

Memories of a War Vet

A hope for many

Testimony by Moe Armstrong

Memories of a War Vet

By Moe Armstrong

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Contents

My Life in the War and After ……Page 7

We Changed the World……Page 19

On to Recovery……Page 39

Words and Photos by the Author……..Page 41

My Life in the War and After

My name is Moe Armstrong. I was born on June 25, l944, Keokuk, Iowa. Lived in the Midwest till I was eighteen years old. August of l962, I went to Des Moines, Iowa, I was driven there by my mother. I was sworn in to the U.S. Navy. Sent on a train to California, and went to Navy recruit training called boot camp in San Diego, California.

My first week in boot camp, I was chosen to keep the barracks clean. I had worked for years as a janitor cleaning out my parents bakery and was given the job to clean up the barracks. The job consisted of having the barracks cleaned spotlessly.

The way we did it was, we only let the other recruits use one toilet stool. All the others were shut down and never used. All the black toilet seats were also shined with black shoe polish and had a glimmer. I made sure that nobody walked on the floors and kept the cleaning detail busy all the time, dusting and waxing. The barracks were always spotless and shone. I kept screaming and yelling at people, “keep off the floor, don't use the toilets.”

The barracks won awards every week for being the best cleaned at the Navy recruit station.
During this time, I had tried to become a member of the Underwater Demolition Team, UDT. Besides cleaning the barracks, I was constantly running and exercising, hoping to be a Navy frogman. I was told in bootcamp that I couldn't be accepted in UDT unless I was a petty officer or had Naval career experience.

The Naval career officers suggested that I go to hospital corpsman school, and from there could apply for Marine Corps Duty. The Marines had a unit called Marine Reconnaissance. He said it was a long shot, but if I was accepted, I would have the same duties in the Marine Corps as a Navy Underwater Demolition Technician.

I applied for hospital corpsman school, and was accepted. Hospital corpsman school was also in San Diego. On my first day in hospital Corpsman School, I didn't realize that my job would be working around so many people who are ill and needed medical care.

My first experience in taking care of other people was at hospital corpsman's school was very uncomfortable for me. I thought I had come into the military to kill people and not save lives. So, I tried hard to get through school and join the Marine Corps. My main job in the school was, again, keeping the barracks clean,

In those days, my hands were very steady. I was good with giving shots and performing sutures. After hospital Core School, I got accepted to Field Medical School at the Marine Core Base at Camp Pendleton. When I went to the Field Medical School at Camp Pendleton, I was the only hospital corpsman who wanted to be in the Marine Corps. Even the hospital corpsmen who were stationed with the Marines felt that the Marines were barbaric animals and didn't want anything to do with the

I started making contact with the Reconnaissance unit in hopes that I would someday be accepted in the unit as a Recon Ranger. On graduation from Field Medical School, I was placed in an infantry camp called Las Pulgas with the Seventh Marine Regiment.

I started going to Los Angeles and Disneyland on the weekends. I was a lonely kid from the Midwest. A woman who I knew lived in Fullerton, California. She and her girlfriends took me on several trips to Disneyland and to a giant rock and roll show in the Los Angeles Coliseum. My Midwest dreams had come true. I could see my favorite pop singers and could go to Disneyland.

Back at Camp Pendleton, I met a person named Smitty. He was a medical corpsman Like myself, except he never shaved and never cut his hair, never shined his boots, and read books all the time. He began to confront me. He said, "You seem like an intelligent fellow. Why do you believe in this American militarism? Don't you understand that there is much more to life than the Marine Corps."

I said I was a poor person from the Midwest and liked California. I wanted to stay in California, but didn't know what else to do to earn a living. He laughed and threw me a book by James
Baldwin called Another Country. I picked up the book and started reading it.
The year before I had a done a high school paper on Cry the Beloved Country by Alan Patton and Clock without Hands by Carson McCullers. I had read a great deal by Carl Sandburg and other writers from the 50's. The book that Smitty gave me by James Baldwin was great reading. My parents had been integrationists in an era of segregation. I had joined the Congress of Racial Equality in 1960. Even though I was a fanatical patriot for the United States, I still believed that freedom was for all people, white and black.

The book, Another Country, also discussed the theme of homosexuality. I had never heard of homosexuals or homosexuality until this time. So the book that Smitty gave me began to challenge my thinking. Even though I had never heard of homosexuality, the military said homosexuality was bad. The book said there was nothing wrong with homosexuality. This was my first experience with a conflict in military values and civilian values. Smitty asked me what did I think of the book. I said I had never heard of Homosexuality before.

He laughed and started to ridicule me and say that I was so bible belt Midwestern that I could never accept different people, different ideas. Smitty said not only were there homosexuals in the world, but also there were people who never bathed and called themselves beatniks, and what would I do if I were to meet a beatnik or a homosexual.

I said the beatniks I was familiar with. We had had a beatnik day in high school, and I had won the prize for looking the most like a beatnik. I wanted to meet beatniks in California. I just didn't know where I could find them. Homosexuals I didn't know about, never met, but I was willing to meet anybody. Smitty laughed at me.

After that, Smitty started to fill up my life with books, Look Homeward Angel, The Web And The
Rock, Of Time and the River, by Thomas Wolfe; Let us now Praise Famous Men by James Agee and Walker Evans; Letters to Father Fly, by James Agee and we would have discussions in the hospital corpsman's station about what I read and how it affected me. On the weekends I would travel to Los Angeles and started going to Hollywood. There was the giant Pickwick bookstore in Hollywood where I could browse through and buy books to take with me back to Camp Pendleton. I kept running and exercising.

While I had been in Hospital Corps School, I met a sergeant who played football for the Marine
Recruit Depot. He knew I had been a great football player in the Midwest and he suggested

that I try out for the Marine Corps football team. Some recruiters came by from the Marine Corps football team and gave me a tryout. I got accepted into the Marine Corps football team.
That same week, I got a notice that I could transfer to the Marine Corps Recon Unit. I went with Recon.

I was transferred from Las Pulgas to Camp Del Mar, a beach shore Marine Corps camp within Camp Pendleton. I loved being close to the ocean, running in the sand and swimming. I kept reading and going to Los Angeles, but I lost contact with Smitty. Smitty had told me that there was a folk singer named Joan Baez, who had a beautiful voice, but I would probably not understand what she was singing. Her politics were towards ending war and having peace. My politics were going to war and killing people.

When I got to the recon unit, it came as a surprise that two other people in the recon unit played folk music and listened to the music of Joan Baez. During that time, I met another medical corpsman from Arkansas. He was familiar with folk music, but he knew the songs from traditional Ozark mountain singers. He and I became close friends.

He started going with me to Los Angeles on the weekends. There were several people who I had grown up with, and I could stay with them in Los Angeles. It was during this time of 1963 that we were training Army rangers. When the joint training was finished, we went to a bar to get drunk, and talked about our training together. Sargent Bass said, "I haven't had a woman in 6 months and I want to fuck an army ranger." A fight broke out, there was a large scream, and Sargent Bass carried around a bloody ear lobe in his mouth around the bar while a soldier was screaming in the bar. I said to the group, "You're a great bunch of guys. I know that you would save my life in combat, I would save yours, but I won't be sFrom that moment on, all my free time was spent goint to Los Angeles with Frank or by myself. While walking around West Los Angeles one afternoon, I found a sandal shop. The person named pending any more weekends with you."

From that moment on, all my free time was spent going to Los Angeles with Frank or by myself. While walking around West Los Angeles one afternoon, I found a sandal shop. The person named Steve Henigson made sandals and belts. Everything he did was handmade. I came into the shop from Camp Pendleton and asked him, "Are you a beatnik, and do you play music?" He said, "Yes."

He had come from the East Coast and had gone to Bard College and lived with Pete Seeger. I was bonkers. I met my first beatnik, who played music. I would spend every weekend at his shop, singing folksongs and meeting people. He was the first person who started asking me the question, "You're a nice person. What are you doing in the Marine Corps?" He offered me a place to stay and the keys to his shop, which meant that I could go out at night and explore Los Angeles. I would drink coffee and eat jelly off toast to survive on the weekends. I would hitchhike from Santa Monica to Hollywood and would stay up all night long meeting people who were writers, poets, singers. I had pockets full of books, pens and writing tablets. I would write down everything I saw. the images of lights on Sunset Boulevard always had an effect on me. Coming from the Midwest, I had never seen so many bright lights. I was fascinated by the many people I could meet and talk to.

Steve had an assistant named Brian McLean who was also a folk singer. He introduced me to a group of people who were folk musicians a block away called the New Christy Minstrels. I liked their music, but the music I had been raised on was old country music like the Carter Family and Jimmy Driftwood. I grew up listening to Carl Sandburg sing music of America. The folk music I discovered in Los Angeles was too polished compared to the music of my youth.

It was then that I met Brother Christopher. Brother Christopher was an old singer who was blind who sang on the corner of Hollywood and Vine. Every night, just about sunset, he'd get off the bus with his guitar. I would be waiting for him. He played a four-string tenor guitar, and he would sing all the songs I knew: "Railroad Bill," "Wildwood Flower," "Sow it on the Mountain," "Little Moses," "Like a Mountain Railroad," and many, many others. For the first few weeks, I just stood and listened. I had never heard such beauty as his singing except of a few old 78 rpm records that I had heard on juke boxes growing up.

One day he said, "Boy, why don't you sing one with me?" I said, "Brother Christopher, I sing these songs to myself, but I never sang one in public." And we started singing "Sow it on the Mountain." We sang "Sow it on the Mountain," "Reap it in the valley," "Your gonna reap just what you sow" over and over and over. Finally, every weekend that I could get to Hollywood it would be me and Brother Christopher singing on that street corner, Hollywood and Vine. I'd help him get off the bus, get set up on the corner, get the guitar case set up for the public to put money in. Then, the two of us would sing for hours. Then I would help collect the money pack up the guitar and walk Brother Christopher across the street. He would get eggs a and hash browns. I would drink more coffee and eat toast. I would walk him to the bus stop, wait for him til he got on the bus, then I would hitch-hike back to West Los Angeles and Santa Monica.

Next to Santa Monica, there was a town called Venice. I had my choice of watching late night movies at a theatre called the Nu Art or going to a coffee house in Venice called the Venice West. It was at the Venice West that the person who ran the coffee house, named Dawson, asked me what I had in my pockets. I said, "Books and notebooks." I had discovered the poems of e.e. cummings and was writing my own poems. Dawson asked me to start reading poems at the Venice West.

The Venice West was open from l0:00 in the evening til 2 or 3 in the morning. This gave me the chance to hitch-hike back from Brother Christopher in Hollywood, then read poems and meet other poets at the Venice West. It was during that time, that I would hand write, or hand letter, each of my poems, and give them out to people who were in the audience.

Dawson started taking me back to his place and introducing me to jazz music. Around 3 or 4 in the morning I would hitch-hike back down Santa Monica boulevard to the sandal shop to get some sleep in the back room until Steve would open up the sandal shop. He would make music playing the banjo while everyone else beat on boxes, small drums, and I played two spoons as a rythm instrument. I thought my life would go on like this forever.

I enjoyed being in Marine Corps Recon. We spent weeks in the mountains and weeks on the beaches. I could then run off to Los Angeles for extended periods of time. My job in the Marine Corps as a medical corpsman with reconnaissance was like being a military beach bum. Marines from the unit would come back with me from Los Angeles to see how I lived. I had been given a small office where I did my Medical Corpsman first aid work. I was also in charge of keeping the topographical maps for the reconnaissance unit.

I was in extremely great physical condition, running through the hills and beaches of Camp Pendleton every day and running through the streets of Los Angeles on the weekends. There were no wars on the horizon and I thought I could stay in the Reconnaissance Unit forever and live like this. All off us had to go overseas for one year out of our four. Almost all the unit had been going to Okinawa. This new duty station had a chance for real life action for some special reconnaissance soldiers. About every four months we would send one member of the recon unit as an advisor to participate in real guerrilla warfare against a real enemy in a country called Viet Nam. Viet Nam was a distant country that nobody knew anything about and people kept saying we had to pick up the pieces that the French left behind. I still had a desire to prove myself in combat. I still had a fascination for war and kept volunteering for Okinawa and Viet Nam.

In the meantime, I was meeting Art Kunkin, who ran the Los Angeles Free Press, the first underground alternative newspaper in the United States, and he was located next to a coffee house called, "The Fifth Estate." I also met a person named Ed Pearl, who ran a folk music coffee house on Melrose Avenue in Hollywood. Both of these guys were connected with the anti-nuclear and anti-war movements. They couldn't understand how a guy like me would be so driven to want to go to war.

Art Kunkin had the Free Press sent to me at Camp Pendleton and Ed Pearl would send to me the War Resistors Lreague Calendar every year. The Marine Corps took a dim view of my getting this information sent to me on the base. My superiors at the Battalion Aid Stattion wanted me to stop receiving this material. An officer named Lieutenant Crane said he didn't think there was any harm in me learning about different ideas and different philosophies. My superiors thought this information was Communist and would affect my thinking. Lieutenat Crane disagreed.

I kept receiving the information, and Lieutenant Crane would go with me to Los Angeles to meet the people who I knew and would develop a friendship with Steve Henigson, lthe sandal-maker, even though they politically disagreed. During this time, the Reconnaissance Battalion had also been unofficially segregated. There were no black people in the unit, and when I asked the colonel why, he said, "Doc, blacks can't swim as well as whites." I was in charge of teaching swimming. I said to the colonel, "That won't be much of a problem, sir?" I started giving swimming lessons to black people. We qualified many black people to work in rubber boats and swim through the surf to do their job with reconnaissance.

While I was going to Los Angeles, I met some people who were demonstrating against racial discrimination in Los Angeles at Van de Kamps supermarkets. I joined the picket line and learned freedom songs from them. A man named Jim Garrison invited me to go to Watts and learn about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He introduced me to a organizer from the South named Fanny Lou Hamer. We rode around Los Angeles and talked about how to organize the student nonviolent coordinating committee in the Marine Corps. He sent me back to Camp Pendleton with information about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

There was one black person who I had taught swimming who worked in the mess hall as a cook. I gave him the information which Jim had given me and he distributed the information to other black people. Both he and Jim felt like my organizing in the Marine Corps would attract too much attention, and would get myself and other people in trouble. The idea of civil rights and liberties in the South ignited many black Marines who had joined the Marine Corps to get out of living under total segregation. The information that Jim passed on to me seemed to be an inspiration to many blacks. When a Marine lieutenant found out that I had been responsible for bringfing the SNCC information to Camp Pendleton he wanted me investigated as a homosexual because the only white people who would like black people had to be homosexuals. The captain of the unit defended me and said, "Freedom and equality are values in America," and told the lieutenant to leave me alone.

The captain had given me the office with the maps and suggested that I stay in the office, stay away from the lieutenant and stay away from my superiors. I followed his advice. Raised Christian, I met many Jewish people in Los Angeles. I started to read a book called I and Thou, by Martin Bruber. I began to question many of the values of Christianity and became interested in Judaism. I began to see a Rabbi and began to study Judaism while I was spending my weekdays at Camp Pendleton. I said to the Rabbi I would like to convert to Judaism. He told me I would have to study for a year before he could make a decision. I kept studying with him on the weekdays and running military maneuvers, also. I would go back to Los Angeles on the weekends, spend time in the coffee houses, sing on the streets, and write. I would write to my parents and was still in contact with the people in Illinois who I grew up with. I had a friend, Dick Frank, who I knew from childhood, who was now living in West Los Angeles. He and another friend of mine, Bill Craycraft, from the same small Midwestern town, would always come over to visit me while I stayed at Steve ' s.

Henigson's sandal shop. I would go visit them at UCLA where Bill was trying to go to school. I would spend time on the campus, but never got to meet anyone other than Bill and Dick. Almost all my time was spent hitch-hiking back and forth to Santa Monica.

My life was in a pattern that I always enjoyed. The great mix of being a military beach bum and beatnik; it was a time in my life that I call the beatnik-warrior years. During that time, Sargent Manel, who had been our platoon Sargent, got orders to Viet Nam. We all went down to the beach, got drunk and said goodbye to Sargant Manel. Two weeks later we found out that he had been killed. A North Vietnamese attack force assaulted the fort where he was staying as an advisor. He picked up a machine gun, ran out the entrance to the fort, and as one man attacked the North Vietnamese. He was killed instantly. Many of us wanted to go to Viet Nam to avenge the death of sergeant Manel and save Viet Nam from Communism. After a year of studying Judaism with the Rabbi, I was finally accepted to convert to Judaism. I went back to the barracks ever so happy to find I had orders to be shipped to Okinawa and maybe Viet Nam.

Before I was shipped overseas, I went back to Illinois, met with Bill Craycraft and Dick Frank in my home town, slept on the sofa over at their place, listened to records, read books until I left Illinois and was shipped over to Okinawa. I took a civilian jet plane to Okinawa, and was sent to Camp Schwab on the furthest point on the island of Okinawa. The first week I got there, they asked for volunteers to go to scuba school. I volunteered immediately. I went to pre-scuba school, which is a hell week of trying to wash out the candidates for scuba school. No sleep, people yelling day and night, throwing cold water on me, constant push-ups and running, and pulling off our air hoses and face masks while we were underwater. The small group of us, (six out of twenty-five), who passed the test went on to Subic Bay, US Naval Yard. At Subic, we all went to scuba school together. My partner, Curran, was the only person who panicked when they pulled his air hose off of him under water, but in the end we all graduated.

