

POETRY CORNER

Real Gems

By Seth Kaplan • sethkapp55@gmail.com

I

Reaching into the closet's darker corners
reveals those singular objects I chose to keep
turned smooth and polished by my own geochronology
until everything left had become precious jewels.
And all the frail things turned soft and fragile,
too dear to handle, like delicate fineries
aged beyond their intended purpose into artifacts.
Among all these curiosities the real gem
was the loose stack of notes and letters, tangible
evidence that memories need only light to come to life.

II

The box was filled with decades-old baseball memorabilia.
Jackie Robinson and Mickey Mantle cards pristine
in their 1954 youth and glory. A 1963 world series scorecard.
Mordecai "Three-Fingers" Brown preserved better
than he should be from a 1910 box of Lucky Strikes.
But the real gem was the 1976 autographed baseball
from my 21st birthday signed by friends and lovers
gathered for what none of us understood was the final time.
Lost and reclaimed from one inimitable moment
at Honeysuckle Cones & Cups onto polished white cowhide.
Some of what I pulled from that box historical and valuable
and some the palpable feel of a long-fleeting moment
eating ice cream with one hand and holding
my young life by the seams with the other.

III

Discovering these boxes waiting 50 years for their grand opening
is like finding a message in a bottle yellowed with age
and new meaning. Or maybe a case of wine bottles
from a half century ago, some sealed and filled with promise
of a tasty vintage and some hiding fragments of forgotten story.
Some contents prized. Some priceless. And the real gem
was discovering what matters most depends on the nature of the thirst.

Seth Kaplan is a recent emigrant to Talent from Humbug Creek and remains a devoted member of the Applegate Poets. His poetry has recently appeared in *Tokyo Poetry Journal*, *Cobra Lily*, and *Jefferson Journal*.

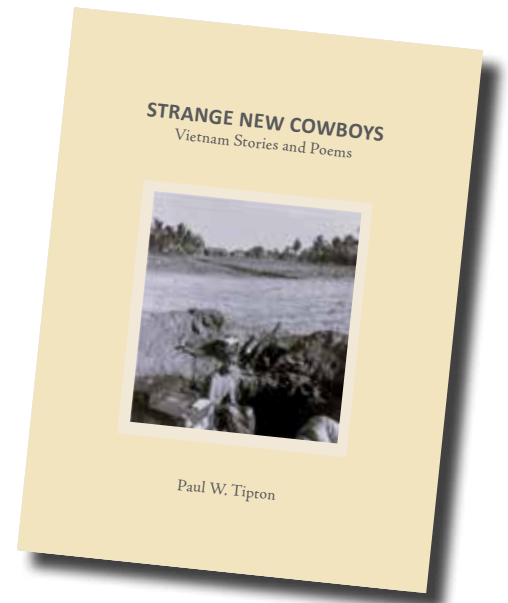
Have a submission for Poetry Corner, either by an Applegate resident or about the Applegate? Email it to *Applegater* poetry editor Paul Tipton at ptipton4u2c@gmail.com.

BOOK REVIEW

Strange New Cowboys Vietnam Stories and Poems

Paul W. Tipton
N8tive Run Press
Grants Pass, Oregon 2024

BY CHRISTIN LORE WEBER



A writer sorts words in an attempt to make sense of an experience that crowds his memory and sticks to his soul in ways that will not let him go. Focusing on what happened haunts dreams and hinders daytime concentration. This is the situation of our friend and neighbor, Paul Tipton, during and after the Vietnam War, in which he served, in-country, with a US Naval Construction Battalion repairing steel infrastructure by day and sleeping in bunkers at night—sleeping, if that was a possibility so close to the front lines, deafened by bombs that killed some of his company.

Sandra Scofield, an award-winning author formerly from Ashland, encouraged everyone to write their story, the story that grabs your life and insists that you write it despite your arguments, your privacy, your lack of understanding, your questions, your fear, and sometimes guilt. It doesn't matter what form it takes: short stories, a novel, poetry, photos, letters, even a book of illustrations for those who love to draw. Writing our story is a good way to make meaning of our personal mysteries and confusions, to leave hard-wrought wisdom woven into the timelines of our lives.

Fortunately for us, Paul Tipton is a skilled writer, and he's been working on his Vietnam experiences for 50 years. We know the Vietnam War became a turning point in our culture, a requirement of choice, and many books and movies have been written and filmed in our attempts as a nation to understand, live with, and accept our personal place in it. This is a big reason Paul's book is of vital importance. In these pages he has achieved this task both for himself and for us.

Paul's writing and the stories he chose to tell touch me deeply. I've read other books about Vietnam by talented writers, but none have moved me as much as his. One reason for the power of this book is that Paul Tipton brings the paradox of war into the center of what makes us human. He takes our most troubling questions and our deepest longing together with a moral outrage that cannot be easily defined. The main character, called Bill in these stories, cannot reconcile who he knows himself

to be with what he experiences himself doing. Are Bill and Paul one and the same man? Maybe. But now, 50 years later, Paul has had the opportunity to examine and ponder the choices of his younger self and the consequences that those choices seeded as he grew into his mature self.

How could anyone work through what is experienced in war? Paul Tipton asks this question with such intensity that the reader is sometimes tempted to skim over the words or else garner extra courage to stay on the page and take in the horror and enigma that humanity seems to conclude must be our lot since wars have been fought by us since time's beginning. Paul Tipton writes on page 94:

"...no one seemed to totally understand. No one could see behind his words to the realities burned into his memory. No one could conjure up the image of the brown-skinned, black-haired seven-year-old boy struggling to stand up along the dirt road, blood streaming down his face from the crack in his skull... No one could know the cold fear he had felt. No one could know how much he hated the people who had led them. No one could know what the guy who'd been sleeping beside you looked like after he'd been wasted by incoming in the night, splattered on the mess hall wall. And no one could know what Death sounded like, starting to talk to you in the automatic language of guns, clacking like a typewriter, beginning at your side, in the bright daylight, out of nowhere, in the green heat."

From *Strange New Cowboy* to *Treasured Sage*—that's Paul Tipton now.

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Strange New Cowboys is available at ptipton4u2c@gmail.com, *Rebel Heart Books*, local libraries, and the internet.



Voices of the Applegate seeks singers

Our community choir, Voices of the Applegate, is back in the swing again with successful seasons last fall and spring. We are looking forward to another great season this coming fall.

We will be rehearsing in the Jacksonville Library every Tuesday evening from 7-8:30 pm beginning September 3. Our concerts will be held on November 22 in Jacksonville and on November 24 in Applegate.

We are looking for more singers to join our choir! If you are interested in spending 90 minutes a week in joyous music with a group of happy people, then come to our first rehearsal on September 3 or call me for more information.

We hope to see you in the fall!
Joan Peterson • 541-846-6988 • joanpete5317@gmail.com

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and dinner.
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