

## Her Own Vietnam

**Lynn Kanter**

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*A woman's story of wartime PTSD gathers complex characters to shed light on a little-discussed point of view.*

*Her Own Vietnam*, by Lynn Kanter, is the story of Della Brown, who served as an army nurse in Vietnam but only begins to address her trauma decades later, when an old friend who shared that experience contacts her out of the blue. Kanter portrays Della's painful chronicle with sensitivity and surrounds her with a family that is imperfect but, for the most part, making an effort. The resulting novel is insightful in telling of the little-known struggles of women "in that green and poisoned country."

Della, now an oncology nurse, is divorced, and her daughter, a recent college graduate, is so distant as to feel inaccessible. Della thought she could leave Vietnam behind, but when she gets a letter from a fellow army nurse and once best friend, Charlene, it all comes tumbling back: the recurring nightmare, the insomnia, and finally a frightening flashback that threatens her present life. Unlike in the years just after the war, Della is sober, unable to hide inside a bottle. She's been rejected from support groups for veterans with PTSD and for female victims of violent crimes. The new struggle is to talk about what she experienced—things her family is reluctant to hear—and maybe, if she can stand it, to see Charlene again.

Della's inner struggles feel intimate, compelling, and all too real. The characters that surround her are equally engaging and fully formed: complex, well-meaning women laboring not only with the best way to comfort but with their own obstacles too. This novel, which reads like a memoir, is thoughtful and introspective, but still employs suspense as Della moves forward in time but not necessarily in terms of her own healing.

*Her Own Vietnam* is well written, compassionate, and perceptively told, addressing the trauma felt by the "invisible" women in Vietnam. While not political in nature, it may serve as a tool for asking difficult and important questions in that regard. The final trauma that closes this discerning novel might just bring things into perspective and finally allow Della to make peace with herself.

JULIA JENKINS (Spring 2015)

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