

I'll Be Seeing You, Veterans

In life, seemingly unrelated events often coalesce as lights coming into focus. Call it Kismet, call it chance or call it life.

I recently experienced three such lights: An octogenarian WW II bride relating a story of commiserating and crying with a seemingly unsavory Vietnam veteran, a recent comment from a former presidential candidate and my recording a three – hanky, WW II popular Bing Crosby tear jerker. (www.tonydeaf.org). All brought focus to Veterans Day.

The Sicilian Tsunami Mommy (my 87 year old mom) volunteers at a hospital gift shop as long as there's no conflict with her tee times. She recently encountered a bedraggled, fatigued veteran bedecked with jewelry, chains, tattoos and body piercing. In trying on a new necklace, he had removed another from which hung a small gold disk beautifully portraying hands clasped in prayer. Teary eyed, he said, "It belonged to my Mom, she's here with lung cancer". He explained that the pendant kept his Mom close to him and he touched it frequently.

In his grief, he left it behind in the gift shop. My mom, struggling with her own anniversary grief of the lung cancer death of my Dad, a WW II veteran, set out to find him knowing it meant a tough trek to the Oncology ward. It was the last place she saw him many years ago.

Fiercely gripping a mother's present to her son, she searched for Paul, the no longer nameless 'Nam vet. She found more than him. The ward nurse remembered my mom's old familiar face. Oncology nurses, like soldiers, always do. Intense emotions, intimacy with mortality and selfless devotion to others who are in harm's way galvanize and time-lock the human heart and mind. The nurse remembered my mom, my Dad, my three a day phone calls to him and my daily collaborative transcontinental chats with his doctors. And for a moment, I think my mom saw dad again, in an old familiar place her heart had once embraced.

Dimly lit facts regarding one interpretation of that former candidate's recent political comment about our troops' smarts was the second beam of light illuminating my Veterans Day musing.

Here is the light. Over 97 percent of the military have high school diplomas. They are not largely our poor, underprivileged or social or intellectual detritus and they have smarts we all should admire. Over half of senior non commissioned officers have college degrees and over a third of officers have advanced degrees.

Most importantly, our troops and veterans have the smarts to understand that our brothers and sisters in uniform are not potential offerings at some sacrificial altar. They are American volunteers doing superlative work at less than their free market value who in return reap the dividend of protecting all of our freedoms. They understand fidelity and the enormous value of team work to negotiate some horrendous seas of life.

Music can soften those seas. During times of war, there have been songs pulling at our hearts, reminding us of what we love and are willing to fight to protect. A haunting need to learn a beautiful old classic was my third light.

About the time I was getting ready to record my version of that tune; my mom finished her story of Paul. She told me that Paul and she often talked gently about his mom. At their last visit he shared that his mom was off to hospice but if possible, he would still like to visit. My mom had become an old familiar place he still needed to see.

So every time I see one of Americas finest, present or past, I reminisce that great song and think of them as those who protect... "Those old familiar places that this heart of mine embraces" Thank you to Paul, our veterans and troops and gifted composers Irving Kahal and Sammy Fain.

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