Our last two weeks of Scuba school were paradise. We had a barge with an air compressor.
We would do two dives a day, go in town, get drunk, and meet some girls. It was during this time that I fell in love with a woman named Baby Garcia. Every night I would go in town and we would be together, and we were in love. During the day we would go swimming and go diving. At the end of our day, we had to swim through a field of jelly fish which would sting us land raise welts on our bodies because the instructors felt this would make us tough. Our last dives were through the ship's in the locks and on the blocks for repairs in Subic Bay shipyard. We had to dive under the aircraft carriers and big ships to make sure they were secure on the blocks to make sure they were secure in the water and on the dry dock. The danger of swimming under the ship was minimized by the disgusting water which was raw sewage of toilet paper, human feces, and urine which was dumped on top of us as we swam around under the water.

The day we graduated and packed to return to Okinawa, some of us had orders to Viet Nam.
The last time I would see Jim Shockley and he flew to Viet Nam and I flew to Okinawa. In Okinawa, I was put on an assault ship and sent immediately to Viet Nam. We got to Viet Nam before the invasion of Chu Lai. The night before I got there, reconnaissance units had explored the beach and the Viet Cong were waiting for the invasion. The invasion took place and there wasn't a Viet Cong to be seen. We started to unload the boats, set up the camps and prepare to secure the area. Little kids came out from everywhere selling green beer, a local beer sold in Viet Nam. The color was green. It was 120 degrees, no ice, very little water. Guys started drinking the beer immediately, talking about how cute the kids were and how great the beer tasted. The beer was filled with ground glass. The Viet Cong slowed the assault without firing a shot. We had to do so many medical evacuations that they couldn't continue the full beach landing.

I stayed in Chu Lai for one week until I was transferred to Danang. We got to Danang and started to build our base camp, digging trenches, filling sandbags, setting up barbed wire. Every night, after dark, the Viet Cong would come in and throw a couple of grenades or cut through the barbed wire and try to cut the throat of a marine. The war went on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We had a little stream, we built a shower out of a pipe and bamboo. We put up old canvas tents that we brought with us. It slept about l2 people per tent. The mosquitoes were as bad as the Viet Cong. We would run patrols in the day, searching for the Viet Cong, and the Viet Cong would come at night, searching for us.

I had a Vietnamese-English dictionary, and I was learning Vietnamese. The barber was from the village right outside the camp. He would come to the camp, cut the hair of the marines all day long while his wife worked in the rice paddies.

. One day, I took my dictionary, went down to where his wife was working in the field and tried to explain that I was a farmer and wanted to try farming in Viet Nam. The plow was made of logs and had spikes to rake the rice paddies coming out of the logs. The logs were pulled by a team of water buffalo. I got on the logs, took the rope which was harnessed to the necks of the buffalo. The barber's wife gave me a small switch to prod the water buffalo and begin raking the rice paddies. There were many rice paddies filled with water. The logs were heavy and could rake the water in the rice paddy. Each rice paddy had a dike which parted the farmer's plot from another farmer's plot. The barber and his wife only had a couple of rice paddies directly in front of our camp. I got on the logs behind the oxen, took the switch, tapped the oxen, and whoossh, we took off. The water buffalo started running across the fields, knocking over other farmer's dikes and ruining their fields. The barber's wife was chasing me and the oxen until the plow broke and left me stranded up to my knees in water in a rice paddy. The barber's wife and the oxen ran all the way back to the village. The barber came from the center of our camp. He ran down the small path where he and his wife would come into the camp every day. The barber was laughing. The colonel started yelling at me that I was an idiot for attempting this. The barber kept laughing, lit a cigarette, and went back to cutting hair for the marines at the camp. A year later, I found out the barber and his wife had been Viet Cong the entire time.

The war began in earnest during the fall of l965. The Viet Cong had pulled back and were living outside of Danang. They had small spaces for two or three men that they carved out under the jungle canopy. Here they could hide from airplane observation. Our first patrols were more like day hikes through the countryside. People in the village seemed glad to see us. The kids yelled "Hey Joe, give me some gum." I spent most of my time going into villages and treating people with skin infections. The water in Viet Nam from the streams and the wells was very contaminated with bacteria. Many people were walking around with open sores on their arms and legs.
We would run small patrols into the villages. While in the villages I would treat the children with antibiotics and band aids. Since most of the children had never had antibiotics, the topical antibiotic ointments worked well for them. I was known to the people in the village as “Dr. Moe.” For most people, it was the first medical attention they had ever received. I learned to sit like a Vietnamese, eat Vietnamese noodles, and speak Vietnamese from an English/ Vietnamese dictionary. It was during that time that Lieutenant Reasoner was killed. He and
James Shockley had been on patrol and gotten in the middle of a North Vietnamese assault. He was killed rescuing the others and Shockley got shot up with a Browning automatic rifle.

The news of Shockley being wounded was very hard on me (devastating.) Of all the people who I had gone through scuba school with, Shockley was one of the most fun guys and he didn't think I was weird. He had intelligence and heart. He seemed to be a person who might go to college and do something with his life. My dream was still to someday go to college. Then, come back in the Marine Corps, be an officer in reconnaissance and live in a barracks by the beach with the rest of the soldiers. I thought we would all grow up together in the Marine Corps, serve together forever, and be friends forever in the Marine Corps.

Shockley was the first to leave the war wounded. I had heard he'd gotten hit by automatic weapon fire in the legs and would never walk again. I picked up my life and my own sorrow, and kept going back on patrol. My philosophy became, “help the wounded, try to save the living and bury the dead.” Our patrol started going further out in the Vietnamese countryside. Before long, we started meeting massive enemy resistance. Every patrol we took incoming fire from the Viet Cong. At first, there was snipers and trip grenades. Once one of the Marines on point tripped over a grenade, set it off, and fell into a stream bed. Half of his body was shattered with shrapnel. He was wounded and couldn't get out of the stream bed. While he lay in the stream bed, incoming rifle fire started digging up the sand from the stream bed. I ran out to the middle of the stream, I used my 45 caliber machine gun to fight off the Viet Cong assault, I threw a couple of grenades, put bandages over his wounds, threw him over my shoulder and carried him to safety. I received a Navy commendation award medal with a combat V for saving his life under fire.

The patrols kept becoming longer in miles and longer in time. We would be driven by truck out to the edge of where the farming stopped and the wilderness began, then be released to continue through grasses and shrubs that were so thick we had to take turns laying a man down on the grass using the body to press down three feet of walking space. Then, all of us moving in the smallest steps forward through the bush grass. The heat was 120 degrees. We couldn't have anybody over 2l on patrol with us because the terrain and the heat broke people who were in their mid or late twenties.

It was on one of these patrols that all hell broke loose. We were trying to make our way back to finish the patrol. We saw these trucks at the pick up point in the distance. The Viet Cong opened up in ambush. They had been waiting for us. We took no casualties, but had to retreat back into the mountains without food or water. For 3 days, we stayed on the side of a mountain setting up a perimeter while we watched the Viet Cong searching for us in the valley. Since we had no food or water, we began to dehydrate rapidly. The only water we had to support us was the dew on the leaves of the plants in the morning. From licking these leaves, our lips were covered with blood. We kept cutting ourselves on the leaves of the plants. During the day we would watch the VietCong search for us in the valleys below and at night some small wild cat kept trying to get into our camp and explore the camp. We couldn't get off any shots or we ould be detected by the Viet Cong. We just let the wild cat roam freely and we would take sticks and make aggressive noises to scare off the wild animal.

On the fourth day, we saw no Viet Cong in the valley. We were dizzy and lightheaded from lack of food. The temperature was still 120 degrees. We radioed for the trucks. We shut off the radio so we wouldn't be heard. And, we tried to make a break down the side of the mountain to the road where we could rendezvous with the trucks. We were picked up by the trucks and taken back to the base camp. Being without food and water for three days left me never wanting to be without food for the rest of my. I still stockpile food to this day.

We were sent on another patrol back to the same area. Headquarters wanted to see if we could again find the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong found us. Just before night time, we took massive incoming rifle and automatic weapon fire. The usual way to break up an ambush was to assault the ambush directly. We were in a giant marsh almost surrounded by the Viet Cong. We had no place to go except to lay in the water of the marsh and hope that the Viet Cong couldn't find us in the night.

We broke radio contact, laid in water with only our heads and weapons above the water line. All night long, we heard the voices of the Viet Cong searching for us. Their voices were loud. They were calling out to each other. They kept probing the swamp trying to find us. Fortunately, reconnaissance ran eight-man patrols. We were probably outnumbered l0 to one, 20 to done, 30 to one, but because of the smallness of our unit, the Viet Cong couldn't find us. Morning came, the Viet Cong had gone. We walked back to a pick up point. But from that moment on, myself and the others had ongoing skin rash around our feet. The only way we could survive was to wear shower shoes the entire time we were in camp and not on patrol. The rice paddies were filled with water that used human shit as fertilizer. Skin disease from contact with that water was common for both the soldiers and the Vietnamese.

Another patrol took us by helicopter to an outlying area. While the eight of us sat on the side of the hill, we watched North Vietnamese with pith helmets and tan uniforms doing rifle drill in the village below. Again we were outnumbered about two to one. We had come in, set up our position overlooking the village at night, and when the sun came up we found there was no place for us to hide. We were exposed directly to the line of sight from the village. We had to lay there with no shade, 120 degree temperature. We couldn't move, couldn't drink water and watched North Vietnamese regulars train in the village below. It was then I heard a loud crack. The call came up, "Corpsman, Doc, somebody's been hit." The North Vietnamese soldiers in the village disappeared and everybody in the village had gone inside and taken cover. While, we were exposed on the side of the hill. I crawled on my stomach down the line of reconaissance men, got to the end, and there was one of our soldiers who had become so frightened he shot himself in the foot. Now, we had somebody wounded almost 80 North Vietnamese soldiers only a few yards away and no cover to hide behind and no clearing for a helicopter to be brought in. I fixed the person's foot, looked at the map with the lieutenant. I shared map reading skills with the lieutenant. Since being a boy scout, I understood topographical maps. The lieutenant and I agreed on a position way up on the side of the hill next to the tree line where the mountains started that seemed like a safe place to bring in the helicopters. By being close to the tree line, if we were attacked, we could drop back and make a stand along the tree line. I carried the wounded soldier I don't know how long. He was able to walk with one good foot and I gave him enough Morphine that he felt no pain. We got to the helicopter zone, the helicopter swooped down, picked us up, and we received only light sniper
fire.

The next patrol we walked from the base camp. We were looking for feeder trails from the Ho Chi Minh trail. We were in the area where the Viet Cong had placed mortars to bring in mortar fire on Marine patrols. The place was called Mortal Valley. We got lost. We couldn't read the maps well under the jungle canopy. The maps were based on old French information whch was inaccurate. We would try to do back azimuths from points we could see on the map or thought we could see to find where we were located.

Many times, the prominent peaks were different from the map readings. We were lost. The brush was so thick, even machetes couldn't cut through the brush. We kept having to wind our way in long switch backs up the back side of the mountain to try to come into Mortar Valley. Then all hell broke loose. Automatic weapons, small arms, people screaming in Vietnamese. We were so close to the firing that we could see the yellow flash of the weapons firing directly in front of us. The only thing that saved us was the brush under the canopy of the jungle was so thick that bullets were richocheting. We fell to the ground and fired back. We used an M79 grenade launcher and some hand grenades because the explosion of the grenades under the jungle canopy made such a loud noise that it was terrifying.

We moved forward gradually. Then, we stopped receiving the automatic and small arms fire. When we got to the place, where the Viet Cong had been-there were many shell casings but no soldiers. We proceeded forward till we came upon an opening under the jungle canopy. We were amazed. There was an entire battalion position hidden under the trees so that it couldn't be seen from the air and the American planes.

Even the smoke from the campfires, couldn't get above the space the Viet Cong had carved out under the jungle. They had a whole canopy of jungle that kept them hidden. When we entered the camp, there were no people. There were buildings constructed from the local trees. We could see that many Viet Cong soldiers lived here. We immediately knew we were out numbered by hundreds. We went to an outcropping of rock to try to find out where we were. The rock was a natural fortress that the Viet Cong had been using for mortar positions. We looked down into the valley. We saw Mortar Valley. Instead of one isolated mortar position, the Viet Cong had built an entire hidden trail with command posts, hospitals, dining kitchens, supply depots, all hidden and carved out under the jungle canopy.

The jungle was so thick, this warrior village was impossible to see unless a person was under the canopy. We had the good fortune that the jungle was so thick that there was only one trail in and one trail out. All along the trail the Viet Cong had carved small hiding places to hide two or three men. The entire ridge line could then hide a battalion or more of Viet Cong coming down the side of the mountain.

I got put on point, set up my ambush, sat down, looked down the trail. Within ten or fifteen minutes, a young boy delivering rice to the Viet Cong came up the trail, fell into my ambush. I shot him while jumping up. He got hit by the bullet but was so filled with adrenalin that he sprung from the side of the trail into the brush down the side of the mountain. I kept firing. Hoping to kill him before he got away. I got to the edge of a cliff and he went over the side. I never knew if he lived or died.

The startled look on his face, almost quizzical, asking why, the sad sorrow of knowing that he was going to die, the understanding that his life would soon end here, and it was a surprise, was a look I would see again and again on different people's faces in Viet Nam. We regrouped and started moving down the trail til we came to a small hidden entrance to the trail by the side of a rice paddy. The entrance to the trail was so well hidden that anybody could have walked past it and nobody would have realized that this would have been the beginning of the trail to the mortar positions above Mortar Valley The hiding place for more than a regiment of Viet Cong soldiers.

Another patrol was during the rainy season. We knew the Viet Cong were running patrols on either side of this village. We thought if we got to the village, took over some of the farmers' huts, and set out trip wire grenades on the trail, we could probably kill some Viet Cong. That night the rains and the mist came. We set out the grenades. They went off. We heard the yelling. We knew there were wounded people in the dark and we couldn't go out because we thought we would become ambushed. We then heard the breaking of sticks, the movement of people in a 180 circle around us. We knew the Viet Cong were coming for us. It was dark and raining, we couldn't see the people, we could only hear some movement sometimes through the sound of the rain. The only way we knew we could escape was to bring in artillery fire. Again, we were using French/Vietnamese maps. The first artillery strikes were close to the people who were attacking us. The next artillery was right on top of us. Dirt, sticks, houses, the huts, everything, blown to smithereens. We ended up with no roof to speak of except for one house where we had to huddle together, all eight of us, sleeping on the floor. The floor was covered with insects. Even though we had no more contact that night with the Viet Cong or our own artillery, we woke up the next morning covered with welts head to toe from insect bites.

The rainy season brought the leeches. We'd be covered from 50 or more leeches at a time. We tried to tape our trousers to the boots, tried to tape our collars to our necks and our sleeves to our wrists.

Leeches got through everywhere. Our legs were covered with leeches, our underarms covered with balls of leeches and our crotches were covered with leeches. Leeches on top of leeches. Leeches also form an anticoagulant so that the blood keeps flowing. The more blood, the more leeches become attracted to each person.

During that time, small streams where we had filled canteens were now small rivers with trees and branches floating over waterfalls and rock formations. It rained so hard, the only time we could move was during the day to set up new positions. The Viet Cong moved at night. We would set up ambushes and try to disrupt their travels with trip wires on grenades. Many nights the grenade would go off, we wouldn't hear a sound after that, no yelling, no pain, only spattered blood left behind. Sometimes the blood was washed away by the rains.

We were asked to do some more patrols south of Chu Lai. We were on a hillside looking into a village next to a series of rice paddies. The rice paddies were where the helicopter landing was to take place. We didn't know how many Viet Cong were in the village, but we knew there were many. We suggested that a search and destroy mission be done before they try to do a major helicopter assault. Our idea was to postpone the helicopter assault until the village was secure. The idea was rejected, the assault went forward, the Viet Cong had massive concrete and earthen reinforcements in the village. The Marines took massive casualties.

A few days later, we were on patrol constantly. Every week another mission. One time we were sitting on top of the hill. We were watching the Viet Cong doing rifle inspections in the valley below. We couldn't get down to kill them, so we thought we would bring in shrapnel air bursts. We started bringing in shrapnel air bursts on the village. We were killing everybody. People were spinning in the fields with their arms swung out to either side like whirling tops, then dropping in the mud and water of the rice paddies. We started laughing, jumping up and down , we couldn't believe we were that successful at killing so many people. Then the air bursts stopped. We were told to go down into the valley and count the bodies.

We got lost on the way down the side of the hill and ended up lost trying to get into the village. The Viet Cong had set up a triangular ambush for us. We took them by surprise, since we didn't come down the traditional trail that they thought we would take. We were out in the middle of the field and a little off from the killing field they had set up for us. They realized that we were upon them and had stumbled past their listening outpost. We were pinned down by automatic weapon fire on all sides. They started to bring in mortars, but for some reason, the mortars didn't explode and threw up water and mud all around us. Not one mortar shell exploded. But we were taking direct hits from the mortars just the same. We pulled ourselves back to the edge of the rice paddies and the edge of the brush. We crawled out of the rice paddies and used the rice paddy dikes to protect us the only protection we had between the straight line of fire of the Viet Cong automatic weapons. We thought we could bust up the ambush by moving through the brush through the river and trying a full frontal assault on the Viet Cong directly behind us. The Viet Cong were in a three point position around us, or 360 degrees.

The automatic weapon fire from in front of us stayed strong. We could hear the voices of Viet Cong from the brush trying to take our position and kill us. Sergeant Troy charged down the river thinking he could find a weak spot in the line of the Viet Cong. The entire Viet Cong line opened up with massive automatic weapons fire. Sergeant Troy had a 357 Magnum and an AR15. He thought he was hit by the automatic weapon fire. There was noise, smoke, and gunfire everywhere. People screamed, "Doc, the sergeant has been hit. You've got to rescue him." I took off running down the side of the hill, dodging incoming bullets, and threw myself over Sergeant Troy. I ripped open his shirt. There was no wound. He had only been hurt by the spent cartridges of his weapon. He was burned in the abdominal area badly by the spent cartridges.

