



## Her Own Vietnam

*Lynn Kanter*

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## **Her Own Vietnam** Lynn Kanter

For thirty years, Della Brown has tried to forget her service as a U.S. Army nurse treating horrific battlefield injuries in Vietnam. But now an unexpected message arrives that propels her into harrowing memories of the past. She must also confront the fissures in her family life, the mystery of her father's disappearance, the things mothers and daughters cannot—maybe should not—know about one another, and the lifelong repercussions of a single mistake. An unflinching depiction of war and its personal costs, *Her Own Vietnam* is also a portrait of a woman in midlife—a mother, a nurse, and long ago a soldier.

## **Her Own Vietnam Details**

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Author : Lynn Kanter

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## From Reader Review Her Own Vietnam for online ebook

### Stacy Natal says

This novella brings to the forefront the impact that the war in Vietnam had on the women/nurses that served there. They had unique challenges on the way there, during their stay there, and on their return. Examples include side effects such as miscarriages due to the chemicals that they were exposed to, not being included in in vfw clubs etc.. because they didn't "see" combat even though they were the ones seeing the suffering first hand, and having to fight off the unwanted attention of males in a female sparse environment, etc... It was a very fast, interesting read. I did feel that the ending tied up too quickly and neatly, but believed that the story captured the setting past and present.

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### Tory says

Incredible! Well-written, with well developed characters and an engrossing story that kept me turning the pages. It gave me some insights into the Viet Nam war, and its long-term effects, that most of us can't even imagine --- particularly the effect on women who served and returned home to family, friends, and a community who could not even begin to comprehend what they had experienced.

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### Connie says

I won this book for our bookclub in a book giveaway on bookmovement.com. The author was gracious enough to sign each of the 10 copies we received as well as adding a personalized note card to our group. I found this book fascinating as I have never read a book from a veteran nurse's point of view. This book told the story of a nurse who was sent to Vietnam under false pretenses. Well, at least it seemed the recruiters were not completely honest with her about what she would encounter there. It was a bit difficult to follow all the different characters, but the more I got into the book, the more fascinated I became. The present day plots were hard to follow and could have used some more depth, but overall I enjoyed this story.

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### Melanie Page says

Lynn talks about how she became a writer at the blog PhD in Creative Writing at her first virtual book tour stop.

Next, over at Book Puke, Lynn discusses how she became a political activist at age 16, during the Vietnam War era.

The following day you can read an excerpt of *Her Own Vietnam* and the insights of the author at Guiltless Reading.

Several women weigh in what they would advise to their 22-year-old selves about forgiveness at The Next Best Book Club blog.

Lynn answers questions about the content of her novel over at [PANK].

## HB says

Why have so many nurses who served in Vietnam chosen to remain silent about their service, burying their traumas deep in their psyches? In her powerful book, *Her Own Vietnam*, Lynn Kanter shines a penetrating light on this question.

Kanter tells the story through the character Della, an Army nurse. The story alternates between flashbacks of her "in country" tour on the one hand, and her long transition back into "real life" on the other. In the Vietnam scenes we experience the nurses' emotional exhaustion. The shifts they work are relentless. The wounds they see are horrific. The disillusionment they feel is profound. ("She had believed in them, the men in suits who stood before the flag and spoke with such assurance...")

Back home we see a different angst as Della struggles to talk about the war with her family. They don't understand her, and she doesn't understand herself. She feels she is breaking down and seeks help, only to be discounted and demeaned. "Della, you can't have PTSD. You didn't see any combat."

I loved this book for its honesty and candor. It is an important book about the lasting implications of war. It packs a wallop.

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## Susanna Sturgis says

As a Goodreads newbie, I've given some thought to those star ratings. Three stars and four stars mean very good, well worth reading, met my expectations. Five stars? Five stars means "Drop what you're doing and read it. This book blew me out of the water."

*Her Own Vietnam* gets five stars.

Della Brown, an oncology nurse whose grown daughter has recently left home, receives out of the blue a letter from her past, a past that she's tried with mixed success to keep buried. More than 30 years earlier, she served a year as a U.S. Army nurse in Vietnam. The letter is from Charlene, sister nurse and close friend. Charlene asks if they can meet.

