

SOLDIER'S heart

SOLDIER'S HEART HOLDS CONFERENCE AT THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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Soldier's Heart is a veterans' return and healing project addressing the emotional and spiritual needs of veterans, their families and communities. Soldier's Heart promotes and guides community-based efforts to heal the effects of war based on strategies presented in "War and the Soul".

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Soldier's Heart is about healing. It is also about forming community. On September 13th we gathered at the Theosophical Society in Wheaton, IL to once again create a safe and trusting circle of veterans, their families, helping professionals and concerned citizens. We told stories, held each other, ate together, cried, laughed and sang. When we said goodbye on Sunday, we were all transformed. Many thanks to the Theosophical Society for providing us with wonderful hospitality. Here are a few comments from those who there.

David Bland, General Manager, Theosophical Society in America:

The staff of the our Center was so impacted by the spirit of the group and the pervading sense of healing that they have asked me to schedule another Workshop next year. This was the first time that we have had the opportunity to share our campus and its aura of love and wholeness with people who have given so much. The workshop truly became our blessing.

I saw the dream I had the night Ed and I discussed the yet unborn War and the Soul be more than I had ever thought it could be. To be a part of men and women finding their souls when they had almost forgotten what a soul is has and will continue to be one of my greatest blessings.

Patty Hall, workshop participant:

My father is a WWII vet. I never before gave this any thought, even when looking at his old black and white crinkly edged photographs. And as a mother of a 17 year old son, am mortified at the thought of what it took for him to volunteer. I also never thought back to the fact that his own father, my grandfather, served in World War I. Their marriage and household was also broken apart. And still our whole family wonders, "What's wrong with dad?"

So much is clear about what had been a looming dark shadow that I couldn't make disappear 100%. Although I had longed to hand out the olive branch to what has been both a strained and abusive relationship, I have been hesitant for fear of outright hurting the man who once was a loving father. I now feel like I have the tools and understanding I need to approach him with compassion and understanding, which are two elements that were all but missing before I took your workshop.

John D. Zemler, Combat veteran, Artillery captain:

Our Journey from the Valley of the Shadow of Death to the Holy Mountain
Massive uncontrolled healing occurred at this workshop because within it our lives have been valued and affirmed, and called to further service on the path of true warriorhood. The Theosophical Society facilitated this healing by kindly allowing us the sacred holy ground to plow, plant, and grow new and renewed life. They allowed us to take the Hero's Journey together and emerge as matured warriors. Our lives and our wounds - both physical and soul wounds - were told and expressed, honored, and embraced.

Many of us, in a multitude of ways, were suffering when we arrived. Our souls bore the wounds of our lives. In biblical terms, we suffered from a "fever," an ailment that debilitates, disables, and attempts to kill its victim; an infection that alienates us from all of our positive relationships and reasons to stay alive. Throughout our time together we managed to accept the hand of the Luminous Other to raise us from our deathly fever to our new life, whether that hand was seen as the hand of Jesus, the Bodhisattva, the Elder Spirit, or simply another one of our own circle, our own lodge. Souls that had been rendered dark, emerged, showing light.

Men and women were able to begin to expel the alienating identity of PTSD, the identity of the killing fever, and to recover their own names, their own identities, their own souls. In doing so they were raised from a slow death to a realized life. Many of our complement had been walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death for decades on an endless patrol, unable to ascend to the Holy Mountain, a place of rest, light, and life. The workshop allowed us to walk out of the dark valley and embrace the light. And, depending upon where we are in our individual journeys, some of us can now walk back in and help carry out those whose souls are still too wounded to redeploy back home on their own.

Our current steps may still involve tears of both mourning and joy, and a limp or a tremor. We still feel pain. This is because wounded healers often make the best healers. Regardless of the shape of our physical frames, because of our Hero's Journey together, our steps now fall with integrity, meaning, and life. Massive uncontrolled healing occurred at this Workshop because our lives have been valued and affirmed. and called to further service on the path of true warriorhood. And, because of this healing, I offer all my thanks and praise to that which is Holy.

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WILD BEASTS AND WANDERING SOULS:

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By Ed Tick

This important work explores the values, concepts and practices from shamanism that are most helpful in understanding the combat experience and healing the war-wounded soul. The originality of Ed Tick's healing vision is stunning in its boldness and couldn't come at a better time. This new essay from one of our best practitioners draws its strength as much from a deep empathy as it does from the radical approach to a most difficult concern. Finally, fugitives are given a real hope of returning home."

