Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group, July 17, 2010, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

10:00-10:15 Opening discussion/breakfast items
10:15-11:15: Workshop/sharing of group members' writing
11:15-11:30 Break
11:30-12:00 Writing exercise discussed/Open writing time. Wrap-up and planning for August meeting

Possible dates for August meeting: August 14, 21, 28

--Ivy has a writing group exercise to share this month.

--Please compile a short biographical statement for our Writing group website (one paragraph suggested). Some suggestions about how to write this.

- Name
- Where you live or where you are from/hometown
- What you do for a living
- Info about your military service and/or connection to military service
- What you are writing/working on in the group
- Anything else you want to include (interests/hobbies or other information)
Character Sketches

We make characters come to life in our writing through attention to their physical appearances, styles of dress, gestures and mannerisms, voices, and their unique idiosyncrasies. The details of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste that generate memorable images when writing about events also generate memorable images when writing about people.

In the following character sketch, entitled “Crazy Horse,” Ian Frazier characterizes Crazy Horse by linking together a series of interesting historical facts about Crazy Horse’s life. Notice how Frazier’s vignette includes both a record of Crazy Horse’s actions and also the things Crazy Horse didn’t or wouldn’t do:

Personally, I love Crazy Horse because even the most basic outline of his life shows how great he was; because he remained himself from the moment of his birth to the moment he died; because he knew exactly where he wanted to live, and never left; because he may have surrendered, but he was never defeated in battle; because, although he was killed, even the Army admitted he was never captured; because he was so free that he didn’t know what a jail looked like; because at the most desperate moment of his life he only cut Little Big Man on the hand; because, unlike many people all over the world, when he met white men he was not diminished by the encounter; because his dislike of the oncoming civilization was prophetic; because the idea of becoming a farmer apparently never crossed his mind; because he didn’t end up in the Dry Tortugas; because he never met the President; because he never rode on a train, slept in a boardinghouse, ate at a table; because he never wore a medal or a top hat or any other thing that white men gave him; because he made sure that his wife was safe before going to where he expected to die; because although Indian agents, among themselves, sometimes referred to Red Cloud as "red" and Spotted Tai as "spot," they never used a diminutive for him; because, deprived of freedom, power, occupation, culture, trapped in a situation where bravery was invisible, he was still brave; because he fought in self-defense, and took no one with him when he died; because, like the rings of Saturn, the carbon atom, and the underwater reef, he belonged to a category of phenomena which our technology had not then advanced far enough to photograph; because no photograph or painting or even sketch of him exists; because he is not the Indian on the nickel, the tobacco pouch, or the apple crate. Crazy Horse was a slim man of medium height with brown hair hanging below his waist and a scar above his lip. Now, in the mind of each person who imagines him, he looks different.

Writing Prompt: 10-15 mins.

For this writing exercise, choose a person you know or knew in the past, who interests you as a character, and write about them, describing every aspect of their being. Remember that characterizations can stand on their own or become fruitful starting points for other writing projects; please allow yourself the freedom to veer off topic to explore other territory if you so desire.