

The Trouble with Brass

A memoir by Teri Ekland



(Introduction written in the 1990s)

I wrote my first book while in the Army and later called it *The Trouble with Brass*, NOT, *The Trouble with Me*! The title occurred to me, in the way poems flow from the mind. The meaning is several fold. I of course criticize those in command during my service—the Top Brass who ignored problems among the troops. Or at least didn't resolve them. The result of this is that the troops lacked discipline and I suffered. The title is also a metaphor for my life. The going to extremes.

In the late 1980's, I joined a writer's critique group. Mostly, I wanted the group to critique my book, *Moonbeams in Asia* (about my first trip to Asia 1982-5). I was nervous about having my Army story critiqued because of the unflattering reaction from people concerning my having been in the military. A Woman in the Army!? (Lesbian? Whore? Trailer trash?) My writer's group consisted of six people. Two were older men and both had been in the military during the Korean and Vietnam Conflicts. These two men tore into me with criticism, not about the writing, but about the gist of my story. "We all went through harassment! Even men! How

dare you criticize the U. S. government. What the hell were you doing in the military in the first place?” I was crushed and had no interest in having the rest of my book critiqued. Still, I sent the manuscript to Kansas University Press. The editor was amused but suggested my story was too short and didn’t provide enough history.

(Introduction written 2019)



Induction ceremony at a Portland Buckeroo’s Hockey Game. I am the 7th at right, next to Kathi

Since my stint in the Army, I’ve made about four revisions to this book, using different aliases. The last revision was in 2002. I found that it described my disability too much so I present the core of my original book written in the early 1980’s and include chapters pertaining to the process I went through with the VA to file and receive a disability claim.

My memoir, *The Trouble with Brass*, is about my stint in the WACs, the Women’s Army Corps. In 1974 when I joined, I was 18 and had already traveled in Europe for three months. I enlisted to study German, get a European Out, and travel some more before I went to college on the GI bill. I had big dreams, honest intentions. It didn’t work out that way. My story may not be a conventional military history, but it is a portrait of what was going on in the Army at the end of the Vietnam era.

I was among the last recruits of the Woman's Army Corps, an auxiliary of the Army formed during WWII. Women became part of the regular Army in 1978, three years after my honorable discharge.

Of course, there was lots of disparagement for a young woman among the ranks of men, not to mention sexual harassment. Hashish, Mad Dogs, even heroin were rampant among the troops at my permanent post Cambrai-Fritch Kaserne, in Darmstadt, Germany. As soon as I arrived, troops invited me to smoke hashish. While I studied German at my desk, WACs ran in and out of my barrack's room tripping on acid and pills. During bivouac exercises in the German forests, Medics gave me pills. Eventually, I succumbed to the overwhelming conditions. I overdosed on one occasion, then I went AWOL to Spain to get away from the disorder and peer pressure.

I served out my enlistment term honorably, then I aimed high to improve myself. I earned three college degrees—BS, MA, JD—and tried to make an accomplishment of my life.

Ironically, I am now totally dependent on the VA. In 2002, the VA deemed me 100% totally and permanently disabled. They awarded me compensation because I had a pre-existing condition that was exacerbated by my military experience. I am not a wounded combat warrior, true, my time in Darmstadt was difficult because of a sloppy Army at this time in history, but I served my country, I am proud to be a Veteran, and I am lucky the VA stepped in and helped me out.

End of the Vietnam War Era

(written in the 1990s)



In the early 1970's opposition to the draft lingered with the hippie counterculture. Hippies dressed in bell bottom jeans, wore love-beads, had long, unkempt hair and engaged in permissive sex and drug experimentation. Purple Haze, Window Pane, LSD was the craze, marijuana the staple. Hippies spoke of free love and of freedom from all that blighted society. They asked, "Who am I?" and "Whose ideals are we dying for?"

On January 24th, 1973 while the body of LBJ lay in state, President Nixon declared an end to the Vietnam war. Headlines read: "Prisoners to come home; fighting to halt; over 350,000 Americans dead or wounded, and millions more permanently scarred by the events of a decade."

While new recruits headed for Germany, remaining soldiers returned home from the paddy fields of Vietnam. In the States, the anti-Vietnam protests died away while naked Americans streaked across football fields, high school and college campuses, and the stage of the Academy Awards. Headlines followed Golda Meir, Brezhnev, Sadat, Mao, the Shah of Iran, and Moshe Dayan—all of whom have been dead now for years. Along with the ever-present face of Henry Kissinger, there appeared Uganda's tyrant Idi Amin Dada, the exiled Soviet author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and the kidnapped newspaper heiress turned terrorist Patty Hearst. Jack Benny died during this time, Yoko and John split up then reunited, Liz and Richard remarried and then divorced again, and Sonny and Cher permanently separated. People Magazine premiered and movies included Tommy, The Exorcist, and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

Best-sellers were *Helter Skelter*, *The Joy of Sex*, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *Jaws*, *Fear of Flying*, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and *The Gulag Archipelago*. Music rocked with Chicago, Crosby Stills Nash and Young, The Who, Eric Clapton, and Bruce Springsteen with his hit, "Born to Run." Television portrayed *All in the Family*, *The Waltons*, *Happy Days*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *M*A*S*H*, and *Chico and the Man*.

In July of 1973, the military abolished the draft and enacted the All-Volunteer Armed Forces. Thousands of young Americans enlisted in the new Army. Many were high school dropouts, drug abusers, disillusioned unemployed youth looking for a way out of poverty, and petty criminals who chose the military over serving time in jail. Single mothers enlisted seeking a means of financial support. A few average middle American high-school graduates sought adventure and opportunity through the enticing offers of recruiting campaigns. The later was me.

In magazines, newspapers, and on billboards recruiting ads challenged young men and women to join the armed forces and make it on their own:

"It takes brains to join the Army. Don't laugh. If you're a recent high school graduate, joining today's Army might be the smartest move you could make. Consider your alternatives. College is one, but are you really ready to take full advantage of it now, or would you get more out of it at a later date? Thousands of young people do, every year. A job is another alternative. But it takes training and experience to get a good one. And what kind of job are you qualified for right out of high school? Consider a third alternative, today's Army. Now that we've said goodbye to the draft, we have to compete harder for the people we need, so we're making the Army more worth your while. A positive, meaningful, productive way to spend the next two years of your life. To start, we don't just sign you up and send you somewhere. You have a say. You can

now choose from over 50 locations in the States and abroad. Pick an outfit near your home. Or enlist for faraway places like Europe, Panama, Hawaii, Alaska, or Korea.

“We also give you a choice of over 300 valuable technical jobs, and 200 job-training school courses. Excellent courses with some of the best equipment available anywhere, with professional instructors to train you in a skill you can turn into a career. In the Army, or later in civilian life. There are other options, too. Like the Language Option, Army Band Option, Medical Skills Option, Army Intelligence, and more. If you select one, and if you’re qualified, our enlistment guarantee will make it stick. Everything we guarantee will be given to you in writing before you enlist. Spelled out in language you can understand. If you’d like to begin studying for your college degree while in the Army, we’ll give you the chance. And pay 75 percent or more of your tuition at colleges and universities near your post.

Today’s Army wants you.”

Chapter One: Basic Training in the Women’s Army Corps



Oath of Enlistment

I, (name), do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;

that I will obey the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. SO HELP ME GOD.



(My Army story, written Spring 1974):

I'm writing this on my bunk in a large barracks at the Reception Processing Company, Fort McClellan, Alabama. It's after "lights out" and I'm using a flashlight under the OD (olive drab) scratchy wool covers. The room is cool and quiet, but the day is scorching and noisy with lots of recruits among the gray metal bunks and lockers.

The other girls from Portland and I got here five days ago and I'll be in this reception company until I begin my six-week basic training cycle. There are six of us from Portland. The other Oregonians seem nice but some of the girls in the reception company are really weird. Lots are black and Hispanic and most are about my age, but a couple are pretty old—nearly thirty.

They come from all over the States, and a couple are from Puerto Rico and Hawaii. Everyone is nice and so far I'm enjoying the experience, but I'm told basic training isn't going to be simple—up at 5 AM and drill, drill, drill until we drop dead every night.

One of the girls who bunks near me is really strange. Her name is Bixby, that's her last name. We go by our last names because, "we're in the Army now" (as everyone around here jokes). Bixby fascinates me. She's squat and stupid. Never even heard of Portland and she only

got through her sophomore year in high school. Wow! I can't imagine how her recruiter got her in. For one thing, I thought you had to be at least five feet tall to join up, but somehow Bixby made it through. She's a hillbilly from Kentucky. Her teeth are stained and one's missing, her hair's messy (and possibly has lice), and she talks loudly and says slangy things like—y'all, ain't, we was, she know'd, and "winder" for window. What a kick! I doubt she'll even make it out of the Processing Center.

The other girls avoid Bixby, but I often talk to her because she's so interesting. It's not that I think of her as my friend or anything, it's just that I've never met anyone like her. She says her boyfriend's name is Clem, which absolutely kills me. I mean, I could have guessed that!

At the airport in Birmingham, some WAC sergeant met me and the other girls from Portland. Then we took a military bus to this reception company barracks, where I'm at now. We were really excited when we arrived here. Honestly, I don't think I've ever been so thrilled in my life. I can't imagine what's in store.

As soon as we got off the bus we had to line-up in formation. Then this reception company drill sergeant, a heavy-set lady with curly black hair and a gray felt Stetson worn to one side, stared at each of us with squinting eyes. She said, mean and teasingly, "Welcome to Fort McClellan, Ladies. The next two months will either make you or break you." I don't think I'll ever forget that moment. I wasn't exactly scared because it seemed more like I was going to college or something.

Before I describe the reception process, I must mention the silly way me and the other girls from Portland took our oath of allegiance. My recruiter, Sergeant Hooper, said he wanted to publicize enlistment (I think he needed to make his end of the month quota for new recruits). So, he had the new female recruits pledge during a Buckaroo Hockey Game. No kidding! I don't

think mom and dad were necessarily proud of me. They don't say much about what I do so I don't know what they really think. Maybe they're not quite sure about my joining the Army. I guess they don't know what to say to me about it.

Anyway, it's OK that they don't say much because I will make it on my own, no matter what they think or say. At least they liked the free tickets to the hockey game. I don't know who won because after we made our pledge we went to the Heathman Hotel, where the Army had us stay until we flew off to Alabama the next day.

The country around here is hot for Spring. It's green, has a lot of pine trees and red clay, and is located in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains (home of the Beverly Hillbillies). This morning we were outside the barracks in time to see a bright orange sunrise.

The base at Fort McClellan is the headquarters for the Women's Army Corps. The Vietnam grunts had their training here for the infantry. Imagine that. Both grunts and WACs at Fort McClellan. Today I saw a bunch of grunts jogging in formation as our group pulled up in the OD bus (which we were crammed in). They looked so lean and mean. They were singing that "Airborne" song: "I want to be an airborne ranger, I want to live a life of danger, I want to go to Vietnam, I want to kill some Viet Cong!"

This place is a military city. These old whitewashed rectangular buildings with tile roofs have been here for ages. There's a store, dispensary, chapel, post office, hospital, library, bowling alley, theater, and service club, but we can't use any of the interesting places (the bowling alley and clubs) until after our fourth week of basic training. That is, if we earn a "full post" pass.

Like I said, I'll be in the processing company until we get assigned to our training company. So, what am I doing in the mean time? Waiting in line after line, getting nasty shots

for meningitis, flue, and polio, filling out form after form, learning Army stuff, and getting uniforms and insignia.

Whenever the other recruits and I go anywhere around the base we march in formation, almost like being in grade school. And when we meet other WACs who are actually in their basic training cycle—the trainees—they yell to us, “Recruits, recruits don’t be blue, our recruiter fooled us too!” It’s all in fun but I can’t wait to be in the training cycle so I can yell to the new recruits.

The food is pretty good around here, as I hadn’t expected. Even though Army grub is supposed to be awful, there’s great things like black and green olives and strawberry yogurt with every lunch and dinner.

I got my military green ID card and my picture looks like I’m half asleep. They say that for my MOS I’ll go to communication school in Georgia and become a communications technician (if I’m lucky). Anyway, I don’t really care what job they assign me since I joined-up to go to Europe with Kathi. Not to learn some goofy military occupation. (The Army offered us either training or travel and of course I chose travel!) I wouldn’t mind the communications field, though, especially if I can learn other languages. In fact, I would really like being a French specialist or some kind of translator, since I studied French in high school. But they say this isn’t likely because they don’t need language specialists. I do plan to learn German while I’m in the Army. It’s one of my goals and it’s separate from anything military. You see, I’m not really trying to get a skill in the Army so I’d prefer a simple, general MOS.

Unlike me, I think a lot of these new recruits are here because they had no choice. A lot of them seem poor, even desperate, like they enlisted to avoid trouble. You get the feeling they come from terrible families, or from no family at all, or they joined to get away from creepy

boyfriends or husbands who beat them. I can only guess, but a lot of these ladies look tough. I worry that some of them might steal anything I've left out—just to steal it.

Practically everyone around here smokes, especially Kool Menthol cigarettes. Now I'm smoking too (usually Marlboros). Whenever we're waiting for the next formation call, the girls all light up. But I only smoke two or three cigarettes a day since I've never been a real smoker. Somehow, just being in the Army makes smoking enjoyable, or at least I like to do what everyone else does. We have to smoke outside the barracks and only during cigarette breaks. I really don't think I'll become a regular smoker. It's just part of what people do in the Army.

Speaking of cigarettes, we go on a lot of "police calls" to look for trash around the barracks and mess hall. We pick up cigarette butts or any other trash laying around and put the trash in these big green metal canisters called "Dipseys Dumpsters." Part of being a soldier is to learn a whole new vocabulary. I never heard "police" used this way before but now I say it all the time. If you think about it, that's what police are for—keeping areas clear of trash.

After a few days in the processing company, we got a pay advance of \$160.00 and then we went to the PX, a store that stands for Post Exchange so I assume it comes from the cavalry days. I put one hundred dollars in savings and kept the rest for splurging at the PX, even though there's not much one can buy during basic training. We have to store most of our stuff in the luggage locker and when we leave here we are only allowed so much weight without having to pay for shipping.

Before we went to the PX, the drill sergeant gave us a list of items we can't have in the barracks because they're contraband—candy, magazines, chewing gum, knives, and any weapons, alcohol or drugs. I can't imagine anyone being so stupid as to keep weapons or drugs in the military barracks, unless they want to be thrown in jail. The sergeant also gave us a list of

required and suggested items to buy at the PX—an iron, starch, bleach, Brasso, Kiwi black shoe polish, a polishing cloth and brushes, and soap, toothpaste, and shampoo (they assume we don't know much keeping clean, though it's true for some of these recruits). I also bought a vanity case, a ditty bag, which is an Army bag with a zipper used to store makeup and bath stuff and I bought a trunk to store my excess stuff.

When we were first learning to practice military commands, such as saluting, I was partners with Bixby, that weird hillbilly gal, because nobody else would be her partner and like I said, she's a kick. But Bixby didn't make it through the reception company and was sent home. I figured she wouldn't make it. You can't be that uneducated and survive in the Army.

Besides learning how to salute, we've learned how to stand at attention, at ease, at parade rest, and a couple other commands. You're supposed to always salute officers when outdoors or when in charge of a work detail. To salute you neatly snap your right hand to your forehead, with the thumb aligned. To stand at ease you keep quiet and relaxed, your hands folded behind your butt, and to stand at attention you bring heels together, turn feet out 45 degrees, keep legs straight without stiffening knees (or you could faint), hold body erect, chest arched, shoulders square, arms straight, and fingers slightly curled with the thumbs touching the first joint of forefingers.

Boy, I tell you. Military customs and courtesy are stiff and what they call "strac," which means to look and be sharp, prepared, alert, and on the ball, like a soldier who stands proud and tall. I'll never be too strac because I'm not that gung-ho of a soldier. I mean, big deal. Besides, being too strac goes against my nature. It's like being a faceless robot and I've always been more independent than what's expected of a true blue strac soldier. But I try to look dignified and to do what I'm supposed to do.

When I first arrived here, I thought I had to salute anyone wearing a uniform who wasn't a private. But you only salute those wearing the brass or silver bars, stars, eagles, and leaves—the officers, in other words. NCO's wear patches. We're supposed to call the men officers "sir," and women officers "ma'am." You're never supposed to call an NCO "sir" or "ma'am." NCO means non-commissioned officer—the sergeants and those in rank higher than privates or corporals. The Lifers, or career soldiers. I'm getting most of what I'm writing down from these little billfold cards we were given which tell the grades of enlisted personnel and officers. I had no idea there were seven ranks of sergeants (but of course, I never knew anything about the military before I joined).

Sergeants are E-5 through the Command Sergeant Major of the Army (E-9). Below sergeant is the corporal, or Spec 4. There are three ranks of private: E-1, 2 and Private First Class, PFC. I'm a PV1 (E-1) now, which means I'm nothing but a lowly private without patches.

Chapter Two: More Basic Training, Fort McClellan



General Orders

- 1. I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved.*
- 2. I will obey my special orders and perform all my duties in a military manner.*
- 3. I will report violations of my special orders, emergencies, and anything not covered in my instructions, to the commander of the relief.*

(written in the 2000's)

WWII changed the world. Men went to war and society put women to work. In 1942, congress passed a bill authorizing the Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps. President Roosevelt signed Public Law 554, establishing the WAAC as an auxiliary with the Army, not in the Army. At Fort Des Moines, Iowa, 360 educated women were selected for the first-officer candidate WAAC school. They were trained in converted stables and wore inadequate uniforms, such as WWI wool coats over summer attire. The WAAC director, Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby, met with the War Department.

From the beginning, the attitude toward woman in the military was demoralizing. How dare she enter a man's world. The incapable slut! Women entice men. Women menstruate and get pregnant. Sexual harassment seems part of human culture. I call it Brute Force. The stronger has the power. The control. And he fights to keep it. The cave man drags the cave woman by her hair, to his cave. There is no civility involved in demoralizing another for a sense of self-worth. When I was little, I tried playing with my older brother and his friends, from time to time. Eventually, they would turn against me and call me, "tag along... Here comes tag along." But I digress.

During WWII nearly half a million women enlisted in the military, despite negative attitudes and claims that "WAACs were issued prophylactics!" Women joined the WAACs, the WAVES (Women accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service [in the Navy], the WASPs

(Women's Air force service Pilots who ferried planes for the Army Air Force), the Women's Reserve of the Marine corps (NOT the WAMs—wide ass marines), and SPAR, women of the Coast Guard.

In 1943 legislation terminated the WAAC and established the Women's Army Corps as a part of the regular Army. WAACs were discharged and invited to enlist in the WACs. Most did. Those who returned to civilian life weren't entitled to Veteran's benefits because they weren't officially veterans. Though years later these women were declared eligible for some benefits.

The WAC was a low priority in the Army, a second-class status. Regulations permitted women to work in noncombatant jobs, such as technical, clerical, professional, motor vehicle, supply and stock, foods, mechanics, communications, radio, electrical. Some assisted in aviation missions—the Air WACs. Despite integration, there was no equal treatment. Many WAC officers were secretaries to their male counterparts. And if a WAC became pregnant, she was automatically discharged.

About 7,500 military women served in Vietnam, seven are etched on the Memorial Wall in Washington DC. Most were from the Nurse Corps. From 1972 to 1978 the WAC forces increased from 12,000 to 53,000. After July 1974, WAC officers were assigned to career specialties, rather than WAC units, and the Women's Army Corps began to cease. While I was in Germany, weapons training for women was reactivated after a ten-year pause.

By October 1978, Public Law officially eliminated the corps. Two years after I left the service, women underwent the same basic training as men. Then in 1982 the Army ended the integration practice of basic training because women were “slowing down the men.” These were the Reagan Years. Before the Gulf War. Before 9-11. Now I think women in the military are not

so spurned and disgraced. They serve with dignity and honor. Though still harassed, I'm imagine.

(written Spring 1974)



Yesterday we got our uniforms and boy was I excited. We had already gone to the warehouse to tailor our skirt and blazer cords, wool winter greens, and cotton greens. My measurements are 34-28-34, which isn't too bad especially if I lose some more weight and look sharp (maybe even strac!?). Just wish I was a little taller. Then maybe I wouldn't feel so puny. Some of these ladies around here are a bit intimidating and I'd hate to get into a fight or something.

In addition to our uniforms, we got towels, anklets, a duffle bag, three hats, white dress gloves and regular black ones, an ugly black purse like a grandma would use, an OD overcoat, a rain coat (the only piece of military clothing we can wear with civilian clothes), dress pumps and ugly black oxford shoes like old ladies wear. Our regular day clothes, called PT's (physical training clothes), are light green blouses and green wrap skirts and shorts.

We don't even get fatigues which disappoints me. I hear that in the near future women will get to wear fatigues because the WACs are going to become a part of the regular Army.

Then women will even have to shoot M-16 rifles. I guess I wouldn't mind firing a gun, but I'm afraid it might be too heavy.

We also got three pieces of brass insignia, one for my dress hat and two round collar insignias—a plain disk with “US” on it, and the WAC insignia with the Pallas Athena face. The “US” brass goes on the right collar and the Pallas Athena goes on the left. The drill sergeant explained that Pallas Athena was born fully grown and armored from the head of her father Zeus, and she was a fierce soldier-goddess who defended her country and home from the enemies. Obviously, this is why they chose her to represent the WACs. The drill sergeant also said to wear the Pallas Athena with pride. By her expression I could tell that she was proud about being a woman in the Army. As for me, well, I sure can't wait to get to Germany with Kathi!

Dearest Teri,

We were very happy to get your letter—have been looking for one every night since you left. We're glad you like it there. Hope it doesn't get too hot while you go through your basic training. Guess the South can be a hot place. How are your bunks? Do you have a hard time sleeping in the Barracks? I bet you've met a lot of nice girls and made a new list of friends.

We got your pictures today. Thanks—we like them a lot and think you look very nice in your uniform. We also got a picture from the Army Recruiting Center of you girls on the hockey ice-arena. It's a good picture and you show up really good.

Tell us about your training and how you like it. We want to know what you are doing because we love you. Do you get any time off to visit the town or are you confined to the base all the time?

Now you know how other people live—not always the best. Home isn't so bad after all, is it? Oh well, the experience is great and will soon be over. It will be interesting to see how long you can keep in touch with your new friends when basic is over and you're off to meet more new friends.

Be good and remember, we love you very much.

Mom and Dad

It's ten PM and I'm writing this during the last week of basic training while I'm on CQ (charge of quarters or guard duty) in the battalion office. Another gal and I have been pulling CQ since 4 o'clock this afternoon and we stay on duty until 7 o'clock tomorrow morning. This means we'll miss a night's sleep.

I don't mind this too much since it gives me the chance to write letters. I haven't written mom and dad for a while. They worry when I don't write. Imagine that. Maybe they appreciate me more when I'm not around.

Anyway, we're posted here in case of emergency, but all we really do is sit at the desk and answer the phone. We got this stupid list of telephone procedures called, "Telephone Tips for CQ Personnel." It says: "When you RECEIVE a call: 1. Answer as promptly as possible. 2. Identify yourself by rank and name. 3. Speak distinctly and pleasantly (hold the mouthpiece in front of lips). 4. Don't be abrupt. 5. Volunteer the 'Whereabouts and Whenabouts' of a person. 6. Volunteer assistance. 7. Request identity of caller only when necessary. Be tactful. 8. Explain off-the-line delays. 9. Take messages willingly and deliver promptly to the correct person. 10. Transfer call only when you know the correct person or number.

“When you MAKE a call: 1. Plan out your call before dialing. 2. Place the call so that you are on the line when answered. 3. Know the correct number. 4. Dial carefully and accurately. 5. Identify yourself immediately to the first person answering the called number. 6. Identify also, when helpful, your rank, office, and purpose for calling. 7. Ask whether called person has ‘time to talk now’ if call is likely to be lengthy. If person has not time, say you will call back at a more convenient time. 8. Try to complete your business on one call by securing information or leaving a message for a return call. 9. Volunteer your number and the best time to reach you in case you request a ‘call back.’ 10. And remember. Always keep you conversation brief and businesslike.”

So, you see, as I’m sitting here writing, I have to be ready to catch the phone before it rings twice or I’ll get a demerit, or as they say, a “gig” – one of the first words you learn in basic training. I have to be constantly alert and ready to answer, “Company B First Battalion, Charge of Quarters. Private Teri speaking.”

Basic Training has been a busy time for me since we finally moved to our permanent barracks: Co B, 1BT USWACCS (D2) Fort McClellan, AL 36201. This means Company Bravo, First battalion, United States Women’s Army Corps Center and School Brigade, (Delta Second Platoon). Company Bravo has two platoons with about 25 girls in each—Bravo 1 and Bravo 2. I’m in Bravo 2 and we’re called Foxy Bravo. The Army’s got its own alphabet which is used in radio talk and in naming platoons—Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliett, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Quebec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee, and Zulu. I got this from one of those billfold cards they gave us.

Our barracks, along with those for companies A, C and D, is on a grassy hill and in one of those ugly white rectangular buildings. It was used for guys during WWII so the latrine has

urinals. The building is so old it was condemned about twenty years ago, but they restored it. Every once in a while cockroaches the size of your thumb creep across the floor. They're not too pleasant to step on, if you know what I mean.

We call the long room where we bunk "the bay." Iron bar bunk beds line both walls of the bay and every area (two people to an area) has two metal lockers and two wooden foot lockers at the end of the bunks. I had to store that trunk I bought and a few other things in the storage room because they don't allow anything non-military to clutter up the bay, or the entire company will get gigs.

The ceiling has taped up pipes and rafters and the floor is an ugly grayish blue linoleum. What really makes the bay seem bleak are the OD blankets tightly tucked into each bed. Because of my last name, I happen to be on the top bunk near the front of the bay, and I'm always first in the line. But I never have minded this.

My best friend Kathi ends up at the other end of the line, in another squad because of her last name. At least we can spend breaks and meals together. Besides, I've been making lots of new friends and so has Kathi. Sometimes I feel a bit jealous of her new friends and maybe she is of mine. I hope Kathi and I get the same MOS, but I'm beginning to worry that we won't.

Foxy Bravo has two drill sergeants, one female and one male. Sergeant Curran is one of first male drill sergeants at Fort McClellan for the WACs. It's a new thing and they want to see how well we can be drilled by a man. Who knows? Maybe someday we'll even go into combat with the grunts. I don't think I'd ever want to fight, even if I was a guy.

Sergeant Curran is nice looking, but he doesn't yell as loudly as the female drill sergeant. Maybe he's unsure of how to treat us. He wears strac khakis and a brown Smokey the Bear hat. He's OK, I guess, at least I like him better than Sergeant Meyerson. She's this short skinny bitch,

who's probably a lesbian, as the rumor goes. She obviously doesn't like us because she speaks sarcastically. What I really don't like about her is that you can't talk to her personally about anything which is what I sometimes feel like doing. I don't know. Sometimes I've needed to break from the training cycle and see her as someone who could explain why I should be in the Army. Especially since Kathi and I don't seem as close as we once were. And this constant drilling, yelling, and regimentation becomes confusing. I sometimes don't know what the hell I'm doing in the Army.

During basic training the girls quickly form groups of friends. I've made close friends with three gals—Becky, Robin, and Angelina. They're normal like me and joined-up to travel and get the benefits. We eat together in the mess hall and clown around when we have free time. In a way it's strange how close I feel to these girls. Like we've always been together as best friends and always will be. I can't imagine what it'll be like when we part company, but I'm sure we'll keep in touch.

One of these friends is my bunk mate, Becky. She's an attractive blond lady but is always clowning around if she can get away with it. For example, she'll throw my underwear in the toilet or turn my brass insignia upside down. Of course, she'll warn me if I miss her joke before we "fall out" in formation. I do the same to her so we have lots of fun.

Robin is an average looking brunette, bunks at the other end of the bay, near Kathi. In fact, her and Kathi are pretty good friends now. Robin is one of the girls from Portland who pledged with me during that hockey game. We hit it off as friends during the flight and while we were in that processing company. She's a lot like me—average and normal though possibly smarter because she knows how to be strac and doesn't get many gigs. But she gets crazy like the rest of us. Once she made this flower chain from those lawn daisies near the mess hall and then

she put the chain on Becky's and my bunk. Each of us—Becky, Robin and I—got “three gigs” for “an unauthorized object on the bed.” It was a big joke and we all got a kick out of it, except for drill sergeant Meyerson who doesn't like any joking around.

My other friend, Angelina, is a Catholic from Puerto Rico. She wears one of those saint pendants. She's twenty-four and she's smart. I can talk personally to her when we're alone. Once I admitted that sometimes I feel confused about being in the Army and nobody at home saying that I shouldn't join up or that I should go to college. Don't get me wrong, I do want to make it on my own, but sometimes I want somebody to make me feel that they know what's happening with me, and what sort of things I might consider doing. I suppose mom and dad believe that I have to make my own decisions. Which is good. I know they love me and want me to be happy, but still, like I told Angelina, I sometimes feel confused about my life. I mean, I'm not going to always be in the Army.

When I explained all this to Angelina she said to me, “Read, Teri. That's what you should do at this time of your life. Read everything you can get your hands on—bestsellers, literature, history, science, and so on.” Like I said, Angelina's smart and a good friend because she can talk personally when you need to get serious.

Throughout the training cycle, girls have been coming and going in our platoon. None have been as weird as that hillbilly gal, Bixby, but some are washed-out. Take for example this one lady who's about 25, heavy set and terribly smelly – pee, BO and bad breath. She wears old fashioned civvies (civilian clothes), her hair's cut like a bouffant, and everything she owns and her entire area has fumes. About a week into basic the drill sergeants made her cry by throwing her and her stuff in the showers then making her wash in front of us. We didn't really stand

around and watch her because we felt bad since she was crying, but we were glad to see something was done about her stink. Surprisingly, she seems to be making it through basic.

A few girls in our bay got “recycled” (“put out of the Army”). Some of the recycled gals were actually thrown out because they were too stupid, and others desperately wanted out for personal reasons. To get out of the platoon you have to act like you can’t do anything right. Like Barb, for example. About half way through basic she got a letter from her boyfriend saying he wanted her to come home and get married. Barb decided to get out so she started to dress sloppily, turn left when the drill sergeant yelled “right face,” and she never polish her shoes or her brass. In fact, she wore her brass upside down, but would always have to change it right side up when the drill sergeant yelled at her. It was weird seeing Barb dress like a retard since she was such a dignified and pretty lady. But she had to do it and by the time the drill sergeants assigned her to the “recycle platoon,” her brass was really tarnished. But, she got out!

Another gal that got recycled was Shelia Hammond from Virginia. One Saturday, after we came back from lunch, we had a messy “shakedown” in the barracks because Shelia’s billfold was missing. During the shakedown, we had to stand at our areas and wait for the sergeants to inspect everything we owned. All the while Shelia carried on hysterically because in her billfold was the only picture she had of her baby daughter. The sergeants never found her billfold, but Shelia ended up getting recycled because she missed her baby too much. I can’t figure why she joined up in the first place. But I guess we all got our own private reasons.

Now and then we get a recycled girl in our company who isn’t being thrown out, but who had flunked a week or two for not passing major inspections. There was this one recycled gal who had a chipped tooth and dish water straight hair. One night, while I was in the shower by the latrine, she said she was married but liked to do it with women (she’s a bisexual, in other words).

Then she asked me if I'd like to try it. I was shocked and quickly got out of the shower. Then she came to my bunk where I was telling Becky about what she had said. Get this. Sherry then asked both Becky and me if we wanted to try it and she added, "Don't knock it until you try it." I couldn't believe it. Becky and I were really grossed out. This was the first time I ever personally met a lesbian. Of course, you hear rumors all the time, such as our drill sergeant is a lesbian. But to be asked to do it by one is really pretty gross.

From day one of Foxy Bravo's training cycle, we are on our feet all the time and by night we were really pooped. Every day begins at 0500, before the sunrise. But we're not awakened by the bugle call of reveille, like I imagined we would be. Instead, the drill sergeant enters the bay turns on the lights and yells, "Everybody up!" We then dress, clean up, and "fall-out" for roll call and PT (physical training), before we march off to breakfast. We return to the barracks on our own but have to "fall-out" again at seven o'clock to march off to our classes.

Throughout our basic training cycle, we've had such classes as: Benefits of Military Service; Discipline, Morality, and Traditions; Drill and Ceremonies; Drug Awareness; Field Training; Financial Affairs; First Aid; Geneva Convention and Code of Conduct; Land Navigation; Military Justice; Organization of the Army; Personnel Policies and Procedures; Physical Readiness Training; Race Relations; Survival, Evasion, and Escape; Social Diseases; and Personal Appearance and Health. We also had a birth control class on all the methods and I got some birth control pills for future use. Who knows when they might come in handy? Certainly not here!

Some of the classes were interesting, but some were really dumb. Like this class on how to iron our clothes and wear makeup according to this color chart. The most interesting lesson covered the organization of the Army. Basically, the Army began in 1789 but the Women's

Army Corps wasn't established until WWII. We learned about the "Chain of Command," which is one of the most important features of being a soldier. What it means is that requests have to be sent up through the chain of command starting with the closest superior in rank. For me, it's the squad leader, then the drill sergeant, etc. Everything about the military is chain of command. If you're a lowly private like me, you're under a hundred different hierarchies. There's the NCO chain of command which ends with the Sergeant Major of the Army, down through the Command Sergeant Major, Post CSM, Brigade CSM, Battalion CSM, First Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant (or drill sergeant, in our case) and squad leader. The highest Chain of Command ends with President Nixon and goes down through the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army commands, then post, brigade, battalion, company, and platoon commands, and then onto squads and enlisted personnel—or lowly peons like me.

The most fun during basic was the bivouac when we spent four days in the Appalachian foothills simulating combat, like the grunts humping the boonies in the Nam. We didn't actually camp out. Instead, we got up early and took the bus out to the field each morning.

It was sizzling hot and we all sweated like crazy in our fatigues and helmets (we were given fatigues to use for this exercise). Once, we played a kind of hide and seek by escaping from the enemy "double time" with loads on our backs, and hiding in the forest. Then the drill sergeants looked for us and anyone caught was killed (simulated, of course) and got an X put on her helmet which meant a gig.

Imagine getting a demerit for being killed. Seems wrong! I hid far into the woods under a bunch of leaves and branches. I remember waiting and waiting for the sergeants to find me, while I itched from the heat and the sweat dripping down my forehead. It was easy to pretend that everything was real, that I was in the Nam, and that if I were found the Vietcong would kill

me. I kept wondering how a real grunt must have felt when he was out on night patrols or on point during the day. Somehow, the longer I lay hid in the brush the more I began to think about how he must have felt when he realized he was going to lose his life.

After a while, I began to wonder how long I would stay there under the leaves, if the sergeants didn't find me. I mean, I could have died from heat exhaustion. And if it were real war, the Vietnam war, I wondered if I would dare move, ever. Those gooks must surely have been able to detect the slightest abnormal movement or sound.

I eventually heard someone approach me as I lay as still as possible. They were rustling the leaves step by step, and then someone yelled, "All right private. Out with you!" And that was that. I got caught and killed.

The first aid session was really funny. Each of us took turns at being a casualty and at applying first aid to the casualties sprawled out on the ground. They painted us with fake blood and gave us simulated plastic guts, like intestines that you place on your stomach and that hang out of the wound. I was surprised by this exercise because it seems like a guy would die if his guts hung out. But evidently, if you carefully bandage the guts back in, the guy has a chance to live. I also learned that if a guy's wounded you can pee on him to sterilize the wound, but of course this is for men who can more easily do such a thing.

The gas chamber was wicked. It involved learning how to get our protective masks on, fitted, and cleared in nine seconds. That was the first test. Then we had to go inside a gas filled room, take off the mask and say our name, rank, and service number. Boy, did everyone run outside that gas room and cough and cry from the gas stinging our eyes and choking our throats.

CBR training was fairly interesting. It stands for Chemical, Biological, and Radiological warfare, which is a lot different from straight bullet shooting and cannon fire. Did I screw up on

the exercise when Sergeant Meyerson put me on point ahead of my squad. You see, we were walking through the forest, just like the guys did through the jungle, and I saw in the distance this sign warning of chemical contamination in the area. The thing is, as squad leader I was supposed to immediately warn the troops so we could all put on our gas masks, but for some reason I thought I needed to get closer to the sign. I wasn't thinking clearly, and the drill sergeant call me stupid and put someone else on point. I got a gig.

