

## **VETERANS OF WAR, VETERANS OF PEACE ANTHOLOGY AUTHORS' BIOS**

### **MAXINE HONG KINGSTON, editor**

Maxine Hong Kingston began writing at the age of nine (“I was in the fourth grade and all of a sudden this poem started coming out of me”). She won her first writing award—a journalism contest at UC Berkeley—when she was sixteen. In 1976 *The New York Times* praised her first book, *The Woman Warrior*, comparing it to Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, saying, “It is an investigation of soul . . . Its sources are dream and memory, myth and desire. Its crises are crises of the heart in exile from roots that bind and terrorize it.” At the age of thirty-six, she was a celebrity, winning the National Book Critic’s Circle Award. Other books would follow, and the praise would continue to be unstinting. In 1980, she was named a Living Treasure of Hawai‘i by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i.

In 1991, following a massive fire in the Oakland-Berkeley hills that consumed Maxine’s house and the only copy of her manuscript-in-process, *The Fourth Book of Peace*, and as the first President Bush was ordering the invasion of Iraq, she began offering writing and meditation workshops for veterans, to help them give voice to their experiences and work toward personal peace. As she’d hoped, the writing became a process of healing and renewal not just for the veterans but also for Maxine. She drew on the experience of these workshops in *The Fifth Book of Peace*.

In 1997, Maxine Hong Kingston was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Bill Clinton. In March 2003, she was arrested for crossing a police line at the White House as part of a CODEPINK action to protest the Iraq War.

She retired last year from her career teaching literature and creative writing, mostly at UC Berkeley, where she was known for offering personalized instruction to each student, even in auditorium-sized classes, encouraging “real communication.” She and her husband, actor Earl King, live in Oakland, California. Their son, Joe King, is a musician in Honolulu.

### **LOUISE AMLONG**

Pacific waves lulled me to sleep as a baby and I took my first swimming lessons in the rollers of the Atlantic. I remember my father’s advice: “When a big wave knocks you down and pulls you under, relax and let the water take you. You’ll pop back up. Struggling will only make it worse.”

I graduated from college with a degree in wildlife science and began working as a biologist in remote field camps in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, surrounded by the clear blue ocean. From Hawai‘i, I moved to the mountains of Idaho and lived in a two-room cabin buried in a sea of snow in winter.

The first excruciating attempts to untangle my deep silence and give voice to the fears and griefs of a military officer’s daughter began at a veterans’ writing workshop with Maxine Hong Kingston and Thich Nhat Hanh. This story and the healing that continues would not have been possible without the compassionate support of my partner. His willingness to tell his own stories of Vietnam gave me the courage to seek out other veterans and, with their encouragement, begin to give voice to the suffering of the families left at home.

One night while I was on watch aboard a sailboat crossing the Pacific Ocean, a blue whale surfaced alongside the boat, and rolled one enormous eye out of the water to have a look at me. I gazed into the whale’s eye and knew in that moment that I had never truly been alone.

### **YIGAL BEN HAIM**

I was born and raised in Kibbutz Ramot Menashe in Israel. I lost my leg in the Yom Kippur War in 1973.

Studying and working as a trauma psychologist in San Francisco, I treated many Vietnam veterans, helping them to come home again. Since 1998, I've been living with my family in Haifa, Israel.

## **SHEPHERD BLISS**

Born into the proud, military family that gave Fort Bliss, Texas, its name, I followed my father, his father, and our ancestors to enlist as an officer in the United States Army.

I was trained to fight from an early age. Even the way I played chess at home was to learn military strategy. As a boy I had to stand at attention before my father, salute him, and address him as "Sir." I remember being a teenager in the army. It was the time of the Vietnam War, and I wanted to defend my beloved country from the "evil empire" of Communism. Testosterone pumping through my body, the thought of war was exciting. Basic training with my buddies at Fort Riley, Kansas, was actually a good experience. Though demanding, it felt like playing with the guys in the woods and preparing to defend our country. I was a boy soldier, enjoying my buddies and the conditioning of my male body into that of a man.

Bliss men had fought in American wars for more than two centuries. Wanting to become another General Bliss, I requested assignment in Vietnam, hoping it would help me rise up the ranks quickly. But after hearing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., preach, I resigned my commission and enrolled in the University of Chicago Divinity School, where I received a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree and was then ordained as a United Methodist minister. I became active in the resistance to the Vietnam War and then went to Chile during the democratic government of Salvador Allende.

Since that time, I have held teaching and administrative posts at various colleges, including Harvard, New College of California, and the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, and have contributed to eighteen books, including coauthoring *A Quiet Strength*. In 1992, I established the organic Kokopelli Farm in Sonoma County, California, and in recent years I have divided my time between Hawai'i and California. My current writing focuses on Peak Oil and how the decline in petroleum supplies is changing the Earth.

I left the military forty years ago, and I have worked hard to demilitarize myself. I'm older now, and war is no longer exciting or glorious to me. I know that even if you return alive, battle scars are inevitable, not just on the body, but on the soul.

I enjoy receiving e-mails from readers. Feel free to contact me at [sb3@pon.net](mailto:sb3@pon.net).

## **CARROLL PARROTT BLUE**

The following story is from my book, *The Dawn at My Back: Memoir of a Black Texas Upbringing* (University of Texas Press). In 2004, the American Library Association selected *Dawn* as one of the thirty best American Association of University Press publications. *Dawn's* DVD-ROM won the 2004 Sundance Film Festival Jury Award, and I am now completing an interactive multimedia installation for Project Row Houses of Houston, Texas.

As a documentary filmmaker, I have won prizes for the following: *Dubai 2005*, *The Fern Street Circus*, *Mystery of the Senses: Vision*, *Nigerian Arts-Kindred Spirits*, *Conversations with Roy DeCarava*, *Varnette's World: A Story of a Young Artist*, and *Two Women*.

My recent work, *The Dubai Orlando Project*, was a virtual collaboration between media production students from University of Central Florida, USA and Dubai Women's College, U.A.E.

At the end of the war in Viet Nam, pro-American groups of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Hmong relocated from Southeast Asia to the United States through Camp Pendleton, California. At the time, I was an aspiring photojournalist and asked a local San Diego newspaper for a press pass to photograph their arrival. Three days after the refugees landed, I photographed them throughout a makeshift tent city built by U.S. Marines on the

base. Years later I discovered that because there is very little remaining documentation of this 1975 settlement and its participants, these images have historical value.

### **BONNIE BONNER**

I am a native Northern Californian and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. As a freelance writer and photographer, I contribute to such publications as: the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Francisco Examiner Sunday Magazine, the Stockton Record, Rugby Magazine, and Poetry Flash. Bonnie Bonner is the pen and maiden name for Joanne Palamountain, my stage and married name. When outdoors, I take pleasure in running, hiking, and snow skiing. When indoors, I paint botanical watercolors. In 1968, I accompanied my late husband, Greg Palamountain, to military flight school and in 1969 to Korea, where he served as a helicopter pilot for the U.S. Army. Since then, I have traveled throughout Asia and have been writing about Vietnam with the Veterans Writing Group since 2000. A version of the following story, “For Soldiers Not Known,” won the 1999 University of California Lilli Fabilli/ Eric Hoffer Essay Prize and is part of a novel in progress.

### **NANCY SUE BRINK**

I was first invited to the Veterans Writers Group while working on a film about dog tags and was welcomed for all that I am— documentary filmmaker, writer, activist, and lover of birds, wilderness, good stories. I grew up during the Vietnam War and when I heard the courage of the veterans’ voices—the depth of their stories, the risks they take in telling those stories—I had to ask myself, “If they can do that, what do I have to be afraid of? What stories do I need to tell?” The people in this group helped me find the courage to write without fear.

Some things that are important to me: My exceptional family and friends. My small independent film and video company, Present Tense Productions. Hiking in the mountains. Working with the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, monitoring migrating hawks and falcons. (I take exception to the hawk–war metaphor.) Being a member of a Friends meeting (Quakers). Teaching filmmaking and writing to young people, with the hope that they will tell their stories and break open the heart of the world.

The Saturday after the Iraq War started in March 2003, I traveled to Sebastopol to join my friends in the Veteran Writers Group. The raw despair I felt about the war starting, about our inability to thwart the violent momentum of the Bush administration, took form in “The Night the War Begins in Iraq, We’re Learning CPR.”

“Wintering Cranes in the San Joaquin Valley” reflects for me another profound aspect of days spent with the group, writing and meditating: the search for healing and peace—not only for ourselves, but for as many as we can touch through our activities. On those days, we share with each other the beauty of a changing garden, walks through a eucalyptus grove, the seasons of birds, the California hills—the complex and intricately balanced relationships of the natural world—for me, the source of peace.

### **JOE BROTHERTON**

I was born in Bozeman, Montana, in 1918. After my father was shot to death, my mother married Rich Gex, a Basque cowboy. A Montana boyhood among cowboys, Indians, ranchers, rodeo hands, remittance men, gamblers, and survivors was her gift to me. Rich Gex raised me to ride horses, learn cowboy jobs and rules. In 1940, I graduated in literature and journalism from the University of Washington and took a job as a farmhand so I could write at night.

In World War II, I was commissioned directly from civil life as ensign, USNR. I volunteered for armed guard duty commanding a USN gun crew on armed Liberty ships and merchantmen in all three theaters of war. In 1945, I became an operations officer on the staff of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, Commander in Chief, Western Sea Frontier. After World War II, I moved to San Francisco, where I played roles with The Actors’ Workshop. I was emcee on KPIX’s Art in Your Life and KQED’s Discovery. Also at this time I was enrolled in the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and sang and acted in the San Francisco Opera Company, the Pacific Opera

Company, and the San Francisco Little Symphony. During these years, 1950 to 1980, I also worked as a painter, exhibited in one-man shows at the de Young Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Phoenix Art Museum, Bennington College, and Cambridge University. I published poems in Poetry and had a story in Best American Short Stories. In 1946, I married Mary Elisabeth Watts, of Seattle, Washington. She is mother of Shuah and Luke Brotherton. In 1982, I married Nam Kyong Hye, of Seoul, Korea. We lived in Kyoto, where I worked as a painter, studied Japanese art, and lectured at The Japan Foundation. In 1999, after a brief residence with Kyong Hye's family in Seoul, we returned to San Francisco.

### **SEAN MCLAIN BROWN**

I served in Episode I of the Gulf War as a Marine jet engine mechanic on Harriers. I helped our jets successfully drop more than two million pounds of ordnance, which killed thousands of people.

I don't need an alibi. I'm here to confess. I did it. I'm on the run from my own life. I ride on caffeine and fumes. I'm on the run from the Marines, from the charred bodies of young men, children, and women. Maxine and the other veterans of our workshop have given me the strength to stop running and begin healing. I found other veterans and people who understood the horrible tragedy and grief that war causes. I know now, as many Vietnam veterans have learned, that I will never be fully whole until I revisit Iraq and make peace with the people I once falsely believed were my enemies. I long for that day.

My prose poems, "Dear Commander in Chief," "Easter," and "Spin Drift," are fragments from my first novel, Shrapnel, which is a story about the weight of guilt, the levity of grace, and a soldier who struggles to make peace with the fragments of his past and finds his way home on America's black velvet highways. These poems are evidences of my distrust and disbelief in war as an option, as well as expressions of my personal experiences during and after Gulf War I.

You can follow my Project: Dailyness at: [www.seanmclainbrown.com](http://www.seanmclainbrown.com) or email me at [seanmclainbrown@gmail.com](mailto:seanmclainbrown@gmail.com)

### **JIM CASTELLANOS**

My military service began at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, on August 13, 2001. Following boot camp, I started Marine combat training at the Camp Pendleton School of Infantry and subsequently trained as an aviation ordnance systems technician at the Naval Air Technical Training Center in Pensacola, Florida. I then trained at the Naval Air Maintenance Training Marine Unit in Cherry Point, North Carolina, where I specialized in helicopter weapons systems. Upon completing my training, I arrived at my permanent duty station, Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 775, a UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra helicopter squadron at Camp Pendleton, California.

