

DOC SMITH

# THE WAY OF THE VETERAN



THE WAY OF THE VETERAN  
BY MARK A. "DOC SMITH"



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IN MEMORY OF

ISG BORDELON  
CPT JACOBSEN  
PVT THOMPSON  
SGT PLUMONDRE  
SSG JOHNSON  
SGT MORTON  
SGT DAVIS  
SPC GERTSON  
SPC SANCHEZ  
SPC SAYLES  
SGT SWINDELL  
SPC DOERFLINGER

...AND ALL THOSE WHO DIED IN SERVICE  
TO OUR GREAT COUNTRY

THE WAY OF THE VETERAN  
INTO THE DEEP

ON BEING A VETERAN

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## INTO THE DEEP

Our journey home begins with the experiences of war fresh in our minds. The memories that we did not have time to reflect upon cease to be held at bay by constant activities carried out during our tour of duty. The beast of battle has one more trick before falling into the abyss of our memory. As we turn to depart foreign lands its tail whips around and ensnares our limbs dragging us down into the deep with him.

This second part of battle can be more challenging to overcome because we are often unprepared for it. Instead of dealing with a direct threat we must learn to cultivate the courage of self-reflection and carefully harvest meaning and purpose in our post war lives. This final enemy comes in many forms. It is often disguised as guilt, fear and loss but there are many others.

Nothing in this booklet is commentary of the auspices by which conflicts are shrouded. The political, sociological and media paradigms are not the subject of emphasis here. There are plenty of critical sources on such matters and although these topics are valid and warranted—they strive for an explanation *within the context of their realm, discipline or scope*. The scope that we are to address in this work is that of the *metaphysical, the soul and our spiritual development*.

Our task is to address the individual warrior, the journey home and the re—entry into civilian life after experiencing combat. For many, the return home can become more difficult than battles fought abroad. This new challenge requires more than courage and urges the tolerance for self-reflection. Training to fight for war is much different than trying to understand what war *means*

and *harvesting meaning* from experiences of war for purposeful work afterwards. The emphasis on purposefulness in postwar life is crucial.

There are many organizations, programs and institutions who try to return veterans back to their families, vocations and communities as quickly as possible. Where once rituals and ceremonies for atonement after combat brought the warrior back into his tribe—we hand them an application or ask for a resume instead. The intentions are good enough for some but not so much for many. There is no fault to be found in this heartfelt desire to help veterans get back on their feet. But beyond the nostalgia of the hard working individual earning a check and supporting his family in an honest American way—there is something worth being said about the current dilemma at hand. In truth many veterans will at first desire the simple aspects of life only to discover after they begin to carry out the day to day tasks that something is missing. There must be meaning. This small booklet has been written for that purpose.

This dialogue contains two veterans. One is a newly discharged enlisted soldier who has served in combat named “Andrew Hatch”. The older veteran has also served in combat and offers his perspective on the way of the veteran. His name is William (Bill) “Stone”.

~ON BEING A VETERAN~  
REQUIREMENTS  
PART I

**Stone:** ...So what I am talking about isn't how you are classified to get any certain benefit. I am talking about the certain things I think make you a veteran and other things that take that dignity away from folks.

**Hatch:** You mean how people act and stuff like that right?

**Stone:** Yes...sort of. I guess anyone can claim that they are vet and go around saying that. But even if they are telling the truth...then what does that mean...that say they are a veteran?

**Hatch:** You mean like the guys who wear all the veteran hats and vests? I wouldn't wear that stuff.

**Stone:** Has nothing to do with hats or whatever. You younger vets wear those certain shirts, parachord bracelets and whatnot. I can spot a new vet a mile away. They have tribal tats and do the beard thing. That is what I call veteran culture. Of course the older guys have

different things that they wear but it is all part of the same thing—*culture*.

**Hatch:** So what are you talking about then?

**Stone:** Sure. Let me see...I guess I would say that there is a good and a *not so good* way of being a veteran. Sort of some unspoken rules or guidelines. I don't know that they have ever been written but I think that most vets instinctively know them. They at least have an idea about it.

