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“Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand the mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” St. Paul Corinthians 13:1-2

PTSD
POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Presented by

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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- The common causes;

–War

–Public services such as police and fire department incidences

–Abuse/rape

–Violence/crime

–Terrorism

–Natural Disasters



Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- PTSD was once linked to participants of war. Many years ago they called it “shell shock” because those who suffered were visibly seen to twitch or jump while their nerves were uncontrollable.
- Vietnam changed the way the psychiatric community viewed those who suffered. From the research done on Vietnam Veterans guidelines were established that assisted in the treatment of a wide range of mental illnesses.

September 11th 2001

- When this Nation was attacked by terrorists the psychiatric community was prepared and they were rushed to treat the thousands of people traumatized by this unspeakable inhumanity.
- They helped the victims and the first responders who valiantly rushed to their aid.
- Years later we are still feeling the pain from the loss of life and the loss of our sense of security.

Thousands still suffer from PTSD

- The government estimates that 500,000 Vietnam Veterans sufferer from PTSD. Many are no longer with us. They were unable to cope with the illness and the symptoms so severe that it

destroyed their families, their ability to work and their ability to find hope. Alcohol and drugs that were used as self-medication no longer killed memories or calmed nerves.

Those who fought in war are joined by thousands of others.

●Terror

–Anyone who has been in a life threatening situation.

–Anyone who has been beaten.

–Anyone who has been raped.

–Anyone who has been involved in something they lost control of.

–Storms, accidents, abuse, gang crimes, and military actions.

–All potential catalysts for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

National Center for Post-traumatic Stress

Effects of traumatic stress in a disaster situation.

- There are many effects on people with PTSD, emotional as well as physical. These are the major effects associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

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Effects of Traumatic Stress in a Disaster Situation

National Center of Post Traumatic Stress

Modified from

Disaster Mental Health Response Handbook

Emotional and Cognitive

- Emotional effects

–**Shock**

–**Terror**

–**Irritability**

–**Blame**

- Anger
- Guilt
- Grief or sadness
- Emotional numbing
- Loss of pleasure
- Difficulty feeling happy
- Difficulty experiencing loving feelings
 - Cognitive effects
- Impaired concentration
- Impaired decision making ability
- Memory impairment
 - Disbelief
 - Confusion
 - Nightmares
- Decreased self-esteem
- Decreased self-efficacy
- Self-blame
- Intrusive thoughts and memories
 - Worry
 - Dissociation
- Dreamlike or spacey feeling

Physical and Interpersonal

- Physical Effects

- Fatigue, exhaustion
 - Insomnia
- Cardiovascular strain
 - Startle response
 - Hyper-arousal
- Increased physical pain
- Reduced immune response
 - Headaches
- Gastrointestinal upset
 - Decreased appetite
 - Decreased libido
- Vulnerability to illness

- Interpersonal Effects

- Increased relational conflict
 - Social withdrawal
- Reduced relational intimacy
 - Alienation
- Impaired work performance
- Impaired school performance
 - Decreased satisfaction
 - Distrust
- Externalization of blame

-Feeling abandoned or rejected

-Over protectiveness

—

What to do.

- The best advice I can give is that you first understand what PTSD is. Once you know what you are dealing with, it is easier to deal with.

- Not understanding leads to conclusions that are wrong.

- Not understanding prolongs recovery.

- Understanding leads to healing and finding peace with the past.

5.2 million have PTSD during the course of a year.

- 7.8% of Americans deal with PTSD

- According to the National Center for PTSD

- 1,700,000 Vietnam Veterans in all have experienced “clinical” serious stress reaction symptoms.

- Nearly 500,000 or roughly 15% Vietnam Theater veterans had PTSD from a survey conducted from 1986-1988.

The numbers are increasing

- The Veterans Administration has seen an increase in the numbers of veterans from Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq seeking treatment.

- September 11th added to the civilian population seeking treatment.

- Weather related issues are also adding to the numbers of people seeking help in this country and around the world.

The new generation

- The new generation of war wounded from Afghanistan to Iraq troops will suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at a rate of one out of five.

- We are seeing the changes in those who return from these missions and already the families are asking “Why?”

- Until the general public has some understanding as to the nature of the illness, more families will ask the same question. We need to start giving answers.

We can and must change attitudes toward mental illness.

- Our attitude toward anyone claiming they have a mental illness keeps them from seeking help.

- Healing is possible with medication and treatment.

- Yet it can only get worse without help.

- Learn all you can and support those who are in need of help.

Author of FOR THE LOVE OF JACK

- FOR THE LOVE OF JACK by Kathie Costos

- In a time when half of all marriages end in divorce, they stayed together. When most were only interested in their own happiness, they remembered what love was. What she did, she did because it was the right thing to do and she did it for the love of Jack.

The book is our story.

- But it could be about anyone who suffers with PTSD. It was written to assist by offering the facts from the standpoint of life and not clinical observations. Although books from this perspective helped to understand what the illness was, they did little to guide in how to live with it.

I am not alone!

- Considering how many people have PTSD and other illnesses because of PTSD I knew I was not alone. You are not alone either. There are many places to go for help, support and understanding.



Mother Crying Over the World

MOTHER CRYING OVER THE WORLD by Albin Polasek Bronze 1942 with permission from the Albin Polasek Museum, Winter Park FL.

MOTHER CRYING OVER THE WORLD

By

Kathie Costos

The tears of a mother are not bound by nation or race.
They are bound by love, hope and grace.
She knows that this must be done
in order for the battle to be won,
yet wonders why it had to be her daughter or son,
to do what so few others have done.
She waits and prays and counts each day.
She grieves more than words could ever say.
She prays the angels will intercede.
She cries out in agony for the death caused by man and
blamed on God, country, need or greed.
Mother crying all over the world in unity
for what man has done to humanity.



HOMELESS VETERANS
FROM THE NATIONAL COALITION OF HOMELESS VETERANS

We ask so much of those who serve this nation and we need to start asking where
will we be when they are warriors no more?

NATIONAL COALITION FOR HOMELESS

• VETERANS

STATE FUNDED HOMELESS

BEDS	VETERANS
AK 7	350
AL 27	5,275
AR 80	4,389
AZ 219	6,190
CA 2,713	49,250
CO 72	3,457
CT 137	2,900
DC 175	9,403
DE 15	600
FL 492	19,231
GA 81	9,852
HI 118	3,000
IA 17	1,600
ID 10	400
IL 158	19,943
IN 138	1,600
KS 27	1,259
KY 153	2,100
LA 186	4,620

MA 477	2,700
MD 126	2,800
ME 3	1,000
MI 69	5,171
MN 42	1,961
MO 96	13,549
MS 40	1,400
MT 17	320
NC 247	6,805
ND 48	1,100
NE 12	560
NH 72	437
NJ 193	8,300
NM 26	3,600
NV 219	5,500
NY 354	44,700
OH 258	9,697
OK 42	1,750
OR 143	8,450
PA 206	10,166
RI 23	400
SC 50	3,850
SD 16	430
TN 230	2,972
TX 256	19,640
UT 114	575
VA 98	2,450
VT 10	1,200

WA 167	6,850
WI 209	1,132
WV 52	531
WY 31	1,175
PR 0	50
total 8771	316640 These are men and women just like Jack so when you read our story remember how many of them got to be where they are today. Some do not have PTSD who end up homeless. Most do have it.

Places to go for support;

Your local Disabled American Veterans Organization or on line at www.vva.org

Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists www.atss-hq.com

National Coalition of Homeless Veterans www.nchv.org

New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans www.ncshv.org

National Center for PTSD www.ncptsd.org

PTSD Alliance www.ptsdalliance.org

Vietnam Veterans of America www.vva.org

Or contact me via email at Namguardianangel@aol.com . You can also go to my web page at www.Namguardianangel.org .

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*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast our devils : freely ye have received,
freely give.*

The words of Christ as direction to His Disciples Matthew 10:8

FOR THE LOVE OF JACK

HIS WAR/MY BATTLE

By

Kathie Costos

(Some names have been changed at the writer's discretion.)

This book deals with mental illness and the Vietnam War.

This work is being provided free to the general public. The author only asks you to look into your heart and donate to a veterans shelter in your area and do it in the name of Jack who could have been one of them.

New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans 17 Court St. Boston, MA

Please consult your local shelter.

There was a time when I thought when someone had a mental illness it meant they were crazy and dangerous. They were the kind of people you needed to stay away from. It was so much easier to have sympathy for someone with a physical illness. There were just too many stories on the news about people with mental illness committing terrible crimes. Truth is that there are many different kinds of mental illness and as with all illness there are different degrees of them. You cannot tell by looking at them. You cannot tell from their status in life. Depression, clinical depression, is about as common as having your appendix removed. Yet it is responsible for suicides in all age groups from teenagers to senior citizens. How many times have you heard about someone on drugs or addicted to alcohol? Happy, well adjusted people don't commit suicide and don't use alcohol as an escape. You come into contact with people suffering from mental illness every day of your life. They are just like everyone else on the surface. We see advertisements for drugs to treat different kinds of mental illness, the most

common being depression and impedance. We see celebrities checking themselves into the Betty Ford Clinic for treatment of addictions. Again all parts of mental illness.

This is about one of the mental illnesses that can strike anyone, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. It has been linked to veterans of wars however anyone who has had a traumatic experience can “catch” it. All it takes is an event or series of events that place your life in jeopardy. In war it is common to face death. In our day-to-day lives living in a peaceful society, one would tend to shrug at the thought of facing death. September 11th was a wake up call to the country and the world. Now we have vast numbers of average citizens with PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is an illness that knows no boundaries of nation. It strikes all humans. Take a kid living in a heavy crime area with drive by shootings and you end up with a least one child with PTSD. Take what is happening in Israel with the suicide murderers and you will find many with PTSD. A wife who was beaten by her husband can have PTSD as well as a woman who was raped. Some manage to kick the illness in the teeth and walk away with nothing more than bad memories, remembering what happened and the fact they were able to survive it. It is the ones who cannot get past the horror that see their lives forever changed. It consumes every aspect of their emotions. Nightmares and flashbacks invade without warning. Emotions begin to be frozen in an attempt to protect against further assault. They become disconnected and isolate themselves from those they were close to.

This is a story of a Vietnam veteran who has PTSD and our family. It is because of war that his illness took control of his life, yet although the cause may be different, it could be about anyone who has faced the unimaginable horror of such evil acts committed by “humanity.” I believe that the veterans who could not get on with their lives, as they were told for many years

to do, were those who were simply too kind to walk away from what they went through. Their gentle souls could not deal with what happened. They paid a high price for their kindness.

*For thy sweet love remembered such wealth it brings,
that then I scorn to change my state with kings!*

William Shakespeare

It seems so strange to have those words mean so much to me now. There were so many times that I would have traded my life with just about anyone. Now I wouldn't change a thing about my life. I would just change the way veterans are treated in this country. This is our story. Maybe you will change your mind about those who served this country. Maybe it will change your attitude toward mental illness that strikes so many, yet there seems to be little tolerance for those afflicted, just as there was little tolerance for the Vietnam veterans returning after their service.

Many of them suffering from the illness of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder have paved the way for treatment of this illness. There were a lot of doctors experienced with treating these veterans rushed to aid those affected in New York and Washington following the September 11th attacks. You didn't hear about them on the nightly news and saw very few interviews of people following the attacks. Yet the results were staggering. The veterans of wars have changed the way the medical community treats mental/emotional illnesses. It took years of studying them, treating them with medications, trials and errors, and while they dealt with them reluctantly at

first, they learned from them. Over the years the medical community has made great steps toward treating mental illness, yet they have much more to do before society catches up and realizes that mental illness is an illness and they change the way they look at those who suffer. My husband changed the way I look at everything!

I never thought that my life would become a Vietnam War story, but at the age of 23, nearly ten years after the war ended, it did. All I had to do was look into Jack's eyes. I knew my life would never be the same. It was a time in my life when I wasn't happy or sad. I was just going on day to day and feeling half complete. I was dating but nothing serious. I didn't want to get involved after a bad divorce. It was as if we were supposed to be together. It is strange how being in a certain place at a certain time can change your life without you even suspecting where it will lead or the importance of that particular moment. You walk into a store and suddenly get the urge to buy a lottery ticket. You win a million dollars and your life changes. You take a job just because you need one and it turns out to be another changing point in your life. That is what happened to me. I took a job I really didn't want but I had to work. It was with a cable TV company in the customer service department. Everyone I knew told me the job was beneath me because of the training I had. I took it anyway as a temporary solution and planned on looking for a better job. It only took two months before I knew what taking that job would mean to the rest of my life.

Jack had lived in the same city most of his life. I could have seen him a thousand times before and never noticed him. We could have been at the same club or movie or in the same store and I would have walked past him without giving him a second glance. With an age difference of almost eight years, we had different friends and interests. We had different lives. Without that job I don't think we would have met. I was living with memories of a hard

childhood and a bad marriage. Jack was living with the effects of one year of his life in Vietnam which led to a failed marriage and a string of jobs. It led to signs of mental illness brewing inside him. One year that he would never be able to get over. To me, Vietnam was in the past and I didn't really think much about it or war in general. I had a lot to learn.

We've all heard stories about Vietnam Veterans and what the war did to them, yet there is so much more to the story that goes far beyond 1975 and the withdrawal of U. S. Forces from Vietnam. The effects touch the lives of everyone involved with them. The parents, the spouses and the children are also paying the price of this undeclared war. It is estimated that 500,000 Vietnam veterans have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to varying degrees. That's 500,000 families and countless friends affected by an illness few understand.

Vietnam was a different war. It was televised on the nightly news. Graphic images of war broadcast during dinner. Protestors marched against it and violence erupted. Others profited from it. The chemical company that created the defoliant called Agent Orange profited. Politicians from each side had their voices heard. Still our young went off to war, facing death as their fathers and their father's fathers did. The Korean War had its share of opposition as well, yet not to the extent that the Vietnam "Conflict" inspired.

They used to call the effects of war on a soldier, "shell shock," when their nerves were on end and their mental capacity had been diminished. The effects of this war were compounded by several factors. This time the government decided not to send our soldiers in as a group to fight for an unspecified length of time. They decided to send them in as individuals for the period of one year. It sounded like a good idea but it wasn't. It led to further destruction of the mind. There was also the factor of drugs. Many used pot, or more potent drugs to cope with the issues of war. Many drank to kill off the nerve endings and prevent the uncontrollable motions. To top

it off, most of them were just kids too young to drink but not too young to fight. They were on the other side of the world and they were afraid. They left their cities and towns for the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam.

To understand how some veterans came home seemingly fine while others claim PTSD, (post traumatic stress disorder) you need to look no further than within your own circle. One person may be a success, another, a failure, one funny and outgoing, another shy and quite. Although what they all went through may be different one thing stands out. It depends what they were like when they went into the service as well as where fate placed them in the war torn country. Some were exposed to seeing death surrounding them while others were constantly being attacked by mortars blowing up.

To some, the memories of Vietnam are just memories. To others, it was unbearable. There were a tremendous amount of Vietnam veterans who could not go on and committed suicide. The numbers of homeless veterans has increased sharply. The National Coalition of Homeless Veterans estimates that there are now 316,640 on any given night homeless veterans in this country. More than half a million experience homelessness, men and women veterans too. There would be more women in the Veteran's homeless shelters but most cannot take in children. Yes, women homeless veterans with children. They suffered in war and after with memories as real as the second it happened, with all the emotions of the moment in full force. They became a different person back at home. They had flashbacks of moments of terror, brought on by seemingly insignificant events. They had nightmares that broke the sleep pattern. During waking hours they became paranoid of the actions of others and were constantly on guard. Some experienced repetitive motions, checking doors and windows excessively. They developed twitches in their eyes, faces and body. The emotional connections were broken. They

were unable to trust anyone. Still the human spirit went on and they tried to live a normal life. They got jobs and got married. They tried hard to put the past behind them but it had a hold on them that wouldn't let go. The walls of self-preservation were being built. As the years went on, so did the symptoms and the destruction of lives. They knew something was seriously wrong with them. Although they may have heard about PTSD, as with most diagnosis of mental illness, it is extremely hard to face. Denial sets in. They wait to get back to normal and try everything available to achieve it, from sex, to drugs and alcohol, to moving away to remote parts of the country, to the final step of suicide.

Some parents had to bury their sons and daughters. Others wondered if they would ever find closure with the return of an MIA. Some parents were lucky enough to have their child return to them physically, however, tragically changed. Some came home addicted to drugs and alcohol. The parents knew what changes occurred in the time of service, yet could not understand why.

Wives and husbands felt the distance, broken bonds and the effects of the self-imposed isolation. Children wondered what was wrong with their fathers who fought or their mothers who nursed the wounds. No one knew what was wrong. They blamed themselves. They all tried to fix the problem. They gave it everything they could and ended up resenting the residue of their efforts. Nothing worked. Soon it was not about fixing the problem, it became a matter of self-preservation.

This is not just about another Vietnam veteran. This is about the effects on him and my family as we pick up the pieces and try to heal from such a tragic part of his life. We are only one of thousands of families in this country today yet our lives are lived pretty much same way. Truth is we are America's secret.



CHAPTER ONE

Vietnam High

In our case my husband Jack, was only seventeen. He dropped out of school and enlisted soon after. He didn't come from the best of homes or the worst. His mother had been married before and had two daughters that were much older than Jack. He was young in many ways. His grades were not the greatest and he lacked self-esteem. Jack struggled with his need to be a man and his sensitivity. His father and uncles were veterans of WWII. Jack's father had a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. He didn't talk about the war with Jack or anyone else for that matter. Jack looked at his father and wanted to be like him. So at seventeen with bleak prospects, Jack went to an army recruiter and had his mother sign him in. He dropped out of school and got on a plane to Fort Jackson for basic training.

After basic training, he was sent to Vietnam. Jack ended up in the thick of things. In 1970 at the age of eighteen he was stationed on Camp Evans and Camp Eagle with the 101st Airborne near the DMZ in the northern part of South Vietnam. The first base was bombed shortly after he arrived from the states. It was just after the Thanksgiving meal. There he was a teenage city boy crying his eyes out while bombs exploded for two agonizing hours. It seemed it was only a day before he was hanging around with his friends in his neighborhood. It could have been an episode of the Twilight Zone. One minute young and carefree, the next you are running for your life.

He looked so young that he grew a moustache to look older. His body had reveled that he was still just a boy. At 5' 10" he was skinny. He wanted to fit in and desperately wanted to be accepted. Most of the members of his unit were a few years older than he was. Eventually he made a few friends. There were down times when they had time to hang out and talk.

War is unpredictable. They never knew when the next attack would happen so none of them ever could relax. There was so much more than just the enemy to worry about. There

were rats, snakes, biting ants and other assorted creatures. The weather was bad a great deal of the time with monsoon rains and typhoons. The rest of his year didn't go much differently. He had his nineteenth birthday in Vietnam and faced another nine months crossing days off the calendar counting the time left before he "D.E.R.O.S.ed" (date of expected return from overseas) out of there. He received a Bronze Star like his father, but he wasn't proud of it. He was ashamed of what he had to do to earn it.

When he came home the signs of his illness were there. He had nightmares so terrifying some nights that the next day he couldn't function. He had flashbacks during the day that made him relive events. His eye developed a twitch. He developed involuntary arm movements. He talked to himself more and less to others. His father told him to get over it. He came from a long line of servicemen. The uncle he was named after died in WWII. Jack's father had the attitude that you do what needs to be done and put it behind you. Life is full of tragedies. Life is also what you make of it. At that point he should have gone for help at the VA hospital. His father was convinced that if he could work, he didn't need help. Help from the government was for the ones who couldn't work. So he didn't seek help although he knew he needed it.

As the years went on he thought he would get over it. The nightmares and flashbacks wouldn't let go. He got jobs and lost jobs. He got married. They separated and got back together more times than he could remember. He drank and got high when it was all too much. He would react badly to sudden movements or sounds of a helicopter. The walls grew thicker and higher with each passing year. Walls to protect him from his past only trapped him and began to erode all that is human and good. Every emotion was being frozen except anger. He relied on anger to help him survive and it was the only emotion he could depend on.

The world I lived in was totally different from his. I didn't remember much about Vietnam. The biggest concern I had at the time was if my mother would let me go out to play after dinner. I got upset seeing the news reports on TV, yet in my mind the images were not real. At first it bothered me but my mother always told me not to be afraid of what was on the television, because it wasn't real. The only experience I had with the war was writing to a soldier for school. He died. I didn't want anything to do with the insanity after that. I turned my ears off. It hurt too much to know that people were dying.

It seems as if I spent the first twenty or so years of my life believing I could make a difference. Not just thinking I could, but believing I had to. I did volunteer work at the Girls' Club and then worked at the YMCA. It was fun helping kids learn how to swim. I wanted to share the exhilaration of speeding weightlessly through the water with every muscle in my body working in high gear. I wanted to share all the things I loved so that other people could feel the wonderment of life as well. I wrote poems and stories to share my emotions and imagination. Anything less was a waste of all that I had been given.

On Thanksgiving Day in 1970 as the base Jack was on was being bombed, I was crying in my room because my father was an alcoholic. Jack was trying to stay alive and frightened out of his mind while I was listening to my parents scream at each other. In 1972 Jack was adjusting to civilian life and trying to cope with being back at home. I was receiving an award as Girl of the Year at the Girl's Club for volunteering so many hours and performing on stage singing "Climb Every Mountain." I was almost thirteen and he was and he was over twenty. Amazing!

CHAPTER TWO

1982-1983

BEST FRIENDS

By the time I met Jack, it was ten years after he got out of the service. We were working for a cable TV company. I was in the office as a customer service representative. Jack was a technician and drove a van with the latter attached to the roof. There were a few nice looking

men working there but Jack stood out. I remember the first time I saw him. He was standing by the row of filing cabinets talking to the supervisor of his department. I heard him laugh. I turned toward him and he had the nicest smile. His eyes had a twinkle. As soon as he noticed me looking at him, he turned his head away from me. I continued working.

He was quiet and shy from what my co-workers told me. Some of them liked him but they knew he was married. It was one of those marriages when they separated, tried, separated and tried again. He was living back home after another failed attempt. We looked at each other for two months but didn't say a word. We finally "met" at a work Christmas party neither of us wanted to go to. I went with my friends. The man I was dating couldn't make it, so I sat alone while my friends were on the dance floor. I was angry with my friend Linda for dragging me to the party. She kept telling me that I would have fun. I had only been with the company for two months and didn't know the others that well so I felt a little out of place. I wanted to be at the disco, our second home, as Linda and I called it. We had so much fun dancing the night away. That night it was obviously not my choice to be there. Linda told me we would only stay until we ate then we would go to the club. It was over an hour later and she was yakking with a couple of the other girls from the office.

Jack kept looking at me while he talked to some of the other cable installers. I was thinking about going home. He smiled at me from across the room. He walked over to the table and pretended that he hadn't noticed me at the office. "Hi. Who are you here with?" He asked as if he had seen me for the first time. I thought "What is he trying to pull we had been looking at each other for two months and then he was trying to act as if I was a stranger." Then the words ran out of my mouth before I could stop them and he laughed. I could tell he was nervous. I thought he was nice looking but at that moment I could only wonder how much more time I had

to stay at the party. We talked for a little while. Then the only thing I could think of was how different he was while we made small talk. He looked right into my eyes and then he looked at the floor. I hadn't noticed how pretty and warm his eyes were before. One of the small local bands was playing and they played a slow song. He asked me to dance. I took his hand thinking I was stuck there anyway so we danced a slow dance and it felt good to be in his arms much to my surprise. Sometimes you can be in someone's arms and know that you don't belong there. You feel your back stiffen while they pull you close. I was relaxed as I wrapped my arm around his neck. He had thick, curly, black hair and a moustache. He was a few inches taller than I was which was perfect considering I always wore high heels. We just fit right. He wasn't my type at all though. I had a large frame and was muscular from years of swimming. Rugged jocks were the type of men that attracted me. I thought he was a little too thin but as the night went on, I was comfortable with him and it didn't matter what type of men I liked. I couldn't stop looking into his eyes. I wanted to know him. I wanted to know everything about him.

Finally when Linda was ready to go to the club, a rush of guilt came over me. I was already dating someone else. I said goodbye to Jack and we put our coats on. Some of the other girls decided to go to the club with us. The party was a bit of a bore. Jack asked if he could come too. We managed to get from the two of us ducking out early, to about sixteen of us heading down the highway. It was funny thinking that there were so few left at the party. Jack stayed near me the rest of the night. Linda wondered what was going on between Jack and me when we went to dance to one of our favorite songs. I was wondering the same thing too. I had the strangest feeling that what ever it was, it was suppose to happen. Linda and I went back to the group to have a drink. The DJ played another slow song A One in a Million. After I heard the first few lines I looked into Jack's eyes. He asked me to dance again. I felt sad suddenly as

if I could cry at any moment. I couldn't get that song out of my head. Maybe it was a one in a million shot of falling in love again and maybe it was just a moment in time that would change my life. He held on to me tight, kissed me for the first time and he trembled. I didn't know what he was thinking. I didn't want to know. It just felt right.

We saw each other every day in the office before he went out on the road. I knew he was separated from his wife. I knew what that was like having been through a bad marriage as well. My boss Joan was Jack's ex-sister-in-law. She was married to his soon to be ex-wife's brother. I thought he must be a great guy if he got along so well with her. Joan couldn't say enough nice things about him. She thought it was a good idea for us to be together. Joan also thought that I would be good for him since I was such a strong willed woman. She said I'd keep him in line.

He asked me for a date. I said yes. We went to a movie and saw Jim Henson's, *The Dark Crystal*. He was so amazed with the animation and the "puppets". I smiled thinking how cute he was. I didn't think he would enjoy it. I was twenty-three and he was closing in on thirty-one. The age difference didn't bother me considering that my oldest brother was the same age. I was used to the music. It amazed him that I knew most of the songs he liked. I thought that it was so out of character for me to be dating two people at the same time. It was even stranger that they were both named Jack. When the other Jack and I were together it didn't feel the same. We had a good time together and he treated me like a queen at the club he played at. He loved music and so did I. He loved to dance, so did I. He noticed the change in me and so did I. I was thinking about the new man in my life.

As the weeks went on we dated more than I saw the other Jack. I thought about the fact that I had only gone to Washington, DC., with my father when I was young and Florida on my first honeymoon. Jack had been everywhere. He went to Vietnam, Australia and Alaska among

other places. How boring I was compared to him. I spend my life working and trying to find myself, who I was and what the heck I was suppose to do with my life. He never stopped long enough to think about where he was going in life, he just went.

The dispatch section in the office was near my desk. We could hear the service technicians calling in. As soon as I heard “502 to base” in his deep voice, it automatically brought a smile to my face. I was falling in love. I didn’t want to admit it. I didn’t want to feel it. I tried so hard to fight off the feelings I had for him. I had made up my mind that I wouldn’t let anyone get close enough to hurt me again. I managed to get hurt too many times before with one bad choice after another. The last time I got hurt was from my ex-husband. I knew from more than my share of “relationships” that sooner or later what was at one time charming in me in their eyes became something to start pulling away from or pushing me from them.

