WOMEN and WAR

A Reader's Theater Play

by Jack Hilton Cunningham

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WOMEN and WAR was first produced by Retro Productions at the Spoon Theater, 38 West 38th Street, New York, New York in May of 2010. The performance was directed by Peter Zinn, with sets by Jack and Rebecca Cunningham, costumes by Rebecca Cunningham and Casandera M.J. Lollar, lighting by Justin Sturges, and sound by Jeanne Travis. The production stage manager was Jenny Kennedy. The cast was as follows:

BUDDY, JACK, JOHNNY, VIETNAM MARINE. . . . . Lowell Byers
AGNES, GOLD STAR MOTHER, WWII NURSE. . . Heather E. Cunningham
BESTY, DOUGHNUT GAL, MOTHERS OF . . . . . Lauren Kelston
HELEN, SP. 4, DELANEY . . . . . .Casandera M.J. Lollar
CAMP FOLLOWER, HELLO GIRL, WESTERN UNION GIRL, VIETNAM NURSE. . . . . Elise Rovinsky

CHARACTERS

There are five main actors in this play; four women and one man, to play all male roles:

BUDDY & HELEN — a couple in WWII
JOHNNY & AGNES — a couple in the Korean Conflict
JACK & BETSY — a couple in the Vietnam War
VIETNAM MARINE (writes to his mother and brother)

In between the stories of these character's, there are a number of monologues that can be assigned to the four central actresses, or given to new actresses for an expanded casting option. Monologues include:

VIETNAM NURSE
CAMP FOLLOWER
HELLO GIRL
GOLD STAR MOTHER
MOTHERS OF…
WWII NURSE
DOUGHNUT GAL
WESTERN UNION GIRL
SPECIALIST 4TH CLASS DELANEY

If there is a need for even more female characters, additional monologues are included in an appendix.

CAST BREAKDOWN

If the director desires a smaller cast, the breakdown can be as follows:

Actress 1: Camp Follower, Hello Girl, Western Union Girl, Vietnam Nurse
Actress 2: Agnes, Gold Star Mother, WWII Nurse
Actress 3: Betsy, Doughnut Gal, Mothers of…
Actress 4: Helen, Sp. 4 Delaney
Actor 5: Buddy, Johnny, Jack, Vietnam Marine

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The premiere production of *WOMEN and WAR* was presented as a traditional 'reader's theatre' play. Five actors sat in chairs onstage and read from scripts placed on music stands in front of them. Scenery, except for the chairs and music stands, was not required.

Directors of *WOMEN and WAR* are welcome to present this play in the original "reader's theatre" style, but are also welcome to explore various staging styles of their choosing.

The voiceovers and sounds of war should be at a disturbing level at times and other times fade under the actors' voices.

The entire piece should be performed without a break.

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

An Education Guide by Felicia Lipchik Gell, edited by C. Rebecca Cunningham, written to accompany *WOMEN and WAR* is available in PDF format for producers and educators obtaining rights to perform the play. Please contact Retro Productions at www.retroproductions.org for more information on how to obtain a copy.

To the women in my life:
My Mother
My Wife
My Daughter

PROLOGUE

(As the house lights fade the cast assembles on stage taking their seats as we hear the sound of a radio dial turning into static noise. The sound of static signifies the passing through time when it is heard. The radio dial turns into various archival audio footage of broadcast reporting beginning with 911, Vietnam, Korea, D-Day and WWI.)

[Insert Emily Part I]*

(As the static fades we hear a recording of an instrumental WWII song like Glen Miller's String of Pearls.** *Lights up on Helen and Buddy. The music fades under* **HELEN***'s first letter.)*

HELEN. Brooklyn, New York, April 1944.

BUDDY. Camp Polk, Louisiana, April 1944.

(Music out.)

HELEN. Darling Buddy,

Got your letter this morning. I was waiting on the stoop when the postman came. I can't seem to do much with my day until I see him coming down the block.

BUDDY. My Dearest Darling Helen,

I started this letter three days ago. I can't seem to put down on this piece of paper that we are shipping out…

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*This stage direction refers to a monologue included in the appendix section of the play. The choice of whether or not to insert this monologue is up to the director. Other optional monologues are indicated in bold throughout the script.

**Please see Music Use Note on page 3. Please note that this note applies to all Music reference made hereafter.

HELEN. Will you be leaving training camp soon? I hear on the radio that many soldiers are being shipped overseas every day.

