

I. CHILDREN

JOAN DOBBIE

I THINK MY GRANDS ARE THE GREATEST

For Mara, Seth and Lyla

It's because of their love
& because of their laughter

I mean one of them falls
& the other one kisses

or one of them wins
& the other one dances
 & cheers & holds up two thumbs!

or one of them loses
& the other two huddle in close

(whispering love words
until she's stopped crying)

& after we've all watched the
Peanuts Movie for just about two hours straight

the three of them leap to their feet
& they dance & they dance

I mean real classy dancing
(I'm thinking Jackson Five, that really is
what I'm thinking)

& when mom says okay kids it's bedtime they
do crawl obediently into their sleeping bags

though not quite into their beds because
there at the top of the carpeted stairs

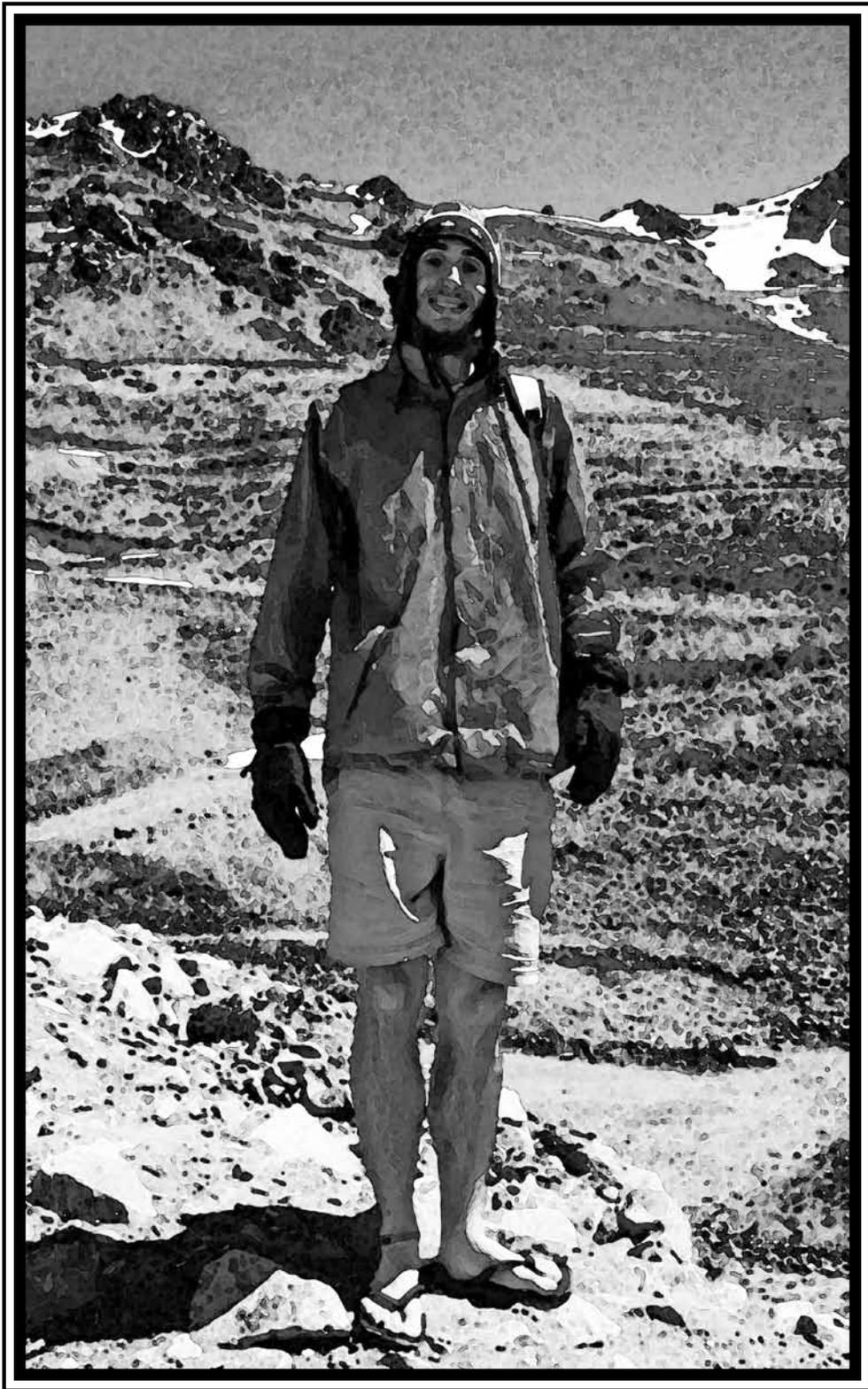
sits young Prince Temptation &
down

 down

 down

 they go sleeping bag sliding
bumpedy
 bumpedy
 bumpedy bump

all the way down to the living room floor
laughing like crazy



II. IDENTITY

TERRY SANVILLE

A NEW BEGINNING

Sometime way past midnight, they packed us into trucks, maybe six or seven rumbling deuce-and-a-halves, and headed for the airport at Biên Hòa. Nobody talked. Nobody wanted to jinx our departure. 365 days was definitely enough. We roared along deserted roads and passed through a Vietnamese village, shacks built of scrap corrugated metal and packing crates. As we drove by one shack, I caught flashes from a color television and wondered if our western trinkets would be the only things left behind when the war finally ended.

The trucks rolled through a series of gates and onto a concrete apron where a commercial jetliner rested with stairs attached to its front and rear. We jumped down onto the pavement and formed two lines. I was the last soldier in the one that led to the plane's rear entrance. We inched forward, with the scrape of our boots and low mutterings the only sounds.

Finally, I climbed the stairs. At the top I stepped onto the plane and turned left. The jet's cabin extended in a one-point perspective into the distance. The soldiers in front of me quickly grabbed seats . . . the last seats. I stared down the aisle and couldn't see any gaps in the sea of closely cropped heads. A chill shook me. Would I have to wait for another plane, spend another minute, hour, day in that terrible place? I told myself that I'd fly the whole damn way home in the latrine, in the coat closet, in the plane's wheel well strapped to the landing gear. It didn't matter. But I would not spend a second longer in Vietnam.

