

# 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?