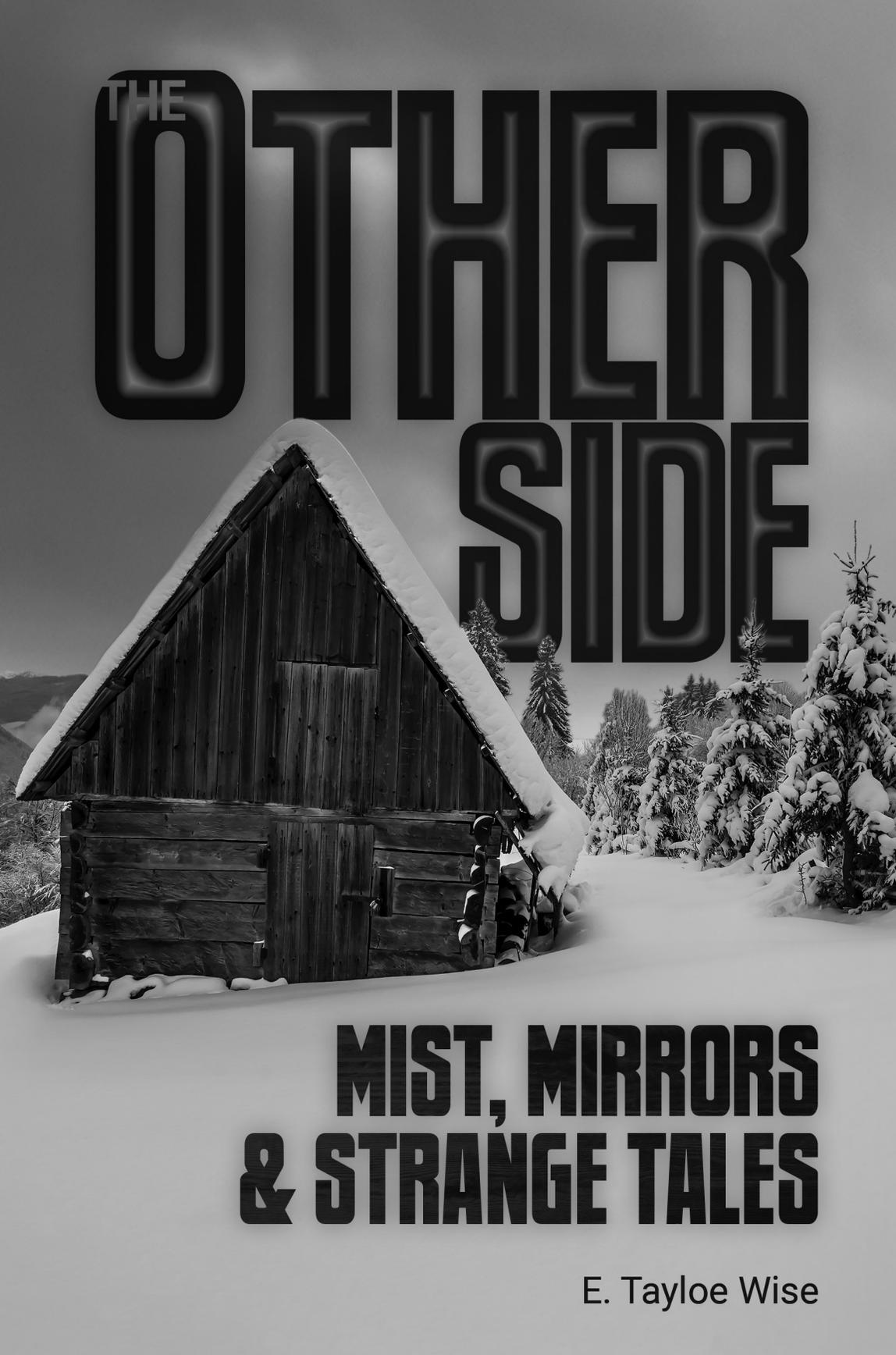


THE OTHER SIDE

A black and white photograph of a rustic wooden cabin with a steep, snow-covered roof, set in a snowy winter landscape with evergreen trees. The cabin is made of dark wood and has a small door. The roof is heavily laden with snow, and the surrounding trees are also covered in snow. The overall scene is quiet and atmospheric.

