

Odyssey Home:

A Veteran Performance

Performed in the Edson R. Miles Theatre
St. Lawrence University
Canton, NY
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With text by

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and excerpts from Homer's *The Odyssey*
translated by A.S. Klein

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Directed by Erika Hughes

Prelude: a lot to tell

Blackout. Lights up on the parachute. Projected images cycle through.

Cheryl (v.o.):

It's called historical trauma, right? Based on the historical trauma that we been subjected to all our lives, let alone us, our great grandparents, blah blah blah, like that, and that following, to how do you break that? And some run, like I did, to go in the service rather than fight my family, right, and stigmas attached of Natives being alcoholics, drunks, blah blah blah. Well, I'm not going to turn into that person so I'm going to leave the reservation and I'm going to fight anybody - I'm going to fight the enemy - so I'll go in the military. Right?

So those kind of stories, to say, like, how did you get to boot camp, why did you go in the military, that's a lot to try to say in 3-4 minutes! And then, also, put a twist in it or show a little humor, that you are human, you know? And so to wrap my brain around how do I tell this story and I'll just say... seven minutes total? Is what I'll put it at and - alright? Seven minutes total, to the now, 'cause the now is two minutes of how do I sell the politics of making the audience understand there's a reason you need to fight for veterans, for veterans that are homeless -

Erika (v.o.):

I kinda think we should -

Cheryl (v.o.):

There's a reason -
Hey, if this is recording, do what you gotta do!

Projection: image from rehearsal

Erika (v.o.):

I kinda want to open with you saying - how the hell do we tell this story?

Ellie (v.o.):

There's a lot to tell.

Cheryl (v.o.):

There is.

Lights up on the empty stage. Performers enter the stage from SL and take their seats.

Movement 1: *the departure*

Gen:

Tell me, Muse, of that man of many resources, who wandered far and wide, after sacking the holy citadel of Troy. Many the men whose cities he saw, whose ways he learned. Many the sorrows he suffered at sea, while trying to bring himself and his friends back alive. Yet despite his wishes he failed to save them, because of their own unwisdom, foolishly eating the cattle of Helios, the Sun, so the god denied them their return. Tell us of these things, beginning where you will, Goddess, Daughter of Zeus.

Angie:

I was born and grew up on (or near) U.S. Army bases. As a young person, I tearfully waved small American flags and sang along as a live band played the national anthem in an airport hangar when my father departed to Operation Desert Storm. Our singing and flag-waving so crystallized the national pride of the moment that a photograph of my then-toddler brothers ran in the local paper with the caption, "Young, patriotic well-wishers show their support."

On all U.S. Army bases, residents mark the end of the duty day with a distinct ritual in which a bugler sounds "Retreat" followed by "To the Colors" as an honor guard lowers and retires the American flag for the day. It is not only customary but compulsory for anyone outside during the end-of-day ceremony to participate, regardless of age or occupation. Soldiers in uniform must salute the flag, anyone driving on base is expected to come to a stop, and even civilians (including youth) are expected to participate by standing quietly until the flag ceremony is over. I learned to participate in this performance through a combination of modeling and direct instruction. I observed my father salute the flag while in uniform and watched as my mother stopped loading the groceries into the car in order to stand quietly. My siblings and I were reminded to "stand still," "be quiet," or "take off your hat." That I learned to participate in this performance is a reminder that youth learn to perform national identity and nationalism, through both informal and formal means, through families and institutions such as festivals, schools, camps -- and theatre.

Paige:

Odysseus fixed his splendid armour round his shoulders, woke up Telemachus, the cowman and the swineherd, and told them all to pick up their arms. They carried out his orders and put on their bronze armour. Then they opened the doors and went out with Odysseus leading. It was already broad daylight over the land, but Athene hid them in darkness and soon led them clear of the town.

Becca:

The night I arrived at basic training was memorable to say the least. We arrived at Lackland Air Force Base around 2300. The bus filled with recruits arrived, and the very moment those bus doors opened, Military Training Instructors, or MTIs, were screaming at us. There is no easing into it. It's like you're knowingly about to catch on fire, but there is no initial smoking or smoldering preceding the fire. It's rather like you're thrown into a colossal blaze already uncontrollable and thriving. I was fortunate in that I had graduated high school from an ROTC program, so I already knew the basic drill movements they were shouting at us new trainees. We all filed out of the bus and formed squads, making our new flight. We got up to our dorm and were told to stand at attention in front of our assigned wall lockers. The MTIs walked around the dorm, seemingly just entertaining themselves by calling us to attention, then putting us at ease roughly seventy thousand times in a row. Most of the other trainees were just learning these movements, but because of my ROTC experience, I was already proficient in these drill movements.

Cheryl (video):

Sekon Se-wa-kwe:kon, (Mohawk language-Hello Everyone)
 Cheryl Jacobs ionkia'ts. (My name is Cheryl Jacobs)
 So, how does one wrap up their military experiences in 10 minutes when trying to remember back some 34 years ago. If ever there was a time to reflect back on the military, this would be the time as we recognize that some loved ones were lost 16 years ago to one of the most horrific losses of life on American soil, as we sat and watched the U.S. being attacked by terrorists.

Humm interesting, what to say, what do you want to know, what do you want to learn about me, I'm from an Native American Indian Reservation just down the road from here not even 45 minutes. What was it like to have entered the United States Marine Corps some 34 years ago. I served from June 1983 to June 1990, USMC and the US Army.

So, in a nutshell, I'll articulate some very short experiences that I encountered while serving in the United States Marine Corp,

then going into the US Army, I share with the utmost respect and no intent to hurt anyone's feeling, so there may be some coarse language used, ha,hah, but that's to be expected. Or is it!!!

I'm sharing with you negative and positive experiences of having served were instilled in me as a human being.

Let's have at it then.

Life on the reservation hasn't always been good, but coming from a family of 10 children, ista (mother) and rakeni (father) did their best to keep us sheltered, feed and clothed. As is the norm in most households, there is always a sibling rivalry that occurs when growing up, that happened between my closest sister and myself as we grew, but it hit a pinnacle when I was 23 years old and it led to us fighting. I decided that I would not fight with my sister and said, if I'm gonna fight anyone it'll be a real enemy, so I on a whim decided to join the military, god damn it I'm not gonna fight my family and it'll be a job and a paycheck for 4 years, that's the way I saw it at the time.