**Hatch:** Okay, so give me an example so I understand.

## ORDER OF PRECEDENCE PART II

**Stone:** Okay...although it is politically incorrect, there is a certain ranking order of veterans. I mean, the government even recognized this by giving preference to veterans who for instance—served in war, was a POW or was wounded in war. There is no unfairness at play here. It is more along the lines of fate than a choice. I think it is more in depth than that. Maybe a good way of putting it is like this...the order & precedence does not take into the account of the motivations intended for a veteran's service or circumstances that put him or her there—but the outcome of it. So for instance...a guy or gal that puts in 20 years of service and goes to the top military training and has an outstanding career but is fortunate enough to never serve in a combat zone is in a different order & precedence than a 17 year old kid who is drafted or volunteer's to serve and is killed in combat. At the same token there is also a distinction of those who are wounded and killed and those who are in a circumstance that they put at risk their own safety to protect the

lives of others. I guess that we would have to ask ourselves what is the “thing” that they are protecting?

**Hatch:** I am getting it...

**Stone:** I hope this is not boring the hell out of you!

**Hatch:** No way! Tell me more about what you are saying. I think they are protecting freedom? What do you think?

**Stone:** You are close. They are protecting life. But not just the act of a living thing. But the potential flourishing of life. The younger the person the more potential has not yet been experienced. Of course, they are also protecting the freedom for the person or persons to live how they desire and fulfill their own destiny. I would say that at the top or near it would be the veteran who gave his life in the direst of situations for the lives of others without regard to his own. Next I would insist that it would be those who were killed while fighting in action. In my book I would go as far as to say that there would be a greater stature given to youths killed in combat. Because they would not have had the chance to live their

lives. At the same time—there is the man who leaves behind his wife and children. The difference between the two is that the family man has someone to carry on his name and the youth does not. The suffering extends to the youth's parents and to the family man's wife and children. In the youth's tragedy a sibling or cousin may be emboldened to carry on the memory through life and with the family man with his children for future generations. In each of these scenarios our society attempts to ease and preserve the lost life through the respective aspect of the family that will be able to carry forward the life that was lost. Do you get what I mean here?

**Hatch:** So what about the youth or mature veteran with no family? Are you saying that they are different?

**Stone:** The veteran's fellow comrades would be the ones who would feel that lost then the most.

**Hatch:** That makes sense...so what comes next.

**Stone:** Well...I would say that it would be those who were wounded and maimed in

combat. The greater loss of their ability to pursue their own life—the greater the stature as a veteran. If a veteran had set out to protect someone else's life and was wounded then they would be higher yet regarded in my opinion.

Next would be those who served combat and have experienced the challenges of returning back to their lives and must spend time to get back to where they would have been before. Some have a much harder time than others. At the same notion we also have those who served in combat and excel when they return home and are invigorated by their experiences to accomplish great things.

Finally, we have the great number of men and women who serve their time in the military and give their life's work to being prepared should war ever happen that they will do their part to defend life. One cannot throw off the immense responsibility of carrying the torch of military preparedness as a deterrent of war because one never broke out in a certain era.

**Hatch:** Are there any others?

**Stone:** Well—let’s not get confused and forget that for the living these are starting points of being a veteran. Those who have passed on in combat are immortalized in that state but for the remaining living veterans—the next challenge is what they will do *now*. That is where you and I are today. What will we do with what we have seen and experienced?

**Hatch:** This makes some sense to me but I have an old vet friend who served in Nam. He points it out to me that American values are a sham and that we are all used by the government to do its dirty work. What about the things he is saying then?

**Stone:** Who could argue with that? I do not support or doubt the surrounding circumstances of political motivations behind war. Anyone who blindly believes anything their told needs to wake up. It is really easy to get caught up in that argument **BUT** it is a *valid one*. However, that’s not the point for me. It is also easy to get distracted on that topic and allow it to overshadow growing from the experiences of war in any meaningful way. We live in a time where meaning is constantly being questioned. Any reference to values or

faith come under immediate attack. All of these things make the return home harder for many in my opinion. For many that aspect of the community is missing. People do not realize that such attacks are poison to the soul. They'd rather talk about how bad things are than take the time to reach out and help someone understand themselves. The worst thing that can happen is to become encased in hatred, bitterness and isolation. I certainly do not want *that* to be the outcome. But it is even more offensive is to try and convert others to such depths of hate.

