

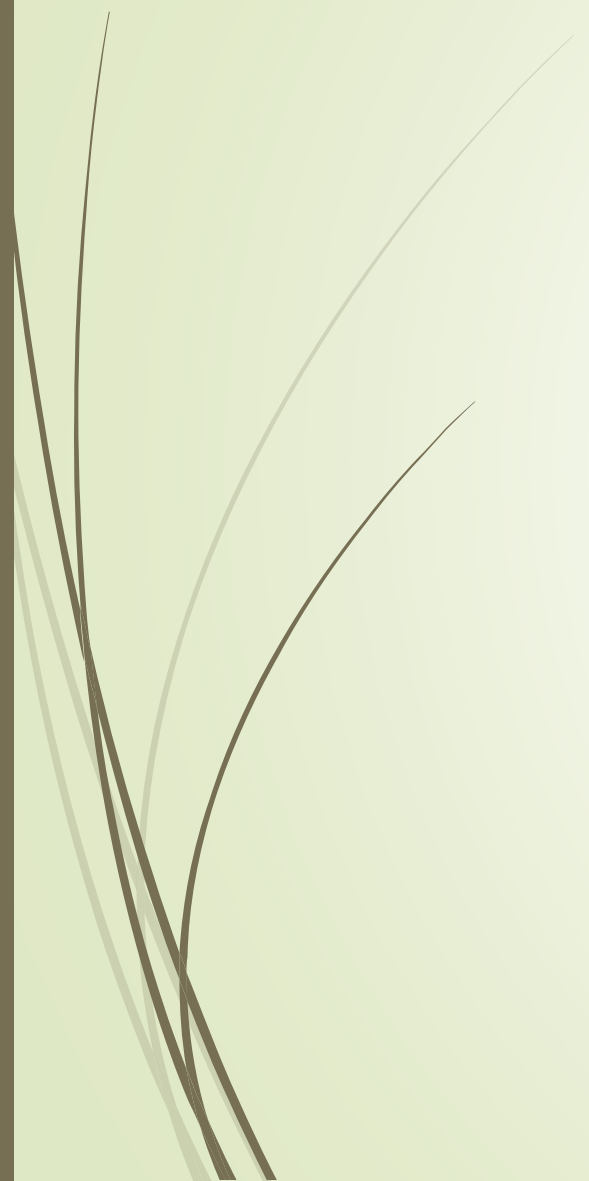


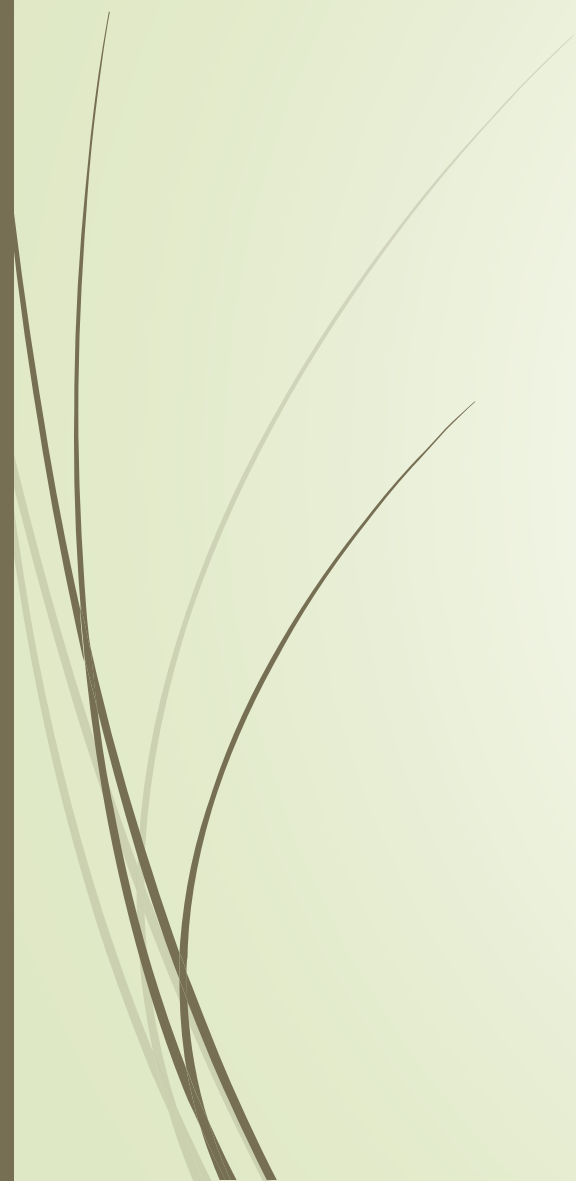
Loving Our Heroes Home: Helping Returning Troops to Readjust

