Utah State University
DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Theses and Dissertations | Graduate Studies, School of

5-1-2011

The Shape of Grief: A Generational Legacy of the Vietnam War

Benjamin A. Quick
Utah State University

Recommended Citation
Quick, Benjamin A., "The Shape of Grief: A Generational Legacy of the Vietnam War" (2011). *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations.* Paper 933.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/933

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies, School of at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact becky.thoms@usu.edu.

THE SHAPE OF GRIEF

A Generational Legacy of the

Vietnam War

by

Benjamin A. Quick

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

Approved:

Christopher Cokinos Major Professor	Michael Sowder Committee Member
Jennifer Sinor Committee Member	Byron R. Burnham Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2007

Copyright © Ben Quick 2007

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

THE SHAPE OF GRIEF

A Generational Legacy of the

Vietnam War

by

Ben Quick, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2007

Major Professor: Christopher Cokinos
Department: English

A well-known memoirist once said that a true war story never seems to end, that it just keeps going and going. The question begs: If the war story never ends, then how does it manifest in future generations? In my case, as the first-born son of a Vietnam veteran, the war story has played out physically, within my body, in the form of an Agent Orange-related disability and a resulting set of limitations and adaptations. Fortunately, for me the limitations have been few and the adaptations many. But despite this, I've known, since a relatively young age, that I am not quite the same as other people, that there is something different, something I've often seen as grotesque.

And the questions this leaves me with are many: How has my response to disability—the contortion, the tendency toward concealment, the development of adaptive mechanisms—affected both the fine details and the overall texture of my life? Secondly, how has my father's war experience—the physical facts and the emotional

residue—shaped my own story? The Agent Orange component is largely straightforward, mostly a matter of piecing together bits of recorded history, but the emotional element is another thing altogether. My father suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for several years after his return, a timeframe that happens to coincide with the first and most impressionable years of my life, and I've often suspected that I've inherited, through the environment of my youth, many of the sensitivities that oozed from father's own psychological wounds. If so, how have these sensitivities helped form my relationships to my disability and to the world at large? Lastly, what can a chronicle of the origins and employment of and fallout from Agent Orange in Vietnam—a history filled with obscurity, secrecy and denial—tell me about my own story? What parallels and crossing points, if any, can I find in the journey through these questions?

(75 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my major professor, Christopher Cokinos for showing me how to be a writer, for leading me through the thesis process and for being a treasured friend and mentor. I would also like to thank deeply my other committee members, Jennifer Sinor and Michael Sowder, for the invaluable encouragement and feedback. To my mother and father: Thank you for your openness to my often sensitive questioning and for your support, financial and otherwise. And to my son, Sage: Thank you for being who you are, for reminding me what really matters in this life and for keeping me grounded in love. Without you I would never have had the courage to complete this project.

Ben Quick

CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT……...iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS……..….v

CHAPTER

I. THE SHAPE OF GRIEF……1

II. UNDER THE BREATH……....59

BIBLIOGRAPHY……..67

CHAPTER I

THE SHAPE OF GRIEF: A GENERATIONAL LEGACY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The summer before the divorce Al and Kathy Quick load their two boys into the back of the green station wagon and drive up the Rock River to a Fourth of July veterans getaway at a campground owned by a man sympathetic to Vietnam vets. Al at the time is so consumed with healing that he and Kathy have not slept in the same bed for months. The marriage is dead.

At the retreat, a middle-aged man in a faded olive green Army shirt and stained jungle hat approaches Kathy. He tells her he lives in a halfway house and asks if she would like to hear a story. Not waiting for an answer, the man begins telling her of the time he encountered the young North Vietnamese boy one day on afternoon patrol. The boy, gap-toothed and shaking, had walked toward the group of soldiers with a grenade taped to his hand. The man watched with big, frightened eyes as the child's fingers crept closer and closer to the pin. It was as if he had not quite made up his mind, as if he was still grappling, in his young brain, with the enormity of what was about to happen. "Stop," the soldier screamed. But the boy merely hesitated, twitched with recognition, and kept moving forward. At last, when he could wait no more, trembling, sweat soaking through his fatigues in long, thin lines, already anticipating the frenzy of pain and guilt, the man opened up his M-16.

And an almost unbearable quiet, a raw stillness grew and draped itself over the afternoon, the soldiers, the thatched roofs of the nearby village, the thin, gray rills of cooking fires. Wrapped up in a cloak of the damp and oily smells of the war, the man

knelt and watched the slow trickle of blood grow from two holes in the boy's forehead as the child laid down to die in the left rut of the red clay road.

"I had no choice," he chokes to Kathy, "I had no choice."

He is not alone. These kinds of stories are common in the campground, and so are the hauntings and tremors that take root in the dark spaces of isolation that so many war veterans occupy. The gathering of these former soldiers, the purging of painful narratives, the sharing of dehumanizing terror that can only be believed by those who have felt it up close, releases a cathartic energy that nearly drips from the heavy branches of the big maples and oak trees that rise above the spread of tents and campers. Demons are named and shed. The wages war extracts from the spirit, the emotional burdens, are lessened by degrees, if only for a few days. Not so the physical.

Men, if they come back from war at all, often come back missing parts. Anyone who has witnessed a Veteran's Day gathering has seen the limps, the formless pant legs, the stumps and eye patches. What is striking about this particular congregation of vets is not that men with severed limbs or men whose skin crawls with the hard, raised lines of scars outnumber whole men; this is to be expected.

What shocks are the children. For they too are maimed. The sheer number walking the dirt paths or being pushed in wheelchairs—some with club feet, some with arms like flippers or shrunken and misshapen legs, some with cerebral palsy—astounds.

At the end of the night, at the dance for veterans and wives in a cement amphitheatre, a band plays rock and roll. In the middle of the dance floor, a one-legged man a few years older than Al and Kathy, a man with rippling, tattooed forceps, dances with a supple, dark-haired woman. He holds a crutch in his left hand, and his ponytail

swings to the rhythm as he moves with the kind of surety and grace that attracts attention. Soon the floor clears except for him and his partner. He spins; he sidesteps; he twirls the crutch and slams it on the concrete. Nobody moves until he stops. And then, after the song reaches crescendo and falls into the night air, after he shifts his weight back to the thick wooden rod in his palm, after he lifts a black t-shirt to wipe the glistening sheet of sweat from his forehead, the scene erupts into applause.

□□□□□

Like many veterans of the rice paddies and jungles of Vietnam, my father doesn't talk much about his war experience. What bits and pieces I've been able to assemble into semi-coherent narratives have come from a scattering of late-night talks with my mother and one hazy conversation with my father on a rough-hewn log porch outside the gift shop at the Grand Canyon Lodge in Arizona. In the midst of divorce proceedings with his second wife—not my mother—he had flown to Salt Lake City, rented a car, and driven down to spend a week with me on the North Rim, where I was working for the summer. I barely remember the conversation, but I know it had something to do with my father's Purple Heart and the questions surrounding what happened to the injured friend he hauled from the battlefield so many years ago. I was twenty-two, and I realize now that he almost certainly was seeking me out as a witness, that something in the loss of his marriage had pulled back the flesh from the old wounds and triggered old images he needed to flush out, that under the eaves of that big log building floating between the ponderosa pines and the vast gap of terraced black space, in the cool August air on the

edge of the dry plateau, huddled with his oldest son over plastic cups filled with ice and liquor, he was searching for comfort. And I think now that if I had been more attentive to my father's suffering, if I had simply been able to say, "Tell me more," I could have not only eased the pain my father was lost in, but I could have learned something of the etiology of my own suffering, my own dull angst.

But the moment passed into the night, like so many others, with father and son moving thumbs in slow arcs over the lips of cups held between legs.

"Sure gets chilly up here at night."

"Yeah. Once the sun goes down."

□□□□□

My parents usher Keith and me to the kitchen and tell us to sit in their laps. The air in the room is damp and warm. Keith shuffles across the tattered wool of the green carpet to my mother's waiting arms and slips up into the loose folds of her lap. I waddle to my father, nestling between the muscled knobs of his bare knees. My mother's face, beneath the seasonal freckles, is pallid. Has someone died? My great grandfather Detra passed on last year, when I was ten, and my parents had gathered us on the living room couch to break the news. From that talk and from the wake and funeral in the days that followed, I've learned to associate emotional heaviness with physical death. The sensation I'm feeling is the same.

The hesitancy and delicate movements of my parents—my mother reaching slowly to lift a glass of water from the dark grain of the oak surface, my father twisting

and untwisting coarse tendrils of his beard with the tips of fingers. Dark stains in the armpits of my father's beer league shirt as he lifts an elbow from the table to run a hand through thinning blonde hair. Small wad of Wrigley's bouncing through his mouth like Silly Putty. My mother's bifocals, much too large, over eyebrows and crow's feet like two clear saucers, her hair, short, straight and rounded at the fringe, bangs cut high. A bell over bloodshot eyes. Many years later, when inspecting photos of her from this time, I will sense a dull stoicism, a lack of humor, a tired drabness permeating her spirit, the same tired drabness I will notice and turn from in the temperament of my wife in the months before my own divorce. But like many things that widen incrementally, my mother's weariness is too faint and too familiar to see.

What is real and immediate is the pinched look on her face, which I'm trying like hell to avoid. I imagine, later, glancing, unblinking and nervous, around the room. Points of brightness on the chrome knobs of the broken dishwasher hold me for a moment before I dart to a spot on the shadowed paisley of the yellow wallpaper below the cupboards where the previous owners, when they had refurbished the kitchen, pressed the patterned sheets of thin, meshed fiber to the wall without consideration for alignment. Along the line where the pieces meet, images slide back and forth in a crude optical illusion. My eyes glide up and down the distraction for no more than an instant before movement through the window, the flit of a small bird or insect or the play of light on the surface of a wind-tossed leaf catches my attention and draws me outward, out past the spread of patio gray, past the leaning garage, past the unmown lawn, past the garden, past the compost pile, past the overgrown ditch in the far corner of the lot where once, when playing with the Waselewskis, the Catholic boys from across the street, we claimed to dig

up the nails from the cross of Jesus, past the tall copse of trees where the raccoon lives, where my father built the rickety tree fort we jumped from in shows of childhood might, past the property line to the next house over, the big blue house with the ping pong table square in the middle of the basement floor. Out over Galena Avenue I fly, onward and upward, the outskirts of Dixon below, strings of power lines whirring and crackling a hundred feet down, water tower climbing from the green like a big white lollipop, then gone, curving brown stretch of the Rock River glinting and shining as I drift on by, over the knitted thatch of farmland I float, millions and millions of thin green lines, at this angle and that, patching and merging, blending together, cut by forest and strips of gold where the creeks cut through, where the bass and catfish grow.

And suddenly I want my fishing pole. I want to sit down on the mud bank of one of these creeks and throw a line in with my good friend Bubba Dean. I want to feel the wet earth seep through the seat of my pants. I want to bait a hook with liver and wait for whiskered giants to strike. I want to walk home to Bubba's house with the weight of big fish in my hands. I want to sneak a peak at the Playboy Channel before his parents get home, ask his dad to clean my prize, and watch it sizzle and pop in a cast iron skillet while Bubba's mom feeds us soda pop and Cheetos, the smell of cornmeal and frying river running through my nose.

I'm lurched back to the moment by the voice of my mother.

"Your father and I are getting a divorce. Do you know what that means?" I do know what it means, and I am stunned. I've never seen my parents fight. One time, when they thought we were asleep in the back of the old Datsun at the end of a long ride home from a trip to the relatives or a weekend in Wisconsin, I heard my father yell. And

that is it. Nothing else. Nothing to make a child wish for a better circumstance, a different life. On my dad's suddenly uncomfortable lap, I am frozen by an unbearable tension. A knob of fire rises from my solar plexus, spreading upward to my neck and face, out in trails of light and bitter numbness through my arms and fingers, down my chest into genitals and legs, carrying deadness and contraction to all parts of my body, tightening and tightening.

