

No War With Iran



Arlington National Cemetery

Nearly eighteen years. That is how long America has been at war since the post-9/11 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists. Many Americans have forgotten this or have stopped caring; most active-duty military, veterans, and their families, however, have not. Regardless of status—civilian or veteran—as citizens we are all equally responsible when our country goes to war. Let us also not forget that the War Powers Clause of Article One of the

Constitution, reinforced by the War Powers Resolution of 1973, grants the U.S. Congress the sole authority to declare war and allow the U.S. Armed Forces to be sent abroad.

Here at The Wrath-Bearing Tree, our editors, including their families, have spent a collective total of eighteen years at war. For some of us, it seems like a lifetime ago. We were all much younger, and most of us were stupider when we first signed up. Some of us claimed to be “apolitical,” as good soldiers are supposed to be. A few of us didn’t really mind when we invaded Iraq, and a couple of us were even happy about it. But today, none of us have any qualms, any excuses, any sense of hesitation. We have our lived experience, and a certain set of values that we trust in deeply—now more than ever.

Some things are morally justified, but illegal. Some things are legal, but immoral. Some things are neither legal nor moral.

None of us at The Wrath-Bearing Tree are pacifists. We believe there are times when war is necessary. But those times are vanishingly rare. We try our best to see through propaganda, shun conformity, and tease out nuance. We aim to see things truthfully, though we don’t always succeed.

This much we firmly believe: War with Iran would be illegal, immoral, unjustified, and catastrophic. There is no web of lies that the masters of war can spin that will erase those truths. We hope that, like us, the American people have learned from the past and refuse to accept this action for what it is: war profiteering, political distraction, and state-sanctioned murder.

In Solidarity,

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Japanese Poetry Never Modifies

August 2011

I remember when you first joined, I used to tell you that the Army would be four years, the way that college had been four years, and that really used to help you. These days, I'm not so sure. You called me this morning on my way out the door. You know the routine, the sun's still not out yet so I go out onto the landing looking down on the parking lot to wait for the carpool of teachers so we can drive the hour north to Clinton. Closer to Mississippi than Baton Rouge, but we don't pick where we're assigned, you of all people know that. I was smoking my morning cigarette—God, I'm turning into my mother—when you called me and told me you'd killed a man. I didn't know what to do with that—I don't know what to do with a lot of the things you tell me. So I told you to wait, wait until you got home. We would deal with it together. You said you didn't feel anything, weren't you supposed to feel something? But then Jimmy and Becky and Mormon Rick showed up in the carpool, headlights jumping at the speed bump and I told you I had to go. You said you knew. Hung up.

#

So why did I stay with you? Maybe because I remember the string lights hanging above us like torch flies when we'd kissed. The smell of the East River as you'd walked me to the train. The sound of your voice after midnight, how it felt like biting into something alive. The vacuous kinds of things people with marriages that never last say. Maybe because I looked at you, and there was a sadness on your face that you'd been born with, like the freckle beneath your eye or your fullness of your lips.

You told me about your mother, your father during the war, and I envied them. I thought your parents took up so much space in your heart, and I wanted to take up as much as they did, to be carried as you carry them. Maybe I'm just another white girl with a savior complex, but then, all those Peace Corps kids can always go home. It can't be like that for me; I need you. I'm struggling to figure out why. If you would just talk to me again in that open way you do like when we'd first met and it was like I'd known you all my life, if you'd topple those walls of sandbags and pull away those spirals of razor wire you put up around you, if you'd fucking say just one honest thing to me instead of going out there every day, rifle in hand, and pretending like you're doing something good even though you know you aren't.

When I hear your voice, I know that something else sits there in your heart, beside yours parents' memories. I should've known it was never them—a woman I'd met twice, and a man I'll never meet—who'd, like a festering tumor, plastered itself to that beating organ. It was always war, wasn't it? It grew, it grows, it will grow, and one day it'll kill you. I shouldn't have to compete with something so big for possession of you. Any sane woman would be long gone. But I wonder if that's what love is, a kind of insanity, an irrational urge to never wash your pillowcase and sleep in the dip you've left in the mattress. A mnemonic kleptomania of the way your hair feels between my fingers, the way your sweat smells stuck to all

those worn out shirts, the way your eyes look in the sun—not black, but a deep, warm brown masquerading as the absence of color. A manic episode of binging on the way you smiled. A depressive plateau when I realize I may never see that smile again. I hoard these pieces of you and each one slices into me, bleeds me. It's the only thing that's real anymore, the pain of it. And I fear if I ever let go, I'll be letting go of a piece of myself.

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Things That Quicken the Heart

(After Sei Shonagon)

How fewer egrets there were after the oil spill. Imagining you with an infant on your chest. Laying down to sleep and dreaming about waking up from this life into another. Looking into a broken mirror that splits me in two. A beautiful woman with a simple request who makes me forget you for just a moment. The weight of a camera, to spool a ribbon of cellophane into it and walk out onto a strange boulevard somewhere, and even if I'm nowhere special, I feel a drunken kind of pleasure knowing I can capture thirteen moments in time. After all this waiting, on a night someday soon, knowing that, like the summer rain, you'll come back to me and drown the stifling sun with the heat or cold of your body, making my heart quicken.

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You disappear for days or weeks at a time, and when I don't get an email or a phone call, I'll make whoever is driving us to work or home turn the radio to NPR so we can catch the BBC World Service or Steve Inskeep and Renee Montagne read the news. I'll hear things like, *five dead in Kandahar, drone strike in Helmand, bombing outside the embassy in Kabul*, and Becky or Mormon Rick might say, *oh God*, but I'd tell them it had nothing to do with you—probably. I often stew over their

ignorance, tell them for the fiftieth time you're in Wardak province, *Wardak* goddammit, and they forget again the next time, but I guess I can't really blame them. They don't have maps of Afghanistan pinned to the walls of their bedrooms.

There was the week you sent me a short email, told me to check the news, and I looked up the *Times* and there was a developing story about that helicopter full of SEALs that'd been shot down, how it was the biggest loss of life in a single day since the beginning of the war. You called when you got back, told me how, on the last day there in that valley, you'd killed that dog—a *bitch* you called her. But then you surprised me and said you wished you hadn't. You said there were pieces of men scattered all through the branches like Christmas ornaments; how the valley smelled like raw crab and you didn't think you could ever eat crab again. I didn't know what to say, then. I guess I don't know what to say still.

Then there was the day bin Laden died. I came home, turned on the news, watching those fraternity bros and sorority girls partying in the streets. I thought, they're the ones who should get drafted and they're the ones who should be sent over there, because I wanted you back here with me. It should be them, not you, over there fighting. But you don't know that, do you?

We say so little when we talk, always speaking around and past and between one another. You want to know more about home, and when I tell you what's happening in Louisiana, back home in New York, it only makes you seem further away than ever. I want to tell you, instead, how tragedy magnifies beauty, how this pain stitches us together, how I hope that someday all this distance and lack and yearning will be useful, one day. I want to tell you that you need to survive so we can start a family together, like we always wanted. I want to tell you that I know you'll be a good father, no matter how afraid you are of becoming one. Instead I just talk about the radiators in my classroom cranked up to eleven and phone bills and what

so-and-so said at that party I'd half forgotten because I drank too much. If I could go back, change anything, I think I'd like to say what I feel more often.

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At the beginning of your tour, when we spoke on the phone, it felt like you were right next to me. Now you sound like you're on an entirely different planet.

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July 2011

When you told me Sergeant Finley died, I thought of his straw-haired wife, that EMT. I wondered if she would get a flag at his funeral, seeing as they'd been divorced. Or would they give it to her boy? I wanted to give you all the time and space in the world to grieve, I wished you would cry, if only to remind me that the man on the phone was the same man I'd fallen in love with. It's selfish, I know. But you didn't, so I cried for you.

#

There's still time, that's what I kept thinking the whole time you were on mid-tour leave. Then it ran out and we missed our chance. Now, with all this—a dead man on your conscience, all that fighting, all those moral compromises that have shaken you, I can't help but think of where I went wrong, what I could've done differently to persuade you to run across the Canadian border. Now I worry that even if you make it home in one piece, it wouldn't matter, because I've already lost you.

I know there would have been consequences if you had run. Maybe you would never be able to come back to the States. But it was never your country—not really—anyone could see that. Just a flag and a bunch of stupid rules everyone agreed to. But then again I'm not one to talk, am I? I pay my taxes and

have a bank account and drive a car to work every day, I follow the rules just like you, like everyone else. Sometimes I wonder if you think I'm a hypocrite, turning my back on my convictions. You used to say my life was politics, but now, I wonder if you think you couldn't trust a college anarchist who'd once shouted about abolishing the state, only to become one of its many drones. Maybe I'm projecting. Maybe telling you to run was selfish of me, a way for me to stay true to the woman I'd used to be. Or maybe this was a way to keep you all to myself.

I thought I knew your heart well enough—you were always selfless in a way that you refused to see—and if you didn't to it for yourself (how could I ever believe you'd do something for yourself?), then at least you'd do it for me. I forgot about your boys. You were thinking about them after Finley died, weren't you? What you could have done differently. But if you'd gone AWOL, you wouldn't have been there and it wouldn't have been your fault and you wouldn't have to carry that around with you.

I also forgot about Afghanistan. The first few weeks you were there, you'd write me, saying that you hoped there'd be peace soon so I could see it. *No place as beautiful in the world*, you'd said, *you could understand how people believed in God—just seeing how small it makes a man feel*, you'd said. Sometimes you'd write angry e-mails or be flustered on the phone over how the people around you refused to see the Afghans as people. Mothers and fathers and children just like us. You'd wanted to do everything to help them, and I was proud of you, but now I wish I hadn't told you that, because I know your heart is over there, and not here with me.