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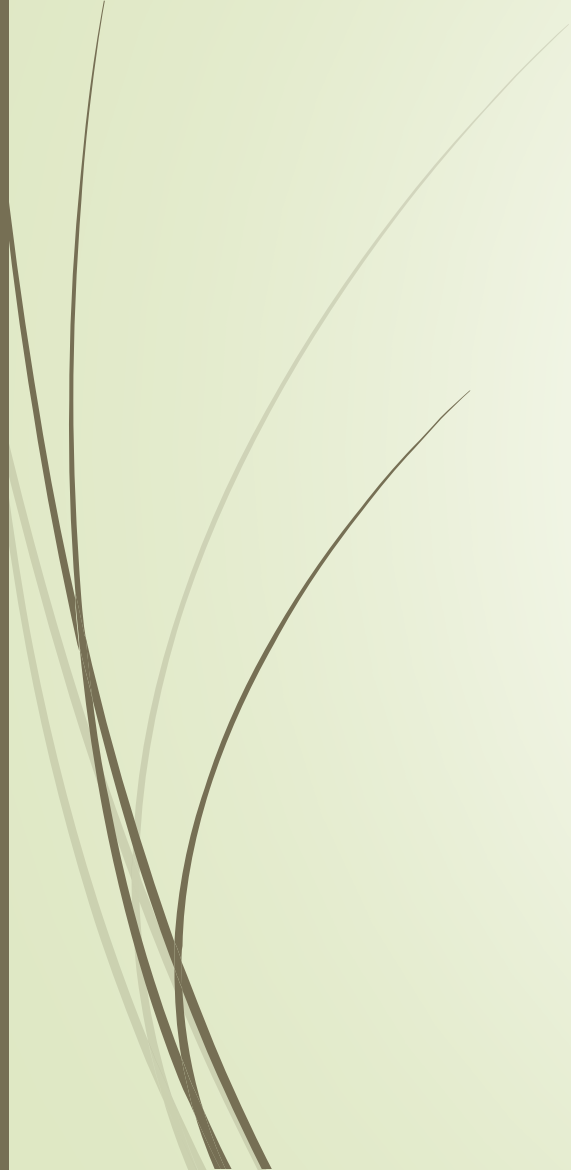
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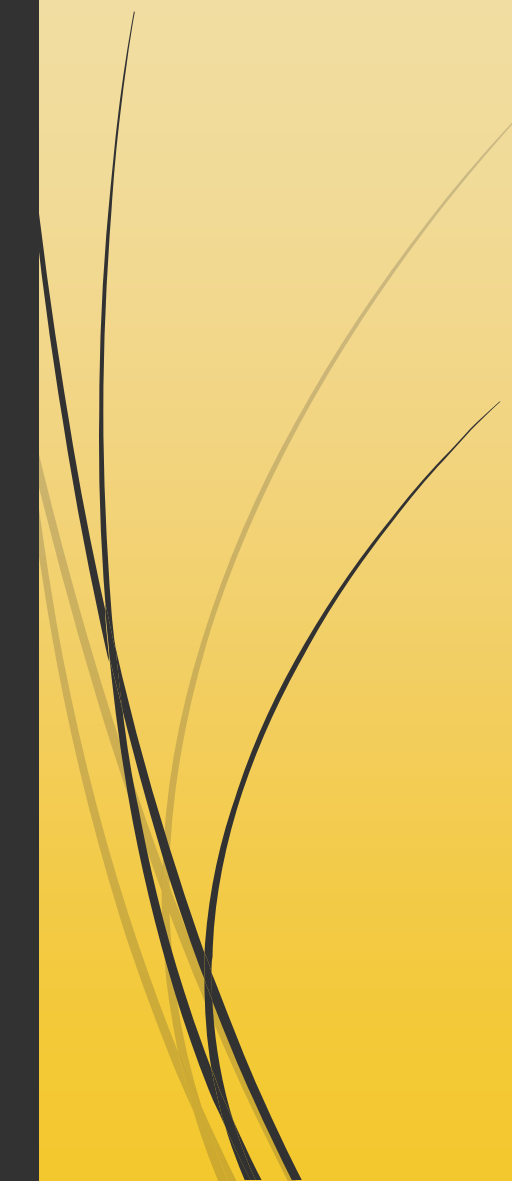


What happened to Twig?

