

Excerpts from Part 3

Is America Capable of Love “Wed To A Disquieting Soul”

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”

“I do!”

They say, I have been told, they will say, such discord in that hour: the name of 835 Eastern Avenue – its name known for the unfolding of a continuous line of lately vanished legal and ethical summations – has been howled, even hurled with such violent distortion and opposition that I thought I would break the glass of the compartment and throttle the interrupter: Keep quiet! Do not, by means of your insensible barking, divulge the shadow which has here been instilled by my spirit to the carriage doors banging beneath an inspired and egalitarian wind, now that the ubiquitous payment for rent, rooming house guests have been vomited out. And what now do you reply?

“Villains!” I shrieked, “Dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!” I used this quote by Edgar Allan Poe, taken from his short story, THE TELL TALE HEART, and inserted into my story on Page 7 of Part 2.

On June 1, 2010 I returned to the Togus VA to have stitches removed from my back as the result of minor back surgery performed successfully the week before. Henceforth, as I gathered myself in my thoughts before breakfast much like the latent fog ahead I felt that morning’s three-inch ice lapse underfoot as my eyes spilled upon the salt sheet of snow drowning under the crippling contradiction of what I was about to see happening on

835 Eastern Avenue both upon entering and leaving the Togus VA. Had I become just another passerby passing, removed from all witnesses, responding to the solicitations of the lawn? What tells me at last where I belong? But the most important question remains: What does emotional violence, theft, ambivalence to a solitary confinement manufactured in its own corrupt absolutes, tyranny, and bodily harm ultimately accomplish? We often don't know the intimate stories, the names and faces of those who have died, suffered, or have been painfully dislocated for life after their experiences at the Togus Gate Lodge. They hang like apostrophes in the scriptures. As the reader's eyes head downward, come forward with your story, signifying and aftermath. Untie the hands of law enforcement and take some responsibility. Stop what appears to be a cover-up!

Indeed we sense, as the passerby now passes 835 Eastern Avenue, the imaginary experiment or secular commitment/profit as the flaring-up of dead meaning with a surplus inconsistent of that meaning, in which the speaking subject (the house or sight thereof) first discovers the shelter of a formal subjective, but above all the opportunity to play it again in illusions or extreme disillusion.

My email sent to the owner on June 7, 2010 read: "I drove by 835 Eastern Avenue last week and noticed the house formerly known as the Togus Gate Lodge was going through some major renovations, new siding, etc. Have you sold the property, or just upgrading?"

His reply: "I still own it! But my kids are going to use the land to build a coffee shop."

Should I have written back saying thank you for identifying the unstable living situations of the past, intervening to "closing the front doors" on a veteran's potential entry into homelessness? No! We all know that's not true. Fate is a duel in which the owner

screams with fear before being defeated, or giving-up on his original premise even though (alleged) profit is still his motive. What, then, am I, my God? All these things think through me and I through them without quibbles, without syllogisms, without deductions. What the hell is going on? And why is it no one seems to care? Will a coffee shop operated on 835 Eastern Avenue overcome the meaning of “willful blindness” and cover-up the evil things of the past dressed in robes of sorrow? Or is this, as Edgar Allan Poe would say, “a dim-remembered story of the oldtime entombed?”

“In the frank expression of conflicting opinions lies the greatest promise of wisdom in governmental action.”

Justice Louis D. Brandeis
1856-1941

Returning from the Togus VA to my home on June 1, 2010 thinking a lonelier thing, what, what is it, what partition falls, what is the logical conclusion?

On June 3, 2010 I called and talked to one of the men from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services who helped evacuate the last tenants from the Togas Gate Lodge on April 10, 2009. I told him about the renovations I had noticed while passing the infamous house on 835 Eastern Avenue. “Do you know anything about what’s going on,” I asked. He did not. God, I thought, after hanging-up the phone, what is this transparency of a single thought, and dis/placement – care/fully – in a single question? What is it I feel? I feel fragility, indistinct/ness and dismembered roadmaps, finding my way through roadblocks everywhere.

On June 5, 2010 I called and talked to the lead detective from the Augusta Police Department working on the case pertaining to

Joseph L. Spence and the Togus Gate Lodge. She assured me the case was still open. However, she said, she was just one person, and even though the case file was still on her desk, she had many other criminal activities to investigate. Obviously she could not tell me a whole lot more. It appears we live in the throes of resurgence and exhaustion, the middle's middle of insomnia. I also realize the evidence against Joseph L. Spence is buried unless someone of the many he brutalized over the years comes forward to testify without fear of retribution or retaliation. In this environment of irreversible clarity he wins, and everyone else loses. It is however my hope, we all realize as Justice Louis D. Brandies once wrote: "The most important political office is the private citizen."

