

“This searching for Andrew is ripping our family apart,” I said to Eliza. “It could do that,” she said, “Or it could bring us closer together.”

PREFACE

And now, this morning, June 22, 2020, having been in a sweat for much of the night, I awoke at 4:00 a.m. with a sense of urgency. In a wild thrust of the lance, I want this book to help us find our son Andrew, two-tour Marine veteran of the Iraq War, who has severe Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and is homeless.

Today is Andrew's birthday. Today he turns thirty-six. Does he know that today is his birthday? If so, that is depressing. If not, that is depressing. What's not depressing at this hour, in the dark, thinking of my missing son? Finding him.

I picture a thoughtful, middle-aged woman picking up a copy at an East Coast airport, reading the first few chapters while aloft, and later when taking an Uber to her California or New Mexico or Washington State residence, contacting us after spotting Andrew marching along the shoulder of a road. It is a long shot. But it is not nearly as long a shot as some of the leads we've followed over the past five years, flying thousands of miles and spending thousands of dollars on flights, rental cars, hotel rooms, detectives, lawyers and meals.

Andrew has PTSD, a deep emotional wound. He is a homeless survivalist, a paranoid schizophrenic, has been in and out of veteran's facilities. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), originally designed to protect a patient's privacy, is one of our greatest obstacles. Andrew refuses to seek help. He has

threatened to shoot himself. Meanwhile, twenty-two veterans a day commit suicide. Hard to believe. Horrible to believe. And he has threatened to shoot others. We've told the police. He is left to roam.

To describe Andrew in this way objectifies him, makes him a stereotype, a faceless, nameless, homeless veteran standing on the corner of an American city. There are thousands out there who fit this profile. You see them in wheelchairs, a blanket over their laps, a "Vietnam Veteran" cap perched on long, thick, gray hair, and a cup with some change at the feet that they don't have; you see them standing by the entrance ramp to interstate highways, the business and pleasure of America speeding by. They hold up signs—"Afghanistan Vet. Can you spare some change?"—with one arm, the sleeve of the jacket to the other arm hanging, empty; they are either broken on the outside or broken on the inside; they might have a twitch; they are overly vigilant—constantly looking over the shoulder; they feel crushed, shattered, beaten.

Thousands of American soldiers returning from wars have been able to recuperate from their PTSD with therapeutic treatment, with the administering of the right drugs, with hard work and support from a loving family; they've been able to adapt to civilian life, to develop a career, buy a house, raise a family; they sleep between the clean white sheets of a double bed; they live the American Dream.

Others, America leaves behind. They are the detritus of our wars.

After Andrew's second tour in Iraq ended in 2009, he returned to the States, was honorably discharged at the rank of corporal after earning two service medals, three service awards and a Letter of Appreciation. Gradually, but with increasing force and intensity, over a four-year period, he began losing jobs, losing apartments, losing friends. He became more and more paranoid, experiencing an onslaught of hauntingly painful false mental images that were real to him. He descended into an unceasing nightmare of trusting nobody. Started having hallucinations. He called, describing them, releasing diatribes and rants against us. And now he's on the streets or in the mountains or along the banks of a river. He's no longer

smoking cigarettes. He's stopped drinking alcohol. He's quit all drugs. He's walking.

He's walking through the coronavirus pandemic. A high percentage of the homeless are dying. How can he remain uninfected?

Headlines: "Trump Administration Models Predict Near Doubling of Daily Death Toll by June." "Trump Administration Projects 3,000 Daily Deaths by Early June." "U.S. DEATHS NEAR 100,000, AN INCALCUABLE LOSS." The energy hisses out of me. It's June of 2020. The Death Toll will rise and rise as 2020 marches through the fall and winter, and as 2021 begins.

He's all right. He's all right! He's smart and he's outside and he's away from everyone.

An-drew

Can-do

"Andrew is outside, away from everyone, camping," I tell my wife Ansley. "He's not breathing in the aerosols of the coronavirus. He's in the fresh air. If he caught it, he could beat it; or he could go to the VA. Then the VA would contact us."

