

WHEN WE CAME HOME

We sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge on the way to Viet Nam.
I just *knew* I'd never see it again
and I cried. I wasn't alone.

Forty-plus years ago this Friday, I flew back to the world.
I remember the bag I carried, heavy with memories; we all had them;
still do. We dream of war dogs; we smell heat, open sewers
and napalm-charred flesh. We taste MREs, the good ones
and the horrid, hard lima-bean ones; we hear
the constant din--of guns, mortars, jungle screams, and the Whoomp.....
Whoomp.....Whoomp.....of Hueys. Nothing else sounds like them.

An older friend strung the ears of VC he'd killed on a cord as a necklace;
feels them leather-like, still,
though he threw them away long ago.

Nobody warned us we'd get angry or be hurt back home, but when we arrived
at the airport, a chick in a miniskirt threw roses with thorns at us.
"Hey, soldier!" she yelled. "How many kids you kill today?"

After being home awhile, some guys moved to the mountains,
some to vacant lots or the street. A friend calls me often at night just to talk
while he fondles his gun. Too few guys ask for help, too many die.

Our tours in-country were wildly different one guy to the next--
some in firefights every day, some like me merely setting up
equipment at a gorgeous Nha Trang beach on the South China Sea,
Bom-de-bom in one hand, Camel in the other. No matter how eventful
our days of war, all of us were warriors, all wounded.

Today is Memorial Day.
After the parade, we *vets and civilians* sing Lennon's "IMAGINE" *together*
by the huge cement fountains in the park. Who would have believed that?

A young man in JROTC gear comes up to me and salutes. Stunned,
I return it. He holds out his hand and we shake. Talk about
who would have believed...?

My war over
young man getting ready for the next.
"Welcome home, sir," he says, turns, and lopes off to catch up to his unit.