Dear Walter,

I haven't kept in touch. Russ's condition became so bad I didn't know if I'd have time by the time we moved. We now live in a senior citizen home that has everything Russ needs, but that I'm having a hard time adjusting to. Parting with my big house and all the things that were a part of my life was very difficult. Only my love for Russ made the move bearable. I'm still working and trying not to look back. I miss not hearing from you. Give all your students my love.

Eleanor

Holiday Greetings and warmest wishes
for a wonderful New Year

Merry Christmas

Eleanor and Russ.
Dear loved ones,

Another Christmas is upon us again and with all our heartaches and problems, we still have so much to be thankful for.

Our children, grand-children are all gone, we have been blessed this year, with a 2nd great grand-son, Matthew Russell Haiges.

Our big heartache is Russ. He is mostly in a wheelchair and on oxygen. He will never get better because of emphysema and post-poliomyelitis syndrome. Not a lot is known about post-polio syndrome, so we just live for today and be grateful for each day.

Life is difficult for both of us now, Russ can't being able to do much, gets him down and watching my love fade from me at times, almost more than I can bear. But these feeling I must hide and just give him all the T.L.C. I can.

But God is good and I still do have my sweetest, my best friend. There is problems are not painful for Rass, it's his breathing that, at times, becomes very difficult.

The dreams we had, when we were young, have faded with our youth and in the winter of our lives, the golden years, we thought would come in latter life is not to be for us.

But life goes on with joy and heartache. Our 4 children are being very attentive to are here for everything Rass and I need. We are truly blessed.

Russ and I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and happy New year. God Bless.

(410) 528-2787

Elsie
Dear Walter,

This year is disappearing so fast I can’t believe it. Now that summer is here, I’m hoping you are enjoying it and life is treating you wonderful.

I’m sure you have been wondering why you haven’t heard from me. Hopefully my life has settled down and I can finally get some rest and write to those who care for you and I. I have given up my full-time job and now work just 3 days a week. With all my problems and working full time, I was caught in a cycle and the only thing I could do was pray my way through each day and fall exhausted into bed each night.

The month of May was one which caused me a lot of pain, yet a lot of happiness. On May 5th, love had a mild heart attack, skin being O.K., now but not quite himself yet. He also has emphysema and had to quit smoking, which makes him a grump sometimes, but I’d rather have a grump than no Love at all. Trying to deal with the
thoughts of losing Russ, keeping up with my job, etc., took its toll on me, both mentally and physically.

Then on May 13th, Nancy was married to Ray Keeper, a Vietnam veteran. It was a beautiful wedding and I now have a wonderful new son-in-law.

Then on May 20th the Maryland Vietnam Memorial was dedicated. Now you bring out many emotions, pain, sadness, love and pride, it also takes its toll on your body, especially when you’re 62. After that I was finally able to get some much needed rest and my life has begun to settle down. I now feel as though I’m seeing some light at the end of the tunnel.

When you have children, they must come first in your life and all the others you love, you keep in your thoughts and hope they understand that out of sight does not mean out of thought. I love you all and hope to keep in touch more often. God Bless!

Love and Prayers

Eleanor and Russ
April 17, 1988

Dear Walter,

Thank you for your phone call. At the time you called me, I was having a very difficult time because of my youngest daughter, Baby. I panic when anything is wrong with one of my children. When I lost Baby, I lost that feeling of security that everyone has, but do not realize they have, until they lose it. Anyhow, as of this minute, (in my family, you never know from day to day) everything is fine.

Because of my still writing letter to Baby, there are those who think I don't have all my troubles. If they could just travel with me, you see, one week, they would see I do not live in the past. Yet, Baby is still and always will be a part of me. I work to have a Event. Take care of your husband, who is not badly handicapped but does require many things, other husband do not. We have a good marriage you there is not aunker, better husband anywhere. What I have given up for my husband, I have received back 10 fold. I also have 3 daughters, Donna, Marlene and Wendy who I could not have got any better daughters, if
I had ordered them special, could not have got any better. My son Barry is a slow gentle kind but has many problems. When Barry was 12, he was in the highest classes in school. Then he lost something very dear to him. His big brother, Billy, who was the only. Barry went from the highest in the class to the lowest. We found out from doctors he not only lost his big brother but a partial factor, too. Barry is a victim of the Vietnam war and has the same problems many Vietnam veterans do. Now you know much about me, you know of my lovely daughter, you know of my pain from losing Billy and you know of the pain I suffered with Barry because like most Vietnam veterans he will never know true happiness even tho he is always surrounded by those who love him dearly, his family.

I have 3 grandchildren aged 12 to 23. And believe me, the little ones help to keep me busy. I also help out with a Handicaps Association that my husband Russ is president of. We have a 36 foot boat that we take handicapped person out on one week end after weather permits.
and also on the Commission to build a memorial in Maryland for the Korean War. They couldn't get a deed from Mother from the Korean War, so the Commission, as they came to the Vietnam War and after paying no money time, I received a phone call from the Coroner's Office and finally said yes. As you see I have very little time left over. I also write to many many Vietnam Veterans, my life is basically happy and very full at times. At 7 A.M., on Sunday morning, I don't really know why I'm writing all this to you.

I saw the movie "Dear America" in Washington on March 27th with June, Donna, Barry and Mindy. (I was so proud Barry was with me). What can I say? It hit me really hard.

I met many of these from H.B.O. at the reception that followed. That night they made me feel really important, like Cinderella at the ball. The next day I felt like Cinderella the day after the ball. Down on my hands and knees at work.

