

# “Oh, Mama”

by Nancy Austin

An old man in a World War II cap dozed in the front row of our poetry reading, reminded me of my father, whose eyes often close this time of evening in sleep, or remembrance of soldiers returning from the Bataan death march—starved, skeletal men.

My final line, *Oh, Mama*, woke this man with a start. Open mic began, his voice broke as he read a poem to his deceased wife, plain spoken, steeped in devotion.

But it was his second poem, a battlefield pock-marked with craters, his struggle to take cover over and around bodies when he heard a cry, knelt to take the soldier’s hand, leaned in to hear his last words, *Oh, Mama*.

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**Nancy Austin** has lived on both coasts but prefers the Northwoods in between. Her dad, Vincent Bavisotto, ninety-eight years old, served in Guam in WWII. Her works have appeared in various journals such as *Adanna*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Portage Magazine*. She has three poetry collections titled *Remnants of Warmth* (Aldrich Press, 2016); *The Turn of the Tiller*; the *Spill of the Wind* (Aldrich Press, 2019); *Something Novel Came in Spring* (Water’s Edge Press, 2021); and a collaborative anthology with the PaperBirch Poets, *Stitching Earth to Sky* (Water’s Edge Press, 2019).