- Constant threat of injury and death caused protracted fight/flight response
- On-going exposure to others' injury = vicarious trauma
- Sleep disrupted by threat of attack and night flights
- Endless experiences and images of violence, gore, horror
- Brain's ability to cope becomes overwhelmed; psychologically over-run
- Adaptation to protracted threat remains when no longer needed
- Absence of support (meaning) from the community compounds the injury



P T S (D)

- Disorder:** Something is not right with how the person perceives and functions in the “civilian” world; prolonged distress, upset, lack of peace within
- Stress:** An experience of a life-threatening event or protracted threatening environment
- Traumatic:** The person is psychologically injured by the experience
- Post:** Symptoms often begin some time after the threatening experience has ended
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Symptoms of the “Invisible Wound”

- Alienation from others(family, friends, spouse); “not quite relationships”
- Expectation of normalcy
- Dissociation from own feelings & memories
- Intrusive images, nightmares, “flashbacks”
- Hypervigilance, startle anger, scanning; easily triggered
- Dysthymia; unresolved grief and sorrow
- Existentially lost (except for work)
- Consistent anger/distrust toward institutions
- Seeking adventure and excitement
- Sense of foreshortened future
- Workaholism (my version of substance abuse)
- Insidious medical problems

A dark grey arrow points to the right from the left edge of the slide. Below it, several thin, curved lines in shades of blue and grey sweep across the left side of the slide.

The Meaning Matters

- ▶ A person can live with almost any “how” if they have a sufficient “why”.
- ▶ For the service member, the “why” (meaning) is held by the people, not by the service member.
- ▶ The willingness and ability of a people to help their warriors reintegrate with civilian society is directly related to their experience of connectedness, which brings meaning and enables healing.



Some things to keep in mind.....

- ▶ Most veterans complete a four-year enlistment without ever seeing combat.
- ▶ “In harm’s way” and “in combat” are not the same thing.
- ▶ It is not necessary to experience fire fights to be adversely affected by war.
- ▶ Vicarious trauma can occur through identification with others who are in harm’s way, wounded, or killed.
- ▶ The unrelenting threat of attack is itself traumatizing.
- ▶ Veterans with PTS are not sick, they’re hurt.



How I made it home....

- ▶ I learned about PTS and recognized my own symptoms.
- ▶ I told myself the truth: "You're not crazy, but you **are** hurt."
- ▶ I said good-bye to the super-hero myth.
- ▶ I got help (friends, animals, therapist, re-connections).
- ▶ I held myself accountable for my choices, decisions, & actions.
- ▶ I sought comfort from the natural world.
- ▶ I started to take care of myself.
- ▶ I created/discovered a deeper meaning about it all; acceptance is key.
- ▶ I will always walk with a slight limp, carry a large first-aid kit in my Jeep, and be Doc.



What do veterans need from us?

- ▶ We do not need to be identified/stereotyped by our “veteran” status.
- ▶ Recognize the significant of our life experiences and membership in the military culture.
- ▶ Include dialogue about our military experience as a factor in career planning and OJT interaction.
- ▶ Be supportive and willing to hear, but avoid questions about our actual experiences until trust is established.
- ▶ If teaching, be mindful about, sensitive to, and aware of how material is presented in class.
- ▶ Create a safe place for us to “stand down.”
- ▶ Refer us to helpful resources as needed.

Landmarks on the Road Home

- **Baby Doll....**A gift of nature to help me heal
- **A long trek** in the mountains....
 - “What are you doing out here all by yourself?”
- “You will always be lethal, but you’re not dangerous.”
- **Grieving at The Wall....** Surrounded by love.
- **Accepting responsibility for my choices**
 - Taking off the “War Paint”
- **Honor the Wild One**, then put him back into the inner place.
 - **Transforming the Knife**
 - **Making peace by telling my story**