"The government is the potent omnipresent teacher. For good or ill it teaches the whole people by its example." Why is it the case file defining the merciless past allocated to one person? It is not enough to say I am not blind but I see nothing around me, because vision has detached itself and reached that distance that is impossibly far, excessively far. Where are the State Police, the Governor's office, the Attorney General, State Legislators, Senator Collins and Senator Snowe, and the private citizen? Go on – tell me what else, what else dissolves these barriers of estrangement?

Do I fear for my life? Do I run and hide? Will I one-day buy coffee as a customer in the house I despise? I'll answer these questions in the words of Justice Brandeis: "Fear of serious injury cannot alone justify suppression of free speech and assembly. Men feared witches and burned women. It is the function of speech to free men from the bondage of irrational fears."

Everything may be quiet, truth to tell waiting, leaning upon the doorsteps of 835 Eastern Avenue. But what about the ghosts inside – here, here, there, there – subliminally and always present. He who secures a universal benefit from his pain has suffered a significant wound. Can you as the reader elude the tragic

consequences of this story? Everything for now may be quiet, truth to tell waiting, leaning upon the doorsteps of 835 Eastern Avenue.

“Those – dying then,
Knew where they went –
They went to God’s Right Hand –
That Hand is amputated now
And God cannot be found –

Emily Dickenson

Help me! Help me please? Don’t thank heaven yet! Don’t order your coffee or tea quite yet! The crisis, the danger has not passed. Out of pure negligence there’s still a man with a volcanic temper, a wounded pride, and a murderous rage on the loose, etcetera. My country, my country I swear! Silver moon or sorrow; risk it all on one throw as my footsteps retrace so many daily defeats.

If I don’t tell this story – as up-close – and personal as humanly possible – there’s a pretty good chance nobody will. Remember, “The most important political office is the private citizen.”

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”

“I do!”

To easily methinks we forget the past forgetting the victims who still cry out! Reflecting justly on Matthew’s Gospel, “Pride must have a fall”; thus proving it was the real thing and not merely the mock. My point more precisely written is found in the words of Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1935), where he writes: “I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America. The majority raises formidable barriers around the liberty of opinion; within

these barriers an author may write what he pleases, but woe to him if he goes beyond them.”

Most moralists have disgraced the United States venture into Vietnam, which is to say less that it has been disgraced by history.

Lets go further, and I choose to do so because most of the men and women who stayed at the Togus Gate Lodge during the Spence tenure of 17 years were older veterans. And men over the age of 50 make up the highest percentage of homeless veterans.

- 1) We lost almost 59,000 men and women during the 16 years of Viet Nam. As of 5 years after the war was officially over, we had 150,000 Viet Nam Vets that had committed suicide.
- 2) The suicide rate for Viet Nam Vets is 86% higher than the national average of peers of the same age group.
- 3) 70% of all one-car accidents are Viet Nam Vets (was it really an accident).
- 4) 60% of all Viet Nam Vets have serious emotional problems.
- 5) Between 50 and 60% have a history of alcohol and drug abuse.
- 6) The unemployment rate for Viet Nam Vets is double the national average.
- 7) The divorce rate for Viet Nam Vets is almost 3 times as many as the national average.
- 8) About 25% of all incarcerated people are Viet Nam Vets. (Most for non-violent crimes).
- 9) 56% of all homeless Americans are veterans, 44% are Viet Nam Vets.

Do you see the fingerprints of the broken hand, the great illusion, and our obedience to our country true or false? History thusly read with a squint plays a formative role on minds kept steadily insecure. Good Morning Vietnam! Go to sleep Joseph L. Spence yells at his parishioners, or “I’ll spank your ass!” No, no,

no Mr. Spence, reflecting upon Matthew's Gospel, "Pride must have a fall"; thus providing it was the real thing and not merely the mock.

The stats mentioned above you don't hear about unless you are trying to discover them. What you do hear 35 to 40 years after-the-fact is that a Viet Nam Vet is a bearded motorcycle gang member with psychological disorders and violent tendencies. They are anti-social and a threat to our way of life. Although this may be true of some it by no means describes 98% of us.

Normally you would never know he was a Viet Nam Vet because he or she would never share that with you. He or she normally is a man or woman working next to you that does his or her job and goes home. He is in every area of this society and usually out performs others in the same field. He may have been on the same job 20 years but chances are that he has held numerous jobs and probably will never achieve enough time on one to draw any retirement benefits.