Well the only damn reason I went into the USMC was that was the only office open at the Malone Recruiters Station. I signed that day and check off the box that said, U.S. citizen, USMC, 4 years. Got home and told my ista, then I said, what the hell did I just do, there was no turning back now.

Ellie:

Back in the summer of 1978 I was dating one of the Army recruiters here in Potsdam. His buddy, Sgt. S., talked me into joining. He promised me a great career in whatever I wanted to do. I said I want to be Military Police like my Uncle Arnie. I loved Uncle Arnie, who was now a New York State Trooper. (Secretly, I also wanted to get out of the North Country where I had lived all my life. So, needless to say, it didn't take much to talk me into signing up.)

I took the ASVAB test and scored high enough to be an MP. My boyfriend was not happy. I reported to the Syracuse Recruiting Office for my physical and oath taking. The next thing I know I'm on an Eastern Airlines flight to Atlanta, Georgia and then a prop-plane to Anniston, Alabama (in the late hours of the night). The guys were taken to their platoon and so was I. I was given a locker and a bed for the night. There were only a couple of other young women in the Quonset hut barracks. I got to make 1 phone call. I called my Mom and Dad and said "I don't know why I'm here. I don't belong here." My Dad said "you'll be just fine. Do your best and you'll be fine."

Angie:

For about a week in my senior year of high school I contemplated going into the Army Reserves. I was missing my friends, and I was really hating Fairfax, VA and all the rich assholes I went to school with. I thought the problem was I was missing the Army life and the sensible solution was to join myself. I knew I was going to college. That was a given. So, I contemplated the reserves as a way to help pay for it. I knew going in that I probably wasn't going to make the Army a career. I was going to college to study English and theatre, not exactly the Army's speciality, even though they put working for AFN (Armed Forces Network) as a potential duty assignment in the brochure.

When I brought home the pamphlet, my dad laughed. "You will never make it through basic training." I was pissed. I thought he was laughing because he didn't think I would be able to hack the PT. "No," he said. "You would never be able to tolerate being told what to do. You can't follow orders to save your life, and the first time your drill Sergeant screams in your face about how you made the bed or shined your shoes, you'll yell back and be dishonorably discharged for back talk."

It was a fair point. In all honesty, it probably would have been a truly horrible fit. Despite or maybe because of his own military training, my father proudly raised each of his children with, as he puts it now, "a healthy skepticism of authority."

I'm not sure if the recruiter knew just by looking at me I wouldn't be a good recruit, or if they just didn't need people in the peace time of the late 90s, but the inducements were not great. As much as I wanted to prove my dad wrong, I did the math, and it didn't seem like the money for school would be enough to cover tuition, let alone room and board. Instead of enlisting to pay for school, I went to college on a handful of scholarships, student loans, and a lot of tips earned while waiting tables. I never went back to a recruiting station.

Ellie:

I almost gave up. And it wasn't during basic training. It was during my last bivouac for the Military Police portion of my training. I went to my Drill Sergeant and told him I couldn't do it anymore. Of course, the temperature dropping from 70 degrees down to 30 degrees in a matter of a couple of hours, together with very little sleep, didn't help my frame of mind. My Drill took me to see the company commander and our Senior Drill Sergeant. They

said I was no quitter. I'd made it this far and I was going to finish. So I did.

Cheryl (video):

If you think for one minute that the USMC boot camp for women was easy, think again, this was 1983. Half-way through, sitting in class, M-16 being readied to be broken down for a cleaning, I'm resting my arm on the dang thing, trying desperately hard not to fall asleep, I get this tap on my shoulder, jump up and damn near fell out of my seat, shit I'm in trouble now, they caught me sleeping.

No, it was the look on the drill Sergeants face that lead me to feel that I wasn't in trouble. I stepped out onto the boardwalk, Chaplin standing there, escorting me to his office, asking too dang many questions about my relationship with my rakeni. Which by the way, was not a good relationship, abusive! I knew in my gut what was going on, he died, passed away right where I had last seen him sitting when I left for boot camp, massive heart attack. Years later I always came to joke about, thanking god how he had died on a Friday, as I returned back to Parris Island on that following Monday after they buried him Monday morning, I returned late in the evening back to Parris Island, but I was damned if I was gonna start Bootcamp over, so I did what I had to do to get back and finish. Family stayed mad at me for a bit, thinking that was mean spirited in leaving abruptly on that Monday right after burying rakeni. You'd have to get to understand the whole family grieving process, values and dynamics of reservation life and the roles that we each play during the passing of a family member.

Becca:

So when we were learning drills, the Military Training Instructor noticed that I knew what I was doing and that I wasn't struggling to execute the movements. She waved her clipboard in my direction and yelled, "Oh, we got an expert over here!" She then got in my face and barked something about me thinking I knew what I was doing, but that I was just a "dirtbag trainee." In the midst of her screaming at me, she raised her clipboard above her head. My fight or flight response kicked in. What I did next was not a conscious decision, it was an immediate response: a reflex. As she raised her clipboard, thinking she was about to hit me with it, I pushed the MTI back. But then I heard the clipboard slam down on the wall locker next to me. But it was too late and I had already *pushed* the fucking MTI. The look on her face wasn't even angry; it was a look of pure shock, then followed by rage, and "WHAT THE

PISS, TRAINEE!" So what I learned from that was that I'm not a flyer; I'm a fighter.

Gen:

So saying, she bound to her feet her beautiful sandals of imperishable gold that would carry her over the waves, over the wide lands, as swiftly as the wind. And she took her heavy spear, great and strong, with its tip of sharpened bronze, with which she destroys the ranks of men, and heroes, when that daughter of a mighty father is angered.

Marjorie (video):

In the spring of 2001, I had an American flag pinned to the top of my black mortarboard when I graduated from college. I put it there to symbolize the American Dream, since I was one of the first in my family to attend a four-year university and only the second to earn a college degree. The flag was also there to symbolize my major, political science, which was an area of study that had intrigued me from my earliest childhood memories. If I close my eyes, I can look back and see myself as a little girl sitting cross-legged on the carpet in front of my parents' box-style television, watching the fall of the Berlin Wall on NBC. By the fall of 2001, it was no surprise that I needed to wear another American flag, this time on camouflage.

