June 19, 2010  Veterans’ Writing Group Agenda:
--Coffee and breakfast items, introductions as needed, recap of last session
--Brief ideas about writing/why write (hand-out)
--Discussion of writing that group members would like to share
--Break
--Writing exercise/writing time
--Closing session/plans for next group meeting:

Possible dates: Saturday, July 17, 24, or 31 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Writing Prompt for the July Meeting:

Pictures as Time Travel

Photographs are “time portals” that allows us to travel back in time and remember a particular moment.

Find a photograph from your time in the military. Take some time to study the photograph and notice details. Then jot down notes about what the photograph captures: what details, sensations, sights, smells, and feelings it brings back (think of advice about capturing those details from the chapter on “The Body of Memory”). Then use those notes/jottings to write a story based on the photograph.

Use the photograph to capture the essence of that time, place, and your experience.
“Saying Yes” to Remembering and Writing

"The body, memory, and the mind exist in sublime interdependence, each part wholly intertwined with the others” -- “The Body of Memory” from Telling it Slant.

“...exploring the details of military life can be salve on an open wound, a balm that allows the future to unfold, not only for the writer but also for the reader. In a country at war, everyone, military or civilian, has a war story to tell and a wound to heal—the story each of us is running from or running down, the brutal truth of loving and losing, of dying and surviving” - Sally Drumm, Milspeak (xxxix).

Writing can bring you home, help you create order out of chaos, memory out of fragments, understanding out of confusion. By making sense of your experiences, you help yourself and others understand them.

Where to start and how to keep going

Lists:
--Write down 20 things you’d like to write about your military service. Don’t worry about chronology or details. Just jot down the fragments, ideas, half-formed thoughts that come to you.
Feel free to add to the list and cross off things off as you write about them.

Timelines and Maps:
--Create a timeline of your military service—when were you drafted or when did you sign up? What were factors/influences in you joining up?
--Make a timeline of your years of service, training, deployments. Note where you were how long, and what took place (incidents, stories, significant events) during those time periods. Note people, details of the places.
--Pull out photographs, letters, diaries, service records, emails, or other materials/artifacts and flesh out your timeline a bit more. Seeing images or documents may help you remember.
--Keep your timeline handy for reference and add to it, revise it as you remember more.
--Alternately, draw a map of your military service.

Fragments/Day-to-Day discoveries:
Keep a journal or notebook of fragments of your experience as they come back to you. Write down dreams, memories, moments as they come back to you. Just get them down on paper and don’t worry about how they sound. Keep a notebook by your bedside or place where you relax. You can come back and revise and develop
further. Jotting the fragments down will you to draw connections and allow you to come back to mine them further.

Writing the list or expanding the fragments:

Go back to your list or fragments and work with them into writing a longer piece. We’ll also give you monthly prompts to help you get going.

Overwhelmed? Go small. When writing about something that seems too big or like too much to handle, just start small. Start with the small everyday details and build from there: What was the weather like that day? What did you have for breakfast? What socks were you wearing? And then go from there. This sounds silly, but it’s a way to get going. One noted writer said that she starts a story by noting where the chairs are in the room.

YOUR STORY is yours: You are a shaper and creator of your story, not ruled by the past or others’ opinions. You have the opportunity to make meaning and share your experiences, as you see fit. It’s your story and your choice how to tell it and share it. The world needs your story and your truths about military life. So much is shrouded and hidden about military service. You are breaking the silence and opening a conversation as well as giving others an entry point.

INVICTUS

By William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

Victorian poet Henley suffered his whole life from tubercular arthritis. He led an active, engaged life and wrote a number of poems addressing strength and perseverance in the midst of difficult conditions.