Minutes go by like this, or at least it seems like minutes, dead and empty minutes, minutes of swirling tightness, hot, tangled deadness bunching and pulsing through my system like spinning logs, heaving and bucking, breaking free then catching, buckling then rushing like fire. I cannot move. The palms of my hands latched to my thighs, my throat stiff, backside of my knees stuck to my father's legs by a thin layer of rime, I am paralyzed, a figure of stone. I hear and see nothing. I am sure there is more talk, uneasy assurances of this and that, more nervous movement, more touching of noses, pushing back of glasses, rubbing of elbows and ears. Perhaps my father takes the gum from his mouth and squashes it on the lip of a coffee mug, reaches for a mesh baseball cap, works the bill, brings it to his forehead in a slow swoop, adjusts the fit until his hair protrudes just so. And maybe my mother shifts in her chair, plucks a bit of lint from my brother's near-white hair, and on the painted surface of the kitchen table, the table I will inherit, two decades later, at a place my own life not far from this, not far at all, drops the tiny ball of filament like a small and weightless plant.

My stupor is broken, at last, by a high-pitched question from my brother.

"Where will I live?" And that is just enough. I bolt from the house, slamming the porch door behind me. Through the dappled light beneath the walnut and maple I run,

eleven-year-old legs sawing through tall grass and dandelions, sliding by the jumble of rusted toy bulldozers and dump trucks half buried in the damp sand of the tractor tire, by the rows of overgrown squash and beans, tomatoes and berries, to the swing-set in the back yard. Pushing my belly into the hanging swing, I rock back and forth, toes carving lines in dark soil, knees hanging inches from the earth. I stay there for hours, shifting positions when the edges of the swing cut into my sides, crying.

Later in the day, my father's friend, Bill Kopanda, stops over to check up on things. A high school principal and semi-professional cyclist whose fitness bubbles over into a kind of social glee in his dealings with people, he exudes a wit and bounce that can, depending upon my mood, elicit laughter or scowls. After assessing the stability of the situation inside the house, he ambles out to find me, approaching with good intentions and high energy. "How you doing, bud?" Sniffling, rubbing my nose, legs still moving in quiet rhythm, I want him to go. My eyes stay trained on the ground. His presence, light and jumpy, is far too much. His teeth too perfect, his smile too large. The veins in his calves pop out like inverted streams, a hydrology of fanatical health. Each time he sways, I can see, under the narrow shadows of high cut cargo shorts, toned edges of thigh muscles roll up and down. He stands there, looks toward the house and back toward me, keeps talking.

"You know, this will be okay. I know it's hard right now but just think, you'll have two bedrooms." When I don't reply, he opens his mouth as if to speak, thinks better of it, turns to the lawn, bends down, lets loose fingers fall to a spot in the grass between the brilliant white shapes of his running shoes, plucks a single blade, places the marrow of the root end in his mouth, bites down quietly, nods his head, says no more for a time.

Sensing him beginning to understand my need for space, I start to relax. And soon I'm confronted by the strange feeling of wanting him to go and wanting him to stay at the same time. I want him to go because what he tells me is a reminder of all that has happened, and that things will not be the same, cannot be reversed, that this is not a dream. And I want him to stay out of a longing for a promise of something else, that even though the structure of my life is no longer whole, certain elements, certain people, however aggravating at times, will remain. I'm not sure what more he tells me under the big trees, but whatever he says is enough to convince me to come in. Transferring weight from bent plastic to my legs by slowly, gingerly tilting my head back and flexing my arms, I drop to my knees on the cool black ground, turn from the swing, rise up tentatively on stiff and swollen limbs, walk to the house, and fall in a heap on my bedroom floor.

□□□□□

Eight inches of snow fall on Washington D.C. on January 20, 1961, initiating one of the worst traffic jams the nation's capital has ever seen as John F. Kennedy takes his inaugural vows on a sloppy White House lawn. Up to now, American involvement in the turmoil of South East Asia has been secondary, mainly involving the grudging flow of money and arms to the fragile Diem regime in South Vietnam. But conservatives in the capital are calling for more than a half-hearted attempt to fill the vacuum left by France in the wake of its defeat and withdrawal from the region. And the American president is young and Irish-Catholic, a suspect combination in mid-century American politics, and is

worried that Republicans will paint him pink if he doesn't hold the South from communist guerillas. So he sets out to do so, and to do so with gusto, expanding U.S. military operations in a manner described by Noam Chomsky as a move "from terror to aggression."

One year and seven months after the snowbound inauguration and a world away from Washington, in August 1962, Al Quick is 14-years-old, just beginning his freshman year of high school in the small river town of Rock Falls, Illinois. The oldest of five children, Al is introverted as he enters adolescence. The fact that he comes from a household so poor that charity baskets and second-hand clothes are nearly all that arrive on Christmas only adds to his shyness. There is not much love between the parents—Albert and Betty—who married when she was just sixteen. Betty, in temporary remission from cervical cancer, waitresses nights at a local diner in order to make enough money to feed the string of children—Al, Barb, Chuck, Mike, and Deb—and their father. Recovering from a sinus infection that has burst, shooting mucus into his brain, leaving him with a steel plate and enough cerebral damage that he will from this point on seem a bit off kilter, Albert has taken leave from his job loading coils at Northwestern Steel and Wire. So Betty, in addition to running the operations of the house—cleaning, feeding her children and husband, sewing up torn pants—has become the primary breadwinner.

Though the family is poor and in many ways unhappy, in the eyes of Albert there is something precious growing in clapboard home on the outskirts of the river town—the agility of his firstborn son. As he moves through high school, Al appears to shed his shyness, catches for the high school baseball team, plays basketball, runs track, starts at running back on the varsity football team as a sophomore, becomes a ladies man. In his

senior year Al Quick cuts and weaves his way to all-state honors on the football field and is recruited by the Big Ten schools like Northwestern and Wisconsin. But with grades better suited to small colleges and with no real understanding of the ins and out of the recruiting process, he ends up settling for the first school that admits him. In August of 1966, the land still hot and the leaves yet to turn, straddling the engine of the brand-new Honda 90 motorcycle his father has bought him, hands fast to the ends of the bars, knees and elbows bent to the loose shape of freedom and space, Al Quick chugs down Highway 40 to play football on scholarship at Millikin University in Decatur.

□□□□□

One pleasant summer evening in 1983, we loaded up the wagon and drove—my mother, my father, my brother, an aunt, and I—to the slow muddy river that glides by wide and brown, next to the old gothic high school. Along with most of Dixon, Illinois on the Fourth of July we were there for fireworks. Eight-years-old and giddy for the coming show, I ran with my brother through a maze of carefully stretched blankets, coolers filled with soda pop and string cheese, and paper flags hung from strollers. Above the riverfront's mingling odors of cotton candy and dead fish soared a cacophony of carnival rides—Ferris wheels and revolving cages, whirling cars and roller coasters—buzzing and flashing in the gloaming sky. Children traced their names in the humid air with lit sparklers and tossed the thin metal rods aside when the gunpowder was gone. We spread our sheets in a careful line and sprawled out to wait for the show. My father took a walk. When the fireworks were over and he had not yet returned, we looked for him in

the darkened crowd of spectators scattering toward cars and sidewalks. We searched for what seemed like hours, but could not find him.

"Come on boys," said my mother. She fiddled with the silver buckle hanging from the worn leather of her purse cover. "Aunt Sara needs her medicine."

Arching long fingers to her forehead as if to shield her eyes from a remembered sun, she scanned the high school lawn once more and shrugged.

"Don't worry about your dad. I'm sure….I'm sure he just met up with a friend." And I was sure she's right. As we walked the three blocks to the Price's, where our car was parked, my young mind was unconcerned. I knew nothing of war or trauma or triggers. I only hoped that Josh would be up when we collected our ride.

He wasn't, and we drove away, headlights illuminating the long rows of petunias—pink petunias, white petunias, petunias striped with cream and purple—that wave from the planters lining the streets of Dixon during the summer festival season. We drove past the unkempt Victorian homes in Swissville, beneath the canopies of old walnut trees, here and there hearing a dull crack as we ran over a full, green shell. Up the winding grade of Swiss Street we rolled, out onto the quiet busyness of Fourth Avenue, the soft troll of car lights pulling us home. Keith and I curled up on the vinyl of the backseat, my mother driving apprehensively, Sara telling a story from Chicago, we turned onto Park Street. Although the distance from the Prices' to the yellow house on the slope of the small ravine was less than a mile, by the time the car crunched over the last few feet of gravel and came to rest, Keith and I were nearly asleep. My mother rousted us and sent us to bed.

Hours later, as she was dumping the compost, perhaps pausing for a moment to watch the dance of fireflies, listening to the rustle of the scrap-fed raccoon above the hum of cicadas, my father barreled into the backyard, confronting her with an anger that couldn't be explained. And although I was not in that backyard with open ears, I know my parents well enough to imagine.

"Kathy, where the hell were you?" He was nearly screaming, frothing at the mouth, the veins on his neck full and taught, teeth clenched, his normally pale and Scandinavian face as red as blood, eyes swollen.

"Al, we looked for—"

"Goddamnit, Kathy. How could you just fucking leave me?"

"But we—"

"Why?" As if there was something she should already have known, some pact that was broken, as if they had spoken an oath in dreams.

□□□□□

I'm sitting cross-legged in the living room of the house on Park Street with my seven-year-old brother. My father walks upstairs. In the thick of my parent's splitting off, the time of the great confusion, sadness blurs the edges of the scene. The announcement was made last week, and I've been nearly catatonic since, resentful and disbelieving, unable to help with the packing, unwilling to gather up even one handful of socks and underwear for the move. This much is clear: My mother putters around, scraping things off the couch with nervous hands, trying her best.

"Keith, can you pick up your Star Wars things? They've been on the floor for days. And Ben, your baseball cards—please." I imagine neither one of us budging from our seats on the carpet, our eyes glued to the action heroes slinging sawed-offs and Uzi's on the black and white screen.

"Boys." Her voice rises, becomes stern. She turns off the television. I'm sure she is hurting. I can see it in her face, the saddles of dark flesh behind the rims of her glasses, the lines around her mouth and eyes growing, crossing in broken furrows. But I am eleven, oblivious to the needs of adults, and right now the only pain that matters is my own. And I don't know that moments ago my father, choked up and nervous, has asked my mother if she thought him abusive. And that she has told him yes.

"Mom, can't we just wait until the show's over?"

"No. Get it done now and you won't miss much."

"But mom, I can't—"

And then I hear it, as clear as day. The great wailing that emanates from the bedroom at the top of the stairs. The tone is both grieved and panicked, lonely and tense and full of humiliation. It vibrates through me like tined steel. I will carry its sound forever.

□□□□□

Counterinsurgency is not a common word in the wood-frames and factories of rural Illinois in the mid-sixties. It is, however, beginning to appear frequently in the speeches of American politicians. A long and awkward utterance, it is a word that

depends on the existence of a root word, *insurgency*, which is defined by Webster as, "a condition of revolt against a government that is less than an organized revolution and that is not recognized as belligerency." In the case of Vietnam, the people charged with perpetuating the state of revolt—the insurgents—are a loose but growing number of communist soldiers recently given the tacit approval of the Hanoi government in North Vietnam. They have begun conducting night raids on military posts and villages in the South under the name National Liberation Front, and have become known condescendingly to Diem supporters as the Vietcong.

In Vietnam, countering these insurgents means denying the Vietcong and their allies in the countryside and hills the apparatus of survival: food and forest. Before long the primary method of denial becomes the aerial application of a variety of vegetative defoliants. In 1960, accepting a joint recommendation from the State and Defense Departments, President Kennedy signs a resolution accelerating the program. And spraying intensifies through the early sixties in three distinct plant communities: the dense broadleaf vegetation that blankets the Vietnam outback and turns roads and supply routes into ambush zones; the mangroves that line swamps and provide habitat for the catfish and shrimp that are staples of the Vietnamese diet; and the fields of foodstuffs—rice, manioc and sweet potatoes.

Meanwhile, in Decatur, Illinois, the liberty of that first breezy ride down the highway fades fast. Separated from his family for the first time in his life, away from his tight knit group of friends, surrounded, on the neat campus of the private school, by rich Presbyterians from Newark and Trenton, Boston and Queens, kids with cars and nice shoes, Al never quite feels like he fits in, sinks back into shyness. What's more, after

four years of high school almost devoid of rigor, not yet able to wrap his head around language of Milton or the theorems of algebra, he struggles with his studies. With his country at war and a college deferment only thing standing between him and a draft card, the possibility of dropping out is frightening. All the same, by the end of the spring semester he's fallen below the B average he needs to keep his funding, and he doesn't have the money to go back in the fall.

