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With Patrick, Through the Looking Glass

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With Patrick, Through the Looking Glass

A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the Department
Of Languages and Literature
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
To Graduate with Honors

By Kate Ferrie

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This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the
Department of Literature and Language.

Director

Reader

Reader
This thesis could not have come to pass without generous assistance and support from some very special people:

Kay Satre, crafter extroidinaire, for her insistence on shape, focus and audience and for encouraging me to chop;

Murphy Fox for showing me the art of weaving a tale without pronouns;

John Downs for a grace-full reading of my story;

Lou Talley and all of the other Vietnam veterans who gifted me with their trust and their stories;

Erin and Molly for living with a wild-eyed mom with love, support and encouragement;

Finally – and always – for Pat.
I remember the day of my wedding. A fine September day, fine like the smooth silkiness of linen. Lightly run fingers over the grain and a sense of rightness enfolds — crisp, cool, and even. Usual concerns about customary details cluttered my thoughts: getting hair done, decorating the hall, debating whether to wear my glasses, checking the rings, praying that everything went without the dreaded "hitch." But through it all I moved with deliberation toward Pat, my guiding light.

I was stepping into my wedding gown in the dressing room when I heard his voice.

"Is Kay inside?"

"You can't see her, it's bad luck!" Mom's reply was brisk and emphatic.

"I just wanted to tell her I'll see her at the altar."

No luck.

I listened at the door, gown unzipped, veil askew, shoes off, make-up unfinished and smiled. His voice always conjured up a surge. Contentment. I eased the door open. A peek wouldn't hurt, a brief flash of a tuxedo jacket as my parents pulled the outer door closed.

Later, crossing the parking lot on my father's arm, moving toward the church, I was surprised by Pat climbing up onto the six-foot fence and shouting, "I'll see you inside, Love!"
I married William Patrick Ferrie on September 14, 1974 because I loved him, because inside that strong, compassionate man lived a lively little boy who still climbed fences. I married him because our lives together promised to be so fine.

Little River Inn in Albion, California is nested high on the cliffs of the Mendicino coast. Wide lawns weave through coastal pines providing privacy for lovers. Pat and I sit curled together on the boulders at the edge of the cliff. In September, the humpback whales migrate from their Alaskan breeding grounds to their wintering waters in Baja. As we watch, they breech straight up out of the water and crash back down. Their exuberant dance amazes.

I tease Pat, telling him that the whales are the high point of our honeymoon, so far. His deep chuckle vibrates through my body. He’ll just have to concentrate on making it more memorable, he says, pulling me closer for a kiss. As Pat’s arms close around me, I meet his lips with mine. My whole life has been a journey to where I am at this moment.

After two days at Little River, we traveled up the coast, then cut over and down to the Trinity Wilderness. There, we planned a leisurely week camping in my uncle’s van and hiking the area. On our second day, while gassing up the van, we met a hitchhiker. Pat offered him a ride. As we followed the winding road, he and Pat struck up a conversation. When our passenger discovered we were honeymooners, he was embarrassed.

“Hey man, you don’t need three on a honeymoon. I’ll take off.”
Pat’s chagrin revealed that he had never thought of the awkwardness of inviting a stranger to share a part of our special time together.

“Kate? Is this O.K. with you?”

The two of them waited, like kids caught with their hands in a cookie jar, one expecting to be set on the side of the road, the other afraid he had blown it big time with his new bride. How like Pat, to offer help to another without a second thought.

I smiled. “Tell you what. You’re welcome to ride with us and share dinner with us, but at night, you’re on your own.”

He blushed and nodded, “That’s cool.”

I caught Pat’s eye and his worried look turned into a smile. His eyes sparkled and his grin lit up his whole face. Then he winked.

Pat’s wink, not one of your common roadside variety one-eyed blinks, required hardly any movement of the eye muscle. His wink involved direct eye contact, a slight smile, and then a soft twitch. That twitch demoted Rhett Butler to rank amateur. It’s been years since Pat’s death, but I still feel a warm rush whenever I think of his winks.

At one point our passenger mentioned Vietnam. There was a silence before Pat spoke.

“You were in ’Nam?”

“Yeah, you?”

“Yeah.”

“Where?”

“Camp Carroll out of Khe Sahn.”

“Khe Sahn? When?”
“1970. I missed Tet.”

A pause, then a soft whistle. “Not a healthy place to be my friend.”

“No shit.”

“Any buddies make it?”

“A few.”

“Not many?”

“No.”

“I was in Saigon – a desk jockey. No big deal.”

“You were there. That’s enough.”

I listened, puzzled. I didn’t understand the mono-word volleys, but felt a vast meaning that passed beneath the spoken words. How could I, a blushing bride of four days, know how much the war had affected Pat’s life? Now, a widow of six years, I look back and see the clues.

I remember one incident even before our wedding that offered my first clue to Pat’s hidden pain. Pat told me he was afraid he might not be a good husband, because he had done some awful things. Naïve, heartlessly glib, I replied the past was just that. What he had done then made no difference in our love for each other. “After all,” I added, “it’s not like you’ve killed people or anything.”

He grabbed me. The pain in his voice shocked me. His anguished look left me shamed at my insensitivity.

“My God Kate, I have killed people, lots of people. I’ve been in a war. Don’t you understand?”
I held him close. Our tears that day marked my gradual realization that war is not a noun, but a verb -- a verb delivering a sobering force.

***

Pat didn’t talk much about his life in Vietnam. Sometimes in response to a direct question, he’d flatly convey information: where he was stationed, where he spent time, geography, weather, descriptions of everyday life. One of my best sources of information were the times when Pat gathered with other ‘Nam vets and traded stories. If I was quiet and they forgot my presence, a more complete picture began to emerge. At the first couple of gatherings, I called attention to myself by asking questions or making comments. The stories quickly became condensed and cleaned up. Vietnam vets have an unspoken agreement not to give too much information to friends and family. There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, instead of being welcomed, they were brought home to be spat upon and called baby killers. Snuck in the back door, returning home, they entered another war zone. No ticker tape parades. No hero’s welcome. They returned shamed, defeated. The post WWII generation took great pride that the U.S. never lost a war. Movies glorified our soldiers marching into battle against all odds, defying the military experts, and winning. Winning. During the Korean conflict we stuck it out and got the job done. Onto this background, the Vietnam War was flung like a paint filled balloon, all order was splattered beyond of recognition. There were no clear-cut goals. Politicians fought the war using soldiers as pawns.
Our men went to Vietnam believing they were protecting people from the evil giant of communism. What they found were poor families who were only interested in raising enough food on their little space of ground to feed their children and grandchildren. They weren’t interested in who ran the country; they only wanted to be left alone. Our soldiers weren’t saving them from anything. The U.S. and North Vietnam were, like a pair of bull moose with antlers locked, tearing up the countryside and destroying their means of livelihood. Too many battles to win a hill or a piece of ground were followed by concessions giving the area back to North Vietnam. Peace talks allowed the NVA to fire upon our positions from safe zones while forbidding our soldiers to return fire. Reality was a far cry from John Wayne movies seen at the neighborhood theater. The troops knew there was no concrete purpose for the war. They knew their country betrayed them.