## MERIT VS. ENTITLEMENT PART III

**Hatch:** I think I see where this is going. They way that you serve is one side of things but what you do *after your service* counts as well.

**Stone:** Right. If not more.

**Hatch:** Hmmm.

**Stone:** And especially how you perceive your service in regards to how you believe others should view you.

**Hatch:** Meaning...?

**Stone:** Some may feel as though they the right of entitlement. Some may not. It is a sticky subject. But a real one nonetheless.

**Hatch:** You see that all the time at the hospital.

**Stone:** My way of looking at it is like this. The purpose of service is to preserve a way of life. Our freedom and liberty are not just vague ideas but worthy aspects of humanity to fight for. Some even die for these things. But those who make the sacrifice do not make them for extrinsic rewards alone. If you do something

good just to get something in return then the act is lessened by selfishness. The same thing happens when you leave the military. If you run around pounding your chest telling everyone how much they owe you something you will quickly find yourself short on friends! And that is not to say that society does not have a debt to repay for its protection. But all of this is taken under the presumption that your service has ended when you left the military. I have thought about this a lot. I wondered about all the missions I did for the people in the small villages in the outskirts of town to protect them. What about the medical treatment and community projects to help build schools or get a neighborhood generators for electricity? Some of my buddies died doing things like that for the people over there. We were trying to give them something more than just *things*...we were showing our sense humanity and love. But I now see that an error of my own thinking was that my service ended when I left the military. My realization is that our *true service* was to humanity, which is a universal quality. The effort of giving back must continue in our communities when we return home.

**Hatch:** Like The Mission Continues?

**Stone:** Exactly, Greitens addresses the topic beautifully.

**Hatch:** And that's why some of the other ones don't do so well I bet. Like that one down by Odon.

**Stone:** It was outside of Crane but let's not go there—but yes. The best thing they did was to change their name and *try again*. Let's hope they get it right this time. Last time I checked they were...

**Hatch:** Yea...it seems like one way is to look at being a veteran as something of merit and the other is through the sense of entitlement.

**Stone:** It almost seems that the attitude of entitlement negates to some degree the merit of service.

**Hatch:** I definitely agree.

## DUTY & CONTINUING TO SERVE PART IV

**Hatch:** So then what? What comes afterword? You go and see all the crazy things of the world and come home to get a job that you hate. It seems like *no-one* understands what you have seen or been through.

**Stone:** And they probably don't. Maybe they do...in their own way. But this goes to the previous topic of what happens after leaving the military.

**Hatch:** Alright. I am listening.

**Stone:** Are you okay? This seems to be a touchy subject for you...

**Hatch:** No. I am good man. Just makes me pissed that I can't keep it together. I quit my job because I hated doing dumb shit all the time. It all seemed stupid and I really felt like no one would ever understand.

**Stone:** I totally get it man. I have quit many jobs on the same account. At one point it seemed like I was not going to ever find my way through that feeling.

**Hatch:** It sucks.

**Stone:** It *still sucks...* but I have to keep trying. It's all I can do. Let's say that I discovered that if I expect people to get where I am coming from then I am forced to wait on them to understand me. If I am to allow myself to be compelled to do something out of a sense of duty and commitment to continue to serve either my family, friends or community then I am still doing something good. For me, this was the best way to honor those who did not come home. I think of them when I am out there helping veterans or other members of the community.

**Hatch:** So what then is your duty now?

**Stone:** My duty is to honor the memory of the fallen and the innocent victims of the war through actions dedicated to them. Further, I would stress that it would be in honor of the ideas that they died for and the sacrifices they made with their lives.