We were issued our dog tags before we went out on bivouac. I'm wearing mine right now, as I always do, under my PT blouse. We wear them in case something should happen to us, in case we die in action. My name, social security number, blood type, and Baptist, are etched on it, though I'm not sure the religious part matters to me. But when we filled out the form for the dog tags, it asked our religious preference and the sergeant said it was better to say something than nothing. I guess it's necessary in case you die and they need to pray over you. For example, if you're Jewish you wouldn't want a Christian prayer or the other way around.

I like wearing my dog tags, but they gave me a weird feeling when we were on bivouac and bandaging casualties with their guts hanging out. It's creepy to think about you guys in Vietnam lying dead. Real people with real guts hanging out. Not simulated war games. I could picture American soldiers my age dying and unable to speak, or maybe all blown up or burned beyond recognition and the only way to identify them is from their dog tags. It's eerie to imagine holding all that's left of a dead soldier—a small metal plate with a name, number, blood type, and religious preference that might not even be true.

If they go back to Vietnam one day to look for the American MIA's, dog tags will be the only way they can tell whose bones are on the ground. When you get down to it, dog tags are the

opposite of brass. They're part of a soldier's uniform but you never wear them outside, or polish them, and you hope that nobody will ever have to identify you from them.

It seems like the Army keeps reminding you about death. I mean, every night at "lights out," loud speakers around the base play Taps. It's played faintly so you can easily miss hearing it, but sometimes, before the drill sergeant comes in for "bed check" and when I'm in bed and the whole bay is quiet, I hear Taps play and I get chills because it makes me think about dying. It's weird to think this way because I feel so young and alive and death seems so unfair. But everyone dies. I guess this is why people think about God but I don't know about God. I'm not sure I should believe in him simply because of mom and dad. I only know that death is confusing. So, I try not to think about it too much, but sometimes it hits me and I can't help feeling afraid.

But I'm a soldier in This Man's Army and I ought to be tough! So, what does it mean to me to be a soldier? Other than to fight, kill or die for your country. Being a soldier means you pull a lot of unexpected duty like latrine orderly, KP (kitchen police), and CQ. Once I had KP with Tess and Angelina and it was a blast. We joked around and flung food at each other, but we tried to keep it under control knowing how much trouble we'd get in if we got caught by the kitchen sergeant.

Being a soldier also means you do a lot of drilling. When you march you have to keep in step—left, right, left—and let your arms swing normally. I had trouble doing this at first and Sergeant Curran, our male drill sergeant, kept yelling at me to swing my arms naturally, but I got the hang of it. One morning we marched in a parade in front of the General of Fort McClellan. I felt pretty special when, at the command, "Dress of Dress Right, Dress!" all of us in Foxy Bravo smartly turned our heads and eyes toward the General sitting in the bleachers. We marched like

this, then the drill sergeant yelled, “Front of Ready, Front,” and we turn our heads back to the front and continued marching on. What a kick!

I was chosen to be first squad leader for a week, which meant I was ahead of my squad (about 12 people in two rows), and that I called out the songs we sing as we march along. Here are five of our marching songs:

Everyone sings, “I wanna be an Airforce Ranger. I wanna live the life of danger. I wanna go to Vietnam. I wanna kill some Viet Cong.”

Squad leader yells, “Sound off!”

Troops respond, “1, 2.”

Squad leader, “Sound again.”

Troops, “3, 4.”

Squad leader, “Bring it on up now.”

Troops, “1 up 2 up.”

Squad leader, “Bring it on down now.”

Troops, “4,3,2,1 – 1, 2, 3, 4!”

Everyone sings, “Oh it’s beer beer beer that makes you want to cheer in the Corps, in the Corps. Oh it’s beer beer beer that makes you want to cheer, in the Women’s Army Corps. Oh it’s wine wine wine that makes you feel so fine, in the Corps, in the Corps. Oh it’s wine wine wine that makes you feel so fine in the Women’s Army Corps. Oh it’s ice-cold duck that makes you... (you can guess the rest!)”

Squad leader yells, “I got a guy in New York City, he’s so blind he thinks I’m pretty. Am I right or wrong?”

Troops yell, “You’re Right!”

Squad leader, "Correct me if I'm wrong?"

Troops, "You're Right!

Squad leader, "Sound off..." (and so on).

Everyone sings, "Here we go... (two beat pause) We're at it again... We're marching through... We're marching in... We're marching to... We're marching fro... We're always marching on the go.

Get out of my way... I'm coming through... If you don't move... I'll stomp on you!
(repeat last refrain.)"

Squad leader yells, "One, two, three, four... One, two, three, four... Your left, your left, your left, right, left... A little bird..." Troops repeat. "With a yellow bill..." Troops repeat. "Was perched upon..." Troops repeat. "My window sill..." Troops repeat. "I let it in..." Troops repeat. "For a piece of bread..." Troops repeat. "And then I squashed..." "And then I squashed..."
Everyone sings, "Its little head! Yum, yum, yum, yum! (We say its "fucking" head if the drill sergeant isn't with us.)

The last and foremost thing that a soldier does is polish and clean everything in sight for endless inspections. In addition to the daily area inspections, we had first sergeant's, lieutenant's, captain's, colonel's and general's inspections. You quickly learn how to arrange and hang everything in your locker and how to make your bunk. The sheets have to have square corners folded at 45 degrees into the mattress, there can't be a single wrinkle on the pillow case, and the whole bed should be made so tight that a quarter can bounce on the middle of it. Once I tried pinning the tucks of my sheets to my blanket and sleeping on top of it. My idea was to jump up in the morning and quickly brush off the bed and be ready before everyone else. Unfortunately, my legs got scratched up from the pins so I quit using this method.

On the night before the lieutenant's inspection, I was sleeping on top of the covers and dreaming I got up to go to the latrine so I'd be ready for the inspection. But in reality, I was wetting the bed. How embarrassing. I've heard they discharge people for bed wetting. But nobody found out and I changed my pajamas and washed off the blanket and put my spare one on as quietly as possible. Becky didn't even wake up. I have to tell myself that I was just nervous because I've never done anything like this since I was a small child.

Before a big inspection we had what they call a "GI party" which means stripping and waxing the floors and shining up the latrine and dusting everything including the old ceiling pipes. Even though this took all day long we still got up in the middle of the night, covered the windows with blankets (to hide our activity from the sergeants), and did some more scrubbing, waxing, buffing, dusting, and polishing.

It's been kind of fun to polish our shoes and brass every evening, because Angelina, Kathi and Tess always come to Becky's and my bunk area and we polish while talking and clowning around. To "spit-shine" the shoes we set the Kiwi polish on fire, blow out the flame, take a damp cloth, dab it in the polish, and then rub the shoes in circular motions while occasionally spitting on them. To make them shine like patent leather, we buff them with an old panty hose. To polish our brass, we use liquid Brasso. You take the collar insignia off its little round disk and polish both pieces separately. You got to be careful not to leave any Brasso residue in the crevices, or a thread caught between the insignia and disks, or you'll get a gig.

Kathi tries the hardest to shine her brass so it looks like silver. She wants to rub it so much that the crevices of her Pallas Athena wear away and the face disappears, like the drill sergeant's insignia which always looks silver. But I disagreed with Kathi because I think it goes too far when you try to be so strac that you rub away Pallas Athena's face. This is the trouble

with brass. If you polish it too much, the insignia disappears, and if you don't polish it enough, the brass gets tarnished, or you get brasso residue, and it's hard to get the tarnish out of the crevices. In my opinion, brass has to be polished not too much and not too little. It's an art.

Evidently, my strategy worked, at least for the captain's inspection. You see, I did the very, very, very, TOP and was the only one with +2 merits (instead of gigs). The closest to me was Kathi who got 3 gigs. Wow, I got merits on my shoe shine, foot locker appearance and general display. And the captain said she really liked my brass. Boy, I felt so good about the whole thing. It was like winning a contest, but there's more pride involved when you're in the Army.

After captain's inspection, I got my first full post pass (meaning I was free to wander around the post) along with Angelina, Kathi, Becky and two other gals (only the best of our platoon got passes). Since we couldn't wear civvies on the base yet, we wore our cords (class A uniform, a skirt and blazer) which we were able to hem an inch above the knee. Otherwise, the skirt comes below the knee and looks pretty dorky.

We took a bus ride around the fort and at night we went to the service club and played pool and drank. I drank my first slow gin fizz because around here, at eighteen, I am old enough to drink. I felt pretty grown-up. I danced with this cute Puerto Rican guy named José who was in the infantry. He was a Spec-4 (specialist rank equivalent to a corporal) and he seemed nice. He eventually told Angelina in Spanish, after he joined us at our table and bought us more drinks, that he liked me a lot. Pretty soon he told me he wanted to go on a walk so we could be alone. I decided to go with him because I liked all the attention he showed me. It was like I had a boyfriend and I felt special all of a sudden.

We walked a while and it was romantic in the warm evening air. Soon we came to this Rec building but instead of going inside, we went around back and sat on the lawn. I got a little worried about what we were doing when José started kissing me. I told him I should get back to my friends since I was in basic training. He said, real softly and sweetly, that I shouldn't worry because he'd take care of me.

Well, to make a long story short, he took out his penis. This in itself didn't bother me, but I quickly worried about staining my uniform. So, I started to stand up but he gently pulled me back down and tried to do it to me. I wasn't really scared because I knew he wasn't going to rape me or anything. He was too sweet. But the fact was—and is—I'm a virgin so I just couldn't do it on the spot like that. Besides, if we got caught I'd probably get thrown out of the Army before I even made it to Germany.

I told José that I couldn't do it because I was in uniform. He tried to persuade me, saying we wouldn't get caught, but he soon gave up and took me back to the Service Club and left. I figured that would be the end of him but the very next weekend he came to Bravo's orderly room and asked for me. I met him in the day room but said I was really afraid I'd get in trouble if the drill sergeants saw him. He said he wanted to know when I got my next pass so he could buy me a drink at the Service Club or take me to Anniston. I told him I didn't know and we played a game of pool then he left but came back the next afternoon (Sunday). I told the CQ orderly who came into the bay to get me, that I didn't want to see the guy. But she got annoyed and said that it was my problem, not hers. I then pulled Angelina aside and asked her how I could get rid of José. He wouldn't understand that I had to be disciplined while in basic, and I was afraid he might think I didn't want to see him because he was Puerto Rican.

Boy, I tell you. That Angelina is quite a gal, and a really good friend, too. She took care of the situation by telling José that now was not the right time or place for him and me, and that if it were some other time and place, I would be happy to see him again. I thought it was a real neat way of telling this guy to get off my back.

To tell you the truth, I didn't mind José, but I really didn't know how to handle his wanting to ball. I don't want to be a virgin. In fact, I feel kind of stupid being one. Like I'm real immature and inexperienced, sort of a creep. Sometimes, when I lay awake at night and think about dying, I think that it would be even more terrible if I were to die a virgin. Of course, I never tell anyone this, even my best friends. There's some things you can't tell people because they don't know where you're coming from. Or more plainly, it's too embarrassing and too private.

Chapter Three: Teletype Machines

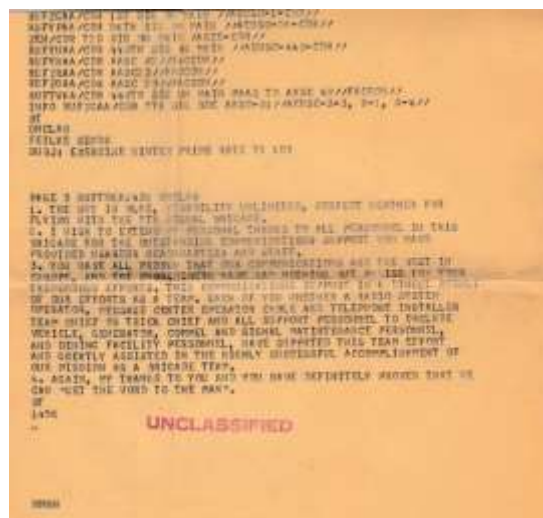


Code of Conduct: For Members of the Armed Forces of the United States

- 1. I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.*
- 2. I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command I will never surrender my men while they still have the means to resist.*
- 3. If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.*

4. *If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.*
5. *When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am bound to give only name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cover.*
6. *I will never forget that I am an American fighting man, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and the United States of America.*

(written shortly after I moved back to the desert from Florida, early 2000's)



My MOS was 72 Bravo, which had to do with Communications with Teletype Machines. Today, as I look back, I can scarcely believe how antiquated this technology seems—the teletype era of huge main frame computers that used data cards and ticker tapes with perforated holes which I learned to transcribe. The clunky teletype machines pounded out on yellow sheets of rag paper, encrypted messages in capital letters. I was given a Secret Clearance for my MOS, so I won't discuss what's in my “communications center specialist course student workbook,”

although I doubt any of it is in use today. Besides, to describe what is in the book would be tedious: Message types,—single call; multiple call, book, general; Message construction, Transmissions discrepancies, Routing guides, Code formats and Military Forms! How to minimize your message. How to process. Classifications (top secret, secret, confidential, and general). How to intercept. How to receive. (It sounds jumbled, like society and my head?)

I never even used my MOS during my permanent station in Germany. Instead, I first worked in the orderly room, then, after TOP (top sergeant of my company) tried to kiss me in his office, the Command Sergeant Major of the Battalion transferred me to headquarters company where I worked as a draftsman's assistant.

After my AWOL, I worked as a peon clerk for various sergeants in HHQ. In fact, I can't recall exactly what I ended up doing. I had been stripped of my Secret Clearance, "debriefed" so I had nothing to do with any machinery at all. Merely, I sorted through military paper work, which has no beginning, no end, and no middle. It is simply a process of processing paperwork. Based on my recent experience with the VA, I doubt much of this has changed. ,,

It seems that everything I've done in life, all that I've produced and collected, are Messages concerning my fate. Nothing is coincidental, except maybe the trivial.

Morning Troops

(written in the 1980s when I taught English in China)

I'm taking off my angry hat
To write these words for you,
And pluck a moment off of time,
Before the hour's through.
Where are you from?
These morning troops?
All visions in a line,

That come to me,
To set them free,
Inside a captured rhyme.
Many faces have you all,
In colors lost in hue,
Must I select a stratagem,
Before the hour's through?
I'll plot the summit by design –
An ordinance for you.

(written Summer of 1974)



Dear Teri,

Your graduation day is near and I bet you're glad. It's been quite an experience for you, hasn't it? Do you know where you'll be going next? No matter where it is, you'll meet new friends and enjoy yourself. This is a great experience for you. Enjoy every minute of it.

Love, Mom and Dad

My MOS (military occupation specialty) is in communications but I don't really know what I'll be getting into at AIT (advanced individual training). All I can say is I hope it won't last

too long so I can be off to Germany. My orders read, "Following reassignment directed. Individual will proceed on PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION as indicated. Assigned to: WAC Student Company (W2MD3B X) 1st Battalion School Building USA SE Signal School, Fort Gordon, GA."

They tell me that after basic training the Army won't be so bad. After all, there are 365 days a year and we sleep 8 hours a day, making a total of 122 days ($365 \times 1/3$ of a day), which when subtracted from a year leaves 243 days. Plus, we have 8 hours off per day for recreation, making another 122 days and leaving 121 days for the Army. There are 52 Sundays that we don't have to work on which leaves 69 days. We have Saturday afternoon off, which makes 26 full days when subtracted leaves 43 days. Considering we get 1 hour off per day for lunch which equals 16 days and this leaves 27 days. On the average there's 21 days leave which leaves 6 days. And the Army does have 5 legal holidays which makes only 1 day to work. So perhaps on this one day of work, I might get ill. (This was going through the barracks on a flyer.)

I did superbly on the General's Inspection and made E-2, that's private second class—PV-2 out of Basic Training. Only 15 out of the whole battalion of around 200 girls made PV-2. I must have done something right during those miserable weeks of training. Really, I think everything adds up together, appearance, aptitude, attitude, and so on to make the E-2s that are chosen.

Angelina and Kathi also made E-2, but in addition, Kathi made "Outstanding Trainee" and Angelina made "Honor Trainee" for Foxy Bravo. I guess I play second fiddle when it comes to such awards. But I don't mind since I got promoted to E-2 and will get a raise in pay. Besides, I can't say I'd brag about making honor or outstanding trainee once I was back in civilian life.

Graduation day was truly a big deal and I felt sharp, even strac, dressed in my cords with my brass shining and my pumps polished. I felt really good about being a part of the team. We marched in a parade and had a bunch of ceremonies. Some of the parents and husbands of the other girls came for the event. I didn't even invite mom and dad because I knew they could never afford the flight out.

Our platoon came up with a graduation song to compete with the other platoons in the battalion. It's called "After Graduation" and goes to the tune of "On a Clear Day."

Unfortunately, Foxy Bravo didn't win. The song that did went to the tune of "Que Sera Sera" (Doris Day) and our entire platoon sang it during the ceremony in the chapel. What was really funny was that the other platoon came up with their own version of the same tune. What a joke!

The hardest part about basic was leaving my best friends—Becky, Kathi, and Angelina. Kathi's going to Ft. Bliss Texas, Angelina's going to "Ditty Bop" School to learn Morse Code, and Becky's going to be an MP. Kathi and I were kind of disappointed not to get the same MOS because we joined up on the buddy system. But by now I guess we weren't really surprised. Everything the recruiter tells you is a lie anyhow, except for the guarantee of going to Europe. Besides, I think it's for the best. Kathi and I were starting to get on each other's nerves, just a bit. So, I think we need a break from each other. In Germany, we're still hoping to get stationed in the same place or at least we'll get together on leave and travel around some more.

All the other friends I made in basic are going every which way in the States. It got really emotional when we all parted and Becky, Kathi, Angelina and I hugged and promised to write each other and party together in 22 months when we ETS (end our term of service).

Now I keep thinking about what this other trainee, Janet, an older lady about 28, said to me after my friends had already left. Janet and I were alone in the bay and I told her how sad I

was to be leaving my friends even though we would see each other again. Janet smiled and said that she grew up in a military family and knew from experience that when you part company you'll write a few letters then your friendships fade away and you end up never seeing each other again. "You meet new people," she said, "then move on and change friends. It comes with being in the military."

I told her that what she said may be true for her, but my friends and I were too close and that we'd definitely see each other again. I said that, but I wonder if Janet was right. I kind of believe her because she's older and has experience, but at the same time, I really hope to see my good friends again. At least I'll see Kathi again.

Ft. Gordon, Georgia, Summer 1974



I've been at Ft. Gordon almost a week and this is the second time I've pulled CQ. I started at 7:00 this morning, or 0700 hour as they say in the military, and will have it until about 3:30 this afternoon (1530). At least CQ gets me out of the other duty they assign the new "in-processing" privates—policing the area, cutting the lawns, painting old buildings, and cleaning latrines, shower areas, garbage cans, and the kitchen. You see, I'm what they call a "zero weeker" until I start my classes.

Yesterday I pulled “hall guard” from 0400 to 1000 and believe me, there’s nothing so boring as when there’s nothing to guard. But the Army always needs to simulate actual war like circumstances. I had to sit in the same spot for six hours without a break, except five minutes now and then to go to the toilet, and check everyone’s ID card as they came in and out of the billets. Really stupid, but looks like tomorrow I’ll finally start classes and will no longer have to pull “zero weeker” detail. No telling what classes will be like.

I came here by Greyhound bus, but I had my trunk shipped from Ft. McClellan. They said I’d have to wait to get it for who knows how long. Unfortunately, most of my civvies and personal stuff are in my trunk (I had my military clothes with me, in my duffel bag). If my trunk doesn’t arrive soon, I might have to send home for some cutoffs, jeans, blouses, etc., but I have no idea how long this will take and it would be silly if they arrived after I left for Germany.

Fort Gordon, Georgia, is a hop, skip, and a jump from Fort McClellan, Alabama. So far, I don’t have much to say except this is not the best place in the world especially this time of year when it’s hot and muggy. There are a lot of old red brick buildings, a nine-hole golf course, a gymnasium, lakes for fishing and picnicking, a hobby and crafts shop, theaters, as well as Service and NCO clubs. There are eight girls to a room and we have three shelves to place our junk on. The girls in my room have been here several weeks and they say everyone calls this place Fort Garbage.

“Lights out” is from 2200 to 0500 Sunday through Thursday and the morning headcount, by our WAC barracks staff sergeant, who goes from room to room, starts at 0450. Twice each day we have to read this bulletin board in the orderly room to see the duty rosters, the mess hall hours, special events, or which places in Disgusta (Augusta) are off limits to military personnel because of drugs, and because, as I understand it, sometimes the GI’s get pretty drunk and rowdy

at the taverns in town. Every Tuesday evening, we have a mandatory GI Party for Wednesday morning's inspection.

In addition to these things, I was given to read, as part of my in-processing, this 61-page SOP (Standing Operating Procedures), which I have been reading while on CQ. The print is old and faded and pretty hard to read in places. Everything in the Army has to do with SOP and there sure are a lot of regulations. It's scary because a soldier is not a person like a civilian. He (or she) has to, according to the SOP, "subordinate personal desires to the needs of his unit in order to accomplish the mission."

"The Security of Classified Information" section of the SOP says we're not supposed to discuss our military training or activities with anyone while off post and we're to report to our First Sergeant any person who possesses "undesirable traits such as drug addiction, excessive drinking and sexual deviation" because such traits "place the individual in a compromising situation and cause her to become a poor security risk."

The section on going AWOL (absent without leave) sounds really bad. It says that "99 out of every one hundred AWOLs are captured. You are then a prisoner, confined, fingerprinted and photographed. Your record will be a dark shadow trailing you for the rest of your life. As a prisoner your possessions will be locked up and guarded. You will have placed yourself in, and will be thought of as, part of a group of people that includes: mentally and emotionally unbalanced persons, criminals, alcoholics, and deviates. Don't go AWOL. Think before you act."

Wow! I don't need to go AWOL to feel like I'm in a barracks prison along with a group of mentally unbalanced deviates.

We call the WAC building the “WAC Shack” and already since I’ve gotten here we’ve had two bomb threats. One of the gals in my room said they go on about once a week. These bomb scares must be some kick going on around here. They always happen in the middle of the night and both times I was sound asleep when the fire alarm went off. I grabbed my army blanket, which is what the SOP says we’re supposed to do, and we filed out onto the front lawn in the cool night air for about an hour. The MP’s came to guard the building entrances while search teams ran in and checked each and every room for bombs. There hasn’t been a real bomb and I wonder if the guys, who are in the billets across from ours, call the WAC orderly room with these bomb threats so they can see us run out of the building in our nightgowns and pajamas.

By the way, I was chosen to be a guest at the general’s lawn party which will be held at the home of Fort Gordon’s two star general. I guess every once in a while the general likes to meet with some of the WACs and GI’s attending school here, for morale. It happened when I was standing in formation at the end of the day, and the barracks sergeant, this black man, announced the party and said that the best soldiers in the WAC student company would be selected to go. Of course, I was new and nobody knew about me except that I was a zero weeker so I hardly suspected he’d select me. However, the sergeant kept looking my way and eventually called my name from the name tag on my fatigues. I guess I looked better than a lot of the other girls in formation, and I have E-2 strips on my fatigues. It’s still an honor to be chosen and I’m excited to actually see a general (privates rarely do) let alone speak to one and possibly shake his hand. I’ll get to socialize with these big officers—the top brass! It’ll sure be something to remember and I hope my trunk arrives so I will have something decent to wear. Otherwise, I may have to buy a new dress.

Ft. Garbage is totally insane and so unorganized it's sick. There's garbage everywhere. I swear, it's like living in a New York ghetto. Now if you can believe it—they give us an article 15 (military punishment for non-criminal offenses) over everything, such as walking on the grass or for having your uniform skirt too short. Also, I heard there are rapes going on all the time and that the other week four girls were murdered during the night. I don't know if this is all true, but I wouldn't be surprised.

I'm listening to the radio now and they're playing "Rocky Mountain High." Goddamn, I really like John Denver. His songs almost make me cry.

Four weeks down and five more to go and I'll be on my way to Germany. School's been pretty easy so far. We had a typing progress test and guess what? In three days, I went up from 23 wpm to 36. That was the highest score in the class. I guess I'm just a whiz around these people though I wasn't in high school, but I never put much effort into high school which is presumably why I was an average student. Most the guys here are typing less than 25 wpm.

I'm a 72 Bravo in Army Communications (A Com) School We teletype out messages and receive them. A teletype is a real funky typewriter that sends messages. My school lasts either 8 or 10 weeks, depending on whether or not you've had typing before. Since I had it in high school and got up to 36 wpm, I was able to be AOG—ahead of the game—and I got into the 8-week session. Hurrah! The first part of the training is unclassified, but we have to get a secret clearance for the last part when we'll be going out into the field to simulate real wartime maneuvers.

Instead of the frumpy blouses and skirts we wore during basic training, the WAC students get to wear green fatigues and black army boots. So, when I have kids they can say "My

mother wore army boots.” The WACs get these stupid fatigues with pockets on the outside. The men’s fatigues look more authentic and are made from softer cotton.

Every Tuesday and Thursday night, I’m taking this German class and because of it I get out of the Tuesday night GI Party (cleaning the billets). The class is held in one of the training classrooms and has only about ten people in it. Not many of the soldiers going to Germany care about speaking German. I can’t imagine what they want to get out of the Army. If you’re going to Germany why wouldn’t you be interested in learning the language? My main reason for being in the Army is to go to Europe. I don’t care about the Army itself, in fact, I quite often hate it.

THE ARMY IS LIKE A PRISON SENTENCE SOMETIMES.

Oh yeah. I went to the general’s lawn party. It was nice personally meeting such a high-ranking brass as a two-star general. He even shook my hand, firmly. It was almost like meeting the president. The party was at his house by a beautiful lake with ducks, geese, and a swan. We had, if you can believe it, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I guess the general wanted us regular guys to feel at home. Throughout the evening someone played this piano sitting in the yard. One of the GI’s wanted me to stand with him at the piano and sing. I felt too embarrassed but he kept insisting saying it was what we should do. I never did because I felt too shy. Anyway, it seemed corny to stand around and sing like a clean-cut person from the Lawrence Welk show.

Everyone wore civilian clothes for the event so it wasn’t too intimidating to be around the top brass. Unfortunately, I had to borrow a dress to wear to the lawn party because my trunk still hasn’t arrived. The dress I borrowed from this gal in my room was pink and looked a little old fashioned because it was about knee length on me. I also had to wear my military black dress

loafers, so I looked dorky—like a Lawrence Welk singer. I guess that didn't matter to the guy at the piano. He seemed to want to get to know me more than I cared to get to know him.

During the party I talked with two of the chaplains. They asked me if I was enjoying my stint and I said that I was even though this isn't entirely true. They asked me if I liked my MOS. I said yeah then told them I was looking forward to going to Germany. One Chaplin then said, "Keep a stiff upper lip and a good profile, and you'll have a memorable experience that will last the rest of your life." Those guys didn't ask me about God and that sort of stuff but if they had I may have said I pray a lot, just to get them off my back. I didn't dare ask them what rank they were, but I suspect one was a colonel because he looked about fifty.

By the way, people do rip off a lot of things around here. I've had my shower thongs taken and my name's right on them and they're so cheap. I've also had my stationery taken and someone took twenty dollars from my locker when I stepped out of the room for a minute. And just the other day I was doing my laundry (we have a laundry room down the hall, next to the showers and latrine) and I went to watch this TV program about birds in the large day room downstairs. When I came back my clothes were neatly folded on top of the dryer, but the blue jeans I just bought and a couple of my blouses were missing. Boy, from now on I have to sit like a hawk on the dryer as I do my laundry. People steal anything, just to steal. I can't imagine why though, except jeans look pretty cool especially if they look used. Really, it seems so pathetic to rip off someone's clothes, like stealing food. Well, what this amounts to is that now I have even fewer clothes to wear until my trunk arrives from Fort McClellan.

In addition to taking classes and pulling duty—what do I do around here? I've been so busy bowling, reading, walking, dancing, shooting pool, and drinking lemonade or 3.2 % beer.

The drinking age is 18 at the NCO club so I barely make the age. But not off post in Georgia where the drinking age is 21. Also, you got to be 21 to buy hard liquor at the NCO club.



In general, I'd say the GIs are terrible and I could never have anything serious with one. Though, I've been going out now and then with a friend from class. His name is Drew Parker and he's a few months younger than me and comes from a town near Los Angeles, California. He's the cutest guy in my class and he's OK for a GI. He's about six feet tall, has a nice light brown moustache and brown hair, and gorgeous blue eyes. He's kind of been my boyfriend, but it's nothing serious. We just end up doing more and more stuff together.

Sometimes Drew and I go to Augusta (or Disgusta, as it's known around here). There isn't much to see or do in Disgusta because it's sleazy. Along most streets are these pawn shops and the owners stand outside their doors and say to Drew as we walk by, "Hey, want to buy the pretty lady a diamond ring? Real cheap?" Drew and I just go past them but once Drew told a guy to mind his own business. Drew's kind of touchy that way. Usually, Drew and I are the only white people shopping. It's a weird feeling being in the minority. I've also heard that some of these pawn brokers are sergeants from the base moonlighting. I thought that was interesting.

Dear Mom and Dad, (1974)

Thank you for the jeans and blouses. My birthday sort of passed by unnoticed, except for your presents and some cookies from aunt Edith. But I guess I'm a big girl now and can't feel sentimental about birthdays.

It's around 0400 and I snuck off in the bathroom to write some letters. I'm out of school now and am a "holdover" instead of a "zero weeker." But I'm still assigned zero weeker detail. I'm going to be held over here for God knows how long. Day after day I wait for my orders to come in. Hopefully, when they do, I'll have enough time to come home for a week before reporting to my permanent duty station in Germany. It'll have to be advanced leave since I haven't earned enough time in the service for a real leave. In any event, I really need a break from military life so I can make sure I'm not going crazy.

I don't think I ever mentioned that my trunk finally arrived from Fort McClellan, practically two months after I got here. I was so glad to get some of my civilian clothes and personal stuff. Like my green alarm clock, flower posters, calendar, novels and address book from basic. I haven't even been able to write to any of my good friends.

You're not going to believe this, but shortly after my trunk arrived our building had a security check, since it was payday weekend and a lot of stealing goes on around here. The thing was, I happened to fall asleep and left my trunk open at the foot of my bed. Well, I tell you. The sergeants making the security check took my entire trunk. I couldn't believe it! I awoke just as they were leaving my room carrying my trunk. I yelled at them to stop, but they said it was too late and that I was in violation of security SOPs.

I went down to the orderly room to ask for my trunk back but they wouldn't give it back because they had to inventory the stuff they got from everyone. So, I went back the next day to

get it, like they told me to, and in the meantime everything had been moved out of that orderly room office. And guess what? Those morons went and LOST my trunk. I could not believe it.

I got pretty upset about the whole ordeal and kept going to the orderly room saying that if I didn't get my trunk back they'd be paying for everything in it which I figured added up to almost \$500.00. As you can imagine this kind of stuff does make me mad. I finally went to see the company officer and I told him about my missing trunk and he said he'd look into the matter. The next day I got it back (thank God). Boy, from now on I sure plan to keep a heavy guard on my stuff, which was the lesson they wanted to teach me in the first place.

On the plane to Germany from McGuire Air Force Base, a GI proposed to me, though the proposal was really a sham. I was one of the few soldiers in uniform. We didn't have to dress down for the flight, but I wanted to, mostly to impress mom and dad who saw me off. Besides, it made me feel special for people to see me in uniform.

Anyway, the GI, Gary Miller, was a classmate from AIT. He sat beside me on the flight and after a brief chat about our leaves, he asked me if I wanted to get married. He even pulled out a ring and said he was dead serious and had the whole thing figured out. Gary was a nice-looking man, well built and all, but marriage? He said if I wasn't interested he'd ask this other gal that was in our class and on the same flight.

I guess it's fairly common in the military for people to marry just to draw off-post housing and get dependent benefits. Extra money, in other words. Gary said he'd figured that the best way to make it through the Army was to avoid as much of it as possible, especially living in the barracks. He wanted to gather up his benefits as easily as possible and be on his way. He

even said that if we did get married we could stay friends (not have a sexual relationship) and split up after we ETS, if it turned out that way. He was a pretty easy-going guy.

Well, it was an interesting idea and it did match my plans to avoid Army life and get into Germany. By this time, I knew Kathi and I weren't going to be stationed together, though we still talked about ETS'ing out in Europe to travel around a while. But she didn't come home on leave so we hadn't really talked since basic, except for a letter. She seemed happy with her MOS, unlike me.

I told Gary I'd have to think about his proposal and that he could go ahead and ask that other gal, which is what he did immediately. I couldn't believe it. Just like that and he was off asking her. Such a businessman.

Actually, I sat on that flight and thought about my experiences at Fort Gordon. Boy, did my leave back home go by fast. Seems like yesterday I flew to Portland to take a breather from the military. Drew Parker was still at Ft Garbage waiting for his orders when I got my advance leave, but I got a letter from him while I was in Portland. Drew was nothing but a jerk, even though he was my first real boyfriend and we spent a lot of time together.

He knew how to type so he got placed in the advanced class when I did and we started going out together. He said he thought I was the cutest girl in class. But now that I reread the letter he sent me, I'm positive he was just using me to get his "rocks-off" while he was in AIT. I know he looked down on me because to him, I wasn't a person, I was a lowly WAC. In his letter he says stuff like, "I just got paid \$160 bucks. Where are you now that I have moolah, babes?" This is his way of covering for not buying me a birthday present and for making me pay half for the hotel room in Disgusta when the whole thing was really for him. He would have gotten me a

present if he cared. But I don't care about Drew or his putrid attitude because I have a bad attitude about him as a lowly GI.

One reason I know Drew has this attitude about WACS is because of what he said about my other friend from class. Her name was Christine McKinney and she had a boyfriend from our class, Ed, a nice-looking average guy. A couple of times the four of us went to Atlanta, and twice Drew and I went to Christine's trailer house for dinner. It's interesting about Christine's situation. She owns that trailer and plans to stay stateside during her entire tour of duty so she can move it around wherever she goes. The thing is, she's got two dependents—her two-year old daughter and her mother, who looks after her daughter while she's pulling duty or in class. It's a clever arrangement. Christine's figured out how to have the Army help her support her entire family. Although it still must be tough and the trailer isn't exactly luxurious because it's kind of cramped. But I like Christine a lot and I admire her for trying to make things work out.

Anyway, as I wanted to say, it seemed to me that her and Ed were a tight and happy couple. They were nice looking together and both were soft spoken and easy going. So, one day, I said to Drew, "I wonder if those two will get married before they finish AIT."

Drew laughed and said, "Are you kidding. Ed's only after a piece of ass. He's not going to marry a WAC."

I didn't say anything, but I wondered if Drew realized that his words might hurt me, because I was a WAC. I think he's pretty immature, and like I said, a bit of a jerk.

I did have one girlfriend during AIT who got married. Her name was Nancy Parks and she met this PFC when she and I were at the NCO club. Nancy was one of the gals that took the bus with me from Fort McClellan. Because we both arrived together, Nancy and I chummed around for a while, even though we didn't have a whole lot in common. She's sort of unattractive

with a bad complexion and oily long black hair. In fact, she's the gal I borrowed that pink dress from for the General's party.

Nancy got married to this PFC a week after they met and he took her to his parents' farm in West Virginia. Nancy later told me that this farm was really primitive and didn't even have plumbing. They had to use an old wooden outhouse that had double seats. What was really weird was that this PFC, her new husband, wanted them both to use the outhouse together and shit holding hands. How incredibly perverted. I asked her if she did it and she said not until he insisted. Then I asked, "Why would he insist on such a sick thing?"

She said, "He wants us to experience everything together."

In response, it hit me to say, "Are you sure he didn't want you two to get you're shit together." She laughed at my joke, but not fully. Like it was funny, but also a serious problem. As it turned out, their marriage only lasted a month.

I had a few other friends but not too many before I started hanging around with Drew. It seems I didn't have too much in common with a lot of the girls, including the ones in my room. And I couldn't write any of my friends from basic because my trunk didn't arrive until way after I did.

A lot of the WACs were black and I liked them but I could tell that I didn't really fit into their clique of friends. They were nice to me and everything, but didn't care to get very close with a white girl. Like this black girl, Cynthia, that came with me and Nancy from Fort McClellan. The first week I was at Fort Gordon, I kept going to Cynthia's room to join her for breakfast before our zero weeker detail. Then one morning the black lady in charge of her room said straight forward that I shouldn't come around anymore and invade their privacy. I took the

hint but was hurt and realized that I'm not as aware of what's going on as are a lot of these ladies.

Another reason I hadn't made many friends during AIT is because I think a lot of the girls were lesbians and I'm sure not interested in that. In fact, I think some of the girls in my room were lesies but they kept to themselves and didn't flirt outright with non-lesies, at least, none did with me. But a lot of rumors flew around about these ladies getting busted for having orgies right in the rooms. It's hard to believe and I can't imagine why they'd do such a thing in a military barracks. For this reason, I sometimes wonder if such rumors aren't true.