That summer, Al finds labor at the steel mill with his close friend, a former tackle on the Rock Falls football team named Dick Lundquist, and along with Dick, Dan Kraft and Ron McClintock, Dick's cronies from his time across the Rock River in Sterling, spends the next few months working, drinking, womanizing and fighting at parties and taverns. The fights become legendary, involving police cars and paddy wagons, drunken fisticuffs that end with teenage boys riding to hospitals on gurneys and late night visits from deputies.

One such scuffle begins at the Royal Palms, a dingy bar on the square in downtown Dixon, where Dan makes a flagrant pass at the wrong woman, probably touching her or blurting out some drunken and aggressive slur. When the woman begins yelling, the foursome decides to leave. On their way out, she flings a glass in their direction, hitting Al in the head. With blood oozing onto the collar and rolled up sleeves of his shirt, Al and the other young men cruise to the police station in Dick's Mustang to file a report.

As it happens, the woman and her friends are brought in before Al finishes the paperwork. Both groups leave at the same time, and under the glow of unwashed stars the woman's car follows the Mustang out of town, passengers throwing beer cans and

trash. Eventually both vehicles pull off on a dirt road between cornfields. People leap out. Ron starts to fight while the others watch. Before long, Al and Dick jump in. But Dan, normally an aggressor, is nursing a broken jaw from the time he was hit with brass knuckles. He stands next to the car with a tire iron, just in case. But the mammoth frame and blunt weapon of the state heavyweight-wrestling champ are not deterrent enough, and at some point a punch finds his chin. He spins around and beats a man nearly to death. The next day, after hearing their names on the news, Dan, Ron, Dick and Al turn themselves in, are given a sequence of lie detector tests, and let go. All the same, by the time he is twenty, Al's nose, already bearing the crock and heft of Scandinavia, is crooked and scarred as well.

In the fall, the group splits up, Dan going back to wrestle at Northwestern, Ron off to study teaching at Illinois State. Only Dick and Al remain. While Dick is by this time settling into union life, Al's path isn't so clear, but the deferment expiration notices are beginning to filter through the mail at an alarming rate, so Al quits his job and enrolls in fall classes at Sauk, the small community college buttressing a channel of the Rock River five miles from town. The next two years go by much the same, with Al holding jobs at the steel mill or the local grocer until the letters pick up, then heading back to school.

Eventually he finds work as a brakeman on the Chicago Northwestern. From the main station in Sterling he rides the train back and forth to assorted factories and grain elevators from Nelson to DeKalb and from Moline to Clinton, Iowa, moving boxcars from trestles and gangways, hitching and piecing the containers together to form longer freights, sending them off to Chicago and Des Moines. Again the reminders from the

government start, but by this time Al has grown tired of avoidance and makes no move to register for class. And then, one day in the summer of 1968, with violence at the Democratic Convention saturating the airwaves, along comes the real thing. Al's father tells him to enlist so he won't end up an Army grunt. With a shrug, Al starts up his motorcycle and heads down to the recruiting office in Sterling.

In August, still not sure what to expect, he hops a bus from Sterling to the induction center in Chicago, where, along with hundreds of other young men from all over the Midwest, he is weighed, given a physical and a small battery of psychological exams and asked to fill out forms. If a person wants to get out of serving by faking some malady, this is the place to pull it off, and some do, but Al harbors no such thoughts. Although not exactly gung-ho about his immediate plans, neither is he anti-war. And the idea of carrying a gun in the jungle holds a certain, hard-to-describe but tangible appeal to the former athlete and fighter. So Al moves right along with the other enlisted men, off the bus, through the routine, back on another bus, where, along with a soldier from Sterling named Russ, the only inductee he would remember from this day, he rolls off to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

At Fort Leonard Wood, in the sweltering heart of southern Missouri hill country between the Gasconade and Big Piney Rivers, Al Quick gets his first taste of Army life. After eight weeks of running, push-ups, chin-ups, spit shining shoes, being taught how to throw grenades, getting up early in the morning, cleaning barracks, learning how to feel his way through tear gas, how to shoot an M-16, watching conscripts keel over from heat stroke and doing KP, he's on the road once more, this time to Fort Ord.

Because he scores above the baseline on aptitude tests, he barely has time to digest a spectrum of training in map reading and calling in coordinates for artillery strikes in the balmy installation along the Monterey Bay of the central California coast before leaving once more for Sergeant school in Fort Benning. Just outside of Columbus, Georgia, he undergoes the Army's version of leadership training, and in a matter of a few short weeks is on his way to Fort Polk, Louisiana, the last stop on his journey of martial education. At Fort Polk, more than three months into his training, still untried but no longer new to the fundamentals of military etiquette, Al is charged with instructing fresh recruits, completing the circle. A few weeks later, head shaved and filled with a rudimentary knowledge of war tactics, he will get on an armed forces flight to the combat zone.

But first, there is one more stop to make. Before taking the bus to O'Hare, before checking his baggage and climbing aboard—boots, uniform and all—the commercial jet that will land at Fort Lewis outside of Seattle, where he will transfer to another airplane, a loud green monster that will cross the Pacific, refuel in Tokyo, and touch down in the airfield northeast of Saigon, before all this, Al spends Christmas at home with his family. At some point in the course of the day, perhaps when the younger kids have settled down to read in their beds and the older children are off fooling around with friends, when the house is quiet and warm and unaware, Al's mother pulls him aside. Speaking softly, she tells him cancer has reappeared. And she tells him this: "I can't die until I know you're back."

□□□□□

My father is a good man. I can trace this goodness in many ways: the reluctance to put his men in harm's way, his decision, upon returning from Vietnam, to enter into a career centered on helping people, his role in environmental and social justice movements, the tender manner in which he gives of himself to his four-year-old grandson, my boy Sage. My mother–from whom he has been divorced for more than fifteen years–tells me stories of the way he cared for my brother and me when we were young children, of how he relished the role of the soft, caring father, of how much time he spent with me, of how, in the years after his return, when my parents were students at Southern Illinois University, the nurturing of the children was divided equally between husband and wife, of how my father, long hair streaming behind his unkempt beard and deep blue eyes, could be seen flying through the streets of Carbondale on his second-hand ten-speed, smile on his face, and me in a faded white child seat, helmet nearly obscuring my head, cooing in delight.

And my own memory gives me points of absolute grace and brightness. By the time I was nine, my dad was in his third year of coaching my soccer teams. That he knew nothing of the sport when I first brought home the registration form and the accompanying parental volunteer sheet mattered little to him. I wanted to play; my school's second team was in need of a coach; and he signed us both up. I can still remember the thin white book he dove into—*Coaching Youth Soccer: The Basics*. And although I'm not sure he ever became particularly adept at conveying the fundamentals offered up in this volume of drills and techniques, his intent was pure, and his enthusiasm for anything that sparked my young and eager fancy was obvious and well received. The

official matches took place on Saturdays, on a complex of regulation pitches next to the junior high on the far side of town. But the twice-a-week scrimmages against the other squad from Jefferson Grade School, because neighborhood pride was on the line, were every bit as spirited as the sanctioned games. If I sit back in the chair at my desk and wait a few moments I remember their tenor well. For this, there is no waiting. This is fresh:

My father strolling across the warped green surface of the old tennis court next to the school, mesh sac bulging with soccer balls and pylons bouncing from his shoulder, work-tie flapping in the breeze, me begging him to untie the bag so that I can dig out the best ball, him stopping, pulling loose the nylon string, resting his arm on my head while I reached in, me clicking over the hard surface in my cleats, reaching the grass, cocking my leg and kicking the ball as hard as I could, bounding after, turning back to my father. His face was enormous and grinning.

And this: Streaking down the soccer field behind the school after some proud play, I glanced toward the sideline where I knew my father would be standing. And there he was, tight yellow t-shirt clinging to his broad frame, whistle dangling from his neck, thin blond bangs pressed to his forehead by the warming breeze of the Indian summer, late afternoon sun reflected off the big lenses of his sunglasses like two shining bronze disks. He was watching me, not clapping or shouting or announcing his approval in the loud manner many parents do, just watching. I perceived the smallest smile rising from his wind-chapped lips. And I knew in that moment he loved me more than anything on earth. He was good, and so was I.

□□□□□

My mother, in a scramble to leave the old house and find a place she can afford, very nearly moves into the cluster of housing projects on Avery Avenue. The "Jects," as locals call them, are a splatter of dirty tenements where, when I am sixteen, my friend Alex will introduce me to Fay, the thirty-year-old woman who will, each time we stop by in my mother's red Mazda—which I will eventually total in a flip-over—leave her young kids next door and jump in the back seat for the few dollars she will make buying us malt liquor and vodka at Trailside, the same set of hovels where, the summer after I graduate high school, I will enter, as children sleep in the next room, a young woman so drunk she can barely speak.

Eventually, after days of painful consideration, she decides on a neat but more expensive second-floor apartment on Locust recommended by a friend. When the time arrives to begin slogging through clothes and toys in anticipation of the move, I am still every bit as paralyzed as I was on the day may parents broke the news.

On that day at the tail end of August, as my little brother works diligently to pack his things neatly in cardboard boxes, I curl up on my bed, belly toward the wall, knees to my breasts, and rock. My cousins, Niki and Shanna, mill about the room and stow my belongings—books and blocks, G.I. Joes and sports cards, baseball mitts and soccer cleats—in storage containers for the ride down Galena Avenue to the east side of town. I imagine Niki—two years older than me and something of a mother hen saying things to try and prod me from the fetal position. *You're not going to know where anything is* or *I bet you'd feel better if you got up off that bed*. When at last she realizes I will not

respond, she brings herself down close to me so that I can see her face, frowns, clomps down the carpeted stairs and tries to recruit my mother, busy packing plates and serving spoons in the kitchen, to the cause. And my mother trots softly up to my room, kneels beside my bed, runs her hand through my hair, and pleads with me gently to help out. Nothing works.

We end up spending nine months in the new place before my mother, appreciating fully the direness of our finances and acknowledging, perhaps for the first time in a decade, the longings of an intellect that once scored thirty-five on the ACT, applies and is accepted to graduate school at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. In the future, the memories I will call back from these nine months will be mostly scattered and vague. My mother lying on the wood floor of the dining room, eyes toward the wobbling blades of the ceiling fan, legs cutting through the air in distinct patterns, lips pursed with fatigue and purpose as she labors to loosen and build the muscles encasing the disk that slipped somewhere in the course of her work at the special needs school.

And the trip to Hanover Square. Too poor to buy a tree and gifts when Christmas rolls around, my mom gives Keith and me each twenty-five dollars. A couple of days before the holiday she drives us up the river to the old piano factory turned shopping mall rising from the cobblestone streets of Oregon, where she turns us loose. Like most boys my age in this part of the state, I am captivated by the Chicago Bears, in first place of the Central Division and on the fast track to the Super Bowl. I head straight for the sporting goods store where I scoop a dark blue and orange Monsters of the Midway t-shirt out of a folded pile on a table near the back of the one room shop, place it on the counter and ante up. With my loose change I buy hard candy from the vender in the hall.

And several months earlier, this: I am walking down Park Street on my way to the yellow house. I am supposed to be at my mother's tonight, but some longing on this particular evening has caused me to seek out the old place. Dusk has come and gone, and only a trace of dark blue in the western sky suggests the passing of the late-summer day. As I approach the yard, I notice my father standing on the front porch with a cigarette in his right hand, a Merit Ultralight. I can see the orange glow of the tip grow when he puts the cotton filter to his thin lips and shrink when he takes it away. By the time he finally perceives the sound of my feet moving through the grass, I am probably thirty feet from the porch. He stops in mid-drag, throws the remaining length of cigarette in the flowerbed, and attempts a frazzled greeting.

"Oh, Ben. How's it going? What are you doing?" A line of smoke creeps up from between the lilies, and wisps drift from his mouth as he talks. Still, he doesn't think I see.

"I need my football." Or he doesn't want to think I see. And even now, at eleven years old, I sense something strange in his secrecy, something that doesn't quite line up. Never mind that he's been watching me make believe I'm smoking butts I've scooped off the driveway for years. In the not too distant future I will, whenever I run out of cash, which will be quite often, root around in the basket on the top of his refrigerator, grasping for the slick cellophane package, pulling out fresh cigarettes for myself and my friends. He will either not notice the missing smokes or will notice and not say a word. Even after Mr. Higby, my high school French teacher, the rumpled old thing with the hairpiece and the sweat-stained suits, catches me and Curt Delhotal hot-boxing Camel straights in

the alley behind the football field and calls our parents, my dad will still be sneaking off into dark places and throwing lit cigarettes in the flowers. Pretending I don't know.