(Sounds of WWII prop planes segue into an instrumental in the genre of 1960's music like For What It's Worth. *The music fades beneath the* **VIETNAM MARINE**.*)*

VIETNAM MARINE. Danang, Vietnam, May 1968

Dear Ma,

Happy Mother's Day from your son. I've just arrived in Nam to the tune of chopper blades and the fireworks and blare of gunfire. It ain't no Fourth of July celebration, but have no fear, I have both feet on the ground and am surrounded by fellow marines — a great bunch of guys here from all over the states — even a few from good old Philly.

I promise to write as often as I can Ma, but please don't expect too much from me. Ma ya know I wasn't the best student when it came to writing and penmanship; so bear with me.

The chow here is OK Ma, but I sure miss your lasagna.

Keep smiling Ma; you'll always be my best girl.

(Instrumental back up, segues into 1940's big band music like String of Pearls *and fades under…)*

HELEN. Brooklyn, April 1944

How is the weather there? It is a lovely spring day here in Brooklyn. Sis and I went to the gardens yesterday and…

(Music out.)

BUDDY. Camp Polk, Louisiana, April 1944

Our shipping orders came Monday. They didn't tell us where we are going or when we will leave, but we're pretty sure we leave Saturday. The orders didn't tell us where we are going. If they would only tell us where we are going. That's the army for you, keep you in suspense and guessing — hurry up and wait — but for what? Just keeping us in suspense.

HELEN. …the grape hyacinths are like a lavender carpet and the tulips, your favorite; seem to be more beautiful this year than ever…

BUDDY. Gosh Sweet Pea, I know this'll as be hard for you to accept as it is for me to write. As miserably hot as it is down here in Louisiana, I would jump at the chance to stay here, but staying in the States has passed me by.

HELEN. … and, my favorite, the daffodils seem to be more spectacular this year. Sis and I walked over to Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Park and sat for a while talking about you and our engagement. Sis seems to think that I should go ahead and start making plans for the wedding, but I said no, I should wait for when you come home. I so want it to be the wedding that the both of us dream of.

BUDDY. On the other hand, Sweet Pea, I feel that your love will be with me wherever they send me.

All my love, Buddy.

HELEN. I love you, Buddy!

(a beat of silence)

CAMP FOLLOWER. My name is Barbara Berry, my friends call me Babs, and I was a "camp follower." Now don't get your drawers in a twist — most people, when they hear the words "camp follower" immediately think of the girls who hung around army camps selling their company to homesick young men. I am not one of those kinda gals. Nope. I am a married woman.

After the president declared war on Germany, Barry, my husband, enlisted and was sent down to Louisiana for basic training, so I took the first bus out of Lawton, Oklahoma to join him.

(sounds of jet planes taking off)

JACK. Vietnam, June 1968

Dear Betsy,

I'm writing this letter to say some things because in this flying business you never know when your next flight will be your last. Please don't think I am being morbid,

but we all have to recognize what is happening here in Vietnam.

I want to be a comfort to you, but the distance separating us makes it very difficult for me to do so. All I can say is that you are in my thoughts during every sortie I fly.

BETSY. Chicago, June 1968

Dear Jack,

Your words make me cry. Being without you this Christmas is going to be difficult. I see you in my teacup in the morning, and in the mirror as I get dressed, and in every young man I see on the street. When I return home, I rush in to pick up your picture from my dresser and hold you in my arms. But Jack, I am so torn by the constant protests that are happening against this war – I know you are doing the right thing over there, but every night when I turn on the television news and I see men burning draft cards, and angry crowds shouting horrible things about our service men, I just don't know which way to turn. Help me to understand Jack.

JACK. Now baby, don't get yourself so upset. I know we are trying to do the right thing over here; all I need to hear is that you are with me in this conflictive, unpopular war. I think I'm strong enough to look past these times of uncertainty as well as to accept my mortality. If my plane does not return tomorrow, I will die without regrets. A little sack time now, must be up first thing tomorrow…

(Music segue.)

CAMP FOLLOWER. Barry met my bus when I arrived in Alexandria, Louisiana. We needed a place for me to stay, so we found ourselves going from house-to-house, knocking on doors. After hours of, "Sorry buddy, but we don't have no spare rooms to rent," we passed a lady and her three young children sitting on a swing in her front yard. When Barry asked her if she had a

room to rent, she said she only had four rooms in her house and no inside facilities except running water in the kitchen. But, she said, if that was all right with us, maybe she could put up a bed in the living room. She told us her husband was in the hospital and she needed money to pay the rent and feed the kids. Barry found an old davenport at a used furniture store not far from the house and with the help of some of his army buddies, carried it down the gravel road to the little house.

