



## How We Got Here

It all started with a small idea. But that one small idea led to a lot of other ideas and soon it was a big idea.

In 2016, Donna Groom came upon a box of love letters exchanged by her parents Marilyn and Don Guyker during his months of service in the Airforce in 1952. They had not yet married, but it was clear that they were very much in love. The letters told of their longing for the separation to end, and how they both looked forward to receiving them.

Donna and her parents are all very musical. Marilyn played and taught piano, and Don played Trumpet. Donna started playing piano and singing at age three, and as we know, was destined to do so all her life.

Donna immediately saw a connection. She realized that putting one of their letters and their favorite song together would be a magical and powerful pairing. And thus, "From a Distance" was born.

Tonight's performance is the culmination of that connection and eight years of research, fueled by a determination to honor our Veterans, a passion for music, and the generosity of the families who allowed us to tell their stories.

This concert is a celebration of the bravery of our military veterans and their families. We wish to pay homage to them by sharing their deeply personal letters underscored by the music that inspired their service, their commitment, and their sacrifice.

*One item of importance to note –for those who have served our country, it is expected that we identify them using their highest achieved rank. So, where their letter may show them as a Sergeant, they may be addressed in this show as a higher rank.*

Finally, and most importantly, we wish to acknowledge the Veterans and their families who allowed us to share the private letters and photos you will see tonight. It would have been impossible for us to present this program without their generosity. Their time and efforts were essential to the success of this tribute, and they worked alongside us every step of the way. Please accept our sincerest thanks.

*Maj. Tom O'Sullivan, Jennie Taylor, wife of Maj. Brent Taylor, Sgt. First Class Steve Brittain and Kathy Brittain, Pvt. Don and Brita Hicks, Marilyn Guyker, Pvt. Dan Schlagel, Maj. Rita Lyman.*

*Corporal Regis Costello letter and photos courtesy of Michael Kraus Collection*

Some of our letters came from Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum in Pittsburgh. We spent many hours researching their collection, guided by Archivist Michael Kraus. Our sincerest thanks to them for their permission to use letters from *Sgt. Jim Kerr, Capt. John Milton Ray*

It has also been a privilege to work with the following authors of books based on wartime letters. We encourage you to read more about the letters and history within these wonderful books:

<i>War of Independence</i>	<i>Pvt. John Eggleston</i>	<i>"Behind the Lines" by Andrew Carroll</i>
<i>WW1</i>	<i>Sgt. Roscoe Chittim</i>	<i>"Until I Come Home" by Paul Spellman</i>
<i>WW2</i>	<i>Lt. Francis Tracy</i>	<i>"War Letters" by Andrew Carroll</i>
<i>WW2</i>	<i>Cmdr. Jack Sweeney</i>	<i>"As Always, Jack" by Emma Sweeney Lewis</i>

*We would love to hear from you!*

For more about "From a Distance" and our creator and performing artist Donna Groom, to send us a message, or book a performance, go to:

**<https://www.donnagroom.com>**