"Oh, your football." He recovers, tries to appear perplexed, scratching the stubble on his chin as if in deep rumination. The smell of burnt tobacco shoots from his mouth and drapes the air between us there on the old wooden steps.

"Does your mother know you're here?"

□□□□□

Before 1961 is up Kennedy sends Dr. James Brown to the newly established United Sates/Vietnamese Combat Development and Test Center (CDTC) in Saigon to explore the effectiveness of a variety of other herbicides for use as counterinsurgency tools. The results of Brown's work are a cluster of compounds that come to be known as the rainbow agents for the colors of the identification bands on barrels of the herbicides. Agents white, purple, and blue will all see use in the jungles of Southeast Asia, but the most intensively employed, by far, is agent orange, a 50/50 mix of the n-butyl esters 2,4 dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4 D) and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T).

The origins of Agent Orange lie in an obscure laboratory at the University of Chicago, where during World War Two the chairman of the school's biology department, E.J. Kraus, discovers that direct doses of 2,4 D can kill certain broadleaf vegetation by causing the plants to experience sudden, uncontrolled growth not unlike that of cancer cells in the human body. Kraus, thinking his findings may be of use to the Army, informs the War Department, which initiates testing of its own and finds no use for the hormone

before the war ends, though experiments with 2,4 D and 2,4,5-T continue through the 1950's. By the end of the decade chemists churn out a suitable mix. Late in 1961, technicians at the CDTC decide the time is right, the testing complete, the dispersal methods sound. On January 13, 1962, three Air Force C-123s—twin propellered short range assault transport planes, whales with wings—lift off from Tan Son Nhut airfield in South Vietnam, each loaded down with more than 1,000 gallons of agent orange. The planes fly low over the canals and deltas of the Ca Mau Peninsula—the claw shaped tip of the nation—occasionally taking fire from implacable points in swaths of jungle, finally reaching the prescribed site and spraying the chemical cargo continuous jets from three groups of high-pressure nozzles jutting from internal dispensers, the entire load dropped in minutes. A mist can be seen settling over mangroves as the crews of young men turn back toward Tan Son Nhut. Operation Ranch Hand is underway.

Such spraying has been going on for more than seven years when the plane carrying Al Quick clunks down, taxis, and finally comes to rest on the hardscrabble runway outside Saigon. The details of the next year become sporadic. This much is true: The heat is thick and oppressive as the men are corralled into long, green trucks and driven through Saigon to the base camp west of the city at Cu Chi. While at Cu Chi, Al is assigned to a platoon in the 25th Division—the Electric Strawberry—out of Fort Lewis and moved to Tai Nin, a smaller, more remote camp. Before he can blink, it seems, he's on a cot in a barracks filled with strangers, young men from Ohio and Michigan, Virginia and Texas.

The chain of authority in the field, though fluid and subject to the needs of circumstance, most often appears like this: a Captain to a company of one hundred, a

Lieutenant to a twenty-man platoon, and a Sergeant to a squad of five. The 25th Division tends to move in companies, drawing attention with numbers, scaring up the enemy, tracking them down and blowing up facilities. For the first five months of Al's tour, he travels with his squad in the relative safety of the company through jungle and fields, here and there taking hits, calling in missiles and shells, checking the damage, and scrambling back to the shelter of the base camp. For Vietnam, the scene is uneventful, sprinkled with just enough free time for Al to savor fully the care packages sent from Rock Falls by his mother. With stained and oily hands, the blonde boy with the crooked nose digs through the box for the prize, a clear glass jar striped purple and brown from the inside with the peanut butter and jelly concoction known as Goober Peas. When he finds it, he pulls the jar out, smells it, holds it to the light, and thinks of home.

Eventually, the 25th pulls out, and Al is transferred to the 1st Air Calvary Division, where things change fast. The base camp is set up in Binh Hoa, but Al is almost never there. The 1st, unlike the 25th, moves in squads and platoons, using the cover of night and the absence of noise to engage in recon. Sometimes Al leads a squad, sometimes a platoon. In either case, he is gone with his men for days at a time, walking directly from base camp or dropped of by helicopter in small clearings deep in the jungle. For hours and hours they creep through moist brambles and ford creeks, listening for sounds, trying to stay silent, watching the orange streamers, hearing the report of gunfire, smelling the acrid sulfur of the mortars, but usually managing to circumnavigate the worst of the action.

One dawn, with Al's company dug in across the border during the invasion of Cambodia, commanders get word of an enemy cache. All the men of the company spend

the morning trudging off into the bush, where they discover the store of bullets and rocket-propelled grenades, blow it up, and set up camp on the edge of the jungle. Although they can't see it through the wall of riparian green, from maps, and from the low, rolling hum on their flank, they know they are yards from a river. That afternoon, while soldiers settle in to clean weapons, write letters to girlfriends, clip toenails and dry out boots, two American PT boats—heavy with mortars and guns—plug by. The boat captains don't realize the smoke and banter coming from the other side of the shrubs is American and open fire, strafing the camp with thousands of pounds of ammo. When the men of company realize who their attackers are, those who can pull out flares and aim for the sky. In the middle of the chaos, a Cobra gunship, a flying arsenal with many times the firepower of a PT boat, circles the company, hovers, readying its barrage. Seconds before the sure annihilation of the entire band of men, the helicopter pilot recognizes the group, pulls back, calls off the boats. Still, many soldiers are wounded and killed. Al is shaken. Later that day, perhaps stacked as an afterthought on one of the helicopters flown in to mop up after the friendly fire, the newest edition of *Stars and Stripes*, the G.I. newspaper bringing word from the states, is handed out to the troops on site. On the front cover is a large photograph of a long-haired woman standing over the dead body of a war protester on the Kent State campus in Ohio. Right there Al vows to do whatever he can to get out alive.

In the time-honored tradition of disillusioned Vietnam squad leaders, he begins ignoring orders and leading his men away from the fighting into hollows and holes in the forest and mangroves where he hopes they will be safe from the killing. When the pin worms from the infected meat at the mess hall flare up, writhing and crawling through his

feces, instead of grinning and bearing it like he's done so far, he demands to be sent back to base camp for treatment. And hearing through the grapevine that rubbing insect repellent on ringworm will cause the rash to become so irritated and swollen that boots will not fit before several days of drying feet out in the safety of the barracks, he tries it, and it works. He even goes so far as hiding from troop supply choppers to avoid yet another uncertain trip to the sticks. And he is not alone. By this time, even among many higher ups, the objective is to "get the hell out with two good legs."

Then, one sunny afternoon, Al in charge of the entire platoon, the men sauntering down abandoned roads and trails, guns and canteens bouncing easily off ammo belts and drying pants, someone spots a clutter of freshly worn routes through the bush. The soldier whose turn it is to walk point is a short-timer, scheduled to go home next week, and he refuses to march to the head of the well-spaced line. Al assigns another man, and they keep moving, this time more slowly, without talk, a perceptible edge to the string of grunts as it pushes through the nervous path. When Al feels like they've gone far enough, he creeps up the point man and is about to whisper something in his ear when a bullet hits the soldier between the eyes. Suddenly, the stuttered noise of shots echoes through the land. In the thickness of the jungle, they've walked straight into an enemy camp.

More men are hit. Al drops to the ground, un-straps his M-16, crawls through weeds on elbows and knees back toward the low spot where his men are bunched. He stumbles into Rico, one of the few men with names Al will remember, cannot forget, sees blood pouring from a bullet hole in his neck. Al plugs the hole with his thumb, tapes white gauze to the wound, and is dragging his friend to safety, screaming, bellowing the

calls of war, the unrestrained cries, when an enemy soldier pops up, fires a rocket propelled grenade, peppering all with shrapnel. What keeps Al from taking more of the fragments than he does are the three or four comrades in the way.

Finally, help arrives. Al leaves Rico with a medic, never learns the young man's fate. The shrapnel will never be completely removed from Al's shoulder, and far into the future, when it shifts and settles, he will feel a sharp pain course down his arm and be run through with the memory of that night and the wounded friend.

□□□□□

I entered into this world on a muggy July evening in 1974, the sun beginning to sink down into the hardwoods that hold the town of Morrison, Illinois, from miles upon miles of fields of corn, fields that would have been at least six feet tall by then, that would have been ripening with line upon line of thick yellow ears sheathed in green. The delivery went without complication in the thick air of the hospital room. There was my mother's low moaning, the usual frenzy of female nurses and the old doctor reaching his latexed hands to cradle my small wet head as it emerged from the birth canal. There was much crying and celebration, the ceremonial cutting of the cord by the father, the grandparents waiting anxiously in the hallway, aunts and uncles, friends. But there was something else, as well, something curious: Although in every other way I fit the profile of the stereotypical bouncing baby boy, my left hand was almost round, and at first glance, fingerless. Looking closer, a person could see there were indeed fingers in the flat bell of flesh and bone, but no space between them, and bones were either misshapen

or missing. Instead of clutching like a tiny claw at nipples and beards, it flew from side to side like the club on the tail of a prehistoric beast. My grandmother was horrified.

Despite my grandmother's unbridled concern, I ran through the first half of my childhood like any other Midwestern boy, playing soccer, baseball, fishing, running around the neighborhood in packs. I played war games in the local woods, sneaked off to the candy store with my younger brother, dug up earthworms in the big garden between rows of tomatoes and hot peppers, watching with delight as aphids and sow bugs crawled over my hands. Although I endured a number of surgeries on my hand in a prolonged attempt to separate fingers, and although I was forced to wear a series of uncomfortable brace-like contraptions to bed—sterile plaster meant to force the bones in my hand to bend into a more functional formation—these were happy times for me. Too young to feel self-conscious, stubborn and creative enough to circumnavigate any limitations, protected still from the judgments of adolescence, I had no idea—at least consciously—that I was different from other children. I climbed trees, played catcher in little league, kept goal for my soccer team, won sprints in swim meets.

Still, I have to believe an awareness was growing. I suspect there were innocuous comments from neighborhood boys, partially hidden conversations, questions. And parents, even kind and well meaning parents, can fumble with answers.

I must have been close to ten-years-old that day my mother and I ambled through the worn automatic door of Eagle's Supermarket and across the chipped green and white checkers of tile. We came for just a few items, the only one mattering to me being the ice cream. We were gliding across the tile of the store, headed straight for the open freezers of the dairy section, my mother and I, me in my shorts and t-shirt, she in her gardening

clothes. We were moving fast, and were so close to the freezers that I could almost feel the chill, could almost see the dense coating of hoar frost on the inner chambers, when she looked at me, ran her eyes quickly from my face to my shorts, and asked, with impatience: "Why do you keep your hand in your pocket? Don't you think people know?" And of course my left hand was stuffed in the pocket of my shorts. By this point, hiding my flaw was beginning to become second nature, an act of instinct rather than will.

And the summer after that—the dance. The dense evening air that settled on the youth camp around the wooded shore of the small lake crackled with early adolescent hormones. Feathered hair and rat-tails catching like still-shots in the throbs and flickers of a cheap strobe light, eleven –and twelve-year-olds milled about the varnished boards of a cleared mess hall while the distorted love songs of Foreigner and REO Speedwagon clamored from a Sony boom box. Teenage counselors broke from flirtations in dark corners of the room to sweep through hesitant groups of giggling girls and tough-acting boys, urging all to the dance floor. Just past my eleventh birthday, I was beginning to awaken to the power of the feminine.

And Linda was the girl of my dreams. Long blond hair, blue eyes, subtle in her manners and speech, but confident in her slow, swaying gait, quiet but calm, and most important to my young heart, twelve years old and showing the delicate signs of maturity, I was infatuated. She'd not said a word to me all week, but I'd caught her shooting me glances across the lunch tables and in passing on the dirt trails between the staging areas for camp activities. The routine went like this: She would look up for a moment from a plate of baked beans or goulash—of course I would already be gazing at her—and our

eyes would meet. She would hold the gaze and begin to crack the smallest smile. Her lips would lengthen and curl at the corners. And then, quickly, I would drop my eyes back into the mash of food on my plate. Or, if our groups trundled past each other on the hard-packed earth she'd cock her head just so, and her hair would gather in loose rolls between her embroidered Polo and the track of sun on her neck, and she would look right at me, smile, and I, once more, would plunge my embarrassed eyes down to my shoes and watch the dirt clouds rise in desperate rhythm.