Later she moved herself into the back bedroom with her three children and rented her bedroom to another couple, Sally and Joe Malone from up north. Mrs. C, as I called her, also allowed us kitchen privileges.

One day Mrs. C told me that her landlord, Mr. Sweeny, gave her notice to vacate the house because she was running a house of ill repute. Well, he put it more bluntly she said, quote, "You and yer kids gotta move, you ain't running no whore house on my property!" So she told me and Sally, "Gals, get your husbands and your marriage licenses ready, we are going to court." Ms. C couldn't afford a lawyer, so she pleaded her case herself, and won!

So we stayed and became known as Mrs. C's "camp followers." Now I tell you, Madam C was a saint to us, and no way was she any other kind of Madam. She took care of me and Sally, and other camp followers when we moved on, like we were her own family.

[Insert Los Alamos Wife Part I]

(Brief battle sounds of Korean Conflict.)

JOHNNY. South Korea, May 1953

Dear Aggie,

The heat is unbearable here in Korea. Pork Chop Hill is no place to spend a warm Sunday afternoon, especially if you don't want to be shot at.

AGNES. Atlanta, May 1953

Dear Johnny,

Grandma Johnson is crazy about Johnny, Jr. She thinks he's getting to look more and more like you all the time. Your mother insists that he takes after me more.

You would be so proud to see how good Junior is while we say the rosary after supper.

JOHNNY. I used to dread those Sunday evening rosaries when I was a boy. We had to keep quiet for too long while the old women, in their black dresses, knelt in front of the crucifix chanting the "Hail Mary," over and over again. Knowing that fresh doughnuts and cold milk would be served afterwards, my impatience always caused some kind of disturbance. Gee, Johnny Junior seems to be following in his dad's footsteps.

(Sounds of war segue into an instrumental in the genre of 1960's music like For What It's Worth. *The music fades beneath the* **VIETNAM NURSE**.*)*

VIETNAM NURSE. I had never been away from home before. I was a good Catholic girl and like most Catholic girls, I was only given three professional options — I could join a convent, become a nun, married to the church and live a life of obedience and celibacy — or, option number 2, become a school teacher, teach grammar school, and be a shaper of young minds, or option number three, become a nurse. Well, Florence Nightingale won over Mother Teresa *(a nervous laugh)*. So I became a nurse. A nurse in Vietnam.

My daddy, as I left home, took me in his arms and said, "I raised six kids, five of them boys. Now they are all men, and here I am sending my only little girl off to war." That was the first, and only time I ever saw my daddy cry.

When I got off the plane in Vietnam all I could hear was "Get down, GET DOWN!" I lowered my head and ran as fast as I could — I was there — I was in it — I was a part of it, and it was, and is, a part of me.

(Audible ER noises of generators, respirators, doctors and nurses shouting instructions, etc., build —)

My first day in the OR I looked around at a room filled with rows of beds. Chaos — the smell — the smell, the yelling — nurses yelling, doctors yelling, GI's yelling.

[Insert Emily Part II]

(… and then segue into and 1940's big band song like String of Pearls.*)*

BUDDY. France, July 1944

Dearest Helen,

I can't remember when I wrote ya last, but don't worry I haven't forgotten ya. Your letters give me strength every day, so please keep 'em coming. My outfit has been moving around so much, I haven't had time to write. I am now in the 4th platoon, 3rd squad of company B of the 1st Battalion of the 10th Infantry Regiment of the 5th Division of the 3rd Army. Boy, what a mouthful. Don't forget that I am crazy about you.

(Music out.)

HELEN. Brooklyn, August 1944

My Dear Buddy,

Wow, what an address. I have so much to tell you, but these little V-mail letters just don't give me enough room to let you know how swell you are, and how I pray for your return.

[Insert Los Alamos Wife Part II]

VIETNAM NURSE. I had been an OR nurse in Beaumont, Texas where everything was quiet, sanitized, and orderly; and all of a sudden I found myself surrounded by chaos — filth and screams. On my first day a body was plopped down on a table in front of me — a boy no more than 18 years old — a bloody sheet over his abdomen and I was ordered to "prep" him — that meant clean his wounds, shave him, if necessary, and

"Oh, Yeah!, while you are at it, remove his arm that's just hanging by a piece of loose skin."

