

## Toni Press-Coffman on *Armor*

I wrote *Armor* because a scientist friend—the husband of a friend, actually—was hired to staff the U.S. House Armed Services Committee. This man was opposed to the war in Iraq—in a quiet way. His whole way of being in the world was quiet. His discourse when we socialized was always intellectualized, no emotionality, very little affect of any kind in fact. He hesitated to take strong stands—he did his job well, in silence. He liked to get along, but even the word “liked” is a bit strong. He was just temperamentally disinclined to argue, or to protest, or to be loud in any way.

He was sought out by a congressman to use his expertise in polymer science to bolster tank armor—which had been being roundly criticized for a couple of years. Washington brought in Vietnam vets to advise, since they had developed ad hoc armor in Vietnam when their trucks were not armored at all, and when they got hit, they were—almost always—dead.

As the tank armor development process proceeded, he became involved with a Vietnam vets group—men driving supply trucks who had survived through their ingenuity. He became a bit of a folk hero to them. He traveled to Iraq twice (and was extremely disappointed when he couldn't go a third time) to teach soldiers how to up-armor their trucks with the “truck kit” he'd developed. He collected all their cards and letters and e-mails. Something in this process completely changed his life and worldview. When I spoke to him, he was downright passionate. That he was working at something that had so much meaning was emotionally huge for him.

But it also blinded him to the corruption around him. And that's what the play is about.

His wife in the play is an artist—a pianist—but a woman who has devoted herself to her family and to her husband. Their oldest child, Cynthia, thinks she wants to become a scientist like her father, but she's also a musician like her mother. What's the difference between these two ways of viewing the world, of solving problems, of coping with your demons?

Their story is impacted by two quite different but somehow parallel events: Cynthia's younger brother gets hit by a car and has been hospitalized. In critical condition for a brief time, he is now facing a long recovery. He's in the hospital, his mother is giving piano lessons, his father is testifying in front of the committee he staffs, hoping to extend the life of the truck kits he invented, and his sister, Cynthia, is trying to figure out in which direction she should steer her life when she graduates from high school in a few months.

Into this family comes a man who lost his father in Vietnam and has come to visit the scientist, the inventor of the truck kit, saver of soldiers' lives. The Vietnam War is long over but it haunts him still. He was not much more than a toddler when his father was killed but the loss of this person he never knew has an effect on his life he doesn't understand—not simply a positive or a negative effect—a profound effect.

The play approaches its characters' lives and problems with humor—as I suppose we all must in order to survive in a world where war never ceases to be waged.