Sometimes, I dream that you did run off, go AWOL. I see you rowing the little aluminum boat up Champlain, going north, and I'm worried you'll get lost or caught, but I'll remember that you're a soldier and I should have faith in you. In the dream, I wait months or years—impossible to say in that floating

life—but I find you, we start our lives over. I go on teaching, you become an artist, we start a family—in Montreal, maybe. I dream our kids have miraculously red hair and wide smiles and you see them and forget all about that faraway country and the mountains that made you feel small. I dream this dream, and when I wake up, I half expect you to be in the kitchen making coffee, frying eggs.

#

I worry sometimes that you'll kill yourself and leave me all alone to put the pieces back together. Maybe you wouldn't do it by your own hand, but let the enemy do it for you. That way you get to die a hero. I think about you, sitting on the bank of the Mississippi in New Orleans, before you deployed. We watched the barges and container ships easing past as slow as honey. You joked that if you were killed over there, I'd be able to pay off my student loans with the life insurance money.

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I've been thinking of writing poetry, like Shonagon's *The Pillow Book*. I like the idea of a book composed of lists. I like the way that, in Japanese, every word stands on its own.

#

June 2011

When you were on leave, we developed rolls of your film and I saw all those smiling girls in the school you've been helping to support. I wish I could speak Dari and I didn't have asthma and I could come to Afghanistan and teach in your girls' school. I would teach math, just the same as I do here, teach them to make cranes from square sheets of paper, how to make garlands of them to hang in the classroom. We might have to share the same discomforts and dislocations and disappointments, but at least we would be sharing them

together. At least that way, I'd be making a difference. Not like teaching to a test my kids will fail because they've got bigger problems, like grandparents on dialysis and electricity getting turned off and their unemployed parents and the revolving door of principals at the school.

If we actually did what we said we were supposed to—get kids to graduate and go off to college and rise out of this backwoods Jim Crow town, that'd put this whole white savior factory out of business, wouldn't it? I fantasize about flying away from this place every time I go to the dollar store to buy school supplies to send you. When I pack boxes full of crayons and notebooks and pens and coloring books, with a carton of cigarettes or a can of shag tobacco on top for you, I feel like I'm sending myself over there piece by piece. I wish that were truly the case; that I could just mail myself out of here.

I used to look forward to teaching, but these days I'm just looking forward to the end of the week. One of my kids has been acting up since her father left, and one day poured a soda out on one of her friends. I didn't want to send her down to the vice principal's just to get smacked around a bit. I told you about the vice principal, didn't I? Has this big paddle hanging on the wall with air holes drilled into it and a handle wrapped in leather. My student's grandmother, who has taken over raising her, told me just to whup her right there in front of the whole class. That's what she'd said, *whup*. Said if I didn't want to do it, she knew enough teachers who'd be glad to. I thanked her and hung up. When I told it to one of the other teachers—a scab like me—she said I should've let the vice principal take care of it. *These kids can be animals*, she said. Her eyelids have become a sleepless shade of red, her skin—I used to marvel over how it was so clear she never had to wear foundation—was caked to cover up the way her skin looks like spoiled milk from all the stress. When she said, *animals*, there was a rusty creak in her birdsong voice. We

were all so idealistic when we'd started. How much a year can wear on you.

I don't think you remember when I told you this on one of the nights we talked. Our conversation lasted only a few minutes—you'd just gotten back from a long patrol rotation. You didn't say much, but when you spoke, I heard that creak in your voice too.

#

May 2011

After you started helping that Afghan school, I felt something else. A little worse than envy. It seemed like your work was the most important thing in the world and I took a back seat. You, playing the man, the savior, the martyr, the hero. You get to be Odysseus. I'm typecast as Penelope.

You fucker, can't you see how hard I've tried, how much work I've done for you? I do the taxes, I pay the bills, I go apartment hunting, I manage the bank accounts. I'm the one on the phone with the rear-detachment commander every time we get a red message, a white message, seeing if there's anything I can do for the families of those dead and wounded boys. I'm not some shrinking violet in the damn wives club, and even if I were, they've got kids to raise while you men are off playing GI Joe. Can't I be the hero of my own story?

But I don't suppose you know that. A little like how I can't know what combat is like, how I can't feel it in my veins. So how could you ever know what it's like waking up every morning and wondering if today will be the day two men arrive on my doorstep to tell me you're dead? How do we balance the two? How do we reach across these shores?

If I were the hero of this story, it would be the war at home, not the one over there that I'd fight. We'd march on the Capitol, throw off the government and hang the profiteers and

politicians from their neckties, line Pennsylvania Avenue with their corpses and leave them for the crows. I'd build schools where we taught girls and boys that life isn't money; it's clear September days and the way the leaves are most beautiful before shedding in death and how finishing a book is as bittersweet as saying goodbye to a friend. If I were a hero, I'd go over there and rescue you, my damsel, and all the soldiers toiling and bleeding and dying. If I were a hero, I'd have a little agency, a choice to make, a journey with arcs and morals and an ending well earned, but this isn't that kind of story.

#

March 2011

Here is a List of Things That Make My Heart Lurch:

- Strangers' footsteps in front of my door.
- The country code +93 before a number beckoning on my phone.
- The word *Afghanistan*.
- The words *America* and *liberty* and *freedom*, and how I don't know what they mean anymore.
- The words *Standardized Testing*.
- How the word *rifle*, which figures so heavily into the stories you tell me, is so violating, as if a stranger goes through my things each time I hear it.
- A scowling parent and/or guardian.
- The sounds of police helicopters overhead and how I look up and wonder if you too are looking up at a metal bird beating its wings.
- The way I sometimes confuse your dismay at what you're doing over there with my dismay at what I'm doing here.

-Other couples with their cliches, couples who wonder if their lovers are looking up at the same moon. For you and me, that's impossible. The moon can't show its face to both of us at once, and my day is your night.

-Sleep deprivation combined the hour long commune to East Feliciana Parish at 5am.

-What waiting feels like.

-What nothing feels like.

-What knowing that no matter how hard I try, I'll fail feels like.

-The nightly news.

#

February 2011

There's one memory I save for special occasions. I hide it away, use it sparingly to keep its blade sharp. It comes out when I'm alone and the night is cold like it had been the night we'd met. When I see a couple all tangled up in one another's arms. When the news reports six dead in a suicide bombing at a remote forward operating base. In it, you walk me to the train. I wear your coat. You even swiped onto the platform to see me onto the car. Then I gave you my number. Then the train took me home. You forgot to take your coat back. Then you called the next day. No one does that.

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January 2011

I wish my great-grandmother Ada were still alive today, so she could tell me what it was like to see her husband enlisted in the Navy and sent off to the battles on the Atlantic. I wish I were as lucky as she; to learn that the war had ended ahead of

schedule, sparing my great grandfather, sparing the generations that followed from meeting our ends at the hands of a German submarine captain. I'd want to ask her what was in my great-grandfather's heart when he'd sworn that oath of enlistment to a country that hadn't considered us Jews any more American than they consider blacks or Latinos or anyone or Vietnamese. I'd want to know what my grandfather's skin felt like when they reunited, if the sun had tanned and cracked his face, if ropes had calloused the palms and fingertips his large hands, if there were other changes—in his heart for instance—which took years to undo, changes which could never be undone.

#

November 2010

I sometimes wonder if it was right to follow you to this place. I wondered it the day you left, and I saw you march to the buses that'd take you to the plane that'd take you away. I had to drive the two hours back to Baton Rouge to get to work on time, and I got lost in a cornfield because I couldn't stop crying long enough to notice I'd taken a wrong turn, and I thought why the fuck did I follow you here? I don't mean Louisiana.

#

October 2010

I hadn't been able see you when the whole brigade assembled on Honor Field, patchy with carcinomas of dead grass and barren dirt. You said you you'd be in the first rank, and that may have been true, but I didn't see you. You said you saw me there, in my green dress with my Yashica in hand, waiting to snap a six by six of you, my soldier husband. I thought I'd show it to our children one day, and they'd say it was funny how daddy's body blended into the bodies around him, your uniforms melting into the half-dead landscape. A hot day, and

the medics had their hands full with soldiers passing out from standing in the sun so long. Everyone wore those bladders of water on their backs, and you seemed less like brave soldiers and more like brigade of hunchbacks. They played some Sousa march from speakers hooked up to a CD player. It reminded me of high school football games. I thought of our future children again, and what you said to me when your orders came through for Afghanistan—there was more danger here, in America. That I ran a higher risk of dying in a car crash than you did in combat. Look at the numbers, how few people died anymore. Saved by the wonders of modern medicine, all the clotting agents and cargo planes turned into ICUs and little strips of velcro and ballistic nylon used to stem blood from severed limbs. You told me about all these things that were meant to reassure me, but didn't. You marched past and I couldn't find you, so I snapped a photo of a row of soldiers, their heads turned to face the reviewing stand.

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September 2010

At the cavalry ball, you men all wore your ridiculous cowboy hats and silver spurs on your shoes as if they made you like those horse soldiers on the plains, as if they tied you to history. It would've been amusing if I was drunk, but I stayed sober so I could drive us the hour home. I stewed. At our table, Barker kept making jokes about the red snapper, and I told him to shut his mouth. I think his wife, Kelly, smiled at that, but I can't be sure. She didn't say anything all night.

You sang your damn songs and waved your damn flags, and I thought it was all a nice bit of trickery, all this ceremony and pomp. What is it Napoleon said, that he could persuade a man to die for a pretty piece of ribbon? You were getting drunk with your soldiers, who had their arms around you, pulling you towards the dance floor, and I could see how uncomfortable that made you; how you couldn't tell where the

line was between fraternal love and fraternization. But they were—we all were—just a bunch of dumb kids.

I didn't talk to the officers' wives; we didn't have anything in common, not really. Tupperware parties and boozy breakfasts and needlepoint or whatever it was they did with their time. The enlisted wives—who were covered in tattoos with jobs as bakers or smile-worn shop girls or soon-to-be de facto single mothers—all reminded me of people back home, a little creased and windswept, even though they were, for most part, youngish. Two of them were still in their teens; they could've been plucked out of the graduating class of my anemic Upstate high school. They were both knock-kneed and vine-armed and clinging to each other while their husbands—barely old enough to drink themselves—fed them booze for what I'm sure they thought would be a romantic night. They reminded me too much of home, so I kept to myself. I was alone, even then, even with you just a few yards away. That's not why I came to shindig, to sit by myself and watch a bunch of grown men act like kids who'd broken into their parents' liquor cabinet.

