

# “I saw Vietnam for real today” (8)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Memorial Day, Uncategorized May 26, 2019

*(8th in a series of posts on Memorial Day)*

*Peter Crownfield is officially retired but spends most of his time working with students in his role as internship coordinator for the Alliance for Sustainable Communities–Lehigh Valley.*

Memorial Day, 1993

Lisa J. Parker



Gadfly:

I saw Vietnam for real today,  
not from the words of textbooks and teachers.  
I saw it in its most raw form:  
Primitive, wounding, private, and moving,  
I was touched by a generation I was not a part of.  
I saw the Wall in its entirety,  
that immense black testament to the pain  
of human lives reduced to marks on a rock.  
Its smooth surface, warm with hands  
reaching, touching, rubbing, connecting.  
It offers open arms and solace to those who served,  
the recognition, dignity, and respect they deserved  
and were never rightly given  
from their country, their fellow Americans.  
In replacement of human arms to comfort them,  
they take what refuge they can in a slab of black marble.  
A man with no legs and seven medals  
saluted that wall and wept openly.  
I reeled at the irony of the image and  
knew that I couldn't hide behind the textbooks anymore.  
Once you have seen that kind of reality you are forever changed.  
I touched that wall and I cried:  
Cried for the wounded with their tarnished medals,  
for my own late understanding,  
for the sick beauty of flowers against the blackness.  
I looked at the Wall with its silent mourning,  
at the legless man with his head in his hands,  
and the capital was silent but for a  
Lonely trumpet stilling the air with Taps.

Here's a poem my son and I published back in 1995 (in a journal called *Echoes Magazine*, a total of 17 issues from 1993 to 1997), written by a young college student, Lisa J. Parker — one of several of her poems we published. She went on to win a coveted spot in Penn State's graduate program for writers (she was 1 of only 2 poets admitted that year) and has since published 1 or 2 books of her poetry. The drawing is by Ferrilyn Sourdiffé, which we used both with the poem and as the cover.

Peter