Our affair went on like this for seven days. By the time the closing dance rolled around, I was certain this was all that would ever pass between us. And it really wasn't that bad. From a distance, I was attractive. I was worth noticing, worth a smile and a nod of the head. Were she to come closer and see the monstrosity growing from the end of my left wrist, she might change her mind. But she hadn't come closer, and the week was almost up, and I would forever be remembered as the hot guy at Camp Benson. Too cool to talk. She might even tell her friends back home. I would be famous in Walnut or Streator or Tampico or wherever it was she came from. I would be the raw material for junior high fantasies. I was golden—from a distance.

As the dance wound down, I paced the duff of pine needles and walnuts outside the mess hall waiting for the music to stop and campers to begin filing out of the metal doors and picking their way through openings in the forest to the hum of cabin porch lights.. But the music had not stopped; as one of the mess hall doors swung slowly open, the rasping vocals of Steve Perry rose above the scratch of locusts for just a moment. My favorite song—"Don't Stop Believing." If I would have been at home, Keith and I would have broken out badminton racquets and sunglasses and strummed along. But I was not

at home, and the silhouette creaking toward me over the high, darkened planks was not my brother.

Still, I was cool; I was sexy; at least Linda thought so. Things would stay that way forever. I had weathered the week. Not five minutes after I opened the back door of the green station wagon, ran through my front yard, up the porch steps and through the living room I would be yapping on the phone to Tom Radke. And I would have stories about Linda. Just because there was no physical contact—

"Hi." And there she is. Face to face. Linda Williams. Grinning like a sheep, like a sweet, smooth, electric sheep. Like a sheep with big blue eyes and this energy, this raw energy. I am terrified. I want to run. I want to grab her. I want to put my face in a bag and make it all go away. She is looking at me with those eyes, those terrible eyes, those huge, those burning blue— "I was wondering…." I can't look up. Her feet are shuffling. Nervous. Reebok high tops. White and scuffed. Acid washed jeans. What is she saying? Leg warmers. She'll find me out. She doesn't know. I think she knows. No she definitely doesn't know. She wouldn't be talking if she knew. I can't let her find out. She cannot, under any circumstances—

"They say there is one slow song left, and I was wondering…."

I cocked my right arm back, aimed a clenched hand at her body and brought it down hard. I can still see Linda's reaction, the look of disbelief as she reached for the spot on her chest where my fist landed. Linda was developing, perhaps a bit sooner than most girls, perhaps not. But her breasts were definitely noticeable. They must have been tender. I must have caused her great pain. I didn't mean to. I didn't consciously aim for her breast. Nevertheless, that is where my gathered knuckles connected with her body. I

remember her crying, falling to the ground and clutching at raw soreness. I remember a camp counselor walking into the scene. And I remember shame.

□□□□□

One full year after my parents' divorce, the summer before my seventh-grade year, my mother goes back to school. We move once more, from the second floor apartment on Locust to another second floor apartment forty-five miles away in DeKalb. Backed by an alley where neighborhood kids ride bikes and play spin-the-bottle when parents aren't home, the place is shabby and uninviting, but with rentals more expensive in DeKalb, this is what my mother, supporting two children on a yearly stipend of $10,000, a bit of child support, and a small loan from my grandfather, can afford; the times are lean, and so are the digs.

The next year is a vast stretch of blankness strewn, here and there, with strange and unsettling details. Running home from school in the middle of the day and crawling under my bed to avoid a yet another trip to the therapist's office; skipping class and slinking down to the railroad trestle over the Kishwaukee River to chew tobacco and sip from the bottle of peach schnapps that Steve, a boy I'd met in P.E., has stolen from his parents' liquor cabinet; my mother bribing me with fifty dollars she doesn't have so I will agree to be tested for A.D.D. at the clinic in Naperville; jolting up from the curb where I'm resting, head buzzing, somewhere along my paper route and rushing to a patch of bushes to vomit a thin gruel of Skoal and saliva when too much of the brown syrup trickles to my stomach; and hours and hours of hiding from the world by playing Super

Mario Brothers and Zelda with Keith on the secondhand television on the living room floor. In the selective vacuum this time and place will come to be, two moments, two images will rise above the falling mass and show themselves with clarity and sharpness: one of arrested violence, the other of peace and order.

My brother jumps his bike—a Diamondback, white and low to the ground, the kind with foot-pegs for tricks on the hubs—off a makeshift ramp in the alley. Because my left hand is weaker than my right, unable to grip tightly enough to the handlebars to ensure safety, something I've learned in the forms of scrapes and strawberries harvested from the concrete of the Jefferson Grade School parking lot, I observe from the shade of the garage. Keith is big for his age, husky, and the ramp he's cobbled together from plywood and bricks shudders and heaves when the tires pass, one then the other, over the layered grain of the narrow slab to lift off briefly beyond the edge and into space. But his riding is steady and sure, and the pride he takes in his effort is evident in the eyes that beam toward me and Alex—the neighbor kid who's pulled up his own bike next to my upturned milk crate under the cover of speckled shingles. Each time he navigates the creaking wedge. I watch with wonder and a flake of jealousy.

On his tenth or eleventh pass, he lands wrong. After picking up speed with several furious strokes of the pedals, cruising down the graveled runway to the front end of the launching pad, surging up the limp gut of the dusty plank and blasting out over pebbles and dirt, he comes down hard, front tire first, wobbles for a moment with his seat in the air, looses his balance, crashes to the ground, slides like a tree limb, face leading the way, for several feet on rocks and broken pavement.

I run to my brother's side. His chin gouged nearly to the bone, he's bawling and frightened. I look up to see Alex straddling his bike on a piece of turf a few feet away, pointing and laughing. And he won't stop. He won't fucking stop. I have no idea how Keith makes his way up the stairs to the apartment. Although I like to think I help him off the loose pavement, cradle him all the way past the leaky garage, down the sidewalk, and up the string of loose boards to my mother's waiting arms, I can't say for sure.

What I do know is this: The sight of Alex laughing causes something to snap. I grab the boy, now standing in our backyard, throw him to the brown grass—I am probably crying myself by this time—pin his arms with my knees, hold my clenched fist high above his head. The rush of traffic from Annie Glidden Road whirring through my ears, the smell of fresh asphalt and pizza hanging in the air, the massive elm creaking and moaning as the breeze picks up, late afternoon sunlight pouring like thin juice on the side of the young boy's cheek, my teeth seized up like pliers, I am ready to pummel him.

"You little fucking shit." I'm old enough to know the language of adults, and I've taken to using it freely when I see fit. I stare down at Alex, wishing him dead. I can tell he's scared. No trace of laughter remains, his mousy appearance all the more pronounced by uninhibited fright, his smirk replaced by gaunt and trembling lips, his eyes wide and blinking and terrified.

"Why are you fucking laughing, you little shit? What is so fucking funny?"

"You better let me go or I'll tell Benji."

"You tell your fucking brother—I'll kick his ass too." And I know that if his older brother comes running down the sidewalk I will slam their skulls together like two

eggs. I am filled with enough anger to take on a dozen of their kind. I shake Alex violently, watching with grim pleasure as his brown bangs flutter up and down every time I yank the sleeves of his shirt away from his shoulders. Tears form in the corners of his eyes, grow larger, drip and roll down the sides of his face, following thin creases of young skin, disappearing in the hair above his ears. Again and again I jerk him off the ground, and each time I bring him down feel the wet, foreign splatter on my arms, rails of sweat and droplets of liquid fear blending on popped veins of my hands. In the ready succulence of that warm afternoon, I want to pound him. I want to bring my closed hand to the bridge of his nose, listen for the dull cracking sound, watch thick streams of blood gush from his nostrils, into his mouth. I want him to cry out in pain as his muzzle shatters like glass, the skin around his sockets purple and black from brow to brow.

"Let me go!"

"I'll let you go when I'm done. Now shut the fuck up." And I want all this not just for his cruelty and indifference but for everything, for my parent's divorce, for moving to a strange town, for missing old friends, for being different at a time when I want to be normal, for the gnarled tangle of hormones spreading inside. All of this blends and wells up within me in a chemical blaze, smashed together like layers of hot, bloated clay, full and ready to burst.

"Let me go!" Or ready to melt like a candle into a cooling pile of wax. For as much as I want to pulverize this boy, I'm beginning to suspect that I can't. Each time I cock my fist back, something, some halting weakness or lack of conviction keeps me from slamming it down. If I were going to level him, I would have done it right off the bat, but I've waffled too long, and my resolve to do harm is slowly falling off. I'm not

sure why, but I cannot punch him directly in the face. I don't have it in me. It's not that my rage has lessened: I can knock him around; I can say terrible things; I can let drool from my mouth fall on him in long threads of sticky goo, but I cannot finish the job.

"Are you going to laugh again? Are you ever going to fucking laugh again?" It's over, fully and finally over. In the not-too-distant future I will see teenage boys beat each other bloody in after school marques behind the football field at Dixon High School. I will marvel at their fortitude, their ability to put aside any trace of sentiment or worry and pound the shit out of people for the sake of honor. But I am not one of them, and behind the gutters and fading paint of the converted house I cannot pull the trigger, not now, with my subject prone and trapped beneath me, not ever.

"No."

"You better fucking swear to me right now that you aren't going to do it, you little faggot. I'll break your face."

"I won't do it. I swear."

"Get the fuck out of here." With that I let him go. He rolls over, rubs his arms and brings himself up. As he wanders off to collect his bike, seed pods and dead grass fall from the back of his shirt and the soiled fringe of hair above his neck, drifting to the ground. And what I am left with is not a smug feeling of restraint, of doing the right thing, of self-control and moderation.

What I am left with is impotence and frustration, a failure of will. And I will bear its weight for a long, long time.

□□□□□

Fifteen thousand gallons of herbicide are sprayed over the forests and fields of Vietnam that first year. By 1966, the annual application increases to 2.28 million gallons. In retrospect, the ecological and human consequences of the spraying program will seem catastrophic. Right now, in the thick of an increasingly desperate conflict, with a silent enemy hiding in the bush, the extermination of mangroves and rice crops, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of acres of forest canopy, and the desertification of land adjacent to supply routes, are embraced as moves toward creating the conditions for winning the war, conditions that seem to be slipping further and further away from American military strategists in Washington and Saigon. The kerosene stench of chemical rain that falls on American troops as they slink through the hinterlands is search of Vietcong is seen as a bearable nuisance. The lethality of the dioxin carried by the fog that settles on the farms of South Vietnamese peasants and the convoys of American soldiers, like so many war costs, is a hidden concern, an issue to be dealt with in the future, or not at all.

Operation Ranch Hand dissolves in 1970 under intense pressure from a rising awareness of research showing the dangers of dioxin. By this time, one-seventh of Vietnam's total land area has been sprayed with herbicides; twenty percent of its forest flattened. Studies will later show that the spray missions flown by the men of Ranch Hand had little or no effect on the path of the war, that the millions of gallons of herbicide dropped on nipa-palm and mangrove, on tropical rain forest, on trails and swamps and roads, on military barracks and rice paddies, saved few American lives. Studies will also show, and are beginning to show even now, that the substance held in

the orange striped barrels is more dangerous than its handlers realize, and that American military leaders have known this for a long time.

Peter Schuck , author of *Agent Orange on Trial*, writes, "as early as 1952, army officials had been informed by Monsanto Chemical Company, later a major manufacturer of Agent Orange, that 2,4,5-T was contaminated by a toxic substance," a byproduct called dioxin, a chemical that will come to be acknowledged by the Environmental Protection Agency as "one of the most perplexing and potentially dangerous known to man" (17). Lab tests show that even the tiniest amounts of dioxin, concentrations as small as 4 parts per trillion—an amount equivalent to one drop in 4 million gallons of water—induce cancer in rats. In slightly larger doses, the substance brings on virulent symptoms leading to quick death. With average concentrations gathered from surplus barrels of defoliant 2,000 times that level and samples collected from single barrels of Agent Orange as high as 140 parts per million, questions about the effects of human exposure naturally become pressing.

