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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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In Memory of Skip

3/8/99

{after seeing "Saving Private Ryan"}

I

You always seemed a little older,
And it wasn't the two years
Time you had on us.

A maturity perhaps found
In learning to be
A husband;

While we were still
Half in half out,
Hobbitlike tweens,

More carefree
Than we knew and
Not quite responsible;

For all life ahead
Was an unknown path
Into the Wild,

With dangers we thought
We knew something of,
From class and training,

Barely beyond Toy Soldiers
Mustering, but tasked
To lead real men

With very real lives,
Both sturdy and fragile
Before the human storm,

To beard Death
At his own hearth
And bring them back

In one piece
After duty was done...
"Objective Secure, Sir!"

So we slipped and slid
On the red clay mud,
Benning's best batch.

And the wait-a-minute
Vines held us fast.
Looked good on the map!

And you took the BS
And messing around
With our minds

With quiet good humor,
steady calm patience
Through it all.

II

Vietnam... In Country!
Fourteen months, or was it
A lifetime later.

Amidst eighteen laboring
Air conditioners inside
The Cam Ranh Bay O-Club.

Talked of my R and R
To be, and yours just past,
With the wife you loved,

And how the combat forced
Changes within yourself
Made necessary

Painful reintroduction
To whom you had become.
Hawaii would wait

Till you knew each other
Again. Then back it was
to jungle, NVA and battle.

I promised I'd write
On return from R and R,
and I actually did,

But never was there reply,
And in three months,
Came time to go home.

On the hot dusty runway,
With duffel and my thoughts,
Boarding beginning...

The company jeep comes,
Flying up to the plane.
A waved tan envelope

In the clerk's hand.
"We regret to inform you...",
Official notice inside.

And my letter unopened.
Dead already four days
After Cam Ranh Bay,

On Easter Sunday. Did I
Pray for you at Mass
in Bangkok's cathedral?

No memory, but suspect not;
Other things on my mind,
Not all of them holy.

A very sober homecoming
From the start, but you
Never had even that.

III

Find myself thinking
About you more often;
As I grow older.

Am double the
I was then, and I
Why you were the

Taken, and the rest of
Allowed to further
To make our marks in

As husbands and fathers,
Employers or employees,
As just human beings;

Have our acts and omissions
Improved our world, justified
God's gift of time?

Have I lived my life
In a way that honors
Your life sacrifice?

God knows I'm not
What I was created
To be... At least, not yet!

So I bumble on,
An older dog still learning
To become truly human.

Rest easy, my friend.
We haven't taken ev'ry hill,
But haven't given up either.

~Gerald A. Ney~