

# Everyone Needs a Veteran

P.H. Crosby

Oh, everyone needs a veteran,  
so we can feel on Veterans Day that stolen mix  
of pride and pain the date demands: without it,  
it would be like Easter for atheists, a holiday in search  
of a celebrant. I have my veteran, he's Dave, and every  
Veterans and Memorial Day, I drag him out of the closet  
and don him like a suit of dress blues. He deserved better,  
that crusty hero, natty uncle, stubborn wraith, though  
he would have dismissed as self-indulgent and puerile  
all these poems, taken umbrage at the downright treason  
of this one. I say this now then: I'm sorry. Some people  
thought he was using me, that old fractious man: I was using him.  
He and his searchlight battalion casting light on my puny  
battlefield as I fought my father's death. Spanning a gulf  
I couldn't ford with his nice, narrow, precise, wooden  
bridge. So then I stop to look up some detail about bridges  
in those wars—not one but two Dave was in—and I see,  
by Getty Images, I've got it all mixed up: were they searchlights  
or skylights, and were those two different things? And

was it World War II not Korea where all that happened? Oh,  
he'd be livid at my ignorance and I could keep  
trawling the internet or ask my smarter siblings but  
suddenly I'm too appalled to continue. Had I really  
tried to aggrandize, dramatize, amortize my tiny, vain,  
cosseted life with this? Flame-thrower remains,  
stumbling bloodied children, soldier  
holding soldier crying no

P.H. Crosby, Gill MA, has been published in *Changing Men, The Other Side, War, Literature & the Arts* (WLA), *Sparks of Calliope, Friends Journal, Blue Unicorn, The Montague Reporter* and other venues. Crosby's readers theater adaptations of "The Odd Women" and "Bartleby the Scrivener" appeared at the Lava Center in Greenfield, MA, in 2022-23.