Working for the cable company was hard work for both of us. There were times when angry customers threatened us because their cable service had been shut off for non-payment. Part of Jack’s job was to install the service or upgrade it, the other was to disconnect the lines and recover the cable boxes. That was before technology allowed changes to be made from the office. I was afraid for him if he had to go into a bad area and jealous of the times he went into the rich towns near us. He got to see mansions and the way the rich people lived. Jack would tell me stories of this house with the indoor pool or that house with a game room and marble floors. He would take me for rides to point out the houses and tell me what it was like inside.

We spoke softly to each other about a wide range of topics. No shouting which was a treat for me. I came from a family of loud passionate talkers. We never seemed to run out of things to say. What impressed me about him was that he was smart enough to want me to be happy. That really mattered to him. He was also intelligent. When we played a game of Trivial

Pursuit he knocked out our opponents, so humbly that he was surprised he knew the answer. I couldn't believe how much he knew. He was so laid back and seemed simple, yet there was so much more to him than he normally let show. He had a great sense of humor too. When he said something really funny, making others laugh he looked shocked for a second, then laughed as well. It made what he said even funnier. He thought I was funny and I loved to make him laugh. He got a tiny little twinkle in his eyes and it reminded me of the first time I saw him.

Jack didn't drink too much back then. I was worried when anyone drank too much. My father was an alcoholic and I remembered it all, a little too well. My father stopped drinking when I was thirteen years old and became active in AA. Jack, on the other hand was content to go to movies or stay at home watching TV. I heard all the talk from experts that said children of alcoholics tend to gravitate to the same type of person and it was always in the back of my mind. I was not a weak person and I was not foolish anymore. To be swept away with the emotions of being in love had been done and I was not about to do the same thing ever again.

I stopped dating the other Jack. Jack was happy about that but he couldn't understand why I picked him. He didn't have much money and he wasn't into going to clubs to dance. He hated getting dressed up. Flannel and jeans seemed to be the only clothes he had. He had to borrow the sweater he had on the night we met. The other Jack was wealthy, dressed great and loved to dance. He kept asking me why I picked him. Truth is Jack couldn't understand why anyone would pick him over anyone else. There was just something very special about Jack. Something I didn't want to walk away from.

We ate out often, talking and enjoying each other's company. We would go on day trips, taking in the New England sights. At least once a week we would end up at one of his friend's houses. We would play cards, talk and laugh. He became my best friend. He cared about what I

had to say and how I felt. Jack redeemed my faith in men. He reminded me that there were still men in the world who were not on some kind of macho trip and had to be in charge. I ended up liking everything about him and loving him. Still there was a pain in his soft brown eyes that I just couldn't reach.

I thought that the pain came from the end of his marriage. Knowing the way he was I knew it bothered him deeply. They ended a six-year marriage after many separations, as friends with no children and no fighting. Jack told me that she didn't care about Vietnam and didn't want to hear anything about it. He told me that her family controlled the marriage and that was the reason the marriage didn't work. After what I heard about her from his friends, I was convinced that he was telling the truth. As a matter of fact I found them their lawyer who drew up the papers for both of them. They went out to lunch after. I thought that maybe he still loved her. He was still hurting underneath it all. His tone of voice changed every time he talked about her. He said it didn't bother him. I saw a picture of her in his wallet. It made me jealous to think that he still had her picture with him. The pictures of my ex-husband were torn up as fast as I could find them. I wondered how many times he opened his wallet and looked at it. I wondered what he thought when he held her face fresh in his mind. Did he think about when their love was new and wonderful? Did he think about making love to her? Did he think about the dreams they shared? I remember thinking that some day I would take away what ever was behind the pain in his eyes.

I felt like a kid when Jack did silly things. I would go to my car after work and on my windshield I'd find notes on the back of door hangers with cute pictures and our nicknames. He was "Cookie" and I was "Chippy" for chipmunk. He said that when I smiled my cheekbones filled up like a chipmunk. Jack was what I wanted and needed in a lot of ways. Mainly I needed

to feel safe, protected and cherished. He wrapped me up in a blanket of trust. There was no doubt in my mind that he would be good to me and for me. The roughness of my personality was worn away. He took down the walls I was hiding behind, afraid that if I let them down I would be hurt again. I didn't want to love anyone again. I didn't want to let anyone get close enough to see "me" warts and all. I stopped pretending that my heart was a rock. I also had to face the fact that I didn't want to be alone anymore. I didn't want to just date and be treated like a queen. I was tired of getting rid of guys who couldn't measure up. Running away when they came to close to seeing the real me. Afraid they wouldn't like what they found in me.

We had a bond between us that I couldn't put into words. I didn't totally understand it myself. It was as if we had been together for years. It was comfortable and I felt safe to be open and honest. I didn't have to prove anything to him. He took me just the way I was. We didn't want to change anything about each other except to make each other happy. Jack knew that my past was something far less than ideal. I had been hurt and used. There was a pain in my eyes too, but not as deeply as his pain.

My parents liked him but my father thought that he was sick and should go to the Veteran's Administration for help. He was sure that Jack had "shell shock". I didn't doubt my father. He was a Korean War Veteran and 100% disabled. I knew he was probably right, but Jack didn't want to hear about it. I thought that Jack was too proud to go for help and I admired him for it. We didn't believe in getting handouts. Jack was hurt that my father kept talking to him about the Veteran's Administration and getting treated. He felt that my father thought less of him because of his twitching. It broke his heart to think that my father thought he wasn't good enough for me. It took a great deal of talking but I finally convinced Jack that my father really liked him and was only thinking of his best interest.

CHAPTER THREE

1984

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES COLLIDE

We both got different jobs. I went to work for a trailer company and he went to work for the city. It was the perfect job for him. He was driving trucks and working outside. He couldn't stand the thought of having to spend his day in an office. It also gave him time to be alone. He had a hard time connecting with others. He was well liked at the cable company but he didn't realize how much. Everyone saw Jack for who he was and was willing to overlook his problems. I really thought that I could make him happy and get him to see himself through my eyes. I saw him as one of the most gentle and caring men I had ever met. He was troubled by

what he had gone through as I saw it, he was sensitive enough that he still felt the pain from so long ago. I saw him as someone who could love deeply.

One of the men he worked with took us out on a boat for a day. It was wonderful looking out on the water. You feel so small against the ocean. I was looking at the shore fading away with a drink in my hand loving every minute of it. Jack came up behind me and I jumped. He put his arms around my waist and told me how much he loved me. I almost dropped my drink. I believed he did. It was as if that was important for him to say at that very moment. I was not surprised he felt that way. I was just surprised he said it. I knew he did, but it was wonderful to hear the words and look into his eyes when he said it. I told him that I loved him too. I knew that I felt love for him almost from the start. It was nice to finally get the words out of my mouth.

To me there is a difference between being in love and loving someone. Being in love, means to me that you are swept away by a hunger that can't be satisfied until you are together. Loving someone means that you are part of the other one. Jack and I were together comfortably. I carried that feeling throughout the day until we saw each other later. He became a part of me and I felt complete again.

We got engaged after dating for over a year. It was before Valentine's Day but he couldn't wait. I had burned my right hand that day and wanted to cancel our date for that night. He insisted he bring dinner over to my house. My parents didn't care for lobster at all but he still brought four of them. I had one and he ate the other three. Jack seemed more nervous than usual. I thought that something happened at work, but then dismissed the thought realizing that he was in too good of a mood. He was complaining that he ate too much but wanted to go out for ice cream. It was freezing out and he was stuffed. I tried to talk him out of it, but he

wouldn't change his mind. Jack could be a brat at times being the youngest child. (Ok, so could I since I was the youngest as well.) It was one of those times when I gave in and let him win. He got more nervous and distracted.

I sat in the car while he walked to the ice cream stand. He got in the car with a milk shake in his hand. He tried to give it to me. I thought he was crazy and told him that I didn't want it. I was ticked off that he had to drag me out of the house to get a shake. He told me to just hold it. I was looking out the window getting irritated with him. He told me to look at the straw. I did. My diamond was on the straw. I started to cry but managed to stop after two tears fell. He told me how much he loved me and how much I meant to him. I kissed him and said yes. Up until that moment, marriage was just talk. It was something to think about, but not much more than that.

My friends were still single. I talked to them on the phone, but I didn't have much time to see them. Jack's friends were married and settled. Tom and Ellen had known Jack for years. I found out what Jack was like when he was younger. I knew how deeply his friends cared for him. I also heard about his first marriage. They didn't like her very much. His other friends, Gary and Jane had three small kids. Both sets of friends had adopted us as part of their families. We were included in on everything from birthday parties to cookouts.

He couldn't wait to tell his friends. He drove straight to Tom's house. He was beaming when he told Tom and Ellen. He grabbed my hand and showed them the diamond to prove that he was serious. They both said it was about time. They were very happy for us. There were the usual questions about when and where the wedding would be but it had just happened. We didn't have time to think. Then he drove to Gary's house and repeated the entire night moment by moment.

He drove me home and we told my parents. They were happy for us. My mother had to take a picture to remember the night. I was a bit surprised she was that happy about it. It was time for me to do some hard thinking that night. I ran my entire first marriage through my head. What did I do wrong? Why did it turn out so badly? I was sick thinking about how stupid I was not to see things the way they really were for us. No one liked my ex-husband and they certainly did not want to see me walk down the aisle to him. I didn't want to be blind again but I didn't want to turn into some cynical old woman either who never tried again.

I couldn't understand why Vietnam had such a hold on him. One year out of his life so long ago, yet it was still fresh in his mind. I knew that if I was ever going to understand Jack, I had to understand Vietnam. I loved to read. I read whatever I could find in magazines about it. Over time Jack opened up about his nightmares and his experiences and I opened up with mine. He started to spend more time with some other Vietnam veterans. I met some of them during dedication ceremonies for monuments. It seemed a little too late to them to be honored but the gesture was appreciated.

We had several cookouts together. During one of them, the vets seemed more open than usual. They put on their uniforms and marched in a parade. There were crowds cheering as a line of flags passed by. The black POW/MIA flag was a powerful sight. There were speeches and a list of names was read. Most of the crowd stood silently, swept away with emotion. The guns were fired and taps was played.

We went to one of the veteran's trailer. Their mood was different that day. Usually there was a lot of drinking and laughing. I think the dedication got to them. They had the same pain in their eyes that Jack had. That deep, gut down, gnawing at their soul had an unrelenting grip.

They talked more about their tour of duty and what they had gone through. It was a privilege to be there, listening to their stories.

When we were leaving, Jack was more quiet than usual. So was I. I couldn't get the entire day out of my mind. I was consumed with the sadness the day represented. Up until that day, I only grieved for the ones who died in the war and their families. It had not occurred to me that the devastation went so much further than the body count and the count was rising. So many of them took their own lives, unable to let go of what they saw and what they did. I thought about Jack. He was so young when he was there. I looked at him and wanted to cry for the pain in his eyes.

It touched me so much that I wrote a poem from their point of view. I loved to write about things that either touched me or ticked me off. I wanted to be a writer all my life. Most of the time, the words seemed to flow freely. Having written a great deal of poems and stories, I didn't think twice about doing it. This one was different. It was as if I had been pulled into their strange world of walls and boundaries.

Their words hit me hard that night. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine myself in that strange land of natural beauty and tragic events. I thought it must have been like the first day in a new school when your stomach is twisted. You have an overwhelming sense that you don't belong there. Every eye is on you while you wait to see a smile among the sea of faces. Sooner or later you end up getting friendly with one or two if you're lucky. Jack was high school age while he was there so the image was right on the target. In Vietnam instead of a bell ringing, you hear bombs exploding as the earth shakes from the impact. Some submit to the chaos while others take control. The sound of machine gun fire bursts in your ears as your nerves react jumping out of your skin. The smoke and stench fills the air while you truly believe that your

moment to die has come. You wait for the next bomb to fall. They stop falling. The machine guns are silent and swung to point down. Calm over takes the camp as suddenly as it was taken away. You are numb wondering why you didn't die, when the next time would come and if it would be your last day. You wonder if it would matter to anyone anyway.

You do your time in service to your country, survive and go home. On the plane you think about all that happened and thank God for what did not happen. You think about home and the first meal you want to eat. You think about your friends, your girlfriend, and your bedroom. You think about getting a job. You know you have been through hell and made it back, but you fail to notice the change in you. The boy who left a year before was going home a man with a great deal on his mind. You gave up the last part of your youth. A time meant for finding out who you are and where you are going in your life. A time meant for building a future had been sacrificed. You convince yourself that you can act as if you never left home.

In the beginning you do a good job of fooling everyone in your life that nothing about you has changed. Yet your eyes reveal the truth. There in the center lies the pain of your soul. You grieve for the loss of the boy you were and worry about the man you have become. You wonder if you can set aside the internal force of self-preservation that kept you alive. The kill or be killed attitude that was a necessary survival tool became a repulsion. You try to calm your nerves when someone moves too quickly or a noise startles you. You think about the things that you adjusted your senses to become numb to and worry that the numbness will never go away or the memories of what had been. Home is now the foreign land filled with people who no longer know "you." You don't want to talk and they are too uncomfortable to ask what you are unwilling to speak of. Days turn into weeks and months pass too quickly. You think about

Vietnam and know that you need to go back to reclaim the part of you that died there. You need to bring the teenager home or at least bury him before you can find peace. You know that the memories will stay with you until the earth claims you. You fulfilled your obligation to your country and returned not as a hero, proud of the medal you were awarded but as a man who is forced to sneak back from hell.

One of the vets said, "It boggles your mind to think about what happened." The poem started out with that thought.

IN THE NAME OF GLORY

The things I've seen and done would boggle your mind.
I've seen the death and destruction created by mankind
in the living hell that I walked away from but could not leave behind.

It all comes back to haunt me now and makes peace impossible to find.
The ghosts of the past that find me in the night
make me wonder if my life will ever be right.

I have tried to forget what I have done,
and now there is no place left to run.

All this in the name of glory!
There is no end to this horror story.

It still does not make sense even now that I am older,
why, when I was so young they made me a soldier
and why I had to be a part of that war
when I didn't even know what we were there for.

At eighteen I should have been with my friends having fun
not patrolling through a jungle with a machine gun.

I did my part just the same, just for my country
and stood helplessly watching my friends die all around me.

I felt a surge of hate engulf my soul for people that I did not know

and saw children lose their chance to grow.
All this in the name of glory!
There is still no end to this horror story.
There was no glory for guys like me
only bitter memories that will not set me free.
I can never forget the ones who never made it home
some of them dead and others whose fate is still unknown
and the stigma that we lost what was not meant to win
most of us carry that extra burden buried deep within.
All this in the name of glory!
Will there ever be an end to this horror story?

I signed the poem W.T. Manteiv for We Trusted and Vietnam backwards.

When it was done I cried thinking about all these men had been through! They were children when they left their homes for an unpopular “conflict” they didn’t understand. I wanted to call Jack. I wanted to wrap my arms around him and hold him. By the time I finished writing the poem it was after 1:00 am. It was too late to call. My heart ached for him the way a mother aches for her child. Indescribable empathy ran through me. I knew I loved him but not until that moment had I realized the depth. I tried desperately to block the images from my mind. I didn’t want to be there. I didn’t want to feel the pain. I wanted to turn back time returning to the safety of my naive sense of the world. I tried to snap back into reality by remembering my high school years. I couldn’t hold on. I would see myself in my senior year one second, then Jack running from the exploding bombs the next. I knew I had gone too far into the soul of him. There would be no turning back. I knew I would be fighting right by his side from that day on.

I showed the poem to some of my co-workers. My friend Sue cried. I knew that I had put their feelings into words that did them some justice. She said that she had no idea what it

must have been like. I told her I didn't either until they told me. We got into a discussion of what the veterans said. I told her about one of them that had been a medic in Vietnam. She told me about some of the people she knew.

I gave the poem to Jack while we were eating in one of our favorite restaurants. I thought that he would be touched that I cared so much about him and his friends. I watched his face as he read it. His eyes became narrow. He got angry. I wanted to run out of the restaurant before he had a chance to tell me what his expression was already saying clearly. He finished reading it. He slammed it down on the table. It was the first time he raised his voice to me. He wanted to know why I did it and what it was supposed to mean, as if it was an insult. I was shocked at his response and got defensive. He wanted to know what right I had to do it. I told him that he gave me the right when he pulled me into his nightmare. I thought that he would have known me well enough by then to understand that I think deeply about someone else's pain. He dragged me into it all. I didn't ask him to let me in. I wanted to know about the war since it was a part of his life but not enough to intrude where I was not welcomed.

The poem was meant to connect him to the past and face the ghost head on. When people have nightmares, the bad dreams continue if the person runs away, yet they stop if the person faces the fear and defeats it. We hardly said another word through dinner. The food was just as good as it had been the week before. Still it was hard to chew when my appetite was gone and replaced by acid churning in my stomach. Jack didn't finish his meal either, which was extremely unusual for him, considering he ate enough for two people usually. (He never gained any weight.) We waited for the waitress to bring the check without looking at each other. She finally came.

Jack took me home without a word being said between us. It was the first time I felt tense with him. His face was different. His expression was cold and hard. I got out of the car without kissing him. He sat looking out the windshield without turning toward me. He drove off while I walked to the door. He usually waited for me to get in. It felt as if I disappointed him enough that he changed what he thought about me. I went into my room and cried. I thought that it was going to be the end for us. I was hurt and angry. Hurt because he didn't really know me as well as I thought he should have. I was angry thinking that I put my soul into that poem and he dismissed it as an intrusion. I wondered if he really loved me or not.

I wondered why I had to be in a position of defending myself. I didn't do anything wrong. Was I going to have to spend the rest of my life defending what I was to him when I was willing to accept everything about him? Vietnam was as much a part of who he was as his family life. Everything that happened to him formed his character and personality, just as mine was formed. How could I accept him without trying to accept Vietnam?

The next day in work Sue said that I looked like I had just lost my best friend. She didn't know how right she was. I told her that Jack and I had a fight. I couldn't tell her what happened. My pride was on the floor. She asked me if Jack liked the poem. By reflex I told her that he did. Then I was ashamed of myself and told her the truth. I told her that he was offended. She couldn't understand him either. Jack had complained that his ex-wife didn't want to hear anything about Vietnam and that hurt him. I cared too much and it hurt him. It didn't make any sense at all. What was I supposed to do? I couldn't act as if it didn't bother me. He broke my heart. I thought about all the times when I felt so close to him. I thought that maybe those times only existed in my mind. Maybe he was hiding what he was really like and only pretending to be sensitive.

Later that day, he called me and told me that he was sorry for getting so upset. I explained my point of view and told him that if we had any future together at all, he would have to understand who I was as much as I wanted to understand him. Over the next week or so, I felt that it had come between us. I tried to forget about it but it was still there.

Maybe I tried too hard to understand what someone was going through. I didn't know. I did know that everyday I was going to do the best I could at whatever I did. Sometimes I made mistakes. Sometimes it felt as if I should have thrown the alarm out the window instead of getting up because the day was so bad. Still, I could lay my head down on the pillow without regrets. This was something well intentioned that I regretted doing. I replayed the entire day in my head trying to figure it out. What did the vets tell me? Why did they tell me anything? They were private people who did not share easily. Was it part of a divine plan for my life or was I just deluding myself into believing that I could make some kind of difference in their life? I was nobody from no-where. I was even too young to remember any of it. Who did I think I was? What made me such a "know it all" that I could turn their lives into a few lines on a piece of paper? I was simply being me! I heard the words and felt the pain they had. After the emotional assault I inflicted on my ego, I was positive I did the right thing. It didn't matter what Jack thought or didn't think. I wrote it. It was his problem, not mine.

The poem seemed to fail at helping Jack. I felt confident that it could at least help another veteran know that people cared about them. That the monuments finally being dedicated to them were truly heart felt by those who planned and finished the long awaited work. I felt terrible that these vets were treated so horribly by society in the 70s.

Jack was told not to wear his uniform when he got off the plane in Boston because of all the protestors. The protestors had good motives. They didn't want any more people dying, not

the enemy or our own people. The images of war were hard to take. It is one thing to know the death count in the newspaper. It is another to see the event itself on TV during dinner. However, their method was wrong. They called our GIs baby killers. They ended up attacking the very ones they were “trying to save” and further damaging them by hostility. It was bad enough that most of the ones fighting thought that the government didn’t support them, even though the government was the reason they were there. They heard about the protestors and the conflicts between them and the police force, as well as the National Guard. They also heard about the attitude of this verbal branch of society. In their mind they were dying and killing while no one back home supported them. They were outcasts and facing death for nothing. They remembered it all and it ate away at them along with the war itself.

I sent the poem to a local paper. They printed things I had written before. I wasn’t sure if they would print a poem or not but I sent it anyway. I was determined to not let the poem collect dust in my desk drawer. I got a phone call telling me they not only wanted to publish the poem but they wanted to interview me to get my perspective on the veterans and to know how a woman could write like that. I was excited thinking that I could finally do something important. Jack hit the roof when I told him. He reacted so terribly that I was disgusted with the entire thing. I could see his point of view. Since I wrote it for him, I turned down the interview. It wasn’t part of my life. It was his. To go against him on this would be dishonorable. He just refused to see my point of view. He acted as if I had betrayed him by writing what I did. I was sick to my stomach thinking that I had finally written something good. I finally found a way to bring some sense of purpose to my life. I envisioned Vietnam veterans being touched by the arrangement of their words and a part of their lives in my poem. At that moment it was all for

nothing. All the emotional investment that had gone into the piece was wasted. At least the newspaper ended up printing the letter.

May 26th, 1984

On Saturday, May 19th, I was one among many in attendance at the memorial dedication in Peabody. Casualties of World War II, Korean War and Vietnam were remembered and their names were carved on the stones as they have been carved on the hearts and minds of family and friends left behind for many years. They will never speak or smile, nor shed a tear. They will never see their plans complete nor see them fade and they will never be forgotten by those who remain. War is wrong and will never be right but when our country called they went whether by choice or draft, all who served did what they had to do.

It was a day that touched every heart of anyone who could hear the sound of the bugler playing taps or the twenty-one gun salute which rang in the air. A mist was in nearly every eye and a feeling of respect not only for those who died but for the Medal of Honor recipients and all of the uniformed servicemen who served so well. As passing motorists slowed to watch they turned down their car radios not only to hear but I feel out of respect for that solemn occasion. Yet at one of the moments when most ears were hearing the speaker, a driver called out obscenities and made a vulgar gesture to a group of veterans standing near the street.

I was so ashamed that he was one of my generation, too young to have served and too old not to know better. I doubt he realized that his Neanderthal attitude was a reflection on all of us. My generation and age group were still in school and Vietnam was a conflict, not a war. All we heard was how many died and dodged the draft and of the protestors who were arrested.

Not many of us understood that they did what they were asked to do. They returned in defeat with many brothers dead and America wanted to forget its mistake. It seems fitting that the slogan on the Vietnam Memorial is "We Trusted" which is exactly what they did and we let them down and the families of those who died or returned different than they left, arms or limbs gone, or without feeling, and changed in many other ways, are the ones who could not forget.

The ones who returned could not forget. There were no reasons that could justify treating them as we did or for taking ten years to honor those who deserve that which any other war

veteran received, at least our respect and for the dead brothers in arms to be remembered among the honor rolls.

The people who organized dedication ceremonies such as the one I attended in Peabody should be proud of their efforts. Everyone needs to be remembered and have earned our respect. Isn't that the reason we have days such as Memorial Day and Veteran's Day? It is time to recognize all of our war veterans not just those from the acceptable wars such as World War I and World War II, which our countries involvement was not questioned, the Korean War which was controversial but not as much as the Vietnam War. There were people who died, were wounded, and left scarred from all the wars and battles throughout history and controversy will never alter those facts.

I got over the hurt that I felt although it took longer than I thought it would. Every now and then he would ask me to let someone read it. The reaction of a tough Vietnam vet in tears told me the work would be healing. It was enough for me to know that Jack wanted to pass it on. He finally told me that the thing that bothered him about the poem was the fact that I could put into words what he couldn't. I wasn't there, he was and it was his war, not mine. He was conflicted between gratitude and hostility. He couldn't understand. I told him that I just listened with my heart.

It relieved some of my own guilt that I carried about my attitude at the time. He was in Vietnam fighting when I was mad it was on TV interrupting my programs. I also thought about the one I wrote to so many years before. He could have been like Jack. Then I thought that it could have been Jack killed over there.

I understood that this war was fought by strangers. They were given a DEROS date, one-year from the time they were to arrive in Vietnam. They were among a diverse group, all with one thought in the back of their mind, the end of their tour. All they had to do was survive for a year and they would be sent back home. How much could change in a year? They thought

everything would be frozen in time waiting for them to pick up where they left off. They didn't realize how much they would change in that short time. They had a hard time connecting with others. One would be leaving in a month, a week or a day. None of them wanted to be around the new guys who could get them killed right before they were to return home.

CHAPTER FOUR

1984

WAKING THE BEAR

As we planned the wedding I had to think carefully about the future. I never thought that I would get married again. I had been married for a year and a half with a messy divorce. I didn't want to go through that again. My ex-husband was the total opposite of Jack. He was aggressive, domineering and egotistical. I loved Jack for his gentleness and was willing to take

another chance. I was never one to worry about what others had to say about me. So although the thought of a second divorce was unpleasant, it was not an issue. I knew that I would have to be careful with Jack and not be pushy with him, but to walk the thin line just enough to keep him going. He was a hard worker but not very motivated. In that respect, I was the opposite. I always wanted and expected more out of myself. I thought about his problems and his quirks.

He was not accustomed to a close family life. My family was very close and there were always relatives gathered for one event or another. I could tell when it was getting too much for him. He tried to cope with the loud talking and commotion, but sooner or later, he would sit in the chair looking at the floor. I knew he had enough and we would make an exit. His family was not close. He had a sister that they had no contact with at all. His other sister, Julie, lived in the next town over and we saw her and her adopted daughter often. His parents were simple people with simple lives. The highlight of their week was to go to the horse races. They didn't want or expect much out of life. I thought about how our life would be.

We would go out to a movie and look into each other's eyes standing in line. We would see other couples standing apart from each other without eye contact or finding a single word to say to each other and we thought it was sad. Jack would always tell me that it wouldn't happen to us. We didn't have to worry because I talked so much and he was a good listener. I talked to him about work and what happened during my day. It amazed me that after seeing so much of each other we still found things to talk about. If we were not together, we were on the phone. I thought that "this is the way love is supposed to be" and I was happy.

We were looking for an apartment when I picked out an enormous cannonball bedroom set. Jack thought it was wrong to pick out something so large without knowing what size apartment we would end up with. I just looked at him and he melted. He told the salesman to

hold the set. It was so easy to get my own way with him. He hardly ever put up an argument. He wanted to elope but I wanted to get married in the church. We had our big weddings with our ex partners in the traditional way. I wanted to do it just my way this time, by having all the fun but not the fuss.

We found an apartment but the bedroom was too small. We set it up in what would have been the living room. He kept telling me “I told you so.” I just laughed and did my best to show him that it would be fine. We went shopping for the rest of the furniture and everything else we needed. He hated to shop. He couldn’t stand crowds. I wasn’t going to let him get out of it that easily. If he had his way, he would have stayed in the car.

