

What are you going to tell the guys on the wall

Sarge: My name is Sarge and I did three tours in Vietnam 1966, '67, and '68. I did enjoy my service in the Army up until the time they made me Combat Infantry Squad Leader. Up until then we would lose someone. It would be a terrible event, but once I was a Squad Leader it seemed to be my fault. I felt I should've died in Vietnam.

Shortly after I got home, my mother took me to the VA Hospital and she said "This isn't even the guy we sent to Vietnam." I was trying to feed my adrenaline addiction and I would hang out at bikers' bars and not take sass from anybody till I got beat up and thrown out. I met my wife, Leslie, in Perry's Bar. We've been together ever since and 48 years we've been married.

I had this totally animal awareness level of hyper vigilance, night terrors. I would not have any memory of what terrorized me, but I would wake up with a start, sit up drenched in sweat, trembling. I couldn't hold a job for more than three months. I was experiencing a big problem keeping my mind out of the jungle. It would be a Norman Rockwell scene: Leslie sitting beside me, the children playing on the floor, and it would be so beautiful and perfect, and then boom. I would explode in a terrible rage and they're gone.

Well it was Survivor's Guilt. I didn't feel like I deserved these extra special moments and so I would ruin them. One day, Leslie had this pamphlet and it had every symptom of PTSD all listed in a row. By the time I got to the bottom of the list, I was pretty sure I had PTSD because every one of them was me.

Eventually I started writing things down and I was shocked and dismayed that it all came out rhyming. So I hired this guy to come in my little trailer and teach me the 12 Bar Blues Progression. Then I began turning my poetry into Blues songs. It's the most beautiful medicine that I ever got for PTSD, is having an audience really like what I said. It's just so healing.

I teach in schools all around Arizona. I was able to tell the students things that I hadn't told Leslie and she learned so much about my PTSD and the cause of it. All I know is it didn't decrease her love for me and that was my biggest fear.

There's a talk that I've given to many, many Veterans and it's basically "Okay, what are you gonna tell the guys when you see them again? The guys on the wall. Here you are making your life and your family's life miserable every day. They're gonna want to not hear that. They're gonna want to hear a great story about how much fun you had, what a good time, how wonderful it was being home. What are you gonna tell the guys on the wall?"



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