



MEN TALK

THE MEN'S CENTER NEWS

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Inside a Veterans' Group Writing About War and Peace

— © 2007 BY SHEPHERD BLISS

After being raised in the military family that gave its name to Ft. Bliss, Texas, I have tried to live a normal civilian life. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam Era, I have tried to live a normal civilian life. But like many “military brats” and veterans, I have not always adjusted so well to life outside the service. I spent over 20 years being militarized and have now lived nearly 40 years demilitarizing myself. Those formative first two decades have been hard to overcome, though I can usually cope and pass. Then war breaks out again...

After a dozen years of writing and reading our work to each other, our Veterans' Writing Group will release a book in September. Edited by award-winning author Maxine Hong Kingston and published by Koa Books, it is entitled “*Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*.” (Information at www.vowvop.org.) It includes storytelling— nonfiction, fiction and poetry-- by 80 veterans spanning five wars. The writers are combat veterans, medics, others who served in war, gang members and victims of violence, draft resisters, deserters and peace activists. Unfortunately, our book is timely, as the war drums grow louder every day.

Our group emerged from workshops given by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. By writing within the group and listening to the stories of others I have been supported to understand, describe, and heal from some of my military trauma. Our writers' community seeks to heal war trauma through art and produce writing that can communicate to those both in the service and civilians.

After decades of counseling in groups, at Vets Centers, and with therapists, I still have more work to do. My sound trauma still gets triggered, and I typically respond with the classic flight or fight. Certain sounds agitate and irritate me, so I usually just leave the scene. Leaf blowers, ticking clocks, people talking while chewing gum or eating, and other sounds can literally drive me crazy.

My contribution to the book is about sound trauma and is entitled “Sound Shy,” a play on the term “gun shy.” It is an insider's personal account of a military family and a veterans group. My childhood was filled with loud sounds—including planes taking off near our house, rifles and other weapons being fired, and men yelling orders at each other and responding “Yes, Sir!” My adult life has been characterized by sound avoidance. I can go to considerable extremes to get away from sounds that others do not even notice or tolerate.

I never saw combat in Vietnam, though I have war wounds to heal. While still in the Army I went with a friend to hear Martin Luther King, Jr. His way of being was such a contrast to the many military men who had been my models. I decided to resign my officer's commission and joined the resistance.

Such memories often seem distant, like they did not really happen to me, but to someone in a novel. Being in the Veterans' Writing Group has enabled me to process some of my feelings within a structure that provided support. I always look forward to our gatherings, even when I cannot attend. Just knowing that a group of veterans that I am a part of is meeting to write and heal supports me.

But war continues to happen, making more casualties and spreading its destruction. I remember a few years of relative peace. But when the bombs start falling, they seem to head right for my stomach. I feel them in my body. The casualties may be distant, but they feel close to home to me. So I keep writing, though usually from a safe enough distance, leaving some of the more difficult things inside.

Things happen. When the first Iraq War erupted, I remember sitting with a Chicano friend whose son was in the military, watching television. “Brown on brown,” she commented, noting how much the Chicano and other dark youth on the American front look like the Iraqi boys fighting.

Things happen. On Sept. 11, 2001, war had once again reached me. Sept. 11 was also the date that the Chilean military launched its coup, 1973, so it has long been an anniversary date of loss for me.

Now we have another Iraq War. Iran may be next. I try to lead a normal civilian life. But I know what is happening. I do not need to watch it on TV, which obscures much of the real story. Books like “*Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*” and documentary films like “Sir!, Nor Sir,” in which two members of our vets group appear, are more helpful to reveal the realities of war than the sanitized, corporate media.

Though she is not in our book, many years ago Deena Metzger wrote a poem that our book echoes:

There are those who are trying to set fire to the world.

We are in danger.

There is time only to work slowly.

There is no time not to love.

Dr. Shepherd Bliss, sb3@pon.net, is a retired college teacher who has owned a farm in Northern California for the last 15 years.

