

WHY I WRITE
by Peter K. McShane

I write because I want to know why.

I was a money changer with the empty suits and charlatans, the social and economic elite, the pinky rings and silver spoons; we had nothing in common. They never served. Their sons and daughters never served. They went to the Country Club, flew to Monaco and St. Moritz, managed their investments, traveled to homes in the mountains and on the seacoast. They'd court a customer in good times and kick them out when times were tough. I held them in contempt for turning their backs and was fired for insubordination. If not for my VA pension, I'd be travelling from park bench to cardboard box. I want to know why; why didn't I play the game?

When I left the service, I put my military memorabilia in a box and stored it away, out of sight. I wanted no part of that memory to cloud my future. I would see the box every time we moved and try to leave it behind, but the box followed me everywhere, and the memories caught up with me. They came to me in nightmares; they came to me while having dinner with my wife; they came to me while in the passing lane on the Interstate; they came to me while walking in the forest. I want to know why; why I felt remorse, fear, anger?

I want to know why our CO grandstanded and got us shot; why I saved his life, but couldn't save others more worthy; why they napalmed the camp while Tommy was still there; why I chose not to return to my team; why I trusted no one; why I pushed the people away who cared for me; why I compromised my humanity; why we had to pay the price for others' cowardice; why the bullet merely grazed my heart and why I'm still alive? I want to know why, so I parried with the memory fragments.

I wrote, and I parried. I wrote, and it hurt. I wrote, and I cried. I wrote, and soon the pain diminished.