

New Poetry by Patricia Hastings: "Dad"



SLOWLY IN THE DARK / image by
Amalie Flynn

Dad

1950s father. Family man
as best he could.
Provided everything but
stories of his life.

I played army with his old canteen,
green backpack, wore his sergeant's cap
in open fields, running bush to bush
avoiding bullets fired by Rick and Neil.

Nothing real about my war
No blood unless a briar scratch

Grass-stained jeans, home for supper
Pork chops, mashed potatoes, apple pie.

We liked Ike and flew our flag
Memorial Day and on the Fourth
No mention ever of the War
less than a decade past.

Eighth grade social studies essay question:
Did your soldier/father see combat?
I scrawl, No, he never left the states.
Didn't watch men die. Or kill them. Not my dad.

He died of too much drink
Earnest citizen/father turning mean
though never loosening his tongue
to tell tales of army days.

Turns out you did see combat in the war.
Watch men die. And kill and kill again.
Your job: to fire fire into tunnels
where Japanese holdouts hid.

Creep slowly in the dark
nerves shriek, sweat stings.
Something moves! Throw your flames
Then hear screams and smell the burning flesh.

Did you sleepwalk through your life
wife and children just a dream,
stare at fireplace, Scotch in hand
while other ashes floated into focus?