It probably wasn't a surprise to my parents, either. They were proud, but decidedly unhappy about my decision to join the military. I am from a large family and rarely have one-on-one time with them; they knew something was up when I asked them to meet me for breakfast at Denny's so we could talk. I remember my mom saying, "But you have a degree, you shouldn't have to go."

My mother was coming from a different generation's point of view—the Vietnam Generation. Her brothers were drafted, and at one time, four of them were serving combat tours in Vietnam. Going into the military is what poor families would do, from her experience. She was from a large Midwestern family that worked on farms to earn a living; she knew all too well how hard life could be. Her siblings used the military as a way to get out and on their own, since there was hardly enough money to put food on the table, let alone for a higher education. She was immensely proud of my recent graduation from college, and I tried to reassure her that my college education was exactly why I should serve in the military, and that I was not stepping backwards.

Nellie:

I find it difficult to express in words the experiences of Vietnam. It's hard to describe a scene in pre-op where casualties were brought in without the penetrating smell of blood I associate to this day with fatigues and black satin pajamas. My senses are so involved with my memories of Vietnam. I think of Xuan Loc or Vung Tau and smell the pungent odor of garbage or fish and hear the sound of Vietnamese speaking hurriedly in their strange language as they walk by. I see the bikes, chickens, and the young Vietnamese man behind me with both legs gone, scooting himself along the dirty street with the palms of his hands. There are few artificial limbs in Vietnam. I can hear the pelting eerie rain of the monsoon season on the tin roof of our hooch. I can almost feel the unspoken closeness I shared with the people I lived and worked with in my corner of Vietnam. How do I vividly bring the reality of those sights, sounds, smells and faces to others?

Marjorie (video):

I told her that I wanted to do this, that I was joining an all-volunteer force. She was quiet for a while, staring into her cup of coffee, but finally looked up at me with her gentle eyes and said, "Well, at least you will go in as an officer with your college degree." That's when I had to break the news to her that I was signing a service obligation to be an enlisted soldier. Needless to say, any ground that I had made with her was lost, and she was totally upset and opposed to my decision all over again. I assured her that I had plenty of time to become an officer, but that I wanted to start my service in uniform as an enlisted soldier. She argued with me vigorously: "You are setting yourself up for failure—you have always been a leader, from senior class president to captain of the volleyball team. Plus, you have your father's mouth on you—you'll speak up and get in trouble."

This is when my dad, who had been unusually quiet during this entire conversation, interjected. "Marlene, you do not have to have a title to be a leader. She will be a leader as an enlisted soldier, and this will be good for her in that sense because it will teach her to keep her mouth shut. She will be a better leader because she will know how to follow." My father does not mince his words, or filter much thought either. He is a cowboy, a union man, who has always had a flagpole in his yard and keeps his draft card in his bedside stand to this day. He would have loved to serve in uniform, and was officially on the books for a couple of days until he was disqualified for medical reasons. He would have been a terrific soldier, sailor, airman, or marine. He is no less a patriot, and loves his country.

He looked at me and said, "Okay. If that is your decision, okay. Just keep your head down because you're awfully tall to be out front. Now, are you getting pancakes or biscuits?"

Becca:

Facebook post. August 8, 2013. Ever since I was in sixth grade, I've known that I wanted to be in the military. I dreamed and daydreamed about it, trained for it, dedicated myself to it (which is probably the only thing to which I've fully dedicated myself). And it's blowing my mind right now that in four more days, I'll be starting to live out the dream I've had since I was eleven years old. As cheesy as this sounds, it's true when they say to never give up on your dreams because the sense of self-satisfaction and fulfillment that I've been getting lately is insane... and it hasn't even started yet.

Nellie:

I was sent to Vietnam within four months after completing basic training at Fort Sam Houston. I had graduated less than a year before from the University of Maryland when I landed in Vietnam on April Fool's Day.

The Army seemed to have something in mind for me other than an assignment to a medical ward at the Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh which I'd requested. Another Army nurse (and good friend, Joan Humphrey) and I found ourselves on a helicopter en route to the 7th Surgical Hospital to each become one of seven nurses at the basecamp of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

Like everyone else, I was not well prepared for what I would witness in the coming year. My first mass casualty situation occurred about two days after I arrived. They were Vietnamese civilians whose village had been attacked. I was on duty in the holding ward where the extreme cases were sent. I walked over to a little girl unconscious with her head bandaged. It was soaked with blood, as was the stretcher under her head. As I moved to check the dressing I saw a lot of pink spongy matter exposed and with shock realized her skull was partially gone. I looked at her mother and the child and for the first time realized but this was war. This is what war does to people. It was no longer intangible. I could touch this little girl. To attend someone dying of an illness elicits compassion of its own, but to care for someone blown apart by another human being leaves you feeling horrified with what we are capable of doing to one another.

Becca:

Facebook post. August 12, 2013. 'Hmm... well, I suppose it's time to say goodbye now. I'll be back in a few months... Gotta go fulfill my dreams and all that fun shit. ;D Peace out.'

Lights shift; musical interlude.

Movement 2: so hard to comprehend

Paige:

What catastrophe has brought you all down into the land of darkness, all chosen men and all of the same age? Someone choosing a city's best would have selected men like these. Did Poseidon raise tempestuous winds and surging waves, and overwhelm you and your ships? Or did enemies strike you down as you were rounding up their cattle and their flocks, or as they were defending their town and women? Tell me, for you and I have been host and guest.

Marjorie (video):

Journal Entry for 20 May 2010. Nothing like starting your day sitting in a mission brief that you are about to go on, but it is entirely in a language you do not speak. Thanks to an elaborate sand table, body language, and Taylor (one of the soldiers on my intelligence collection team who is fluent in French), you got the gist that "we" the good guys were going to talk with "them" the bad guys (Taliban sympathizers, probably fighters).

I am on FOB Kutchbach, another base solely run and operated by the French. My five-person team (and the only Americans on the mission) convoyed our MATV alongside a French infantry unit and Afghan National Army unit, and participated in a dismounted patrol deeper into Bendreni Valley today. Once in the village, ANA received small arms fire. We were tucked into the village and stood by until close air support arrived. Wow. That got your attention, and the shooting stopped for the most part, which allowed us to continue our meeting with local village elders. Since my team was utilizing the interpreter, the only way I could communicate with the children sitting near the meeting (there was not a woman in sight) was by sharing a pack of gum. I made origami birds out of the wrappers, and they ran off with them, smiling. We always leave an impression, so hopefully that one sticks.

