

2-3 Normal is as Normal Does

Living alone with your nine cats at the top of a beautiful, wooded mountain in Ohio, the sign hanging on the locked gate at the bottom of your driveway reads...

“There’s nothing here worth dying for.”

If anyone was invited up to your base camp, the very first thing they’d see was the Marine Corps flag hanging from a twenty-foot pole. You built your home by yourself and are proud of it. There aren’t too many geodesic domes in your sector.

Hanging inside over the front door is a Mini-14 you call Sting, and over the back door hangs the love of your life. Her name is Raptor, and she’s a beautiful, Springfield M-14.

Lightly fastened to the headboard of your hand-me-down bed, tucked against the wall of the dome, lovingly hangs a .45 caliber, Ruger P-90... with five extra magazines, "just in case." Your nine sentry cats move in and out of the cat door, patrolling the compound for intruders.

It’s that Sunday when all of your equally armed Battle Buddies are about to arrive for the monthly shoot. This is the highlight of your life; and you’re excited to eat real good chow, consume unlimited numbers of brain grenades and fire your weapons with friends of like mind.

You’ve carefully stuffed a set of vintage BDUs (purchased at the local surplus store) with bundles of old newspapers. A black ski mask sits on top of its shoulders, securely sewn into place... also stuffed. Kinda gives it that hostile look.

Walking out to the end of your hundred-meter range, you secure the enemy target on a wooden 4x4x6 foot rack.

Good times are about to begin!

As your Warrior friends arrive and the day is spent having a real good time, you feel a sense of true satisfaction. Too bad the neighbors don't feel the same.

When the firing is over, you and your well-lubricated friends retrieve the manikin (Marines: Not a man that can) and hang it by its neck in the trees at the edge of your property line.

Looking down the fence line to the gallows-row of past good times makes for a great laugh and another click of the beer tab. One of your team fires another series of rounds at the enemies already hanging in place. This calls for even more laughs and a feeling of remorse that this wonderful day is drawing to a close.

Your Mennonite neighbors, who you meet by chance on occasion, constantly remind you that, "We're all praying for you." But the enemies hanging by their necks in trees, along with "No Trespassing" signs every fifty feet on the fencing prevents them, as well as other neighbors, from playing "looky-lou."

That night, with the wood burner stoked to break the autumn chill and the sentry cats all accounted for, you pop in a nice soothing movie to wind down for the day. An oldie but goodie, "Apocalypse Now" seems to fit with your gourmet Mac & Cheese (with Charlie the Tuna) dinner.

Taking a sigh of relief while patting your P-90, you think...

"This has been a damn good day... a nice, "normal" Sunday with friends."

"Whoa! Normal for the Psychos-R-Us Club!" you nervously mutter.

Not at all, just normal for Warriors feeling comfortable. You may think this story is a stretch. It ain't. Because what I've just described to you is one of my own, very happy Sundays. That is, at a time in my few-shy-of-a-six-pack days when I thought I had my shit together.

Now I'm not sayin' that I'm all center-of-bubble now, but at least I'm not hangin' dummies from trees and terrorizing my neighbors. Well, at least not like I used to in the good old days. Guess that's sayin' somethin'?

But I gotta tell you, when I look back on those good old times now of when I was hunting hunters in deer season and havin' drunkin' shoots; I was on the brink of suicide and homicide... moment to moment.

A bit dimwitted? Perhaps. Way out of plumb? No doubt. But remember, I only did one combat tour for thirteen months. Imagine if I'd have done six tours? Let your mind tickle that thought for a bit. Scary, isn't it?

Well anyway, let's get on to talkin' more about this normal thing and maybe put together all you've learned up to now about Combat Warriors. And, if your thoughts on the issues of Combat Stress aren't so fuzzy by this point, then I guess you're starting to understand. We'll see.

Like our present day Troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, I was being led down the primrose path to the slaughterhouse. My Beasty was pullin' at my lead rope like a bull with a ring in his nose. The crazier my actions got, the more I liked 'em. Hell, I didn't fit in anyway, so I guess I was developing my own twisted identity.

