

Soul Injury

Liberating Unmourned Loss & Unforgiven Guilt



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Opus Peace/Soul Injury Ambassador

www.OpusPeace.org

www.soulinjury.org

SOUL INJURY:

An Overlooked, Unassessed Wound

- Personal Historical Background and Source of Information
- “More than just PTSD”
- Dying people know things the rest of us don’t!
- Awaken to “I matter!” (the “gift”)
- Meeting Maker: → Unvarnished Truth

Unburdening of the Soul

- A Privileged Witness – “Window of



SOUL INJURY:

An Overlooked, Unassessed Wound

- Trauma morphs at the end of life (weakening of conscious mind → unbidden memories → agitation)
- Thousands of Hospice & PTSD professionals
- Handful of professionals specializing in BOTH
- Confluence of these two patient populations (Dying + Trauma) is yielding lessons not previously appreciated – lessons for the world.



Hospice: A Laboratory of SOUL Truth

A Bird's-eye View...

Witnessing trauma

vs.

Causing Trauma

Soul Injury



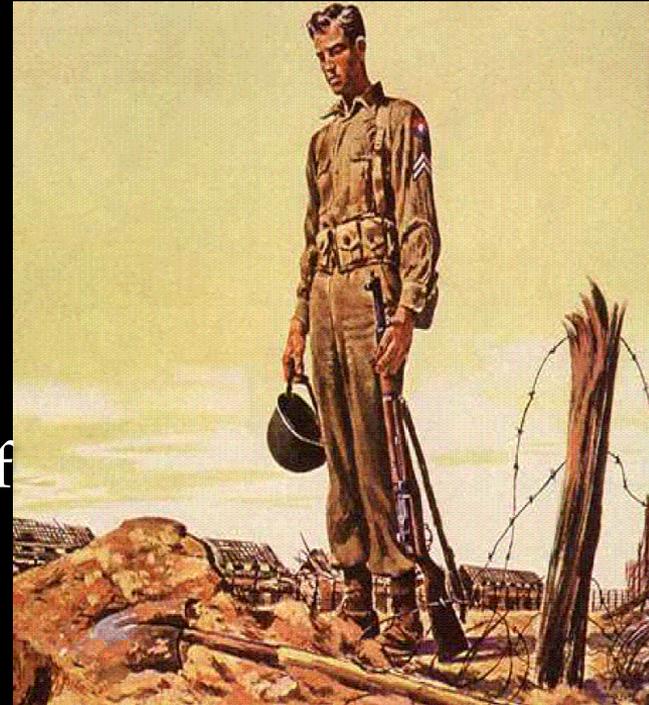
Soul Restoration Process: Liberating Pain & Shame

Began with *opening* to the pain/shame
he had been fleeing.

Shame separated him from
his sense of self and inner goodness
Telling his story of shame to a receptive
“witness” → **RE-OWN** the lost part of self

Forgiving self → **RE-HOME** self
(exile changed into safety)

