



“In Memory of Skip”

MEMORIAL DAY 2015

I
 You always seemed a little
 older,
 And it wasn't the two years
 Time you had on us.

A maturity perhaps found
 In learning to be
 A husband;

While we were still
 Half in half out,
 Hobbitlike tweens,

More carefree
 Than we knew and
 Not quite responsible;

For all life ahead
 Was an unknown path
 Into the Wild,

With dangers we thought
 We knew something of,
 From class and training,

Barely beyond Toy Soldiers
 Mustering, but tasked
 To lead real men

With very real lives,
 Both sturdy and fragile
 Before the human storm,

To beard Death
 At his own hearth
 And bring them back

In one piece
 After duty was done...
 “Objective Secure, Sir!”

So we slipped and slid
 On the red clay mud,
 Benning's best batch.

And the wait-a-minute
 Vines held us fast.
 Looked good on the map!

And you took the BS
 And messing around
 With our minds

With quiet good humor,
 steady calm patience
 Through it all.



II
 Vietnam... In Country!
 Fourteen months, or was it
 A lifetime later.

Amidst eighteen laboring
 Air conditioners inside
 The Cam Ranh Bay O-Club.

Talked of my R and R
 To be, and yours just past,
 With the wife you loved,

And how the combat forced
 Changes within yourself
 Made necessary

Painful reintroduction
 To whom you had become.
 Hawaii would wait

Till you knew each other
 Again. Then back it was
 to jungle, NVA and battle.

I promised I'd write
 On return from R and R,
 and I actually did,

But never was there reply,
 And in three months,
 Came time to go home.

On the hot dusty runway,
 With duffel and my thoughts,
 Boarding beginning...

The company jeep comes
 Flying up to the plane.
 A waved tan envelope

In the clerk's hand.
 "We regret to inform you..."
 Official notice inside.

And my letter unopened.
 Dead already four days
 After Cam Ranh Bay,



PHOTOS BY LEE BAC PHAN



On Easter Sunday. Did I
 Pray for you at Mass
 in Bangkok's cathedral?

No memory, but suspect not;
 Other things on my mind,
 Not all of them holy.

A very sober homecoming
 From the start, but you
 Never had even that.

III
 Find myself thinking
 About you more often;
 As I grow older.

Am double the age
 I was then, and I wonder
 Why you were the one

Taken, and the rest of us
 Allowed to further continue
 To make our marks in life;

As husbands and fathers,
 Employers or employees,
 As just human beings;

Have our acts and omissions
 Improved our world, justified
 God's gift of time?

Have I lived my life
 In a way that honors
 Your life sacrifice?

God knows I'm not
 What I was created
 To be... At least, not yet!

So I bumble on,
 An older dog still learning
 To become truly human.

Rest easy, my friend.
 We haven't taken ev'ry hill,
 But haven't given up either.

—Gerald Alan Ney