On the surface the Viet Nam Vet looks like anyone else but underneath is a complex man of deep feelings and emotions. He may be physically there but mentally he could be one of the MIA's (Missing in Action). He may be emotionally isolated and may even be physically removed from the routine of everyday life that most of us endure with ambivalence. He is a POW of a war that he doesn't even realize is still raging inside him. He may look good on the outside but there's a numbness inside that doesn't allow him to have feelings like normal men and women. His family witnesses him die daily but when confronted he will deny that he has a problem. Afterward he feels so guilty that he just gets drunk and stares at the TV for hours and hours not really seeing anything accept the recesses of his mind. He usually has difficulty with authority and constantly criticizes governmental figures.

He may cry a lot or be cold as ice. He can usually handle any crisis that comes up with a cool that is never there at Christmas dinner. He may disappear for days without warning and act like nothing happened when he returns. His sleep is never without labor and it is dangerous to wake him suddenly. He usually is obsessed with guns and weapons of all kinds and is never without protection. If he meets another Viet Nam Vet it's almost like they automatically connect on a frequency that no one else is privy to. They may talk for hours about the war but he would never mention one word about it to his own family.

Life generally leaves him confused and scared though he won't admit it and he avoids any talk of therapy like the plague. If he does go to therapy it takes Forever to get him to talk because he doesn't trust anyone. He usually has Great Ideas and plans but they never materialize because of his unknown fears prevent him from carrying them out.

This is by no means a comprehensive view of a Viet Nam Vet but it gives you an idea of what many Viet Nam Vets face on a daily basis. What is a Viet Nam Vet? Viet Nam Veterans are Proud Americans regardless of the outcome that politicians dictated for Vietnam.

Surely as we go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, we will, as President John F. Kennedy said, "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardships, support any friend, and oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty." Interesting huh? Where was America's heart, her benedictions, and her prayers when as of 5 years after the war was officially over, we had 150,000 Viet Nam Vets commit suicide.

A man checks into the Service Center at the local VA Facilities. The weather was getting colder, so all day, the homeless vets had

crowded into the reception room and waited impatiently for their turn.

The man next in line was dying.

“Do you get Social Security Disability, or public assistance,” asked the clerk?

“No, I’m all set,” the man answered. “I got Agent Orange. A Hundred Percent. They send it to my post office box, since I got no home.”

Now the clerk understood. The homeless man was living on the streets. A monthly disability check from the VA was being sent to him because of his diagnosis of Dioxin Poisoning from his Service in Vietnam related in proximity to the herbicide, “Agent Orange.”

But the clerk also wondered how long it took for this man to get a disability rating. What kind of struggle did it take so this man could subsist on the streets, all be the benefit of his monthly Agent Orange Check? This man is dying! Where is America’s heart, its benedictions, and its prayers? Say again, the US Budget Seen as Hurting the poor, Aiding the Rich. Is this statement subservient to a philosophical level illiterate? No, I don’t think so! Not when there is prejudice, while men and women die to uphold a Democratic Principle, making (the Viet Nam Vet) subject to a moral jurisdiction.

Veteran abuse in Maine is a problem we must all acknowledge. And even though we need to gather statistics for remedial action Mainers in particular need to grasp the necessity of supporting grass-roots elder veteran’s abuse prevention efforts, and for our politicians and policymakers to listen to the stories that older veterans tell us when we weigh outreach strategies and campaigns. Victims often downplay the seriousness of the abuse because they

fear losing their living arrangements. There is also the common belief that these are “family matters,” and very often the abused blame themselves and are afraid of causing trouble for their abuser. There is a denial factor, and many times these people suffer in silence.

“War is one of the conditions of progress, the sting that prevents a country from going to sleep.” – Ernest Renan (1876)
The manners and morals of politicians and lawmakers must be sketched where they are to be found, which is in the behavior of the individual. The physical, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse that took place at the Togus Gate Lodge did not go unreported it was covered-up. The men and women who stayed there during their tenure of Joseph L. Spence were afraid of losing their living arrangements. While his threats, criminal innuendoes (excessive impulsive behavior), all of which adversely affected its victims’ health and welfare, for whatever reasons fell far below the radar of suspicion. I fail, with all that I have written here to understand this.

The roster of victims must not be distinguished. They must be found. They must tell their stories. For these men and women there has never been a more striking example of the utter irrelevance of the human being (a majority of older Veterans) when the politics of “total denial” is involved. If the United States of America (1% of the world’s total population) is going to take the lead in promoting the basic global standards of human rights, we should look first and no further to a commitment of our own! The Viet Nam Vet, although forgotten, has not fallen asleep! It’s time for a reality check. “...publicity over achievement, revelation over restraint, honesty over decency, victim-hood over personal responsibility, confrontation over civility, psychology over morality.” – Maureen Dowd (1995). Maureen Dowd’s written comments suffice to say, appears to be what our country has become, promoting in notoriety the reasons why Joseph L. Spence may never be tried in a Court of Law.

