

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

This poem for Memorial Day week comes to us from Bruce Guernsey of Bethel. Bruce says that in the spring of 1987, his elderly father, a veteran and baseball fan, wandered off from a VA hospital and was never found. At the start of baseball season a few years later, Bruce wrote “Extra Innings” to resolve his father’s disappearance.

EXTRA INNINGS

by Bruce Guernsey

The commemorative plaque on the trimmed lawn
of Indian Gap National Cemetery
has “Captain” inscribed before my father’s name,
the highest rank among the honored around him,
the other soldiers missing, I presume, in action,
unlike my zany Pop who simply wandered off,
AWOL one spring from the Veteran’s Hospital,
his furlough, eternity.

He always marched to an off-beat drummer
and then with Parkinson’s
became a wind-up toy soldier who’d charge,
head down from the disease, straight on,
elbowing my mother’s vases and crystal
on his way through enemy fire to the end of time.

Wherever he went that day, years ago now,
I see him leading a platoon
of men like those not there around him,
Purple Hearts and heroes, all of them, yes,
but not on this mission with a daffy Captain.

Instead, they’ve found their way
to some green ballpark,
the 9000th inning about to start
and beer for all forever:
just a bunch of happy ghosts,
waving to the camera.

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