You and I used to sit in laundromats and make up stories about strangers passing by the big storefront window or eavesdrop on diners in the restaurants we could barely afford, whispering jokes about their problems and arguments and bougie sensibilities. We'd been so sure we would never be those people. I remember once, it had rained while we were out buying books and it didn't let up, so we'd had to spring to the L and rode home soaked. You put my book—I can't even remember what I'd bought—and stuffed it under your jacket so it wouldn't get wet. We stripped out of our clothes when we got home and you made tea. I lay in bed naked, thumbing through a graphic novel—*The Photographer*—and there was something about all those images, the real contacts sheets and fictive illustrations, and the way the protagonist cried that'd given me the idea to give you a camera to take with you over there. You brought in the tea and we drank it. Got under

the covers of your thin twin mattress, and stayed up talking about all the nothing we'd do after you were done with the Army, talking about where we'd live and what our kids might look like—if we wanted them. We'd talked about how, sometimes, the most important thing in an image wasn't its subject, but what lay just outside the frame. We'd talked until we stopped, and we stopped because we slept, and we slept through the soundless night in your windowless room and it felt like the world had ended and it was just the two of us in our abandoned city. When I woke, I was disappointed to hear your roommates shuffling around outside the door, to hear that life had continued without us.

Here it was again, all this life around me marching forward, but this time I was alone. Your men kept pressing drinks on you, and each time you refused, but took it anyway, and you were all were singing, *I wanna be in the cavalry, if they send me off to war*. So I went to have a cigarette, out in the air, which was somehow as sticky hot as inside, and found a bench out front. I hadn't noticed that Barker had followed me out. He asked me if I was okay, and I just shrugged, and didn't say anything. I gathered he wasn't used to that—not being listened to. He started talking about my dress, if this was one of those ironic things people my age did. Something about making a statement by dressing like a flapper instead of wearing a ball gown like all the other women. It was an A-line, a formal mid-century modern piece I'd found in a thrift store, but I didn't bother to correct him. I was a little afraid of him, the way he looked at me, the way he swayed ever so slightly. He was drunk, and I might be able to throw a mean punch, but he's a large man and we were basically alone. I crossed my arms, like I was cold. He offered me his jacket, which I didn't want. He sat down beside me, fanned himself with his Stetson. He said I shouldn't worry, he'd do what he could to bring me back. He said it'd be hard, what I was about to go through, told me how when he'd come back after Iraq, *things with Kelly, well they'd never gone back to the way they'd been*

before. I thought these were just the musings of a drunkard who'd stayed in the Army too long, who'd lost touch. These days, I wonder if he was trying to warn me.

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~~Here is a List of Things I Would Do if I Left You:~~

Here is a List of Things I Would Do if You Died:

~~-Drink~~ Find something less cliché to do, something warm and numbing, something that feels like early-onset dementia—and permanent.

-Find someone new to sleep with and feel nothing.

-Gather up a handful of blow-flowers and instead of doing what the name commands, set them on fire.

-Think about suicide without making a plan.

~~-Eat a handful of pills.~~ I *could* eat a handful of pills, but someone would find me because I'm a broke-ass teacher and we share everything, like cars and bar tabs and apartments and a pool of school supplies which always comes up short when you go looking for another manila folder or calculator battery—and yeah, we share pills too—so that's out.

-Think about suicide and try not to look at the Huey P. Long bridge—the second smaller one, its steel bones oxidizing to death—or the Mississippi. Think about how stupid people are when they believe water will somehow be softer than concrete at that height.

-Go to the funeral.

-Push everyone away.

-Quit TFA and leave all the future politicians padding their resumes and the twenty-two-year-old scabs who don't know better and the white saviors with their Jesus complexes

behind.

-Nothing.

-More nothing.

-Enough nothing to get behind on the rent, which, as you know, is not at all like me.

-Live out of my car for a while.

-Consider moving to Arizona like my doctor had suggested when I'd been hospitalized for asthma for the fifth time in a year. Consider doing something with turquoise, maybe. Remember how much I hate sand and heat and the sun and fucking turquoise.

-Move back in with my parents.

-Climb the Adirondacks

-Try not to think about suicide when I make a climb in the rain. Try not to hope for an accident, a slip, a broken neck, a painless death.

-Write poetry, let one be titled: *Here is a List of Things I Would Do if You Died.*

-Write a poem titled: *Here is a List of Things I Would Do if I Left You.*

-Burn everything I'd written.

-Never write poetry again.

-Never shave a hair on my body again.

-Never date another man again.

-Never look at anything that reminds me of you.

-Never start wearing makeup.

-Never date.

-Never say never.

-Drink, and try to think of less cliché things to do with grief.

-Apply to every job that'll take me to the place that took you from me.

-If rejected from every job for which I'd applied: book a ticket to Kabul anyway.

-Make a list of things to pack. A camera will be at the top of it.

-If visa to Afghanistan gets rejected, buy a ticket to Pakistan, plan to sneak across the border.

-Come home alive or die there or never come home at all or abandon all those plans—I haven't decided yet.

-Buy a hairless cat, name him/her/they Gefilte Fish. (I've always wanted a cat.)

-Live longer than my cat; remember that nothing lasts, especially not love.

-Find the shoeboxes and musk-laden clothes and books and 35mm negatives that remind me of you and start a fire and burn it all and immediately regret what I've done.

-Find some small town—preferably in Vermont—with an empty role to fill, a need, a lack. Occupy that unoccupied space, and with time, become a familiar fixture, a woman with graying hair, a woman past her prime and alone. Become someone everyone wonders about, worries about. Become an enigma, a mystery. Let them say, *there's Old Lady Fishman, off to the library/animal shelter/schoolhouse/tollbooth, what a sad story*—even if they can only speculate. I'll put my lights on

at Halloween and give out full-sized candy bars. I'll put out food for all the neighborhood strays and the town will try to stop me, but they won't succeed. I'll teach a class to the local kids on how to photograph, just like I'd taught you; I'd teach them to think about the picture plane and what lies outside it and how absence is sometimes more poignant. Maybe I'll find another lonely woman, let her fall in love, never her tell her anything. (She'll leave eventually.) And when I'm in my autumnal years, I'll think of how trees are most beautiful before they die and think about you and not think about suicide and fade and fade and finally go, and I'll die thinking that if I can let you go in this life, it'll make the next one, our next meeting, our next reunion, that much more sweet.

#

March 2010

Our honeymoon was one night in a fancy hotel. The next day, you drove two days south to your new unit.

#

Our wedding day, in the living room of my parents' creaky old farmhouse, was a string of mishaps. It was rushed. So much went wrong. My mother was sour that we hadn't asked the rabbi to conduct the ceremony, but a county judge. At least he looked Jewish, she said. When your family arrived, your grandmother brought me a jade bracelet as a wedding present, but it wouldn't slip over my knuckles, not even with a little grease, so I couldn't accept it. Then I heard your little brother whisper to my brother how he'd just enlisted, and to not tell you, because last time you saw him, you'd told him not to join. Then we even saw each other before the ceremony, and my mother rushed you back into my bedroom where you were changing. It's a stupid tradition to keep bride and groom apart, but I guess that's what I'd signed up for. Some

anarchist I am. Just to make sure, you practiced breaking the glass under the *chuppa* half a dozen times, and each time you did it perfectly.

But then none of it mattered, because I saw the tears in your eyes and heard the shudder in your voice when you recited our vows. I wasn't thinking of tomorrow or the next day, just this moment together. If you weren't wearing your dress blues, we could've pretended we were just like any other couple in the world. But I hold onto that moment, that idea that a wedding ring represents infinity—I hoped, for once, one of these damn symbols would hold up. My father put the glass on the ground. You brought your foot down on it, but it slid off, breaking only the stem. I wonder now if it was an omen, but you'd always been the superstitious one, not me.

#

After we got our marriage license, we threw ourselves a little engagement party. You were on leave. The old rad crew was all there, belting out *Defiance*, *Ohio* songs and dancing like the tomorrow would never come to that indie electronica garbage you like so much. There were gifts, even—like we were real adults. Sara brought us that Spanish wine that we didn't know would turn to vinegar during the move to Louisiana. Daria brought us pralines from New Orleans without knowing I was allergic to all those tree-nuts. We got a few cards, a leather-bound edition of *Arabian Nights* from Ranya, which, if you're wondering, I call dibs on if we ever get divorced. I don't know why I joke like that. I don't know if I could've stood any more gifts than that, and thank God all our friends lived on day-old bread and bottles of Four Roses and were too broke to give us anything but their presence—or pretended to be that poor, at least.

Everyone marveled at how we were getting married, how young we were—I was 21, you were 22. I guess we're still young, in a way. I know some people judged us for it. Judged me, really.

They were my friends, anyway. All those dreadlocked boys with their bandannas tied around their necks like their convictions and girls who'd thought freeing the nipple was the first step towards the revolution. That's the thing, we were so young, believed so ardently that things like matrimony and jobs are quaint antiquities that belong in museums. But that's not real life. They didn't have to worry about the things we did to pay for college like holding three jobs or joining the military, and still leaving with tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debt. If I told them how it is now, waking up in the night, thinking there's a knock at the door, and two men in their blues are waiting outside, what would they say? If it were them, what would they do? Anyway it was my choice.

Arianna was there. You already know all about us. You already know she was never right for me. But she's loyal, and my friend, and I couldn't just throw that away. She watched the two of us dancing our asses off, dancing and drinking because it all hurt so much was already on our shoulders. I found her crying in the stairwell, her voice bouncing off the breezeblocks. She'd told me she asked you why you were doing this—the Army and all that. You said you had to go. She told me, *he's got you, Mir, and now what're we going to do?* I didn't know what she was talking about, but she was drunk, and I pulled her up and folded her into my arms. She held the hug for a little too long, pressing her nose into my hair. She pulled back and looked at me with her head tilted to the side, her eyes half-closed. I don't know when I'll ever get around to telling you this, Dave, but she tried to kiss me. Like it was the easiest thing in the world to get me back, like real life and marriage and hardship and poverty were quaint things best left in museums. I dragged her back inside, told her she was drunk.