Nellie:

The closest I came to any experience of my own in the field was on a MEDCAP mission to the firehase "Holiday Inn" for the 11 ACR was supporting an infantry unit. We rode on tanks to a local hamlet to where we performed minor medical treatment and then visited the

hooch of the hamlet chief. We viewed a rice cachet in the hamlet where the V.C. had a tunnel leading from there out into the field.

An incredible incident happened when we first arrived at Holiday Inn. A young Vietnamese woman claiming to be either a Vietcong or a North Vietnamese nurse walked into the clearing and "chieu hoi'ed." Military Intelligence began questioning her. The other nurse and I were introduced to her and spoke with her briefly through an interpreter. I like her. We were both nurses, that in itself created a bond. I hoped she would be treated well. Flying back to base camp my mind was filled with the events of that day and the Beautiful country below me, immersed in war. "How could that be?" ... and the 19 year old gunner beside me, what was life like for him?" it all seemed so hard to comprehend.

My naivety extended to the Vietnamese people themselves. The Army had taught us nothing of these people and their culture. They were referred to as "gooks." On the ward they were numbers, "Native #49, etc..." I had a few Vietnamese friends, some interpreters on Basecamp and a girl who worked at our PX named Kim Son. There were others I met of our MEDCAP missions to the provincial hospital in Xuan Loc. We were foreign people in a country where we considered the Vietnamese to be the foreigners and their country belonged to us. I've since learned much more about the Vietnamese and I wish I'd known then what I know now.

Paige:

Godlike Telemachus, sitting troubled among the suitors, imagining how his noble father might arrive from somewhere, throw the suitors from the palace, win honour and rule his own again, was first to see her. Thinking of it, sitting among the suitors, he saw Athene, and went straight to the doorway, ashamed a stranger should wait so long at the gates. Approaching her, he clasped her right hand, took her spear of bronze, and spoke to her winged words: 'Welcome, stranger, here you will find hospitality, and after you have eaten you may tell us why you are here.'

Ellie:

The AWOL App Unit had a good rapport with the local and State Police and with the Navy Shore Patrol in Groton, CT. The Shore Patrol were the folks that came to Ft. Devens and picked up the AWOLs from us. They transported them to Ft. Dix in New Jersey to be dishonorably discharged. The majority of the AWOLs were troubled young adults who were given a choice between going to jail or entering some branch of the service. When we got a call from one of the PDs in Southern Massachusetts, I was the one to go

pick the guy up. He was a stocky little guy. I put the handcuffs on him, put him in the back of the van and took him back to Ft. Devens. I was the one who put him in the D-Cell to wait for the Shore Patrol. Then I finished my paperwork. He never gave me any trouble. I think he gave the rest of the crew working the main desk a problem though. I don't know if it was my size or manor made them chill out. I always let them know that I do not play games and I don't take any crap.

Nellie:

Vietnam was not without its moments of humor either. I once tried to get a wringer washer from the Engineer Battalion because all the nurses had for our laundry was a manually operated pump we bobbed up and down. They delivered the washer without the motor. When they did deliver the motor they put it in the XO's backyard. When I finally got it removed they took it to the ward and put it under one of her patient beds so I could get it - just in time for the hospital inspection team from Long Binh. I frantically worked to get it out of there. The motor never made it to the washing machine, the engineers left for the fields and I was left staring at that useless wringer washer while I pumped my laundry by hand for the rest of the year.

Becca:

So my favorite food in the Air Force was peanut butter. That shit got REAL. Some weekends, we'd get to go to the BX and the most popular product over there was peanut butter. It was no joke. I once saw a girl get slapped across the face with a hot hair straightener for messing with another wingman's peanut butter.

Video commercial from the AFN. Angie's choice! (See Youtube)

Angie:

Back in the dark ages before on demand television, the internet in every home, and smart phones, there were VHS tapes and Armed Forces Network, aka AFN. I did not speak German when we moved to Germany and like a classic teen, I rebelled against moving there in one of the most impractical ways--by studying Spanish instead. So, my television options while in Germany were confined to AFN. AFN played American tv shows, but they were a season (or TWO!) behind, which meant that you spent your first 6 months overseas watching episodes that you had already seen before you left the states, and thank heavens for reruns or I never would have seen that 1994 season of Seinfeld.

We actually knew a guy who worked for AFN. His real life job in the Army was to make commercials for things happening on our base and on the surrounding bases (there were a lot of German bases in the 1990s, many of them are now closed, including the Leighton Barracks in Wurzburg). Imagine the most embarrassing commercials for small local businesses and that gives you some idea of the aesthetic quality of these commercials. Well, this guy starred in a commercial for a bowling alley on one of the nearby bases--the Giebelstadt Bowling Center. I can't remember a thing about the commercial except the ending...He throws a ball down the alley, we hear the pins clank, and then he looks directly at the camera and says, "Yes! I just love bowling at the Giebelstadt Bowling Center!" I mean it was some of the worst acting imaginable, and we spent hours mocking it, particularly my dad. In fact, my dad after running into the guy on base one day he spent the rest of the afternoon repeating it, "Yes! I just love bowling at the Giebelstadt Bowling Center." My dad labeled the gestures the guy made in the commercial as, "Definitive arm pull. Double indication!" Over time the gestures became a joke in and of themselves. In fact, when I played Antigone in high school, I convinced the entire cast to perform the "definitive arm pull, double indication" at various points during the choral ode announcing my death. My dad said he giggled throughout the rest of the scene, as one by one my castmates each performed the gesture, some slow, some fast...they all found a moment to do it. Like Carol Burnett's famous ear pull, for a while it was my ode to my dad, and really to my entire family. Whenever they came to see a show I was in, I would find a moment and perform the "definitive arm pull, double indication." Both the line and the gesture are now Sweigart Family classics.

Nellie:

There were some good experiences in Vietnam. We had a strong feeling of Brotherhood amongst our unit in Vietnam. Our backgrounds didn't matter. In fact they complimented our closeness. We all knew we'd go home to our unique lifestyles someday and things would never be the same should we meet again. We'd probably realize how little we shared in common but here we shared everything. We laughed and joked together, defended one another, looked out for each other, know a lot about one another.. And worked like clockwork when the casualties came in. We shared our sorrows together and our joy when one of us would DEROS and head back to The World.