I said, "Sergeant, you aren't hit, we've got to get out of here." He said, "Doc, doc, I'm hit and I can't move." I gave him Morphine, threw him over my shoulder and started running up the hill to where our position was. The Viet Cong tried to follow us across the river. The Vietnamese soldier who was with us stood up started throwing grenades and shooting at them to stop their assault. We heard the voices of another Viet Cong assault team coming through the brush to overrun our position. Then, the Napalm. Out of the sky, flying low, so low you could touch them with a pole, so low that you couldn't hear them coming, came the jets. The Napalm fell like a rain of fire. We were surrounded 360 degrees in flames 30, 40, 50 feet high. We heard the screams of the Viet Cong as they were being burned alive. The smell of human flesh burning was everywhere. In that ring of Napalm fire, three Marine corps helicopters shooting M60 machine guns out the side and out their windows at a 90 degree angle, spraying the area with automatic weapon fire. I carried the sergeant over my shoulder. We boarded the helicopter and flew away. Sergeant Troy was awarded the Bronze Star.

Patrol after patrol we hunted the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong hunted us. Sometimes they would take out some of our people with sniper fire and booby traps. Sometimes we would take out some of their people with an assult and booby traps. The time in Viet Nam rushed by. I had come to Viet Nam with doubts about the war. However, the initial villages that I came in contact with around the air base and the camps loved the American soldiers and were glad to see us. Yet, the further away we got from the American bases the less and less popular the American soldiers were. I had more and more reservations about the war as we went out into the field and saw the villages were deserted except for old women and old men. It seemed like everybody else had left town to fight the Americans.

I was changing my political position from an arch conservative, who felt that no matter what, the Viet Cong were wrong. I began to respect the Viet Cong as socially responsible. They always set up first aid stations, medical centers and schools when they took over occupation of a village. We consistently torched, burned, and terrorized the occupied villages. The South Vietnamese were more brutal in their occupation. Torture by electric shock was common for their interrogation.

I was sent back to Okinawa on a special mission to bring in more reconnaissance troops. We were taking so many casualties that we had to increase our troop strength. In Okinawa,I took a few days off, went down and saw the Beatles movie, "Help." Bought myself a record player and some Rolling Stones records. I went back, lived off cheese and crackers, wrote poems, and walked by the beach. I was then sent to the Philippines to train other reconnaissance Marines to go back and fight in Viet Nam.

It was in the Philippines, that I was able to sneak off the base and look for "Baby." She was the woman in the Philippines who I fell in love with. We had a child together. I sent some money to her from Vietnam. I kept writing her letters from the war. Then, there were no more letters. I would go out into the town and see what happened to her.

I got a special base pass from some other reconnaissance Marines who were going to scuba school at that time. I went into town to look for her and our child.

I met friends who knew us and said her mother had become hysterical that she had had a child with an American soldier. Her mother had thrown her out of the house, Baby was working as a prostitute outside of Clark Air Force Base to support her and her child. I was in shock.

I went back to the mountains in the Philippines, trained the other special operations Marines, and flew back to Viet Nam. My last few months in Viet Nam were special search and destroy missions south of Chu Lai.

It was a dark night on the air strip on Chu Lai when Richard McNally, a person who I went to high school with, was able to find me in between missions resting on a box of ammunition. We talked about the old days in Illinois and how I would probably never go back. At the time, I wanted to stay in the Marine Corps and be a career officer.

We ran a month and a half of special search and destroy raid missions. It was on one of those patrols that three North Vietnamese soldiers tried to surrender. They had their hands above their heads. We killed two, wounded one. I was called to save the life of the wounded soldier. The temperature was 120 degrees in the hot sun. I had compresses on the wound and had given the wounded North Vietnamese soldier some Morphine. I returned to the Captain and said to him, "Sir, I think we can save this person's life if we bring in helicopters. He turned to me and said, "Doc, I don't give a damn if this gook lives or dies." It was like somebody took an axe through my head and split my head in half. I realized that we were in the war because the Vietnamese were different. We didn't like the Vietnamese. We thought that whatever we, Americans, did was right.

I loaded the wounded North Vietnamese soldier on the helicopter, I became very quiet, went off and started to cry. I couldn't stop crying. We were flown back to the Valley Forge and I kept crying. I had become absolutely out of my mind. I was angry, filled with grief, experiencing dizziness. I had extremely violent thoughts. I wanted to kill my Sargent. I didn't know what to do, and there was no one to talk to. . I started taking showers. I was taking showers about every hour to cool out my emotions. When I got back to Danang, I kept breaking down, kept crying. There were these flickering white lights the size of small candle flames that kept flashing on either side of my head. I was dizzy all the time and would begin to cry unpredictably.
I was standing in the post office line when I started to cry again. I was asked to go down and see a psychologist the next day. I couldn't stop crying. I couldn't sleep that night. The guys in the tent said they had something for me and gave me some pot to smoke. The pot cooled me out, but I also became extremely excited.

Somebody put on a record by Bob Dylan, "It's all right, Ma, I'm only Bleeding." I started kissing the record player, the music seemed to envelop my body. I became the song. I listened to the song over, and over, and over again. Walked outside in the middle of the night, looked up at the sky and fell down exhausted on the ground outside.

I woke up the next day and was told to go down to the Battalion Aid Station. I started crying and saying, “I can't kill farmers anymore.” The psychologist saw me for a few minutes and said, “you’ve seen too much war, it's time to go home.” I had been in Viet Nam a year. He sent me to a ward in the field hospital. I sat at the end of a cot shaking my head my whole head. My head hurt, My head felt like I had an electric current running between my temples. I kept crying and crying and crying. I was frozen in this position, my head bent down between my knees, this incredible electric current running between my temples and emotionally exhausted.

I fell asleep that night falling back on the cot in emotional exhaustion. I fell asleep with my feet still on the floor. I woke up the next morning to be ushered to the air field and evacuated to Clark Air Force Base. I was in the Clark Medical Infirmary for two days. I thought how ironic to be placed in the air force base outside the town where the woman I loved and our child was working as a prostitute. I left Clark flying back to the United States in two days. We stopped in Hawaii. The ramp lowered. A marching band came out on the runway and marched up to the rear of the plane. Officials from the Marine Corps boarded the plane and started placing medals on the wounded soldiers. The wounded marines ripped the medals off, started throwing them back, and screamed, "I want my arm, I want my leg, I don't want a Medal." The officials became nervous, left the airplane. The band turned around and left. We flew off to Northern California. I remember driving through the suburbs of Northern California to the naval psychiatric hospital in Oakland. I had seen more death and destruction before I was 21 than people will ever see their entire lives. Now, I was completely emotionally lost, dizzy, and seeing these little white lights. I came to Viet Nam to be a career soldier and left a mental patient.

I got admitted to the Oakland psychiatric hospital at night, had no clothes, had given up on life and didn't know what would happen next. When daylight came, I was on a hospital ward. I was the only person who came from the war. This was February, 1966. A week later annother person from Viet Nam was admitted to the ward. He had tried to steal an airplane and bomb North Viet Nam. He got stopped on the air strip and was taken away to put in the psychiatric hospital. The others on the ward with me were seen as having behavioral problems on ships and in boot camp.

I had been on the ward for two weeks when the psychiatrist asked me, “I hear you write poetry.” I said yes, and he wanted to see my poetry. He saw my poems, saw my writings, and I was on the locked ward the next day. He must have been concerned about what he saw.

The day I got on the locked ward, I met a man who told me it was a mistake that he was here at the psychiatric hospital. I said I felt the same way. “This has all been a big mistake,” he kept saying. He told me, “I was on leave from sonar school. I was at home on leave. I piled my car into a bridge and was taken to a doctor's office. At the doctor's office there were these metal and glass cabinets. I destroyed the glass and metal cabinets. They put me in a straight jacket. I tried to chew my way out of the straight jacket. Rip it off me. Get out of it any way that I could. I don't belong in a mental hospital. It's all been a big mistake.” I said I agree.

I felt like I shouldn't be here either. In l966, they gave involuntary electroshock to people in the hospital. I remember the screams of people being dragged down the hall and shocked against their will in the morning. They would be back for the 10:00 group and could barely talk. I got very quiet. The only medications available were stelazine and thorazine. These two medications almost broke me physically. My left hand kept rolling up and I kept walking around like my curled hand was pulling me.

I stayed out in the basketball court most of the time and learned to become very quiet. I was transferred to the open ward. My friends drove up from Los Angeles. We had to sign in at the war station every four hours. I signed in, went out to the car in my pajamas, they opened the trunk, and I jumped in. We drove off to San Francisco. They bought me shrimp cocktail and an armful of books. I told them that I had believed so firmly in the war, fought so hard, and now I questioned everything. My friends told me that there were people who didn't believe in any war. I bought some books by an author named Kenneth Patchen. I went back to the hospital changed back into my pajamas and four hours later signed in like I'd never been out of the hospital.

A few weeks later I was given my first official liberty. I went to San Francisco and found a dance with a rock and roll band. The band was the Blues Project, and the people who presented the concert were The Family Dog. I made friends that night with a person named Chet Helms. I didn't want to go back to the hospital, so I slept with an over coat covering me by the side of a freeway.

I went back to the dance the next night and continued to enjoy myself and the music. I returned to the hospital and told my psychiatrist that I had been to another world. Where everybody loved everybody, and there was no violence. He said he wanted me to get back into this world.

I kept reading and writing while I was in the hospital and on the weekends, I would go to San Francisco, Berkeley. In Berkeley, I met people from the anti-war movement. There was an organization called the Viet Nam Day Committee. One night, while I was at the office, someone placed a bomb in the building and the bomb blew up. I took people who were wounded out to the backyard and put compresses on them. It was like being in the war again. The psychiatric asked me what would I do when I got out of the hospital? I said I want to be a beatnik. He said, we'll have to keep you here for observation a few more days. The next time they asked me what I wanted to do, I said, I want to work in the post office, and they discharged me.

We Changed the World

I had just gotten out of the psychiatric hospital and headed back to Illinois. My head was ringing. I wanted to find a way to re-establish myself with my past. Illinois where I grew up. Illinois. Where I walked be the side of country roads, collected leaves of native plants and camped by the banks of muddy rivers.

I would come home. I was celebrating. I had survived the war. I was out of Vietnam. I cried thinking about those who I had left behind in the war. I would write to them. Someday. Right now I was back in sweet Illinois.

I had seen live concerts in California. I had been the first concert of the Family Dog Productions in San Francisco. There was a band called the Blues Project. I had danced for two straight nights. I didn't have to find a partner. I could extend my arms and move my feet. I had become one of the dancers. The dancers up front by the stage and off to side. A group which held a tribal stomp. The dancers seemed to fuel the bands. The bands fueled the dancers. Each person was out to change themselves and the world.

Changed the way we danced. Changed the way we lived. Changed the way we ate.
There was a time that I came out to Illinois. Thinking that I could have an apartment in Macomb, Illinois. Have this San Francisco life style in the Midwest. I was back home from the war. I was out of the psychiatric hospital. I was ready to live.

The first night in Illinois I got drunk and stayed drunk. I was home from the war. I had survived hell. Nobody could imagine how much blood and destruction I had seen. I had felt death. I smelled the burning of flesh. I would be drunk until I left Illinois.

My friend was playing in a Rock and Roll band. I was living dressed in a golden bathrobe. Golden bathrobe over blue jeans and tee shirts. I said that I was now Saint Francis. I wouldn't hurt a soul. I was back from the war. I had flipped out and ended up in the psychiatric hospital. I stood behind the band and danced just like in San Francisco. My arms were spread out and my feet were moving. At the end of the set I was introduced to people who came to the dance. They were from Macomb. I was from Western Illinois. I was like nobody else in Western Illinois.

I would go on listening to music and passing out on people's floors. I was alive. I was back from the war. I was free. I was out of the psychiatric hospital. I stayed up at
Tom's place and listened to Rock radio from Peoria. "California Dreaming" by the Mamas and Papas and "Along Came Mary by the Association. I brought out Bob Dylan and Subterranean Homesick Blues. I had a copy of On the Road by Jack Kerourac. I was going to bring this life to the Midwest. I was evangelical missionary from the west coast. I had tasted the life of the counter culture and the Midwest would have this experience.

My parents were freaked out. They couldn't believe the energy that I had. I was out of the psychiatric hospital. My life was to be a career soldier. I could have stayed in the military forever. I could have lived on the base and gone to Los Angeles on the weekend. Los Angeles was tame compared to what I had experienced in San Francisco. I had been part of the new dream. I had tasted the new dream. I had pockets full of stenographer pads. I carried a portable typewriter from the pawn shop. I would wake up in the morning and start to write. Walk around Macomb with taped wrapped around my shoes. Whenever I got too hot I would just step outside the house where I was visiting and dump water all over me. Take a garden house and spray myself with water. Lay down flat on the ground and just turn on the water let it fool all over me. Then, go back into the house with my clothes wet. Pieces of grass and ground stuck to me. Keep the conversation going about music, San Francisco the future. One day we would not be a nation of warriors. We would be poets and painters. We would make music. We would have free concerts. We have night time psychedelic dances. I hadn't taken LSD. I knew that if I could I would. I knew that I was made for LSD. Or LSD was made for me.

After five days, I had become too much for Macomb, the people, my friends and parents. My mother said, " I don't know who you are but you are not from here. You are not our son." I caught a plane back out to Los Angeles. Back out to California.

My friend Steve had a Sandal shop. I could stay in his shop while I ran around Los Angeles. I had been writing to Kathy since before the Vietnam war. I went over to see her at Immaculate Heart College. She was being trained in art by Sister Mary Corita. I was in love with her. I thought that If we could only be together we could produce art together. We could make beautiful art. San Francisco was calling me. In San Franciso young people were building a new world. A world of painting, writing, art. I wanted to be part of that world. I would stay with Steve and Lea for a few day and then head off to San Francisco. Getting on the plane. There was a woman with wire rimmed glasses. Her name was Stella. I thought that she might be with the peace movement.

While I was in Vietnam. I had been getting copies of the Los Angeles Free Press. Ed
Pearl from the Ashgrove had been sending me copies of the War Resisters League Calendar. There were people who didn't believe in the war. 1966 and being opposed to the Vietnam war was not a popular position. The military let me get the newspapers and information sent to me. There was no military paranoia that there would be a peace movement of growth and size that was to split the United States in a future civil war of civil disobedience.

Stella on the airplane. Tried to get away from me. I sat next to her. I was flying at half price. I was in uniform with this stripped read and white boat necked shirt falling out from the back of my uniform. I kept telling that I had seen the death and destruction in Vietnam. I had to make contact with the peace movement. I had to let people know that we were killing people and being killed in Vietnam.

I was waiting for the new Bob Dylan album to come out and looking for a place to live. I found the place to live before I found the new Bob Dylan album. This was supposed to be a two record surprise package with longer songs than had ever been recorded. Stella was going with a guy named ..... Then helped me find a place. I had some money from my severance pay. I had some unemployment insurance. I got a place to live on Laguna and Haight street. There was a funky chick dressed to the nines named Janis on the corner. She had been living at 1090 Page street. I went up to 1090 Page street and met an artist from Omaha named George. He did these painting that were so different. I loved what he did with painting. I loved what Kathy did. She was sending me paintings from Los Angeles. Her art had gotten me through the war in Vietnam. There seemed to be such cruelty and brutality in Vietnam. I wanted to live with painters and poets. I wanted to create beauty around me.

I was experiencing a dizziness. I kept feeling like I was in a stupor. I wanted to sleep late. I couldn't go to sleep at night. I had dexamyl leftover from the war. I used to have a cannister of one thousand green and white dexamyls that I would pass out to the troops. I would take some myself. I didn't like it because the uppoer had made me nervous. With this stupor that I now had, this dexamyl was perfect. I was walking around stunned. My mind was racing so fast that I didn't have this dizziness. I used to see this little white lights off to either side of my head. Up late at night reading Gasoline by Gregory Coroso and listening to the New Lost City Ramblers. I wanted to take drugs. I had read about all the wonderful things that drugs did for people. I was feeling terrible. I felt terrible from the war. Maybe, drugs could make me happy. Make me whole. I couldn't find anyone who I could trust to sell me some drugs. I hadn't taken LSD. People in San Francisco were afraid to sell me acid. LSD was supposed to let a person know about themselves. I needed to know about myself. I didn't know who I was. Whoever I had been didn't exist.

I was the kid who was supposed to come back from the war and go to college. Missouri Valley College. Now I would live in San Francisco and be a writer. I would like the life like Penrod in the Booth Tarkington novel. I would go out have adventures and come back to the apartment and write about what I had seen and done.

But first, I wanted to understand America. I wanted to understand the country and people who would send me off to the war in Vietnam. I couldn't sit still. Stella had someone who would rent the apartment. A person from Kansas named Charlie Plymell. I kept my books and typewriter. I stored the poems. I kept the plays and poems that I had written in the military and took off on a Greyhound bus to discover America. I paid my landlady the entire rent for the summer. I know that I needed a place to live. When I came back to San Francixoc. After, I would come back to San Francisco I would become a beatnik writer. In the fall. I would be backs. With my pockets full of observations. My typewrite on the go and just stay with myself alone in this lone little room. Writing up about who I had seen and where I had gone. May, 1966. Said good bye to Stella and her boyfeind. Gave them the keys to the apartment and took off on a Greyhound bus going East. 100 dollars for 100 days.

Along the way I bought bags of bread and chesses. I enjoyed small bottles of wine. I would eat the cheese and bread. Get back on the bus after some sips of wine and start to write. I kept a copy of Howl and Mexico City Blues with me. I kept several copies of Kenneth Patchens books. I kept a copy of Journal of Albion Moonlight and kept reading that over. All the way across country I kept reading. I was going to Connecticut. To see Beth.