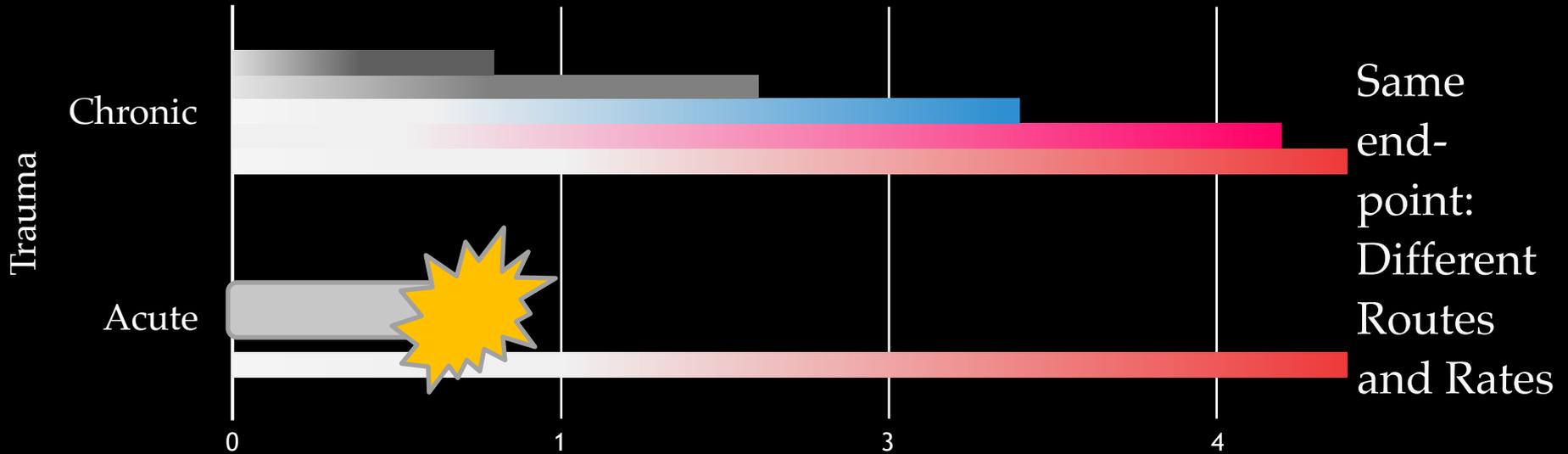
Smile of Relief → **RE-VITALIZE**



Few Can Relate to “Slitting Throats”

- Many can relate to “Traumatic Soul Injury”
(about 50% of population – probably more:
abuse, crime, natural disasters, car accidents,
sexual assault, domestic violence, etc.)

Understanding Soul Injury: A SPECTRUM of Wounds



Insidious Soul Injury



Webster's Dictionary: 3 Definitions of "Insidious"

- Developing so gradually as to be well established before becoming apparent
- Harmful but enticing
- Awaiting a chance to entrap
- Caused by a LOVING father → Insidious Soul Injury
- MY decision caused damage (ashamed of the part of myself feeling pain, numbing, dead inside). Loss of Personhood, grew over time
- My unfreezing (age 35) came when I realized that my FEAR of pain was worse than feeling the pain
- All of us have ACQUIRED insidious soul injuries.



What Keeps SOUL INJURIES Embodied?

- **Unmourned Loss** [includes failure, disappointment (divorce, job, friendship, etc.)]
- **Unforgiven Guilt/Shame**

“Why didn’t I learn how to do this years ago?”



Impetus for launching *Opus Peace* Non-Profit Organization started by five VA Hospice staff

We have been the “Witness Bearers” for lessons about attaining peace from those who went to war

I've seen how bitterness and addictions
sometimes squeeze life
from traumatized souls
until they become shells,
hardened and lifeless,
dead in bodies that are alive.

-Deborah Grassman
Author, *Peace at Last*
& *The Hero Within*



I've seen the SOUL INJURIES
that the aftermath of trauma
can cause.

-Deborah Grassman
Author, *Peace at Last*
& *The Hero Within*



I've also witnessed the damage
insidious soul injuries cause...



I've also witnessed the damage
insidious soul injuries cause...
more subtle,
but just as corrosive.







There is hope
for healing
SOUL INJURIES...

There is hope
for healing
SOUL INJURIES...
but the approach
is different.



Hope begins
when we stop being afraid
of emotional pain.

A close-up photograph of a police officer's waist and hands behind their back. The officer is wearing a dark uniform with a utility belt. A yellow crime scene tape with the text "POLICE LINE: DO NOT CROSS" is stretched across the foreground. The background is a blurred asphalt surface.

POLICE LINE: DO NOT CROSS

POLICE LINE: DO NOT CROSS

Retrieving fragments
of scattered, hidden selves
is the task after SOUL INJURY.





The time has come
to RE-OWN painful parts of yourself
you've disconnected from.















Disarm your heart
so painful parts of yourself
can be RE-HOMED.



Instead of telling yourself
“I can’t do this,”
during a painful feeling,
BREATHE and say,
“I can do this
even though it hurts and it’s hard.”