There are some humorous memories of we nurses running to the bunkers when we were mortared at night with our short pajamas

covered by a flack jacket, trying desperately to smash our helmets down over our curlers. The thought never occurred to us to take the curlers out. I didn't like sitting out in the bunker. I always felt I'd have much more control over my life if I could just get out and see the mortars coming. I found it somewhat petrifying to sit there and listen to the rounds come in.

Becca:

My dreams are always very vivid and I usually remember them in great detail. During this time in my life, I thought I had found the love of my life (typical 18 year old, eh?) and she showed up in my dreams almost nightly. One dream that I still remember, because it was so realistic, was that I was on EC (Entry Control) by myself during the night hours. EC at night really sucked because 1- you had to lose some much needed sleep, and 2- you got a full two hours to be by yourself while all your wingmen slept. So EC at night was when you really got to thinking and feeling about how lonely you were and who you missed. In this dream, the supposed love of my life knocked on the door and I, being the Entry Controller, let her in. I didn't ask why she was there or how she got there. I sat down at the EC desk and she put her arms around me and just sat with me. Saying nothing, but just being there made all the difference. Waking the next morning to realize that the people I missed were really thousands of miles away was an everyday devastation.

Angie:

My dad is gay. He came out in 1994 when I was 15 or maybe 16? My parents had gotten married when they were just out of high school. My dad enlisted and my parents headed off to California in a beat up VW Beetle so that he could go learn Russian and help fight the cold war. I was born at Fort Ord in CA a year after they got married; my sister Jessica was born a year later at Fort Hood, Texas; and my sister Sarah was born a year and half after that at a base in Germany (side note - my father was also born at the same hospital in Germany when his dad was stationed there). There is a bit of a gap, but my brothers Tony and Taylor were born a few years later while we were stationed at Fort Benning in Georgia. So, my parents had 5 kids before they were 35, and before my dad really came to terms with who he was and who he wanted to be.

It was a difficult and confusing time for us. Not just because my dad had "come out," but also because we had just moved back to the states after a four year tour at Leighton Barracks in Germany. I had left in the middle of my sophomore year of high school, and

leaving my friends there felt like the end of the world. We no longer lived on a base, which meant we were enrolled in non DOD schools for the first time in a long time, which meant almost none of my classmates were Army brats. We had moved to a pretty affluent suburb of DC, and making friends was hard for a lot of reasons. With all these transitions, a looming divorce and a major reconfiguration of your understanding of your parents' relationship made for a rough go.

He came out in 1994, which meant Don't Ask, Don't Tell was brand new. I have to remind people who complain about President Clinton's LGBTQ policies now that Don't Ask, Don't Tell was actually the progressive position at the time. Regardless, it was a year or two after he came out (1995 or 1996, I think) that he applied for a position at the Pentagon. It was intelligence related or had some sort of security clearance requirement. I was a totally self-centered high school student and was getting ready to head off to college, and I don't remember exactly the nature of the position, but I knew he was being subjected to a lot of scrutiny. He had to pass multiple levels of background checks that included security interrogations with lie detectors, even our neighbors were being interviewed.

Becca:

During tech school, the stress from holding in years of anxiety and not knowing how to deal with it finally caught up to me. Somnambulism is a stress-induced sleep disorder. It's often referred to as sleep walking, and it's a medical disqualifier for the military. I've often been asked "Why is that a disqualifier?" Well, there are a lot of qualifiers that seem rather nit-picky and unreasonable, such as having flat feet or being too tall or too short or transgender. But somnambulism is actually not that unreasonable of a regulation because if you were to get deployed, you don't potentially want to get up in the middle of your sleep and walk into a land mine. So I started sleep walking and the ECs at night would see it and tell me all about the adventures I got up to while asleep that I didn't remember the following morning. I didn't believe them at first. I actually thought they were messing with me. But after a while the sleep walking became a nightly occurrence and they ended up telling our sergeant. She came one night and witnessed me sleep walking. Once this happened, they sent me to speak with this man who they called the chaplain, who was essentially a terrible therapist who lived on the base and would talk to airmen when necessary. When I talked to him, I tried to be very open so that we could reach some sort of resolution and I wouldn't have to leave. I still very much wanted to serve, to do

my part, to fulfill my intrinsic need to help and sacrifice for others, and to be heroic in some way. I told him about the anxiety and sadness I'd felt over the years and his response was "From being a lesbian?" First of all, I am not a lesbian; I find myself attracted to particularly good-looking people belonging to both sexes. Second of all, there had been up until that point no mention of my love or sex life, or my sexuality at all. His response was wholly an assumption. Because you know, a person who is not straight is automatically a miserably depressed human being, right? So I told the chaplain about the anxiety and depression I repeatedly experienced over the years, but ensured him that I had never been diagnosed with anything so that I hadn't lied during the military entrance processing screening. Apparently a formal diagnosis didn't matter, and they said that I should have still reported my undiagnosed anxiety and depression. I became a liability to them with having anxiety, depression, and now somnambulism.

I was basically given an ultimatum: I could be court martialed for fraudulent enlistment or I could willingly sign my medical discharge papers and forfeit my dream. Either way, they were going to make sure I was kicked out, so I took the path with more compliance and signed medical discharge papers, which was still an honorable discharge. Being court martialed would have left me with a dishonorable discharge and most likely would have prevented me from ever having a good job.

Cheryl (video):

Fast forward to returning to Parris Island, then to be told, Private Jacobs come with us, what in the hell, where in the hell am I going now, dunt-dunt-dunnh-JAG Office, we have you as a fraudulent enlistee, as you are not an American citizen and you checked that box, picture this young 23 years old girl sitting in the JAG office, Judge Advocate General's office, was I scared, you damn right I was, I was forced to get a 'green card'. Being Native American I was raised to believe that we have dual citizenship as Native Americans under the Jay Treaty. I got the damn card, so I was not Dishonorably Discharged.