Since I was enlisted as a Marine reservist, I was immediately discharged from active duty and put on reserve status, which enabled me to begin academic studies at the University of La Verne in California. I completed only one semester before being activated from the reserves and deploying to Al Asad, Iraq, for a seven-month combat tour in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The following passage describes the events that prompted a two-year conscientious objector investigation by the Marine Corps.

### **TOM CURRIE**

Against my wishes and better judgment I reluctantly left the safety and comfort of my mother's womb and was propelled headlong kicking and screaming into this world on the eve of the Anzio beachhead and the invasion of Italy during the height of World War II, in which my father and all of my uncles proudly wore the uniforms of Army, Navy and Air Force (Army Air Corps then). I was raised in a military town and all my life I saw men go

off to war. The sea called and during the Vietnam War I volunteered for the Navy and served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Essex on her last voyage. An illustrious ship.

The flagship of the Atlantic fleet. I also served as a member of VC2 fighter squadron in Oceania, Virginia. Being somewhat of an impractical devil-may-care dreamer, I settled in Berkeley after my military service to live out my impossible dreams. So far my entire life has come true. The question of free will or predestination still remains unanswered. Life is more mysterious than ever—to my way of thinking at least.

### **DENIS DASS**

(Forthcoming )

### **DENNIS DRURY**

I live on Main Street in Sebastopol, California, with my wife and our dog. We have a grown son living with us some of the time and a daughter who lives in San Francisco. Besides writing fiction and poetry, I also sing with a number of choirs and opera companies in Sonoma County.

Born in Benton Harbor, Michigan, in 1949, I lived in Washington, D.C., and Fort Wayne, Indiana, and moved to the San Joaquin Valley of California in 1956. After living in Bakersfield and Modesto, my parents moved the family to Riverside, in Southern California, where I grew up and tried college without success. I got drafted in 1970. I returned home from Vietnam in 1972 and was educated at Santa Barbara City College and Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, where I studied English literature. I have done a variety of work that I used to think would make an interesting author note on the book jacket of my currently unfinished novel: laundry worker, bindery worker, landscaper, hospital page, typist, encyclopedia salesman, busboy, dishwasher, ice cream truck driver, construction laborer, bakery delivery man, disk jockey, greenhouse worker, office clerk, librarian, press operator, mail handler, tile factory worker, furniture mover, letter carrier, and more temporary occupations I have no doubt forgotten. Vietnam has had a profound effect on the rest of my life. I came back to the United States determined that I would always be a grower instead of a killer, a builder and not a destroyer. For the most part I have succeeded at what I have been trying to do. My love of music and poetry and beauty and the love of my family bring me joy.

### **GEORGE EVANS**

I've published five books of poetry in the United States and England, including *The New World* (Curbstone Press) and *Sudden Dreams* (Coffee House Press), plus poetry, translations, fiction, and essays in magazines and anthologies in the United States, Australia, England, Ireland, France, Japan, and Vietnam. A recipient of writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Lannan Foundation, I also received a Monbusho Fellowship from the Japanese government for the study of Japanese poetry. I was poetry and art editor of the national public arts project *Streetfare Journal*, which displayed contemporary world poetry, art, and photography on buses in cities throughout the United States; edited the two-volume work *Charles Olson & Cid Corman: Complete Correspondence* (National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, Orono); translated *The Violent Foam: New and Selected Poems* (Curbstone Press) by Nicaraguan poet Daisy Zamora; and cotranslated, with writer Nguyen Qui Duc, *The Time Tree*, a collection of poetry by Vietnamese poet Huu Thinh.

In the late 1960s I served in the U.S. Air Force as a medical corpsman, stationed in Libya during the Six-Day War of 1967 and in Viet Nam in 1969 during the U.S.–Viet Nam War, where I worked in an emergency room and triage facility at a hospital in Cam Ranh Bay. In Viet Nam, I became involved in various forms of antiwar protest and was eventually court-martialed there for ostensibly disobeying orders, though actual motivations for the trial were rooted in war protest activities. The prosecution was unsuccessful, and I was honorably discharged in early 1970.

## **DAN FAHEY**

This story evolved from an entry in a journal I kept while serving with the Navy in the Persian Gulf. It was July 13, 1991, our ship was in port in Bahrain, and I was awaiting confirmation of my application for conscientious objector status. As I sat in the cramped stateroom I shared with five other officers, I wrote that day to preserve for my own memory the experience of being on watch on the bridge: the sights and the sounds, the activity and the boredom, the external vigilance and the internal reflection. Eleven days later, after my orders finally came through, I flew back to San Francisco. Two months after that, on September 20, 1991, I left the Navy with an honorable discharge and a \$38,000 debt for my university scholarship.

In ways I could not then foresee, my experiences in the Navy shaped my future vocations and interests. For nearly six years I was a paralegal at Swords to Plowshares, a nonprofit veterans service organization in San Francisco, helping homeless and disabled veterans obtain health care and disability benefits. While at Swords, I became an advocate for veterans who developed health problems as a result of service during and after the 1991 Gulf War, and I served on the board of directors of the National Gulf War Resource Center, a veterans' advocacy group. I primarily investigated the scope and severity of exposures to depleted uranium (DU) ammunition, producing reports and providing testimony about DU for federal investigations of veterans' illnesses. Independently, I continue to promote expanded studies of veterans exposed to DU in the Gulf War and improved testing and health care for veterans exposed to DU during service in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My experience working on issues related to the Gulf War sparked my interest in understanding other post-conflict issues and debates. I obtained a master's degree in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, where I wrote my thesis on international responses to the environmental consequences of armed conflict. Currently I am pursuing a Ph.D. degree at the University of California at Berkeley, studying the social and environmental effects of conflict and development in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

## **JIM FAUSS (1940–1996)**

At a meditation retreat in the early 1990s, Jim came up to Therese Fitzgerald of the Community of Mindful Living, looked her in the face, and said, "Therese, give me something to do. I don't need to be here for myself. Let me help others. Let me do something for others." When Therese and her husband Arnie Kotler, of Koa Books, visited Jim in the hospital in 1996, when he was dying of cancer, Therese asked if he'd like to read the Buddhist "Five Remembrances." He responded, "Sure, I'll read." After reading the First Remembrance, "I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old," he grinned his wide spread of a grin and said, "That sure sounds good to me."

The last time Arnie and Therese visited Jim in the hospital, he was completely lucid although in much pain. At that time, the almond blossoms were in full bloom. Therese bent down to Jim's ear and said, "Jim, the Almond Blossom Sangha is blooming beautifully now."

He had so much energy, joy, and love to share with others. He created places of refuge for people to come, sit themselves down, and try to make peace with all the stuff kickin' around inside. He set out on a course of meditation to center himself, to ready himself to meet death with as much ease as he could muster, with the help of all his wonderful family and friends—friends in the hospice movement, his veteran buddies, his friends in the Methodist Church, the Buddhist meditation hall, the Jewish synagogue, and many other places of prayer and contemplation that he made his home.

There is a nugget of inconsolable grief for the loss of Jim. But there is also being mindful of Jim and what he taught, and allowing him to continue in us. We can let the Jim with his down-to-earth authenticity help us look at pain and strife and even smile; the Jim whose love of cultural diversity based on deep connections with people all over the world, the Jim who can inform us so deeply from that beautiful way, and the Jim whose great heart of compassion and soulfulness, we can let all these Jims warm our hearts.

## **DENNIS FRITZINGER**

My mother read me Longfellow's "Hiawatha" when I was little. My dad came home from the war, having survived internment in a POW camp after being shot down during the bombing of Dresden. A few years later he joined the Air Force, and my two sisters and I were raised as Air Force brats. In 1968 I was drafted and sent to Vietnam. I came back in 1970 and finished college, graduating from San Francisco State University with a degree in creative writing. I lived off the GI Bill until 1978, when I got a job at UC Berkeley. In 1986, I started reading my Vietnam poems in public.

"Charlie Don't Surf" was inspired by a line from *Apocalypse Now*. "Charlie" is a name we gave to the Viet Cong.

## **GARY GACH**

I was born in 1947 in Los Angeles. I've worked as an actor, book designer and typographer, bookstore clerk, assistant hospital administrator, legal secretary, longshoreman, magazine editor in chief, office temp, and web weaver. I attained a B.A., in English, in 1970. I'd always shied away from writing workshops, until I happened upon Maxine Hong Kingston's veterans' writing sangha, in 1994. I currently teach haiku at Book Passage University, Stanford University, and the San Francisco Zen Center. And I facilitate mindfulness meditation at the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples.

I am editor of *What Book!? Buddha Poems from Beat to Hiphop*, which includes works by a number of veterans; author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Buddhism*; and cotranslator of three books of poetry by Ko Un (*Flowers of a Moment*, *Songs for Tomorrow*, and *Ten Thousand Lives*).

## **ROBERT GOLLING, JR.**

I am a U.S. Navy veteran of the American War in Viet Nam. My tour of duty was from January to June 1969. I am a retired telephone engineer living with my loving wife, Rebecca, and our two sons in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. I home-school my thirteen-year-old son, Matthew, and watch (mindfully) my sixteen-year-old son, Alex, begin his adult life. My four older sons are grown and have their own families.

I believe it is my duty to live well, to lead a righteous life, and to remember the sacrifice of the soldiers and sailors who came before me. I am currently writing a story about a soldier who comes home from the Korean War, plants roses, and finds enlightenment.

## **RON GREENBERG**

During the Vietnam War, I worked with the Moratorium in Washington, D.C., helping plan demonstrations. In 1969, I married Barbara Sonneborn, a widow of the war. The indelible mark the war imprinted on her continues to have a dramatic effect on my life. We mourned Jeff's death together for years. Then I became coproducer of Barbara's film, *Regret to Inform*, about Vietnamese and American war widows. The film garnered awards around the world, including an Academy Award nomination, Best Director at the Sundance Film Festival, and a Peabody Award.

I have enjoyed a long legal career. In 2000, after eighteen years on the bench, I retired from the State Superior Court of California. Over the years, I published numerous articles about law and social justice in a variety of media, including *The New York Times Magazine*. Currently I work as a mediator and arbitrator. I've spent the past four years writing a novel about a judge and the basic issue of truth, both in the law and in personal life.

I joined the Vets' Writing Group many years ago. Barbara had been a member, and I was asked to join because my life had been so affected by the war in Vietnam.

## **SARA HAINES**

I was born and raised in Denver and attended the University of Northern Colorado. After graduation, I signed up with the Red Cross to go to Korea. My Supplemental Recreational Activities Overseas (S.R.A.O.) class

trained with the first S.R.A.O. class going to Vietnam at the American Red Cross headquarters in Washington, D.C. In class we discussed not using the term Donut Dollies or wearing skirts above the knee. There was no mention of body bags, 1,000yard stares, or incoming. I spent six months in Korea and seven in Vietnam—Da Nang, Phu Loi, and Qui Nhon. The Red Cross transferred us often to avoid attachments. The war seemed surreal, but returning home the day before Tet in 1967 left me feeling even stranger.

I continued to work for the Red Cross, first at the hospital at Travis Air Force Base on the psych ward, where the patients seemed like the sane ones. I was overwhelmed with the aftermath of the war when I was transferred to Letterman Hospital at the Presidio in San Francisco. There I worked on the quadriplegic, amputee, and plastic surgery ward. I tried to escape in a marriage that failed, lost a parent, and had many jobs and relationships. Twenty-five years later, I found myself meeting with a group of women in San Luis Obispo who had served in Vietnam. We discovered that none of us had spoken about Vietnam for twenty-five years, and now we couldn't stop talking. I wrote "Dream Catcher" for the wedding of a woman from our group to a Vietnam vet. Deciding to go to the dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial with the group inspired me to write "The Wall."