Library Corner

– **RAY CLARE, LIBRARIAN**



We are pleased to offer our members a unique and extensive collection of quality reading on men's topics. This month, we received a wonderful donation from a newer member. We have five copies of:

No More Mr. Nice Guy, A proven plan for getting what you want in love, sex, and life. By Dr. Robert A. Glover!

Other new offerings include:

Sober for Good, New solutions for drinking problems by Anne M. Fletcher

Many Roads, One Journey, Moving beyond the 12-steps by Charlotte Davis Kasl Ph.D.

Addiction, Change and Choice, The new view of alcoholism by Vince Fox

The Truth about Addiction and Recovery by Stanton Peele, Ph.D. and Archie Brodsky

Rational Recovery, The new cure for substance addiction by Jack Trimpey

The small book, A revolutionary alternative for overcoming alcohol and drug dependence by Jack Trimpey

A Million Little Pieces by James Frey

And while you are enjoying our many book resources, consider a browsing our large and growing selection of periodicals.

Address Change Notifications

from the post office cost the Men's Center \$1.14 each. Please let us know in advance of mailings! Thanks!

Men Talk is a bi-monthly publication of the Twin Cities Men's Center, a non-profit organization. Call 612-822-5892 for subscriptions, or e-mail us at tcmc@tcmc.org

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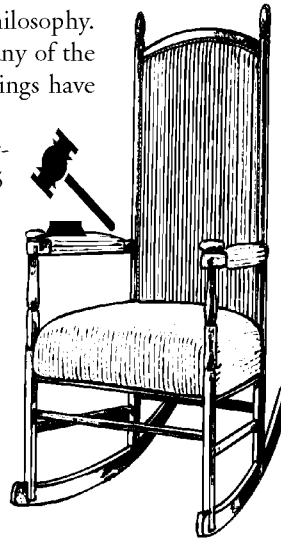
Greetings from the Chair

Several years ago I attended a seminar centered on Carl Jung's philosophy. Though I've forgotten many of the details of that weekend, two things have stuck with me.

The first is a simple observation that there were about 25 attendees, yet all but two of us were women. It's interesting that women seem to be more willing to step out and learn more about themselves and life. Is that part of our macho men's culture, afraid of appearing weak if we need to ask for directions, even in the serious business of navigating the road of life?

The other is something I find myself applying over and over. As we all know, life is full of peaks, plains, and valleys. What I learned is that we usually gain our most valuable lessons, not when everything is running smoothly or when we're on top of the world, but when we're in the valleys.

When we are aware of this, it helps us



to be open to embracing those down times for the opportunities that they present for growth. It doesn't make the pain any easier, but I believe that it does help us to face it head on and with greater strength.

One of the strong hindrances to overcoming any addiction, be it alcohol, drug, sex, or anger, is the practice of denial. If we can't admit we have a problem, how can we possibly deal with it? Accepting the valleys in our life helps us to accept ourselves, including all of our weaknesses and shortcomings; things that are much more clear to us when we are not "all-powerful". With this acceptance and awareness, we can see the valleys, not as good or bad, but as an integral part of the fabric of life. Then we can begin the process of becoming the complete person that we are meant to be.

**LEN ZIMNEY,
OUTGOING BOARD CHAIR**

Mini-Review of *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*

I have the somewhat mixed pleasure of reading the book: *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace* edited by Maxine Hong Kingston, Koa Books: 2006, ISBN 10:0-9773338-3-3. I say somewhat mixed because some of the stories reminded me of the pain our country inflicted upon the Vietnamese people in the 1960s. I was reminded, too, of the pain that men brought home with them from Vietnam.

I was a Marine from 1968-1971 and performed body escort in 1969. That is, I escorted the remains of dead Marines home to their families. That's the extremely condensed version of the story I tell high school students.

The essays in the book grew out of writing workshops that Ms. Kingston offered for veterans in the San Francisco bay area in the 80s and 90s. These men poured their souls into their works. If you want to get a taste of what war is like from the point of view of the men who walked the trails and watched good men suffer and die, I recommend you seek out this book.

