

INTRODUCTION

duty as a physician to do my best to heal, but I have an even greater duty to *prevent*.

What are the psychological injuries? Let us listen to the words of Vietnam combat veterans with severe PTSD as they tell what their life is like today:¹

I haven't really slept for twenty years. I lie down, but I don't sleep. I'm always watching the door, the window, then back to the door. I get up at least five times to walk my perimeter, sometimes it's ten or fifteen times. There's always something within reach, maybe a baseball bat or a knife, at every door. I used to sleep with a gun under my pillow, another under my mattress, and another in the drawer next to the bed. You made me get rid of them when I came into the program here. They're over at my mother's, so I know I can get them any time, but I don't. Sometimes I think about them—I want to have a gun in my hands so bad at night it makes my arms ache.

So it's like that until the sun begins to come up, then I can sleep for an hour or two.

It wasn't any different when I was working for _____ before I lost it and they put me in the psych hospital. I remember the company doctor putting Valiums in my mouth, and they strapped me to a stretcher. I was screaming, and I thought the Gooks had overrun us and were pouring through the place. Everyone I looked at looked like a Gook.

I worked a lot of overtime and also went to school and had a second job. I didn't sleep any more than now. Maybe two hours a night. But I sure made a lot of money. Workaholic. That's me—no, that *was* me. I was real lucky they kept me so long. They understood that sometimes I just had to leave work. And they never laughed at me when I hit the floor if there was a loud bang or something. I know guys here [in the treatment program] who work other places who had firecrackers lit off just to see them dive over a conveyor belt or something like that. Or their supervisors pushing them, mind-fucking them, pushing them till they lost it, so they could get rid of them. That never happened to me. Once a lamp in the ceiling exploded with a loud bang, and I dove into a tank of lubricant for the cutting machines. Oof! It was awful. But nobody laughed at me. They were real good to me, and they respected what I could do. They made me the head of the Emergency Response Team, like for explosions and injuries.

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Once a guy was burned real bad when some hydraulic fluid caught fire. I was the only one who didn't freeze. I got in there with the fire blanket—see, I still got the scars here on my leg where I got hit too with the burning hydraulics. I got through Vietnam without a scratch and get a Purple Heart for the _____ Company. [Laughs, then silence.] The smell of burning flesh fucked me up real bad afterward, though. I didn't notice it at the time the guy caught fire, but for the next few weeks I kept having flashbacks of the time the fast-mover [jet] laid a canister of napalm on my company. I couldn't get the smell out of my nose, out of my mouth.

I don't deserve my wife. What kind of life is it for her married to me? She says, "Let's take the kids out for dinner." And I say, "Sure, let's go." So we get to the restaurant and we walk in the door and I say, "Whoa!" when I look around and see all those people. So the hostess shows us to a table right in the middle, and I say, "How about there in the corner?" and she says, "There's people there," and I say, "We'll wait." Meantime my wife is looking at me and there's sweat running down my face. I can't sit with my back uncovered. If I know you're back there covering me, it's okay, but a bunch of strangers, and some of them Gooks—no way. I sit in the corner where I can see everyone who comes in and everyone who leaves. So after we wait thirty minutes for the table in the corner we start walking through the restaurant to it and my heart's pounding, pounding and the sweat's rolling off me and I say, "I gotta go." So they sit down and eat and I stand up in the parking garage, the second floor overlooking the entrance to the restaurant where I have a real good line on everything going on.

Or another thing, y'know my wife's real social, and of course I'm not. She understands now because of the couples therapy _____ did with her and me together. So we don't fight anymore about a lot of those things, and she even helps me now with the embarrassment. Like at my in-laws' she'll even make up something she forgot in the car when she sees that there's getting [to be] too many people in the room, so I can get out of there. But one thing she still don't understand is the mail. She gets so mad at me because I'll drive into town to buy cigarettes but I don't pick the mail up—it's right next to the 7-Eleven. What she doesn't understand is that every time I think it's _____'s kid sister writing me to find out how he died. She wrote to him every day—and I mean *every day*. Sometimes we wouldn't get our mail for six weeks, and when we'd get it there'd be more letters for him than for the rest of the platoon