The letter sends Della into a journey into her own underworld, a past that includes not only her grueling wartime service but the father who deserted her family when she was a kid and hasn't been heard from since. Lynn Kanter evokes the world of the combat nurse with an insight and an attention to detail that makes me think she must have been there, though I don't think she was. She's equally adept with Della's family: her mother, Ruth, a determined activist; younger sister Rosalind, now a successful corporate lawyer; Anne, Rosalind's partner, a lapsed lawyer who works as a florist; Della's ex, Ben, with whom she's on friendly terms; and Abby, their recently fledged daughter.

Each member of the cast is vividly drawn, none is a type or stereotype, yet as an ensemble they convey the complex, bitter legacy of the Vietnam War and even offer hope that we might as a people come to terms with it if we can muster the courage to look ourselves in the eye.

*Her Own Vietnam* is a tour de force. It's also a book that will grab your heart, mind, and soul if you let it. Be

warned.

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### **Maureen O'Leary says**

This beautifully written novel is a long conversation with a Vietnam War veteran belatedly coming to terms with her own trauma and the way that trauma has affected her relationships and the course of her life. I can't think of a more relevant novel for this moment in our history. Her Own Vietnam is contemplative and graphic. It is a fascinating meditation on war and its aftermath, especially for American service people who return to family and friends who could not begin to understand what the veteran has experienced, or even the real meaning of war. The main character Della was a young nurse in Vietnam, compelled by economic circumstances to enlist. Triggered by a letter from a former friend, Della faces the full effects of her trauma for the first time in her life. I highly recommend this novel, especially for book clubs interested in the lives of women. I look forward to reading Ms. Kanter's future work.

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### **Cynthia says**

I received this book from the Goodreads giveaway program, in the mail just 4 days ago... I took it out of the package, looked it over & thought it looked good. I had been right in the middle of a very good mystery, a series by a favorite author.....but I didn't pick that book up again until I'd finished Lynn Kanter's "Her Own Vietnam"! It was that good! I imagine she's done a very good job of an accurate portrayal of a nurse's experiences in, & after Vietnam. I think I might even offer a 4.5 in rating!

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### **Susan Storer says**

Lynn Kanter's book tells the compelling story of an Army nurse and the after-effects of war. For Della Brown, those after-effects include Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. PTSD went unacknowledged even in the soldiers for many years, and it was years after that before it was recognized in the nurses who served in Vietnam.

The book goes back and forth between 1969 and 2003, when a letter from her best Vietnam friend triggers a new series of nightmares. Della has had many sleepless nights over the years: "three years into a new century and Della was still fighting an ancient war."

Kanter tells an absorbing story, and tells it with compassion and humanity.

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### **Hyperfocused says**

REVELATORY

I'm writing this review in the early morning of a day that will end with the clocks changing, giving us an extra hour of sleep. It's a good thing, because I've been up reading since Her Own Vietnam popped up on my Kindle at midnight on its release day. I could not put it down.

The story of Della Brown, a former trauma nurse in the Vietnam war, who had in many ways never stopped

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feeling "In Country" despite coming home and building a life, it is a compelling read. I will not lie and tell you it is a comfortable one. Reading about the war, you will learn more about the true cost of war as it affects the young men and women who are in the non-stop, unending, stinking, screaming thick of it, and how the politicians and profiteers handed off the bills. It is visceral writing, both literally, and figuratively. But you'll also find compassion, grace, small kindnesses, and moments of life affirming passion wrenched from the horror.

The Vietnam story is interspersed with the story of Della and her family in her youth, and in the novel's present day, as President Bush was sending soldiers into Iraq for what seemed like equally dubious reasoning. It is framed by the unexpected arrival of a letter from Charlene Johnson, an OR nurse in the same unit as Della, and the renewed feelings of terror the newfound reminder gives her.

Character wise, Her Own Vietnam has a bit of everything. A bright, interesting nuanced protagonist, her younger sister Rosalind and Rosalind's wife, Anne, and the empty space left by the father who disappeared when Della was 11. Their righteously activist mother Ruth, and daughter Abby, finding her own way into adulthood.

Go, read, enjoy. And while you're at it, know that you're supporting the work of Shade Mountain Press, an important new publisher of literary fiction by women.

