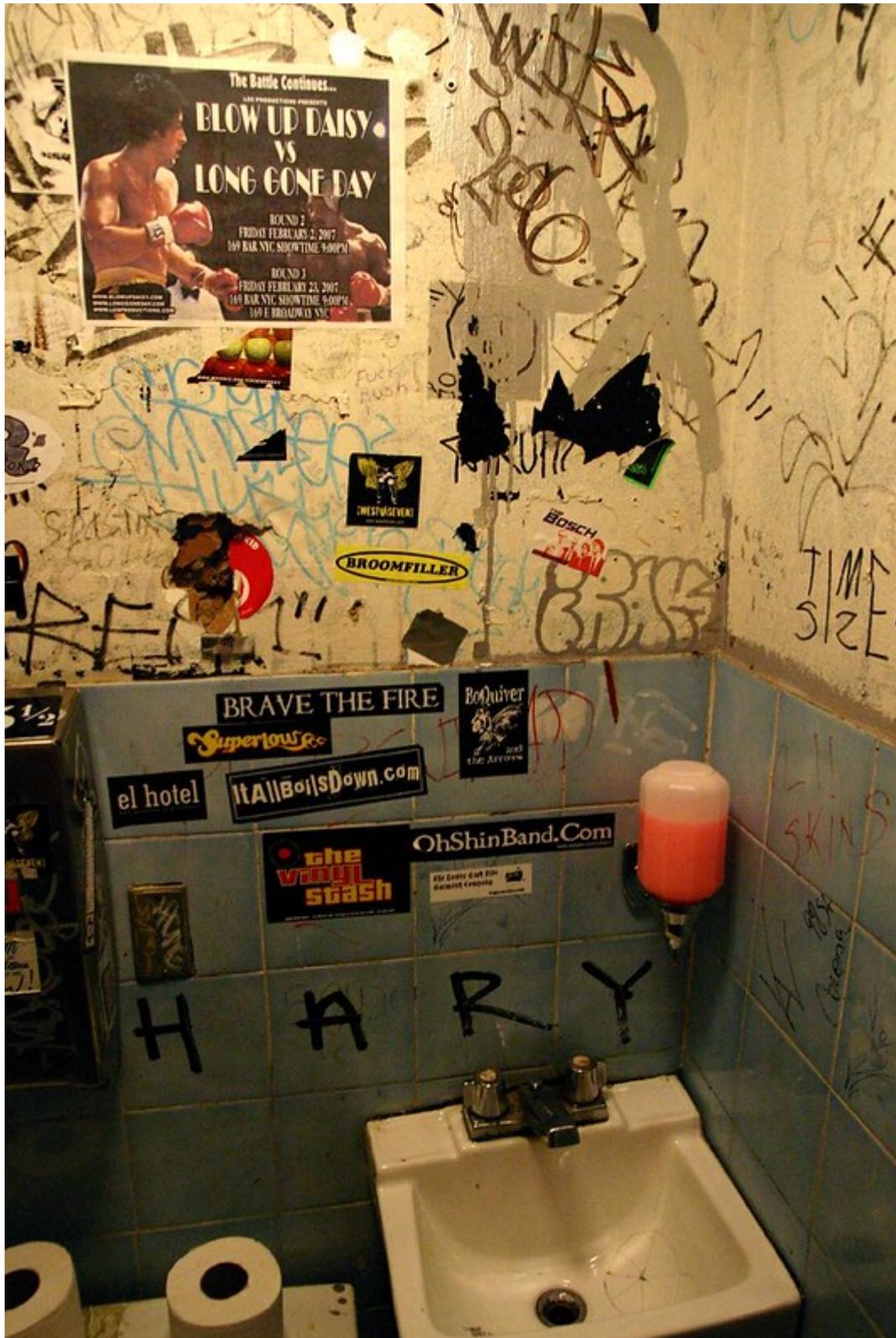


New Fiction by Robert Miner: Shades of Purple



Danny Llewellyn hadn't shit himself since he was a toddler,

back when nobody minded. Since then, he'd joined the Army, gone to war, left the Army. He was, by most people's estimations, a man, especially because his exit from the service had been hastened by injuries sustained in combat. All the pain meds during his hospital stay had stopped him up, and things down there never quite got back to normal. That was part of the reason the accident took him by surprise—in those days, each bowel movement was a protracted trauma of its own.

It happened at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in Overland Park, Kansas. The VFW had a bar room. The bar room had a vinyl floor, and the walls were covered in photographs, unit insignia behind glass, and certificates of appreciation for good works in the community. The bar itself was u-shaped, made from teak like the deck of a boat, light and polished. It was the nicest bit of anything in the whole building, which makes a lot of sense when you think about it.

The winter sun had just set. Friday. Danny walked the mile from his apartment to the VFW through wind and gray slush. He had plans to get blind drunk, and he didn't want to drive home. When he arrived, there were three people in the bar room. Two of them, both men, sat next to each other in chairs on the right side of the bar. Their backs were mostly to Danny, and he couldn't see their faces, but they looked older. There was white hair and wrinkled necks and the broad, uneven shoulders which become under the weight of a hard life lived.

Only the bartender saw him come in. She was in her forties, and she didn't take good care of herself, but she had great big tits, and she wore low cut shirts because she knew the fellas liked something to look at. She pitied most of them for what they'd seen and done.

The bartender told him to have a seat anywhere. The man in the chair nearest to Danny swiveled to see who she was talking to. He had a bushy gray mustache and wore a ball cap that identified him as a Gulf War veteran. Danny limped to the side

of the bar opposite the men. The limp was the result of the explosion that had sent shrapnel up and down the right side of his body. The damage to his thigh and hip was especially bad. The doctors said he'd probably limp for the rest of his life, even as the pain got better.

Danny took off his jacket and sat. He ordered a Miller Lite while trying not to stare at the bartender's cleavage.

"What's with the hitch in your giddy up?" It was the mustache in the Gulf War hat. "You get that over there?"

Danny nodded. He hadn't yet figured out how to talk about what happened to him, and he didn't like to lie, so when people asked about it, he said as close to nothing as he could.

"Iraq or Afghanistan?" This time it was the other man asking. He was a head shorter than his friend, so he had to lean over the bar to be seen.

Danny told them Iraq.

The bartender brought his beer in a smudged glass. There was a lot of foam. Danny went for his wallet, but the bartender waved her hand.

"First timers get one on the house. Thank you for your service."

Danny looked down and thanked her.

The old guys held up their drinks, so Danny did the same. His hand shook, and a little foam spilled over the edge of the glass, but the occupational therapist at the VA had told him he had to practice if he ever wanted the tremors to get better.

He took a big gulp of the beer and came away with a foam mustache. He wiped it off, willing himself not to think about shit-burning detail, but the sensation of something on his

upper lip brought him right back with such force that he could practically feel the rough edges of the metal picket in his hands.

Before higher headquarters dropped the chemical toilets, his unit had been shitting in wooden outhouses. Each one had a hole in the floor positioned over a 50-gallon drum. The setup worked, but something had to happen to all that waste. Pour in some jet fuel, light on fire, stir. Danny always seemed to draw shit-burning detail. It wasn't so much about the odor (jet fuel masks the smell of shit as well as anything), but his cackling squad mates had photographed him more than once with the Shitler mustache that inevitably takes shape under your nostrils after breathing in the smoke. All the while, other guys were out on the glamorous missions.