I can never clear my mind of the constant whirling of choppers bringing more boys in on more stretchers. We were hit a lot and we had to protect the injured men — one time under a barrage of fire we had to cover the men with mattresses. When there were no more mattresses, I jumped up and covered a boy with my own body — I just jumped on top of him. *(a slight pause)*

There was never a time when you could say, "OK, I'm taking a break — for a smoke — for a drink." Don't even think about a long cool bath, makeup, or having your hair done.

Boys came in all marked up with felt markers with their vital signs written on their bodies and faces *(pause)* like so many tattoos. Our priorities were: first, the worse cases that had a chance of survival, second, the guys who could wait awhile to be patched up, and third, well if death was imminent, then death was allowed to take its course.

(She pauses. More sounds of the O.R.)

When I received my orders to leave Vietnam, I got up, put on a fresh uniform, packed my bags and went over to the OR to say "goodbye." The ventilators were popping — it was hot and smelled of blood, yelling filled the air — it was exactly as it was the day I arrived. Nothing had changed.

(… and again segues into a song)

BUDDY. My dearest Sweet Pea Helen,

(Music out.)

I've made friends with a great bunch of guys and two of 'em are from Brooklyn. One is from Red Hook and the other is from Sheepshead Bay. We talk a lot about the Dodgers, and Ebbets Field. We don't hear much about baseball here so any news you can give us is

appreciated. When we win this war, we have agreed to meet at a game and root for the Dodgers. One day they will win the pennant, I just know it.

HELEN. … oh, and honey, your Mom called yesterday to tell me that your Pop went to the game and the Dodgers beat Boston 8 to 7 and the game went to 11 endings.

BUDDY. I haven't had time to write letters to Mom and Pop, so will you please give them my love. These letters are really meant for all the family, as I know ya show everyone all the letters. And sweetheart, it's 'innings' not 'endings'!

Give my best to your Mom and Dad, and to Sis as well.

(Music up, a song like String of Pearls.*)*

HELEN. Lots of kisses darling from all of us.

BUDDY. Love, Buddy.

HELEN. Love, Helen.

(Music out.)

GOLD STAR MOTHER. I belong to the most honorable club in America. The Gold Star Mothers.

MOTHERS OF… My name is Arlene Bishop and I am a disciple of Catherine Curtis and Elizabeth Dilling, founders of the "Mothers Movement," women's war against war.

GOLD STAR MOTHER. When a husband or son is in the war, a banner with a blue star is hung in the window. If he is wounded, a Silver Star is displayed; if he is killed in combat a Gold Star is given to the family to hang in the window so that folks everywhere know the sacrifice that the family has made for our beloved country.

MOTHERS OF… I'm here to rally the women of America who are against this war with our German friends. My aim is to organize as many block groups for the "Mothers Movement" as I can. Show your true stars; join me, and the movement.

GOLD STAR MOTHER. I proudly displayed three blue stars in the window of my modest house in Modesto. Folks would walk by and stop there; some even salute. Passersby always asked if they were for my sons. I stood proudly and I told them, "Yes, my three boys; Joshua, David, and my youngest, Adam."

MOTHERS OF... The Mothers Movement seeks the names of American men who have been killed in the war in Europe. We write to their mothers and tell them "not to be deceived by propaganda into blaming a foreign power" for the death of their sons. Stars hanging in windows signify nothing! It is the President and his war administration that's responsible, not our good friends, the Germans. We endeavor to stop this nonsense of the Allied policy to accept only an unconditional surrender from Germany — that is "un-Christian."

GOLD STAR MOTHER. Slowly my blue stars turned to gold. My baby Adam's star was the first to turn gold, and four weeks later, it was Joshua's. I wrote to my David to cheer him up and told him he's no longer the middle son — he's the only son. David's star turned gold before he received my letter.

MOTHERS OF... Eleanor Roosevelt is a disgrace to this nation. We all know that it's a fact that FDR contracted gonorrhea from Eleanor, who herself had gotten it from a black man. And she is a Jew lover, if not a Jew herself.

GOLD STAR MOTHER. I'm a proud Jewish mother. Folks no longer stop to congratulate me, but to console me. "Chin Up!," I tell them. "What greater sacrifice can a mother make than to give her precious sons for her country?"

MOTHERS OF... There's an octopus trying to foster a Communist takeover of America, and we all know that octopus is the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. New York City is the "Jew-Communist" capital of the world. The Jews are the pawns of the Communist

movement. Let it be known, they are the reason why American men and boys will never come home again.