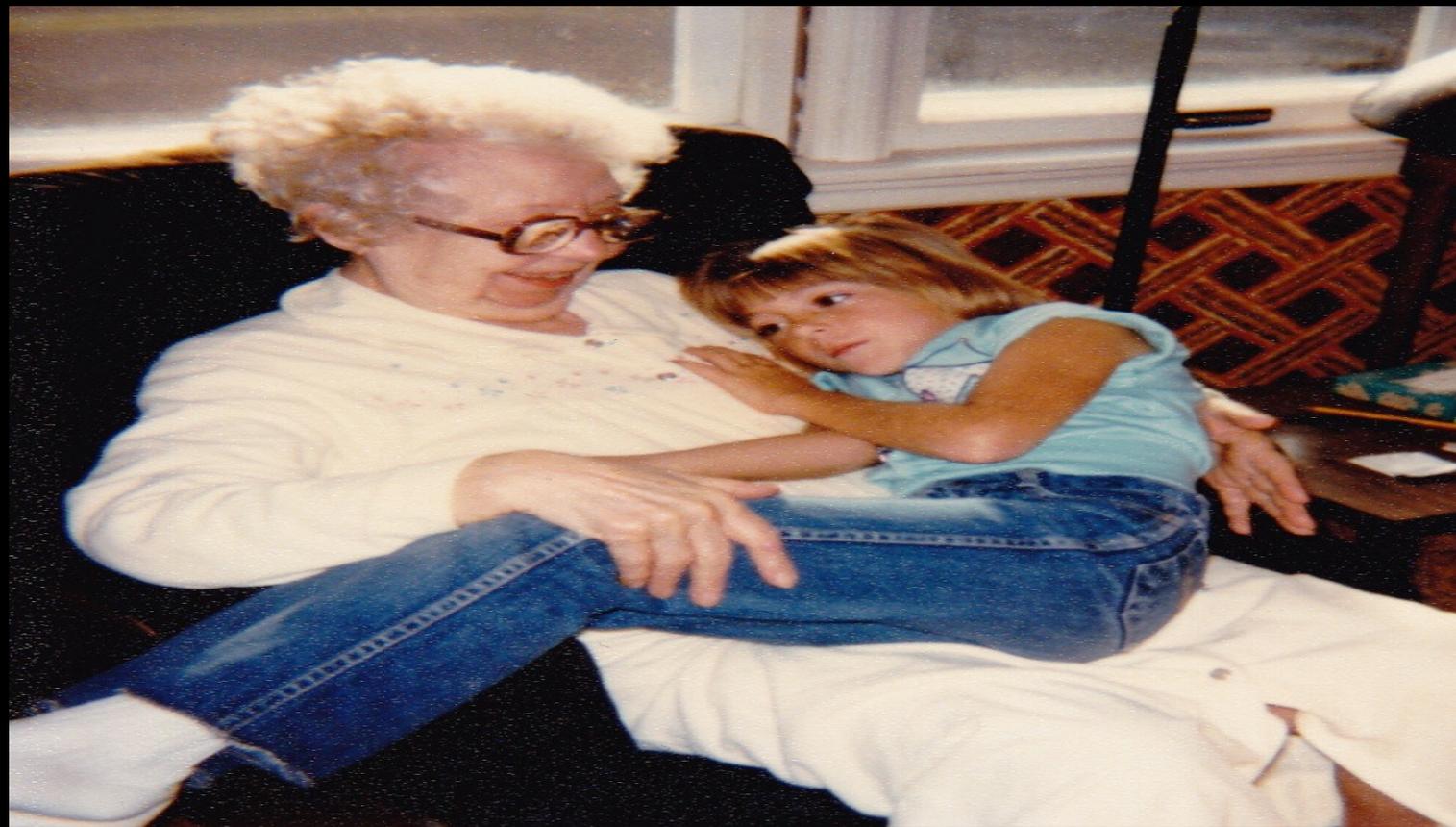
Place your palms firmly
over your heart
as you BREATHE and
RE-OWN your pain.







Friends and Family:
Be safe havens
for the pain of SOUL INJURY.



To do that,
you will have to cultivate the courage
to RE-HOME your own pain.





Instead of scolding people
for their anger,
say:
“Tell me how you are
hurting right now.”





Don't try to take their pain away.
Help them connect with the part of
themselves that is carrying their pain.

There is a GAPING HOLE
in our society
filled with
Unmourned Loss
and
Unforgiven Guilt/Shame.

It is causing

Fear,

Strife,

Hatred,

Violence,

Despair,

Suicide,

War











Help us heal
the SOUL INJURY
that all of us share.

Help us heal
the SOUL INJURY
that all of us share.
We can do this
TOGETHER.

“Bearing Witness” to SOUL INJURY

- Do we know how to “bear witness” to emotional pain?
- Are we prepared to “bear witness” with each other?
- Are we prepared “bear witness” to our own selves?
- Does our **fear** of emotional pain interfere with the “witnessing” process?
- How could an understanding of SOUL INJURY help dissipate that fear?

Important questions to ask:

Soul Injury (Sōl Īn'-juh-rē) *noun*

1. An overlooked, unassessed wound that separates one from their “real” self, causing them to feel less than whole
2. An aching wound perpetuated by unmourned loss and unforgiven guilt/shame, and diminished self-compassion that is often manifested as a sense of emptiness, loss of meaning, or a sense that a part of self is missing

What are the Symptoms of SOUL INJURY?

