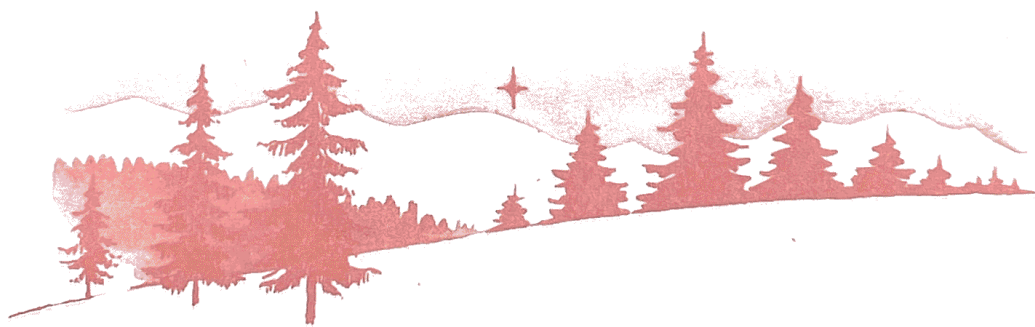


Dear Walter,

Sorry I haven't kept in touch. Russ's condition became so bad I didn't know if I'd have him by the time we moved. We now live in a Senior Citizen Home that has everything Russ needs. but that I'm having a hard time adjusting to. Parting with my big house and all the things that were a part of my life, was very difficult. Only my love for Russ made the move bearable. I'm still working and trying not to look back. I miss not hearing from you. Give all your students my love.

Eleanor



Holiday Greetings and warmest wishes  
for a wonderful New Year

Merry Christmas

Eleanor and Russ.

Dear loved ones,

Another Christmas is upon us again and with all our heartaches and problems, we still have so much to be thankful for.

Our children, grand children are all fine. We have been blessed, this year, with a 2<sup>nd</sup> great grand son, Matthew Russell Trageser.

Our big heartache is Russ. He is mostly in a wheelchair and on oxygen. He will never get better because of emphysema and post polio syndrome. Not a lot is known about post polio syndrome, so we just live for today and be grateful for each day.

Life is difficult for both of us now. Russ's not being able to do much, gets him down and watching my love fade from me is, at times, almost more than I can bear. But these feelings I must hide and just give him all the T.L.C. I can. But God is good and I still do have my sweetheart, my best friend. These 2 problems are not painful for Russ, it's his breathing that, at times, becomes very difficult.

The dreams we had, when we were young, have faded with our youth and in the winter of our lives, the golden years, we thought would come in later life is not to be for us.

But life goes on with joy and heartache. Our 4 children are being super attentive <sup>but</sup> are here for everything Russ and I need. We are truly blessed.

Russ and I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and happy New year. God Bless.

Eleanor

(410) 528-2787

July 20, 1989

Dear Walter,

This year is disappearing so fast I can't believe it. Now that summer is here, I'm hoping you are enjoying it and life is treating you wonderful.

I'm sure you have been wondering why you haven't heard from me. Hopefully my life has settled down and I can finally get some rest and write to those who care for Russ and I. I have given up my full time job and now work just 3 days a week. With all my problems and working full time, I was caught in a cycle and the only thing I could do was pray my way through each day and fall exhausted into bed each night.

The month of May was one which caused me a lot of pain, yet a lot of happiness. On May 5<sup>th</sup> Russ had a mild heart attack, he's doing o.k. now but not quite himself yet. He also has emphysema and had to quit smoking, which makes him a granch sometimes, but I'd rather have a granch than no Russ at all. Trying to deal with the

thoughts of losing Russ, keeping up with my job, etc., took its toll on me, both mentally and physically.

Then on May 15<sup>th</sup>, Wynby was married to Ray Keefer, a Vietnam veteran. It was a beautiful wedding and I now have a wonderful new son-in-law.

Then on May 28<sup>th</sup> the Maryland Vietnam Memorial was dedicated. When you bring out many emotions, pain sadness, love and pride, it also takes its toll on your body, especially when you're 62. After that I was finally able to get some much needed rest and my life has begun to settle down. I now feel as though I'm seeing some light at the end of the tunnel.

When you have children, they must come first in your life and all the others you love, you keep in your thoughts and hope they understand that out of sight does not mean out of thought. I love you all and hope to keep in touch some after. God Bless!