The two old vets were back in their conversation now. The first guy, the one closest to Danny, was doing most of the talking. He spoke with an intimidating energy. Intense. Fatigueless.

The bartender came around and asked if Danny wanted another. He said he wanted two. The fast talker was out of his chair now. He had the body of a marathon runner and the shiny cheeks of someone who still shaved every day. He was telling a story about a helicopter crash in which he'd been the pilot. He described the sound of bullets piercing the cabin, the feeling of losing control of the stick, the centrifugal force as the Kiowa plunged spinning towards the ground.

"I was sure I was going to die, of course." He put both hands on the back of his chair and leaned. "In flight school, they tell you right off that helicopter crashes only have a twenty percent survival rate."

The pilot had actually been in two crashes. The second one was during a training exercise. Mechanical failure. Danny didn't know any of this, nor would he have been able to do the mental

math on the odds of surviving two crashes, but he was still enthralled. His focus was the result of admiration and jealousy. Look at his joie de vivre! This was what happened to soldiers who never pulled shit-burning detail.

Danny was astounded that the bartender and the other veteran seemed bored. She was looking at her phone. He was paying more attention to the rim of his glass. Even if Danny assumed—as he did—that they'd heard this story a hundred times—as they had—it still deserved reverence.

Danny drank fast, and the beer sat heavy in his stomach. Foamy, so foamy, on top of whatever else had built up in there over the last few days. Panda Express. Frozen pizza. More Panda Express. He groaned a little, enough to draw attention.

“Say—” The pilot was looking at him. “What’s your name, young buck?”

Danny said his name.

“I’m Sal. This is Glenn. And the lovely Tina, of course.”

Danny said hello.

“What’d you do over there, Danny?”

Again, Danny did his best to avoid the question. Rather than say what he did, he told them what he’d been trained to do. Often as not, that’s what people meant when they asked about war. He told them he was an 11 Bravo. Infantry.

Sal’s expression brightened. “Glenn, you’ve finally got another knuckle dragger to talk to.” To Danny he added, “Glenn thinks infantrymen are the only real soldiers.”

“I hate it when you speak for me,” said Glenn. Sal the pilot shrugged.

Glenn stared straight ahead and took a drink. Truth was, he

believed that anyone who volunteered to serve deserved as much reverence as a Medal of Honor winner. Heroism was mostly a question of circumstances beyond any soldier's control. He'd won a Silver Star in Vietnam—his was one of the decorations hung on the wall of the bar room—and the citation read like a Hollywood script. But so what? He didn't like talking about what he'd been through either, though his reasons were different from Danny's.

Now on his fourth beer, Danny slid right past tipsy and into drunk. He hadn't eaten since breakfast when he'd poured some questionable milk over a bowl of Raisin Bran.

"Got any war stories?" Sal asking again. "Good ones get another beer on me."

Danny looked down. The pattern of the wooden bar was lovely, soft waves of amber and tan and brown running lengthwise along the planks. They reminded him of Iraqi dunes, which made him think of the day he'd been blown up. He'd been in and out of consciousness, but the view of the windswept sand out the door of the MEDEVAC chopper stuck in his memory.

Danny told them there wasn't much to tell.

"There's a story behind that limp."

Tina the bartender sucked her teeth. "Sal." She seemed to have some power over Sal, because he sat next to Glenn and was quiet for a while.

Of course, there was a story, it just happened to be one that Danny never wanted to think about, much less tell to a couple of war heroes and a bartender whose tits he planned on thinking about while he jerked off later.

But could he omit the embarrassing details without inviting more questions he'd have to avoid? Probably not. The embarrassing parts seemed like the whole thing.

They'd had the chemical toilets for about a week. A week of shitting in luxury—no risk of splinters in your hamstrings, flies kept mostly at bay by the thin plastic box around you, the smell of other soldiers' waste muted by the blue concoction in the tank below. A little hot, maybe, but so was everything else. So was shit-burning detail. And now that was done forever. Danny had begun lingering in the new toilets. Five minutes. Ten minutes. Fifteen. Locking the door to the stall was like shutting out the war.

It was the middle of the night, and Danny's bladder woke him up. Before, he might have just pissed into an empty two-liter plastic bottle and gone back to bed, but now the new toilets beckoned. He took an issue of Hustler from the stack under his cot and grabbed his rifle and stepped out of the sleeping bay.

The sand of the unimproved road looked blue in the moonlight. The concrete Texas barriers, too. It was a short walk to the row of chemical toilets, newly laid gravel at the edge of camp crunching under his unlaced boots.

None of the toilets were occupied. Danny chose one at the end of the row, because even though the likelihood of a midnight rush was low, he liked the idea of not having guys on both sides of him while he did his business.

Danny stepped into the toilet and closed the door. He waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness before dropping the black PT shorts to his ankles. He took an effortless shit. His last one for years. From the sound, it must have knifed into the water below like an Olympic diver. He sighed. He opened the Hustler and stared at the glossy body of a girl with curly red hair.

That was the last thing he remembered until the fractured visions from his evacuation to the hospital in Balad. No matter how many times his squad mates told him how gruesome, how badass his injuries had seemed when they found him, Danny

could only ever imagine himself strapped to a litter in the MEDEVAC chopper with his t-shirt on and his dick flapping in the rotor wash. The psychologists told him that was probably because of what he'd been doing when the mortar hit. Knowing hadn't yet helped.

Danny's stomach made a sound like a bullfrog. He was too drunk to care about the current of discomfort that shot through his groin. Besides, he was used to ignoring pain. He ordered another beer and drank it and ordered another one.

"You're not driving are you, hon?" asked Tina.

Danny told her he wasn't. He smiled, but he could tell the smile was crooked. Tina gave him the beer anyway. It was nice that she trusted him.

Sal was talking again. Danny didn't know about what. He heard a few words here and there, but his drunk brain was busy trying to overwrite his memories. Maybe there was a way to change his perception of the past. Then there wouldn't be any dishonor in lying.

Through the densifying haze of his vision, Danny saw Glenn's eyes. They were focused on him. Unnervingly focused. Glenn got up and walked over to Danny. Sal was still talking. He didn't seem to mind a mobile audience.

"Not my business, I know," said Glenn, "but that's a lot of beers in not a lot of time."

Sal was still talking in the background. Danny nodded his agreement.

Glenn patted Danny's shoulder like he was afraid it might break.

"Just to say, we'll be here all night, you know?"

The pain that swept through Danny's gut gave no warning. It

stabbed at his stomach, puckered his asshole. Sweat erupted on his forehead. He sprang to his feet, and his chair toppled backward. It smacked the floor—*Bang!* Glen started to ask what was wrong, but Danny was already waddling to the door where he'd come in, only to realize he didn't know where the bathroom was.

He stopped in the middle of the room, holding everything tight, afraid if he opened his mouth for directions, he would fall to pieces.

Tina, Sal, and Glenn looked at each other. They all thought he was going to vomit.

Tina said, "Go ahead, baby. It's alright."

Danny collapsed to his knees. Release. The heat of it running down his hamstrings, spreading across his skin and soaking his jeans. He could hardly believe the stench.

"Stay back," he said.

And then a new memory, a clear one, struck him in the middle of the forehead like a sniper shot. He'd said the same thing, or tried to, when he felt the hands of his comrades on him, lying in the wreckage of the chemical toilet, cut and broken and dying. What if another mortar fell? What if people died because he'd lingered after a satisfying shit?

