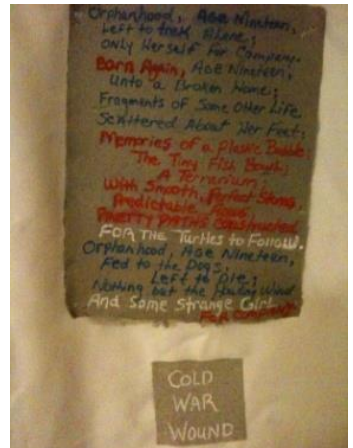
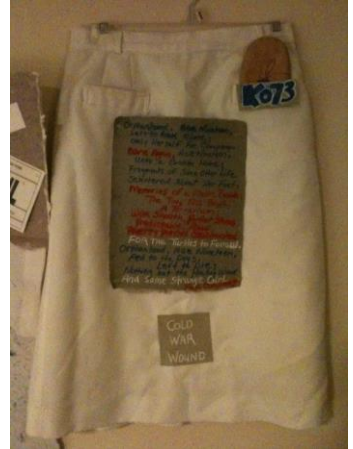


Cold War June



Robin Brooks (U.S. Navy Reserve)



Mixed Media, including pulped fiber from uniforms (2012/2013), Courtesy Robin Brooks

Cold War June

—Robin Brooks

Broken, shattered,
All that ever mattered;
Splintered, Fractured,
Mortally Wounded
In a Cold War June;
Literally torn apart, 1985
Preparing to embark
On a journey of independence;
Eternal reverberations
Of a single gunshot;
Resounding, resonating,
Vibrating through flesh and bone;
Piercing a vulnerable child's passionate heart;
Obliterating yesterday;
Taking with it, tomorrow;
Erasing a brother, annihilating a mother,
Echoing into forever;
So many lost souls
Suddenly adrift;
Now a dead girl walking
Into a sea of white uniforms;
Carrying a burning torch to the costume ball;
Illuminating the faces
Of a new family of surrogates;

Shining light upon painful cracks
In the once solid foundation;
Devoid of inspiration,
Hollow, empty;
Hanging by a gossamer thread,
Yet cloaked in standard, government-issue;
Honorable, protective garments;
Surrounded by generations,
Both past and present;
Rendering a private salute,
Pleading in a silent prayer
One fine Navy day
In June;
Levitating, rising, reincarnating,
A ghostly apparition appearing;
A former self;
A girl who once was;
A shadow, a specter hovering;
An unrecognizable daughter;
Alone;
Without a beloved father

Orphanhood

—Robin Brooks

Orphanhood, age nineteen,
Left to trek alone;
With only herself for company;
Born again, age nineteen,
Unto a broken home;
Fragments of some other life
Scattered about her feet;
Memories of a plastic bubble,
The tiny fish bowl,
A terrarium;
With smooth, perfect stones,
Predictable rows,
Pretty paths constructed
For the turtles to follow;
Orphanhood, age nineteen,
Fed to the dogs;
Left to die;
Nothing
But the howling wind;
And some strange girl
For company.

Description:

Cold War June, in its entirety, describes a sudden and complete metamorphosis in my young adulthood, during the 1980s, which combined two distinct, monumental, yet simultaneous events: Indoctrination into the U.S. Navy (a coming-of-age scenario) and the tragic death of my brilliant, beloved father (who was my foundational parent, life mentor, and hero on every conceivable level). My father died in the month of June, just days after my esteemed graduation from boot camp in Orlando, Florida, literally during the first three days of acclimation to "A School" in Meriden, Mississippi. In other words, my military journey began with horrific loss—not loss induced by war or hand-to-hand combat on the battlefield, but a familial loss that left an unimaginable, permanent wound that I've never gotten over. As the years have passed, I have learned to carry this burden of youth with some amount of wisdom and grace.

At the tender age of nineteen, my entire existence was forever altered; my life, future plans and enthusiastic outlook, essentially "turned on a dime," as the old saying goes. The gut-wrenching emotional and tangible, physical pain; confusion; and newfound embodiment of total abandonment that colored the beginning of my young Navy career are further described in an original poem from 1985 (the year of my father's death) entitled "Orphanhood."

The poem, written while I lived in the enlisted barracks at Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, Maryland, encapsulates the evolution of a latent teenager/young adult to instant adult, overnight, without warning, with suddenly insufficient preparation for adulthood and all of the necessary requirements,

responsibilities, and hardships associated with total independence, the journey toward self-sufficiency at a young age without parents at the helm. I say, "without parents" in plural, as loving homage to my mother who was so deeply devastated by my father's unexpected death (she had lost her first husband in a terrible car accident right after he came home from Germany in World War II) that she was largely unavailable to me as a resource or mother-guide. She was absent, extremely forlorn, "missing-in-action." My brother, three years my senior, was also reeling from shock and disoriented. Therefore, I felt very much alone in my emotional space and processing, like a ship without a rudder aloft in a storm, particularly while attempting to fully embrace and embark on what should have been the beginning of a wonderful adventure, yet was so fraught with despair.

The artwork is a tribute to the girl I once was and the woman I became, largely due to my "surrogate family," the men and women of the U.S. Navy, closing ranks around me at a time when I needed a metaphorical anchor. I chose to imbue my traditional "Navy Whites" into Combat Paper pulp because it was my actual uniform worn at the time and because it represents an apparitional quality (something molting, perhaps angelic, ghostly, or other-worldly) surrounded by a cosmic form of protection; legions of soldiers, sailors, and "wingmen," walking me through the most difficult transition of my life. The uniform represents an authentic patriot, yet the parallel sense of being cloaked in a costume, completely disembodied, disconnected, and disassociated through grief. The ballet slipper, in the pocket of my uniform skirt, is a major part of that "lost girl."