Once, when Pat and I gathered with some friends at a summer picnic, some of the older men began talking about their war experiences in World War II or in Korea. One young man, a friend of Pat’s, started to share an experience from Vietnam. They cut him off.

“We’re talking about a real war, not some damn “police action.”

“What about Korea? It was a police action too.”

“Hey, we fought a real army, not a bunch of half-starved civilians.”

Pat touched his friend’s shoulder and they both left.
Hostility is one reaction veterans understandably shrink from, but family and close friends unwittingly reinforce the silence. When Vietnam vets bring up the war around non-veterans, the reactions are similar: embarrassment, quiet, changed subjects and patronizing comments:

“Well, we don’t need to bring that up now.”

“Let’s talk about something more pleasant.”

“Now don’t get yourself upset thinking about these things. Just settle down.”

The message, no doubt motivated by kindness, is nevertheless clear: don’t talk. We don’t want to hear about it.

The second reason for the veterans’ silence comes not from outside, but from the horrors carried in their memories. Vietnam was an ugly vicious war; it was fought without clear-cut goals or even sides. Guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare is the no-holds barred, bare-knuckled, street-fighting kind of war. While the American forces had the technology and the Soviet Army supplied the North Vietnam Army (NVA), the civilian forces fought with what they had at hand: pits lined with razor sharp bamboo spikes, dipped in dung, littered the countryside, trip wires attached to grenades, claymores and bombs surrounded the paths, and minefields sprang up overnight. The enemy blended into the bush or else dropped underground into the maze of tunnels. To follow the enemy into a “hole” was considered tantamount to suicide – a soldier was either quickly lost or ambushed and killed. Children and babies were booby-trapped to explode when soft-hearted American soldiers bent to pick them up. A ten year-old playing, or an eighty-year old Mama-san doing laundry at the river could be a spy. They could at any second bend to pick up a gun or a grenade. The Geneva Convention failed
to control this war as it had earlier wars. The infamous Tet offensive violated a cease-fire that had been called to allow the South Vietnamese to observe a religious holiday. The North Vietnamese generals knew that the South Vietnamese would be at worship services, so they attacked suddenly and with intensity. Many soldiers fell during that battle.

With these thoughts in mind, drive by your local High School. Look at the young men horse-playing in the parking lot. Listen to them making plans for the weekend. Feel their youth. Now place them in the middle of the war. The average age of soldiers fighting in Vietnam after 1968 was nineteen. Nineteen. They should have been worrying about what type of corsage to buy their girlfriend for the dance, not about the snipers in the trees. Young lieutenants, averaging about twenty-two or twenty-three, served as officers. The “experienced men” of the war, the sergeants, were usually around twenty-one. The officers with experience usually remained away from the front lines. Young men were used as cannon fodder, and they all knew it.

In Vietnam there was no Battle of Normandy. No Marines raised the flag on Iwo Jima. There were no rules or “codes of honor.” There was just staying alive until the next day, hopefully all in one piece. And then they came home.

As Lance Morrow, columnist for Time, stated, “The nation will not recover from it (the war) or learn from all that slaughter and guilt, until it acknowledges that the men who fought the nation’s first teen-age war (average age = 19.2 years), did not cook up the war by themselves in a mischievous moment.” Jim Loughrey’s words suggest just how that experience of “slaughter and guilt,” exacerbated by social ostracism, took its toll on returning vets: “Most of our problems surfaced after our return from combat. We
succumbed as did our older brothers, but we did so alone and thus did not lend ourselves as much to being battle statistics. Furthermore, the differences in our respective homecomings contributed to the apparent disparity. By virtue of their coming home together and on long journeys that allowed for mutual sharing of the war experience, older veterans were able to lay to rest much of their horror. We were forced thereby to carry ours with us into life after our war. Additionally, the initial recovery of WWII veterans was greatly aided by their country’s reception: very warm and appreciative. The negative homecoming we received – the rebuke, disdain, criticism, blame, and forced silence and isolation – not only helped retard recovery but actually very severely added to the stress we had to overcome.”

A friend’s husband was released from the Oakland Naval Base in 1969. He traveled by bus to his home in Seattle. Because he had spent all of his money buying presents for his family, he didn’t have enough money to buy civilian clothes. By the time he arrived in Seattle his clothing was caked with dried and semi-dried spit. He burned his uniform and never spoke of Vietnam again. Ten years later, on the anniversary of his release date he took his life.

The other information I gathered about Vietnam came in fragments. I learned my lessons at night when Pat’s nightmares revealed the experiences that he tried so desperately to keep from me. During these episodes, I was catapulted, like Alice, through a looking glass into a world of twisted reality.
The first time after our marriage that Pat had a nightmare it was, fortunately, a mild one. As he thrashed and moaned beside me, I reached out and patted him. Moving closer to comfort him, he erupted. I was flung away from him, off the bed and across the floor. Then he knelt over me, hand on my throat, fist drawn back. I screamed and burst into tears. The tension left him slowly and his arms fell to his sides.


“No! You pushed me!” I managed to sob.

“Pushed you? You mean I rolled over and you fell out?”

“No, I mean you pushed me out of the bed. You threw me out!”

“Oh, God, I’m sorry, Kate. Did you touch me?”

“Yes, and I’ll never ever touch you again.”

“Kate, I’m sorry. I startle easily when I’m asleep. Maybe I’ll get used to it. Do you want me to sleep on the couch?” The vision of the big empty bed seemed more frightening to me. We crawled back into our waterbed, each of us hugging our sides as closely as we possibly could. Eventually, Pat became accustomed to my presence in bed and I became more adept at knowing how to avoid triggering his hyper-vigilance. That night, I was drafted into my own war, the war that continued in Pat’s nightmares. Over the years I gathered together the pieces, filling in the gaps between what he and others told me directly with the substance that emerged uncensored.
"Living with a veteran who suffers the effects of Post-Vietnam Stress is like running blindfolded with weights on. Nothing is easy; the smallest tasks become monumental. Nothing is reliable; the rules change the minute you understand them."