Shortly after I arrived at Fort Garbage, long before I started spending most of my time with Drew, one of my roommates convinced me to go on this trip to Atlanta. Stella Lopez, a pretty, dark completed lady about 22, said she needed a gal to go to Atlanta with her boyfriend and his friend, this Chinese guy named Peter. She said straight out that the guys would pay for everything, and they just needed a date for Peter. They were going to see the Allman Brothers Band but when Stella first invited me I thought she meant the Osmond Brothers because, truthfully, I had never heard of the Allman Brothers. You might say I've been kind of stupid when it comes to rock and roll bands, but I didn't want to ask her specifically if she said the Osmond Brothers (which I doubted). I hardly wanted to sound like I didn't know anything, which I didn't.

Peter and Stella's boyfriend, Max, weren't in the Army, but they lived in Disgusta. I never learned what their work was, but they were both real proud of being Southerners and they spoke with Southern accents, even the Chinese guy. It was kind of weird. Max had long hair, was skinny and a definite "cool" head type. Peter was short and slightly heavy and OK looking, but I had no intention of doing anything with him. I was still a virgin for one thing, and I wanted my

first experience to be more planned out. Not just a one-night stand. Besides, I was embarrassed to be with these guys and had just come along for the free trip.

During the two-hour drive to Atlanta, I was fascinated by the sight of fireflies everywhere at the side of the road. At first, I couldn't figure out what these amazing flashes of lights were. I said something about it to Peter, who was riding with me in the back of Max's huge '65 Buick. Well, without even responding to me, Peter said to Stella and Max, "God, this chick doesn't know what fireflies are." I felt like a fool and I didn't dare ask about the Osmond Brothers.

About this time Stella began lighting up joints, which they called "J's." I felt silly because I had rarely smoked pot before. Only once before, I think, during high school one day when we were sitting out on the hill during a War Moratorium. But nothing happened then. Anyway, I smoked the J Stella handed me and of course everyone laughed when I coughed. I felt like they took me along for a joke, but maybe it was my imagination. Pretty soon Peter asked me if I wanted a "power hit." I wasn't sure what he meant, but I had just watched Stella take one from Peter. He put the burning end of the J in his mouth and blew through it and Stella inhaled the thick smoke.

I agreed to have a power hit but I put my mouth over the end of the J while the burning end was in Peter's mouth. This was evidently wrong. And after I got a big rush, Peter said to Stella and Max, "God, this chick burned my mouth. She doesn't even know how to take a power hit." I really felt stupid.

Things even got worse in Atlanta. We shared a room and Stella slept with her boyfriend and Peter with me. The whole night dragged on and on. Peter kept touching me and I kept telling him I didn't want to do it because I had my period. This wasn't true, but the situation wasn't

right, not for my first time. Especially with Stella and her boyfriend balling in the same room. It was terrible laying there awake all night.

The next morning, if you can believe it, the two guys hinted that I should pay my share for the room. I ignored the hint because of what Stella has said, that the guys would pay for everything. I knew that Peter was mad because he couldn't fuck me.

We went to the concert in the Atlanta Stadium which is huge (tickets were ten each and I paid for my own). We got there around 2 in the afternoon and listened to the Marshall Tucker Band, a country rock group from Texas, and Lynyrd Skynyrd. We waited until about 10:30 in the evening for the Allman Brothers, but they never showed up so we decided to leave because it started to pour down rain. Once we were outside the stadium we heard a rock group charge up. "That's them," Max said. They were disappointed and the ushers wouldn't let us back in. I didn't care since I didn't know about the Allman Brothers anyway. I read the next day that the concert lasted until 3 am. The place was jammed packed with people and it was supposedly a good concert.

The Stewardess has just cleared away my dinner tray. We had some kind of a chicken dish and I bought a small bottle of red wine, which I'm now sipping. Gary Miller asked me to marry him, but now he's sitting with this other gal from AIT, since I've obviously been busy writing. He'll probably get her to marry him. But that's OK. I'm not sure I could go through with his clever idea. He is, after all, a GI.

This brings me back to Drew, my first boyfriend. Like I said, he was an immature jerk in so many ways. I remember us having horrible arguments and I'd end up crying before he'd back off. In a lot of ways, I think Drew was a touchy guy who saw himself as a pretty cool dude. His motto was, "Drugs, Sex, and Rock and Roll." I did learn a lot from him about rock and roll. He

claimed to know every rock and roll band there was and then he'd name off some, like The Grateful Dead, Yes, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Eric Clapton, The Who, and of course, Bruce Springsteen. I only knew a few of them and if I didn't know the group, he'd say I was pretty naive. But I mean, big deal!

After we'd been dating a while, Drew started talking about his previous girlfriends. He'd brag about having skipped school to spend the entire day in bed with a girlfriend. Like this was supposed to impress me or something. In fact, he'd even say outright things like he was an expert at making love and turning women on. Then he said stuff like he was so good at "cunnilingus" because he knew I didn't know what he meant. He'd show me how good his tongue was by moving it around. I'd get mad because it was immature and I didn't want to dwell on such things and I hated him to talk about his old girlfriends. But he'd always like to say big words about sex like cunnilingus, fellatio, and copulation, just to impress me or to watch me get mad.

He'd talk about the orgies his friends living off post had, even the married guys, and how they'd put sheets of plastic on the floor and cover themselves with vegetable oil then roll around and ball each woman in the room. I know he told me these stories to shock me because he saw me as naive, which I was, but still, I could tell when he was saying things to see my reaction. He probably said these things to me, and then later told his buddies in the barracks. I hate this attitude because it's so childish.

Once Drew really upset me by saying that women in the Army were "Double Slotted Kitchen Mechanics." It was a terrible thing to say, even as a joke, and I got so mad at him, but he insisted he hadn't made it up. It was something he heard in the barracks. Still, when I listened to him talk this way I felt abused.

Nevertheless, I stayed with Drew because I figured I was using him as much as he was using me. Besides, he wasn't bad looking and I needed someone to hang around with, and like I mentioned, I wanted to lose my virginity. In truth, there were times I honestly liked Drew. Like when he called me his babe or sweetheart. It felt good to have a boyfriend for the first time in my life. I had simply been too shy in high school to even go out on a date.

Drew also talked about doing all these different drugs, but he and I only drank beer and smoked a joint once or twice. Except this one evening, while we were at the NCO club. Drew said he got a hold of some THC and wanted to drop some with me. I didn't even know about THC but I suppose I wanted to at least appear to be cool, so I told Drew I'd take the hit, even though I had no intention of doing so. Hard drugs scare me. Who knows what crazy things they'd make me do? Anyway, Drew handed me the THC under the table and I pretended to take the white pills, but I actually dropped them on the floor. They were so tiny the whole thing was a cinch, even amusing. But then Drew kept saying, "Did ya get off yet?" and I'd say, "Oh yeah, sure," and so on.

We left the club and walked around base. For the rest of the evening, I listened to Drew on his high. He got crazy and talked about having sex with his old girlfriends, about the different kinds of drugs and their scientific names, and rock and roll stars and hit songs. He especially talked about cunnilingus, which made me sick because he kept it up—his bit with moving his tongue. But I knew he was tripping so I stayed mellow and tried not to get mad. Who knows how violent he could have become if I got him going on one of our notorious arguments?

It took a few weeks before Drew and I started going to that hotel in Disgusta on Friday nights. He kissed me on the first date and on the second one he said he wanted to get it on with

me because I was so pretty and had a great “bodd.” But for a long time, I felt too embarrassed to tell him that I wanted to lose my virginity with him.

By our fourth date, I admitted I needed to tell him something personal before we had sex. It was on a Wednesday evening, about eleven o’clock, after we’d seen that Bruce Lee film, Enter the Dragon. We were sitting on the lawn near the PX parking lot. He kissed me nice and gently because he was trying to put me at ease. He acted seriously and didn’t joke around with his typical jerk like talk about drugs, sex and rock stars. He tried to be pretty decent that night.

When I told him plainly that I was still a virgin he said, “I suspected so.” I thought Drew was trying to be mature and understanding, but when I think back on it now, I bet he couldn’t wait to tell his buddies.

When I told him I wanted to lose my virginity he asked, “But why with me? After all this time?”

“All what time? Drew, I’m not even 19.” I said this, but knew that 19 was a late age to still be a virgin. Drew had already mentioned that most people did it in high school and he did it when he was 13, which I’m not sure I believe.

Evidently my answer wasn’t good enough and Drew asked me again why I wanted to do it with him personally, for my first time. As if I saw him as fantastically special—you know, the neatest guy in the world. And permitting him to fuck me the first time would be a total honor. I tried to think of something to say that wouldn’t create an argument since Drew was a touchy guy when it came to personal stuff. Then I remembered what Angelina had said to me in basic and I told Drew, “The only reason I want to do it now, and with you, is that now’s the right time and place. What else do you think?”

Drew didn't get mad, and he kept quiet though, obviously, he seemed a little disappointed since he expected me to say outright that he was such a special guy. I think he covered up his disappointment by talking about these girlfriends he had had and how pretty they were and how they got it on. I started to get mad because it seemed he was purposely trying to ruin the mood and make me look simple. He backed off and tried to act sweet again.

We went to the Best Western in Disgusta that Friday night and Drew promised to be understanding. In the hotel room, he took from his suitcase a six pack of Schlitz Stout, a bottle of vodka and a joint. I said I'd only drink the beer and vodka, but he lit up the J anyhow and smoked it. After Drew insisted I try it, I took a hit but didn't feel the high. Must not have been very good stuff.

The evening did go pretty slow at first, which was nice for me, and Drew tried being gentle. He called me babes and sweetheart which made me feel at ease, like he cared about me. I took a shower, alone, and then he took one and he came out with the towel wrapped around his waist because, as he said, he didn't want to embarrass me. I thought this was nice.

But later when I was sitting at the desk with a towel around me, and drinking a glass of vodka with OJ, and Drew was laying on the bed smoking a cigarette with the towel still around him, he said, "Gee, when do I get my rocks-off?"

He then laughed almost hysterically and asked me if I knew what he meant. At the time, I didn't and he got up and came over to me and touched my shoulders and ran his fingers through my hair. "Come on babes," he said and then we went over to the bed and took the towels off. I lay there, afraid to touch his penis which was probably average size but it was the first one I'd seen with an erection. It looked pinker and hairier than I expected.

Drew touched me everywhere, and kissed me and did the bit with his tongue—though not below. He got me to touch him and his penis got harder. Before he did it to me he rubbed me and said he wanted to eat me but I told him, “No.” The idea was too much for me at the time.

He jammed it inside and it hurt like hell and I told him so. “Relax about it,” he said. “And move around. Don’t lay like a slab of meat.” When he said this I thought about his saying “double slotted kitchen mechanic” and I got tense and felt sick to my stomach. I didn’t enjoy doing it, that first time, and it hurt like hell, while Drew kept going and going and telling me to move. As the pain got worse I dug my nails in his back and by the time he came, his back was bleeding.

He got off me and laid back to recover, his head on the pillow. After a while, he asked me how it was. I said it still hurt. He sat up, lit a cigarette, and I saw the sheets had blood on them, from his back.

“Wait till next time,” he said. “The first time’s supposed to hurt. But you’ll get the hang of it. And,” he added, getting angry, “never sink your claws into me like that again!”

From that time on Drew and I went to Disgusta almost every Friday night. No matter where we went or what we did, it seems we’d always argue about stupid stuff, and I’d cry. Stuff like what kind of pizza toppings to have. And whenever we had sex, he’d say I’d lay like a slab of meat and I’d get upset. It just never got good like I thought it was supposed to get, or like I wanted it to get. Maybe it never does. Maybe it’s just a sport for men and I’m doomed to a life of suffering. But now that I look back on it, I think Drew was the wrong guy for me even though he was OK looking. He never really cared about me. He wanted a piece of ass, or, as he said, to get his rocks off.

When it was my birthday and I turned 19, I got really hurt because Drew did nothing except wish me happy birthday after I told him I felt bad having my birthday away from home. I had told him in advance when it was my birthday so he could get me something, at least a card. But he didn't because he was too cheap and didn't want to spend his money on a WAC. He apologized when he met me on the evening of my birthday and we went for a walk. He didn't even take me to the club for a drink. Said he was too tired from having pulled CQ the night before. I cried that night because I realized then more than at any other time that he didn't care about me.

Well, I don't care about any guy who'd join Today's Army. They aren't like the guys who went to the Nam. These GI's today aren't even worth the time of day and they're all losers who can't make it on the outside, as far as I'm concerned. Enough about my social life at Fort Garbage, except for, "FUCK YOU Drew!" No, now that I think about it, I'm definitely not going to marry Gary Miller even if he's better looking and more mature than Drew.

Chapter Four: Permanent Post, Darmstadt, Germany



(written in the early 2000s)

We have the French to thank for the Vietnam Conflict. In 1945, Vietnam became independent from French colonization. The Allies, Britain, the U. S., France and Russia, met in Potsdam and decided to divide Vietnam at the 16th parallel. In the north, China and Russia advised, in the south, the French stayed as advisors.

During WWII, U. S. intelligence helped Ho Chi Minh and his Vietminh forces expel Japanese occupation (as the CIA later helped the hill tribes of SE Asia). When the Cold War began, Truman supported the French in their drive to regain the south. He abandoned Ho Chi Minh's bid for independence. In 1954 Ho Chi Minh's army held victory over the French in the battle of Dien Bien Phu. This led to the United Nations formally dividing Vietnam, at the 17th parallel. The U. S. remained apathetic toward Ho Chi Minh and his people.

President Kennedy inherited the policy of "save the free world from Communism." The Domino Theory held that if one nation tumbles into communist clutches, (as Europe fell to the Nazis) then neighboring countries will tumble until all the Free World becomes communist.

President Johnson escalated the war after two U. S. destroyers were bombed in the Gulf of Tonkin. By the end of 1964 there were 23,000 "U.S. advisors" in South Vietnam. By the middle of 1965, there were 125,000 U. S. ground troops. By 1973, the year I graduated high school, 2.8 million U. S. soldiers were in Vietnam. I was AWOL in Sitges, Spain during the fall of Saigon on April 29, 1975. It was the largest helicopter evacuation in history. For 18 hours 70 marine helicopters evacuated 1000 Americans and 6000 South Vietnamese.

Soldiers of the Nam were America's youth conscripted to fight a war without public support, without objective, without belief in cause. There was a breakdown in morale. Many alienated troops escaped their plight with drugs from the Golden Triangle of Thailand, Laos and Burma. The hill tribes of this region grew opium, and they were allies of the CIA. The U. S.

calculated it best to support of the hill tribes, despite the drug trafficking; they were needed as spies. To make matters worse, the American public blamed the VN soldier for the drug use, not their leaders.

By 1971 Congressional studies confirmed that up to 15% of American soldiers used heroin, which soldiers called skag. Probably at least half were using hashish and marijuana. When I arrived in Germany, I entered a climate of rampant drug abuse among the troops, probably a remnant of Vietnam. I never saw so many drugs. Hashish was predominantly used, but troops also popped pills, took acid (LSD), shot up skag and snorted cocaine. Soldiers who got busted weren't necessarily discharged. They were given article 15's and reduced in rank and pay.

(written Autumn 1974)



Dear Mom and Dad,

How's everything back in the World, as we say over here in this cold winter region of Darmstadt, Germany? I got stationed in the 72nd Battalion at Cambrai-Fritch Kaserne (a German Army base). The 72nd is a part of the of the Seventh Army in Europe.

The WACs already here are the first ones stationed in this battalion. Since there are only about twenty of us, we have our rooms on the top floor, the WAC floor, of the headquarters building. Some of us are assigned to other companies in the battalion. Many of the WACs are

married and live off post. I think some of them got married after they were here, in order to move out of the barracks. I've found that the WAC floor isn't the best place in the world. The girls living here are either really strac do-gooders, or they're messed-up. But I do all right because I get out and see the sights of Germany as much as possible. Already I've been to Frankfurt and back on my own.

The second floor of our building is for the guys in Headquarters Company and the first floor has the battalion offices, including that of the commanding officer, Colonel Williams (a full bird), and the Command Sergeant Major.

I was assigned to Delta Company, across a central parkway. You see, in addition to Headquarters Company, the 72nd A Com Battalion has Alpha, Bravo and Delta Companies and each one is in a three-story stone building with a red tile roof. These buildings are at the bottom of this wooded hillside near the back gates. The Kaserne is quite large and has other battalions in it, as well as a library, a park, a PX and restaurant, a Rec center, the college classroom building, a clinic, and a movie theatre.

My in-processing here was easy. I got my mess hall card, linen, and unit crest collar insignia, which isn't brass so I won't have to polish it. But unfortunately, I have to wear it instead of the Pallas Athena that I really like. I also got this ration card because things like cigarettes and alcohol are rationed so you can only get so much per month. That's to keep us from selling these items to the German black market. But soldiers do this anyway.

I was able to sign up for college credit German through the University of Maryland on the Kaserne. I was happy about that. Unfortunately, we sometimes go out on these maneuvers where we play war games. I hope it doesn't keep me from getting through my course.

Oh yeah. Guess What? I've got a great opportunity for this Christmas. I get to spend it with a German family, the Grossmans—an engineer, his wife and their son. I've already met them twice at their apartment in Darmstadt. Once they served me a lunch of cold cuts and cheese which they said was a traditional German “noon time” meal.

The son is a blond, pudgy blue-eyed guy, and about my age. His name's Herman and he speaks English so he has to interpret what his parents say. His parents are sweet and act like they're adopting me as their American daughter. Even though we can't talk directly to each other, they must sense that I'm alone here, and away from my family—especially since it's Christmas. So, you see, I'm in good hands now.

Herman is in technical school and his parents were hoping—when they signed up for this program—to meet an American soldier who was bound for college so their son could practice his English and exchange ideas. I don't think they expected a female soldier and I can only hope I don't disappoint them. They asked me what I planned to major in and I told them art, but I'm not sure yet. I'm also considering anthropology or geology.

Herman asked me if I'd read any Goethe, which he pronounces “Ger Teeh.” I told him I hadn't, and he said Goethe was the Shakespeare of Germany. So, I got a copy of this book called Faust, by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe and I'm going to read it even though it's difficult. It's a poem story about a scholarly man who sells his soul to the devil and meets Helen of Troy. Sounds wild, doesn't it?

I should explain how I met the Grossmans. After I got here, a bulletin came around asking if anyone wanted to spend Christmas with a German family. I jumped at the chance. The sergeant organizing the program is fluent in German and he tried to match up Americans with Germans. So far, I'm the only one I know in the program. I even told the other gal in my room

about it and she didn't seem that interested. I sure see it as a great opportunity and plan to meet with Herman now and then to practice my German.

I'll be spending Christmas day with my new German friends, and going to a Lutheran Church with them Christmas Eve, so I can't be sure I'll be able to call home at this time.

Weather's cold and wet but no snow as of yet. I love you and Merry Christmas,
Teri

Dear Teri,

Christmas has come and gone once again. But it didn't seem the same without you spending it with us. We enjoyed your phone call on Christmas morning and were glad to hear you could have Christmas dinner with your German Family. Hope you had a great time.

Sure, nice to know you are enjoying your new experiences in Germany. We hope the living quarters won't bother you too much, and that you'll make some nice friends while you are there.

We miss having you here, but from what I hear, the part of Germany you're in is a beautiful place. One of the girls who works with me lived in various parts of Germany, including Mannheim, and she tells me how great it is. You'll have a marvelous time! She says there's a town in the Alps close by you where they always went to ski. This sounds a lot better than Fort Gordon, doesn't it?

I'm glad to hear you're able to enroll in college courses while you're over there, but I hope your field maneuvers won't interfere with your studies. Tell us about your maneuvers and how you enjoy Army life now that you are in Germany.

Weather here has been cold but we didn't have a white Christmas this year. Did you?
Keep writing and tell us about your new home. We hope you are doing what you want to do.

Love forever, Mom

(written 1975)



I've been in Darmstadt for over six weeks and I'm at my desk writing. I share a room with one other girl. The room's OK. We each have our own desk, a double metal locker, and metal bar beds that can be made into bunks or left as single cots, which is how we've got them. I've fixed my half of the room, and I bought a fairly nice bed spread from the PX, and posters of German castles for the wall. Tobie Hawkins, the other gal sharing the room, has her side decorated pretty well, and she has a few non-army pieces of furniture—an arm chair, a night stand, and a lamp—which she found in a Darmstadt neighborhood when the Germans set out junk they want to get rid of. I understand they do this once a week and a garbage truck comes around to collect it, but there's often a lot of useful things thrown away.

I finished my German lesson and I wanted to start writing about my experiences and impressions. I got a lot to tell. Some good. Some bad. Real bad and downright depressing. But first, the better part. When I arrived at the Rhine Maine Air Force base, I was thrilled to be in Europe. At the airport, I said good-bye to Gary but instead of telling him I didn't want to get married, I said I'd still think about it. Guess I didn't want to burn all bridges before I saw what

lay on the path ahead. But Gary and I lost touch as soon as we left the airport, and I have no idea where he got stationed.

At present, I am trying to improve myself in the face of Army life, so I've made three self-improvement lists:

Beauty and Health: 1. Keep hair long and silky. 2. Keep complexion young and smooth. 3. Get fresh air and exercise every day. 4. Chew gum and quit smoking. 5. NO DRUGS—only German beer and wine, now and then.

Goals: 1. Speak German. 2. Save money for traveling every weekend I'm not stuck with duty. 3. Get college degree in the future. (I did average in high school, but now that I'm on my own I feel like making something of my life. Sometimes I actually lie awake at night thinking about getting a bachelor's degree or even a master's or a Ph.D. The possibilities blow my mind.)

Ideas for mind improvement: 1. Read about history and science. 2. Learn about German way of life (including geography). 3. Learn about important literature and classical music. (I've already bought a record player and these classical albums on Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. I'm playing Beethoven now and the music is "wunderbar." It gives an upbeat, sophisticated feeling—like you can accomplish a lot. Funny how music sets the mood and makes me think about everything from living to dying. Take for example the albums I brought with me from home—Roberta Flack, John Denver, Neil Diamond, and the Allman Brothers, for the song "Jessica," which I truly like because it's upbeat. "Rocky Mountain High" makes me homesick. Roberta Flack's slow song, "Suzanne," makes me sense how tough life is, yet hopeful. It's like Neil Diamond's, "Song Sung Blue." But that one isn't as inspiring as "Suzanne" because it's more like a sad song you sing with a group of people. "Suzanne" is more like a song you sing alone or with one other person.

For about three days, Delta Company went out on a field maneuver for a week. I was a part of the squad under Sergeant Johnson, a tall skinny black man who acts cool and seems to know a lot about Germany. He lives off base and has a German girlfriend. He's pretty decent and I liked him but I didn't like working on those teletypes in that old metal van during the field maneuver. It was wet, freezing, and muddy, and about ten of us work together in cramped conditions. I was the only WAC and the GI's I worked with were nice but sort of lowly and kept saying stuff to me like, puns about beavers—since Oregon is the “beaver state” and one of the guys comes from there too. Or they'd talk about how to say “fuck” in different languages, or about dirty words in German, such as “foot” which means pussy. Or that “seal” in French is fuck or “fox” in German is fuck. This stuff goes on and on with these GIs, no matter how nice they are. I suppose it's funny at first but then it gets old or personal, such as sexist MCP (male chauvinist pig) talk.

To tell you the truth, by the second day out in the field, the situation got on my nerves. I felt like the teletype job was retarded and people were playing around with a lot of stupid messages such as this one:

1. STALE AIR IS CAUSING ALL MILITARY VEHICLES TO LEAN SEVERELY TO THE LEFT. TO ALLEVIATE PROBLEM, ALL TIRES WILL HAVE AIR ROTATED BY 2400 HRS.

2. DUE TO THE SHORTAGE OF TOILET PAPER, YOU WILL GO INTO AN EMERGENCY RATION SITUATION. ALL ENLISTED PERSONNEL WILL BE AUTHORIZED 6 SHEETS WHEREAS TOP BRASS WILL BE AUTHORIZED A SINGLE SHEET. THIS PORTION OF THE MESSAGE MAY BE USED TO SUPPLEMENT THE SHORTAGE CRISIS AND IS TO BE GIVEN THE WIDEST DISCERNIBILITY POSSIBLE.

3. IF YOU RECEIVE THIS MESSAGE PLEASE DISREGARD AS IT IS
CLASSIFIED.

I complained to sergeant Johnson about the clowning around and being stuck together with all those sex jokes. He said that if I didn't like working in my MOS he'd arrange to assign me elsewhere in the company. I took him up on his offer and now I work as a secretary in the orderly room of Delta Company, which is possibly the best job available to anyone. If the others are jealous that's their problem. I do sense that I get over on the guys because I'm female. But them's the ropes. After all, I'm the one who has to listen to that disgusting MCP and perverted sexual talk. Fuck fuck fuck.

Delta's orderly room is on the first floor of the Delta Bravo building. It's next door to the offices of Delta's top sergeant, TOP, and commanding officer, Captain Davidson. Delta's also has four lieutenants with their offices down the hall. The GI's have their barracks upstairs.

I'm happy with my new job and I like the guy I work with, Spec 4 Frank J. LaRuffa. He's the main clerk in the orderly room. He's nice looking and obviously he's way above average in manner and intelligence for a GI. Actually, he could be an officer but he isn't interested in a military career. He hates the Army as much as I do though he's strac and knows the SOP's and AR's (Army Regulations) like a preacher knows his Bible. He's looking forward to studying law, which is part of why he enlisted. The other part was to avoid getting drafted to Vietnam.

Frank is "short" meaning he has a short time to go before his ETS. Too bad for me. I could use some positive influence around here. And, Frank's pretty funny too. For example, he has this flyer on the side of his desk that's of a frog slumped over a desk saying, "I'm so happy here I could just SHIT!"

I've noticed that sometimes he gets a bit awkward around me. One time, when he was explaining an SOP, he must have thought I was looking deeply into his eyes, which I don't think I was doing, but he turned red and said, "Don't look at me like that." Then he backed off and continued explaining, still red. Another time, he said that after office hours he and I ought to be able to go out for a beer like regular office people. I'm not sure where he's coming from. Does he think I'm attractive? If so, why doesn't come right out and ask me out? Maybe he doesn't want to get anything started since he's so "short" or maybe he's got a touch of the "WACs aren't human" syndrome. But he's nothing like Drew and some of the really stupid low life GI's.

I was flattered when Frank said they assigned me to the orderly room because I had a high IQ, which I didn't even know about. It was determined by that test we took before enlisting. So, I did all right, or maybe just a lot better than most people enlisting in the New Volunteer Army. They keep a card file in the orderly room on Delta personnel and we have access to it, so I can see everyone's IQ. Some of these guys are really stupid, with IQs of 75. Whenever I look at these guys I can't help but see them through their IQ. It makes me embarrassed for them. Even if they're good looking or nice.

They call the top sergeant of every company, "Top." Delta's Top is this burly guy with a crew cut, sergeant Tucker, who's about fifty and looks similar to the drill sergeant on Gomer Pyle. He's been in the Army since WWII, which makes him living history in my midst. I like Top, but I get the feeling he's not used to dealing with WACs because he's really stern with the enlisted guys and always nice to us. Frank's really my boss—through the chain of command—and Frank's boss is Top. But Top comes in and jokes with me and asks me directly to do things. It's pretty causal in the orderly room—AND IT SURE IS NICE TO BE AWAY FROM ALL THAT FUCK FUCK FUCK TALK day in and day out!

The highest-ranking NCO in the 72nd A Com is Command Sergeant Major. He's this really old lifer, huge like a Rhino, with crew cut gray hair. He's the most strac soldier I've ever seen. The Army runs through his veins because he's been in it since there were dinosaurs. It must have taken him 40 years to get to where he is now. I've noticed he's partial to some of the really strac WACs. He's got a sort of family picture, a group photo, of them on his desk. I think they were the very first WACs in his battalion. When I first arrived, they took me on a tour of the Headquarters and I met the Command Sergeant Major. But I've never met the Colonel. He's much too important, although I suspect these strac WACs in the Command Sergeant Major's group picture talk to the Colonel. But I doubt the guys do. They'd have to go through the chain of command from their platoon sergeant, to their top sergeant, to the Command Sergeant Major. It may be unfair but that's how it is until everyone gets used to having women around. WACs get advantages. WACs get degraded.

Speaking of the strac WACs, that Carla Jacobs just came in my room now to borrow my German book and I had to cover up this page. Carla's in my German class and she has this idea that she can use my text book instead of buying her own. However, there is a problem with this. The other day, while I was pulling CQ in the corridor outside the doors into the WAC floor, I was studying my lesson pretty hard. I really want to learn German and that takes a lot of work. Well, this Carla kept pestering me and asking if I was finished yet. About the third time she said, "Boy you sure take a long time to study, don't you?" That bothered me but I'm such a wimp I didn't say anything although I wanted to say, "Get your own goddamn book, Carla!" Anyway, I lent her my book like I did just now.

Besides getting into that German class, going out in the field, and getting transferred to the orderly room, I also took a week of what they call Head Start. It's an orientation course run

by the Army, and in it I learned bits and pieces about Germany and NATO and why I'm here. I'm here to serve the forces serving the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which includes the U. S., Canada, Iceland, Norway, the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Luxemburg, Portugal, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Spain, and of course West Germany or The Federal Republic of Germany as opposed to the German Democratic Republic of East Germany. (Weird names.)

Germany is divided into communist and non-communist East and West. Western German is The West Federal Republic of Germany, and West Berlin, the FRG or, the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, as they say in German. The East is The German Democratic Republic, and East Berlin. My booklet says that "the U. S. forces are not in Europe to defend the Europeans; we are here to defend the United States!... if we were to withdraw our forces, Western Europe would find itself standing alone in the face of the powerful forces behind the Iron Curtain – the communist world."

After WWII, the four Allies divided a devastated Europe into East and West. The Soviet Union soon took over Eastern Europe. As a consequence, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO was formed in 1949. I am a part of USAREUR (US Army Europe) and the 7th Army, which has its headquarters at Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg. The USAREUR troops are deployed along the 300-mile Iron Curtain, as my booklet describes. (I'm getting this information from a booklet called "Army in Europe." They gave this to me after I arrived.)

All USAREUR and the 7th Army are committed to NATO. My "host nation" is Germany—an enchanting place of castles along the Rhine, the Bavarian Black Forest and the October Beer Fests, the Faschings or Karneval. Darmstadt's a pretty ordinary town with museums, modern technological buildings—science and engineering, features of the Roman

times, Gothic cathedrals, Renaissance things, and fragments of both World Wars and of Hitler, which is weird but I think most Germans try to forget about this blemish on their past. There're a few bombed out churches in town, left as memorials to WWII.

Our head start class went to places around Darmstadt which was neat and since that time I've been venturing alone into town almost every day. Haven't made any German friends except for Herman Grossman, but I've certainly greeted a lot of people, and in German. To get into town I simply hop on the strassenbahn (streetcar) outside the front gates. Once I didn't buy a ticket when I got aboard and a stern looking German lady came around and asked to see everyone's ticket. When she got to me I pleaded ignorance, but she wouldn't buy it and I had to pay a ten mark fine, on the spot. So, I learned it's best not to mess with the Germans. I like to wander around Darmstadt and imagine I'm here as an American tourist, rather than in the Army. Since I'm female, most Germans don't suspect I'm in the military, but they assume most of the short haired males are, and there's a lot of them around town. I like every single German beer I've tried because it's stronger and more flavorful than American beer, including Schlitz Stout. And German food is tasty (lots of cold salads and sausages). The people always seem to politely smile at me and if I need directions, I can stop anyone. They understand my German but most answer in English.

I do like the Germans and I like Germany. Every yard you see is manicured, though it's a lot smaller than an American yard. The Germans take pride in everything they own. In one yard I saw a sign on a tree that read, "Wenn du an der Wurzel dieses Baumes suchst, findest du ein Bon bon." It means, "When you search at the roots of this tree you'll find a piece of candy." To me, this indicates the pride and emotion Germans have about their yards. The town parks are also orderly, symmetrical, tended to with loving care, and without any litter. Germans never walk

across a lawn to take a short cut, like Americans do. They always love to stroll upon their neatly groomed paths. Except maybe for the German hippies around the town and in certain parks that shoot up dope, right in the open.

The soldiers call the Germans and the German stuff, “Rad,” like Rad beer, or the Rads. It comes from the word comrade which is a German word but a lot of Army talk comes from WWII. For example, GI’s always say “beaucoup” this and “beaucoup” that, and some think it’s a German word and I can’t convince them otherwise. That’s how ignorant some of them are. GI’s also say, “Mox Nix” (“mach nicht,” in German and means, “it doesn’t matter”) and, “Vos is Los?” for “What’s happening?” In truth, that’s about the limit of what most soldiers know about German. Some guys get into the culture, through girlfriends mostly, but the only other soldier that’s in my German class is that Carla. The rest are American civilians working on the base or officers’ wives, or guys from other battalions.

This brings me to the bad stuff. Aside from low life dirty talk, the major problem has been the WAC floor itself and the room they put me in. If only people left me to my goals, I would hardly notice that I’m in the Army. But they screwed with me by placing me in the midst of a bunch of messed up people. My roommate Tobie, who belongs to Headquarters Company, is nice and has been here a while, but she’s totally spaced out.

On the night I arrived we had a friendly talk, and I thought she was a sweet gal. But on the next night, I was sitting at my desk studying German, Tobie came in the room and sat at her desk. From under her armchair cushion, she pulled out a syringe, a Cricket lighter, and a bag of white powder. She then looked at me and said, “I hope you don’t mind that I do this?”

I told her I didn’t in reflex, but I was stunned and hardly knew what to say. I pretended to return to my book, but I couldn’t help watching Tobie pour the powder into a spoon and

carefully heat it into liquid. She sucked the liquid in the syringe, tied her upper arm, tapped her a vein, inserted the needle and shot up. The sight made me dizzy and chilled, as if the heroin went through my own veins.

Tobie's face suddenly lit up and got pale yellow, like a snap shot of someone about to die, and feeling good about it. At the sight of her face, I could imagine, even feel, what dying was like. It tasted bitter, like chewing aspirin. And it smelled like the dentist drilling your teeth. But there was no sound. In that moment when Tobie's face lit up and went pale, the room was totally silent.

I saw Tobie shoot up one more after that time. I figured that if she left me alone I'd leave her alone. Why should I care what she does to herself? That's her problem. But things got worse and did interfere with me. I realized that while I was living in the barracks it was going to be difficult to be left alone. I don't want to spend all my money on an off-post apartment. I need to save it for college and for traveling, otherwise there's no point for me to stay in the Army. So, I have to live for the future and put up with the present.

About a week ago, while I was sitting at my desk studying German and minding my own business, at about eight PM, three WACs burst into my room, without knocking, and asked for Tobie, who wasn't around. They left without shutting the door, then came back and subsequently kept running in and out of my room. "What's going on," I finally yelled. As it turned out they were tripping on acid and were going crazy with laughter. They were high "zoning" in the ozone, as they say.

They kept asking me crazy questions like, "Is Nixon still our president?" They constantly burst into laughter. I realized that they needed to talk, so they could come down from their high. I made an effort to talk until they spun off to the day room to giggle while watching the TV and

trying to play pool. When this was going on my only thought was, “This place is a total nightmare!”

The final blow came a few nights ago and it’s knocked me for a loop. I’m still shaken up about the incident. It began while I was on bed reading my novel, “The Drifters.” Tobie suddenly rips open the door and bashes around the room. At first I thought she was tripping but instead of being out of control zoning, she was slurring her words, blah, blah, blah, and she was drooling and her pupils were wide and black.

“Are you OK Tobie?” I said after I sat up. I thought she was going to pass out and that I needed to help her into bed.

I barely made out her saying, “My captain’s coming,” as he burst through the door of our room, along with the WAC CQ. At the same moment, Tobie handed me a pocketful of pills.

“All right private,” the captain said to me, as the CQ took hold of Tobie, “Let’s have them.”

Boy, was I scared when I handed him those pills. I felt sure he assumed I was involved. For this reason, I quickly said, “Sir, I was reading when she came in. I don’t have anything to do with this.”

The CQ took Tobie away and the captain told me to write up a report and cover my ass. I said sure and later the CQ came back to my room and gave me the official forms for writing up a report. She also said Tobie was taken to the hospital and would be there overnight recovering from an overdose of downers.

As commanded, I wrote my report about what happened. The next evening, while I was watching TV in the day room, Tobie and some of the other WACs, the ones that were tripping on

acid that night, cornered me and called me a “fucking narc.” One of the girls actually shoved my shoulder and Tobie was screaming hysterically at me for writing her up.

