America

Sandra Temple has written poetry, prose and plays for more than 20 years. She was inspired to pen "America" after hearing on the news that more soldiers had lost their lives after the end of the major military offensive in Iraq than during it.

Temple is a seventh-grade social studies teacher at Carver Middle School. She is a member of West Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, where she sings in the choir and serves in several other capacities.

Temple

Oh Beautiful for spacious skies // can you hear your sons and daughters cry? For amber waves of grain // Their voices ring out loud and clear echoing despair and pain // For purple mountain's majesty // They're fighting for some who may not even want to be free // above thy fruited plains we send them over there and they are back and buried — before we've processed their names // America, America, God shed his grace on thee // So why can you continually send loved ones abroad to fight and die — making His favor a mockery? // And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea // how long for others and not our native brothers will we continue to fight for liberty? America, America, God shed His Grace on thee // And on faith in That grace does a mother in New York, Mississippi, Nebraska pray: God, bring him or her home to me // and crown thy good with brotherhood // so that sons and daughters lay parents to rest as they should // from sea to shining sea // let them come home, not after the flag is lifted from the coffin, folded and placed on a mother's knees // but while it still flies above so proudly.

— Sandra Temple

SUBMITTED PHOTO

OPERATION WE CARE

Members of a youth group from Central United Methodist Church in Meridian help get boxes ready to send to military personnel serving in Iraq as part of Operation We Care. The group worked on the project in late 2004. Pictured are, in front, Charlotte Williams. In the second row, from left, are Maloree Watson, Jessie Fortson, Taylor Shock, Callie Jo Surles and Bonnie Bennett. In the third row are Addison Shock and Hannah Christopher.

Dear soldier ...

This letter was submitted by Jade Anderson, 13, a seventh-grader at Magnolia Middle School.

Hi, my name is Jade Anderson. How are you doing? Great, I hope.

Anderson

I want to thank you for being brave and helping protect our country.

When you really think about it, there are not many people in the world who would risk their lives for the safety of other people.

When I first heard about the war, I was scared. I also felt selfish because I did not want my family getting hurt. I thought the war was stupid and useless. Now that I'm older, I have a better understanding about the war and I realize that you all are fighting for the freedom and safety of our country and the people of Iraq.

Well, I want to wish you and all of the soldiers the best. Don't forget you will always have people like me praying for you every step of the way. God bless you!

Jade Anderson

Lessons from history: Avoid making the same mistakes

Stacey M. Carr works at T.J. Harris Elementary School and is a full-time graduate student at the University of West Alabama. She is working toward a degree in secondary history.

She is a member of Oak Grove Baptist Church in the Bonita Community, where she is a member of the sanctuary choir and the youth committee, and teaches Team Kids on Sunday nights. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, especially her new nephew, Carson Blaine.

By Stacey Carr
special to The Star

Saying that I have a bachelor's degree in history makes a lot of people look at me wide-eyed and utter the words, "I hated history in school."

But then when I tell them I'm working toward a master's degree in secondary history, (in other words, I want to teach high school history) I often get the 'Oh, I'm sorry' look, head shake or deep sigh.

I usually just smile and reply, "Much like being a preacher, you don't get into it for the money, you have to be called."

I loved history when I was in school and can remember first learning about the American Revolution and how hard we fought to gain our independence, or about traveling west and the deadly Oregon Trail (I loved playing the computer game).

I have been taking history classes since my first semester at college back in 1998, and it is there that I found my true love of history. It is from those wonderful professors that I learned about some of the most awful battles in history and most glorious victories.

How monsters rise to power

Many people say that history repeats itself and thus it isn't worth learning, but I don't believe this is true. History teaches you how not to make the same mistakes twice.

Take, for instance, Adolf Hitler.

From the very beginning, Hitler was planning a war that would engulf Europe and take the attention off his racist agenda and glorification of the "Aryan" race. Murdering millions of Jews could only be accomplished under the confusion of war. He had such convincing arguments and propaganda that it was not hard to see how the German people were so easily fooled.

The same can be said about Saddam Hussein.

In 1980, Hussein invaded Iran because it appeared that the Shiites could be a threat to his continued dictatorship, the Kurds (Iraqi minority) were sprayed with poison gas for participating with the Iranians in an attempted overthrow of his country. The war continued for eight years. This was neither the first account or the last of Hussein's deadly agenda.

He is a ruthless killer, who forced his hatred for certain religious groups onto the people of his country. He has killed millions, and terrorized even more.

With that being said, is it worthwhile for the United States to send military personnel overseas to help protect other nations? The answer is yes — of course it's worthwhile.

You can argue all you want that our troops should not be over there or, as John Kerry claimed, that it is the "wrong war at the wrong time."

What cannot be done is not to support our troops. Much like the disciples and apostles of the Bible, they freely gave up their life to follow Christ and, in doing such, had to endure such horrible persecution. Such is true of our wonderful military men and women who have stood up and said, "Send me. I will go."

Support our troops

Earlier I talked about how people cannot believe that I want to teach high school kids history ... That is not what I want to hear.

I want to be encouraged. I want to be told good luck. I want to be told that the years I have attended college, written papers and read books have not gone to waste.

The same should be said for our military men and women. They want to be encouraged. They want to be told good luck. They want to know that their years of hard work, training, blood, sweat and tears have not gone to waste.

No matter how you feel about the war, the president, or a certain political party, they want the same thing every person in America wants — to be supported 100 percent.

Make an active effort to support our troops.

Women, military service and the Biblical story of Deborah

Virginia Dawkins of Meridian is a freelance writer who authors a spirituality column for The Meridian Star's quarterly publication, Senior Life, and a semi-monthly column for Cross-Walk newspaper. Her work has also been published in the anthology, "A Cup of Comfort Devotional: Daily Reflections to Reaffirm Your Faith in God," published by Adams Media.

Dawkins and her husband, Tommy, have two sons and three grandchildren. The couple attends Church of the Way.

Here is her letter.

Dear brave military lady,

You have obediently stepped out of the comfort zone of free America to risk your life in service to your country. I am searching for words to describe what you are doing. Is "courageous" adequate? Or "daring," "heroic," "brave" ... ?

In the process of looking for adequate words, I went back to the story of Deborah in the Bible, Judges 4 and 5. What an unusual story!

A woman — in a time when society did not value women properly — led her people into battle against the enemy, and she led them to victory. Deborah loved her country and her people and, most of all, she loved her God. God valued this brave woman's life and guided her steps.

As I read, I began to see the real star of the story, not a flesh-and-blood Deborah — but God Almighty. Deborah had a remarkable relationship with God. He was the source of her strength, the strategist for her plan of attack, the secret of her success.

Dawkins

As she spent time listening to her Lord and depending upon him, he equipped her to march into battle to face the enemy. God can accomplish great things through men and women who stay tuned to His voice. He gives the victory.

In God's eyes, you are very much like Deborah. He loves you with the same kind of love. He values your life, and whether you are giving commands or carrying out orders, he wants to guide you and protect you and give you strength for each day.

If you invite him, he will be in the midst of battle with you. Without him, there is no victory.

Thank you for stepping out to make a difference. Thank you for leaving your loved ones behind in our land of freedom to go into an alien country to fight for freedom.

What a price you are paying! God will not forget you; we will not forget. We pledge to bring you before the throne of God in our prayers daily. God bless you.

Virginia Dawkins