

THE MAP

Where Were You When . . .

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The Map

Time passes, Wounds close, pain dulls,
As scars heal.

Once again, I'm tricked Into believing
It's Finally Over.

Then my eyes, unbidden, Grasp that 'J'-shaped
Coastline in Asia, on a map of the world.

Where were you when the first man died?
Where were you when his family cried?

Once again, these names draw me closer, ever
closer, so close I can't see them Without my glasses.

Once again, these places, That time, jumps out
Clutching my back, Thrilling my neck.

Whoa ! Stop ! Once again, again the room spins
as I flash back anew to that huge airport where I first
came to the Nam.

Senses assaulted, hot, Hot, HOT, burnt-dung smell.
Humid as a steam bath, Fetid as a swamp.

Where were you,
when an eighteen-years old boy left for Vietnam, and
returned, eyes ten-years older than his nineteen years old
body?

Can you understand what those eyes reveal

about places and things you, who are protected,
never have to know?

CRACK ! 'Incoming!' Sonic boom 122 mike-mike
Katyushas streak inches overhead, 50-pound warheads
explode so hard my soul is shaken.

Where were you when we began taking rocket fire
casualties just ten minutes after
arriving in South Vietnam?

Where were you when one of my men,
his second-day in-country,
was killed on his 18th Birthday?

An Kke, Quin Nhon, my First fire fight.
Top says, 'Your buddy's dead !'
That can't be right!

Where were you when my best friend
triggered a landmine, then died in my arms,
covering me in body parts, and bone
fragments?

Where were you when I arrived
in that war torn land, age just twenty-one.

Doing what my government asked me to do
and what my fellow Americans expected me to do.

Pleiku, Kontum, '*Enemy in the Wire!*'
Outgoing, incoming, 'The Nam's on fire !'

There—on the map! The A Shau Valley !
GOD! Grunts're dead at A Shau, We fought all week.

Where were you those long, dark, and
frightening nights when we sat in the mud and the
rain waiting for the enemy?

Ban Me Thuot, Nha Trang, Got shot down,
I flew again that afternoon—Got shot down again!

Where were you when our men turned up missing,
became POWs? Seventy-nine Prisoners of War have been
seen in Asia since 1972.

2,096 Americans—still missing, unaccounted for.
Why aren't you there now? searching while our men are
STILL missing?

Khe Sanh, Quang Tri, Hue, Phu Bai, Marble Mountain,
Đà Nẵng, Nui Ba Dinh, Vinh Long, My Tho—
'He's shot through the head!' Rach Gia, Chi Lang—
So Many Friends Dead !

Where were you when we arrived back on American soil?
Did you curse and throw rotten eggs at us?

Why aren't you at the funerals we go to for our
comrades who were poisoned, and continue to fall to
dioxin and Agent Orange?

58,229 Americans died in Vietnam. Since the war ended
150,000 vets have committed suicide.

Why aren't you howling in pain?

Why do starving homeless Vets sleep in cardboard
boxes, while criminals get free medical care,
wholesome food and shelter?

Why do prisoners have huge law libraries and get to sue
the government? Why do we spend billions on foreign
aid while denying Vets adequate medical aid care?

Where are you as Veterans' rights are threatened every day?
Where are you when the V.A. man denies our benefits and
claims?

I held myself together and kept the wolf so far from your door, that you and others can pretend that the wolf never existed.

Where are you now when a sound, or a smell, or a dream touches that part of me buried so deep that I wake up screaming?

Whoa ! Stop ! They're just names
On a stupid map—and It was so
long ago....

Why can't I stop crying?

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We Take Care of Our Own