I finished bootcamp and one of my proudest moments had to have been to see my auntie and ista make the trip, they drove the 17-hour drive to see me graduate. Ohhrah, mission accomplished, ready to serve and dedicate the next 4 years of my life to the U.S. government. I learned a lot of very valuable lessons just coming out of bootcamp, one you sign on that dotted line and the U.S. government owns you for the amount of time you sign up for.

Becca:

So I took the medical discharge but I was not okay with that by any means. I felt lost. I was eighteen and up until that point had my career pretty well figured out - or so I thought. I hadn't applied for college or even paid attention to my high school teachers and counselors who droned on and on about college and scholarship applications. There was nothing else career-wise that I really wanted to do that I felt would have given me that same sense of fulfillment.

Angie:

By this time, my dad had also begun dating men. Over the year or two, we had met a couple of the guys, but now he was beginning to date one kind of seriously. I remember him being nervous at the time. He tried to downplay it, but I distinctly remember him telling us, "Do not talk about dad's boyfriend on the phone..." and "If anyone asks you, do not talk about dad's relationships." He just assumed that until he had gotten his clearances that they could be listening in on the calls, and he couldn't risk it. Not only would he not get the job, but he could lose his entire career.

I feel a bit like we are back in that moment now, and I wonder how many trans service members are as nervous as my dad was then. Don't ask don't tell ended in 2011--ten years after my dad retired. I saw him post something on Facebook a while ago, pictures of his time in service with a label that said "I survived Don't Ask, Don't Tell".

Pause - transition.

Paige:

And in his turn Odysseus, favourite of Zeus, told of all the discomfiture he had inflicted on others and all the miseries which he himself had undergone. He began with his victory over the Cicones and his visit to the fertile land where the Lotus-eaters live. He spoke of what the Cyclops did, and the price he had made him pay for the fine men he ruthlessly devoured.

Nellie:

The people back home couldn't smell the blood on a television set or touch the hand of the small dying child. There was no opportunity to comprehend the horror of Vietnam. So while my friends back home were worrying about who they'd be going out with on a Saturday night I was immersed in I.V.'s and dressing changes on some young person who might never have that privilege again. We

had a soldier very badly wounded on a mine sweep outside of the base camp. He'd been blown out of the tank and suffered severe abdominal and groin injuries. We were waiting to evacuate him to the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon because he was in kidney failure and failing rapidly, but still fully conscious. As I came over to help him he grabbed my arm and pleaded, "Don't let me die, please don't let me die." I could hardly get the words, "We won't" past the hard lump in my throat. I was not used to lying. He died two days later in Saigon. What purpose was served by his suffering and death? I still think of him and I still can't answer that question.

There were many hours in between the physical care that were just spent listening to fellows talk about their girls back home or what they experienced in the field. So much of their field life seemed alien to me. I couldn't imagine sleeping in the monsoon rains and dealing with the leeches and the equipment they had to carry through the Heat and jungle. One young 18 year old named Steve from the 173rd Airborne told me that life in the field was 98% boredom and 2% sheer Terror. Steve had Malaria and was returned to the field. I heard from him only once after that.

Cheryl (video):

Let's move over to the most sobering experience of my life, tent city, Unchon, South Korea. No matter what part of the country you come from, where you went to school as a kid, right on up through to high school, into your college years, our history has a way of telling stories that are both good and bad, but for the most part the bad is usually connected to the sensationalism of the media.

The life changing military experience that I am about to share with you is about a group of 5 Vietnam Veterans in a small room in South Korea, base billeting is where we stayed at a really cheap price in the day, it's about my return to Unchon with my best friend who was in the Navy.

Growing up hearing about the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans by all segments of American society I recall growing up as a child, hearing how when the Vietnam veterans returned home from the war, it was to hostile Americans spitting on them and calling them baby killers. Baby killers, baby killers resonated in my mind, that stayed there until I had to ask and find out the truth, and who better to ask then those Vietnam Veterans that were there.

So, while in the room we had been all drinking and we began to getting pretty into the booze, I became an instant asshole, I asked, "so is it true that while you guys were in 'Nam' that you really had orders to kill everyone including babies and children?" Silence in the room, no response, I said it again, no response,

what in the hell is wrong with these men, can't answer a simple question. After about the fourth time, I got an answer and I did not like it, they began to cry, like they were confessing to something that had been bothering them for years. If ever there was a time in my life that I learned what it really meant to be a soldier, this was it, war is not nice, it's not like seeing through rose colored glasses, it's ugly, devastating, mind-blowing, depressing, so if ever there was a time to learn about respecting these men and every soldier having ever been in a combat zone or a mission, this was it.

I began to cry in that room from of grown men, I apologized profusely, gave them hugs, but I sure did feel like the biggest asshole in the world. At the end of it all, I learned that, any man or woman who joins the service to serve and protect the country they love, is to be shown the utmost respect, there is nothing that can change that day or time in my life, but it has entrenched in me to show every dead, living or disabled or homeless Veteran the respect that he or she may rightfully deserve.

Movement 3: *captain or ma'am*

Gen:

So noble long-suffering Odysseus prayed there, while the pair of sturdy mules drew the girl to the city. When she had reached her father's great palace, she halted the mules at the gate, and her brothers, godlike men, crowded round her. They unhitched the mules from the cart, and carried the clothing inside, while she went to her room. There her waiting-woman, Eurymedusa, an old Apearaean woman, lit a fire. Curved ships had brought her from Apearaea long ago, and she had been chosen from the spoils as a prize for Alcinous, king of all the Phaeacians, considered a god by the people.

Angie:

My father's birthday is September 11th. It is hard to recall, but at one time this date had no significance beyond being his birthday. In fact, the morning of September 11, 2001, I was getting dressed and ready for school. I had just arrived at the University of Wisconsin--Madison a month earlier to begin my first year of graduate school. I was running a little late, as usual, and I was thinking through all the things to do that day, including call my dad for his birthday. I had not remembered to send a card--I never do, but I always call. My husband Dan had run off early that morning to get some drafting for his lighting design class printed at print shop down the street and right next to the bus stop, where I planned to meet him in order take the bus

in to school together. I was still getting ready when he burst through the door, panting from having run at breakneck speed down the street. He looked at me and said, "Call your dad. Call your dad right now. Something attacked the Pentagon."

