

Action Report

Subject: Memorial Day Writer's Project (MDWP)

Activity: Poetry, Prose and Song on the Mall

Date: May 30 & 31, 2004

Location: Washington, DC

(behind the sidewalk facing 20th Street and Constitution Ave.)

Weather: Overcast, occasional showers



Our friends Jonathan Myer (USAF, FAC O-1E) and his wife Brenda couldn't be with us this year. We will wait until next Veterans Day to hear about *"The FAC and the Green Beret"* and Medal of Honor recipient and fellow FAC Willie Willbanks.

Roy Correnti (3rd Marine Div) started us out with some of his wailing blues on his dojo and acoustic guitar. Roy spent both days with us as he played and read several times. I had the pleasure of putting Roy through his paces with a 4-mile walk each morning. This was Roy's introduction to Washington's 16-year cicada and inquisitive as he is, Roy found out how to make a cicada scream at will (the Marine way). Roy read several of his works including *"War is Hell Don't Go in There,"* *"Thank You My Teachers"* and *"Through Vince's Eyes"*. For those of you who don't know Vince (Vince Kaspar), who inspired many of the early members of the MDWP, donated his eyes for medical use. Roy sang *"Sons and Daughters of America"* and read a recently published poem about PTSD entitled *"Vietnam, New York, Daniel Pearl."*



Gerald Ney (USN- Arial Surveillance Officer 68/69 and VVA Pennsylvania State Council Chaplain) and Randy Sena (active duty USAF) were also with us Sunday and Monday. Among others, Gerald read: *"In Memory of Skip,"* *"Purple Leaves,"* *"The Road to Ollie,"* *"Vietnam Lowdown In-Country Backstabbin' backside Fraggin' Cook Cuppa Coffee Blues,"* *"Christmas Eve at Shitfield Tower,"* (a Memory of 24 December, 1968), *"Here There be Dragons"* and *"Bullet Rinsed Duds and Hold the Ice Cream."* It was great hearing from Gerald again.



Randy Sena surprised us by singing an introduction to a new poem *"Going Home."* to the tune of *"Take a Sentimental Journey"* as well as *"Standing Guard in Peacetime"* and a poem about an adopted Uncle (a WWII Vet). Randy is assigned to Andrews AFB and he's getting ready to retire. I understand Randy has been developing scripts and directing plays as part of an emergency training program.

Kenneth Lee (9th Marines) was also with us last year and had no problem with the noise created by Rolling Thunder. Ken made some thunder of his own with his poem *"I Once Breathed the Fire of Dragons"* and he followed with a soft-spoken love poem written by a veteran of the Civil War *"Letter From a Soldier."* Other poems read by Ken include: *"Crisis of The Mind," "Will You Still Love Me?" "Bastions of War" and "Marble Men"*—all words of power and sensitivity.



Terry Lockridge (a new presenter from the 3rd Marine Div) came with his daughter and read several poems written by his friend Doug Todd (1st Btn of the 9th Marines) from a new book *"Aftermath: A Song for Tyrone."* Doug tells us he is going to donate a portion from the sale of his book to the MDWP. Welcome Terry and thanks for joining us. We expect to see Terry again on Veterans Day.

Marj Watson read with us for the first time and it was great to have her join us. Marge is responsible for the judging the art submitted by local high school students (Northern VA) as part of the Vince Kaspar scholarship sponsored by the MDWP and VVA Chapter 227.

Again we missed the ceremonies held at the Wall. I suspect that had a lot to do with the surprise visit by **Holley Watts** (Donut Dolly, 67/68, 3rd Marine Amphibious Forces, Chu Chi). Holley gave us a good dose of her soon to be available book *"Who Knew?"* Copies of Holley's book can be ordered through www.whoknew@earthlink.net.



Bruce Curley (USAF) was with us again this year. Bruce brought his wife and son this time (Eamon and Robin) and it was great having them with us. Bruce read several poems in tribute to his Mom who recently passed away including: *"To Stretch a Potato," "That Laugh," "Don't Remember," "Treats," "This Broken Silence," "Screaming Like a Banshee,"* and on the military side, one of my favorites: *"Future Dust."*

Datrinne Barker read and spent the day with us on Memorial Day. Datrinne tried to be with us on Sunday, but couldn't get across Constitution Avenue because of the "Run to the Wall." We all enjoyed her heartfelt reading of her poem entitled *"Taps."*

I snagged first timer **Larry Haworth** (Author and Chaplain USA- 11th Armored Cav) as he walked by the MDWP tent with a box of books. Larry reminds me a lot of the Chaplain portrayed on MASH. We all laughed as he related several incidents from his book: *"Tales of Thunder Run."* Larry operated in the area along QL 1, the highway that ran from Saigon to Cambodia. He gave us a wonderful description of an ideal female that all the guys in his unit liked only to find at the end of the poem that he was describing his dog Margaret. "Eating Dirt" along QL14 near Loc Ninh was another tale of Larry's.