(-the wife of a Vietnam veteran; Aphrodite Matsakis; Vietnam Wives)

Soldier’s heart, shell shock, war neuroses, combat exhaustion, battle fatigue, and now, PTSD – these are all euphemisms for war’s effect on the human psyche. General George Patton said it correctly, “War is Hell.” How does a normal, rational, human being react to a year or more in Hell? By turning him or herself inside out with grief and pain. The Vietnam Veteran suicide rate is 33% greater than the national average, and the suicides typically occur at the twenty-year anniversary of their time “in country.” Over 150,000 Vietnam Veterans have committed suicide since the war, that’s almost three times the number killed in the war. Added together, that brings the casualty count to 200,000. The total almost rivals the 250,000 Americans killed in World War II. And that tallies only the deaths. Joel Brende and Erwin Parson write, “The government estimates that approximately 800,000 war veterans are suffering from varying degrees of post-traumatic stress disorders, disorders that are significantly intrusive enough to rob their lives of fulfillment and meaning.” Veteran’s groups believe that the approximation is dismally low.

Pat suffered from “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD). The Department of Defense wants you to believe that veterans complaining of these symptoms suffered from basic character defects to begin with. They insist that war really didn’t play any part in
acquiring their ailment. The American Psychiatric Association, however, holds that PTSD is a normal reaction to a traumatic or abnormal situation – for example, rape, war, murder, mayhem, and natural disasters. And not so natural disasters.

PTSD manifests itself in many individual ways. Pat suffered from nightmares, flashbacks, fugue-states and hyper-vigilance. His nightmares varied in degree of intensity—sometimes contained to tossing, turning and yelling out or at other times, active dreams of fights or other incidents. According to experts, there are three main kinds of PTSD symptoms: intrusive symptoms, avoidance symptoms and symptoms of hyperarousal. People suffering from intrusive symptoms may have an episode where the traumatic event “intrudes” into their life in sudden, vivid memories that are accompanied by painful emotions. Sometimes they experience “flashbacks,” (a recollection that is so strong that the individuals think they are actually experiencing the trauma again or seeing it unfold before their eyes). Often the flashbacks occur as nightmares. The re-experience comes as a sudden, painful onslaught of emotions of grief, fear or anger that seem to have no cause. Symptoms of avoidance affect the person’s relationships with others. They avoid close emotional ties with family, colleagues and friends. Feeling numb, with diminished emotions, especially toward those with whom they are closest, and they can complete only routine, mechanical activities. Appearing to be bored, cold or preoccupied, veterans with PTSD avoid situations that are reminders of the traumatic event because the symptoms may worsen. Some avoid accepting responsibility for others, thinking they failed the people who did not survive the trauma. They feel guilty and view themselves as failures.
People with PTSD may become irritable. They may have trouble concentrating or remembering current information, and may develop insomnia. The persistence of a biological alarm reaction is expressed in exaggerated startle reactions. For example, veterans may revert to their war behavior, diving for cover when they hear a car backfire or a string of firecrackers exploding. At times, they suffer panic attacks in which they experience extreme fear. Feeling sweaty, breathless, nauseated, and experiencing increased heart rate, PTSD sufferers also develop depression and may abuse alcohol or other drugs as a “self-medication” to blunt emotions and forget the trauma.

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Pat did tell me about his initial arrival in Vietnam. The plane taxied to a stop down the runway in a “safe” South Vietnam area. The area was so lush and green, it looked like a bit of heaven. Just as Pat thought that perhaps his stay wouldn’t be so bad, someone opened the aircraft door. A wall of heat and humidity slammed through the plane. It sucked the breath from every passenger. Each soldier was instantly drenched in sweat. And the stench. It overpowered them; churning stomachs and gagging throats. It smelled as though everything in the country was rotting: vegetation, meat, water, even the air. Crisp jungle fatigues melted to limp, damp weights dripping from their bodies.

During his stay in Vietnam from 1970 through 1971, Pat was stationed at Firebase Carroll, outside Khe Sahn, a pit in the Northwestern section of South Viet Nam right off the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Supply choppers brought mail, food and tools of war. Arrival
mobilized the camp. Pat’s job entailed driving out to the landing pad, picking up the supplies and transporting them to the supply shed. He picked up the first box and its coldness startled him. He pulled it close to his bare chest and savored the sensation of his skin puckering into goosebumps. Lifting the canvas, he gazed at dozens of cartons of cold milk. He lifted a carton and its waxy wetness reminded him of kindergarten -- milk and graham crackers. Mouth watering, he opened the carton and tipped it back into his throat. Most had already reached his stomach before his system registered the sourness. Bending over he heaved his memories into the dust. The irony, of course, completely escaped him at the time. Years later, he used the story to illustrate his lost innocence.

At a firebase soldiers sometimes relaxed and settled into a peaceful routine. But at other times total pandemonium broke out. Everyone knew the location of the firebases, including the enemy. A firebase housed the Big Guns, cannons with the capability of delivering rounds over a mile away. The enemy didn’t attempt the impossible task of destroying them. They did, however, try to eliminate the humans that worked the guns. When the Viet Cong attacked nearby positions, they “neutralized” firebases by massive bombardment; incoming rounds hit the ground at two or three per minute. Depending upon the size of the battle, the attack could last hours or days at a time. After a while, the spirits of even the strongest men began to crack, tempers flared as nerves frayed. The soldiers knew, of course, that something was “going down.” They also knew they were supposed to be protecting a position, but they could do little. Sometimes they had radio contact and heard their fellow soldiers at outlying positions begging for help. Sometimes all they heard were screams. Later, they received the casualty lists. Occasionally, depending upon the location of the battle, the dead,
shrouded in body bags, were shuttled to their base for storage while waiting for the choppers to pick them up for transport back to headquarters. There were no refrigerated huts. The bodies were stacked in the shade (if there was any), the black plastic glimmering in the sun and the stench permeating the air.

Once a soldier talked to me about the experience face to face. Even after twenty years, he choked up and could only whisper his memories. “Christ, I remember one time they [the bodies] were stacked waist high. Like cords of wood. We tried to avoid them. We wouldn’t look or we walked a different route. Ya know? But they were there. We failed them. They were dead because of us.”

