

## Gil from "The Passionates"

By, Dave Ulrich

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GIL

Got this a few years back at an estate sale. Damn near black when I saw it. But I knew. And I was right. Shined up real good. If you take something like that and put a little elbow in the effort, you gonna to get something stand up real tall and look proud. Roy was like that. My boy. That's him, there. Here. Right here -- with a mighty young Bill Clinton. Lookit Billy there. Knee deep in pussy that year, I betcha. I betcha. But my boy. Roy. He was... I'm gonna say ten. Funny how he ended up in this here photo. Funny story. See, Roy gets himself in trouble at school one day. He's ten, mind you. Well he don't want to say the Pledge one day. Seems he read some history book didn't sugar coat nothin' about our checkered past. You know, of the stars and stripes, I mean. And you know, maybe -- maybe that shit's all true. Maybe so. Maybe we done some shit, but it's still the best goddamn country in the world. And ol' Roy...ten years old! And he didn't think much of making no pledge to the flag of a country that went and killed a bunch of Indians. Had slaves. Burned witches, and what not. But Miss...ah, damn, I wanna say -- Miss Friedman. Well she punishes him with a paper. A paper 'bout why he loved America. Was a punishment, mind you. But ol' Roy goes and writes something no ten year old supposed to be writin'. I mean to say it was real smart. Wins an award and everything. Next thing we know, he's shakin' hands with a young Slick Willie right there in that picture. To my mind, before that, he took too much after his mother. But, something happened. I don't know what the boy found inside him to love the USA like that, ya know -- after he was down about it. But whatever it was, it stayed with 'em. Right into active duty. And it's funny 'cuz I never thought me being a soldier really moved him much one way the other. So when he went and wrote up something like that. I guess I kinda thought, or hoped, that maybe I had something to do with it. That it was his way of saying he thought... you know, he was proud of what I done. Even if he was only ten. I suppose he was awful young to understand it much. That boy. But I never been so proud as when they showed up at my door. When I opened it up and saw uniforms. Shiny brass buttons in the sunshine, stripes, hats, fresh folded letter in hand. I knew. I knew what they was gonna tell me...those goddamned crazy people in the Middle East. I gotta tell ya. I always said you gotta nuke 'em or just stay the hell out of there. But now you know, I know now -- that's just chickenshit thinkin'. 'Cuz we went in there, boy howdy. We went in there and showed that sonofabitch a thing or two 'bout what we got. America ain't gonna sit back and watch no bullshit. I gotta dead boy to prove that. A lotta young punks these days look at the military like free school.

Like extra cash when it all get done. Roy didn't go in like that. Roy understood what the armed forces is all about. One word: Service. Serve. Your. Country. If the United States gonna be so great that we'll go and get our hands dirty in some crazy country of mindless animals -- just to try and save them dumb bastards from themselves... well, you go, goddamn it. You go and do what you gotta do and ya don't bitch about the fact you never thought you'd see action. You want a country like we got, you gotta be willin' to die for the opportunities we got. For the opportunity of life it gives ya. That's why, Vietnam, I signed up. No drafting this ol' boy. I went and killed those yellow commies 'cuz it was the right thing to do. You didn't have to drag my ass out there crying. And Roy did the same thing in Iraq. Went with a clear head to show the world America's strong, 'cuz Americans are strong. That's my boy. That's the kinda boy I raised. That boy. Tough like his daddy, and made me proud. Yeah. Yeah, I'd love him just the same if he lived. But dying in service. Wooo. Daddy's proud ol' Roy, you sonofabitch. Sonofabitch. If he turned out like his mother, I mighta been the one to kill myself. How I ended up with... she didn't... I still can't figure how she didn't... how was she not proud? Roy was our life work and he died a hero, but she gotta act like it was for nothing just 'cuz he died before she did. How long'd she think I was gonna sit back and listen to her call our masterpiece worthless? A waste of time. Who knows what I'd a done if she didn't beat me to it. And it took every bit of decency I could manage to arrange for her... after she... finally went and did it. Well, I made it as fast and simple as her family'd let me. Nothing fancy. Not like Roy. Roy got done up real good. Salute and all. Here, I wanna show you something else. Just sit tight, I'll bring it out. I was gonna give this to Roy when he got back. This was my favorite. My baby. And he knew it. He loved it, too. I let him shoot it a few times, but he didn't never think I'd go and give it to him. I was gonna. I ain't gonna lie to ya. What's hard about it all. The only thing that makes it... I can't completely... I'm proud. You know. I am. Prouda 'ol Roy, but that... that... Roy did die in service. And that's a hell of a thing. That's something special. Active duty, out in the thick of... Sent over and ready to... but that... that -- motherfucker who... you ain't supposed to die by the hand of one of your own! That mother...! When that fuckin' motherfucker piece of shit threw a grenade in my boy's tent... When that sick faggot bitch snapped in the head and stole my boy... that traitor motherfucker... threw a motherfuckin' grenade... there is no punishment, no torture, great enough to -- mean enough to make up... every night I shine this up good. Slow. So as to enjoy it. And I load it. Slow. Both barrels. Get it good and ready. Give it power. Power in waiting. Like a horse ready to buck out the gate. Ready to explode -- with a scream so loud it's gonna wake the world. And I take it... I take it and I stick the barrel in my goddamn mouth. Right in my goddamn... and then every night, I take it out.

I wait a little bit longer. But I take it out. I take it out 'cuz I ain't weak like that bitch I married. I ain't weak like that bitch traitor that blew up my boy. I'm gonna die fighting. That's what we're born to do. Die. Fighting. I always said that. I knew it since I was a baby myself. That's what every man's gotta do. Go out fighting. Roy woulda. You can bet your life on that. Roy woulda. Woulda if he didn't get his face scattered across the desert...Roy shined, boy howdy. And when he meets me at the gates, he's gonna be prouda me. I'm so proud of him. That goddamn boy. Ol' Roy put a little elbow in his own life, and he shined up real good for his daddy. Real good.