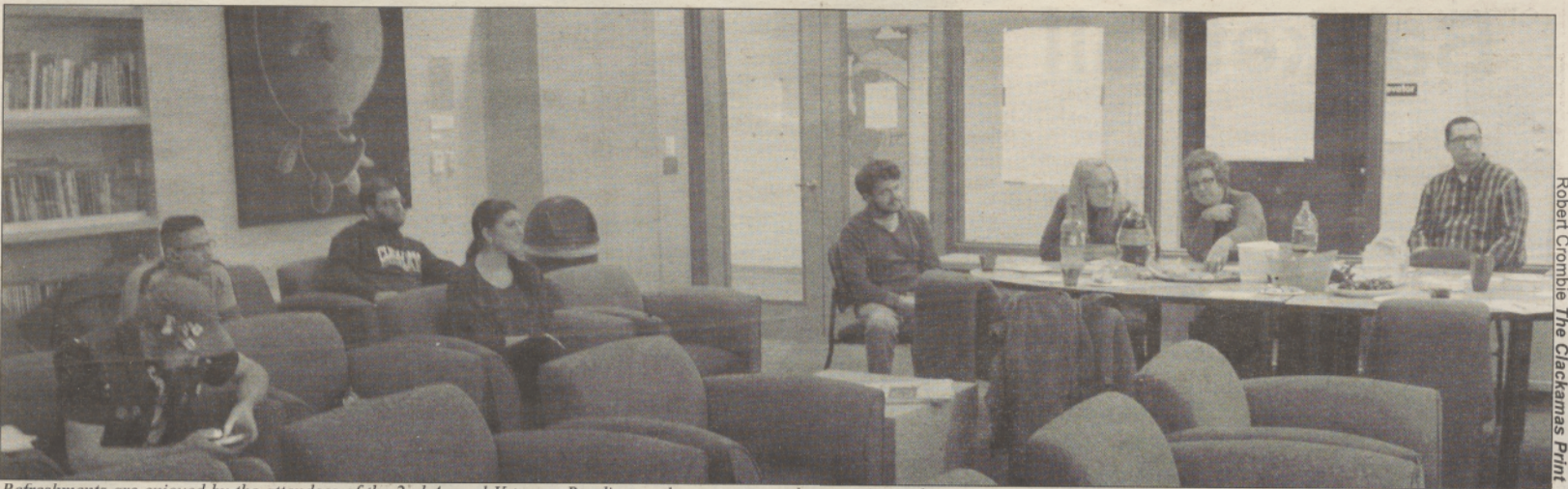


VETERANS: In honor, we read



Robert Crombie The Clackamas Print

Refreshments are enjoyed by the attendees of the 2nd Annual Veterans Reading as they prepare to share stories and enjoy poetry readings from veterans and those honoring veterans. Good food, good people and good readings are always on the menu and hopes are high for continuing the event for many years while increasing attendance as well.

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Myers remembers how veterans were treated when they came home from Vietnam.

"It is really important for people to understand that the people in the war aren't the ones that create policy," he said, adding, "the people who are disrespectful to the soldiers are knuckleheads in my opinion."

While the honored veterans continued entering the room, Davis remembered stories from his Uncle Smoke who was the 16th child born to his grandparents. Davis shared a story about one night when his uncle and five friends pooled their money to buy a Hurst and drove around town wondering why they couldn't pick up girls.

"Uncle Smoke took about 3,000 photos during the war and this August he gave them to me," Davis said. "Uncle Smoke never talked about the war, except about the things that directly contributed to his health issues...They would sit and watch while the

planes dumped the Agent Orange onto them."

Keith Grant came to show his respect to the veterans and shared a poem which he had written. In a peaceful and modest voice, Grant said:

* * *

*"Lives recognized indefinitely,
Reflected upon a field where,
crimson pedals lay atop the stems,
a sea formed in bloodshed,
portraying the beauty,
sprung forth from this slaughter,
immortalizing them,
allowing us to honor sacrifice,
an eternal mark sewn by earth's
historians."*

* * *

As Grant finished, the room was silent and emotion ran high.

Lance Cpl. Joe Ballard, also a Marine, was not comfortable reading, but shared a poem that this reporter was honored to read for him, which he entitled "Forever Forward."

* * *

*The danger of this place is real.
Death in this place lives./
Keeping traditions of ages past,
Protecting innocent souls to the last,
Falls now to our youngest generations of kids.*

*Hate we constantly feel. Love we don't./
This desert is evil to your mind./
Endurance itself, isn't enough to survive./
You can try to understand it, but you won't.*

*In an instant things can be better. In a flash hope can begin./
Everything changes with just one letter from you./
A simple line of encouragement or a few./*

Think that power you have with that mighty pen.

*Somewhere across the ocean,
somewhere across the sky./
We jump from planes, with our*

*thoughts on the mission./
No thoughts of dying or nervous positions./
Calm envelope's these men that fly.*

*Shadows of violence cover the locals. Shadows of despair cover us all./
Steel-rain travels miles, seeking people to free./
You wouldn't believe how quiet very loud' can be./
Feeling destruction's fire is awakening most of all.*

*Oblivious of time. Numb to reality it seems./
Lining up the sights and hearing your heart race./
It's just a dog-target you think, as sweat pours down your face./
The end of someone by any means.*

Ultimate sacrifice, or ultimate goal?!

*No one makes you fight in these trenches, with esprit de corps./
They must die for their country, not for yours./*

But you volunteered to sleep in this hole.

*Listen: this isn't pettiness. And it isn't sympathy, my friend/
You must remember that blood got us here./
It was hard. It was nasty. It was beyond fear./
So the next time you see them say, 'Happy Veterans Day... Again.'*

* * *

After the readings, the crowd had grown moderately and socialized for a while.

"It is neat that this will be ongoing," Ballard said. "It would be better if more people got the word out. We only had about 10 to 12 [attendees]. It was also supposed to last from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., and didn't even go an hour, but it will get better."

Leque agreed. "Turnout was nice," he said. "Interesting poetry and a variety of subjects. Hope we get more [people] next time."

*Forever Forward
by Lance Cpl. Joe Ballard*

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