They ignored him of course. They lifted him up, uncaring about the smells and the stains his blood put on their clothes. They carried him for hundreds of meters to the helipad. They reassured him the whole way.

You're not going to die. We won't let you.

They hoisted him into the chopper and strapped him down and told him they'd see him soon. They squeezed his good hand.

He remembered all this for the first time, sitting there in

his own filth. And then he was levitating again, as Sal and Glenn hoisted him to his feet. They guided him toward the bathroom.

“Thanks,” said Danny.

They agreed it was no trouble at all. Danny had his arms around both of them, and he thought that Glenn was sturdier than he seemed, and that Sal had a more tender touch than he'd expected.

Tina waited until they'd gone out of the bar room before she pulled another pint for Danny. She set it in front of the chair next to Sal's seat. She figured that's where he'd be sitting when they returned.

**New Fiction by Jesse Nee-
Vogelman: Improv**



The terrorist sat down at the cafe at a quarter to one. She had always been punctual. Beneath her clothing was a bomb improvised from ammonium nitrate. The bomb was uncomfortable. She kept thinking things that didn't matter, like: ripping off the tape will be painful, or, it's going to leave red marks on my skin. She raised her hand and ordered a cappuccino and a chocolate croissant. Why not a little pleasure? Someone had left a newspaper at the table. She didn't feel the need to read it. She knew all about what was happening now, here and all over. She looked around the cafe at the other people eating and drinking. She didn't feel much of anything. It was difficult to imagine, really, that anything would be different in just a few minutes. She'd been in a hundred cafes just like this. A thousand! Nothing strange had ever happened before.

She looked down at the newspaper on the table. The sports section. How about that? She'd thought it was the news, but it was just sports. She didn't know anything about sports.

Everything going on in the world and there was just sports happening and that's what people chose to read about. She looked around the cafe. All these people care about sports! she thought. She picked up the section and flipped through the games, reading the box scores carefully. This is what people care about, she said to herself, as if trying to understand something. She flipped to a page that printed the scores of local high school games. She hadn't known newspapers printed high school games. She found her high school and read through the names of the varsity basketball players and how many points they had scored. She recognized a last name: Ramakrishnan. She had known a Ramakrishnan in high school. It wasn't a very common last name. His son, maybe. She checked and saw that he had scored twenty-eight points, the most in the game. A surge of pride went through her, so strong and sudden it made her anxious. What did he have to do with her? Nothing.

Her food came. She paid and left a very big tip. Why not? The waitress smiled at her. A lesbian maybe. Go ahead, what did she care? That wasn't the type of thing that mattered to her. She took a bite of the croissant and sipped the cappuccino. Ah. Very good. She would miss this. What a funny thought. She wouldn't be able to miss anything. She laughed to herself. What a funny time to be funny! Her heart was beating very fast. She felt calm, but her heart was beating very fast. As if it were someone else's heart. Wouldn't that be something. The bomb goes off and this old man across the world dies because she'd actually had *his* heart all along. That's who I would apologize to, she thought. I had no idea, she would tell his widow. It wasn't supposed to be him.

She checked the time. There was a clock above the cash register and another by the door. Everyone had their phones out, and their phones were also clocks. There were clocks everywhere. She thought the world had done away with clocks, but she was wrong. There were clocks on the coffee machines.

Timers beside the ovens she could see through a glass window into the bakery. Clocks that everyone thought would go on forever, but really they would stop. A clock strapped to her chest. Oh no officer, she thought. I'm sorry for the confusion. As you can see, that's just a clock.

Just a few minutes now. Not one o'clock, actually, but twelve-fifty-nine. A little joke to herself. They would all expect it at one on the dot. But no, it was twelve-fifty-nine. As good a time as any! she wanted to scream. She pictured a hero from a movie, running computer programs in some dark basement, cracking the code. At twelve-fifty-five the program would blink—they've got her. At a cafe just down the street. The hero checks the clock (there's always a clock nearby). We've got five minutes! he yells and rushes out the door, and as he's running as fast as he can, he knows he has just enough time to stop her. Five minutes, the exact right amount, and he throws open the cafe door, just over a minute to spare, just what he needs, and then, boom. Twelve-fifty-nine. Ha!

The clock above the door crowed. She looked up wildly, heart pounding. Was it time? But the clock was five minutes fast. She let out a breath. She hadn't been scared before, but now she was. Stupid clock. It should be illegal to have the wrong time on a clock. There should be someone whose job it is to go around to all the clocks and arrest the people putting the wrong time on them. She looked at the clock again, and this time she was surprised to find the clock was not just a clock, but was actually the belly of a wooden rooster. Cock clock, she thought, which calmed her. Then she looked around and saw all sorts of other things she hadn't noticed: paintings of cardinals and shakers shaped like crows and napkin holders that looked like hummingbirds. It was a bird cafe! Ten minutes she'd been here, and she hadn't even realized it was bird themed. Some old lady must really love birds, she thought, and for some reason this made her feel very sad. All those goddamn bird decorations that would be broken. That woman's whole life

collecting bird decorations and one day she starts this cafe and thinks, these goddamn bird decorations are just too darn special to sit cooped up in my dusty old house. The public needs to see all these freaking birds. So she puts them in the cafe. Bird mugs and bird napkins. Close up photos of beaks in tulips. Signs with bird sayings like, Toucan Do It!, and Flock Off!

Flock off! she wanted to yell, but didn't. All of you, just flock the flock off!

She touched the lump under her shirt. There was no button. Just time. The clock would reach a certain time, and then it would happen. This made it easier. She didn't have to press anything or do anything. It was almost like it was happening to her. She just showed up at this place and it happened. If you zoomed out far enough, she thought, there was no difference between her and any of them. She had been a normal woman and then, at some point, the circumstances of her life had led her to this particular cafe at this particular time and the bomb had exploded and she had died. Just another victim.

Would anything change? She didn't know. She wasn't really concerned with that part. She was concerned with doing something. She was concerned with being heard. They would hear her, alright, this time. What they did after, well, that was up to them. There was danger, always, in telling people what to do or how to feel. That's how people end up in situations like hers. People always telling them what to do and how to feel until one day they turn around and say, No! This is what I am doing and this is how I feel!

She had always known there were bad things in the world. It seemed to her that all the people who tried the hardest to fix them only made it worse. There was a book she liked that said, All our worst crimes are committed out of enthusiasm. Yes! she had thought. That's exactly it. All these bad things in the

world because people think they know the answer and want to get there. She had lived her life with this in mind. Skeptical. Questioning everything. Always knowing everything that was wrong but never knowing anything that was right. Then, years later, she had reread the book and noticed another line: skepticism is the rapture of impasse. And she thought, Yes, that's exactly it. All these years of questioning, she had done nothing. She had been skeptical, so she had done nothing. Then all the things she had been skeptical of just happened. Better, then, to commit a crime with enthusiasm!

So she had made the bomb. Improvised explosive device. That's what they called it in the news. Not that anyone would know that, only reading the sports section. It was an evocative name. It made it sound desperate and spontaneous. It demonstrated creativity. That's not a very good bomb, a professional bomb maker might say. Well, I had to improvise!

She had taken an improv class in college. She had hated it. She had hated it because the people were awful. The people were awful and they stared at her when she didn't know what to say and they were always saying things like, The first rule of improv is always say, Yes! No one seemed to know any other rules. They just repeated that rule over and over. Once, when it was her turn in class, she got on stage and her partner said, Wow, what a crazy day at the zoo! What a stupid thing to say, she thought. Even if it had been a crazy day at the zoo, she would never have said that. She didn't know how to respond to something so stupid. So she just said, Yes. I can't believe what the chimpanzee did to that tiger! Yes, she said. The zookeeper is going to have some trouble cleaning up! Yes, she said. She said, Yes, over and over until the teacher had said, Alright, that's enough, and she was allowed to sit down again.

