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**Blessed Are The Pure Of Heart**



**PTSD And The  
Holidays  
Helping The Veteran  
You Love**

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by

Andrew Budek-Schmeisser

author of

[Blessed Are The Pure Of Heart](#)

This book is dedicated to my wife

Barbara

Who has been called on to give far more than her  
fair share, and has given without complaint

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The holiday season is a time that's supposed to be marked by joy and hope and togetherness. For most of us, it doesn't quite live up to that.

Old family conflicts flare anew and the stress of decorating, entertaining, and buying presents turns the spirit of the season into something of an ordeal.

And we're blue when it's over, when the only chores left are the cleanup, taking down the tree, and paying the bills.

For the veteran with PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder), it can be far worse. The holidays emphasize the differences between him or her, and a world of which they were once part. The lights and the festivities recall memories of other times, other places, and the contrast is sometimes unbearable.

Twenty-two combat veterans, on average, kill themselves every day, and during the holidays the numbers rise.

This short book is intended to help you help the veteran you love in navigating what is nearly always a difficult time of year.

Please note that I'm no psychologist; I have combat-induced PTSD myself, and my beloved wife, to whom this work is dedicated, can attest to some of the difficulties inherent in surviving from Thanksgiving to past the New Year.

She can also bear witness to some of the sacrifices she's had to make.

The strategies for getting through the holidays are ones that have worked for me (they are effective through the rest of the year, too, but are 'keyed' to holiday issues). Not all will work for everyone, but I hope some will work for most. It is the best I can do.

Some of them do call for sacrifice on the part of the 'caregiver', in modifying or giving up what may be cherished Christmas activities and traditions. I'm sorry about that; truly I am. It

would be easy to say that your combat veteran made sacrifices, so you should expect some, but that misses the point, the *ethos* of the warfighter. There may be jokes and sharp comment about America going to the mall while its best and brightest go out to fight, but protecting those at home from sacrifices...*that's what it's all about*. The sacrifices you may have to make are simple necessity. It's not any form of payback.

It should be noted that PTSD isn't solely the province of the combat veteran; survivors of rape, child abuse, spousal abuse, car accidents, and natural disasters, among other traumatic events, are subject to it as well. While these words are mainly directed to the families of the veteran, I hope that anyone whose family has a member with PTSD arising from other causes can find some help and perhaps comfort in reading this.

I would strongly encourage you to find a copy of Jonathan Shay's landmark study of PTSD among Vietnam veterans, *Achilles in Viet Nam*.

Finally, you should know where I'm coming from.

I am a Christian, and consider myself devout. I'm certainly *not* a my-way-is-the-only-way Christian; I have no idea who's going to Hell and who's going to Heaven. The Almighty's the only one with that information, and He hasn't seen fit to share it with me. When He does, I'll let you know. Maybe.

I wrote this to be welcoming to people with all faiths, and to those with none. I have known Muslims and Buddhists and Jews and Sikhs and Hindus and agnostics and atheists in whose brave footsteps I would have been proud to follow, for they met death with a stouthearted courage that I feel must have brought Heaven to a respectful silence.

I can only hope that somehow I will meet them again.

## What PTSD Is, And What It Is Not

You probably know the symptoms of PTSD. They include –

- Hypervigilance
- Flashbacks; reliving the traumatic event or events
- Sharp reactions to sudden stimuli (like hitting the deck when a car backfires nearby); an exaggerated ‘startle response’
- Withdrawal and emotional distance
- Anger
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Nightmares (and the inability to sleep)

And so on. They’re hard for a veteran to live with, and can be almost impossibly difficult for loved ones. They can make social occasions stressful and even the most innocuous activities carry the seeds of trauma.

The symptoms themselves are bad enough, but they’re underlain by something else, a pervasive melancholy that’s caused by an acute *sense of loss*.

It’s the loss of a lot of things...first, a loss of innocence, the loss of the feeling that the world is ordered to be a basically benign place, a place where the really bad stuff is kept at bay.

It’s a loss of the past, because years are often sacrificed to something that may eventually have seemed a waste (as is the case with many veterans of Viet Nam and Iraq, who saw the enemy close over the places and people for whom their sacrifice had been demanded).

It’s loss of the future, because the events and the times of combat are the things we carry with us, and there’s no putting them down and walking away...even if we’d wish to. And we *don’t* ‘wish to’, because *they are what define us now*.