You know about that identity thing, don't you? It's sorta like people who have an illness or some sort of bad surgery. They call that "My illness," or, "My condition." They use that bullshit as an excuse to stay fixated (Marines: Not standin' still and eating.) at one moment in

time.

That's exactly how a lot of my Brothers from the Nam are fixated back in the War to this day. They have adapted to civilian life, while being fixated in the past. The past has become their identity, and their identity has become what is now normal for their survival in the present.

This locked-in-time mentality is dangerous. Why? Real simple. A lot of our Troops are fixated at a moment in time on the battlefield and searching the ridgeline for the enemy. That's OK in War, just not in downtown Chicago.

Think about it. If most of your waking thoughts were about the killing, the loss, and the horrors of War you've experienced, and you couldn't get a grip on it, where would you be? As in, where would your head be? Would you be in the present or in the past? It isn't too hard to figure out, is it?

In this state of mind, there is certainly no place for productive, fuzzy, warm thoughts way out in the future. Besides, as we've already seen, Warriors don't live in the future, anyway.

The trick for us is to not live fixated in the past either. We must live in the present moment, and the present moment cannot be controlled by our past events. That's usually when the Beast is the lead dog and you're hangin' on, emotionally white-knuckled.

So all this fixation stuff just adds to most every Warrior's baggage. It makes it far more difficult for us to actually live in a peaceful present. That, by the way, takes a lot of work and lots of talkin' out the problems (battlefield events) that are ripping our lives apart.

Now, back to my own Hamburger Hill in Ohio. And again like so many of our Troops today, I hated everything about civilian life. That's because I was failing miserably at

living in the Two Worlds at the same time.

Do you see how this works? I was recreating the Warrior World on my own little chunk of land. It was not only comfortable for me to be there, it became my normal environment... my identity.

Trouble was, when I finally saw how disturbed my life had become and just how plain weird I was, I bolted from there like a coyote with rock salt in its ass. I felt even more ashamed.

When our Troops find themselves in a similar situation as I've been describing, the same feelings (emotions) can turn to rage, and the rage may turn to killing... themselves and/or others.

That was one of my options. I was ashamed of "fucking up again!" Of wasting more of my life. And because of survivor guilt, a life I didn't feel I deserved.

If I hadn't met a real fine woman with two beautiful kids, I hesitate to think of the rage I would have expressed. Remember, like our Troops, I was (and am) a well-trained Killer. If your Beast is in control in this same kind of situation, the consequences can be grave... literally. That is, in a mortician's happy holiday fest.

Like so many of the Troops I've talked with, I was feeling normal up until the time I realized I was only normal for the battlefield. When this realization comes, you have only two choices: You either adapt your military training to civilian life, the civilian world; or you go ballistic and destructively express your rage.

Although extremely explosive at the time of this story, I managed to maintain marginal control. Here's a short example.

After more than twenty years of failing to see into the future to the end of a semester, I finally got a degree from

Ohio State University. And somehow, by either the fates or Murphy, I finally got certified to teach school. Look out nose-gold miners!

Of course, I ran my classroom like Marine Corps Boot Camp. Stranger yet, the kids loved it! On the first day of class, my introductory comments were...

“I am Sgt. Brandi, United States Marine Corps. I am a combat rifleman from Vietnam. If it is your will against mine, you will lose. I will love you, but I will also punish you with extreme joy.”

A bit unusual? Yep! A bit twisted? You decide, but it worked.

Well anyway, after six years (my longest job ever) when I brought my Mini-14 to parent conferences, my VA vocational counselor strongly advised...

“Brandi, you need to get your ass out of the teaching business. I won’t be of much help to you in the slammer, because that’s where you’re heading.”

He was right, even though I explained to him how so many of the parents needed to meet Jesus... as in die of lead poisoning by a .223 round. So once again, thinking I had pulled off the being “normal,” in-the-civilian-world disguise, I screwed the pooch and left with my tail between my legs.

Now, being a thick-skulled Jar Head, I still didn’t get the joke. Still thinkin’ I was in control while my Beast was runnin’ point, I chose another job.

