

1-4 Between Two Worlds

”Hiya, Honey,” you say, speaking softly as your leg swings up and over. Positioning yourself perfectly in the comfortable saddle seat, your foot moves back slowly, pushing the metal stand into position. This is the most meaningful love of your life. You feel the bond of flesh and metal. You’re at center of gravity and relaxed.

Depressing the start button, 1200ccs begins to purr, and you pull out of the bar’s driveway onto the paved desert road that’s now become all too familiar. Bringing Jenny up to a nice steady seventy miles per hour, the warm, dry air just east of Scottsdale, Arizona, reminds you of a time almost a year ago in another desert not so peaceful.

Shadows of Saguaro cactus just off the pavement... standing silhouetted against a starlit sky, these dark sentinels, remind you, “This is another place, another time.” And yet you ask yourself, “Why do I feel so out of place, so uneasy in the town where I grew up?”

You see your Brothers, your fellow Warriors at the Vet Center twice a week, where the counselors say you’re normal for what you’ve been through. They say you’re normal for living through four, fifteen-month combat tours in Iraq, but you can’t help but wonder.

You’re learning to control your Primal Side, the Beast you now call your Guardian, yet five shitty jobs in the nine months since your discharge make you think, “What the hell’s goin’ on!”

About a month before coming home from your first tour, you thought, “Man, I’m gonna drive my car, take my wife and little girl cruisin’, listen to my music, put on my great clothes, and get that Big Mac I’ve been dreamin’ about.”

But steppin' onto the tarmac in the land of the big BX, all of that changed.

Slowing to a stoplight, you decide to head East. RPMs at redline, maxing out every gear, you're pissed off and hittin' over a hundred MPH. Then, backing off, you recall,

“Man, I couldn't even drive my fuckin' car. I was afraid of IEDs and ambushes.”

Thoughts reel through your head, but you're back down to seventy.

“I was so damned ashamed, my wife had to drive my ass everywhere, my kid didn't understand... guess that don't matter now... don't have a wife or kid.”

That ended after your second deployment, after she came up behind you one night, and you almost killed her while your daughter watched on, terrified.

“Wonder how my little Chrisie 's doin'?”

After a restraining order, you don't get to see her anymore. And by your fourth deployment, your wife had remarried some computer geek.

“Guess that's safer?” you think.

Still drunk and back up to over a hundred MPH, “Those telephone poles are lookin' pretty damn good... but maybe I'll wait till tomorrow to see my buddies at the Vet Center... they'll understand... hell, they're the only real friends I have now.”

Riding alone in the warm desert night, one more Warrior painfully looks into who he has now become.

This young Soldier is twenty six years old and struggling between two worlds. What do I mean by two worlds? Let's take a look at both; and maybe it'll make

sense if we think about it more as two realities, or maybe even two dimensions of thought.

After being conditioned in boot camp, it only takes one life-threatening experience to unleash the Primal Side, the Savage, the Beast, or as this Soldier calls it, the Guardian.

Understand that this is no bullshit.

In battle, Warriors are literally baptized in blood. Not in the blood of our enemies, but in the blood of our Brother and Sister Warriors. At that moment, every hope, every dream, every aspiration for the future is gone.

You have paid the “Boatman” the silver coin for the passage across the river Styx, to another world; a world from which you will never return. And from that passage, your boots are then firmly planted in two worlds, two realities, two dimensions of thought.

There is the Warrior World, of black and white, of Honor, discipline, and self sacrifice. And then, there is the Gray Civilian World in which we find little or no true Honor; the world we as Warriors for the most part hate.

We are then caught in the conflict between these two worlds, moment to moment, year after year. Because my friends, these conflicting worlds DO NOT mesh.

Our lives have changed forever, and the innocence and ignorance of youth is gone forever. We have now become a True Warrior, as all Warriors before us. We have entered the Inner Sanctum, where our pain will be kept in silence until the end of our days.

But as to innocence, I say “good riddance” to it. To this old Marine, innocence is bein’ naive. (No Marines, it don’t mean, “not evening”) It’s nothin’ but an illusion, a fairy tale perspective of life that everyone hopes for but

rarely ever comes during the extreme difficulties of life's challenges.

The perfect marriage, those perfect children, that perfect job, lots of money, or a dog that doesn't bite the neighbor's nasty little kids. That fairy-tale-illusion only happens in movies. A perfect life? Give me a break!

For example, have you ever seen those scammers' ads on the Perfect Wedding? You know, the ones that show everyone smiling, while Daddy is writin' a check to pay for this festive occasion with his whole life savings? Talk about an illusion!