#

November 2009

I decided we'd get engaged, there in the whispering gallery with all those Metro North commuters buzzing past. We were going to my Aunt's place in Westchester. You were on pass; flown in from Armor School for Thanksgiving. I was thinking how we had so little time, how fast life was moving—and wasn't it crazy that two kids had to rush like this? But it wasn't rushing, it was the right time. How we knew, and couldn't explain it, but we did. I was thinking, *at least if he gets hurt, I'll get to come to the hospital. At least if he dies, I'll get a folded American flag. A Gold Star in my window. The excuse of a lifetime.* I was thinking how I'd look in a black dress and a black veil and what it'd feel like to watch your body lowered into the ground and how selfish I was—that's what came to mind, selfishness—to fantasize about your death.

And/or I was thinking of simple things—the ways your eyes snatch the light out of the room, how your face opens up when you see a film, the way your hair feels between my fingertips. How our words curl and nest into each other's and I feel like something missing had been found. Does that make sense? Let me try another way of saying it. When you speak, I can't help but listen. When I talk, I can't help but feel heard. And without you, I'm mute to the world, deaf to its music. How no one else in the world can do that to me. Fuck me, I'm drunk and you've got me talking all purple. I've always hated over-qualified language. But it's always the small things, the details.

I thought these things, and decided—in a split second—to tell you to stand in one corner and press your ear to the tiled wall. I hushed my words up the vaulted ceiling and over the bustling commuters' heads and into your ear. I slipped those words in like my tongue, and I could almost taste the bitter wax and delicate hairs when I said *marry me*. I thought about how I could stick my tongue in your ear, and that's all I needed to get you going. I was thinking how much like foreplay it was. How our children might look, what features they'd steal from you, from me. What your body would look like

beneath a closed casket, because I can't imagine it being anything but closed. How there'd be a hunk of me carved away and how I'd wake up each morning you were gone and be surprised that I'd waken up at all.

#

October 2009

As a birthday present, I sent you a copy of Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*. You said it was the best gift you'd ever received. Then, you sent me the diary you'd filled since you'd started training. I was dismayed at how often you'd sketched scenes of your own death.

#

August 2009

You went back and forth between the city and all those joint bases and forts and posts where you'd trained. Each time, you'd come back to me a little changed—though I don't think you'd noticed. After Fort Benning, your manner had stiffened. You told me how one of your training sergeants said you were too polite, that it just wouldn't do in combat. They asked which branch you'd been assigned to, and when you told them Armor and Cavalry, they laughed. No room for good manners among tankers and scouts, they'd said. Still, you spent nearly all your pay on flights back to me when they gave you the rare weekend pass. I thought that'd be enough to keep us—this—going.

#

July 2009

There's a photo you took of me in Montana, on the first leg of our cross-country road trip. That was supposed to be our send-off. The last hurrah between college and the real world. We'd agreed that this was how our relationship would end. I look at

that photo now; I use it as the backdrop for my computer, and sometimes I think it's a kind of self harm, like I'm carving hatch-marks into my skin every time I set my eyes on it. I'm the subject in the photo—a strange sensation. I'm wearing your plaid flannel, cleaning my camera. There's a layering of images—you're on the other side of the motel window, the reflection of a parking lot of cars superimposed on our room, the ghost of your silhouette imprinted on the pane of glass. I see me as you see me, and that makes the distance harder. Don't ask me to explain how that works. I'm looking at the photo, and it's only been a year, but I'm already thinking, *I used to have such good skin*, I'm already thinking, *we used to be so young*.

We went out to dinner that night at the motel bar, where they served us steak and fries, and when we were done, we got a six-pack of that skunky beer they called Moose Drool, which I hated, but which you liked just fine. When we finished it, we had sex on the motel bed with a movie flickering on our bodies, and it felt desperate, like something out of a neo-noir film, like we were on the run from gangsters or cops or both, and of course they'd all have ridiculous accents. *Cawfee. Shawtgun. Brawd*. I wished it was real—that we were on the run, I mean. And if the villains caught up to us at the end and we made our last stand in some seedy parking garage staring down a dozen goons with automatics, that would be fine by me.

At the time, I was thinking about how far we'd come to just end it. It couldn't; I couldn't. We saw Ohio and all that flat farmland, Chicago on the shore where you reached down and dipped your hand into Lake Michigan, the Twin cities where we imagined ourselves settling in a brick house if New York ever sank into the Atlantic, the Crow Reservation where I wanted to go one day, to teach, and past Billings and Bozeman and Butte and Missoula and into the Rockies. How much further we'd go. Past the mountains, into Idaho, through Coeur d'Alene, where

you'd be terrified of the way down, coasting the whole winding descent. We'd strike forth into the Eastern Washington scrublands and desert, into the Redwood forests and onto the coast, the briny-aired Pacific coast. And I'd imagine it'd be a new beginning, just the two of us. I would've let that air stay in my lungs forever if I could, but it wasn't the start of a new life, just a brief interlude.

When you reported to your first duty station—a temporary posting to train cadets, just like you'd been a year ago—I flew back to New York to my para job at PS 21 and the ICP gig. You'd given me all those rolls of film and all those moments from our trip, and when I developed them, I was surprised to see how many you'd taken of me. That image of me in your flannel, the ghost of you on the window. I thought about asking you to marry me.

I'm thinking about that damn photo, and thinking about taking it down, replacing it with a black field, because when I look at it, I remember that what I'd felt when we drove across the mountains and forests and plains and cities of this God-forsaken country, how I felt like the last woman alone left on Earth with the only man in the entire world, and that hurts, Dave, you can't imagine how much that hurts.

#



May 2009

I gave you my dad's old 35mm before we graduated, and we went out into Carroll Gardens to practice shooting. You didn't load the film right—the sprocket holes hadn't lined up. I took it to the dark room and found one long, empty strip. I still have photos of you from that day—you on top of a traffic light control box, you at the edge of the F and G train tracks, you in front of Rocketship Comics aiming your lens at me. You thinking you'd captured all these moments.

#

I try writing about things, like they'll make them easier to say. All that comes out is bad poetry, fragments of memories.

#

Do you remember how you'd been saying that you knew distance was hard? You never said you were thinking about your parents,

about the day your dad had left.

#

Do you remember our first date, not the time we met at the Waverly, but our first real date? Film Forum was showing *Sans Soleil*. You left the theatre in a haze.

#

I can't seem to describe a sun as a sun unless it's radiant. A spring is not a spring unless it's limpid.

#

I remember the first time you said, *I love you*. It wasn't when you thought, not at the top of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank, but in your sleep when you came to stay the night in the dorm where I RA'd.

#

January 2008

I follow my friends to your place for a party, a rent party they called it. There you are, thinking you're so smooth, but you're drunk off your ass. Handsome in your own awkward kind of way, and not stringy like all the beanie'd bearded hipsters. At least you're not dangerous. At least I've got my friend around me. You ask if I'm Jewish, and I think that's an odd kink. I want nothing to do with you; I'm looking to hook up with another girl. I'd broken up with Arianna a few days before, but I won't mention that. And you're still here, acting like a schmuck. The music's playing, some David Bowie cover band. You pour me a beer that's ninety percent foam, grinning at me the whole time.

A few minutes later, I witness you making out with someone else. (Did you forget you'd been hitting on me?) You had the nerve to come back, trying your bungling German pickup lines

(I'd told you I spent a semester in Berlin). I was a little down, and hell, you ask nicely, so I let you kiss me. We make out, and it's nice because I can forget about my two jobs and student debt and financial aid and Arianna. I can forget, and you've got wide, soft lips, and the press of your fingertips just wrap me up in this second. You try to convince me to stay the night. I laugh, tell you I've got work in the morning (I lie). Just a little make out session, that's all it's supposed to be. That's all I need. But you sober up. We talk a little, dance a little, there's a DJ on now. When I want to go home, you offer to walk me all the way to the train in the snow. It's not snowing, but it's a nice flourish, and that's how I'll choose to remember it.

You wear your flannel shirt, and I wear your workman's coat. The streetlights all take on fuzzy haloes and toss our shadows far ahead and behind us. You tell me you listen to electro-clash and hip-hop and folk music. I stare at the warehouses that go for blocks, the ones under demolition and the fishbowl condos taking their places. You tell me how when you hear Pete Seeger play Frank Proffitt's "Going Across the Mountain" the banjo sounds just like a *dan nguyet*, how that song about the Civil War might as well be a Vietnamese song. We're all wrapped up in history, I say, and you ask me if you can hold my hand and I say yes. A hipster dive is still open on North Fifth. A Polish bar is still open on Bedford Ave. But they'll be closed soon. We're racing daylight for a few hours of sleep. The warehouses end on a block of vinyl-sides row-houses and shutters shops and restaurants. I expect you to leave at the corner of the station, but you walk down. I expect you to say goodbye at the turnstile, but you swipe in. We wait on the platform and I tell you about folk-punk, which you think sounds a little funny, but say makes sense anyway. You apologize for being so forward at the party, and ask to see me again.

The train won't be here for another fifteen, and you tell me

about your future, what the next couple of years hold. The Army. I write my number in the notebook I find in your coat pocket, a fresh one with a few sketches—a dead rat, a woman holding a child, the facade of a brownstone being demolished, but the rest is still fresh, blank. It's the empty sheets of paper which appeal to me the most. I say I'd like to see you again, but what I say is overpowered by the announcement that the train is here. It howls into the station and the doors open and I enter and you're on the edge of the platform and I'm on the edge of the car and for a moment that's nothing between us and you ask to kiss me and I nod but the doors close. I try to tell you that we have all the time in the world for a kiss, but the announcer is too loud, the doors too thick. Then the train takes me away.