From the far end of the cabin a stewardess waved her hands over her head. I pushed toward her and she pointed to a seat near the front. I plopped down and attached the lap belt, pulled it snug, and sucked in deep breaths. I folded my arms so that the guys around me couldn't see how badly my hands shook.

We waited . . . and waited some more. Finally, the ground crew removed

the stairs, the doors closed, and the plane began to roll. It stopped and turned at the end of the runway. I tried breathing slow and steady. Then the surge of power, the roar from the engines, the thump thump thump of the wheels rolling faster and faster, then the liftoff and the clunk of the landing gear being retracted.

When that clunk sounded, the soldiers erupted into cheers and shouts of joy. It sounded more jubilant than any New Year's Eve celebration I'd ever experienced, which wasn't many since I'd just turned twenty-one, six months before.

The flight from Vietnam to Oakland, California took forever, flying north then east into the black sky. After two stops and more than eighteen hours, I deplaned in a stupor. The bitter San Francisco Bay winds chilled me. But after a year living in the super-humid tropics, the cold felt wonderful.

Most of us soldiers had dressed in light jungle fatigues and boots. But the military wouldn't release us into the civilian population wearing combat gear. We waited in a drafty building while Army tailors assembled dress green uniforms for each of us, complete with new black "low quarter" shoes and all the appropriate medals, ribbons, and patches affixed to our jackets.

Hours later they finally let me go. Myself and two other GIs grabbed a taxi and headed for San Francisco International Airport on the other side of the Bay. One of the guys wanted to catch a plane east to Kansas City. I felt lucky that Santa Barbara was only an hour-and-a-half flight south. But could I find a local flight? Or would I have to spend a night in the City at some fleabag hotel, waiting yet another day? And the closer I got to my home, the slower things seemed to move, and even minor delays felt excruciating.

But I lucked out. A coastal flight would leave in less than two hours. With my name placed on the standby list, I took a seat. Later, I was confirmed for boarding. I phoned home and let my parents know when I would arrive. As I sat in the airport terminal, passing strangers stared at me. Some smiled and nodded. Others that looked my own age glared and flashed the peace symbol. But no one spoke to me, except the airline staff. At the gate, a young woman who took my ticket said, "Welcome home, Specialist." I guess my new uniform, medals and dazed demeanor signaled to her that I'd been one of the lucky ones. I nodded and hustled down the ramp to board the plane and begin the first stage of my return to normalcy.