Everyone took turns on patrol, even the “cherries” or newcomers like Charlie. Cherries were avoided because they were likely to make stupid and often lethal mistakes. During a patrol over by the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Pat tried to take Charlie under his wing in spite of warnings from his friends. He passed on information and kept an eye on him while they were out. One night there had been a lot of movement by the Viet Cong along the trail and a patrol, that included Pat and Charlie, “humped the ruck” to investigate. All of the men were tense, concentrating on every sound. They moved through the bush in a fanned out position. Pat usually kept Charlie within his line of vision, but this time his full focus was on the darkness around them. The explosion sent them all to the ground. When the air cleared they found Charlie. He was still alive, but part of his neck had been blown away. Carl radioed for medics while Pat held his hands over the wound trying to stop the bleeding. The medics came and carried Charlie to a clearing so a chopper could medivac him out to the nearest hospital. A week later a request came from Headquarters
to send Charlie's belongings to them. Pat tried to find out about Charlie, but the
commander only knew that Charlie was going home. Since they usually offered
memorial services for guys if who died, the commander assumed that he was going to be
O.K. After the belongings had been sent off, someone ran across Charlie's photo album.
Pat took it planning to find him when he got back to the States. After almost twenty
years of writing letters and searching records, Pat finally found Charlie. His name listed
among the thousands of others on the Vietnam Wall.

One afternoon at Firebase Carroll, the friends were sitting around eating dinner.
"Tweed," the short timer, regaled the others with tales of his Mama and her mouth­
watering pies. He joked that in seven days time he'd be home for good and just bursting
from the pies waiting for him at home in the freezer. Maybe he'd think of them as he
munched them down. Suddenly, shells started falling. They dropped their plates and ran
for cover. As Pat dived behind some sandbags, he heard Carl yell, "I'm hit!" Doing a
zigzag run, with a shoulder roll thrown in, he ran over to Carl, whose face was covered
with blood.

Pat grabbed him, "Where are you hit?"

"Right here!"

Carl reached up and plucked a B-B sized piece of shrapnel out of his forehead.

"You S-O-B! I almost killed myself running over here and that's it? I ought to
shoot you myself?"

"I'm sorry Pat, but it's so funny! You looked like John F-ing Wayne runnin' over
here!"
“Oh God Carl. Do you think maybe you’ll get a Purple Heart?”

They fell to the ground laughing until tears ran from their eyes. The shelling halted and they weakly returned to their now cold meal. Then they stumbled over the mangled remains of Tweed. It was almost as if he’d exploded. When they began the chore of “matching” body parts to reunite in body bags, they couldn’t find Tweed’s left hand. Pat was distressed by the idea of sending Tweed home to his Mama without a hand, but the choppers had arrived and the bodies had to be stacked inside them to be transported back to the base. After they finished, they returned to retrieve their dinner plates. Then Pat found Tweed’s hand, lying in the middle of his food.

Not long after, a Catholic chaplain came out to visit the men. It had been several months since Pat had seen a priest. After Confession, Pat began to talk. He expressed his confusion about the war. How could he be Catholic and still be involved in a war that he was beginning to see as wrong? The priest told Pat that he didn’t understand the “bigger” picture, that he had a duty to God and his country, that he must obey the oath of allegiance that he took when he joined the army. Pat listened and nodded. He guessed that the Chaplain was right. The next day, the commander called him into his office.

“So, you think you’re too good for the war?”

“No Sir, I don’t think that.”

“Well, that’s not what the Chaplain tells me.”

And so it continued. The officer “locked Pat’s heels” for almost an hour. Pat emerged from the bunker in a daze. He had confided his deepest doubts and fears to a priest. And the priest, in violation of both Catholic law and military law, betrayed him.
I learned about these war experiences and more from Pat. Sometimes, late at night, he talked. But more often, I pieced together bits from the war that continued in his nightmares or his flashbacks. Names, incidents – I watched them unfold before my eyes. I helped search for Tweed’s hand on my knees beside Pat on our bedroom floor. I held him in my arms as he sobbed night after night in shame and disgrace over failing to find the hand in time. I wiped the tears and held his hand as he shuddered and sobbed and told me how funny it was to use the body of a V.C. for target practice and about the “cool” snipers that wore necklaces of ears from “kills.” In the mornings, the memories were forgotten again, locked back in the recesses of his unconscious.

How do you live with the memories? How do you hold insanity at bay? You convince yourself as completely as you can – “It don’t mean nothin’. It’s not important. It can’t be important. Your sanity depends on it.

***

Pat returned from Vietnam in October of 1971, a changed man. Mike Kangus, one of Pat’s remaining childhood friends, once commented, “After Pat came home I never saw him smile, not a real smile. When he did smile, it was cold. His smiles never reached his eyes.” Angry and arrogant, he defied authority and withdrew from his family and most of his friends. Pat moved through a succession of jobs. Gone was the young man who gave his employers 100% effort and loyalty. On one of his jobs, he was ordered to climb onto some faulty scaffolding. When it collapsed Pat was thrown across
a turnbuckle hitch and injured his midsection and back. Two days later, in excruciating pain and furious with the doctor who ordered him back to work after “eyeballing” the “bruise,” Pat refused to climb onto another obviously unstable scaffolding. He was fired for insubordination. To demonstrate real insubordination, Pat chased the foreman around the yard twice with a wrench, drove home, walked into the house, and collapsed with no sensation in his legs.

At Ft. Miley Veteran’s Hospital in San Francisco, Pat was diagnosed with a ruptured disc in the lower lumbar region of his back. A routine psychiatric exam diagnosed him as schizophrenic. However, the doctors did not prescribe any treatment for the mental illness because the majority of Vietnam veterans diagnosed with schizophrenia were unresponsive to treatment. Actually, they were sufferers of PTSD, but since the Army and the VA didn’t recognize the condition until after 1981, schizophrenia was the diagnosis of choice. Since they didn’t respond to typical treatment for schizophrenia, the Army labeled them as “uncooperative.”

After his discharge, Pat tried to find direction and to exorcise some demons, by enrolling in classes at the Solano Community College in Suisun, California. Pat found his pottery class particularly restful. Unfortunately, his defiant attitude frustrated his instructor. In one class, after he finished a beautiful piece of pottery, the instructor turned to Pat and spat, “I don’t know why so much talent is wasted on someone like you.”

Pat didn’t respond. He picked up his pot and left the class. He never returned. When he related the story to me I asked why he didn’t defend himself.

