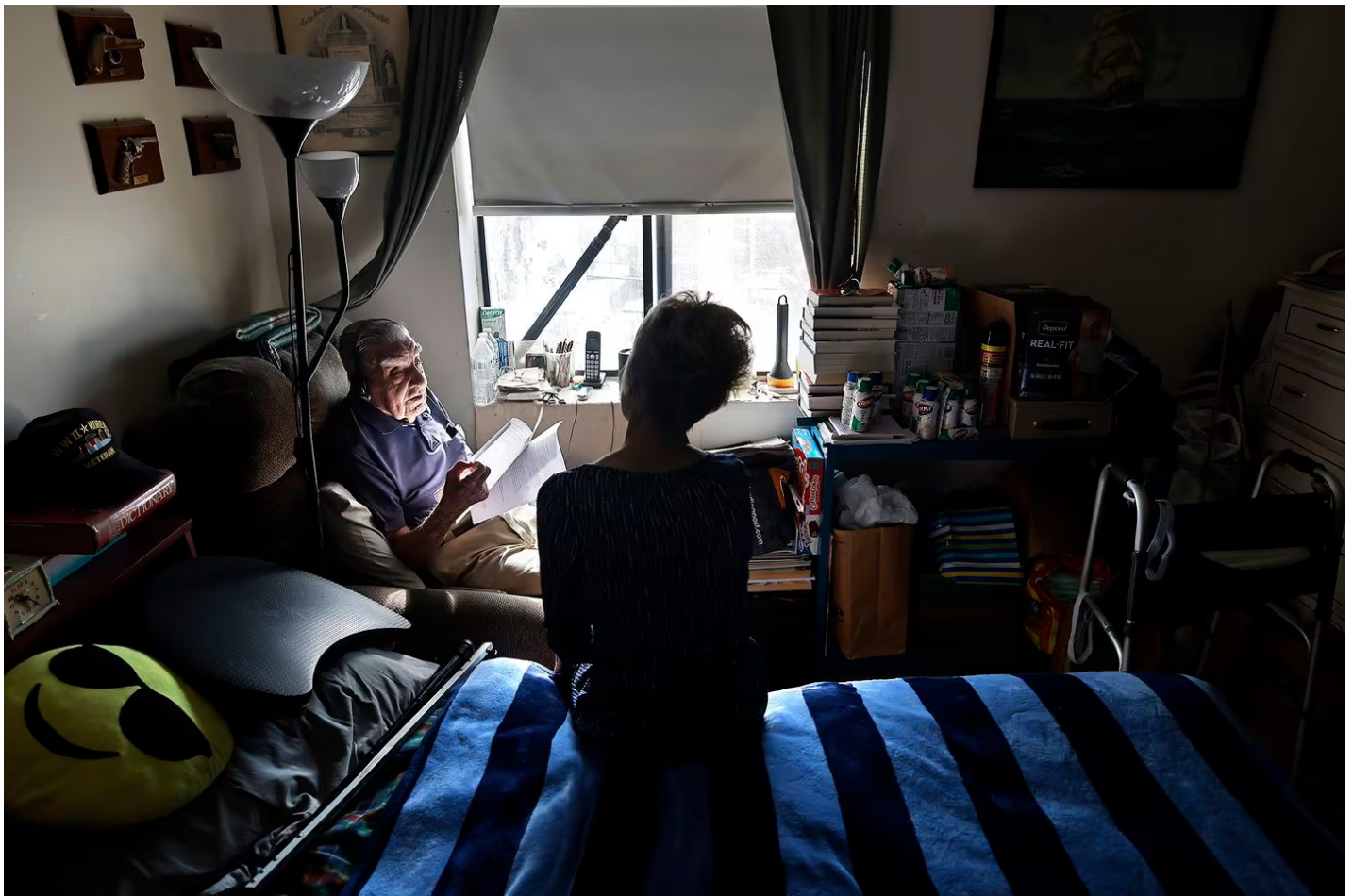


VETERANS DAY

# A hero of two wars puts his memories in words

Donald Chase, 97, of Framingham, has a book of poems from his battles in World War II and Korea published. He received four Purple Hearts and two Bronze Star Medals.

By **Cindy Cantrell** Globe Correspondent, Updated November 10, 2023, 7:01 a.m.



In his Framingham apartment, Donald Chase reads his former nurse-turned-book editor, Gwen Garban, one of his poems. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

**F**RAMINGHAM — As Gwen Garban presented author Donald Chase with his newly published book of poetry, the 97-year-old Framingham resident cradled “[Through My Eyes](#)” with both hands while gazing at his former nurse-turned-editor with delighted wonder.

Suddenly, a look of concern crossed Chase’s face.

“Your name isn’t on the front!” he exclaimed, unmoved by Garban’s reassurance that it appears inside the 68-page volume published on Oct. 26 by [Damianos Publishing](#) of Framingham. Chase then leveled his gaze at a reporter and instructed, “I want to make sure Gwen gets all the credit, because if it was up to me, there wouldn’t be a book.”