**Hatch:** That makes sense...

**Stone:** It isn't *perfect*. But it is the only way I can ever come close to doing something with

the depth of the memories and feelings I have about my experiences. I almost feel that if one loses the intensity of such reverence for those wounded and killed in war then something has been lost. At the same time it can destroy you if you let it go too far. Reverence and memory can quickly become guilt and pain...so there is a line to tread carefully on.

**Hatch:** I think about that type of stuff all the time. I don't think I can ever let it go. I just try to not think about any of it.

**Stone:** Most people do that. And that is okay if it truthfully works for you. But the danger comes when we choose not to look at these things carefully because they cause discomfort or pain. I don't think there is anything normal about war. We are in a sad state of affairs if death ever becomes normalized.

**Hatch:** Yea I drink sometimes to forget. My wife gets pretty mad at me for it. But I don't know what else to do...it's tough. I try to work a job and make money but something inside me is thinking "what the hell did my buddies die for?" "So I can work at the supercenter

and greet people at the door?” I think to myself “What the f@ck am I doing?”

**Stone:** I don’t blame you one bit. Sometimes forgetting is needed until we are ready to start to try to understand. Things can be really hairy when you are not ready to make the effort of that magnitude. Just try to be responsibly irresponsible during your coping phase. I myself almost let the coping habits of alcohol ruin me because of the truth I wasn’t sure how to deal with. But even if you struggle with all of this—staying committed to the memory of your friends through actions if nothing else—will help you do good things. And I am a believer that good things done in their memory is a noble way of honoring them despite your own troubles. It will help pull you through.

~THE JOURNEY HOME & RETURN OF THE HERO~  
AFTER THE DRAGON  
PART V

**Hatch:** That is all fine and dandy for some I guess. But for me—all I think about is getting shot at or getting blown up. I have dreams about bombs in the roads and suicide cars chasing me through the streets.

**Stone:** I think you are still fighting the dragon of war and have brought it home with you. It hasn't been long after all since you were there right?

**Hatch:** Yeah...been out for about three months already.

**Stone:** Well...that makes sense then. You are still reactive to war. Your reflexes and survival instincts are still there. It takes time for that to ease down a little. I remember I was still sort of on high alert for a while after I came back. It was when I started to remember things that I simply did not have time to think about while I was deployed that kicked my ass.

**Hatch:** Like?

**Stone:** Like the faces of the wounded Iraqi civilians. Or a helmet filled with the blood of a young soldier. The smell of munitions and flesh. And horror... But working through all of those things starts by having a place in life after the epic battle of our own story. Each person has their own role in their own particular story. The trick is understanding the narrative of where you fit in *after the war* that actually helps make sense of it. But if one is to be forever consumed solely with the memories of war then they have not begun the journey home yet. They are still fighting the dragon so to speak. How did you feel when you left Afghanistan? What was your outlook or attitude towards life?

**Hatch:** I respected life much more. I appreciated the things I have and the people I care for.

**Stone:** Exactly! That is it. You are talking about humility and the love of humanity. Those are the gifts given to many who see war. I felt the same way. I felt a deep reverence towards life.

**Hatch:** Okay so what happened then? Because after all—we are sitting outside of a counselors office on the fifth floor. How did you get here?

**Stone:** That is the best damn question I have heard in all day!

**Hatch:** Ah... sorry man. You don't have to go there.

**Stone:** No it's cool bud. It is pretty important for me to share that part of my story.

AVOIDANCE & PATH OF THE RECLUSE  
PART VI

**Stone:** You see...after I got back I felt that sense of purpose but then after months of being around so many negative people who bitched and moaned about dumb shit I started to lose my respect for people. I became so damn angry hearing people whine that I would almost get ill just listening to their belly aching. I started to retract from my normal range of friends and family. I stopped calling people or going to a lot of places. Over time my social circles became smaller and smaller. Eventually I was home almost all of the time. I even hated to do shopping for food. No—I really *hated* doing it. I started seeing a counselor back then. They were trying to find the right medication for me to take and so I felt even stranger than before. I also started to drink more during that time and my habits went from social partying to just trying to sleep. My nightmares were intense and I got little or no rest at all. And my anxiety was immensely difficult to deal with. I avoided most if not all social contact as possible. The best thing I

figured I should do was to stay away from everyone.