O' how we forget when an eighth grade social studies teacher begins her explanation of "American History": "There is a common misconception that a history course is a study of the past." Did Sharron Angle of Arizona teach eighth grade social studies before she became involved in politics? She seems to think the written words of Thomas Jefferson were misunderstood, and now she wants to rewrite history while the militant Jesus-Christers are organizing in order to take political control of Congress itself. There's a new coffee shop located at 835 Eastern Avenue in Augusta, Maine. Please don't ask for more time to consider the ramifications of this story. Grave trouble never grants time.

In ending I wish to share with you a poem I wrote in the winter of the year 2004.

LOVE ME PLEASE

We must weep and sing
To our duty's conscious wrong...
Turn an envious look
The Devil in the clock
Our goodness carefully worn
For atonement, or for luck...
And I have done
What I never wished
On the wings of malignant doubt
Confessing my love
Worn of hidden guilt
Of wind-bent grasses I go
Waiting with or without
My death rushing on –
Feeling with or without

Love

Eternally unwanted

Eternally gone...

...My life is on a thin line, pulled only by the string of God –
Love me, please

Strange too, is how we define love/how what is and what is not/makes a quixotic braid, or a vertiginous, enthralling, at times desperate dance, here and now, by turns both fierce and sensuous, a languor of hope, and a wounded strength, in a language bewildered...

There, in tear and song
I cannot find, there...
A seed, a bed

There

I cannot hear
Thru ghostly shadows (love)
Her wandering

Prayer

Waking, wishing
I was somewhere else

There...

The invisible war wounds of a traumatic brain injury oftentimes feels like you have been stripped of your humanity. As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq rage on without a clear end in sight, I was recently reminded about the readings of the ancient Greek plays written by a general officer named Sophocles' entitled "Ajax" and "Philoctetes." Sophocles' Ajax tells the story of the strongest warrior in the Greek army who, suffering from a "divine madness," or what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder, attempts to murder his commanding officer but enters into a dissociative state in which he slaughters harmless animals instead. When he awakens from rage and sees what he has done, he takes his life, plunging upon his enemy's sword.

“Philoctetes” depicts the isolation, resilience, recovery and reintegration of a soldier who is abandoned by his army on a desolate island for nine long years because of a mysterious illness.

Philoctetes sustains a “wound that never heals” and is ostracized by his fellow soldiers after driving them away with the sounds of his cries.

Does any of this timelessly describe for the reader the impact of war on human beings, asking one fundamental question: How do we restore humanity to those who feel they have lost it? Do you hear me Vietnam?

Places like the Togus Gate Lodge did not serve as a resting place of purification and reintegration where men and women made meaning out of their physical, emotional, or traumatic experiences, healing themselves, restoring their humanity.

Building a coffee shop in a place where there was once upon a time unbridled terror is a plot of erasure, the rose petal fragrance rising from the waters baptismal bath, truth be known, the dark has won by a landslide.

O’ is it all a vain illusion? Perhaps I am not one to flinch from these most intractable fears, and dissolution in the face of suffering, redemption without pain, or the sulfurous vapors repelling all creatures that might stray near. The “rift in the human soul” is my audition, before and after Virgil, reminding us, too, this illumination is often accompanied by disillusionment and that the spiritual awakening which allows us to see more clearly may well leave us in despair. What tempts man into envy when he weeps and begs to stay? Perhaps we are, I am, the one who awakens first, perhaps too, you will be the first to see me in the first dawn thereafter, the stranger, and a night in summer, sounds of a summer storm – perhaps, “this the wine & this the bread.”

Maybe “again,” maybe “not,” have you, can you, will you:
“Walk with me past the droppings of the moon to where you
inhabit the ocean, earth, and sky of my heart, to its center, where
you kiss it, and set the world to a new beginning.” I am only here
for a day or two auditioning for thereafter, but tomorrow, although,
not forgotten, I may be gone!

Most dismal to her eyes will be the shadowy letter read 39 years
ago foreboding long thereafter, its postmark lost, its traumatic
disguise still tormented and unimpressionable as written, reciting
wounds of the sword and wars eternal suffering, its sublime
message wandering, never, no never, would there be a place
thereafter called home.