MIST, MIRRORS & STRANGE TALES

E. Tayloe Wise

The Other Side: Mist, Mirrors & Strange Tales

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This is a work of fiction, but some stories are loosely based on the author's personal experience. Names and characters have been changed, but some locations and events are historical and are identified in the footnotes.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	VII
<i>The Other World</i>	1
Believing	5
<i>Come, Pick The Flowers</i>	13
The Cabin, The Journey, And The Vision	15
<i>Footprints In The Sand</i>	67
The Church	69
<i>The Canyon</i>	87
Ghosts	91
<i>The Road</i>	123
The Kool-Aid Kid	125
<i>Heroes</i>	139
<i>Thoughts</i>	141
The Return Of The Ghost Mirror	143
<i>I Am Going</i>	195
The Ship	197
<i>I Saw Death Walking Down The Street</i>	239
The Window	243
<i>Death's Dark Coaches Come Marching On</i>	287
Acknowledgments	303

• *Italicized titles denote a poem.*

INTRODUCTION

In the following tales you will need to let your imagination flow. In my stories the protagonist usually has an otherworldly experience with ghosts, aliens, or other supernatural beings. There is, in these tales, a seemingly parallel universe existing alongside the present one in which we now live. I have always been fascinated by the possible existence of what I call “The Other World.” Based on certain unexplainable phenomena I have experienced throughout life, I believe there is a strong possibility that some sort of parallel world—or dimension—might possibly exist here on Earth. I also cannot discount the fact that, in all likelihood, there are other worlds besides ours out there in the vast stretches of space. They are waiting for us to discover them, or they may have already discovered us, which I believe is a strong possibility.

The Other Side

In the following pages, you will also find that the majority of my short stories contain multiple references to combat events that happened during the Vietnam War. Advice that I was fortunate enough to receive over the past several decades from many people, generally revolved around one theme: write about what you know best or have personally experienced. Most of these tales are set in areas of the United States that I have visited many times or lived near for years, thus enabling me to use them as a background for the stories.

In 1968 I voluntarily joined the U.S. Army and, eventually, was sent to Vietnam as a combat rifleman. After three to four months, I ended up as a combat medic. If one did a good job in the jungle he was rewarded with a rear echelon job, and I was fortunate enough to get one. My combat tour in Vietnam is detailed in my first book, *Eleven Bravo: A Skytrooper's Memoir of War in Vietnam* (McFarland, 2004), which is still in print.

My second book, *Letters From Potsdam: Colonel John S. Wise's Impressions of the 1945 Berlin Conference* (Fiesta, 2022), took me over twenty years to complete. It details my father's experiences as an U.S. Army liaison officer at the Potsdam Conference held outside of Berlin where Truman, Churchill, Atlee, and Stalin divided up Europe after World War II—except Stalin was already in possession of Eastern Europe and wasn't about to divide or give back any of it to the Allies. The Cold War had begun.

I come from a family with a long military background—a great-great grandfather fought in the Civil War and my grandfather fought in the Spanish-American War—plus I experienced heavy combat fighting in a not so popular war. “War is,” as R. F. Delderfield wrote in *A Horseman Riding By*, “a boring, bloody muddle, punctuated by moments of fear and disgust.” What you see, what you do, what you experience in a war never leaves you. The dead and the dying haunt you day and night: they have never

left me. The result is that I have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) along with various physical crippling ailments for the last fifty-three-plus years. By finishing *Letters from Potsdam*, I realized I had a lot more to say about the Vietnam War and how it has affected me since 1969.