It's the loss of what we'd hoped relationships could be, because the memories result in emotional walls that prevent the full embrace of spouses, children, and friends...of everyone, in fact, except those with who combat was shared.

It's a loss of context, because the experiences and relationships that are forged and sealed by combat; as they become only memory, time takes away the context of the veteran's strongest definition of personality.

And finally, it's the loss of a shared cultural paradigm; the 'stuff' that makes the world we live in coherent. PTSD makes the daily cares and concerns can seem small and even silly when compared to a firefight. We can't get excited over the same things, or sometimes even appreciate them, and the only safe place, the only place where life still makes sense, is alone with our memories.

All of those play into the nightmare that the holidays can become for the veteran with PTSD, and for his or her family.

There are, however, some things PTSD is not, and they're important.

It's not a personal failing, or the sign of a weak character. The hardest individuals can be affected.

It's not the sign of a lack of faith, because the most devout Christians can be the hardest-hit.

It's not 'dysfunctional'. Most veterans can function quite well in the context of a gunfight; it's civilian life that's treacherous. Ask yourself this – could you function in the situations your veteran faced?

It's not something you need to try to fix...and it's not something you *can* fix, because it's the result of experiences of which you were likely not a part. Love is helpful, but it's not enough.

Faith is important, but Jesus can't remove the experiences. PTSD is *for life*. The responses may fade, the reactions may become controllable, but the package never goes away, because it's become a part of the veteran's history, and part of the soul.

And it's not the end of the person you loved, before *it all happened*. He or she is still there; changed, yes, and with much burned away by the flames of combat, *but the person you loved is still at home*. You don't have to learn to love someone 'different'; you merely have to love someone who's been through a lot, and who will never completely forget.

## 'Tis The Season

The buildup to the holidays starts in September, now. The stores are sending out flyers for Thanksgiving, and the decorations are up before Halloween.

And then they really get to work.

Commercials all seem to carry Christmas music and images of gift-wrap and Santa and feasts and how easy it is to pay for it all...on credit. The Christmas sweaters come out...displaying the naïve tackiness that would be impossible at any other time of year.

And then there's the sentimentality, from televised images of happy extended families gathered 'round the tree, to syrupy songs like *White Christmas*, to the tearjerker films that are led by *It's A Wonderful Life*.

It's enough to make the veteran want to go to ground until about January 10. And some do, retreating into themselves for the duration, and becoming quiet grim presences at the banquet table and the neighbourhood party.

The presence for whom you may feel you have to make excuses...

...and you kind of resent that.

Unless you've walked the same road, or a similar one, your responses to the ambience of the holidays are probably quite different. You can take part, at least in larger degree, to the joys and the wistful sentiment and the sometimes silly life-games that come with the season.

And you can understand the background of the family conflicts that might arise...and you can take part in them as well, because in a way they're part of the tradition.

You're a part of life, and your mate's on the other side of a glass wall created by experience.

And you resent that. You resent being alone.

And perhaps you resent feeling guilty, because your veteran is a constant reminder of the bad things that can happen in life. Mirrored in the veteran's eyes, you see the killing fields.

In the background of their words, you hear the gunfire.

You're the link between the battlefield and the gift-filled living room, and how can you live with that?

How can you help?

## The Most Important Thing Is You

Make no mistake; you're the most important thing in your veteran's life. You may think that sometimes the memories are more real to him or her, and the activities – hobbies and other things - with which may be pursued with an almost monastic dedication put you in the shade.

It's not true.

The past is *past*; part of PTSD is an almost wistful desire that one could fade back into the flames and the comradeship...forever...but it's not going to happen.

*YOU* are the centerpiece, the link between your veteran and the world he or she now inhabits.

It's a hard burden; it doesn't seem fair, to have that weight placed on your back. And it's not fair, not really. It's not fair that we live in a world in which combat's necessary, in which good men and women are killed and maimed, while others return with their spirits scarred and their souls blunted.

It's merely reality, and I'm sorry.

But the other side of this is that *you have to take care of yourself*. *YOU* are important, not only as a support, but as an individual.

So through all of this, all of the methodologies we'll look at to help your veteran through the holiday season, *please take care of your own heart*.

Listen to the music you love, watch the movies that help you make sense of the feelings you have. If you enjoy shopping – even Black Friday – don't give these up.

