

Mr. Gary Sinise, Chairman &
Ms. Elizabeth Fields, Director of Development
The Gary Sinise Foundation
P.O. Box 368
Woodland Hills, CA 91365

March 29, 2019

Dear Mr. Sinise and Ms. Fields,

“Veterans—All Conflicts, All Writing Skills—Helping One Another ’Til We Get It Right.”

Shelter From The Storm.

When Alexa Kingaard wandered into a meeting of The Veterans Writing Group of San Diego (VWG-SD), seeking shelter from a literal and figurative storm in February 2012, she had no idea where it would lead.

Reeling from the tragic loss of her Vietnam Veteran to suicide in 2011, she realized she had one story to tell.

Since that day in 2012, with the encouragement that she found in this group of combat veterans, she has published two books, has spoken at various Veterans Day gatherings, been featured on the San Diego Morning Extra Show to talk about the effects of PTSD on family members of veterans, was featured on the Steffan Tubbs American Veteran Show podcast, hosted numerous book signing events and was invited to be the Keynote Speaker at the Veteran Arts Showcase at the FDR Library in Hyde Park, New York.

Alexa is just one of many stories we have to share with you.

The Veterans Writing Group of San Diego (VWG-SD) wants to **form mutual partnerships and alliances with other organizations**—such as The Gary Sinise Foundation—**that serve our U.S. Military Veterans in ways that promote healing, preserve history, and help veterans connect** with each other and their communities.

The Veterans Writing Group of San Diego—Who Are We?

We are:

- Veterans that span all conflicts—from World War II (although this group is rapidly declining), the Korean conflict, Vietnam, to the more recent conflicts
- Writers—or want to be
- Supporters
- Mentors

In 2008 the Veteran's Writing Group of San Diego was formed to offer assistance, education, encouragement and a safe environment for military veterans (and now some spouses) who are interested in becoming better writers.

As Military Veterans learning to write our stories in our own words, we are passionate about improving the process needed to tell our stories.

We have the "fight to get home" desire to help each other achieve that "over the hill" goal—what ever that might be for each of us.

As U.S. Veterans, we are doing our part to preserve our personal stories for our family and friends, comrades and the generations, whose futures we have fought for, that follow in this nation.

For the past 11 years we have met monthly at the Veteran's Assistance of North County facility in Oceanside, CA.

We are supported by the Writers Guild Foundation and mentored by various local professional writers who help veterans improve their writing skills, develop a creative outlet, share their experiences and explore the possibilities of a career in writing.

The Last 3 Years and Counting.

In 2016 we published our first book entitled, "Away for the Holidays." It is a compilation of stories from our writers about their experiences of being in the military and being away from home and loved ones during the holidays.

Contributions from private individuals, as well as grants from the Issa Foundation and the San Diego County Supervisors, made it possible to **donate over 1,700 copies of our book to local VA Hospitals, Naval Hospitals and the USO.**

2017 found us publishing our second title, "Listen Up! Things I Learned from the Military." This book contains stories of lessons big and small, humorous or serious—but all lifelong—that our writers learned from our military service.

With our current support we have been able to **donate over 800 copies of this book** to the same entities, as well as expand our donations to include VA clinics and veteran's assistance offices at local colleges and universities.

Additionally, in the past year, we have **given direct assistance to nearly 50 veterans** who are writing memoirs, creative non-fiction, literary fiction, poetry and other works.

With further financial support, our target is to donate 700 (or more) further copies of the latest book and to publish another book of stories by our members, for donation to Veterans organizations, in 2019.

How We Help.

As vets-who-write **we understand** many of the struggles our fellow U.S. Veterans face.

And we understand how hard it can be to express those struggles to the civilians in our lives. The isolation. The loneliness. The difficulties of re-entering non-combat society.

We hope our writing group, and the books that have come from it, inspire hope, give a point of connection, and even the courage for other vets (and their families) to begin to share *their* stories—**because our stories matter.**

What Others Are Saying About VWG-SD:

“I have found purpose for the rest of my life after the loss of my veteran, and it all started with the seed that was planted in the Veteran’s Writing Group...we learned that the demons of war affect more than the warrior – the wounds penetrate and spread to all family members as we do our best to learn to live with PTSD...I am fortunate to be a member of this brave group of men and women of many conflicts, and consider it a privilege to spend time with these American heroes.”

~Alexa Kingaard, Spouse of Vietnam Veteran, Author, Speaker & VWG Member

“I am a Vietnam Veteran and retired Officer who served for 25 years in the U.S. Marine Corps. I joined the The Veterans Writing Group-San Diego in the spring of 2017 as a fledgling writer and poet who desired to gain experience and further my own writing and creative abilities. Through my association with the Group, I published two books in 2018. I thoroughly enjoy the wisdom, stories, critiques and laughter this group brings to each meeting.”