As the day got closer I got nervous. I tried hard to think about what was wrong with our past marriages. I didn’t want us to make the same mistakes we had made before. I knew that I needed to try to relax more and stop being so picky. I thought that the problem with my ex husband was that we were too much alike. We were both strong willed and argued too much. Jack was easy to get along with. If it made me happy, that was all he wanted. I couldn’t believe that I actually found someone like him.

Our wedding was like a big party. Gary was our best man along with my cousin Maureen. She was Greek and the rules of my church dictated that the best man had to be Greek. So Jack had two “best men.” My sister-in-law Carol was my maid of honor. Her daughter, Helen was the flower girl. Carol was also very pregnant with what would turn out to be Athena. The reception hall was filled with family, friends and children. Most of the people there had not seen a Greek wedding before. They were asking questions about the crowns with the ribbon attaching them. I told them the ribbon represented the bond that tied us together. Jack said that he didn’t feel like we were married because in a Greek wedding, we don’t have anything to say.

I told him that since the both of us showed up, it was taken for granted that we wanted to get married. When it came time for our dance, I had to drag him to the dance floor. I told him that we started out with a dance and our marriage was going to start the same way. Our song was “One In A Million.” One of the lines in the song was “Life showed compassion and sent to me a stroke of love called you.” To me it was the perfect song. The odds of us finding each other were astronomical. Both of us tried to do our best in our first marriages. It just wasn’t enough to make them last. We were both hurt and carrying a great deal of pain. My ex husband was once the love of my life. I never thought that it would end the way it did. I was young and very much in love, but that same love blinded me to the truth. No one wanted me to marry him. I couldn’t see the bad side of him until it was too late. I wondered if Jack thought about his first wedding. I wondered if he thought about all that went wrong. Was he just as concerned as I was that the same thing would happen again? It wasn’t a day to think about what could go wrong. It was a time to think about the possibilities. It was a day to remember new love.

It was a wonderful day. It was also my parent’s anniversary. We didn’t plan on it but that was the only day we could get between the church and reception hall bookings. It just made it more special. Everyone that mattered to us was there to share our day. The hall was filled with laughter, dancing and kids running around. The DJ kept playing the best music from oldies to a few Greek recordings. I led the line dances. My cousin from New York took the pictures. She knew me well enough to know exactly what I wanted. We only had to pose a few times, the rest of the pictures were taken randomly.

That night we went back to our apartment and opened the cards. I couldn’t believe how generous people were. The outpourings of good wishes were as if neither of us had been married before. I was expecting a romantic night but we just went to sleep. I don’t know when Jack got

out of bed. I slept soundly from being exhausted. The next morning we headed to Canada. I thought that our wedding night was a let down but I passed it off to us being tired. I was not fully aware of what the nightmares did to him until our honeymoon.

We went to Niagara Falls but it was not romantic. We had a king-size bed and I am sure that he didn't sleep in it for more than a few hours. I'd wake up in the morning and Jack was sitting in the chair watching TV. I think that we made love once, maybe twice on our honeymoon. During the day it was romantic and we were happy. We kissed a lot, held hands and held each other. At night it was as if he couldn't stand me near him. Sex was never really that important to us. I already had a marriage where sex was too important. That didn't bother me as much as the fact that he didn't want to hold me or be near me. I thought there was something wrong with me. It hurt. I understood quickly that to wake up Jack was like waking a grizzly bear. He was ready to attack but stopped himself.

As we headed back home, I thought about the nights we had to make love in the cable van or my car because we didn't have a place to be alone. All those nights when one of us said how nice it would be when we were married and didn't have to look for a dark place to park became a distant memory. We talked about falling asleep in each other's arms. What happened to us? How did we go from dreaming about embracing in our own bed to not being able to tolerate my body touching his? He rubbed my leg while he was driving. I watched his hand go up and down my leg and screamed in my mind, "Oh, so now you want to touch me." I looked out the window and realized I was blocking his touch, numbing my nerves so that I wouldn't have to feel it.

When I went back to work everyone was talking about how much fun they had at our wedding. They all wanted to know about the honeymoon, including my boss. I told them what

we saw and where we ate. I had to hold back the tears when I thought about how the nights were. I have to admit that it entered my mind more than once that I had made a terrible mistake. I thought about the good points Jack had and weighed them against the bad parts that I would have to face. I decided that I was in it for the long haul. It wasn't bad enough to leave him. I would have to deal with it. The best part of my first marriage had been spending so much time in his arms. We would lie in bed for hours, watching TV, cuddling (and the sex was wonderful). It was the feeling I had inside believing I was so close to someone that I lost myself there. Maybe it was being in love with being in love and nothing more. I just missed feeling that way and knew that I would never have that again.

There were things that were important to Jack. Paying bills on time took priority. I worked long hours and would come home to supper on the stove and had time to relax. He supported me when I wanted to turn the spare room of our apartment into a den so that I could write my short stories and poems. He was not a big reader and didn't like horror stories, so he really wasn't interested in what I wrote. He could have given me a hard time considering the fact that I couldn't get published. I wrote letters to the local paper for the opinion column and every letter was published. I knew that I was good enough to get published but had to face the fact that no one wanted to pay for what I wrote. I didn't have a clue where to send the manuscripts. When I took a chance and sent them out, either I sent them to the wrong place or the work wasn't good enough. It was nice to dream for a while about being published. I would say a little prayer at the mailbox, "God bless the effort." It reminded me of when I was young and dreamed of being a singer. My second dream of being a writer was so strong that I was never able to kick it. I wasn't a very good singer and had to face the fact that I wasn't a very good writer either. Still there was no harm in trying. I had a vivid imagination and Jack knew that I enjoyed doing

it. That was enough for him. That's the way it was with us. We never stopped each other from doing anything.

We continued to visit his friends and enjoy life. I got over the hurt of his lack of desire and realized that he was older than I was. I thought that maybe his sex drive wore down with age. We still hugged and kissed a lot. We both worked hard, so when we did get to "fool around" it was enough. It was at least once a week and that was enough for me. Once in a while we would end up down the beach and make love in the car even though we were married and finally had a place to be alone. He said it brought back memories. It felt good to just be in his arms.

On Sundays we would either go over to my parents' house for dinner or his parents'. We took long rides going "nowhere" and enjoyed it. I thought that this was the way things were supposed to be. We grew even closer. I was so happy we found each other. He was what I needed. It was just at bedtime that I dreaded having to face. There were a few times I approached him when I followed him into the bedroom. He wouldn't touch me. He wouldn't look at me. I stopped trying. A few days later, he would want me and we would make love but not when he was ready to go to sleep. I didn't think I could be more confused.

CHAPTER FIVE

1986

THE TRIGGER

Less than two years later, I was pregnant. We were thrilled. Jack was very protective of me. He managed to make every doctors appointment. I thought that he would finally be happy. He loved kids. I saw him with our friends' children and the way his face seemed to glow around them. We had a cat that was a terror. We would joke about not even being able to raise a cat and that our chances of raising a normal child were not that great. The cat must have thought that he was a dog. He would hide in the bushes and attack people walking by.

We were so happy. The last thing on our minds was that something bad could happen. Everything we wanted out of life was within reach. We didn't want to be rich. We just wanted a happy family life. My stomach got big fast and I said that either I was carrying Paul Bunyan or it was twins. We had twins on both sides of the family. I was actually looking forward to having two at once. Both of us wanted two children and it would be nice to get it over with in one shot. I didn't like being pregnant. I was intimidated by the thought of having a baby. I didn't know anything about them. Both of my nieces cried when they were newborns and I held them. More than cried, they screamed as if they knew I would drop them or something. I was also worried about being a good mother. I didn't want to wreck a kid.

When I was 4 ½ months pregnant, I started to bleed. We were afraid. It was the most terrible day I could remember. One day we were on top of the world and then it crashed. Jack took me to the doctor. The doctor sent me for an ultrasound. I was pregnant with twins. He thought that the bleeding could be because of carrying twins and only time would tell. We were fighting emotions. We were happy that I was carrying twins and yet still devastated with the thought that there was something wrong. Every time I moved, Jack had his eye on me.

The next day, I miscarried. Jack rushed me to the hospital and saw most of it, which would have been hard on any man, but add in the guilt. He blamed himself. He was convinced that it was because of Agent Orange. In his mind, he watched them work on me and saw me bleeding, shaking and crying hysterically, he thought it was his fault. He remembered drinking the water and the talk among the men about what was in the water. They knew about the spraying that had been done to kill off the thickness of the jungle. The doctor tried to tell him that the egg split wrong and that it wasn't his fault but he couldn't believe it. He looked as if he wanted to run away. I lost him emotionally that day. I had to beg him to come back to the

hospital to be with me. I had to beg my husband, my best friend to keep me company and comfort me! I was totally confused with his reaction. I thought that maybe he decided to blame me. Maybe he couldn't look at me because he wanted the babies so much. My world had just crashed. I lost the babies, my husband and faith in God. There was not a single nerve cell in my body that wasn't weeping for the losses. It was torture to hear the laughter and babies crying from down the hall of the maternity ward. How could they have been so heartless to put me in with all that happiness?

I didn't know how much pain Jack was in. In those horrible hours that day, Jack was swept back to Vietnam. He wasn't just remembering it or dealing with flashbacks. He was there, reliving every single detail. He was drinking the water and washing in it. He saw the faces of the men he was with and felt the rain pelting his skin. He saw the rockets glare streaming through the blackness of the night sky. He heard the bombs hit the earth. He could feel the vibration of the helicopters. He heard it, saw it, and smelt it as real as when he was there. Physically he was sitting next to me but his mind was there, too far away from me to reach, too far away to hold me and tell me that everything would be okay. For once in our life together, I needed him to be the "parent" to tell me that he loved me, to tell me anything that would make the pain stop. I couldn't stand the fact we sat in silence, not looking at each other, comforting each other, or healing each other. I knew he was off on a mind trip somewhere where I couldn't go.

Some part of Jack retained the love he had for me and he did comfort me the next day when I went home. I was struggling with the most pressing loss of the moment, my faith in God. To me it had always been there. No matter what I did in my life, good or bad, there was one constant, God. He was the reason I found the will to breathe. In my mind, Jesus was like a

friend, someone to talk to no matter what I had on my mind. It was easy to trust Him because He knew me inside and out. I needed to find that connection again or there was no point in recovering. I went back to work as soon as I could. I was still weak and sore. I was not looking forward to hearing about how sorry everyone was for me. The last thing I wanted was for someone to feel sorry for me. As usual, I was in the office before sunrise. I opened the front door, turned on the lights and started to brew a pot of coffee. As I unlocked the back door, the sun was just breaking through the darkness. My spirit marveled at the sight of purple streams that separated the darkness from the land as the sun followed. I couldn't take my eyes off it. As I stood there I knew why purple was my favorite color. That sunrise reminded me of the darkness that God's love took away. It filled the emptiness of my soul with warmth. I was no longer feeling alone. It wasn't God's fault that I lost the twins. It was biology and nothing more. He didn't abandon me. I let go of His hand when I needed to hold onto it the most. I was home again.

Jack wouldn't talk about the loss or the fact that things had changed between us. I knew I was losing him but I didn't know why. So many things ran through my mind. He used to stay in the kitchen with me while I washed the dishes and then we would go cuddle on the couch watching TV. As soon as dinner was over, he took off for the living room and his recliner. He stopped talking to me. He stopped looking at me. I thought that he would tell me he wanted a divorce at any moment. He stopped making an effort to go to bed with me. If he fell asleep before me, he would get out of bed as soon as I would get into it. It hurt. I still loved him and was sure that I was doing something wrong. I thought that I must have been a bad wife. Maybe I wasn't doing something I should have or doing something I shouldn't. If I had been "this" or had been "that", too many "ifs" and no concrete reasons for the way our life was.

The beer that used to sit in the refrigerator was gone in a day. He didn't want to go over our friend's houses as much. He lost touch with the Vietnam veterans we spent so much time with. I tried to get him to talk about what he was feeling. He was building the walls higher. Walls that used to shut out everyone but me had locked me out as well. I remembered my mother telling me that Jack was too quiet. I told her that he wasn't with me. As long as he was talking to me and trusting me, I knew that we would be fine. That reassured me. As the weeks went on that reassurance was disintegrating.

CHAPTER SIX

1987

LOVE LOST

He kept reassuring me that he would get over the way he was acting and that it didn't have anything to do with me. He would say that he had a bad day or that he was tired. I knew that if I didn't do something, I would lose him. I had read as much as I could about Vietnam. I knew that if I wanted to understand Jack, I had to understand Vietnam. In some of the articles they mentioned PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). I read the list of symptoms and would put a mental checkmark next to each one. I knew I wouldn't get any answers from Jack. Every time I wanted to talk to him about it, he got angry. That is unless he was drunk and wanted to talk. I understood that I had been stupid to think that he wouldn't get worse.

Ellen would keep calling for us to go over and so did Jane. Jack had to be dragged over to their houses, but at least he had a good time when we got there. It used to be taken for granted

that we would get together at least once a week with them. I didn't know what was going on in Jack's mind and didn't have a clue what to do about it. I tried to tell them that there was something wrong with Jack and they kept telling me that he would get over what ever it was. They would reassure me how much he loved me and how good I was for him. I remembered all the times they told me his ex-wife didn't want to bother with them and I cared too much for them to have them think the same of me.

The war taught Jack that he meant nothing. As the base was bombed, he was alone and terrified. He kept waiting for someone to walk up over the top of the hill to save him. At the very least he thought they would come when the bombing stopped to check on him. No one came until his watch was over. He was alone and forgotten. Sometime that horrible night he felt he could have died and no one cared. He felt abandoned by man and God. The world as he knew it had ended. I finally understood that no matter how much love I had to give him, I was not going to free him from that. No amount of human love could do that. I prayed for a miracle for him. I thought I could have made him feel that he mattered or that he was somebody of value, at least to me.

Less than a year after I lost the twins, my father passed away at the age of 58. I was crushed. I was also alone. By then Jack wasn't able to give me any emotional support. At the wake I was alone. Jack came late. He hardly talked to me. I wanted to tell him that I was being ripped apart. My father was the first person I was close to who died. I was worried about my mother. She had been through a hard life with my father. I also wanted to talk about the way I felt about my father. I loved him but I never felt he loved me. I know he did in his own way, but there were so many times that he seemed cold to me. I forgave him for the years of drinking and the embarrassment I felt growing up. I knew that the hunger I felt to be loved by a man

would not have been so strong if I felt loved by him. I thought that I would not have been so quick to marry the first time if things had been different between us. Even though my father stopped drinking, it was not a happy house. Someone was fighting with someone all the time. My father was gone and it was too late to change anything between us. I thought I finally found someone to fill the missing pieces of me when I met Jack but that seemed to be over too. There had to be something wrong with me. My father didn't worship me as his little princess the way my friend's fathers did. My first husband ended up turning into a monster. Then Jack was pushing me out of his life. No one wanted me. When we were in the limo following my father's body, I lost it. I cried for him, for my mother and for me. I could no longer have a chance of getting my father to love me the way I needed to be loved.

The thoughts of divorce were more frequent for me. I was no longer worried about him asking for a divorce. I was still young and wondered if I could live half a life for the rest of my life. I went through the motions of being married. Most of the time, I did what I wanted. I went shopping alone. I spent Saturdays with my mother. I went to movies with friends since he couldn't be bothered to go with me anymore. Most of the time, I visited my extended family alone. We made love only a few times that resulted in another pregnancy. The passion was gone. I felt empty after. I felt as if there was something so wrong with me that I was "unlovable". One bad marriage and then this kind of marriage led me to doubt what I thought about myself. It had to be me. The confusion changed to hurt, then to disgust of myself. I couldn't let myself get excited. I have to admit that the thoughts of Agent Orange were in my mind although I never told Jack about it.

I thought my marriage was over and there I was, pregnant. I had to worry about the baby, Agent Orange, and the thoughts of a happy ending or another tragic end. Although I had

more of an understanding about Vietnam, I still thought that something could happen to snap him back into the way he was. I thought about the bad times in my life and I got over them. The events of my life contributed to what I was inside. They were memories and only memories. They were not on my mind twenty-four hours a day. I thought that I would have to try harder with Jack to make things work.

There were times when Jack seemed happy about the idea of a baby. I thought it was just human nature to want to be connected to someone and I knew that he wanted a baby. I thought about all the times that we said we wanted two kids. We wanted what everyone else on the planet wants, a home, family and friends. We had the same dreams everyone else has. We had dreams of getting old and living out our days together. We wanted to travel and see the country, then see the world. I would look at our wedding pictures and try to figure out how we ended up the way we were. Was it just the loss of the twins? It was a terrible thing but it happens all the time. How could that tear us apart? I never thought that anything would come between us.

Jack's parents and his sister Jean patched things up and we found out that she was in Florida, remarried to a wonderful man and had a business. Jack's mother was finally talking about her. Up until then, I don't think I heard her name more than three or four times. I thought how strange it was that they didn't want her at our wedding.

I broke out in hives and had to go on medication for the last four months of the pregnancy. The doctor advised me to stop working because of the stress of my job, so I left the best job I ever had. Jack couldn't get excited either. He wouldn't go to appointments with me or feel the baby grow. Again Jack thought it was because of Agent Orange that I broke out in hives. He couldn't get it through his head that I had allergies.

In my eighth month I was given a baby shower. He started to look more relaxed about it all. I was in shock with the shower and all the people there for me. I was shocked that Jack cared enough to get me there. My family came up with a false retirement party for one of the men Jack worked with. He put up a big fuss that he didn't want to go but felt he had to. I didn't want to go at all. I thought maybe there was hope for us. Still there was a little monster in him that reared its ugly head every now and then. I just wanted to concentrate on the baby and not his problems for a change. I have never been the type of person who allows the actions of others to destroy me or erode my strength. I may wonder what is wrong with me that I was treated so badly. We all tend to get defensive but still in the back of our minds we think that it has to be our fault someone acted like a jerk. We can't see that the problem belongs to the one who did the mistreating not the recipient. While my emotions are in control I feel it is my fault, but when I tell them to back off and take a nap, my brain cells function and I can see things differently. I might feel terrible for a short time but my own self-preservation kicks in to high gear and I get over it. I knew myself, the good points as well as the bad points. I was comfortable in my own skin and I don't think that I have ever tried to hurt anyone, but I am sure that I have just the same. I don't like everyone and not everyone likes me. That is the way life is. I am only responsible for what I do. If someone decides to hurt me or make me feel worthless, I have to think about the motivation behind it. Some people feel better about themselves cutting someone down in size. I feel better knowing that they don't win at my expense. They end up losing someone who could make them feel better about themselves by building them up, instead of knocking me down. I still loved Jack but the neglect hurt our relationship.

Jack had me spinning to the point I questioned everything I thought I knew. I now believe that I started to disconnect from Jack during the last part of my pregnancy. I couldn't

depend on him for emotionally developing our marriage while his illness took control. I could only try to remain focused on doing the right thing.

I took out the desk and typewriter and put in a crib. I let one dream go for the sake of another.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1988

MIXED BLESSINGS

During a January blizzard I went into labor. It was torture. Ellen and Tom stayed with us while the hours ticked away. Finally Jack called the doctor and told him the contractions were still going on. The doctor told him to take me to the hospital. They put me on morphine to help with the pain I was having. With each contraction, I woke up screaming and crying. I couldn't understand why I was in such pain. I had a high tolerance for pain and was very strong. Twenty-five and half-hours of front and back labor, due to a bad tail bone, she entered the world at seven pounds ten ounces. Rachel was beautiful and healthy. I looked like hell. My bladder was messed up so they put in a catheter. When I looked at Jack holding Rachel in his arms, I saw bliss on his face for the first time. He looked beautifully at peace with the world. He was nervous like any other new father but totally amazed at the tiny life in his hands.

The catheter caused a bladder infection. The antibiotics didn't get rid of it although everyone thought the medicine worked. I felt weak and tired. I thought I was supposed to feel

like that and was not concerned. Rachel was my joy. I was sure she was a gift from God and called her my little angel. I couldn't believe how close I felt to her or that I was capable of that kind of love that has no limits. Jack was good with her and he seemed to be a little happier. He talked to the guys he worked with constantly about Rachel and couldn't wait to show the latest pictures. I started to think that maybe she was what he needed. I couldn't give him the kind of love that she could. She looked at him with trusting eyes and he knew there was unconditional love there. I was going to wait to decide what to do about us.

Our happiness didn't last long. As the weeks went by I could feel the walls separating us getting thicker. The pain in his eyes grew deeper. He smiled less, talked less and hugged less. We fought more about things I would have gotten my own way on before. We argued about little things that really didn't matter. I got so accustomed to his bad attitude that I was shocked he didn't put up a fight when I wanted to have a big Baptism party for Rachel. It was Greek tradition to have an elaborate event for a firstborn.

We rented a hall and sent out the invitations. I hadn't been working for nearly a year and money was tight. My mother pitched in to help and Jack borrowed the money from the credit union. He actually realized how important it was to me. We got dressed up for the first time in a very long time. Rachel cried through most of it until she was given the wine for communion. Everyone laughed. She ended up sleeping through most of the party. I thought that she took after me. Wine always did put me to sleep too.

Eight months after giving birth, I couldn't get up out of bed. I called my mother and told her that she had to come take care of Rachel because I was too sick to get up. When Jack came home he took one look at me, put his hand on my head and told my mother to call the doctor. I put up a fight and told him that I was just tired and needed to sleep. I was burning up

with a fever. He pulled me off the bed and got me dressed. My mother stayed with Rachel. Jack rushed me to my doctors. My temperature was 104 and 105 by the time I got to the hospital. The infection had spread from my bladder to my kidneys and blood stream. I almost died.

I drifted in and out, walking up shaking when my fever spiked. I couldn't care about anything or anyone. I thought that I was going to die. Part of me wanted to. I was so miserable. I wondered why God had spared my life so many times. Was it just a waste? I couldn't believe how bad my life was. The loss of Jack's love was unbearable. As far as I was concerned, it was a wasted life. I was a failure. I gave up writing except for letters to the editor of the local paper. I gave up every dream I ever had. Worst on the list, was that I gave up on Jack. He meant so much to me and I was left with nothing. I was tired of getting short-changed by what I thought was fate. I thought God wanted us to be together and that Rachel was my reassurance that I was right where God wanted me to be. My soul cried out to God to just end the misery and take me home. Then I thought about Rachel and knew I couldn't leave her. She meant everything to me. At that point she was the only good thing that came out of my life. She needed to know how much I loved her and how special she was. My body kicked into high gear and nothing was going to stop me from going home to her.

I looked at it as Jack saved my life by making me go to the doctor. He thought it was his fault again. No matter what I tried to say it didn't matter. He was wonderful with our daughter. He took care of her by himself for the week I was in the hospital. When I came home, it was back to the old routine. But I was different. She took top priority in everything I did from that point on.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1989-1990

GHOST HUNT

I watched him change little by little. I was watching him die. The walls kept getting thicker. He drank more but it was different. He wasn't the life of the party anymore. He was more depressed about his job, our apartment, and his life. He stopped caring about himself and us. He had to be reminded to get a hair cut and to shave his face. He didn't care about his clothes. He excused his appearance by blaming his job. Jack didn't want to go over our friend's houses anymore. I missed getting together with them. Soon we lost touch with them all. He stopped noticing things around the apartment. He didn't enjoy anything. Most of the time, he was angry and distant. He was disconnecting from us. There is no other way to put it. He was cutting off any ties he had to me as his wife and refused to release his emotions to bond with

Rachel. I knew he loved her but he kept an invisible line stopping him at the point only he was willing or able to go. He hardly ever laughed unless he was drunk and found a private thought amusing.

By the time Rachel was two years old it was too hard to live the way we were and we separated. I couldn't take it anymore. All doubts about Jack having PTSD were gone. He refused to get help. It was like living with an unpredictable stranger. I didn't know what would set him off. I couldn't take the constant questions repeated over and over again. He was twitching more and started to talk to himself more than he talked to me. He would snap at me and talk to me as if I was dirt. The thoughts of Vietnam were constant. He watched an HBO special about Vietnam over and over. I still believed that he loved me deep down but there were no longer any outward signs. Something had to be done but I didn't know what or if I had the will to do it. Although we communicated while we were living apart, we couldn't actually have a conversation any more. It was small talk. It was as if he had forgotten how to give and take in a normal conversation. Most of the time, it was as if he wasn't there although he was in the same room. I could tell by looking at him that his mind was too far away to reach. I would end up yelling at him to snap him back into the moment.

I packed up Rachel's clothes and stuffed animals trying in vain to keep my tears from falling on her things. Jack sat in the living room too numb to care about what I was doing. I couldn't believe I was actually leaving him. He was everything to me at one time and then he was a burden I was not willing to suffer with. I wanted to share my life with him and grow old together watching Rachel grow up. I wanted another child so that she would not be alone. I wanted a normal life! I wanted to be loved again.

I finished packing up Rachel's things and went into my bedroom. Our wedding album and Rachel's baby book were reminding me of what I lost. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right. How many times had my heart been ripped out? How many times had Jack hurt me? I looked around the room and felt cold in my bones. The ghosts were passing through me taking away any warm memories remaining within my soul. I would be without a husband and Rachel would grow up without her father. I knew she would be loved in my mother's house. My mother and I could make her feel safe and loved but I worried that Rachel would grow up and blame herself for Jack. How could she help it? I blamed myself for Jack. I finished packing and loaded the car. I looked up at the window of our bedroom in disbelief.

I was praying for a miracle. I believed that it was possible for Jack to be saved from his self-destruction. Through praying I found the courage to be strong enough to demand that he contact a doctor about his problem before I would discuss returning to him. Our family doctor recommended someone who was supposed to be extremely experienced with Vietnam veterans. Jack was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and started to get treatment. When I suspected PTSD it was one thing. It was another to have an expert confirm it. At first I thought he was crazy. He had been diagnosed with a mental illness, which to me meant that he was insane. I didn't know enough about it. The facts were buried under my prejudice and I was out of my league. I had no way to deal with the reality.

Rachel and I stayed at my mother's house while Jack stayed in the apartment. He was missing a lot of work while doctors were trying medication to level Jack's moods. He was having a hard time with the medications and wouldn't take them. He kept going for therapy and he seemed to be less edgy. We talked all the time. One of my brothers, Peter, was getting

married and I was in the wedding party. I wanted Jack to be with Rachel and me. He was still her father and still important to me.

Jack picked up Rachel and my mother and went to the church to wait for us. As the limo pulled up, I saw Jack and Rachel standing in front of a group of others waiting. She looked so cute with her fancy dress. Rachel had just started to grow a real head of hair and she wore glasses. She held onto Jack's hand. I thought that it was the way it was supposed to be. I made up my mind to act as if we were still together. Nothing was going to ruin at least that one night with us acting like a real family.

We danced together and had our pictures taken. We spent the entire night looking at each other and holding hands. It was as if we had never been apart. I thought about the life my brother and his new wife were starting and how our life was. I remembered the wonderful thoughts I had on our wedding day. It was the day I married my best friend. I went from feeling total connection to abandonment in just a few years. I was watching every move he made instead of just looking into his eyes. I listened to every word he said wondering what he was holding back and what he meant by what he said.