“What was I supposed to do?” I yelled back. “Your goddamn captain saw you hand me the pills!” I was choke up but felt boiling mad. They had no right to bully me. No right.

Then one WAC said to me, in a calmer way, that I should have refused to write the report. “How was I supposed to know?” I said. “I’m new here and the captain ordered me to write it up to cover my ass. And I don’t know diddly shit about the rules.”

“Just don’t be narcing anymore,” one of the girls said, “if you know what’s good for you.”

“Leave me alone,” I finally yelled. “Just leave me alone!!!!” I was crying, so they left. I felt cornered. But you got to be tough in the Army, got to be tough. Otherwise, things happen to you and you get dragged down down down into a quagmire.

I’ve been depressed about this. I avoid eye contact with anyone passing in the halls. Tobie has calmed down and doesn’t mention the incident. In a strange way, I’m not totally mad at her because I have this feeling that she fell into drugs, like a lot of these messed up chicks and GI’s. Maybe it happened here, or while they were growing up. Maybe they were born into a terrible family—but I’m pretty sure they fell into it and weren’t born messed up.

This morning I told Frank how depressed I was about my living situation. I had to tell someone normal about the drug problem on the WAC floor. It was driving me crazy. All I want to do is mind my own business and be left alone, but this seems impossible when living among drug addicts.

Frank suggested that I ignore my roommate and the messed-up WACs and study the ARs and SOPs and excel in the Army. Make battalion Soldier of the Month. “Are you kidding,” I said. “I don’t want to be that strac and gung-ho about the Army.”

“Forget about whether you like or don’t like the Army,” he said. “Do it, kid, get the best out of the Army. And don’t get involved with these screwed up individuals in your barracks.”

This depressed me more because it didn’t seem like any sort of solution to my problem. I explained this to Frank and he suggested I go tell Top everything.

I collected myself and knocked on Top’s door. He immediately invited me in and told me to have a seat. Sure, he could sense something was wrong even before I began crying. Top fetched me a soda then leaned against the edge of his desk and listened as I told him what I told Frank. I asked if he could help me get into another room by myself and he promised to try. But what he told next me was surprising. I expected him to take care of the drug problem since he’s my top sergeant. Instead, he told me I needed to bring up the matter at the next monthly WAC meeting, which is held in the day room on the WAC floor. During these meetings the WACs, including those living off post, get together with the captains and top sergeants of each company to discuss issues like the Army’s policy on pregnancy (which is a flat discharge), or ways to improve the WAC floor – such as new furniture in the day room.

As I said, Top wants me to bring up the issue of drug abuse at the next meeting. I told him I couldn’t possibly do this because the problem WACs would be at the meeting. I sure wasn’t going to “narc” on anybody again—ever.

Top responded by saying, “I know it’s difficult, but you have got to take a stand against the drug problem. Somebody does. I’ll be there to support you and anything you say. I have confidence in you, Teri. You’re a good soldier. I know you can do it.”

This all happened this morning and I feel somewhat better in spirits, since I've gotten a lot off my chest. But at the next meeting I know I won't bring up the drug problem. I'm hardly a narc, and I'm not an idiot.

Dearest Teri,

We are so happy that you are finding army life to your liking. It sounds like you chose the right thing to do. Daddy and I thought that once you got to Germany, you'd be happy. So glad you are thinking about your education. Get the most you can while you are there.

It makes me happy to learn you are now beginning to like my type of music—Beethoven and Mozart. Never could get your dad to like Mozart or any of the classics. You'll find that some of the classics are relaxing and easy to listen to.

We are glad to learn that you decided to quit this smoking business. I know people in the Army tend to smoke all the time, but for your health, it is a good idea to stay away from it. It also makes a person smell like smoke. Now maybe you understand why we haven't cared for smoking.

Everyone here is happy and doing great. Linda likes school and your brother's doing fine.

Love, Mom

Dear Teri,

We got your letter Saturday and we're happy about the progress you're making in your schooling. You'll be a real German expert when you come home and I'm sure you'll be able to use this to your advantage. It looks like everything you had planned for is coming true. Keep up

the good work. We are proud of you. After all the difficulties you had with your Basic training in Alabama, and your military training in Georgia, it looks as if it was worthwhile. Seems you made the best choice when you picked joining the Army. Now that you are planning for the future, it looks great. We are so happy that you are looking ahead, and not just playing around. Do your best and you will always have good luck.

Love, Mom

Dearest Teri,

I was so glad to hear from you and get your pictures of the German countryside. The pictures are great—you did a good job of taking them. It also gives us an idea of what you are seeing. There's so much history in that country and we're happy you're able to live there and see and understand a lot of what you might otherwise know nothing about. I'm going to buy an album and start putting your pictures in it. This should help keep them in order for you and when you return, you'll have many fond memories of your time in Germany.

Keep up the good work over there and see all you can and learn as much as you can. I sure am proud of the way you are doing things. We always wish you the best and we send you our love. I'm thinking about painting your room a second coat, while daddy is away elk hunting with your grandparents. Just the second coat, because we never did get around to doing it.

Have fun on your upcoming leave to Rome. So glad you managed to get the time off. Nothing else has happened around here. We are happy and well.

Love, Mom

Advanced Leave to Rome 1975



Me and Kathi are on the train to Rome for a two-week leave. Thank God! Originally, Becky, my “pee” (good friend) from Basic was going on this trip. But she got pregnant and had to pull out at the last minute so she could fly to DC and get an abortion. Apparently, she’d rather stay in than get discharged and have a baby. Maybe it’s a smart move.

I’m just glad to be getting away from KFK and that crowd of messed up individuals!!! I can’t wait to see the ancient ruins, the Coliseum, the Vatican, and the Sistine Chapel. Who knows? Maybe I’ll even make it to Naples.

I had to arrange for another advanced leave, since I’ve hardly accumulated enough days in the service for a regular leave. But Top pulled strings because he knew I needed to get away. Too much has been happening to me and I haven’t even been at my permanent party for three months.

Top kept reminding me to bring up the drug problem at the WAC meeting. But at the meeting, while the brass and Tops and WACs were sitting or standing around the day room, I couldn’t narc on anyone, though Top was watching me and nodding for encouragement. The next day he called me in his office and said he was disappointed that I didn’t bring up the problem, but that I should at the next meeting. I sure wish he could realize that I cannot narc on anyone especially in front of everyone.

I decided to ignore the drug scene on the WAC floor and not to mention it to anyone like Frank or Top. They couldn't or wouldn't do anything about it anyway.

For a while things were going OK. I met with the Grossmans now and then. On weekends, when I wasn't pulling duty, I traveled to Wiesbaden and Heidelberg, and I spoke as much German as I could, mostly by asking directions. Traveling's a blast, but sometimes it makes you feel lonely when you do everything by yourself. For this reason, I wanted to make friends so I started getting social with people around the Kaserne, instead of being such a loner. I'd strike up conversations with the guys I'd run into on the stairwell up to the WAC floor. Or I'd sit with the guys pulling the main CQ on the second-floor landing. I'd start out by asking the guy where he was from in the states and the conversation generally took off from there.

A lot of the other WACs, the goodie goodies and the messed-up ones, were starting to see me as pretty independent and capable of getting away from the barracks. A messed-up WAC even said she'd like to get away one weekend. She also said she thought I was one of the few people around that had her head together. I was flattered and told her we could plan a trip to Zurich when I got back from my leave.

As I gradually got to know people around Headquarters, I started to think most of them were OK. Even Tobie and I have been getting along better. She's been trying to straighten up because she wants to stay in the Army. She's in some counseling program and I no longer see tombstones in her eyes. However, I do see tombstones in the eyes of a lot of guys around Headquarters and it always gives me an eerie feeling especially because they have this strange smile that matches their eyes. A smile heroin causes. I avoid these guys.

Things were going fairly well until I met Tom Baines, this nice-looking guy with baby blue eyes and brown hair. He told me he got married straight out of high school to avoid the

draft. After three years of marriage, he got divorced and decided to join up anyway. Funny how it worked out for him.

When we first met, Tom stopped me on the stairway up to the WAC floor and asked if I was the new girl from Oregon. I said I was and he told me he was from Roseburg, Oregon. He called me his “homey” and welcomed me to Kambri Fritch Kaserne. This tickled me and we talked about Oregon and pretty soon he asked me out for a beer. I hadn’t gone out with any of the GI’s before because I wanted to get into Germany. Plainly, I was afraid to go out with them because I didn’t want to get involved with another Drew. But when Tom said he had POV (a privately owned vehicle) and could drive me around town, I decided he’d be all right. That weekend we drove around the pastoral countryside and saw flocks of sheep on the hillside and old men shepherds with walking sticks. We stopped at a guest house in the forest for dinner and wine. I had such a great time that I started going out with Tom.

Eventually, I got to know Tom’s friends, GI’s and WACs, who were living off post. On most weekend nights we went to the apartment of Steve and Debbie Ellars where a party was either going or getting started. There was always a lot of drinking and dope smoking at Steve and Debbie’s. I could never bring myself to refuse and look like a narc or a goodie goodie creep, so I ended up taking a light hit or two. Sometimes I faked taking a hit to keep up with everyone, appearance wise. I figured once they were fucked up they’d never know the difference about me.

It was nice to have a lot of friends and a good-looking guy to go out with. But I got more and more involved in smoking “shit” and partying. It sort of happened. You begin to feel a part of a bunch of friends, and then you start losing track of your original goals. I all together quit meeting with Herman because I got too busy going out with Tom. When I realized what was

happening to me, I wanted to get away from it, and fast. It was a conflict too, because I liked having the social life. I told Top I wanted to go on leave for two weeks. I figured once I got back into traveling, I'd get back into my original goals and away from so much partying.

Well, Top arranged for this leave I'm on now, but before I left, something devastating happened. Two nights ago, Tom took me over to Steve and Debbie's—a party before my leave, he told me. But it really wasn't for me since a lot of people were already there partying and listening to Steve's huge stereo system, which has a large reel to reel, an 8-track cassette, turntable, amplifier, four Marantz speakers, and two receivers. We listened to the Dead, Zappa, ZZ Top, Janis Joplin, and Jefferson Starship, we drank lots of beer and had munchies like potato chips, and Cheetos, and Fritos.

Tom and I sat on the sofa he had his arm around me. As usual, I felt shy and to cover up I smoked and listened to the music. Pretty soon Tom asked if I wanted to try some window pane acid. I hesitated, thinking over whether or not I should try it. Everybody else around me had and since I was with a group of friends, I decided to try half a hit. Tom dropped his then had me open my mouth and he placed the tiny yellow cellophane square on my tongue. I sat back on the sofa thinking to myself, OK, let's see what this LSD stuff is all about. Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds. Strawberry Fields Forever. Yellow Submarine.

About twenty minutes later, while I was sitting quietly and Tom had his arm around me, I felt his hands slowly come around my neck, like snakes. He started choking me. I jumped up and yelled, scared to death, "No Tom."

Tom absolutely freaked out, or as they say, "freaked fucking flipped out" on a bad trip. He jumped up and said, "What'd I do to her?" Before I knew it, he was face down on the floor, as if we were in a war zone and someone had yelled, "Hit the deck!" He started acting like a

baby pounding with his fists and kicking his feet. This freaked me out totally because everything seemed so real. So nightmarish. The Twilight Zone! I didn't realize that what was happening had to do with the drugs. I climbed up on the back of the sofa and sat like a squirrel, as Tom suddenly flipped to his feet and said, jerking his head from side to side, "Who's calling? The police, the police, the Rad police are calling." He lunged back onto the floor, face down with his hands shielding his head. "Someone answer the phone. Tell the Rads everything's OK." He thought we were in WWII.

Steve quickly took charge of the situation and turned off the blaring music, but I kept hearing over and over again – "Strawberry Fields Forever... Strawberry, strawberry, strawberry... Fields, Forever, forever, forever..." I was so terrified that the Rads were coming to get us. It was horrible. Steve had his wife Debbie get me off the sofa and out of the room so he could deal with Tom.

The next thing I remember, Debbie and I were sitting against the wall on the floor of her bedroom. I felt paranoid, trapped inside myself. I was two people—a hollow shell on the outside and a person inside doing the realizing. Pretty soon this intensified and got psychedelic. Everything in the room spun and changed colors. The inside person tried to analyze this nightmare, while the outside person, the shell, talked and talked about how scared she was. When I heard Tom yelling again, I totally went berserk and ran to the corner of the room, knocking over Debbie's night light. Then it seemed like this deeper inside person emerged and tried to control the rest of us and eventually I felt like I had a whole army inside me that was trying to control the situation. At last Debbie screamed for someone to take me back to the barracks and away from Tom Baines.

I remember being back in the barracks and having one of the messed-up WACs help me to my room and into bed. But on acid you can't sleep. So, I got up and found one of the WACs who takes drugs. I was one of them now. She listened to me talk because she knew I was tripping. I remember explaining how freaked out Tom had gotten, and that I couldn't wait to get away on my leave.

It was almost sunrise when I returned to my bed, but I still couldn't sleep. I stared at this long crack in the wall and saw coming from it, inch size yellow, black, white, and blue babies, and each was fat, naked and slippery. All I could do was watch babies coming from the wall. I don't remember when I fell asleep.

Naturally, I was afraid to ever see Tom again. But he ended up seeing me off at the train station. That is, I was at Darmstadt's Hopbahn hoff earlier this evening, and he showed up to apologize because he hadn't seen me since that awful night. I was sitting on the platform bench waiting for my train to Frankfurt when he approached me. He was serious about his apology, so I knew he felt sorry and I accepted it. Then he said, "Can I give you a kiss?"

"Oh, come on Tom," I said, embarrassed. But he handed me one of those large Hershey's Chocolate Kisses, and this made me laugh. Still, I told him that I didn't want to go out with him anymore. He said he understood and we left it at that.

(written 2023)



Me and Giovanni

What happened during my leave to Rome? I know I wrote about it during the time, but it's now missing and probably swallowed up by the expanse of nearly fifty-years. But I now want to include the gist of that trip, my first and only leave during my stint in Germany. First of all, I had traveled to Europe out of high school with my best friend Kathi and was very gung-ho about traveling. So was she. That's a big reason we enlisted together—only two years in Europe and a European Out (discharged in Germany rather than returning to the States).

We had been to Venice, Florence, and Pisa, but had missed Rome, Naples, and Sicily. Kathi and I first traveled to Sicily because, during our escapades in Europe out of high school, she had met Lilo, a handsome Sicilian man on the train. They corresponded and he invited Kathi to Sicily. Everywhere we went men tried to hit on us. I was young, slender, had long hair, and probably looked like the perfect mark for a sexual liaison although I've never been promiscuous. I had to constantly fend them off. Even as I waited for the train, men kept approaching me and inviting me for coffee or to listen to music. Most of these fellows, as I now recall, came from Turkey.

In Rome, one of the most beautiful and enchanting cities I had ever been too, an Italian man who looked like Sonny Bono approached me at the Coliseum. I think he even went so far as reaching under my blouse. Well, romance must have been in the air and I ended up staying with him in his one room apartment until the landlady kicked me out. Then, I came down with some kind of influenza and an ambulance rushed me to an Italian hospital where I lingered maybe a week in a room where a lady kept moaning. Giovanni, who came to see me every day, said the lady was dying.

When I returned to the Kaserne, I assumed I was AWOL because I was returning a week late. I waited at the front gate and had the guard called TOP to come down and get me. TOP said that everything was fine and I wasn't AWOL because Kathi had informed them what had happened to me.

Giovanni and I wrote love letters for a while and I tried to send him cartons of cigarettes from the PX but the post wouldn't allow it.

Chapter Five: Transferred to Headquarters Company



(written in the early 2000's)

In many ways my life has been tied to Asia, especially SE Asia. The war going on in Vietnam was part of my childhood, especially my high school years. Outside the west doors of Andrew Jackson High School, there was a place students called "the hill." Here, on the grassy bank, "cool" students smoke and held moratoriums against the war and candlelight vigils for peace. I was too young to fully understand America's policies in Vietnam and the anti-war protests. I doubt I sat on the hill very many times.

Every night TV news announced the U. S. soldiers killed that day. June 1969, after I graduated eighth grade, Life Magazine featured a week of the American Dead in Vietnam. Here

are statistics from that article: out of 242 Americans KIA, 4 were PV-1, 90 PFC, 53 E-4 (SP4 or Corporal), 27 E-5 (SGT or SP 5), 2 SFC, 7 S/SGT, 3 warrant officers, 6 were 2nd lieutenant, 6 were 1st lieutenants, 4 captains, and one Lt. Colonel. Out of the 242, 26 were marines, 3 were navy, the rest were Army. The oldest KIA was a 40-year-old Staff Sergeant (S/SGT), the youngest were sixteen 18 years old soldiers. Most KIA were 19 and 20.

Nearly 60 thousand died in Vietnam, compared to nearly a quarter million in WWII and half a million in the Civil War. The average age of a Vietnam soldier was 19.2, compared to 26 in WWII. I was 18 when I enlisted.

I traveled twice to Asia, wrote a book, *Moonbeams in Asia*, and I wrote many poems reflecting a spirit deeply tied to Asia. At times, I've thought of myself as an Easterner more than a Westerner. Maybe this is my culture shock. Maybe I am a very old soul from the Ancient East, born mismatched into Western Culture. I was certainly a mismatch in my childhood family and in the Army at the tail end of the Vietnam War.

While I was studying for my BS in Anthropology in 1979 (four years after my discharge), I taught English to non-literate refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam and to the Hmung and Mien hilltribe people who had spied for the CIA during the Vietnam War. They also grew the opium furnished to the U. S. soldiers. I made good friends among my students, most notably a Mien woman named Muong Po Sachow and a Hmong woman named Yi Yang. I admired their bravery. They had gone through a great deal more than I ever had, and yet they were driven to carry forth in a new culture so opposite theirs in pace, ideals and demands.

My Second Grandiose Manic Bubble (as I like to call three major and somewhat delusional episodes of my life) occurred in Asia, after I graduated with an MA in English about six years after my military discharge. While teaching at the Prince of Songkla University, in

Pattani, Thailand, I invested all my money and credit on a bungalow business across the Thai/Malay peninsula, on an island called Lamson. At the same time, I was writing my book *Moonbeams in Asia*, which was about me as I lived the story. I got myself in quite a mess and became deeply depressed. I attributed my mental torments to the culture shock of living in Thailand although I remember wondering, how can I be sure it's not my own mental problems. No, I told myself. Everyone goes through culture shock when living in a new culture. (But at the same time, it seems that I've been in culture shock all my life).

During this time, Vietnamese refugees landed on the beach of Pattani. Here is the story I wrote in 1984, about meeting these refugees:

(written in 1984)

After the monsoon floods had subsided, about mid-December, one of my students informed me that a group of Vietnamese refugees were staying at the nearby grade school off Chareon Pradit Road. Under a school ground pavilion, my student and I met twenty-eight refugees with bags, blankets, and a guitar. Only two spoke English. One was a slender woman who greeted me as I pulled up on my bicycle. I said I was interested in her story and would like to help them if I could.

Nguyen Ngoc Ly was twenty-six. She had been a culture-history teacher for seven-year-old children. The other English speaker was her boyfriend, Nguyen Dinh Thien, twenty-two. He was a mechanic. His younger sister was also in the group.

Ly introduced me to the group's six children ranging from a nine-month-old baby to a five-year-old girl. Others included a widowed mother, a husband and wife, an old woman, eight single girls and ten single boys. While my student played with the children, I sat on a blanket under the pavilion with Ly and Thien. They took turns telling me their story.

I asked about the Vietnamese government. Ly said, “The communists say to the people, ‘We will make you safe.’ In fact, they cause the war and too much poverty. The government can take anything—our businesses, farms, and rice fields. And government send you to work on public farm.” She told me that her mother had been killed in the war and that her father was a doctor. “I want to be a doctor, like my father, to help people. My father thought too much about the communist he didn’t like. He died of worry. My family were capitalists and we were watched.”

Ly said she had attended the university for one year, but in 1975 all university students were required to study, “Communist ideology.” At times, she admitted, she wanted to give up. “It was my faith in God, that makes me survive.” Most members of the group were catholic, a few were atheist.

I asked if they would like to return to their country one day. “Vietnam is beautiful,” Ly said. “We have Da-lat City where the weather has four seasons. In Autumn, there are yellow and golden colors under a mist in the blue sky. My cousin in America wrote to me that California was like Da-lat, lovely valleys, roads, waterfalls, light snow in winter.”

“We also have Ha Lan Bay,” Thien interjected. “So beautiful with mountains and small islands.”

Thien said he had been captured three times by the government and sent to prison camps to work on roads from five a.m. until midnight. I asked why he was sent to these labor camps. “If you listen to the BBC or VOA, you go to farms.” In addition, he told me, he was sent there because he protested against the communists.

“April 1975,” he added, “every girl and man has to join the Army when 18. The women work in non-combative positions and all the men had to go to Campochea.”

“How were you able to leave Vietnam?” I asked.

“We had waited since before 1975, saving money to escape,” Ly said. “It took one year to organize final plans.”

“You see,” Thien explained, “my family has business before 1975. We buy and sell palm tree cargo along Saigon River. From this time, we save \$1000 to make boat.” Thien pointed to a young man in the group who looked up and smiled. Thien’s friend Hai had helped make the boat.

“How did you make the boat without the government becoming suspicious?” I asked.

“We tell government we make boat to buy and sell wood along river and make again our family’s cargo business.”

“Government stupid people,” Ly said. “They don’t care.”

“On December 1 we set sail when government sleeps,” Thien said. “Journey take us four days and three nights before we come to Pattani.”

“Why did you leave during the monsoon season?” I asked

Thien replied, “Otherwise, police can see us and catch us, so we must leave Vietnam in bad weather though we hear that many people drown.”

Ly added, “We think we may die in sea, but it made no difference. We can fear nothing when life is already too bad. If captured by communists in Saigon, we will be more afraid.”

Thien then explained that shortly before they reached shore, their boat broke apart from a stone under the sea. I suspected they had purposely sunk their boat so the Thai government would not force them to go elsewhere.

“When we reach Pattani the police help us. Then we call Catholic service and they situated us at this school.”

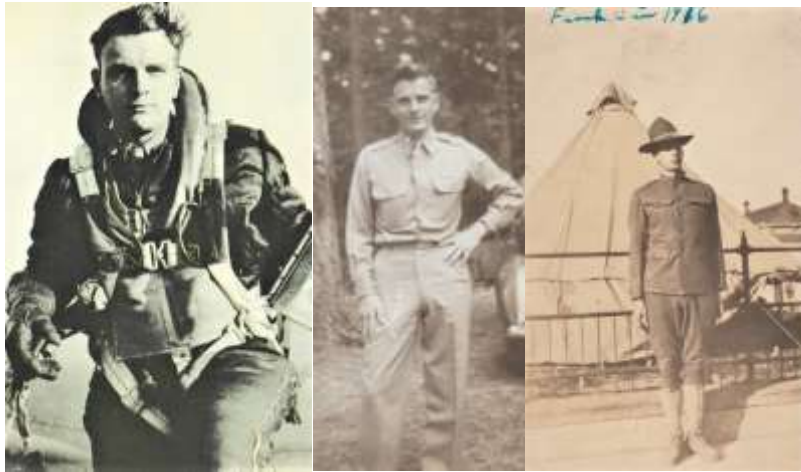
The night was growing late and my student suggested we leave. Before doing so, the group gathered around an oil lamp to sing while Hai played the guitar. Ly asked us to join them. I said I had to leave, but first I wanted to hear a Vietnamese song. She then began singing a Vietnamese song. I asked her the meaning and she said it was a sad song about saying farewell forever.

I returned to the school pavilion the next morning with canned milk for the children, some tea, sugar, creamer, Nescafe instant coffee, and some cigarettes for the men. I was willing to buy them anything to make them feel better. My encounter with the refugees lessened my own self-pity and the misery I felt before they arrived. It was painful to admit that I had lost all my worldly possessions on a dream I could no longer pursue. But I felt relieved to let go of my obsession with an island bungalow business. By Christmas, the ghosts of Lamson no longer haunted me so severely and I resumed searching for a good paying teaching position at universities in the Middle East.

(written in the early 2000's)

My most recent tie to Asia occurred in 1995 when my then husband and I traveled in Asia for three months, for his sabbatical. One stop was in Vietnam. I had many expectations about the war-torn country headlined during my childhood. I imagined feeling tremendous sadness about the loss of lives. I thought I'd encounter resentment toward Americans from the Vietnamese. Instead, I discovered a beautiful country of emerald mountains and ivory beaches stretched along aqua blue surfs. Vietnam seemed thriving in spite of America's closed trade policies. The people were kind, eager to speak English and to show us the sights of their cities. One waiter at a cafe in Hue said, "I have tomorrow off. Can I show you around?" We agreed and the next day we rented bicycles and rode to pagodas, temples and parks along the river. The war

was far removed from this young man's mind. It was an "old timer's war" to him like WWII is to me.



(written in 1975)

Dear Teri, (1975)

We were glad you called this morning to tell us about your new job in Headquarters Company. A Battalion Artist? Sounds like a great opportunity for you. Should be a real help for you later on, if you chose a career in art. Write and tell us about it. I am glad you are finally able to use your artistic ability as you have such great talent.

I am glad you are able to spend so much of your time visiting so many different countries and cities in Europe. Sure, hope your dad and I will be able to fly over to Europe this summer while you are there. Are you allowed to drive private cars on the roads? If we do make it over, it would be great to have a chauffeur. It wouldn't hurt for you to look into military transportation for family members, or whatever they call it, to see if we could get over there in this way. We are very proud of you and the good work you are doing.

Love, Mom

“I wonder what I’ll be doing ten years from now.” PFC Jaworski said while standing beside me and staring out the window. I’m sitting at the drafting table in Headquarters Company. Jablonski left the room, but I’m impressed by what he said. It makes me wonder; will I even be around in ten years? Will the time go fast, or will it drag along? And will I get anything accomplished?

Most people in my new unit think Jaworski is weird because he slouches and acts dense. When the sergeants tell him to do something they have to go over their instructions slowly and treat him like a retard. Once I heard a sergeant say to him, as he put his arm on Jarl’s shoulders, “Look over there Jablonski... See that typewriter. Well... take this piece of paper and walk over to it and type up this memo. Can you do that boy?”

Jarl’s not bad looking since he has nice green eyes. And though he’s hardly a conversationalist, he comes up with interesting ideas. I think Jarl pretends to be crazy so he can make it through the Army in the midst of the real idiots (most everyone around, that is).

The other male enlistees in my new unit, PFC Gifford and Spec 4 Landofter share a room with Jarl and they tell me, as if I’m a guy, that Jarl’s always “whacking off” at night. I generally respond with stuff like, “That’s pretty weird,” but in truth, I don’t need to know such personal things and I’m not sure why they tell them to me. Gifford also said he and Landofter suspect Jarl’s CID (from the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division, e. g. a soldier planted within the troops to sniff out criminal activity.) They think he acts dumb as a cover. But I doubt this because Jarl draws too much attention to himself for any kind of a cover.

One time Gifford wanted me to go out with Jarl as a joke and then report back on how weird Jarl acted. But I never did. It seemed like the joke would also be on me. Besides, the scheme was their joke and I’d be doing the cruel stuff by faking that I liked Jarl. And another

thing, Jarl started coming into the drafting room and saying, as he stood and stared out the window, "I understand you like me and want to go out." The guys had been working on Jarl and saying I had the "hots" for him. This annoyed me and I told Gifford and Landoffer to stop it. They said they would, but Jarl kept thinking I liked him, and he still does which is why he comes in here throughout the day and says stuff like, "I wonder where I'll be ten years from now."

I got transferred to Headquarters Company and I'm working as battalion artist, but so far I've made one poster for a battalion meeting, and two flyers. I haven't much else to do which is why I'm using my work time to write in my diary. As long as I look busy, the lifer sergeants on the other side of the partition are satisfied. They come back here once in a while to see if I have time to type up some dumb memo they're too lazy to do themselves. Why not have me do their grunt work?

How did I end up in Headquarters Company? That is a hefty story. So much has happened to me since I got back from Rome, mostly terrible, except for my new job and for my promotion to PFC—Private First Class, which means a decent pay raise.

After I got back from leave, I was set to make it through the Army with my head straight, my chin up, and my sight forward. I was prepared to keep away from the messed-up drug scene. I would ignore the sexual harassers, and the strac lifer idealists and keep to myself, meet more Germans like the Grossmans, and study German and other subjects from books from the Kaserne library—like the history of Rome, Renaissance Art, and the Crusades. I even signed up for this college course in Black History. It was the only evening course convenient for me to take and I figured I should learn a little about black people and their culture anyway. Sometimes I think black culture must be so much richer than the average middle class white culture I come from. I mean, blacks have been treated so badly that they've learned how to survive and fight and

struggle. Maybe white folks got it too good and they lose sight of what it really means to have freedom. One thing's for sure, the Army isn't a place to feel much freedom. In the Army you're not an individual, you're a part of the big GREEN Massive Team machine!

As bad luck would have it, Tobie moved out and two new WACs had moved into my room while I was away on leave. And they are worse than Tobie. Both are already good friends with all the other messed up drug taking WACs. What really got to me was that all my furniture had been shoved together, like I was in their way. In addition, a lot of my things were missing. My locker door had been bent open from the bottom, and my Allman Brothers and Roberta Flack albums were gone. And so was everything I'd had on the wall, my calendar and posters, and a bunch of my desk accessories—pencils, a desk top vase. God was I pissed.

I wasn't sure how to go about confronting these two, Kim Southerland, a puny blond with blue eyes, and Julie Norman, a tall brunette, with a bad complexion and a grotesque Southern accent. I asked them about having moved my bed and desk aside. They said they needed the room and figured I'd put my furniture back when I returned. I said I understood, and then asked them questions like, "Do you know what happened to my calendar?" or "Have you seen my desk vase laying around?"

Both looked at me innocently, unconcerned, and Julie said, "I don't know. Maybe someone got in here when I was away." I knew she was lying but there wasn't anything I could do. I hardly wanted to get off to a rotten start since I was stuck living with these two. The head WAC sergeant had already said I couldn't change rooms.

What really pisses me off is that I'm so helpless here, when it comes to who lives with me. It doesn't seem fair that I go away and two new messed up chicks move in my room without my consent and then take over and shove my stuff aside.

I've had nothing but problems with these two pukes. They both work together on a graveyard shift and come in my room in the middle of the night, start banging around—while I'm trying to sleep. They turn on the lights and radio, hardly concerned that I'm there.

One night when they came in like this, I sat up and yelled, "Can't you be quiet!" Then that skinny runt Kim Southerland said back to me, "Why Teri, is something the matter?" She purposely tries to get at me and for the life of me, I don't know why. Except maybe she's jealous because she thinks she's so cute and I'm just as cute if not more. Bitch!

The worst part is that my new roommates fearlessly smoke hashish in our room with a bunch of the other WACs, right in front of me. They know I won't narc on them, and I won't either because it won't do any good, and if I do, they'll just gang up on me. What really gets me is that hashish has this detectable odor and it seems someone in charge, a CQ or otherwise, would investigate. Since nobody ever does, I figure it's being ignored. Besides, the CQ is often one of the messed-up WACs.

A few times Julie offered me a hit. (we aren't always enemies. Sometimes we're fairly decent to each other). Once or twice, I took a shallow hit, so I wouldn't get loaded. I did this mainly to be on friendly terms. It's awful to live in the same room with someone you have to ignore.

Like the other messed up WACs, both Kim and Julie take acid and pop pills. I swear to God, there's no let up. Even when we get along, I'm still pissed they were placed in my room while I was away. But I don't know who to complain to anymore. After all, the one NCO I trusted, Top, turned on me. And that's why I'm in HHC now.

It happened shortly after I returned from leave and got promoted to PFC. Delta Company went on a field maneuver. We spent one week in the wet German forest. There were about four

WACs in one tent, but I only saw them late at night unless they came to the orderly room tent where I worked at my regular secretarial job with this new Spec 4 who replaced Frank. Frank had ETS'd by this point.

Being out in the field was like the MASH unit in a woods. The German landscape was pretty, and old German couples wearing heavy wool coats casually strolled along the dirt road past our tents, trucks, jeeps, and vans. Even when it was raining, they'd carry gray or black umbrellas and wear galoshes. It was like the U. S. Army was in a park and on exhibit for them. I really like the Germans, especially the older ones, because they appreciate nature and show pride in their environment—even if an army's parked in it.

Speaking of pride. You should get a load of "lifer talk." My first experience with this talk happened on that Delta Company field maneuver. One evening, I played pinochle in the orderly room tent with three sergeants—two of the real old-timers ready to retire, and Top. These guys took the game seriously! Because I hadn't played the game for years, I made a mistake and one sergeant yelled, "Re-Nig!" and I had to take back the play.

After the game, I sat with those three men and we drank coffee and smoked while they told me about the virtues of having a career in the Army. They talked about ideals, values, and having pride in yourself and your country. It all sounded good, but it was lifer talk.

I don't think they were hoping I'd reenlist. Why would they care? Rather, I believe they enjoyed sharing their purpose in life—a respectable career that has ideals and lots of structured goals. What they said made sense, and I respect these old guys for having ideals, but as I said to them, ideals must vary from person to person. I wasn't sure what my ideals were, though I was certain they weren't the same as those of the lifers. I'm not so sure they cared to hear what I had

to say. Probably, they didn't understand what I meant because they called me, "wet behind the ears."

During much of the field maneuver I had to stay up pulling night shift—simulating that a real war was happening. I worked along with Spec 4 Aimes, Top, Lieutenant LaTouff, and Sergeant Dicker (one of the old-timer fossils). This was a bit tiring, but not bad. What got on my nerves was the sex talk outside the orderly room tent. Every time I headed for the WAC outhouse some enlisted guy followed me. Once I saw a guy spying on me through the trees, hoping to see me pull down my pants and crap. It's so sick and perverted. In addition, whenever I went to the mess tent for a meal, and a bunch of GI's sat with me, they'd end up talking about how horny they were and how they couldn't wait to get back for a piece of ass. They'd even talk this way about their wives. I'm sure they said these things around me to see if maybe I'd give them some. I can't understand why being out in the field makes these creeps think so much about fucking. I'm convinced it's a lot of macho bullshit talk.

One afternoon, Top asked if I wanted to return with him to the Kaserne to clean up. "You bet!" I said. I knew I got privileges over the other lowly guys, but what the heck. I get harassed. I get privileges.

I rode to Cambrai-Fritch Kaserne in the back of a jeep along with Top and two other sergeants. After I showered, I went to the orderly room and I sat at my desk to wait for Top, as he instructed me to do. But while I waited, it hit me. I hated being in the field, it exhausted me. I hated the sexual harassment, the low life perverts. I hated the fact that I was stuck living with drug addicts. And nobody would help me out. God, I hated everything about the Army. Especially the fact that I had to try so hard not to be messed with.

By the time Top showed up, I was feeling hopelessly depressed. I tried to cover up my tears, but he could tell I was feeling down.

Top closed door behind him and I thought he wanted us to have a heart-to-heart talk about what bothered me. He said he understood how the field was difficult for a young lady. "It's rough, but you've got to be tough, Teri. You're a soldier."

This frustrated me because it wasn't just being in the field that bothered me. It was the whole ordeal of being in an Army filled with horny men and drug addicts. "You're right," I said then stood up to collect my things and leave. But as I did this, I couldn't control my tears.

"There, there, Teri." TOP took out his handkerchief, reached over to where I stood by my desk, and wiped my tears. I was surprised by his touching me in the first place, but then, before I knew it, he pulled me close and started kissing me. My mind went blank. Everything that previously bothered me was gone. Instantly, I faced a new problem. I was nervous and scared, because nothing like this had ever happened to me before. It was like an uncle molesting me.

I pushed myself away and said, "Oh Top." I was so sorry he did that to me. I thought TOP cared about me, as a person. But he was no different from everyone else. He was nothing but a horny GI.

"You're so pretty," he said as I went for the door. "So young and pretty."

I thought it was over. But before I opened the door, he put his arms around me from behind and groped at my breasts. I shivered, afraid he would rape me or something, but he turned me around and forcefully kissed me once more.

"No Top! What do you think I am?" I tried to pull away but it was difficult because he was so big. I cried hysterically and TOP got a hold of himself and backed off, before I let out a scream. Then I tore out the office and back to my room at headquarters.

I assumed, as I laid crying on my bed, that TOP would go back to the field without me. But it didn't happen that way. Instead, the WAC CQ came to my room and said I was to report immediately to the jeep outside Delta Company and be prepared to return to the field. She said the orders came from my top sergeant.

