

## **GOLD STAR DAUGHTER**

*By Tom Jones,  
Past President, 25<sup>th</sup> Inf Div Assn*

On Friday, April 8, 2016 I drove to Columbus, Georgia to attend the world premiere of a play at the Springer Opera House. I found this theater, originally constructed in the 1800s, to be a renovated jewel in the heart of the city's downtown area. The name of the play was "Mother of Rain", titled and based on a novel written by Karen Spears Zacharias, a longtime friend of mine. People watcher that I am, I spent several enjoyable hours watching Karen, her wonderfully supportive family, and an incredibly talented group of actors and musicians interact to share a well-crafted production.

Karen Spears was an Army brat who last saw her father, Staff Sgt. David Spears, in Hawaii before he deployed to Vietnam in early 1966 as part of the Third Brigade Task Force, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Sgt. Spears was a member of a gun crew with a 105 mm Howitzer section of Battery B, Second Battalion, Ninth Artillery (Mighty Ninth). He was Killed In Action on July 24, 1966.

Karen's family roots were in the mountains of Tennessee and she has spent a lot of time researching them and their culture. Her widowed mother took the family back there from Hawaii to live. After a while Mrs. Spears recognized the need for quality healthcare for her children and moved the family to Columbus, Georgia in order to be closer to the medical facilities at Fort Benning. As Karen developed into a talented writer these locations set the background for the wonderful stories that Karen began to tell.

"Mother of Rain" is the tragic story of Maizee Hurd who, after the torment of losing her parents at age 10, is raised with love by a childless couple. She marries the love of her life, a man named Zeb, and they have a son named Rain. Seemingly surrounded by the various spirits and voices of the hills Maizie's life unfurls amid a series of tragedies and World War II, which takes her husband Zeb off to war. She is befriended by Burdy Hurd, a woman of the mountains with striking features and mysterious ways who is also the town "healer".

Karen and I first met in Washington DC on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry division Association held a mini-reunion for the event and Karen and I were seated at the same table at the banquet that night. She sat next to me and I noticed the photograph she had on a lanyard around her neck. The photo was of an Army Sgt. surrounded by Montagnard children in front of a 105 mm howitzer. Mountagnard's were indigenous natives of Vietnam and Karen perked up when I mentioned that name to her and inquired if I had served in the Central Highlands. When I responded that I had, it initiated a long conversation in which I learned that she was looking for anyone that could fill her in on her father's service. The rest is history as this young woman, who was a newspaper reporter at the time, searched out her family background.

Over the ensuing years I have had the pleasure of meeting Karen, her husband Tim Zacharias and other members of her family at The Wall in DC. Her pleasant attitude and spirit have allowed her to make friends wherever she goes and she became involved in the movement to build the Women's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I have been proud to witness her giving readings at that Memorial on Veteran's Day and Karen now sits on the Board of Directors of that nonprofit foundation.

**Previous Books by Karen Spears Zacharias:**

After the Flag Has Been Folded (Originally titled and published as "Hero Mama")

Benched: The Memoirs of Judge Rufe McCombs

Where's Your Jesus Now?

Will Jesus Buy Me a Double-Wide?

A Silence of Mockingbirds: The Memoir of a Murder