She looked around at the cafe and suddenly it felt to her as if she were stuck again in a terrible improv scene. That everyone around her was trying poorly, desperately, to seem

natural. Off-the-cuff. She took another bite of croissant and closed her eyes, imagining herself on stage. There's a bomb in the cafe! Yes, she said. Everyone is going to die! Yes, she said. Yes, yes. She squeezed her eyes. Yes, yes, yes. She squeezed as hard as she could. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Even the word eyes was made of yes. Yesses everywhere. Yes, yes, yes. Eyes closed yes. If her eyes were closed when it happened, it was like she wasn't there. If her eyes were closed when it happened, it was like she wasn't there. If she closed her eyes when it happened.

Yes.

But she couldn't make it. She peeked. She had always been a peeker. At Christmas, tearing the corners off wrapping paper to see what was hidden inside. That's how she felt then, in her final seconds, squinting through one eye at the people around her. Sticking her eye to the dark hole she had ripped in the paper and hoping it would let her see some new world that had not yet come to pass. But it was just the same. Just people. Yes. And she realized with a start that each of these people had their own lives, and that those lives were about to end. But that, of course, was the point.

New Poetry by Richard Epstein: "The Dance"

New Poem by Richard Epstein: "The Dance"

New Poetry by Ellie J. Anderson: “Impact, 1984”

New poem by Ellie J. Anderson: “Impact, 1984”

New Interview by Larry Abbott: Doug Rawlings



Doug Rawlings had his life planned out: graduate school, business school, eventual law school, and a career in business. But then, like thousands of other young men, he received the dreaded SSS Form No. 252, Order to Report for Induction. Future plans on hold. Rawlings completed Basic Training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and AIT at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. After a two-week leave, next stop, Vietnam, where he was stationed in the Central Highlands (about 100 miles

east of Pleiku), "B" Battery, 7th/15th Field Artillery, Firebase/LZ Two Bits, with an MOS of 93F20, Ballistics Support.

After his return to the States, he moved to Boston, and discovered the poetry of Denise Levertov and Muriel Rukeyser. He started writing his own poems, and sent a handful to Bill Erhardt and Jan Berry, who published them in the 1976 *Demilitarized Zones: Veterans After Vietnam*. Rawlings' first book, *Orion Rising* (2014), opens with two prologues: the first discusses his reasons for being one of the five founding members of Veterans for Peace, which originated in Maine in 1985 (and now has chapters in all fifty states, England, and Vietnam). In his statement he is especially concerned about the effects of war on children, past, present, and future. He writes "A group such as Veterans for Peace can offer us, veterans of war, a vehicle to bring our special message to the children of the world." The second prologue, and the first section of poems, is entitled "A Survivor's Manual: Out of the Ashes." In this prologue Rawlings has a running "conversation" with Robert Bly that was touched off by the 1970 *Forty Poems Touching On Recent American History*, edited by Bly. Rawlings presents excerpts from Bly's introduction and then he reflects on how Bly's comments connect to his life and work, especially as they relate to the idea of "political poetry." Rawlings synthesizes these two apparent opposites, politics and art, when he writes "So I found some kind of comfort, if not inspiration, from Bly's insistence that poems can be written that would 'penetrate deeply into the psyche of the nation' without sacrificing a personal voice."



Many of the poems in the first section of *Orion Rising* concern the continuing impact of the past on the present, specifically the ways that memories of Vietnam haunt the life of the veteran. For example, in “A Soldier’s Lament,” Rawlings writes about the Vietnamese children who sat “beneath the barbed wire/ . . . to sell us what they would:” Now, decades later, “our souls/blister and burn/across the years/above the bonfires/of children’s curses.” In “Medic” Rawlings pleads with a medic to wash the blood of a wounded soldier off his hands, and then in the present to “come stop his screams/from tearing through/my dreams/my dreams”

About section two, entitled “The Maine Poems: Family, Friends, and Place,” Rawlings notes “So it is a life of books and ‘hands-on’ labor that infuse many of the poems in this section. It is no mistake that love of the land, melded with love of family and friends, weaves throughout them.” Poems such as “Homage to the Winter Moon” find solace in Nature by providing a respite from the “strident headlines” of the world; similarly, in “Ice Out Poem: A Quartet,” the cyclical renewal of Nature offers hope for another year. At the same time, the poems about family often have a melancholic tone and hint at the tension between father and son, in “Father

Grieving” and father and daughter, in “The Exchange.” In the heart-wrenching “To Jen Turning Sixteen” the writer is forced to come to terms with familial change and loss as his daughter, “The princess I made you out to be” grows into womanhood: “Yet celebrating you on this day/A new rider on the rhythm of the moon/I must also mourn my own passing/before your eyes”

The final section of the book, “Fiddleheads: Poems for Children,” contains twelve of the original eighteen poems Rawlings wrote for his young children. He writes that he and the children, ages five and seven, were “immersed in A.A. Milne, caught up in his poems musicality and utter joy of language play. . . . I carried this musicality into the woods and meadows and followed it where it may.” The poems activate the imagination with whimsical juxtapositions, like “Rainbow Girl,” who “just drank up/a hatful of rain/and gobbled down/a most enormous chunk/of sunbeam” Likewise, “Gravity Experiment”: “But what if we took/a moose/and pumped/his antlers/full of air/and then cut him/loose--”

A BAKER'S DOZEN
FIDDLEHEADS
AND OTHER POEMS FOR CHILDREN



DOUG RAWLINGS
ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
XOCHITL AND IONA POPE

Rawlings next book, *A G.I. in America: The Government Issue Chronicles and Selected Poems* (2015), comprises two major

sections: "The Government Issue Chronicles" and "Selected Poems." In the Foreword Rawlings recalls the start of the Full Disclosure project, a program of Veterans For Peace. He includes the text of a flyer he wrote announcing the event, held at the Judson Church in New York City. His basic question is, who gets to tell the truth of war? "Is it the soldier coming home wounded in body, mind, and soul? Or the farmer whose land is sown with blood and unexploded ordnance? Or the families with loved ones buried in the ground? Or the families with loved ones maimed in body and mind? Is it, perhaps, all of the above?" His poems attempt to answer all these basic questions by giving voice to those affected by war. For example, "Working in the Garden" is dedicated to Suel Jones, who returned to live in Vietnam after the war. He finds "solace . . . in the warm soil." However, the past rises up and any sense of peace is destroyed when the memories take hold: "Until they come at him again – unbidden –/those images of the village children/he was ordered to think of as weeds/as better to be wasted early on/than allowed to grow/into the enemy" Another poem, "Unexploded Ordnance: A Ballad" (dedicated to Chuck Searcy and his team that scour the country for unexploded materiel), juxtaposes the poet on Christmas Eve, pondering the shells he had sown in the war, with a scene in Vietnam of a grandfather leading his granddaughter into a field: "They trip into a searing heat/brighter than a thousand suns." The book closes with the poem "The Wall" and an apostrophe to the dead whose names are on the Wall. In the poem he writes "Slipping past the panel where/my name would have been/could have been/perhaps should have been . . ." The lines indicate both a sense of guilt for surviving and also the randomness of war. Why did he live while others died? In the apostrophe he seeks a connection to those brothers: "I will touch your names and force myself to swing back through these many years and put myself in the place and time where and when we may have met."