Cathie Solomonson (24th Evac Hosp, Long Binh '68) read a touching tribute to her Dad *"Morning Glory for Dad,"* a poem inspired by the memory of medic Rod Kane *"How to*

Seduce a Woman When You Have 6-Months to Live, “*Letters from the Guys*” and “*But You Did, Dear Nance*”. Then Cathy surprised us by singing a recent work “*When Joanie Comes Marching Home Again...*” I have to tell you, Cathy’s poems stay with you long after the words are spoken. “Heart wrenching” was a comment made by someone in the audience.

Joe Finch (25th Aviation Div 1969) gave a tribute to the nurses and all female Red Cross workers. Joe read a poem from his book “*Angle’s Wing*” and told us about requisitioning (by med evac chopper) a refrigerator from the rear of a PX, and the importance of scrounging for parts and supplies. Joe had several fans waiting most of the morning for him to appear. Holley Watts inspired Joe and Gerald Ney to interrupt each several times to relate their personal encounters with the Doughnut Dollys.

Mark Pankow (a new presenter) stopped by with his young daughter and spent most of the day with us. Mark read several great poems including a contemporary version of “*Flanders Field.*” Mark is involved with the honor guard detail for the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Joe Mitchler stopped by with his Dad (a WWII veteran) and sends his regards to all and a veteran, who goes by the name Rane, was here for cancer treatment and recited a poem from memory.



Jim Porter had to be dragged away by his wife. Jim entertained us with several great songs “*The Things You Do,*” “*Those Were The Days*” and a song made popular by Louis Armstrong. Jim also brought out his harmonica (Bob Dylan style) to accompany himself. Jim, a Green Beret, worked the delta in ’63. Jim said he fully expected “to take care of the situation.” Hoc dinh Nguyen and his wife (from Texas) were spellbound and didn’t want to leave, but had to catch a plane. I’m pleased to say that Peter Griggs and his lovely Vietnamese wife Chi Nguyen came to listen as they do every year. Other loyal listeners included Bernie Williams and Robin

Pachman. It’s good to see repeat visitors in the audience.

Lad Carrington and his friend Donna rode on a Harley from North Carolina to participate in Rolling Thunder and to spend time with members and friends of the MDWP. Lad read his poem about the “*Memphis Belle*” (a B17 bomber) “*Heroes*” and his popular “*A Name on a Wall.*” Lad has become one of our regulars and we are glad to have him. He is now working on a play about Names on the Wall.

Mike McDonell, co-founder of the MDWP, read both days from the MDWP Anthology and a book in progress based on incidents that took place as he served as an Officer with the 1st Mar Div, I Corps. Mike also read “*Enough Hugs*” written by Vince Kaspar, and his own “*Making Peace With the Past,*” “*The Trip to Hoi An*” and “*Dinner,*” a poem from a tiger’s point of view. Suellen Manning, official photographer, took photos throughout the day to record our activities.





Briah Conner (official MDWP greeter and supporter) received plenty of competition from Roy Correnti on Sunday and Monday. Briah read his “*Marine Invocation*” and several Clyde Wray’s poems throughout the day. **Dick Epstein**, who got his usual \$100 Washington, DC parking ticket, managed to squeeze in several of his poems between readers: “*First Night in Town*,” “*A Night in Saigon*”, and “*Feeling No Pain*.” Dick also read several poems written by Clyde Wray (who could not be with us) and Rod Kane, who passed away in ’99.

Dolf Droge (NSA Specialist, advisor to Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, and former local talk show host) visited us toward the end of the day and serenaded and educated us as he has in the past. Dolf told us of the training programs he presented to Vietnamese villagers in I Corps while he was in Vietnam with the USAID and gave us several history lessons about the art of winning war without fighting, and the benefits of nuoc mam.

It was two days of remembrance, two days of compassion, accepting oneself and each other, frailties and all. Thank you for sharing yourselves, for remembering and for raising your voices so that others won't forget, so that names on the Wall will never be just names. I hope to see many of you again next Veterans Day. God Bless.

Thanks Briah Conner for the muffins, Cathy Solomonson for the brownies and chai, and Noy Epstein for her fruit cocktail and sandwiches.

We had five new readers who participated with us on Memorial Day weekend:

I almost forgot. A young girl in her twenties or early thirties sat in our tent before the program started and wrote the following. I thought I convinced her to write a poem she could read later that day. Here are her reflections of what she saw and felt this Memorial Day.

“I am younger than you, just an infant when you were gone. I see so many faces tarnished by life and yet I sit amongst a few who still find beauty in life.

Today I came to Washington, D.C. in search of a history; a time I never knew. Maybe through my passing today I have touched another’s life or someone has touched mine... and together we can continue to love life.

World War II Veterans, you stand so proud and tall today. You’re eyes are deep with history. Vietnam Veterans, you still ache with pain. I can feel it. We will continue to endure hardships and wars but possibly through your history, may we learn the precious values of life and may God guide us all and bless us eternally.”

*Sarah
Slgordon8@yahoo.com*

Thank you to all who came to sing, read and listen. God Bless.

New books written by MDWP participants:

Tales of Thunder Run, Larry Haworth, Chaplain USA, ISBN 1-932124-24-1
Aftermath: A Song for Tyrone, Doug Todd, 1st Battalion 9th Marines, ISBN 0-9748463-0-9

Who Knew? Reflections on Vietnam, Holley Watts.