



## Beautiful Wreckage

BY W.D. EHRHART

What if I didn't shoot the old lady  
running away from our patrol,  
or the old man in the back of the head,  
or the boy in the marketplace?

Or what if the boy—but he didn't  
have a grenade, and the woman in Hue  
didn't lie in the rain in a mortar pit  
with seven Marines just for food,

Gaffney didn't get hit in the knee,  
Ames didn't die in the river, Ski  
didn't die in a medevac chopper  
between Con Thien and Da Nang.

In Vietnamese, Con Thien means  
*place of angels*. What if it really was  
instead of the place of rotting sandbags,  
incoming heavy artillery, rats and mud.

What if the angels were Ames and Ski,  
or the lady, the man, and the boy,  
and they lifted Gaffney out of the mud  
and healed his shattered knee?

What if none of it happened the way I said?  
Would it all be a lie?  
Would the wreckage be suddenly beautiful?  
Would the dead rise up and walk?

Source: *Beautiful Wreckage: New & Selected Poems* (1999)

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