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Eighth Grade

This is a poem to thank every soldier who has ever seen, heard, or experienced war. This poem is to commemorate the losses of soldiers who sacrificed their life to America and to spread awareness to the veterans that are scarred with the memory. My poem is based off of my grandfather, who is a war veteran for many wars, including the Iraq War. He has painted over 1,000 paintings after the war and has used painting as an escape. When others have heard of his story, he had the amazing opportunity to have one of his paintings in the White House. It hangs there to this day. He was very quiet about his experience all throughout my life. This poem is to thank all of the veterans and soldiers who died at war. Thank you.

“What was it like?”, the girl asked.

Her eyes clear, his eyes stained.

“Do you really want to know?”

Paintings of war, tainted in red

The painting of pictures of those who have bled.

“It was...”, he started, but there was no finish.

Jumbles of words tangled in loss,

Painted over by grief, the memory’s patches,

To cover the holes that the soldiers have crossed.

She looked down, unknowing of what was to come.

No words, but a story with nothing but silence.

Yet, it wasn’t silence. It was a scream.

The brushstrokes and memories of death and of violence.

Touches of color, the artwork of death.

Red, blood. Gray, smoke.

Ashes in white, floating like doves

Watching the soldiers kneel down and choke.

Swallowing up their thoughts,

Eating away their fears.

Clogging up their throats,

With lies and with tears.

With nothing for an answer,
But everything was said.
The soldier looked to the little girl.
“Why don’t you go to bed?”

Conversation.

And that’s the very least.
If one voice was a conversation,
And one question was the only piece.

He noticed she grew up,
She noticed he stayed the same.
The question clumsily drifted,
Without a reason or an aim.

“What happened?” said the little girl.

And so the colors all came back.
And her words painted the empty room
With red and gray and black.

Each single painting saying something different,
Each single stroke a different hue.
So many paintings blending together,
Creating a mess entirely new.

The monster that eats up all the soldier’s lives,
And leaves them, still wanting more.
The monster painted in the air.
That monster’s name is war.

And the monster robbed the man of words,
There was nothing he could say,
So the man turned to the little girl,
“Why don’t you go and play?”

Answers.

That’s all the little girl wanted,
But she wasn’t as little as she was then.
One thought still stuck from when she was small,

And it whispered to her again and again.

And it painted itself into her brain
As any mystery would.
The words started flowing with the old man,
And so she wondered if she should.

“What went down there?”

And then the strokes started dancing,
In fiery oranges and dirty brown.
With smudges of fire and squiggles of bombs,
The colors are what made them drown.

Seeing the soldiers swimming to land,
Painting the picture of waves upon waves
Watching the soldiers tread through the water,
And watching them pile graves upon graves.

He looked at the soldiers,
With paint in his eyes,
Honoring the soldier who drowns,
Saluting to the soldier who dies.

She looked at the painting,
Only seeing paint.
She tried to see what happened,
But it was just so faint.

Covered up layers upon layers,
With paint and tears and blood,
He saw artwork.
She saw a flood.

“I don’t understand”, she said.

“Neither do I”.

Now she finally understood.
The painting didn’t look like the war.
The war looked like the painting.
The mess was something more.

The colors weren't just colors.
They were the soldiers, the sky, the sea.
The paint were the last breaths.
And what they would last see.

She understood.

And so they painted on.