This, its ordained fate retained/unknown is my story. Be still,
perhaps it is time to bring these verses to a close.

“Where have you been since Viet Nam,” my psychiatrist asks?
“I’ve stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains. I’ve walked
and I’ve crawled on six crooked highways. I’ve stepped in the
middle of seven sad forests. I’ve been out in front of a dozen dead
oceans. I’ve been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard.
Don’t you know it’s a hard, hard rain that continues to fall?”

“What have you seen and heard since Viet Nam,” the
psychiatrist asks. “I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were
all broken. I saw a black branch with blood that kept dripping. I
heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter. I heard the roar of
a wave that could drown the whole world. I heard the sound of a
clown who died in the alley. I heard ten thousand whispering, but
nobody listening. Oh, what will you do now? I’ll tell it and think it
and speak it and breathe it, and reflect it from the mountain so all
souls can see it. Don’t you know it’s a hard, hard rain that
continues to fall?”

Lyrics in quotations by Bob Dylan (1963)

In Genesis, Chapter 4, Verse 9, it says, “And the Lord said unto Cain, where is Abel thy brother?” And he said, “I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?” Like it or not, we cannot limit the damage of Vietnam to suit our hopes and needs. “And the Lord said unto the Federal Government, where are the Veterans of the Viet Nam war? And the Federal Government said: “I know not: Am I my citizen veteran’s keeper?”

“Beware how you take away hope from another human being.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Torn from the earth where it once stood the Togus Gate Lodge has now long gone into the forgotten woods of a time rendered invisible. Now what you see is a betrayal of the final act seduced by choir and song addicted to man’s self-righteousness, which includes a meticulous delinquency seemingly detaching itself from any governmental authority, federal or state laws, or any common clause civility where I no doubt will become the victim. Has the distance between God and man been consumed? Maybe I assumed a brevity brittle, but certainly not a siege alone of incipient cures.

Great truths cannot be put into writing, nor ideas set in stone. We may open those book paper pages of our minds (the umbilical cord of thought, sight and sound) but we will only find memories of memories, shadows of shadows. It is here we can only hope that these glimpses of words, even if they are not all of them true, will at least take away some of the pain from our heart’s, if only!

I still recall every sight, every taste, and every scent. But my strongest memories are those associated with either the greatest beauty, or the greatest bitterness/pain, or a combination of both.

It's here the performer's body itself (if only in words) must become its own instrument, completely enfolding his poetry, words, stories, and music of his life, a destiny of hide-and-seek, harbored in the eternal secrecy of God's composition: his oratorical myth.

I have written and rewritten, edited and reedited this story tediously, and suffering immensely well over a thousand times. Hours, and hours, and hours have gone into my subconscious eternity to make my words speak without prejudice or an uncontrollable weakness.

I have also worried myself sick about the consequences of this story being published. Who is going to knock at my door with a gun aimed at my head? When will I be called into the principle's office of those dressed in black? When will the subpoena be delivered from those who only tell half-truths to protect themselves? In other words who is going to protect my 1st amendment rights?

Time is, to see clearly into my journey calling to mind those many departures, one landscape more than another and its impenetrable retreat. Mystifying as well is what can be found in a dark heart seeking its own escape. When it is not hard to imagine the millions of rooms, the rooms of humanity lonely, where a person, he or she, writes about their tears. Does pride at morning light always fume? Pity the pure vessel of more sadness brewed. There's a part of this story (or all of it I would assume) that yearns. Do you not hear it? The truth of its own design has been ignited, while we, its matrix weeps.

On October 23, 2010 I was again proud to volunteer my time and whatever I could do to help homeless veterans at the Togus VA Stand Down. A total of 72 homeless veterans took part in this year's Stand Down. But it represented a small fraction of Maine's

homeless veterans. There are 876 homeless veterans in Maine according to shelters around the state. How many more are there? We can guesstimate, but I sincerely doubt anyone truly knows. What I consider to be naïve fragility is a fact not commonly known. While held at the Togus VA the Stand Down is not a VA event. At least 20 state, federal, veteran and private organizations, including 150 volunteers and staff took part in this event.

If you go to page 33 and forward, chapter 2 of this story, you will see how disappointed I am towards the dismal attendance of this event. The statistics need to change. We should be reaching 30 to 40% of Maine homeless veterans, bringing 250 to 300 homeless veterans to the Togus VA Stand Down every year. 8.2% of those in attendance this year are not a reassuring condition. We have to step out of the primeval foliage and begin to rearrange the reasons we fall so short of achieving our goals. Or without any creativity for establishing said goals do we struggle with self-imposed limitations? I also believe there are some people on the Togus VA Homeless Veterans Committee who do want to not push the limits of what is possible. Or even consider what we can do without first saying it won't work, and how do we raise the number of homeless veterans who will attend this event in 2011 from 72 to 200.