After the CQ left and before I pulled myself together, I stood up and screamed as loud as I could. One of the strac WACs came running down hall and burst into my room and said, sarcastically, as if I was one of the messed-up WACs tripping on acid, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," I said and she gave me a dirty look and left. God, I hate this fucking place. People categorize you without knowing you.

I went back to the field and ignored TOP and he avoided me, though he acted dignified about the situation. I couldn't stand it because I'd have to work with him in the orderly room so that night, after mess, I broke the chain of command and told Captain Davidson what had happened. I said I felt totally disillusioned. He said I was just naive. Then he asked me what I wanted to do. I said I didn't want to file a report against TOP because he was a career soldier and I didn't want to ruin his life. But I wanted a transfer out of Delta Company. Captain Davidson said he'd look into the matter.

Later that night, TOP came to the WAC tent and asked for me. As we stood outside the tent, beyond the hearing range of anyone, he apologized and said, "I know I did something terrible today and I don't know what came over me." I knew he feared I'd ruin his career, if I chose to file a report against him. I told him I didn't want to get him in trouble, but I wanted to transfer out of Delta Company. He said he'd see that this was taken care of. Before leaving me he said, in his own defense, "If only you WACs weren't so darn pretty."

It's funny, I felt sorry for Top, as if both he and I were victims, only more so me since I'm younger and a female. I realized that for TOP the Army's the only life he knows and that he's made it high up the NCO hierarchy and now he's vulnerable because I might destroy everything for him if I pressed charges. And what TOP did was probably just a whim. A moment of lust. These people have just got to get used to women and learn to treat us like soldiers. TOP never saw me as a real soldier. He's not used to working with women and even being around them except for prissy military housewives. Still, I'm not excusing his behavior. He was wrong. He wronged me. He destroyed any faith I had for anyone in charge of this man's Army. Why can't these men control themselves? Do they think WACs are nothing but tinker toys?

As soon as we got back from the field, Captain Davidson sent me to the Command Sergeant Major—that old gray brontosaurus who walks with a mean step and who's so strac that the creases in his fatigues are Army regulated. When I met him in his office and sat before his large desk with the picture of his strac WACs on it, he asked me where I would like to work. "I am sort of an artist," I suggested. "At least, I can draw."

This explains how I got my job as a battalion artist in Headquarters Company and am now working behind this partition on the drafting table. I do like my new job and perhaps it will line me up with a good job on the outside. I find the people in my unit interesting and for some obscure reason, I like Jarl, though not as a boyfriend. I like it when he comes in here and stares out the window and says, "I wonder what I'll be doing ten years from now." It gets me to thinking.

Dear Teri,

Hey! What goes on? We haven't from you for several weeks. Are you all right?
Remember us, we're your parents and we do get concerned when we don't hear from you. Please drop us a card, even if it only says you're all right....

Love, Mom

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am truly sorry for not having written. Try and understand that I've been going through many changes and sometimes it seems impossible to write. Believe me I haven't forgotten home and someday I'll tell you about my times here.

Even though I want to save my money, I'm thinking about moving off post because I need a change for the better. Living in the barracks isn't too swift, believe me. Do you have any suggestions?

I like my job. So, you see, things are going pretty good for me as long as I let those in charge know I have some talent. Though at times there isn't too much for me to do in the drafting room, I'm hoping that the training will be something I can use once I'm out and back in civilian life.

Sorry to say, but I missed most of my German and my Black History courses at the beginning of the term. I had to go out in the field twice. It's a place in the woods that reminded me a lot of Scappoose and I spent a lot of time watching German couples stroll past our set up.

Love, Teri

P. S. Don't worry about me I'm fine.

Dear Teri,

It's very hard to give you advice or guidance when you're so far away from home. Just use common sense in all you do—work for a future goal, and do your best. We think you made the right decision in joining the service. Jobs are very hard to find and you are getting the greatest of experience. It may be rough at times, and some things seem senseless, but the experience is what matters. All jobs have their good and bad points and it's the attitude of the person involved that makes the difference between liking or disliking what you do. We know you will have bad days along with good ones—this is life. So, make the most of the situation and save your money for your education.

Enough motherly advice for now. I can't think of anything new going on around here. Everyone is well. No problems here. Be good and enjoy yourself.

Love, Mom

When I first got transferred to Headquarters Company, I tried to make a go at things. I liked my job and took a lot of pride in being the battalion artist drawing star stencils for jeeps and artistic flyers that went around the offices. Unfortunately, they took it all away from me when the real drafter with a drafting MOS arrived, but I'll say more about this later.

At the same time, I started meeting with Herman Grossman in order to speak German, and I got back into going places on the weekends. Most often by myself but occasionally with a WAC friend who I'd convince that getting out in Germany was the only way to survive the Army. I took weekend trips to Munich, Zurich, the Black Forest, and to that rustic, medieval little town, Rothenburg-Above-the-Tauber. I also got several letters from my Italian love, Giovanni. He kept saying he'd come up for a visit. I felt pretty neat having an Italian boyfriend

and I even bragged about him to my roommates and the other WACs. They seemed impressed but somewhat jealous.

My roommates never quit using drugs, but more and more I didn't care. I just kept to myself and minded my own business. But that was hard to do since everyday WACs are smoking shit in my room, and they never get caught. If nobody else cares why the hell should I. Right? WHO GIVES A FLYING FUCK, ANYWAY??

Julie and Kim started getting into those Mad Dogs, or Mandrix, a common downer around here. I couldn't imagine where all these drugs came from, but people all around the Kaserne keep tripping, smoking, and popping drugs. My roommates are high so often, I don't know how they manage to work. They invade my room slurring words, when on downers, or talking endlessly when on speed or acid.

Shortly after I got transferred, I started chumming around with my roommates and some of their GI friends at the beer hall. I guess if you're stuck living with people, you eventually start feeling like you're friends. Really, I think it all happened because now and then I took a hit of her hashish and got high. The high made us hungry so we went to the beer hall down the road and got something to eat. Eventually I started eating dinner at the beer hall at least twice a week. It was better than going to the mess hall all the time or going to a restaurant in town by myself.

The beer hall is a social place for soldiers at Cambrai-Fritch Kaserne. It's a large hall with tables, a bar, and slot machines on the wall. An old German couple and their son run the place and everyone likes to hang out there during off duty hours. A few German ladies hang out to meet the GI's. Soon enough I hung out with the beer hall crowd which included Tom Baines and the people he partied with. The same ones I'd met when I was going out with him. There were some new faces too.



Before I knew it, I got engaged to this guy from Mesquite, Texas. All the fuck-ups in the barracks call him Bummer because that's what he kept saying about everything. He is a cool, fairly good-looking, kind of beefy guy, and he's funny and only eighteen. Well, Bummer and I hit it off after one night, when I got caught in a brawl at the beer hall, like in the Western movies. Before I knew what happened, guys started bashing each other around and throwing chairs. When I jumped from my table to avoid getting hit, Bummer knocked into me and we both crashed to the floor. He helped me up and brushed me off, then went back into the fight until the owner broke it up with the threat of calling the MP's.

Bummer caught up to me as I was returning to the barracks. He sweetly apologized then offered me a cigarette and we smoked and rapped about what a drag it was to live in the barracks.

I liked the way he showed me attention that night and how he came after me. It was romantic. I also liked the fact that he's a tough guy, though he's messed up, which is why he and my roommates are such good friends. Bummer likes to drink and party, and he's lots of fun. He's about 5'10" with curly black hair, a thick moustache, and dark brown eyes. He's also got this long scar down his cheek which he said was a knife wound. Bummer's pretty wild.

About the time I started hanging around with Bummer, the new draftsman came and replaced me. This was a real blow since I enjoyed that job. I ended up working on the other side of the partition as an ordinary secretary typing and filing for the lifers. Boring stuff. I felt bad and lost any pride about my work. This is partly why I began going to the beer hall and spending more time with Bummer and his “pees” and smoking more shit, even in my room.

Bummer and I started going together and he quit screwing around with Julie. We’d walk into town and around the post, and we’d drink a bottle of wine in the woods, alone. I’m not sure why I liked him. I didn’t fall in love. He just became my guy to hang around with. Maybe I ended up going with him because he’s so laid back and funny, and even if he’s not trying to be funny, the things he says make me laugh, including the sad things. He’s Catholic and he gave me this St. Christopher medal to wear.

Part of what initially attracted me to Bummer, was that I pitied him. He’s had a difficult background. When Bummer was ten his father was shot and killed in a tavern and then his mother died and he ended up living with cousins and foster families. He joined the Army to get away. But he hates the Army and isn’t doing too well since he doesn’t have the drive to do much more than get fucked up.

Things started to go bad for me after I lost my job and started hanging around Bummer. It began on a Friday night, when I was pulling CQ. Bummer called me around eleven o’clock from the main CQ desk to say he had to see me right away. He came up to the WAC floor landing. He was feeling guilty about something. I knew he’d been partying over at Steve and Debbie’s and I was surprised he had come back to the barracks. He snuggled up to me and said, “I’ve been raped.”

“What?”

“Yeah. I’ve been raped and I had to come back and tell you. I’m sorry it happened. But it wasn’t my fault.”

I asked him what the hell he was talking about. As it turned out, that bitch Kim Southerland seduced Bummer to prove he didn’t love me. So, what, I thought. I didn’t care about that fucking whore or who the fuck fucked who. No. That cheap Kim deliberately got Bummer into bed, but Bummer felt bad and came back to tell me this. It’s all so ridiculous.

I was glad Bummer cared enough to explain Kim’s dirty trick. I forgave him and said I understood the situation. Then he talked me into sneaking from my post and walking to town to get something to eat. He was feeling like he needed to make it up to me. I guess I felt like the personal stuff was more important than pulling my Army CQ bullshit. Besides, nobody would miss me because everyone was either in bed or away for the weekend, since it was a Friday night. But I had to sneak past the main GI CQ on the second floor and to do so Bummer and I figured out this plan. While I got into my civvies, Bummer would go down and tell the CQ someone had thrown a rock at his window. When the CQ went to investigate, I’d sneak out.

The scheme worked beautifully. Bummer met me outside the front gate, and we walked all the way into town since it was a nice evening and the stars were out. We went to a disco and had some munchies and beer, but we didn’t dance.

It was later that very night, while Bummer and I were walking through the park on our way back to the Kaserne, that I thought of Gary’s idea about getting married in order to get more pay so you could save money while living off post. I told Bummer this, and he suggested that we get married and “get over on” the Army. “We could live away from that flea bitten barracks and get into Germany and travel and so on.”

Bummer wasn't keen on the idea of traveling, but he liked the idea of living off post and he began talking about how he could get a stereo system and have parties. I wasn't quite sure what Bummer pictured, but I saw us as being independent if we lived together. I'd travel alone and sometimes he could come along if he wanted to, or he could do what he liked as long as he didn't get too wild. I knew I could never seriously plan a life together with Bummer. That's absurd. I mean, he's fun to hang around with, but he's a loser.

By the time we got back to the barracks, we were dead serious about the idea of getting married. But guess what? When Bummer went ahead to distract the main CQ, it didn't work. And I got in deep trouble for leaving my post.

A few days later, they gave me an article 15. It stated: "It was reported that you were, without authority, absent from your appointed place of duty at which you were required to be, to wit: WAC CQ duty for HHC 32nd A Com Battalion. This is in violation of Article 86, UCMJ 1969." My punishment for the misconduct was reduction in rank from PFC to E-2 and forfeiture in pay of \$75.00 a month.

I actually celebrated getting my first article 15, like it was a badge of honor. Bummer, Hernandez, Tom, John, and Julie already had at least two each, so when I got mine it was, in a way, it was like getting initiated into the "FTA (Fuck the Army) Club." It was a big joke and I drank lots of beers at the beer hall, in celebration, but I didn't feel entirely good about what had happened. After all, I was really messing up and getting penalized for it. Something deep inside regretted this, though I acted proud with the gang and I partied hard.

Oh yeah, as soon as I ran into that bitch Kim Southerland, after she pulled her little seduction stunt on Bummer, she said to me, straight forward, "Teri, Bummer doesn't really love you or he wouldn't have slept with me."

I didn't get mad when she said this. In fact, if she hadn't brought it up I don't think I was even going to bother saying anything about it. I felt Bummer and I had an understanding between us, and that was good enough. What he and Kim had done was their business and I just didn't care. But when Kim brought it up, I just saw her as a pathetic little slut, and I said, "Kim, forget about it. Bummer and I already talked about your little love affair. It doesn't affect me in the slightest." I meant what I said and Kim couldn't say anything back since her whole point was to bother me.

The idea of getting married got out of hand. I sent home for my birth certificate, which I needed in order to get married. Of course, I didn't explain what I was doing to my parents. I just said I needed it for Army stuff. I figured I'd marry and get divorced before I left Germany and my parents would never know the difference. It was better that way.

What really sucks is that my parents want to fly over here and have me show them around. No Way! I can't have my parents come over here while I'm living in such a mess, especially if I marry Bummer. For this reason, I rarely write them anymore and when I do, I've avoided the topic of their coming over—hoping they'll drop it.

Don't ask me why, but like an idiot I started making plans for a wedding at the beer hall. I'd wear blue jeans, and have primroses and pansies in my hair and Jim would be Bummer's best man and this WAC friend would be my maid-of-honor. In addition, Bummer kept getting wild with his pees about the whole idea of his getting married—like he was having a stag party every night. I worried Bummer was taking it all too seriously. My simple idea turned into an ordeal. I got scared. And confused! I wanted to save money and move off post, and marriage was a way to do this, but I hardly wanted a big deal wedding. But there I was, planning it. Like a fool.

Fortunately, before I went totally insane, Headquarters Company went on a maneuver and I got away from Bummer, the FTA gang, and the wedding plans.

This time my week in the woods was OK, considering it was warm and bright instead of cold, wet, and muddy. I still had to pull all-nighter shifts—smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee for hours on end and I had to listen to that typical bullshit sexism and GI horniness talk. However, this time, though I wanted to get the hell away from drug using low lifers, but I drew them to me like flies. By this field maneuver, I had A REPUTATION. I was one of the messed-up WACs.

Everyone knew I hung out at the beer hall, along with Bummer and his pees. So, when I'd be off alone, on my way to the WAC outhouse or to the mess tent, some fucking GI would come up and ask if I wanted to smoke some shit or snort some coke, etc. I had to avoid people. Lots of time I ended up skipping lunch in the mess tent and eating C-rations in the WAC tent. I went to the medic van for some aspirin. The medic, a Spec 4 who's one of the cool guys that hangs out at the beer hall, gave me a handful of Mad Dogs. I didn't even ask for them, he just assumed I'd want the stuff, that I was hip. And he smiled and didn't say a word when he gave me the pills, like it was really far out that he could hand out pills because he was a medic.

I put those pills in my pocket and figured I'd hand them over to Bummer as a gift. At the time, it never occurred to me to report that the medic or those GI's were bugging me. That would be narsing. Besides, after the incident with Top, I didn't trust any NCO or officer. They all wanted to get in my pants. And doing drugs is happening everywhere on the Kaserne and in the field. It's a part of the Army, or so it seems to me—a lowly peon at the bottom of the military heap.

On occasion, I was able to sneak off to a hill overlooking the wooded valley and think about the terrible mess back at the Kaserne. Was I going to marry a loser for practical reasons? And if so, could I possibly pull off such a sham?

I also wrote a few of poems while I sat on the hillside. The setting was inspiring and poems popped into my head, line by line.

Fragments of Feelings

I thought I once knew

Emotions caught up with the times

Periodically thinking of what I must do

Leaving old memories behind

Will I continue this broken up pace

Will things become easy and smooth

Will it all happen this time, this place

Or must I continue to move

Fragments of feelings

I know I once had

Locked up in a past here today

I can feel it coming, a time to be glad

And a beautiful lifetime to play.

I'm not what I was

I'm not what I'd like to be

I'm not what I will be

I am what I am.

You are you

And he is he

She is she

And I am me

We are we so let it be

I am what I am
I'm not what you offer me
I'm not what you want to see
If what I am don't worry me
Then I am what I am.
When I am me I want to shout,
My feelings win all others out!
I must agree along with me,
I am who I am.

I shared my poem, "I am what I am" with a strac WAC in my tent, Spec 4 Cindy Taylor. I like Cindy and she said she was surprised that I could write a decent poem. I'm sure she meant it. The thing is, she knew about my marrying Bummer and about my hanging around with that FTA crowd. She probably thought I was a loser though she's always been sweet to me. That's just her nature.

I told her I'd been thinking about God and the mess I got myself into. She's pretty religious and brought her Bible into the field. I prayed that God would make me believe in him and help me out of the quagmire I was stuck in.

That Sunday morning, I joined Cindy at the church service in the mess tent. The minister was a Protestant sergeant. After his sermon he had us put our heads on the tables, and he prayed. When he was done praying he said something like, "I know a lot of challenges and obstacles come with being a good soldier. If there's anyone here who is unsure of the Lord's salvation, who yearns to know the truth and the comfort of the ever loving, Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, let him raise his hand."

I felt sure that the minister's request was tailored for me. I even wondered if Cindy had told him about my situation. I raised my hand believing this minister would help me out

somehow. But nothing ever came of it. No minister, chaplain, or chaplain's aid, ever came to see me and I felt let down. I had raised my hand, like a stupid first grader, and for nothing. All that happened was I returned to the Kaserne and to the same old bull.

After I got back from maneuver, Bummer called me and we met on the second-floor landing. He acted like he was glad to see me. But I wasn't thrilled to see him and I think he sensed this. I didn't want to smoke any shit, so we walked around the Kaserne and he talked about getting married. I tried to put him off by saying my birth certificate hadn't arrived, though it had. I also said I changed my mind about having a wedding. I didn't tell him I didn't want to get married since I wasn't sure. No sense in burning bridges. I wanted to live off base and save money. I tried to have a serious talk with Bummer and I mentioned having ideals and goals, but he couldn't follow me. At one point he said, "Oh, I get it, man. I'm stepping on your space."

"No. That's not it. I don't know. I just hate the situation I'm in. Let's take it slowly about this marriage thing." He agreed, but acted hurt, kind of dense about the matter. Bummer hasn't a clue about who I am or what it means to want to be somebody or to get somewhere in life. Take for example the time I wanted to show him this wooden clock I was working on at the Kaserne arts and crafts center. When I asked him to come and see it, he said he was tired and would look at it later. I almost begged him to go and see it because, at that very moment, I needed him to be interested in seeing something I was doing. He kept saying he was too tired. I knew he wasn't interested in seeing a dumb old clock. In fact, I knew he'd never come to see it. This made me feel empty inside. Terribly alone. It's frustrating to be with someone who makes you feel this way. After Bummer and I finished our talk and I left him on the stairwell landing up to the WAC quarters, I felt emptier and alone than ever before. I was a prisoner in my own life.

Now, if that weren't enough. Get a load of this crap. As soon as I turned down the hall to my room, I ran into that slut Kim Southerland and she said to me, "Hey, Teri. Bummer told me he'd marry anyone just to move off post."

I could not believe it. I stared at that runty little bitch. There she was, trying to hurt me and she couldn't do it because I was at rock bottom and I didn't care about anything. Especially Bummer. I merely looked at her thinking, What a pathetic little fool. I suddenly felt so tired of her putrid face that I pushed her and told her, slowly and clearly, to FUCK OFF.

Then she said, "Fuck you, Teri."

Well, I went absolutely berserk and pushed her again and said, "Keep your fucking little nose out of my business you slut!" My push knocked her on the floor. She looked astonished. She could hardly believe that I stood up to her, at last. I could hardly believe it either. I guess I'd reached the point where I wasn't a wimp anymore. I'd gotten tough.

"God Teri," she said as she got off the floor. "I was just telling you what Bummer told me."

"Oh, fuck off Kim. Just fuck off. I'm so sick of you," I screamed uncontrollably and then pushed her again and again and again. She didn't even fight back.

Unfortunately, the WAC CQ, who was that strac gal Carla, came running down the hallway and pulled me from Kim. At first Carla was going to write me up, but then she said she might not and that she'd think about it.

To avoid getting into trouble with another article 15, if Carla did report me, I went to see the Command Sergeant Major. What happened was, the day after the fight, I ran into him at the front entrance to headquarters building and I asked if I could talk privately with him. I was

breaking the chain of command but I'd already decided that the hierarchy didn't work in my case and I had to get to the top on my own in order to be noticed.

I believe the Command Sergeant Major sensed I was feeling pretty low because he said I could come in his office at that very moment. After I was seated before his desk, I started crying. I think he was bothered with us WACs troubling him because he started to sound angry when he asked me, "What do you want?" and I said, "I don't know."

"Look here, private," he replied. "How can I help you if you don't help me. What's the problem?"

In the end, I couldn't think of anything to say except that I needed someone to talk to. An authority figure or something. Then he suggested that what I probably needed counseling. "Would you like to see a psychiatrist?" he asked and I said that sounded like a good idea.

Within a week, the Command Sergeant Major arranged for me to see this Army shrink in the Manheim hospital. I was looking forward to the visit, believing the psychiatrist could help me deal with my problems. But I was in store for a major let down. The shrink turned out to be this scrawny looking major who had me take several silly tests. For the last test he gave me three black and white pictures and told me to write a story about each one. Then he left the room. One picture was of these three people standing in the wind beside a wheat field. Two people were women in 1930 dresses flapping in the breeze, and one was a guy in farm overalls. I liked this picture and I wrote that the guy was the youngest brother of a five-brother family and the two women were rival sisters-in-law trying to take over the farm. This young brother was madly in love with both of these women and was going to murder his four brothers and parents, and marry the two women.

That stupid shrink wasted my time because he never talked about my stories, or the serious issues surrounding my life. Instead, he set up another appointment for a month away and wrote a prescription for Librium pills and told me to take one whenever I needed to calm my nerves.

I returned to the same old shit back at KFK, feeling even more depressed than I had in High School, and that was a severely depressing time for me. I didn't want to study any more. I didn't read anything. I couldn't. All I could do was go to work and lumber through my tasks, eat, then lay in bed every evening. I avoided Bummer and everyone else.

About a week after I saw the psychiatrist, I took all my green Librium pills because one only made me feel slightly relaxed. Then from my locker I took out the Mad Dog pills that the medic gave me. I had stuffed them in one of my socks. I had simply hung on to them. I was beginning to feel a pretty good buzz from the Librium, when I took the Mad Dog pills in my hand. I of course didn't really want to kill myself. But at the same time, I did. I was that miserable. Nobody cared. I couldn't get myself out of the slump. I hated my life. Just like I hated my life during high school. But now I felt worse. And I knew the pills would work better than dozens of aspirin, which is what I took when I tried killing myself senior year.

I looked at the Mad Dogs for a long while. I was buzzing pretty high, and feeling wonderfully relaxed, and I wanted to take the Mad Dogs and Painlessly drift away. At the same time a voice deep inside said NO. And I was scared. What if I really succeeded? Then, everything happened slowly. I had the taste of aspirin in my cotton mouth, my lips and tongue felt thick and numb, and sound was like silence in an echo chamber. Sound was held in the air. I remembered hearing a siren, then I woke up in the hospital. It wasn't until after I got back from

the hospital, that Kim explained that she and Julie came in the room and found me on my bed slurring and drooling. They noticed the bottle of Librium laying empty on the floor beside me.

Nobody came to visit me during the six days I spent recovering from a drug overdose. An OD. OD Green. OD Drugs! Did I tried to kill myself?

I had a hell of a time getting out of that damn place. I was so weak from the overdose that when I took the out-processing sheet around for officers, doctors, administrators, and nurses to sign, I eventually forged some of the signatures. But I got caught and a WAC colonel, the hospital administrator, called me in her office and said I had committed an offense punishable with an article 15.

Oh Jesus, I thought, as I listened to her anger toward me. Everything's going bad, so bad, in fact, I almost killed myself. I confessed to that colonel that I had nothing but trouble since I came to Germany, and that I forged the signatures because I was dazed. The colonel took me seriously and changed her disposition. She said stuff like—because I was a woman soldier I had to try harder than the guys to prove myself, to make it in a man's world. I quietly listened to her lecture, relieved she wasn't angry and ready to punish me. I didn't want any more crap falling on me.

This brings me to where I am now. Back at my desk, in this hell hole the day after I was released from the hospital. I almost died. But no one cares. No one knows I tried to kill myself. Just like High School. I never told my parents that I had tried to kill myself. No one gives a flying fuck about me. I'm not even sure I do. That's why I'm going AWOL. What choice do I have? I hate it here! FTA! FTA! I'm trapped in hell. FTA! As I see it, my only choice is to clear out of here while I'm still alive. I'm glad I didn't die. That would have been a horrible waste.

Chapter Six: AWOL to Sitges, Spain



(written in the 1990's)

For ten years I lived in my house in Phoenix. Like all new houses in the foothills of South Mountain, a block wall surrounding our backyard. I never met the neighbors behind us, behind the back wall. But over the years, I heard their baby grow into a child. I heard him cry, learn to talk, and play with other kids. But I never saw him.

What is it about walls? They divide, limit, protect, and are a necessary part of any house. They describe the fears and conditions of a civilization. I have been to the Great Wall of China, one of the few manmade sights astronauts see from Space, or so they say. When communists built the Berlin Wall in 1961, I was in first grade. “Ich bin ein Berliner,” rang President Kennedy’s words of compassion for people suddenly locked behind a wall. In 1989, I watched the Berlin Wall crumbled with jubilant celebration. The Iron Curtain lifted. The Cold War ended. The Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D. C. is a healing wall, etched with names of those killed in action.

Not too long after I was discharged, I wrote this poem. Does it describe me and my family? I think so.

They all stood there, four, no five,

Standing at the wall.

The fifth was me, between five and three

All against the wall.

Only I, as I could see

Had my back facing me.

The other four were faces clear,

Their backs against the wall.

Beyond the wall, shoulder high,

Stretched Unknown to me.

But that was me, that I could see

Facing toward Eternity.

I have many barriers in my mind, phobic walls I cannot surpass. At the same time, I've had no walls, no barriers in my manic bubble phases. Let down the walls, open the gates! My AWOL from the Army was the first of my three manic bubbles. My mind ran away with me, my imagination soared, I believed myself invincible. I was that famous writer, writing about herself. I was a character from the Mitchner novel, *The Drifters*, on a spectacular adventure, escaping a chaotic world.

(written Spring of 1975)



Times are good on the Golden Coast of Spain. I awoke in paradise, where a blue sea stretches before me under golden sunshine. Pure heaven. The wind messes my hair as my bare feet dig in the cool sand. The sun is hot, but I've got on my floppy hat and sunglasses to shield me from ultra violet rays!

Behind me curves a street lined with white three-story buildings with blue shutters and red tile roofs. To my left and right are green rugged mountains plunging to the sea. The sounds of surf and the "kah kah kah" of seagulls is all around. There's something about a seagull running along the surf and soaring high that makes me feel alive. Spain is marvelous.

Lazy Days,
Dreaming in the sun
Of starlit nights and salmon dawns
A doe in graceful run.

Crazy life
Drifting with the breeze
Not to ever worry with society's disease

Funny moods,
Up and then I'm Down

Still I keep on looking for
those things I've never found.

I can't believe I actually did it. I planned the whole thing out and got the hell away from KFK. I bought my month's ration of hard alcohol to sell to the Rads to get about fifty dollars extra cash. And I brought along cartons of Raleigh's, Camel Filters, Marlboro, and Kool Menthol cigarettes to sell and smoke as need be. I decided to head for Spain because of The Drifters. Spain sounds like the place to go. I want to be a drifter now—an individual free from the ropes and chains of social institutions and intrusions.

I've already spent a lot of my money on clothes, beads, a huge cross pendant, a snake ring and a pocket watch. I look hip. I don't wear a bra anymore. Freedom! And I dress in cut offs and my pale blue painter's shirt with the sleeves rolled up and the shirt tails tied around my waist.

I've been on the Golden Coast for about a week. Almost every afternoon I sit on beach and write, or read Faust or Tropic of Cancer by Henry Miller. I always carry around my book by Goethe, but I can only read a few pages at a time. It's intense poetry so my mind wanders. But I'm determined to make it through the story. I find some beautiful words like, "A new day beckons to a newer shore!" or my favorite "A glorious dream! though now the glories fade. Alas! the wings that lift the mind no aid. O wings to lift the body can bequeath me. Yet in each soul is born the pleasure of yearning onward, upward and away, When o'er our heads, lost in the vaulted azure, The lark sends down his flickering lay,— when over crags and piney highlands the poising eagle slowly soars, and over plains and lakes and islands the crane sails by to other shores."

Yesterday I asked this fourteen-year-old Spaniard if he'd take me out on his small sailboat and he agreed if I helped him pull it back on shore. I felt wonderful once we were on the sea, under the sun, bobbing on the waves. The young Spaniard said I should go to Mallorca, an island off the coast, because that's where a lot of hippies hang out. I like the idea and maybe I'll end up there, but for now, I'm having a great time relaxing in Sitges.

As soon as I arrived in Barcelona, I wanted to head straight for Torremolinos, the place in Michener's book. But at the Barcelona train station I met Scott, this big husky American hippie with a reddish beard and curly blond hair. Scott approached me when I was getting off the train and asked where I planned to stay. I told him Torremolinos.

"Torremolinos isn't anything special," he said. "The Golden Coast is the place to go. I'll take you there. On the Magic Bus."

"The Magic Bus?" I asked. I had never heard of it, at that time.

"That's right, babes. The Magic Bus. Like the song by the Who... A ride on the Magic Bus is a Magical Mystery Tour."

As it turned out, Scott recruited passengers for the driver-owner of this Magic Bus. He said it was easy to spot hippies in any crowd, like me, and hippies are the only passengers allowed to ride in the Magic Bus.

The whole idea sounded perfect, so I handed Scott my backpack (I had bought in Darmstadt for my AWOL) and I followed him a few blocks through the commotion of Barcelona. Shortly, we came to this large psychedelic van parked against the curb and met up with three hippies congregated at the back doors. Scott introduced me, and everyone was really friendly and cool. The driver-owner was this skinny tall dude with brown hair to his waist. The

other passengers included this nice-looking tall guy from Amsterdam, Bert, and this short Japanese hippie with a flimsy moustache and beard. Everyone calls him Yamaha.

The Magic Bus was spectacular inside with green shag, from the ceiling to the floor, and the windows were one way so only from the inside could you see out. From the outside you couldn't see in. Every corner had stereo speakers and black lights, and on the carpeted walls hung a bunch of velveteen black light posters of flowers, knights on unicorns, fire breathing dragons, vines creeping over castles, and magic mushrooms. Behind the front seat stood a bar where incense was smoking in brass burners.

I could not believe what luck I had in running across this Magic Bus. As we drove along, Scott fixed me a shot of whiskey and we smoked some of my cigarettes while the stereo pumped out Beatle songs—Magical Mystery Tour—and songs by The Who, and the Moody Blues. It was crazy and got wild when we spun down the narrow roads through rolling hills and along the coast. I swear, the whole trip seemed like I was dreaming it up as it happened.

The Magic Bus dropped us off at the Hotel Costa Dorada, one of those three story buildings behind me. After I settled in my room, the owner, this retired British man, invited me and the other new hippies to his museum like apartment. He showed us all the trinkets he'd collected from around the world when he worked in the British service, and then he offered us a cognac. He was quite friendly. I'm impressed. The hotel is perfect and my room has a terrific view of the sea.

On the same day it dropped us off, the Magic Bus took off for Madrid, but Scott decided to stick around until the bus came back. I sensed he had the hots for me while we were in the Magic Bus. He kept twiddling with my hair and saying how he could show me a good time. I tried to break away from his attention, since I wanted to enjoy myself and not get messed up in a

relationship so quickly. Freedom's in my hands, and a guy toying with me at this point would only spoil it. Especially this big heavy American guy. If I do get together with a guy, I want him to at least be European.

On the first night I got here, Scott invited me out for dinner, but I told him I wanted to go off alone and get to know the town. I said that maybe the next day we'd go out or something. He said it was cool.

Since that night, I've been hanging around with the gang of hippies at the Hotel Costa Dorada. In the evenings we go to the Cantina Paloma, a couple of blocks from the hotel. It's a cozy wooden tavern, dimly lighted with a few old tables marked by cigarette burns and wine spills. A long wicker bar with a rough surface stands at one side, and a dart board in on the back wall. There's also a funky jukebox beside the front door. I'm always drinking red wine and playing El Condor Pasa "I'd rather be a sparrow than a snail." Or the Moody Blues—Nights in White Satin, and New Horizons for to See. These songs make me feel the freedom of who I am, in my new life.

During *Nights in White Satin*, I close my eyes, rest my head on the bar, and picture heroic knights in silver armor on unicorns draped in white satin. I know this isn't what the song's about, but when it plays, I see knights and unicorns on a hill top silhouetted by dusk, it's cold, and the wind blows the white satin.

Yeah, we're a bunch of carefree hippies hanging around the Golden Coast of Spain. It's great. Better than The Drifters, because it's real life.

There's eight of us hippies at the Hotel Costa Dorada, counting Scott and I. I don't know too much about anyone's background. I think most of us are here because we'd prefer to forget our past for all kinds of reasons. Some known. Some mysterious. Really, we only live in the

present, the only way we want to live. Day by day. Moment by moment. Partying all night and sleeping till noon.

The most interesting guy among us is this short American we call Rasputin. He's about forty, and he wears leather sandals and a long brown night shirt tied at the middle with a rope. When Rasputin reaches for something his sleeves pull back and reveal sickly pale skin. Rasputin has this shaggy long brown beard, messy dark brown hair, long finger nails and his right pinkie nail is painted purple. He makes leather belts, wrist bands, and hair clips for a living, but he's loaded most of the time so he hasn't made the belt I asked for. He always carries around a book by Henry Miller. When he enters the cantina, at about nine o'clock every night, he has his book wide open and he dramatically quotes things like, "This is not a book.... NO! This is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art." I told him his quotes impressed me so he lent me a copy of *The Tropic of Cancer*.

The other American in our gang is the Mad Professor. He's at least fifty and he hangs around with the señoritas since he's fluent in Spanish. Every day he wears the same dorky plaid pants and plain blue sleeveless shirt which he probably washes less than once a month. He has messy gray hair but he's clean shaven and handsome, for an old guy. He often talks about *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann and *The Trial* by Franz Kafka. The first few nights I was greatly attracted to the Mad Professor. He seems so intelligent, but I soon realized he was pretty spaced out. I sat with him at a table in the cantina when he wasn't with a Spanish lady, and I asked him to tell me about *The Magic Mountain*. "My friend," he said. "We all live on the Magic Mountain. It's a sanatorium for the sane. We come to visit the dying and find we cannot leave until we ourselves die." The Professor calls me an intellectual amateur experimenting with

various viewpoints like a character on The Magic Mountain. I liked this notion about myself. It's a lot better than being called "Wet behind the ears!"

The Professor likes to talk about total consciousness. "Only one one-hundredth of one percent of the brain's total capacity is being used by mankind," he said. "And only one one-hundredth of that is being used to any sort of good."

"What sort of good might that be?" I asked.

"Why," he said wide eyed, "the pursuit of mind expansion." He comes up with crazy statements, which is why he's a Totally Wired Man. The other reason is because, as Scott told me, the Professor burned himself out on too much LSD in the sixties and underwent a series of shock treatments before he came to Spain.

The other hippies include Maureen from London who's a heroin addict but is trying to kick the habit, which is why she came down here. There's also this cute Danish guy, Christian, who's thin, about twenty, and who has a sweet baby face. I like him a lot, but he doesn't seem to like me. Scott still likes me and keeps trying to hit on me, coming into my room at night, just like I go to the room of the Danish guy. It's rather comical. The guy who wants me I don't want and the guy I want doesn't want me—not even to sleep with. I find this strange because I assumed all men would sleep with you if you offered yourself to them. But this isn't the case with that Danish guy.

The other two hippies are the passengers from the Magic Bus, Bert from Amsterdam and Yamaha from Japan. Bert occasionally hangs around the Cantina Paloma, but shortly after he arrived he met this lady driving a Mercedes Benz convertible. I might have gone for Bert, but since he met that rich lady he only has her on his mind. Yamaha hangs around with us. A few times he's tried to hit on me, put his arm around me and all. But I'm sure. He's short and goofy

and I'd go for Scott before Yamaha. But he's fun and he has no inhibitions. Lots of times, in the late afternoon, we go to the beach or to a villa boarded up while the owners are in northern Europe, and we drink a huge jug of wine and eat bread, cheese, and grapes. During these picnics, Yamaha will grab the jug of wine with his bare feet and roll back on the ground and try to aim the wine in his mouth, like a Spanish Parron. He seldom gets it in his mouth, but he keeps trying and we all laugh and get drunk and have fun.