Some of this book's short stories were written between twenty-five and thirty years ago while others were written more recently. With the opportunity to publish them, I decided to use Vietnam as an underlying motif. I updated and expanded the Southeast Asian War details in my earlier stories and, in most cases, incorporated the war into the more recent tales. Many of the Vietnam incidents described herein actually occurred either to myself or others. I have altered combat events slightly and not used anyone's real name.

Despite the trauma of Vietnam and its lingering physical and mental aftereffects, I am still a patriot and do not regret my tour in that Asian country. I am proud to have served my country and agree with a quote by Senator John Kennedy (LA) in a 2022 speech, "I believe that Arlington National Cemetery contains four hundred thousand reasons why you should stand your ass up for the National Anthem."

I hope you will find these stories and the poetry, which I have written throughout my life, interesting, enlightening, and informative. If you are a Vietnam Veteran reading this, you will, most probably, recognize familiar scenes. I dedicate this book to you and to others I knew who did not return.



COME, PICK THE FLOWERS

Come Quickly My Friends to the Fields
And Pick the Flowers at Their Ends
Gather Them - Sniff Them - Keep Them.

The Sun Shines Sweetly on Their Beauty
The Clouds Quietly Cover Their Upturned Faces
Which Droop - Wither - and Die.

The Other Side

The Rain Pounds Down upon Them
While Winds Forcefully Bend Their Backs
The Silent Cold Quickly Chokes Their Life.

They Drop - Decay - and Disappear
The Leaves of Autumn Fall Here
The Earth - Thus Naked - Lies Barren.

Pretty Spring in Beauty Now Approaches
Making Earth Lie Pregnant with Seed
We See the Flowers Born Again.

Come Quickly My Friends into the Fields
Pick Them - Pluck Them - Keep Them
Save Them - - For Beauty Fades Quickly.



THE CABIN, THE JOURNEY, AND THE VISION

Part I - The Cabin

My name is **Thomas West**. Shortly after I moved to Colorado, I lived in an isolated cabin on 139 acres of thickly forested land located on the west side of the Rockies. The nearest town, Gunnison, Colorado, is about thirty-one miles away. At an elevation of 7,703 feet, the town got its name from the first known European-American explorer of the area,

The Other Side

John W. Gunnison, who, in 1853, as a U.S. Army officer and surveyor, was trying to locate a route for the transcontinental railroad. He only spent three days in the area. In the late 1850s the town began to take shape from miners looking for gold.

During late spring and summer, I usually trundled down from my mountain lair to the town consisting of some 6,560 souls where I picked up my mail, plus stocked up on groceries and supplies. Although I had a three-hundred-gallon gas tank at my cabin, I always stopped at the local Sinclair station to top off my tank as an extra precaution to insure I'd always have an almost full tank of gas.

For most of my life I've been a loner ... not exactly a sociable individual. Isolation from the rest of humanity was an asset, especially after THE WAR. I was perfectly content to live in my mountaintop hideaway. Little did I know how much my life would change, some fifteen months after I moved to Colorado. An unfathomable life altering event would completely alter my life in a new direction. I call it "The Miracle."

I'm a disabled veteran from the Vietnam War thanks to a North Vietnam Army Sharpshooter, or NVA for short, hiding in a tree in our patrol area near the Parrot's Beak area of Cambodia some thirty-five miles west of Saigon. My left arm was all but useless—not good for a lefty. Could hardly raise it without much effort, or feel much below my elbow, since there wasn't much left of my elbow area. As I was lying on the ground, the gook's second shot took off three toes on my left foot. My buddy, Jack "Gunner" Robertson, who carried our platoon's M60 machine gun, soon located the sniper and demolished the top of the tree. I watched the NVA's body fall headfirst from his twenty-foot perch to the ground followed by his SKS rifle. Tony, "Doc" Myers, worked on my wounds while our radioman, Bob Riley, called for a medevac.