"Japanese Poetry Never Modifies" first appeared in the [Columbia Journal](#), November 12, 2018.

Photo courtesy [goodfreephotos.com](#).

New Poetry by Antonio Addessi

You'd caught
the big one they said, you'd hooked a willow and
sank thigh deep into the muck. They hung up
when I asked if they'd bring you home.
It was late and I had my rollers in.

Wrongful Appropriation of the Soul

In regard to cruelties committed in the name of a free society, some are guilty, while all are responsible.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

One: Complicity

Every time I read another account of sexual assault in the armed forces—most recently, when I read Senator Martha McSally’s recent statement that she’d been raped by a senior officer, hadn’t reported the assault, and continues to support leaving the prosecution of sexual assault cases in the hands of military commanders—I think of the last thing that poet Audre Lorde ever said to me.

I said goodbye to Audre one night shortly before her son Jonathan and I reported to Naval Officer Candidate School in 1988. I didn’t know then that it would be our final conversation: the breast cancer she’d survived a decade earlier had metastasized in her liver, but homeopathic injections prescribed by a doctor in Switzerland had been keeping the tumors under control for four years. Audre was a warrior, and at that time she seemed invincible.

Still, she never wasted time or words. If she spoke,

what she said mattered. One listened with respect, and remembered.

She put her hands on my shoulders and looked directly into my eyes: "Jerri," she said, "don't let the Navy steal your soul."

In the decades that followed, I often wondered if I'd honored my promise or if the culture of sexual harassment and assault in the armed forces had stolen my soul. Like Senator McSally, who commissioned a few months before me, I was sexually assaulted on active duty. Like her, I did not report the assault. And like her—like almost every military woman of our generation, if we're being honest—I was complicit in a culture that enabled systemic misogyny and abuse.

Two: Assault

Unlike Senator McSally, I was not raped. My assailant was not senior to me. He was a foreign midshipman and I was a lieutenant, three paygrades senior to him.

The midshipman was a foot taller and at least fifty pounds heavier than me. He drank enough at a shipboard dining-in to imagine that I was interested and he was desirable. He followed me to my stateroom, pulled me inside, slid the pocket door shut, and grabbed me in a nonconsensual liplock. I waltzed him around until I could push the door open, and tossed him out so hard that he bounced off the steel bulkhead on the other side of the passageway.

I didn't report him. In the summer of 1994, the first women to be permanently assigned to American naval combatants

had just been
ordered to their ships. I didn't want my experience to be used
as an argument
that women didn't belong at sea. The midshipman, like many of
the men who
harass and assault military women, was technically proficient
and behaved
professionally when he was sober. His entire career lay ahead
of him, and he
had potential to contribute to the defense of his nation and
to our alliance.
Most importantly, I didn't want to tarnish the success of a
joint mission with
an important ally, or diminish my own contribution to it. Like
all good
military personnel, I prioritized mission accomplishment over
personal
inconvenience.

And by the time I was assaulted, I'd been groomed to
accept abuse and to remain silent about it.

Three: Grooming

Military culture grooms women
in uniform for abuse like a perpetrator of domestic violence
grooms a partner
for victimization. Military women are too often isolated from
each other,
desensitized to sexual aggression, encouraged to accept abuse
of power as the
norm, rewarded for compliance, and then silenced if they dare
to object. Commanders
would consider those behaviors unacceptable and inexcusable if
they occurred in
any other criminal offense against another servicemember.

Military culture mixes rewards—camaraderie, a sense of belonging, the right to see oneself as successful and strong—with elements of abuse. The grooming process isn't linear. The techniques of desensitization vary, but they're familiar to anyone knowledgeable about domestic violence and sexual assault.

Grooming often begins in accession training.

I met my first military sexual predator at Naval Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island. Our first eight weeks of training included a class in maneuvering board, a system of solving relative motion problems graphically and mathematically. The instructor, a chief boatswain's mate, made no secret of his contempt for women. We were of no use in his man's Navy; women's sole purpose was gratification of male sexual desire.

Another officer candidate, a prior enlisted woman who'd served as an operations specialist on an oiler, whispered to me in the passageway outside of the classroom that the best way to handle him was not to draw his attention. *Don't ever get caught alone in a classroom or deserted passageway with him*, she said. She didn't need to say *Don't bother reporting him*. He was still an instructor: one needed to know only that to read between the lines. I'd survived a violent sexual assault two years before I joined

the Navy; I was so uncomfortable around that chief that I choked on the final maneuvering board exam and failed it.

The cadre brought me before a board to discuss whether I should repeat just the exam or the entire first eight weeks of training. I claimed that a relapse of bronchitis kept me up all night before the test, and showed them that I could estimate a target angle—a basic maneuvering board skill—using the photo of a destroyer on the wall. They allowed me to retake the exam. A different instructor proctored it; I passed easily.

I assumed that the horny chief was an outlier. Some of the men in my class didn't exactly approve of my presence, but none of them behaved unprofessionally. Listening to women in the know and avoiding the occasional bad apple seemed to be reasonable strategies for sexual assault prevention—which I understood to be my individual, personal responsibility. I didn't realize how many bad apples were in the barrel; that a network of street-savvy, collegial women didn't exist everywhere in the Fleet; or that some men worked hard to prevent women from trusting each other and sharing information.

Several months

later, I attended the Intelligence Officer Basic Course in Dam Neck, Virginia.

The only other woman in my class of twenty had a girly-girl name and an open, friendly smile. She spent Friday and Saturday nights at the officers' club at Naval Air Station Oceana, home to hundreds of Navy fighter pilots.

Our male classmates told me, *She's always talking about the pilots who take her out to dinner: where they go, what they eat, and how much they spend on her. She's just in the Navy to find a husband. And if you pal around with her, people will think you're fucking every pilot at Oceana too. You're a professional, though, aren't you? You're one of the good ones.*

It didn't take long to figure out that sailors laud promiscuity among men and loathe it among women. I learned never to use the phrase "double standard" to describe this phenomenon; every man who heard it changed the subject to complain about gender differences in scoring on the physical fitness test.

I wanted the men I worked with to consider me one of the *good ones*, even if it meant being judgmental about another woman's love life, isolated from other women, and often lonely. I stayed cool and distant around the other woman in my class. She showed even less interest in getting acquainted. I wonder now what our classmates told her about me.

In December 1989, I reported to my first duty station at the Antisubmarine Warfare Operations Center (ASWOC) at Lajes, a village on the island of Terceira in the Azores archipelago. I was one of two women naval officers in the command; both of us were young, junior in rank, and single. The command's mission, straight out of *The Hunt for Red October*, was to locate and track Soviet submarines transiting the central Atlantic using P-3C Orion aircraft.

In addition to serving as the station intelligence officer for two years, I was to earn qualifications to be responsible for the safety of the aircraft in flight, and to debrief the missions and report submarine contacts back to intelligence and antisubmarine warfare headquarters commands in Norfolk, Virginia, and Washington, DC. Although 10 USC § 6015 still prohibited women from flying combat aircraft in 1989, the P-3C community had accepted women in support roles for several years and was considered to be less aggressive and hostile toward women than the carrier aviation community.

The first person I met at the ASWOC was a Limited Duty Officer ensign, formerly a senior enlisted man. He shook my hand and asked, "Are you going to be like our last female intel officer, and sleep with the commanding officer of every squadron who comes through?"

By then I'd

learned the value of a snappy comeback. I batted my eyelashes at him and
simpered. "Why—I don't know! Do you think that's a good idea?"
Then I turned
away and walked past him as if he didn't exist.

Later he and some
of the other watch officers introduced me to that day's duty
air crew. "I'm
Lieutenant N-.,," said a grinning pilot. "the plane commander
for Crew Six. Are
you like our intel officer? She only sleeps with O-4s and up."

I shook my
head and stomped my foot a couple of times like a Navy
instructor who wants students
to remember something important for an upcoming test.

"Gentlemen," I
said, "I am not out here to get laid. I'm out here to catch
Soviet submarines.
When's the next mission?"

First
assignments in the Navy are, as the saying goes, "like
drinking from a fire
hose." I told myself that I had no energy for sneaking around
and no time to be
lonely. And since the men I worked with apparently had the
right to police my
relationships, I decided that dating and sex were out of the
question
altogether for the next two years. I earned my qualifications
as fast as I
could, stood my watches, and learned to write intelligence
reports and personnel
evaluations. I dated one man, an Air Force logistics officer,
in the last few

months of that assignment.



One of the P-3C crews deployed to Bell's first duty station let her fly the plane for 15 minutes—with the mission commander in the copilot seat, and the vertical autopilot on. Said Bell, "I'd have stayed in that seat the whole mission, if they'd let me."

Women could fly

on P-3C missions as long as the crew wasn't expected to drop torpedoes on an

enemy submarine. My supervisor in Lajes, the operations

officer, wanted me to fly as often as I could. For my first flight, the detachment officer in charge assigned me to ride with a crew that always read the same excerpt from a fifty-cent book of pornography aloud after they completed the preflight checklist. While the plane commander chanted a graphic sex scene, I tried not to think about the implications of being locked in a flying tin can for the next ten hours with a dozen men who'd just gotten themselves all hot and bothered. I refused to look down, and attempted to make eye contact with every member of the crew. Some wouldn't meet my gaze. Others squirmed and looked away.

One asked quietly afterwards if their reading had bothered me. I smiled and said, "The bodice-rippers I read are hotter than your crew's shitty porn."

I didn't complain. If women wanted respect, we had to act tough and never, ever spoil the guys' fun. The crew's porn ritual, just words, didn't hurt me. Acting tough and depriving bullies of their fun generated a lovely dopamine rush. I refused to think too hard about the effects of accepting bully behavior as the norm.

