

Authentic War Heroes

María Luisa Arredondo | 2009-09-24 | [La Opinión](#)

At an age in which many young people still have not decided what to do with their lives, Miguel Vázquez and Sherman Watson have a very clear mission: To help war veterans overcome and cope with the traumas caused by their combat experiences.

Vázquez and Sherman, both 26 years old, have experienced and suffered in their own flesh the nightmare of trying to adapt and reintegrate into society after having being in the combat frontlines. Both are veterans of the Iraq War, where they both met and formed an iron-clad friendship, which became an even stronger bond, when Sherman was gravely wounded during an attack near Baghdad.

“The vehicle in which Sherman was riding was flipped over by a bomb exploding very near him as he was traveling, and this caused him injuries that left him in a coma. For several months, he was battling and bordering between life and death”, related Miguel with an obvious pained facial expression as he recalled this dramatic episode, during a recent meeting and presentation to UMAVA (United Mexican American Veterans Association) of Orange County.

Miraculously Sherman recovered from the grave wounds that he suffered, and today he lives to tell about it. “I feel very lucky and grateful to God for being alive”, stated this young African-American US Marine with his big, engaging “dreamy” eyes and great smile.

However, life has not been easy for the both of them. In spite of their efforts to enjoy the welcoming reunion with their loved ones, the homecoming became overshadowed by destructive feelings and emotions, such as anxiety, anger, depression and the “survivor’s guilt” that comes from having survived while many of their close buddies lost their lives in the battlefield.

“These are feelings that most all veterans suffer from, but which they refuse to acknowledge because they feel that to do so would make them a burden to society, and they refuse to be a burden to society”, stated Miguel.

This is precisely the reason of why many combat veterans do not seek psychological help and treatment. “They have been trained to learn to ‘suck-it’ up, to adapt to it, and to not complain” explained Francisco J. Barragán, Board Member and Public Relations Officer for UMAVA. As a result of this, many turn to and become further victims of alcohol, drugs, or simply aimlessly roam the streets.

In Miguel’s and Sherman’s case, their situation was different. Thanks to the deep friendship that bonds them, they had the courage to share the emotional pain that hounded them, and after many months of thinking and talking about it, they felt encouraged enough to seek psychological treatment. But they were not satisfied with just that. They decided and set themselves on a crusade to create awareness among their combat buddies and brothers-in-arms, about the need to seek psychological support, and towards that goal they created an organization which they named, “The Veterans Alternative”.

“We have meetings in our homes to talk about these problems, and to put an end to the erroneous idea or notion that we have to ‘suck-it up’, put up with it, and remain silent. We want to create a consciousness and awareness among the veterans and among the young Marines and troops that are about to head into the battlefield, that they need to ask for and seek psychological guidance and support to reintegrate into society”, stated Miguel.

Listening to him, one can only admire Miguel’s and Sherman’s maturity, “Esprit de Corps”, and selfless devotion and spirit of service for others.

With the task and “burden” that these young men have chosen to bear, these young men have so clearly demonstrated by their commendable example, to our government and to our society, that we must not remain with our arms crossed nor ever allow that our veterans, who after they have risked their lives in the battlefield for us, end up forgotten, deep in their pain and alone in their sorrow.

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