“I couldn’t. I wanted to tell her to drop dead or go to hell. I wanted to tell her she was a lousy bitch, but I couldn’t. I guess it’s because deep down I knew she was right.”
I still have that pot; it rests on my mantle. It reminds me that words can break a soul as completely as a bullet can destroy a body. One person’s spirit dwindles to nothingness; another person’s life force drains into the ground for all to see.

During this same time, I was trying to find some direction in my own life. I had signed up for some classes at Solano College as well. Sitting on the lawn outside the PE center, two boots walked into my vision and I looked up into a face that caused my heart to jump. Pat. Shoulder length dark wavy hair, hazel eyes, moustache, and a quirky smile—I was a goner. I admonished myself to get a grip. I had plans and they did not include developing a crush on a guy who would only break my heart. He winked and I looked away, thanking my lucky stars that I was sitting down so my weak knees went undetected.

After a month of meeting on campus and eating lunch together, Pat asked me out for dinner. We started to the restaurant, but began to talk and somehow ended up sitting in a park for hours. That night when I dropped him off at his house he invited me in to meet his dogs. Pat approached the back door.

“Back! Back! Sit! Calm down! Be Good”

I laughed at what I assumed was an act for my benefit. Then he opened the door. A canine tornado whirled into the room. Dog hair tickled my nose, rough tongues vied for space on my face, and paws stepped in my mouth, on my stomach, legs, arms, and hair. I screamed and laughed and, eventually, ended up with the two of them sitting on my lap in the middle of the floor. A tummy rub and an ear scratch rendered the two pups
into canine jelly. Later, Pat said that was the moment he knew he would marry me. It took him three more weeks to ask. I said yes.

And so we married on that fine September day and began our life together.

Our first home was modest, tiny. Located in a valley of rolling green hills and scrub oak, we were in heaven. Weekends spent hiking and picnicking with the dogs. Our meager funds didn’t allow for many entertainments, so we contented ourselves with each other’s company. One night when we returned from work, Dozer and Tee were missing. The neighborhood kids shamefacedly admitted to opening the gate to play with the dogs. The canine delinquents had pushed past them and escaped. They were last seen high-tailing it down the road toward the highway. We found them both by the side of the road, dead. Pat dragged them into the side ditch, out of the way of traffic, and with a brief “too bad,” got into the car to leave. I couldn’t understand his callousness. He was going to just leave them there. They weren’t even my dogs, but I was heartbroken. As tears ran down my cheeks, I reached over to Pat and squeezed his arm. He shook me off.

“Look, they were stupid. If they hadn’t gone into dangerous territory they wouldn’t have gotten killed. They deserved what they got.”

I was confused. Was this the compassionate man I married? What did he mean, “dangerous territory”? Was he talking about the dogs or something else? Some sixth sense told me that it was not the time to delve into Pat’s thoughts. We spent the night in silence. Later, in his nightmares, Pat grieved.
The following Christmas, I had an artist paint an oil portrait of the two dogs for Pat. He cried. He said that no one had ever taken the time to understand his sorrows. Just because he was unable to express his pain didn't mean he didn't have the feelings. Afterwards he trusted me more. From time to time, he talked.

A few years later, I woke with Pat's hands on my throat. I felt the panic begin to rise in my chest, but through my fear I heard Pat repeating over and over, "Kate, I can't get the bleeding to stop. It won't stop. Are you all right?"


Quickly I responded, "Pat, I'm O.K. This isn't my blood. It's Charlie's. He's been choppered out. He'll be fine."

Pat took my face between his hands. "You're sure you're not hurt? Tell me the truth, Kate. Are you O.K.?

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Good."

Then he lay down in the bed and slept. The next morning absolutely no recollection of the incident.

On April 24, 1978, the first of our two daughters was born. Erin Maureen, with an attitude at birth captured her Daddy's heart. Since I worked evenings, Pat picked up Erin from the sitter, fixed dinner, drove to my office and answered the phones while I ate and nursed the baby. He loved his time alone with his baby girl. Cradling her in his arm,
he one-handedly cooked dinner, or propped her infant seat on the kitchen counter and
discussed “world events” with her while he washed dishes. Pat’s patience was incredible.
I thought fatherhood and the chaos that babies bring might be a difficult adjustment, but
Pat loved it. He had unending stamina for walking the floor during colicky nights. He
never tired of watching Erin. Sometimes, late at night I found him standing over her crib
with a soft smile on his lips. When she got older and began to walk and talk, his
fascination grew proportionately. She was his little person.

Mary Katherine, “Molly,” arrived on June 3, 1980, as easy going as her sister was
strong-willed. We hiked the hills with a “four-wheel drive” stroller and an ever-vigilant
Saint Bernard named Buck. With Pat and Buck chasing after Erin, teaching her how to
climb trees or harass squirrels, Molly and I sat together and watched leaves and birds.
Once Molly began to walk, however, she eagerly joined the file ranging up the hills and
through the woods. The girls quickly acquired nicknames. In vain I protested the loss of
their beautiful Irish names. To Daddy, and only to Daddy, they were always “Butch” and
“Maynard.”

During this period, our life settled into a peaceful routine. Other than some
nightmares on anniversary dates, Pat’s symptoms quieted. I breathed sighs of relief,
thinking time was healing wounds.

Pat worked for the Department of Defense in a position that required belonging to
the Army Reserve. After a few years, Pat finally found his calling in the Reserve’s
Chaplain’s Section as a Chaplain’s Assistant. Encouraged by his supervisor, Chaplain
(Lt. Col.) Jack Coward, Senior Chaplain of the 159th Support Group, Pat attended the annual Chaplain's Assistant School at the Presidio in San Francisco, and graduated at the top of his class. Pat soon made a name for himself in the Reserves as a respected professional soldier with a "can do" attitude. He told me, "I finally feel vindicated. I've finally succeeded." His dedication to the enlisted men and attention to detail earned him several medals from the military, and in 1987, the City of Helena awarded him the Citizen Soldier of the Year Award. The award was based upon a nomination from Pat's commander and his supervising officer. A great honor.

Pat rose to the position of Senior Chaplain's Assistant, working as a team with Chaplain Coward. Together, they developed the Section into a cohesive group that gained recognition for high quality work.

One afternoon, as the Reservists worked to prepare for the journey to their annual training site, Pat stood visiting with some men. He told them that Camp Parks was not too far from his hometown and if they needed anything, to let him know

Bill, Pat's civilian boss, sidled over to Pat.