I needed to feel married again. I needed to have Jack back as my husband and my best friend. I couldn't imagine living the rest of my life without that kind of relationship with him. I prayed all my life but I began to pray with such emotion that my body actually shook. I remembered all the stories about Jesus in the Bible and the miracles. I remembered the crazy man that had demons cast out of him and I envisioned Jesus doing the same for Jack. I thought that it was possible for Jack to be healed at any moment. I thought that God had brought us together the night that neither one of us wanted to go to the work Christmas party. He knew we

were both hurting. He gave us a wonderful little girl. It couldn't have been for nothing! There was a reason we were together.

Our separation lasted six months. Soon after I moved back in with him, he stopped going for treatment. He said he felt better and told me that he would get over what he was feeling. I wanted to believe him. I wanted it so bad that I put all I had learned about PTSD out of my mind. I believed in miracles and thought that one could have happened. Wishful thinking! Again I made the mistake of thinking I could make him happy by finding a house. We were too crowded in the tiny four rooms. He never lived in a single-family house. I really wanted a house for Rachel and that kept me going. Concentrating on finding a home kept me from thinking about our problems. I didn't want to think about the truth. I didn't want my days filled with what was wrong. I wanted and needed to think about possibilities for a change.

I was having a hard time getting him to keep his job. I told him if he left it there would be no turning back for us. Buying a house was another reason for him to keep working. I did crafts and made some extra money, but I knew that it really didn't make enough of a difference. I went to work at an ice cream parlor at night to be home with Rachel during the day. I really liked it. It was harder than I thought it would be. It was a lot different than what I had been accustomed to doing for a living, but it was good, honest work. I got to meet some really nice people. It was hard getting home so late at night and getting up the next morning but I was lucky that Rachel still wanted to take naps in the afternoon.

I worried about her up until I called her to say good night. I worried that Jack wouldn't give her attention or that his mood would make him snap at her. I was not worried about him hurting her. I knew that was something he was not capable of but he could hurt her emotionally. I knew once she was in bed, her sweet dreams would fill her head and he would fall asleep soon

after. He was usually asleep before 9:00 on the couch. He kept trying to stay awake and wait up for me but never made it. Most nights I didn't get home before 11:00. Then I was too wound up to go to sleep. I'd put on the teakettle, go check on Rachel, get changed and kick Jack off the couch. I would sit in the glare of the TV half- concentrating on a program until I couldn't keep my eyes opened any longer. I'd get into bed and counted the seconds until Jack got up and went back to the couch. Most nights I'd cry a few tears until exhaustion carried me off to dreams of a better life. Days were hard but the nights were hell.

I stayed busy during the day taking care of Rachel and the apartment. I studied the real estate market so that I would know enough to not get ripped off. We were so limited on what we could afford that I had to be sure we were getting as much as we could for every dime we spent. It got so bad that real estate agents were getting angry that I could tell what a house was worth after seeing only two rooms. I kept busy with my mother going shopping and doing a few things around her house. When the weather was nice, I walked Rachel down to the pond to feed the ducks and geese. I had to stay busy. If I didn't have anything to do, I'd end up thinking negative thoughts. When I did, I hated my life.

CHAPTER NINE

1992

DESPERATION

It took two years of looking for something in a good area that we could afford. He thought I was crazy to keep looking but just when he thought I would never find anything, we got a call from one of the real estate agents I had been working with. The house was less than a quarter mile from our apartment. It needed a lot of work but the price was right. He worked hard on the house and worked overtime. I kept working nights. I thought that we would finally be happy again, that somehow having a home of his own would make things better for him and give

him a different outlook on life. I didn't know that buying a house was another stressful thing that would make Jack's condition worse.

We started having a hard time financially. The responsible part of Jack was taken captive by increased dependence on drugs and alcohol. I knew that I had to get a full time job to get out of the mountain of bills. There was no way on earth I was going to lose the house. I spent too much time and energy looking for it. Rachel was going to live in a nice neighborhood and go to a good school. I was not going to let Jack take that from her or me. We were innocent in all of the mess. By then we were doing without him as a husband and father. I thought that we already lost enough and suffered enough because of his illness. If we lost the house I knew that I would never be able to get over it. I knew that whatever love I still felt for him would have turned to hatred. I also knew that I was perfectly capable of getting a decent job to make ends meet while Jack was blowing more money drinking and doing drugs.

The ice cream place was closing for the season and I didn't know how we were going to make it through the winter. I prayed so hard that my body was going back and forth. My hands were sweating and I could feel the heat in my face. All of a sudden peace washed through me. I didn't know what to expect but I knew it would be okay.

Our friend Ellen called to tell me that a job had opened up where she worked in the accounting department for a group of psychiatrists. She was the receptionist. I had an interview and was hired despite the fact I was nervous. Ellen decided that she wanted the new job and I was hired to take her place. I had answered phones before at various jobs, so I thought it would be easy. I was totally wrong. I just knew that I was supposed to be there for whatever reason God had but I was not the type of person to work for doctors. I just couldn't let them treat me like a slave with their "godlike attitude."

Jack was like a man without a soul. In every detail he was dead inside. I was afraid he wanted to die so badly that he was planning on doing it himself. I felt so worthless. I had a job I hated. I had plenty of experience in the accounting field but none working for psychiatrists. I tried hard but I wasn't very good at it. The money was great, so it was impossible for me to quit. We needed the money too much. I also knew that I was supposed to be working for them.

I had reached total desperation one day. I fell to my knees and prayed. I felt my soul scream out to God for help. I was deeply religious and firmly believed that all people needed was something to believe in that was bigger and stronger than any problem they had. Most of the people did not realize how much they were loved by the One who sent them here. So many times I wanted to open up my big mouth and tell them that all they needed was faith. These people were being torn apart by life and I grieved for them. It was another reason to hate the job. People who were in pain surrounded me nine hours a day. Listening to problems on the phone and in the office and then going home to another one in pain was almost too much to take.

I tried to keep it all inside of me and not let anyone know. I did a good job of hiding it until things got so bad with Jack I had to talk to someone. I talked to Ellen and she told me that one of the other girls in the office had a husband that was an alcoholic. Debbie was friendly to me and although I was reluctant to talk to her, the opportunity came. She had just gotten off the phone with her husband and was clearly upset. I learned about her problems and told her mine. We ended up best friends. We had mutual interest and beliefs, as well as heartaches. Having two friends in the office made working there easier.

One Saturday I was in a good mood but Jack had taken off for the day. I brought Rachel over to my mother's house. I went home and waited for Jack. I was determined to confront him

and demand that he go to a rehab. He was drinking all the time and looked like hell. He had gotten skinner and looked like a homeless man. At first I was calm and talked to him rationally, but he wouldn't look at me. He kept looking at the TV as if I wasn't even there. I got angry and started to scream at him. He didn't hear me. He didn't care that I said either he go to the hospital or get out of the house. He told me that he wasn't going to be around much longer anyway. I asked him what he was talking about. He told me that he would be dead soon. I heard the words come out of him before, but it was different this time. I was sickened and sure that he was planning on doing it himself.

I went to the hospital where I worked and went to the crisis center. I just needed to know what I should do. I was so confused. He looked dead inside. I knew he wasn't drunk. I thought he may be high on drugs, but I wasn't sure. I couldn't get the image of his dead body on the floor out of my head. What would I do if he did commit suicide? How could I live with myself if I just let it happen? So many others had committed suicide before him. Was he so miserable that alcohol and drugs stopped giving him enough relief? I still loved him but I knew that I wasn't enough to take the pain out of his eyes. Nothing I did was enough.

The councilor listened to what I had to say and then asked me who I thought I was. She wanted to know why I thought I was God and could save Jack's life. I got angry. I told her she was in the wrong line of work. I didn't think I was God but I wouldn't be a very good Christian if I didn't try to help my own husband. I wanted to slap her face. I slammed the door on my way out instead. I was livid. I couldn't believe someone with that kind of attitude was there to "help" people.

I went to the police station. I knew I had to do something. The feeling I had about Jack committing suicide was getting stronger as I drove the car. I told officer at the desk that Jack was

a Vietnam vet with PTSD and that I was afraid for him. The officer and two others talked with me in their break room. I recognized one of them from the veteran's events that I had been to with Jack. I knew that he was a Vietnam vet and felt comfortable talking to him. After a while I filled them in on what was happening and I told them about going to the crisis center at the hospital. I told them that I thought the hospital would help but I ended up so angry that I couldn't wait to tell my boss what happened. One of the officers asked me who I worked for and when I told him, he handed me the phone. He told me to call my boss and have Jack "pink papered" into the hospital.

I called one of the doctors and told him what was going on. I guess I did a good job covering up my personal life. He had no idea. He told me that Jack would have to be evaluated and would be admitted to another hospital so that it wouldn't be so hard on me. I had him committed. The police met me at the house and came in. Jack was in the bedroom. The officer was very kind and explained to Jack what was going on. He put the handcuffs on him. Jack looked at me and said "thank you" and meant it. He was happy I did it. I knew I was right to be so worried.

I got a call from a woman at the hospital that night and she told me that I was wrong about Jack. She said that Jack was only suicidal when he was high. I thought that the entire world had just gone crazy. I was trying to save the life of a man who was ill and I was taking grief from one person after another who was supposed to be helping people like Jack! I asked the woman if he was high when they took him out of the house. She said that he was. I asked her what her problem was. If she couldn't see that he could have taken his own life that night then she shouldn't have the job she had. She told me that they were going to release him but he wanted to stay on his own even though I had violated his civil rights. She wanted to know who I

thought I was trying to save his life. I told her that I was the wife of a very ill man and nothing was going to stop me from helping him. Then it dawned on me that she was the same woman at the crisis center. I asked her if she was and she confirmed it. I thought Jack was at another hospital and couldn't understand what it had to do with her. She told me that the police brought him to the crisis center first and then to the other hospital. She had to be contacted after he was admitted. I told her she was an ass and that I was going to inform my boss about her attitude. She asked me who I worked for. She changed her attitude when I told her. I reported her. Jack stayed in the hospital for a week. I dreaded him coming home.

He ended up in and out of local rehabs. AA meetings and the rehabs were a waste of time. He tried to talk about what was bothering him and why he drank. No one could help him back then. I had to decide if I could leave him for good. Walk away from the house and him. The problem was my conscience. I knew that PTSD was an illness. If he had cancer and changed due to depression or medication, I couldn't leave him. To me, this illness was just as bad. It was killing him. It was taking away everything that I loved about him. I decided to stay and fight.

Things were okay for us for a while. It was a bad winter and Jack worked a lot of overtime. Rachel was in nursery school and my mother helped out picking her up after school and taking care of her until I got home. I really hated being away from her. By the time I got home and we had dinner, it was time to give her a bath and put her to bed. I knew I had to work but it was torture. I ended up losing the job. I was so happy that they let me go. I actually thanked my boss. He told me that he liked me and was sorry that it didn't work out. I wondered what took them so long to do it. I couldn't quit because of the money. They solved my problem.

I thought it was ironic that God put me there only as long as I needed to be there and as soon as possible, He got me out of there.

I ended up doing temp work for neurosurgeons. These doctors were totally amazing. The patients were a profound testament to their skill. Still they were down to earth and humble. I was sure that working for different kinds of doctors gave me a view of life that I would not have had. It made me realize that no matter how bad I thought my problems were, there would always be others whose troubles were greater. I started to look at people differently. I knew that when I looked at someone there was something of value in each of them that compelled them to carry on with their life and fight. Every job I had, and I had a lot of them, I learned something. Not just about the job itself, but about people.

Jack got worse. I got another job and stopped doing temp work. I needed something to depend on in my life. The hours were great. I started work after I dropped Rachel off at school and was there to pick her up after. The job was with a small company, close to home. They were flexible with my hours and I could be where Rachel needed me to be for a change. I got involved with her school when she started kindergarten. It was a relief to know that I could be with her more.

As with any small company, it is impossible to keep secrets. I did a good job of keeping my life private at first. Little by little conversations were overheard and bits of my life came out. My coworkers were wonderful and became an extended family. Things between Jack and I however got worse. We were hardly talking. I hated the way I lived. I'd go home from work, Rachel would go off to watch TV or play in her room. I went to the back porch and read. I was so comfortable lying on the bed with the sun beating through the window. It got my mind off problems long enough to fall asleep. It was my quiet time before making dinner and doing

chores. No one was allowed on the porch for the hour of “my time.” I knew that if I didn’t take some time during the day, just for me, I wouldn’t be any good to any one. I was too stressed out.

It was beautiful and relaxing. It was quiet and gave me time to talk to God. I was being buried by problems but I wasn’t afraid. I had so much peace inside despite what the world and life were throwing at me. I knew I wasn’t facing any of it alone. It was as if someone was walking with me every step of the way, watching over each step I took.

I knew that we needed help. I also knew that there was still too much I didn’t know about PTSD. I made some phone calls. I contacted a Veterans Center and started to talk to a councilor named Bill to get some ideas. I felt like a lost child trying to find home without a single clue where I lived. Jack didn’t want anything to do with the government. I convinced him to at least go and talk to Bill. He did reluctantly.

I talked to Bill several times trying harder to understand what happened to Jack. He handed me a pamphlet. “Readjustment Problems Among Vietnam Veterans” by Jim Goodwin, Psy.D. The first page was written like a letter from someone who had PTSD. He told a story about how he felt or couldn’t feel. The Vet would be in one room while his wife was in another. He reported that his wife wanted a divorce and he didn’t really care but he didn’t want to be alone. That was the same point Jack and I had gotten to. There were so many times that I felt he was only with me so that he didn’t have to live alone. The point was that he couldn’t have been more alone. It didn’t matter that we lived under the same roof. Jack was alone with his thoughts and memories because he shut everyone out.

I knew that it could have been written about Jack because it was pieces of him in every line. The list is, depression, isolation, rage, avoidance of feelings-alienation, survival guilt,

anxiety reactions, sleep disturbance and nightmares, and intrusive thoughts. It all clicked. I saw him getting more depressed with each passing year. I felt the walls built by him that isolated everyone from reaching him. His temper over little things and his avoidance to talk about the way he was acting suddenly made sense. His problems sleeping through the night and nightmares made sense. I was living with all of it and seeing it.

It said that, "Most Vietnam veterans have adjusted well to live back in the United States following their wartime experiences. That's a tribute to these veterans who faced a difficult homecoming to say the least. However a very large number of these Veterans haven't made it all the way home from the war in Southeast Asia. By conservative estimates, at least half a million Vietnam veterans still lead lives plagued by serious war related readjustment problems. Such problems crop up in a number of ways, varying from veteran to veteran. Flashbacks, feelings of alienation, or anger, depression, loneliness and an inability to get close to others, perhaps even suicidal feelings (symptoms). The litany goes on."

As I read it became a blur. I understood what I read however I kept looking for the magic words that would give me back my husband. I just wanted him back the way he was. I was also fully aware that I was dealing with something that was over my head. I was afraid that he would get so bad that he would be one of the statistics and end his own life. I knew how close we came to it before. I didn't know how far over the edge he was.

CHAPTER TEN

HAUNTED

The odds of Jack coming home from Vietnam normal were astronomical. He was too young and too sensitive to be there in the first place. I studied the pamphlet to the point where I was wearing down the pages. I was reading his life story. The depression and the self-medicating, the rage and anger, the distance he kept from me, and the walls that shut me out. It was all there. I wanted to run away from him. I didn't want to look at him and know that he was only half -alive. I couldn't look into his eyes and see his frozen soul staring back from the

emptiness. He didn't love me anymore. I knew that if he couldn't feel anything than love was no longer felt either. He didn't love Rachel. I was sickened thinking that after all the years we spent together, all the heartache, and all that I had given him, was worthless. I was alone. I couldn't understand why I was left paying for something that happened to him. Why did I have to suffer for something I was too young to remember? Every time I looked at him, I knew I was living with a man who was buried alive under the weight of every second he served in Vietnam.

I didn't want to go with him to Boston when he went to the veteran's center. I just didn't have a choice. If he didn't go, he would just keep getting worse. I stopped wanting to help him out of love. I was forced to help him out of desperation. I was shocked one day after Jack went to see Bill. Bill wanted to talk to me after. Jack waited in the waiting room and I went into his office. He told me that Jack needed to get help soon because of all he had been through. He told me he checked the records and there was a lot that happened but he couldn't tell me about it. Up until then, I thought there was nothing more than the bombing of the base.

Bill knew what he was talking about and helped me convince Jack that he needed to go to a VA hospital for treatment and to dry out. I thought that Jack was an alcoholic and drug addict on top of everything else. Bill explained that Jack was doing what most of the sufferers of PTSD do. He was self-medicating to kill off the flash backs and nightmares. When something went wrong that he couldn't handle, he reached for what he grew to trust. The local rehabs did nothing for him. He had to go to the V. A. hospital.

The depression had settled in to the point where nothing was good. He was looking at the entire world through a fog, convinced that everyone was the enemy. No human emotion could penetrate the stone cold hardness of his soul. There were no miracles. Guardian Angels had abandoned him. He was no longer worth salvation in his mind. Life was no longer to be

lived. It was an existence. Everything that happened during the day had become personal. The guy driving the other car switching lanes in front of him was personal. If he dropped something, it was a personal attack by an unseen force out to get him. If the phone rang from a wrong number dialed, it was personal. Standing in line was a personal attack from the people who were ahead of him. He had to function but that was all his illness would allow him. When he was home he was not safe from the demons of the day, or the ghosts of the night. Turmoil was a constant companion. Part of him thought he deserved to be miserable with the consequences of his actions. Yet the inherent force that tells us to survive bellowed stronger. He didn't determine the events of his time in Vietnam, yet to him he was responsible for the outcome. Jack was running the "what ifs" through his mind as surely as he had taken responsibility for every single event from the second he was born. If I had been worth more, they would not have done "this." If I were smarter they would not have taken advantage of him, or he would not have made so many stupid mistakes and wouldn't be paying for them now. He thought there must have been something tragically wrong with him that other people could see clearly but he could not. Jack thought the world of his father therefore he was not good enough to compel his father to talk to him about the war or what he was going through. He couldn't see that his mother's coldness was part of her character and not in response to his worth. He escaped into the world that had imprisoned his mind. He just couldn't believe that the actions of others belonged to them and not him. He couldn't see that he was not responsible for bring short changed in his life. The adulterated affirmations had penetrated too deep.

I was fighting all the ghosts chasing him, demanding his attention and taking him from me. It was as if I was fighting a woman who wanted him. Vietnam was the other woman. She had him for a year and wanted him back with her. She wanted to take away all the good

remnants of his soul that she was unable to yank out of him while they were together. I was not going to let her win. Vietnam couldn't have him. As far as I was concerned, I was not about to lose to the mistress of his past. I was not about to allow her to be in his mind instead of me. I was not going to allow her to be in his heart corrupting where I was supposed to be. I would not look into his eyes and see her reflection staring back at me. Every time I looked into his eyes and saw the pain, she was there, calling me to fight her. Vietnam was determined to win and take him away. She didn't know who she was up against. He meant too much to me and I remembered all that she had taken away from me.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1993

DMZ

MY BATTLE BEGINS

He put himself in the hospital for a month. I thought that they would see how bad he was and how much he had been affected by Vietnam. We had health insurance but the hospital wouldn't take his insurance plan. We were broke and facing a month without a paycheck from his job. I couldn't believe that they were making us pay for his treatment. It was over a

thousand dollars! I thought that I would never see a day when it stopped getting worse. It didn't seem to make a bit of difference to anyone on the planet that what was happening was wrong. I knew it had to be done and somehow we would get through it. It wasn't easy. I wasn't making much.

I thought, my God, what else is going to happen? First my husband had a mental illness that no one I knew could understand. My marriage no longer existed. We were total strangers. My daughter didn't have a father. We were broke and our car kept breaking down. I had to drag him there and then they were telling us that it was going to cost us on top of everything else. When he went to private rehabs, the insurance paid. He was a veteran seeking help for a condition caused by war and they were not about to help him unless we agreed to pay. It was totally wrong of them to put a veteran through something like that. The VA hospital was my only hope of him getting help. They could send him away unless we agreed to pay them for something the war caused!

I made arrangements with the mortgage company to pay them late. With what I made and help from my mother we got through it. I had to forget about my pride and called every agency for help. None of them could help us because according to them, we made too much money. I always believed that if you worked hard you wouldn't need help from the government. There I was, suddenly needing help and couldn't get it.

The doctors at the VA hospital thought he had PTSD and tried to evaluate him but every time they scheduled the test, he hid so that aids at the hospital couldn't find him. He was afraid they would keep him if they knew what was going on in his mind. That was a constant fear for him. He told me that was the real reason he never wanted help from the government before. He hated being there but at least it gave me back some hope for him.

Rachel and I went to visit him at least a couple of times a week and we talked on the phone every day. It was a hard time for all of us. At least I had a month of peace in my house. I went to bed without worrying most of the day about Jack. Wondering where he was, who he was with or if he would come home in one piece tore me up. I thought about the way our life together started out. I questioned everything. Had I been blind? Did I overlook signs? I remembered a six-pack of beer sitting in the refrigerator that lasted most of the week. I also remembered the times when some of his friends talked about how he liked to get high. I remembered the times when he did get drunk before we got married. I remembered hearing experts saying that children of alcoholics ended up either marrying the same kind or becoming one of them. Was I stupid? I made a lot of mistakes in my life and paid a high price for them. Was Jack just another mistake?

I tortured myself for the entire month. I realized that I didn't make a mistake with Jack. I knew him too well when we started. There was no possibility that he could have pretended to be something he was not. The experts said that the veterans with PTSD get worse with something very stressful or tragic. I knew it had to have been losing the twins. The question was, "What would turn him around?" Having me loving him wasn't enough. Having Rachel wasn't enough. Having his first house wasn't enough. What was it that he needed to heal? At that point, nothing short of a miracle could help us.

His parents went with me to pick him up from the hospital. Neither of them had much to say to him. His father did tell him that it was time to straighten up. They never asked about PTSD or what the doctors had to say. I think that they just wanted his problem to go away. It was hard for anyone to understand what the illness is like unless they witness it first hand.

When Jack got out of the hospital he went back to work and for a few weeks he was doing better. I was tense. I kept watching the clock when it was getting close to the time he should come home from work. I kept remembering the times I thought he was working, only to find out later that he had been out drinking instead. Too many bad memories flooded back into my mind. All the times he would come home drunk and talking about Vietnam and chanting in Vietnamese kept flashing in my mind. My heart relaxed when I heard the door open at the right time. He was working and started to talk to his AA sponsor again. He looked more normal. I had hope for us again.

Then we found out that his sister Julie had cancer. She was only 48. It was hard going to visit her. She always had long hair and was very pretty. We watched her fading away. She lost so much weight and her hair fell out from chemo. I was worried about Jack getting through it. He was always close to her. I knew she meant a great deal to him. She meant a lot to me too. She passed away in February. At the wake and the funeral, I was worried about the whole family. I had to look at Jack's parents, stunned at the fact they had to bury a child of theirs. It wasn't supposed to happen that way. I had to look at Jack's niece saying good-bye to her mother. She was amazing. She took care of her during the worst moments of the illness at home so she would not die alone.

Jack had been very close to her. Julie spoiled him. When she got married, she took Jack on her honeymoon. She was the only constant in his life, before me anyway. She was there when he was in rehabs and she was there to give him comfort when I couldn't. I had to be strong and firm with Jack so that he could get better and deal with the results of his illness on Rachel and me. I just didn't have room in my heart to soften for him. She did. I was glad she was there for him. He needed to feel loved by someone. She was gone and he was grieving for the loss. I

didn't know exactly what he was feeling because he wouldn't talk about it but I knew that he missed her. Julie had given Rachel a big stuffed bear that she loved. Rachel would cuddle the bear and Jack would become saddened by the sight. He would ask if he could cuddle Rosie. Rachel would look at him and say "Sure Daddy but give her back to me!"

Jack's father started to feel weak and sick. I got him to the doctors and found out that he had cancer as well. He had lung cancer from asbestos. The doctor said that if he were stronger, he would operate but he was weak and drained from all that happened. I knew Jack couldn't handle any of it. I had to take over. Jack's mother wasn't capable either. For the first few weeks, I took him for tests and doctors appointments. I didn't need something else to deal with but because of the way he was, it was no burden for me.

He got weaker and the cancer moved quickly. He was admitted to a hospital and transferred to a hospice. The next two months were hard. I really loved his father. I thought he was a wonderful man. Jack's mother wanted Jack to stay with her. She had been ill for several years with emphysema. Although I understood that she was afraid to be alone, I knew that it was a bad idea. His mother couldn't understand, or wouldn't understand that Jack was no longer capable of taking care of anyone. We tried to have meals on wheels deliver her food and have a visiting nurse go to see her. She was stubborn and refused to have strangers in her apartment. Thankfully, Jack's other sister Jean came up from Florida to be with her. That helped take some of the load off Jack but I ended up taking care of everyone. Jack was numb. We would go to visit his father and Jack would look at me the way a child looks at a mother, helplessly. His father died after two months, and I thanked God that this wonderful man didn't suffer.

We buried him in April. I made the arrangements and got the house ready for people to come back after the funeral. Jack got ready and told me that he would be going with his mother

and sister. I felt like a leper. He just walked out the door and left me standing there. How could he leave me to go alone! After that I couldn't stand the sight of him, knowing that I meant nothing to him. I had given too much to him and his family without getting anything back.

Jean had to go back to Florida to be with her husband and their business. His mother wanted him to live with her and was pulling at him day and night. I understood that his mother meant a lot to him but she was breaking up a family. I thought that she was a cold-hearted woman in the first place. Now I was convinced. I thought about the times we tried to buy a two-family house or a house with an in-law apartment for them. She put up such an argument and refused to move. We didn't have enough money to renovate our house to fit her in.

I had to work and so did Jack. I broke down and let him move in with her. It felt as if Rachel and I meant nothing to him at all. If she was all he cared about then that was where he should be. I thought she should have moved into a nursing home or a senior citizens center. She wouldn't hear a word I said. I tried to explain to her that she couldn't afford the apartment and needed to move. She wouldn't hear that either. Jack said that it would have been different if my mother were the one who needed help. I reminded him that she had been a widow for a long time. I needed some peace in my house. With her constant phone calls and her inability to understand that Jack wasn't well, I knew it would be impossible.

I didn't know how any of it was going to work out. It didn't take long before his mother got sick and was admitted into the hospital. I had to talk to her doctor about what to do with her. He told me that she needed to be in a nursing home. So she went in the nursing home, Jack was living in her apartment and I was taking care of everyone again. We saw each other and visited his mother together but it was hard. I wasn't sure what to do. I was tired of living alone. Even when Jack was home, I was alone. I was so hurt that it ended up the way it did. It wasn't

supposed to be like that! I wasn't supposed to be so empty! There were times I felt like a monster. He just lost his sister and father and I couldn't bear the thought of him in my house. I hated him for his neglect. I hated him for his coldness. I wished he had died so that I could stop suffering for him. I had to come to terms with my hunger. Love, passion, affection from him had been gone for so long that I couldn't remember the way it felt to be in his arms. I couldn't have an affair because I was married and it would go against my beliefs. I didn't think that I could take any more pain. It hurt to remember the way he was. It hurt to think about what it was like for him to live the way he was. It even started to hurt to hear him say, "I love you" when I knew he couldn't feel anything any more.