We've had Andrew in VA rehabilitation clinics, in psychiatric wards, in jail cells, but every time he talks his way out. This same cycle of events is happening to thousands of families across the USA: get a lead, make a plan, buy the plane tickets, reserve the hotel rooms, contact the police, check with the lawyer, text the detective, call the PTSD psychologist—in other words, take action. Then the crushing letdown when at the end of all our efforts, we either do not find him, or we do, and yet, he walks away, or even is driven away by the police.

War's Over, Come Home is the story of a family living in constant threat, under daily pressure, ready to throw pajamas, toothbrush, notepad, pen and binoculars in a carry-on bag—as I was five days ago—and fly anywhere on the notice of one Facebook post, one text, one hazy, grainy emailed photograph of a tall youthful homeless man with a beard. In one way—craving that lead, that call, that adrenalin-pumping motivation to pack and go. In another—not

wanting the call to come at this exact moment, privately wishing to continue with normal life for the upcoming week. And there are the misunderstandings, the tensions, the disagreements, the clashing points of view of the parents. The mother—process oriented, a planner, a born teacher, a multi-tasker par excellence, an exemplar of organization who reads and follows directions, who confers and consults and considers, waits until she is sure everything is set up just so, before she goes into action. The father—goal oriented, prefers discoveries gained from serendipity to those resulting from the drudgery of prearrangement, a disciplined and dedicated compartmentalizer, impatient with reading directions, raised to be a steeplechase jockey—ready to get on the wildest horse and ride full tilt at the drop of a hat. Each, the oldest sibling in their family, likes to take the lead. Will the marriage survive the resulting plans and actions—something has to be done, we must march forward—when one half opposes what the other half proposes, and each is certain he or she is right?

Just when it seems life is peaceful and there's a sense of release, and Andrew drifts out of our minds for a few days, *bang*, it strikes.

Early on, he would call: has a new job, all is going well, living with a new woman. His voice would be low, gentle, mellifluous, and he'd be confident. We'd be relieved. A month later, he'd call about problems at work. Two weeks after that conversation, he'd be on the attack: we were out to get him. There would be anger in his tone. We were spying on him. We were texting his employers and telling them horrible things about him—which was why he was being laid off. That was from 2014 to 2017. In 2018, he cut off all contact.

My intention in these pages is to put the reader on the street with the homeless men, women and children of America, and put the reader in the living room, in the kitchen, in the hearts and minds of relatives and friends searching for their sons, cousins, brothers, trying to help them, but being hindered by HIPAA, by federal laws, state laws and the unwieldy, overwhelmed VA.

WAR'S OVER, COME HOME

Andrew was a skilled marksman—as a boy with his BB gun, then his pellet rifle; as a twenty-year-old in the Marines with his M-16. I look down the barrel of this pen and through its cross hairs, squint, as he used to do on the range. I slowly tighten my finger on the trigger, aiming at the bull's eye of this quixotic undertaking: a narrative of what a father is going through searching for his son—a son who is running away from war memories, from nightmares, from hallucinations, from his close and loyal friends, from his family. These pages relate how this search, this reconnaissance mission, affects the father's relationship with his wife, with his two other children, and with so many helpful policemen, veterans, homeless men and women, social workers, hotel clerks and flight seat companions he meets along the way.

I hope readers will keep their eyes out for a tall man in his late thirties, quiet, gentle, and polite if having to speak, reddish-brown beard, hair over his ears, baseball cap (wool cap over the baseball cap in the cold months), blazing blue eyes, delicate nose like his sister's, frame backpack—tent lashed to the top, sleeping bag tied to the bottom—and moving. He's marching. Long strides. Never stays in one place long. Last seen at dawn in a park in Albuquerque: running. Looping around the park. Running, knees a little higher than most, with a long, loping stride.

We'll find him.

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