Six years ago, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's. No one else in my family has had this condition, which means it is probably more environmental than hereditary. I suspect that Agent Orange is a contributing factor, as there are a disproportionate number of veterans with P.D. It presents a new challenge, and I try to focus on the small things in daily life that I enjoy. Painting is a big part of my life now. I'm lucky to have a wonderful extended family here in Denver, where I grew up, as well as my second family, the coworkers I've worked with for the past six years. I miss the men and women who live on the edge (California), whose poetry fills these pages. They helped me regain a part of myself and introduce me to the world of poetry. I am honored to be a part of this anthology.

### **DONALD L. HANDLEY**

I am a sixty-two-year-old Vietnam veteran, and I live in Midland, Texas. I was an Air Force Aircraft Maintenance Officer in Vietnam with the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing at Danang Air Base from July 1968 to July 1969. I recently retired from a local retail store after twenty-two years but still work part-time for a convenience store chain. I am the proud grandfather of three beautiful grandchildren and recently became an equally proud great-grandfather of a beautiful great-granddaughter.

I started writing in 1988 after a visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. I was fortunate beyond words to meet a beautiful lady named Lana Spraker, who had been a protester during the war. It was the beginning of a long-delayed healing process. She is my muse, inspiring me to use writing to heal from the psychological trauma of war. I have had some success in getting some poems and short stories published over the years. I have also written two novels not yet published.

### **EDIE HEINEMANN**

After growing up in New York, I moved to Chicago in time to witness the mayhem that was the Democratic Convention in 1968. After supporting my husband, Larry Heinemann's, work as a writer, raising two children, volunteering many years within the Chicago public school system, and working at several positions, I turned to my own writing and discovered how two wars—the war of my father (World War II) and the war of my husband (Vietnam)—have influenced and defined my life. My journey included obtaining a master's degree in social science from the University of Chicago and a second one from the Smith College School of Social Work.

My birth was not only the result of an impassioned moment of my father's homecoming but also a wish for a new beginning for the family that had waited out his war tenure. That hope died early as he practiced medicine for the next ten years while insistently drinking himself to death. My mother attempted to receive benefits from the Veterans Administration after his early death but could prove no direct link and her request was denied. The legacy of being a child of hope followed and drove me to live out the mission of saving a soldier and making a family work—one imbued with conflict and paradox. War and loss have been persistent themes in my life—an emotional legacy that lives on despite driven efforts to be rid of them. I had to be numb to be able to type and

retype my husband's books *Close Quarters* and *Paco's Story*. Those who live with the soldiers who bring the aftermath of war into their homes develop strong barriers around their hearts. I have spent my life breaking down those barriers. "War in the House" explores that journey.

### **MARTIN HIGGINS**

My earliest childhood memories are filled with laughter, songs, and an extended family so diverse it took me well into early teens to sort out aunts and uncles from close family friends. My father had returned from World War II severely wounded, so he was loved and respected by everyone in his New York City neighborhood. I was the firstborn son of a hero.

In the mid '50s we moved to Long Island. My Catholic school education, guided by aged Dominican nuns, pointed me toward the priesthood. By the time I was twelve, the question was not college or seminary, it was which seminary. Two years later, a high school English teacher lent me a copy of Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer*. I read it, and my stars shifted position. I lost the Faith, but not my faith in myself.

I toured with a blue-eyed soul band, built motorcycles and hydroplanes, sang in the New York State Choir, and by the time my draft notice came, didn't have the grades to maintain my college deferment. I'd heard that some draftees were being routed into the Marines, so I joined the Army.

The following story was written with the loving support of Maxine and the Veterans Writing Group. My Vietnam experiences still tear at my soul, but they are much more tolerable when bound to paper.

Now I live in Denver with my patient and loving wife, Laura, and our two heart-song daughters. I have not found a way to avoid my memories when they pull me out of our comfortable life, but I've learned to incorporate the lessons and insights revealed to me into my stories, scripts, songs, and laughter. My advice: Share your stories.

### **HO ANH THAI**

I was born in 1960 and was evacuated from Hanoi at the age of six because of the American bombing. For the next seven years, I lived in refugee areas in the countryside. After graduating from the College of Diplomacy, I was drafted into the People's Army and served in the 47th Battalion from 1985 to 1987. I was a diplomat in South Asia and am presently a member of the Executive Committee of the National Vietnam Writers Association and Chair of the Hanoi Writers' Association, as well as consulting editor for Curbstone Press' *Voices from Vietnam* series. I've written eighteen novels and short story collections.

In my 1985 novel, *Nguoi dan ba tren dao* (published in the U.S. in 2000 as *The Women on the Island*), I became one of the first writers in Vietnam to bring attention to what had been a forbidden subject: the terrible cost paid by thousands of young women veterans of the Youth Volunteer Battalions of the People's Army of Vietnam. Their main duties during the war were to keep the Ho Chi Minh Trail network open, fill in bomb craters, repair the roads, and defuse or explode unexploded ordnance. After the war, many of the women who survived found there was no place for them in the society they had defended. They were kept together in their old units and sent as labor battalions to underdeveloped parts of the country. Exiled to lives without families or children, having lost the opportunity to get married when they were young, many sought consolation in getting pregnant and having a child out of wedlock.

The following excerpt from *The Women on the Island* depicts a confrontation by a brigade of these women with a callous bureaucrat who brutalizes a pregnant woman to find out who is the father of her unborn child. The women, empowered by the sacrifices of their military service, rebel against his mistreatment.

### **HANH HOANG**

I grew up in Saigon and left Vietnam in 1974, five months before the war ended. I've worked as a teacher and freelance journalist, earned my Master of Fine Arts in creative writing at Saint Mary's College in Moraga,

California, and am working on a Ph.D. in English. I am finishing a collection of short stories, whose characters are mainly Vietnamese and Vietnamese–Americans. “Field of Heads,” which won first prize in the 2005 Writer’s Digest Short Short Com petition, is about the cultural and social isolation that some of us immigrants suffer in a modern society.

### **DOUG HOWERTON**

In 1967, I was in the United States Navy on the Aircraft Carrier USS America during the Six-Day War, watching the destruction of a culture by surgical air strikes. The precision of the bombs and the bravado of the carrier crew made a peace warrior out of me. I wrote “Firing Blanks at Moving Targets” to help heal the dreams that haunt me of screaming people in craters full of blood that I still dream in black- and-white 3D images.

I was shell-shocked and caught up in rock ’n’ roll when I joined the infamous Philadelphia revolutionary group MOVE in 1971. Then a self-proclaimed child of love, I attempted to bring a wreath of peace into a revolutionary war zone. I labored to explain to MOVE members and anyone who would listen that revolution means total change with an eye on human awareness, not just social structure. It fell on deaf ears as the blind continued to lead the blind into the noise of time. Yet that spirit, that spark of peace and love, lives on as a bulletproof entity that denies the theater of war respectability. This short story about the MOVE revolution comes from my unpublished novel, *Born under Prophecy*, and my poetics, “War Isn’t Peace.”

### **JOHN PATRICK IGNATIUS**

When the Marines stormed the city of Fallujah, I found myself fascinated with the coverage on the News Hour. I watched as squads of Marines went from wall to crumbling wall shooting and calling to each other; they even had intermittent interviews with squad leaders and platoon sergeants. These were real people, and I got to recognize them as they continued fighting during the days of that week.

Perhaps my strangest reaction to that week was the feeling like I should have been there with those hard-chargers. I had served in the Marine Reserve from 1987 to 1993 and still felt like a wayward member of this bellicose tribe. My unit was called for the first Gulf War in 1990, but that action fortunately was over so quickly we never made it out of Los Angeles. I have spoken to other former Marines who shared a similar feeling and even know of one vet of the current war who wanted to return after some of the guys in his unit died in Iraq after his tour and contract were up. I still don’t know what to clearly make of these seemingly crazy feelings.

A native Southern Californian, I now live with my family in the Diocese of Monterey in the parts of California I love the most. “The Prayer of Saint Francis” takes inspiration from a story I saw on a late- night TV news magazine about a Marine who came home from Iraq to Chicago. I do not recall the name of the Marine in the story, but this “Prayer” is for all Marines.

Now I enjoy chopping wood for our wood-burning stove and looking for sand dollars with my two sons and golden retriever on Grover Beach.

### **ELIJAH IMLAY**

I grew up in what was then rural Maryland outside of Washington, D.C., with miles of woodland on either side of a brick home. My father was a paleontologist whose research supported the continental drift theory. He took his family with him summers camping out in mountains and deserts collecting fossils. He and my mother imbued in their children a love of nature and the importance of contributing to the betterment of our planet. My oldest brother, Marc, wrote the proposal for the Endangered Species Act and was the first scientist responsible for listing endangered species. My other older brother, Richard, is a nuclear physicist.

I liked science and built a homemade telescope that I spent whole nights using to view objects in the sky. However, my stronger interests were music and literature. I practiced the clarinet a couple of hours a day, which may have saved my life when I was drafted into the army. Like many of my generation, I was opposed to the war in Viet Nam. Three times I evaded the draft, then volunteered to be an army bandsman. I discovered many fine

musicians similarly drafted. After the war I worked as a teacher and then a social worker. I studied the teachings and the contemplative sides of spiritual paths, especially Sufis, and became a retreat guide. At the age of forty-eight I decided to write poetry for the first time since college.

During a workshop, participants were asked to remember in sensual detail a significant event in their lives, and I was back in Viet Nam. I started writing about the war and located a friend from that time after twenty-six years. At the age of sixty, I discovered that I had completed a manuscript of poetry about the war. Now my interest is in transformation of conscience, individually and collectively, as well as consciousness. My day job is counseling emotionally disturbed adolescents in a school-based program. I live close to the beach in Ventura, California, with my wife, also a poet. We have two grown children who also care about the well-being of our planet.

### **CHANPIDOR JANKO**

In 1968, I was born in Svay Rieng City, Cambodia, near the Vietnamese border. I am a survivor of the Pol Pot regime. I lost my father, my oldest brother, and several aunts and uncles between 1975 and 1979. In Cambodia, I was a teacher at a public high school in Phnom Penh. I married James Janko in 2000. Two years later, we moved to the United States of America. I am now living with my husband in Oakland, California. I have been interested in a medical profession since I was a girl. I will begin nursing school in 2006, and I hope to one day be a nurse-practitioner.

### **JAMES JANKO**

My novel, *Buffalo Boy and Geronimo*, began at a meditation-and-writing retreat in which children were present. Maxine Hong Kingston, who led the writing part of the retreat, offered a suggestion: "If you write about war, write about it in a way that a child would understand."

I began that day to write about the children and animals of Southeast Asia, and I wrote in detail about the land, the rivers, that which sustains life. I was a platoon medic in the Viet Nam–American War, a war that—in my memory—had been a story about soldiers. But my novel went in a direction that surprised me: The land became a character, and the children and animals became main players. Nguyen Luu Hai (*Buffalo Boy*) and Antonio Lucio Conchola (*Geronimo*) are relentless in their search for beauty. They do not compromise. They persevere.

### **PHIL JOHNSON**

In the early 1960s, when the United States was sending advisors to Vietnam, I was faced with the choice of being drafted or leaving the country. I do not believe in killing people to support the power plays of governments who jump into wars for questionable reasons. So I joined the Air Force Medical Corps and worked in hospital psychiatric wards. During my reserve duty through 1968, I worked in Air Force hospitals in New Jersey and California, helping to treat the increasing number of airmen who came back physically and emotionally wounded from the Vietnam War.

