

Veterans Journey Home

Executive Summary

Veterans' stories need to be told in a way that transfers the moral weight of the event from the individual to the community.

-- Ed Tick, War and the Soul

Veterans Journey Home (working title) will be an hour long documentary for TV highlighting the powerful transformational healing of the Veterans Journey Home workshop (<http://www.vetsjourneyhome.org/index.html>). The VJH is a non-profit, all volunteer organization. It's mission: to create wholeness of being by healing the traumas of war. The film's centerpiece will be the VJH workshop – a 48 hour period culminating in the Sunday evening gathering of Vets tearfully returning “home” to the loving accolades of their wives, kids, friends, and families. 80% of the film will be filmed inside the Mount Airy, Maryland, Gaia Healing Center where the transformational work occurs. 10% will be filmed beforehand with the Vets at home in their everyday lives; 10% will be filmed after the workshop with those same Vets back home where we will see the powerful reverberations their transformation is making on their wives and families.

Whether official PTSD victims or not, some of these men and women are serving life sentences without chance of parole. Until they cleanse themselves from “the ghosts of war,” by cathartically releasing the pain of combat, they will be stuck, forever soldiers at war with themselves or others. It will only be a matter of time until their wounds surface in the everyday through divorce, alcoholism, unemployment, domestic violence, and maybe even murder or suicide. The workshop addresses the trauma of battle and begins the healing process through each veteran telling his story.

The film will tell the wild, one-of-a-kind, hero's journey of three very different veterans. What we will witness is an emotional hurricane. Though at times terrifying, shocking, and emotionally wrenching, the film will be tremendously uplifting, filled with the humor, spirit, and heart of the men and women who open themselves to our cameras. Their backgrounds and experience will express the full range of combat soldiery - different across race, class, and culture. Their stories will reveal the transformation from the closed, suspicious place they inhabit before the workshop, to the open, emotionally expressive and loving place they inhabit at its end. The homecoming will be the penultimate scene – providing that symbolic destination point. Thanked again and again for their service, wrapped in the thundering embrace of the community - the hugs of parents, children, spouses, and friends – these servicemen and women will step back into civilian life with vigor and promise. Yet it's only in their literal return home – back to the everyday trials of domestic life, work, and relationships – that we will take the full measure of their transformation and experience their rededication as fathers, husbands, workers, and coaches.

Perhaps most movingly, we will also witness the staff, most combat veterans themselves, many from Vietnam, as they impart the lessons *they've* learned from their combat “recoveries.” Men like Sam Luna - VJH organizer from Houston and a Vietnam vet. Sam experienced a rebirth during his own VJH weekend. We'll see him offer the new generation the hard-won wisdom and acceptance he's experienced on his own journey home. We'll see his love and caring of the new Iraqi vets in his dedication to the weekend set-up and logistics, in his devotion to their attendance, in his bright smile and encouragement, in the open-hearted vulnerability that he models.

Bearing witness, creating change.

Positioned correctly, this program will be a programming blockbuster. At the very least, it will be “prestige piece,” generating tremendous positive press (especially op-eds), uniformly good reviews, festival awards, policy-maker attention, and word-of-mouth recognition for years to come. Most importantly, it will reach veterans in their own homes to powerfully motivate them to seek the healing they so richly deserve.

Though it will broadcast nationally, perhaps on PBS or HBO, the program’s greatest impact will be through long-term educational distribution and outreach. It will reach and impact three different audience groups: average American adults, policy makers, and veterans themselves. Average Americans will learn that the most ordinary, healthy and well adjusted soldiers can be traumatized by combat experience, that they can carry the subsequent wounds for a lifetime. Hopefully, they’ll realize that tax dollars for veterans might be put to best use in programs like this. Local, state, and national policy makers will learn that work like Veterans Journey Home makes families stronger and communities safer. Programs like these can truly support the troops as they return to civilian life.

It is estimated that there are currently one million homeless veterans living on the streets of America. There are another 250,000 in prisons, the more violent the combat they participated in the more violent the crimes they were imprisoned for. We have 1.7 million returning soldiers from the Afganistan and Iraqi wars. The Veterans administration has estimated that 20% -30% are returning with post traumatic stress syndrome. Within five years that could be as high as 40%. Programs like the Veterans Journey Home can over time actually save our society millions of dollars. Veterans and their families around the country, some desperate and lost in torment, will learn that transformation and hope are not only possible, but readily available.

VJH does some of the most important in-depth, self-transformation work with veterans in America today. For the hundreds of thousands of vets already returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan nothing could be more integral to their safe transition back to civilian life than this program.

Veterans Journey Home will be produced and directed by Academy and Emmy nominated filmmaker Frederick Marx and produced by Academy and Emmy award winning filmmaker Jeffrey Brown. *Veterans Journey Home* is a tax deductible 501.c.3 project. For further information please contact Frederick Marx.

PTSD and the story of what caused it always concern more than just the survivor. Until properly addressed it reverberates through our relationships and down the generations harming everyone it touches.

-- Ed Tick, War and the Soul