discovered the officer's wife is Ruth W. Crocker, author, MWSA ambassador, and coincidentally, a book publisher: Elm Grove Press in Mystic, Connecticut. We connected and corresponded, she read the manuscript and was taken by its uniqueness: War and antiwar, letters and poetry. After this incredible connection, Ruth Crocker also helped me locate soldiers from her husband's and my brother's unit. One veteran wrote to say he was in one of the

battles mentioned on page 68, then sent me a photo of himself from that day.

I have heard from professed non-poetry readers. Several are high-ranking military leaders who told me they related to the letters and the poetry. They sent emails saying how they were moved by the book; more than one person said the poems, especially, brought tears to their eyes.

A retired colonel from Washington, DC, asked me to send him an autographed copy of the last poem in the book to frame and hang on his wall next to photos of several generations of his family members who fought in past wars.

Another soldier emailed to say he was diagnosed with the same rare cancer as Peter but survived with treatment that had been perfected from earlier cases such as Peter's.

Those born long after the war tell me they are learning about the history and politics of the Vietnam War from the book.

After five decades, poetry paired with and prompted by Peter's well-written letters emerged as *Combat and Campus: Writing through War*, a hybrid of memoir, biography, history, and poetry to honor my brother, Peter Langlois, and all Vietnam veterans. And readers still mention the poetry and how it has touched them.

What's hiding in your attic or family desk that you could write about?

SLIPS OF THE TONGUE

Nancy Panko

“GOOD MORNING, DAD. WHAT’S NEW?”

“Oh, hi, Margie. Nothing much. Your mother is doing some online shopping, I think she’s ordering a shroud.”

“A shroud?”

“Yeah, do you want to talk to her?”

Having overheard George’s end of the conversation, I snorted. I took the phone from his hand but couldn’t talk because I was laughing so hard.

“Mom, are you crying?”

“No, laughing,” I managed to croak.

“You ordered a shroud?” Her voice had risen an octave.

“No, I ordered a bathing suit cover-up.

Margie began to laugh hysterically. “I hope you’re writing these ‘Georgisms’ down.”

“I am. I bought a notebook. I swear since he retired, they’ve gotten more frequent. I think it’s because he’s not having as many interactions with other people. They are getting funnier, though.”

“By the way, we love the Amazon Echo you bought us for Christmas but Dad has a hard time remembering how to activate it. One day I heard him in the kitchen, “Melissa, Alissa, Melinda



...” I came into the room and saw how agitated he was. He was almost ready to throw the device.”

He turned to me and growled, “This is infuriating! I am so vivid!”

“Vivid?”

“Yeah, I’ve never been so mad at a, a, a thing!”

“Her name is Alexa,” I said.

He gave me a sheepish look.

Margie burst out laughing again, “You two sure do keep me entertained.”

We got off the phone and I sat down to note the latest incident. I started reading through my collection of George's crazy mixed-up words to find they were just as funny as when I first heard them.

One day he came into the house, shut the front door, and sagged against it. I walked around the corner from the kitchen to ask if he was alright. He held up his hand, "Don't talk to me right now, I just need ten minutes to decompose."

I walked back into the kitchen hoping his decomposing didn't make a mess in the recently cleaned foyer.

Our daughter introduced us to the delightful taste of quesadillas. We both love them but George cannot, for the life of him, remember what they're called. One day he turned to me after breakfast, "Can we have conquistadors for supper tonight?"

"Conquistadors?" I had no idea what he was talking about.

"What are they?" I asked.

"You know, Margie made them for us. They're those things in a tortilla that are browned and crunchy on the outside with good meat and cheese inside."

"Ah, I think you mean quesadillas."

"Yeah, those."

"Maybe tomorrow we can have those cornucopias in the freezer," he suggested.

"I'm not sure what you mean," I replied.

I pulled out the freezer drawer and saw what I thought he was talking about, "You mean the spanakopita?"

"Yep," he confirmed. "I just love them."

"Sure, no problem." I scrambled toward my notebook to enter two in a row.

After dinner one night, we gathered all the waste cans in the house to empty them. George tied up the big white bag and with a flourish of his arm announced, "Madame, I shall depose this garbage." He was out the door in a flash.

I pictured him as a legal eagle, recorder on the table, taking testimony from the offending bag.

He did learn to master Alexa, but requesting specific music was an occasional challenge.

From the laundry room, I could hear an argument taking place between my husband and an electronic voice. "What seems to be the trouble?" I asked.