It seemed only “normal” to put my Force Recon skills to use. So, I started making military spec. Ghillie Suits (see glossary) for operators all over the world.

But, after about 600 of those, my wife at the time

(and still my dearest friend) and I happened to start taking care of abandoned and abused farm animals... mostly horses and cattle.

Through working with new friends that could be “trusted” (all 4 legged), I realized what a shit-for-brains I’d been, even though I’d always felt normal.

Again, I was only normal for a Warrior, but I never did make it in adapting my military training to civilian society. I never gave adapting a 100% effort, because I didn’t know I needed to, and I sure as hell didn’t know how.

So, what’s the point of all this? Well, it’s real simple.

When one of our hundreds of thousands of Combat Warriors gets triggered into a rage response, they’re gonna think they’re acting normally. But, in that state of high emotions, the Warrior usually doesn’t see the contrast between their actions and what most peaceful folks accept as normal in their so-called civilized lives.

This ain’t rocket science either. You see, the Combat Warrior’s brain has been thoroughly reconditioned (remapped) in War. This means that their reaction to any threat level triggers an intense rage response... the survival mode response. This also means a maximum output of combat adrenaline. And when you’re able to leap small buildings with a single bound, you usually do.

They’re acting normally for the battlefield. But, it’s a tad bit uncomfortable for folks to know that a Warrior may be sitting calmly in front of 'em, yet at the same time thinkin’ about guttin’ em like a pig for a hog roast.

I still do this all the time. If I had a TV monitor on my head so people knew what I was really thinkin’? Well, let’s just say I’d be in a padded cell or holed up on my ranch

with a twin .50 cal. on my sandbag bunker. Here's a short example of what I'm talkin' about.

Last year I did a radio talk show with a guy who I know was an asshole. But because of wanting to get the word out about our Troops and how to not only understand them, but help them as well, I agreed to go.

One of my very dear and long-term civilian friends went along with me to watch my six. This lady understands the Combat Warrior mind, and how we pretend to fit into society.

The first thirty minutes did not go well. The guy doing the interview was not prepared, was uninformed, and had a real egotistical attitude. This tended to piss me off like a shit-throwin' gorilla at the zoo.

Stopping for a head call (toilet break) and walking down the hall, my friend asked me what I was thinkin'. She could see I was more than a little angry. Being allowed to speak freely to her I replied...

"This fucker is a waste of good oxygen. All I wanna do is ridge-hand him to the throat, light him up, and throw his maggot-ass out this third story window, in a ball of shit burnin' flames. No repelling allowed."

That was on my TV Brain Monitor. My friend just laughed and reminded me that we had another hour to go. So I walked back in the studio, kept my "vision" for his future and did the talk for the Troops. I adapted to my surroundings without violence. But I sure as hell wanted this puke-for-brains to feel some real pain. Not that many years ago, he might have had a sky diving lesson. That is, when I was still thinkin' I was acting normal and the thought of killing a civilian was acceptable.

Do you see what happened there? The radio announcer became my enemy. He became the enemy of my

Brother and Sister Warriors. And what do you do with the enemy? To protect your fellow Warriors, you kill the enemy.

What I'm attempting to do here is explain how a Warrior's actions may appear normal through their eyes and their thinking. They may not realize how Ab-Normally **dangerous** their perspective truly is. If they're so conditioned to War and completely fixated in their battlefield "events," they may not even realize there's any other way to act. They are reacting to their conditioning, to their training. They are acting normally for War.

As you may have gleaned by now, Warriors carry around a lot of pent-up emotions in an unlocked cage. Given the right trigger, these emotions are out and looking for a victim to kill. Any victim will do, any person thought of as the enemy gets treated as such.

There is absolutely nothing like hunting a human being, especially another Warrior. The playing field is level, and whoever walks off the turf wins. **If** you are perceived as the enemy, then you're in the game... like it or not. No prisoners allowed.

This whole, "Who's the enemy," leads us into the next topic. So get ready for the concussion wave.

**A 500 pounder just detonated outside your
bunker!**

**When you ain't dizzy no more and you stop pukin'
your guts up, grab your gear.**

We're headin' to another firebase.

Choppers are Standing By!