**Hatch:** Oh man... Let me tell *you!* Been there already. Even my wife has been getting onto me about not going anywhere anymore. Truth be told...I hardly want to be with her...intimately and that sort of thing. I don't know why but it just seems too close—I don't want her to sense the truth of things I saw over there...

**Stone:** I have heard more than a few say they felt that way. I have been fortunate on that topic. But I believe my view is valid on the subject. Your significant other—is your greatest ally. They are a source of strength not something to fear sharing the truth of your heart with. I remember I did not share with my wife the things I was experiencing. Not only was I trying to hold it together going out in the world but at the same time—I was trying to shield my family from noticing that I was struggling. That is a lot of impression management going on. But as corny as it sounds...I discovered that *love* nullifies *fear* and flourishes in truth—the truth being that I

needed help and my wife up ended being a great champion of my healing.

**Hatch:** That sounds pretty damn cool. You have me thinking about it. Maybe she wouldn't hold judgments against me like I have been thinking she would.

**Stone:** Yea...I wish I would have known that way in advance. It may have changed a lot of things that happened for the worse until I knew. But before I ever shared my visions of Iraq with her I grew bitter and was lost for a few years. I felt like a sick animal that went somewhere to be alone and either get better or die. Looking back...it was like a phase of being in a cocoon and going through some transformation. But there was no grand epiphany of understanding. It was slow and spread over time through a series of steps and choices. Some were good others bad. But there was much more "bad" choices before I found the good ones.

**Hatch:** What happened...?

**Stone:** I will tell you. But I want you to understand that there are different ways to live your story after you return...and for some time

I was chose to be alone. If you find yourself there I want you to remember that it can be a phase and not to get stuck there. Remember that although many do not recognize or have the ability to understand the depth of your journey...do not lose hope. Don't allow yourself to become overcome with the loss of your own worthiness. Your value is inherent in the *quality of your being* and not by the recognition of any certain appraiser. The second thing is that you must continue to hone your own understanding of your own life's meaning and purpose. No one can do it for you. It is tough but you will pull through. The opposite of one who becomes recluse out of fear and discouragement is the hermit who uses the time to reflect and gain some insight on life. He is that old guy on the Led Zeppelin albums holding the lantern.

WALKING AMONGST CATTLE & PATH OF  
FALSE SUPERIORITY  
PART VII.

**Hatch:** That is a bit deep. But I have never really thought of it that way. All I have been thinking about is how to get away from people, try not to get pissed and make some money. The hardest thing is that people don't seem to understand. They think because you are veteran who was in combat you are going to go postal on everyone. Do you know what I mean?

**Stone:** I have heard a lot of veterans talk about this but I have never heard a person actually in a work environment say it. I am not sure if that is totally true *only* because I have talked to so many people who want to help veterans. I have never faced the stigma that our Vietnam veteran brothers and sisters ever faced. Any civilian prejudices of today pale in comparison to their era. I am not saying that your concerns aren't true. I just haven't seen it myself so far. I am sure it is out there but not nearly like before. I feel as though many people want to help veterans but simply do not know how to

or what to say to them. I think that we do not give enough credit to the dilemma of communication.

**Hatch:** I'm not convinced. People are assholes and they think all of us vets are crazy. Most of them have never been through the shit we have. They have it easy compared to what we did...

**Stone:** Many military folks never seen actual combat too. Even of those deployed into the combat zone only a small amount go out into daily combat operations. But we can't blame folks for where they ended up. I don't know...I don't feel comfortable discounting others that way.

**Hatch:** What do you mean? You don't think nonveterans don't have the same experience as us?

**Stone:** I think we have our unique experience...Yes. But I *don't think* that because I have seen the things that I have that I am *better* or *more of anything* than a nonveteran. I try to avoid that way of thinking because it only divides people. Yes—your experiences have given you the *substance of*

*wisdom* BUT as soon as you proclaim to be superior in any regards because of it—that quality disappears.