Andrew Hoffmann, Ph.D.,
University of Utah

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Ed Tick to Speak at Walter Reed

Soldier's Heart Director, Ed Tick, will offer an all day seminar to the staff of Walter Reed Army Hospital on Friday, Oct. 5, on "Spirituality and Traumatic Stress." The hospital has ordered 350 copies of WAR AND THE SOUL to distribute to staff at the facility and chaplains abroad. The presentation will be simulcast to other U.S. military facilities around the globe.

For more information or attendee registration, contact Chaplain (Major) Kristi Pappas, Senior Chaplain Clinician, Department of Ministry & Pastoral Care, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Office: (202) 782-6305 / 2090, E-mail: kristi.pappas@us.army.mil

A Soldier's Heart

Dr. John W. Fisher, Viet Nam Warrior

Author, Angels In Viet Nam, Not Welcome Home

What is a soldier's heart? It has become a foundation structured from the work of Dr. Ed Tick and his book *War and the Soul*. His work is about helping combat soldiers reconnect with their own identity. The identity is the spirit of an individual and is seated into the depths of the ventricles in the heart. It is the "Being within"—the core of your very existence. In a soldier's heart, the very relationship with this light is gone. The stethoscope still reverberates the thumping from its chambers and all seems fine. All is not fine, however, because the Being and human are no longer connected. This part of a soldier's heart, estranged from its soul, must weep in the darkness.

Veterans come home after combat and endeavor to live a normal life. Then later, well after the war has been fought, they realize that something is wrong. Their memories haunt them and make them strangers to the rest of the world. Nobody seems concerned how they feel or what they dream about at night. They think that nobody cares. They try to live a normal life, but it isn't normal. It's a life without an identity. Doctors describe it as PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), but the disorder was there way before the diagnosis was given. The syndrome can be seen in all veterans. Dr. Tick calls it a post terror soul disorder (PTSD).

Soldiers come home and are influenced by their cultures and spirituality. Their reception from the community dictates their "welcome home." Greek and Native American, even Vietnamese soldiers were given high regards from their societies following battle. Culturally they were honored for their duty. Spiritually they were honored for the deity that lives within them. Sins were forgiven. They felt very welcome to come home and knew that their nation cared. Honored as warriors, they felt a kinship with their very own soul. Most did not experience post terror soul disorder. The "welcome home" was the vital component the soldiers needed to retrieve their souls. It made the difference between a normal life or a self-tortured life.

Besides the retrieval of the soul, however, there is another part to a soldier's heart. It's something that doesn't go away, no matter how well the warrior is able to sleep at night. It's the part which shudders at the sound of fireworks on the Fourth of July, the part which sheds tears during a war scene in a movie, and which feels the horror of combat when another K.I.A. is announced on the news. This aspect of the soldier's heart is different from the rest of the population, except for other soldiers. This has become the brotherhood that soldiers/veterans/warriors feel for one another. This kindred connection is because they all know the difference within their hearts.

And this brotherhood is world wide, including veterans from all wars, historic or modern. On a recent trip to Vietnam, several American veterans, some with PTSD, met their former enemy. The Vietnamese warriors welcomed their former foes into their arms with celebration and ceremony because they shared the bonds from war. South Vietnamese, Lao-Hmong, Australian and Korean allies to the Americans during the Vietnam War are also within the brotherhood. The difference within their hearts that they have in common keeps them from ever being estranged from each other. They all experience the part of the soldier's heart that keeps them from ever forgetting, even if the light of soul has been retrieved. It is the part that still cries.

Important for all warriors, however, is that they realize the crying for what it is. Those coming home without an appropriate cultural and spiritual welcoming are destined to experience soul

disorder. It may take many years to come to terms with this loss of identity, and in the meantime those inflicted may instead begin to identify with the disorder itself. Vietnam War veterans have been living in the dark for more than 30 years. It's all they know, even if they have had profound healing. The tears that seem to flow without reason do not indicate they have lost soul once again. The crying is not grieving about the war. It is an expression of the pain stored in the soldier's heart. Warriors will always be different from non-warriors.