JIM LOVESTAR, MINNEAPOLIS

Ed. Note: to read more about the Veterans Writers Group, go to: <<http://www.vowwop.org/>>

HELP!
We need volunteers to help mail Men Talk. We meet at the Men's Center from 9am to about 1pm on a Saturday (see MT calendar for exact date). Easy work and good fellowship!

**Very Last Chance
Book Sale**

Special sale prices end with this issue. \$3 each, or 2 for \$5

Men Freeing Men

By Francis Baumli, Editor
Explores the myth of the traditional male role.

Male Menopause

By Jed Diamond, Ph.D.

Surviving Male Menopause

- A Guide for Women & Men
By Jed Diamond, Ph.D.

The Men's Center ALL-PURPOSE FORM

Clip this form and mail to The Men's Center. A regular annual membership at The Twin Cities Men's Center is \$20. With that you get access to the extensive reference library on Men's Issues, receive the Men Talk newsletter, participation in the annual meeting, and enjoy reduced fees to Men's Center sponsored events. If you are able to afford a membership at the Patron (\$40) level, you get free admission to all Wednesday workshops in addition to all the regular membership benefits.

- I want to sustain the activities of The Men's Center by becoming a "20 x 12 Honor Roll Member."
- Please ENTER/RENEW my membership at The Men's Center for the next 12 months:
Enclosed please find \$_____ \$20 (Regular) \$40 (Patron).
- I want to make an additional, tax-deductible gift of \$_____. Thanks much.
- My new/correct address/phone is printed below.
- Please remove me from The Men's Center mailing list; the pre-addressed gummed mailing label is attached.
(You won't receive Men Talk if this box is checked.)

I have these feelings, thoughts, opinions, ideas, news items for The Men's Center:

FROM: name _____

Date _____ Mailing address _____

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Anger Management Program

The focus of the twelve week anger management class is both education and support. Through class interaction, experiential exercises, lecture, and homework assignments, men will develop new ways to manage their feelings of anger. Following completion of the class, participants can join an ongoing support group to reinforce their new skills. These ongoing support groups will also be facilitated by the trained volunteer facilitators.

Length of Class:

12 consecutive weeks (next class begins Monday, Dec. 4)

Number of Participants:

Space is limited to 12 participants with 2 facilitators per class

Cost:

\$215 for Men Center Members (\$225 for Non-Members)

Starting Dates:

Classes are filled on a first come, first served basis. Please call TMC at 612-822-5892 to be placed on the waiting list. State name, address, telephone, preferred starting class. Or if you need further details, call our Anger Management coordinator, John Hesch, on the Anger Management phone 612-229-3102.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

25 years exp. as director of U. of M. employee assistance program and private practice. Individual, couples, issues of depression, identity, coming out, CD.

Fees based on ability to pay.

David W. Johnson, MA 612-721-8048
dwjohn@umn.edu

Dear Men's Center Members and Friends:

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Your Gift Card will be sent to your home or your email!

Shopping at www.shoptrustbuy.com is easy and convenient. We offer:

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There's so much more on the website, why wait to shop?

TMC Office Hours: M, Tu, Th, F ;1-4:30pm. Our telephone (612) 822-5892 is answered 24-hours per day by US West voicemail, and an attempt is made to return calls within 1 or 2 days. Our FAX number is (612) 821-6424.

TMC is in the lower level of "Uptown Office Park," a brick office building on the Northeast corner of West 33rd Street and Hennepin Avenue in south Minneapolis, Enter through the door on the north (3249) end of the building (it has 2 numbers: 3249 and 3255!), immediately turn left and descend the stairway through the fire door to Suite 55. (Formerly) handicapped access is easiest through a side door on West 33rd Street.

Check out our web site: www.tcmc.org or correspond at our e-mail address: tcmc@tcmc.org

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Another Day in the Life

*The face I find in the mirror is
not superman's.
still, I am sure I am some superhero,
but then, in the shower
the soap slips out of my hand,
resounding, slithering, sliding around
in the bottom of the tub.*

*I am gloriously human,
my sweat washed off, the grime gone, clean —
the day's soil, if not sins, scrubbed away —
but no cigar, no special powers,
though I do leap out of the tub
in a single bound.*

BY KEN STERN

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