**Hatch:** Huh? *WTF* are you saying?

**Stone:** *Bear* with me. A veteran can't go around demanding people to honor their actions because it negates the purpose of what being a veteran stands for in the first place. A veteran represents the virtues does he not? When I was in—we would say LDRSHIP Loyalty, Duty...

**Hatch:** Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage. Right...I see your point.

**Stone:** Exactly. You can't be any of those if you feel in anyway superior to others. We can't rest on our laurels and we cannot think we are better than anyone. That leads to a dark place where only the cynical and sinister live...

ANGER, ANNIHILATION & PATH OF FURY  
PART VIII.

**Hatch:** That is a hard thing not to do! I mean I try not to get pissed at people but I just can't seem to get my life straightened out. I don't have time to try and understand why people are so uncaring about veterans. You know what I am saying?

**Stone:** I *do* man...

**Hatch:** Hear me out Stone. The last thing I want to do is deal with anymore bullshit. I just want to do my thing—and be on my way...

**Stone:** And then what?

**Hatch:** What do you mean?

**Stone:** So let's say people leave you alone. What would you do after that? Will you no longer be angry?

**Hatch:** If people leave me alone I won't be.

**Stone:** So you are going to let the war win then? If you have to spend your life avoiding people because you are angry that they do not

understand then it as if you forfeit all of the experiences after your return because of your own anger. Imagine you were to count every time you chose to not do something because you didn't want to deal with other people or your emotions about your experiences from war. Let's say...that you were walking into a store to buy food. It is really busy so you leave or start to get angry with people you work with and walk away. A pile of trash in the road that looks like a roadside bomb and you change lanes and so on. Those actions begin to add up. That is a large portion of your experience in life that is somehow being altered by the past. Do you see what I am getting at?

**Hatch:** I think so. Wait...I don't get it completely though. Why is all of this so complex? Why can't it be simple?

**Stone:** I think it can't be simple or it isn't intended to be anyway. But that is the nature of things that are *profound*. Experiences that are profound in nature do not take well to being reduced to the mundane. You can push it away and try to forget it but that never worked for me. Those memories just came back with a vengeance. They made me want to

fight the world. Hell I figured people did not care anyway so what use were they? I guess I had to think about *why* I was fighting. I realized I had gotten lost on my journey home. That journey was inward so to speak...I was looking for something to make sense of it all. Since I didn't have that I was angry at everything. The anger was unsettling and made me discontented with life. Everything seemed wrong. How could I be mad at everyone for not understanding what *I had been through* when *I didn't even understand it myself?*

**Hatch:** Alright...I never thought of that way but yea...I see your point. That is a lot to take in. I feel like you know exactly what I am saying. When I was over there I said that if I made it back I was going to do all sorts of good things because I felt closer to being alive than ever. But when I got back home I just got wore down by things. I think of my friends who died and the lives they *will not have* and here I am *a mess*. I feel like I am wasting my life and they died for nothing and no one understands man...*no one!* So I get this unbelievable anger

inside because everything is a big fucking mess.

**Stone:** Fuck man I feel the same way sometimes... I just try to think of what my buddies would want me to do. They would tell me to live life to the fullest and do whatever I really loved to do, take care of my family and be happy. I figure that even if I forget what I am doing in life as long as I keep their lives in the front of my mind I will always do well in their honor. I try to honor them by *living well for them*. I take time to try and notice the small things and do things that I really love doing—like helping veterans. That keeps me alive man. It cannot be good for anyone to go from combat to fulltime employment and life's responsibilities with no time to reflect the bigger picture. Maybe that is what robots are good for but not people with souls anyway.

THE CHALLENGE REMAINS  
&  
WAY OF THE VETERAN  
PART IX.

**Hatch:** I wanted to help others as well. I thought of teaching or something like that...maybe working with troubled youth.

**Stone:** So why don't you?

**Hatch:** I don't know man. That would take a lot of college. I am a grunt so I should probably do security or something.

