



GI Bill

By Elizabeth Indianos

**My Dad William was a WWII Veteran,
a Private First class who
had never been away from home.
They wanted to send him to officer school
but he didn't want to go...
and make a career out of it.**

**Soldiers made so little, that he took odd
jobs and washed GI's hair; and
cleaned and ironed their clothes;
and worked very hard to make extra,
close to \$3000.
A lot of money back then.**

**He was a radio guy;
a *Forward Observer*
who would run ahead of combat troops,
climb trees and tell squadrons behind him
the position of the enemy so
they could tack through the danger.**

**They said that a *Forward Observer*
had 16 seconds of living time.
He would get so close
he could hear Germans talking, and
when he got shot down from a tree
his captain ran away and left him to die.**

**His intestines were mangled,
hanging outside of his body;
his leg
almost
severed,
almost
off.**

**The injuries were serious.
He was more dead than alive.
The family was notified and
On his 21st birthday, he travelled to France
on a railroad car crowded with wounded;
broken boys all stacked up,
on platforms one above the other.**

**He was on the top,
and freezing.
His breath so cold it formed icicles.
When they sailed together to America
on a medical ship they prayed
they wouldn't get blown out of the water.**

**He was in the hospital for a year and
had the record for taking the most penicillin
for something they called
“ A million dollar wound ”
because it nearly kills you...
but also gets you home.**

**He almost lost that leg.
They barely saved it and
wearing his uniform he hitchhiked
across the United States,
begging rides on
crutches to get home to...**

**An argument in Congress about
a GI Bill that almost died and
didn't come to pass...deadlocked
because some questioned sending
battle-hardened veterans to colleges
and universities, a privilege reserved for the rich.**

**This GI BILL stalled in Congress,
citing veteran's "*diminished incentive to work*"
as a reason until a single senator from the south
rushed in to cast the tie-breaking vote
and President Roosevelt made it law.**

**Dad went to design school on the GI BILL
and got Veteran's compensation;
an eye for an eye, a leg for a leg
and \$40 a month for life
for 40% disability.**

**It stopped when he died.
Widows don't count.**

**Sometimes the check came in handy.
Yes, sometimes,
it was a real lifesaver.
Like when they had no money to pay
for new shingles on their first home,
a tiny house backed by a VA loan.**

**But not when they had to pay for me.
For that they cashed his Army Life Insurance.
They wanted to keep it
but they had no money.
He got back what he paid in to it.
\$300; just enough for the hospital and me.**

**GI Bill thought war was insane.
He couldn't talk about it.
He didn't like to go to VFW reunions.
He didn't want to talk about it.
Neither did my Uncle.
A war buddy wrote a book about it.
Dad was in it.
He didn't want to read it - and never did.**

He lost much of his hearing
from bombs and gunfire.
It wasn't considered an ailment then.
He was deaf most of the time.
I remember seeing his wounds; those
purple knots and gashes and heard
him cry out in his sleep until the day he died.

He had lots of medals.
Purple Hearts, Silver Star,
Sharp Shooter and stuff.
Sometimes, when looking for
clean clothes, we'd find his medals
all jumbled up in the sock drawer,
way in the back.