In the 1970s, I taught in community colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area, focusing on outreach to underprivileged individuals and groups. I taught in a reentry program for Vietnam vets returning to college. I also counseled delinquent boys and worked as a juvenile probation officer. I worked as a parent participation coordinator for countywide childcare and development programs and served on the California Governor's Advisory Committee Task Force for Child Development Services.

In recent years, I have returned to teaching—in programs for adults at City College of New York in Harlem and at Children's Aid Society in a community school in Washington Heights. More recently I taught reading, writing, and math skills to youthful offenders at a county correctional facility in western Massachusetts.

Currently I am associate director of youth programs for a community center in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. I also run a poetry and fiction reading series at a local bookstore in the Berkshires and a radio program that

features the spoken word and music across cultural boundaries.

## **ROBERT JOST**

I was born in Oakland, California, on January 28, 1947, and raised in San Leandro. I was drafted into the Army in 1966 and arrived in Vietnam on my birthday in 1967. In-country, I served as an infantry soldier in the 9th Infantry Division with Company B 4/47th Infantry and with the 2/60th Infantry. Our area of operation was south of Saigon in the Mekong Delta.

After military service, I worked as a baker. The last bakery position I held was in Alameda County Jail, Santa Rita, where I supervised and worked with inmates. Then I was a supervisor of food services at Highland Hospital in Oakland. My county employment ended in 1995, when I was laid off during a period of downsizing. At first, being out of work brought anxiety; however, I came to realize that it was a gift, which allowed me to pursue education.

I began writing poetry, which has become part of my healing process, while attending Chabot College in Hayward, California. I received a degree in English literature from Holy Names College (now Holy Names University) in Oakland and a master of theological studies degree from the Franciscan School of Theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. My master's thesis, which focuses on pastoral ministry to Vietnam veterans, is entitled "God! Where Were You in Vietnam and Where Are You Now: Theological Perspectives and Pastoral Approaches for Veterans Whose War Experience Damaged Their Christian Faith." I hope to publish this thesis. I volunteer as a boxing coach at the University of California, Berkeley. I have one son, David, who at the time of this writing is twenty-nine.

## **WAYNE KARLIN**

I began my writing and editing career after my return from the Vietnam War; I served as a Marine in I Corps—part of that time as a helicopter gunner. I've published eight books—two memoirs and six novels.

Over the last decade and a half, I've been involved in efforts to bring contemporary Vietnamese literature to an American readership, and vice versa, as a form of reconciliation through literature, serving, pro bono, as American editor of Curbstone's Voices from Vietnam series. My involvement with that project began when I met Le Minh Khue in 1993, while I was a visiting writer at the William Joiner Center at the University of Massachusetts. Part of the Joiner program was a project to bring together Vietnamese and American writers who were on opposite sides of the war. Khue, one of the leading writers of Vietnam and a chief editor at the largest publishing house in that country, is a veteran of the Volunteer Youth Brigades; she had been one of thousands of teenage girls who had left high school and went to work on the Ho Chi Minh Trails, filling in bomb craters and disarming or exploding unexploded bombs, and while often under heavy attack from our aircraft.

Khue and I discovered that we had at one time been in the same area during the war, and I thought about a mission I'd flown on when I'd shot down into that thick jungle canopy that covered the area, and how she could have been under it, an invisible but hated target. That moment of realization was an epiphany for me, and that invisibility and hatred that allow human beings to be reduced to targets or weapons or foci of fear came to stand for me as the exact opposite of what good stories, literature, could do for and to human beings. "The American Reader" is a story which deals directly with that scenario—in it I imagine the young girl on the ground, a reader, as Khue was, of American novels, and that young man in the air and his own reading habits, as the story reveals.

## **MIKI KASHTAN**

I grew up in Israel, where war was a persistent and formative part of my life. Like most Israelis, I identified with the story of a persecuted people defending itself. I saw us as being misunderstood by the world and having only our ingenuity to protect us from annihilation. The Six-Day War took place when I was eleven. By 1973, when the Yom Kippur War broke out, I had begun to see war as a choice and to envision other options for dealing with conflict. I was seventeen, and I decided to leave Israel, unwilling to support the violence being done in my name.

But a few months later, unable to escape the draft, I became a soldier, and by the time I was twenty, I was defeated and numb, my dreams lost. Seven years later, in 1983, I left Israel and have lived in the United States ever since, working steadily to heal the traumas of my life, personal, familial, social, and political.

In 1994, I heard a reading of the Veterans Writing Group at Cody's Books in Berkeley, and I knew I wanted to join the group. I sensed that this would be a place I could dig deep into my fears, longings, and unhealed experiences. Being part of this group has been everything I had hoped for, and more.

The following story, "Esh," gives voice to what I endured in Israel and what I am still struggling with to understand and become whole. For the past ten years, I have dedicated my life to teaching nonviolence in word and spirit, fervently hoping to contribute toward a world in which war is obsolete.

### **SHARON KUFELDT**

Growing up, I had tears of pride in my eyes as the flag passed by. My heart beat more quickly as they played the national anthem. My father served (was drafted) into the Marine Corps in World War II. He was called up to serve again, in Korea, and served at the Chosin Reservoir. He served further as commander of his VFW post in South Denver, where I grew up. I wrote the newsletter, sold poppies, and listened to the vets' stories.

I was raised to believe in the good things our Constitution and our country stand for. I believed, and still do, that everyone should give service of some kind for two years. I was raised to take the responsibilities of citizenship seriously. Trying to put myself through college was tough, as women weren't paid much for their work. At the age of twenty-one, ripe for service, I was very thoroughly recruited by a family friend; I believed that I would finish college, become an officer, and serve my twenty or more years to retirement. And, yes, that I would be treated equally with the men. I proudly donned the USAF uniform. I enlisted in 1969 during the Vietnam War.

Today I work for peace. As the vice-president of Veterans for Peace, I strive to maximize the voices of veterans to end war and the militarization of our youth. I work to make visible the misogyny and treatment of women in the military. I struggle daily with the seeming ambivalence of so many of my fellow citizens to taking direct action to stop the Iraq War.

### **JOE LAMB**

I served as a hospital corpsman in the United States Navy from 1968 through 1971, during which time I worked on intensive care and psychiatric wards. My jobs after the military have included building solar homes, teaching ecology, and organizing against nuclear weapons. In 1990, I founded the Borneo Project, a nongovernmental organization that promotes rainforest preservation and indigenous rights. I am co-owner of Brende&Lamb, a company that cares for trees. I live in Berkeley, California, with my wife, Anna; my four-year-old daughter, Carson Lamb; and our dog Xtra.

### **ROBERT LANDMAN**

In 1969, I was in the infantry on the front lines in Viet Nam. After nine months, I had a unique encounter on a mountainside with a North Vietnamese soldier that changed my life. "The True Geography of Meeting" is the story of that encounter and all that followed.

Currently, I live on a mountainside in Occidental, California, called "The Place of Peace" by the Pomo Indians, the first people who lived here. It is a good place to "be in the silence" to better hear the voice of Spirit. This is where "In the Silence" came to be written, although about a silence of a different kind.

Since the beginning of the Veteran Writers' Group, I have worked with many forms of storytelling and writing. I discovered that screenplay writing is a powerful way to shine light on the great mysteries of life and a profound way to express the deeper truths as they are revealed. A good story can become a great movie that can transform people's lives and the world.

Over many years, Maxine Hong Kingston, Earl King, and many other members of the Veteran's Writer's Group and I have been working on a story for a movie. It is based on the writings of Maxine Hong Kingston and original ideas from our meetings. Called *The Way of Peace*, it begins in ancient China, where the lives of a young girl and boy interweave over three lifetimes. With a charge from their ancestors, each searches for the lost Book of Peace. In an unfortunate incident and loss of innocence, they enter into an escalating cycle of violence that spans continents and centuries. Ultimately, they find the Book of Peace. As they read the Book of Peace, the fragile, ancient text disintegrates in their hands. What they learn is enough to begin a new path, but with a catch . . . Their story is our story, for our time and our world.

Over a lifetime of reflection, I have come to believe that everyone has a gift. Finding, developing, and sharing our gift is our true work. The fruit of our work is our gift to Spirit and to each other. Our gifts grow best in peace. The greatest gifts foster peace. My greatest prayer: May everyone find and share their gift. May everyone live in peace.

### **WILLIAM LARSEN**

The road to hell, they say, is paved with good intentions. So was the path most of us took to Vietnam. In my case, this involved my father, Earnie Larsen, a warm, rough sports-obsessed man of Viking heritage who valued physical prowess to an extreme degree. Unfortunately, I took after my maternal grandfather, a small artistic fellow whose only obsession was his clarinet. Never doubting my father's love, I was nonetheless unable to excel on the athletic fields that so captivated his attention.

But I did find a way, and that was the war in Southeast Asia.

Much later, I discovered that healing combat trauma often demands resolving the initial motivation that led to the battlefield, as well as what happened on it. Men go to war for many reasons. The most common, I believe, is blind obedience and the surrender of our moral authority. My father loved me dearly, but carried into adulthood wounds of violence and self-doubt that compromised his ability to parent wisely.

In the way of fathers and sons, his doubt became my doubt.

On the day I was wounded, I realized I had crawled into battle as much to win Dad's approval as to help wounded grunts. If Vietnam taught me any one thing, it is that I alone am responsible for my choices. This is a lesson I have tried to represent in my personal life and psychotherapeutic work with combat vets and others.

### **PAULINE LAURENT**

On May 10, 1968, my husband, Sgt. Howard E. Querry, was killed in the jungles of Vietnam. I was twenty-two years old and seven months pregnant.

For the following twenty-five years, I suffered from nightmares, depression, and unresolved grief. In 1990 after a significant loss, I fell into a major depressive episode. For the first time in my life, I lost my will to live.

Because I had a daughter still dependent upon me, I chose to investigate the loss rather than commit suicide. I started therapy, began 12-Step Recovery work for my addictions, and most importantly, started writing.

Writing was the container that could hold my grief. The blank page wanted to hear every last detail.

Since publishing my memoir, *Grief Denied: A Vietnam Widow's Story*, I have been helping others explore their unresolved issues through my work as a Life Coach, an Inspirational Speaker, and a Workshop Leader. For more information visit: [www.griefdenied.com](http://www.griefdenied.com) and [www.gutsycoaching.com](http://www.gutsycoaching.com)

### **LE MINH KHUE**

During the American War, I served in the Youth Volunteer Brigades working on the Ho Chi Minh Trails. Later I

became a war correspondent. I was in the war from 1966 until its end in 1975, serving on some of the most dangerous battlefields. I've written eleven short story collections and novels, and I'm currently chief fiction editor of the Vietnam Writers Association Publishing House, and a consulting editor of Curbstone's Voices from Vietnam series. Many of my stories and books are concerned with culture, environmental degradation, and human kindness, and in "Fragile as a Sunray" the dream of healing some of the wounds war left in my country.

### **JADE LEE**

From my earliest memory, I was told what my duties and responsibilities to my family and my race were as a first-generation Chinese girl learning English in 1940s San Francisco Chinatown. The concepts of responsibility and duty were difficult for me to understand, though I did get that they were important and something I had to do, though I wasn't sure why. As I was growing up, I faced sexual abuse, battering, and cultural and religious conflicts. I was usually told that the sexual abuse and beatings were my fault for something that was intrinsically wrong or "bad" about me, so I focused on myself to avoid being "bad."

The events described in "Beating" marked a major change in my thinking and perception of my place in the world. When I saw the blood on the back of my grandmother's bathrobe, I felt responsible for her pain, and from that time took on the responsibility for the wellbeing of the people I loved and, for many years later on, for the world.