~Leif K. Thorsten (nickname, Kris)

“I have been a member of The Veterans Writing Group-San Diego for over seven years. I am a former Marine and Vietnam War veteran and have been a writer for many years. Through of my fellow veterans in the group, I made contact with the editor of The-VistaPress.com, an online newspaper. From a single submission I now have a weekly column where my action adventure stories appear every Sunday. I am approaching my three-year anniversary as contributing writer. None of this would have been possible without The Veterans Writing Group-San Diego.”

~Thomas Calabrese

“In 1968, while flying a long early warning flight along the coast of Vietnam, I decided to write a story about an experience I had prior to the U.S. Navy that fit with my ongoing military experiences. As a radioman, I had my typewriter and the opportunity to jot down thoughts and ideas. I expanded the writing over the next year. I never finished the book as discharge, family, school, and career started happening. Then six years ago, I read about a Veterans Writing Group and I was immediately attracted.

The fellowship and the writing challenges fit into a routine of feeling good about creating art while enjoying the men and women who attend. We have published two books and I have been published in the San Diego Annual Poetry publication. These brothers and sisters provide challenge, friendship and lessons in recovery through writing. One day I WILL finish that book.”

~Garry G. Garretson

“*Away for the Holidays* is more than just a good read. It offers a window into the the experience of the modern veteran. The book’s many, very different veteran writers tell honest, eloquent, and moving tales of what it’s like to be who they are: Americans who served their country. Sometimes funny, sometimes heartbreaking, always ringing true. You should read this. You’ll be glad you did.”

~Robert Ben Garant, Screenwriter, Author, Producer, Director, Actor, Comedian and
Mentor

Where We Are Going.

As The Veterans Writing Group of San Diego, we want to further our mission to come together for the personal growth, professional and creative development of our members and most of all helping vets to get connected.

In 2019 (and beyond) we want to:

- Continue to donate our currently published books to as many Veterans organizations as possible.
- Publish and donate our new book (publishing date late 2019)
- Continue to provide assistance to those veterans in our group who are creating their own works
- Find a model for replicating our group in other areas of California and the rest of the U.S.
- Partner, and form alliances, with other organizations who are serving our U.S. Veterans

We are uniquely qualified as veterans to tell the stories of our military service, directly, **with no outside perceptions to get in between us and our audience.**

We hope to continue to do this with the help of our professional mentors, industry leaders, and our partners who donate their time, talent and treasure to give us the means to do so.

Your Giving Makes ALL The Difference.

The financial breakdown of what we need to continue our writing group in 2019 is listed below. Will The Gary Sinese Foundation take on one (or more) of the items to help us?

- \$3,500 to publish and donate the remaining 700 copies of “Listen Up! Things I Learned from the Military.”
- \$500 for our facility rent for the year.**
- Purchasing our books for distribution. A price point sheet is given upon request to see the price breaks for quantities purchased.
- Speakers & entertainment for our upcoming networking fundraiser event (date to TBD for later 2019).
- Speakers to come and talk to our group of veterans who write during our regular, monthly meetings.
- Invitations to speak, perform readings, and donate books at other organizations’ events.

***as of this writing a donation has come in that covers the cost of our facilities rent for 2019 and 2020.*

Of course, VWG-SD are open to more opportunities than we have listed. **Creative alliances and ideas are always welcome.**

We operate under the 501(c)3 non-profit status of Veterans Association of North County and your gift is tax deductible. (Tax ID # available upon request.)

If you prefer to give a general donation amount, rather than to one of the specific needs listed above, your gift is deeply appreciated and will be applied where most needed.

In Closing...

Each of us in The Veterans Writing Group of San Diego writes for many different reasons.

But our common goal is to continue to operate The Veterans Writing Group of San Diego County for all future veterans who want to write—and not just for vets, but also for the citizens whose freedoms we fought for.

We want to expand our reach and provide a way for more vets to connect with each other and their communities, all over the state and even the U.S. *We want to show that our stories do indeed matter, and that theirs do too.*

We have enclosed copies of each of our two published books, “Away for the Holidays” and “Listen Up! Things I Learned from the Military,” with our compliments.

We hope you read and enjoy them, as well see the value this group brings to our community of veterans.

Help us continue in this life-giving work. Help us continue to serve the vets of San Diego County—and beyond.

Sincerely,

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Treasurer, The Veterans Writing Group of San Diego
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www.veteranswritinggroup.org

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