The perfect day may in fact happen for one day only, or maybe for a few more on the honeymoon. But when that's all over, reality sets in and old Murphy's ridin' around on his eagle with you in the cross hairs... ready to dump right on your happy times!

It might be a tad more honest if these "make my day" marketing people would simply say, "We'll sell you happiness for one day, and for an extra bonus, we'll even throw in some Prozac for when you get over it."

In Eastern Philosophy, it's said to "know thyself." And I've got news for you: Thyself is made up of two distinct individuals in the same body... yours! But even knowing that, it's damn hard to live as a Warrior in a civilian society.

Even if you have your Beast somewhat under control and you've mastered a few tools for adapting, you still have the constant, frustrating battle of being forced to go along with wishy-washy-don't-have-a-pair, don't-want-to-upset-anyone's-feelings people.

Our Warrior World is black and white. Period. No lack of brass (either balls or ovaries), no false hopes the bad guys will change their ways, no expectations of UFO's

landing and saving our sorry human asses, and no Pollyanna-like thoughts of, “Seeing only the good in people. Now we all need to just get along.”

We don’t all get along, we can’t make everyone happy, and we damn sure better be vigilant of those who would like to turn New York City into a glass factory. There’s the way it should be, and there’s the way it is. Everyone needs to deal with that.

If we survive long enough, Warriors have an exceptional amount of control and self-discipline when living in the civilian world, and we don’t really plan too far ahead. That’s because we know we really can’t.

Life is a constant state of change. You adapt to change or you suffer even more. You remember the good times, the few moments of joy that happen to come your way; but you can’t cling to ‘em and long for more or you’ll be miserable once they’re gone. We have to simply enjoy those brief moments for as long as they last, savor every second of peace and calm in our lives, then let ‘em go.

It’s sorta like sittin’ down to a great meal on some holiday, if you’re lucky enough to have one. And by the way, most Warriors who’ve been down range don’t care much for holidays... especially if their friends died on ‘em.

You smell the food being prepared. You anticipate the taste that’s comin’. And when it arrives, you bolt it down like a monitor lizard. Before you know it, the chow is gone, and all you have at that point is a few drinks and a memory... in the case of Warriors, the gut-wrenching memories of the deaths of your fallen comrades.

Life’s the same way to us Warriors. Sometimes we can feel something good comin’, just like we can feel an ambush comin’. We enjoy the moment or deal with the situation accordingly. Then, all we have left is a memory,

good or not so good. We don't think about three days from now, because we may not be around when it arrives. And if you haven't figured all this "live-for-the-moment stuff" out yet, let me give you an example.

After you make it through a few firefights and you see your friends blown away, you can't help but think, "Damn", that could be me in that zip-lock baggy." And, "Shit, will it be my turn tomorrow?" This tends to stick in your brain-housing-group for the rest of your life.

As a rifleman in a full-blown firefight, my life expectancy was, as I was told, three and a half seconds. That is, before being wounded or killed. In 1968-69, a line Officer (Second Lieutenant) in Vietnam lasted about sixteen minutes. So you see, every damn minute counts!

All this tends to build a division between the way Warriors think and the way they're expected to act in civilian society. Hell, it's damn hard for our new Troops goin' to school now to think ahead to the end of the semester! Again, the Warrior World and the Civilian World don't mesh.

Warriors also tolerate politics and politicians, sometimes with great difficulty. We also tolerate civilians bitching about all they don't have and all they think they need. "Why is this?" you ask. I'll explain.

We tolerate this shit-for-brains attitude because we know that nothing here is as bad as war. Nothing. Oh, some Americans think they have it bad, but they're not sittin' at a checkpoint in their SUV, with a man armed with a twin 50 caliber machine gun pointed at 'em.

They don't have to worry about drivin' down the street and having an IED go off under their vehicle. They don't have to be concerned about walking through the mall and having a suicide bomber blow their family to hell.

And they certainly don't have to worry about walking out their back door in the morning, with a fresh cup of home brewed crap-achino and having a sniper round hit them center of mass. Nothing here is as bad as war. Nothing. And by the way, there are many countries where this kind of violence happens daily.

Warriors know all this clearly because we've lived through it. That's why it pisses us off when all we hear is bitching. And how do you think our Troops feel when their friends are dying in Afghanistan and Iraq, and all they see on the news, or in newspapers, is some dipshit actor losing millions of dollars in their ninth divorce? Or some cake-eatin' politician, low-crawling under the media radar to avoid jail but voting him-self a big ass raise. Meanwhile Veterans are living homeless in the streets?