On another day, a pilot invited me to the hangar to learn about the squadron duty officers' responsibilities. When I arrived, he and another lieutenant called me into the squadron

duty office and told me to shut the door. On the back of the door, they'd hung a *Penthouse* centerfold of a naked blonde (I am also blonde) sitting in a spread-eagle split. My face was exactly level with her crotch. I could count her short-and-curlies. Suppressed snickers confirmed that the placement had been deliberate.

Looking the poster up and down slowly, I considered the options. If I complained, every man in the command would label me a "bitch" and a "whiner." If I ignored the behavior it might stop—or the aviators might choose to escalate the harassment in hopes of getting a reaction. If I pretended that the prank was no big deal or made a joke of it, I might convince them to think twice about messing with me. I might even win their approval.

I turned to
the smirking lieutenants, shrugged, and pointed my thumb over my shoulder in
the direction of the poster's focal point. "I think she dyes *that*, too."

When I left, I waved cheerily at the centerfold. We had something in common, but for years I didn't want to think about what it might be. Many of the strategies women use to access and retain some of the power men try to exercise over us and over our bodies become maladaptive. Even damaging.



When Bell commissioned, she had little idea that her career in the Navy would, at times, resemble a gauntlet of sexual advances by superiors, peers, and subordinates. In spite of this, she was able to maintain her faith in the United States, and confidence in her mission.

Over the

course of the two-year assignment to Lajes, three of my married colleagues

propositioned me. Each time I declined: *Flattered,*

but not interested. They accepted the

rejections with grace; I had no problems continuing to work with them.

I never told anyone
about the propositions. Certainly not the married colleagues'
wives, who
already suspected me of sleeping with their husbands—or trying
to—just because
we worked and traveled together.

In a “he said,
she said” situation, either the men or their wives might
accuse me of having
invited the propositions, or accused me of sleeping with a
married man—conduct
“prejudicial to good order and discipline” and a violation of
the Uniform Code
of Military Justice. I told myself that I had too much self-
respect to hook up
with guys who cheated, and that I deserved better. I allowed
myself to feel
morally superior to my colleagues, and to pity their wives.

But I never
learned to feel comfortable with the old Navy adage about
detached service, *What goes on det, stays on det*. Officers
are supposed to follow a code of honor and report violations
of the Uniform
Code of Military Justice. Every time I lied by omission, I
felt like I’d ripped
off another piece of my integrity and flushed it down the
shitter.

For weeks before the summer antisubmarine warfare conference,
held that year in Lajes, the only other single woman officer
in the command (the administrative officer) and I endured
repeated badgering from the executive officer and my
supervisor, the operations officer, about who our “significant
others” would be for the Saturday night dining-out event at a

local seafood restaurant. The executive officer wasn't satisfied when we told him we were going stag. Practically licking his lips at the picture of two young women paired with two hot-to-trot pilots, he ordered us both to bring significant others to the dinner.

At the Friday night reception, the admin officer and I cornered the two admirals attending the conference. We explained the situation, and asked them to be our dates for the dining-out. One had to depart for a family emergency, but we picked up the other from the VIP Quarters, stuffed him into the admin officer's little two-cylinder hatchback for the drive out to the town of Praia da Vitoria, and arrived at the restaurant a few minutes late.

We made a grand entrance on the admiral's arm and announced: "XO! OPSO! You ordered us to bring significant others to the dining-out. We're high achievers, so we brought the most *significant* other we could find. Will this one do, gentlemen?"

Everyone laughed but our supervisors, who turned bright red. They left our love lives alone after that.

The master's tools might not have brought down the master's house, but taking a whack with them from the inside and knocking down a little plaster afforded us the illusion of success.



Bell's solo campsite on the summit of Serra da Santa Barbara, Azores, July 1990, looking north across the caldera. Her military experience was not unpleasant, but it was, by necessity, more solitary than that of her many male peers.

In the summer

of 1990, a married pilot deployed to Lajes heard that I planned to go camping

on Serra de Santa Bárbara, the crest of Terceira's largest extinct volcano. He

invited himself to go with me. He insisted that he would join me even after I

told him several times that he wasn't welcome.

I didn't complain,

but my fellow watch officers overheard him and offered to straighten him out if

he was scaring me.

I thanked them,

but told them I could handle it. *If the*

pilot gets anywhere near the top of my volcano, I said, I'll just push him off the side of the mountain

and watch him die. With pleasure. I meant it literally.

I went camping
alone and kept watch on the one-lane road up the mountain
until sunset. Not
even a Navy pilot would risk the hairpin turns with no guard
rails, the
three-thousand-foot plunge to the sea. The pilot never showed.
I slept
fitfully.

I told my
colleagues that I'd managed the situation and enjoyed the
campout.

Not all
empowerment stories are true. Mine wasn't. But I told it so
many times that I
began to believe it. *Fake it 'til you
make it.*

A naval flight officer, a lieutenant commander known for
harassing women—especially enlisted women—returned to Lajes
for a second deployment.

Both the watch
officers and the enlisted sonar technicians assured the women
in the command
that they wouldn't leave any of us alone with him. The sonar
techs wouldn't
even go behind the sonar equipment racks if I sat at the
debriefing table with the
lieutenant commander.

During one
mission debrief, he put his hand over mine and leered at me.
Every enlisted man
in the room stopped working to glare at him.

I didn't smile. His hand, I moved firmly off my body and out of my personal space. Then, with eye contact and a facial expression, I indicated that he'd better not do it again. He shrugged and grinned: *Can't blame a guy for trying*. I didn't report him.

The next day, the operations officer—the supervisor who'd teased me about bringing a “significant other” to the dining-out—called me into his office. The sailors had told him about the handsy lieutenant commander. He asked why I hadn't reported it. He'd already arranged for the squadron's commanding officer to put the lieutenant commander on the first flight back to Rota. He insisted that he would never tolerate sexual harassment.

I pretended to see no irony in his statement. I considered myself lucky to work with men who were pranksters and occasionally bullies instead of rapists. I wondered what would happen to the women at the antisubmarine warfare operations center in Rota, and what might already have happened to the women in the deployed squadron. I didn't wonder too long: they weren't in my chain of command.

I'd completed the qualification process for “handling it.”

Four: Silence

In 1991, the same year I began congratulating myself for being tough enough to handle

military misogyny, Navy helicopter pilot Paula Coughlin reported sexual assault and misconduct at the naval aviation community's "Tailhook" professional conference. I admired her courage in speaking up, and saw her as a role model.

The Navy had one more lesson to teach.

In her essay "Cassandra Among the Creeps," Rebecca Solnit describes concentric rings of silence, through which women who dare to speak up against powerful men descend. Navy women watched Paula Coughlin descend, and we learned.

Almost immediately, most Navy men—even the Naval Investigative Service personnel charged with investigating the allegations—either dismissed Coughlin's story or attempted to discredit it.

Then they began to discredit Coughlin herself. The Navy grounded her and questioned her mental health. Suddenly, everybody knew somebody who'd known her: in ROTC at Old Dominion, at flight school, in the squadron, on the staff. They said she was brash, foul-mouthed, promiscuous (why else would she have gone to Tailhook in the first place?), and a shitty pilot. Claiming that she hadn't earned the honor of being an admiral's aide, those same men reasoned that the job had been given to her at better pilots' expense because the Navy was pushing to integrate more women into naval aviation. That was the first year I heard the term "political correctness."

Speaking up in Coughlin's defense was a one-way ticket down to the next level of silence: bullying and intimidation. *Are you one of those feminazis like Pat Schroeder? It takes a special kind of man to be a Navy pilot—what happened at Tailhook's just the culture in naval aviation. Do you think this*

investigation will actually change anything? Coughlin's career is toast, whether or not she wins her case. And the witch hunt is ruining the careers of good aviators who cost the taxpayers thousands of dollars to train. Would you ruin a man's career over something like that? It's not like she was raped or anything.

I disagreed.

Aw, we thought you were one of the good ones, Lieutenant.

Lesson learned: no woman would be awarded the Medal of Honor for jumping on the sexual assault grenade.

Coughlin resigned her commission in the Navy. I decided to stay, took another big gulp of the Kool-Aid, and jumped feet-first down to the bottom of the pit. The need for silence, I internalized as a personal survival strategy. I didn't speak up in support of Coughlin again. Women who challenged military bullies and predators risked criticism, ostracism, lower marks on performance evaluations, or trumped-up misconduct charges that could lead to discharge from the service—even dishonorable discharge. Few senior women were around to serve as role models or mentors; those who would discuss sexual harassment advised us to keep our heads down and pick our battles. We couldn't rely on women who agreed with us in private to stand with us in public. Men were even less likely to offer support.

In 2005, my graduate fiction advisor suggested that I write stories from the perspective of women in uniform. "Military women don't ever tell those stories," I replied. "That would just make things worse for every woman still serving." That had been my lived experience, and I believed every word when I said it. I didn't start writing about the Navy for almost another decade.

Five: Barriers

Senator McSally needed years to decide to break her silence about her assault. Many of us do. If you'd asked me when I retired in 2008 if I'd been sexually assaulted on active duty, I'd have said no: I'd handled the incident with the handsy midshipman and moved on. Senator McSally may have thought she'd handled her sexual assault, too.

An admission of complicity in the culture that permits and encourages gender and sexual violence in the armed forces, and the realization that there is no contradiction in being both the victim of abuse and an enabler of it, can take much longer. Responsibility for sexual harassment and assault in the military rests squarely and solely on the shoulders of the perpetrators; staying silent to survive, or to remain employed, in no way equals consent to being assaulted. But men and women who served and are still serving bear the responsibility for tolerating and perpetuating an abusive culture that creates conditions in which sexual assault can occur more frequently, in which victims who come forward are routinely silenced, and in which those who courageously insist on being heard are denied justice.

Complicity costs us a fortune in integrity. Worse, when we fail to recognize and acknowledge the ways in which we individually enable toxicity in the culture, we pass some of the cost on to other victims. Military sexual trauma factors significantly in

depression for many veterans, female and male. It's a risk factor for substance abuse and homelessness. It's almost certainly implicated in the suicide rate of women veterans (250 times the national average for women). Complicity allows the culture of gender and sexual violence in the armed forces to appropriate our souls—or to steal them outright.