Marjorie (video):

For more than a year, even before I had deployed to Afghanistan, I anticipated and visualized the exhilaration of returning home. And up until I boarded the early-morning flight on an American Airlines jet, reality was better than what I had wished: all of my soldiers were safe and also returning home; I served them with every ounce of my soul; and we had left a part of the world better than how we had found it.

It was a Friday morning when my unit was released from our demobilization site at Ft. Bliss, Texas. Over two hundred soldiers were shuttled to the local airport and would scatter to the wind on dozens of different commercial flights. My soldiers would travel to Hawaii, Wisconsin, Texas, Maryland, and Germany, to name a few corners. That morning, I was making my way to Tennessee. We had been back in the United States for eight days, during which only one of those days we were given a pass to go off base for a few hours. So our first steps into the airport were pretty much the first steps toward reintegration with civilian life. We were still on military orders, so we were traveling in our uniforms, with dirt from Eastern Afghanistan still embedded in the soles of our boots. And our one carry-on luggage was most likely a ratty-looking, well-used "thirty-six-hour bag," which probably looked like it had been to Afghanistan and back.

I was carrying my bag in front of me when I stepped onto the plane with the second boarding group. I had just rounded the corner and was making my way through the first class cabin when a large older man in a disheveled suit stood up from his aisle seat—bumping into my bag and me. Without eye contact, he blurted, "One second, sweetheart, I need to grab something out of the overhead." Stunned from being knocked into—without an apology at that—I was even more perplexed by what this stranger said. Did he just call me *sweetheart*? My parents or my husband would use that word—but even they would not call me that in a public setting while I was in my military uniform. That nonchalant term of endearment reduced my status and immediately reminded me of the old Special Forces sergeant who had called me *toots* and that memorable first drill sergeant I had encountered who gave me those ridiculous three choices of the kind of woman I could be. I had served ten honorable years, part of a generation that transformed the

military—only to return to a society that still had people who put me into a category I did not choose. And this all happened on a day I was returning home from a grueling tour as a commander on the front lines.

After digging through his bag, this stranger turned to look at me, and before sliding back down into his seat, he smiled then said, "I got it. Thank you, darling."

Really? Now he was calling me *darling*? This man probably did not know that the patch on my right shoulder represented time served in combat. He surely did not register the bayonet with wreath insignia above my left pocket was a Combat Action Badge, earned for active engagement or being actively engaged by the enemy. However, one would think he would render a baseline of respect from simply seeing a military uniform. Instead, he was treating me *like a girl*. Yet *like a girl* means so much more. This girl was part of the Frontline Generation who had taken an oath to defend and protect.

I stood still in that aisle, and waited for him to recognize that I was not moving. What felt like forever (yet not as long as it took to find an IED on a convoy in eastern Afghanistan), he finally looked up at me. Once we locked eyes, I said, "I am a soldier and officer in the United States Army. You can address me as captain or ma'am."

Angie:

My dad was stationed at the Pentagon, at least he had been until September 2001. He was retiring after 20 years, and going into a federal agency as a civilian employee. I visited his Pentagon office a few times, going through the metal detectors and following him through the labyrinthine hallways to his windowless office. He was a major, and he no doubt did important work, but his office at the Pentagon lacked, how shall we say it...prestige. It reeked of mildew, had leaking pipes, and he shared it with a bunch of people. Dan and I had moved away in July and I knew my dad was starting his new job, but I didn't actually know when his retirement went into effect and his new job began. In other words, I had no idea if he was actually still at the Pentagon that day.

Becca:

On top of all this confusion, there were overwhelming feelings and thoughts of inadequacy and animosity I was having toward myself. I wasn't good enough. What would my friends and family think when I came back before my contract was up? They were all so proud of me for stepping up to serve, but I was falling miserably short of their expectations. When it was finalized that I was being

discharged, I was in a very dark place. I was placed in medical hold on a suicide watch. AB Anderson was in charge of watching me at all times to make sure I didn't try to off myself. I felt even more pathetic that I was an adult having to be babysat by another adult, and I knew she didn't want to sit around with a depressed sep all day. So I felt guilty for that too. But I guess it's good that they did have her watching me because many times during the month I was in med hold, I found myself eyeing my surroundings for the nearest weapon or the sharpest object in the room, which were all taken from me. One day I unwound the metal spiral part of my notebook and attempted to slice my wrists with it, but those ended up looking like cat scratches at best.

Pause - transition.

Gen:

To which the thoughtful Laertes replied: 'By Father Zeus, Athene and Apollo, if only I could have been the man I was when as King of the Cephallenians I took the stronghold of Nericus on the mainland cape, and like that have stood by you yesterday in our palace, with armour on my shoulders, and beaten off those Suitors! I'd have laid many of them low in the halls and delighted your heart!'

Ellie:

I have to tell you a little about my husband. He's a Marine. I knew him when I was a teenager growing up in Northern New York. His family and mine took a vacation trip to Maine once. I was allowed to date him when I was 14, but that's only because our Moms worked together. He went in the Marines and we went our separate ways after a while. Later on, after he and I both got out of the service (and divorced our first mistakes), his Aunt had a hand in getting us back together. Thank you Aunt Lynn! We've been married 31 years and we are best friends, soul mates, and have great respect for one another.

I'm really proud when I hear another Marine greet him with "Semper Fi Marine!" We joke that the only one good enough to marry an MP is a Marine, and the only one good enough to marry a Marine is an MP.

Marjorie (video):

My first night home, I had never felt more alone in my entire life. Charles had been deployed to Iraq. In fact, while my plane was flying back to the States, his plane was flying in the opposite direction, toward the Middle East. Now I was the person

who could not reach out and call him at any moment, I was the person with the weight of uncertainty on my heart. As I lay in our bed that night, the excruciating silence that I had yearned for when I slept alongside Bagram's airstrip only allowed for those terrible fears to slip into my mind—the concern for his safety was all I could think about.

I resolved that I could help the situation if I stuck to my bedtime routine and write my last journal entry. I had religiously poured my heart into that brown leather book every night of my deployment. However, nothing would leave my pen. I lay in bed and tried to write . . . to no avail. I could not write. Instead, I began to cry. The sacrifice of my generation, from every level of personal commitment, was overwhelming. We have given so much. I began to flip through the pages of my journal, reading the stories of the past year and feeling comfort that I was not entirely alone—I had my company with me, in that book.