**Stone:** Ah...well you might as well do what you think would give the greatest chance to *thrive* in life.

**Hatch:** *Thrive?* You mean make money and have a nice living?

**Stone:** Well I suppose if that is what you value...or if that is what you would be most happy having.

**Hatch:** Well, I wouldn't mind making money but it isn't all about that.

**Stone:** So what else do you value in life besides money and things?

**Hatch:** My family, doing something meaningful and having a sense of purpose I would say.

**Stone:** I could not have said that any better... Are you trying to fulfill these things or the former notion you mentioned about thriving?

**Hatch:** No I hadn't thought of that really. When I go looking for a job I just go by what they tell me is available. I don't want to have my head in the clouds. I have to be realistic.

**Stone:** Alright, well let's back up a second here then. Who ever said that fulfilling your values was unrealistic? As long as you are not sacrificing any of the things important to you that you named—you would only be pursuing happiness. I think that pursuing something simply for the money is fine if it fits with the other values you hold. But if in the pursuit of money you find yourself in a meaningless and unhappy situation then it would be more unrealistic to continue that venture than any other.

**Hatch:** I don't know if I understand. You are telling me that if I want to be happy I should quit my job and go to school? How would I pay the bills? I couldn't afford anything.

**Stone:** I am not telling you to do anything other than find a way to fulfill your own sense of a *good life*. You said it yourself that you value your family, doing something meaningful and having a sense of purpose. If your current situation keeps you from your family, is meaningless and has added to a feeling of living a purposeless life I would say it doesn't meet your own standards. And there are many ways to make it through school to do what you want to do. That requires effort and work. Those are good things because you are building something...you are going somewhere with that and are growing. It is the stagnant life of discontent that breeds anger and contempt. I like to think that our friends who never came home look at us with greater esteem knowing that we are pursuing our dreams with the life we have than drudging through a job in the grind. I know I would if I hadn't made it back. I would want everyone to live well and do all the things they really

wanted to do and not what they felt they were supposed to do.

**Hatch:** Yeah that is it exactly! I feel as though I am supposed to do what I am doing.

**Stone:** Well...you have to figure out what you really want to do and the difference between them. Now I am not saying in any way to not be responsible but at the same time I am not saying to not be adventurous either.

**Hatch:** That's funny because my wife tells me all the time that I should find something I enjoy. I never listen to her. Maybe she is thinking these same things because she always says it doesn't matter what we do as long as we have each other.

**Stone:** I just feel that the best thing I can do is to keep giving for the life I have been given by those who did not make it home. If I let my life go to waste without even trying then I have somehow let them down. It is the only thing that has ever made sense to me. I once heard someone great say *honor the fallen by continuing to serve...* I feel that those words are the wisest I have ever listened to because in my heart of hearts I know it is true.

**Hatch:** I have a lot to think about. Maybe we could hang out sometime. I come here every week.

**Stone:** That would be cool bud. I will send you a message. Is that you counselor over there? She looks like she is looking for you.

**Hatch:** Yea man that's her. It was really cool to talk with you Bill. I will catch you next time.

**Counselor:** Hi Andrew...how are you doing today...





Mark served 8 years in the Army as a medic and deployed to Iraq in 2004-2005 with “Deuce Four” a new STRYKER unit out of Fort Lewis WA. As a medic part of 1/24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> SBCT (25<sup>th</sup> ID) Mark “Doc Smith” was deployed to Mosul where he was moved by the experiences of his fellow soldiers who faced challenges and adversity with great resolve and perseverance. “I will always be grateful for the time given to me with Deuce Four. We were a close group of guys who would do anything for each other” (Doc Smith). After returning home and leaving the military Doc Smith took up his next mission to help veterans deal with transition through his art, writing and advocacy.

Doc Smith believes strongly in the triumph of “the human soul over adversity and a positive approach” to helping veterans deal with issues such as PTSD, employment, education and transition from a peer support perspective.

Any and All resources from the sale of this booklet goes to furthering Doc Smith’s work to help veterans, advocate on their behalf and promote their wellbeing.

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