



Like American buffalo bulls protecting their herds from predators, those who serve protect their loved ones and their country when called upon to do so. It is their role. For the plains Indians and other traditional warrior societies, this life — giving devotion was honored by the civilian community. In turn, the civilian community would care for their warriors, tend to their wounds, and honor them for their sacrifice, the courage they had shown, and the wisdom they had gained.

❁ DID YOU KNOW? ❁

Traditional warrior societies had similar rituals for bringing warriors home and for healing them. The symptoms of PTSD were accepted as normal warrior experience and were ritually engaged as an initiation onto the warrior's path. Being a warrior was a moral and spiritual achievement.

The warrior was honored and marked, often with tattoos or scars, which meant he or she could never be a civilian again — one could not go backwards. Instead, the warrior was set on a path of psychological and spiritual development through the life span.

Veterans “own” their identity as veterans and find ways to be of continued service. They turn the lessons they have learned into wisdom and experience, and carry that back into their society.

The Native Americans, Zulus, Xhosa, Maoris, and the European Celts and Norse — in all of these cultures the veterans told their stories to civilians, including their families.

Brochure designed by Roger Brooks, Ph. D.,

www.rogerbrooksphd.com

The veteran and community

“What a returning soldier needs most when leaving war is not a mental health professional but a living community to whom his experience matter” (Jonathan Shay: *Achilles in Vietnam*).

THINGS TO DO TOGETHER

Without professional help, a veteran-friendly community can make a huge difference.

Examples:

1. Offer immediate response to a soldier or veteran or family member in distress.
2. Have safe, sober gathering places locally.
3. Create religious services for veterans.
4. Develop faith — based community events for congregations and their veterans.
5. Develop small talking circles in places of worship, libraries, and community halls.
6. Respect the meaning of Memorial Day and Veteran's Day.
7. Invite veterans into schools and community centers to educate the young about the realities of service.
8. Build veteran-friendly businesses, with recruitment policies and in-house training.
9. Start breakfast storytelling clubs for veterans, with invitations to their families.
10. Have expressive arts events, such as painting, photography, poetry readings.
11. Find ways in VA centers to bring civilians onto campuses for community events.
12. Develop programs specifically for veterans in colleges, the Courts, prisons, and hospice care.

WHAT CIVILIANS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VETERANS

- They are better educated than their civilian peers.
- They have lower rates of violence and incarceration.
- They tend to be highly disciplined, and excel at initiative, leadership, and team work.
- Even the minority with PTSD tend to function fairly well at work, school, etc. Their suffering is largely private and evident only to those who love them.
- All veterans are changed, marked by their experiences. That is not good or bad in itself, but it is helpful for all, even veterans, to accept that.

TIPS FOR VETERANS WITH OR WITHOUT PTSD

- Veterans who recover from war best do not try to drink away their memories and distress. It simply doesn't work for long.
- They keep a disciplined routine. They get up in the morning and make their beds.
- They face their experiences and memories and ask themselves how to relate to them in meaningful and helpful ways.
- They remember and honor the dead.
- They find ways to dial back their symptoms — exercise, mindfulness, yoga, dance, hunting, outdoor adventures, socializing, etc.
- They share their experiences with others, including their families and loved ones. While not always easy, and not all details are necessary, their loved ones and children then know them and their story becomes part of the family's legacy.



African American Union soldiers

A Soldier's Heart

In the American Civil War (1861-1865), what we now call PTSD was known as Soldier's Heart. This term names correctly the traumatized center of our moral, emotional, and spiritual lives — the moral injury that is the heart of the veteran's suffering.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, written over 2500 years ago, the warrior hero Odysseus took ten years to get home after the Trojan wars. In this time he had done drugs, betrayed his friends, and at this homecoming his family did not recognize him. Again, a familiar story.



The Xhosa warriors of southern Africa called it the *kanene*, which is the warrior's insight into the shadow that follows him around and never lets him forget what happened and what he has done.

Military sexual trauma

MST is unfortunately also as old as war, and it involves assaults on men as well as women. It is an awful betrayal to be assaulted by those who are meant to be one's brothers in arms. Some perpetrators feel shame and guilt too. Fortunately, there is understanding and help available now.



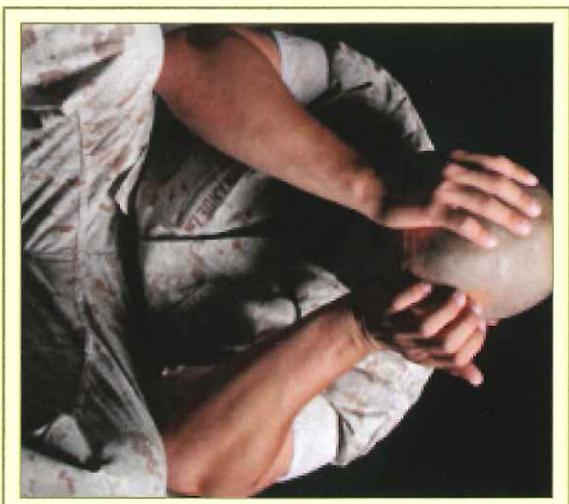
Sitting Bull, Lakota Sioux

DID YOU KNOW?

The Lakota Sioux called this wound *nagi napyapape*, which means, 'the spirits have left him,' describing the feeling of numbness and loss of vitality and soul which many veterans describe.

Sitting Bull is known as a great Indian warrior and chief. He commanded the combined forces that defeated Gen. Custer at Little Big Horn in 1876. However, he regarded his central role as the healing of his warriors from the psychological and spiritual wounds of war. He said that if his warriors were not healed, his people would not survive.

So it is with all cultures: if our veterans are not healed then our own communities will not be healed either. Perhaps we should think of PTSD as a post traumatic social disorder as well.



PTSD

DID YOU KNOW?

What is now called post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among veterans is not new, and it has only recently been interpreted as a psychiatric condition.

War-related PTSD is a human universal. It has been named and addressed ritually in all traditional warrior cultures around the world.

Because of this universal warrior experience has not be appreciated in our time, contemporary veterans with PTSD have felt stigmatized and isolated. Families and local communities have felt disempowered and marginalized because they are unsure of their role in bringing the warrior home. In societies with strong communities that know this role, PTSD is rare.



Pennsylvania State Association of County
Directors of Veterans Affairs