“Well, Tom, you got two, one-million-dollar wounds!! You’re going back to THE WORLD, man!” Doc grinned as he shot morphine into my arm and then my foot. I just grunted, gritted my teeth furiously, and prayed for the excruciating pain to go away, even though I knew it wouldn’t totally disappear. But the morphine soon began to make me woozy and, imperceptibly, the agonizing pain dulled.

Medevac came in about twenty minutes later and whisked me off to the hospital in Pleiku, where they stabilized me and shipped me off to Biên Hòa airport outside of Saigon. I, along with about thirty-five other WIAs were then airlifted to Japan, where after five surgeries in eight days, the medicos told me I’d be shipped off to the states for further operations. Three more surgeries in Denver plus rehab took another two years of my life before they mustered me out just a year after the war had ended in April 1975. Now I had to incorporate either a cane or a walking staff into my daily agenda when ambling anywhere. And, in the beginning, walking consisted of moving at a snail’s pace.

At first the VA only gave me 50 percent disability. I guess some government pencil pusher figured that since I still had one good arm and one good leg I only rated a 50 percent award. I hired a lawyer from the hotshot law firm Beasley and Graham in San Francisco, which specialized in VA disability cases. Finally, after a long hard slog of five years, the government bureaucracy caved and awarded me a full 100 percent disability. Because I had fought the VA’s original 50 percent ruling and managed to ultimately win, I was entitled to back disability pay from the original award date until the full award of 100 percent. I took the tax-free money and banked it.

I gaddered around the country for three or four years before I was accepted into a Texas grad school on the GI bill, where, in four years, I earned both a Master’s and a Ph.D. in Asian history, taking one-

The Other Side

and-a-half times the regular course load every semester and during the summer. I wanted to know why the U.S. got into the Vietnam War. As expected, I didn't like what I found out. We had pissed away millions (probably billions) down the drain only to lose the war in Vietnam. We weren't the Greatest Generation by far. My Ph.D. orals turned out to be a breeze—hell, I knew more about the French and American participation in the Vietnam War than anyone else in the history department. Plus, a little personal experience didn't hurt.

After graduation, I was bored. I knew I didn't want to teach. I didn't like the stares and pitying looks people gave me because of my scars and disabling injuries. It probably didn't help that I had tattoos inked up and down both arms, especially on my left arm to hide the elbow scars. In the mid-70s tats weren't in vogue and often made people somewhat uneasy when they were around me. On my left arm I have the tat of a cobra wrapped around that limb from shoulder to wrist ending up with its mouth open and fangs exposed, as if to strike, on the back of my hand. So, perhaps, unconsciously, my use of tats was a purposeful means to keep people at a distance—a subliminal message ... “DON'T F*CK WITH ME!”

Plus, were I to teach in a university, the college youngsters might latch onto my disability and try to make my life somewhat difficult. A few tried while I was in grad school until I had a personal one-on-one come-to-Jesus meeting, and they quickly learned never to cross me again. While I wasn't ashamed of my disability, it still made me feel incredibly self-conscious.



I decided to become a vagabond and roam across the U.S.
I climbed into my truck and kicked off around the country

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book is never easy. As it takes form—especially when extensively edited—there are myriad details that have to be checked and rechecked. As I write, the words flow, but when finished I find I need to either find and fix minor discrepancies or clarify and fine tune certain descriptions and conversations. The author is extremely grateful to several people who helped bring *The Other Side* to fruition.

First, I would like to thank my publisher, Julie Castro, who not only published my second book, *Letters From Potsdam: Colonel John S. Wise's Impressions of the 1945 Berlin Conference*, but also did an outstanding job editing it. Every writer needs a cheerleader and not only was she incredibly helpful with that book, but she also went out of her way to encourage me in the completion of *The Other Side*. Her comments, ideas, probing questions, and suggestions enabled me to make this a much better book. Lastly, her faith in me is deeply appreciated.