There's more room in a broken heart. One can never erase the horrors of war. Hearts have been broken in so many ways, but the scars that mend it back together leave more room with a larger aperture for the reclaimed light from the "Being within" to shine. When warriors die, they know that they're going to heaven, because they've already spent their time in hell. Leaving the hell in the war, realizing the identity with soul, understanding tears for what they are, the warrior becomes a unique character within his society that traverses above the rest with honor and wisdom. This accomplishment makes them spiritual warriors and they no longer have to die to experience heaven.

Heaven is on earth for the spiritual warrior with a soldier's heart.

Report From Nome, Alaska, July 2007

Larry Winters, Viet Nam Veteran, Psychotherapist, Author, *The Making and Unmaking of a Marine*

Tom Punguk is a native Alaskan Viet Nam Army veteran who was in country from 1967 to 1968. I met him during a trip I made to Nome Alaska in July of 2007. I am a psychotherapist working at Four Winds Hospital in Kantona NY. I was in Nome to teach Native Alaskan mental health workers group psychotherapy skills. I am also a Viet Nam vet who served in the Marines from 1969 to 1970.

When I finished teaching the four day workshop my friend Greg, a Social Work administrator for Norton Sound Health Corporation, and the man who'd invited me to come to teach in Nome said he'd take me to Golovin to meet Tom.

Golovin was a village of one hundred and fifty people a few hundred miles south of Nome. The twelve seat prop plane took off from Nome airport flying south over a vast tundra of lowing lying shrub. We did not begin to see real trees until we neared Golivin.

Tom's house sat on the side of a hill. Several set of antlers were nailed to fading red siding of the house. A four wheeler sat just in front of the side door. Tools, skins, and all kinds of unidentifiable things were nailed up to the outside walls of the house. It looked more like the walls of a workshop than a house. As we entered I noticed a high caliber rifle leaning against the wall to the entrance way.

Tom invited us to sit in his living room. I sat on a couch, Greg sat in a chair and Tom pulled out a small wooden stool placing it right in front of us. I told Tom that I was a Viet Nam vet and wanted to speak with him about his experiences in the War. He agreed, nodding.

I surveyed the room and saw a long silvery pelt hanging on the door jam that led from the living room to the kitchen. I asked what it was, and Tom answered, "It's a lynx. I shot it last winter and I'm going to send it off to my sister. She said she wanted it."

I started asked Tom questions about the war and his time in the Army. He politely answered them but I soon began to feel awkward so I sat back on the couch and let him go where he wanted. For the next hour Tom told us stories.

At the time there seemed to be no Logic to his stories. I struggled to connect their meaning. He'd tell us how every year he'd go up river and into the woods and shoot a moose. He said he'd been doing this his whole life. He described how he'd skin the animal and how he hauled the meat home. With almost no breath in between he'd then tell us a Viet Nam story. "Did I tell you I worked on an island off of Vietnam? Out there we were in charge of the communication tower. I was trained in electronic communications. We handled navigational information concerning the war. It came through our tower. I was just thinking of the number of people's death that I had something to do with at that time, it must be huge. The information coming thorough our tower held the coordinates of where folks were to be bombed, shot, and ambushed."

Another short breath and Tom went on. "When I worked up on the oil lines..." After that story he started with, "I fished my whole life, almost always alone."

Not until I got home did I realize that these stories did connect. They came right out of Tom's unconscious and into ours. The death, courage, depravation, and knowledge held in these stories were a form of teaching that village elders used. There seemed to be no linier thread holding things together, but I remember each story better than anything I'd been taught in school.

What I have been thinking about after coming home is what Tom told me about when he came home from boot camp. He said he was seen by his village as a brave man. He had been off training to fight for his country. He'd been one of the few villagers to leave and to see the larger world which meant he had new knowledge. As listened I gathered what Tom meant was that he left Golovin a boy and come back a man, and was respected as a man by his village. He then told me when he came home from Viet Nam his role was elevated to war hero. He was known as a man who stood up for his people, who risked his life for his country, a man who was well on his way to becoming an elder in his community, which is what he truly is now. Tom never lost his identity. In fact, the Vietnam War solidified Tom into the role of warrior. He said, "I didn't have the same kind of adjustment problems you guys did down in the lower forty eight. Everyone in the village looked up to me, and they still do."

And so do I, I thought.

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