The plane jerked and swayed in strong crosswinds. The stewardess barely had time to serve a single round of drinks before we started our descent to



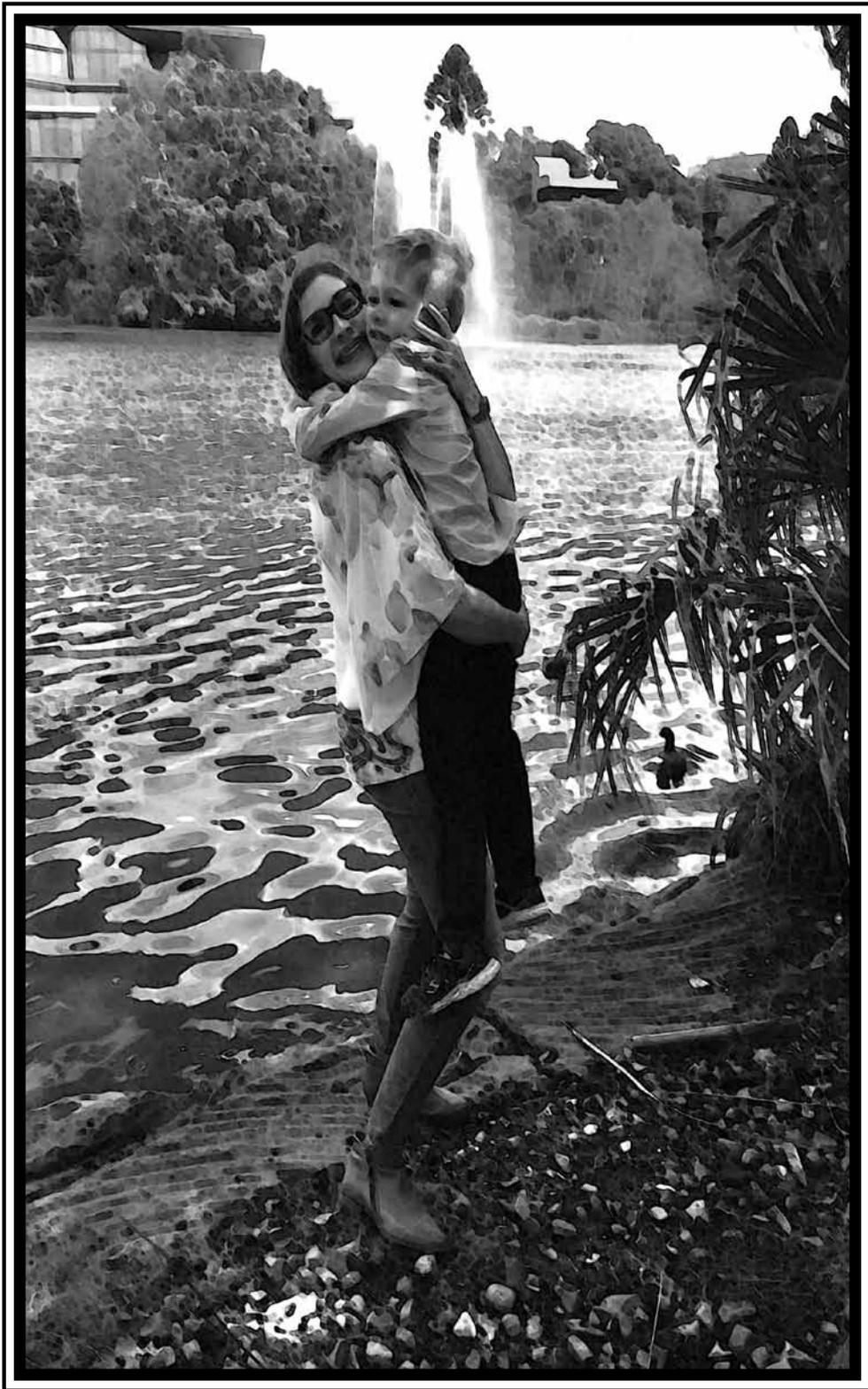
KERRY LANGAN

MY NAME IS YOUR NAME

She thinks of that article her son brought her to read. It said that if you can't remember something, think of things you associate with it. For instance, if you can't remember the name of an actress, think about what movies she was in and who her co-stars were. Our memories live in neighborhoods, the article concluded. "Oh, I don't give a hoot about some actress!" she'd said, tossing the magazine on her bed. She wonders if her son remembers the neighborhood where he grew up, all those years ago when her husband was still alive. When she closes her eyes, she can sometimes see it. There were shrubs in front of the porch, she's almost certain. Shrubs that grew so high that they blocked the house. A boy in the neighborhood climbed up one of the shrubs all the way up to the sky where he encountered a giant. She shakes her head. No, that's just a fairytale. That's not real.