I would especially like to thank my editor, Michelle Williamson, for a great job at not only editing, but for turning it into a finer book. It is interesting to me to see how someone else views your writing and can, by small, but important changes, improve the book. With her skills and perceptiveness, plus her encouraging thoughts and comments about each story, she helped me make this a more interesting book for you, the reader, to savor and enjoy.

A special thank you to Stefan Hansen of Creative Instincts for his skill in creating not only the cover for this book, but also the

The Other Side

interior design and typesetting. His idea to have a mirror with a scene pertinent to the subject of each poem and short story was absolutely outstanding and much appreciated by the author. His vision and artistry enhanced this book far beyond what I could have ever imagined. The importance of an enticing design not only brings a book alive but also sets the mood for the reader.

For over fifty years, my dear friend, Cindy Conte (1952-2021), encouraged me to write. Her faith in my ability has always been an inspiration. Her ongoing faith resulted in my first book: *Eleven Bravo: A Skytrooper's Memoir of War in Vietnam*, along with my second book mentioned above, and now this—my third book that you hold before you. It was especially nice to have a good friend cheer me on for so many years. Sadly, she will be missed. RIP.

The author thanks Donna Nardi for her phenomenal proofreading expertise. Due to her eagle eyes, she made this a much better book.

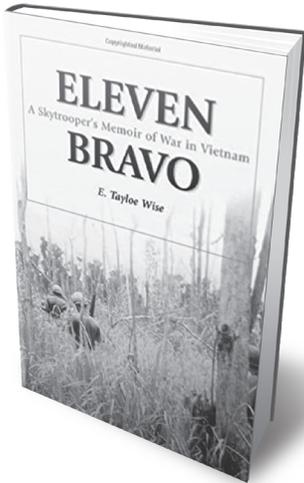
With profound appreciation, I would like to thank Braden McKinley, former Worship Pastor and Choir Master for Scottsdale Bible Church, North Ridge. The worship hymns at each Scottsdale Bible Church service are both inspiring and uplifting. During one particular Sunday service, several hymns gave me a few ideas, which I was able to incorporate into my story titled *The Cabin, The Journey, And The Vision*. Braden gladly and happily supplied me with the lyrics of those hymns, which I found most useful and helpful in completing that story.

The author would also like to thank Jamie Rasmussen, the senior pastor of Scottsdale Bible Church. His sermons, without any doubt, are the most awe-inspiring and historically informative discussions of biblical history the author has ever heard in his more than seventy years of periodic church attendance. The biblical research information that he imparts during his sermons is

particularly fascinating to the author who has also been a historian for more than thirty years. The idea for several of the short stories included herein came about from information Pastor Jamie examined during his sermons, which I was able to jot down in brief notes that I later included in *The Other Side* tales.

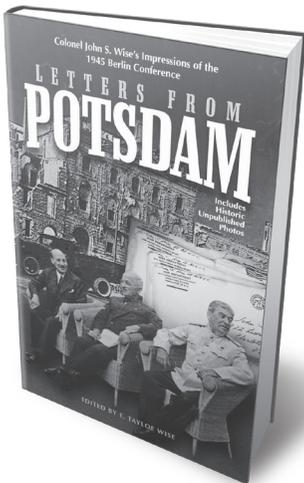
Finally, I especially want to thank the many friends I have made through Scottsdale Bible Church who, in many subtle and different ways, encouraged me to write my books—Erick and Bev K., Yoko L., Steve S., Arnold A., Dan S., Brian K., Eddie C., Pastor James D., and Pastor Kevin Y. Without their friendship and warm-heartedness, I would not have been able to find the inspiration to finish these books and stories, some of which languished for more than twenty years in my filing cabinets.

Books also by E. Tayloe Wise



Eleven Bravo: A Skytrooper's Memoir of War in Vietnam

*A narrative of the author's
1969-1970 combat tour
in Vietnam*



Letters From Potsdam: Colonel John S. Wise's Impressions of the 1945 Berlin Conference

*Letters to Colonel Wise's
wife from the editor's father
who attended the 1945
Potsdam Conference*