Often includes:

- A vague *emptiness* or a profound *aching* and feeling of *meaninglessness*
- A sense of *betrayal* by parents, spouse, friend, colleague, themselves, an organization, an institution, society, God, their religion, etc.
- **DEFINING ourselves** by the SOUL INJURY (impacting roles, relationships, etc.)



Why Should We Be Addressing Soul Injury?

- The approach to SOUL INJURY is different than traditional PTSD or chronic stress interventions
- The approach includes learning how to grieve losses / failures / disappointments → releases the loss
- Learning how to forgive self and others → releases shame
- Grieving and Forgiveness are not routinely taught in PTSD programs, nor in healthcare curricula in general

Therapeutic Value of “Soul Injury”

A woman’s daughter died suddenly of unknown causes. Months later, the woman told a friend: “My soul is dead.”

Friend asked, “Why do you say your SOUL died?”

Woman: “Because **my soul is who I am.**”

Friend: “Your soul is not dead. **You’re just so injured, that you can’t reach it right now.**” (*Soul Injury*)

Woman: “I am so excited to find out this has a name: *Soul Injury*. It gives me such hope!”

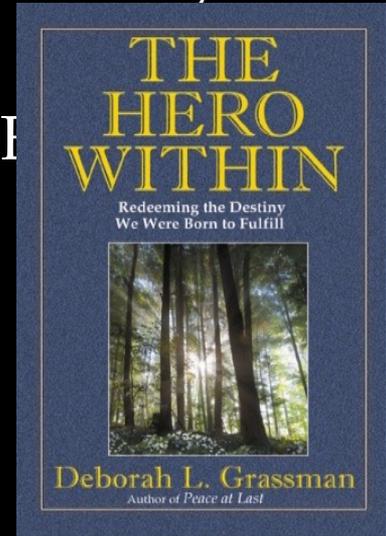
What 10,000 Dying Veterans Have Taught Us...

Lesson #1: As a culture, we are categorically
afraid of emotional pain.

(Not taught how to lose, fail, grieve;
flee and numb)

Ever take a class on how to be a loser? (Page 1)

- Never have to say “good-bye”
- “You don’t have to learn to let go”
- “You can have it all” mentality
- Society’s fear of emotional pain perpetuates SOUL INJURIES



Does Everyone with PTSD
also have a SOUL INJURY?



Caught on Camera

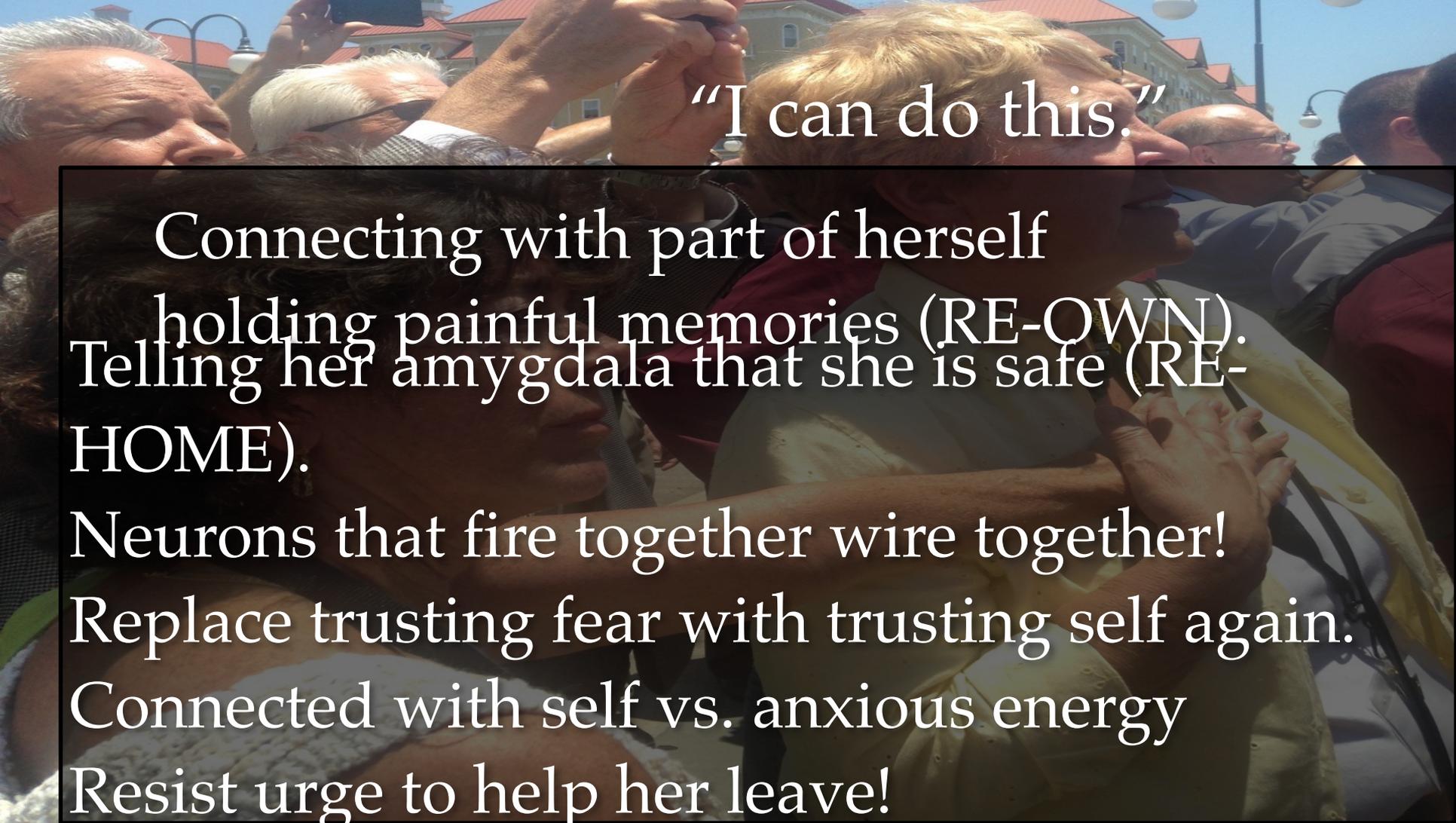
“I can’t do this!”