Her name is Eleanor. Or Elizabeth. Think! she orders herself, but she still can't determine if she's Eleanor or her sister is. Her sister. She should call her sister. But, no, her sister died. A few years ago. No more than ten. Does it say Eleanor or Elizabeth on her gravestone? She needs to check the name engraved on it and then she will know what her own name is. She could ask her son what her first name is but he is so exasperated whenever she asks him a question. Or his eyes start to mist the way they did when he was a child and struggled with his reading. She'd made little signs and hung them all over their home, word labels for bed, table, chair, window, room, on and on. She'd sat with him for hours and hours, making up little stories about words so he could remember them. When he arrived home from school each day, she'd say, "Yellow, Charles" instead of "Hello, Charles." And he learned to respond, "Y-E-L-L-O-W, Mommy." She'd been relieved when math came easily to him.

Now she doesn't live in a neighborhood. She lives in a big house with too many people. Or she did until she left. The last thing she remembers



III. FAMILY

KENNETH WISE

A DAY AT THE BALLPARK

The baseball slowly rolls across the dirt next to home plate and comes to a halt beside the catcher, who picks it up with his bare hand. He turns to the umpire, who straightens up from his squatted position, looks down at the clicker in his hand and says in a barely audible voice, "Ball."

The batter remains frozen. The umpire, who has the lifeless demeanor of a person handing out rental shoes at a bowling alley, points to first base and says, "Take your base." The batter lobs his bat towards his dugout and heads to first. There are players at each base, and in a choreographic fashion, they all slowly jog to the next one. The runner from third steps on home, picks up the bat from the last batter and walks towards the visitor's dugout. He slaps five with the batter on deck, who steps up to hit.

The scoreboard flickers from 5-0 to 6-0. The light that signifies outs cruelly remains unlit. I stand up from the wooden beam that runs across the dugout, wipe the dirt off the seat of my pants and grip the rusty chain link fence that provides protection. This is just the first inning. It already feels like it's endless and, without any outs, it's going to last an eternity. The worst part is that my son is responsible. He has thrown one strike in the last four batters. It's a walkathon.

"Come on, James, just throw strikes." James's hat is pulled down to just above his eyes. The cap creates a shadow over his face, so I can barely make out his expression. He nods to me and steps on the rubber.

James lifts his leg, pulls his arm back and hurls the ball towards the catcher. The ball ricochets off the ground. The batter attempts to avoid it by jumping, but it clips his front foot. The umpire holds his hands up and declares, "Dead ball." He directs the player to go to first. Once again the runners move ahead one base, and the scoreboard flips from 6-0 to 7-0. I close my eyes and massage my forehead.

The head coach for our team, Bill, on the bench with his arms and legs

out like he's relaxing at the beach, says to me, "He's really struggling today." Next to Bill is a player, Eric, who is also sitting on the bench. He is creating a pyramid from stones he's gathered from the ground of the dugout. His focus on the construction of his miniature Mayan structure makes him impervious to the events around him.

"I know. He looks great throwing at practice. I don't get it," I say.

"I'll give him some more time. Hopefully he'll come around." Bill says.

I clap my hands and yell to James, "Come on. Get a big leg kick and stay on your powerline."

James nods to me, lifts his leg and fires the ball over the plate. The catcher receives the ball in his glove and freezes, waiting for the call. The umpire stares at the location of the pitch, stands up, lifts his mask off, pulls out a small towel from his back pocket, wipes his face and ponders. He looks like a husband, stuck at Home Depot with his wife, being asked to pick between two color palettes so they can paint the guest room. I look over to James, who awaits his decision like a convict bracing himself for a sentence. "A little low. Ball." The call is a body shot to James's gut. He bends in half and grabs his legs. He stands back up, puts his hands on his head and goes back on the rubber.

A little low! The players are nine years old! My son is floundering out there, and this moron is worried about a few inches. I take a breath, calm myself and yell to the mound, "Good pitch, James. Really good pitch," I say in a slow, loud, deliberate voice so the umpire will know he missed a call. "Just get it up a little higher." James keeps his focus on the plate and delivers another ball. As soon as it leaves his hand, the upper trajectory is evident as it flies well over the head of the catcher and the umpire. The scoreboard operator, sitting in a wooden structure above home plate, ducks for cover as the ball smashes into the wood directly below her. The umpire remains fixed in his position and says, "Ball."