Kthy didn't seem like she would ever want to be with me. She was being controlled by her father. Her father wanted her to go to school and graduate. I wanted to live. I wanted to discover America. I had been writing to a girl from Connecticut and was off to see if Beth on the East Coast was the woman of my dreams.

Driving across the country open fields and greasy spoon restaurants. Talk wasn't of the war. People didn't even seem to know that I had been in Vietnam. The talk was of home town people and places. Everybody I talked to had something to say about the place where they lived and the people who they knew. Each town had a local character. Someone who made them laugh. Someone who made them proud. I was just a temporary reporter who made my way across the nation. Writing down what I saw. Writing down what was said. I had the best piece of pie since my father's bakery in Wyoming. Met a girl who put her head on my shoulder. I held her in my arms all the way to Chicago. All the way to West Virginia was the land that I had known. I had only been east once before. I had traveled by train several times from the west coast. The East coast was all new territory. In high school, I had gone to New York and
Washington DC. When the others stayed in the hotel. I had hit the pavement in New
York. I pulled into Port Authority bus station. Made my transfer to take the bus to Connecticut. Stowed my clothes in a bear claw brand back pack in a locker in the bus station. Hit the pavement one more time in new york to smell and look into the windows of New York. I had money from my severance pay. I didn't have a place to live. I didn't care. I was free. Money in my pocket and notebooks to write poems. My life was full. There were so many people and things to buy. There were imported trinkets. Transistor radios were the rage. Every corner had a different transistor radio. There were transistor radios on every store window. I didn't know that people could listen to that much radio.

I went back to the Port Authority bus station and took my bus to Connecticut. I got off the bus in New London. I went to look for Beth. I met her friends. There was Beth's brother who I had served with in Vietnam. I had saved his life. He had a seizure one night and I had given him artificial respiration. he was at the house. Beths's friends were there. Beth wasn't there. I found out that Beth had been committed to the psychiatric hospital. My Beth. My love. Love of my life. Hospitalized. Thrown away. Just like I had been. I knew that I couldn't stay in New London. I had my bed roll. I could stay anywhere. I went out to the psychiatric hospital. I was allowed one phone to Beth before she was stopped from talking to me. I told her that I would be outside the hospital that afternoon. I saw here and she saw me. She was on the top floor and waved to me. I waved back and cried. Poor Beth just like me. Caged in this psychiatric world. I called her back. She told me how her therapist didn't want her to see me. I would be bad for her. I was also insane. I would have a bad influence on her. I slept that night in the woods around the hospital. I suggested that I would see her one last time to say good bye. I went to the hospital the next day. Beth stuck her head to the open window. She yelled out that she loved me. She would love me forever. I yelled back that I would love her forever. I went off with my pack on my back and started hitch hiking. Started crying. Where ever people were going with a ride I went. I ended up in town called Voluntown, Connecticut. I thought that I would never hear from Beth again. I was toxic. I was toxic person. I was bad for her. I was bad for myself. The time that I had spent in the war didn't work out for me. Instead of coming out of the war with a commission and a career I was left wandering the streets of America. Alone Frightened Crying.

Downtown Voluntown with my back pack. I met Sue Fletcher and somebody who she was with. I told her that I was a veteran back from the war. She told me that she knew a place where I could stay. There was a farm outside of town. She like bob Dylan music. She had read Jack Kerouac. Here was someone who knew where it was at. She was one of my kind of people. She would insure that I would be in a great spot. The farm was run by peace activists. They were against the launching of nuclear submarines. They were opposed to any war. They were opposed to Vietnam. The Vietnam war was just part of the bigger picture. War was the bigger issue was asked to some work around the farm. I would sleep outside or in the barn. I was fixing up the summer camp to where kids from the city would come that summer and stay. There would be kids who parents were interested in the peace movement and wanted to live a peaceful life. There was Annie and her boyfriend Doadie who was a Jazz pianist. I would spend hours in conversation with them. I wrote poems. I missed Sue Fletcher. I wondered would

she be the girl of my dreams. Would she be the one who loved me. Annie tried to caution me. She said that I should be with someone special. She said that I fell in love too easily. She said that I would need someone special in my life. There was no reason that I would return to Beth. Just thinking about Beth started to make me sad. I had been told that I was eligible for Veterans benefits. I thought the benefit I would need would be was to check myself into a psychiatric hospital. I took the bus down to Hartford. I felt that my head was exploding. I could stop my head from blowing up. I slept on the grounds of the psychiatric hospital that night. I was crying and crying. I wanted to check myself in. The next morning, I was crying so hard that I didn't make sense. The people at the information desk seemed frightened. I couldn't answer. I tried to explain to them about Beth. I tried to explain to them about the war. The more I tried to explain the less they seemed like they wanted to hear. I walked out the door lost and crying. Sat under a tree. Broke out a package of Vanilla Wafers. And, downed the wafers and a quart of milk. Look at the yard and the people passing by. I was just a rumpled figure. My legs tucked up under me. The people went by and looked at me then looked away. After an eternity. I got up and caught a bus to New London. And, hitch hiked back to Voluntwon.

The Newport Folk Festival came along that summer. Paul Swanson, a guy from the peace farm, was going to take me to hear the music. I would see the music that I grew up and loved. Sue Fletcher would be there. I could meet her and maybe she would see that I was the guy for her. I missed the music and spent most of my time trying to impress Sue Fletcher. Nothing seemed to work. She wasn't impressed. Back on the farm the first campers were coming in from New York City. Some of the kids had talked about taking drugs. I was fascinated. I hadn't taken any LSD. Stella and Bob in San Francisco had made sure that drugs would stay out of my hands. Just some pot the night I flipped out in a tent in a tent in Vietnam. I was not interested in any drugs during the summer of 1966. My life was a natural high. Except for these extreme moments of sadness where and when I would break down in uncontrollable grief and sob, and sob, and sob. I would break out the milk and cookies. Go off by myself and read some Gregory Corso and Kenneth Patchen poems. Write my own poems and make myself happy.

The summer went on. I was in charge of cleaning the kitchen and the carp grounds. Met Old bill. He told me about diet. He talked about Health Foods. Ate garlic. Went for long walks. I liked his life style. Just didn't that I could live It. I was too strung out on milk and cookies. Then, I met Lisa. She was one of the campers. We made love on night and got caught. It happened. I loved her and she loved me. The rules and regulations of the camp seemed to be in the way of our love. I was fired and sent out of the camp and the farm the next day. My bus ticket was still good. I got a ride to New London. Took a bus to New York City. Went to look for Sue Fletcher around Cooper Union where she was going to school. Found Sue. I was still too square for her. Went to see a group called the Fugs. Met a guy who lived on the lower East Side. He invited me over to his apartment. He had a bath tub in the kitchen. I stayed with him for two weeks and got to know New York. Met some Vets who were drunk of ripple wine. Thought I would have to get back here. The climate was so hot that I couldn't stay. We down to Port Authority bus station with the pack on my back and took off for New Orleans. Wanted to see my aunt and uncle. They were the bohemians in the family maybe they could understand what I was going through. The south had changed since I had been here. The segregation wasn't so obvious. My aunt asked me that I was writing a lot of poems about garbage. I said that I was seeing a lot of garbage and people living on the social edge or off the social edge. Two days later the bus was driving across Lake Ponchatrane and going into Texas. Up from Texas. Across the southwest. And, into southern California. Back to Steve and Lea's at the sandal shop. I stayed with them for several weeks. ran around Los Angeles. I had spent almost all my severance pay. I had lived on cookies, milk and poems. I was coming back to San Francisco.

My apartment was clean and in order. All the food that I'd bought had been eaten. I had to start all over. I went out and got a job at dental cleaning place. I found out from some friends that there was a job opening and I took it. This was the last job lead that I had gotten from Bob. Next time I went to Stella's there was a new guy living there named John. John played the flute and drew pictures of animals. He was light hearted and had just come out of New York driving two guys named Peter Berg and Emitte Grogan across the country. John was painting back drops for the San Francisco Mime Troupe. He spent hours with me in conversation. He had just gotten out of the nut house. He had been insane. He was insane and not ashamed for being crazy. He defined himself by how far out he was. I went back to 1090 Page street and met George. George came and stayed at my place. He told me what a great artist that John was. I thought that George was. Everybody who I met like George were ambassadors from some hip community in the town where they lived.

George was from the scene in Omaha. He was in constant contact with the people back in Omaha. Tom appeared at my door. He was the ambassador from Macomb, Illinois. He was writing back to the people back in Illinois about the sights, sounds, and experiences that he was having. That fall there was a full blown race riot. Friends of mine were working at the post office. I never heard again from Sue or Beth. I met Brooke. I fell in love with her. She lived up in the heart of the Haight Ashbury . I lived on lower Haight I could hitch hike up to see here or ride my bike. I had gotten a bicycle and kept ridging my bicycle through San Francisco. So I would ride up to Brooke's. Read the San Francisco
Chronicle, Herb Caen articles, and what was on at the movies. I would go out to newspaper distribution points. Pick up copies of the Berkeley Barb. That fall of 1966, there was to be a new newspaper. At First it was to be political and start the revolution. Then, it promoted trips and exploring your mind. The first issue was to be called PO San Francisco, then the name was change to the Oracle. So I was selling both newspapers.

Before the newspaper hit the streets, I was interviewed for the first issue of the PO San Francisco. I talked about what I had seen in Vietnam. My experiences. I talked about what I had seen in the East coast. I talked about what I would see. If the war didn't stop. Iff we didn't start to care about each other. The United States was involved in Foreign policy snafu's and couldn't keep our back yard clean. The people coming home from the war were littering our back yard with alcoholism. I wasn't drinking. I too my first LSD trip. I went with John around San Francisco and dressed up in cloth garbage bags. I would dress in sack cloth. I would become a saint. I would atone for the sins of killing that we had inflicted on the Vietnamese. My hands were covered with blood. The way to make myself clean was to do good deeds. I would take in the hungry, cloth and feed those in need, I would start to live a new life. Cars honked their horns at me as I wondered stoned into the traffic. I took the elevator on the outside of the Fairmount Hotel to see the entire city of San Francisco. I was to become a saint in this city. My home would be a crash pad. Anyone could stay with me and be welcome. I would let go of everything. I came home. Gave away my combat medal. Gave away my writing from the war. Gave away clothes. I would start out the new Moe. The streets were my home. My companionship were the people who roamed and ran through the streets. I had a new home and a new future in San Francisco. That was my first trip. After this trip I would go and have more trips. As long as I had no material wealth I could live forever. I would be free. No one could take anything from me. I had given away everything.
While I had been in the psychiatric hospital, I had started going to concerts. I had seen the Blues Project, the Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, the Thirteenth Floor Elevators, and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. I was really excited because the Paul Butterfield Blues Band was one of the records that I had sent to me in Vietnam. I got the record after I had been in the war for a while. I was listening to the record during the time I was in Okinawa. I kept my records in the foot locker. I had sent them back to my parents. Now, I was able to see the Paul Butterfield Blues Band live. Two nights in a row. I got to see the Yardbirds. I was able to dance and dance to the 13th Floor Elevators. I would dance and spin out of control when they played the Bob Dylan song, "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window." I used to get spare change to go the dances and feed myself. I started out at the Fillmore asking for money. Then, I would end up at the Family Dog. I got more money at the Fillmore. At the Family Dog, Chet Helms let me in for free, as long as I did the clean up after the concerts. There was Big Brother and the Holding Company. The day that the Velvet Underground came to town and San Francisco go to stare New York right in the eye. There were Andy Warhol movies showing on the walls. The Velvet Underground played on and on. The Mothers of Invention came to town and a couple of the women mothers jumped off stage and danced with me. By this time, I was becoming one of the dancers. I lived off to the side of the stage. Every Friday and Saturday I would be at the Dance Halls. I sold Berkeley Barbs or Oracle all day long. Then, was at the Dance Halls at night. I never wanted to sleep. During this time, I started taking LSD. Somebody had said to take it once a week. I would read the Tibetan Book of the Dead while I was tripping. Man, the scene was building. There were some concerts that were at Winterland. I would go over a catch Moby Grape. No matter who was playing where I would be part of the science and try to spend all my time in the music. I bought another small record player. The portable kind that I had in Vietnam. Somehow the acid made the sound come out of the record player seem like the band was right in the room. The feeling of listening to music was just like the time I went crazy in Vietnam. When I was kissing the record player and talking to Bob Dylan. Taking acid was just like being crazy, but it was nice. There was no freak outs for me. One time, I did think that I was going to drown. And kept crying like the old days. One time I felt that these hooks were in my body and the LSD made the pain more intense and the pain didn't go away. With LSD the pain didn't come along. I was distracted into watching flowers breathe or watching the sandy beaches melt. There was so much to discover. Each day was so full that I was forgetting that I had been in the war. I spoke at some Anti-war rallys in Berkeley. I read poems that the Oracle published. Days and weeks were all blending in to one.

I could n't tell when one week started and another ended. During this time I was still going with Brooke. we would go to some concerts. I enjoyed my morning conversations with her. I was still messed up from the war about women. I had thought that women for sex. I was to run around with the guys. I was only to be with women as a last resort. I was too much of a man to spend time with women. I had been so saturated with bought sex in Vietnam that I saw women as sexual favors. I was falling in love with Brooke. The mornings with her were like heaven. The sun on her back porch. Reading the Chronicle and talking about the news. Brooke had started to get concerned because I seemed more interested in taking drugs. She asked what If I never came back. I couldn't explain that I had already been insane. I couldn't get crazier than I already was. I was falling deeper and deeper in love with her. I didn't know how to have a domestic life. All I knew was two parents who worked all the time,
a guy like me who was on the go all the time, and just buying sexual favors. I wanted to have a relationship and at the same time I was scared. Finally, I would become more frightened. Brooke who was so good to me. I would end up deserting her and become deserted myself.

Kathy came up from Los Angeles. I threw myself at her. I would be with Kathy. Kathy would understand me. I was an artist. I would draw and write for days. I hadn't learned how to rework what I had written. I hadn't learned that writing is work. I would spill out volumes of this written word. I still had my portable Royal typewriter. I would go out on the streets fill up stenographer pads with sights and sounds that I had seen. I would sometimes come home and fill up typed pages with the same sights and sounds. I would just write straight through.

Kathy was an artist. A great artist. She would understand me. I would be appreciated. Kathy left me for home in Los Angeles. I was left in San Francisco to live by myself. I was panhandling. I found an apartment that was a crash pad. I filled the apartment up with all the people who had been living with me on Haight and Laguna. I couldn't get rid of the people from the old place. Everyone came with me to the new place. People came and went. All I needed was a corner to do my poems and sleep. I was writing all the time.

George the artist came and went. Steve and Jimmy T. came from Vermont and then moved down the street. There was a guy down the hall who played bass. His name was Pablo. He played at one time with the San Francisco Symphony. One time he had a family. He struck out on his own. To play bass with jazz groups and local musicians. We used to go to house to Jam Out. Everything was a Jam. Steve and Dave were two of the best musicians that I knew. They would play music with anyone for hours. I would beat tambourine and shout. When the music stopped. I was back out in the streets selling Berkeley Barbs. Going to concerts.

The bass player never stopped making music. He would just open a window and play bass to the traffic that was passing by. I still had my bicycle and would take off. During this time I got a job offer at the US Post Office. I took the job. Now that I had a straight job I couldn't have the people in the apartment. I took over the rent and people started to leave. I also had money for drugs from the employment. So I started getting high. Before employment, I had only been a recreational user. Now I was loaded every day. I could come home and be stoned. I stopped writing. I was exhausted from the job. Just roll a joint and smoke by myself at night. Take acid on the weekend. Brooke was working at the Post Office. I loved her and regretted not wanting to be with her full time. Now, I was high. I was distracted. Couldn't carry on a conversation. I was just stoned all the timI worked so hard that I could unload an entire semi truck by myself. I was the talk of the whole post office. There was no one who could unload a whole semi truck by themselves. Not only could I unload one semi truck. I unloaded truck after truck. In the afternoon I would have some break time go smoke and joint, eat a sandwich and come back into the post office to load shipping cartons for the mail going to Vietnam. I was lucky there would be boxes broken open and candy and cookies had spilled out. There was always something to sweet in the afternoon after I got the munchies from the pot. e. I started bringing joints to the post office. I was there to unload vans.

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The rains came in San Francisco. I rode my bike through the rain. I would come back to the house. Hit the street. Work during day. Tried to work on the weekend so that I

could have my free time during the week and work on the weekends. The war was so distant. I wrote some letters to people who I served with. Never got a response. Frank came from Arkansas. He had gotten out of Vietnam and was heading back to Arkansas. I showed him what he could have. He could be all this that was. He wasn't interested. He just me living in crash pads surrounded by people who needed me financially. I kept working and letting people crash at my pad.