*You are important.*

**FOR WHO YOU ARE.**

## Routine Is Your Friend

Part of the holiday magic is stepping out of your normal life, leaving, for a little while, the routine patterns that define your days.

The lights and the colours call, and the music changes from eleven months of *normal* to a month of *Christmas!*

Going back to normal life can be hard. And kind of sad.

But for the veteran, routine can be very comforting. This may sound contradictory; in patrolling, for example, one never sets predictable patterns, but even those *deliberate* departures from patterns for a routine in themselves.

Routine, you see, is the doctrine for how life is lived. Put bluntly, if you can predict tomorrow, you have a better chance to survive it.

Have you looked at your veteran's life? The small things he or she does? Chances are there are patterns that you haven't noticed. I, for instance, tend to pre-positioning...even to the extent of taking the time to set up the dog food dishes for the next meal, after finishing a feeding.

You may select the clothing you're going to wear in the morning, but your veteran likely lays them out the night before...and there isn't much variation in colour or style.

Almost like a uniform.

So...how do you integrate your veteran's need for routine into the spontaneity of the season?

First, *try to have things planned and known in advance*. There's more control of the situation if your veteran *knows* that shopping will take place on a certain set of days, that the tree will be up and trimmed on a particular evening, that parties are predictable, and last-minute invitations won't be accepted.

Second, *try to maintain your daily routines*. This may be something of a sacrifice for you, and I'm sorry for that, but if the daily routine is a comforting presence, chances are your veteran will be a pleasant and gracious presence as well. Try to maintain similar mealtimes, and similar menus. Special foods may be something to which you look forward, but they can mean other things to your veteran...aside from unpredictability, they can underscore the transience of joy, emphasizing that *this happiness is only for a short time*.

It's the same with being too elaborate in decorating...I didn't realize that taking down the tree wasn't just the end of the season for me. It reminded me of the friends who didn't come home; it was symbolic of death.

Third, *go easy on holiday media*. Again, it's potentially a sacrifice, but try to maintain a mix of Christmas music and television with more general fare, and ease into the seasonal stuff...and ease out of it.

Finally, *exercise self-defense against the post-holiday blues*. Your veteran will be more affected by your post-holiday mood than you think, even if he or she seems cold and distant. The help you need and deserve from a marriage partner in getting through the 'slump' together probably won't be forthcoming, so be prepared to take care of yourself.

It's not that your veteran doesn't care, or doesn't want to help...*it's that he or she can't*. And if you expect that help, you may run into a hurtful comment that belittles post-Christmas

sadness with a comparison to the day the firebase was rocketed, and several friends were blown into a red mist.

Some of these suggestions are sacrificial, but unfortunately, that's what's going to be asked of you.

Sacrifices; and there will be more.

## Avoiding Triggers

If you love a veteran, you're probably well aware of triggers, small things that can lead to a startle response, or withdrawal, or a nightmare, or flashbacks.

The holiday season is full of them, and they can be hard to predict because sometimes they can bring up suppressed memories of which you are unaware, and which your veteran has hidden from him-or-herself.

A classical trigger is *crowds*, the kind associated with holiday shopping, especially Black Friday.

It can be kind of fun, or so I am told, jostling for a place at the bargain racks, trying to get a hand on the last big-screen TV, to claim it.

The voices, the energy, the swirling people...it's *exciting*.

For your veteran, it says *This situation is beyond my control, and something BAD is going to happen!*

Accidentally hit a combat veteran in the ribs, and you're likely to find yourself fighting a wildcat, and you'll lose.

A few years ago I was at church; after the service the aisle was crowded, and a neighbor tapped me on the shoulder. I spun around, fist cocked, and would have hit him had my wife not pushed me over.

Yes, it's probably best to avoid Black Friday.

Your veteran may, however, take some enjoyment in shopping and in selecting gifts...particularly for an 'angel tree', for needy kids. You can reconcile things and meet that desire to participate by shopping when the crowds are light. My wife and I decided to shop at our 24-hour superstore in the small hours of the morning and I took comfort in the emptiness, and even in the small homely sounds of the floor cleaners being run. It felt 'operational', as if I was somehow a part of the functioning of the place, rather than being crushed in the mass of consumers.

Other triggers may be lights...at New Years', fireworks. Certain colours of light have indelible associations with the lights seen even from afar on a killing ground, and fireworks can stimulate the memories of gunfire and flares.

