March 2012 Syracuse Veterans’ Writing Group Prompts: Telling the Story

1) The poet Adrienne Rich, who died this week, believed in the importance of the writer as "witness." What does this word "witness" mean to you? Is the role of the witness active or passive? What does it mean for a writer to "bear witness"? How does this idea factor into your reflections on the military? Do you see yourself as "bearing witness," or are you just "telling your story"? Is there a difference? What are the challenges and responsibilities involved in the act of bearing witness?

2) A YouTube video called “Shit Civilians Say to Veterans” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4Esni1RbwU depicts a number of typically awkward, insensitive, and “dumb” questions that veterans are routinely asked by civilians as civilians attempt to engage vets in conversation about military experiences. In addition to this widely popular viral video, a number of veterans have blogged and written about the awkward or “dumb” questions civilians have asked them. What questions have you been asked about your service that would consider to be “dumb,” stupid, uninformed, or even offensive? How did you handle the situation? What questions—if any—do you wish you were asked by civilians and/or what opportunities would you like to have to talk about your service to civilians?

3) As always, design your own writing assignment. What do you want to write about?