During the late afternoon on October 23, 2010 I was alone thank God, but visibly shaken and upset. It made no sense to me damnit. It made no sense. Failure is not an option. Why am I doing this? Why am I writing this story? I am usually a quiet soft-spoken man. Suddenly, without much effort, and with tears rolling down my cheeks, I walked over to my CD player. Sitting on top of my CD player, appropriately I thought for the aftermath of this occasion, in plain sight was the song "Some Gave All," by Billy Ray Cyrus. Ironically speaking I suppose, this will be the song that will be played at my funeral when I pass, buried in my Marine Corps Dress Blues at the Veteran's Cemetery in Augusta, Maine.

Lately it seems my health has been waning. The headaches have returned. My eyesight seems to be getting worse. And more often than not it is getting more difficult to maintain a positive mental attitude about anything. And yet here I am quoting in directness and succinct brevity the words of Nietzsche (1882): “In place of fundamental truths, I put fundamental probabilities – provisionally assumed guides by which one lives and thinks.” Only by defiance, and a quest for what is right can a livable world, with an expressive art to match, be created. Failure is not an option. This is not a thinly veiled audacity with any repercussions quietly cast aside. When sitting in America’s judgment chair, unaware, searching for tomorrow, another year will pass hopelessly pleading its ignorance.

Wasn’t, isn’t, could have been my story? “The patient (SGT Allen Francis Foley) should be continued on TDRL status. He should continue to be reviewed. The patient should not be retired, as he has not been treated appropriately for his illness.” The doctor goes on to say, “The treatment is not available through VA facilities,” Womack Army Hospital/1976. What the doctor didn’t say in 1976 was that my brain injury would become the trickster in the land of my dreams. Take my life away but give me a reason to live. And the saddest part of this story is that when I was properly diagnosed and treated (33 years after my visit to the Womack Army Hospital in 1976) the compensation paid to me was only back to when I filed my claim which was approximately (in terms of how the government does things now) 21 months.

Secondly, if you raise your voice and yell foul, you are likely to lose everything you may have gained. That’s why I say every homeless veteran in this country should come under the auspices of one huge tent filled with lawyers to sue the United States Government, and impeach those politicians who want to privatize the VA. The Vietnam Veteran especially has paid the price of service to his or her country dearly. And the promises made to us

have either been amended or falsely and incorrectly adopted with extreme prejudice. “I we’d fought the law, and the law won.” This was and is our trial without a jury.

Who builds a narrow house too narrow for thee to enter – oh make it wide? It is in ruins (life) – oh rebuild it! This in wounds of chaos they we’d suffer. “[For] we must tread on shadowy ground, must sink deep, and aloft ascending breathe in worlds to which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.” Wordsworth/Confessions

I watched, I prayed, and I shed a silent tear as I handed a winter coat to each homeless veteran, his or her final stop so-to speak, a posttraumatic catechism to a grueling day. This is in ruins (life) – oh rebuild it!

This is my story, this is my song, and my idealistic contempt that purely portrays what is ethically irresponsible in the United States of America. Have I mistaken the ‘vision’ that is not nearly transitory enough? Tyrants will always find a way to abuse and enslave. It’s up to the people to keep watch and say, Oh no, we will have no more of this, this very day. The main character in chapter 1 of this story, Joseph L. Spence, was and is such a tyrant at the expense of many innocent victims. And within this scathing manifesto written, contemplating, describing the Mind and Man, I see this vision of both past and present that goes beyond hell.

On November 5, 1970 I was alive, half-dead, and alive again. Was this to be my hopeless dream? Have you ever seen the rain, sunny day coming down? One night while I was recovering from my injuries at the United States Naval Hospital in Yokosuka, Japan I was found sitting in the corner of my dormitory crying. A man came from nowhere; he leaned towards me, and said, Sgt. Foley come with me. We walked together towards the elevator, got on, and headed up to the 7th or 8th floor of the hospital building. God, God, O’ God – get this out of my head! Forever, from that day

forward Oh wounded soul – alive, half-dead, and alive. The ward we entered was filled with men who had lost arms and legs. Some of the men had half their heads blown off. Some were just lying there half naked, their bodies covered in bloody bandages. Many of these men were going to die! Most of them were Marines. But I could see in my heart that they still had a purpose. They had fought for their country red, white, and blue. They didn't care about the political fall out or the bullshit riots back home. All they wanted was to be understood, what they did, and why they did it, and to be loved by their wives, girlfriends, children, friends and family. I smiled and laughed with these men during that fateful night, the whole time crying inside. The crying has never stopped. That's right, have you ever seen the rain, coming down on a sunny day? God bless America.