There were nights when I thought that he was more trouble than he was worth. That thought made me sick. I couldn't believe that things had gotten so bad that I let horrible thoughts like that enter my mind. I would look at Rachel and wonder what it all was doing to her. She never knew the Jack that loved her. She never knew what he was like before the illness. Could I keep us together or was it time to just end it all? Then I imagined her ten years older and having to answer her questions about her father. I wouldn't be able to handle the fact that I sent him away. It wasn't something that family does to each other. I wasn't sure if I could keep being a single parent and give her enough love to make up for the love she would never feel from her father. I prayed that God figured it out. I couldn't see into Jack's heart. I didn't know what he still felt or if he felt anything at all. I prayed that he stay away from us if there was no love left in him. I thought that I would have some sign leading me in the right direction.

After a few months of talking, he told me that he decided to file another claim and that he wanted to go back to the hospital for help. He told me that he realized he didn't want to spend the rest of his life "not living." He told me how much Rachel and I meant to him. I looked at

him, standing like a helpless, lost soul. I searched my heart. I knew that I would never really have him out of my heart or out of my life. Still I was tired of suffering because of him.

We barely had time to grieve for his father when his other sister had been diagnosed in Florida with cancer as well. We ended up back together after several months. It was the last time we separated. It didn't make sense to live in separate houses when we never stopped talking to each other. Jack's sister passed away the following January. His mother passed away in March the same year. Thirteen months and four deaths I didn't think that Jack would survive all that. His illness was a blessing at that point. He was unable to feel the tremendous pain. We ended up making the funeral director tired of seeing us especially when my aunt passed away during the rest of the funerals. He saw me five times in a little over a year. We also had to deal with the thoughts that Jack would be next to get cancer. Agent Orange was a constant worry after that. His whole family died of different kinds of cancer and his mother with emphysema.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1994-1995

WALKING WOUNDED

During this time, he filed a claim with the Veterans Administration and was tested for the level of his illness. It wasn't good. I thought that they would start to treat him and he'd get better. I trusted the system. Jack started to trust the doctors to a certain extent but held back. He started to call himself "another crazy Nam vet." By the spring I decided that it was time for me to get selfish or I wouldn't be any good to anyone. I was getting burnt out. Feeling sorry for myself became an alternate career move. I knew I needed to take some time for myself out of the day. After work, I had my quiet time again. I had given it up for a while with all that was going on and no time for myself. I fixed up the back porch, which was enclosed. I made a comfortable place out of a cot and some old table. I covered the cot with a bedspread and six pillows. I would grab the newspaper or a book in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. I announced that I was not to be bothered when I was on the porch and if I fell asleep, I was to be

left alone. Rachel and Jack knew that I was serious. Everyday I relaxed, I read, I prayed and usually got so comfortable that I fell asleep.

I searched my soul for an answer. If God wanted me to stay with Jack then I needed to know why. I believed that I was supposed to stay because every time I wanted to end it, something would happen and my heart would turn soft again. I kept asking when my prayers would be answered. One day I heard it loud and clear. "Wait." Rachel was in her room and Jack was in the shower. I thought that the voice was one of the neighbors. I looked out the window but there wasn't anyone outside. I smiled and thought that I was going crazy on top of everything else. I argued with God. I told Him that I was too tired to fight and too weak to continue with living half a life. I reminded Him how bad it was when I was sick and wanted to die. I was feeling just about that low again. I was also worried about being able to keep giving Rachel what she needed to thrive. I asked God why He wanted us to suffer for Jack. I wanted to know what made him so important that we had to go through hell. Two people were paying the price for Jack. I realized that only Jack and God knew where the illness ended and Jack took over after. What part of him was suffering from PTSD and what part of him just didn't give a damn? The answer came to me. It was all connected and we were connected to Jack. Rachel would not be on this earth as she was without us as her parents. It was up to me to do the best I could for all of us, but I didn't want the job anymore. I didn't want to be the care giver. I wanted to be cared for. I wanted more from Jack than he could give and there were moments that I cried just to release the pressure. There were times when I soaked my pillow, but there were also times when I laughed. I was still alive and found that somewhere deep inside there was more strength of character than I had ever realized before. I actually felt proud of myself.

We couldn't believe that his claim was turned down over and over despite the diagnosis of the Veterans Administration's own doctors. At one point they claimed his condition was due to all the deaths in his family. I tried to point out the fact that a private doctor had diagnosed him with PTSD in 1990 and he was admitted into their hospital in 1993, before everything happened in his family. I had been seeing all the changes in him since 1982 when we met. How could they be so stupid? We continued to be billed for his treatment. I tried to prove that we couldn't pay, but they said, by their standards we were responsible. They kept taking our tax return to pay the bills. Our insurance company told us that because of the diagnosis it was the responsibility of the government, not theirs. I had to fight Jack to keep going for treatment and fight the government for him. It was nearly impossible to get him to go to the doctors when the same government was making him pay for what was caused by his service to them. It didn't make sense. He was tested for Agent Orange and the records showed that there had been spraying in the area he was in. He already knew that, but he didn't expect what the doctor told him. "There are no adverse health affects at this time." the doctor said. In other words, some day there will be.

The Veterans Administration's criteria are that the veteran has to have been in a life-threatening situation. They would have to have been in a combat environment. Jack was in life threatening situations daily. He was stationed on Camp Eagle and traveled to Camp Evans with the 101st Airborne Division. To hear Jack tell it, the only thing that bothered him was the bombs. They have tests to show if a veteran's problems were because of service or other factors. Sounds simple, but it isn't. There are claims with the Veterans Administration that after years stuck in red tape are not settled. Jack had a friend that was disabled to the point where he couldn't work at all. His claim had been going on for over ten years and kept getting turned

down. Jack worked with a vet who also had his claim turned down over and over again. Every document has to be right. One doctor told me that for every ten veterans that filed claims, eight drop out of the system out of frustration. It is nerve racking to go through. The doctors at the Veteran's hospital were telling Jack that his illness was because of Vietnam, but the Administration was telling him that it was not.

The denials were hard to understand. Jack wouldn't talk about what happened. I didn't know how to prove the truth. I knew that the bombings affected him but I believed that there was something else to the story. I remembered Bill telling me that Jack had been through a great deal of bad things. I thought the Veteran's Administration would have records of what happened to Jack. None of it made sense. I still believed in the system and kept waiting for someone to tell me that they had made a big mistake and it would be all right. I was fighting a giant with a bubble wand. I kept calling the VA office to at least try to understand how they worked. Every time I was given limited information because I was not the veteran. They kept telling me that Jack had to call them. I kept telling him that he was not capable of fighting for himself and we needed help. At one point I asked for their guidelines in writing. I was told they didn't have any. That it was handled on a case-by-case basis. Then I told them in this case, they needed to deal with me to serve a veteran who needed help. Good point but not good enough.

We went to the Disabled American Veterans Administration for help with the process. We knew we couldn't fight the Veteran's Administration alone. It was not a matter of getting money from them. Although financially it would help, the most important thing was Jack getting help without having to pay for it. I was proud of him for going for help. There was a time when he was actually getting a little better. He seemed to have more times when he enjoyed something. We even started to go out to eat again. Talking about it to someone seemed

to be doing the trick. He held so much of it in for so long. It had taken a long time for him to develop a trust with the doctors to be able to let any of it out.

The denials kept coming from the Veterans Administration. Still he kept going for help. I realized that I was wrong about the way I felt about the doctors I worked for. As long as Jack was getting help for his problem, I had hope. The thoughts I had about doctors who worked on the mind, were no longer a waste of time, they were a necessity. I had developed a relationship with the doctors and the officers at the DAV over the years. They understood that Jack couldn't fight for himself and they had to deal with me. I wrote letters, made phone calls and fought Jack. He started to think it was a waste of time again. He told me that he didn't want anything to do with any of it. He was tired of getting his hopes up. I reminded him what our life was like together and that it wasn't normal.

We no longer acted as a family. He stopped doing things with us again. He disassociated himself and could no longer carry on a simple conversation. I had to fight my family because they couldn't understand what I was trying to tell them about the illness and they only saw how unhappy I was. I knew they had my best interest at heart and they were worried about Rachel. She was quiet many times around them. They wanted me to end the marriage and get on with my life. They knew he was ill and saw him getting worse along with the erosion of our marriage. I was firm. I knew the truth and knew myself. I had to finish the fight. There were so many times when I didn't want to. There were times when I thought about our daughter's needs and my own. We didn't deserve to live the way we did, but then neither did Jack. He didn't deserve to be so unhappy and certainly didn't deserve to be dealt with the way he was from the Veteran's Administration. All we had been through, all that happened to us and I knew that nothing was a sure thing. I didn't know if he would take off and leave me, or go so far

over the edge that nothing could reach him. I didn't know if he would ever look at me again with any resemblance of love in his eyes. Every time he told me he loved me I pulled my emotions further back from him.

There were times during it all that he was helpful and acted like part of a family instead of a disinterested third party. I was getting tired of doing so much around the house and working too hard. He kept telling me to relax. I gave in and made a list of the things I had to do. I told him to pick one thing. He picked doing the laundry. I told him he would have to do it forever. He said he didn't mind because he remembered having to go to the laundry mat when we lived in the apartment. Doing it at home would be easy.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1996

THE SYSTEM

Jack was given a hearing by the Veteran's Administration. The hearing officer asked to see some of the pictures taken on Jack of bunker guard duty and doing sweeps. He asked for copies of the Bronze Star award along with the paper work. He asked Jack if anyone died while he was in Vietnam. Jack looked him dead in the eye and said, "No one I knew." Then he looked down at the floor. The hearing officer was looking for something more than Jack was willing to talk about. He was more interested in Jack's reaction to the question than the answer itself. The service officer with the DAV told us that it looked good. He was proud of Jack for not giving any kind of bravado statement to the hearing officer. I knew it was hard on him. His twitch was pretty bad that day.

I didn't want to get my hopes up but I couldn't let Jack see that I was not hopeful. I trusted the system for too long and ended up kicked in the teeth for it. I believed the councilor at the Veteran's Center when he said that Jack needed to go to the VA. Up until then our insurance company was paying for his treatment. All I cared about was Jack getting better. I didn't care if they gave him disability or not, just as long as they were treating his illness. I trusted all the doctors when they told us that it was clearly PTSD because of Vietnam. I trusted the DAV when they told us it was a good claim and shouldn't take long to approve.

Most of the time I had to take time off from work to take him to the doctor's appointments. That was hard but my boss was very understanding. We made the half-hour drive with Jack in the passenger seat, too nervous to drive. A million things crashed around in my brain. I wanted it to just be over. I wanted him back, but not in a year, a week or a day. I wanted him back the way he was without another second going by.

It is amazing what changes happen to a person. Facing Jack's problems and sticking it out made me realize something about myself that had to be changed. It was time to make the same commitment to my current job and stick it out. All the other jobs I had, I ran away. I would quit the job and move on to another one. I was always good at what I did and tried to give 100% but I never felt that my effort was appreciated. I was always taken for granted and devalued. I was feeling the same way about my current job. I didn't want to run away this time and end up learning a job all over again. I didn't want to start from scratch. I was just going to make my attitude different and stick it out.

It took five years of going to the VA for help before Jack eventually dropped out of treatment. The denials were like a knife in his back. He couldn't take it any more. It was causing us financial hardship and he lost time at work going to the appointments along with the times he

couldn't function at all. There were so many times that he couldn't bring himself to get up off the couch. There were times when I saw it coming. He would become edgy, agitated and quick to anger, then silent, motionless holding his head in his hands. I was losing the battle. The fight had gone out of me and I was looking for a reason to stay with a man who could no longer be a husband or a father. I was in all respects a single parent. I had stress at home and a stressful job. It tore at me knowing that no matter what I did, I would not be happy. If I left him, I would have felt guilty for turning my back on part of my family. If I stayed I knew that I wouldn't be happy knowing what I would never have again. I didn't know if I could do it. I didn't know if I could keep looking in the mirror as the years left their mark on me, knowing that I would never feel desire or passion again.

It was like living on a roller coaster. I would start to relax when Jack would level off and he would be easy to live with, then just when I was getting over the bad days, they would come again. It was as if he couldn't stand being emotionally close to me. There were times of the year that seemed worse for him. November was bad, the month he went to Vietnam and the month he came home. It was also the same month that Camp Evans had the 122mm rocket and mortar attack. February was a bad month for him. So was April. The other months were bad but those three months seemed the worse for him. I suppose I could have become an angry, bitter woman. I could have taken out the unfairness of my life on others. I could have but I didn't. I credit God and Jesus, as well as an understanding of the Bible for providing me with the strength and courage to stay true to who I was. Rachel was wonderful, bright, funny, sensitive, loving and an "A" student. I tried extra hard to show her how special she was and how much she was loved. I tried to always explain things to her so that she would know that none of what was happening with her father was her fault and that it had nothing to do with her. She was my

greatest joy and heartache. I wish that she could have known Jack before the illness got the best of him. She deserved a father. To feel loved by him and given attention by him. How do you explain to a child that a grown up can keep changing? She wanted to know why I married him. I told her how different he was back then and tried to explain what happened to him. I tried to be open and honest with her and my emotions as well. It seemed to be a good idea for her to understand that although I was upset with him, he still mattered to me. We lived our life as if he wasn't a part of it. In all respects he wasn't. He simply lived under the same roof.

Rachel was getting older and wanted a brother or sister to keep her company. She was shy away from me and I knew that she was lonely. I felt terrible for her but I knew children who were the "only child" and they survived. I talked Jack into getting a dog. Rachel always wanted a golden retriever and we found one. We named him Brandon. She fell in love with him after a few days. He was big and as mild as they come. I thought Brandon would be good for Jack too. I wasn't prepared for what having him would do for me.

As with most big dogs, he needed to have room to run. We lived near the woods. I took him for walks nearly every day so that he could get out in the air and feel the wind on his coat. It didn't matter what time of day it was but as soon as he saw the leash in my hand he came running. The walks made me feel less stressed. I started to walk for Brandon and ended up doing it just for me because I needed it. Some days the walks took longer than others, if the weather was nice most of my neighbors were out and wanted to talk. I was always very outgoing so I enjoyed it but Brandon got impatient. Soon we were at the pond. It was far enough into the woods that the sounds of the city were blocked off. On windy days the water was rough and the wind beat my skin. On calm days the water was still and reflected the clouds

with streams from the sun. I could imagine what the world looked like before humans messed the perfection up so much. I talked to God more and found peace there.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1997

FORCED OUT

I did my best to make a normal life for Rachel. During the summer, I took a day off every week to do something with her. We would go out to a movie, shopping or go down the beach. One day I took off from work so that I could take her to Maine on a Beanie Baby hunt. She really wanted Erin, the green bear and I couldn't seem to be in the right place at the right time around where we lived. Rachel asked for so little, so when she really wanted something, I moved heaven and earth to get it. Jack heard us talking the night before. He still had some sick time coming to him. He decided to use a day and go with us.

The three of us, set off to Maine for the day on a quest to find a stuffed animal. It was one of the rare times he wanted to go with us. He was worried about me making the long drive. He was actually worried about me. When good things came out of him, I took them as a sign and a blessing. It turned out to be a nice day together. We didn't fight and he didn't snap. We roamed around the mall and little stores on the way. We stopped for lunch and Rachel was feeling that we would never find Erin. We found some Beanie Babies that she wanted but couldn't find Erin.

We were driving back home and Rachel was so disappointed. I told Jack that I saw an Erin in the mall near where we lived but that she cost \$50.00. Jack started to laugh. He couldn't believe that we went all the way to Maine and spent the entire day running around when I already knew where to get it. I realized that I should have just bought the bear when I saw it but I had a hard time spending money. So our next stop was the mall and Rachel had her Erin. I was suddenly glad that I made us go to Maine. It gave us all a chance to be together just to make Rachel happy. That was the way it was supposed to be. I thought that Jack felt the same way. He held my hand while he was driving home and kept looking in the rear view mirror at Rachel holding onto the bear. In his mind, he accomplished something monumental. He made his "baby girl" happy. She wanted so little out of life and when she got it she was overjoyed. I felt so warm inside looking at him. For those few hours, all the bad times went out of my head. It was just us, a family, enjoying a day together. We were just like everyone else on the road and on the earth.

When we got home there was a message on the answering machine. It was the VA hospital. They were following up on why Jack had not been there in such a long time. I watched Jack as he listened. The color drained from his face as his eyes glassed over. I held my temper.

I didn't think that seeing me getting angry at the injustice would do any good at that point. I decided to save it for the next day. I couldn't sleep at all that night. I kept thinking about what I wanted to say to the hospital. That I felt all the years of waiting for Jack to get better, all the heartache and hope, all of it was for nothing.

He was paying a high price for his service to America. He was paying for his act of enlisting to carry on the legacy of his father and uncles. We were paying for him. I was paying for losing someone like Jack in my life. I knew men like him were rare in this world. All that I loved about him was trapped under the years of the illness's appetite for his character. A war between the devil and God were battling it out for his soul. He would not be defeated easily. I hated the system.

I called the hospital and wanted to know how they could have called him after forcing him out of care. To say I was furious with the person who answered the phone would be an understatement. They tortured him out of the system. There he was, a Vietnam Vet, seeking help for what VA doctors deemed to be caused by his service and they took his money. He couldn't afford to lose a dime. We were lost in a web of misunderstandings. I had been begging for help for him. I called his doctors and told them why he couldn't keep getting treated for his illness. They suggested to me that he go back into private treatment so our medical insurance would pay. I told them that because he was diagnosed with service connected PTSD they would no longer cover treatment. Even if they did, I knew that I could never get Jack to see a stranger. It was hard enough to get him there in the first place. How could I tell him he would have to start it all over again? Our hope of a miracle happening of healing was looking as bleak as hope of him getting the help he needed from the VA.

I received a call back from the second person in charge of the hospital. He wanted to know everything. As I filled him in, the fight came back into me and the battle began again. It was wrong. It was simply wrong that Jack had to go through any of it. It was wrong that I had to fight for something that should have come easily.

I was relentless. I kept in contact with the assistant administrator and Jack's doctors. I kept in touch with the DAV and kept Jack's claim moving. I didn't tell Jack what I was doing. As far as Jack was concerned, it was over. He didn't know that I decided to fight again. I couldn't tell him and have him be turned down again. I had spent too many years believing in the system that was destroying him. I knew the truth and would not give up until the VA saw the truth as well. I was frustrated with the system and the fact that the VA expected to be paid regardless of the diagnosis without an approved disability rating from them. I wrote to senators and told them what the system designed to help the veterans was doing to them instead. I wrote to the newspaper, knowing that the general public had no idea what was going on. The editor told me that it sounded like "sour grapes" just because my husband's claim was turned down. I called at least five different organizations. Although they were shocked by the story, there was nothing they could do. The system needed to be changed but no one would do more than listen.

I also had to face the truth that Jack hated me for making him go to the VA and starting what turned out to be hell for him. He wanted me to let go of it all. He didn't want to go to the VA in the first place. He could not forgive me for pushing him and for getting up his hopes. If I gave up on his claim, I was giving up on him and our marriage. I believed that if his claim got approved, I would have some hope of us having a marriage again. I was feeling like a complete total failure. I kept fighting to save him and my marriage while I was suffering and watching Rachel grow up without a father. I remembered what it was like to be a little girl without a hero

for a father. Without being cherished and protected by a male role model. I carried that longing into adulthood. Knowing that I had missed something so many take for granted, the love of a father. We were all suffering. The answer to our problems was within reach but something was missing.

Each day it got worse for me to go home after work. I kept waiting for the end in my mailbox. I kept waiting for my prayers to be answered and finally finding justice for Jack. I kept silent with the weight of the world crushing me with the responsibility I had to carry alone. During the day, I acted strong and tried very hard not to let anything show to anyone. At night, I cried and I prayed. Sometimes I asked God why. Sometimes I asked myself why I bothered to pray at all when nothing was getting better.

My well-intentioned friends kept telling me that I should leave Jack. They had seen the suffering go on too long. I tried hard to act as if I was happy. I took pride in my job and stayed on top of every situation that came along. I didn't complain about my life or the lack of a life unless it was just a really bad day and I felt totally sorry for myself. My tears were held for the privacy of my room.

I was getting so tired of fighting. It seemed as if I had to fight everyone when none of it was necessary. I even had a fight with my brother Peter. He didn't want to hear anything about PTSD or what Jack was going through. He seemed more concerned with the strangers he helped through his job than his own brother-in-law. He was a councilor working with the underprivileged. Yet he had shown no compassion for me or for Jack. I was so hurt that my own brother could be so cold. I walked out of my mother's house where we were visiting and realized that I just shut the door on Peter emotionally. He was my brother and I was supposed to feel connected to him, but I didn't. He became my brother by blood only.

Peter talked to someone he worked with about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and she told him that she felt sorry for me. She said, "Oh my God, your poor sister." He told me that he was sorry but it was too late. I had tried too long to get him to give a damn about my family and me. The hurt had gone too deep to get over it. I couldn't forgive him easily. He was supposed to care about me and be supportive, not attack me and treat me like a second-class citizen. I could still hear his words reverberate in my ears, "You don't know what you're talking about! You don't know anything!" His anger and hostility directed toward me as if I was just some insignificant underling. He couldn't see that I was living with it on a daily basis. He didn't want to realize that I had been studying and investigating it since I fell in love with Jack. I was just his kid sister that didn't know anything.

In an odd way Peter's attitude made me decide that I needed to do something with my life so that I wouldn't have to depend on Jack since our marriage was such a mess. I knew that computers would be needed in whatever line of work I ended up doing. I started to go to night school to be certified. At first I didn't think that I would get it. I had been on a different kind of computer system for twenty years. This was an entirely new world. I didn't realize how much I knew about them and the instructors made it easy. I flew through the classes. I was actually proud of myself.

During the weekend Rachel and I would spend most of it with my mother. We'd go shopping on Saturday and to church almost every Sunday. I thought it was wonderful that Rachel and my mother were so close. I never knew my grandparents. They passed away before I was born. Rachel was still at the age when she didn't mind being with us. It was second nature to her since she had spent most of her life being with my mother a great deal. I thought it was

good for my mother as well. Rachel was born so soon after my father's death that I think she helped my mother heal. Rachel was good for everyone.

Rachel was proud of me when I finished school. I think it enforced the fact that learning was important. She had been a good student right from the start but she tried even harder.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1998

TRUTH

Jack got a letter from the Veteran's Administration informing him that his claim had been sent to Washington to be reviewed. I thought the end was in sight. Without a disability rating of 30% or more Jack was not entitled to free care at the hospital. That was all I expected. I called the DAV and they said that it was a good thing. It was nothing for me to worry about. They said it would be over soon. A few months went by and we kept waiting. Jack kept getting worse. Hope was a distant memory.

The case was sent back to the Boston office with a copy of the remand sent to us. Washington tells the regional office handling the claim what they still need to do, or they totally turn down the claim if the regional office had done everything they needed to do. The regional office still had work to do. The answer was finally clear. They said there was no record of Jack receiving the Bronze Star Award. His records had him listed as a clerk typist and without a combat infantryman badge or the award, all he was to them was a typist. They could not justify his claim of suffering from life threatening situations as simply a clerk.

I couldn't believe their records were so messed up that they didn't know what he did or what went on where he was. I saw the pictures of him on bunker guard duty and doing sweeps holding a machine gun. I stared at the documents of his award. It was all right in front of me. I was holding the Army orders, the citation and the award itself. I held the medal in my hand. The VA saw the papers! The DAV saw the papers! I stared at it. Then it hit me. All the documents I was looking at had one wrong number in his social security number. I suddenly felt ill. I asked Jack if he knew about it. He did. They told him they would correct it when they gave it to him so long ago. They didn't fix it all the way. It showed up on his separation documents, his DD214, which led him to believe they did what they were supposed to do. He never thought about the mistake again.

I blamed myself. All the suffering and the answer was in my hands all the time. If they thought he was lying about the award, then they would assume he was lying about the trauma. The wording from the VA on all the other denials was confusing to say the least. I pulled out all the denials and re-read each of them. I finally understood what they were talking about. It all came down to one number. Numbers were part of my life as I do accounting for a living. This one number led to years of needless emotional suffering, financial suffering and torture. Jack

was left without any hope of getting better, condemned to living in hell alone with his demons. I was left without a husband, companion and lost my best friend. Rachel was raised without a real father.

I called the DAV and told the one handling the claim at that point what we found out. They kept changing claims from one service officer to another. The one I talked to on the phone claimed that Jack could have forged the documents considering that he was a clerk typist. I told him he was out of his mind. I said that if he were smart enough to fabricate the award, he would be smart enough to use his right social security number. I slammed the phone into the receiver and paced the floor. I could feel my blood pressure rushing to my head. I called the head of that DAV office and told him what happened. He had me FEDEX the documents to him and told me he would take care of the mess. He told me that the other service officer had no right to suggest that Jack fabricated the award.

Jack's case ended up with the one he saw in the first place who was wonderful and Jack felt comfortable talking to. Bob felt so terrible that Jack had to go through so much. I knew he would fight hard for Jack.

The documents were taken to the VA. They said they would check into it. I called the assistant administrator at the VA hospital and told him what I found out. I thought he would be interested. He asked me for a copy of the records so that he could see what he could do. I sent them and soon after he wrote to me. He gave me the name and address of a general he contacted. I made copies and mailed them. Less than a month later the general's assistant called me and told me that he would have the award corrected.

I was fighting to keep it a secret from Jack. He couldn't take any more disappointments. I also started to investigate the war on the Internet. I found a government sight with veteran's

claims and appeals. I couldn't believe all the stories I was reading. I heard there were thousands of veterans with claims in the system. There were just too many. I was fully aware that behind each claim there was a person with a life on the line, being tortured by the system. There was probably a family paying the price along with the veteran. I felt about as low as I could get.

One night I had just gotten off line when the phone rang. It was my brother's mother-in-law. My brother Peter was rushed to the hospital. I raced there praying for him and praying that I wouldn't get a ticket for speeding on the highway. I still loved him simply because he was my brother, but I no longer felt any connection to him. By the time I got to the hospital, he was gone. He was only 42. He had several operations. During the last one, a blood clot broke off from his leg and got into his heart. They found out that he had a hole in his heart. They operated and he recovered. He had been on medication and was doing okay. He had another heart attack.

I was more worried about my mother getting through it than anyone else. I think that after all the deaths in such a short time, I was numb. Two months before my brother died, we buried my cousin who passed away at 52. There were no more shocks that could affect me. It did make me think more about life. I thought I needed to be strong for my mother. I knew my brother Alexander felt the same way. We did a good job keeping it all together for our mother's sake. It wasn't until we were at the grave site where my father was buried nearby. I took a flower arrangement to his grave and totally lost it emotionally. I couldn't stop crying. Two people were buried there that I never felt loved by. I knew they loved me but they didn't know me. They didn't love me for who I was or what I had inside because neither of them ever got to know me.