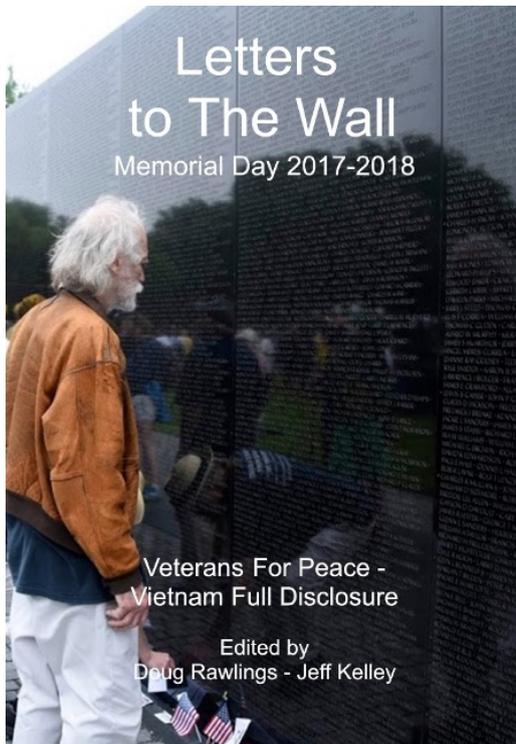


In the Shadow of the Annamese Mountains was published in 2020 (hardcover; paperback issued in 2023). The new and selected poems cover work from the years 1974 to 2019. In their various ways the poems offer a gloss on the book's epigraph, "Whatever you run from becomes your shadow," as the poems attempt to confront and erase the shadows. There are poems of resistance and hope, and many of the themes Rawlings explores in his other books are evident here. For example, in "Walking The Wall: A Song" (2014), dedicated to his friend Don Evon, Rawlings notes at the start of the poem: "My time in Vietnam started in early July, 1969—Wall panel number W21—and ended in early August, 1970—panel W7, line 29—a walk of about 25 paces past the names of around 9800 dead. I call this 'walking the Wall.'" While the 1986 poem "The Wall" has a more melancholic tone, this poem ends defiantly, angrily, anti-war: "So take a walk with me down the Wall some late evening/Where we can all listen to the ghostly young soldiers keening/But don't waste your time thanking them for their service/They just might tell you the truth – all your wars are worthless." Another "Wall" poem likewise has a sense of anger. In "At The Wall for the Memorial Day Service 2015: A Lament" the speaker is at the Wall for a supposedly solemn service but observes nothing but hypocrisy and phony sanctimoniousness ("The beginning does not bode well./A pasty white rent-a-padre/ . . . wants us to know

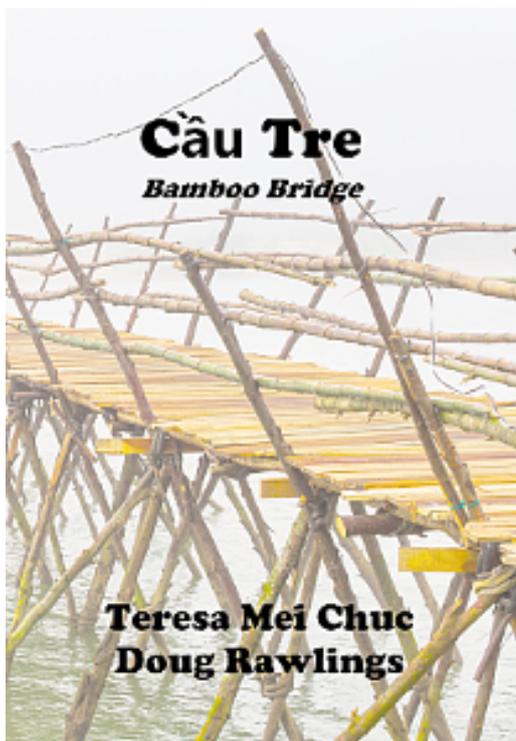
that the young/did not die in vain"). The dishonesty of the ceremony is in contrast to the reality of this "black granite wall/glistening with the entrails of those/poor bastards we left behind" The poem ends on a hopeless note: "How can I possibly abolish war in their good young names/how can I tell them they certainly did not die in vain/when I can't even stop these clueless clowns/from desecrating this holiest of all grounds?"

The book includes a number of photographs by Rawlings' fellow soldier, Don Evon, which mainly show village scenes, landscapes, and children, and in some cases offer a counterpoint to a poem, as in "Please Don't Shoot the Orphans" (2013) and "On the Path of Moral Injury: More Questions Than Answers" (2019). About the photographs Evon writes in the introduction: "My hope is the photos here will trigger good memories for those who were there and will provide some small insight into the way of life of a non-political, non-military Vietnam."

Relatedly, Rawlings co-edited three volumes of *Letters to the Wall* (2015-16, 2017-18, and 2019-20). The letters are from veterans, family members, friends, and others affected by the war. Some of the most moving letters are from sons and daughters addressed to a parent killed in the war.



Cầu Tre/Bamboo Bridge, Conversations between a Vietnamese Refugee and an American Veteran. Told in Poetry and Prose was published in 2021. The book is a collaboration between Rawlings and Teresa Mei Chuc, and is bilingual, with work in both Vietnamese and English.



The poems and prose alternate between Chuc and Rawlings. They

do not necessarily form a “dialogue” between the two writers but rather create thematic echoes in the book’s five sections. Most recently, Rawlings journeyed to Vietnam in August, 2023, for the 14th Engaging With Vietnam conference.



In his remarks at one session of the conference Rawlings talked about the idea of heritage and noted “that we who were in the U.S. military as part of the American war in Vietnam are now part of Vietnam’s heritage and, through us, American veterans, Vietnam has become part of America’s heritage.” He also read two of his poems in English, “Unexploded Ordnance: A Ballad” and “The Girl in the Picture,” which were then read in Vietnamese by Ms. Tran Xuan Thao, the director of the War Remnants Museum.

Rawlings’ poetry is about the many forms of heritage. There is the heritage of the war and its effects not only on the veteran but also more broadly on society. There is the heritage of family through the generations. Finally, the poems are about the heritage embodied in literature and the arts. In “Song of Myself” Walt Whitman asks “Who wishes to walk with me?” Through the many facets of his poetry we can walk with Doug Rawlings.

In September 2024 Ron Shetterly's portrait of Rawlings was unveiled at the Common Ground Fair in Unity, Maine, as the 275th in the series Americans Who Tell the Truth (see <https://americanswhotellthetruth.org/>).

Larry Abbott:

Let's start by asking how you came to write poetry, starting around 1974, four years after your discharge in 1970.

Doug Rawlings:

My earlier education was not leaning towards poetry at all. I had received a degree in economics and was working on an MBA at Ohio State University, to go to work at Eastman Kodak, where my dad worked, and become a corporate lawyer. Then I got drafted.

