

**A Different Christmas Poem**

By Michael Marks

The embers glowed softly, and in their dim light,  
I gazed round the room and I cherished the sight.  
My wife was asleep, her head on my chest,  
My daughter beside me, angelic in rest.

Outside the snow fell, a blanket of white,  
Transforming the yard to a winter delight.  
The sparkling lights in the tree I believe,  
Completed the magic that was Christmas Eve.

My eyelids were heavy, my breathing was deep,  
Secure and surrounded by love I would sleep.  
In perfect contentment, or so it would seem,  
So I slumbered, perhaps I started to dream.

The sound wasn't loud, and it wasn't too near,  
But I opened my eyes when it tickled my ear.  
Perhaps just a cough, I didn't quite know,  
Then the sure sound of footsteps outside in the snow.

My soul gave a tremble, I struggled to hear,  
And I crept to the door just to see who was near.  
Standing out in the cold and the dark of the night,  
A lone figure stood, his face weary and tight.

A soldier, I puzzled, some twenty years old,  
Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.  
Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,  
Standing watch over me, and my wife and my child.

"What are you doing?" I asked without fear,  
"Come in this moment, it's freezing out here!  
Put down your pack, brush the snow from your sleeve,  
You should be at home on a cold Christmas Eve!"

For barely a moment I saw his eyes shift,  
Away from the cold and the snow blown in drifts..  
To the window that danced with a warm fire's light  
Then he sighed and he said "Its really all right,

I'm out here by choice. I'm here every night."  
"It's my duty to stand at the front of the line,  
That separates you from the darkest of times.  
No one had to ask or beg or implore me,  
I'm proud to stand here like my fathers before me.



**Freedom isn't free!  
Just ask Any Soldier**

My Gramps died at ' Pearl on a day in December,"  
Then he sighed, "That's a Christmas 'Gram always remembers."

My dad stood his watch in the jungles of ' Nam ',  
And now it is my turn and so, here I am.

I've not seen my own son in more than a while,  
But my wife sends me pictures, he's sure got her smile.  
Then he bent and he carefully pulled from his bag,  
The red, white, and blue... an American flag.

"I can live through the cold and the being alone,  
Away from my family, my house and my home.  
I can stand at my post through the rain and the sleet,  
I can sleep in a foxhole with little to eat.

I can carry the weight of killing another,  
Or lay down my life with my sister and brother..  
Who stand at the front against any and all,  
To ensure for all time that this flag will not fall."

"So go back inside," he said, "harbor no fright,  
Your family is waiting and I'll be all right."  
"But isn't there something I can do, at the least,  
"Give you money," I asked, "or prepare you a feast?"

It seems all too little for all that you've done, For  
being away from your wife and your son."  
Then his eye welled a tear that held no regret, "  
Just tell us you love us, and never forget.

To fight for our rights back at home while we're  
gone,  
To stand your own watch, no matter how long.  
For when we come home, either standing or dead,  
To know you remember we fought and we bled.

Is payment enough, and with that we will trust,  
That we mattered to you as you mattered to us.

**A Veteran and The VA Hospital**

(A fight between a Vet's quality of life and a Chief of Staff who is playing God )

By: Skypilot  
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Here I am a 100% disabled Combat Decorated Vet who served our country for twenty years with pride and never a thought about possibly giving my life. I'm having problems with my Cervical Spine (need two Disc replaced) and I went to the one and only Neurologist that Lebanon VA (Pennsylvania) has, after being examined by her, she suggested cortisone injections which made things worse. She suggested the next thing she should do is make an appointment with an outside facility for me. So she sent me to the Lancaster Neuroscience and spine associates to see Dr. Perry Argires, who is an expert in this field.

I go to the outside Doctor, who recommends a double disc replacement with Titanium implants to solve my problem. One of the top surgeons in that field in the state, so you know he knows what he's talking about ( which my VA neurologist agrees with him) and has his assistant call VA to get surgery scheduled and recheck the financial responsibility for the surgery for me, which my understanding from my VA doctor in Lebanon, Pa. was approved.

As the patient I'm thinking everything is going great and I'm finally going to get rid of the pain I've had to live with for months. I get a call from my VA Neurologist who tells me "I'm going to recommend to the Chief of staff that this is the surgery you need and it should be approved", so now I'm really feeling good, thinking I'll have the surgery, a little recovery, but the best thing no more pain.

Wrong answer! I get a call the next day from some department saying the Chief of Staff Dr. Hartman has disapproved the surgery because it's considered experimental . Even though the VA is spending millions of dollars on returning Iraq Vets (using experimental surgery), the Vietnam Vet is thrown aside along with the WW II and Korean Vets, even though I've got a 100% disability rating and served my country for twenty years.

This Doctor who is the Chief of Staff Dr. Hartman at the Lebanon VA has probably never served one day in the military. He just sits up in his office deciding who gets care and who doesn't. I can't understand why a man like this has the power on who is able to have a good quality of life and whom can't get relief and have a good quality of life. I guess if there was something wrong with my heart or had cancer which required an experimental procedure Dr. Hartman would just decide to let me die.

By the way when you call the Lebanon VA the phone message states. " You've served our Country, Now let us serve you". What a joke! In my opinion there should be a board made up of veterans from all wars and they should have the power to say who gets what is needed for the veteran. Dr. Hartman's opinion is probably, "well this vet is in his late fifties, so how much longer is he really going to live, so the heck with spending all this money on him".

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