It consumed me for the following week. I thought about all the times in my life that they were involved or their lack of involvement in my life. I got over being hurt and got angry. I went to the cemetery and had it out with my father first. I told him that although he hurt me, he didn't destroy me. I understood him. I forgave him. As for Peter, I felt sorry for him. He could have been close to us but he pushed us away with sarcasm and selfishness. I knew that he was my brother and thought that we were supposed to be close. That was what a family was, especially a family like ours. We were not close. I finally realized that the feelings of my inadequacies were gone. It wasn't that I wasn't worth being loved by my father or brother. It was their inability to love that separated us. I was willing to love them for what they were inside yet for whatever reason, they couldn't do the same. I forgave both of them and forgave myself. There was no law that forced me to feel any different than I did. They hurt me. It no longer mattered if they meant it or not. They did and I forgave them. They couldn't hurt me anymore. I let them both go in peace.

I thought about the way they were and started to think about what makes people so different. My brother Alexander and I were always too much alike. We all lived in the same house yet Peter was so different. I thought about the soul. The soul of a person is supposed to go to Heaven. What does the soul take with it? That question led to what does the soul hold while on the earth. We are all searching for something that we are missing. Then I figured it out.

Our soul is sent from God on the very second we enter the world. We come from His love and the soul remembers it. As the years pass by and events on the earth form our minds and bodies, we begin to forget where we came from. The total perfect love once felt becomes a void we try everything to fill it with. Our soul holds the love we give and receive and retains the

bonds we make on the earth until we return to the perfect love of God. We didn't know when we would be born no more than we know when we are going to die so it is important what we do with the life while we are here. I have been hurt deeply many times in my life and I have hurt others. I have felt hatred and I am sure that someone out there, at one time or other has hated me as well. I have forgiven and carry no hatred with me. I have shut people out of my life that have no regard for me but bear them no ill will. I have simply removed the opportunity for them to ever affect me again.

I thought that in many ways my father and brother were the same. They gave what they had to give. You would think that each of us has the ability to care but simply choose not to. I had to believe that it was simply not in them. I tried to remember how they were with others. They were the same way. So it wasn't me. It was them. The realization was healing. I grew stronger and felt more complete. Wondering what made them the way they were helped me with my relationship with Jack at least to the extent that I no longer felt it was my fault or testimony to his feelings for me.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1999

JUSTICE

I was in the office pulling my hair out doing too much. It felt as if everyone wanted something from me at the same time with equal importance. I got a call from the DAV. Bob, who had Jack's claim most of the time, asked me if I was sitting down. I thought that it was going to be bad news. I was thinking that the VA found something else to blame instead of Vietnam. He told me that his claim was approved. I screamed! My hand was shaking as I

listened. I looked at John, the sales manager I shared the office with. I had to focus on a human to make sure I wasn't hallucinating. I asked Bob what finally did it. He told me that when I sent him copies of the paper work to back up the Bronze Star Award, he took them to the VA office and told them it was time to do the right thing.

When I got off the phone, John told me that he had just seen someone hit the lottery. He had never seen me so happy. After sharing the office for six years, he knew what I was going through. He knew how hard it was and how hard I worked for it. VINDICATION was mine! All the years of fighting everyone, including my husband, were over and the truth turned into justice. Everyone that told me to give up, everyone that told me I was wrong to fight, they were all WRONG!!! It felt so good. I knew that if I trusted God to get me through doing the right thing that it would work out. There were so many times that I doubted it, faced with all we had been through but in the end, I was right.

I couldn't wait to go home to tell Jack what happened. I finally got him on the phone. I told him the DAV just called. His claim was approved. He couldn't believe it. He thought it had to have been some kind of a mistake. The thought of finally being acknowledged by the government was too hard to take. Nine years after being diagnosed, six years after turning to the government for help with his illness, finally they took responsibility. The approval meant that all the years he suffered, living half a life, were because of his service to his country. All the years of flashbacks, all the nights of broken sleep, all of it was their responsibility.

I thought that if I had known what the VA was talking about with all the denials, none of the suffering we did would have happened. He could have kept getting treated and would not have lost an entire year of treatment. He would not have been told again that he was nothing to the government. I lost so many years fighting him and for him because I couldn't understand

that someone made a mistake over twenty years before. He received 50% disability and was given a retroactive check for five years. All the hell we went through to get to that point seemed to dull. I knew Jack could get the help he needed. It would be up to him to seek it.

We won after all the years of fighting a seemingly losing battle. All the work I did was for him to be helped. I didn't do it for the money or any other reason but I couldn't believe that he was not grateful at all. One night he came home drunk and called the award blood money. He wanted to know how it could be split three ways. He wanted to know how much each was worth. I didn't know what he was talking about but I assumed I finally found out how he got the Bronze Star. He must have killed at least three of the enemy. I wasn't sure what happened to him and for whatever reason, he couldn't even tell his doctors. We all knew there was more to his story. The question was what. How do you get someone to talk about something so deep it won't let go of him? He was just a kid!

I knew that he didn't see how hard it had been for Rachel or for me. He had no idea how much I had done to get him what he needed and deserved. The years of phone calls, letters and paper work piling up in a bag in the basement went unnoticed by him. All the times I had lost the will to fight for him, unable to beat the gigantic ball of red tape. All the years of praying for a simple matter of justice had come to an end. I could finally relax and rest after the long battle. I knew the enemy was still there in the form of Jack's illness but at least I would not have to fight in the abyss of bureaucracy. I was stronger than ever. Stronger in the sense of standing my ground when I knew it was the right thing to do and stronger in my faith of God. It was so hard trying to convince people that I was doing the right thing when all they saw was suffering. I knew it was what I had to do, but they only saw the misery. I came through the fire that tested

my commitment. As a private tribute to the strength God gave me to fight, I decided to do it with candle flames. I called the church secretary. I knew her well enough to know she would keep the secret. She had forty \$10.00 candles lit. As I sat in church thanking God, the glare from those candles made me smile. No one knew I had the candles lit. My own mother didn't know. I was so happy and thought that our problems would soon be over. We would not have to worry about money for the first time in our lives. Jack could get all the help he needed and we would not have to fight for any more of it. We would even get our tax money back that was taken for his care. It was strange that the holder held **forty** candles. I was **forty** years old, with half my life gone (by most standards.) The Jews followed Moses for **forty** years in the desert. We fast for **forty** days and mourn the dead for **forty** days. It meant the end of the dark times to me. The Jews reached the Promised Land in the end. After forty days of fasting we eat a feast. The first forty years of my life were hard. Maybe the rest of my life would be carefree. Sure it would and I believe in the Easter bunny too! (Not to mention that poor Moses never made it there.)

I planned a vacation for us to go to Disney World. It was the first vacation we had as a family and the first one we had together since our honeymoon. Jack and I hired contractors to finish renovating the second floor of our house. He gutted it several years earlier. He put on a new roof and had windows put in during the years, but we never seemed to have enough money to do the real work. It was finally going to happen. We would finally be able to use the rest of the house instead of living in just five rooms.

It seemed as if I was constantly shopping. We all needed clothes for the trip. I was also picking out things for the house and the renovation. There were many times that I was worried that Jack wouldn't go. In the back of my mind I thought that he would either get me so mad that

I wouldn't want him to go or he would go and make me wish he hadn't. Up until we were on the plane to Florida, I worried. I wanted it to be perfect. I wanted us to have a good time and enjoy something out of life.

I couldn't believe we were actually there. Still I kept wishing that things were different. Jack seemed to enjoy himself. Rachel had a wonderful time. I think the best part of the trip was watching Rachel and Jack playing together in the pool at the hotel. We brought my godchild Athena with us and I don't think that she could have been any happier. Athena was always a wonderful cousin to Rachel, the next best thing to having a sister. She is also a great kid. We enjoyed each other's company. We had gotten so used to not having extra money that spending it was hard for Jack and Rachel. I had to keep reminding them that we could afford it and that we had waited a very long time for a vacation like that. I have to admit that although we didn't overspend, it felt good to not have to worry about how much something cost for a change. We spent the entire week doing what we wanted to do, when we wanted to do it with no restrictions. We went to all the parks several times. There were times when I looked at Jack and I saw the old Jack come out. He was the guy who could look at something so simple, and be amazed with it like he was on our first date watching the movie. One night we had dinner in Cinderella's Castle. They had butter shaped like Mickey Mouse. Jack was so fascinated with it he had to take a picture before we used it. He had a great smile on his face and there were even times when the light came back into his eyes. He was actually funny teasing Athena and had us all laughing. We even splurged on a limo to and from the airport, which impressed the girls and made the trip more memorable. He still didn't sleep through the night and the detachment was only broken for moments but those moments were ones I will never forget. I remembered the man I fell in love with so long ago. I remembered what it was like for him to take my hand when he reached for it

walking through the crowds. I couldn't remember when the last time I heard him talk so much or laugh so much. For most of the week, the Jack I loved came back to life.

I had a chance to be alone with Athena walking to the food court. She wanted to know about Jack. I told her some of the things that were wrong with him. She was very understanding and relaxed around him. She finally knew Jack instead of just seeing him every now and then at their house or for family holiday dinners.

Most of the time, I couldn't get any of them out of the pool. It was hot. While they were playing and swimming, I shut my eyes while the sun hit my face. The tenseness in my neck was finally gone. After years of going to bed with Ben Gay it was gone along with all the stress. I wouldn't have to worry about making it from one paycheck to the next. I wouldn't have to worry about another denial coming from the Veteran's Administration and worrying that it would be the denial that would send him beyond the point of return.

I did have to think about what was left of my marriage. I cared deeply for Jack but the question was, if I still loved him or not. It had been so hard for so long I was having a hard time dealing with something good happening.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1999

COMING TO TERMS

When we got back home I was worried that the year he was out of treatment and feeling betrayed had taken its toll on him. Every time I saw him twitch or make an involuntary arm movement or heard him talk to himself, I thought about the past six years. There wasn't any logical reason we survived it all, or stayed together. There wasn't any logical reason that Rachel turned out so terrific with such a dysfunctional background. Everyone said that it was because of me. I couldn't get them to understand that there was no way I could have done any of it without the help and guidance of God. I am smart, stubborn, and aggressive but I couldn't have

pulled it all together alone. I was relieved when he decided to go back to the hospital for treatment. He didn't have to but he wanted to. I think the trip made him remember how much of life he was missing out on.

I have heard too many stories about homeless Vietnam Vets and have read too many obituaries in the paper to let this man become one of them. He was still a good guy trapped in something that he didn't ask for. I know what it is like to feel trapped. I couldn't walk away from this but I was still a human being who had needs that were sometimes overpowering and I cried because I knew that the way I thought our life together would be was impossible to have. The doctors told me that although Jack could get better with therapy and medication, he would never be the way that he was. PTSD is progressive. I would not throw him away. I would not be able to live with myself if he ended up homeless or died abandoned by the only family he had left. How could I explain that to our daughter? How could I instill a sense of values, morality, accountability or commitment if I sent him away? Sometimes the right thing to do is the hardest. I could have made our life easier but I doubt the quality of our life would have improved. There were many times when Jack would be asleep on the couch. I'd be in my room watching TV and thinking, feeling sorry for myself. I was still young, married without a husband, companion, partner or lover. I was so lonely. There were times during it all that I talked to him about getting a divorce and times when it was all I could think about, but he wouldn't talk about it. His favorite line was "Things will get better. You'll see!" They didn't get better. I guess we just got accustomed to the way our lives were. I couldn't divorce him and I was tired of separating. There are times when what you want isn't possible to have. I understand why my life is the way it is but that doesn't mean I never have times when I give into myself preservation. The facts of life are, there are going to be problems not caused by you but affect you anyway.

There are going to be people who tell you that you brought bad things on yourself. There will be times when you believe them. There were times when I thought that my life was as terrible. When I thought about all that I lost in the marriage I didn't want to get up out of bed. I was also tired of it all. I was tired of fighting, for him and with him most of the time. I was sick and tired of having to shout at him, when I would have gotten just as much reaction from shouting at the wall. I was tired of hearing about love on the radio in songs that I once enjoyed listening to or seeing people in love on TV. I was happy for people who had love in their life but it hurt to know that there wasn't any for me. I was tired of defending Rachel when he got unreasonable or defending him when she wasn't able to understand that he is ill. When I thought about what it must be like for him, it hurt. The walls built to protect him had stopped all that was good in life from reaching him. He stopped feeling love, passion and joy. His heart could no longer be warmed by the love we had for him.

It hurt me when I heard people talk about doing things together, and it hurt to think about Jack not being able to feel any of it. The longing tugged at me when I walked away from conversations regarding relationships. I had nothing to contribute. It was as if I was surrounded by rich people talking about all they had and I was standing there in rags. They were rich in love and didn't know it. They complained about tiny little things, so troubled by them that they were depressed. I stood there thinking that they didn't know how good they had it. They didn't know what it was like to be devastated by illness. To see every dream of how it was supposed to be disappearing.

I knew I had to have a different perspective. I started to look at all the things that were good in my life. I had a wonderful daughter who loved me and thought I was cool. It was impossible to be in a bad mood around her. I had a nice house and my bills were finally paid on

time. I had a decent job with a big pay increase after I went to school to be certified on computers. I had a good relationship with my mother. I was close to my brother and sister-in-law with their two wonderful girls. All in all, if I stopped thinking about Jack and our life together, I was happy.

In November I had to have a small operation on my right hand. It was only day surgery, but it required me to have my hand in a brace and I couldn't use it for a month. Jack had to do everything. It was hard letting go of control but it was also nice to not have to be the one to do it all. He took care of the shopping, cooking, dishes and laundry. He wrapped up my hand so that I could take showers. He helped me get dressed. For the first time in years, Jack was caring for me again.

When I was feeling well enough to go out, he took me to see the Traveling Wall That Heals. It was a smaller version of the Wall in Washington. They handed out a sheet of statistics; The average age of KIA's (killed in action) in Vietnam was 23.1 years old, the average age of veterans who served in Vietnam was 22 years old. (Jack was eighteen) The number in the military during the Vietnam Era 1955 through 1975 was 9 million. There were 2.9 million men and women serving in the war zone during those years. 1.6 million fought in combat or provided close support. 303,704 were wounded and 75,000 were permanently disabled. 2,065 missing. There are 58,219 names on the Wall. Eight of them are women, seven Army nurses and one Air Force nurse. 260,000 women served during the Vietnam Era. Between 7,000 to 10,000 women served in Vietnam. It was like looking at a cemetery standing upright. So many names linked together from so many years and so much sadness. There were many veterans walking slowly past the black wall fighting memories and heartache. Dignitaries spoke eloquently. Taps was played and the twenty-one guns fired in the air.

Jack couldn't talk about how moved he was but I saw it in the way he held his head and put his hand to his mouth. I saw it in the way he walked ever so slowly past the wall with his head frozen. A tear ran down my cheek and it was hard to breathe knowing that Jack was in deep pain. I wondered when he would be able to heal.

So much of our life together has been sad. People looked at us and never knew. Sometimes I thought that Jack should have worn a sign saying, "I have been through hell and need a hug or a kind word." I didn't need a sign to tell people that I was tired. It was too obvious. I was tired of everything. My hand hurt from the surgery. I tried to focus on how wonderful Jack and Rachel were dealing with my temporary disability. They had to do what I couldn't. I kept my mouth shut when they did things their way instead of mine. The route they took was different but things got done. I had to hold back the tears. It reminded me too much of the way it once was for us.

I was so tired of being alone. I was tired of going to an empty bed every night and waking up alone. I was tired of seeing couples holding hands. The few weeks that Jack was there for me, doing things for me and with me, failed to make me feel better. It made me want days like that more. I hated the thoughts I was having but I had to admit that I needed someone in my life to be there for me. I needed someone to care about how I felt and what I wanted for a change.

Every Saturday Jack took off and went drinking. He would be gone for hours. I wouldn't know where he was or when he would show up. I didn't know what kind of condition he would be in, considering the times he showed up with little more than two beers in him or the times when he was so drunk he walked home. I had seen too many days of worrying about the police coming to tell me he had an accident. I started to hope for it. I was only worried about

him hurting some innocent person. I felt horrible about the way I thought until I realized that it was because I was tired of watching him suffer. I was tired of watching him die. I was tired of the illness eating him away. The bad thoughts didn't last long and I felt guilty after. I knew that I was just a human who was hurting and struggling to find the will to go from one day to the next. I kept busy, focusing on anything but him for as long as I possibly could.

We finally finished the second floor. There were two big bedrooms and a large bathroom. I decorated the rooms loving every minute. It had been too many years that I had waited to do it and had too long to think about every detail wondering if I would ever be able to do any of it. I painted butterflies in Rachel's room and put up border prints in our room, as well as the bathroom and hallway.

For a brief time, Jack tried to go to sleep in our new room, but he was so accustomed to sleeping on the couch, he couldn't. I don't know what I really expected from the changes in our life together. I didn't expect so many things to stay the same. I didn't think that he would still look at me sometimes as if he were looking at an enemy. I guess that I wanted it to be like it was in Disney World between us but it didn't happen.

I'd hear him pacing the floors at night. He walked with force as if he was still marching. I would lay in the dark waiting for the silence. I'd drift back to sleep and to dreams of what I thought would never be. I would be in his arms.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

2000

TAKEN ITS TOLL

Jack was in trouble at work. Due to a change in the management of the department head, the rules changed. It used to be that Jack could take his time off at will. All his sick, personal and vacation time could be taken the way he wanted and as he needed. It was great because his illness is unpredictable and he never knew when he simply could not function. So many times he just couldn't get up and get moving. Either depression or flashbacks would drain him and he would be unable to cope. With the change in management came a crackdown on abuse of time off. Jack called in sick on the Friday before Memorial Day. When he went back to work, he

was told that he lost two days pay and he was suspended. He nearly lost his job. He filed the Family and Medical Leave Act to keep working. Jack loved what he did for a living but hated where he worked and the politics of working for a city department. He could have taken the easy way out and applied for 100% disability as well as disability retirement from his job but he chose to stay and fight. He did apply for an increase in his disability with the VA because his condition had gotten worse but he didn't want to be labeled unemployable. He wanted to be able to work.

Summer came and we went back to Disney to go to Sea World and Universal Studios, which we missed the first time. We wanted to keep our promise to go back with Rachel and Athena. This time Jack was depressed most of the time. He didn't want to go on the rides he loved the last time. He didn't play in the pool. He just went in to cool off. It was a let down. I thought I would see the old Jack come out and play again. I kept waiting for him to have the amazed look in his eyes again. I kept waiting to see the smiles and hear him laugh again. The vacation was over and we were back on the plane heading home. I knew I was still losing Jack. How much more of him would die off in front of my eyes?

When we got back he couldn't get off the couch for a solid week. By Thursday I had enough and made him go to the VA on an emergency visit. I didn't know that he stopped taking the medicine he was supposed to take during the day. The night medicine was based on what he took during the day and not taking the day one messed him up. I thought that he would get better with medicine and treatment but he wasn't. He was getting worse which was really hard to take.

Still I kept busy, working around the house and out in the yard. I loved to work in the gardens. I had flower gardens all along the house and a vegetable garden with tomatoes for Jack,

cucumbers and celery that Rachel and I wanted. I ended up walking up and down the street delivering the extra tomatoes to the neighbors. At 41 I was in the best shape of my life. I was strong and worked like a man. I loved to get my hands in the soil and be in touch with nature. Everyone kept telling me to use hand tools and wear gloves. I couldn't stand the thought. I didn't want to study gardening either. I wanted to learn by doing and not really think hard about it. It was something for me to just enjoy.

The VA turned down Jack's appeal for an increase in disability and he had to file another appeal. He was turned down for promotions at work that were supposed to be based on seniority. They said it was because of his attendance. He kept going to the VA and went back on the medicine they gave him. His doctor kept increasing the dosage. Still he kept fighting to keep his job until he just couldn't take it anymore. One of his doctors at the VA told him that he needed to retire. The stress of the job was too much for him along with the attitudes of most of his co-workers. He got support from a few of the guys he worked with but the others were terrible. He had to file for disability retirement but I hated the thought and could not support him on this one.

We had our sixteenth anniversary. I wish that I could say that everything was fine between us, but it wasn't. I ended up seeing a psychologist to deal with the stress of my marriage and job. I guess that all the years had taken a toll on me. Sometimes I would joke that it only took me ten years to crack and seek professional help. The frustration made me angry to the point where I felt it eating away at me. I needed to vent and let it all out to someone who I knew understood mental illness. No one I knew understood any of it. I knew I could say everything on my mind freely.

When I began to look for a psychologist the first question I asked was if they understood PTSD. Most had limited knowledge. When I reached the woman I picked I said, "I am not looking to save my marriage. I am trying to keep from killing my husband." She laughed. Not only had I found someone who would understand the pressure I was dealing with and the illness but someone with a sense of humor as well. I couldn't control things in my personal life and I couldn't control things where I worked. That is the point of this. Nothing is a sure thing. I didn't know if we would make it to seventeen years or not. I didn't know if the Agent Orange exposure would give him cancer or not. I didn't know what is going to happen in a day. I did know that I was going to continue to do the best I could for the three of us. I was going to be his friend if I couldn't be his wife in every sense of the word. I still cared about him. There wasn't a mean bone in his body. When I looked at him, I saw a man who suffered for his gentleness and I was proud of him for not giving in or giving up. I tried very hard to understand that he had little control over some of the things he did, but it was the things he can control that bothered me the most. Like all the times he disappeared for an entire day without a single phone call. He reminded me of a disobedient teenager who doesn't want to call and be told to come home. The countless times that I told him I couldn't stand being treated with such little regard that he didn't care about taking off on me for the day. I was going to be the best mother I can possibly be and keep being the responsible one in the house.

It had been an emotional roller coaster ride, never knowing what to expect one moment to the next. He went on medication to help him sleep without waking up in the middle of the night and on medication for during the day. I stopped wishing things were different and started to focus on simply making the best out of what there is. When I thought about the other families like mine, and there are many Internet sights to prove the vast number of us, I realized my

attitude changed. There had been a time when I blamed the families for turning their backs on veterans like Jack. You see them wandering the streets among the other homeless. I could see how difficult it was to live with them. Your heart breaks because you know they are a part of your family and you know that they mean no harm to anyone. Still the effects of their illness make it impossible to have a “normal life” with them. Each has to decide what is best for their situation. The shoe was on the other foot when it was about me. Everyone was judging me and telling me that I was wrong to stay with Jack. I was judging the others for giving up. None of us were right or wrong. What is wrong is what is done to these veterans by the administration. They claim it is necessary to prevent false claims. It may save some money in the long run but at what cost? What is it worth for a veteran to suffer the effects of war and then endure further torture by the very ones who were supposed to help them? It is wrong for a family to be in a position of total helplessness and despair watching their loved one being consumed by the atrocities of war on their conscience. In this system the veteran is presumed well until proven wounded in action. When the problem is physical, the veteran must prove a physical act happened. When it is a mental disorder, the veteran must prove he couldn’t handle what others dealt with. Not an easy task. It is not just hard to pinpoint the turning point that sent them over the edge. They also had to admit to something society will not speak of in polite conversation. There are so many different kinds of mental illness and with just as many varying degrees.

Nancy Rubin, of the National Mental Health, wrote a letter in the Dear Abby Column. According to Nancy, “Every 17 minutes another person commits suicide. More than 70 percent of young people who suffer from mental illness do not receive the help they need.” She went on to write “As a nation we have addressed the stigma associated with diseases like cancer and AIDS by expanding our knowledge. We must now apply that same knowledge and

understanding to mental illness. To accomplish this, we must create a climate that not only encourages discussion about these issues, but one that also brings mental illness out of the closet and into the realm of physical illness. Science has shown that mental illness is as treatable as physical ailments and in some cases, MORE treatable. Major depression is treatable in 85 % of cases while angioplasty-a treatment for heart disease-works only 41% of the time.” It is my opinion that until this happens these veterans will remain suffering in obscurity and people like me will continue to have to write about it with fake names to protect the privacy of the one suffering from the illness. This is wrong. Nancy also wrote that, “Our goal is to create understanding and awareness and to convey the message that mental illness is no ones fault. Help is available. No one should be ashamed or afraid to reach out for it.” Our assault continues on these veterans. First they were dishonored and then they were shamed into suffering in silence.

My psychologist asked me if I still loved him. I told her that I wasn’t sure. To be honest I really didn’t know what is buried under all that has happened. How could I say that I didn’t love him when all these years I have done everything possible to make his life better? Then again, how could I still love him when I have gotten so little back from him? Love has to be fed to survive. If it isn’t nurtured it does not grow. If I had a marriage that changed under normal circumstances, I don’t think that I would have been able or even willing to stay in it. I keep reminding myself that this marriage isn’t about blaming. It’s about coping. It isn’t about building a future together. It is about surviving together. There are a lot of marriages that exist for different reasons. Some marriages only exist and some thrive. I also have to remind myself to not be so concerned with what others think about me. If I think too much about how others see me, then I no longer am “me” and give up my life. I am not ready to give up any power over

my life to another imperfect creature. In a perfect world, we are loved. This is not a perfect world. That fact is that we were not sent to this earth to be worshiped and adored. We were sent here to love and to be the best person we can be.

There were still times when I wondered how this happened and I will probably wonder for the rest of my life. I wondered what it would have been like if the first time I left him, it ended. I listened to the experts on TV when they talked about marriage. They could only give advice on a limited basis to the “normal” side of society. The experts never had much to say about a family like mine. I laughed knowing that a marriage could survive without sex, without the partnership. Children could thrive in a dysfunctional home if there is love there. An illness did not have to mean the end of everything. It was hard. Don’t get me wrong. There are families with alcoholics who in the process of their illness hurt the only ones who should matter to them. I believed that they feel so terrible about themselves that they strike out at the ones they are letting down unable to face the truth. The families are left to pick up the pieces of shattered lives and emotions. A father is supposed to love us and protect us. A mother is supposed to support us emotionally and nurture our souls. Husbands and wives are supposed to complete each other, keep us grounded when we get too full of ourselves and build us up when we feel pulled down. Home is supposed to be a place of refuge from the craziness of humanity and obligations. A place where we feel we are able to be ourselves and be loved despite ourselves. I did have a place to be myself and I tried to give Jack a safe haven, a place where he didn’t have to worry about the outside world and his past. At times it seemed impossible but still there was a bond between us that existed before the illness was into full swing, before all the tragedies happened. We are not married in many senses of the word but the one that matters most of all to us, a bond that is strong.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ANOTHER ONE GONE

Jack's sister Jean had three children. Her son, Andy was also a Vietnam vet. When he was fourteen years old, he came home from school one day and found his father on the kitchen floor. He shot himself in the head. He was a policeman and an alcoholic. Three years later, Andy was in Vietnam. Jean was several years older than Jack. Andy was born within months of Jack. They both enlisted at seventeen. Andy got addicted to heroin while he was there. He also developed PTSD.

Andy was married for a brief time after he returned. He had a son with developmental difficulties, which Andy blamed on Agent Orange. Andy ended up in prison in the late 1970s. When he got out he tried to get back to having a normal life. He dated and got jobs. Andy was smart and adapted to any job he was given but he was still plagued by his past. He found a job he really loved to do, but his prison record ended that job when they did a security background check.