Love and Prayers

Eleanor and Russ



April 17, 1988  
Dor Burnie, md

Dear Walter,

Thank you for your phone call. At the time you called me, I was having a very difficult time because of my youngest daughter Wendy. I panic when anything is wrong with one of my children. When I lost Billy, I lost that feeling of security that everyone has, but do not realize they have, until they lose it. Anyhow as of this minute, (in my family, you never know from day to day) every thing is fine.

Because of my still writing letters to Billy, there are those who think I don't have all my marbles. If they could just travel with me, for one week, they would see I do not live in the past, yet Billy is still and always will be a part of me. I work 40 hours a week. Take care of my husband, who is not badly handicapped but does require many things other husbands do not. We have a good marriage for <sup>there</sup> ~~there~~ is not a kinder, better husband any where. What I have given up for my husband, I have received back 10 fold. I also have 3 daughters, Donna, Marianne and Wendy who I could not have got any better daughters, if

I had of ordered them special, ~~could not have got any better~~. My son Barry is a man gentle, kind but has many problems. When Barry was 12, he was in the highest classes in school. Then he lost something very dear to him. His big brother, Billy, who was his idol. Barry went from the highest in the class to the lowest. We found out from doctors he not only lost his big brother but a partial father, too. Barry is a victim of the Vietnam war and has the same problems many Vietnam Veterans do. Now you know much about me. You know of my lovely daughter, you know of my pain from losing Billy and you know of the pain I suffer with Barry because like most Vietnam Veterans he will never know true happiness even tho he is always surrounded by those who love him dearly, his family.

I have 8 grandchildren ages 2 to 23. And believe me, the little ones help to keep me busy. I also help out with a handicaps Association that my husband Russ is president of. We have a 36 foot boat that we take handicapped person out on on week end when weather permits.

I'm also on the Commission to build a memorial in Maryland for the Korean war. They couldn't get a Good Star mother from the Korean war, for the Commission, so they came to the Vietnam war and after saying no many time, I received a phone call from the Governors office and finally said yes. So you see I have very little time left over. I also write to many many Vietnam Veterans, my life is basically happy and very full at times. Its 7 A.M., on Sunday morning. I don't really know why I'm writing all this to you.

I saw the movie "Dear America" in Washington on March 29<sup>th</sup> with Russ, Donna, Barry and Mandy. (I was so proud Barry was with us). What can I say. It hit me really hard.

I met many of those from H. B. O., at the reception that followed. That night they make me feel really important, like Cinderella at the ball. The next day I felt like Cinderella the day after the ball. Down on my hands and knees at work.

One of the nicest parts of the evening was meeting a nurse Lynda Van Devanter (also in the movie) when I hug a Vietnam nurse I feel like I'm hugging the one who was very possibly with



Billy when he died. As we cried together, little did she know how important it was to me.

On Easter Sunday I had the family and some friends with us to share the day. By 8 o'clock everyone was gone except John Baca. John lived in Virginia but occasionally spends a weekend with us. John has never married, his parents are dead and basically has no one. He is our #1 "adopted son". John saved many lives in Vietnam and has the Congressional Medal of Honor. Marianne was unable to go to Washington with us and had not seen the movie. She went home, put her 2 little ones to bed and came back. So with John, Marianne, Russ and me, we watched the movie "Dear America". After the movie and the hugging, kissing and crying had stopped, I went to bed. I had barely dozed off when Russ came up and woke me telling me Jim was on the phone and having a hard time.

Jim was with Billy in Vietnam. He only refers to Billy as "Spanky", his nickname in Vietnam. Jim is the one I talk about in the letter in the movie. If it were not for Jim I would



not have written the letter. If it were not for Jim I would not have the picture of Billy that is in the movie. Jim sent me the picture after Billy died and said it was taken 2 weeks before his death. I have met Jim only once (at the New York parade for Vietnam Veterans.) but we talk on the phone and write. Jim lives in Michigan.

When I picked up the phone, Jim's wife, Susan, said she didn't think Jim could talk. I heard him in the back ground say, "yes, I can." When Jim got on the phone, he told me things I was hungry to hear. He told me how Spanky was the one who kept them sane in Vietnam. Between the things he told me, he would break down and cry so hard, tell me more, cry more. I really think it was harder for him than me. That's what you call real love.