*I should be shooting.* Not the kind of feeling one necessarily wants in the holidays.

Finally, there are the memories associated with music. We all know that there are songs that make us sad, either through their lyrics or the notes used, but for the veteran this can summon an almost inconsolable grief brought about by that indelible *sense of loss*.

It isn't predictable, and there may not be a way of predicting it, but if your veteran becomes suddenly quiet during the playing of a piece of music, take note, and perhaps remove it, or limit its use on your Christmas playlist.

You may not be able to 'find out'; asking if your veteran is OK might get a gruff *Yeah*, which may actually tell you all you need to know.

Finally, there are experiential triggers. See dead kids, and going down the toy aisle is unbearable. Please don't ask that of anyone.

## Dealing With Anger

Anger is the handmaiden of sorrow and it's perhaps the hardest part of PTSD for the family to deal with.

The first and overriding thing to remember is this – ***YOU ARE NOT THE TARGET.***

The anger that arises from the experience of combat comes from a couple of different places, one physical, one psychological.

The physical side of war is more intense than anyone who hasn't experienced it can realize. There are demands on the body that can, in retrospect, seem inhuman, but they have to be met.

The aggression that has to be summoned to meet that demand has to be visceral, and almost automatic.

And yet, it has to be strictly controlled. The *berserker* of Viking mythology has little place; he's replaced by the cold fury of the modern warrior, whose rage is subsumed into the ability to kill without remorse, at least no remorse in the moment.

*It changes part of a person.* The 'useful anger' is grafted onto someone whose first few decades of life were probably spent in an environment in which peaceful responses were good and angry ones *bad*. Your veteran's a walking dichotomy, trained to build and handle aggression, but by nature not a violent or angry person.

Dealing with that is hard.

It's not an excuse; I'm letting no one – especially not myself – off the hook. The veteran's obligation is to self-control, and self-awareness that includes the triggers for anger. If it's not well-managed, professional help ***must*** be sought.

But I will tell you how you can help.

Most of the holiday outbursts come from deep places, and are caused by the contrast between a remembered past that had purpose, and a present that seems pointless.

You see, a large part of PTSD is *loss of a sense of mission*.

There's little use for a machine-gunner in civilian life, but he's a vital member of a heavy-weapons platoon, and it was in that context that he developed his strongest sense of identity.

But that context no longer exists in his life, and seeing, for example, one too many commercials about how he absolutely *must* buy everyone he knows the latest cell phones can cause patience to end with a very loud snap.

That snap can well become personal; you are, after all, probably the only person nearby on whom he can vent his anger, and *see the response*.

That's a part of it, and it's an ugly part. Anger works to hurt, and works to see the pain it inflicts.

There's no easy way out of this and the only effective way is to try to see that *it isn't about you*, and let it pass.

It also helps, if there was a clearly definable trigger, to get away from that trigger, and avoid it in future.

Whatever you do, *don't retaliate*, however hard it may be to hold back.

If you were hurt, you should let your veteran know. He's probably aware that he did hurt you, and feels terrible about it.

But your telling him should also carry your forgiveness.

I told you that some of this would be hard.

One postscript to this chapter; physical abuse is *completely intolerable*, and you should get out of the presence of a physical abuser *immediately*, and seek professional help.

## Withdrawal

Many veterans with PTSD may seem a bit quiet, but the holidays can make ‘quiet’ seem like ‘reclusive’.

This can be awfully frustrating, especially if entertaining is a part of your holiday life. You look around for your veteran and realize that he or she has slipped out the door and is standing in the snow, looking up at the night sky.

You feel like going out and saying, gently, “Come on in, dear...you’re ignoring our guests.”

*Don’t.*

He knows he’s ignoring them. It’s not that he means them ill will, or wants them to go away; indeed, the sounds of the party in the house may offer a strange comfort to that lonely, haunted figure.

He may just not be able to take it anymore, and has left to avoid weeping.

Remember the melancholy I mentioned? It’s most pronounced when it’s emphasized, and nowhere is it more emphasized than in a happy, joyful group when one is inescapably reminded of lost friends and bad scenes.

You don’t *snap out of* this. Saying “hey, c’mon, *enjoy yourself*” doesn’t work.

He *can’t*.

All he can do is withdraw, and hold his heart close.

The best thing you can do is let him, and if anyone makes a snide remark...protect your veteran, for the dedication he made to protect you.