Andy remembered all the bad things that happened in Vietnam. He remembered a place called the Hobo Woods where it was a "free fire zone." They were able to shoot anything that moved and they did. He remembered finishing off VCs (Viet Cong) with his knife against their throat. He was haunted by a female VC he killed. He remembered a pair of grunts he was friends with named Butch and Sundance. He stopped to tie his boot when they went on ahead of him. They were blown up by claymore mines. He was convinced that they were the mines he put in the ground on a distant road that the VC must have moved during the night. He remembered being wounded twice, receiving the Purple Heart. He did not remember the acts of bravery he showed that earned him a Bronze Star for Valor. He hung onto the urges to fight, yet lost the drive to take charge with heroism.

Andy was a warrior yet the gentleness of his heart would not release him and allow him the peace to live with the necessary evils war demands. It was the goodness of his character that was killing him and made him attempt suicide countless times. It was the force that reached out for help with one hand and pushed it away with the other.

Andy stopped by our house, looking happy and on top of the world. Jack was putting together a vanity for our new bathroom. It wasn't working out too well considering it was a Saturday and he had gone out earlier to the DAV club and had a few beers. The last time I saw Andy was during all the funerals. Naturally he didn't look good at the horrible time in our lives. It was good to see him with a smile. Andy had found someone to love him and look past his problems. It had been hard for him to call Jack his uncle when they were younger. They always referred to each other as cousins. It was not until they were both in Vietnam that Andy started to address him as Uncle Jack. That was the last time I saw him and the time that I will remember. I had to hang on to the memory of him happy and in love.

Andy filed a claim with the Veteran's Administration and got word that his claim for disability had come through. Still the nightmares and flashbacks kept coming. He wanted to put it all to rest but first he wanted to fill in the missing pieces of his life there. He sent for his records. His back was bothering him and a doctor had set up an appointment for a MRI. He was claustrophobic and too afraid of the test. Later he learned that the test could have killed him. He still had shrapnel in him. A few months later, he received a letter stating that the unit he was with did not exist. That sent him totally over the edge to the point of no return. He started drinking again and ran back to his old friend, heroin.

Andy tried to go live with his brother but he had enough of the drugs and bailing Andy out of trouble. He told him that he couldn't live with him. Andy tried his sister. He got the

same response. They had been through too much with him and wanted him to face his demons. They tried tough love. There is only so much a person can take and they had reached their limit. Andy had it all. He had money for the first time in years. He had the love of an understanding, good woman. He had a sister and brother that loved him. All the people in his life loved him and looked past the problems he had. Still it was not enough. Nothing was enough to erase what he saw as a personal assault from the government. He felt he had been thrown out like a piece of garbage just like the records of his unit. It meant to him that it was all a waste. The lives lost were a waste. It was all for nothing.

Andy checked himself into a motel and used every lock on the door. The demons were screaming in his ear while visions of Vietnam invaded the room. He knew he lost the war he had been fighting. He surrendered. He put the heroin into a needle and it was the last night he would have to fight off the demons. His life ended. His brother got a phone call from the police.

I knew how hard it was to love one of these men. You see all the good inside of them that they were blind to. You thought that love could make everything inside them right again. Then you had to face the fact that it couldn't. It made me more aware of the fact that if Jack had not been the way he was when we met, I couldn't have stuck it out with him. By the time his illness was in full force, we already had the foundation of our relationship. It also made me think about how close we were to it happening to Jack. The level of my grief made it hard to cope with the guilt. What is the value of a life? How many times had I put my needs on a higher plane than his life? I am not fooling myself into thinking that it would have been my fault if anything happened to him, but honestly I can't imagine getting through it. As much as I understand, I am still just a human and I know that I would take part of the blame. I would run

the “should have”, “would have” and “could have” through my brain and doubted everything I did do.

I was so sad about Andy and knowing something about the kind of pain he must have been living with. My God, we are just humans and our emotions are so easily confused. We are told not to kill yet we go to war. We are told it is okay to kill if it is in self-defense, yet we put bomb controls in human hands and tell them that it is war. As if that one word “war” is supposed to make the difference between forgetting about it and being destroyed by it. How do you tell a teenager that it is okay to do something they are totally repulsed by? How do you explain to them that they should forgive themselves for the necessary evil they committed when they were called “baby killers” and treated like a sub species?

Andy was like so many others. It ate away at him as surly as the drugs did. Maybe he didn't have enough hardness in him to keep him wanting to live? Maybe he loved the drug more than anything else or maybe nothing would have given him peace. I knew he started out with a hard life and did some horrible things while under the influence of drugs but he was like Jack in many ways. He was sensitive and that ability to feel so deeply also made him suffer deeply.

I knew that whatever it is that is inside Jack, I was grateful for. There was something there that told him to fight and go on. Some said that it was because of me again. I gave him the support he needed but it would have been a wasted effort if Jack didn't have structure in the first place. You cannot support what doesn't exist. It was in him the day he was born and despite the attacks of the world and bombardment of negative influences, it survived. The gentleness was not crushed beneath the weight of the horrors of war, yet it suffered because of the goodness that was there.

Andy's brother and sister tried so hard to do the right thing for him. They tried to help him out and then they tried tough love. Then they were left wondering what else they could have done. They gave him love but it was not enough to wipe out thirty years of being terrorized by ghosts. Four more lives paid the price for Vietnam. A brother lost his life. A sister and brother are left to pick up the body and say a final goodbye to a life ended so tragically. A lover lost her fight to keep him alive.

It seems I think too much about death lately. It's hard to avoid when I am surrounded by it. It's not just a matter of the ones that I know. I am tired of reading about Vietnam vets in the obituaries being buried in their 40's and 50's. I wonder about the families they leave behind. I wonder about the ones like Andy who died without a home or money to bury him. I cannot believe that any life was wasted.

It was hard to think about things I wanted to talk to Jack about. Things that seemed important to say but I just couldn't get the words out. I had forgotten how to talk to him. I had forgotten how to let him know I cared about him without worrying about him pulling away. He held my hand during the funeral and I think he was comforted that I was by his side. I just don't know for sure. I should know things like that after all the years we have been together, but I don't. We had a month of getting along and working together as a couple around the house. He was home for four Saturdays in a row, which was a record for him. I didn't want it to end and was afraid that it would end too soon.

I was worried about how he was handling Andy's death. I wanted to tell him how I thanked God it wasn't him. I couldn't tell him. It seemed that every time we started to have any kind of a normal relationship, he ran. He just couldn't get past the need to isolate or deal with the need to have some kind of connection.

I read so many obituaries in the paper that had the words Vietnam Veteran under the name. They were all so young and I wondered if PTSD had anything to do with the end of their lives. I ended up weeping for the loss of a total stranger.

CHAPTER TWENTY

GOING HOME

I thought about my father, my brother and all the others who are no longer here. At first I thought how sad it was for the ones left behind to grieve. Then the thoughts regarding their souls gave me comfort. There were so many people who were here, touching my life and my

heart. I couldn't settle for thinking about them only in the past tense. I needed to think about who they really were, and actually still are.

I closed my eyes and was carried away from the cares and worries of the world. I was no longer flesh and blood. I was a spirit. I remembered the peace that God gave me when I cried out in anguish to Him. It was God easing my troubled soul and embracing me as a parent would comfort a child. I saw it clearly.

Scientists are very interested in the power of prayer. They study the human brain in an attempt to understand the mystery, knowing there is unlimited power. Doctors have been unable to answer why people seem to heal themselves or why some die without reason. When the body dies, everything that is part of the body no longer functions. The heart stops beating. It doesn't matter how many songs are written about the love it feels, the heart simply pumps blood throughout the body. The brain stops thinking and no longer remembers. It all stops as the lungs stop breathing. What is left? It is the soul. It is the soul that knows what science cannot prove or disprove, and that is the existence of God. It is the soul that calls out to the Creator of IT all. Prayer is food for the soul.

It is not the heart that loves, although we say, "She has a good heart." It is not the brain that remembers the day a child was born, the first kiss, the wedding or the death of someone close. It is the soul that remembers all. We cannot explain why some prayers are answered and some seem to go unheard. We cannot explain why angels seem to be protecting some while turning their backs on others. We cannot because we are human. As much as it may hurt the ego, we are not meant to understand everything, we are only meant to try.

I attend a Greek Orthodox Church. The incense fills the air. It is not my brain that understands the meaning. It is my soul that feels the power and comfort. It feels the emotion of

the choir and chanter's voices crawling up my spine. It understands the priest's message and knows that it is home. The service is a combination of Greek and English. I do not understand Greek. As a child my thoughts would wander, now I understand through osmosis or something. It is my soul that understands the meaning behind the procession carrying the bread and wine. It is a funeral for my Savior and dear friend. Every Sunday His sacrifice is remembered and the life He gave for us. The soul finds peace in the house of God. It understands the "good feeling" we have as we walk out the doors of the church carrying the peace with us. The same feeling we have after visiting someone who means a great deal to us while the warmth lingers. I have attended other services. It doesn't seem to matter what denomination the attendants are, the message is the same, the emotion is the same and the beauty is the same.

We simple humans do not seem to understand that God created the soul and the soul lives in us all. The Holy Spirit lives in those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God and died for us to be forgiven for the sins of our days. To cry out to God is a cry of the soul. It is beyond the human brain's ability to be in contact with God. Contact with Him is enabled by His Hand. There are human forms of love, and then there is the true love from the spirit of God. It enables us with the love that sets self aside to feel compassion for a stranger. It is the rush to help without one thought of self or the prayer offered for someone who had hurt us in the past. There is the ability to be transformed into a saint for a moment and return to our normal routine. It enables us to try, fail, and awake the next morning ready to try again. The soul communicates faith and by faith we pray and believe in the love of God for us to do what is best. By that, it is not what we ask Him to do, it is what is He deems to be right. Our ego, our sense of fairness, our needs and wants, may or may not be satisfied, however our soul knows that it is the will of God.

It is the soul that acknowledges God in everything and releases power from “self” to the divine will of Him. It is not by weakness that the will is yielded to Him. It is by strength and courage that we trust Him to take over. It is honesty that admits we do not know it all. By human nature alone we are unable to have the wisdom or the foresight to be in control. How many times have we thought that someone does not like us, is mean or cruel, only to find out that the person is simply in need. Or we judge the actions of a neighbor only to find that we totally misunderstood. We think that we had a horrible day, only to find that it was also the day that something wonderful began as well. We worry about money and wonder how we can survive when reality sets in and the bills pile up, while across the country a check is being signed for our benefit. We cry over a sick loved one, feel alone and helpless, while someone is praying for us at the very moment and we are being brought to the attention of God. Imagine the power of prayer to be carried on the “wings of angels” to the ears of the living God. The soul understands the sudden calm in the middle of pain, the tears that stop or the tingle running up the spine while worrying. The soul knows why it suddenly feels that it will all turn out right.

Maybe it is time that scientists began to study the soul. To know that prayer and faith, belief, is a power that exists beyond the brain and human understanding. It is simply what it is, the soul that God gave us the day we were born, and the soul that will return to Him. The only mystery is why some follow what is inside of them and others turn from themselves? Why some live out their lives in a quiet state of sainthood, holding onto the Hand of God, and others never reach out? What is the power behind prayer? It is God communicating with His creation, His children through the soul. The brain can be seen, studied, scanned and dissected. The soul is invisible. The effects of the soul can be studied in a thousand ways. All they have to do is look.

I have known the peace that washes away what the world dishes out. The calmness that fills, pushing away all the negative thoughts that the world drills into my brain. There is no power on earth that can compare with the power of God. A simply spoken prayer, The Lord's Prayer, yields so much power in its simplistic message. "Our Father....." Can anything be more beautiful than the beginning? "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." By that we say that God is in control of what He created. We hope that He will take care of our materialistic needs, knowing that there are things necessary to survival. Yet what if we were rich? We may lack the sensitivity to appreciate simple things, like a sunset as purple splits the light from the looming dark. Or a quality that reaches out to someone else in need. We could be so involved in obtaining more that we don't spend time with our children. We may find ourselves unable to forgive. Then Our Father would see that the need is not more money. Our need is to return to oneness with the soul. It is a state of bliss that we all hunger for. It is a state of bliss that can conquer illness, loneliness, stop anger, and obliterate judgment, yielding power with surrender. Bliss that can release negative energy to make room for the love and truth that God intended us to have. We can go blindly about our business, doing as the mood suits, or we can walk with God. We can understand that we are here for a reason, a reason of choice. We are not forced to love God or believe in Jesus.

The angels themselves were created with free will, as Lucifer was. He made a free will choice to defy God and paid the price. He was forced out of Heaven. He had to leave the side of God and has been making humans suffer ever since, blaming us for his choice. It is easy to love someone who is good to you and you know that they care about you, listen to you, and hold you when you cry. It is hard to trust the love of God when you cannot feel His arms around you. To know He is there all the times when you cannot feel the touch of His hand or wiping away your

tears. Yet trust, remembering past times when you were sure He was involved in your life is all the soul needs to work miracles in that moment. We were taught that God loved the world, us, so much that He gave us His only begotten Son. He cares deeply for all His children. It is a sin against God and our very own soul to hate another. It is written in the Bible that God created all nations of one blood. Yet we see the color of skin and see the difference between us, not that which binds us to God. We may hate the actions of a person, yet we are to remember that the ones who fuel our anger and fire us up, is also a child of God and God still loves them.

We live searching for what the soul longs for, remembering the oneness with God and the love of Him. We search with our eyes, our minds, and our wallets. Yet we are empty. The soul knows the only love that can satisfy the need and fill us, the pure Holy love of God. If science truly wants to understand the power of prayer, they need look no further than within their own body to the soul that God placed within them.

Miracles do happen. Prayer changes lives. It is not a matter of changing the life style in the sense of worldly goods, but changing the life itself. We are not only shown by example the way to live out our days. A companion dwells within us, to guide, comfort and correct instantaneously. We call the soul our conscience. It is in communication with God and the laws He set forth thousands of years ago, placing them in the hand of Moses. Laws further explained and expanded by the mouth of Jesus. There is a peace within those laws. A sense of gentleness in the words of the "Rabbi from Nazareth" that we are all guilty of sin, yet forgiven by a love that knows no bounds. That all sin is equal in the eyes of God and as such we are all guilty.

To know that we are loved with the knowledge of everything that we have done in every moment of our lives brings it all into perspective. It does not matter what others may think of me, what matters more is what God thinks of me. When I question what I am doing, I think

about what I have been taught that God wants. When I do something wrong, others may not know it, but He does and He is the one I am sorry to. It is His forgiveness I want first and others second. It is hard to accept that there is anyone who could love me knowing everything, and I do mean everything, about me. He does! He understands when I am afraid, confused or acting like a real jerk. I may get Him angry or disappointed with what I have done, but He loves me anyway. He doesn't let me get away with it but He does forgive me. He reminds me when things happen that are horrible, hard or unfair, that He isn't doing it to me, or anyone else. He is there to give me what I need to get through it, not alone, but with Him.

Prayer is a wonderful thing. When it is yielded to God's will, it is beyond human words. If we pray and the prayer is answered the way we want, we call it a miracle. If it is answered the way God wants, it is hard to accept. It is never easy to hear "no" for an answer. That is where the will of God should be taken without question and when it is the hardest to do. I question all the time and hope a day will come when I will simply understand. I am not sinless. I am only forgiven. I am not a saint. I am only a child of God with the soul that He gave me. I have searched in a vain attempt to replace what was lost from my youngest days. The innocent bliss and wonder at God's creation. I tried to fill the vacant "heart" with everything and anything, while remembering that once there was something wonderful there. I was separated from my first love, only I didn't know it. Call it stress, or call it divine intervention. I was finally at a point in my life where the only answer came in the pages of the Bible. There was a power in the pages that transforms and slowly fills the void the soul longs for. It had lived within me for so many years starving to be fed by the word of God and Jesus. It existed on a diet of weekly church service with crumbs as dictated by the length of the church service. I was starving my soul. Time began to take its toll on me and faith was hard to find. I picked up the Bible out of

desperation and frustration. Soon I began to understand that the power of the Bible is the same as the power Jesus held over the people who heard His voice. His words, from God, transformed the Man to pure Holy Spirit, stretching out His hands to reach to soul. He was poor, dressed in simple clothes. He had no public relations firm working for Him or broadcasting commercials in prime time, or on a WEB page. He was a poor man speaking a simple message of God's love for His children. He did not hold Himself above those who heard His words. He connected. He became one of them. Reading the accounts of His lifetime here made me long to hear His voice. What a beautiful voice He must have had, gentle yet strong, loving and compassionate. He did so much without expensive clothes or a bank account. What would have happened if He walked the earth today? I know His hand reached out to me while my soul was being fed, yet there was sadness in me that I could not feel His hand. The outcomes of things that are placed in God's hands are in God's hands and out of my control. I know He was in control, yet I dearly wished that I could have been more reassured. As time went on I realized that it wasn't as I expected. I thought that this return to my "innocent faith" would make my life easier. It didn't. The problems in my life got worse. It was inconceivable the peace that I retained despite what was happening. My soul took over and gave control to the one who knew best, God. Faith is a wonderful thing, fed by prayer and trust that follows, filling the soul that lives within us all. Even scientists! Isn't it wonderful?

Job knew God. He knew what God expected of him, yet he suffered. He suffered because he knew he didn't do anything "wrong" but God took everything away from him. Everything vanished except his faith. Sure, he questioned why God had dealt with him so harshly. Still it was his friend's attitude that made him suffer more. No matter how hard he tried to explain that he was innocent, they wouldn't listen. They judged him according to their own

knowledge of God and found him guilty of some secret sin. How many times have we all judged the suffering of another? They must not be listening to God. They must be doing something wrong. It is beyond our human ability to stop judging and start seeing that God's purpose in our lives is not the same as ours. He has a reason for all He does and does not do. Job's friends thought that he was wrong. In my own life, simply knowing that I am doing what is in accordance with my soul and spirit brings heated debates. It makes it harder to explain what I am doing when I do not know the reason, or the intended goal. I only know it is what is right. I suffered and cry out to God out of desperation, then found peace without reason. I feel like a child when asked, "Why did you do that?" and I must admit, "I don't know." I do not suggest that we compare ourselves to someone like Job. He is a good example because he did know so much about God, more than we may ever know. His knowledge and tremendous faith demonstrate the level of human "connection" with God. We should all seek that same connection and thereby grow to be what we were intended to be. Then maybe we would have what God intended us to have out of the love only He can have for us. To stay attached to that love while suffering is a miracle.

On one hand we may believe that "God so loved the world..." and in truth, us, that He loves us individually. We rationalize that if He loves us then He would eliminate whatever suffering comes our way. Our brain wants to make sense out of it. Our minds know that when we love someone we do not want them to suffer. We want them to be happy. We want to help them. That is what love is. Yet as a parent, we want all that and more. We can see beyond the moment and the current "need" to tomorrow. We know that if we give a child everything he or she wants they will become greedy, spoiled and ungrateful. They will not develop good work habits, a strong work ethic and a true sense of gratitude. Perhaps God looks at us the same way

as His children. If He gives us what we “think” we really need, then maybe we will not develop to our full potential. Stop and think about something that you have done that was really wonderful. What made you do it? I am sure you would find a series of events that led to the outcome. Maybe you helped someone? Maybe you changed something that was wrong or made someone think a way that they wouldn’t have unless you gave your input. An input based on your experiences. Maybe you helped someone connect with God again.

There are countless stories of doctors and scientists that dedicated their lives to curing an illness because someone they loved suffered. Writers, artists and composers have achieved greatness because of suffering, their own or someone else’s that touched them greatly. While suffering we have a choice to make. We can change what is wrong and blame God for it all. We can remember that loving us, He knows what is best, and try to use the pain for a greater good. Perhaps it will all leave us with a soft spot in our “heart”, our soul that feels a little more than it would have if we had it all our way. Maybe Mother Teresa would not have helped so many of the outcast and poor if she had not been poor herself. Maybe Princess Diana would not have gotten so involved with charity work if she had been happy in her life and as the Princess. It could be part nature, the basic foundation of our soul and part life that makes us who we are, and thereby affecting what we do. It is these reasons and the choices that we make on our journey through life back to God, that affect the world and all we come into contact with. No man lives alone. We each touch someone and if we hold onto our faith, the hand of God, we are stronger to not only carry our own “cross” but the “cross” of another as well. Somewhere along the way we become what we started out as, a child of God, nurtured by His love and fed on the richest diet in existence, prayer.

I find myself wondering what God was thinking as Jesus was dying on the cross. I am sure that He was proud of Him, having lived thirty-three years knowing that it would all end at that moment on the cross. Did God cry? Can anyone imagine the pain He must have felt watching a part of Himself suffer? Knowing that this was the only way to reach His other children who had been so lost and far from Him. One so beautiful had to pay the price for such an ugly world our deeds created. It makes me sure that the God/Jesus/Holy Spirit loved us. It doesn't matter if we totally understand how it worked when the world was created or why there are so few women in the Bible, or fill in all the missing pieces. I don't think that the mind can hold, sort and retain everything there is to know. I don't think there are enough brain cells. What really matters is what we believe. I cannot believe that God loves yet brings disaster. He sent Jesus to be the New Covenant. So why do we still hear people blame God when we just don't have the answers? I heard "God only gives me what I can handle." repeated over and over when people are asked how they got through something terrible. God gives us what we need to handle it, deal with what we face each day. God does not make us ill or send our lives out of control, we do. There are too many variables and life dishes out some heavy doses of reality when we are least able to cope. Yet we survive and go on.

Maybe if we were not so apt to disregard the power our soul has, we would be able to heal the illnesses that our actions produce. Maybe we would see suffering and want to help heal instead of condemning the souls suffering. Maybe we would realize that one day we will meet up with the same souls we turned our backs on here on earth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

HEALING THIRTY YEARS AFTER

Finding out about what happened to Jack while he was in Vietnam has become an obsession to me. I had been on the Internet checking everything I could and looking for some of the guys he was with that could fill in the missing pieces. He wouldn't talk about it. I needed to know for myself as well as for Jack, but more for myself. I needed to know why my life was so messed up and why no matter what I did, I couldn't get through to him. Learning about his "old neighborhood" may give me some strength to keep going. It is complicated to find out because he was stationed at two bases. He worked in the message center and pulled bunker guard on both bases. He traveled on helicopters that were a great target for being shot down.

I bought several books about Vietnam. A helicopter pilot wrote one of them. The book is "The Price of Exit" written by Tom Marshall. He was on both bases the same time Jack was there. He wrote about the rocket attack along with other attacks. He wrote about the actions of the pilots and ground forces. He helped me to understand more clearly what life was like for

Jack. I told Jack about the book and that it had the rocket attack in it. He was interested and for a brief time, he actually talked about Vietnam and answered my questions.

The thoughts of Jack traveling between bases on helicopters must have been terrifying for him. I thought that he must have come into contact with some of the pilots that were shot down at one point or another. I couldn't believe that after all these years, I was finally finding out some of the rest of the story. I wondered if he had been shot at while in a helicopter. I wondered if he had seen some of the events in the book. The Quang Tri Province was close to North Vietnam and the area where I Corp. was located. I had heard about Phu Bai, near Camp Eagle and I assumed that the only information I needed was about that area. The search began all over again. I had to start from scratch for the entire Province.

The information was out there somewhere. I just had to find it to move on. I have come into contact with several Vietnam veterans via email. They continually amaze me. After thirty plus years, they still seek each other out. For the majority of them, it was one year out of their life, yet left such an impact on them that even now they need to feel connected to the only other ones that can understand them, their brothers. I sent for the records of the 101st Airborne Division from the National Archives. It took a while for them to come, but it was worth the wait. The records told about the weather, enemy attacks and death. It was hard to know the terms US WIA, meant one person wounded in action yet reduced to US instead of a name. Or US KIA, another person dead, another family to be notified, another life ended.

I found one of the guys Jack was with. I remember the chill I felt when his phone number came up on my computer screen. I lucked out because his name is not very common. I called the number and left a message with his daughter. I didn't think that he would email me. After all, he didn't know me and I wasn't sure what kind of shape he was in after all these years. I

called the number again. This time I left my work number. He called. I was shocked. I didn't know what to say to him at first. I took a deep breath and said a silent prayer. I picked up the phone with my hand shaking. After we verified the facts that the two men were together, he told me that he didn't remember Jack's name. He had me describe him. Then he remembered. He remembered some of the things Jack talked about. It felt so strange to talk to him. He talked about things no one else would know. He also explained a mystery. Jack had always had problems with his feet. He kept getting rashes and no one knew what it was from. He had been prescribed creams but nothing kept it from coming back. He told me that he found out that the rash was from the ants biting their feet. After all the things that Jack held onto from Vietnam, there was now one more thing to remind him of his year in hell.

I believed that we, as Americans, had learned a great deal about ourselves because of Vietnam. When the Gulf War was going on, the public stood behind the servicemen and women, although we did not agree with the war itself. They went together and returned together as heroes. I wondered if the Vietnam War's outcome would have been different if the South Vietnamese people had oil. We didn't have anything to gain by helping them. It cost money and lives. The vets of Vietnam saw what America was capable of when the government gave full support to the armed forces. They knew the answer to "Why now and not then?" They had been sacrificed by a misconception of what the American public would tolerate.

The Vietnam veterans were left to fight in obscurity. Fight the memories and aftereffects as well as fight for their rights as veterans, again without the support of the American public. PTSD is real! If you haven't heard about it before this, you are in the majority. It is considered a mental illness and as such, no one suffering from it wants to stand up and shout for his or her rights. They have been told too many times, "It happened thirty years ago. Get over it!" I am

here to testify to the reality of this dark secret. I have been a witness to the destruction of lives and the insurmountable obstacles they must overcome for justice. To heal and find peace is the primary goal and the compensation for their suffering is validation of their sacrifice.

I know that the Jack I loved is still there inside of him and sometimes he lets him out from behind the wall to reassure me that he lives on. As long as I see signs of the man I fell in love with, there is hope and a reminder of how it used to be with us. There are times when this man that I have shared nearly half of my life with amazes me. With all that he has been through he is still a good man. There must be so much strength in him to be the way he is. So many times I want to climb into his head and take a look around to find out what makes him so special. It seems funny to use that term but I saw something special in him so long ago and it is still there. The medication is helping him sleep and he has fewer times when he is totally despondent. It still breaks my heart when sometimes I glance at him. He will be sitting in his chair, his head held in his hands, staring at the floor. Then he will look up and smile. I hate the fact he has suffered so much and I miss the way it used to be for us.

Over the years I have learned a great deal about people. We are all searching for something more. It is as if we are fully aware that we are missing something, but no one really knows what it is. If you asked a person who is religious or spiritual, they usually will be able to answer you. Faith fills the void. We really are remarkable. The human spirit hardly ever admits defeat. We keep trying and getting up out of bed every day no matter what we are facing.

I suppose it is true what they say about adversity, it either destroys you or makes you stronger. I know that it made me stronger and also made my faith stronger. I am confident that I would not have read the Bible and clung to it as a lifeline so many times. I realize the value of just being there to listen when someone is hurting. My mother and sister-in-law still don't

realize how much their being there for me meant. I tried to explain that just knowing someone was there for me to turn to kept me going and kept me from going over the edge emotionally. It made me a better listener. It feels good to know that people feel comfortable enough to come to me with their problems. I understand that they are not always looking for answers. Sometimes they just need comfort.