GOLD STAR MOTHER. The Gold Star Mothers have a heavy burden to bear. I stand behind our great president in these times of trials and tribulations. He gives me great strength.

MOTHERS OF… I believe in the words of our sister Agnes Waters when she said:

"If we cannot get these traitors out of office by peaceful legal means we can resort to shooting them out! … Let us demand that this war be stopped at once. Let's keep a clothesline handy in every little back yard to hang the traitors, or a gun!"*

GOLD STAR MOTHER. My boys never left me — I still see them every day. Climbing that big tree in the back yard, scraping a knee while skating, chasing the cat and running after the dog, collecting cans and newspapers for the war effort. Before they left they planted a Victory Garden and gave me strict instructions on how to keep it growing. Giving up a son is the hardest part of being a mother; losing a son to war is the agony of motherhood. No more will I call up the stairs to them — no more will I sit up at night worrying when they come home late — no more will I fall fast asleep in peace when I hear the key in the door — no more — no more.

[Insert Emily Part II]

(More radio search noises, a clip from **MA PERKINS***, and then noises of crowds and airplanes crashing and an announcer:)*

(A voice announcing the 9/11 disaster.)

(More crashing noises fading under a current hip-hop song.)

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* *[This quote is taken from an article published in 1944 in "*Women's Home Companion*" magazine and printed on page 338 of "*Our Mothers' War*" by Emily Yellin, published by Free Press, New York City, NY, ISBN 0-7432-4516-4 (Pbk).]*

SPECIALIST FOURTH CLASS DELANEY. I was seventeen when 9/11 happened. I woke up that morning to Mamma making breakfast — the smells of bacon frying and coffee brewing — smells that I will forever associate with that morning — Mamma never made breakfast on a workday before. But that morning the television in the living room was blaring reports of airplanes crashing into buildings in New York City.

That morning I told my Mom and Dad that I was going to do my part to help see that this horrible thing never happened again to our country. I joined my high school's ROTC. After graduating the following May, I joined the Army.

(Instead of static we hear a steady tone as the dial is being searched for news of the war. More static and searching and it comes to a song like For What It's Worth, *the song fades under.)*

VIETNAM MARINE. Nam, January 1968

Dear Ma,

Tet is no holiday. It leaves little time to write to you. The American casualties they say is about 2,500, but they are saying the Vietcong lost up to 37,00 troops, but they still keep coming at us.

I am tired and weary Mom, but I gotta keep plodding on and dreaming of your manicotti!

Love ya' Ma.

(Sounds of choppers fade in the distance and we hear pastoral sounds, a gentle breeze in trees, birds, etc., then more radio static sounds, and we hear a few bars of a WWI song like Over There *that fades into sounds of telephone operators some speaking French, others English.)*

HELLO GIRL. *(She speaks with a slight French accent.)* It was bitter cold the day when I landed in France in 1918 — a day that was much like many days in Bangor, Maine. I was an operator for the telephone company in Bangor

when I heard that the Army was looking for switchboard operators who spoke French. I was one of 223 girls who would be shipped to France. We were sworn into the U.S. Army Signal Corps Telephone Units as soldiers. Think of that, the first women to serve in the Army and yet, at home we didn't have the right to vote.

BUDDY. France, November 1944

My dear Helen,

I yearn for you and a warm sunny day in Brooklyn. I have never been so cold in all my life. Although I have plenty of clothes to keep me warm, my feet still get cold. I am wearing two pairs of wool socks and they make my boots so tight that I can't wiggle my toes.

HELEN. This little piggy went to market — darling keep those toes warm, you will need all 10 when you get home to walk me down the aisle, and then to keep my feet warm every night. I yearn for you Buddy Boy…

BUDDY. …oh, how I long to come home.

HELEN. …come home, oh Buddy Boy, come home.

HELLO GIRL. After arriving in France I was assigned to a station in Chaumont. The work was hard. Sometimes the noises of war made it difficult to hear voices from the other end of the line. We had to scream at the top of our lungs in order to be heard through the telephone lines — all the girls screaming into their instruments at the same time. I knew I was doing something important — the excitement — the constant noise kept me going.

I was sent from Chaumont to Souilly to reinforce the girls there. Conditions were awful. The weather was cold and it rained constantly. There was mud everywhere. The bottom of my skirt and my boots were caked with mud. The morning of November 11th, 1918 the hello girls handled heavier than usual voice traffic. Gradually the noises of war ceased. I remember that day well; it was another blustery cold day in November.