Becca:

I received several letters while I was in medical hold. I kept them and reread them because they made me feel a little bit brighter when things seemed gloomy, or when I got really down on myself.

November 3, 2013. Dear Becca, Just a note to let you know I'm thinking about you. I know your whole world is upside down right now - but don't let it get you down!!! You will survive. Just pick yourself up and get back in the race. I am sure there are other alternatives to get you where you want in life. One door closes and another opens. OK - enough clichés!

We are still extremely proud and love you. If you need some moral support, I am here for you, I hope you know that. Don't let the 'other' family members wear at you. You don't need anything but encouragement. Shit happens and it will continue to happen for the rest of your life - just roll with it. It's not easy, but nothing worthwhile is. You are a great and wonderful person. Hold your head up and keep going.

Love, Grandma Terry

Paige:

Alcinous married her, and honours her above all those women on earth who keep house at their husband's command. Such is the heartfelt honour she ever enjoys from her children, and Alcinous, and the people, who think of her as a goddess, greeting her as she walks through the city. For she is no less wise, and settles the disputes of those she favours, men or women. If she looks kindly

on you, there is hope you may see your friends again, and return to your vaulted hall in your own land.'

Angie:

So, when my husband rushed in I was totally caught in the panic of the moment. We turned on the TV and watched the news breathless. We watched the towers fall; we watched the Pentagon burn, and as we watched I had no idea where my dad physically was. I was pretty sure he wasn't there, but I grabbed the phone and tried to call. Something was weird about the phones that day. I can't remember now if it was a busy signal or if it just rang, but it wasn't going through and with every unanswered call I got more worried. I tried my mom. My parents had been divorced for several years, and they weren't really on the best of terms, but I didn't know who else to call. Not only could she not answer my questions, but she had not even heard the news. She and her husband didn't believe me until I convinced them to turn on the TV for themselves.

It wasn't until the early afternoon that I finally got a call through to my dad. I was so relieved. Once we established that he was safe, I found myself relying on the Sweigart brand of gallows humor. So, I ventured, "Um, happy birthday?!?" He responded, "Thanks, I spent it being evacuated from my federal office building. Good times."

Gen:

Agamemnon, we used to think of you, among all our princes, as the lifelong favourite of Zeus the Thunder-lover, because of the size and bravery of the army you commanded in the land of Troy when we Achaeans suffered so much. But you too were to be visited in your prime by that deadly Fate which no man born can evade. How I wish you could have met your doom and died at Troy in the full enjoyment of the honour due to you as our leader. For then the whole nation would have joined in building you a mound and you would have left a great name for your son to inherit. But instead you were doomed to die a pitiable death.'

Nellie:

In February of 1969 six weeks before I was due to fly home a young Soldier was brought into pre-op. Both legs were blown off. He bled to death. We couldn't revive him. I walked over and read his name tag. I don't know why, I just felt compelled to. His body was still warm, his face handsome, his name was Richard Burns. I thought, "His mother doesn't even know her son is dead." I grieved. I grieved for him and this whole senseless bore and I

knew I needed to go home. That same day one of our corpsmen and a dust-off pilot I knew (and liked well) were shot down and killed. The base camp and everything about Vietnam had become intolerable. This is not what people are meant to do with their lives. We should ALL go home... now.

That night while on duty I noticed a soldier having trouble sleeping. He kept lighting up a cigarette and staring off into space. I walked back to him and asked if he had something bothering him that he needed to talk about. He answered, "A buddy of mine was wounded badly today, I haven't been able to find out how he's doing. His name's Richard Burns."

I had to tell him what had happened and that if he felt like crying to go ahead. He talked for an hour and a half about Richard, about what had happened, about the war. He cried. How many men have come home from Vietnam and never cried for their friends? Have never been able to get the pain out?

The very next evening Richard's Lieutenant was wounded and in a bed next to my desk. He too couldn't sleep, he too remembered and grieved for Richard Burns. He too cried. I spent a long time listening to him talk about the field, his command and his anger.

Becca:

When I got home, I was mandated to attend therapy for 3 months, which was actually very helpful. It felt like I was going through a breakup with the Air Force. I threw away all my pictures and most of my belongings that were related to my service. I no longer have the photographs of my squadron from basic training, nor my uniformed service picture. I threw away my ribbon, but my mom ended up fishing it out of the trash so I do still have that today. I do sort of think of the military as an ex that I don't really want much to do with anymore.

Nellie:

At the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. I looked up Richard Burns's name. It was there. I reached out and touched it and felt the tears well up in my eyes. It was all real, vietnam was real, Richard Burns was real and he died in Vietnam.

That we must all die is inevitable, but My God, how uselessly premature when human beings are so cruelly pitted against each other because their governments disagree.

Cheryl (video):

Did the military change me? Of course it did. It changed me for the better. I probably would not have experienced half the things I've done today in my life. I went on to become a police officer, worked in Indian gaming-surveillance, the regulatory field, went back to college at 50, law clerk, then my world of politics in both Canada and the United States. I'm very passionate nowadays on Veteran's issues, FEMA working to assist Native American Tribes in NYS and community volunteerism as a leader in helping the less fortunate in my community. The military shaped me into this hard working, passionate person with a lot of structure in my life, that increased my already good family values instilled in me from what little time I had with my rakeni, to the time I still cherish with my ista at 82 years of age, still taking care of her baby girl, like I am taking care of her now.

As I wrap this up, I just wanna say, 'Semper Fi to my veteran brothers and sisters and to all the Veterans serving, stay cool, continue to work hard in protecting our freedoms that we sometimes take for granted and know that we do care, we as the average American citizen do care about your contribution to society in protecting our freedom.'

To you the average American, sitting here, send out and support the messages of what the government is doing to Veteran's benefits.

You may not like what your government is trying to do to our Veterans, so speak the hell up for our Veterans', and be loud, lobby for them, lobby for our Veterans to be taken care of, lobby for those suffering from PTSD and coming home wounded, limbs missing and fighting for their medical needs to be taken care of. Those wounds are not just on the surface, they run deep in the veins of the Veterans minds and especially their souls, they stay there forever. Lobby for increased mental health programs for Veterans, because remember without our Veterans we could lose it all in a heartbeat.

Then where would we all be sitting, not here in the comfort of these walls.

Onen keh, tanon niawen:kowa.

Lights fade to blackout.