One of the nicest parts of the evening was meeting a nurse Lynda (Dar Devante also in the movie) when I hug a Vietnam nurse I feel like I'm hugging the one who was very possibly with
Bobby when he died. As we cried together, it hit me she knew how important it was to me.

On Easter Sunday I had the family and some friends with us to share the day. By 6 o'clock everyone was gone except John Raza. John lives in Virginia but occasionally spends a week and a half with me. John has never married, his parents are dead and basically has no one. He is sort of an "adopted son." John served many tours in Vietnam and has the Congressional Medal of Honor. Marranee was unable to go to Washington with us and had not seen the movie. She went home, put her 2 little ones to bed and came back. So with John, Marranee, Russ and me, we watched the movie "Dear America." After the movie and the hugging, kissing and crying had stopped, I went to bed. I had barely dozed off when Russ came up and woke me telling me Jim was on the phone and having a hard time.

Jim was with Bobby in Vietnam, he only refers to Bobby as "Sparky," the microwave in Vietnam. Jim is the one I talk about in the letter in the movie. If it were not for Jim I would
not have written the letter. If it were not for Jim I would not have the picture of Billy that is in the movie. Jim sent me the picture after Billy died and said it was taken 2 weeks before his death. I have met Jim only once (at the New York parade for Vietnam Veterans) but we talk on the phone and write. Jim lives in Michigan.

When I picked up the phone, Jim's wife, Susan, said she didn't think Jim could talk. I heard him in the back ground say, "yes, I can." When Jim got on the phone, he told me things I was hungry to hear. He told me how Spanky was the one who kept them sane in Vietnam.

Between the things he told me, he would break down and cry so hard, tell me more, cry more. I really think it was harder for him than me. That's what you call real love.

That night, for the first time in a long time, I fell asleep sobbing. And so the pain goes on. But now with sharing and love from the Vietnam Veterans.

I have heard from very few since the movie. I sent to at least 40 people to let them know about the TV Guide and the movie. I have only heard from 2. I guess it's too painful for them to write
to me. If they only knew how badly I need to hear words like "I'm proud of Billy." "I'm proud of you for sharing your pain." I know they are but oh, how I need to read or hear those words. When I really get down and the pain seems endless I think I must write to any more veterans. Not going to the "Wall," just stopping everything and maybe the pain will be easier. (That's what I call my "pity" party) Then I reach way down inside me, feel the love I had from Billy and know if he was brave enough to volunteer for Vietnam, go thru hell there, lose his life for the love of family and country, then his soul must can keep smiling and be proud of Billy and try to help all she can.

If I don't stop soon, this will turn into a novel. Thank you listening. Thank you caring. Let me hear from you. God Bless.

Love and Prayers,

Eleanor Wembell
Dear Professor Cappe,

I saw you on 60 Minutes and feel pride, pain and sadness! The pride and sadness are because of the Vietnam War. The pride is because I had a son who volunteered for Vietnam and there he gave his life. The pride is for you also. For the love and caring you are giving to these Vietnam Veterans and helping them bring out some of the pain they have carried much too long.

And for bringing this to the attention to the younger generation who are hungry for knowledge of what really happened in Vietnam.

My son, Billy, died at age 21 on February 13, 1969. He had been in Vietnam 4½ months. At that time my 4 other children were Donna 23, Barry 15, Marianne 10 and Wendy 7. I cannot tell you how losing Billy almost destroyed me. Here, my big, fun loving son who was a part of me was gone. My heart was totally broken. How do you survive such a loss? Only God knows, I only knew I could not even speak his name, without crying, for at least 5 years. Time does have a way of healing, but there are still mornings when I wake to a yellow wet with tears.
From February 13, 1969 to December 11, 1982, I felt our family was alone in our grief. No one wanted to hear about Vietnam. They were those who grieved with us, over the loss of Billy, but few who would listen when I said where he died. So I went into a shell. And was the beginning of my writing letters to Billy, poems to Billy. At that time I wrote in secret for fear people would think I was crazy.

Then on December 11, 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., was dedicated. I cannot tell you of the pain I felt in seeing his name, touching his name on this black wall. And the pain I felt as I stood and spoke his name in the National Cathedral when they had the continuous reading, night and day, of all the names of those who had died in Vietnam. I left that wall on April 11, 1982, with almost as much pain that then a human being should, not knowing if I could ever go back again.

But with the passing of winter and Billy’s birthday coming on May 9th, I invited all my family to go back with me. There I left the first of many letters to Billy, on the ground beneath the panel that held his name. Section 32 West - Line 29.
And there at that memorial, on that beautiful day, it was the beginning of a great change in my life. Here, I found others with the same pain as I. And there I found those wonderful Vietnam Veterans who feel my pain and together we share that pain and love.

So far, my husband Russ and I, have unofficially adopted 36 Vietnam Veterans and hoping for more.

I don't know if a mother has ever shared her pain with you, over losing her child in a war. All Mothers' pain is the same when they lose their child but when they die in a senseless war it's hard to explain the added pain.

I could talk all day about Vietnam Veterans but I think you get the picture. If they in any way I can help please let me know. I am enclosing some things that have been published to help you understand the pain that never ends.

Tell those Veterans who were on your show, I love them all and am proud of their courage in sharing their pain with so many. you have my permission to give my address to any one who would like to write (can be adopted) God Bless you.

Eleanor Westenfeld