For Vietnamese living and working in spray zones the answers to these questions are starting to be clear and painful. Babies born with massive birth defects, some with skeletons that bend and twist as they grow, some with organs on the wrong side of skulls and ribs, some with conditions so bad they survive only for days, fill the clinics in towns and villages. Even though for American servicemen contact with the toxin lasts for months instead of years, soldiers—particularly those serving at the apex of Ranch Hand, men dropping on knees to fill canteens with odd-looking water pooled in bomb craters, men walking with handheld weed sprayers around the flanks of base camps, men sleeping on naked ground—run the risk of lethal exposure. A risk so real, in fact, that as Yale

biologist Arthur Galston puts it, all soldiers "who worked with Agent Orange or saw duty in the heavily defoliated zones of Vietnam have a legitimate basis for asking the government to look into the state of their health" (qtd. in Schuck 19).

By the mid-sixties, worries about long-term effects on the people and ecology of Vietnam and the health of American G.I.s prompt groups of critical American scientists to publicly denounce the use of Agent Orange and other herbicides. In 1966 and 1967, a coalition led by the well-respected American Association for the Advancement of Science sends petitions to the Johnson White House calling for an end to all chemical and biological warfare. At the same time, international anxiety mounts. In 1969, after three years of failed attempts, the United Nations succeeds in passing—despite sustained and often menacing opposition from the U.S—a resolution declaring Operation Ranch Hand a violation of the 1925 Geneva Convention Protocol limiting the use of chemical weapons. Still, the spraying continues.

Finally, in late 1969, evidence shows up that is to damning to be stonewalled or intimidated away. Matthew Meselson, a broad-shouldered Harvard scientist fond of bow-ties and no friend of war boosters, obtains a copy of the report from a National Cancer Institute study confirming the teratogenicity—the ability of a compound to cause embryonic or fetal malformation—of 2,4,5-T in rats and mice. Meselson convinces Lee DuBridge, his former colleague at the California Institute of Technology and science advisor to the newly elected Richard Nixon, to hold meetings discussing the implications of the findings. In spite of the continued reluctance of many in the Pentagon to admit the seriousness of the data, administration officials can read the changing tea leaves of public tolerance, and on April 15, 1970 application of Agent Orange and most other defoliants is

suspended indefinitely. Years later, a sad and fitting epitaph for the Agent Orage saga will come from Dr. James Clary, the Air Force scientist and author of the official history of Operation Ranch Hand: "When we initiated the herbicide program in the 1960s we were well aware of the potential for damage due to dioxin contamination in the herbicide. We were even aware that the military formulation had a higher dioxin concentration than the civilian version, due to the lower cost and the speed of manufacture. However, because the material was to be used on the enemy, none of us were overly concerned."

In November of 1969, Ranch Hand only months from its ultimate demise, Al Quick—a Purple Heart pinned to fatigues—is discharged one month early so that he can see his mother die. The cancer has finally come back with enough aggression to take her fully, and it seems, unless Al gets home soon, that the promise made at Christmas will not be kept. Remarkably, she hangs on until the tail end of winter. Three months after Al arrives back in the lazy river town, Betty Quick passes from this world in a Rock Falls hospital room.

Along with the legacy of loss that follows Al back to Midwestern America, along with the images and the guilt, there is something more tangible, a rash that covers his back, raised hive-like splotches that don't go away until his firstborn son, still two years from conception, is nearly three. The name for this rash is chloracne; its cause, prolonged exposure to herbicides. Al Quick, grieving for lost comrades and a mother, rashed, bitter at having fought in a war he didn't believe in, infused with a sense of weary idealism, goes to work at a home for the developmentally disabled tucked in cornfields along Route 30 ten miles east of Rock Falls in the village of Nachusa.

In the brick halls of the Nachusa Lutheran Home, Al Quick meets a like-minded group of idealists: Mike and Cindy Barge, Alex Asafa, Mark and Masha Cunningham, Ken and Sheryl Novak, and a bookish woman with long brown hair and eyes as blue as his own. Kathy French, daughter of a small town insurance salesman, fresh from four years of awakening among the peace activists at Shimer College in Mt. Carroll, lives in the basement of an old Victorian home in Grand Detour, a hamlet nestling in the hardwood forest within the great bend of the Rock River. The day they meet, Kathy mentions that her dog has just delivered puppies, and as it happens, Al is looking for a pet. Less than a year passes before she is pregnant with the couple's first child.

The rash still covers Al's back on his wedding day and has not gone on July 22 of 1974 when Kathy gives birth to a son whose left hand is clubbed and webbed and missing bones. And though Al functions perfectly well most of the time, there are occasions when he becomes frightened or agitated for no apparent reason. He hears things in the woods. Chipmunks become snipers; snapping twigs morph into land mines. And sleep, when it comes, is light and sporadic. Sometimes, he wakes with a start, sweating and anxious, not knowing where he is until Kathy reminds him. Finally, he musters the courage to meet with a shrink. When the man asks him what's wrong, Al hunkers on the chair in the office and begins crying. But by then, only months into the marriage, problems have surfaced. The slow creep has begun.

Even so, Al is healing. The worst of the memories are losing speed, falling behind the pace of daily events. The veterans' support groups help, and so do the tasks of everyday life: the coaching of his two sons' soccer and baseball teams, the Tuesday night softball leagues, the camping trips, the gardening. He's back in college, working on a

master's degree in social work, driving to Champaign every week in an old Ford pickup to spend two days taking notes in the classrooms of the state university. And there is the work, the good work at the hospital, counseling people with addictions and suicidal tendencies, battered wives and angry husbands. But despite the healing, despite the gradual opening up, the years of emotional isolation have already taken too great a toll on his marriage; Kathy needs out. In the spring of 1986 the divorce is made final.

□□□□□

By the time I reached adolescence, there was no longer any doubt as to whether or not I was like other young men. I was different, less than, not quite whole. Instead of attempting to come to terms with what I have come to realize now is minor glitch in DNA, instead of facing up to my own uniqueness, the shape of my particular hand-print, I tried hard to deny myself, to prove to myself that I was in no way distinct from the two hundred boys and girls I entered Dixon High School with in 1988. And at least on the surface, I succeeded. I joined sports teams, and—I'm sure this was a conscious act of rebellion—put myself in positions that required the use of both hands to be successful. I wrestled and won matches as a freshman, won four varsity letters as a soccer goalkeeper, brought home trophies and plaques. What's more, I had awkward sex with teenage girls, drank beer and smoked pot, grew my hair long, hung out with the right crowd, took a cheerleader to the senior prom.

Inside, I was a wreck.

I recall the summer between my junior and senior year and a girl named Krista Farster, younger than me, brown hair, green eyes, slender, carrying always the smell of Elizabeth Taylor Passion. Krista was the first girl I spent more than one or two nights with, and I fell for her hard. Along with my friend Josh and his girlfriend Billy we spent the better part of the summer together. It was a hot summer, hot in the manner that all Midwestern summers are, tense and so thick with warm vapor that even the loosest clothing sticks to skin, and tightest fitting sunglasses slide down noses. That whole summer, when I was in the company of Krista—which was most of the time—I wore long sleeves. I would rush into my bedroom to change clothes each time she came to my house. There was a particular red cotton shirt a friend had loaned to me that I must have worn three times a week. I wore it in the water when we swam in the moonlight at the abandoned rock quarry; I wore it during sex on the gravelly shore; I wore it when to do so must have been agonizing. I thought the sleeves would hide my hand.

And the long sleeved t-shirt was not the only mechanism employed for hiding the truth of who I was. I took to wearing thick goalkeeper's gloves that kept the shape of their fingers against gravity when I shook hands with players from opposing teams after soccer games (I often wonder if the gloves weren't the part of the appeal of the position). I would bury both hands—so as not to be completely obvious—deep in the pockets of my letterman's jacket as I flirted with girls from other schools at soccer games or wrestling meets. I learned to strike a variety of postures that kept my dreaded deformity out of sight; turning to this side or that, sitting down just so. I learned to live in a state of contortion.

□□□□□

For all the turmoil and disarray of my year in DeKalb, a year that will end, mercifully, around my thirteenth birthday in July, when my parents at last decide to allow me to move in with my father, there is one thing I will miss from that time, one memory or set of congealed memories that even twenty long years into the future, will call up, in my heart, a measure of joy. Every other Friday, my father picks up Keith and I and takes us back to Dixon for the weekend. This particular evening, like most evenings when we know our dad is coming, we peer through the picture window that opens to the alley with great anticipation for the coming days and nights—an excitement that is doubled if the visit is to be longer because of a holiday. When my father's blue Nissan pick-up finally pulls to a stop into the dirt driveway, we listen for loud, scissored click of the emergency brake. By the time he dons his baseball cap and emerges from the cab, we are out the door and down the stairs, scampering over the sidewalk to hug him and toss our backpacks in the covered bed.

"Wait a minute, guys. I need to talk to your mother before we go," he says. He looks up to see my mom's lean frame moving down the flight of steps and shambles over to meet her.

While my parents go over rules and concerns behind the garage, just out of earshot, I reach my hand under the silver handle, draw open the passenger door, pull back a lever to release the front seat, watch Keith climb into the small extended cab and wait impatiently for my turn riding shotgun to commence. Once we are loaded and ready to go, my parents done running through the list of worries and suspicions—a list that has

grown and will continue to grow as I, and then Keith navigate the tumultuous years of adolescence—my father sidles up to the driver's side, opens the door, slides into the seat in one quick motion, adjusts the rearview mirror, unwraps a green stick of chewing gum, pops it in his mouth, smiles at Keith and I.

"You ready?" We are, and he turns the key. When the ignition fires and the engine kicks on, so does the music. A cassette of the Talking Heads has been stuck in the tape deck for months, and I've come to know the words to the music by heart. *People Like Us*, a haunting ballad of solidarity and hunger, winds through the inside of the truck like gray and beautiful yarn, covering all of us in the blissful sorrow of passing joy. The atmosphere is warm and communal, the Quick boys and their dad together again for the drive back home.

After escaping the expressways, college students and commuters of DeKalb, the traffic starts to thin. Within minutes we find ourselves meandering through the rolling farmland of northern Illinois. We are riding the tail-end of summer, and as I gaze out the window at fifty-five per, rows of head-high corn play tricks on my eyes, bending and shimmering in line after line of ripe tassels. In the depressions between and sometimes inside the fields where water collects, red-winged blackbirds perch on cattails. As dusk approaches the occasional owl rises from a telephone pole or fence post, wings beating, in search of field mice and rabbits. Less than five months from now, in the starkness of January, wisps of snow will trail from the lips of four-foot banks, drift across the two-lane road and curl around the slipstream of passing cars, forming a mesmerizing layer of fluttering whiteness just above the surface of the road. And smoke will billow from the brick chimneys of scattered homesteads. But now, harvest time a few weeks away,

blizzards and wind chills only faint blurs on the horizon, the land and its people, having given their effort to the seasonal thrust, are full and playful. The countryside, as twilight settles, glows with richness and life.

Through the hamlets of Malta and Creston we roll, not seeing a stop sign or traffic light until we hit Rochelle, a union town of eight-thousand where sometimes we break for a burger or ice cream cone at the local Tasty Freeze. Like so many Midwestern towns, Rochelle is crazed with high school football this time of year, and as we sit at the intersection waiting for the signal, the cheers of parents and the whistles of referees waft from the circle of stadium lights a few blocks away, sneak through the cracked windows of the truck. When the light shows green we move on, hurrying to be home when Tom, my best friend, shows up on the front porch for the sleepover.

The sleepy buzz and halogen of Rochelle fade off into stillness, and once more we find ourselves churning through corn and soybeans on a freckled ribbon of county highway, passing farmhouses with barking dogs, my father chewing gum, letting his sunglasses fall around his neck, asking us more about our week and whether we wanted to head over to Barb and Don's on Sunday morning to see our cousins, which we do. We pass by Flagg Center, which consists of an unmarked service station and a small home where a black, worn out BMW with a sunroof and a for-sale sign in the front window sits in a patch of gravel. Every time we come through the car catches my father's eye. And this time is no different.

Finally, we come to a stop at the Route 2 cutoff. To the left is Grand Detour, the village tucked in the hardwood forest along the Rock River where a hundred years ago John Deere perfected the tractor and where my mother was living, in the basement of the

old Shaw home, when she met my dad. To the right, less than five miles away, is Dixon. We are, all three of us, smiling and buoyant.