The occasion marked Garban’s first visit to Chase’s apartment, but the pair warmly interacted as the close friends they’ve become since meeting two years ago at the Jamaica Plain VA Medical Center. Despite lying on a stretcher in urgent care where Garban works, Chase was most interested that day in dispensing tidbits of advice and inspiration to the medical staff.



Gwen Garban and Donald Chase look at his book together for the first time. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

“We were chit-chatting about his military service when all of a sudden, Mr. Chase broke out into a beautiful poem. When I asked who wrote it, he said, ‘I did.’ Then he recited another one,” Garban recalled. “My coworker and I looked at each other and our jaws dropped.”

Before parting ways, the Brookline resident invited Chase to share more of his poetry. Sure enough, a package arrived a few weeks later containing dozens more, “some typed up for him and others handwritten in the most beautiful penmanship.”





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Although some of Chase's 53 poems featured in the book have appeared in print and online over the years, "Through My Eyes: A Collection of Poems by a World War II and Korean War Combat Veteran," is Chase's first book. Garban said she sought his permission for the project — despite having no prior publishing experience — because of the essential themes of home, coming of age, love, loneliness, fear, trauma, resilience, persistent grief, aging, and enjoyment of life's simple pleasures.

"After all [Chase] has been through, seen, and experienced, I found his life perspective and outlook extraordinary," Garban said. "Not only is he a true American hero in every aspect, but these poems are a legacy of his bravery, selflessness, and his life."

Born in Framingham on Jan. 11, 1926, Chase lived at 203 West Central St. in Natick while attending West Natick Grammar School, Coolidge Junior High School, and Natick High School. Yearning to explore beyond his hometown, he joined the Army Reserve at age 18 on May 20, 1944.

“I was young, dumb, and very naïve,” Chase said. “To me, going to war was a great adventure. I didn’t understand that what you see there stays with you.”

Following 17 weeks of basic training at Camp Croft in Spartanburg, S.C., Chase was assigned to the 89th Infantry Division as a rifleman. He landed in Le Havre, France, in January 1945, and later fought in some of the bloodiest battles of the war with General George S. Patton’s Third Army.

Using numbers from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Chase is [one of about 119,000 of the 16.1 million Americans who served in World War II who are still alive](#), the National WWII Museum estimated.

After the war ended, Chase was assigned to occupation duty with the 83rd Infantry Division in Linz, Austria. He reenlisted and trained at Marks Air Force Base in Nome, Alaska, to be a firefighter for airplane crashes and structural fires before being discharged in October 1948.

“I came home from World War II without a scratch!” Chase said. Yet his good fortune didn’t last after reenlisting in December 1950 to fight in the Korean War.



Wounded four times while fighting in Korea after his stint in World War II, Donald Chase was awarded four Purple Hearts, two Bronze Star Medals, and two Presidential Citations. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

While in the 24th Infantry Division, Chase was wounded by shrapnel in February 1951, shot through the right leg in March 1951, and shot in the neck in June 1951. He was assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division upon returning to battle in November 1952, but was wounded by shrapnel on July 26, 1953 — [the day before the ceasefire was signed](#). On Oct. 13, 1953, Chase was discharged as a sergeant first class.

“All I can say is somebody is watching over me,” said Chase, whose lengthy list of military awards includes four Purple Hearts, two Bronze Star Medals, and two Presidential Citations. Yet he said he is most proud of his three children, Stephen, Peter, and Ellen.

Chase enjoyed racing stock cars after the wars, and he worked as a carpenter and construction foreman until his retirement in 1990. At that time, he said he began writing poetry about his wartime experiences “as a form of therapy, when all those scenes would come to mind.”



"It pleases me immensely that others might find the book interesting," Donald Chase said. "I'm very appreciative. I don't take it for granted." LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

"You cry a little bit when you remember," he added, "but it's a means of coping and processing."

In his poem "Prisoners of War," Chase writes,

*They were enemy  
soldiers, yet human like  
you and I,  
and one couldn't help but  
notice, the pain in their  
anguished eyes.*



*That scene of pain and misery, which  
has defied the passage of time. Is  
another unwanted souvenir,  
from a war that left scars in the  
mind.*

Chase said some details have become hazy as the decades passed, while other events remain as clear as the instant they took place. Those recollections continue to inspire new poems such as “Memories,” which Chase recited on the day of Garban’s visit. The final of its seven stanzas reads,

*These vivid, unseen memories,  
never ceasing with passage of years.  
Strongly come forth and darken my day,  
because they so easily resurrect old fears.*

Despite the complicated legacy of war, Chase reflects on his military service and life with pride. He expresses deep affection for his family and caregivers, as well as gratitude for the opportunity to “get things out in a way that I hope reaches people.

“It pleases me immensely that others might find the book interesting. I’m very appreciative. I don’t take it for granted.”

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