"How about helping me find a hot young thing for some sack time?"

Pat ignored the comment and continued talking to the others, but Bill persisted.

"Come on, Pat, maybe you can find a number for yourself, then we can double. When the cat's away... what do ya say?"

There was an uncomfortable silence. Bill was known for his wandering eye, but he'd never been so blatant before.

Pat sighed. "Bill, you are really out of line. The Chaplain's Section doesn't do procurement. Let's just drop it, O.K.?”
There was some feeble laughter, but silence fell on the group. Bill glared and stomped away. Later, at home, Pat told me he didn’t know what else he could’ve done. He was worried that Bill might cause trouble for him at work. For a while, Bill maintained a calm working relationship with Pat and we relaxed our vigilance.

One afternoon as Pat stepped off a mobile platform, the wheel lock came loose and the platform rolled out from under him. Landing stiff legged; Pat experienced a blinding pain in his head and dropped to his knees. Struggling to his feet, Pat staggered into the office. Bill and another mechanic were eating lunch, but one look at Pat’s white face caused them both to jump to their feet. They made arrangements to transport Pat home and called me at work.

After arriving home, Pat collapsed into bed. The doctor diagnosed a ruptured disc in his neck and scheduled surgery. Pat was placed on permanent disability and Workman’s Compensation was notified, we thought.

A month after the surgery Pat received a certified letter from the Civil Service Division informing him of his hearing date. Incredulous, Pat called the number and requested information about the allegations. His boss, Bill, had reported that Pat had failed to file a report, faked an injury and was currently receiving disability payments. Pat was shocked. His first impulse was to find Bill and confront him. His next impulse was to find Bill and beat him to a pulp. His third impulse was to laugh. How could he fake an injury that required a surgery? How could he fake two x-rays, three MRI’s, and a CAT scan? How could he fake the testimony of five doctors, three of them employed by Workman’s Compensation? Fortunately, the judge agreed and the case was thrown out.
We thought it was over, but Bill was persistent. For over two years, he worked to complicate Pat’s life, filing grievances, loosing reports, and enlisting the aid of his cronies in his campaign of harassment. When Bill retired, he had set up a network of his friends to continue his mission. Why would total strangers take pleasure in making life miserable for someone they had never met? It didn’t make sense. Since Pat was on disability, he had limited contact with them on a daily basis, but they all had positions that required their membership in the Army Reserve. Pat still had to deal with them in his capacity as a Reservist. Pat dealt with many fine, professional military men; credits to their country. But in the wings were jerks and saboteurs, waiting for a chance to strike a blow. For a person with PTSD, it was a tailor made disaster waiting for a chance. At first, we gave the problem the attention it deserved – none – but eventually it began to take its toll.

We discovered stress breaks down the defenses and allows PTSD a wider reign on the psyche. Simulating the stress of combat, mental pressure triggered the symptoms. Every time the team pulled another stunt, Pat suffered renewed nightmares, flashbacks and avoidance symptoms. He anger flared more often and he was constantly tense.

Pat began to self-medicate himself with alcohol. He withdrew and became surly. At any time he could slip back into flashbacks of Vietnam. And most frighteningly, he began to consider suicide.

Some evenings, Pat locked himself in the bedroom. Lying in the dark for hours on end, he often refused to allow me in the room even to sleep. Sitting with his pistol, he’d load it and unload it over and over. Whenever I tried to calm him or ask him to put
the gun away, he exploded in rage. I was terrified. Yet Pat had no awareness of his forays beyond the boundaries of sanity.

Facing a future on disability was not appealing to Pat so he decided to go back to school. One evening Pat called me from the Carroll College library where he was doing research for a psychology paper.

"Think you could come over for a little while?"

"Right now?"

"If you can."

"Sure, let me get the girls settled and I’ll be right there."

I made my way to the back of the library to Pat’s habitual chair, where he was sitting and reading. He looked up and smiled, a smile that could still melt my heart even after fifteen years of marriage.

"Hello Love, glad you could come."

"Any time. What do you need?"

"A kiss?"

"My pleasure. Did you have a special reason for wanting me to come by or were you just missing me?"

"A little of both. Here, read this."

The chapter heading read, “The Effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).” As I read the material, I felt Pat’s eyes on me. When I finished I looked up.

"It’s me, isn’t it?"

"Yes."
"I have PTSD from Vietnam. But at least it's not as bad as it could be. I mean, I
don't have the really bad nightmares or the intrusive thought episodes."

My silence cut through his thoughts.

"Do I?"

"Sometimes."

"I have to go get help, don't I?"

"Yes. I've been waiting until after finals to bring it up."

"O.K."

"Remember, you won't be alone. I'm here."

"But you don't need to listen to me talk about Vietnam."

"I already have."

I told him that I'd been with him when Tweed died. I was there with Charlie. I
held him through the bombings and through patrols. I knew the names of his comrades,
the ones who died and the ones who came home only to die by their own hand. I knew
the atmospheric changes that triggered memories. The sounds and smells. I knew he
hated fireworks on the Fourth of July. I'd been in this war for fifteen years standing by
his side. I told him there wasn't a chance in Hell that I wouldn't be there for him
whenever he needed me.

Pat began counseling. Sometimes I went with him and other times he needed to
face issues alone. I tried to keep close contact with the counselor, but he was a
contracted counselor provided by the Veteran's Administration and he didn't always
seem to move as quickly as I felt Pat’s symptoms warranted. And above all, he didn’t listen.

One night, Pat locked himself in the bedroom. I couldn’t escape the feeling that something was deadly wrong. I called and pounded on the door, with no response. Finally, after an eternity, the door swung open and I found myself looking into the eyes of a madman.

I tried to reason with him, to give up the gun, to let me call for help, but soul-freezing venom was his answer. I finally blurted out that I wasn’t going to let him kill himself, that I’d do anything to stop him. Then he laughed. Before I could understand the meaning of the laughter, the world around me exploded. I floated out of semi-consciousness with Pat standing over me screaming obscenities. My jaw, rigid with pain, was beginning to swell. As I got to my feet, Pat grabbed my hand and forced the gun into it. It was loaded and cocked, ready to fire. I tried to drop it, but he encircled my hand with his, trying to force my finger against the trigger.

“So you won’t let me kill myself? So do it yourself, Bitch.”