Vietnam Nurse

“Breathe!”





“I can do this.”

Connecting with part of herself
holding painful memories (RE-OWN).
Telling her amygdala that she is safe (RE-
HOME).

Neurons that fire together wire together!
Replace trusting fear with trusting self again.
Connected with self vs. anxious energy
Resist urge to help her leave!

3-Step Self-Grounding Technique

(Use when anxious, emotionally pained, etc.)

Anchor the Heart

1. Hand(s) on Heart & Breathe Deeply
2. Feel (RE-OWN)
3. Be curious about the place inside you strong enough to hold your pain *without* fear

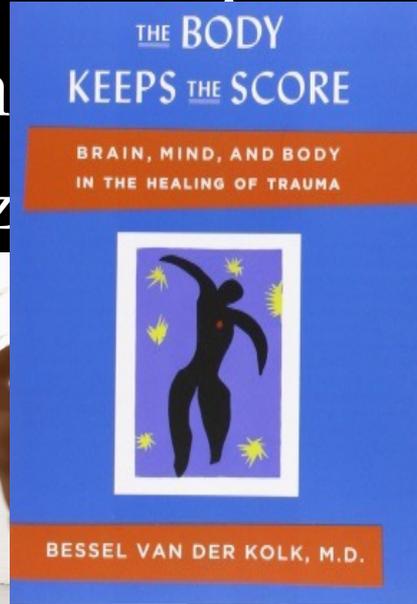
PTSD Research

Body Awareness Therapies:

Yoga, massage, tai chi,

Movement Desensitization,

etc.]



biofeedback, Eye
Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR),



PTSD & SOUL INJURY

- SOUL INJURY is not worse than PTSD; it is different. PTSD impacts the brain; SOUL INJURY impacts our sense of being.
- Related but are NOT mutually dependent. (For example: one Vietnam Vet said: “I grew up in a loving family who gave me a strong sense of who I am. I may have PTSD, but not even VIETNEM could squeeze me out of ME.”)
- SOUL INJURY: It depends on whether or not you get separated from your own sense of self by feeling defective, inadequate, or incomplete.

Treatment for SOUL INJURY vs. PTSD?

PTSD: Manage symptoms (otherwise can't address the SOUL INJURY)

SOUL INJURY: *Open up to* the symptom, connect with the part of self generating the symptom → opens healing.

PTSD: Arm the heart to manage the triggers

SOUL INJURY: *Disarm* the heart through self-compassion, love, grief, and forgiveness.