I love these people and everything is going well. I'm glad I'm not tied down to anyone so I can sit alone on the beach and write or read Goethe and Henry Miller. I'm a free spirit living in the here and now. Before me stretches nothing but new horizons and a new day's dawning. I might not always know what I'm after, but I know I must be free from society's diseases. Like in the song from Tommy by the Who, I want to shout and sing, at this very minute, "I'm Free—I'M FREE, and freedom tastes of reality... I'm free—I'm free, And I'm waiting for you to follow me."

I'm on the train heading back to Cambrai-Fritch Kaserne. I've timed it so I'll show up during the Colonel's inspection. This should make a big splash. I can picture it. The crazy drifter, the first WAC at KFK to ever go AWOL, returns and spoils the battalion inspection. I'll look bold, courageous, and soon enough, I'll be set free from that drug infested slum.

You see, I met an older, extremely intelligent man from England, a genius, and because of him, and my own instincts, I've decided to go back and face the music. Sometimes I wonder what was in my head when I decided to go AWOL, except maybe I always knew I'd return before I became a deserter. One thing's for sure, I hope this AWOL will get me out of the Army. I'm sure it will, though it may be a matter of time.

Martin wore slacks, loafers, and a white long-sleeved shirt with the cuffs rolled up, and he was clean shaven. He wasn't totally wired like the Mad Professor. We met in the Cantina Paloma a few evenings ago. Maureen, Yamaha, Scott and I were sitting at the bar, and I was listening to Nights in White Satin when Martin walked in and sat on the stool next to me. He bought everyone a drink and introduced himself as a scientist. He sort of bragged, but not offensively. Maybe we were so wasted we didn't notice it as bragging. He claimed he could speak seven languages and he proved he could speak at least six. He spoke Japanese with Yamaha, Spanish and Italian with the bartender and the Professor, and he spoke German and French much better than me, and he claimed to speak Russian but nobody was around to confirm this. But I believe he can. When I asked him what kind of scientist he was, he claimed to be an inventor. The Mad Professor, who was sitting in the corner of the room with Rasputin and two senoritas, asked him to answer a few equations. Amazingly, Martin knew the answers off the top of his head.

Scott asked Martin questions like, "How old is the earth?" and "How far is the farthest object in the universe?" Martin had a snappy answer for each question and the Mad Professor said his answers were correct. Martin kept amusing everyone with his intelligence, but I could tell he was mostly interested in me. He asked me about myself. I said I was a carefree individual enjoying new found freedom.

He smiled, then turned to Scott, "Got any more questions? Go ahead. Ask me anything."

Scott sat back a bit and a question seemed to hit him. "OK Martin," he said. "Where's the center of the universe?"

"Inside your skull," Martin replied, without a moment's hesitation.

This wiped everyone out, we were so impressed. I kept thinking how simple Martin's answer had been, and how Martin had said it so immediately. When I think about it now, it's really the only answer to an unanswerable question. Nobody can prove where the center of the universe is, so there is no provable answer to the question. This means that the answer depends on the individual. For example, if you think the universe is centered on God, that's inside your skull. If you think it has nothing to do with God, that too is in your mind. So, no matter what you come up with concerning centers to the universe, it's an individual opinion. That's genius!

The moment Martin had answered Scott's question I fell madly in love with him. I felt I'd go anywhere with him to hear him talk. It was wonderful to meet someone like that. Someone mature, wise, intelligent and not totally wired.

Anyway, after a few more drinks, Scott said to everyone in the Cantina, "Let's go skinny dipping."

I looked at Martin, wondering if he'd go along with this. He leaned over to me and whispered, "I want to be alone with you." Chills ran down my back.

So, the others left me and Martin at the bar. We smoked cigarettes and discussed scientific things like evolution and the solar system. I was so happy being with Martin. Such a cool dude, a genius, and a drifter like me. We left the bar and walked to the beach where everyone was skinny dipping but we didn't join them. Instead, we sat on the sand and he held my hand. It was neat to be together like that, feeling the warm breeze, and facing the night time horizon of the sea.

He told me to be quiet a moment and listen to the surf. I did and started to hear the others playing around. Soon I got into the rhythm of the waves coming ashore and I began counting the different sounds I detected.

Martin's maturity made me feel comfortable, though I must admit, the silence made me kind of uneasy. I guess I wondered what to say, when he was silent. Because of this, I was really relieved when he got around to bragging again and asking me to ask him more questions. It was hard to know where to begin, but I ended up asking him whether the world changes as I change or whether I change because the world's changing.

He liked this question and laughed and kissed me on the forehead. Then he said the nature of the universe is "change" but I couldn't follow what else he said. Eventually, he asked if he had answered my question and I said sort of, but I wasn't sure. So, he concluded something like this, "The world always changes, T, and you change as you learn more about the world around you. As you change, how you see the world changes. And... as the voices of the world change, you change, if you have any mind at all. And you do, T. I knew this about you when I noticed you reading Goethe." I had been carrying that book around with me everywhere I went, as a trademark, like my jewelry, my hat, or like Rasputin carries Henry Miller.

At one point, I asked Martin if he took drugs and I was surprised when he said he did. I figured since he was older and wasn't a Totally Wired Man, he probably didn't. When I asked him why he said, "Because I look for altered states of consciousness." This made me laugh since it sounded just like what the Professor had said. But a lot of scientists are experimenting with altered states of consciousness. Like Timothy Leary.

I admitted to my experiences with drugs. "Sometimes," I explained, "it's like you're a shell on the outside but inside, there's an army fighting to gain control. Sort of a hierarchy. If it's pot then only one soldier takes charge but if it's a stronger drug, like LSD, more and more troops appear to control the situation."

“But think beyond this,” he said. “What do you learn from your altered state of consciousness? Does your reality expand? Do you ever realize that you are God?”

I told him that I think about God and wish I could believe in him, but I never went so far as to see myself as God. He didn’t respond and I listened to the surf and the distant voices of my friends. One by one I heard them laugh or call out in fun. Soon, I imagined voices of drowned people, calling from the sea. Calling me to join them in the sea of night time dreams. I became spooked, then I suddenly thought about being AWOL. I started crying. I wasn’t a free spirit. I was nothing but a fucked-up individual on the run.

Martin put his arm around me and asked what was wrong. I told him about the AWOL, the terrible time I’d been having in the Army, and that I wasn’t sure why I went AWOL. I explained that it sometimes seems like you step into something and before you realize it, you’re way over your head. The reality hits you in a clear moment because you avoid thinking about it otherwise. But when that clear moment slips through, you get scared because you see the quagmire you’re in. And you realize you’re getting nowhere except deeper and deeper into trouble. “And now I’m AWOL. How did I get so messed up?”

He held me tighter, trying to make me feel safe, but I felt horribly alone. “All you got to do is face this and once you do that, you’ll be all right for the rest of your life. I’m talking from experience. If you flee once and don’t face your troubles, you’ll be running forever.” When he said this, I wondered if he had left his wife and family.

Martin took me back to the hotel but didn’t come to my room like I thought he would. Instead, he said good-bye in the lobby and kissed me on the forehead. Maybe something was wrong and he couldn’t have sex. He was a fifty-year old man, older than my own dad, and he was such a genius. He simply had to have some kind of interesting background. But he never

told me what it was, and the people who end up on the Golden Coast of Spain, rarely talk about their past.

Dear Teri,

Sorry I haven't written for several weeks but I was getting a little upset with you for never writing home. We do want to know how you are doing. No matter what it is. I'm not very pleased with your little escapade (AWOL). We did receive a letter from your commanding officer telling us about it. Please, don't do anything stupid like that again. It can ruin your chances for a good job and any benefits like your education that you have been working for. We all get fed up with what we are doing. I hate my job at times, and wish I were somewhere else—can't really say I enjoy it—but I know that the benefits I will receive in the end are worth working for. You'll discover all through life that things are upsetting—but if we do our best we will come out OK in the end. So just hang in there and do a good job and no more foolishness. Ten months will go by fast and you'll have the rest of your life ahead of you.

Don't forget to write. Behave yourself. We love you and only want you to be happy.

Love, Mom and Dad

It's been two weeks since I got back from my AWOL. Two weeks of being fucked with and getting fucked up. I'm on a window sill in the large bay room on the WAC floor, where I now live. I like sitting here, like a little bird. Free to fly at the drop of a feather. A feather that'll blow in the breeze and land who knows where. WHO KNOWS WHERE? The heat of summer smothers the air, but the view offers me openness—the park below is green and the sky is bright

blue. Everywhere, birds are singing cheerfully. What is it with birds? Why are they always so goddamn happy?

It was weird getting back during the Colonel's inspection, though it turned out to be no big deal. I didn't make a big splash! I just got in trouble! The halls throughout Headquarters echoed emptiness. Everyone was in their rooms, strac and prepared for the inspection. I boldly walked in wearing my painter's shirt, tails out, my blue jeans, and a leather strip around my hair. The CQ took me straight to the orderly room and I waited about an hour to see Captain Ferguson, the commanding officer of Headquarters Company. I wasn't afraid to face him at that time for I had the courage of a bold AWOL behind me. I felt so confident he would take one look at me and make arrangements for my discharge. Don't get me wrong, I knew I was in for beaucoup trouble but I thought it would be worthwhile since I'd be getting out of the Army.

But all my courage drained away, when I stood before Ferguson's desk, looking like a hippie, he said to me with a lot of annoyance, "What is your problem soldier?"

"Sir," I said, and took a breath to regain my courage. I knew at any second I'd start crying if I didn't take it slowly. "I want out of the United States Army, Sir."

"Stand at attention," he yelled because I was standing casually, like a civilian which is what I felt like. Besides, I figured that since I was dressed the way I was, standing at attention would be inappropriate. But when Ferguson shouted that order, I snapped to attention. I was terrified. I felt like a fool when he said, sarcastically, "Private, you can't get out of the United States Army because you want to. This isn't a country club, little lady. You're in deep trouble, but you're not getting out."

I was stunned. I felt worse than I had ever felt as a child getting scolded. My chin dropped, but I wasn't a child anymore, and this wasn't my mother punishing me for throwing a

tantrum. This was real life and I had committed an offense against the Army. And I had no more courage, no more boldness, no more ideals. I was nothing but a low life and I hated myself more than I hated the Army. I felt so bad, I couldn't even think of explaining why I had gone AWOL in the first place. My free spirit sense was gone. I was a maggot, petrified at attention, while tears rolled down my cheeks, one by one.

The WAC sergeants in charge of the WACs barracks, had taken my trunk and sorted through it. Removing some of the military stuff I had collected, such as "Top Secret" cover sheets or SOP booklets. They inventoried all my belongings and stored my trunk away. I didn't have a room to return to. But this was OK since I didn't want to move back in with Julie and Kim.

Now I have a bunk in the large bay along with ten of the new WACs. I don't mind, but it's a little like being a holdover among the zero weekers. Mostly, I keep to myself though I've gotten back together with Bummer, as a friend. We don't speak about getting married. That was dropped without discussion. We drink together at the beer hall—only me, Bummer, his pees and maybe one or two other dudes. Never with Julie or Kim.

Julie's doing heroin now with this new boyfriend, which is one thing I haven't done. I've popped pills and smoked shit, but I haven't shot up and I never will. That's too hard core. But I must admit, now that Julie's doing it, she's more mellow. When she and her old man are high on skag, and they're always high together, they sit around the Kaserne with glossed over eyes and stupid grins that say they're not bothered by anything.

Because of my AWOL, I lost my secret clearance. In my debriefing, I was told that anything I had learned that was classified secret was to remain secret. Surprisingly, they didn't court martial me since my AWOL wasn't that serious, as it turned out. They only court martial

for crimes, such as this dude in Headquarters Company who got caught with a stolen M16 riffle in his personal stuff. Desertion is a court martial offence, but an AWOL (being away for less than a month) is just another article 15 no different from the one I got for leaving my CQ post. Since I didn't mind that first article, the second one's another trophy under the belt. A Purple Heart.

My punishment has been demotion to the lowest rank, PV1, a private without patches. I got a forfeiture of \$50.00 per month for two months. If I continue to screw up they can't reduce me anymore but they can contain me to the billets, like a prisoner, or make me pull some retarded duty, or forfeit more of my insignificant pay. But I don't care.

The worst thing now is that Lifers look down on me and accuse me of stuff I'm not even doing. They HATE my guts and treat me like the enemy. They can't stand me for disrespecting their big MF ARMY. Once you're marked as a total fuck-up then you become the ideal scapegoat. They assume I'm stoned, though I not. Master Sergeant Anderson, the head of my unit, was so surprised by my AWOL that he waited two days before reporting me as missing from the morning's formation. This surprised me. I figured it was obvious that things were going bad for me. I had been in the hospital for an overdose. But evidently, people in my unit saw me as an average WAC, and not as a messed up one. Anyway, Master Sergeant Anderson assumed I was sick or something because he couldn't believe I would do something as "stupid" as going AWOL. Now he absolutely hates me. He called me to his office to tell me all this and then advised me to "screw my head on straight," because if I didn't he would see to it that I left the Army without a cent to my name. He talks to me like I don't have feelings. But I do. Even though I'm trying not to care.

And there's this Spec 4 Walton in my unit who suggested I was OK but sometimes I get a wild hair up my ass. But what right does he have to suggest anything to me. I mean, he even came on to me before I went AWOL, and before his wife arrived. Jerk. All these jerks wanting to fuck fuck fuck—and it's me they love to fuck with. Spec 5 Cray, one of the old-timer WACs, said to me, "Teri, how could you do such a crazy thing? I can hardly believe it of you." I wonder. What do all these people think?

The worst asshole has been Staff Sergeant Schneider. He loves to hate me. I see it in his eyes. When I go to the mess hall, he accuses me of not having a mess card and having separate rations. This isn't true. But Schneider hardly cares when I produced my mess card. He walks away after saying he's watching me so I'd better not try to pull anything. And there was this one time, when I went on sick call to have a checkup. Well, Schneider tells captain Ferguson that I'm pregnant and Ferguson calls me into his office. I had no idea what Ferguson wanted when I stood at attention before his desk until he said, "Sergeant Schneider reports that you're pregnant. I want you to tell me about it, so I can arrange your discharge."

"Pregnant?" I said, really shocked. "Sir, I went to have an exam, that's all. I'm not pregnant." Captain Ferguson turned red, and rightly so. He apologized and I left his office. The incident made me realize how everyone views me. They want to see me as a slut. Out of control. An object to despise because they've lost control over me. I tell you; this was only the beginning. That Schneider keeps accusing me of sneaking onto the men's floor and sleeping with the guys. And I never have. It's these other WACs who do this all the time, Julie and Kim, for example. But you see, Schneider caught them once and as he came out of the men's floor, he saw me coming down the stairwell and claimed that he caught me on my way to the men's floor. I was

mad about this accusation. But I felt helpless. Nobody would believe me over Master Sergeant Schneider so I didn't fight to put him in his place.

No. Ever since my AWOL I get wrongly accused all the time. And more and more of these GI's come on to me. Various enlisted guys say they want to smoke hashish with me. Many of them are married guys, living off post, or guys waiting for their wives to come. They flirt with me and assume I'm an easy target for sex. One married guy even offered me \$50.00, like I'm a prostitute. I could not believe it and I told him to go straight to hell. He just laughed. And his wife is one of the real nice WACs who's been here longer than me.

Well, that's all I have to say now. The main CQ is hollering from the street below that I get off the window sill. He doesn't like it when I sit here. Probably thinks I'll commit suicide or something. Or maybe he thinks my sitting here spoils the uniformity of the barracks. I'm not in the SOP's.... "A little Bird, with a yellow bill, was perched upon, my window sill..."

I haven't written for a while, but a lot keeps happening, and still, I'm not getting discharged. I got back from my counseling session with Spec 5 Bowers. Kim, Julie, Bummer, and a bunch of the other trouble makers were put in this drug counseling session as a new step toward cleaning up the place.

Things have been getting worse for me and I've been smoking hash and doing a lot of shamming (avoiding work) which is why Ferguson ordered me to attend this counseling session twice a week. Bowers, the counselor, is a real dork. A fake Army psychologist. He asks me what I do and I say, "shamming now and then, I go on sick call to avoid people. Why go to work when everyone messes with me?"

During the sessions he writes down everything I say, like maybe they'll use it against me some time. Who knows? Today we talked about why I went AWOL to Spain. I told him about Michner's book and I showed him the jewelry I'd bought there. He asked which piece I liked best and I said my pocket watch because of its outer etchings. One side is of a doe tenderly bathing her fawn and the other side is of a woman kissing a dove. I said they represent peace and love. Bowers asked me if I was looking for peace and love. I said I didn't know but by saying the words, I felt them.

I'm fucked up now. HIGH on some Mad Dogs I copped from Bummer. I'm bound to get out as long as I keep shamming.

So, I'm back to hanging around Bummer and all the other fuck-ups. It's easier that way. Safer for me and for those I'm with. Bummer's getting out in a few weeks because his "piss test" came up positive. We hang out together because time here is drawing to an end. He's short!

I think it must be kind of scary for Bummer, even though he doesn't say anything personal to me. He only talks about how he'll be getting fucked up as much as possible when he gets back to the world. And he says stuff like, "Yep. Pretty fucked up now."; "Can't wait to get the fuck out of this hell hole, man."; "Copped a pretty good buzz."; "Having a bitchen time." This is about as deep as he ever gets. But when you actually get your early discharge for being a fuck-up, you know the Army's setting you free and you'll have to be responsible for yourself. Bummer's excited about getting out, but if he thought about what he might end up doing back home, then he'd probably get scared. Maybe that's the thing about living only in the present. It gets scary looking back or ahead and it's easier to avoid the whole thing and not think about it.

There's several categories of people in the Army. First you got the top brass—those majors, colonels and generals who run battalions, divisions, and brigades. Then you got the regular brass—the captains and lieutenants who run the companies. But you never socialize with the brass. That's fraternization. Next come the NCO lifers who can all be lumped together in one category. But the enlisted personnel—the privates and Spec 4's, both WACs and GI's—form several groups. You got the cool people who love to get fucked up and party, and you got the really wasted guys who are obviously shooting up skag. There's also the OK but not so cool guys who listen to Neil Diamond or John Denver instead of rock groups like Bad Company, BTO, Zeppelin, Zappa, ZZ Top, and Black Sabbath. A lot of people around here go by their last names and others go by initials, like RC, AJ, and PR. Some go by nicknames such as Doc, Porky, Tex, Tennessee, Shorty (this short cool dude), Big Shorty (a taller black guy), and Pee Wee (another short not cool dude), Radar (who looks like the guy on MASH) and Clit (whose real name is Clinton but is called "Clit" for clitoris). I go by T and I'm one of the cool WACs who loves to party!

Getting loaded all the time now. But when HIGH on shit, still can't talk, when on dogs can't write, when on acid can't stop talking, but when on speed can write write write.

With drugs, sex and my music, how can I not be happy. Honesty to the fullest extent. All right! John Dawson Winter the III, Marshall Tucker, The Who—"Tommy... I'm FREE... And freedom for you to follow me." Tull—"Aqua Lung... Sitting on a PARK BENCH, eying little girls with bad intent! SNOT RUNNING DOWN HIS NOSE." Deep Purple, Uriah Heep—New Day's Dawning, The Dead—"Trucking... What in the world ever became of Sweet Jane? Living on Reds and Vitamin C and Cocaine." Savoy Brown, Canned Heat old, Traffic old, the Allman Brothers—

Eat A Peach! Emerson Lake and Palmer—"Oh what a Lucky Man he was." Crosby Stills Nash and Young—"You, who are on the road. Must have a code. That you can live by." Simon and Garfunkel—"I'd rather... Be a sparrow THAN A SNAIL!"

Listen to words. To the voice of our time. I'm hip. I'm cool. I'm fucked up.

I did it now. Twice. Shot up with RC, a Bravo company guy that hangs around the beer hall. He took me to a party at the apartment of one of his "pees," and I had to leave because I threw up all over the coffee table. Did that guy get pissed! Then I shot up with another dude. In the woods outside the Kaserne. He was shaking like hell because he needed a fix. The dude was in bad shape, not me. He ended up in the hospital with hepatitis. Lucky I didn't get it. This other guy, who I didn't know but who was a "pee" of the dude with hepatitis, died shooting up while he sat on the toilet seat. Wow! What a trip. Imagine what his parents think?

Now I know what the smile is about. Oh, yes. I have seen tombstones in the eyes of all skag users. And my own. I have bitten death. No more speculation. It feels sooo fucking real, man. Must describe.

On skag, inside persons disappear and I get back to one. Remember. Army hierarchy inside—inner soldiers trying to gain control of that stupid outer shell of a person. On skag, all beings erased. My body flooded after the injection, like a glass filled with whiskey. All right! I'm living in a motion picture while I'm outside watching me inside. Dig it? All one movie. But no inside me trying to get control. That's gone on skag. Really weird, man. Nothing to care about. Am totally free. Got to be like death. JC nothing matters! Happens without intention. What a RUSH!

Death is pleasant and knows how to treat a lady. I know this now. It's at hand and is the ultimate mind expansion. I want to die. Maybe try killing myself again, but this time for the hell of it. No other reason. EXCEPT that LIFE SUCKS. You see, everyone's standing at the edge of a cliff on top of Magic Mountain. But very few dare to jump. Some get shoved. Others cautiously wait to get shoved, but sooner or later they gotta jump or get shoved. We all gotta DIE and there ain't a goddamn thing we can do about it. Only the brave few dare jump before they get shoved. The bold ones take their lives into their own hands and say-FTA, FTWorld!

The mood of depression is hard to control. It strikes without warning and when it does, it hits HARD! I think of where I've been but mostly of where I'm going. What seems to depress me most is where I am right now. In such deep reality there couldn't possibly be any problem and this dissatisfaction is only temporary. Need a hit to get out of this thinking business. Thinking creates depression. Mindlessness is absolute freedom. Need a hit. A hit to deaden the pain of living. Of realizing. Of this mushy self-pity. God where am I now? How did I ever get so messed up in this quagmire. I feel the mush choking me, the mud spreading higher and higher. No light. No hope. No out. Need a hit. Need a good HIGH. That's all that can lift me out of this fucking hole. Dissatisfaction is only temporary. Satisfaction is high.

Things to buy at PX for self-improvement: Books: meditations, philosophy, science. Appearance: chap stick under lipstick (glossy look), cotton balls and swabs (complexion cleaners), old spice deodorant (prefer smell), pearl drops. Try different tooth pastes to find best. Try different shampoos and conditioners for best. Dye hair black to look pretty. Get tapes to record when I'm thinking stuff but am too fucked up to write it down. Will write later. Need to get head together.

Everybody's gotten so complex in this modern age where we've learned how to master our minds into creating the atomic bomb, supersonic jets and space craft, and the electron microscope (we can actually talk of DNA—dioxy ribo nucleic acid. Or is it Lysergic acid diethylamide!). Just think, with telescopes and microscopes our eyeballs extend sight by millions and millions of plus or minus magnitudes, both bigger or smaller. Wow. And we got devices to destroy what exists. EXISTENCE DESTRUCTION DEVICES. But as I thought the other day, the whole world getting destroyed can't be that much different from when a single person dies. When you're dying or going to get killed in a car wreck and you know it's about to happen. That's the end of the world as much as if you see the bomb hitting the Earth and making a mushroom cloud. In either case, you realize in an instant that the entire world's going to end. It's all so individual whether on a global scale or a personal tragedy. We are ALL going to DIE totally alone. Your last thoughts have got to be individual ones.

All we can do is forget about dying and wonder about the world around and realize that what you see is probably different from what another guy sees. Or thinks. I wonder what a very young child sees? Or a dog, a spider? Heavy. And what does the tiniest cell know that we human's must have once known but have since forgotten? What does a mushroom know, or feel? I wonder what a shrimp thinks when another shrimp floats by. And how can he tell he's not a lobster. Must be instinct or DNA. Is DNA like drugs or do drugs work on DNA? Mutations must be the key to this. Got to read Kafka—The Metamorphosis. Heard it's about a dude that wakes up as an insect.

Sometimes I feel really strange but I find that if I grasp life so tight that there's nothing left to squeeze then I can float.

Never hold onto anything. I say. Nothing. Never. Not even life. How else are you going to relax?

My head's together. sometimes I forget.

Forward never straight.

I might be crazy but I'm not insane!

When and if decades go by noticed, then I'll watch. Now, I don't care and am only living on the edge of time, from day to day to day. But there's this goddamn wall that's in my way.

Parents don't know the pain. Reread letter from mom (after AWOL) thinks I'm just here messing around. When really the whole world's fucking me over. my parents are so unreal. Never cause anyone in all your life a reason to lose sleep or to cry. Never. Pain's a personal matter. I am alone. I am but me. NOBODY gives a shit anyhow. Nor do I, except I don't want to make my parents cry.

Dear Teri,

I sure wish you would let us know what's going on over there. Your letters of explanation never seem to reach us. We don't know whether to send you a birthday present or to wait until you get home. What kind of trouble have you gotten yourself into? We would like to know, wondering is hard on the nerves. I think it is about time we receive an explanation. We know that whatever you do is your decision, but we would like to know what it is so we will quit wondering.

Listen kid. The time from now on will go by so fast you will be out of the Army before you realize it. Please do a good job and save money for your future while you are still there. It is a good idea to learn to save and not spend everything you earn.

Please write and explain your situation! I must close now and get to work.

LOVE ALWAYS, Mom

Letter to Mom and Dad,

I know I haven't written for weeks, but sometimes it's impossible to write when so much is happening. I can't say I'm fine when that's not true. I'm not exactly fine, but OK because, at the same time, I can't say I'm in terrible trouble. So, I end up not writing at all. I haven't forgotten you and I know you are probably worried about me.

It must be close to 7:30 in the morning now as I gaze outside the bay room window to nothing unusual. Today is a battalion training holiday, so with hope I may get a few things accomplished. If by chance I finish this letter, I shall declare today well spent. Although, it's terribly cloudy. I expect the rain to fall at any time.

How have you been? I have been having decent times lately, despite the trouble. A week ago, Sunday I went up to Frankfurt to the free Uriah Heep concert. It was held outside in the rain, but this didn't dampen anyone's spirits. I enjoyed the jams as well as myself. Friday I went to Dusseldorf with some friends to a rock festival. It lasted until early Sunday morning and we camped out under a shower of stars. There were mainly British groups with the exception of a couple of American ones. Savoy Brown, Ginger Baker, and Gentle Giant.... I had an excellent time but fear it'll cost me another article 15 for taking off on Friday.

My radio cassette was stolen from under my nose by this junkie living in the bay room. She has stolen hundreds of dollars from people on this floor and is going to be discharged with an honorable. These kinds of things are expected here, though. It'll be so nice when I no longer have to worry about losing anything I value. I have most of my belongings squared away in my

trunk, which I'll send ahead as soon as I get word about my discharge. It's an expeditious honorable one, with all the benefits, including college money. It may be difficult to understand why I'm getting out and all, but I'm doing what I must. I'll explain everything when I see you. Bear in mind that it's not as simple as I'm all messed up and don't have my head screwed on straight.

I spent a lot of time now writing, sketching, reading, and meditating. Some of the books I've read lately are *The Answer*, a science fiction novel by Philip Wylie, *Nine Princes in Amber*, a good fantasy story by Roger Zelazny, some more Henry Miller, whose writings I simply adore, some poetry by Henry Dumas, Odgen Nash, who is really a classic, and Truman Capote's *Local Color*. I finished that book by Goethe called *Faust* and this one by Thomas Mann called *Magic Mountain*. Both were hard to follow, but each has some beautiful words like, "A man lives not only his personal life, as an individual, but also, consciously or unconsciously, the life of his epoch and his contemporaries"; or "All interest in disease and death is only another expression of interest in life."

I think I'll spend the rest of this day, if the sky holds tight to her rain, off in the dark woods behind the Kaserne to think about the beautiful things around me. Even if it rains, I'll spend my time in the bay sitting on this window sill, as I am now. I like sitting here and breathing in the fresh summer air.

And I care, so deeply care. About the feelings in the air. But the time has not been right for me. NO—the time has not been right.

You know I often wonder what you think about me. Then again you probably don't even know me. The time I've spent away from home, a time I've learned, a time I've grown. It'll be nice to see you again. I'm not sure of my immediate plans for when I get out. I'm anxious to see

my good friend in Texas before I go to Portland. He recently went home on an expeditious discharge. He was a pretty special person and I miss him a lot. It'll be nice to see him as a civilian and in the "heat of Mesquite," Texas. I'm waiting for a letter from him now so I'll know if I'm going to stop by for sure on the way home. Who knows, if things work out maybe I'll settle down there, at least for a while.

Can't wait to be on my way. This place has ruined my appetite and I hate being hungry!

Love, T

I talked to Chaplain Russell a couple of times. He's a small man, about fifty or so, and he's always serious in the way he says things. Captain Ferguson ordered me to see him after my piss test came up positive, like of course it would. I mean, I'm doing drugs all the time now. Ferguson also said he thought I needed the counsel, though I'm not religious. God never bothered answering my prayers.

Bummer's piss test came up positive and he's already out and gone. So did a bunch of other WACs and GI's. Julie's was positive too, but she wants to stay in so she's gotten the chaplain to recommend she be given another chance. She really is trying to get it together. She dresses strac and has a new boyfriend who's not on drugs. What a change! I guess there's some important reason she wants to stay in. Especially since she came here so wild. But everyone's got their reasons. Personal reasons. It's ironic that she invaded my room and brought in all those drugs and messed me up. Now she's the strac one and I'm the fucked-up individual getting out. But I don't care and I can't say I'll ever admire her. She's played too many dirty tricks for me to turn around and admire her for trying to clean up her act.

The Army's started using this recent "piss test" to locate drug users. If they had done that when I first got here I'd be a Spec 4 and speaking German fluently. Bastards! The Army messed with me until I'm hardly anything but a shell. I didn't come here a wild drug user, but I'm leaving all screwed up and depressed. That's what I wanted to see the chaplain about, though I was ordered to see him.

I told the chaplain that I was confused about my situation. I didn't bother to go into details about how everything got out of my control. I didn't bother to give him much background. I guess I felt insecure. So, I said, "I'm depressed. Really depressed, and I'm not sure what to do. I already tried to commit suicide."

That chaplain didn't seem shocked by what I said, perhaps he already knew this, and he didn't give me a lifer talk. In fact, he said something impressive and it wasn't necessarily about God. He said, "Teri, you're young and only starting life. And you can make it a failure, mediocre, or a masterpiece. But only you can do it. Make yours a masterpiece, Teri, not a failure. Don't give up on yourself before you even get started."

I was impressed with this, and I do want to improve myself. But lately I swing from hope to hopelessness to less hope and more hopelessness. I told the Chaplain this and he said he could see to it that I'm not discharged, if I wanted to change my attitude and stay in. Now I'm thinking—should I clear out of this place while I can, or should I beg to be kept here and let the Army clear out all the real fuck-ups. NO! I don't think so. I think I got to get out of this Hell Zone. HELP!!!

When Captain Ferguson called me into his office after my test came up positive and said he recommended that I get this expeditious discharge, I had drastically mixed emotions. JOY on the outside, but terror deep inside.

Ferguson was pretty decent about the whole thing, not as angry as he was when I returned from the AWOL. He explained that this expeditious discharge was some new program enacted to ease out those who have difficulty adapting to military life. Misfits like me, in other words.

Ferguson asked what I planned to do, once I got out. I told him go to college. He thought that was the best thing for me to do. In reality, I first want a taste of freedom and then I'll take things day by day. Don't think I dare show up at my parents' house for a while. They'd freak out seeing me now, a hippie who smokes. I'm not the same person any more. For this reason, I think I'll visit Bummer. He's already getting HIGH in Tucson and he wrote and said he missed me and that I was welcome to join him for as long as I liked. Cause I'm a cool chick.

My recommendation form for the discharge reads: "Under the provisions of letter, Headquarters, Department of the Army subject: Expeditious Discharge Program . . . I am initiating action to discharge you from the United States Army. I am recommending that you be furnished an Honorable Discharge Certificate. The reasons for my proposed action are as follows: Your poor attitude and inability to expend effort constructively while assigned to this unit. Your lack of motivation in correcting these shortcomings pointed out to you and lack of self-discipline to become a productive soldier. Your failure to respond to corrective action demonstrates that you further do not possess the promotion potential to advance to a higher grade."

The form says I have the right to decline the discharge, but if I do I could get a Chapter 13, which is a bad way to get discharged. I'll sign the statement and accept the expeditious discharge though this recommendation paints me as a total fuck-up, but Ferguson said that the

drug bit won't be on the discharge or in my records. This is good, I guess, for my future sake, if I got one.

I'm short! One week to go. I keep sinking lower and lower because the "getting out" is happening and it's scary. I want to die. I think about killing myself again, jumping from this window sill, but I'm too spineless. Need more courage.

"A little bird, with a yellow bill, was perched upon, the window sill. We let her in, for a piece of bread, and then we SMASHED HER GODDAMN HEAD!!!"

Being a fuck-up in the Army got easier and easier, then I'm set free and nobody wants me around and I'm a real nothing avoiding everyone. Hiding my feelings. KEEP ALL FEELINGS TO YOURSELF, T, YOU GOOD FOR NOTHING PIECE OF SHIT.

Chapter Seven: Discharged at Fort Dick (Dix)



(1975 Letter to Bummer. Never sent)

HIGH Guy,

Where the hell are you? Been hanging around this doughnut shop for hours. I went to your address, your cousin's place, but no one was home. Even asked a neighbor but he didn't know anything. I keep calling you, but there's no answer.

Guess what? I turned twenty today. How's that for timing? But you're not around to help me celebrate so I'm feeling kind of blue.

The owner of this doughnut shop offered me a room for the night, at his apartment. But when his wife arrived with four scraggly kids, she took one look at me, the hippie chick, and I could tell she said to her husband, "There's no way that girl's staying with us!" I've let it slide and I'm not going to say, "Hey, what about my crashing at your place?" I'll see what happens. Meanwhile, the guy's giving me free doughnuts and coffee because I look like a drifter without money. I got money though, but because of my shades, floppy hat, and bell bottom jeans—assumptions are made.

Anyway, if we don't get together by the end of today, I'll send off this letter and most likely move on home. No need to hang around this crazy dive.

Back in Germany, the Lifer WAC in charge of me took me to the Reine Mein Airport like a baby low lifer. But Chuck, Shorty, and TJ came along and saw me off. I gave Chuck my German meerschaum pipe since I was afraid of the residue in it. And I hardly needed to get busted before I got out. Chuck said he'd send me the pipe in exchange for a few J's from the states. We'll see. I figured if he never sent it I was glad to give him that pipe.

Had a real bad time getting out at Fort Dix. Maybe I should call it Fort Dick, because of what happened there. It was bad, really bad. Pure hell. Worse than any place I've been. It was hot and muggy and crowded with hundreds of low life GI's getting out. I was the only WAC in a pool of GI's moving from building to building like cattle herded from corral to corral. Waiting

and waiting in that crowd of GI's for my out processing. I was sweating profusely in my cords and I had more runs in my panty hose than a marathon. I must have been a sad sight for any Lifer around. My hair was messy, my hat brass was tarnished, and my shoes looked dull and scuffed, but I had to wear my uniform throughout the entire ordeal.

On top of everything, and this is the really bad part, this ugly GI SOB noticed my name tag and then said to me, ALL DAY LONG, and in front of every guy around, "Hey Ekland, Suck my dick!"

None of the guys did a thing. Even the guys I was rapping with. They just ignored him or said stuff like, "What a pain in the ass." But they did nothing. Guess they didn't want to start any trouble by defending me. And sometimes when I was alone in the crowd, not rapping with anyone, I would hear, from behind me, "Hey Ekland, Suck my dick!" This went on and on and on. All I could do was try to avoid this dude, but his ugly face kept popping up in that crowd of GI's and he'd always say, "Hey Ekland, Suck my dick!"

I don't know what it was like for you, but for me, the crowd of men, and those crude words from that dude made me sick. At last, I took off my dress hat and shook my hair down loose. Then I took off my name tag and brass insignia. I couldn't stand being in the Army anymore.

In no time this second lieutenant walks by and says to me, "Private, put your hair back up and your hat back on. And where's your insignia?"

"Sir," I protested, "I'm out of United States Army."

"As long as you're in uniform private, you're in the Army."

I told him about the harassment, and he suggested I keep a stiff upper lip, since I was almost out and on my own.

What was the point of arguing? Nobody cared if I got harassed, especially at this point in my military career. And I didn't care to be defiant anymore. So, I went to the bathroom and took off my torn panty hose and pinned my hair back up. I even rubbed my shoes and brass with my nylons, but it hardly did any good, the brass was way too tarnished.