Neal Cassady was living upstairs with Anne Murphy. They used to have these horrible fights. They could be heard all through the halls in the day and night. Neal would be screaming how he took speed. Speed. That's what he took. Anne was into Acid. She was never to touch his speed. He took speed. Nobody was to take his speed. He loved speed. Speed was what he loved. She could talk all the acid that she wanted. There was always acid. She could take as much acid as she wanted. Sometimes he would punch her. Sometimes he would punch her. Then, one night at my door Anne appeared. She said that she and Neal had a fight. That she was lonely. We started to kiss and next thing I knew we were on the floor making love. She left and took the car with her. I would see Neal the next day with an empty apartment with just a mattress on the floor. Neal started talking to me about how nobody should mess with another man's, wife, job or money. When a man started to mess with another man's wife, money or job that all hell could break loose. Neal was a nice guy and understood that people made mistakes. He made many mistakes when he was young. He came into the apartment and started looking around. He got his stuff and left his mattress in the top floor and moved in. He hit the streets looking for a new car. He found a guy with Volkswagen bus. The owner of the bus was a heroin addict. He kept his outfit with him and kept shooting up. We would drive around from place to place. Neal would talk someone out of some drugs to keep high. He kept saying if you want live high get high. And, high we got. I was no longer a weekend user of drugs. I was a full blown head. I was a dancer . A head. I was San Francisco, Moe. Neal said, "Vietnam, take some of this." And, dosed me with three or four of the most powerful trips of acid that I ever had. Then, he kept shoving acid in me for the evening. And, smoking joints. Every time that I smoked a joint I would come back up on the acid. Neal talking a mile a minute. Talking about jazz music that he knew. He knew almost every jazz record that had ever been made. He would talk about the people he had been with. The different life and drug trips he been through. He kept up this pace. We would get back to the place. I would crash out about two or three in the morning. Neal would still be talking to himself and wandering around the room. He would be talking to himself. He was constantly arranging his clothes. He looked like a neat cowboy from Colorado. He took good care of clothes and his health. He had lived on the streets for so long that he knew how to live on lamb. After a few hours sleep I would wake up Neal would crash out. I would head out in the streets to work at the post office. I didn't or couldn't work a full day. I would just start to work. Work as long as I could four to six hours, then go home. Neal would just start to become awake. We roust up; the smack freak, who usually just crashed out in the Volkswagen van. And, we would start driving again. We did this for almost a month and a half. Neal talking a mile a minute. Bent over the wheel of the Volkswagen listening to the jazz of a radio station. He could tell everything about each record that he heard before the announcer said what was the music and musicians. We kept driving until the VW Van broke down in Berkeley. Neal sent the smack freak into get a new car. We asked at a couple of places. We slept in the van sitting up. At three until four in the morning we asked. We got no response.

At five in the morning, I

heard someone yelling from the house. All the way out to the side walk to where Neal and I were standing. Neal Cassady. You think that I'm going to let Neal Cassady use my car. You had better guess again. Neal Cassady can never use my car. There was silence. In a few minutes the smack freak was back outside with keys in his hand. We took off and had the car until just before New Years. The smack freak kept shooting up and passing out with his head in the shot gun windshield. Neal kept telling me that he would do any drugs but he never would shoot up. Never shoot up. He found out a long time ago that he should never shoot up. He beat into my head that no matter what I did or how many drugs that I took. Never shoot up. He and the smack freak had a falling out. Probably over the borrowed car. Neal and I were left alone to try to get around. These college students came down from Redding, California. They were looking acid. They had been given my name and address.

They had a car. Neal waited in the bathroom of our one room apartment. I said to these guys that I would help them get the acid that they wanted. Just we needed to use the car to get the stuff. The only thing was that I had a friend, my room mate. Who really liked to drive and he would drive us around to the places we needed to go. The students were reluctant then said OK. On cue Neal came out of the bathroom snatched the keys, ran out the door with us all trailing him, we jumped in the car and drove back and forth across the bay bridge without stopping. Neal talking a mile minute the kids in the back seat with eyes as big as saucers. Myself in the front seat riding shot gun, turned around trying to pacify the kids. Neal knew about a party with the Loading Zone. We could go to this party we could have a good time. The kids wanted to go to the Fillmore. Neal said that Bill Graham wouldn't let him in the Fillmore. We could to this party at the Loading Zone's house. Neal said that the important thing was keeping the people in the trip together. We had to stay together. We started the trip together. Keep the people in the trip together. Keep the trip together. We drove right up to the house. The party was in full swing. We got out of the car and started walking to the house. We saw a person fall out of the top of a tree in the front yard. and fall all the way to ground. The people from the party all stopped and ran up and started to make a circle around the person. Neal and I looked at each other. We knew that the cops would be coming soon. Neal always talked about how he had been busted for three joints. He had done three years for three joints. He didn't want to do more time. He wanted nothing to do with the police. We got into the car and drove off. Neal wanted to drive off for La Honda. He wanted to spend New Year's with Kesey. The kids had tickets for the Fillmore. They wanted to see to see the Grateful Dead and the Airplane.

Neal said that he couldn't get in. He wanted to keep the trip together. I could go in and tell Bill Graham that Neal Cassady was in the car I could get him in. The kids got in. I found Bill Graham and asked him if Neal Cassady could get in this night. Neal Cassady, let me tell you about Neal Cassady shouted Bill Graham. Neal Cassady has been nothing but trouble. That hammer. Let me tell you about that hammer. That hammer has always been trouble. there has been nothing but trouble with Neal Cassady that guy is trouble. No way is Neal Cassady going to get into anything that I'm doing. Neal Cassady that guy is dangerous. I've known Neal Cassady for a long time and that guy is nothing but trouble. I went back out to the car. Told Neal that Bill Graham wouldn't let me bring him in. Neal was covered up with a blanket in the back seat of the car. The kids had taken the car keys. Neal said go in and talk to Jerry Garcia. Jerry Garcia could get him in. I went up when Jerry Garcia got off the stage to ask Jerry Garcia to help get Neal Cassady into the Fillmore. Neal Cassady I can't do anything for him. I have tried to do a lot for Neal Cassady. I can't get him in here tonight." I went back out to the car Told Neal that I couldn't get him in. Neal said to get those kids and we would go to Kesesy's for New Years night. I tried to get the kids from Redding out to This was the first New Year's concert that the Grateful Dead played at. Nobody wanted leave. Finally when they served breakfast in the morning, I go t Neal a plate of scrambled eggs and some toast. took the food to him in the car. Mr. Graham watched me take the food but didn't say anything. He let me back in. The guards knew me as a panhandler and a friend who was trying to get Neal into the concert that night. They let me go out and check on Neal that night. I wanted to make sure that Neal was as comfortable as possible. I wanted to make sure that we get Neal to a warm place as soon as possible. I got the Kids from Redding to leave early. They didn't know anyone from the scene. Getting them out of the Fillmore was easy. They didn't know anyone. They didn't want to stay. We went back to our place. Neal was grouchy, cold, and tired of everyone leaving him. He kept saying how we had to learn how to keep the trip together. We got back. Neal crashed out hard. I slept for a little. Neal asked me to get some acid for the concert in the park. Janis Poplin was supposed to be playing in the park. Neal wanted to link up with the Hell's Angels. He wanted to be out of the scene. He wanted to get down to Kesey's. I was able to get some acid for the guys from Redding. With the extra money and some of my post office salary I got Neal 100 hits of Owsley. We all went to the park I gave Neal 100 hits of acid said that I was sorry that New Years got so screwed up and that I hoped his night hadn't been that bad. I said good bye to Neal. Took another hit of acid to give me some energy,. watched Janis and Big Brother and cruised the strip up on Haight street..

The sun was out that day. Bopping down Haight street. Dropped some of the acid that
I gave to Neal. Was Hanging out in doorways. Would try to sell some more Berkeley Barbs to get some more money to get more Berkeley Barbs to get food. Didn't think that anything could go wrong.

Other than I was about go crazy one more time. Lose my job. One more time. And, be set adrift in the big city without knowing anyone. Having people crash at my place for rent money and sell Berkeley Barbs for food money. My favorite spots were in the back woods of Golden Gate Parks. Behind shrubs where no one could see me. Dance and walk all the way to the ocean. Would walk along the beach and then walk back up through the park all the way to the Haight-Ashbury. Every month there were more and more of us. I would swing through town on foot and by bus. I was free. There was always a way to move through the city. I could hitch hike. Very few times I needed to hitch hike. Unless, I was going from the lower Haight street to upper Haight street. Most of the times I had stopped wearing shoes. My feet were hard as the pavement. I the winter I would wear boots. Mountain climnbing boots just like I used to have in the Marine Corps with Vibran soles. The Marine Corps was never far away. I was able to live on the streets and in crash pads by what I had learned in the Marine Corps. Then, came the First Be In.

Jim, Steve, David and I had been hanging out. We could break into people's houses and start to play music and Jam out. The first Be-In was a celebration of our person hood. There were the heads and hippies and everybody else. We wanted the world to know that we are a new people. We going to fall off the edge of the United States. Soon the whole world would be like us. We were changing the world. By changing ourselves were changing the world. The world was changing. Every month there seemed to be more and more people who had left home. Left College. Runaway. Walked away. Just left and came to San Francisco. The concerts were filled. Both, the Fillmoer and the Avalon. i was no longer working for Chet. I could still stand out in front and pan handle. I was too wired out to stay behind. I was invited over to people's houses. I had a rap. I was back from the war. I was older and certainly had more life experience than the other people who I was meeting in San Francisco. I was into staying up until one or two or three in the morning. Just rapping about what we had seen and done. There was a sense of wonder. Older women and kids tripped us out. Everybody thought that kids were where it was at. Kids seemed so sweet. Go to Golden Gate Park and trip out with the kids We could swing and slide down the slides. Our lives didn't have to take on the appearances of traditional grown ups. We were ready live life to the maximum.

The park become more and more filled with people with long flowing gowns and funny floppy hats. I had a railroad hat that pressed down my overflowing hair. I had sideburns. I had always wanted to look like Elvis. I would let my beard grow. I had seen so much life that I could be wise man. I was ready for the first Be In. This was to be gathering a reunion. A reflection. What we had gone through a celebration of our victory. The hip culture had won over the straight culture. We would come together in Golden Gate Park. I was still writing poems. Traveling around in a long wool overcoat. Pockets filled with scribbled observations.

That winter there had been a lot of rain. The streets glistened. The lights of San Franciso were all over the pavements, sidewalks, side of houses. Water running down the sides of Victorian houses. I was always moving from my new place on Fillmore and Oak street to other parts of the city. I could still walk down to Haight street and then hitch hike up to upper street. Go past the drug store cafe and buy a soy burger by the Straight Theater. By then I was a vegetarian. Go home, fix myself some food and go on out into the evening and be part the scene. There was a lot of music going on at people's home. There would three bands a night on the weekends. On the weekends I would go around with Steve, Dave and Jim and just rock out with more Jamming. Steve and Dave would play guitar for hours. They would go on into the night. Around one or two in the morning we would all wander out into the evening. People had beating on pots and shaking maracas all evening. We were the ones who made music for free. Sometimes George would come over and play his guitar. During that time John and Stella had moved to Santa Cruz and I would hitch hike down Route One to see them. I was having strange things happen to me. I would still hear the rustling sounds like someone was in the next room. No one was there. I would see these small flashing white lights on either side of me. There were no lights.

For several months before John and Stella had moved to Santa Cruz, I had been reading about astral travel. I would get the house quiet when other people who were crashing out at the pad had gone. Then, at Santa Cruz, I had this experience where I kept imagining that I was leaving my body. And, I did leave my body. I was laying on the ground one moment and the next I could see myself and was flying away from me. In a split second, I became so afraid that I zipped right back along the path where I had left and slapped right back into my body.

I was terrified. The terror of having this happen to me was so terrifying that I trudged back to the house and told John and Stella that I was frightened. John tried to calm me down. He explained that people who went to look for religious experiences sometimes got them. John thought that people were unprepared for the experiences that might come from these searches. I would never again attempt astral projection.

Back into the scene. Dance halls. Boogie down music. Lost my job at the post office. Went out and became a spare change artist. Kept remembering what Neal Had said, "If you want to live high get high." I was racing around the city. Digging the music. Yonder comes my woman, get me down my walking cane. I had gone through several girlfriends. I couldn't hold a job and couldn't hold on to a girlfriend. Was out all night. Jamming with the music. Steve, Dave and I would break into people's lives. Start doing acoustic jamming with two guitars and anything, anyone could beat on. Banging on pots and tables. Bowls and floors. The free flowing jamming would just go on. My beard was growing out. and my feet were bare. All I had were two shirts and two pairs of pants. Billy the Kid met Jean Harlow in a play called the Beard. At the end of a play where the two people were arguing the entire play. Billy the Kid does oral sex on Jean Harlow. Wow, what a trip. We all sat around and talked about how this play was really far out. By this time the Oracles were coming out on a regular basis. I could count on selling the Berkeley Barb. Whenever an Oracle newspaper came out everybody would snatch it up. People were waiting for the Tribal message. The discussion with Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Allen Watts and Timothy Leary. The discussion centered on the new age that was upon us. Yet, the new age wasn't really transforming people by these traditional spiritual sages. The transformation was taking place by music.
Music that let everybody participate. Music that broke down the pompousness of sterile observational art. We all all make music. Steve, Dave, Jimmy, myself and the people who traveled around making music were creating with what we had. People were the materials. Every time that we got together we would Jam out playing guitars and making music. Wander off into the night after an evening of getting down and getting together. There were no distinctions and barriers. We were not afraid of each other. Because we made music together there had been a communion. This had never happened before. Art and music had a star quality before. There were few star . The people who played at the concerts were the people who were on the street. The real action was on the streets. I missed Neal and never saw him. There were people who I met with Neal. And, even if I didn't know the people I knew how to get through the streets. Less than a year I was into the scene. By the time of the first Be In I knew everyone on the streets and they knew me. We would talk about the music that we had seen the weekend before. We would talk about taking LSD and reading the Hobbit. We would talk about how we could become the Hobbit.

Perhaps,
but you were in the kitchen
and the words i looked for

(under the rug) never seemed to leave my mouth (a
thought for the penny)

-when, the table was set, then the diners sat down
to eat till the end of time-

I wished, you would ask me the same question again....

(Not being part of nothing, I read)

My passing though, holding more than that

"Don't run and hide,"
I was going to say

Till I saw, it was me hiding

Me, the person alone and afraid but
still just me

When you kissed me

Dodging the king and queen

The neon castle

I should have known

and, I'm still mute today, just like I was
right after the war

Still afraid

Would have all been in the rain anyhow

The space gap sending out a marshalled
army

late and early night thoughts

When, me thinking I know so much

forgetting tore's emotions, because I've
become, so cool

My life seems peeking around the same corner
painted different colors

Wanting to cry
Wondering what has happened

I can usually hide my emotions better than that

Loved never, like that almost six
months

Thought love was gone

Never again, from first time I saw you mute words
I turn into a poem When my fears, made the
simplest parts of life, mysteries

No more deserted painted corners

Hands in my pockets, hanging on the streets

But, no, never, none of this seems to hold

I seem to love you too much

Been so long since I felt, those cold shivers,
run up and down my back
You kissed me in the neon light of San Francicsco

night We lost time

We never sat at the same table I was like a car salesman, down
home on the block of pirate's waste

I came home
I cried
Been so long since I loved anyone like you I
wanted to say all things many things to you

The words never came
I was sitting on the back porch looking down Downy
Street where you left

hoping that you would come back so I could say one more
thing to you

See you one more time
Tell you what I really wanted to say

No more Howdy Doody Bullshit
Reall stuff

Throwing myself into you not come home and
write
a poem about nothing

but for once speak to someone I really loved not being
afraid that I would lose
something else another part of my life lost

I'll go down the street and wait for the next bus

My mind is not working like it should

Well not exactly not working

time has passed plans haven't worked out

fallen through
the bottom keeps falling out underneath me

I deserve what life has given me when
life has caught up with me

Back through the streets. Up to Brooke's. Pocket full of spare change. With all the thoughts of where I was. Where I had been. Kept moving. Would stay at Brooke's for the evening. Would be like a cat kind of out all night. Crash for the night. Would sit on the back porch, read Herb Caen and be off the next day into the sunlight. The West Coast weather was so much warmer than the Midwest. Milder the Viet Nam. There was a demonstration down the street which ended at the Federal Building. By this time I couldn't imagine that anyone would want to go to war. Why fight in combat when you could come to San Francisco and be cool. Went with the demonstration down the street to be in front of the building on 450 Golden Gate Avenue. People peering out the windows. There was no way that the people inside would know that the war would grow and so would the demonstrations. Still, I was in blue jeans both pants and shirts. Wore a blue bandana head band.

I want to answer but always use the same excuse of being somewhere that I can never be with the exception inside, inside me and myself passes the empty door steps no policeman on the street to run my brain like an American nightmare dream down Haight Street and no turning back now and I know it as much as I know anything else about myself and less about other but always dealing in the total opposites and my card I want have dealt my way and when they aren't dealt I leave, confused and hurt like tonight earlier with George realizing he meant to say let's be friends.
To that which he didn't say until tonight.
Then, this late night girl fur coat dangling in
front of his frustrated mind
Around Drug Store Cafe Haight Street

Me, I'd had enough and left got to get back to peace
and quiet apartment

George was back later in the evening and we both laughed
but I felt he still meant he wanted to be friends and he did
want friendship

it was true and I hated to admit my own
defeat

I couldn't be friends
I was on a search for identity

The end of my search is never in sight not wanting to end
my life wanting to be reborn

While in the back of my
head
I keep asking what's wrong with the way
I am but something drives me on

I must live
I must find the truth
I must find me

But, not as frustrating as in the past, no worries of war
death or or it'll be too late, my life will be taken from me

Or, overwhelmed by pain and blood, that I can never
understand the present

Understand
Understand
Understand

Every day my routine was the same to go out on the streets and sell newspapers and meet people. I was living some modern extension of the life that I had in the Midwest. With my friends and I we would explore the streets and the Golden Park during the day and come home at night and write about it and talk about it and go out and do it all over again the next day. We would meet people who never thought that we would ever know. Big Steve was a guy who always had a great rap. He had amazing trips. He had taken every drug and had a different experience each time that he had taken each and every drug. His trips were more than drug experiences. His trips were descriptions of people and place. I wanted to meet those people. All I had to do was hang out on a door step and start a conversation with anybody who was coming thorough. Ever body dressed up in cast offs from the Thrift Store and living off the throw always from the super market. Brown rice and vegetables could stretch the diet for the longest period. We ate different. We dressed different. We were different. The life that we had chosen to live was based on conversation and observation. The world as we knew it was spell binding and every day was a discovery. Patrick had been a truck driver. Had a hard edge. Then he became a saint. He was never same. Dressed in rags and gave away what money he earned. He was a refugee from suburbis and now he gave refuge to others who were escaping the life of security in suburbs. And, yet for all the changes we never wanted these days to end. These were some of the best days of our life. George talked and brought more people home. We both fell in love with Jeannie. She would be with Goerge some of the days and would be with me some of the days. Our relationship with her seemed to fit. I was still so free that i could just lay out in Golden Gate Park and look ut at the sky and each spot was special. I never wanted these days to end.