The soldier's grief helps us comprehend the powerful bond that arises between men in combat. The man who brought me upstairs was hospitalized with a serious infection. "In my heart it's – if I was there, he wouldn't be dead, I didn't do my job. I didn't bring him home." Said Sergeant Donnelly. "When it was time, Allen, I didn't take care of him. When he needed me, I wasn't there. I should have taken the fucking round myself."

There I sat my weight a useless burden to the world. There was no theology to explain what had just happened. It should have been me. Why couldn't it have been me? My hearts desire embedded in ghostly nightmares had been that I should perish alone. I was no hero. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I worked in what today would be called "intelligence/crypto/electronics." And yet I still ask myself, why couldn't it have been me? I have like others sought the honorable compromise, the few who inexplicably survived and returned to civilian life with the double torment of death deserving guilt and a ready capacity to go fucking berserk. There is no other comfort, no other warmth, but only heartbreak.

What is said above is why there is no pity for Joseph L. Spence. He had the capacity for dehumanizing another human being... through his [male] psyche, his chord of violence likely to vibrate in response to anyone who questioned him or his authority; and vice versa. If there is an epic narrative here, it is about how Joseph L. Spence exploited men and women for his own benefit. This is why I write my story. For too long I have had a hostile or mistrustful attitude towards the world, social withdrawal, feelings of emptiness and loneliness, a chronic feeling of being “on the edge,” of constantly threatened, and estrangement from all the people I have loved. Erase that, it’s yesterday’s fucking news.

We, we the people, the men and women who stayed at the Togus Gate Lodge fought the law, what law there was, and the law won. I suspect the reason Joseph L. Spence has not been, nor ever will be brought to justice is because to do so would be to open up the closed doors of federal, state, and local bureaucracies, rather than find the evidence behind the social morality of “what is right.” To hear and believe is to feel unsafe. It is to know the fragility of goodness. We, we the people, the men and women who stayed at the Togus Gate Lodge fought the law, what law there was, and the law won, the law of forgetting and denial.

The Vietnam Syndrome has become a spiritual flu defined as a regrettable aversion to sending American troops overseas to kill other people – to which we might add – for reasons that seem less than compelling to the American citizenry. It remains albeit a thick residue of feelings, too deep for any articulation, from which no American who lived through the war is free. War in itself creates situations in which physical survival contradicts moral survival. This is the ‘ism’ we live with today. The betrayal of what is right is to coerce participation in the victimization of others. The Veteran’s Administration has been trained to deny the soldier’s experience so that the normal response is to make all the power-holder’s excuses:

This is a figment of your fantasy; if you knew all the facts, you'd see it was for the best; you've got a hidden agenda in saying this; it never happened; you brought it on yourself; and anyway, it's 30 years ago, so forget it and don't create more problems. The veteran will then, as it was in my case, shake his head in disgust, walk-away, and try as he might to do his best on his own. Other's will say, "You weren't there, so shut to fuck up!" What is the truth that causes the old soldier to weep and weep again? The narrative untold is now hidden between the covers of deadly letters unread untold that lie in wait embraced by the Joseph L. Spence's of this world, 'to scar our souls.'

Over 2,000,000 U.S. troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. Among returning troops, nearly 40% of soldiers, a third of Marines, and half of the National Guard members report symptoms of psychological distress. "I can't find the right words to describe when you are homeless," says Iraq war veteran Joseph Jacobo. "You see the end of your life right there. What am I going to do, what am I going to eat?" Veterans make up almost a quarter of the homeless population in the United States. The government says there are as many as 200,000 homeless veterans; (I have seen statistics which say this number is between 400,000 and 500,000 depending on whom we believe) the majority served in the Vietnam War. Some served in Korea or even World War II. About 2000 served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

There was 4.8 billion dollars spent on the mid-term elections in 2010, most of which was spent on malicious campaigning. How many of our elected officials who call themselves constitutional experts as they bitch and moan about values, freedoms, and rights, which includes the pursuit of happiness for our citizenry could tell the American people who wrote the following. "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they

perceive veterans of early wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.” Anyone? John Boehner? Sarah Palin? John McCain? President Obama? The name of the man who wrote this was George Washington, the first President of the United States of America. For the Vietnam Veteran it was like being with a hooker who gave good head – we walked away with discharge papers in hand and would soon be forgotten!

