

It's Just Eight Weeks

by Dan Heck

My wife got pregnant when I was 21.
Partying stopped and I joined the Coast Guard
so we could have more than just drinking money.
From the moment I arrived I regretted my choice.
My Company Commanders would hide their faces under big black
park ranger hats, while calling me fat, calling
me disgusting because when I ran my man-boobs
boxed my chin. I was alone from my close
family, alone from my fellow green

recruits. By week four the CCs only made fun of my
last name. What the blank this and what the blank
that. My fellow recruits joked with me, not at me.
They became temporary friends while I was here.
Then a letter from home said my friend
blew his head off with a shotgun Kurt Cobain style.
Used his big toe to pull the trigger. I would miss
his closed casket funeral. If I could hold my wife
I would remember comfort. I would remember being

useful. Week five I was rewarded with a call home.
Would the gender be revealed? Before my weak
fingers pressed the last number an angry CC said,
"No Emotion!" I would be marble stone.
David in the flesh. No CC would catch me
emoting again. No more push up punishments.
My wife was tears, said she had a late miscarriage,
our unborn child would always be unborn. I said ok.
The park ranger's hat approved while my wife

disintegrated. On week six I got called into a CC's
office, he didn't yell or make unfunny puns.
He took his heavy hat off and said my
dad had a heart attack. He assured me that he
would be fine and that my dad, whose eyes were
sorrow when I joined and voice was nervous,
would see me graduate. Dad once warned me

not to use my body to work, to use my mind.
I finally saw fragility. How quickly the body

expires. On week seven during eight hours of liberty
off base, 8 hours of normalcy, I called
my wife, she told me she was raped the night
I didn't comfort her. She went to a bar
and the last thing she remembered was having one
drink, then waking up in a strange place – torn.
Before I could figure out how to comfort her, she said
my dad was brain dead, that I had to pull the plug,
then she comforted me. I gave up my life for a family that

vanished. I needed back on base do push-ups sit-ups run swim no matter how much it
hurt I didn't care if I passed out I wanted anything but this moment I needed boot and
push all day no home because at home I'd have to deal with these mistakes these losses
for the rest of my life. But I will somehow because that's the man I've become.