When the "hello girls" returned to the States we were

told that we were no longer "sworn in" members of the Army. After failing to persuade Congress in 1930 to recognize us as full-fledged members of the military, more than fifty bills granting veteran status to the "hello girls" were introduced in Congress. Finally, in 1978 we succeeded. Congress passed a bill to recognize the 223 women as veterans. Only a handful of us were still alive.

(A few bars of a WWI song segues into a holiday tune.)

BUDDY. France, Christmas Eve, 1944

Helen, my darling,

(Music out.)

My days are bluer than ever, and when I think of you, I have to fight back the tears so my buddies won't see. All of us guys left in Company B sit around in our dirty uniforms, heavy boots, and heavy hearts, and sing "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men." We try our best to comfort each other.

HELEN. Brooklyn, Christmas Day, 1944

Sweet, sweet Buddy,

Mr. Berlin hit it right this year. We don't have to dream; we have a white Christmas. I woke up this morning and looked outside to a glorious day. I was elated, but only for a moment, and then I prayed this will be the last Christmas we spend apart. I lit a candle for you this morning at mass and said a special prayer for you.

BUDDY. Love you …

HELEN. Love you …

[Insert Axis Sally]

(We hear a few more bars of a song like White Christmas*)*

JOHNNY. Somewhere in Korea, January 1954

Dearest Agnes,

(Music out.)

I received the pictures you sent. They are swell. Johnny, Jr. is cute in his cowboy suit. He sure is a show off, just like his old man. When I get home you can look forward to more babies and that little house with a white picket fence and a dog.

AGNES. Atlanta, February 1954

I met Sally Bergstrum this morning after Mass and she was asking after you. Charlie is still in Japan for R&R, she thinks. She hasn't heard from him in weeks. Do you have any news about what's happening with his outfit?

JOHNNY. I had some well-earned R&R in Japan last week, too. I hope you got the postcards I sent. Having a week to do almost nothing found me with lots of time on my hands. What else is a married guy to do? The single guys, well that's another story. I asked around about Charlie Bergstrum, but no one seemed to know. One guy said that he heard Charlie might be missing in action, but can't say for sure. I know this isn't any help so don't tell Sally. I'm sure she probably knows about him by now anyway, if he is OK.

AGNES. Dear Johnny,

I am so glad you had some free time. We all loved the postcards. The one of the Geisha gave me cause for concern *(chuckle)*. That was just a picture and not someone you might have, well you know what I am trying to say.

I love you, Johnny Johnson, Junior says "I love you, Daddy."

(We hear more choppers that segue into a song like String of Pearls *under the next Buddy/Helen sequence.)*

BUDDY. Somewhere in France, January, 1945

Christmas and New Year's were just two more days for us. The weather is rotten. Wish I had some good news to send, Sweet Pea, but I don't.

HELEN. My Darling,

(Music out.)

Missing you is so painful. It helps if I try to keep busy. Do you remember my high school friend Rachel? I met her the other day at Abraham & Strauss and we went over to Schraffs for a soda, and we talked for a very long while. She said that being a Jewish wife in Brooklyn has been very difficult. There is so much hatred toward the Jews she sometimes thinks that her parents might as well have stayed in Poland and suffered the oppression that is open rather than suffer the sneers and whispers that she feels whenever she walks down Flatbush Avenue.

My darling, I am trying so hard to be a good American and do my part. I got a job down at the navy yards and I encouraged Rachel to do the same; it's hard work, but I don't complain. Women all over this country are going to work and keeping house and being mothers and feeding their families even with the rations of sugar and butter. Last week there was no butter to be had so we bought oleomargarine, it comes in a block, white as lard, with a little packet of yellow coloring that you mix with the oleo till it looks like butter. But it tastes like lard.

BUDDY. Sugar, you are sugar enough for me. Keep your head high and never lose that beautiful smile that I fell in love with. Yes, I remember your friend Rachel, and the next time you see her please tell her to keep her chin up and not give up hope. I pray that when this war is over, and I am back home again, that will be the end of hatred and we will all live as free Americans and worship in our own way, Jews and Christians alike. Don't worry about the butter, or me, I will butter you up when I get back to Brooklyn!

HELEN. Buddy Dear,

When I get home at night my muscles ache with pain. Things are surely getting worse here in Brooklyn. I received a new book of ration stamps today, which was a relief. Mom and Dad are helping out as much as they

can by standing in line when food is available. We just keep tightening our belts and making do with less and less.