## Eat, Drink, And Be Merry...NOT

Feasting is a traditional part of the holidays...getting a bit tipsy, and indulging in the meal that requires the loosening of one's belt.

*Bad idea* for the veteran with PTSD.

First, drinking. This should be obvious, but combining drink with a time of year and situations that are emotionally stressful is a recipe for sorrow, and potential disaster. Drinking to be social can easily become drinking to forget, or to get away...and there may be more than can be forgotten, and no place far enough away to which one might escape.

Overeating presents some unexpected potential for problems. One of the best defenses against the worst effects of PTSD is *physical health*; exercise and fitness, when not carried to an extreme, are an excellent part of living with it.

Overeating is the antithesis of fitness. It changes the body's 'digestive paradigm', loading it with unfamiliar quantities of unfamiliar food. Remember the chapter on *routine*?

Routine isn't just emotionally valuable. It's *physically necessary*. The challenges of combat trauma are hard enough to face with a baseline and consistent level of physical fitness; degrading that 'stable platform' serves no good purpose and can do harm by weakening the psychological defenses against sorrow and despair.

There's another consideration, and that's *avoiding contrasts*. The sight of a banquet table fills most with good feelings, but for the veteran whose Christmas dinners may have consisted of MREs, or Ks or Cs, the feeling will be one of *loss*.

Loss of the comrades with whom he may have shared those meals, yes, but perhaps more important, the loss of sharpness, the loss of a purpose-filled life.

Being at the sharp end has its compensations; it's being in a hard, competent elite dedicated above all to one another.

Feasts are soft. *Soft* isn't a good word to the veteran.

## Helping Others

In *Achilles in Viet Nam*, Jonathan Shay made the somewhat surprising observation that Viet Nam veterans who suffered from PTSD frequently found meaning in their lives in serving those less fortunate than themselves; delivering meals to the elderly, for example, or working with crippled veterans (many such veterans don't like the word 'disabled' as they consider themselves *plenty* able).

In retrospect, this shouldn't be all that remarkable, because one of the 'losses' of PTSD is *loss of a sense of mission*.

We all want to be needed; we all want a 'place' in society.

Combat brings that, and so much more. It's being needed in a place in which the currency is life and death, and there's very little in civilian life that can match that.

Except the places where the stakes are still high, and those include serving the poorest of our brothers and sisters.

Remember talking about shopping, a couple of chapters ago? The community 'angel tree' for the disadvantaged, and how veterans often contribute more than others? That's the impulse.

This isn't something you should push hard, but offering a suggestion can often be useful; your veteran might be too shy to suggest it him-or-herself.

"Would you like to come with me and deliver some Christmas meals?" might bring back the *good* memories, like the hot meals that the US military tries to deliver to troops in the field for Thanksgiving, or the Marines' celebration of the most important day in the year, November 10, the Corps' birthday, when no Marine is forgotten.

It's not just human beings that many veterans seek to help; some "don't mix too well with people", but have a gift for reaching the hearts of animals.

In writing this chapter, I had to take a break to clean up after one of rescue dogs, who has a dodgy tummy. It wasn't a problem; it's how I can best show love.

And trust me, *your veteran wants to love.*

## Travels

We all want to go Home for the Holidays, right?

No necessarily; for your veteran, Christmastime travel might not be the best idea.

First, travel is the enemy of routine, and holiday travel (whether by car or by air), with its potential for weather delays, is the least predictable of all. Even if all goes well, it's a source of stress, and unless it's completely unavoidable, it's probably better to schedule those 'going home' visits for another time of year.

Air travel, in particular, presents holiday problems. Airports are crowded, and as we've discussed, crowd exposure is often a bad idea.

Too, the people *in* those crowds are likely to be overdressed, overloaded, hurried...and ill-tempered. For a nervous and suspicious veteran, this makes the setting far more difficult, and harsh words – or worse – with a stranger can result.

There's an addition factor in air travel, and that's the high level of security needed as these words are written (2015). For a veteran whose symptoms include hypervigilance – scanning the roadside for IEDs (roadside bombs) when driving, for instance – the atmosphere of heavy security and the implied threat can make any trip into something of a misery.

Travel by car, when feasible, is a better idea, but be aware of this, that many veterans, in dealing with the general stress that the holidays bring, will want to control as much of their lives as far as possible.