As I was watching the returns from the mid-term election I was stunned to watch John Boehner from Ohio, assuming he was in line to be the next Speaker of the House, go up to the podium and cry on National Television. His speech was less one of language than of gentility and optimism as he talked about economic freedom, core values, and chasing the American dream. Nothing is his fault. And no one, not Democratic, not Republican takes the blame that is becoming the decline and fall of our great American society. Listening to Mr. Boehner my head started throbbing, I got sick to my stomach, went into my bathroom, sat on the floor, and puked my guts out!

Mr. Boehner doesn't pay a dime for social security. When he retires, he continues to draw the same pay as he does today until he dies. Except that may be increased from time to time, by the cost of living adjustments. And he pays nothing for retirement and health benefits. Buying stock in a pharmaceutical company, filling his political and personal coffers with corporate donations, money from lobbyist, or paving paradise to put up a parking lot in (spatial finitude) does not reveal a country's woe of limitations. It instead reveals a vile hypocrisy. There is no infinitesimal gratitude for the American warrior. C'mon Mr. Boehner, I have a recent report in front of me right now which says, “It is impossible to know exactly how many U.S. veterans are on the streets, but experts estimate that about 300,000 of them are homeless on any given night and that about half a million experience homelessness at some point during the year.” It's here too we should ask Mitch O'Connell why

Republican Senator's blocked an important bill on homeless veterans on June 29, 2010? This sends the wrong message to the members of America's armed forces.

"It's what the American people want," we hear from both sides of the aisle. That is impossible I say. Because unless you've lived on food stamps, you can't get medical care because you have no health insurance, your heat has been turned off in the middle of winter, you have no income because there are no jobs, or you're a homeless Vietnam Veteran sleeping in laundry rooms and washing yourself in fast food restrooms until you get kicked-out, do they, Democrat or Republican, Tea Party Advocate or Independent have any idea what is really happening in the United States of America today?

Ken Saks lost his feet because of complications caused by Agent Orange, then lost his low-rent Santa Barbara, California apartment in an ordeal that began when a neighbor complained about his wheelchair ramp "I'm 56 years old," Saks said. "I don't want to die in the streets... This is what our soldiers in Iraq are coming home to? They're going to live a life like I have? God bless them."

Is there a constitutional theorist, Republican, Democrat, or Tea Party loyalist who can tell me who wrote the following without displaying signs of Hitler? "A man good enough to shed his blood for his country, is good enough to receive a square deal afterwards." His name was Theodore Roosevelt.

Supporting our veterans should not be about politics – it should be about what kind of country we want the United States to be. And about what our priorities are as a nation.

On this day, Veteran's Day 2010, God wants you to know...that the weight you carry on your shoulders is much too heavy for one

human being. Give some of that weight where it belongs – to God,
and have faith that what happens is for the best, whether you
understand it or not!

“Few folks even knew his name
But a hero yes was he
He left a boy, came back a man
Still many just don’t understand
About the reasons we are free
I can’t forget the look in his eyes
Or the tears he cried
As he said these words to me:
All gave some – some gave all
Stood through for the red, white, and blue
And if you ever think of me
Think of all your liberties and recall
Some gave all.

Now Sam ‘The Cane’ is no longer here
But his words are oh so clear
As they echo throughout our land
For all his friends who gave us all
Who stood the ground and took the fall
To help their fellow man
Love your country, live with pride
And don’t forget those who died
America can’t you see

All gave some – some gave all
Some stood through for the red, white, and blue
And if you ever think of me
Think of all your liberties and recall
Some gave all.”

God Bless America!

...Only here, or here only
is just another dream he or she cannot recall

listening

dreaming of escape
the unsayable said now said

“It should have been me!” is the cry of guilt that goes up the midst of grief from a survivor condemned by his very survival. Erase that, erase that in willful blindness, it should have been yesterday’s fucking news.

I consider this finished essay to be the end of a poem. To some it may be wordy, but to others I hope, it will be intensely moving, and passionately written. I have lived in a parallel world most of my life. Its basic features have included a procession of mourners, appeals and questionings of witnesses, life and death, outbreaks of anger or emotion, expressions of tribute and the use of natural imagery in a world, which can be seen as the site of renewal and loss. War is the century’s corpse out leant. It’s casualties absent, and subtlety betrayed.

“You cannot fold a Flood –
And put it in a Drawer –
Because the Winds would find it out –
And tell your Cedar Floor”

Emily Dickenson

We may fulfill the object of our existence by asking a question we cannot answer, and attempting a task we cannot achieve. If you protest, my friend, wait until you arrive there yourself!