After my war experience, I came home, and my wife and I moved to Boston in the early '70s for whatever reason. I don't know. I got a job at a hospital, counting out pills and stuff. But Boston, at that time, had a number of all-night bookstores, and I wandered into one, on Harvard Square actually, and found this collection of poems by Denise Levertov from New Directions Books about her recent experiences in Vietnam, in North Vietnam, with Muriel Rukeyser, another poet. And I was just blown away. These poems were just amazing. They were, to me, the first realistic, honest account of that war that I read. There wasn't that much out there. A lot of it was the gung-ho crap or really stoner stuff. I have nothing against that. I was a stoner when I was in Vietnam. Trust me – I was. But I just didn't want to go in that direction. Her poems had a clinical tinge, but they read beautifully. Again, when I talk about political art, political poetry, I always talk about that notion that you have to be really careful about diluting the politics for the art, or destroying the art in favor of the diatribe from the politics.

It takes real skill to walk that line and come out at the other end with a powerful poem, and Denise Levertov did. I was reading her work and I started writing my own. I didn't have anybody to share it with; I was just writing it for myself. This was before computers and the internet and all that. I started piecing together some poems, and I discovered in about 1975 or 1976, I think it was, these guys down in New Jersey, Bill Erhardt and Jan Berry, putting together a collection of Vietnam veterans' poems, called *DMZ*. I put eight poems in the mail and sent them off to these guys, thinking, what the hell? And they wrote back and said, "We love your poems. We're going to put all eight of them in this collection."

Wow. That, for me, was the first time – I like to call it an affirmation. Oh, my God. Maybe my poetry really has some kind of ability to reach others, to work with others. I started writing more poems, back and forth, back and forth, sharing with one or two here, whatever. There was a publication in Maine called *The Maine Times*. They published a few of my poems, which felt really good. So I continued writing.

Then we moved from Bath, Maine to this old farmhouse, an 1823 farmhouse in Chesterville, Maine. It just so happened that one of the people renting the house across from us was a guy named Jeff Kelly, who was into self-publishing and who had published a lot of books. He connected me with Lulu down in North Carolina, a company that does self-publishing. He, himself, has published 500 books, so he knew what he was doing.

He took me under his wing and started helping me put together these books of poems.

Larry Abbott:

This led to *Orion Rising*, which has three sections. The first section is more about your war experience, and one of the themes, I thought, was that the past continues to haunt the present, like the poems "Medic" and "Flashback."

Doug Rawlings:

Right. You're making me think about this work I've done at Togus Veterans' Hospital [Chelsea, Maine]. I went up there and volunteered for three years in the psychiatric ward, and we would talk about poems from the Civil War right up through the Afghan wars, looking at Walt Whitman, looking at the World War I poets, various writers like that. I would encourage the patients to take material from their psychiatric journals, which they had to keep, the therapeutic journals which they had to keep, and see if they could pull something from that and transform it into this thing called "a poem," which is, in a sense, this abstract artifact sitting on the table that we're talking about.

It's not you, it's not your war experience, it's not your therapy, but it's this thing called a poem. Can we craft it? Can we do something with this to make it for a particular audience, other veterans, yes, or people who are not veterans? We did that kind of work and it leads to this: my theory is that we can use our war experiences, which we're never going to forget – they're going to be with us forever, so forget trying to get rid of them – but we can use them in a positive way, as opposed to them using us. That's what I was talking to these guys about. We had this one vet, he unfortunately died, who was a sniper in Iraq. He wrote these rhyming couplets about being a sniper, and he called them his Dr. Seuss couplets.

We would sit there and laugh. One time we had a sociology student sitting in there with us, and afterwards she said to me, "I can't believe you guys were laughing at this stuff." And we said, "Well, yeah, it's just another way of dealing with it, quite frankly." And they were quite explicit, but, again, they were humorous. It's using that notion of gaining control over your experiences. The nurses said this really helped him sleep at night. He would work on poems and then he'd sleep at night.

Larry Abbott:

That relates to one of the quotes in your book: "Whatever you run from becomes your shadow." If you confront those things, then you lose the shadow.

Doug Rawlings:

Exactly right. If I can tie this into Veterans For Peace, when we formed V FP, that's one of the specific reasons we did it. We are a 501(c)(3) so we're an educational organization, not a therapeutic one. There were plenty of those and we knew that, but we thought, can we – most of us were Vietnam veterans, but others joined us later – use our war experiences in a positive way? It was this notion that got us thinking about going to high school job fairs and setting up tables next to military recruiters. We'd assure people that we are not anti-military, but we also want young people to have a deeper understanding of what military service entails.

We had some very interesting conversations with these guys – which, by the way, gets to the point of Full Disclosure, because people are accusing us of being anti-military, anti-recruiting. We said, "No. We're all about full disclosure. Young people, if you're going to join the military, take a look at the reality. Find out about how women are treated in the military, for example, or look at this. Look at that. Read this stuff." So if you still make that decision to join the military, at least you're going into it a little bit more informed than you otherwise would be.

Larry Abbott:

Another poem in the book, "The Girl in the Picture," is about the idea of forgiveness and being forgiven.

Doug Rawlings:

"The Girl in the Picture" is that famous photo of Phan Thi Kim

Phuc, fleeing a village being napalmed. ["The Terror of War" by Nick Ut]. Most of us who are from the Vietnam Era know the photo exactly – I can look at people my age and say, "You know 'The Girl in the Picture'?" And they know exactly what I'm talking about, that picture. It was iconic. It won the Pulitzer Prize [1973], and it was on, I think, the cover of *Time Magazine*. But it was a transformative picture for many people. They said, "This is the reality of war. This is what's happening."

I was writing this poem about suicide [the 1997 "Formula for a Single Car Suicide (A Tried and True Veteran's Way Out)"] – quite frankly, driving down Ridge Road, which is an S-curve, going 70 mph and turning the wheel to the left and to the right and heading into the woods and killing myself. After the war we called those single-car suicides. The VA did not recognize them as suicides, but we did.

A guy all by himself hit a tree, no alcohol involved, no skid marks? This was what he wanted to do. So that was where I was, working on that poem, and I happened to read in a magazine that Kim Phuc, the girl in the picture, was nine years old when that picture was taken, which, at that time, was the exact age of my granddaughter. It just flipped the poem for me, and I started thinking about it in those terms. And at the same time, coincidentally – or, according to Carl Jung, synchronistically, – I was also looking at this collection of poems, a collection from Buddhist texts, and saw that phrase, the shadow phrase, and it flipped the poem for me entirely. I imagined driving down that road and having Kim Phuc appear on the road. What would happen then? Well, I'd have to stop, as I say in the poem, pick her up, and take her home, because that's what you do when you see a little girl walking down the road: you take her home.

That would happen to be a little village in Vietnam, as I say in the poem, where we could stand at high noon, and there are no shadows. The idea is that, perhaps, forgiveness exists

somewhere – and as I say over and over again, I do not have the right to ask the Vietnamese people to forgive me for what we did in that war. But if they offer us forgiveness, we accept it graciously – and gratefully, actually.

I returned to Vietnam in August of 2023 with my son for a conference. I was meeting with a woman, Dr. Tran, who runs the War Remnants Museum in Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City, depending on what you want to call it. She took me aside and gave me this phrase. She said: “We never forget, but we forgive.” And I thought, that’s exactly where I’m coming from.

Larry Abbott:

The second half of *Orion Rising* is titled “The Maine Poems: Family, Friends and Place.” This seems to be a counterpoint to the first half, although you do have poems about aging and death, but it seems to have a different tenor from the first section.