It took several years of counseling, support groups, and "talk story" for me to be able to come to terms with the pain of my childhood. As a counselor and an activist I became comfortable speaking of the abuses in my childhood without shame or fear. A close comrade took me to the Veteran's Writers' group, led by Maxine Hong Kingston. "Beating" was the second thing I attempted to write after joining the group. After reading it and getting feedback from the group, I was able to see myself as a veteran of domestic wars.

### **MICHAEL LITTLE**

Two American wars bookend the middle passage of my life and the lives of the writers alongside me in the pages of this book. While my father was leading a battalion of helicopters in Viet Nam, I quit military service for good reason.

Let me begin at the beginning. In the spring of 1944, I crouched in my mother's belly. At twenty-one years, my father was the trainer of bomber pilots until the U.S. Army Air Force put him on the short list of pilots to drop the atom bomb. I thank the infinite wisdom of the Pentagon that he was passed over as too young for the job.

I was born just as World War II ended. Civilian life didn't suit my folks, so they reenlisted in the new aviation branch of the Army and got sent to Austria in 1949. During the fifties and sixties, I traveled as one of three dependents from Austria to Fort Bragg, Japan to Fort Rucker, France to Fort Leavenworth. My father is credited for his role in creating the helicopter-mounted machine gun. In 1965 to 1966, when my father joined the 1st Air Cav as a helicopter battalion commander, I joined ROTC at Dartmouth College. I twice refused military service: once with courage, once with cunning. After the birth of two sons, I began teaching college and making movies. In 2003, I went home to Fort Hood, Texas, to take care of my father in his last round with Parkinson's disease just as the liberation of Iraq turned sour. While on errands, I began to interview the families of soldiers. (Readers can use Google to find the community blog HomefrontBulletin and watch these interviews.)

Over forty years, shame and guilt have circled over my manhood like birds of prey. Shame that I betrayed my father, guilt that good men went to war in my place. This is the account of how, watching over my father's dying while the American War in Iraq turns sour, I redeem myself.

## **MORGAN JANE LOTT**

I was born in Fairbanks, Alaska, of an Armenian father whose family escaped the 1911 genocide by the Turks, and I grew up under the shadow of the DEW line—the Distant Early Warning system that was supposed to alert the United States when the Russians attacked. My dad was a civil defense director, and it was his job to ensure that citizens stocked up on emergency supplies in the event of nuclear war. I worried because permafrost prevented anyone from digging a bomb shelter. But the things we worry about are seldom the things that destroy us.

Vietnam was at the other end of the world from my isolated life in Alaska. But it was a different enemy that took me prisoner a quarter of a century later. After eight years, I am still caught in the crossfire of the so-called War on Drugs, a war that blames its victims, criminalizes its wounded, and enriches its enemies. Like Vietnam, this U.S.-backed war is a losing battle, and America has once again turned its back on those forced to fight on the front lines.

## **FRED MARCHANT**

I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1968 so that I could go to Viet Nam and be, as I imagined it, a writerly witness to that war. I was a young poet, just out of college, and thought it was my special fate and duty to do this. Underneath my conscious understanding of what I was doing were all sorts of tangled motives, including the desire to get out of Providence, the desire not to “miss” the war of my generation, especially given its by then apparent moral emptiness. I have to admit also that I was out to prove I had a certain version of “manhood,” and perhaps even had the desire to pull a trigger.

Two years later, while I was serving on Okinawa and within a few weeks of rotating into Viet Nam, I formally declared my conscientious objection to the war in Viet Nam and to all wars. Six months later I was honorably discharged as a conscientious objector, one of the first Marine officers ever to be so discharged. The months preceding and following that decision were in effect the crucible out of which I claimed and began to forge my own being. It also took me twenty years of writing before I ever wrote anything worth reading about that experience.

## **ROMAN A. “HOPPER” MARTINEZ**

I enlisted in the Army in January 1969 to be a chaplain’s assistant. I was an altar boy and a choirboy and believed in “Thou shall not kill.” So I joined the Army to do my service to my country in the shortest possible time, which would be a two-year enlistment. Unfortunately, my enlistment officer didn’t tell me that he put me in for infantry rather than as a chaplain’s assistant. So after four months of training, I ended up in Vietnam in June 1969. I informed my officers that I was a conscientious objector and that I had enlisted to be a chaplain’s assistant, so they volunteered me for a recon platoon, which was totally contradictory to my beliefs.

The time that really got me ... I was very new in-country and new in the recon platoon. We met the enemy. He fired on us and we fired back. There was a saying, “cho hoi,” which means, “Open arms— I surrender.” We hollered out to them “cho hoi,” and when they surrendered we killed them. That was my first experience of how things were done.

I had a burial ceremony for myself. I actually got an M-16 and a bayonet, and I had a funeral for Roman Martinez. I buried him and my God, so that the altar boy and God could not see what I was doing.

My alter ego, the one who was stronger than the altar boy, took over and Hopper came out. That was what they called me in Vietnam. He took over the responsibility for the carnage that was going to happen. Death and having to die were all taken care of by my alter ego. All the memories of the horrors of war were buried when I came home. I didn’t think about them. I grew my hair long and put on hippie beads and pretended like I never went. After the time went by, things started to happen. The old time bomb of the Vietnam vet.

## **KEITH MATHER**

My life began on November 30, 1946, in San Mateo, California. A year later my family moved to Sterling, Colorado. I was raised on the prairies near the Kansas–Colorado border in a working-class town. We had good schools; it was a safe place to grow up. We all walked to school by ourselves, even at five years old. The winters were hard on my father; he was a plumber and he was frostbit the winter prior to our leaving to return to California.

We arrived in 1957 and lived in Brisbane, just outside San Francisco. We moved to San Bruno after a year, where I attended school and had the California life. As a teenager, I had a difficult and wonderful time, a few problems with the law and at school, but somehow the '60s worked for me. With my rebellious nature, the music, dancing, and progressive thought moved me to happy and meaningful times and places. I danced at the Avalon Ballroom to Moby Grape and the Dead, Quicksilver, Country Joe and the Fish, the Airplane, and Janis Joplin with Big Brother. We all had a good time.

Then came the draft. I was inducted into the Army on the 17th of September, 1967. After basic, at Christmas, I got a two-week leave. I got back in with family and friends, and during that time I decided to resist the war. In July, I was a member of the Nine for Peace—nine AWOLs representing all four branches of the military. We held a press conference and resigned from the service and said, “Come and get us!”

Three days later, they did. I was put in the Presidio stockade. On October 11 a fellow prisoner, while on a work detail, was shot to death by a guard. Twenty-seven of the prison population demonstrated nonviolently, and we were charged with mutiny, punishable in wartime by death. Shortly after the mutiny, I was convicted and sentenced to four years at Leavenworth. Awaiting a second court-martial for mutiny, I chose to forgo decades in prison. Along with a friend, I escaped on December 24, 1968, and went north to Canada, where I lived for twelve years, finding other deserters and draft resisters. I lived, played music, and worked. I returned in 1980 with my two young children and, in 1984, served four months in a military prison and then received a dishonorable discharge.

## **PHYLLIS MESHULAM**

Like everyone of my generation, the Vietnam War made its mark on me, savaging my college-aged sensibilities with its insanity. However, I was not affected directly as so many in our writing group were. By the mid-'70s, I had put it out of my mind and gone on trying to address my own issues of how I fit into this world and what I was going to do in it. I taught, raised a family, and took many, many years to acknowledge my interest in writing. This I finally did in the late

'90s, going back to school and getting my MFA in both poetry and fiction. In late August of 2001, I sent my older daughter off to Pomona College, my own alma mater. When the attacks of September 11 occurred, it became obvious that our country was going to go to war again and the feeling of déjà vu was overwhelming. I was overcome by a huge sense of responsibility for not having attended to war and peace issues during the intervening decades. I became a peace and political activist and still struggle to find ways to use my skills as a writer in the service of nonviolence. Learning our own ecosystems, eating locally grown organic food, entertaining one another with our own words and music—these are indeed recipes for more harmonious, vibrant living, free from corporation-dictated excesses.

## **CLARE MORRIS**

I am a veteran of the peace movement, in which I have been involved since 1968. In 1971, I helped found the Ecumenical Peace Institute of Northern California, a chapter of Clergy and Laity Concerned About the War in Vietnam. After working full-time with the institute, I experienced the need activists have for deepening their contemplative life and, in 1974, helped to organize the Angela Center in Santa Rosa, California. Its programs integrated social responsibility, spirituality, psychology, and the arts. In 1983, I left Angela Center, earned a Ph.D. in psychology, and became a licensed psychotherapist. At the same time, I was trained by the Guild for

Psychological Studies in San Francisco to lead seminars in spirituality, myth, and depth psychology.

I have participated in the Veterans Writing Group since 2001. The privilege of hearing poems, stories, and reflections written by people with a wide variety of military experience has deepened my understanding of war and its imprint on the Web of Being.

### **DON EDWARD MORRIS**

What do you do when you are sixty-two and permanently disabled by multiple sclerosis? The world gets much smaller when you can no longer go out into it easily. Time gets harder to fill without the use of hands and with increasingly limited endurance. Two problems arise, how to meet the needs for community and creativity. It helps to have a bit of serendipity. A year ago, I happened upon an article in the local newspaper about a writing group started by Maxine Hong Kingston that was still meeting after ten years. While the group's original purpose was to heal the wounds of Vietnam veterans through writing and an encouraging community, it had grown to include people from a number of backgrounds. Best of all, from my point of view, the group met only fifteen miles from my house. I had found my community.

A few years earlier, I had discovered that writing poetry was just the right medium for me. Poetry gets right to the point. You get in and you get out. It is a sprint not a marathon. A poem can be written easily on the computer with speech-recognition software. Most importantly, the poem, which originates in a chaos of images, impulses, and emotions, settles into a form in language which reveals a certain meaning. I believe, however, that even such a solitary pursuit as writing poetry eventually needs community for criticism, support and inspiration. In time, out of the community come individual friendships and teachers.

I wrote these poems in the early days of the Iraq invasion. They betray my "youth" as a poet. I am proud, however, to have them included with the writings of others who have lived through disabilities and dark times.

### **SCOTT MORRISON**

I entered college in the Fall of 1966, not long after "The Ballad of the Green Berets" hit number one on the charts. It was early in the Vietnam War, and I was a strong supporter of the war. I majored in political science, with dreams of a glamorous, globetrotting life in the diplomatic service.

By the spring of 1969, the war was tearing America apart. I took a course in international relations, and for my term paper I determined to prove our involvement in Vietnam was legal under international law and in our national interest. After weeks in the library trying to prove us "right," facts forced me to opposite conclusions, and I became a vocal opponent of the war.

"Draft Night" is a story of events triggered by Richard Nixon's draft lottery. Like several characters in the story, I pulled a bad number that night. I had no intention of fighting in a war I knew to be wrong, and considered Canada. But as bad as Vietnam was, Soviet divisions were poised to strike across the Iron Curtain. Rather than submit to the draft, or evade it, I conflated my crisscrossed beliefs and became what the U.S. Army called a D.I.E., a "draft-induced enlistment," and did my time as an MP in Germany.

"Draft Night" was originally to be part of a novel about the damage done to American society by the war in Vietnam. Eventually, I decided the best way convey how Vietnam warped our history was to create a world in which there had been no Vietnam War. The result is my first novel, *The Energy Caper*, in which a "good" Richard Nixon, with no Vietnam or Watergate to slow him down, fights the Arab oil embargo and unwittingly saves the planet from the catastrophe of global warming. Somewhere, in a parallel universe or an alternate reality, it could even be true.