□□□□□

Nineteen, broke and strung out, I phone my father. I know his soon-to-be-wife is on her way home from work, and that there are two pitchers of iced coffee on the second shelf of the fridge in their south Albany flat. A head of fresh arugala in the crisper. I picture goat cheese and a loaf of good bread on the oak table. My father dropping hunks of clean mushrooms in a sweet marinara, wiping hands on a thick blue towel. Candles. While the phone rings, I try to gather my thoughts, the words. I don't say what I want to say; that last Sunday I swam naked in the Platte, that it was a fine August day to float on the clouds, that the river swung broad and low and braided loose into many soft channels, that the sandbars were warm, that I felt strong, that the ride back toward the lines of the wide Nebraska dusk grew brilliant with rose and amber, that I don't know where it all went wrong. That I need answers, but that most of all, I need refuge, a place of shelter, a warm place from which to consider. What I do when he picks up the line is scan the white breath of the cold basement to make sure I am alone.

"Dad?"

"Hey Ben. How are you doing?"

"Not so good."

"What's wrong?"

"Well, I'm just, I'm in a bit of a tough spot. I don't know exactly how to put it."

"What do you mean—tough spot?"

"Um, well, I'm having some trouble with, you know, um…I think I'm having a nervous breakdown."

"What makes you say that?" His voice is void of color, flat, far-off, unable or unwilling to emote. As if this must be, has to be, had better be because he is not prepared for anything serious, anything he has to look in the eye and deal with, nothing more than a little school related stress, too much coffee, too little sleep, too many nights up studying for finals. Something small. Too many hours shelving books at the local media mart. Just a little worn down, a few days off should do the trick, maybe a back rub, a bike ride, a beer or two, perhaps a road trip up to the Sand Hills to look at geese, a night at the Zoo Bar in Lincoln, B.B. King was there last month, the B.B., the King of the Blues, nothing like a little blues—

"It's just a bad time, Dad, and I need to get the hell out of here."

"Oh boy. That bad huh. Is there anything I can do?"

"Well, you know how you said that once you got stuff unpacked and everything, that maybe then, maybe you'd have room for me?"

"Oh, geez Ben. Yeah, well, you know, Barb and, well the bedroom is still full of boxes, and—"

"Dad, I'm just, I need to get out of here, and you said—"

"Have you called your mother?"

"But dad—"

"I really think you should call your mother. It's just not a good time for us either. We're not settled yet."

"But I thought…" I'm losing my composure. True, he had basically kicked Keith and me out of the house, shipped us off to the flat redneck wasteland of Kearney, Nebraska to live with our mother, sold the house to pay for Barb's New York graduate school, left it all behind—the softball leagues, the job at the hospital, the small town friends, my small town friends, the only ones I'd ever known, Uncle Charlie's Bar and Grill, the Corner Tap, the big white arch over Galena Avenue, the one that spells DIXON in big purple letters, to match the petunias in summer, the spring floods, the brown and lazy Rock River with its low sandstone cliffs, so perfect for diving, Al and Leda's Pizzeria, Joe's Pizzeria, Angelo's Pizzeria—left it all behind and shipped his sons off to the Great Plains. But still, I'd always imagined that if push came to shove, if the situation were to be unimaginably dire, if, for instance, I was completely fucked up and my mother was no longer in town, if she had moved to Utah and I was all alone on the Great Plains—

"I thought…." I take my ear from the receiver and begin to sob. A week later, I'm on an airplane to Salt Lake City.

□□□□□

The story of hiding, of not honoring elements of my humanity with the dignity of words, of admission, runs deep. Even now, though I would like to think I've faced my secret, named it, called it out of its corner, I'm finding that old habits die hard. If I've lost myself momentarily while driving my car, reading a book, or engaging is some other task that requires a chunk of my brain, I sometimes find that without my intending to, I

have tucked my left hand gently behind my right elbow. Lying in bed at night before sleep takes hold I'll often notice my left hand is resting underneath the ruffles of the comforter while my right hand sits bare and comfortable on top. Or I'll think about a class I've taught on a particular morning, coming to a sudden realization that all the gesturing and hand waving was done with one arm.

But still, something has changed; some small corner has been turned in the darkest part of my mind, my spirit. Less than two years ago, my own marriage finally came to an end. The following several months were some of the hardest of my life. Anxious over the fact of an uncertain future and jealous over the immediacy with which my ex-wife took a lover, I wandered in a near-constant fog. The world as I knew it was gone, and my thoughts ran wild, looking for something firm to grab hold of, something familiar and calm, searching, grasping, like tentacles waving in the mist. But all I would find were pathways to painful memories, and I would follow these pathways, and they would lead to more pathways, and they were familiar, yes, but not calm, not peaceful. Around and around I would run, spiraling down dark where I relived old stories: here my parents' divorce, there, summer camp, everywhere, the smell of war. Everything seemed so fresh—and so connected. And I sat with these things, and I watched them as if watching a movie, hundreds of movies, all with different actors but identical plots. And even though the plots were the same, it took a long time for me to see this, to observe with open eyes the pattern that emerged.

The saying, attributed to the late Los Angeles writer and activist Peter McWilliams, goes: "Courage, contrary to popular belief, is not the absence of fear. Courage is the wisdom to act in spite of fear." I can think of no better slogan to live by.

To go beyond the known, to step out of the pattern and run toward instead of away from, even if we do so trembling and quivering, is the only way to real transformation.

And I look at my hand, in its present state, more than two decades after the last surgery, after I finally said no more—no more casts, no more stitches, no more blood work, no more Darth Vader masks spewing anesthesia into my lungs, no more IV needles hanging out my arm, no more hospital beds and bad chicken noodle soup. I look down at the rumpled flesh, the grafts sewn between the spaces opened up to give me fingers, grafts of crotch skin, grafts that grow hair, and the lines of scars from the stitching, and the two tiny inner digits, and the middle knuckle that bears no fruit, and the pinky that juts straight out, and the short, thick thumb, and I am glad that I finally said no. They wanted to do more, the surgeons, wanted cut a little more here, tweak the bone structure a little more there. And I said no.

I was six years old then. And still there is the residue. A massage therapist once told me that the body's memory is not unlike that of the mind. That worked and kneaded muscles will try for weeks to return to familiar patterns and positions, even if those patterns and positions were painful. That the body's fibers, if not stretched regularly, if not exposed to the healing sweep of daily motion, will seek out the same snarls and knots, the same bunches and tangles, the same secret places that brought them in the first place to be laid bare on the masseuse's table.

That the way to rid the body of pressure is to train the muscles to forget. And that the way to forget is through remembering. Through going back in.

□□□□□

On the beach at Cape Mears, father and son. The Oregon coast is a landscape of shifting planes: beach, surf, open ocean, sky, long lines of sloping forest. All different colors. All soft. The planes grow and shrink and bend with cloud cover, wave surge, tide. They are broken only by the sharp forms of occasional basalt horns punching through the face of sea. If a person moves, the planes move with him. And I walk a line of tide leavings: smooth, milky bodies of dead jellyfish, swarming with sand fleas, shards of seashells in various stages of polish and tumble, some as smooth as hidden skin, others rough with rutted patterns, not a one whole, chunks of transparent green sea lettuce, sometimes whole stalks that look like bull whips, broken cleanly at the round base by some underwater torque or gale, pink and mauve claws and torsos of Dungeness and rock crab, and, pasting everything with a delicate, almost eerie thicket of matted gray and white, the fallen feathers of millions of shorebirds—cormorant and gull, pelican and coot.

I lean forward to inspect what appears to be an intact sand dollar and extend my hand toward the starred ivory flapjack. The find is small enough to grasp between my thumb and index finger, but as my fingers close around the creamy disk it splits in two. As I lift the smaller of the pieces, watching as bits of shell flake off and fall back to the glaze of shoreline, I hear my father's voice—faint but undeniable—floating on the edge of the damp breeze, calling my name. I flip the remains of the sand dollar into the approaching tide and wait.

He wants a picture of the two of us, and seeing as the only other people on the beach are Barb and my girlfriend Niki, and seeing as they are sitting on a big piece of

driftwood probably a quarter of a mile down the silvery shore, we must tromp, barefoot, side-by-side on the cold hard sand, for ten long minutes.

"How are things going?" His standard opening line, always spoken in an awkward sort of manner, his glance never quite touching mine, always just out of reach, jabbing, ducking and sliding, especially since that time on the phone.

I follow three black spots far out under the lip of a long wave. Seals? Cormorants? If they are seals there should be casual bouncing, undulation, spinning, rolling in and out of the green surf in careless, playful lines. But all I see are rhythmic bobs. I crane my neck for some sign, some crack in the pattern that will mean mammals are out there, sea mammals, playing in the breakers. There is none, only three black splotches, moving in a cautious string.

"Not too bad," I say. "How about you?"

Stiff and somber, eyes hiding under dark glasses, skin shadowed by the rim of his cap, my father seems tired and beaten, so much older than I remember. His hair is thinner than it was the last time, stringy, gray. He is wearing that designer sweatshirt he bought himself for Christmas last year, just like the one he gave me, faded now, with the high, dense collar and the triangles on the sleeve. An ancient pair of Army binoculars hang from his neck. I think he is trembling.

"Not too good."

"What do you mean—not too good?"

"She's leaving."

"What?

"Barb—she wants a divorce."

This is really not all that surprising to me. He's been making passive allusions all week. They weren't sleeping in the same room—the snoring, he told me, she can't handle the snoring, but there was something desperate in the way the words shot off his tongue, some undertow. And the way she touched her hand to his leg somewhere near Tillamook on the drive to the coast—different than a lover's touch, formal almost, dainty, more reserved, a gesture of ceremony rather than affection. It spoke volumes, that touch. Even so, I try my best to act shocked.

"Since when?"

"For a long time."

I suppose I should be smug. This is my chance, at long last. I should give him the *I told you so* speech. I have every right. The *What the fuck were you thinking* speech. The *You fucking shipped us to Kearney, sold the fucking house, moved to Albany, then to Portland, all because of this woman who is leaving you, you stupid motherfucker, thanks a fucking lot, you deserve this* speech. But there he is, and he looks so ragged and weary, so broken and frazzled. One small tap and he might shatter.

"I'm sorry."

"Well—"

And there we are. We pose for the camera. I stand barefoot, squint-eyed, smiling, my back to the white lines of low waves rolling on wet sand, my left arm strung loosely on my father's shoulders, small fingers pointed toward the sea. I am wearing the black fleece given me by a stepmother that will soon be gone and a faded pair of blue cotton shorts that I've had for as long as I can remember. Left hand buried in the pocket of his jeans, my father reaches the fingers of his right hand around my torso, gripping my

side, holding me tight. Up close, I can see the bags beneath his eyes, can feel the tense flesh between his shoulders, can taste the Nicorette fling like rubber between lip and gum, tongue and tooth. Swollen and stale, but not altogether unpleasant, not necessarily rank, and certainly not strange, is the odor of loss that blankets him.

CHAPTER 2

UNDER THE BREATH: THE VIETNAM WAR THROUGH THE EYES OF A WARRRIOR'S CHILD

As Tim O'Brien advises in his autobiographical Vietnam War novel, *The Things They Carried*, "You can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end" (76). The question begs: If the war story never seems to end, then how does it manifest in future generations? What are the roles of the children? In my case, as the first-born son of a Vietnam veteran, the war story has played out physically, within my body, in the form of an Agent Orange-related disability and a resulting set of limitations and adaptations. Fortunately, for me the limitations have been few and the adaptations many. But despite this, I've known, since a relatively young age, that I am not quite the same as other people, that there is something different, something I've often seen as grotesque.

And the questions I am left with are many: How has my response to disability—the contortion, the tendency toward concealment, the development of adaptive mechanisms—affected both the fine details and the overall texture of my life? Secondly, how has my father's war experience—the physical facts and the emotional residue—shaped my own story? The Agent Orange component is largely straightforward, mostly a matter of piecing together bits of recorded history, but the emotional element is another thing altogether. We learn so much about how to be in the world from the examples of our parents, and what happens when one parent's model has been shaped so deeply by the horrors of war? My father suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for several years after his return, a timeframe that happens to coincide with the first and most impressionable years of my life, and I've often suspected that I've inherited, through the

environment of my youth, many of the sensitivities that oozed from father's own psychological wounds. If so, how have these sensitivities helped form my relationships to my disability and to the world at large? Lastly, what can a chronicle of the origins and employment of and fallout from Agent Orange in Vietnam—a history filled with obscurity, secrecy and denial—tell me about my own story? What parallels and crossing points, if any, can I find in the journey through these questions?