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### **Jan says**

Lynn Kanter's novel Her Own Vietnam draws you in instantly and is compelling through to the very last sentence. The characters are fascinating and very real. Della Brown, the main character, is a nurse in Vietnam who takes the reader through her experiences there and back home post-war while also showing the war's impact on her family and her relationships with them. The book illuminates the role of women in this war in a way I'd never seen before. It does not stop there, though, as Ms. Kanter also creates a window for the reader into Della's family life apart from the war, affected in part by her father's disappearance. I highly recommend reading this thought-provoking and emotionally satisfying novel. You will not be disappointed.

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### **Carol Douglas says**

The Vietnam War shattered army nurses as well as soldiers. This is the moving story of a nurse who didn't know what she was going to face. Almost from the moment she landed, the sight of severely wounded and dying soldiers bombarded her. And she had to help them. Blood soaked her shoes, and when she was issued boots, covered her boots. Daily.

Many years later, Della still hasn't found anyone to listen to what happened to her. A letter from a nurse who served in Vietnam with her triggers a flashback.

Della struggles to finally tell her family about her experiences and to decide whether she wants to see her old friend and possibly relive terrible moments.

Most of the characters are women. The book shows how they support and fail to support each other.

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## Marybeth says

Lynn is a friend from way back in our FW3 (Feminist Women's Writing Workshop) days where we spent a glorious summer week filled with writing and camaraderie on Seneca Lake in Ithaca, NY. I've loved all Lynn's books, but this one is especially poignant and sheds much-needed light on the experiences of women nurses during the Vietnam War, exploring issues of racism, sexism in the military, and PTSD through characters Della and Charlene. Lynn tells their story with honesty, passion and humor, and the sub-plot concerning the whereabouts of Della's father, who disappeared when she was a child, was as tension-filled and fascinating as the main plot of Della learning to come to grips with her war experience. Highly recommended!

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## Julie Christine says

In the winter of 2003, as the United States guns its invasion engines toward Iraq, Della Brown receives a letter from an old friend. Flooded by memories she has been trying to bury since 1969, Della falls into a wellpit of anxiety and anger.

Weaving together the recent past with an era that is now fading into Polaroid souvenir, Lynn Kanter tells a different kind of Vietnam story. She brings the reader into the world of the women healers: Army nurses who repaired soldiers only to see them returned to the front lines. Or, far too often, stood beside those young men as they exhaled a final time.

It is hard to believe that this is not fiction based on personal experience—although a Baby Boomer whose youth was shaped by the Vietnam era, Kanter is too young to have served. Yet the author wholly inhabits the space of Della's soul. Whether as a young nurse on active duty or a middle-age daughter, mother and nurse struggling with her past, Della Brown is a startlingly complete and empathetic character.

Della was twenty-one when she enlisted, driven far less by patriotism than by practical need: a stint in the Army would pay for nursing school. She never imagined she would be sent to the front lines. She lands bewildered in Cu Chi—outside Saigon—in 1969 and within a day is surrounded by the horror of combat: the broken, burned, maimed, wrecked bodies of young men sacrificed for political gain. Graphic descriptions of the triage, intensive care and OR units reveal the care Kanter took in her years of research as she connected with groups of women Vietnam vets, including Army nurses.

By the time we meet up with Della in 2003, she is a recovering alcoholic. The author wisely chooses not to focus on Della's descent into addiction, offering instead a portrait of a woman sorting through all that has passed since '69-'70: her marriage dissolved; her daughter grown; her mother entering vulnerable old age; her addiction in recovery. But when a fellow nurse-veteran contacts her, all the wounds reopen. *Her Own Vietnam* explores that pain while offering healing and redemption.

There is beauty and grace in the female relationships depicted here. Kanter show the bonds between women that are both complex and deeply satisfying, whether those woman are partners, sisters, mothers/daughters, friends or fellow soldiers. Men are present everywhere, of course--this is a novel about war, after all--but their behavior, vulnerabilities and strengths are filtered through the perspective of women who are not dependent upon them for an identity.

*Her Own Vietnam* is a novel of such humanity and strength, beautifully written, engaging from page one, offering insight into a world I've never seen before on the page. Highly recommended.

## **Kris says**

This was an easy read which made its point about women nurses in Vietnam (and all war zones) but the plot played out much too quickly and the dialogue sounded scripted.

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