Jack and I lost the friends we had. I guess it was hard to be around us when we were dealing with so many different things. I miss them. I miss Tom and Ellen. When I think about how much they were a part of our life back then it is hard to realize that closeness has been reduced to a Christmas card every year. I think I miss the Vietnam veterans the most. Tom was a Vietnam veteran too and as far as I know he is still okay. They have a special place in my heart and I am sure that I will never forget them. It is easy to dismiss what you have not truly been touched by. They got to me. I do not delude myself into thinking that I would have cared so much if I had not been so personally involved with them. They do not open up easily. I think the invention of the Internet will help them more than anything else has. They are able to reach out to others across the country and continue the brotherhood.

I have spent the last eighteen years of my life trying to understand Vietnam and veterans of this tragedy. I think about the families behind each of the men who died there on the battlefields and in the jungles. I think about the ones who took their own lives like Andy and the ones like Jack that lived with it all on a daily basis. Again a reminder for me is the statistics that of the 2.8 million that served in Southeast Asia, over one million saw active combat. One million lives offered as a sacrifice for a war no one supported. We went to the Wall That Heals when it came to a nearby town again. We were not sure when we would get to see the real one and couldn't resist going. They had a list of statistics. The statistics of the other wars made me

sick. I couldn't believe the numbers. So I tried to get the percentages to understand clearly what I was seeing.

WAR	SERVED	BATTLE DEAD	OTHER CAUSES	WOUNDED	MISSING
WORLD WAR I	4,743,826	53,513	63,195	116,708	204,002
WORLD WAR II	16,353,659	292,131	115,185	407,316	672,846
KOREA	5,764,143	33,629	20,617	103,284	8,177
VIETNAM	1,600,000	58,219	STILL	303,704	2,065

There are 8 women on the Wall 7 Army nurses and 1 Air Force nurse. 260,000 served during the Vietnam Era with 7,000 to 10,000 served in Vietnam. With 75,000 Vietnam veterans permanently disabled and the figures keep growing. There have been so many suicides by Vietnam veterans there is a growing number of web sites to add the names to the list of war dead.

World War I and Korea combined had only 3,582 more wounded than Vietnam and 10,507,969 served in those two wars vs Vietnam's 1.6 million that served in the combat environment. 24% were wounded and a 4% death rate compared to the other wars, World War I and II with death rates of 2% and 4% wounded, Korea with 1% death rate, assuming the missing men as KIA and 2% wounded.

Another reason our wedding song "A One in a Million" meant so much. As the list of names is engraved as deeply in the American psyche as it is on the cold black wall in Washington, it must be remembered that the list of the dead is endless. Andy's name will not appear on the wall. None of the other ones whose lives ended so tragically will be added to the body count. The homeless who battle their demons as well as the cold and hunger will not have their names added to the numbers. The families dealing with these veterans will not be added to the numbers of the wounded. The politicians repeat the phrase "Not another Vietnam" and act as

if it is something out of history. Vietnam never ended. It is lived on a daily basis. You cannot look into the eyes of a homeless vet and tell him the war is over. You cannot look into the eyes of the men and women who are in the veteran's hospitals around the country and tell them it is time to get on with their lives and forget about it. You cannot pass it off as past tense when it is the same now as it was then for these men and women we asked to serve and suffer because of it. I can't forget.

As for Jack and me, I am not sure what will happen. We still have to worry about Agent Orange and now the VA is concerned about hepatitis as well as diabetes. It was bad enough worrying about birth defects. He still has his claim for an increase pending after over a year and finally turned in all his paper work for disability retirement for his job. I don't know if he will get worse without working but I know that it is making things worse for him where he is. I don't have to see my psychologist every two weeks anymore. I only see her once a month now. I am dealing well with the frustration and anger. It also helps that Jack's medicine has him having more "better" days than before. He is adjusting and is able to get involved more, but I seem to be always waiting for the other shoe to drop. I can't get used to having him back in my life as an active part of the family. It seems too good to be true for both Rachel and me at times. Even my family members are surprised with some of the changes in Jack. He was never excluded from anything but most of the time he didn't want to go where we were going. He was welcomed but if he chose not to, it was fine with us. I knew better than to try to force him to go. If it were really important to me that he was with me, I'd let him know and allow him to make the choice without having to hear about it from me. I was accustomed to being alone, but delighted when he was there. We spent too many years dealing with the unpredictable that we know better than to relax but we are enjoying the good days as they come.

Still I am confident that we will be okay. Rachel tells me that she wants to be like me. I tell her to set higher standards. I think I have taught her that there are no limits on her abilities except for the ones she sets. All my life, I have heard that I was not supposed to do this or that, and I was more determined to do it just to prove them wrong. I hope that I have taught Rachel values and morals. My life has taught me a great deal about myself. I hated the fact that I was sensitive all my life. Jack's illness made me realize that it was not a handicap or a character flaw. It meant that I was able to feel things deeply. Sadness touched me deeper than others. It also meant that I could feel good things more deeply as well. I told Jack that I would rather carry all the pain I was feeling so that I could feel love as much as I did. I would not trade a second of pain if it meant that I would have to give up a second of wonderment as well. I could feel the sun set when the fire in the sky left me speechless. Holding Rachel in my arms from the day she was born or the sound of her voice when she tells me, "I love you." I never get tired of hearing it. The bad things that happened in my life are there in the shadows of all that was good and faded from memory while the good stood out comforting me, warmed me and I found strength. That was the trade off Jack gave. To keep from feeling the pain he had to keep from feeling the good as well.

I don't have all the answers. I am just like everyone else on the planet trying to do the best I can with what is. I was blessed with curiosity and have learned because of it. It is because of this curiosity that I was able to understand Jack better. Reading about PTSD, reaching out to others dealing with it and suffering because of it, gave me comfort in an odd way. There was so many years that I felt absolutely alone. I was ashamed of Jack when he talked to himself or acted odd in front of people, or when his twitch got too noticeable. I saw the way people looked at him. Part of me wanted to slap them and the other part wanted to hide. I wished that someone

could understand and show some compassion. Then I didn't want anyone to know because I was afraid that they wouldn't be able to understand what our life was like. He was suffering. We were all suffering. I couldn't get anyone to understand his illness, so I thought it would be a waste of time for me to talk about the effects it had on my life as his wife and our daughter's life. How could anyone understand that I was living without all the normal things that people expect out of life? I didn't have a normal marriage and it was hard, but it wasn't impossible.

So many people in the world have what is considered normal. Too many others do not. For whatever reason, life isn't fair and the distribution of good stuff is dolled out with the luck of the drawer. There are lonely people, sick people, hurting people who don't have what they want. The trick is to be content with having what we need. I had everything I needed. I had a good life with Jack in the beginning. I ended up losing what I thought was important. Then I realized that I am happier than I have ever been. I have a wonderful daughter, nice home, good job, great family and friends to share my life with. It doesn't matter anymore that my life didn't turn out the way I thought it would. In some ways, it turned out better. I am stronger and more confident than I would have been otherwise.

I can only suggest that if you are married to someone with PTSD or any other illness, stop taking a look at what is not in your life and start being thankful for what is in your life. Grow in faith and patience, knowing who you are and where you came from. Think about what your life would be like if you didn't share it with someone so special that had to suffer deeply for being able to feel. Look at them for the qualities that live on and be proud of them for simply getting up out of bed every day. Think about what I told you about Jack, the progression of the illness and what he went through all these years. I am sure you will find the same amazing qualities in the eyes of the one you share your life with. In the end it doesn't matter what the

illness is or what the problem is. All that really matters is healing. Not just the body or mind, but healing your spirit.

I remember a story in the Bible about being tested by fire. I know that I have come through the fire with some scars that remind me of where I was and what I went through, but the fire didn't win. Vietnam left scars on Jack but it didn't win. It didn't destroy what is good inside him. There are similarities between us that I see more clearly than before. I lost the connection with God and so did Jack. I regained faith and I pray that Jack will someday remember the alter boy days when faith was as natural as breathing. We have been through a remarkable life together and we will go on facing whatever comes the way we have faced everything else, together.

He was my best friend. Then I became his. Vietnam was his war, but it became my battle.

September 11, 2001

I held my breath when I heard the words; "The Twin Towers were just hit by a plane." I heard the words but my brain tried to dismiss them as nonsense. I listened to the radio at work and looked at the wall remembering that less than I month ago I was looking at those two towers standing so tall against all the other buildings. I was on the ferry heading to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

My brain just couldn't get the event into the understanding cells of knowledge. I don't think that I will ever understand how something like this could have happened in a world so filled with technology and resurgence of spirituality. How could it understand that there are so many people in this world so bent, twisted and corrupted by repulsive degenerate leaders that

compel them to destroy innocent lives? Pearl Harbor was horrific yet it was a direct act of war against a military target. This was an act of cowards against people who simply showed up for work in New York and later in the Pentagon. This was an act of vultures that took control of the airplanes and killed the passengers and crew members on four airplanes that were simply going about their day getting from one place to another.

This was not an act of bravery on the part of those that took over the controls of the planes and met their death. This was not an act that will inspire fear in the American people either. Yes we will mourn and bury our dead. Yes we will be wounded by the economic effect. Yes we will watch the sky more closely and monitor the events around the world with an ever-increasing interest. More important is that this was an act that demands retaliation of the highest order against those who believe that the spirit of American is based on such a shallow foundation. Our spirit does not exist on Wall Street and the peace we find does not exist within the walls of the Pentagon. America is so much more than that and its spirit exists on the firm foundation of the principles that began this country. Our spirit exists in the pages of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. Our power comes from the very soul of its people. We may argue and disagree. We may bicker. But we are like any family in America. Our fights are ours, yet when push comes to shove we have the commitment to each other to stand firm against our enemies and we roll up our sleeves to defend our family.

Every nation on this planet should take notice that in our country we have given refuge and shelter to members of your own family. Because we have within our cities and towns members of every country on the planet and we will protect them as if they were born here simply because they are now part of our family and we were all refugees or born from them. We do not take things lightly when our family is attacked.

To the venomous, spineless, “sociopaths” you did not do as much damage as you thought you would. You only made our commitment to our country stronger.

I wrote this the night it happened. I couldn’t believe it or what was to come. Jack had an appointment that morning at the Veteran’s hospital. He was in total shock and called me in a panic. They were evacuating the hospital, sending outpatients and non-essential personnel. As my heart broke for the country, I was worried about our reaction to it. I knew that we would end up doing something that would involve military action. Yet when I looked at Jack that night, I was worried about him. I remembered how he handled the Gulf War, and it wasn’t an easy thing to go through for him. This time it could be worse.

A week after the attack, he picked up the phone and called his old Army buddy. He had the phone number for months but up until then he couldn’t call him. That night he was compelled to do so. They were both in shock and the warrior spirit came out. They both regretted that they were now too old to fight. Still the war drums were pounding across the Nation. We kept the TV on as much as possible praying for them to pull out the wounded from the wreckage and waiting for the country to take action. Even after the way the Vietnam War changed our lives, we knew that war would be a justified response.

I kept a close eye on Jack as the country became unified and showed its patriotism. I kept a closer eye on him when the protestors started. That’s when I wrote the following.

September 22, 2001

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched
refuse of your teaming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp
beside the golden door.”

By Emma Lazarus.

Liberty, freedom and justice. This is America. It is not perfect, yet we continue to strive for it. These values we hold dear in our hearts and minds. Still what America has comes with a price. It is a price that Americans have been willing to sacrifice their lives for from the beginning when the foundation of this nation was being laid. From the Revolution to the Civil War, from World War I to the Gulf War, Americans gave their lives on the battlefields.

We are able to go about our days because of those souls who paid the price to protect what America stand for. Today we face another battle for our freedom. It was forced upon us on September 11, 2001 when our civilians were attacked by terrorists. It was not our will that instigated this. Yet it is our spirit that compels us to react and seek out those who caused our blood to be shed, our safety to be placed in question and our souls to weep for the loss of innocent lives. God and the angels wept the day our nation bowed its head in pain, for it is by the will of God that man was created with freewill. It was an evil act against God and mankind that this was done by those whose souls had been infected by hatred and contempt or all that we as Americans hold sacred. This was unprovoked.

We must, as a nation, unite to defend our country. This is not an option. This is not a cause for protest. It is our right to do so but it is a pathetic demonstration of our right at a time when so many lives were lost on our own soil. During the Vietnam War we witnessed the protestors taking to the streets proclaiming that the War was wrong. It was a time when America was asked to help another country and as Americans we answered that call. As Americans we also exercised our right of free speech. As Americans we also harmed those who fought and died on foreign soil because our elected government sent them. They paid with their lives, their blood, their time away from family, friends and yielded their rights for a greater good. The price

the Vietnam veterans paid led the way to teach Americans that freedom of speech is not always a good thing when the words are ones of hatred and hostility. The Gulf War forces would not have been treated so kindly had it not been for the Vietnam veterans who continue to grieve for the pain inflicted by Americans.

Already the protestors have taken to our streets chanting. They are ill advised and this time they are totally wrong. This is our fight. This is our war. It was declared against us by those who are hiding. These are cowards, afraid of our wrath and our righteous indignation. The protestors should at this time direct their voices toward those who are suffering the tremendous loss of the victims and not declaring our reaction to this despicable act as anything but just and honorable. If they want to enjoy the freedom they have to speak your mind then they must be willing to pay the price for that right and the rights they have under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

We as Americans must also be rational and not seek vengeance against innocent people who simply have the same color skin as those who attacked us. This was not an act of a religion or of a people. This was an act of a terrorist fraction that hides behind the name of people of faith. No religion, no title of Holy War, can defend what has been done. This has nothing to do with faith. It has everything to do with what God despises. It is what we do now that will prove who Americans are. We seek peace, yet we defend it with whatever is needed to be done. We seek to live our lives in harmony with the world, yet must realize that a time has come to put to an end those who killed our people. So many nations have lost people in this attack. It was not just an attack against America it was an attack against humanity. Do not let your emotions delude your intelligence. Do not let your need to do something lead you to do the wrong thing.

I know that now more than ever we need to be concerned with our military forces,

current as well as past. We ask them to do what is against what they were raised to believe was wrong. We ask them to kill and destroy. A necessary evil thing has to be done in response to a greater evil. There were more than five thousand murdered in those few hours on our soil. Nearly ten thousand children lost a parent. Twelve thousand were wounded. (Later figures were revised to less than 3,000 dead.) Nine thousand were left homeless. Businesses were destroyed as St. Nicholas Greek Church was destroyed. The voices of reason have to be heard louder than those voices that call for peace this time. We will never know peace if we do not defend it. We cannot repeat Vietnam and we must remember what we learned from it. We cannot allow those who serve in the military bear the brunt of the deluded. We have to support them in any way they need it and must continue to support them when they return. We must also honor those who served in the past.

I am a person who would be considered religious and as such I do not like the idea of war, however throughout the history of man there have been wars. Some wars carried the support and guidance of God. There are evil people in the world and sometimes war is necessary. I pray this time we have the support and guidance of God. I doubt that He would support what was done to the innocent people on September 11, 2001. (Enough preaching!)

I know what it is like to have the world turned up side down in a single moment of time. I also know what it is like to lose faith. Still I know what it is like to overcome the impossible and the wonderment of having faith return, renewed and stronger than before. We do the best we can from one day to the next and we will go on. Pain somehow yields to warm memories or what once was and our soul carries us on. Our nation is hurting right now and we are afraid to travel or open our mail. We worry about our families more than ever and value them more. We were forced to realize that nothing is a sure thing. The way we expected things to be no longer

matters. The only things that matter is what we learned and what we do now.

I believe it is time for us to change our attitude regarding mental illness. It's easier to talk about problems associated with bodily functions than it is to talk about mental illness. We talk about everything from menstrual cycles to menopause, from hemorrhoids to impotence, but you can't get anyone to talk about being bipolar. We can watch a commercial about someone having VD yet we can't see someone talk about having PTSD. Depression is just about the only mental illness that is addressed. I think that the pharmaceutical companies are losing a great deal of money by not spending their advertising budgets on those who have less acceptable illnesses. There are so many out there that are afraid to come forward and more that are unaware that there is an explanation for their condition as well as treatment that can give their brains back chemical balance. They need to know that they can have a normal life again and that society has finally come to terms with these illnesses instead of speaking about them with whispers.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

ANOTHER BATTLE

Jack ended up retiring from work. It was near our seventeenth anniversary. We made it. It was hard on me when it happened. I knew that it was the right thing for him but it worried me knowing he would have nothing to do all day. It was hard financially as well since he was not making as much. It was a temporary set back and his claim was again denied. Oh we kept fighting and appealing. Jack kept up with his doctor's appointments without having to worry about taking flack for taking time off. He seemed more relaxed with one less problem on his shoulders. I knew that sooner or later the Veteran's Administration will honor his claim for an increase since it was so obvious that he could not work. In 2002 his increase was granted and it was a relief. He is more relaxed with the medication and therapy as well and is trying very hard to change. Rachel is still doing wonderful in school and is still a joy despite the fact that she is a "teenager" in every sense of the word. She is my blessing. She has even taken an interest in writing. She is good for her age. I actually discovered that there are games on the Internet as well as information, which in a way is not a good thing considering I have become addicted to playing some of them. I have accumulated a great fortune in tokens anyway and I am having fun. I fought the battles I had to fight and found what I needed in the Arms of God to get through it all.

Now I worry about the next generation of warriors when they too are warriors no more. I pray that we are able to take care of them better than we did the generations before. With knowledge comes understanding and I hope we have learned enough to be able to understand

that moments in time can change lives forever. I think that in this country to have any homeless people is a sin, but to have even one veteran homeless is a disgrace. I had a couple of visits at the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans in Boston since I finished writing the first version of this book. It is amazing what they do for our veterans but it is so sad that shelters are necessary at all. Most of the veterans that are homeless have PTSD just like Jack, but they have no one to take care of them. I am painfully aware of the fact that Jack could have found himself in the shoes of any one of them. I know how hard it is to give up part of your life for someone else. I no longer judge anyone who could not find it in themselves to do what I did. I have few regrets and I know that it was all worth what we went through. I realize now that it really doesn't matter what the cause of mental illness is. It changes lives and without knowledge, it is nearly impossible to deal with. I communicate with people all the time that either have the illness because of military service, or they are the family member. Many wives ended up divorced because of it and they tell me how guilty they feel because I stuck it out with Jack. I try to reassure them that had I not been so stubborn and researched all I could, I think I would have done the same. They are no more to blame than the one who has the illness. Society makes it very hard to do the right thing.

We need to put things in the proper perspective. The war in Iraq is real and as real as any other war. Men and women risk their lives every day serving our country. Sure, you can say that you are against the war and they should not have been there in the first place. The position you take regarding war does not change what is. We always need to support them, in times of war and peace. A warrior knows no political party. A bullet does not know anything about the person it seeks to destroy. A family waiting back home does not think about anything except the day the warrior is a warrior no more and how much they miss them.

I missed Jack for too many years of our life together and he was right here all the time. I could see him, talk to him and touch him, yet the walls of war kept us separated by his illness. We have now been together for twenty two years and as of this revised writing, approaching our twentieth anniversary. Memories of bad times fade to the back of my mind while good ones are cherished. I still see something very special when I look into Jack's eyes and the pain does not seem as deep. As he heals I become more in love with him and know that he has something inside him that is wonderful. His strength of character is truly amazing and I am grateful that I stayed.

We have met other veterans that are outstanding people. I have met many civilians that have dedicated their lives to helping the military veterans and their families. It is a world that exists in humbleness and grace. All in all I guess things are as they are supposed to be, we are still a family. Isn't that what really matters?

CHAPTER 23

THE NEW GENERATION OF WARRIORS

After September 11th, I was in a rush to get the book out. I knew that it would get worse for Vietnam veterans. What I didn't know was that a new generation would also be afflicted by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The figures in from Afghanistan and Iraq troops are one in

eight. With 17,900 serving in Afghanistan and 150,000 serving in Iraq, it is staggering. There were over 270,000 homeless veterans in 2002 when my book was printed. There are now over 316,640 homeless veterans, most with PTSD. The suicide rate has increased as well. There are now as of January 21, 2005 over 28,000 troops returning from service in Iraq that have been diagnosed with PTSD at a rate of one out of five.

It doesn't matter which side of the action taken in Afghanistan or Iraq you are on when it comes down to our troops. This new generation has volunteered to serve. They ask that they be provided for with support of equipment and all necessary to sustain their lives while they risk all. They assume that their care will be taken care of when they return from serving, yet with the hospitals and Veteran's Administration over loaded, it is obvious that increased funding is of the utmost importance. More has to be done when it concerns their mental health. With society still yet to realize what mental illness is and what PTSD is, much is needed to be done to make us all aware of what they go through. As stated before, it does not take a war to bring about PTSD. It only takes trauma. It can happen to anyone. We ask them to alter their moral belief that it is wrong to kill and they face death every day they serve. That does something to them. It changes the chemical balance within their brains. Some, as with Vietnam veterans can return to normal life while others cannot.

Too many times I have been discussing PTSD on line and there is still little understanding. So many people have said that the homeless veterans are that way because they want to be. They call them drug addicts and alcoholics without a single clue that the veterans are "self-medicating" to kill off feelings they cannot escape from. Too many times I have talked to wives that are trying to cope with what Vietnam veterans wives have gone through for the last 30 years or more, and still too few understand it. With knowledge comes the power to heal. With

knowledge comes understanding so that our human issues do not leave us second guessing ourselves. The veterans and support givers can finally stop the “what-ifs” and self-blame if the illness is finally understood. With over 500,000 veterans of Vietnam joined by veterans of Korea and other military actions before September 11th 2001, we need to start learning more about this illness that will claim the lives of thousands of other veterans. Jack and I were lucky that we made it past all we went through. His nephew Andy was not. If they added those who died after the war from Agent Orange and from suicide to the names on the wall, the entire area for Vietnam would be filled with names. How long will it take for a new section to be added in Washington for this new generation of warriors?



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This nation is again divided by Vietnam. The swift boat ads that have been dominating the news have proven that it is still a passionate issue. John Kerry is an example of what many faced. He served and saw what war can do. Like many he continued to battle Vietnam when he returned. Unlike many his voice was heard by the media and Congress. His words come back to haunt him now. Had he seen how his words would hurt those who served? No. He must have thought that his words would prove the need to end the war. I do not know what really happened to him over there and in the long run I don't really think it matters as much as what happened in his life after.

He could have returned in silence and just got on with his life of privilege. He didn't have to go to war at all when you think about it, but he enlisted. He kept serving his country to the best of his abilities. Some say he was power hungry so he got into politics. I don't agree with that either. Money holds more power in the long run and this election proves that point just as all the other elections. He chose to serve as an elected official just as President Bush chose to serve

Texas and America.

The difference is that John Kerry has seen war from both sides. He knows the price paid by so many. Again we are divided by war. Some say that it is our safety at stake while others say that Iraq has nothing to do with safety. The result has yet to be seen. The only fact at the moment is this nation is being torn apart by it. We have a thousand who paid the price with their life and hundreds wounded for a war that as of today was not necessary as the thousands whose names are engraved on the black wall in Washington for another war that was not necessary for the United States. If we have learned nothing from the lessons Vietnam taught us, then we are doomed to revisit the outcome for many more years.

I think that Senator Kerry has been taught the lessons of Vietnam. I hope that he understands that the price of war continues to be paid after the actions have stopped. 500,000 Vietnam Veterans continue to pay because of Post Traumatic Stress and have been joined by veterans of all the other actions that followed. Hundreds of thousands continue to pay with wounds and broken bodies as well as wounded spirits. I pray that if President Bush is re-elected he learns this lesson as well. War is something that should always be the last attempt to have peace. The peace of a nation is paid by the turmoil of those who defend it.

So that is our story. The same story that is being repeated across the country and around the world with the newest generation coming home. More sadness and a nation yet again divided by war with the reasons for it far from clear. Right now there are over 30,000 returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, much like Jack over 30 years ago. I think that is the biggest reason why I decided to put this out into the world for free. It was, after all the original goal, to reach out. I hope that if I was able to get a total stranger to care about Jack and my family, I would be able to get others to put a human face on the numbers they hear and make it all real. It could be anyone and in any family. In closing there is one more poem I would like to share. I wrote it after many years on line and corresponding with veterans like my Jack.

AS IF

•By

Kathie Costos

AS IF

nothing changed about me

I came home and still it had.

I didn't notice I had left behind that part of me

I couldn't see,

and brought back someone who had turned bad.

As if I could pass it off as part of war

and that I only did what I should

still I know I'd change it all if I could.

As if the reflection in the mirror was telling lies

I couldn't recognize me with my own eyes.
I was only gone for just one year. Why do I look so old
and why does my soul feel so damn cold?
As if I could simply forget what hell looked like
and how it felt to hate with righteous vengeance and more
then lash out and strike
those who meant me harm
As if I carried some kind of lucky charm
I beat the odds and made it out alive
but he should have been the one to survive.
He was better than most and better than me.
As if I can still hear his voice telling me to go on
I breathe, I laugh, and I live while he is gone.
Still the years won't take him from my brain
or the rest of what had been part of my life.
As if it returns as often as the wind or the rain.
The memories come rushing back taking me away
to that distant land of beauty and death
And no one will ease this pain
As if my family, my friends or even my wife
could ever understand that I am a troubled man
who sees the goodness in me coming out from time to time
till the pain follows that I don't want to feel
As if some day I'll separate what is real
from what is just a memory of what had been
and find the peace to simply live again.
to find me somewhere beneath it all

As if nothing had changed about me.

This is what my husband's life became with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Not him alone, but our whole family. It is the same story repeated over and over across this country from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan. We see the body with our eyes and see the price paid by the one in front of us, yet how do you view a wounded mind? They do not look any different from anyone else. Yet it is the wounded mind that needs healing the most and usually needs to heal with the wounds the body has suffered as well. They need support and they need the public to seek knowledge so they can find us there when they need us. Now ask yourself was Iraq worth any of this? Was Bush worth any of this? What happened to the war on terror we were united behind? I cannot put it any more simply than this, the troops should never be used other than the last resort for peace and never sent to battle with a lie on the lips of those who send them to meet their fate.

- Kathie Costos

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- I am very passionate about being against the invasion of Iraq, just as much as I am about the troops we sent. I don't know which side of the issue you are on and as for this work, that really should have no bearing. This is a human issue and as such those we send to fight this nation's battles should be supported when they serve, by our prayers and thoughts, as well as when they come home and need us instead. The time to honor them is every day.

Jack's claim was approved and he received 100% disability rating from the VA. I was no longer trapped working long hours and had time to spend working on helping my adopted vets. I met some amazing people on the internet that are working very hard to help and some women who live with Vietnam veterans who simply need to know they are not alone.

So that is the end of this part of the story anyway. Maybe it changed the way you look at

mental illness. Maybe it changed the way you think about your own life. As with anything else what you see depends on how you look at it.



end of this part of our story anyway.