Once I got out of that slum, Fort Dick, I took the bus to DC. I wanted to see the Smithsonian museums and the capital, but this pimp tried to pick me up in a McDonalds by the bus station. I kept telling him to leave me alone. And finally, he left my table, but then this other pimp comes up (no kidding) and starts the whole ordeal over again, "Hey pretty lady. Can I have a minute of your time?" I decided DC wasn't the place for some hippie gal to hang out, so I got back on the bus and headed for Texas.

At the bus station in Dallas, I asked where the hell Mesquite was and the guy said just off of I-20. At the freeway entrance where I ended up hitching a ride to your place, I met these two hippie Vietnam Vets who were also hitch hiking. They suggested we hitch together. They thought it was cool that I was a Vet, and we hit it off pretty well. They asked me where I was headed and I said to visit this other Vet. Well, they joined me because I told them you were a real cool dude and would give us all a place to crash and you'd get high with us. But then you aren't around and your neighbors don't seem to know where you are.

The Vets and I ended up at this doughnut shop, where the owner's wife is giving me bad looks. Those two Vets went out panhandling, asking anyone they saw for a handout. I never mentioned I had money. It's best they don't know. Besides, I got to make what I have last because who knows what I may end up doing. My future's kind of blurry now.

Those Vets said that if you never showed up, I could join them on their way to this place in South America where lots of hippies and Vets hang out and get HIGH. Lot of junk down there, the guy said, but I didn't want to get into that scene.

So, maybe South America isn't the place for me. But who knows. Haven't decided anything because I'm not sure of anything anymore. I'll try calling you once more, then I better leave this place before those Vets return or before this guy's old lady throws me out. I'll even check your cousin's house again and if you're not there, I'm off to Who Knows Where? And so, my friend, if you get this letter you weren't home. Which means, I guess, ours was never meant to be and now we got our own New Horizons for to see.

Be cool and remember—always forward, never straight!

Love and Peace, Teri E

Chapter Eight: Repatriation Blues



(written in the early 2000's)

In Mesquite, I never met Bummer. Instead, a truck driver stopped at the doughnut shop and offered me a place for the night. Foolishly, I agreed. I slept on his couch but late that night,

he came out in his underwear and “approached” me, but I screamed and he left me alone. I told him I wanted to go to the airport. He offered to take me there, but I insisted on taking a cab. At the Dallas International Airport, I bought a first-class three-hundred-dollar ticket to Portland where I quickly enrolled in college. Without taking any more drugs. Without having problems with alcohol. (Thank god I didn’t join those two Vet hippies on their panhandling venture to South America.)

I recently read about QIC* a psychological condition suffered by women who served in the military, especially the Vietnam Era and before. These women had four identity problems (QIC) during their military service and repatriation into civilian life: 1) identity as a member of a gender relegated to second-class status in American Culture 2) identity as woman in a military system that regards women as inferior 3) identity as a woman in the combat zone with self-expectation to nurture others while denying or repressing her own needs 4) identity as a female Vietnam Era Vet with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). For a diagnosis of PTSD, there must one factor provoking so much distress that the person cannot cope. I developed many factors and was already suffering from hidden childhood PTSD before I enlisted.

Posttraumatic Demoralization Syndrome, PTDS, entails layer upon layer of accumulated stresses, without relief. Symptoms include depression, anxiety, anger, bad dreams. Sounds like me. If I have PTDS, it began in childhood, continued through high school and was aggravated in the military and during my repatriation.

Re-Entry Shock is the other side of Culture Shock. It’s the Next Game. Or the same game. My life has been bubble after bubble of shock. I return home from a foreign culture with increased knowledge earned by harrowing experiences. And no one is interested. My parents

never asked me why I had gone AWOL. They really didn't ask about anything and I was left alone to decompress and face all the stigma. Repatriation is Re-Entry Shock caused by the stigma attached to the returning Vietnam Vets and women vets of that era.

My younger sister told me what my parents had told her concerning my return. They thought I got out early because I was pregnant. This hurt me. I had just gone through a demoralizing experience and returned home and my own parents thought so negatively about me, without even asking about my experience. ("That's what we thought of [Army] girls in those days," my mother said recently, when I confronted her about this.)

But I persevered as my own mentor and guide.

(poem written while suffering Culture Shock in China, 1983)

You cannot stop my song

You cannot stop my song
Internal vows sing too long.
This music is my destiny,
Unburdened by humanity.
You cannot stop my song.

And do not look at me,
As though I lack your sanity.

Talk about an odd sort of
Looking guy—
I'd like to know what that is, resting on your eye.

I think Jesus said something to this effect about the log in your eye. Look at yourself, your own shortcomings before you make judgments on others. Before you think of another as

inferior. Rings of Trumpism and the white nationalists who see themselves as superior to others. Rings true of misogynistic men who see themselves as superior to women. Rings true of society that looks down on a person they label as bipolar or some other degrading term because they have a different manner of thinking.

When I first returned to the World, I bragged about my military service, even about my AWOL. It showed I was daring, unusual, possibly brave. At my first Christmas gathering back home, my uncle asked about my tour of service. He had been a captain in the military during Korea. I told him with pride that I had gone AWOL? He was shocked and didn't know what to say. I quickly learned not to share that story.

A few times I mentioned to groups of college friends that I had been in the military. Some asked if I had been an officer. When I said I had enlisted, the conversation stopped.

One incident was quite disturbing. I was in graduate school sitting around a table with a group of students in my Applied Linguistics class. For some reason, I said something like, "oh that reminds me of when I was in the Army." This skinny woman across from me, rolled her eyes to another student. This made me ill. Here was a woman, a snob, who thought highly of herself, and she downgraded another woman who had gone through an unusual experience. Had served her country!

In the end, I rarely mentioned my military service or I resorted to saying that I had lived in Germany and worked for NATO. Today, I could completely care less what others think. I was a soldier. I am a Vet. But also, I think that a lot of the stigma has gone away. For women in the military. (I hope this isn't another delusion.) In fact, my specialized license plate indicates that I am a woman Vet and more that once some man in a parking lot has said to me, "thanks for your

service.” It’s very enduring and puts a smile on my face. Most are older men, perhaps Vietnam Vets.

Here is a quick review of my life: shock from an abusive childhood, culture shock in the Army (demoralizing), AWOL, my first manic bubble, repatriation shock (demoralizing), college and travel, overseas jobs in Asia and culture shock, second manic bubble in Thailand, re-entry shock after living overseas for four years, first marriage, law school (which was a culture shock in itself), divorce (a big and shocking upheaval), third manic bubble at a Florida B&B—which has left me disabled. Ding—bong—ding!

My Present Condition (written in 2002)

Really, by virtue of writing this book, I show my manic side. I am fulfilling a huge destiny. Do you not see why I have problems? I wouldn’t be delusional if I didn’t believe my delusions were true. The irony scares me.

Life Magazine, Feb 23, 1948, discusses A Study of History, by Arnold Toynbee. Civilizations grow by Challenge and Response, Toynbee claims. The life of each civilization is measured by the number of challenges successfully overcome. Personally, I’ve had too many challenges. But the struggle never ends otherwise you become dead or as Toynbee might say, “arrested.” Eventually, society makes a wrong response to a challenge and enters a Time of Trouble. This marks society’s breakdown and the end of its growth.

Toynbee’s theory of Withdrawal and Return is best exemplified by Buddha, Moses, and Jesus. Creation in society comes from the rare non-social soul. I withdraw from society, (the recluse) and will return to raise ordinary human consciousness by “cutting through the cake of custom.”

I had a recent prophetic dream among my jumbled dreams. I was a Healer. I am a Bodhisattva. A man on his death bed summoned me to his room. I sat with him. He produced a Bible and asked me to turn to Revelations 9:11 and 10:11. He was testing me to see if I could look it up. I did. But as he read, I saw Egyptian Hieroglyphs in the passages. And I understood the words. Then I took charge and told the man to let me heal him. I would go away and return with my entourage and spiritual things (a long red silk cloth). I would heal by my methods, if God was willing.

The dream then took a sharp turn. I was before a big auditorium at a Microsoft Conference (for computer geeks). I wanted to attend, but wasn't registered. (I'm not an employee from anywhere). At the registration tables, I mumbled my name, and watched the woman go down her list of names, stopping at Ellan T.

"Ellan T?" she asked.

"Yes," I said and she gave me a conference portfolio. I went inside the auditorium and placed my materials on a table. Then left, not sure whether I'd come back. In review of this book, I wonder if the name Ellan comes from Ft. McClellan, where I had my basic training.

I have looked up Revelations 9:11, as I'm sure many have. Who is Apollyon, the Angel of the Bottomless Pit? But Me. One Terror now ends, but two more will follow.

Am I the Avatar—Ellan T—withdrawn to write my books? My vision is unbound again, despite my recent collapse. Am I too far gone?

I end with this poem written circa 2000.

Life I struggle through
The struggle is not the end
It is always the beginning
The now

The present
The happening – madness
Or Hope?
Sure
But struggle
For some reason –
(unbeknownst to the seagull
or the Doberman proud)
Is the ceaseless movement
Of a cloud...
About a world
Of spectacular speculation
As stupendous
As “right on hit.”
As
The earth, this solar planet
That offers food and shelter
And ALWAYS struggle
Even when – and
Whether or not –
I choose to adventure through life
I struggle on and on and on

Chapter Nine: The Waiting Room



(written in the early 2000's)

I was a soldier. I am sitting in the Waiting Room of the Phoenix VA hospital. The Mental Health Ward. I am revising my Army book to explore the events of my past that have caused my present condition. In this book, I am now including my claim to the VA, with the actual story written during my tour of service, 1974-5. I was one of a last group of women to serve in the Women's Army Corps during the Vietnam Era. My claim: Events of my military service aggravated pre-existing conditions. Namely, a manic psyche and PTSD from childhood abuse.

Experience is cause and effect. I've had many of both. I traveled worldwide, I enlisted in the military, I earned a BS, MA, and JD. I taught at universities in China, Thailand and Kuwait. I had a web site import business. And I owned a million dollars in real estate, including a B&B in Florida and a ranch in the Sonora desert. Now, I'm nearly destitute and disabled. I panic when leaving home, I'm unnerved around people. I might go off!

I live in rural Arizona with five Doberman Pinchers and my boyfriend. We haul our water from the well at the ranch house my ex-husband and I bought five years ago. It's up for sale but will probably foreclose. The B&B already foreclosed. I have to unload all my real estate problems. I have to unload!

The waiting room is confining with ten chairs. Two orderly clerks sit behind a glass panel. Paper work is slipped under the glass along a metal dish. The clerks are a Philippine woman and a middle-aged man. It's August 2002. Arizona temperatures soar to 112 degrees.

Last January, I resorted to the VA hospital for my health care (physical and mental) because my divorce insurance ended. Thank God I'm a Vet. I had nowhere else to go, except, "Go Get a Job!" Yes, but, "I can't work outside my reclusive world!" This is my claim.

I first went to the VA hospital in Tucson, but am changing to the Phoenix VA because its closer. VA Hospitals are mostly about old timers from WWII, Korea and the Nam. The halls echo with, "my company was surrounded by . . ." "we pulled out from . . ." Old timer war stories retold again. A Vietnam Vet rambles and repeats, "I just want my life back. I've been robbed. That's all I'm saying. . ."

You can always tell a Vietnam Vet on the streets or in the VA mental health ward. Usually, they have darkened skin from living in the sun. Most wear a piece of OD green or camouflage Army issue. They have bristly chins, graying hair. They wear tattered shoes without socks. Some are amputees, many are drug addicts. You know their story. They are wrung out. Burdened by combat in a reviled war, repatriated as villains when they were America's children.

A derelict man sits across the room from me. He wears camouflage shorts, cheap boots. His hair is long. He quietly sits and waits. I am quiet too. Anxious, but quiet. Coping: If I could just be numb . . .

A man and a women dressed in blue shorts and polo shirts enter the room. The back of their shirts says, in bold white, "Comtran." (crisis transport services) The woman carries a clip board and jokes with the man clerk.

"Where are you taking him?" the clerk asks, in jest.

“That’s confidential, sir,” she says, in charge. She turns to the Vietnam Vet, “Grab your bag.” He grabs a large tattered bag beside his chair. They quietly leave the room. I’ve noticed everyone waiting has large bags or backpacks. I have a backpack with my essentials—a calendar of appointments, pens and my Everything Diary which includes, thoughts, lists, poems, and visions. Or are they all delusions?

I jot notes in my Everything Diary. I rarely read. Too nervous. Coping: ordinary tasks are difficult. I have memory lapses. I cannot take stress. I’m stressed all the time. My fears control. I’m reclusive. Let loose. All messed up in the head.

A young man is also in the room. I guess he’s a Gulf War Vet. (Funny how Vets carry the badge of their war – e.g., Civil, WWII, Korea, Nam, Gulf war) He doesn’t look distraught compared to a Vietnam Vet. Compared to me? He looks like a college student. Why does he seek mental health care from the VA? I wonder. Maybe we all suffer PTSD one time or another.

I’ve had a long wait. Two appointments for my intake. My first appointment was at 10:30, with an intake nurse (who had a suicide hotline on her desk. That unnerved me). She asked me hundreds of questions while typing my responses. Much of the time I cried. I always cry at sessions. At one point, she asked for my greatest strength. I said—intelligence and creativity. “I’m an artist and a poet.” Then she asked for my weakest quality. I look at her as if to say, what do you think! “My mental health problems, I can’t function very well.”

A professional man enters the room. He’s not a patient. “We found him wandering at the SW clinic,” he says to the middle-aged clerk.

“A walk-in,” the clerk states.

The professional man opens the door and motions in a tall man, no socks, crumpled jeans, and long hair. He has a large nose and dark skin. A Vietnam Vet. He sits near me. The professional man heads down the hall. I am quiet, unable to read. Coping: I can't stop thinking. My head haunts me. Continually. I've reverted to my childhood tantrums, which I "threw" when in primary school. I grew up tormented. Over what? I'm not sure. That's why I need therapy. It doubt it was entirely my parents fault. They came from a much simpler era, before and during WWII. And I was born astoundingly complicated and temperamental in an era of disillusion. I was a total mismatch with them, one psychiatrist said.

At home I threw tantrums, in public I was painfully shy. In third grade, my parents took me to a child psychologist, a Mr. Stevens at the University of Portland (1963, a very traumatic year). Mr. Stevens had me finish pictures he started, or say the first word that came to mind after he said a word. The outcome of these sessions didn't help me. For one thing, Mr. Stevens told my parents that I was a brilliant child and that one day, when I made up my mind, I'd could to do whatever I put my mind to. (cliché) For some reason—my mother failed to tell me this positive reinforcement until several years after my discharge from the military, when I pressed for information about my visits to Mr. Stevens. I grew up doubting I was very smart.

A far worse outcome from Mr. Stevens was his advice on how to deal with my tantrums. To stop my fits, my parents locked me in the bathroom and threw water on me. I screamed and ripped my clothing. (It's often the same with fighting dogs. Spraying water makes them more agitated). I had suppressed this memory, until lately, when I've had to dredge up my past for my VA claim.

Throughout high school, my mother kept suggesting, "these are the best years of your life." I couldn't imagine how much worse life could get. I no longer threw tantrums. Instead, I

was rebellious against my parents—which amounted to ignoring them, saying hateful things and smoking cigarettes with best friends. Mostly, I was depressed. My parents sent me to a social worker and to a weekend camp for troubled kids. The camp had humiliating exercises such as having me lie on butcher paper and another kid outlined me. (this invaded my privacy, detached me from my individuality bubble) Senior year I was so depressed, I hid in bathroom stalls during study hall. I couldn't face the world. I skipped a week of school, staying home in bed, not telling my mother (this may have been when I took dozens of aspirin, thinking I'd fall asleep. I lived. But my ears rang for months to follow). I forged a note and the school suspended me for forgery and truancy.

I remember overhearing my parents one evening. I was in the bathroom, next to their room. "I wonder why Teri smokes." Why didn't they ask me? Was I that horrible? Now commercials advise parents "TALK TO YOUR KIDS. They'll listen." My parents never talked to me about my difficulties, my issues, my reasons for being upset. It was during the Cold War, an era of delusion and indifference. A very chilling era.

The "walk in" grabs an Arizona Highways, the only interesting magazine in the room. The other is Family Circus. He doesn't read. He scrapes at words, page after page, as if scratching out lottery numbers. Suddenly, he pulls a pen from his pocket and writes "complete" in the magazine. He circles the word and draws a star. Combat. Circle! Star!

He draws more circles and stars over the pages. He's not doodling, he's intent, seriously at task. He is too bizarre. Drugs? Combat? How do we become so far gone?

A nurse appears and calls for a Thomas Jones. No one answers. Not the gulf war Vet and obviously not me. She looks at the man consumed with his magazine task and sees he's far gone.

“Are you Thomas Jones?” she asks loudly, slowly, as if addressing a small child, or someone old, deaf, or mentally ill.

He peers up and politely answers, with a British accent. “Oh no, ma’am, I’m Captain Higgins. My client is in the other room,” he motions to where the professional man went. The nurse smiles and leaves.

I am relieved when the psychiatrist calls me into his office. He assess my condition and increases my Quetiapine, which suppresses illusions and voices calling me or saying, “Hey!” or “knock, knock.” When nobody’s around. Or the fleeting sight of a person as I walk through a room. Are they phantoms or figments? I feel paranoid and depressed so the psychiatrist prescribes Zoloft—“When you know more about what’s wrong, you can help make it right.” It’s a good explanation for why I’m writing this book.

I didn’t serve in Vietnam. I wasn’t in combat. I am not schizophrenic or brain fried from substance abuse. Other than medications, my only drug is coffee, which I drink with soy milk. I am a health-conscious vegan, which may lead some to say, “ah ha, that’s it.” She’s lacking protein. But I disagree. I’m not traumatized by life because I don’t eat meat or dairy. More likely, I’m a byproduct of the 20th Century. The latter half.

What is it like inside my head? What are my symptoms? I have many ailments: anxiety disorder, depression, sudden mood swings, panic disorder and paranoia. Am I an obsessive-compulsive Manic Depressive? I think I’m what they used to call a Megalomaniac? I fit the dictionary profile: I have “a mental disorder characterized by delusions of grandeur and I tend to “exaggerate.” Not this story. Rather, I exaggerate to myself in seeing myself go as far as I can go—until I end up in bubbles of delusion that lead to my inevitable fall into fears. The Manic and the Depressive.

Delusion is difficult to explain, or realize, when delusional. After a doctor first suggested I was delusional, I disagreed. I'm rational, scientific, intelligent and always trying to progress. But in retrospect, I've had three increasing Bubbles of Delusion: 1) my AWOL in the Army, nearly 30 years ago; 2) My Bungalow business in Thailand, 1984; and 3) my recent fiasco with a B&B in Florida. The last bubble grew so huge, I've ended up nearly destitute and disabled.

I ALWAYS wake from stressful dreams—a hodgepodge of what happened before sleep, such as events on TV, mixed with situations and places in my past, and my fears—which are many. In one dream I'm trying to get my parents on a train out of a foreign country. In other dreams I've been dropped off with no means of getting home—whether at a lake shore or in a house full of hippies. The struggle never ends.

Though I dwell in an impact crater of Hope,
I just can't do it, Now.
I'm a bundled-up knot
My stomach churns
My heart palpitates
Vultures circle overhead
I'm alone in the desert
I just can't survive.
I don't even want to try
No more
Some days
I do not care to survive.

I survive?
Because I do it.
Because I try

Because I continue forward on a vision quest that has no limits beyond imagining.

My imagination.

My heart.

Beyond all hope, I fly.

Pain, agony sometimes

I burst with Hope to survive...

But I am exhausted now,

And alone.

(every one's got their own problems)

I am

"oh, ah," all too tired

of trying day by day,

hour by hour

Always stretching forward

To quench my thirst in a dry desolate land

Difficult thorny land,

I pull myself across.

Tug and pull until I die.

Thus sayeth the Prophet of Hope

(the spirit who roams the earth

and bursts open like a desert flower flame,

a dust devil spinning high and long)

disturbing those upon the scene,

those who cross my weary path of,

murals on the wall of

hope, like my heart –

or is it that

hope is my heart

and both have no limit.

There is no limit to Hope

As there is no limit
To adjusting
In order to survive.
survive the desert crawl:
Behold!
all around there is water in many hidden places –
water pure clean, like breath itself.
all the gold and all the jewels of earth
are not as wonderful as water,
to quench my thirst,
as I walk to the desert's edge
and paint bedazzled frescos
about adventures beyond my scope,
I'm an impact crater full of hope.

While describing my dreams to a psychiatrist, it occurred to me that my experiences were as jumbled as my dreams. My dreams mirror my reality, which entails Dreams Along the Upside-Down River, the title of one of my novels. My Army experience runs like a phantasmagoric dream: "I go to Germany with educational and travel goals. They place me in a barracks with rampant drug abuse among the troops. No discipline. No control. As I study German, WACs enter my room tripping on acid. Out in the field, medics hand me pills to pop. My roommate shoots up heroin. I tell my first sergeant, Top. He advises I nark. I obey and am tormented for being a nark. I complain to Top. He molests me. I go to an Army psychiatrist. He prescribes Librium. I overdose (the depressive). I go AWOL (the manic). When I return home the world and my family belittle me. But I've done nothing wrong.

No wonder I have sudden mood swings. No wonder my head fills with negative thoughts, usually against my boyfriend because he's the only one around me now. Our relationship is

stable, but sometimes I become another person, furious at him, even if he's away. But I don't want to talk about him. Otherwise, everyone rallies behind him as the culprit to my problems – and I unwind negatively and that is part of my problem. My mind spirals from a basis in reality. I fall into a confused state of mind and past trauma becomes what is happening now (the exaggeration into depression?), even when nothing wrong is happening to me. I am raging, then suddenly, I'm needy or compassionate. Are these moods personalities – a dichotomized (lobotomized) me? My boyfriend believes so. And he lives with me.

I've been a deep thinker throughout my life, especially when writing or studying. When someone interrupts me, I always jump. Startled! Annoying the person who disturbed me. Since my latest collapse, I've ventured deeply into a state of mind. For example, I'm sitting in the car, waiting for my boyfriend to fill the water tank (we haul water to our 3.3 acres from the well at my ranch house, which is up for sale and nearing foreclosure). I am deep inside my head, in a dream state. Unaware of my trance. I hear a distant voice, through clouds. I've always heard voices, so it remains inconspicuous. The voice returns. I struggle to wake. Suddenly I hear my name yelled! And I scream! My boyfriend's been calling me. My scream upsets him, then I explain I was in another world. (we have reached equilibrium. Thank God. My upsets were becoming too psychotic.)

Over the years I've grown increasingly dysfunctional, especially socially. I've had claustrophobia and agoraphobia since childhood, panicked by confinement and crowds. I never liked shopping. During better times, I panicked on flights over Mt. Everest. Now, I have attacks in stores – my heart palpitates, everyone looks at me, closes in on me, it seems. I have attacks while traveling – heart palpitates, palms get wet, I'm agitated. Usually my boyfriend drives, especially when I'm on high doses of medication. I'm so stressed by the drive that the slightest

thing upsets me. He asks for directions, for example. I don't know the directions and I panic and he gets frustrated and I lose control and flip out. One time I scratched up my face. When I throw fits of rage, I am Athena—the warrior woman angered by injustice. My boyfriend says my eyes grow wide. She scares him. No telling what she might do. Could her fits lead to suicide or homicide? I can't blame Athena for her anger. She did nothing wrong. She simply reacts to injustice.

I have lived a life of Culture shock within and without my own culture. I live with painful feelings. I offer the following (depressive?) poems to describe my turmoil. (the first was written while I lived in “culture shock” Thailand, the second during my marriage):

I envy you of war
I envy you the pain,
External war,
Eternal war
Internal war, no more.
I envy you the pain.

You—
Who saw death,
Saw it come.
Heard it.
Sought it.
Bought it.
Lived and died so young.
Death you had
When death had won.

And you died, died, died.

But eternal war is real –
(Internal as I feel)
Physical.
For you,
Who've lived a war,
This "real," I envy you.

I really envy you,
I envy you the pain.

My House not Broken was a Silent House (written in the 1990's)

How nimbly does the cold wind fly
Through Houses Broken.
As though it were fleeing, fleeting...
Incapable of illusion.

When cold winds do breathe silence
The House not broken yields
Many an illusion.

Silence is golden?
Think you that?
Silence is the voice unspoken
And this breaks the spirit
Called inspiration – breath.

(if thou be silent,
go down to the pit.)
a burden done,
'lest one flees,

I, from
the silent House not broken.

The first poem is NOT about my desire to live in a war. I'm not claiming to suffer like a Vietnam Vet who lived in actual combat. Circle! Star! That's preposterous. I would not trade my life with any soldier of any war. I'm too frightened to be so brave. Rather, the poem is about not being able to explain the cause of my emotional pain. It's not apparent like the horror of a war, or a broken home. I come from a House Not Broken. But my childhood pictures often show a little girl pouting. What's bothering her? Why is she so sad? (This makes me cry now, in my present.)

Life after the Army seemed promising. I deemed myself intelligent! and headed straight for college, viewing my Army experience as a diving board, down low then leap high into study, research and writing.

I earned a B. S. in Anthropology, traveled again to Europe, this time to Sweden with a Swedish boyfriend twice my age. (I met Lars in an Astronomy course.) Then I earned a Masters in English so I could teach overseas and have more travel adventures. I taught at universities in China, Thailand, and Kuwait. I left each job early, because of conflicts and Culture Shock.

I never had a job during my thirteen-year first marriage. I was mostly reclusive, writing books about my adventures, and novels subconsciously explaining my life – e. g. Dreams Along the Upside-Down River. With or without my husband, I still traveled. I went to Egypt and Mexico to research novels, to Tel Aviv to study International law, to Guatemala and Costa Rica to study Spanish, and to the Galapagos Islands with my parents, to see the Solar Eclipse. The following poem describes my Mantra during my traveling years (age 18 — 43):

A small town,

Can be any town –
Even New York City

If you were there
Born and raised
But cannot stay,
For reasons left unclear to say.

People will advise – unfortunately:

“There’s no place like home.”

“You can’t run away forever.”

Well, I heard my own voices,
Inside my head
Since early childhood.
And to me they said,
“Go out to sea,
and stir up whirlwinds
with flowers.”

I also went to law school during my marriage (a big Manic). I couldn’t find a publisher for my books and I wanted to make intelligent, progressive friends and to have a fallback career. Law School was another Culture Shock—I was swimming against my own nature. Students were haughty and cut throat competitive. Snobbish and Cliquish, rather like high school. I graduated because I can study. Working with people is difficult for me.

I was too stressed by law school to pursue a demanding career as an attorney, so my first husband and I started a web site business and I learned to create web pages. I had a technical

background—My MA Thesis in 1982 was about using Computers to Teach English and I had used personal computers since then. Our web site business never got anywhere. My husband didn't have time to help with the marketing and I hated venturing from my home office.

Five years ago, my husband nearly lost his good paying job. We made a sudden move from Phoenix to the ranch house in rural Arizona. I had always wanted to live in the rural desert, and we felt we'd better move while he still had a job, so we could qualify for a mortgage.

We lived one year in our rural home. He commuted to work while I fixed up the money pit. We had dreams of an ecological ranch in the Sonora – solar panels, gray water systems, composting, recycling—but we never got beyond repairing the infrastructure – installing septic tanks, insulation, fixing the well, plumbing, wiring....

At first, I had an office in the small town of Maricopa, to continue creating web sites. But I soon quit. I couldn't bear leaving the ranch for very long, or at all. Symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder? For protection, I bought two Doberman Pincher puppies and instantly fell in love with them. I hated leaving them, especially after we spent over \$2K saving them from Parvo. I was stressed by the chaos of not being settled, by the money pit, by the threat to my husband's job, and I became obsessed about not leaving home.

Finally, I collapsed from the stress and our marriage disintegrated. Ironically, I left the ranch and fled to an apartment in Tucson, with my Doberman Pinchers. My husband hardly shed a tear. He rented out the ranch, moved back to our house in Phoenix, and immediately pursued a foreign woman on the Internet.

Instead of getting a conventional divorce and dividing our assets, my ex and I bought the B&B in Florida—Not the wisest thing to do, especially for him. I thought it was a good plan, though. I would manage a B&B and write my books. My home would be my source of income. I

“deluded” myself into believing that I could live with the constant intrusion of guests. What a terrible idea. I was constantly stressed by endless work, and though I enjoyed visiting with interesting people, there were mornings I hated greeting anyone at the breakfast bar. I had to put on a façade until I could ease back into my office retreat.

My third grand Manic Bubble occurred at the B&B. My mind leaped with vision. I wrote business plans for a fabulous resort. I saw myself creating websites that would rocket me to stardom with over 30 books to sell, mostly books I was planning to write. I believed I was destined to be a famous writer and spiritual leader. It was part of my plan. People would flock to my retreat and “come together.” I’d give seminars on healing and on astronomy and the Tarot (I have diverse interests. I’ve been an amateur astronomer since college, and I’ve read the Tarot cards since leaving Kuwait in 1985). My vision at the B&B had no limits. I lived it, believed it, and made decisions based on a visionary reality. It was all a delusion. My third Manic Bubble.

Because of my outstanding credit history, I was extended 50K dollars on credit cards. Big mistake. I did not hesitate to spend, because in my mind my wealth and fame were not far away. I frivolously spent money on a fountain with lions, which would sit in the front yard over the grave of my beloved Siamese cat. My business plan included a gift shop with a line of “safari print” clothing from Africa and Nepal (clients of my website business). We were going to have a coffee shop and tea bar, a restaurant, and we’d host fabulous weddings. With the help of my business partner/ex-husband, I invested in more real estate—four rental cottages and a house neighboring the B&B. In two years, we owned a million dollars in real estate (tied up assets without profit. The rental money barely paid the mortgages).

I showed my grandiose business plan to a woman at the SBA. I can only imagine what she thought. The plan said, “Goal: to build, manage and operate the (B&B) as 1) a high-end

resort with seminars and 2) to develop a quality product line and quality name brand and 3) to sell Books by Teri at the (B&B).” I was so caught up in the vision, I included: The (B&B) will become a famous retreat because it is created by the famous writer, (Me).

During all this mania and stress, I hallucinated – I thought the B&B was haunted. I also screamed a lot at my boyfriend for his problems (when guests were away). Bringing him to the B&B was another delusion, perhaps part of the same one. He had worked for me at the ranch, helped me fix up the place, so I invited him to help me at the B&B where he became my boyfriend. He had problems, but I saw myself as his redeemer, his angel. I was a Bodhisattva, spiritually assigned to him. And so on. Don’t a lot of women have this delusion? At the B&B I became completely stretched out of bounds? No wonder I couldn’t find a basis. No wonder became erratic. There was too much of me.

The B&B failed because of the economy, my collapsed nerves, my unruly boyfriend with a misogynistic view of the world and a drug problem, and because my ex-husband pulled out. He knew of my mental health issues (he had lived with me 15 years), and he saw my grandiose vision plans, yet he stayed in the business for two years, he even flew to the B&B three times and bought products for the gift shop. But as soon as his new wife arrived from overseas and wailed at him for being in business with his ex-wife, he bailed out. Without his financial support, I couldn’t keep up the expenses. Then I learned I had cervical cancer cells. I unraveled completely; thought I was dying. (fortunately, it was caught in time. The cancer came from the papilloma virus, which I contracted during my military service. (I enlisted as a virgin and shortly after I got out, before any sexual activity, I was diagnosed with the virus.)

My B&B Manic Bubble burst entirely when my ex-husband suggested he take the properties in Arizona (the house in Phoenix and the Sonora ranch) and in exchange, I take the

B&B and Florida real estate. Good idea for him. Bad idea for me. I'd be stuck with a mortgage I couldn't pay (\$2850 a month for the B&B and the business averaged \$1500 a month) and a business I couldn't psychologically manage. I'd end up destitute in Florida, which I hated, instead of Arizona, which I loved.

Immediately, I signed on realtors to manage the rental properties and put the B&B on the market. Then I fled to Arizona. That was a year ago (summer 2001). I stayed at the ranch house a while, but couldn't manage the mortgage either (\$1500/month). And, I didn't have the stamina to deal with renters or anything else. I put my retirement money into my present home, where I now live, with my boyfriend, cats and five Doberman Pinchers. (My original two had puppies and I kept three. Why? I'm obsessive-compulsive. I love my dogs. They protected me from the real world and the world of spirits. They are not afraid.)

The terrorist attack of 9-11 affected me severely. Even if I solved my psychological problems, I lived on a globe of human terror. Evil. At my ranch house last winter, I fell deep into depression and my doctor prescribed stronger doses of medication which put me in a stupor and prompted me to escape into the "spiritual" world. Or, is it my world of mental delusion? I present the following to completely show my present condition.

I've been told that I'm a very old soul. I believe I've traveled to places I've been to before (by collective spirit—past lives – or through osmosis?) During my first trip to Asia, 1982-5, a great many poems flowed into my mind, as if ancient voices were channeling me. This is one of those poems:

A new road!

Where am I now?

I've ventured far.

A new road,
Yet,
I've been here before.
A Deja-vu?
Or is it true –
Have I been here before?

A silent quake
The trumpet blows,
I know not where
I'm bound to go,
But words I hold
Dear to me,
Travel back eternally.

At times I became Afertiti, a beautiful priestess of the Old Kingdom in Egypt. (She lives in my novel, Ten Years Past Cairo.) Last autumn, I lay on a chaise longue at sunset and I was Afertiti on her barge, floating on the Nile. I felt beauty and composure. She is everything I am presently not. Even her feet are extraordinary (my feet are as messed up as my head, I joke).

I am possessed. One day in early Spring, when the Palo Verdes were in yellow bloom, my boyfriend and I took a load to the dump. Along the way, messages and signs appeared everywhere. I saw hieroglyphics on my Explorer (written in dust), on the hillsides I saw Maya symbols and more hieroglyphics, in the clouds I saw Chinese characters. It went on and on all day. I was being channeled; I was being summoned to write my books. I recorded these messages on my camcorder.

I am possessed. Twice, while I was refurbishing a travel trailer whimsically bought and parked near the well at my ranch, I fell into a vortex. I was being summoned by the ancient

Egyptians. My head spiraled through a dark tunnel (AND I HAVE CLAUSTROPHOBIA!) I became so afraid; I ran to my boyfriend in the house. I didn't want to be alone. This hasn't happened since I've stopped taking high doses of medication.

When I grew especially depressed, Shiva possessed me a few times. I walked around my desert ranch with a trident—a saguaro stick split into three prongs. The possession calmed me as I sat alone beside a creosote or under an iron wood tree, holding my trident. Nothing to think about. Ahom. Amen.

Lizzie also took hold of me. She is my “Pure Hearted” great grandmother who died ten years before my birth. She kept diaries during WWII, which I transcribed in a book I call, Those Far Away Strawberry Fields. Lizzie comes to me and her love reaches me beyond her time. She surrounds me, as God surrounded her. She takes me to her farm to pick strawberries, and nuts, and to can peaches. On her farm I find honor, respect, community, and caring. I endure. Despite tragedy, even infamy. My spirit recovers.

I believe I was the poet Emily, from Civil War times (a brazenly Manic thing to say). My novel Dreams Along the Upside-Down River connects the Civil War with the Vietnam Era. I've dreamed of being her and I know she is somehow part of me. Her poems describe sunsets, nature, death and a great deal of pain, as do my poems. She ventured to foreign lands in some of her poems, as I have in real life, although she lived reclusively in Massachusetts (as I live reclusively now). Was she me, in the past, in my future incarnation? Which is my present. Was I her? Or is all this spiritual mumbo jumbo part of my mental disorder? If I knew the answer, I wouldn't be filing this claim with the VA.

How can I conjure up the past?
When the past is what I be.
And this I know,

By all our rhyme,
Belonged to Emily.

I don't believe anyone is the sole cause of his or her experiences. Nature and society create experience. And each individual has his or her own unique individualized response. Inherent nature, in other words. Otherwise, everyone would react identically to the same challenges. Obviously we don't. Some people are motivated by stress, others paralyzed. Some escape the ghettos, others succumb. Why are some people cruel, depraved, and others compassionate? There is no consistency in the world. This shatters my mind.

Along with challenge and response, are the ironies of life. (Keys to our fate? Doors to our past? Windows to reality?) I've hit hard times now because of my stint in the Army. The Veterans Administration exists to help Veterans like me. It is the third largest federal agency (following the Department of Defense; and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare). Since my discharge, my VA benefits included: extraction of my wisdom teeth, a few months of unemployment, four years of college, and the GI Bill – a mortgage for my first house in Phoenix, purchased with my ex-husband.