That night, for the first time in a long time, I fell asleep sobbing. And so the pain goes on. But now with sharing and love from the Vietnam Veterans.

I have heard from very few since the movie. I sent to at least 40 people to let them know about the T.V. Guide and the movie. I have only heard from 2. I guess it's too painful for them to write

to me. If they only knew how badly I need to hear words like "I'm proud of Billy." "I'm proud of you for sharing your pain". I know they are but ah, how I need to read or hear those words. When I really get down and the pain seems endless I think of not writing <sup>to</sup> any more veterans. Not going to the "wall". Just stopping everything and maybe the pain will be easier. (That's what I call my "pity" party) Then I reach way down inside me, feel the love I had from Billy and know of he was brave enough to volunteer for Vietnam, go thru hell there, lose his life for the love of family and country, then his old mom can keep smiling and be proud of Billy and try to help all she can.

If I don't stop soon, this will turn into a novel. Thanks for listening. Thanks for caring.  
Let me hear from you. God Bless.

Love and Prayers,  
Eleanor Wimbeth

American Gold Star Mother  
Eleanor Wimbish  
205 6th Ave. S.E.  
Glen Burnie, MD 21061

70-761-  
4541

Glen Burnie, Md  
October 8, 1987

Dear Professor Capps,

I saw you on 60 Minutes and felt pride, pain and sadness. The pain and sadness are because of the Vietnam war. The pride is because I had a son who volunteered for Vietnam and there he gave his life. The pride is for you also. For the love and caring you are giving to these Vietnam Veterans and helping them bring out some of the pain they have carried much to long. And for bringing this to the attention to the younger generation who are hungry for knowledge of what really happened in Vietnam.

My son, Billy, died at age 21 on February 13, 1969. He had been in Vietnam 4 1/2 months. At that time my 4 other children were Donna 23, Barry 12, Suzanne 10 and Wendy 7. I cannot tell you how losing Billy almost destroyed me. Here, my big, fun loving son who was a part of me was gone. My heart was totally broken. How do you survive such a loss? Only God knows, I only know I could not even speak his name, without crying, for at least 5 years. Time ~~there~~ <sup>does</sup> have a way of healing but there are still mornings when I wake to a pillow wet with tears.



From February 13, 1969 to November 11, 1982, I felt  
my family was alone in our grief. No one wanted  
to hear about Vietnam. They were those who grieved  
with us, over the loss of Billy, but few who would  
listen when I said where he died. So I went into  
a shell. Thus was the beginning of my writing letters  
to Billy, poems to Billy. At that time I wrote in  
secret for fear people would think I was crazy.

Then on November 11, 1982, the Vietnam Veterans  
Memorial in Washington, D.C., was dedicated. I cannot  
tell you of the pain I had on seeing his name, touching  
his name on this black wall. And the pain I felt  
as I stood and spoke his name in the National  
Cathedral when they had the continuous reading, night  
and day of all the names of those who had died in  
Vietnam. I left that wall on Nov. 11, 1982 with <sup>almost</sup> more  
pain ~~that~~ than a human being <sup>can</sup> stand, not knowing  
if I could ever go back again.

But with the passing of winter and Billy's birthday  
coming on May 9<sup>th</sup>, I invited all my family to go  
back with me. There I left the first of many letters  
to Billy, on the ground beneath the panel that holds  
his name. Section 32 west - line 29.

I was there at that memorial, on that beautiful day,  
it was the beginning of a great change in my life.  
Here, I found others with the same pain as I. And  
there I found those wonderful Vietnam Veterans who  
feel my pain and together we share that pain and  
love.

So far, my husband Russ and I, have unofficially  
adopted 30 Vietnam Veterans and hoping for more.

I don't know if a mother has ever shared her  
pain, with you, over losing her child in a war.  
All Mothers pain is the same when they lose their  
child but when they die in a senseless war it's  
hard to explain the added pain.

I could talk all day about Vietnam Veterans but I  
think you get the picture. If there is any way I can help  
please let me know. I am enclosing some things that  
have been published to help you understand the  
pain that never ends.

Tell those Veterans, who were on your show, I  
love them all and am proud of their courage in  
sharing their pain with so many. You have my  
permission to give my address to anyone who would  
like to write (or be adopted) God Bless you.

Eleanor Woodbush