"I was trying to play one of my favorite country groups, Little Big Horn. It's not working," he declared pointing to the flashing hockey puck.

"Maybe, if you asked her to play Little Big Town you'd get somewhere."

"Oh." He scowled at me. I walked toward the desk and my notebook.

Paging through my notes, I came upon the funniest one of all, but this time

Continued on page 56

Continued from page 55

George was not the offender. His best friend was, but George was a willing accomplice, hanging on every word.

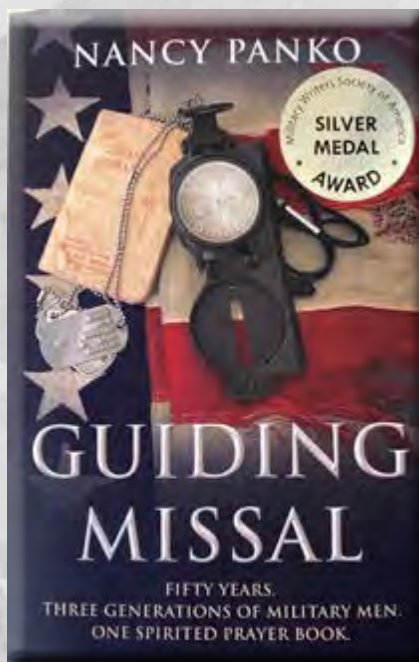
We were visiting our friends Anne and Bill for a few days. Anne prepared a sumptuous breakfast and had gone into the kitchen to retrieve cinnamon buns from the oven. Friends for over thirty years, the two men at the end of the table began to exchange stories of health issues plaguing men over a certain age. Bill related his experience of having a prostate biopsy. He reassured George, “It didn’t hurt because the doctor numbed me and it only took a few minutes. I never had any side effects and now, all we have to do is wait for the autopsy report.

I had just taken a big mouthful of orange juice. My eyes widened and I bolted from the table into the kitchen bursting through the swinging door. Anne looked up at me as she held a pan of hot buns in her oven mitts. I tried not to choke as I shook with laughter and attempted to swallow.

“What did he say now?” Anne inquired. She knew her husband.

I told her. Both of us convulsed as we leaned against the countertops. “Bill’s been like this ever since he retired.”

Just as I suspected, retirement is the culprit. I rest my case.



NANCY PANKO IS A RETIRED pediatric RN, and author of award-winning novels—*Sheltering Angels* and *Guiding Missal - Fifty Years. Three Generations of Military Men. One Spirited Prayer Book*. She is the author of medal-winners *Blueberry Moose*, *Peachy Possums*, *The Skunk Who Lost His Cents*, and *Chicken Scratchings*, a compilation of short stories.

Panko is a frequent contributor to *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and has written for *Guidepost* and *Woman’s World* magazines. Nancy is a member of the NC Scribes Writing Circle and The Military Writers Society of America.

She and her husband migrated from Pennsylvania to North Carolina in 2008 to live near their two children. They have four grandchildren and three grand-dogs. They love being in, on, or near the water of Lake Gaston with their family. You can contact Nancy at www.nancypanko.com or at gnnpanko@yahoo.com.

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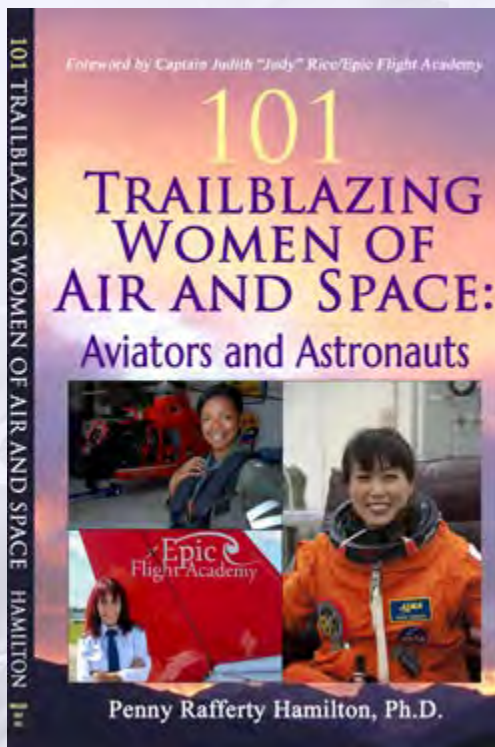
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