Robert Carroll MD

SOUL INJURY Propagation:
Barriers that Interfere with Healing



STOICISM:

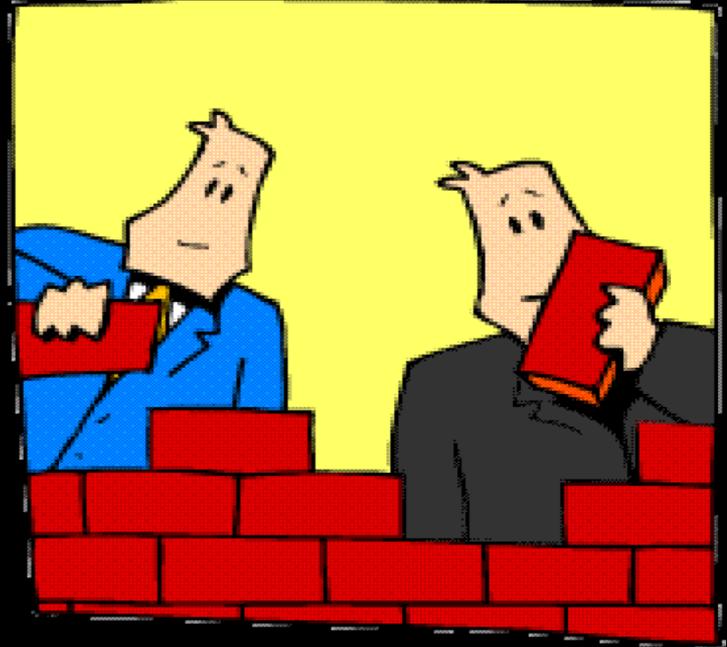
A Form of Denial
Heritage

Military Necessity

Soul Injury Propagation: Stoicism

“Showing
indifference to joy,
grief, [unclear],
pain.”

Disconnected
(Week
Grit AND Grace
occur!
(ary)



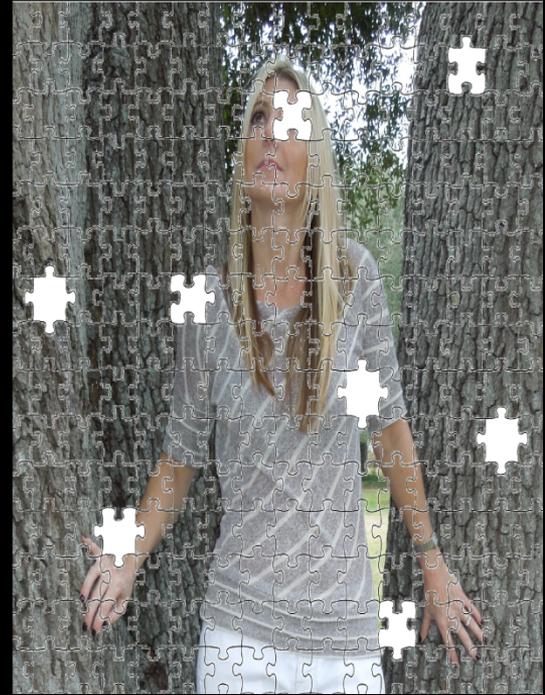
What 10,000 Dying Veterans Have Taught Us...

Lesson #2: Stoicism is necessary in some ways
and a hindrance in other ways.

(It's important to be able to
make the distinction!)

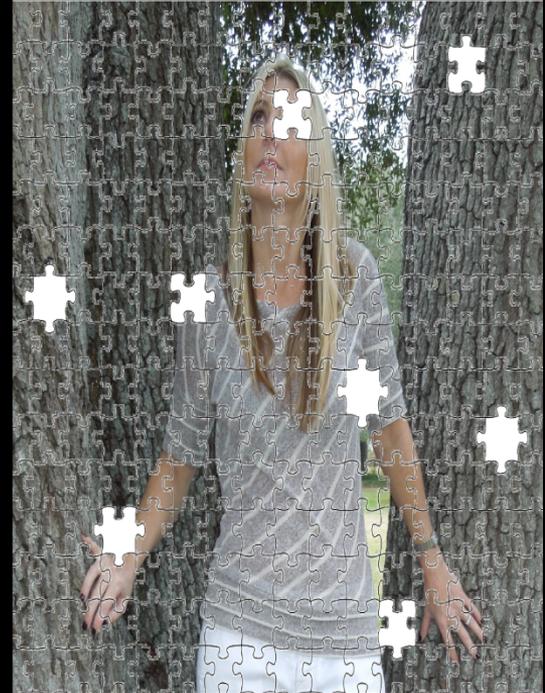
Soul Restoration

Soul restoration includes learning how to RE-OWN, RE-HOME, and RE-VITALIZE scattered pieces of self by cultivating *personal* intimacy with the part of self carrying our emotional pain.