But Don't Worry

Mad cap rushing-pushing
freeway traffic from here to....

16th Avenue closed no place to go next place
is overcrowded with ten too many cars

Ice cream is running stickily down my Black Walnut flavored face

An American flags sticks out from this traffic jam
waves wincingly from the whizzing car antenna

My mind go back to two Kathy letters that I wrote to Los Angeles

She said that I am like perpetually lost
and I am

Seeing more than
there is to see

I try to read her personally read her personally into me My life on the streets is ribbons and colors Barbs and money
all thrown into one life

I am not as confused as chaos I am confused

Freeway traffic makes me feel less chaotic

There's a lost road map between George and myself

I want to kiss off this whole life take my sleeping bag, hitch hike back to Mexico see Kathy in Los Angeles

Holding the road map, Me and George
suck in this place not traveling anywhere
barely making Santa Cruz

Instead of doing the great stupendous See it tomorrow, United States of America mountains to climb deserts to cross people to meet places to be
I'm still waiting for a drug connection

Taking drugs instead of life

How does all this show up in my life

The before, is slowly past endless
highways to walk beside

countryside to walk through over

I'm just leaving the Bay Area for the first time in months
I want to be the American crumb-bum

rag muffin, Huck Finn poet Who had been in one spot too long

Grown too so for to

Slam Bang Neal who made me looked twice, and didn't know what I would have to do next

I came out Neal for a while instead of me

Peace of mind me hoping that someone might feel sorry for poor old Moe

George and I breaking out in chaos In calm
redwood retreat hideaway

coming through drive in movie marquee flash by announcing the newest money trap
"Hallucination Generation"
Anything for a Hollywood laugh

Taken less serious than I take myself My confusing midnight despair
I tried to pass on to Kathy My excuse for loneliness,
trying to have sex with everyone and have Kathy tag along behind

I just end more empty

than in the beginning Catholic nun like angel
believing what she's told

like me

standing in old crystal palaces wondering if I should worship, who

Sexual fantasies still play with my mind girl with jeweled necklace from Santa Cruz we danced all night

Me, Big time hippie from the city by the end of the night I beat my tired frustrated head against Fillmore dance floor She ran off horrified while the crowd laughed

Beautiful Belle Kathy gone

Me, with a sack of Chinese store oranges, gone

Today,
Yesterday
Tomorrow---gone

Was I too far out to go back. I could never return to the Midwest. I was stuck in San Francisco. I had tasted the magic of hipness and cool. There was no returning to the Midwest. I had my friends and my way of life in San Francisco. Then, after the first Be In came the time to head to the East Coast. Spring had come. Kathy never would return. Brooke, who I thought was too class distant from me, seemed more and more and more like the person who I should be with. I was falling in love with her. She worked hard and was dependable. She wanted to travel back to the East Coast. Brooke and I started hitch hiking. We were with Jimmy and David. We lost them on the way to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles we stayed with Steve and Lea. We got a drive away car and drove back East.

She, Woman
at my door personal port of entry

Sunshine beach, headed out across town

this day, after last night Bullshit party

Too drunk and high to remember

Shuffled out in the moonlight

Take a break in coffee shop

One stop 22 Fillmore bus

From fog machine express of Dance Halls

everybody loving each other

to bullet shot Middle of city story of violence Between Dance Halls, and private party

go up the outside of Fairmont Hotel get view of whole city

Next day after the sunshine day on the beach

Back home
Back to work Back to everything

How can I be with the time that never saw the sun till the next day . Traveling back and forth and Berkeley. Berkeley is where I would get my sunshine. The clouds and sunshine always broke open in Berkeley. Then, dive back into the dance halls and music in San Francisco.

The life I was living in San Francisco had a down side. I was from the country and there was no space to look out on and just let my mind roam. With the life that I had in both Illinois and the Marine Corps I had a lot of space. I was in a small apartment as a child growing up and a barracks filled with other people as a Marine. I still had places I could out and be alone in the wilderness. The city was lonely. Riding my bicycle was my way of staying healthy and living a country life in the city.
An evening predawn morning never seeming to know what or why is expected of me by who or the endless road
I'm always seeming to write about.
Wondering inside my once too often thought filled head if anyone else ever has these thoughts or if if is just me and then more thinking and will my thinking end with new dawn madness and someone saying and writing it is your mind and running down the street screaming, running down empty street San Francisco, finding out that I am living with madness and dishonesty.

That I never knew
was me
but, always believing different that I would never know
madness

Until tonight

The time
The time

The time is now and anything is just to put off the
agony that I feel

I'm on my bus stop corner

wondering is it me is this my time is
this your time

Why do I look stupid I can't get my way
out of this madness?

Why haven't I learned to see

my own body
the same body I carry day to day season to season

Still, something calls me

Life in the Haight had taken on a romantic sense of discovery during the day and writing at night. Spent time with Brooke. I would stand with her and be in love. Then, on my own I would think about how I never deserved someone like this and then I switch back into thinking that Brooke wasn't good enough for me. Moe Armstrong adventurer from the streets. In the end of a day, I would always come back to Brooke. I would hate myself more for having these thoughts. And, I couldn't stop these thoughts. I would go off and walk through Golden Gate Park. I had wondered what life would be like when I could give myself to love and have her love in return.

Now, in the morning so much later

Still, I'm able to be closer. The parties depended on me taking my clothes off. I would dance naked around the room. This seemed like a way of being open. So open that I was naked. But, I was more hidden and misunderstood than before.. I Mean like all the old ghost come back to haunt me, no place to run type of thing..... I wish I could help, don't you see what was mine never was. The thought flash of the dream machine asked in public what I was afraid to say in public .

Now, as triangle tolls the time I never knew. I was asked by the guardsman who thought that I couldn't come in. The tower and home belonged to him. Belonged to him alone. I sometimes stand naked out in the street and cry aloud to myself. Look up and find out that the others have heard what I'm saying Then and now, I'm lost for words. The night gives me a different name. Where Petty pot deals, killing time around Brooke's apartment. Didn't have a way to live without her. Was around her and knitting needles. Waiting for a lid of grass. Grass to cool me out. The only way that I knew to cool out was to smoke some dope and settle in for an evening. Life with Brooke was better than ever. There were books to read. I wanted to be a pirate. Brooke hadn't been in the war. Brooke had been living the life that I wanted to live. She was the intellectual with books and ideas. I wanted to be more like Brooke than the soldier who went off to war. Still I was fascinated by the pirate flag which reminded me of the Marine Corps Recon emblem.

Skull head Cross bones old story past time ask questions get no answers .

Then, I saw back to back one
more word repeated come to
me let me kiss you and go
home
before daylight

Hours were spent in bed reading the paper. The first light of dawn. Together reading San Francisco Chronicle. Scones and tea in the morning. There were muffins, also. Going back and forth to Brooke's I would spend my extra hours. Spend my time off the streets. I would have a place to go that was always warm. San Francisco, over cast then.

I didn't have a car and took transportation most of the time that I was in San Francisco. I would climb up on buses and swing through town. I had to look out the windows and see the city. I would love just to ride the entire route of a bus. I would get to know the city through the Muni. Then, come home and write what I had seen .

Remembering the way I grew up and trying to return to Illinois was a thought on my mind. I didn't know how I would get back to Illinois or what I would do when I would get back to Illinois. Life is precious and I kept wondering that being a vagrant on the streets of San Francisco might not be the best thing to do. I would sit around with the apartment dark, light some candles, I had hand held portable record player and would listen to music. I listened to Eric Anderson, Pete Seegar, The Grateful Dead, Buffy St. Marie, Joan Baez, Ravi Shankar, Sandy Bull, Bob Dylan, and host of other musicians that I had been listening to. Seems like whenever I put those records on my hand held portable record player I would become nostalgic for the Midwest. Wonder what would happen if this life had of mine had been differen . If I had gone home.

I would get some money and have this spare change life style. Eat on the run. Standing up. Eating like there was no tomorrow. Tried forever to just to get through every day and have some money left over to start the next day. Every day this way just to get through the day. I didn't work for anyone but my own survival. I hit the streets with a vengeance. I was everywhere. I would somedays walk all the way from Market street to the Haight/ Ashbury. And, walk all the way back. My life was one of every day going out and keeping going. I would make a run for life and then come back and write about what I saw and felt. There was no end to me being on my feet. I would be on the streets almost all day long. Notebook in my hand. My head filled with poems. The world was an image to discover.

Then, Kathy came back to visit me. I thought that this would be it. She would love me and stay with me. We could live together and draw pictures in San Francisco. We would become artists in residence. We would write and draw together. I wasn't prepared for here dependence on her parents. I kept showing her the parks, the houses, the beauty that was San Francisco. She would always leave and go back to Los Angeles. I never understood why she would want to leave. We had never made love. Yet, I loved her deeply wanted to show her the world that was out there in San Francisco. We watched this

world together and she would always go back to Los Angeles.

I would keep breaking out of San Francisco. Trying to find a way to see the world around me. What was California like. I wanted to travel. I wanted to discover life. There was a whole new way of living in California. I wanted to soak up every second and get a hold of every minute. Make life last. See as much as possible. Meet people listen to them talk and learn about what was America and American.

California was filled with a strange mix of people. From the Avant Guard to the Old
Guard. All lived in one state. There was a mix of two different California. One California around San Francisco and then the rest of the state. The other people from the Old Guard were still people. There was a need to love all people. I had to see them all. I had to write about those that didn't fit into the hip mold. But they were still part of the world. They were American. They were American characters.

Clicking down the street. Swing on a bus when I get tired of walking. Could walk all the way across town. Would be the way this whole year in San Francisco would be to get me ready to go off and live in the mountains. Walk all day. Walk all into the night. The legs are what propels me. I have more strength in my legs than I have in my brain. Meeting a whole cast of characters. There was a whole group of characters like straight out of a movie like "Pocket Full of Miracles." I would meet them and they would talk to me. I felt adopted by this cast of characters. I never knew names. I knew areas.
Haight and Fillmore. Lower Fillmore. Upper Haight. Market Street. North Beach.

These were the places that I would hang out. Meet people and read, talk, listen. Everything seemed to be based on conversation. Who you could talk to. What you could find out from other people. There were no trees. There was no space. The space was in our heads and what we got in talking to each other. There was always another human being to learn. We were out there. We met people who were out there. And, some of us just stayed out there. We were never going to come back. We couldn't come back. There was no way back. We were the ones who gave all we had to give every day. And, we would meet another generation of people who had given all they had. Except this time, this generation there were more of us who came from all parts of the country to come into live in this one place. In this one place of time. We were the ones who would be all talking to each other. There would be no turning back. We were changing the world. We knew it. Yet, we could never know how much the time and people were running away with us. We were the ones who knew how to live with nothing. And the spiritual who lived in the material. We were the ones who tried and gave each other all we had. It was by not holding back. Not afraid to give all we had. That's what made us different. What was different was that everybody could now live full tilt. We could all run off and join the circus. Not only could we join the circus, we became the circus. There were so many people joining the circus that those of us who had recently joined were now the old timers. The circus ready to be looked forward to. The life that we had that was now a circus. And we were all part of the show. The conversations took place in door steps. So many days. Just sit down in a door stoop somewhere. Anywhere. Haight and Fillmore. Lower Fillmroe. Upper Haight. Market Street. North Beach.

Just sit down anywhere and soon there would be someone there sitting there by me. In the way of days of yore. Sit down and soon someone else would sit down by my side and start to have a conversation with me. I would have a conversation with them. There wouldn't be this paranoia like in other parts of the world. There were not strangers. There were fellow travelers. People searching for life. A swig of wine. A hit of grass. There was an uplift from the day that all people had. There was an expression of life. Freedom to get up and run around was what people were able to do. All of sudden jump up and get moving. Life was all there. There was nothing left to do but live the novel. We lived so hard and fast that we had no time to write. To write, To write. I had to squeeze in extra time at night. Come home to old Royal portable typewriter. Portable record player. Everything in my life was portable. Portable because I might be gone tomorrow. I was living like every day was my last. I had no idea what might be the future. There was no way to hide. My destiny was right now. Today. And, if I made it through today then I would come home and work out what I did by saying it short poetic clips on that Royal portable typewriter.

Liife for me was a total upheaval. Even though I could live on the edge. I couldn't keep a job. There was no way that I had any staying power. I was so far over the edge that I didn't know how to stay put and stay busy Well, really I stayed busy and yet, there I was not ready to stay in the one room. . I didn't know how limiting the experience was.

I didn't realize how long it takes to write down what has happened and how it happened to me. I went all out. The way I lived I would keep living for the next thirty years. I was walking talking the way through life and the writing that I did was almost next to nothing. I could imagine that this was a novel. I was living. The conversations that I had were still part of the whole way I talked that would change my life. I was there ready to change. e way I talked that would change my life. I was there ready to change.

On to Recovery

After coming down from the LSD I went back to my apartment and thought that I needed to understand America and Americans. Who were these people that wanted me to fight in Vietnam? What was this country really like? I had nearly lost my life for America, and I had lost my sanity. Yet, I didn't know America." In my mind, it was all very clear. I had to go find America. That was the next thing I had to do. So I hitchhiked across the country.

I ended up Connecticut. I was living a pretty clean life but I was starting to fall apart. I was starting to cry again. I was starting to feel totally alone again and I didn't know what to do. One night when I couldn't sleep I started walking around. I hitchhiked and took a bus to New Haven, Connecticut.

At the first light of dawn I found my way to the Veteran's Administration Hospital. I was crying and sad. I couldn't stop crying. I felt like I would never be able to work again. I'll never be able to be my old self again. I wanted to just check into the VA mental hospital, I was totally broken. I got there early in the morning. Nobody wanted to see me. They told me to come back later in the day. They told me that they had no records of me, as I had not yet applied for Veteran's benefits. I would need to prepare for that process before I could get services.

Crying, lonely and suicidal, I went back to San Francisco. The San Francisco scene had become flooded with people. Everyday Volkswagen buses and Volkswagen Beetles with hippies from all across the country were leaving their towns and coming to San Francisco. There were so many new faces, so many new people. Once we had known everyone, now the city was filled with people who we didn't know.

In August a newspaper came out called the "San Francisco Oracle." They ran an article about me as a Vietnam Veteran. I had also done a radio show on KPFA about my experiences and my misgivings about Vietnam. I had read some of my anti-war poetry at peace marches around Berkeley, but I wasn't able to maintain any political involvement. I was struggling to keep myself sane. I was debating whether drugs were hurting or helping me. I was trying to keep constant in my meditation practice. I was struggling with my stability.

It occurred to me that there were three paths that I could follow. One was the political path. I had grown disenchanted by the anti-war movement. They kept talking about veterans like we were animals, not smart enough to understand the war in Vietnam. I had, too, my own psychiatric condition that got worse the more I dwelled on anything to do with Vietnam and that got better when I just kept putting more experience between myself and my time in Vietnam. The second path was Buddhism and meditation. I was too jumpy and nervous to be allowed in the meditation room. The other people at the Buddhist center seemed to have a gracefulness that I lacked. I was loud and noisy and didn't seem to fit into their quiet world. The third path was rock and roll and taking drugs. I wore blue jeans instead of velvet. I had denim shirts instead of paisley. I listened to the Carter family instead of Pink Floyd. I didn't fit here either. I decided I'd just take drugs. I was alienated from all groups.

The "Human Be-in" happened. All of us were high. We came out in the Golden Gate Park and saw all the people. It seemed like a whole new nation was being born. People with flowers and shawls sweeping through the park, feeding each other, taking care of each other. We danced to the music. We heard the poets talk about 'the new generation' and we went home thinking that we were part of something big. For the next few months I was all over San Francisco, selling barbiturates and taking drugs.

San Francisco in June, 1967 was called “The Summer of Love.” But it wasn’t so loving for me. Most of the people I knew could no longer get marijuana or LSD. They ended up taking heroin. People were strung out and dying. It had gone from “turn on, tune in and drop out” to just “drop dead.” People went from being beautiful people with flowers to angry people with clubs and guns.

I took off hitchhiking for New Mexico. I ended up in the mountains watching a dance by Pueblo dancers. When the Santa Domingo Pueblo dancers emerge from the kiva they form lines with pine boughs and shake and move in a way that looked like the earth was moving. They seemed to be able to duplicate the actual vibrations of the earth. There were no tourists, just the Pueblo people. While they danced a small dust devil stayed at the end of the plaza. It was like a spirit was overlooking these aged dancers and enjoying their time together. The singing sounded like it came from deep within the earth. I had never heard music like this before. Voice, drum and rattles.

I cried many times as this realization became so great. I felt very small and knew that I was just a temporary blip on the screen of life. There was so much before me, so many people, so much history, so much personal history, so many stories and so many songs. We left the pueblo after the dances and went back up North.

I stopped taking drugs. The same mountains of New Mexico that gave me peace of mind also where able to give me the space to be away from people who used drugs and drank booze. There is a gentleness with nature. My mind was in such torment that this gentleness gave me peace. I couldn’t have internal peace. I could have external peace. There was a giant mesa up above El Rito called La Jara Mesa. Every day I would find a different path. I would walk along the ridge lines. I would dance with my arms wide open among the trees. I would sing songs to birds, plants and animals. Tears of joy came to my eyes.