I take my hat off and rest my head on the fence. This is terrible. I scan the field. The second baseman has both arms extended and spins in circles while slowly releasing dirt from his ungloved hand into the air. He appears to be sending some sort of distress signal to overhead aircraft. Third base is talking to the runner on base, and centerfield is turned sideways, staring off into the distance. I yell, "Come on, guys, baseball ready. Someone make a play!" None of the players bother to respond.

The third base coach from the other team claps his hands and says to the

DEBORAH A. SCHMEDEMANN

GLORY

10:00 Sunday morning, July 5th, 2015, the north side of Chicago: the city is waking up and warming up. My husband and I enter the century-old church and settle in to worship.

Although I have never been here before, this sanctuary is familiar space. Beams stained deep walnut crisscross its high, white-washed ceiling. The pews of well-worn oak flank a still-plush rose carpet. The sun filters through stained-glass windows depicting New Testament scenes. Two ranks of organ pipes frame the altar, into which is carved "Heilig, Heilig, Heilig"—Holy, Holy, Holy in German, the language of my forbearers. I am a mixed-brand Christian: baptized by an Episcopalian Army chaplain, raised Presbyterian by parents with Baptist and Lutheran roots, married to a one-time United Church of Christ pastor, sometimes a Methodist, now a member of a U.C.C.-Presbyterian church. Yes, this place says "church" to me.

Soon, I am swept along into the service celebrating our nation's birthday under God. I recite familiar liturgy, listen to familiar scriptures, nod to familiar themes in the sermon. I rise in accord with the asterisks in the bulletin. With others, I sing out familiar verses as the organ hums along: "Our country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty."



Almost twenty-four hours ago, I met the new love of my life. Swaddled in a blanket of white printed with blue lions, this newborn was resting, pink head against bared breastbone, in the arms of his mother, my older daughter Mary. Mary had given birth to this baby boy at 1:39 a.m. on July 4th, and she and her husband Adam had named their baby, my first grandchild, Luke.

When I took Luke from Mary, I gazed first at his rounded rosy head, capped in delicate brown strands. His big eyes peered back, blue-brown and

unflinching. His nose commanded attention. My first words about the new love of my life? "Gee, he has a really big nose." His pouty lower lip looked like a tulip petal. He was alert as could be, rested still against my chest, and gave off an air of disgruntlement and curiosity. His shoulders and arms too were clothed in delicate brown strands (Adam: "He's a beast!"), and his pink hands curled into loose fists. Newborn though he was, he seemed somehow familiar.

So, I thought, *we finally meet*. Intuitively, I had known of this baby boy for nine months. I am not a mystical person; indeed, most would describe me as analytical and practical; I was a lawyer and law professor for over three decades. And yet: I had a dream about Luke's conception about the time he was, in fact, conceived. And about two months before his birth, when no one knew his gender and his parents had not revealed their choices of names, it came to me, as I jogged, that Mary would bear a boy on July 4th and name him "Luke."

As I held Luke in my arms that first time, my emotions were a spicy stew. I was awe-struck at his mere being: he was, as all newborns I have ever cradled, a testimony to life beginning and an embodiment of innocence. I was grateful to be alive for this moment: my wonderful mother died when I was a teenager, and in my deepest being I have never expected to experience milestones that she missed. I was relieved that all had gone well: Mary had planned on a home birth, only to discover as she was about to deliver that the baby was in breech presentation, requiring an ambulance trip to the hospital. I was pleased—yes, proud—that my strong and determined daughter had pulled off a natural breech delivery of such a big baby (eight and a half pounds—oof!).

Yet, deep down, I was melancholy: it was July 4th, and I missed my patriot.



One-eighth of little Luke's genes trace back to Keith Schmedemann: my father, Mary's grandfather, Luke's great-grandfather. One day, Luke will learn that I kept my maiden name when I married out of devotion to my father; that Mary's original last name, Bowmann, was formed from parts of her father's last name (Bower) and mine; and that Mary gave Luke that same name, Bowmann, as his middle name. Although linked through a few letters, Keith and Luke never overlapped in life: Keith died at ninety-three in 2013, over two years before Luke was born.