“Intimacy” within own Self

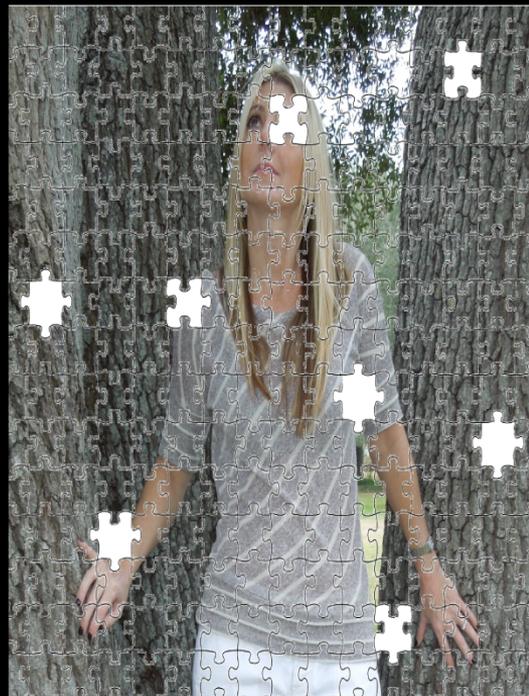
We will keep looking for it
outside ourselves!
We will keep looking for
short cuts!



“Intimacy” within own Self

Connecting with the part of self
generating the pain, paradoxically,
“restoreths the soul”
not numbing & disconnection.

The Hero’s Journey...Within



Poet: Derek Walcott

The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door,
in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome.



This is PERSONAL intimacy...
Especially when you can greet the part of self carrying your emotional pain.
So why aren't we using grieving and forgiveness to restore our wounded

Fear gets in the way

Unmourned Loss Sabotages our Bodies, Minds, and Spirits!



Box up your pain → your vitality, your personhood,
your passion get boxed up as well.
Recipe for Losing Self (SOUL INJURY)

Soul Injuries are Fatal...



if they deaden your sense of
Being.

Those Who Grieve Well, Heal Well



Because the grief doesn't have to be stored.

Grief is the natural, normal expression
of loss, disappointment, failure.

Grieving releases emotional pain.

Those Who Grieve Well, Heal Well



Grieving is CREATIVE: Let go of what was
and open up to what is.

Grieving is NOT a destructive process.

UNMOURNED Grief is a destructive process.



Failure to grieve leaves
the part of self carrying the pain of loss / failure
HOMELESS.

Don't be afraid of that part of yourself.
Clinicians and Families: Stop being afraid.

We need to learn how to
develop a different relationship
with the part of self carrying our pain.

Replace:

“Go away. I don’t like you. I’m afraid of
you.”
with

Numbing Out Your PAIN Means...

You are NOT a safe place
for the part of yourself carrying your pain!

What's your favorite numbing agent?



Stop working or job hop Talk about the pain without feeling it

Put on a Painted Smile Yell Stay Busy Watch TV

Pornography "Positive Thinking" "I'm

Go Nurture!" Over eat

Get angry DENIAL

Stoic Dying Peoples' Regrets? Isolate

Blame Others for the pain

Sports Bring Awareness! Surf the Internet Shopping

Addiction "Let it Go" Get anxious

Over-Plan Do Too Much for Others Video Games Drink

Work-Work-

You already have
everything you need
in order to be whole.
It is a matter of
removing the barriers.

How Would the World Be Different if We Weren't Afraid of our Pain?



How would my world be different if I wasn't afraid of MY

emotional pain?

How would our CHILDREN'S world be different if we taught them to not be afraid of their emotional pain?

If We Were Not Afraid...



We would have less of a relationship with our numbing agents, and more of a relationship with our soul!

When You're Living Life Passionately...

You stop NUMBING the pain and instead let yourself feel it.

You stop being afraid of your pain.

You tell your ego to stop covering your pain up with anger, fear, and shame.

You talk to the part of yourself carrying the pain.

You comfort that part of yourself (not with numbing agents!)

You tell a TRUSTED other about your pain.



SOUL INJURY Origins & Propagation:

We Don't Know How to Re-Own & Re-Home Guilt/Shame/Blame



Almost always surrounds
PTSD and SOUL INJURY

Yet

Seeking and Finding Forgiveness:
A Journey into
the Wilderness of the Soul



He Did Not Waste His Suffering!
He USED it to learn & grow.



The difference between
“ordinary” people and “heroes”
is that heroes don’t waste their suffering.

What 10,000 Dying Veterans Have Taught Us...

Lesson #3: Learning the process and work of forgiveness is redemption.

(Not learning it is a recipe for disconnection from the soul which can lead to bitterness.)