I'm the living present of 47 years, not just the past few days. Thirty years ago, the Army threw me into demoralizing and undisciplined conditions that led to my first clear case of a manic bubble that burst. In the past two years, I've collapse into disability and near destitution. My claim to the VA is that the Army aggravated a pre-existing mental condition that has troubled me most of my life.

Chapter Ten: A Pin Ball Machine



(written early 2000's)

When little, I watched my brother play pin ball machines at a campground in the Wallowa Mountains, near the Idaho border. With a nickel, he released the ball and flipped it into play with an outside lever. The ball hit an object that lit up and dinged! Then bounced to another object which lit up and dinged, then back to the control lever which my brother flipped again, keeping the ball in play and scoring up points.

I never had a business plan for filing this claim with the VA. I was led to it, like a ball in a pin ball machine. The ball lands where it is hit. I'm here—bang—hope you send me in the right direction. (when distressed, it is difficult to be fully in charge of oneself) As I told one psychiatrist, some people prey on the weak—which happens to me, a lot. I'm delusional and easily duped. But there are a few angels in the crowd who help others for no other reason than to help them (especially when someone is obviously distressed).

Last year, I went to the Social Security office saying I had mental health problems that made it difficult for me to work. Impossible really. But SSI refused my claim because of my tied up real estate assets that provided me nothing but burden.

At the beginning of this year, I went to the VA clinic in Casa Grande to make an appointment with a psychiatrist in Tucson, to continue my medication. The clinic steered me (the

pin ball) to a man in the Social Security office. The man was a counselor and a Korean war Vet. He saw I was distressed and had me fill out paperwork for a claim to the VA for mental health disability. He suggested I include everything wrong that might be service connected. In my application to the VA, I included: mental health problems, foot problems (from wearing Army boots), diminishing eyesight, and my cervical cancer which came from the papilloma virus contracted while in the Army.

My first VA psychiatrist in Tucson, a woman younger than me, didn't provide therapy. Her concern was medication. Strong medication, especially when I arrived with my face scratched up. Especially, after I said I nearly committed homicide. It was at night and my boyfriend had upset me. My head spun. I flipped out, raging throughout the yard, screaming at him, screaming profanities at the world. I had grabbed his gun. My finger was on the trigger. It was pointed at him. Thank God, something stopped this lunatic woman and she dropped the gun and froze. She could be in prison now, like a lot of women, perhaps, because of a temporary state of mind. A moment of craze.

My first meeting with a VA therapist didn't go well. I sat in her office, cried about my condition, "my parents threw water on me and locked me in the bathroom, I'm traumatized by life, I'm nervous, depressed, I throw fits of anger and I can't seem to function." Unfortunately, I mentioned my boyfriend upsetting me, and my mind spiraled into negativity. The psychologist concluded, in one fifteen-minute session, that I lived with an abusive man and needed to join an anger management group. "You learned to victimize yourself," she concluded and gave me the number to a battered women's shelter. I left disillusioned. Is that all that's wrong with me? No. My condition was much more complicated. The next meeting was cancelled and then I had car trouble, my phone was disconnected. I was getting nowhere. The pin ball fizzled to the pit.

I met an angel when I went to the Tucson VA to make sure there were no more cancer cells. The nurse practitioner saw I was distressed. I didn't even know the names of my medications. She referred me to the "Vet Center" in Tucson, a place that offers Vets therapy and assistance in filing VA claims for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

My visits to the Vet Center went like another phantasmagoric dream: I met with the psychologist, rattled off my afflictions, and returned later to take a written test. When I returned for the results of that test, the psychologist declared, vehemently, "You are unemployable! Even if you get a job, you'll become over stressed and leave" (which is my job history). He concluded I had mental afflictions far worse than PTSD and he suggested I was delusional, negativistic, and a paranoid "schizotypal." He seemed too excited (hyped) about my extreme psychological disorder. Still, I was thankful that someone other than myself understood that I had trouble functioning. I was finally going to get help. I left his office saying, "You don't know what it's like to be so alone in the world."

Before he sent a final report to the VA in Phoenix, he had me take another more extensive written test with hundreds of questions. He wanted to better diagnose my mental health disorder. Two things happened. First, I was out of my head upset with my boyfriend, who drove me to the appointment. Angry Athena threw him out of the car, locked it up and went to the Vet Center, not caring what happened to him.

I was in this state of mind when I sat down to answer hundreds of "a. b. or c." questions. I dove into the test. Some questions hit the core of distress. Others were blatantly silly. Lots were about drugs and alcohol which I consistently answered NO I don't take drugs or drink alcohol. And I found many inconsistencies: "I always want to kill myself. Ten questions later, "Sometimes I think about killing myself," twenty later, "I have thoughts of killing myself." Then

questions like, “I hate my mother.” Later, “I don’t dislike my mother.” And there were so many questions.

Part of my mental health disorder is my erratic mind—the mood swings. Sometimes I hate my mother. Let happen what will because she’s been indifferent to me all my life. Then, she’s a saint. A woman of wisdom. I honor and love my elderly parents. The same happens with my boyfriend. In just one day my mood can swing from hatred to love. I am erratic. I am moody. I’m inconsistent in an inconsistent world.

A few weeks after I took the second test, I called the Vet Center to ask if the psychologist had written my report for the Phoenix VA.

“Your test was too erratic,” he said.

“What?” I didn’t understand.

“It’s no good. Your claim would be neutralized by the results of this test. My report would do you more harm than good.”

“No,” I protested. “This can’t be. Isn’t there another test? Can’t you check my chemistry?”

In the end he suggested he’d write a letter saying I had PTSD based on our clinical talks, but I never retrieved it. I was upset because of his declarations about me based on the first test. How dare he talk hype to someone mentally distressed. Then let me down because of his stupid second test. (this is Manic Depressive) My nerves could barely stand the news. I questioned myself. Who am I kidding? Am I faking? Was I “shamming”? as we used to say in the army. Was I going on sick call to get out of duty. No. I bucked up. Too many things torment me and I have to pursue the claim and meet other psychologists. I need help.

This summer, I was finally called for my ratings appointment at the VA in Phoenix. A psychologist was going to rate my condition for my claim. She gave me the same sort of test I had at the Vet Center, but by computer this time. She said I could put an “x” where I couldn’t answer, and toward the end of the test I was putting an “x” in nearly every other stupid question. Some questions made me cry and I was nervous about taking these psychological tests and failing and losing out on my claim. Thanks to the Vet Center.

“You answered with too many ‘x’s,’” the doctor said.

“So, I failed the test?” I began to cry. But this psychologist was more sympathetic. She suggested I was psychologically erratic and nervous about the test. She indicated that the test was just for diagnosis and that she would meet with me in sessions to make the diagnosis. I felt encouraged. Someone to help me sort through a phantasmagoric world. I am sending her this book, to help her assess my condition.

Getting letters of support from family and friends proved disastrous. Nobody is comfortable with a claim for mental illness. It’s a blight, a shameful thing, or a concoction. For my parents, such a letter was a poor reflection on them, considering my claim concerned a mental disorder from childhood. When I first suggested to my mother that I was mentally ill, and that I was seeking help from the VA, she said, “people like you end up on the streets.” (what does she think of me, really?) I asked her for the letter, and she seemed typically oblivious. “I don’t remember anything about your Army experience.” Naturally she didn’t. She had never asked.

My mother wrote a letter parroting what I told her about my military experience – that I had been molested by my first sergeant, that when I was being discharged a soldier said, all day

long, “Hey, Suck my dick!” Her letter was useless, so I wrote a letter for her to sign and send to the VA. It noted my childhood tantrums, visits to the child psychologist, my troubled high school years and the fact that my parents gave me no advice when I enlisted and that they told my sister I was probably pregnant when I got out. I didn’t mention their throwing water on me because I wasn’t out to hurt my elderly parents.

I got my ex-husband/business partner to write about me during our marriage. He said some seemingly cruel things about my mental health. Such as I had sexual problems (I thought he did too), that I was suicidal and alcoholic. I don’t have a drinking problem. There was one time, when we were in Mexico City, that I drank a bottle of wine at a café and became so “flipped out suicidal drunk” that he left me stranded on an island in the middle of a busy intersection. My only problem with alcohol is that it depresses my already depressed mind. A lot of medications seem to have adverse effects on me.

I had two childhood friends who had also been in the military. I am not really close to these women now. Since I left Portland twenty years ago, we met every three to five years, and spoke on the phone perhaps every year or two. They don’t really know me. And that in itself was a problem. I contacted each for a support letter. The results left me more reclusive. I have no friends.

I first called Carrol, who had been in the Navy. She had previously mentioned thinking I had psychological problems during childhood, so I thought she could write some kind of letter. She refused with righteous conviction. Then she admonished me about my boyfriend and how I had to get rid of him. (While in Florida, when I was utterly depressed, I had called her a few times, complaining about him. It was always a mistake.)

Anyway, Carrol's reproach went further. She scolded me for, "taking advantage of the system," and for writing "evil New Age books" (while in Florida, I had sent her a synopsis of my book ideas although she's a staunch Christian. It was part of my Mania). When she claimed that I had "taken advantage of my ex-husband," I hung up, devastated. She was supposed to be my friend and she assumed the worst of me. She didn't even know my husband. Suddenly I was evil, doing wrong because of my claim and because I never got rid of that boyfriend! And somehow my marriage suddenly became a sham. It was all such a jumble. Did she think she was being a good friend by making me into a "bad person"? Am I constantly having bad luck when it comes to family and friends?

I bucked up. Scribbled her name from my address book. As one psychiatrist said, I had no use for unsupportive friends who thought the worst of me. But, why had I caused her to react so strongly?

"Shut up," I yell aloud.

"We all have problems!" says a voice in my head. "Shut up. Shhhh!" Stop the voices. Stop the torment.

For weeks, I didn't even call my mother. She was against me, too. I hated her. After all, to her I was a "bad girl" when I returned from the service. She probably thought I was a "bad girl" when I threw tantrums as a child. She probably sees me as "bad" now. Never asking me what happened, what was happening, just assuming the worst. "People like you end up on the streets!"

In time, I called my mother and switched to honoring her as my mother. I'm not out to hurt her. Only to heal myself enough to function.

For several months I avoided contacting my other friend, Kathi, the one who had joined the Army with me. I wrote her a few times, asking for a letter to the VA explaining that she had enlisted with me, that I was fine during Basic Training, even got promoted. Then, when she visited me in Darmstadt, she had observed first hand my chaotic barracks. I also asked if she remembered me mentioning that my first sergeant had molested me. I was trying to jog her memory. After all, nearly thirty years had passed.

My phone call with Kathi was another fizzle out. She couldn't believe I was resorting to a VA claim. That's for old men, Vietnam Vets in the mental health waiting room. I didn't fit the profile!

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

Because I'm a Vet. That's all. And the VA can help me. Is it really so difficult to understand? Are all the judgments and preconceived notions about who I am, who I should be, and how I should behave, really necessary? Yes. That's the reality of my phantasmagoric world.

"We all got harassed," she advised, the conversation spiraled downward. There was no hope. Then she said she didn't remember that I got raped.

"Raped!?" I exclaimed. "Where did you get that word? I said that my sergeant tried to kiss me in his office."

"Well, I do remember you telling me your first sergeant approached you."

"Approached?!" I said, "as if asking me on a date? Molested, I said he molested me. Groped at me. Grabbed me, kissed me, felt me. That's not rape. That's not an approach!" I was getting nowhere. Her mind was made up about me. Probably had been since I first requested the letter.

She then said she had always admired me and knew I would pull out of my present darkness. Herein lay an irony. What she admired was that I had pulled myself from a ghetto experience—ipso facto, my stint in the military—and went to college and tried to make something positive of my life. So, she’s admitting that I went through something demoralizing in the military. And that’s my point. People rarely understand ironies. I think both my friends are ashamed of me. They picture how I am supposed to be and it’s in a bubble I can’t pop because I’m too emotionally distressed to explain myself to them. So, I write these chapters of my book to explain my story and to make my claim.

Chapter Eleven: Achieving Clarity of Mind



(written 2023)

Life is a daily progression of learning about the self and our environment of family, friends, and society. My mental health is a subject I’ve learned not to discuss, the hard way. But I want to share my story with the hope that readers will find it interesting and maybe even helpful.

My understanding of my true mental health has been a progression over the years. A reckoning of self-awareness. Psychology and mental health is an opinion, not a science. Nothing is proven with empirical facts, in my opinion. Rather, psychology is a clever set of premises and

labels doctors, pharmaceutical empires, and society use against people with frail inner cores. For many years I accepted the labels and diagnosis from VA doctors concerning my mental health. It's an easy thing to do. An easy trap to fall into. But by doing so, I saw myself as faulty. I bought into the theories that psychologists and mental health practitioners gave me and took the meds that were supposed to What? Make me think correctly? Make me not feel depressed or moody?

How did I end up falling into this "disability"? I believe that the impact of childhood trauma stays with a person throughout life. I was terribly shy as a child but had a powerful mind filled with emotion and spirit. As a little girl I was moody and often became upset, over what is not important. The fits were uncontrolled because I had no proper guidance. The first diagnosis the VA gave me and the only mental health term that I accept is that I suffered from PTSD because of my mother's punishment sessions for my childhood tantrums. She never calmed me down when I grew upset.

My mother was only doing what she thought was correct parenting, the VA doctor told me. This was the 1960's. At the same time my older brother behaved inappropriately toward me. Take that as far as you will. Suffice it to say, I avoided him, hid from him, from age seven until after my discharge from the Army when his wife pulled me into her fold for a few years. Since then, I haven't heard from my brother and I know nothing about him.

My early childhood trauma created a frailty in my inner core that I didn't recognize until later in life. Children don't articulate the trauma they endure. Either it's embarrassing or seen as normal or possibly as the child's fault. To survive a child holds the trauma deep inside. But it never leaves the psyche until there is some kind of self-reckoning—an understanding that the child is not the culprit.

As a teen and young adult, I strived with a powerful will to succeed in the world. I honestly aimed for a bounteous rewarding life and was always hopeful. Straight from high school, my friend and I traveled to Europe charged with the promise of romance and adventure. I kept the childhood traumas deep inside and bravely went as far as I could—traveled to Europe, joined the Army, went to college, and married a standup guy.

Then it fell apart. This standup guy was too shy to even consummate the marriage. Stress overwhelmed me when many factors fell on my life all at once. My first husband, D Ellis, the standup guy, almost lost his job. Then he and I moved to a Money Pit in a rural area and I became very manic trying to create a splendid ranch in the desert. Eventually, I left him.

D Ellis and I then agreed to invest in a B&B as part of the divorce settlement. I traveled the southern states and found a B&B in Pensacola, Florida where I moved along with my two Dobermans and my ranch hand who wanted to help me run the B&B. After two years D Ellis pulled out and I couldn't manage the enormous enterprise without his financial support.

Then he took me to court for three years because he didn't want to pay any alimony or give me any of his stock options earned during our thirteen-year marriage. He blamed me for everything even though, I aver, he was at least equally at fault for everything that went wrong with our investments together. The stress overwhelmed me. Ellis even filed bankruptcy to avoid paying me a dime, but his efforts failed, I won all the court disputes, and the ex-spouse came off looking rather foolish.

At the same time, the ranch hand became my boyfriend and he overwhelmed me with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde moods and a misogynistic attitude toward me. A lot of stress and it seems I could not get away from him. I left the B&B and returned to the ranch house in Arizona because I did not like Florida's climate of humidity an hurricanes and my heart was in the Sonora Desert.

However, soon after I returned to the desert my inner frailty took hold. I'm speaking of the core that I developed when I was a little girl. Fortunately, the VA stepped in.

For fifteen years I lived in a stupor because of VA mental health medications that I thought I needed. I was taking up to three and four different kinds at a time. I really did very little during this time but muddle along day by day, feeding up my animals and living delusionally. They were wasted years.

My mental health awakening started when I quit taking all the VA mental health drugs. I began questioning why I needed all these drugs. They stifled my creativity and I really didn't get depressed, although there were many reasons why I should. In a moment of clarity, I had asked myself "Why am I taking these stifling and dangerous drugs for this and that condition? I wasn't interviewing for a high-profile position and I only interacted with my boyfriend who became my spouse over the years. And he was someone I had adjusted to, somewhat. Taking all these meds began to seem preposterous to me, even in my hazy state of mind. I quit cold turkey and quit seeing mental health specialists at the VA. They weren't helping me anyway. All they did was diagnose me with many unflattering and degrading psychological terms and labels.

What really brought my self-awareness to a head was another fiasco the VA put me through, the catalyst of my coming to terms with myself and developing a clearer state of mind.

I was nearing sixty, was overweight, and my physical health began to ail me. I had high blood pressure, IBS, osteopenia, and eventually rheumatoid arthritis. My mind was still foggy in places so I asked the VA for Aid and Assistance. I wanted help around the house and help driving to doctor appointments. The VA granted me the extra cash but because of my past mental health record and because during the application process I told the nurse practitioner who called me that I no longer took mental health medications, the VA declared me incompetent.

At first, I didn't think this mattered. But it did. I arranged with the VA for my spouse to manage the finances. That was a joke. He can't even manage himself at times and I continued managing the bills like I always had. Then, to top it off, in my spouse's worst mood, his Dr. Jekyll phase, he started saying he now controlled the money and may take off with it and leave me in the lurch.

I wrote the VA and said that my spouse spewed off in fits of rage and often behaved like a schizophrenic because of his Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome and his use of Meth. I mentioned his threats to me and the VA sent their field guy out to see me. Based on his assessment, the VA decided to put my disability funds into the hands of a fiduciary.

It was a terrible situation. The fiduciary didn't allot me a dime until the twentieth of the month. Bills did not get paid. At times I had no money for food and gas to see the doctor for health issues. And the fiduciary treated me as a, well, incompetent. She did not reply to my phone calls and emails. I called her twice one day and she claimed I was badgering her. I was in a deep scorpion pit and completely on my own. My spouse was not supportive and in fact he only made my stressful situation worse. That was my environment.

The VA forced me to have a fiduciary without proper due process. Why wasn't I given a legal competency hearing? To help me understand that I was facing the termination of my right to handle my own money. Why wasn't I given a psychiatric evaluation? To determine whether or not I could handle my disability funds? Why weren't my financial records investigated to determine this? Why did the VA allow me to fall into a life-threatening crisis? It reached the point where, at times, I had no phone, no funds, little food, no auto insurance, and no recourse. The VA made me helpless to survive. Their negligence and mistreatment put me in peril.

I couldn't imagine how I signed away my rights. I'm sure other people with disabilities are given special help and consideration—the blind, the deaf, the wheel chair bound. Why wasn't special help provided to me, a disabled vet dependent on the VA since 2002? Because my disability had to do with mental health.

I fought and fought to resolve the situation and get the money back in my hands. I emailed the field worker who re-visited my home only to scold me and suggest that “I did this to myself.”

In my desperation, I set up a GoFundMe page and contacted reporters. That was a dismal failure. One reporter called me back and suggested that the VA had to put my funds in the hands of a fiduciary considering all the mental disorders I had. He had read my GoFundMe page where I described what VA doctors claimed about me. That, I quickly realized, had been a big mistake and I took down the page or rewrote it. Red flags immediately go up in people's minds when they see someone with mental health issues. It is not a normal disability. It is as stigmatized as leprosy once was.

I continued reaching out for help but without saying so much about my VA diagnosis. I contacted my senators and congressmen, VA groups such as Wounded Warriors, and mental health organizations. I even contacted the NRA and the white house. I told everyone I could think of that the VA took my funds without due process, that I never had a face-to-face meeting with a mental health doctor before they took away the funds, that no one had examined my financial records that proved I paid my mortgage and bills every month. Nearly everyone I contacted told me that to get my finances back I needed a psychiatrist's opinion stating that I was competent.

For ten months I had needlessly spun around the VA hospitals and clinics like a pinball trying to get this letter from a VA doctor. All the practitioners treated me as a, well, incompetent and none of them would touch my need for a letter of competency. Finally, some good soul at the VA informed me that VA doctors could not overwrite what other VA doctors had decided. This was news to me.

I realized that I needed to see a doctor outside the VA system but I had no financial means so I borrowed money from mom (couldn't possibly tell her what this was all about) and I called a private psychiatrist in Las Vegas. I explained my situation as best I could and said I needed a letter stating I was competent. Dr. Gouda said he would like to help me and as it turned out, he was absolutely the right guy for me to see. He asked me very appropriate questions.

“What’s the best thing that’s ever happened to you?” he first asked.

I said, “That God gave me life.”

Then he asked for three words to describe myself and I said, “Hopeful, Enterprising, and Kind.”

“How did you overcome your condition?” Gouda then unexpectedly asked.

I thought a moment about all the adversity I had been facing in my life, especially about my unsupportive family and my Dr. Jekyll spouse. Then I said, “To survive, I learned to remain calm at all times. I’ve learned to manage a terribly active mind that always dreams, always thinks about this, that, and the other. I learned to discipline my impulses, the dreaming of possibilities, the racing to conclusions. I stopped becoming overwhelmingly upset over matters that are unjust and out of my control. To survive I must be calm,” I reemphasized with my spouse in mind. I didn’t want to bring up the Dr. Jekyll syndrome of my spouse but I had to say something about how I stopped reacting to his fits of anger, hatred, and rage.

“You can’t battle ignorance,” Gouda said. “And if you try it takes a deadly toll. Stress is as bad as smoking, taking drugs, and eating an unhealthful diet.”

Gouda’s most poignant and cathartic question came when he asked me, “Do you believe something is wrong with you?”

I thought for only an instant then said, “No. I believe I’m gifted and very intelligent.” The doctor smiled and quietly said, “So do I.” It was a pivotal moment for me. My first confirmation in my whole mental health unravelling journey that I was really all right and not some dingdong imbecile.

Anyway, the VA accepted Gouda’s letter of competency and I got my funds back in my hands. Phew!

No. I don’t accept all the pseudoscientific labels from mental health practitioners at the VA. No more than I accept the label “incompetent.” Yes, I suffered from PTSD and have a powerful, manic mind, that’s all. These two terms I accept. People who commit mass murders, who create havoc for evil purposes are mentally ill. Or maybe they’re just evil. It took me a lifetime to understand myself. Now I’m faced with the problem of my age and health but I’m off all medications. I respect myself and my memory is good enough to pursue my artistic endeavors.

Mental health labels put me in a pit with no way out. The worse kind of belittlement is to call me bipolar or to say I have multiple-personalities or that I need to take my meds. Unfortunately, once stamped mentally ill, there is no escape from the stigma.

It’s how I see myself that matters. NOT what I’m told about myself. Like society, I transform and grow wiser. I am not stagnant nor afraid to disrupt the status quo. I’m thankful for the VA’s financial support because I truly needed help. I need their support. But the help is a

double-edged sword. Sometimes I wish I had a normal life with kids, a job, friends, and a family who loved and supported me.

Maybe we're supposed to learn from the difficulties thrust upon us. It's what hones the mind to survive. Hones the rational wit. We must learn to not live in a stupor. And be happy, not upset. Each day I thank my higher power that I have won the journey of life despite the monumental odds stacked against me from early childhood.

These days my focus is on my life's purpose which is finishing the novels and books I've written throughout my adult life. I am in no way delusional anymore. Never manic or depressed. No point to that. I simply live by the day and do what I'm driven to do without a grandiose notion about where my efforts will take me. I simply enjoy what I am doing and try to maintain my physical health.

When working on my novel *Key to 1000 Doors*, I spent a lot of time doing Buddhist meditation. It was not a religious effort or even a spiritual matter. The meditation and visualizations were to calm and center my mind on the present. Not the past or future. And to maintain a rational and compassionate mind for myself and others. I cannot dwell on resentment toward others including my indifferent and unsupportive childhood family, including friends who have dropped away from me because they saw me in a negative way. They probably assumed I was a shamming fake. I don't know what they really thought I only know that people and society stigmatize my disability.

Perhaps we can never overcome the stigma attached to mental health issues, but I believe individuals can overcome mental disorders by hard work, effort, and self-reckoning. I rejected the labels and the meds and fought hard to understand who I really am in all the muck and debris

I found myself swimming in. I wrote the following poem while in Thailand in the early 1980's. It seems to sum up what I'm trying to say.

Stopping for the moment

Stopping for the moment
Can only be done
When time is still.

It's the little things –
You see –
Coffee with a friend, the landscape,
An empty thought,
Empty time.

Stopping for the moment,
Can only be done,
When thoughts are cleared.
And then
In the wake,
(observeth me)
I am alone
Yet,
Surrounded by the sea.

This poem, which I probably wrote in view of the vast sea, is again about being alone. Seems to be a recurring theme. Why? Because in finding my own clarity of mind, I've realized that the philosophy I formulate, adhere to, is entirely of my own making. I am not a follower of one specific Lord or guru. I follow the teachings of my own mind. I awaken into the reality that I alone can fix myself, not some psychiatrist, or spouse, or parent, or friend. No one will ever

know me better than I can know myself. That is why I ultimately rejected religion which did not bring about any clarity of mind. In fact, religion clouded my mind with maxims that never really made sense to me, probably all my life. Patriarchy doesn't suit me. I'm a human being first, not a vessel for a man, not an underling of a man or anyone else. All human beings, including the Dalai Lama, are fallible. Including myself and my approaches to life and my thinking processes. I have to get a grip in order to discern what is real about myself, and about the world.

I've never experienced the supernatural, the magical, except in what's coincidental and poetic. Images, visions, literature, poems are my magic, my mystical experiences. I never experienced a rapture about a specific Lord. That's my reality. But when I gained focus and clarity of mind, came to really know myself in this world, came to shed regrets and dislike for those I once felt wronged me (ex-spouse, current spouse, mother, sister, ex-friends), I found that clarity and peace. It's so Buddhist. Maybe Vedantic.

Empty thought, empty time means to have no reflection on past, no imagination about the future, and certainly no subscribing to the conditions, labels, and negative degrading definitions imposed upon us by others in the world (by spouses, friends, society, doctors, and even by the self.)

This poem is about living in the moment and enjoying the things of the moment, daily simple things of life. That's the awakening which we do alone and through our own efforts. But when we do awaken (in the wake) we realize that we may be alone in our efforts for self-realization, yet, but, we are connected to all the world, to everyone else, to universal consciousness, we are surrounded by the sea.

What's the meaning behind the Trouble with Brass? The title of this book that I first wrote while a teenager, a young adult, striving to be all I could be in the US military. For me, it's

as simple as finding centeredness, the middle way, the calm and peaceful, rational and compassionate mind. Don't let the mind go to extremes, the manic or the depressive. You cannot over polish brass insignia or it will lose its texture, its face, and you cannot leave it alone and do nothing or it will tarnish and corrode. Life is as simple as this. Get your head right and be all that you are meant to be before it's too late.



Addendum: A Tribute to my Uncles and Aunts who Served:

Yes, I do have heroes in my family--men and women who served their country especially during the Great War. During research for my book featuring my great-grandmother's diaries, I learned that even my aunt Hazel and her sister Wynona served in the military during the war, in some women's auxiliary. In a letter, I asked my aunt to tell me about her experience and she replied, "I can only say I didn't like it." My grandmother Bertie's eldest brother Fay served in WWI. Bertie's grandfather was a Union soldier in the Civil War. Two of my Dad's brothers also served. His eldest brother Jack fought in the Pacific during WWII . He could never talk about his experience. My dad's youngest brother Dick was a captain during the Korea conflict. I am proud of them all.



A great-great-uncle serving in World War II. Frank Pace, relative of Mother's Father. My great-grandmother was a Pace. Granddad Brown came from a farm in Banks, Oregon.



During this time, people put their pictures on postcards. This is the back of Frank's picture card.

A Special Tribute to William R Davies, my uncle



Bill Davies with his sister and cousin.

William R Davies was born in 1925 to Bertie and Brown. He enlisted 10 July 1943 at the age of 18. His term of enlistment was for the duration of the war plus six months subject to the President. His civil jobs before enlistment -- kitchen worker in hotels, restaurants, railroads and steamships (what I read on Ancestry.com)



Navy Letters from Bill



R T Davies, my grandpa Brown. Russel Theodore. His nickname Brown comes from Buster Brown, a cartoon of the early 1900s

U. S. NAVAL DISPATCH

NAVGEN-42-4

From: W.R. DAVIES	CLASSIFICATION PVT.	PRECEDENCE ROUTINE
Action: R.T. DAVIES & FAMILY		
Info: R.T. DAVIES & FAMILY		

Hi Dad, Mother, And Sis,

Tell I am still cyrclyng waiting to go back to the lagoon, I sure wish the lag on would become safe and we could get our work done and be on our way out of here and home.

You had better start addressing my letters to the USS Avery Island because by the time I get an answer to this letter I will be aboard her. It won't be long until my address will be (William Russell Davies 7048 N. Polk Ave. Portland 3, Oregon.) It will sure be nice to have a first name again, I am getting tired of the impersonal name of Davies.

I still don't know what I can do when I get out but I would rather starve to death on the outside than put up with all the unjustness and cheating that the Navy teaches you to do. I just can't fit in too good with those who expect you to use foul language just to be using it. I refuse to do anything because other people do it. The Navy is filled with a bunch of kids who will never grow up. There are a lot of kids of about fifteen or seventeen who must have lied to get in the navy that go around trying to find places in their talk for foul language so they can sound big. I hear kids boast of cutting up seats in theaters and other things that make me sick of the human race. I often wonder what kind of parents some of them have. I have been criticized because I do not use bad language and for using too many big words. I don't use big (over)

RELEASE	CWO	FOR	TOO	DATE	DIT GR.																		
XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXX	?	28 July 1945	250400Z																		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24

words at all. It seems that all of the guys that come here with me from Chicago and Treasure Island are having trouble with the crews on the deck forces etc. To begin with there are a few that are easy to get along with. Most of these are those that go to church. The navy is no place for anyone that believes in God or has a moral code. I get along with everyone pretty well. I can never understand as long as I live why people like the Navy. It doesn't give you a chance to think for yourself at all. They treat you like a bunch of little children.

As you can plainly see I am getting awfully anxious to get home. I like so many things so much that the Navy can't offer. I like going to picnics, fishing, waffles on Sunday, good food which the navy doesn't know what is. and so many other things that home has to offer.

It is hot here today, the breeze that is usually here is missing and the heat gets kind of uncomfortable.

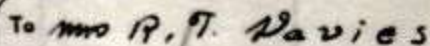
I suppose all of my old friends are out by now. I hope so.

There have been no messages all afternoon so I have no idea when we will go back to the lagoon and board our ship ~~XXXXXX~~ which is now on the beach so it won't sink.

Well I guess I will close for now. I can't think of anything to say.

I am just writing these and then will mail them all at once when we go in and anchor.

4



part 1 and 3
Oregon

Enter

J. L. Hoffman 12/23/09
(Hoffman's name)

~~ИГЭ, О.И.З.~~

~~200.000 200.000 200.000~~

Jan 31st 45
(Date)

well I received your recent letter a few days ago. Was sure glad to hear from you and also to hear that you don't have so much sunbathing now. I bet that begins to get old, working so long without a day off.

I do believe Tomorrow is payday. That means I will be able to go up and cash my check for \$3.95. Boy isn't that a big pay check. Well, hell, it plenty for me over here. You one of those guys who believe in getting home. And I know it will do me more good than then now.

The news really sounds good here lately.
I hope it continues that way from now
on out.

I sure hope you folks are all feeling
O.K. As for myself, I am fine. - H. Lee

with love
Ed.



UNITED STATES NAVY

Dear Mom:

We all love it is a week since
I got out of Camp Decatur and we
people got out and had most time
here were not. I know the
right way to use jobs for
now because we only live one
life time so in I will try to
write Mother & Grandma tonight.

On second thought I go to
the dentist at nine o'clock. so
I will not see you for another
day is my last dentist date. I've
got to go to 2 o'clock. I got a
letter from Bob. He says it is
a good thing you do not live a
slave because some of these
guys are 35 year old men and
live like babies with all slave love.
It looks like some get homesick and
love another liberty net from 6
to 1 all next morning but I think

I will stay home. today we
jumped off a 20 foot tower
with a life jacket on. Twenty
feet isn't very far for me with
a life jacket it is not easy.

I try to write a letter ^{at least} every
other night but don't get some
mailed. I sure don't get a letter.

He now went to my book room.
Grover Williams used to be the
public relations manager at Juvon
I don't see you, it is today. is
writing small stories which he
sells to Readers Digest etc. I
am going to buy a detective magazine
just to see what kind of stories
he writes. He is sure to sell them
as he has a good imagination. Well
I had better close now,

Love
Bill

U. S. NAVAL COMMUNICATION SERVICE

SRS

DEAREST MOTHER,

PLEASE MAIL ME SOME AIR MAIL STAMPS! I CAN'T
GET THEM HERE. YOUR LETTERS TAKE ABOUT SEVEN DAYS

TO GET HERE. SO KEEP WRITING. I AM NOW ON WATCH
UP IN THE BRIDGE. IT IS 03:15 AM. YI AM TIRED!

I LIKE THE HUGHES FINE I DONT HAVE ANY
WORK TO DO, I AM THE ONLY R.T. ON THE SHIP SO
I HAVE EVERYTHING MY WAY, & I HAVE TWO STRIKERS
TO DO ALL THE DIRTY WORK FOR ME. I HAVE TO FILL
OUT SOME REPORTS TODAY BUT THEY WONT TAKE LONG.

MY TIGHTEST JOB IS TO GET MY STRIKERS TO
KEEP THE PLACE CLEAN. I HAVE TO PRACTICALLY BROWBEAT
ONE OF THEM, HE DOESNT LIKE TO WORK VERRY WELL.

WE ARE SHORT HANDED OR I WOULDN'T HAVE TO
STAND THIS WATCH. BUT ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SIT BY
A RADIO & ANSWER ANYONE WHO CALLS ME SO I CAN READ ETC

Letter from Bikini Island

U. S. NAVAL COMMUNICATION SERVICE

SRS

IT IS TIME FOR ME TO WAKE UP MY RELIEF SO I
WONT WRITE MUCH MORE. A BUNCH OF GUYS ARE MAKING
GROPEY NOISES ON THE RADIO & PRETTY SOON THE HEAD
OR MAIN STATION WILL START GRIPING.

☆ 000 10-10000-3

I DONT KNOW YET WHEN I WILL GET HOME BUT ONCE
I HIT THE STATES I GET OUT OF THE NAVY. I DO NOT
DRAW ANY PAY HERE Y HAVE SOME STILL IN SO I SHOULD
GET QUITE A BIT WHEN I GET HOME. BIKINI DOESNT
GET AS HOT AS GULF PORT WE HAVE ALWAYS GOT A
BREEZE SO IT IS NOT UNBEARIBLY HOT. I WENT OVER
ON THE ISLAND & WENT SWIMMING THEY HAVE
A PLACE WITH A NET AROUND IT. AND IF YOU HAVE
ANY SENSE THAT IS WHERE YOU SWIM. THE WATER
HERE IS LOST WITH BARACUDA & SHARKS.

U. S. NAVAL COMMUNICATION SERVICE

SRS

ONE GUY WENT SWIMMING BY HIMSELF OUTSIDE
 THE NET & A SCHOOL OF BARICUDA GOT HIM. (LOOK
 UP THE FISH IN A DICTIONARY) OR ENCYCLOPEDIA. THESE
 FISH JUST EAT YOUR BONES CLEAN IN A FEW
 SECONDS. SO I SURE DON'T WANT TO GO SWIMMING
 WHERE THEY ARE. THE FOOD IS PRETTY GOOD BUT
 WE HAVE AT SHIP SERVICE SO COULD YOU SEND
 SOME CANDY & NUTS IN TIN CANS PLEASE, HUH?

WELL I GUESS I WILL HIT THE SACK SO LONG

Love & Love & Love

Bill

JOINT TASK FORCE ONE ATOMIC BOMB TEST

SCIENCE

DAVIES, William E. ETM3

has participated in OPERATION CROSSROADS
 ordered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to test the effect
 of the Atomic Bomb on naval vessels and conducted
 at Bikini Atoll, Marshall Islands.

USS HUGHES (DD410)

(Unit or ship)

D.S. BILL R.

Commanding

Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy
 Commander Joint Task Force ONE

My Brave young uncle Bill was on a ship watching the A-Bomb at Bikini Island.



*The United States of America
honors the memory of
William Russell Davies*

*This certificate is awarded by a grateful
nation in recognition of devoted and
selfless consecration to the service
of our country in the Armed Forces
of the United States.*

A stylized, handwritten signature of Barack Obama in dark ink.

President of the United States

Letter to my mom from Barack Obama. Mom was Bill's closest surviving relative.