I love you.

BUDDY. I love you.

(Some static and more dial searching and we hear a bit of a military song like Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition *as it fades under* **WWII NURSE**.*)*

WWII NURSE. Ah, you bet'cha.

I grew up in a large family in a small town south of the twin cities. My dream was to become a nurse, so after graduating high school I attended a nursing program at our junior college. Papa worked in the General Mills plant and Mama kept house. We weren't rich, but we weren't poor either. Having many brothers and sisters kept us all busy looking out for each other; when one got the measles we all got the measles; when one brought home the mumps, we all had the mumps. I guess that's why I am a nurse.

When two of my brothers joined the navy, I wanted to do my part as well. After all, why should we leave it to only the men to carry the burden of war? So I enlisted in the Navy and was sent to the Pacific — Corregidor, Bataan, Guam, and Saipan. The hospital ships are always short staffed and filled with the wounded — our boys with limbs blown off, faces scarred for life; boys barely able to assist themselves on crutches, battlefield bandages barely holding their mangled bodies together. They all seem to be so lonely and homesick. More often than not, they just want to talk to someone. They show me pictures of their wives, moms, and girls from back in the States. After my official daily tour, I write letters for the boys without hands or arms or who were so badly burned that they cannot hold a pen to write. Many nights I become the messenger of news like, "gee Mom, my right arm is missing in action," or "dear Sally, guess what, I will no longer be able to play

football, which you hate, because I am now missing both legs." It is difficult to write these things on paper and difficult for me not to cry along with them. I slip away to cry alone, I'd never let the boys see me cry, they never see me cry.

(A beat of silence allowing the mood to change. If there is a change of light it should go brighter for **DOUGHNUT GAL**.*)*

DOUGHNUT GAL. I know you've heard of the USO Girls who toured behind the lines to entertain the troops. Well, I was a Doughnut Gal, one of the gals that drove two-ton army trucks and served doughnuts and hot steaming coffee to the men. Well, I called myself a Doughnut Gal. Molly is my name. From down south Alabama.

Alice, my doughnut companion, and me ended up somewhere in France to serve our boys hot coffee and doughnuts. So, me and Alice would load our old truck with sacks of flour, sugar and coffee, and cans of cooking oil, and hit the road by five every morning. What a bumpy ride! By the end of the day we were as greasy as the doughnuts. No need for any beauty lotions for our hair, the oil kept it preee-ty shiny. After a day 'on the range', our blouses and skirts needed degreasing as well.

Did you know that a greater percentage of Doughnut Gals were killed in action in the European Theater than gals from any of the other women's services? Put that in your record book, Uncle Sam!

In 1945 Alice and I split up; she was sent to Le Harve, and I, well lucky me, I was sent to England where my doughnut days continued and my jitterbugging days began. There was this very large, empty warehouse building where the boys assembled for their next assignments. There was lots of music, and the boys loved to jitterbug, and since I knew a few steps — move over English gals — I went from being just a 'Doughnut Gal' to a 'jitterbug gal'. Give 'em some hot coffee and doughnuts, and jitter they would. And oh boy, could those boys jitterbug!

(We hear a bar or two of a 1950's song like Wayward Wind.*)*

JOHNNY. Korea, April 1954

Dear Aggie and Little Johnny,

(Music out.)

I can't explain why I have not been writing more. But you see, here in this mess, there is not a solider with a rifle that knows which way to point. We hear the enemy fire, we see the tracers light up the sky, and some times we are just lucky, like the other day when we captured those North Koreans.

AGNES. Atlanta, April 1954

Dear Johnny:

I let your Mom and Dad read the 10-page letter you wrote. You should have seen your Dad's face when he read about the 28 prisoners you captured. That was something else for him to brag about. Grandma Johnson laughed and told us you're doing a whole lot more than your father did when he was in the army.

You're so thoughtful, honey. That's one of the many, many things I love so much about you, Johnny darling. There isn't any more news so I'll close for now.

JOHNNY. This morning we encountered, face-to-face, a team of North Koreans. They were lobbing grenades and firing at us, and as they charged toward us I fired and hit one in the face. I watched as he fell silent and died almost instantly. Agnes, I can't tell you how awful I feel to have killed another man. I immediately asked God to forgive me, and oh Agnes, please forgive me as well. I am so confused. I will go to confession the first chance I get.

AGNES. We put little Johnny in Kindergarten this week. I do believe it was harder on me to leave him, than it was for him on the first day. He seems to be having a wonderful time with the other boys and girls and is learning his numbers and alphabet so fast.