*I'm driving.*

And the driving legs may be longer, and driven faster, than your comfort allows. If this is the case, the best thing to do...another *hard thing*...is to accept it. You don't need an argument when confined for a road trip.

Another argument against holiday travel is the *magnification of emotion*. Your veteran may well be dreading the emotion that's demanded by family and society as the normal holiday 'price'; these are emphasized and forced by the greetings and goodbyes implicit in any family visit, especially when surrounded by the soap-bubble-like ephemerality of the holiday trappings.

It magnifies the sense of transience...*and loss*.

If your families can visit, it's usually the best. The 'greetings and goodbyes' are there, of course, but they're taking place in familiar surroundings, and, if you're wise, in a lower-keyed environment, without extensive decorations or overbearing music and media.

## Going To Church

There are no combat veterans in Hell. They've been there already.

It's no mystery that combat can be hard on one's faith in God; how can a purportedly good God allow some of the things your veteran has seen?

But by the same token, combat can actually *strengthen* faith, by virtue of the unexplained salvation, and the utter good to which men can rise when surrounded by the worst the world can offer.

Yeah, it can leave a veteran's spirituality pretty mixed up.

Christmas is in many ways the *best* time to go to church; the cheerful and non-preachy tenor of the season, along with the cultural tie-in, make it a less unpalatable experience than it can be (in some churches) the rest of the year.

Unpalatable...pretty strange choice of words, eh?

Veterans listen to the sermons far more attentively than most of the congregation. It matters to them, because religion may be the only answer out there, to make sense of some of the things they've seen.

An inauthentic pastor – say, one who uses combat metaphors but has never *seen* combat – can do more harm to a veteran's willingness to attend church than almost anything.

The best way to help your veteran is *not to push*. If he or she resists going to church during Advent or on Christmas Day...accept it, but if you want to go, *go yourself*. Don't make it a demonstration to induce guilt (and sullen cooperation), but be proactive in caring for yourself.

If you're a Christian, please *don't* assume that a withdrawal from churchgoing, or a cynical attitude toward organized Christianity, is a sign of being 'unsaved', and needing your urgent intervention.

*You can't help her except to set a quiet example. If you push, you can only do harm, and drive a wider wedge between the two of you, and between your veteran and the church.*

First, you can't know your veteran's heart. People don't always say what they mean, or mean what they say, and presuming to try to 'lead your veteran back to the Lord' can backfire on you in the worst way possible.

*You didn't see what I saw, or do what I did. Who are **you** to say **anything**?*

Second, the deal is really between your veteran and God. Let it rest there.

## Professional Help

I will make no bones of this – I am a firm believer in utilizing qualified professional help to deal with PTSD.

There's always been a dichotomy in military culture – the recognition that PTSD exists (and that it can be a severe problem) goes back to WW1 (when it was called 'shell shock') and through WW2 ('battle fatigue'). And yet...

Now it's ostensibly in the open, but the warrior ethos doesn't allow its treatment. One is allowed to joke about it ("I was scared shitless!"), but actually talking to a psychiatrist is seen as a sign of weakness.

That attitude is prevalent in the veteran community, as well.

*It should not be this way.*

PTSD can be *fatal*. Real people, with real lives, kill themselves every day. It does not undo the hardness of the warrior to get these people to safety.

So, please...*if your veteran talks about 'maybe' seeing someone, be supportive!*

If your veteran has an ongoing relationship with a professional counselor, it isn't a bad idea to schedule an appointment during the holiday season as a 'temperature test', even if nothing seems wrong.

Because that's the way you want to keep it.

## Wrapping Up

So there it is, a short how-to manual on surviving the holidays with your combat veteran.

I hope it's helped you; I hope that you've gained at least a small measure of greater understanding.

I hope you know how *central* you are to your veteran's life. With separation from the service, he or she has lost the unit loyalty that's defined life.

You are now that unit. I hope you consider it the honour it is, and I hope you hold that place proudly.

God bless.

## About The Author

Andrew Budek-Schmeisser has worked as a college professor, a welder, and a security contractor. He is the author of [\*Blessed Are The Pure of Heart\*](#), a novel of second chances; [\*Faith In The Night\*](#), thoughts on finding hope in the face of terminal illness, and [\*Angela – A New Mexico Christmas\*](#).

He is active on social media –

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Andrew and his wife live on a mesa in New Mexico, with a large number of rescued dogs.