In examining the repercussions of war on children and spouses of veterans, it is imperative to first understand the mindset of the returned warrior himself. Larry Heinemann, author of the National Book Award winning war novel *Paco's Story*, provides a window into the emotional character of his coming home story in the memoir, *Black Virgin Mountain: A Return to Vietnam*:

> That hard and shrunken hollowed-out look did not rub off quickly and genuinely took people aback. The thousand-meter stare (as we called it) is a bluntly intense, narrowly absorbed concentration; perfect in its all-pervasive, unambiguous vacancy without warmth or light. […] And it was irresistible, you understand; by and by, you gave yourself up to it, and you even said it out loud, "I just don't fucking care." And I don't know about anyone else just returned from overseas, but I felt joyless and old, physically and spiritually exhausted, mean and grateful and uncommonly sad […] pissed off and ground down by a bottomless grief that I could not right then begin to express […] (35-36)

And while Tim O'Brien's autobiographical Vietnam war novel, *The Things They Carried* and his similarly themed memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* both touch on the post-combat lives of veterans, O'Brien's *July, July,*

which is not ostensibly a war narrative offers what is perhaps his deepest foray into the subtleties of the after-war experience. Set in 2002 at a small college reunion in Minnesota, one of the novel's primary sub-plots revolves around the on-again off-again relationship between Vietnam veteran David Todd and his ex-wife Marla Dempsey. Although David functions well in most arenas of life, in order to ease the memories of a horrific incident on the banks of the Song Tra Ky River during his tour of duty, he ingests copious amounts of hallucinogens and carries on a regular conversation with a voice in his head named Johnny Ever. When Marla confronts David with a recording she's made of him talking to Ever in his sleep, David's response is quick and to the point: "Chop off a leg, watch sixteen guys die, smell the rot. See if you don't cuss in your sleep" (276). And in this reply is where the dissonance lies, because even though David is frustrated with Marla for not understanding, he can't bring himself to tell her the story of the river. Like the small, Midwestern town O'Brien refers to in *The Things They Carried*, Marla herself "had no memory, therefore no guilt" (143).

But while these narratives all capture critical elements of the spirit of returned veterans, there are problems. Heinemann's *Black Virgin Mountain* can become angry at times, lashing out rather than striving toward some type of resolution or acceptance. And for all of the beauty and clarity in O'Brien's prose, most of the action actually takes place in Vietnam rather than stateside. Most importantly though, these are all first generation accounts, told through the eyes of the soldier. And while they are certainly relevant to my work, providing important insights into my father's experience and building a foundation for the understanding of my own, my story is necessarily different. For me to

place my work as squarely as possible in a narrative tradition, I need to turn away from the war story and toward another narrative, that of the body.

Susan Griffin, in *What Her Body Thought: A Journey Into the Shadows*, creates a blueprint for making "the art of telling become the inner lining of the process of recovery," and shows how "to weave the events of one's own life into a shared fabric, a story that suddenly and miraculously belongs to the social body" (14). She does this by weaving her own story with that of Marie Duplessis, the nineteenth-century, tuberculosis-stricken French courtesan. "Stories about physical trials of any kind," Griffin writes, "are compelling. In a sense, the drama of the body provides the model for all narrative" (14). And giving voice to the drama of the body is essential, she tells us, because "though I have regained most of my strength, something else inside me has not recovered. The dimensions of memory loom large for me. I am still afraid. And this is why I have decided to move toward rather than away from a terrain of suffering," in the hope of locating "a new way of seeing" (8).

As I move even deeper into my own terrain, in large part because of the pervasive lack of second-generation war literature, the models I look to become necessarily more varied. John Daniel's work, particularly the memoir *Rogue River Journal: A Winter Alone*, provides guidance in negotiating the strange and sometimes strained topography of the father-son relationship. *Road Song*, by Natalie Kusz offers another type of body drama, the narrative of disfigurement.

But again, even though these texts and others like them help bridge the gap between my experience and that of my father, they still fall short. Unlike Griffin, I do not suffer from debilitating illness. With the possible exceptions—I say possible because

I've not yet tried either one—of playing the piano and rock climbing, my physical defect has not restricted me from human endeavor in any real or substantial way. Daniel's work focuses heavily on his father's alcoholism, not an issue in my case. And where Kusz nearly dies as a result of a dog attack, is mutilated in dramatic and very visible ways, goes through years of surgeries, hospital stays and humiliation, I've been deformed since birth in a much subtler fashion, and the drama and shame I've encountered has most often been self-inflicted, more a result of personal psychology than the cruelty of others.

What's more, like all writers, these three embody the sensibilities of their youth. Unlike Griffin and Daniel, I did not come of age in the sixties. Unlike Kusz, I am not the child of poor and restless immigrants. What I am is the son of a soldier. I grew up in the middle of America. Most of my childhood corresponds to a decade—the eighties—remembered more for bad music and B-rate movies than social movements. My left hand is not normal, and my parents divorced when I was eleven. And it is from this set of simple yet informative realities, cobbled together in a heretofore-unexamined portrait of the American experience, that the substance of my thesis has emerged.

In keeping with the idea that content should dictate form and not the other way around, I've chosen to employ the braided essay as my primary means of expression. This structure lends itself well to the weaving of the three distinct but interrelated narratives that comprise the architectural foundation of the thesis. It also generously allows for the presence of gaps in time and awareness—important in piecing together the heavily fractured and fragmented stories I'm telling and vital to keeping the work at a reasonable length. My final ambition for this body of prose is a full-length book, and

when that task is embarked upon new forms will be explored, but for now, with the Plan A thesis as the more immediate goal, the braided format seems to be the best fit.

For guidance in working with this form, I've looked especially hard at *The Four-Cornered Falcon* by Reg Saner, which, in addition to presenting a relevant structural mold also provides an model for the sculpting of research into a readable narrative. With a wealth of scientific papers, historical texts and government documents relating to chemical warfare to sift through and filter, this archetype is vital. The book's sixth essay, "Technically Sweet," weaves the troubling narrative of Robert Oppenheimer's emotional evolution together with Saner's backpacking trip to the Los Alamos area and several distinct but patchy stories from his life related either in time or space—but not necessarily content—to Oppenheimer and the atom bomb. In much the same way, I too, am braiding accounts that sometimes relate more in spirit than substance, heavily splintered accounts that seem often to be little more than collections of isolated images I know at my core are somehow connected. Saner and I are kin in this reliance on braiding and splintering.

In the end, I must strike out on my own and stake new ground within the genre of war memoir. My generation is filled with children of Vietnam veterans, and as such we embody a collective view of the word that is unique in its relation to warfare. This conflict was not like its predecessors in that no clear sense of purpose ran through the troops, many of who were drafted, were from disproportionately poor and minority households and generally didn't share any real vision of fighting for a better world. What's more, as part of a well-intentioned but ill-conceived effort to provide G.I.s with a predictable discharge date, the Pentagon piloted a policy of individual troop rotation.

The results were a weakening of attachments among soldiers who moved from company to company and a deep sense of isolation among servicemen that only persisted as each man journeyed by himself from the war zone back to the realm of civilian life. As Frank McCarthy, a veteran and prominent plaintiff in the Agent Orange court drama of the late seventies and early eighties puts it: "The thing with us—we came back one at a time. We were snatched out of society, put into a war situation alone, snatched out alone, and brought back into a society that was apathetic to our needs" (qtd. in Schuck 21).

While there are certainly exceptions, most of our veteran fathers do not speak openly of their experiences in Southeast Asia in the way that, for instance, World War Two veterans do. No reenactments of famous Vietnam battles take place in city parks on Memorial Day. At most VFW lodges, the Vietnam veterans are the men who sit by themselves in corners, not entirely comfortable with the past and not entirely accepted, even by veterans of other wars. Their stories are not shared. We children of the vets are left only with nuance and innuendo and the sneaking suspicion that much of the dissonance in our lives can be traced back to events that took place in a far-off land long before our births.

And I am not certainly alone in my struggle to come to terms with what this means. While perhaps the evidence of my father's service is more visible on me than others, the impact of the divorces, the flashbacks, the disquieting sensitivities to violence on television and the emotional distance of the combat veteran are felt by many in my age range. With more than 2,000,000 Americans serving in Vietnam and 500,000 seeing actual combat in the Southeast Asia in the 15 years of American involvement, the size of

our cohort is enormous. And up to this point in time, our voice has been unnaturally quiet. I intend to change this.

Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa tells us, "according to the Buddhist tradition, the spiritual path is the process of cutting through our confusion," and that the discovery of enlightenment "is not a matter of building up the awakened state of mind, but rather of burning out the confusions which obstruct it" (4). In accord with Trungpa, I undertook this meditation on war and disability with an aim to pull back the layers of my life, to cut and burn through their confusions, and to take a good, hard look at what it means to be the crippled, firstborn son of a Vietnam veteran. While I was certainly prepared to examine every piece of my history, to use every tool in the box, for the sake of focus and brevity, I trained my sights primarily on the points of existence that seemed to carry the most pressure, the highest concentration of scar tissue—in myself, my father and our nation's engagement with Agent Orange. There are gaps in meaning, to be sure, but my hope is that the dots, the images, the exposed layers, have produced, at the very least, a pattern or outline that if looked at with a sideways glace, a shifting gaze, creates some measure of wholeness, of artistic clarity, for me and the reader alike.

Bibliography

Literary and Critical Texts:

Anderson, Sherwood. Winesburg, Ohio. New York: Viking, 1960.

Barnes, Julian. A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters. New York: Random House, 1989.

Barrington, Judith. Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art. Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1997.

Daniel, John. Rogue River Journal: A Winter Alone. Washington: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005.

Duncan, David James. River Teeth: Stories and Writings. New York: Bantam, 1995.

Griffin, Susan. A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Griffin, Susan. What Her Body Thought: A Journey into the Shadows. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1999.

Heffron, Jack, ed. The Best Writing on Writing. Vol. 2. Cincinnati: Story Press, 1995.

Herzog, Toby C. Tim O'Brien. New York: Twayne, 1997.

Kusz, Natalie. Road Song: A Memoir. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990.

O'Brien, Tim. If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home. New York: Delacorte, 1975.

O'Brien, Tim. July, July. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

O'Brien, Tim. The Things They Carried. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

Saner, Reg. The Four-Cornered Falcon: Essays on the Interior West and the Natural

Scene. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1993

Trungpa, Chögyam. Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. Boston: Shambhala, 1973.

Zinsser, William, ed. Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir. New York: Mariner, 1998.

Research Materials:

Agent Orange Website. 15 August 2005 < http://www.lewispublishing.com/orange.htm>

Cecil, Paul Frederick. Herbicidal Warfare: The Ranchhand Project in Vietnam. New York: Praeger, 1986.

Grossman, Dave. On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995.

Klein, Robert. Wounded Men, Broken Promises. New York: Macmillan, 1981.

Lembcke, Jerry. CNN's Tailwind Trial: Inside Vietnam's Last Great Myth. Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2003.

Neilands, J.B., et al. Harvest of Death: Chemical Warfare in Vietnam and Cambodia. New York: Free Press, 1971.

Quick, Allen. Personal Interview. 10 Aug. 2005.

Russell, Edmund. War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War 1 to Silent Spring. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge U P, 2001.

Schuck, Peter H. Agent Orange on Trial: Mass Toxic Disasters in the Courts. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1986.

Shay, Jonathan. Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming. New York: Scribner, 2002.

Solomon, Zahava. Combat Stress Reaction: The Enduring Toll of War. New York: Plenum, 1993.

United States. V.A. Agent Orange: Information for Veterans Who Served in Vietnam. Washington: National Academy Press, 2003.

United States. V.A. VHA Handbook 1302.1: Agent Orange Registry (AOR) Program Procedures to Include All Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange and Special Health Care Benefits for Vietnam Veterans' Children. Washington: VHA, 2004.

Vietnam: After the Fire. Dir. J. Edward Milner. Cinema Guild, 1988.

Weisberg, Barry, ed. Ecocide in Indochina: The Ecology of War. San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1970.

Williams, Tom, ed. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders of the Vietnam Veteran: Observations and Recommendations for the Psychological Treatment of the Veteran and His Family. Cincinnati: Disabled American Veterans, 1980.

Wilcox, Fred A. Waiting for an Army to Die: The Tragedy of Agent Orange. New York: Random House, 1983.