

## Lesson

It was 1963 or 4, summer,  
and my father was driving our family  
from Ft. Hood to North Carolina in our 56 Buick.  
We'd been hearing about Klan attacks, and we knew

Mississippi to be more dangerous than usual.  
Dark lay hanging from the trees the way moss did,  
and when it moaned light against the windows  
that night, my father pulled off the road to sleep.

## Noises

that usually woke me from rest afraid of monsters  
kept my father awake that night, too,  
and I lay in the quiet noticing him listen, learning  
that he might not be able always to protect us

from everything and the creatures besides;  
perhaps not even from the fury suddenly loud  
through my body about his trip from Texas  
to settle us home before he would go away

to a place no place in the world  
he named Viet Nam. A boy needs a father  
with him, I kept thinking, fixed against noise  
from the dark.

—Forrest Hamer

The Other Fathers  
would be coming back  
from some war, sending  
back stuffed birds or  
handkerchiefs in navy  
blue with *Love* painted  
on it. Some sent telegrams  
for birthdays, the pastel  
letters like jewels. The  
magazines were full of fathers who  
were doing what had  
to be done, were serving,  
were brave. Someone  
yelped there'd be confetti  
in the streets, maybe  
no school. That soon  
we'd have bananas. My  
father sat in the grey  
chair, war after war,  
hardly said a word. I  
wished he had gone  
away with the others  
so maybe he would  
be coming back to us

--Lyn Lifshin