

The Part of Ourselves We're Afraid Of

By Victor Inzunza '12

*I found the devil in a fist,
in the shadows
of the part of ourselves we're afraid of,
in a shadow we belong to.*

*He hides in whispered lies that taunt our lonely eardrums,
in roads that lead to strange tongues.*

*He hides in the twitches on the tips of fingers that dance
on the outskirts of a trigger.*

*He hides where the haze and the gunfire swell the
fear of the things that starve for blood.*

*He hides in a paranoid flicker on the horizon,
as the moonlight stains our skin,
and the visions of night reflect on our
sleep-deprived eyes.*

*We get an artillery shell symphony for a lullaby
and a nightmare for a good night's rest.*

*There's a price tag on my M-16.
There's a price tag on our lives.
There's a price tag on every breath.*

*Our chests are an Arlington graveyard,
where we bury the dead thing beneath the skin.*

*Stockton native Victor Inzunza '12 served four years in the U.S. Marines,
with two tours in Iraq. He transferred from San Joaquin Delta Community
College to Pacific in fall 2008. An English major in the College of the Pacific,
he is married and has a 3-year-old son.*



When I first came home from Camp Lejeune, N.C., at the end of my military service and two tours in Iraq, I found that my hometown had changed as much as I had. I struggled at first to accept those changes, but I was determined to succeed. The transition back home, the movement back into academic life and the assimilation back into the workforce did not come easily. I had been a non-commissioned officer and a corporal, a leader for some time. Scrubbing floors at the local grocery store, taking orders from those above me, I found myself back where I had started. As difficult as it was to swallow, I put my pride behind me and remained focused on the future.

Determined to continue my education, I enrolled at Delta College and completed my lower division courses so I could transfer to a four-year college. Pacific was the only school to which I applied. This is my home, and Pacific is part of that sense of home. As a young man I can recall walking passed the beautiful campus and being entranced by the superbly elegant architecture. Now that I am a student here, I know that there is much more to Pacific; there is the pride and a sense of belonging to a great center of learning in the heart of my hometown. In retrospect, it was really the only choice for me, the right choice.

It was here that I began writing seriously as more than just a hobby. I had written letters and some poetry to my wife when I was in the Marines, but as a student I found a love for literature and an irrepressible desire to express myself in words. Professor Camille Norton introduced me to poets who wrote about their war experiences. With her encouragement, I began to give voice to my thoughts and experiences. She urged me to apply to attend the annual writers' workshop at The William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and further pursue my work as a writer. After being accepted, I received a Pacific Fund Grant, which made it possible for me to attend.

At the Joiner Center, the brilliantly imaginative instructors facilitated workshop sessions that challenged my writing abilities. These sessions fostered the love of language and creativity, while developing camaraderie in a peer-learning environment. I studied poetry composition with Vietnam veteran and contemporary poet Bruce Weigl, met with a favorite poet of mine, Iraq veteran Brian Turner, and learned new approaches to my writing. I also met

young veterans, many of them with experiences similar to my own.

After returning to civilian life, I found myself really confused about how I felt about the war, and I tried to just push the thoughts away. From attending the workshop, I came to realize that a writer has a sense of duty to tell the story of war, especially the human consequences. It helped me to reconcile the reality of war in my mind, to learn and grow from it. I confronted many of the feelings that lay buried inside me and exposed them to the light of day in ink on the page.

One experience in particular sticks with me. I remember standing in front of Harvard and looking across the street to see a homeless veteran living in a makeshift tent, his few scattered belongings and the tragedy of his life on full display. I thought to myself, "Here I am in front one of the wealthiest universities in our great country, the apex of prestige and ambition, and here is a man living in squalor before my very eyes."

This experience, among many others, and the wisdom imparted to me by the Vietnam veterans that I studied with and talked to, filled me with a renewed sense of duty. At the Joiner Center, I saw Vietnam veterans working alongside Vietnamese who had also become poets, those caught in the midst of one of history's most devastating wars, putting aside differences and working toward peace and reconciliation. I heard poets share their work, their experiences and their pursuits of peace. I saw veterans looking out for one another, older veterans caring for the needs of the newly returned veterans, providing a haven for those searching for answers and finding poetry and art. I strongly believe that this level of support and reconciliation can also happen here at Pacific.

That is my new mission. Once I returned to the University, with the help and support of the staff, faculty and fellow students, I helped to revitalize the Student Veteran's Organization here on campus. Through our work advocating for the Yellow Ribbon Program (an education benefit for veterans), and with the help of the Veterans Support Committee and the administration, we are working hard to make sure our local veterans get the support they need.



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