Audre Lorde wrote in her final book *A Burst of Light: And Other Essays*: “While we fortify ourselves with visions of the future, we must arm ourselves with accurate perceptions of the barriers between us and that future.” Visions of an armed force in which gender and sexual violence is prevented to the extent possible, and properly addressed when it occurs, must begin with accurate perception. This begins with an understanding of how the culture of sexual harassment and sexual assault functions in the armed forces. It's a slippery slope that leads from inappropriate stressors in training, to the acceptance of gender-based harassment and sexual abuse as norms. Military leaders must also develop an accurate perception of how toleration of sexual harassment and assault, and silence about it, have for too long been the price of approval, acceptance, camaraderie, and privilege in the armed forces, especially for women.

Senator McSally's task force will need to develop accurate perceptions of the systemic barriers to reducing gender and sexual violence in the armed forces. Department of Defense leaders resistant to change and jealous of their authority, and conservative pundits with an antiquated understanding of strength and of sexual violence, will likely attempt to reward the task force for tolerance of the status quo and continued

complicity in the
culture of harassment and assault. Members of the task force,
and Senator
McSally, must refuse to allow their integrity to become the
price for approval,
acceptance, camaraderie, and privilege. I wish Senator McSally
and her task
force all success in tackling the challenges of sexual
harassment and assault
in the armed forces, and welcome her, with sadness and regret,
to the circle of
those who have finally found the courage to break our silence.

Jerri Bell is the Managing Editor for O-Dark-Thirty, the literary journal of the Veterans Writing Project. She retired from the Navy in 2008; her assignments included antisubmarine warfare in the Azores Islands, sea duty on USS Mount Whitney and HMS Sheffield, and attaché duty at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Russia. She also served in collateral assignments as a Navy Family Advocacy Program Officer, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program Officer, and sexual assault victim advocate. Her fiction has been published in a variety of journals and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize; her nonfiction has been published in newspapers, including the Washington Post and the Charleston Gazette-Mail; in journals; and on blogs. She and former Marine Tracy Crow are the co-authors of It's My Country Too: Women's Military Stories from the American Revolution to Afghanistan.

A sickness of the soul:

remembering Adam and Tim Davis

Correction submitted by Delta Company paratrooper: five, not four, paratroopers died from the IED. "Matthew Taylor died September 27th, 2007 from wounds suffered from the IED. Rogers was killed along with Davis, Rogers, Johnson, and 1SG Curry in the D11 vehicle."

Not every man has a positive relationship with his brother. Tim Davis did; he loved his younger brother Adam, and looked up to him. Tim was shy, but Adam was gregarious and outgoing. The two brothers grew up in Idaho, had the same History teacher in high school, and attended the same Basic Training class in 2006. They dreamt of joining the same unit. Things didn't work out the way they planned, though. And when Adam deployed to Afghanistan in May of 2007 with the 173rd, Tim wasn't there—he was in Fort Hood, Texas. That July, driving down a dusty road in Sarobi District, Paktika Province, Adam died in an IED blast that killed his First Sergeant and two other soldiers. He was 19 years old.

A part of Tim died, too—a hole opened up in him that he attempted to fill with alcohol to no avail. After being discharged from the Army, he grew suicidal.

"Everything he did from the time he failed Airborne School was affected by what he perceived as letting Adam down," said Tim's father, Tim Davis, via Facebook. "His job, as far as he was concerned, was to keep Adam safe."

Life is filled with connections and causes that seem obscure at the time. One of the reasons war holds such fascination for its participants

is that causal relationships all become clear in retrospect. A man dies,
another man lives. A brother or son or daughter dies, a brother or sister or
father or mother lives. One can trace grief back to a particular choice, a
moment in time. Grief is knowable. Loss is comprehensible. Guilt is something a
person can carry with them like a boulder, like alcoholism, drug abuse,
despair, and suicide.

This memorial is for Adam Davis, a Charlie Company and then Delta

Company paratrooper and Sky Soldier of the 173rd Airborne Brigade

Combat Team. It is also to his brother Tim Davis, a National Guardsman who

never got over Adam's death, or the pain of separation that preceded that

death. It's the story of two men from America's heartland who wanted to serve

their country together, neither of whom are alive today.

Adam Davis

Adam Davis was born on July 27, 1987 in Twin Falls, Idaho to Tracy Carrico. His grandfather served in the Navy during WWII. In his obituary,

Adam's described as a fan of science fiction and fantasy novels. The obituary

describes him as having enjoyed spending time with his horse, hiking, and

listening to music.



Photo of Adam Davis in Vicenza, Italy, taken by his roommate, Phillip A. Massey. Circa 2007.

Jerome, Idaho, the town in which Adam is buried, has been growing steadily since 2000. Since the census placed the population at 7,780, it has expanded to over 11,000 people, driven in part by expanded employment opportunities, and partly by the spillover from those opportunities (15% of the population lives below the poverty line, a bit above average for the U.S.).

Located a few km northwest of Twin Falls, it's also a few kilometers north of the Snake River. The entire area was nicknamed "Magic Valley" at the turn of last century, when two industrial dams "magically" tamed the Snake River, transforming previously uninhabitable territory into beautiful land, ideal for

human habitation.

Nearly 12% of Idaho resides in the “Magic Valley,” or about 185,000 people. Adam was the first from the area to be killed during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Long way home

Adam dropped out of high school, but finished his GED at a local community college. When he joined the military, he had a plan: qualify for the GI Bill, go to college, get a degree, and become a professor of English. When he finished training, he received a piece of unexpected news:

rather than going to the 82nd Airborne with his brother Tim, Adam

was to be sent to the 173rd Airborne, in Italy.

His introduction to the 173rd was rocky, as it often is with elite units. When assigned to 1-503rd's Charlie “March or Die” Company, the first thing he did was walk up to the hardest sergeant in the unit, Sergeant Berkowski (a mountain of a man and a great non-commissioned officer to everyone who knew him), wearing a Weezer tee-shirt with his hands in his pockets and said “I’m supposed to be in Charlie Company.” One of the squad leaders in first platoon, Adam Alexander, remembered this episode and the ‘smoke session’ (a physical reminder of the importance of discipline) that followed via email, and described Davis as a competent soldier who “had a lot

of heart.”

Adam’s first roommate at the 173rd was Phil Massey, a soldier who’d arrived in Charlie Company’s 1st Platoon (to which Adam was assigned) a week before. Davis was plugged into Weapons Company as an ammo bearer for the 240B medium machinegun, and stood out among the other paratroopers for his size (he was shorter than most) and his tenacity (he made up for his height with his determination never to quit or be last). Massey developed great affection for his small roommate, writing via email that Davis “in PT would sometimes take on the task of bigger guys and lead the way... he would clean his weapon as fast as anyone else in the squad, and was always there when needed. He was a soldier and a paratrooper, and nothing stopped the little guy’s spirit.”

Davis’s platoon leader, Matt Svensson, had similar things to say about the Idaho native’s resolve, discipline and professionalism.

First Platoon’s Platoon Sergeant at the time, then-SSG promotable Steven Voline, highlighted Adam Davis’s professionalism while discussing his value as a soldier, and went out of his way to describe why Davis was ultimately moved from Charlie Company to Delta Company, the mounted heavy weapons platoon: “Everyone loved having him around because he kept the mood light and always had a smile,” Voline said. “Even when

times were tough and training was rigorous, he continued to keep a positive outlook.”

Voline described evidence of the young paratrooper’s resolve. “I remember being at a range somewhere in Italy and we were doing CQB (close quarters battle) qualification tables and his magazine changes were too slow. If I’m not mistaken, he stayed awake doing magazine changes through the entire night iteration training for each Platoon. It ended up being an extra 3-4 hours with his Squad Leader (Sergeant Berkowski) just dropping a mag and inserting the follow on.”

As every soldier knows, maintaining a sunny disposition and positive outlook under those circumstances is trying for the best tempered soldier. Having a paratrooper like Adam around was a boon for his fellow soldiers, and Voline said that’s why he sent Davis to another Company when the tasking came down from higher to send Charlie Co soldiers to Delta Company: “Adam was the type of soldier who’d succeed anywhere,” wrote his former Platoon Sergeant.

Delta Company

When Adam moved to Delta Company, he was quick to make friends there, and developed a reputation as an easygoing, good-natured and dependable soldier.

“Davis was a lot like me,” wrote Matthew Frye via email. Then a First Lieutenant, Frye was Delta Company’s Fire Support Officer, and remembered the last time he saw Adam. “He was a funny kid who kept his platoon

on its toes with his shenanigans.” Days before Davis’s fateful final patrol in Afghanistan, he was talking with Lieutenant Frye about a soon-to-be-released video game, Medal of Duty: Airborne.

“Occasionally the officers would square off with the enlisted in a video game where we could bond with them in a somewhat professional manner,” wrote Frye. “Some smack talking would be involved and a few pushups for the losers would be owed at the end. I had ordered the video game a couple of days prior and told him when he got back from patrol it would be game time.”

That game time would never arrive.