I wasn’t through with mental illness. B u t I could at least find out that my life was enjoyable. I danced and sang with the wind.

While in New Mexico an opportunity came to me when I was approached from the New Mexico Veterans Service Commission, to encourage me to seek an education. I earned two master's degrees at the College of Santa Fe and began working with peer groups, encouraging other veterans to pursue an education.

Moe Armstrong received a Bachelor’s degree and two Master’s degrees and founded the organization Vet to Vet, a consumer/ provider partnership program that utilizes veterans in recovery in a peer-counseling capacity to help other veterans. Vet to Vet is administered by veterans who themselves have been consumers of VA mental-health services. In 2010, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award for his leadership and contributions to the behavioral health recovery movement by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Perhaps that was the most notable. But since 1987 he has been working with different mental health organizations and receiving awards for his work.

Through life, he has accumulated a broad History of work and recognitions that includes: Director of Institute of Peer Support and Resilience) of Errera Community Center as most recent work.

September 2012-2013 Work in the Veterans Administration in San Francisco with MHICM Team and the Psychiatry Unit for the Patient.

2008-Worked with the Veterans Administration in Yale Connecticut teaching peer support modules of psychiatric treatment for the Recovery of Veterans at the Health Care Center in Errera Community. Four years working with VISN 1 MIRECC with Peer Support Education as well as with the Veterans Administration of Connecticut and Yale University. He continues establishing peer support offices throughout America.

1993 to December 2007 Director of Recovery Department for Vinfen Corporation in Boston

Published the news bulletin for the staff and consumers (patients) "The Vinfener."

Established the training scheme for Peer Support facilitators at Vinfen.

Giving courses 15 hs/week of peer support treatment (group therapy) within Vinfen programs and of residence in Eastern Massachusetts in mental health and how to live with it.

Design of a training program for the Law of Americans with Disability.

Belonging to the State Commission for Protection and Defense of the Person with Mental Illness.

Advisor on group therapy at the Independent Living Resource Center.

Just mentioning a few

Recognitions:

2011 Award of Defender of the year in NAMI in Pennsylvania.

2010 the Lifetime Award in selection of SAMSHA for Paramount Pictures

Recognition of CMHS Gains Center in Orlando, Florida.

2008 Lifetime Award by the National Council for Health in Conduct at Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

2007 Recognition for outstanding contribution to group therapy in the mental health system of Massachusetts named Recognition to Moe Armstrong.

2007 Isaiah Ulises Award of the Psychiatry Association of Massachusetts

2006 Psychiatry Rehabilitation Therapist in 8 Division of the American Association of Psychology and Recognition for Achievement by the American Psychology Association for bringing group therapy associated to the mental health services .

He was also awarded the Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, among many other.



THIRD RECON BATTALION

VIETNAM 1965 TO 1966

PHOTOS BY TOM VIOLETTE

WORDS BY MOE ARMSTRONG

50 YEARS AGO!

Was writing poems

Listening to music

50 years later

Writing poems!

Listening to music!

Will be going back!

For my Recon Battalion Reunion

Got some old photos

From Margie Violette

Tom's wife

Tom Violette

Was my friend

He took these photos

Memories are what we have

We are filled with memories



HELICOPTER COMING DOWN

Pulling us out

From another patrol

On some mountain

Top

After we had gone into

Long valley

We had crossed

So much land

All on foot

Ambushed and

Bushwhacked

We pulled ourselves out

Went to a safe zone

Helicopter pulled us out



THE BARBER

Came in through

The perimeter

Every day

Cut our hair

We adopted him

Took out the

Excess food!

Some food

For the family !

I knew his wife!

They farmed the land

Right in front of the

Perimeter

Later on

Found out that he

Had been Viet Cong

And he had been shot



THE HELICOPTERS

LAND

We took over the land

Right in front

To land

Our helicopters

I am sure the barber

And his wife

Who were the owners



Were not happy about

that

But, they made so much money

From cutting hair

They got so much food

They might not have missed!

Their piece of land

Or maybe,

This war was being fought

Over little pieces of land

All across Vietnam

WE NEVER SAW THE

SKY

Always worked under

The canopy

We thought the jungle

Absorbed the sound

Really.....

They could hear us

coming

For miles

How we walked on those

Endless suicide patrols

Eight guys out in this

Jungle

The bush so thick

We never saw the sky



NUGYEN BUONG

He was my friend

Assigned to us

He took me out,

To eat by the side of the road

He was on every patrol!



I learned Vietnamese

From him !

Nugyen would jump

Into combat

Never afraid

He slept in the tent with us

Lived with us

Once I rented a bicycle

Went for a ride

Outside to find the village

Of Nugyen Buong

He was not home,

Got to see his village!

And white plastered house

THERE WAS NO MILITARY BASE

WHEN WE GOT TO VIETNAM



We came and pitched some

Old tents tents brought over

From Okinawa

Temporary base

We thought we would return

To Okinawa in 6 months

We dug foxholes, bunkers and

Giant ditches to run off

The monsoon rains



Somebody made a book case

Out of cast off wood

The flaps just opened up

We looked out from

Our new military base

Made with those sagging tents

We were surrounded by

Vietnam

WHO GOT TO RIDE IN THE JEEP

Who got invited to ride in the Jeep
They were important



One time The Colonel was
Driving by

I was sitting on the side
Of the road

Eating Vietnamese food
Fraternizing with the locals

Having some laughs
As the women watched
Me trying to eat their stew

His jeep crashed to stop

"Get in this jeep
Mr. People to People
You are going
Back to the base"

I got my ride in the jeep

BLEW TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

The mountain named

Dong Den

We were the last outpost

Nobody could climb up

To get us



The mountain so steep

The jungle o thick

We watched the whole

Valley coming into Danang

Built our foxhole/bunkers

Stood watch all day

Saw fires in the mountains

Coming up from the canopy

Hidden by jungl

That was the Viet Cong!

Once we watched an elephant

With a cannon strapped to

The side of the animal

Appeared out of the jungle

They set up the cannon

Cranked off some rounds

Into Danang

We called in the jets to blow

Them up

Jets missed the target

They packed up

The cannon on the elephant

And disappeared



Back into the jungle and mountains

We watched the whole thing

Binoculars

On top of a mountain

Called Dong Den.....

BILL AND TOM

Bill came from Kentucky

Tom came from Boston

Forty years later

We were all reunited



Both guys are dead, now

I have been told that many

Third Recon Battalion Vets

Have died

37 died last year !

We were only around 1,000

In ten years 37 people dead

Is a lot for me

I almost died

Seven years ago

They wanted to

Put a pacemaker in me

Endless Emergency Rooms

Unable to breath

And, possible heart attacks

I continue to live

Bill and Tom are both gone

Always wish that

I would have spent more time

With them……..

OUT IN THE DISTANCE

Patrol moved along

Had to move through

These narrow valleys

Can see why

We were always ambushed

Bush on either side

Narrow valleys

One more patrol

Every week patrol

We moved through

Vietnam!



BILL AND TOM AND……

Is that Sergeant Henry?

I had forgotten so much

Until I got these photos



Like coming out of amnesia

Probably the third guy

In the photo,

Is grizzly "old salt"

Sergeant Henry

Korean War Veteran

Our uniforms were

Hot cotton

With the sleeves cut off

We slept on the bare

Ground

When we got to Vietnam

Bill and Tom

Became my friends after the war

Sergeant Henry, Tom and Bill

NGUYEN BUONG

Learned so much about

Vietnamese music



Nguyen had this tape player

Listened to his tapes

I would go out and listen

To street musicians

Nguyen knew all the songs

Playing wonderful

Stringed instrument music

Nguyen had such joy



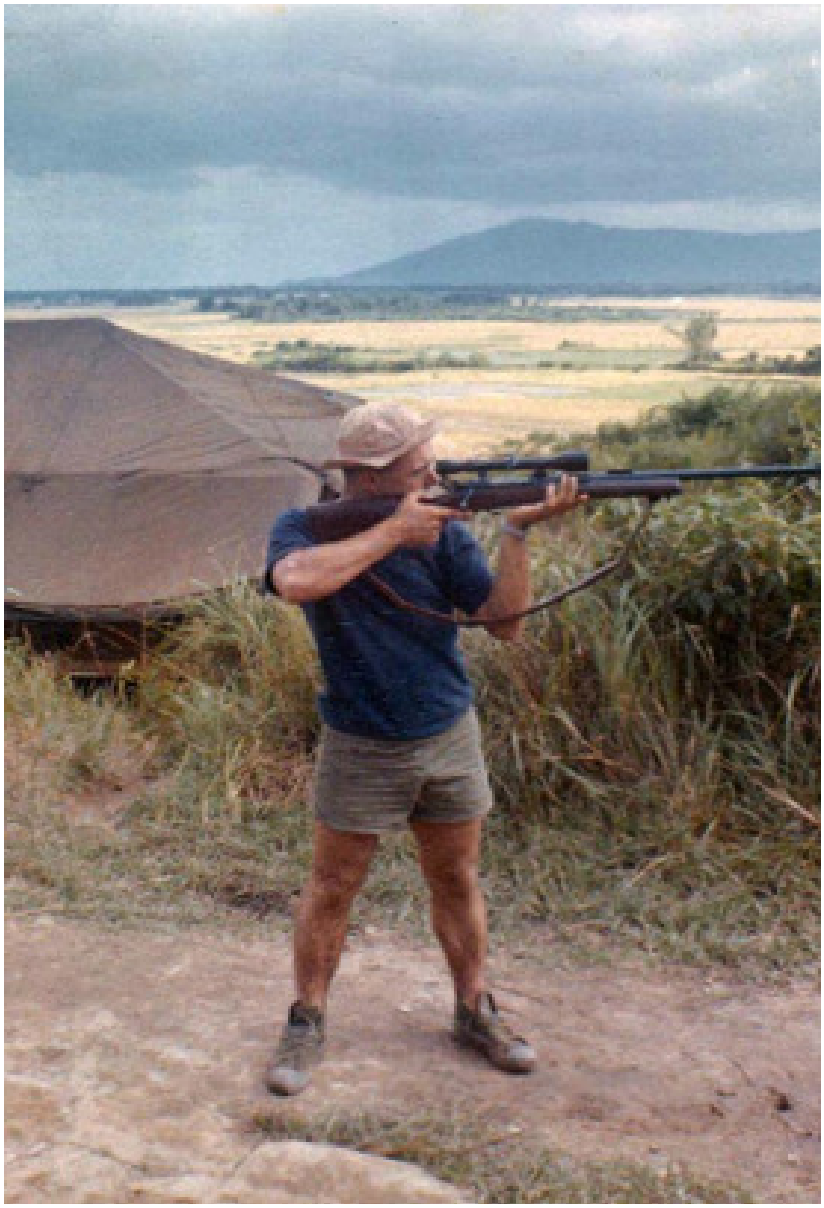
He was killed on patrol

Shortly after the color photo

Was taken

BEFORE AMERICAN SNIPER

BEFORE LONE SURVIVOR!



We fought in the bush,

Unknown and unacknowledged

Track them down

Yet, there was nothing

In our sights

We looked and the targets

Were not secure

The Viet Cong did not organize

On a typical leader system

They were part of a collective

Before we went to Vietnam

Lieutenant Rick Crain

Taught us about the French experience

In Vietnam

And the Communist Experience in

France

We didn't understand that collective model

No leaders

Collective Decisions

So, we never fired those shots

We were honest about

Who we were looking for.....

Instead of the long shots

With lots of civilians hurt

We went for the in close

Combat

Discovering Bee Hives

Of Viet Cong activity

Drawing their fire

Bringing the jets in

Close contact bomb drops

I could smell the human flesh

One fire fight

Then, pulled out by helicopters

We were trained snipers

Who never snipered

HOW DID I KEEP THE TEE

SHIRT

WHITE?!



Don't know

These days can not keep

Anything white

Maybe, my over eating

Dripping food all over me

I have become incontinent

From the Agent White eating

my body

So.won't be wearing white

pants

Somehow

These days

For a lot of reasons

White doesn't fit me

How did I keep the Tee Shirt

White?

In those days……

TOM WAS ALWAYS ON

POINT

Alone up front



Alone moving through

The trails in the the bush

Tom was always on point

When we stopped

Tom would sit out on point

Tom was on point for a year

Longest time

Anybody I know

I knew

Tom was always on point

WATER WITH US

Working so far out
Working so far up
In the mountains



No streams or water
We carried these cans

Dragging these cans
Around the jungle
In 120 degree heat

One time
Carrying these cans
Got us caught by
The Viet Cong

We shot out and
Shot through that ambush

Left the water can
Behind

We could live with out food
We could not live without water

THERE WAS ONCE AN OLD FOLK SONG

Two Soldiers

These photos came from Tom Violetti

He was a great guy and great warrior

He was the Blue Eyed Boston Boy

In my life



These are the word to the song

Two soldiers:

He was just a blue-eyed Boston Boy

His voice was low with pain

I'll do your bidding comrade mine

If I ride back again

But if you ride back and I am left

You do as much for me

Mother must here the news

So write to her tenderly

She's waiting at home like a patient saint

Her fond face pale with woe

Her heart will be broken when I am gone

I'll see her soon I know

Just then the order came to charge

For an instance hand touched hand

They said "aye" and away they rode

That brave and devoted band

He was just a blue eyed Boston Boy

TENT SO HOT!

GRASS SO DRY!

Never went anywhere

Before or since like!

Vietnam



So hot in the day

We could drop dead

Explosions of rain

Lasted for days

Everything was mud

This was our tent

Not much protection

From the elements

Somebody said,

"We are going to be here

For six months,

Kick some ass and go home"

The follow up to that story

Is history.....

This tent is where I came

To rest

Imagine on patrol

Week after week

Month after month

No good boots

Hot cotton uniforms

Nothing dried out

Or got so hot

We suffocated

We came back to

The tent was so hot

The grass so dry

DATE ON A PHOTO

After more than one year,

We got uniforms

Made for the tropics

One year later.....



By then our bodies

Had ring worm and fungus

Feet had jungle rot

From the hot cotton clothing

We brought from The States

Bought my uniforms

On the Underground Market

Even my automatic weapon

Had to buy

Rifle cleaning materials

Mom and dad sent from

Home

This was Tom Violetti who I

saw

He didn't see me

I saw him

While I was

Locked away in a psychiatric

Medical Unit at Danang

I tried to speak

No words came out of my mouth

I just cried!

I just sobbed

The war was over for me

I was a psychiatric casualty

Tagged and being put

On a plane

Filled with Thorazine

Everybody who I knew

Was staying behind

Wearing clothes

Made for the tropics

Going back out on patrol

LIEUTENANT MacCASKILL

We wanted to be MacCaskill's

Marauders

He couldn't read a map

Or do a back azimuth

I could

Being an Eagle Scout



He was still a great guy

Fair and square

Talked to him decades later

Retired Lieutenant Colonel

A few years,

Before he died

He told me,

"Doc, this PTSD happened to me,

Also"

Nobody got away clean

I completed my patrols

He completed his patrols

We both came out alive

Alive but shattered

We were changed

Forever

Lieutenant MacCaskill and myself

PROTECTED BY 106

RECOILLESS RIFLE

We set up this weapon

When those rounds

Went through the air



There were tracers

From a 50 caliber

As a spotter rounds

Booms across the valley

From the 106 Recoilless

This Recoilless Rifle

Stopped any frontal assault

Still, almost every night

Creeping in

Under the range of fire

VietCong kept coming

Sneaking in

Throwing a grenade

Disappearing into the night

We never were over run

Our position was

Never taken

That 106 Recoilless Rifle

Protected us

SADDLE UP GOING OUT

At the ready,

How did I make the endless

Suicide patrols?

Third Recon Battalion



We trusted our lives

To each other

We covered each other

While

Enemy Contact

Almost every patrol

Our clothes so dirty

Boots so worn

We went back out

Called “Black Op Missions”

Today

There is glamor in the movies

About guys like us

Guys like us were just

Everyday guys

The boy next door

Who could walk for miles

With out food or waterOr back packs

Go with out

Food, water, sleep, showers...

For days.....

Go forever

Out on patrol

THERE WAS A DAY

Everything became a blur
Patrol after patrol



Picked up
Let off
We were just going, gone
And coming back

They shot at us
We shot at them

The six by trucks
Were there
The helicopters came, also
The war ground on

Nobody talked about six months
Here in Vietnam
And going back to Okinawa
One day

We just crashed by
Side of road
Trying to catch up on some
Zzzzzzzz's!

Went back out..

Went back out

Went back out!

Here I am with Russell Johnson

Russel died last year....



We ended up in Boston together

For years we lived in Boston

Visited each other

He died a boozer

Happy boozer!

But dead….

RUNNING FOR RUSSELL

Stuck out on

patrol, Vietnam

Russell would,

say to me,

that he was going!

back to Boston

Someday

Listen to James

Brown

Someday

I finally got
to Boston
Thirty years
later

Now, I'm running for Russell
Russell Johnson,
same guy I spent
those nights on patrol,
with

He,
came back to Boston,
before me

I ended up coming
to Boston, 1993

First guy, who I
phoned when,
I got to Boston,
was Russell Johnson

We used to call him,
"Big John,"

He would do anything
for anyone

He looked after
the other guys,
in the Recon unit

Helped clean their
rifles

He carried that damn
five gallon water can,
on his back,
up the side of the mountain
in 120 degree heat

So we could have,
water to drink.

He would stay up,
take a person's watch
who was too tired

"Don't worry,
I can stay awake,"
He said.