Doug Rawlings:

It does. It makes me recall a poem I wrote for Suel Jones, a vet who chose to live in Vietnam after the war. I was talking to him one day and asked him, “Suel, what do these guys do, these NVA guys?” Because he goes out and gets drunk with his former enemies. “What do they do when they retire?” And he looked at me and he said, “Doug, they don’t use that phrase. They say they’re returning to their gardens.” I said, “Ah, okay.” I didn’t do this consciously; I did it unconsciously when I moved into the farmhouse in a wilderness area. My wife and I, both raised in the suburbs, we didn’t know anything about living in the willywacks, if you will, heating with wood, plowing snow, and the like, but we made that choice.

We grew organic gardens and we heated with wood for 20 years, 10 cords of wood a year for three woodstoves, and figuring out that whole thing. Now I can reflect upon that and think, okay, that shifted my attention away from the war to the land –

raising a family, having my two kids, a son and a daughter, learning how to do all these “outdoorsy” things. They’re both wonderful, amazing human beings now. They’re very connected to the natural world. But it was that reconnection with the natural world – or for me, a new connection with the natural world, I think, which is part of the healing process.

Larry Abbott:

You also have a section entitled “Fiddleheads,” children’s poems, which seem to be another counterpoint.

Doug Rawlings:

At night, we’d put our kids to bed, they’d be three, four, five, six years old, and we were reading A.A. Milne’s poems from *Now We Are Six* over and over and over again, silly kinds of poems, beautiful poems, with wonderful rhymes. My kids loved them.

So I started writing poetry in that fashion, just for them. Actually I put together a collection called *A Baker’s Dozen*, which is 13 of these poems, which were all written for my daughter and my son. They’re illustrated by my granddaughters. They’re reading a poem written to their mom, like “Rainbow Girl,” and my youngest granddaughter, Iona, does this drawing. So that’s what this collection is all about, sort of connecting the generations. I didn’t want to be known entirely as just a war poet. I wanted to expand if I could.

I was asked this by a student the other day at the university, about being a poet. I say this: I’m not really a poet. I think of people who are, like Denise Levertov, who dedicate their lives to writing poetry. I write poetry, I read poetry, but it’s not my main way of living; it’s sort of another part of who I am.

So I don’t kid myself about thinking my stuff is going to be immortal [laughter] or get on *The New York Times’* Best Seller

list. But I write it for myself and particular audiences.

Larry Abbott:

One aspect of your writing is that you're trying to bring the voices of veterans to the page, either in poems or prose.

Doug Rawlings:

Letters to the Wall, for example, tries to do that to some degree. As part of Veterans for Peace, we discovered that Obama came up with \$63 million to write a history of the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, he had the Pentagon do it. We looked at their website and saw the materials they were using and our reaction was, "Oh, my God, are you kidding me?" So that's where we really started the veterans full-disclosure idea. What can we do to tell the truth?



I came up with the idea for *Letters* as part of full-

disclosure. Why don't we ask people who were adults, if you will, during the Vietnam War, who were directly impacted by the war – not just veterans, but conscientious objectors, friends and relatives of those listed on the Wall, Vietnamese people – write a letter to the Wall, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and we will deliver those letters every Memorial Day. We did that for six years.

Larry Abbott:

How many volumes were there?

Doug Rawlings:

Three volumes, about 500 pieces included in the three volumes. There's a wonderful poem in there written by a student at the university where I taught. I did a little workshop and she came up to me and asked, "Can I write a letter?" And I said, "Sure." Well, her grandfather was killed in Vietnam, and she wrote this beautiful poem to him, saying, "I wonder what your aftershave would smell like. What would your voice sound like if you held me in your lap?" Incredibly powerful.

Le Ly Hayslip, a Vietnamese woman . . . Oliver Stone did a movie about her coming to the United States [*Heaven and Earth*, 1993]. She's written two letters to the wall. In one of the letters – it's a beautiful letter – she said, "I forgive you." She's writing to the people who killed in Vietnam, American soldiers who killed in Vietnam. She said, "I forgive you."

Larry Abbott:

You include your poem "The Wall," with an introduction. In the poem you write: "Slipping past the panel where/my name would have been/could have been/perhaps should have been/. . . Staring through my own reflection/beyond the names of those/who died so young . . ." How did that poem come about?

Doug Rawlings:

We formed Veterans for Peace in 1985, here in Maine, five of us. In 1986, we found out some vets who joined Veterans for Peace were doing a water-only, 40-day fast on the Capitol steps. They were opposing the war in Central America at that time. We chartered a bus to go to D.C. to support them, which, by the way, was seen off by the governor at that time of Maine, who was a veteran and recognized the work that we were doing.

As a side trip we went to the Wall. This is where my friend, Jerry Genesio [a founder of Veterans For Peace], found his brother's name. He was killed three weeks after I arrived in Vietnam.

I do this thing called "walking the Wall." When I go to the Wall – and I've been there a number of times – I start at the date when I entered Vietnam, July 2, 1969, and I walk it to when I left the country, August 11, 1970. I believe, rough count, there's about 9,800 names on the Wall from the time that I was there.

Earlier, I had written a poem that was opposed to this memorial. It's a very angry poem. I had heard, before I saw the Wall itself, I heard that they were going to build this monument in Washington. I thought: Oh, shit. It's going to be like one of those with a guy on a white horse with a sword and all that crap. And I said, "We spit on/your war memorials" as part of the poem [the 1984 "On War Memorials For My Beloved Friends in VVAW"].

And then I go to the Wall and it's just beautiful. It's just striking. I wrote that poem, what it felt like to be walking down that Wall, thinking of the names. I did it at 2:00 in the morning. There's nobody around. Just thinking of those names, those people in that wall.

Larry Abbott:

Your second book is *A G.I. in America*. The cover image by Rob

Shetterly is entitled *The Dog of War* [2015]. About the image Shetterly notes: "The greatest threat to the humanity of the soldier may not be the enemy's weapon, but his own participation in the war. That's the dog I see." Does *A G.I. in America* continue some of the same themes as the previous book?

Doug Rawlings:

It does. It's one of those books that has older poems and newer poems in it. I wrote it because I was chosen to be the first Poet Laureate of Veterans for Peace, which was quite an honor. They give me that at the convention. Over the first year and a half or so, I felt that I had to put together a collection as the Poet Laureate; that's what this is. It's got some new stuff in it and it's got some older stuff in it.

Larry Abbott:

There is a sense of bitterness, I thought. The poem "Government Issue at the VA Hospital" has a very bitter undertone. You write about a vet waiting in front of a freight elevator: "what was left of his family/waited downstairs/in the lobby/for what was left/of him."

Doug Rawlings:

Actually, a lot of my poems come from actual experiences, like when I'd do my workshops at Togus, which, by the way, is the oldest VA hospital in country; it opened right after the Civil War.

I'd see guys in wheelchairs my age or even younger, and they're going to be there for a long time, and I'm just walking around, looking at stuff. I saw one vet sitting in front of a freight elevator as I went by. That's where the poem comes from, that notion like, "Oh, wrong elevator." No, not really.

Larry Abbott:

Because I'm just freight, stripped of humanity.

Doug Rawlings:

I'm just freight now, being sent down to see my family, what's left of me.

Larry Abbott:

There's that sense of loss.

Doug Rawlings:

Absolutely. Real loss. I have a tremendous respect for the staff and the doctors at Togus. I know other guys who go to other VA hospitals that are not so good, but this is an excellent hospital. They're really caring individuals, but you can't get away from the fact that some of these guys – I look in the eyes of some of these guys, my age or younger, and their lives are just totally taken over by their condition.

Larry Abbott:

There's also the idea that the war, any war, is never really over, either back home, or in Vietnam, or any war zone. "Unexploded Ordnance" explores this idea.

