

April 1, 2019

Queer

## United We Stand



By Gary Jones

Recently while asked to perform for our military in the San Antonio, Texas area, I was invited to attend the graduation ceremony at Lackland Air Force Base. All Air Force enlistees attend basic training there, which lasts eight weeks. Lackland AFB graduates 40,000 young men and woman from all walks of life each year. There were 530 in this graduation class.

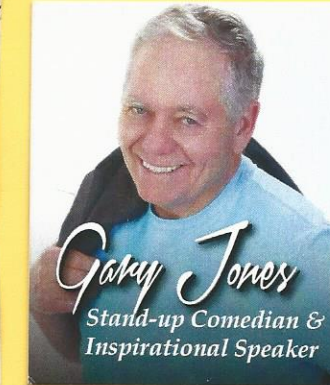
As might be expected the ceremony was dripping with "pomp and ceremony." Marching military bands, American flags flying everywhere and eloquent speeches from high ranking military officers. Members of the class who excelled academically, physically and who had excellent leadership qualities were given honorable mention. Those were the ones who finished in the upper 3% of the class. 52 years ago I too was proudly placed in that category.

It pleased me to see thousands of relatives and friends in the bleachers who witnessed this life changing event. An event that would make any parent proud. Standing tall and to my left on this very cold Texas winter morning was Air Force Lt. Colonel Paul Jones...my son. In my wildest imagination from decades ago I would have never guessed this moment in time. A moment both of us will remember forever.

When I looked at the sea of blue uniforms I was delighted to see so many making a very positive move in their life's. Most like myself from years ago, were fresh out of high school. Granted, a military life is not for everyone, but it offers a great deal. For me, it was an opportunity for a better life and a way to finance a higher education that would have never happened had I not enlisted. It was a decision I never regretted.

Let's turn the clock back 50 years. America as we know it in 2019 was a far different place then, as were the people. For one thing weekly mass shootings were unheard off. The United States was void of any real drug problem and terrorism on US soil was unthinkable. No Facebook, iPhones or internet which meant we actually had conversations with one another.

As I enjoyed this ceremony I could not help but reflect back decades when I completed Basic training here. Compared to what I wit-



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nessed today there was no comparison. No "pomp and ceremony"...not even close. Our drill Sargent marched us to our barracks, gave us our equipment, told us that most if not all would be going to Viet Nam, followed by a very sober, "good luck."

There is no question from a technological stand point we have advanced significantly since the 60's. Man has sent satellites into outer space as it sends us photos of the unknown. Designed and developed GPS navigational equipment that makes both ground and air navigating a breeze. Thanks to the strides in medical research, many diseases from years ago are a thing of the past. Astounding enough, some people with no legs can now run as fast or faster than those with legs...who knew?

As Americans we can be proud of our progress. That being said, we have sadly fallen short in a number of critical areas. Fair to say we all have our opinions on where we are delinquent. If the young men and woman I witnessed today can't one day turn this train wreck around, let's at least be kind to one another.