### **B. COLE MORTON**

I was born Bruce Cole Morton, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on June 27, 1941. The first thing I remember is the whooping cough: Cheerios floating in the toilet. My oldest brother is eighty-four and just remarried. My dad, born 1897, was in the Navy during World War I, many uncles and aunts in World War II, another brother in Korea, so plenty of patriotic upbringing: church, school, Boy Scouts, and more church after my dad died young and my mom relied on religion to carry us through. I was ten and tried very hard to believe. On and on. U Mass Amherst; Teachers College, Columbia University; USMC Infantry Officer School, Quantico, Virginia. Then Vietnamese Language School, Monterey, California, before Danang, An Hoa, Phu Loc 6, and Hue City, Tet '68. Distrustful of authority. Abused alcohol and drugs. Never worked for anyone else since Marine Corps. I have been knocked out and temporarily blinded by lightning, attacked by a big shark, drowned and resuscitated, survived drunk and passed out in the backseat of a car driven by my second wife off a cliff in northern New Mexico, eighty feet through the air. Lost a couple of inches off my right leg in that one. Owner/operator rubbish removal company on Cape Cod. Sold used cars in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Played poker. Smuggled drugs. Two daughters, two sons (one deceased). Three marriages, third one thriving. Living on Cape Cod, thinking of moving to Vermont. Maybe it's quieter and safer there.

### **CHARLIE SHERDYL MOTZ September 11, 1942–May 7, 2005**

From Sherdyl's memorial ceremony Charlie Sherdyl Motz, Sufi and Peet's habitu , was a bit of a public figure around Berkeley. After growing up in an Army family, moving around constantly and living in other countries, losing his mother at the age of thirteen, serving in Vietnam and becoming disillusioned, getting a degree and doing some graduate work at the University of Arizona, Charlie moved to Berkeley, where he really fit in, loving the street scene and helping many people.

A disabled vet, he gradually worked off his extreme trauma syndrome through forgiveness and kindness. Sherdyl had taken the Bodhisattva Vow and Green Tara Empowerment and practiced the identification with that aspect of the Love of the One for more than a decade. When he was without sufficient oxygen and couldn't manage his equipment or move from his bed, he turned to the image that he used for daily practice and was found later by friends with his arm outstretched toward the image of Green Tara, in a beautiful and angelic repose position, having made his transition already.

He kept close to the Quaker and the Buddhist communities he had practiced with as part of his eclectic Sufi tradition. Thich Nhat Hanh was special to him because Sherdyl was a Viet Nam vet. His Sufi name, Sherdyl, given to him by Pir Vilayat at his Sufi initiation twenty-five years ago, means "Lion Hearted," and he truly had miles and miles of heart. Many people treasured his listening ear and his humor.

### **JOHN MULLIGAN June 2, 1950–October 12, 2005**

John Mulligan was born into a family of ten children in Kirkintilloch, Scotland. After emigrating to the United States with his family, at the age of nineteen, he was drafted, and served a year's tour of duty in Vietnam, mostly in heavy combat. Although physically uninjured, Mulligan suffered Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which eventually resulted in total and permanent disability. After the war, he fought increasing illness and alcoholism. Though he struggled for a normal life, he spent ten years on the streets of San Francisco, where Caf  Trieste, "the living room" of writers and poets, provided a place of stability. In 1996, while still on the streets, he was invited to join a writing group for homeless veterans, started by Maxine Hong Kingston. In this group, Mulligan's natural talent found expression in his seminal novel, *Shopping Cart Soldiers*. Writing at the caf , or out of the rain under the steps of the Basque Hotel, the novel flowed, resulting in a powerful story that blended Celtic and Asian mythology and embodied one soul's destruction by war.

Published by Curbstone Press, the novel won a PEN Award for excellence in literature. Studied today in universities, *Shopping Cart Soldiers* was called one of the top three novels in literature of the Vietnam War. Mulligan spoke in front of Congress on behalf of homeless veterans, and worked with groups such as the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.

John Mulligan continued to write brilliantly and to devote himself to helping his brother and sister veterans.

Tragically, on October 12, 2005, he was killed in a car accident. He is survived by three children and a granddaughter, all beloved.

### **MAUREEN E. NERLI**

A native San Franciscan, I attended University of San Francisco, Stanford (postgraduate work in broadcasting), San Francisco State, the Maine Film Directors Workshop, and recently the Hollywood Film School.

I left a fulfilling job as musical director of KFRC-AM, a leading San Francisco radio station, for the job of a lifetime—associate director of the Tan Son Nhut USO Club in Saigon, which lasted eighteen months. After Vietnam, I country-jumped to the USO Club at Utapao, Thailand, and from there I was lured and hired as a Department of the Army Civilian with U.S. Army Special Services, serving in South Korea and Fort Ord, California.

With the Vietnam experience behind me, I set out to right a wrong. I became an activist for the civilian women who served in the Vietnam conflict. I've told my story (and their stories as well!) in the following books: *A Piece of My Heart: Stories of 26 American Women Who Served in Vietnam*; *Reflections Between the Lines*; *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace*; and *Valiant Women of the Vietnam War*. I consulted in the theatrical production of *A Piece of My Heart* and was featured in *Diversion: Vietnam*, an award-winning documentary short about USO and American Red Cross volunteers in Vietnam. I also consulted on the ABC-TV series *China Beach*, which was based in part on *A Piece of My Heart*. I was also asked by Diane Evans, Director of the Vietnam Women's Memorial, to write a story about the USO for the Vietnam Women's Memorial Dedication book. And I served a four-year hitch as president of the San Francisco Unit of Women's Overseas Service League.

I am founder of the first memorial in the nation to honor the civilian women: The Civilian Women Volunteers All Wars Memorial Highway, in San Mateo, California. I realized this dream after three years of hard work, speaking to the California State Assembly and Senate for approval and raising the private money for this nongovernment project, and I received a commendation for my work on this from Congressman Tom Lantos.

I believe that once a broadcaster, always a broadcaster. So I was deeply honored to be nominated and accepted into the San Francisco Bay Area Broadcast Legends organization. I still feel obligated to continue my activism for the civilian women who served in Vietnam. Whatever that course may be, I'm ready.

### **NGUYEN QUI DUC**

As much as I would like to deal with other topics, I have continued to write, talk, and dream about wars. When I am not, I am thinking, dreaming, taking pride, and remaining upset over the fact that I was born in one country, and now live in another. You can't undo the condition of exile. The moment I think I am done, I am right back to deciding where home is. Both Viet Nam and America are homes, but suffice it to say that the one book I have been working on, without hopes of ever finishing, is one tentatively called *Home Is Where You Hang Yourself, True Confessions of an Accidental Californian*. Now that I am returning to live in Viet Nam after thirty years in the United States, I think that life is full of strange accidents, and if you survive them, you accidentally meet your Buddha nature.

### **PAUL OCAMPO**

I graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a B.A. in English literature in 2002. Maxine Hong Kingston was my professor in creative writing. My short stories and other writing projects deal with the theme of the struggle against disembodiment of identity and voice. I recently joined the Vietnam War Veteran Writers Group led by Maxine and have witnessed how writing and sharing stories can achieve peace. I am a veteran of peace, and it is in this spirit that I wrote the short story "Butterfly."

### **GRACE PALEY**

The first recipient of the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit, was born in the Bronx in 1922. She is the author of three highly acclaimed collections of short fiction-- *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), *Enormous Changes*

at the Last Minute (1974), and Later the Same Day (1985)--as well as three collections of poetry, including *Leaning Forward*, also published in 1985. Ms. Paley has taught at Columbia and Syracuse Universities, and currently teaches at both City College of New York, where she is writer-in-residence, and Sarah Lawrence College, where she has taught creative writing and literature for 18 years. She received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1961, a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1966, and an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1970. She is a member of the Executive Board of P.E.N.

Actively involved in anti-war, feminist and anti-nuclear movements, Ms. Paley has been a member of the War Resisters' League, Resist, and Women's Pentagon Action, and was one of the founders of the Greenwich Village Peace Center in 1961; she regards herself as a "somewhat combative pacifist and cooperative anarchist." Ms. Paley has two children and one grandchild, and divides her time between New York City and Thetford Hill, Vermont.

In Spring 1987, Ms. Paley was awarded a Senior Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts, in recognition of her lifetime contribution to literature.

### **MICHAEL PARMELEY**

I'm almost sixty now. In 1968, I was a twenty-one-year-old infantry lieutenant, leading a combat platoon in Vietnam. I've been actively examining, creating, and recovering my life ever since. I live in a small cabin near the ocean in northern California and can see salt water from the window of my writing studio. I'm retired. I receive a small amount of money each month from the Veterans Administration for Post-Traumatic Stress difficulties. It helps and is a blessing. When I have worked in my life, it has often been as a window washer. This memoir is a more or less accurate account of one such workday. I have an eleven-year-old son who often hangs over my shoulder as I write. We talk about Vietnam and much else.

Three photos follow my poem. The first is of me as I looked in Vietnam, taken by a local Vietnamese photographer in his village studio. The second is a self-portrait, taken when I was thirty and just beginning to examine my life. The third was taken recently by my Vietnam vet friend, Ben Benet, and is how I look today. My window washing memoir comes next, followed by a short epilogue that addresses some of the memoir's deeper truths and how I hope, one day, to write about them. My next piece will deal with my father's World War II combat traumas and the way his war memories affected both of our lives. I've been a member of Maxine Hong Kingston's Veteran Writer's Group for almost ten years. It, too, is a blessing.

### **TOM PATCHELL**

The first thing I ever remember hearing about the Korean War, though I didn't know what it was I was hearing at the time, was the bodies. In matters of war, the bodies usually are the end product, but to me they were the beginning. I overheard a conversation between my dad and a priest about a battlefield of the dead. Sometimes it seems that the dead do not haunt the living, but that we haunt them. We worry about where they rest, how they rest, and if they are resting. Writing captures ghosts and makes them physical.

After a lot of different grinds of life, I find myself living back on the central coast of California with my two red-haired boys and my loving wife, Jennie. Many late nights working on these writings have passed; I have been preparing for them all my life.

During the late '80s and early '90s, I found myself in the Marine Reserves in Los Angeles in an artillery battery. "Graves Reg" does not so much seek to honor the dead as much as those night-shifters who dug to bring them back home. Dig on.

### **MONICA ROSENTHAL**

In 1957, at the age of three, I decided to become a doctor. I have now been practicing emergency medicine for more than twenty years. For much of my career, I worked in large county hospitals in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Oakland, California. My coming of age as an emergency physician paralleled the growing urban epidemics of drugs, AIDS, and interpersonal violence. I was trained to deal with witnessing such horror by detaching

emotionally from myself and from the people I was treating. No one told me what the cost of that would be: I became progressively cynical, losing all my significant relationships and living as a smug, bitter, and lonely victim.

In 1994, an everyday encounter with an extraordinary patient woke me up. I saw for the first time how numb I had become, and how much pain that numbness had caused, both for me and for those around me. I developed a powerful desire to recapture my soul. Initially I thought I would have to stop practicing medicine to do so. I quit my career and fled to wander Europe. But my calling wouldn't let me go so easily. When a stranger collapsed on a train between Paris and Florence, I was thrust again into the role of physician, this time with my bare hands, with neither medical equipment nor backup. The joy of experiencing pure medical practice, without the trappings of the American health care system, shocked me into seeing how much I still love being a doctor. Since then, I have been searching for more openhearted ways to practice, and to teach, medicine.

My greatest satisfaction as an emergency physician these days lies less in mastering skills and more in the relational aspects of the job: listening to patients, meeting their families, even breaking difficult news. At the same time, after twelve years of working to undo my professional detachment, I still struggle during almost every shift. I have not had good role models.

I joined the Veterans' Writing Group in 1998, as a veteran of inner-city American urban warfare. With the support of the group, I am slowly writing a book illustrating my journey to numbness and then to wholeness. Through my writing, I hope to spare others the pain I have endured. I dream of someday breaking down the barriers between health care providers and the people they serve.