Tim Davis

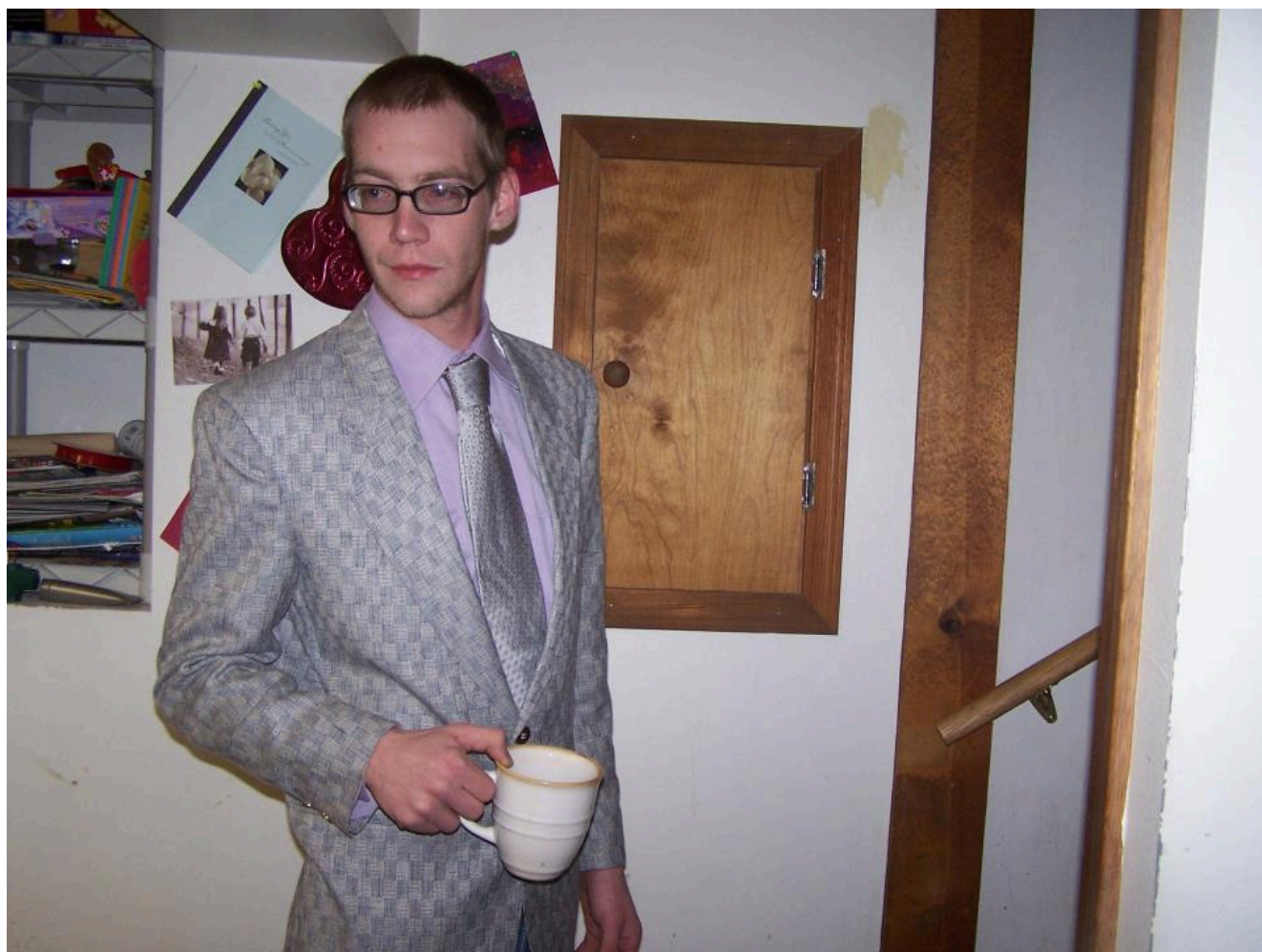
Tim Davis died, some say, of heartbreak over the loss of his younger brother Adam. Things started going badly for him when he went AWOL from Basic training in order to be closer to Adam—the two believed they had signed up for an Army program that guaranteed they’d both be assigned to the same unit. While Adam was assigned to the 173rd, though, Tim came down on orders for the 82nd Airborne.

“Adam was so happy he came down on orders for Italy until Tim told him that he got Bragg, then everything went sour,” said Anthony Roszell, who went to Basic training with the brothers. Roszell, who ended up in C Company’s first platoon with Adam, described the brothers as especially close, “pretty much attached at the hip,” he wrote via Facebook. They always hung

out together, with Tim staying on at Fort Benning to keep his brother company, even though he'd gone AWOL and missed his chance at the 82nd Airborne on Fort Bragg.

We are the product of our backgrounds, and especially so the network of relationships we build during childhood. Tim and Adam built up a very powerful bond, so powerful, in fact, that they joined the military

together. When Adam was assigned to the 173rd Airborne in Italy, it came as a shock and a great disappointment to Tim.



Profile picture from Tim Davis' Facebook page. The photo appears to have been posted in 2012.

The outrage of what Tim saw as the military's betrayal impacted his performance at Airborne School, and he failed out. He was sent to Fort Hood, where he served with the Army

until Adam's death. After that, it was a sequence of bad choices or plans that didn't amount to much. He was never able to reverse the string of disappointments; a successful stint as an Army National Guard recruiter was not enough to permit Tim a combat deployment, as he hoped, in 2010; following that, he was discharged, and worked toward a career in cabinetry. None of that made up for the dashed hopes of serving with his brother. While life had never been easy for Tim, when Adam died, something in Tim's life stopped, too.

"Tim had a very hard time in life," said Amber Watson, Tim and Adam's sister. "He was always worried about something, or thought something was wrong."

A phenomenon of the Social Media age, Tim's Facebook page is still active, [here](#).

This means one can read his wall, and see his struggle unfold in real

time—anger with life, struggles with faith, sadness at having lost his brother.

Frustration with a senseless world where relationships and events *don't* have meaning, necessarily. Where things don't work out. At one point, he mentions running into his high school

crush, who's named. This person exists on Facebook. From her profile, she's

married, with children—happily employed.

"I'm sure [Tim] felt like he let Adam down," wrote their father, Tim Davis. "He said Adam wanted them to be together. Tim was glad to return to Fort Hood."

A mission south

Paktika Province is a sparsely-populated area about 33% larger than the U.S. state of Delaware that includes desert,

mountains, and
intermittently-fertile valleys. Those valleys where rain falls
in sufficient
amount to sustain life hold most of the people. The remainder
of the areas hold
scattered tribes who make do the best they can in a harsh and
uncompromising
climate. The elevation varies from 6,000 to over 9,000 feet on
some mountains.

In 2007 the Army was pursuing Counter-Insurgency (or COIN)
Doctrine. The purpose of COIN is to defeat insurgency by
refusing the enemy
military or propaganda victories, while allowing the
government to provide
people with more and better assistance than the insurgents.
The common term for
COIN was "winning hearts and minds."

At the time, units would "own" battle space—be responsible
for defeating enemy activity there, and also for spreading
goodwill among the
populace. Adam's company, Delta, was a bit smaller than the
other units.

Geographically, they were responsible for a larger space than
some of the other
units, but in terms of population, their area was the least
populated. Afghans
were spread out in villages of some dozens or hundreds of
people, depending on
their proximity to water, roads, or the riverbeds (*wadis* in
the local
tongue) that served as roads in many areas.

According to Matthew Frye, Delta Company had been training
Afghan National Police (ANP) in far-flung district centers
when the unit
arrived in May of 2007. By July, it had become clear that the

distances required
to travel were exposing the unit to risk, and making it more
difficult to accomplish
a key tenant of COIN: living with the population one was
attempting to protect
or train. When the unit had arrived in theater, there was no
obvious place to
quarter an entire unit's worth of paratroopers, so Delta began
evaluating
suitable locations for a permanent Company base as part of
their training
missions. On July 23rd, during a mission south from the
Battalion
base in Orgun, a Delta convoy struck an IED in Sarobi
District. Adam J. Davis,
Michael S. Curry, Jr., and Travon T. Johnson were killed
immediately. Jesse S.
Rogers expired later from his wounds.

The IED

Improvised Explosive Devices or "IEDs" were becoming more
sophisticated and prevalent in Afghanistan in 2006-07. For
years, the U.S.
military hadn't needed to worry about roadside bombs in
Afghanistan,
encountering ambushes and sometimes large enemy attacks in the
mountains,
instead. But trans-national insurgents or terrorists would
take successful strategies
from one place—in the case of IEDs, Iraq—and bring them
elsewhere. IEDs began
making their way into Afghan roads, and then, became
increasingly deadly.

As is often the case with weapons, the Army found itself in
an arms race with the Taliban and Al Qaeda, in which the Army

would develop a way to defeat IEDs, and then the bomb-makers would develop a new method or procedure to overcome the military's technological advantage. In the beginning of the conflict, the most popular type of roadside bomb in Afghanistan had been pressure-plate or pressure detonated IEDs, where the weight of the vehicle would set off the bomb, blowing anything above it to pieces. This had the undesirable (from insurgents' point of view) effect of killing civilians as often as it did Americans. By 2006-07, they were relying increasingly on "remote detonated" IEDs, triggered by someone with a walkie-talkie or cell phone, who could ensure that the correct target (US forces) were being struck. As a result, US forces equipped their vehicles with signal-jamming devices that prevented signal-initiated devices from detonating. Delta Company had such devices installed in their vehicles.

The IED that struck Adam's vehicle, on which he was turret gunner, was a large pressure plate IED. The electronic jamming system was useless.

A sickness of the soul

The deaths of Adam and the other paratroopers—especially Michael Curry, who was nearing retirement and had a great reputation among his peer NCOs—struck Delta Company hard, but also took a toll on the Battalion.

July of 2007 was a difficult month for the 173rd Airborne Brigade, with Major Tom Bostick of the Brigade's cavalry unit (another beloved paratrooper, and former Bravo or "Legion" Company commander in Adam's Battalion) dying in combat in Nuristan, and Juan Restrepo of 2nd Battalion dying in Kunar Province (a [documentary](#) named after an outpost named in Restrepo's honor is one of the finest of its type to describe fighting in Afghanistan).

The paratroopers who died that day are still remembered by the people they served with, and by their families. But the memory of Adam was too much for Tim.

"TJ and I became close as we got older," said Watson, Davis' sister. "I was the one he'd call when he wanted to talk... the night before [Adam's] funeral he went and had the coroner open the casket, and it made him very unhappy."

Watson wrote that Tim struggled with suicidal thoughts, and even attempted to act on those impulses. "I went to see him in rehab a couple times," she wrote. On January 18, 2016, he passed away. [His obituary](#) reads "the most we can tell is that he succumbed to a sickness of the soul which had been with him since his brother Adam passed away nine years ago in Afghanistan."