What Responsibility Do Friends, Family, Caregivers, and Public Have in Healing the SOUL INJURY in our Midst?



Validating Emotional Pain: An Act of Compassion

- Validation is an act of self-compassion to acknowledge the loss, feel the emotions and sensations
- It counters DENIAL. (Don't Even kNow I Am Lying.)
- Denial is a numbing agent.
- “Licking your wounds” allows you to feel the pain so the part of self feeling it doesn't have to be exiled into unconsciousness → numbing and / or angry outbursts.

What 10,000 Dying Veterans
Have Taught Us about Compassion for Self & Others

Lesson #4: Cultivate Qualities that Redeem your
Personhood: Honesty,
Courage, and Humility.

Why Honesty, Courage, Humility?

Honesty: “Unvarnished” Truth

(“Now, while I’m dying, is no time for me to be lying to myself.”)

Courage: No one can die for you. Even with loving, supportive family all around you, you have to take the leap yourself.

Humility: Because people haven’t died before, they don’t know how to do it, they:

Ask for help, receive help, & listen.

Develop these qualities and you won't be left asking, "Why did I have to be dying to learn how to do this!"

(Steve Job's "Wow"!)

Just before you die, there's often an experience of freedom from fear and feeling safe and trusting your personhood.

Just because death isn't easy or pretty, does not mean it doesn't have something to teach us.

Death strips us of our arrogance. Arrogance often separates us from our soul.

I never anticipated
that I would learn lessons about peace
from people who were trained for
war.

-Deborah Grassman

Author, *Peace at Last*
& *The Hero Within*



I'm often struck by
traumatized peoples' resiliency
and the many ways
they've been able to
laugh, relate, find hope,
share, and stay connected.



They have been victims,
and, more importantly,
they have been survivors.

Many learn to live
from a deeper part within themselves –



They have been victims,
and, more importantly,
they have been survivors.

Many learn to live
from a deeper part within themselves –
their soul self.



The cave you fear to enter
holds the treasure you seek.

- Joseph Campbell



Paradoxically,
the things we so fearfully flee
are the very things that free us up,
growing us into our larger selves.

Inside most of my stoic patients
was a gentle,
sensitive
human being
just waiting for a chance to emerge



“For love alone will outlast
any enemy or any war.

Love is what we will build our lives on.

Love is what God is, and in the end,
it's all we have and all I leave to you,
my good friends, is *love*...”

- Russell Ford

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world.

Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead

Anthropologist

Opus  Peace
...begins in me

Soul Injury Film

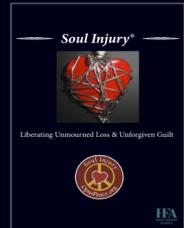
Event Format with DVD:

- Locally-assembled panel to provide commentary and answer audience questions
- 2 CEs for Nurses, Social Workers, Clergy, Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors, Addiction Professionals, Marriage & Family Therapy, Mental Health Counseling, Death Education and Counseling, Nursing Home Administrators, Psychologists, ADEC, and Academy of Funeral Home Professionals.

Use as a PLATFORM for YOUR cause, contextualizing it to your population **Cost:** \$25 for the on-demand webcast and \$50 (plus \$9 for shipping and handling) for the DVD.

To register:

- Go to <https://hospicefoundation.org/HFA-Products/Soul-Injury>



Proclamation to Congress

January: National Soul Injury Awareness Month

(go to www.Soulinjury to sign)

- WHEREAS, each year millions of lives are affected by traumatic or insidious injuries that accompany the aftermath of war, violence, abuse, neglect, betrayal, or serious illness; and
- WHEREAS, the mental and emotional distress that accompany these injuries often goes unrecognized, untreated, and misunderstood, creating a gaping hole in our society that is filled with *Unmourned Loss* and *Unforgiven Guilt/Shame*; and

Opus Peace Prayer

Cultivate in me the willingness to RE-OWN, RE-HOME, and RE-VITALIZE scattered pieces of myself so wholeness can be restored.

Grow in me the honesty, courage, and humility to release my fear of who I am and who I am not.

Fuel me with your grace.

Amen



Opus Peace Vision:

to start a movement that responds to SOUL INJURY

We Need Your Help!

- Start a Healing Community using “The Hero Within” or with veterans “Peace at Last” books
- Take the “Soul Injury Leadership Training” at our Institute
- Become an Opus Peace ambassador
- Utilize websites: www.OpusPeace.org or www.soulinjury.org

Music Credits

Karen Taylor-Good:

- *I Need a Witness*

www.karentaylorgood.com www.stowegood.com

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