When I answered no, he slapped my face and screamed insults at me. Repeatedly he tried to anger me so I’d pull the trigger. I heard the girls come into the house and screamed at them to go outside and stay outside until I came to get them. They ran crying from the house. Finally, I fell to my knees to avoid the slaps. He kicked me and released his hold on my hand. Turning, he walked down the hallway and out of the house. I heard his truck start up and drive away. Breathing a sigh of relief, I took the gun and unloaded it. Then, before he could return, I wrapped it in a towel, took it outside
and hid it in the farthest box of our storage shed. I brought the girls inside, tried to calm them down and then went to bed. Pat was gone for twenty-four hours. When he returned, he had no recollection of his episode. He assumed we had argued and he had gone for a drive to cool down, and had fallen asleep. He was confused about the time lapse and couldn’t understand how my face had gotten bruised.

I didn’t know how to tell my beloved husband that living with him was becoming like a scene from Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When he finally realized that he had caused my injuries, he became even more distraught. Repeatedly he told me that I would be better off without him, that he was no good for us. But we loved him, and he loved us. I could no more walk away from him than if he were dying from cancer. He was in pain not of his own making.

I talked to his counselor, who in turn talked to Pat about whether he intended to injure or kill himself. Of course, Pat denied any intention of suicide. I tried to explain that Pat sometimes was not himself. He had episodes when his sanity slipped from his grasp. I was ignored.

One day, Pat approached me in a rage. Where was the gun? What had I done with it? When I refused to tell him where I had hidden it, he threatened to kill me. I eventually fled the house with the girls, afraid for our lives.

Later, his counselor told me that not knowing the location of the gun was causing even more anxiety for Pat. He had talked to Pat who had assured him that he was absolutely in no way suicidal. The counselor suggested that I needed to learn not to over react to Pat’s bad moods and to give him his space when he needed to be alone. In vain, I
tried to explain that there was more to the incidents than just bad moods. I had seen and experienced Pat’s suicidal episodes. Again the counselor refused to listen.

In the summer of 1090, Iraqi tanks rolled across the border of Kuwait. The Kuwaiti people were being destroyed. Saudi Arabia feared invasion. As Iraqi troops massed along the Arab border the fear looked like a reality. World leaders met and decided that there must be a response. Operation Desert Shield began. Immediately the phone began to ring. Was Pat available and combat ready? He answered yes. His counselor was worried about Pat going back to war. He offered to write a letter to give him a medical deferment from the war. No, Pat belonged to the Reserves he believed to bug out when he was needed would be the act of a coward. He was resigned to the war and even a little hopeful that he’d be able to lay some demons to rest. The phone calls averaged at least three a day from the different branches of the Army asking if Pat would consider joining up with them. Some offered a tour to Germany to replace troops leaving for the Desert; others wanted him for notification teams – the ones who notify families if a soldier is killed. Pat wasn’t interested. The Sixth Army had recruited him, trained him and had hung by him; if the Sixth needed him, he was ready. He made a call to his buddy, Gerry, who was at the Pentagon and had access to the lists. Pat asked if he was on the list to be activated. Gerry wasn’t supposed to say, so he asked Pat, “Would you put your name on the list?”

“Yes.”

“Well there’s your answer.”
So we knew, Pat would most definitely be called up, bad back, PTSD and all. And in all likelihood, he’d end up leaving before Christmas. One day after taking Erin and Molly to school, we went for a walk in the hills and we talked. Finally, Pat asked the question, “Do you support my going to war?” I answered with a question, “Why do you want to go?” After a pause Pat answered, “I have to go.” He knew what war was like and it scared the Hell out of him. But if his going could keep one young man out of war, it was worth it. He was in the Chaplain section, he’d taken Lay Ministry classes, and was an Eucharistic Minister. There was a need for him. Maybe he could give the soldiers the coverage that he didn’t have in Vietnam. Besides, if his country called, he had to respond. If he didn’t go, he’d never be able to hold his head up.

I told him, “I don’t want you to go. I’d rather die that to send you away to war. But if you need to do this, I’ll support you. It breaks my heart to do it. I’ll always love you.” We held each other and then walked in silence for a while.

It’s a funny thing I’ve learned about Vietnam vets. Their country has treated them badly, insulted them, poured poison on them, and ignored their injuries; yet, they still harbor a deep, abiding love. They may be bitter and angry, but they are still willing to give their lives, if necessary, for their country.

On December 20, 1990, the girls and I took Pat to the airport to send him to Ft. Collins, Colorado, where he would meet up with the medical unit he had been assigned to. While I sobbed and held onto him, twelve-year-old Erin looked up at her Daddy and said, “You know, this is a really bad time in my life for you to go to war.”
I stepped away while Pat took Erin and Molly in his arms. He blessed them and asked them to pray for him. He asked Molly to bless her Mommy for him every night. (She has still never missed a night.) He told them that he loved them and was proud of them. He knew they would be strong and that no matter what happened, he would always be with them. At the final boarding call, he walked down the ramp, turned to wave and caught one more glimpse of three tear-streaked faces.

When Pat reached Saudi, he was given a field promotion to assume Chaplain duties. The promotion enables him to work primarily by himself. A typical week began in Rhiyadd at Army Headquarters. Pat picked up supplies and was briefed on new information, then he took his jeep and drove several hundred miles across the desert, often by himself, to King Khalad City Hospital where he visited the patients. After one or two days there, he traveled along the Iraqi and Kuwait border visiting with the soldiers and offering Scripture services as needed until he reached the enemy POW camps. He ministered to the Iraqi soldiers, many of whom were Byzantine Catholic, then he headed back to Rhiyadd where the process began all over again. Many of the soldiers waited for Pat to come by on his rounds to talk to him about their fears and doubts.

Pat often had opportunities to call home. During one of his phone calls he shared his feelings about the war. This war was handled so differently and so professionally. There was a defined mission that was being achieved. Still, his greatest fear was a bombing. He was nervous about possible flashbacks.

Late one evening I received a phone call from Pat.

"Kate, now don’t get excited. I’m all right. There’s been an explosion. I’m in the hospital at King Khalid City."
“My God, Pat, are you hurt? What happened?”

“Well, I’m O.K., except I’ll be here for a few days. I guess I’m not really all right.”

Then the phone went dead. It was relatively common during the overseas calls for phones to work sporadically. This time, I was frantic. For two days I tried to get a call through to the hospital. I called generals, Congressmen, friends at the Pentagon, and anyone else I could think of, but the phones were out. Radio contact depended upon knowing Pat’s location, and no one seemed to be sure about where Pat was.