### **GREGORY ROSS**

A psychic once told me I had been involved with war in many past lives. She also told me I had accrued a lot of karma that I needed to work off. I groaned at that statement, but she laughed and said, "Let me explain further; it is the accruing that is difficult—the killing and maiming and destruction and dying a bad death—but the payment is different; here you are an acupuncturist helping people heal." I hope her interpretation is correct.

This life, I was an R.E.M.F. (Rear Echelon M F , officially known as support personnel). Actually, the in-country R.E.M.F.s would consider me an ultra R.E.M.F. U.S. Navy, Seventh Fleet, the Gun Line, a mile off the coast of Viet Nam, on a ship functioning as a floating artillery unit. About as close to combat as you can get and not be anywhere near it. Nonetheless, I carry my share of responsibility and therefore, guilt for the death and destruction caused by the 2,000-pound shells fired from that ship.

I joined the Navy in 1966 to try to avoid Vietnam and in some senses I did; I was never in direct combat, but was support—in my case, as a communications technician on board two cruisers on what the navy called the Gun Line. The whole Seventh Fleet sat about a mile off the coast of Vietnam and acted as a floating artillery unit. My work/living spaces were one deck below a set of sixteen-inch guns capable of throwing 2,000-pound shells up to twenty miles. Part of my job was to see they went to the right place; on target people died, off target people died.

There were weeks we fired twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. That is a lot of death and destruction; a lot of energy to be absorbed. To this day, I cannot tolerate the sound of two glass bottles clinking together, because it reminds me of the sound of the mechanism used to move the guns, and on the Fourth of July, I join our dog under the bed, waiting for the whole thing to end.

### **SANDY SCULL**

I began writing bad haiku poetry in the spring of 1961, after removing everything but a mattress and a naked lightbulb from my room. In order to cultivate a more seasoned perspective, I took a thirty-three-year break from poetry. It also took me many years to thaw my imagination, frozen by my experience of war. I served as a lieutenant in the Marines in Vietnam during 1967–1968.

I hold a Ph.D. in transpersonal psychology. My internship was at the Center for Traumatic Stress (the Menlo Park Program). My dissertation dealt with transpersonal and existential themes in interviews with Vietnam veterans. During 1988 and 1989, I worked with Soviet veterans from their war in Afghanistan.

After being published in psychology, *Fathers, Son & Daughters: Exploring Fatherhood, Renewing the Bond*, and appearing on Oprah, I have kept my poetry a private affair—except when asked. Currently, I am assembling my poems under the title *Reaching Across*. I write for the gift of renewal that comes from getting underneath an experience, and the play of memory with the present.

I am a board member of the Marin Poetry Center and believe in promoting the poetic perspective to the wider culture. I have volunteered for ten years with The Living/Dying Project, which gives counsel to the life threatened. I enjoy improvisational dance as a practice and as an inspiration. Occasionally, I still surf. Living in western Marin County, I am married with two children and two golden retrievers.

### **TED SEXAUER**

I went to war to fight against war. I was already in the Army, having enlisted in the face of the draft, before I came to understand the moral ugliness of the war in Viet Nam. I felt betrayed. As a citizen of the offending nation, I felt I had an obligation to try to set right the wrong.

So I became a medic. I took the best training for field medics the Army had to offer, the Special Forces medics' course, and served two tours—first, with 571st Dust-Off (Helicopter Ambulance), operating all over I Corps, serving primarily U.S. Marines and MACV advisors, which meant transporting many injured and sick Vietnamese civilians; after that, as senior medic with a line company of the 173d Airborne Brigade, in northern Binh Dinh province, II Corps. (Eighteen months in all, in 1969 and '70.)

I did what I'd set out to do, but it cost a great deal. The moral clarity I'd acted on became clouded and confused. I saved some lives, and I helped the army machine do its work. I was accomplice to murder. I did a lot of medcaps (village clinics), and that was good, and the army used them as propaganda. Doing the right thing did not make me lighter—it gave me nightmares; it confused the hell out of me.

I went to war to fight against war. I do not recommend that course. To young people, I say: Work for peace before you get into a compromised position. Do not stand up for empire. There is humanity inside the machine, but any way you cut it, the military is about killing.

“The Well by the Trail to M̃y An”: This is a poem of compassion in retrospect. The second line of the poem is meant as a progression in terms of respect: The word Ông, meaning “grandfather,” is the proper term of address toward a man older than oneself.

“Poem for Tê't”: I returned to Viet Nam in 1995. Tê't is the ten-day celebration of the Lunar New Year. Following the tradition of writing a poem on the first day of Tê't, I wrote these lines. I happened to be having a hard time on that day. The progression of the poem wasn't planned; it wrote itself line by line, drawing down in increments from a plea for a saving idea down to the essential. An instance of writing oneself out of trouble ... A Buddha poem.

### **MICHAEL SHUVAL**

A draft board pulled me into the U.S. Army during the Vietnam conflict. I served in the Fort Ord military hospital. Afterward I grabbed a graduate degree and set off for Israel, where I became a citizen and a soldier. Annually, for a month each time, I hunted for infiltrators along the northern borders, working mostly at night. At forty-four, I had seen and smelled too much, so I quit. The demobilizing officer sought to keep me in. It would enhance my masculinity, he said. When I retire from my university job, I will become a certified chef ministering to children suffering from digestive tract diseases. Yes, I'll be in uniform again: this time clean, hospital white.

In “February on the Jordan Rift,” I wrote about helmeted soldiers put on solitary guard duty and left to their own devices. An infantryman’s initial alertness (mine) is followed by flight to Roman foot soldiers of yore, and to Terminus, a god I love. It, though armless and legless, retains immense power to this day. Terminus is a spirit calling to men who have lost limbs in battle, and to the emotionally wounded. Terminus is the god of getting along together, of community no matter how difficult it is to reach and sustain accord.

### **BARBARA SONNEBORN**

On the morning of my twenty-fourth birthday, March 2, 1968, I was awakened by the sound of the doorbell. A young man with a sad face, dressed in a military officer’s uniform, was standing outside. “I regret to inform you that your husband, Lieutenant Jeff Gurvitz, is missing in action in Vietnam.” The next afternoon, the same young man came to tell me that Jeff was dead. He had been killed in a mortar attack. There are events in our lives that change us on a cellular level and color the way we see the world from then on. A few years after it happened, I realized that Jeff’s death was either going to destroy me or make me stronger. I had a choice, and his death became my teacher.

I’d always wanted to be a writer, but from the moment I learned about Jeff’s death, I was unable to write. Words were too painful, they made me too angry. So, in 1973, I began working as a visual artist, primarily with photography. For a couple of years, I made self- portraits filled with war, death, and pain. I had a one-person show in New York, and many other shows around the country. I did installations, resulting in a set design for a Jean-Claude van Itallie play, *Bag Lady*, in New York.

For twenty years after Jeff was killed, I avoided meeting Vietnam veterans. I didn’t see movies or TV specials. My own imagery of Jeff’s death was as much as I could handle.

On January 1, 1988, I awoke feeling compelled to transform Jeff’s death into a powerful statement against war. What had happened to all the widows in the U.S. and also in Vietnam? What could be learned about war through their stories? I wanted everyone in the U.S. to understand what it is like to have somebody you love come home in a flag-draped coffin. The result is the documentary film, *Regret to Inform*, which looks at the Vietnam War, and at the idea of war itself, through the stories of widows. The film is coproduced by my wonderful husband, Ron Greenberg.

I have been a student of Buddhism since the early ’70s. In 1989, I attended a retreat for veterans led by Thich Nhat Hanh. Thich Nhat Hanh’s refusal to take sides in the war—his compassion—resonated profoundly for me. This was another life-changing event.

At Thich Nhat Hanh’s second retreat for veterans, in 1991, I met Maxine Hong Kingston, as she was beginning to conceive the idea for our writing group. I joined the group in 1994. The encouragement, support, and challenging questions of Maxine and my fellow VETERANS OF WAR, VETERANS OF PEACE writers helped shape my ideas and give birth to the film. Although composed of very distinct individuals, the group has a life of its own, offering healing, refuge, encouragement, pure energy, and deep friendship. My heart fills with great gratitude to Maxine and to all my fellow writers as we walk the path together.

*Regret to Inform* opened in 1999 at the Sundance Film Festival, where it received Best Director and Best Cinematography awards. It was nominated for an Academy Award, received the Peabody Award, the Independent Spirit Award, the Human Rights Watch Film Festival Award, the Courage of Conscience Award from The Peace Abbey, and numerous other awards. *Regret to Inform* continues to be shown nationally and internationally, and is used in this and other war-torn countries as a vehicle for healing and reconciliation, to look at how war creates profound suffering on all sides.

### **RICHARD STERLING**

The experiences of war and travel and exotic new peoples were so intense that they begged expression. I found

taking up the pen to be one of the most satisfying exercises in life. My mother would read my letters to the family, and they begged for more. My younger sister would take them to school, where her history and geography teachers would read them to their classes. A few were published in the local newspaper. I later took my degree in English and have plied the trade of scribe ever since.

I joined the navy. I haven't dropped anchor since. And when I die, I'll be buried at sea. It's already arranged with the navy. Not that I'll die any time soon, mind you. Hey, I've got a lot of living to do! And a lot of beer to drink!

### **RICHARD L. STEVENS**

I was born in Chicago in 1939, grew up in way-rural Prairie City, Iowa, and joined the Marines soon out of high school, mostly for adventure. I was in Vietnam three years during the war in military and civilian roles, was wounded twice, and came home wiser. I've been a gardener, Foreign Service Officer, refugee worker, university professor, and hunter of ancient trails for the state of Hawai'i. I've written two books on organic gardening and two on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the role of nature in the Vietnam War. I'm a hiker, camper, and passionate tree planter, and I work on native-species restoration projects, including the "Arlington of the Pacific," the West Hawai'i Veterans' Cemetery.

In 1969, I was the Chieu Hoi ("Open Arms") Advisor in Quang Tri Province. Chieu Hoi was the program to induce communist guerrillas to defect; Quang Tri bordered North Vietnam. On the night of the midsummer full moon, a Vietnamese Buddhist holiday called the Night of Wandering Souls, I met and helped capture the "goddess" of this story. What I saw her do that night and what she endured after changed my mind about what humans are capable of, and about the war. In 1995, I returned to Vietnam to search for her. The title of this account, "Meeting with the Goddess," is taken from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in which the mythic hero's journey is understood to be the life journey of us all.

### **LEE SWENSON**

I was born in Minnesota in 1939, of Norwegian and Swedish farmer parents, and migrated with my family to California two years later for the post-Pearl Harbor shipyard jobs. As a teenager, fascinated by the labor struggles of the postwar unions, I searched out the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World), but Gandhi's nonviolent ideas captured my imagination and life path. As a draft resister in the early '60s, I dropped out of Stanford University to join the antifallout shelter, atomic testing ban, and blossoming civil rights movements.

I met Joan Baez and Ira Sandperl in 1959 at the Peninsula School in Menlo Park, and in 1969 became director of their Institute for the Study of Nonviolence, a great crossroads of draft and war tax resistance, AWOL soldiers seeking refuge, farmworker boycott staff, and Buddhist monks and nuns.

At the end of the Vietnam War, I edited the Simple Living Newsletter for the Quakers, then became the executive director of the catalytic Farallones Institute. I met my wife, Vijaya Nagarajan, through Ivan Illich in 1982, and since 1985 we've worked in the Recovery of the Commons Project and our Institute for the Study of Natural and Cultural Resources. Our twin girls, Jaya and Uma, were born in 2000.

During the Vietnam War, some 6,000 draft resisters did time in federal prisons, mostly serving two-year sentences. During World War II nearly the same number served prison time—up to four years in federal prison. Each prisoner had a visitor-and-correspondence list of eight people. As one of them, I would make the monthly trip to visit the Safford Federal Prison in southeast Arizona to see Randy Kehler and David Harris. Then they were transferred to La Tuna Maximum Security Prison on the Rio Grande River near El Paso, where the pigpens were air-conditioned and inmates' cells were not. Visiting hours were 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. Saturday and Sunday, once a month. I drove a thousand miles each way in my noisy Volkswagen Bug. My ears still ring.

