



Murphy's Dream Vision or Warrior's Ring

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When I was nineteen years old, I was drafted in the United States Army and sent to Vietnam as a combat soldier. This painting was created out of that experience. A man I came to be friends with during the time I served with him in the 11th Cavalry Regiment in Vietnam was named Walter Murphy, my beloved blood brother. Those of you who will read this who have had experience similar to combat, will need no explanation of the depth of friendship two men can develop when life is stripped down to what really matters. When living is moment to moment. In my personal experiences since Vietnam, no amount of explanation, no words I have ever spoken, have ever gifted this understanding to anyone who has not been stripped down to its bare essentials of life-and-death.

One day in Vietnam, Murphy came to me and said that he had a dream vision. He told me that he was going to die soon and that I would be wounded but I would live if I remembered to defend my life from someone who would say trust me I am doing this for your own good. That afternoon Murphy predicted the rest of my life, and very accurately I must say. I asked him why he was doing this and he told me so that I would remember the promise I was about to make him. Murphy gave me the engagement ring that he was wearing. Then he asked me to give it to his girlfriend when I met her. He also had a message for me and one he wanted me to give his mother. I did not want the ring or the message it contained. I did not want to hear his predictions of his death. I did not understand the predictions; they were too confusing. Then he began predicting what would happen over the next few minutes, event by event, with amazing accuracy. Amazed and confused I took the ring and made the promise he wanted. Murphy said I would be the only person who could deliver it. That I would have a special way of communicating that would enable me to deliver it.

Well I spent twenty years trying to deliver that ring and message with no success. Then I incorporated the entire story into a large painting. A painting of Murphy,

Sam, and myself, we are surrounded by a golden ring, a plain unadorned golden ring. Inside the ring my friends and I are in Vietnam, outside the ring is a gaily-painted impressionistic landscape. The golden ring permanently separates the two different realities. My hand, in an offering gesture, is the only thing that extends from the Vietnam scene into the pleasant colors. In my hand is painted a small blood red ring. To render our three likenesses accurately I used photographs that Murphy had insisted we take, write our full names on, and sent home to our parents, one day when we were in Black-Horse base Camp, Vietnam. After all being an artist is the only special way of communicating I have and Murphy said that was how I would deliver his message.

Ever since I returned from Vietnam, people that knew me have said I changed. I look the same to me. Yes I do have a few scars but not enough for them to be saying they would never recognize me?. Also, when I was a small boy my parents took me to retrieve my brother as soon as the Army said they would give him back to us. Along the way I fell asleep in the dark in the car we drove from day into dark, my father did not want to stop for anything other than gas. When my parents woke me up we had arrived at an Army fort. They carried me into a big wooden room. A lot of other civilians were there: mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, lovers, children, and anyone else who wanted their man back from the government. I learned that day that the Army does not take women away from their families, only men. All these people were standing around in silence. This big empty room did not have a single chair in it. Not even for the grandparents was there a single chair to rest in. A rope divided the room in half. Our side of the room was crowded, but the other half was empty. Then Army-men began to come into the other half of the room. The grown-ups on my half of the room thought they were scary and pressed back against the farthest wall from the soldiers. My mother held on to me. I was being squashed in the crowd, but through a little hole between all the grown-ups legs I could see my big brother. I broke loose from my mom's hand and ran as fast as I could between the forest of legs in my way. I leaped into the crowd of warriors and my oldest brother, Sonny, caught me. First he threw me high into the air, caught me again when I came down; with hands of steel, with a velvet touch. Then he enfolded me with huge

arms bands of steel and bunny fur. I was in my big brother's joyous embrace. The next thing I knew my mother was trying to pull me away from that evil man. The soldiers had backed away from us. My brother, Sonny, my mother, and I occupied the empty center of a crowded room. I did not understand the drama; I did not understand why my mother thought her oldest son was in the grip of a mean man. So I asked? Then my mother realized that her youngest son was in her oldest son's arms. Then she screamed his name as she jumped into his arms. Suddenly all the crowd of civilians rushed towards the soldiers and enveloped them with tears, laughter, hugs, and kisses. They had not recognized their own sons returned only this moment from the Korean War. Paratroopers with the faces of American Indians embroidered in a black star sewn to the shoulders of their coarse, itchy, wool uniforms with bunny fur on the hood of their jackets. The faces of boys had become the faces of warriors or, depending on your point of view, the faces of killers.

Because of this experience I chose to paint Murphy, Sam, and myself. I knew that each of us had sent photographs home to our families. I thought Murphy's family might not recognize the version of him, that I would paint someone they never met. He never did come home, but they might recognize the three of us together. Murphy's message to his mom was: "I know I'm going to die here. I am doing the right thing. Everything is alright." He wanted me to say this exactly the way he told it to me. Every day for the rest of his life he would quiz me to see if I could repeat it verbatim. Murphy's message to the girl he loved: "I love you very much. I know I'm never coming home to you. Live a happy life."

Murphy's message for me: Is mine