Finally a call came through. Pat was in Wiesbaden, Germany. He was being sent home. A formal order from a general gave Pat access to a phone and he called with the details.

Pat and a private had been travelling along a road when they noticed a civilian walking alone with something in his hands. Just a Pat was about to say that it looked like a cluster bomb, it exploded. Both of the Arab’s hands were blown off. In a panic, he began to run back to his vehicle. Pat was instantly out of the jeep and hollering for the private to radio for medical help. He caught up with the injured man, tackled him, and sat on his chest in order to keep him immobile for the medics. The man continued to scream and wave his handless arms in Pat’s face. By the time the medics arrived, Pat and the victim were both covered with blood. Pat was shaken. That night he suffered nightmares and flashbacks. The next day, he went to talk to the staff psychiatrist. Since the war had ended and we had won, the pressure was off. The doctor examined him and decided that Pat had given enough for his country; it was time for him to go home.
On April 25, 1991, a contingent of supporters waited to greet Pat as he stepped off the plane. The girls and I were at the front of the crowd. While it was wonderful to have him home, I could see he was changed. I worried about him.

Pat was quiet and withdrawn the first couple of weeks. He showed signs of life only around his girls. His eyes lit up and he smiled with joy, just sitting back and watching them.

One night I walked into our bedroom and found him sitting in the dark room with tears streaming down his face.

"Babe, what’s the matter?"

"It’s so hard. Just so damn hard."

"What is? Patrick? Talk to me."

“How can people be so cruel? How can they maliciously cause pain to another person?”

Pat had seen the Iraqi prisoners. They were pathetic. Their own country betrayed them and left them to die. The Kuwaitis were tortured and massacred, for no good reason. In ‘Nam, human beings were reduced to commodities. He couldn’t make heads or tails out of any of it.

I had no answer. I could only wrap my arms around him and hold him as his tears flowed.

In the summer of 1991, Pat continued his therapy through the Veteran’s Administration. The Army changed their view of PTSD. They acknowledged its existence in their soldiers, but they still concluded that those who suffered adverse
reactions to war had simply been emotionally defective prior to the war. Pat was now “defective.” Great.

That summer I went to Washington, D.C. for a conference. Pat came with me. While we were there, we took the time to visit some historical sites. Of course, we visited the Vietnam Wall. Pat wanted to find Tweed’s name. While he was looking through the index, he found another name he knew, Charlie. Throughout the years he had searched for Charlie but had come up against a dead-end every time. Now he knew.

When we returned home he tried to call Tony, one of his best friends in Vietnam, to tell him about Charlie, but the number had changed. When he asked for directory assistance, only Tony’s wife was listed. Assuming they must have divorced, he called her to see if she had Tony’s number. No, she couldn’t give him a number. Tony was dead – suicide. Pat hung up the phone, trembling. Then he slowly picked up the phone and dialed the number for Carl’s shop. Another man answered. Carl? No, he didn’t own the shop any more. He died about five years ago. No, he’d never married. How’d he die “Don’t know. Could be anything. That man was crazy.” Pat was the only one of his companions still alive.

PTSD became the fifth member of our family. Pat struggled with it every hour of every day. It weighted him down. Added to his flashbacks and nightmares was another dream: He was standing on one side of a river in full combat gear. On the other side were all of his buddies, Tweed, Charlie, Tony, Carl and all the rest. They were looking across the water at Pat; they were waiting for him.

Survivor Guilt. Now stronger thought of suicide added to his struggles. Even though he worked with other veterans who were suicidal and was unofficially on-call day
or night to “talk them down,” he still had demons of his own to deal with. He was on medication, but in order to take enough to alleviate his symptoms he was too drugged up to attend his classes at Carroll or to talk to other vets who needed him.

On April 25, 1992, Pat and I spent the day together. We talked about a long-term treatment center in Washington State that had great results treating PTSD. It was a three-month program, but it was worth it if it could help.

That night, as if needing to reassert themselves, the dreams returned in full-force. Pat woke up convinced that the house was being over-run. He was afraid that Erin and Molly had been captured. I assured him that they were safe.

“Their welfare is in your hands, Kate. You’d better be sure.”

“I am sure. They are fine.”

Slowly I got him calmed down and relaxed, but he still kept looking out the window “to make sure they were gone.” Reality receded. He talked about attending Mass the next day, but added a comment that before we left he’d have to “sweep” for mines. I offered to sit up and talk to him but he told me that we both needed some sleep. He told me to lay down and turn off the light; he’d take the first watch. Again I offered to stay awake with him, but he said he needed to be alone.

On April 26, 1992, at 2:40 am, while I lay dozing beside him in bed, my husband, Pat, took a gun out of the night stand, placed the muzzle against his head and pulled the trigger. I was awakened by the noise and the awful smell of gunpowder.
At the memorial service on the evening before the funeral, I spoke to the friends and family gathered there. I shared Pat’s belief that we can only plant seeds and then trust in God to make them grow. I asked everyone to think of the kindness shown to them and to pass them on a hundred-fold – this was Pat’s strongest conviction. Before they closed the coffin, Pat’s mother came up for a final good-bye. Pat was wearing his uniform at his father’s request. Slowly a quivering hand reached out and touched his face. “My baby,” she whispered and a single tear fell on the lapel of his uniform.

On the day of Pat’s funeral, the church was filled. A friend, Father Gene Peoples, spoke of Pat’s color-blindness and how he was now in heaven enjoying God’s rainbows. As we left the church on that appropriately rainy day, the Montana sky was filled with a full double rainbow. I like to think that it was a sign from Pat. At the Veteran’s Cemetery, a kilted bagpiper stood on the hill behind us and played Scottish dirges.

My daughters, Pat’s girls, struggle with the reality that their beloved Daddy left them behind. I fight battles every day and survive only by placing one foot in front of the other.

Pat Ferrie was the love of my life; he was the other half of my soul. Should I have done more? Could I have done more? Maybe. Hindsight is 20/20. Or is it really? Our lives together were a woven tapestry. Some of the threads were bright and lively, others were dark and oppressive. Up close, the pattern is difficult to recognize. Too much pain, too many feelings, makes the pattern blurred. I only know that I loved him.

Pat was the kindest, gentlest, most compassionate and tolerant man I ever knew. But the meanness and cruelty of the world, especially the hardness of war, became a cancer in his soul. I am grateful for the time we had together. And I’m sorry so many
people will never know what a wonderful person Pat was. And there are thousands more who we'll never know because of the Vietnam War. The world is poorer for this loss.