

When My Father Returned From War by *Katherine Almy* (artwalks.blogspot.com)

It's been a long year for artist Annie Reid. She's spent the past twelve months as an artist in residence at the Westhaven Center for the Arts working on a project she called, *When My Father Returned From War*. Annie had a difficult childhood, growing up with a father who was significantly damaged by his experience at war. In the way of children, she didn't think much about it at the time. That was just how life was and she got on with it, and as an adult, she found ways to heal her own soul and live with the difficulties of her experience.

It wasn't until recently that she began to think about telling her story through her artwork. It was the combination of her own maturity and the external circumstances of our current war that made her decide to share her experience and allow others to share theirs, and thus she began her journey.

Last year, she initiated the project *When My Father Returned From War* with an open house on Veteran's Day, 2007. This month, she will conclude the year with an exhibition of the work completed during the year.

At the opening reception, and many times during her year at the WCA, people came in and talked with Annie, opening their hearts and talking about things that they felt no one else would understand. "This show is for those people," Annie says. "It is in honor of all those who have been touched by war." Arguably, that's all of us.

Focusing on war and the horrors of war for a year has not been easy, but it has been a rewarding and enriching experience for Annie. "I always thought it would be about other people," she says, and to a great extent it was, but it also turned out to be very much about her own pain. It was important to go through the process of recognizing her own pain, because if not for that, she could not have contemplated the pain of others. "That made it more real to me, how sad it is, universally," she explains.

By looking bravely at her own feelings and memories, she made a deeper connection with the experiences of others, and the experience of her father. In the text accompanying one drawing she writes, "If someone came to the door, he stood in the hall with his gun drawn. I don't know if he ever felt safe." It is bewildering to contemplate what it might be like to live life never feeling safe. And it is stunning to be confronted with the fact that this is what we do to people when we ask them to go to war. War trauma is something that millions of people experience, in myriad ways. It's not easy or pleasant to talk about it, but if it's not talked about, how will we remember why we don't want to go to war?

The exhibit includes ten drawings from Annie's childhood memories, and these are accompanied by text explaining the context of each. Her goal was to truthfully present her experiences from the innocent perspective of a child. It is the juxtaposition of this innocence with the ghastly stories they relate that make the show so powerful.

The exhibition will be up throughout November at Humboldt Carpet Showroom, 2nd and G Streets in Old Town Eureka. It was originally planned to be held at the Westhaven Center, but had to be moved at the last minute (and the artist expresses her thanks to owner Robert Duerksen for opening his space for the show). There will be an artist's reception during the First Saturday Arts Alive! on November 1st as well as a reception on Veteran's Day, November 11th. All are invited to come and share their own stories.