Then, he would say,
I''m going back to
Boston, someday,
and listen to James Brown,"

He retired from!
the Marine Corps,
with honors

Years later there were
too many beers

So, now I'm running
for Russell

On a March day,
in Boston

There's sorrow,
in trying to understand,
how and why did we
all end up like this

Lost and alone,
looking for the path
to sanity and sobriety

Trying to put
the pieces
Back

Looking in the streets,
for Russell

His wife doesn’t know
where

Finally, when he calls
Slurring his words
with me
On the telephone

Talking about how,
we are going,
to meet the next,
day

Telling him
Don’t fall down,
and hurt yourself

We agree to meet
the next day

Where have we gone?
I don’t know,
since the war,
Third Recon Battalion,
scattered all over,
the United States

And, I’m here with Russell

The same “Big John,”64
from those days in Vietnam
He’s in bad shape
still drinking,
in the morning,
before noon

Where is the place
for him
What is the treatment
for him

Now, I’m trying
to get “Big John,”
to safety

I look over to him,
he doesn’t know
what hit him

If this had been
a bullet,
we could dig it out

Alcoholism and
Trauma disorder
are not this same,
as taking a bullet

He’s hurt

He’s wounded

I can see the pain

I explain to him

what to expect

How impatient,

is where he will go

How to get through,

the inpatient time, to get

a step down program

How to explain his

history of combat missions

Tell them your war history

Let them on the wards,

assess you for,

Trauma Disorder

Get through detox,

with the least disruption

to your life

We talk some more

I”m able to say,
how much hope,
he gave me during,
the Vietnam war

Yet, years later
we‘re still trying
to make it out of Vietnam

He said
“I’m going home
and pack my bags.”

“I’m going to treatment”

We can have,
another chance

We can get free,
from the war

We can have
peace of mind

I’m running for Russell
I’m really,
running for me
ALSO

DANTE

Was so young

Just turned 19

He could push

Through the bush

Like nobody else



We once came on

Elephant Grass

So thick

That we could only

Make progress by

Laying face forward

On that grass

And moving ahead

Pushing the grass down

Moving in three feet

Increments

Few feet at a time

Dante plowed through

That grass

We were hot and sucking air

Dante continued until we got through

His name was Dante

THAT ELEPHANT GRASS

Kept coming back

This plant could lift a house

Kept coming back

Chop with machete

One week later

All grown back



THERE WAS SUNSET IN VIETNAM!

There were several sunsets

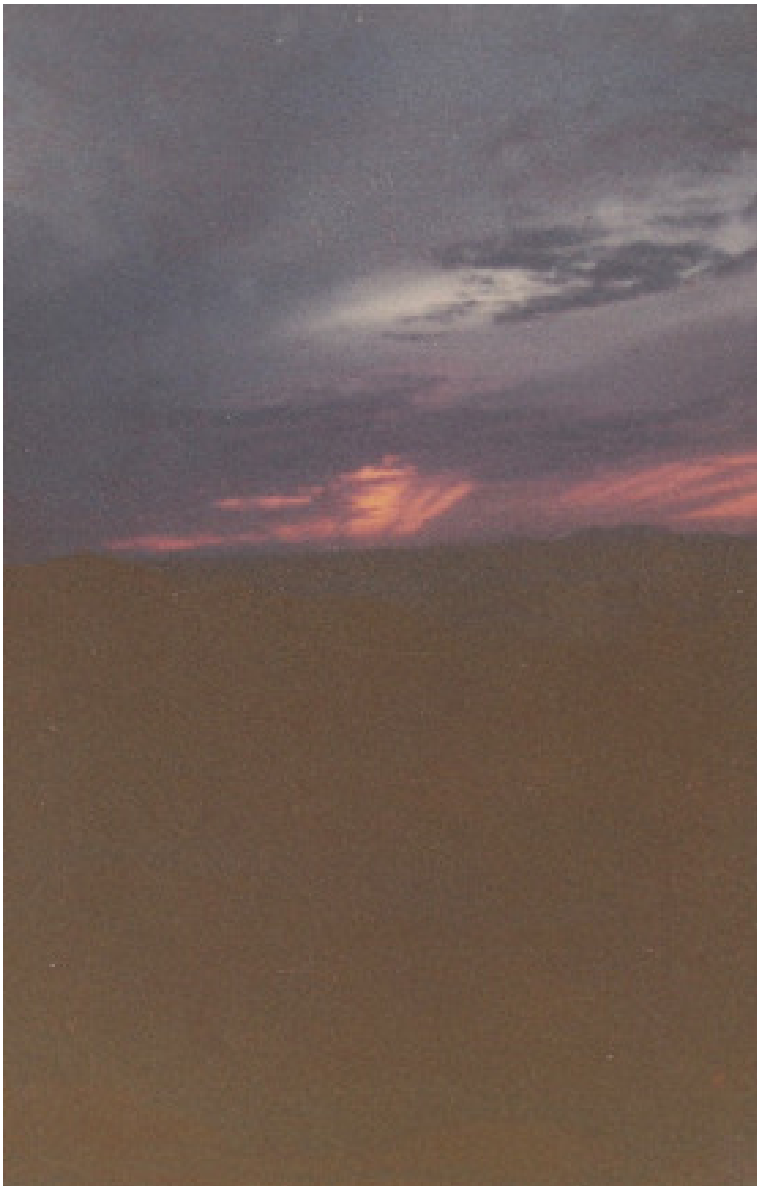
At the end of many different days

We more terrified of nights

The Viet Cong always came in

And attacked

During the nights



Here was.....

Tropical night!

Tropical sunset

Coming down

At the end of the day

Just another photo

In the bunch that

Margie Violette mailed to me

Sunset in Vietnam

How the world turned and changed

We still make some bad decisions

Politically and militarily

These planners,

Never think about what wars

Do to people For the rest of our lives

Me, I would just rather watch a sunset

WE BLASTED

THE TOP OFF THAT MOUNTAIN

We had an outpost on top

The mountain named

Dong Den



Our free time

We were flown to highest mountain

Where we had our outpost

And.....

As steep, remote, and...

Thick with vegetation



As that mountain

As Dong Den

Only once

A group of Viet Cong

Got up the side

Of that mountain

Probed our perimeter

WITH A MESS KIT

We ate with our mess kits
Clanking off to the chow line

Living in the weeds
With tents too hot



Off to get some grub
Fill her up
We said with our mess kits

That was high styling
That was our luxury.....
Our mess hall back at base camp

Out on patrol we got
One can of beans and hot-dogs
And, one can of canned fruit
Per day
That was all!

We never carried packs
Just two cans of food
For each day

Lots of ammunition
Some grenades, too

I had morphine and bandages

I was the Corpsman

Took care of the wounded

We had!

A raw determination

To complete our missions

I still have two mess kits

I still eat with a mess kit

Chow line VA Hospital

At my work place……

Still, trying to complete my mission

Today like then,

My mission,

Saving the living

STANDING AT THE EDGE

Keeping a range of fire!

Open

Scouting at the edge

Of the tree line

We fought hard

We went where nobody

Nobody, dreamed we could go.....



We moved undetected

Still, got ambushed

Every once in awhile

We fought our ways out

I am still alive today

And,this is how we lived

At the edge of woods

Swift, Silent, and Deadly

Motto Third Recon Battalion

We came in

We got out

We saw war, troop strengths,

Viet Cong

Up close and persona

We were standing on the edge

GIVE ME A LITTLE DRINK OF WATER

Mouthfuls of water

No more

Everything was rationed

Food, water, ammunition

Not like the movies

We had to make every bullet

Count



The same with water

We had to make

Every drop count

Did I ever mention heat?

Over dozens of times.....

Or so hot that the heat

Just burned through us

One more week

One more patrol

Against all odds

We just sat down

Where we were

Had a sip of water

"Saddle Up"

We went back out on patrol

HE CAME BY ON A

BICYCLE

I would rent the bicycle

And, buy something to eat



Would discover villages

Off the beaten track

(Lucky, I never got shot

Or kidnapped)

Would discover,

Places we would never know

Except I would ride by

Ride through

Rented the bicycle

From the guy who sold

Noodles

ALWAYS

Setting up a perimeter

Cleaning a rifle

Eating a C ration

We didn't have much

Stripped bare

We tried to rest

We went back into the

elements

For another patrol



Just survival through

The heat

And, in the rainy

Monsoon

We never dried out

Out clothes and bodies

We were wet all the time

Slept soaked and with

A hundred leeches

Crawling on us

Had to scrape off

Leeches with a knife

Open a can

Have something to eat

Try to enjoy what we had

Before the next

Firefight

Battle

Encounter

Mission

Fights with the other side

WE GOT NEW TENTS

We had wood floors

We still had the

Same old cots



The frames kept the tents

From sagging

Water did not come in

The tent was stretched

Nice and taught

We were just left alone

To rest up

Be quiet

How I longed for those

times

Of quiet and rest.....

Back at the Base Camp



PATH THROUGH THE CAMP

Our lives were

Stick close to

Base Camp

Camp Reasoner

Somehow we got

Jungle trousers

Issued from the Marine Corps

Came from the states

Those pants and…..

At least we dried out

From the waist down

By the time the jungle pants

Had come

Most of had Jungle Rot

On our feet

Going up our legs…..

And, when outside was cooler

Than the tent.....

We walked in the heat

And sun

For fresh air

To cool off

Always,

Getting ready for another mission



THE BRIDGE TO DANANG

The Viet Cong had tried to blow

Blow this bridge away

We had de armed so many

Bombs on this bridge

We had no protective gear

Somebody thought

We could guard the bridge and.....

We were just assigned to protect

The bridge

Planting the bombs stopped

We know how set up perimeter

Run a patrol

Over and over

We never really got tired

The VC just went somewhere else

SENT BACK TO THE

PHILIPPINES

Special mission to find

Other Recon guys

We had taken lot

Of casualties



We went to the Philippines

Meet the new troops

We trained in the mountains

Lived off the land

Learned to survive

We had already been

Through this in Vietnam

Didn't know why we needed

Training in the Philippines

We ate good

Off the land

Met the new troops

Got on another airplane

Went back to Vietnam

With the new troop

Back to Vietnam, together…..

ALWAYS WITH THE

VIETNAMESE

We lived with

The Vietnamese

We went on patrols with

The Vietnamese

We were out in the bush with

The Vietnamese

We ate the noodle soups

with

The Vietnamese

Our free time in Danang was

with

The Vietnamese



Everywhere we went

Everything the we did

Was with

The Vietnamese





WE GOT TO KNOW THEIR

FAMILIES

Always had several Vietnamese

Assigned to us

We got to know their families

We got to know their food

We got to know their dreams

In this life

They wanted peace

Life free from strife

Time to be with their families

TRYING TO KEEP

RECON SKILLS

The free time
Back at China Beach
Training just like
We were in the US
California beaches



Rubber boats
Like there was no war
Just some surfers

In Vietnam
Anything was better than
Being on patrol in the bush



We were always prepared
Training for the future missions
Training for the future possibilities

Maybe, some rubber boat work
In our free time…..?

THE BEATLES GOT TO

VIETNAM!

He wasn't a Beatle, but.....

He could dance

And sing Beatles songs



During the day

Fighting he was

A fighting man

A night

A Beatles fan

I should have seen

This war would come

To a bad end

The Beatles were changing

People all over the world

Making them more peaceful

All you need is love

They sang

I was the Day Tripper

He was Sgt. Pepper



BILL MULKEY

From Harlan, Kentucky

After the war he was a coal miner

Was in the movie Harlan Country USA

Union member in the mines

His dad was the policeman

Who arrested the miners

Back in Vietnam

Bill and me

Sang songs from the mountains

How many times

The Wreck of the Old 97?

How many times John Hardy?

He was the radio operator

I was the medical corpsman

We were always on watch

We talked into the nights

About him getting back

To the mountains

I wanted to live on the beach,

Venice, California

Sing folk songs at the Ash Grove

Later on,

I was living in Appalachia

South West Virginia

Couple of hours from Harlan!

Went over to visit him

And visit his church

Went over to see the garage

Where he lived

He was broke and depressed

He got Veteran Benefits

Asked what he did with the money

He said,

“Bought the garage”

Back in Kentucky

Kept playing music with

A guy named Lonnie

Bill died in Kentucky

A few years, ago

I thought from a broken heart

The broken marriages

The abandonment

Caught up with him

Bill Mulkey lived out his country song

Back in Vietnam

Bill Mulkey leaning on

The side of the tent

Smoked a cigarette

Waiting to go on the next patrol

THEY LIVED CLOSE TO THE

GROUND

Agrarian Civilization

Water buffalos and rice

Everywhere



Farmed rice everywhere

In Vietnam

We would wave

They would wave back

Would they report us

Were they VC?

Hard to escape the people

They had been on their land

Too long

They thought in term of

centuries

They had lived the same for

Centuries

We were just passing through

TAKE A BREAK

READ A MAP

We just lived in the bush

The bush was our living room



Whoever could read the map

Was the king

Our lives depended on knowing

Where are we?

Still,

We were lost most of the time

And yet

We felt at home

In the bush

Taking a break

Reading a map

OUT BY THE SIDE

Checking for booby traps
We went so light
Out in the field



Went out against
The Viet Cong
Just us and some rifles

We scoured the place
Found out what was
Really going on

Got to know Vietnam
Real up close

Sometimes never a shot
Was fired

We were blown up
By booby traps

Out by the side

OUT HELICOPTER DOOR

We got to see the land
Right in front of
Our base camp



Our first patrols
Had been right in front
Of us

Helicopter came in
Took us out

We looked out the door

Saw the land in front of us
From up above

The Villages
The people
The fields where

People from the villages
Worked

We were in Vietnam

RACKED OUT

Just some cots

And

We dried our clothes

With our mess kits

All on a line inside the tent



We were always

Washing

Our clothes

Our bodies

Our mess kits

Heat and dust

Were everywhere

And we were.....?

Just some boys

From next door

Sent off to fight a war

WE WERE THE EYES AND EARS

We went

Where nobody dreamed...possible

They make movies!

About guys like us today

In our times,

Nobody celebrated us

Nobody knew about us



Now, Black Ops

Special Ops

Recon Rangers

Are glorified in

Clint Eastwood movies and

Hollywood productions

We lived low to ground

We lived close to the Vietnamese

We fought hard in the war

And set up forward observation posts

Miles away from the Base Camp

Just some guys on a mountain tops

Scanning the valleys

With binoculars

We were the eyes and the ears

WHITE

PHOSPHOROUS

Bring in the air strikes

They probably wondered

How did We know

We could track

All their troop

movements

They got better at hiding

We got better at

penetrating

From out observation

Posts

And field recon

The war went on



THE MESS HALL

First building that we had

The mess hall

Ate out meals

Played cards

Drank some beer

Took a break

Went back out on patrol

That was our life.....



OUR CARVED OUT

POSITION

A 50 Caliber placed well

Protected from a

Mortar attack

Took turns in the hole



Leave our mountain spot

After we saw

Viet Cong activity

Head out on patrol

The jungle was so

Thick

After leaving our

Protected position

We crashed against

The grass

The foliage

Made our patrols

Almost impassable

Until they started spraying

With the “chemicals”

Agent White in my time

HOME

Endless patrols

Endless exhaustion

We would crash out

Back at our tent



Suit up

Saddle up

Go back out on patrol

We were in constant

motion

One week an ambush

One week we blew them

apart

With air strikes

Come back home

Wash our clothes

Fall out in our tent

That we called home

WE TESTED THE NEW RIFLE

Supposed to save our lives

We had left the M-14 behind

They said

When it didn't jam

The M-16 was OK



When the magazine

Could still feed bullets

To the chamber

The M-16 was OK

When it didn't get so rusted

That it couldn't shoot

We tested the M-16

And, stayed with our old rifles

Stayed with the M-14 rifle

And, stayed alive.....

THEY KEPT COMING AND GOING

The war never ended

We were not out in six months

The helicopters,

They kept coming and going

We had patrols, platoons, companies

Out on patrol



Every day

Every week

Mission after mission

The helicopters

Circled in

Pulled us out

Back to the jungles

Back to the battles

The helicopters came

They kept coming and going

SHE CAME TO ME

Bloated stomach from
Parasites in the water

People sick and afraid
To live day after day
Unending pain in the stomach
Infections on their bodies, also



Some antibiotic cream
Some time to show concern
Just some kindness
Was all some people needed

I fought the Vietnamese
I took care of the Vietnamese

I loved the land
And the people

Yet,
I never wanted to return

I lost my youth in Vietnam
I lost my mind in Vietnam

She came to me,

I helped her

I helped the others

Until I could do no more

After the war,

I had the same dream for years

All these wounded people

US Marines and Vietnamese

Where in holes

Dug into the side of mountain

They were crying out to me

Help me

Help me

And, I couldn't

In the dream I walked away

In real life,

I was taken out of the country

Sad, broken, crying, mute

For me,

The war had ended

I was just left with the memories

And, a life dedicated to service

And, a life dedicated to help others to……

Get over the war



Moe Armstrong has been founder of the organization Vet to Vet, a consumer/provider partnership program that utilizes veterans in recovery in a peer-counseling capacity to help other veterans. Vet to Vet is administered by veterans who themselves have been consumers of VA mental-health services.

In 2010, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award for his leadership and contributions to the behavioral health recovery movement by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Perhaps that was the most notable. But since 1987 he has been working with different mental health organizations and receiving awards for his work.

Through life, he has accumulated a broad History of work that includes: Director of Institute of Peer Support and Resilience) of Errera Community Center as most recent work. Collaborated with the Veterans Administration in Yale Connecticut teaching peer support modules of psychiatric treatment for the Recovery of Veterans at the Health Care Center in Errera Community. Developed years working with Peer Support Education in continuing to establish peer support offices throughout America.