Two years before his federal prison sentence began, while the Tet offensive was ramping up in South Vietnam,

Randy Kehler and I spent twenty days in Santa Rita Jail (along with 150 other draft resisters and demonstrators) over Christmas and New Year's, 1967 into 1968. Randy and I paced endlessly up and down the caged-in sidewalk of the rundown World War II barracks, Alameda County's dumping ground for demonstrators.

### **JOHN SWENSSON**

I teach English and business, and am dean of the Language Arts Division at De Anza College in Cupertino, California. I took my undergraduate degree in engineering at the United States Military Academy at West Point. After two tours of duty in Vietnam, including a year in Cu Chi, above the tunnels, and a year in Saigon at the American headquarters, I took a graduate degree in English at the University of Virginia, and later, a graduate degree in business systems from the University of Northern Colorado.

A retired Army officer, I have lived in Asia, Europe, and Africa. I have extensive experience in sales and marketing, including Internet marketing, and have cowritten and coproduced a Hollywood movie, *Fire Birds*, starring Nicolas Cage, Tommy Lee Jones, and Sean Young. I am past president of the De Anza College Faculty Senate, and have been on six Campus Abroad trips to Paris, London, and Vietnam. I recently returned to Vietnam (my fourth trip back) with 440 wheelchairs from the Wheelchair Foundation and the Santa Clara Valley Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce. My wife, Susan, and I live in Saratoga, California.

### **CLAUDE ANSHIN THOMAS**

I served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 as a helicopter crew chief. During my tour of duty, I was shot down five times and wounded once, receiving the Purple Heart. Since then, I have been working to heal the emotional, mental, and spiritual wounds from that war and to find a way to use these experiences to help others. As part of this process, I lived and studied at a Vietnamese monastery and retreat center, Plum Village, founded and guided by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, and I was later ordained as a Zen Buddhist monk by Roshi Bernie Glassman.

Writing has been a crucial tool in my journey to come to peace with the devastation of war. In 2005, my book *At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Journey from War to Peace* was published by Shambhala, and as a result, I've received many invitations to speak about violence and how to heal it. I facilitate mindfulness-meditation retreats that give participants tools to aid them in the process of healing. I have led retreats for veterans, the homeless, and prisoners, and taught in jails, schools, nursing homes, and hospitals. I also practice pilgrimage, walking in my Buddhist robes and carrying all my belongings on my back. In 1994 and 1995, I took part in an interfaith pilgrimage from Auschwitz, where I was ordained, to Vietnam. In 1998, I walked across the United States, and in 1999, I walked through many sites of concentration camps, prisoner-of-war camps, prisons, and other places of suffering connected to World War II. In 2002, I walked from Budapest to the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, following the paths that many Jews had to take to their imprisonment and death. In 2007, I will walk from California to Texas, along the Mexican border.

I now divide my time between the U.S., Europe, South America, and Asia, sharing with people that violence is not a solution.

### **DANIEL MOEN THOMPSON**

I served two tours with the 5th Special Forces in Viet Nam and was assigned to MACV SOG, CCN, Forward Operations Base 4, next to Marble Mountain. I returned to Da Nang in 1994 to more fully understand the essence of the mountain in its historical, spiritual, and geological sense. Afterward, I engaged a Vietnamese scholar to translate the book *Ngu Hanh Son* (Water Mountain, one of the five element mountains) into English. This piece is an excerpt from *Marble Mountain*. After returning from Da Nang in 1995, I wrote *aNAMnesis* (A Viet Nam Journal). In addition to the novel *Marble Mountain*, I have written *Sleeping Soldiers*, *The Snake Pit* (Death at Walter Reed), and numerous short stories. It is with the help and encouragement of Maxine Hong Kingston, the Veterans Group, my beautiful wife, Mary, and the Richmond Men's Group, that I have organized a cohesive remembrance of war. I am blessed with three children, Elizabeth, Daniel, and Alexandra, and a grandson, Isaiah.

## **GARY THOMPSON**

I was born in Whitefish, Montana, entered the U.S. Air Force in 1964, served in Vietnam from November 1967 to September 1968, and was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal. I left the military in 1968 as one of only two men in the Air Force in Vietnam to reach the rank of staff sergeant (E5) with fewer than four years of service.

I entered the University of Montana ten days after returning from Vietnam and within a month assaulted and almost killed an anti-draft protester. This was the first indication of my PTSD, although it took more than twenty years to diagnose it. I started treatment at the local vet center in 1988.

I obtained an M.B.A. from the University of Oregon, and spent thirty years working as a forestry consultant and real estate broker. Then I went from this successful career to becoming an alcoholic, a drug user, and came within three days of homelessness due in a large part to PTSD. Family, writing, Native American spirituality, and friends have helped me to come to terms with my Vietnam experience.

I returned to Vietnam in May 2006 and came home knowing I left “my” war behind. Following my return, I attended the first Native American ceremony during which I was completely free of any of my Vietnam “shit.” I have been clean and sober since 1997 and currently do some freelance writing and photography. I’ve been published by Harley-Davidson, Easyriders, and Biker Magazine.

## **BUZZ TIFFANY**

I was born in 1946, in Würzburg, Germany. After graduating high school in Montana, I joined the Army and did a tour in Vietnam 1966 to 1967, as a recon and rifle company medic with the 1st Infantry Division.

I remember suggesting to a friend’s father (a Mormon elder) over a convivial family dinner, but in a pugnacious way given to untactful youth, that Christ’s death “wasn’t so significant in the way of pain and suffering considering the Resurrection.” He asked me to explain myself. I told him an embellished tale of a soldier dying on the Cambodian border. He stood up at the table and screamed at me, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” This also meant, “Get the hell out of my house.”

I went back to Vietnam in 1994 and poked around Tan Son Nhut Airport and the location of the old MACV compound. I knew that the American mortuary was located in the MACV compound and realized that an autopsy was a more convivial way to say that some young soldiers’ sacrifices are so great in pain and suffering that they are Christs. I think my feelings all through the war, and after, about the conflict between religion and war put the Christian tale of the Crucifixion up as fair game to be mocked, or challenged.

## **MICHAEL L. WONG**

I once was a first lieutenant in high school Army ROTC who believed fervently in the Army and our government leaders. Then came the real Army. My story, “Honor’s Death,” tells of my Army experience and why I turned against the Viet Nam war and deserted to Canada. The next story, “To Take a Street,” tells of one small protest.

What these stories don’t tell you is that in Toronto, Canada, I was a member of a hippie counterculture community known as Rochdale College. An Internet search will produce over 800 entries about this experiment that happened in an eighteen-story apartment building. I wrote in Maxine Hong Kingston’s Fifth Book of Peace: “We were a world unto ourselves, with our own government, a free medical clinic, a movie theater, a library, a health food restaurant, a store, a dance studio, and a host of other features of a community. We even had our own hippie ‘police force,’ Rochdale Security ... ”

A war of attrition by the Canadian government and police against Rochdale formed for me a counterpoint to the war in Viet Nam. The war hawks lost the war to control South Viet Nam. We hippies lost the war to save

Rochdale College. I deserted the U.S. Army, only to serve on Rochdale Security. I never faced the guns of the Viet Cong, but I faced—unarmed—the guns of the Toronto Police Department. My closest comrade, Cindy Lei, was one of those who died for Rochdale. I was never the same.

There is, however, also healing. During a protest against the first Gulf War, I met a group of Viet Nam veterans who welcomed me home with open arms. I have been a member of Veterans for Peace and the Veterans Writing Group ever since. Together, we continue to heal. The journey never ends, but friends make all the difference. To all who have helped me along the way, thank you, thank you, thank you. Peace be with you.

### **PAUL WOODRUFF**

Born in New Jersey and raised in western Pennsylvania, I joined the Army through ROTC at Princeton in 1965. I took a few years at Oxford and then served as a junior officer with MACV at Chau Doc in the Delta of Vietnam from June 1969 to June 1970. My brother had been a Marine in I Corps the previous year.

I have been teaching at the University of Texas since 1973. I have written plays, opera libretti, poetry, and short fiction, as well as a number of translations and scholarly works. My novella set in Vietnam won an Austin Book Award, and my play on returning veterans won a B. Iden Payne Award for best new play of 1983 in Austin. A play I wrote at Oxford was produced as a radio play by the BBC in 1968. I have written philosophical works on reverence and democracy, and I am currently writing a book called *The Necessity of Theater*.

I began writing poetry about my Vietnam experience during Operation Desert Storm. In 2002, I revisited Vietnam and found the tall pagoda described in “Sanctuary.” It was built as a prayer for peace, and it still stands, although in need of restoration. Like most veterans, I found that Vietnam cut across past relationships like a fire. Hence “Walking Across a Burnt Field, I Feel a Puff of Ashes Up My Jeans.” Luckily, however, Lucia and I renewed our relationship and married in 1973. We have two daughters and one granddaughter.

### **CHUN YU**

I was born in China at the very beginning of the Cultural Revolution. For the first ten years of my life, tens of millions people were persecuted by the Chinese government and many died. The United States was identified as the enemy. I never imagined one day I would come to this country and write in its language stories about China. My first book, *Little Green: Growing Up During the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, a memoir in verse, has been published by Simon and Schuster (March 2005). It is the first book of a trilogy.

“The Petition” is intended for the third book in the trilogy. When I was a child, my grandma used to tell me about the wars she had lived through. At a time when all children’s books were burned, those stories, told in vivid detail, were my bedtime stories. For many years, it didn’t make sense to me why she chose to tell those stories, until I wrote “Lullaby,” a prayer for peace.

### **DOUG ZACHARY**

I was born in 1949 in Pixley, California (the setting of *Of Mice and Men*), to Texas-Okie migrants who had not been informed of the end of the Depression. My childhood included nine years in a Southern Baptist orphanage on the outskirts of Dallas, Texas, and four years of public school in San Bernardino, California. I also spent a year embedded with a group of families from Mexico moving about Texas building highways; I lived briefly in an especially kind foster home in Odessa, Texas.

I joined the Marines in 1968 and won discharge as a conscientious objector in 1970. I have since earned a B.S. in political theory from the University of Texas and an M.A. in culture and spirituality from the Sophia Center at Holy Names College in Oakland, California. I work for Veterans for Peace as a fund raiser.

I want to dedicate these stories to my friend with whom I joined the military, thinking that we would serve our country and our people. John suffered an unimaginably severe beating while we were in Marine boot camp in San Diego. The rest of our platoon almost literally carried him through the remaining weeks of training, but John

never regained his emotional balance, and he committed suicide a few weeks after we completed our training. Brother, I am seeking, and I will find, the courage to tell your story.

I have profound karmic debts to each of my children: Billy, Krickett, Isabelle, and Elisa. Their unnecessary suffering at my hands has taught me much about the destructiveness of anger and the value of tenderness. I am eternally grateful to each of the three women with whom I have parented children; Phyllis Blevins, Helene Dreyfus, and Gina Sconza have each made significant contributions to my healing from early childhood trauma. To my friend Meg Patterson and to Mary “Magdalene” Mulligan, who, meeting me at the door of an open tomb, assured me that ALL things can heal, I will forever be grateful.

As described accidentally in a newspaper article, I am a “former ex- Marine” (my emphasis). Don’t buy that jive about “Once a Marine always a Marine” till you’ve talked to me. Having been brought up on Christian parables and the Sermon on the Mount, like Bill Moyers I learned everything I needed to know about politics and war in Sunday School. The Bodhisattva Jesus is my secretary of state, the Beatitudes my national security doctrine.