



MY DAD never told war stories. I remember the day he came back from Vietnam. I woke up in the backseat of our car and saw him, his big round “wheel hat” silhouetted against the sun. I recognized the hat and the voice, though I couldn’t see his face, as he reached in to pick me up. I was 2 years old. So, as far back as I can remember, I knew he had been to war, but he never told stories about it.

He told other stories. When I was in grade school we were stationed in Alaska. When Daddy would come home from work, I would sit on his lap, breathe in the smell of his flight suit, eat the dessert he saved from his flight lunch and hear about the places he had been and people who had flown with him.

An old photo reminds me of one story. It shows my dad, who was a crew chief, standing in front of his plane on a snowy tarmac. Beside him is Santa Claus, who hitched a ride on the plane to help deliver supplies in remote Arctic areas.

I remember letters from his second tour in Southeast Asia. He never wrote about hardship. He would usually remind me to say my prayers and mind my mother. He taught me about peace, even when he wasn’t experiencing it.

Only when I was older did my mother tell me that Dad’s mission in Vietnam was a dangerous one of flying over enemy territory, that he had lost friends there, that he had bad dreams, and that he didn’t tell her war stories either.

Now I live with another veteran, my husband. He has been in war zones, but he doesn’t tell many war stories. In his e-mails and phone calls he

tells us about the guys in his Bible study, or the troops he meets who love old Mustangs or surfing, like he does. Our children don’t hear many war stories even after he is safe at home.

He comes closest to telling war stories when he describes nurses and technicians in a combat surgical unit standing in a circle in the ER, holding hands, crying and praying after caring for a severely wounded soldier. But even that is a story of peace — of looking to the only Source of peace when the world offers none.

As a newspaper reporter, I once tried to interview a World War II veteran who had been in the Bataan Death March. I succeeded

only in speaking to his wife on the phone.

“He doesn’t talk about it much,” she said.

War stories may be hard to tell and hard to hear, but maybe the war has to come out so that peace can come in. My husband is of a generation that has learned this lesson better than my father’s. And I am willing to hear war stories. I am willing to know what peace costs. Peace is not free or easy. It is hard won. It must be pursued, and war stories are stories of that pursuit.

Still, the best stories are peace stories: Not fairy tales pretending war and death and suffering don’t happen, but true stories of peace reaching beyond conflict,

stories insisting that God’s peace is stronger than any war and that “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7, NIV).

So thanks, Dad, for the peace stories. We owe our gratitude to you and to all veterans who have endured the real story of war so that others are free to hear the story of Peace. **tpe**

TERRI BARNES with her husband, Chaplain Mark Barnes, and their three children, are now stationed in Germany. Her column “Spouse Calls,” for military spouses, appears weekly in *Stars and Stripes* (www.stripes.com).

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PEACE STORIES

BY TERRI BARNES

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