Doug Rawlings:

That's a poem I wrote for my good friend, Chuck Searcy, who's lived in Vietnam for 35 years now. He started Project RENEW, which is designed to make the former war zones safer. He trains Vietnamese to go into villages to look for unexploded ordnance, to look for bombs that have not gone off that are killing people now, maiming and killing people. When I went to Vietnam last August, I went to their place. It's stunning, the prosthetic lab, for example, and all the other things they do. The damage done to the Vietnamese people ... even 50 years after

the war is over, kids are still getting maimed and killed by these unexploded ordinances. I wrote that poem from the experience of being in the artillery, having done what we had to do, sending those bombs out there, some of which exploded and some of which did not. They're still maiming people.

Larry Abbott:

And then, in 2000, you published *In the Shadow of the Annamese Mountains*, which included both new and selected poems. The image of *The Dog of War* was on the frontispiece.

Doug Rawlings:

Oh, yeah. That's an amazing image. I wish that image was on the cover of *Orion Rising* [that cover has a portrait of Rawlings by Shetterly]. I didn't find him until later, but Shetterly is just an amazing artist. I could talk forever about him. But *In the Shadow of the Annamese Mountains*, what I like about this, it incorporates a number of photographs by Don Evon that were taken when we were in Vietnam. What I like to tell people – we actually did this – I was in country about eight or nine months. I'm in this little fire base in the Central Highlands, supporting the 173rd. Everything's off-limits. I was never any place on-limits.

We were surrounded by concertina wire and sandbags but we decided that we were going to go into the village of Bong Son. Our little fire base was set up there. Across this plateau, there was a Korean encampment, and then there was the jungle, and then there was the village down in the jungle. We took our helmets off, our flak jackets off, stacked our weapons, had somebody watch our weapons, and we walked into that village unarmed. A lot of the pictures were taken when we met these kids in the village, just walking along without weapons.

A recurring memory about my experience in Vietnam is the damage we did to children. I didn't have children at the time

when I was there, but obviously I had children afterwards. And I realized, walking along with my daughter when she was two years old down a dirt road, the wonder in her eyes . . . we stole that from those kids.

There's one picture in there of our dope dealer. She was about 10 years old and she sold us marijuana, heroin, opium, and all kinds of stuff. We laughed about it at the time, but that's what we did to this kid's childhood.

Larry Abbott:

The idea of the war's effects on children comes out in the poem "Grandfathers," where you're connecting your family in the present to the children's deaths in war where the grandfather has to measure the three-foot long coffin.

Doug Rawlings:

I've watched a video of a guy with nails in his mouth being interviewed by an American journalist. If you look in the background you'll see these coffins, just this little, tiny, three-foot-long coffins. I start that poem about how my kids would measure the height of my granddaughters by chalking their measurements on a post. I thought, I know something about feet and inches, so when I saw those coffins, I said, "This guy's making a whole bunch of coffins for grandchildren." That just blew me away.

Larry Abbott:

Your most recent book is *Bamboo Bridge*. It's in five sections, and seems to be a dialogue with another writer. The sections are: Family, Children of War, When the War Begins, When the War Ends, and Moral Injury.

Doug Rawlings:

Right. This was, again, another amazing experience. I am the poetry editor of a publication called *Peace & Planet News*,

which we've been putting out for a few years. One of my friends, who is now the president of Veterans for Peace, Susan Schnall, lives out in Los Angeles. She suggested that I check out poems by Teresa Mei Chuc for publication in *Peace & Planet News*.

So I did. I liked them. I wrote to Teresa and said, "I love your poems." We corresponded back and forth. One of the things I like about poetry is swapping poems. She teaches high school in Los Angeles now, but she came over as a refugee. Her mom was a refugee fleeing Vietnam. Her father fought for the South Vietnamese Army, so he was put into a so-called "reeducation camp" for nine years. She didn't see her father at all. He finally came to the United States, she writes about this in her book, and he tries to kill her. He's just crazy. He's just way out there. She's just a little girl trying to figure out the world from the perspective of being a refugee. Her mom learned how to speak English and they did the usual refugee things, which is captured by her poetry.

What we decided to do was, say, "Let's put together a collection where I'm the father of a young girl and you're the daughter of a father. You include some of your poems to your dad, and I'll include some of my poems to my daughter, and we'll go back and forth, back and forth, back and forth that way."

Larry Abbott:

Were the poems meant to be a dialogue?

Doug Rawlings:

Ideally, yes. But, in actuality, probably not. They were written separately. She wasn't writing a poem in response to my poetry or vice versa. They were just poems that she had written and poems I had written. When we looked at them, we tried to put them somewhat together so they are not totally distinct from each other. We hoped that they would be related.

That format has worked for some people. It captures the idea.

Larry Abbott:

You were in Vietnam in August of '23 to participate in the Engaging With Vietnam conference. What was that trip like? What was the goal of the conference?

Doug Rawlings:

Oh, my God. It was amazing. We were invited over there because of Ron Carver's book called *Waging Peace in Vietnam*, which he has translated into Vietnamese. He'd been working with Dr. Tran and the War Remnants Museum for years. He's been back and forth eight or nine times. Finally, they got this book published. This was the 14th annual conference, looking at the heritage of Vietnam, put on by Vietnamese scholars, for Vietnamese people. She asked if some of us would do a panel discussion at that conference. Ron asked me to join him and do it, and we did. The conference was an amazing experience. I went with my son.

We landed in Hanoi, and ended up in this wonderful little hotel. We wandered around Hanoi for a little bit, and then we fly down to Hu \square , which is where this conference took place. There were about 500 people there, almost all of them were Vietnamese. There were a couple of people from Scandinavia and a couple Americans here and there, but most of them were Vietnamese. Fortunately, they were kind enough to translate for us. There were workshops on "How can we women in Vietnam overcome the Confucian code of how women are supposed to be treated in Vietnam?" Those kinds of workshops. There was also a workshop on the GI resistance to the war.

I was stunned. I shouldn't have been. Nobody had heard about this. None of the Vietnamese people. They knew about the American flower children resisting the war, but they didn't realize that there were veterans who were actually resistant

to the war in country and when they got back. So that's what our part of the conference was. Chuck Searcy, who did the Project RENEW and the Friendship Village was part of the conference, and Dr. Tran herself, and myself, and Ron Carver.

I had the honor, when I was reading my poems, of Dr. Tran translating my poems into Vietnamese after I had completed them, which was really quite special.

Larry Abbott:

What's next on the agenda?

Doug Rawlings:

We'll just keep on going, I guess. I'm doing presentations now. I do a slideshow of my trip to Vietnam. I'm doing some poetry readings in different places and focusing on political poetry and political art. I think my teaching days are done. I'm 77. If somebody asked me to come back in and teach, I would gladly do it, but with some amount of hesitation because I'm beginning to think: How would I be in front of the classroom now with my memory? Who knows?

I'm still living in the old farmhouse, and I'm going to be there until they carry me away. Yesterday, I was working, planting the garden and cutting the grass and getting the wood ready for next year.

Websites:

<https://kellscraft.com/DougRawlings/DougRawlingsPoetryPage.html>

<https://www.vietnamfulldisclosure.org/>

<https://www.veteransforpeace.org/>

slideshow:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1rqDODNQ13Hn3jodGLuFR6w>

J8BVGdEyoQjZuoyLkdNDg/edit#slide=id.g27eb81cd953_2_18