Oh, Johnny, I pray that when this war is over there will be no more wars, so little Johnny and all the boys and girls can grow up in a world of peace and freedom. I know that day will come, Johnny, and I am doing my part to see that it does.

(Sounds of Korean War segue into sounds of WWII.)

BUDDY. France, February, 1945

My darling,

I attended Mass this morning. Today we were near this little bombed out town and came upon a small church that was still standing. There is a hole in the roof and everything was a bit tattered and soaked. I felt so much closer to God just being in a church again. The sun came out strong just as the service began and a shaft of bright sunlight came through the broken roof and fell upon the altar. It was as if God was telling us He is on our side. We sure were a happy bunch of worn out Catholics. We move out in the morning, going north into Kraut-land. Pray for us.

HELEN. I am doing my best to keep up my spirits. I went to confession yesterday, and Father Malone asked about you. We walked down the aisle and chatted for quite a while. The church is a great comfort to me and keeps me believing in a wonderful future ahead of us when you return home.

Buddy, I love you.

BUDDY. I love you Helen.

BETSY. I love you Jack

JACK. I love you Betsy.

AGNES. I love you Johnny

JOHNNY. I love you Agnes.

(More sounds of war.)

WWII NURSE. Today we had a new shipment of wounded, and we had to undress men who had not bathed in months. There is no modesty, but only looks of thanks. One soldier looked up at me as I was sponging him

and said, "I prayed last night that I could bathe one more time before I die." He stopped breathing — but I continued to bathe him until another nurse tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Honey, he's gone; you can stop now."

(The lights dim on all the women as they bow their heads and hold hands. Their actions should reflect a solemn hippie "Sit-in" as we see a man pass in front of the women in full military fashion imitating a funeral march. We hear the sound of the iron Victory Bell ringing in the distance from the Kent State campus bell tower as the following archival sound recordings play: A press conference held by Ohio Gov. James Rhodes "We're going to use every part of the law enforcement agency of Ohio to drive them out of Kent. We are going to eradicate the problem not treat the symptom." and forensic audio footage of M1 Garand rifles being fired by the National Guard on the Vietnam protesters. The lights slowly fade up as we hear the voices of the war protesters yelling "Hell No! We won't go!")

VIETNAM MARINE. Tay Ninh Province, Nam, October, 1968
Little Brother,

(Sound out.)

Take this advice from me. Stay as far away as you can from the fucking army and this shit-hole called Nam. Trust me, being a grunt in this godforsaken country ain't no fun. Don't be like me, go to college and get good grades or burn your draft card and head straight to Canada. Do this one thing for me, brother. And if I ever get home, I promise to be the big brother that I never was before. And, oh yeah, give Ma a big kiss for the both of us.

I never said this before, but I love you kid.

Your Big Brother

AGNES. Johnny Jr. is so much like you Johnny, more and more each day, I see you in him. Even your mother is beginning to see you in the way he walks across the floor and turns and looks at us with those big brown eyes. She sings him a song that she said she used to sing to you. Do you remember it, Johnny? It goes something like this: "Oh, Johnny, Oh, Johnny, how you can love, Oh, Johnny, Oh, Johnny, heaven above."

JOHNNY. I used to get so embarrassed when she sang that song and my friends were there. But now that I think back, it was such an endearing thing that she did. I know she loved me more than anything. Since I was an only child, she had lots of love to give. Our little Johnny must have brothers and sisters. And I'll see to that when I get home, so prepare yourself, Aggie. Prepare yourself! And Aggie, not to worry, but I took some serious shrapnel in my right thigh, but the medics tell me everything is going to be A-OK.

Love, Johnny

AGNES. Oh, Johnny, are you hurt bad? Johnny, I do worry. Promise me Johnny that you are A-OK and that I need not worry.

I love you Johnny.

(A beat of silence…and we hear Korean war sounds that segue into WWII war sounds.)

HELEN. Brooklyn, April, 1945

Dear Buddy,

Not hearing from you is agonizing. The radio and newspapers tell us that the Germans are in retreat and that our Allied forces are advancing to end this terrible war. I light a candle for you every day at St. Dominics on my way to work. I pray every day that you are safe and will come home soon.

BUDDY. Germany, May, 1945

My dearest Helen,

I know you are worried since you haven't heard from me in months. As we crossed the border into Germany, we were ambushed and taken prisoner. It has been hell