



Words from warriors

"That's when it happened. Killed his driver and his assistant gunner ... He was mortally wounded ... his last words, he wanted to know how his guys were ..."

An excerpt from "Voices of The Guard"

An encore reading of "Voices of the Guard" will be held Feb. 4

BY CASSIDY WHITE

Five years ago Frances Richey, a writer and poet from West Virginia, was asked to write a homecoming poem for the Oregon National Guard. What started as a poem flourished into a book, now called "Voices of the Guard."

When contacted about writing the homecoming poem for the Oregon National Guard, Richey agreed to do it as long as she could interview some service members and their spouses. In the summer of 2010, they were told they could call Richey for a phone interview. The interviews were scheduled for 20 minutes and according to Richey, each one, without exception, went for an hour and a half.

After talking to the service members and their families, Richey was left with 12 hours of recording. She soon realized that the stories these service members had to tell transcended a single poem. It was at this point that the idea of a "Voices of the Guard" first came to be.

Richey was adamant about the fact that she isn't the author; the service members of the Oregon National and their families are the real authors of "Voices of the Guard." According to Richey, her contribution was to cut down the 12-hour tape to the heart of what each person wanted to say. Richey said, "I realized that each person had his or her own rhythm and, you know, poetry is really music and rhythm and language. It's a lot about sound as well as whatever the subject matter is, and each one was talking in their own poetry."

"I think the really important thing, at the end of the day, is that everybody realized that, you know, the real stars here are your Oregon National Guard service members and their families," said Richey.

An encore reading of "Voices of the Guard" will be held on Thursday, Feb. 4 at 5:30 p.m. at Camp Withycombe in the Oregon Humanities auditorium. Richey's reading will be paired with the "Life After War" presentation by Jim Lommasson, a freelance photographer and writer who shares the stories of returning soldiers.

RB Green, Veteran Affairs Coordinator, wanted to extend the invitation to this event farther than just the military community at Clackamas. Green said, "I think one of the greatest parts of this whole idea is, more important that the veterans, the people who haven't had any experience with that kind of subculture. It's really interesting and really great for you and the veteran to kind of be able to converse in a way."

When Richey first shared "Voices of the Guard" in 2010, it was to welcome the Oregon National Guard members who had been a part of the longest overseas deployment since World War II, but the event was also a fund-raiser for the Military Family Scholarship Endowment.

The Military Family Scholarship Endowment was started with one simple question: What is it that our veterans need at Clackamas Community College? Shelly Parini, Associate Vice President of College Relations and Marketing, set out to answer that very question.

Parini said, "As I reached out to the Oregon National Guard ... they said, 'Boy if there is one thing you could do that would really help us while we're serving our country and when they were deployed, was help our families, provide access to them so that they can go to school with scholarships.'" That

was really the inspiration and starting point of the endowment.

"The idea is that for years and generations to come this endowment will be there for both veterans and military family members who are interested in getting an education at Clackamas Community College," continued Parini.

According to Parini, the college has raised more than a quarter million dollars for the endowment and eventually would like to tap it off at a million.

With the encore reading of "Voices of the Guard" and the endowment we offer military family members, it's no wonder that this year the college was named the best veteran school in the Western United States by the Military Times.

In addition, the college offers poetry readings for veteran students and faculty. At these events, veterans are able to write and read poems from their experience as service members. When asked about the inspiration behind these events, Joe Ballard, student and literary laureate, said, "I think it was really just to show support to veterans. I think there's a big veteran's community here; I'm a veteran myself, we just want to show support. We're always trying to lift up veterans and make this a good veterans school."

"Voices of the Guard" will be available for download through the CCC Foundation website, give.clackamas.edu.

Merari Calderon Ruiz contributed to this report