So here we uncomfortably sit, longing to be either deployed and back in the military, wishing for a little combat adrenaline, hoping for an opportunity to justly shoot someone, but having to listen instead to the gibberish of so many people so upset over so much that's not important.

There's a saying, don't know who said it, that, "Don't sweat the little things, and if it ain't life threatening, it sure as hell is a little thing." Makes sense to me and since the English isn't that great, it might have been a Marine?

"So what's the point?" you ask.

The point is that Warriors live in a different reality with a different perspective. We have a life-or-death, black-and-white, don't worry about your 401K because you ain't livin' that long to spend it, reality. We can't help the way we think, because that's what war and combat does to a human being. How could we think otherwise?

The skills we learned in battle helped us to survive. Hey, it's damn difficult to gamble with your life and to change your habits when those new habits haven't yet been battle-tested. This is one of the reasons that we don't feel like we fit in. And I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "Ya know Sarge, I don't feel like I belong here anymore."

Remember that I'm not just telling you how I feel based on my own forty plus years of living with Combat Trauma (PTSD); I'm tellin' you how the new Troops feel right this second!

I've talked to more than one Soldier or Marine, asking them, "What are you gonna do when you have to come back, when you have to stay here?" And several replies were, "There's always Blackwater." Or, "Maybe I'll go live up in the mountains."

Do you think that they're kiddin'?

The last estimate of combat Veterans living in the mountain ranges around Albuquerque, New Mexico, was approximately 1,700. That's right! There are also thousands of homeless Warriors all around America right now, living in the bush, shootin' rabbits for dinner, and wantin' nothing to do with the so called good life.

I talked to one Vietnam Vet who got med-evaced out of the local mountains due to a heart attack. He'd spent thirty years in those mountains, hunting for chow and making it on his own. He said, "I never felt better in my life, was healthier, in better shape... and now look at me." He still looked in pretty damn good shape for sixty three years old! He then went on to say, "it's another world up there, a Warrior's World, and I miss the hell out of it."

So here's a man who would rather live with nothing in

the mountains than live with civilians in society. See anything unusual about that? He said he didn't have to worry about car payments, rent, VA checks, or the threat of all that being taken away.

"I was truly happy," he said. And looking right into my eyes, he continued, "Now I'm not."

When walking off the battlefield, the Warrior then lives in two distinct worlds or realities, and again, these two worlds *do not mesh!* This is what causes us a great deal of our pain. We know how we'd like to solve problems here, but then that just wouldn't be "civilized." So what happens is that we get stuck, and then we get depressed.

I'm not sayin' it's always the case. But for me, most often it's when I get stuck between worlds that depression sets in. You know, it's when you know what to do, but you can't do it or you'll end up in the slammer.

The Warrior Way in the Warrior World is usually swift and violent. Our solution is simply more firepower. But that's a bit hard to do when you're dealin' with bankers, bean counters, and the like who think they're in control because they think lawyers are gonna protect them from a little pain... not to mention dyin' of lead poison. That is, a twenty three hundred foot per second messenger reaching out and touchin' someone from a rifle barrel.

When you really get stuck, substance abuse usually looks real good. Sometimes you're too depressed to even get out of bed in the morning. That's also when your Beast loves you the most, because you're getting close to the outer limits of control. A little nudge and you're over the top, and that can be dangerous for you and for others.

That's when you Turtle. You know, like a sea turtle going under the waves of emotions. I described this in "The Warrior's Guide to Insanity" and I'll hit it again in the

3-1 Tools Section. But suffice it to say, you force yourself up and out and do something that you enjoy. Something that takes your mind off of what it is you're thinking of at the moment. Zombie meds don't solve the problem; they just make you a Zombie. Been there, done that.

I found it much more useful to use that anger energy constructively. That's right, anger energy. Because I found that the best way to get un-depressed is to get pissed off. Snaps you right out of it. And man, in this civilian world, if you want to get pissed off fast, watch TV for ten minutes... I could write a whole damn book on that topic alone! But for now, let's rap wrap this mission up and get ready for the next one.

Break out your night vision equipment and load those magazines with every fifth round a tracer! We're movin' into dangerous territory on a black op, and we're on our own.

Stay Frosty!

**Watch your spacing and keep a sharp eye peeled
for trip wires.**

**No extraction on this one!
Un-sling those Weapons!
Move Out!**