

Veterans, Disability, and the Power of Literature

Part 2: How Veterans with Disabilities Use Literature to Build Community

Southeast ADA Center
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Barry Whaley:

Good afternoon, everybody and thank you for joining us today for the second webinar in our three-part series: *Veterans, Disability, and the Power of Literature*. I'm Barry Whaley. I'm the director of the Southeast A.D.A. Center based in Atlanta. The Southeast A.D.A. Center is a project of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. We're funded by NIDILRR, the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, a center within the Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services. The Southeast A.D.A. Center is one of ten centers that make up the A.D.A. National Network. Our purpose is to provide informal technical guidance, training, and information on all aspects of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University is a leader in the efforts to advance the civic, economic, and social participation of people with disabilities in a global society.

Again, I want to welcome you to today's webinar. Today's episode is "The Luminous Truth: Contemporary Literature by Veterans." Our hosts are Steve Kuusisto and Doug Anderson. Steve Kuusisto is author of the memoir "*Have Dog, Will Travel*," "*Planet of the Blind*," which was a New York Times Notable Book of the Year award winner, and "*Eavesdropping: a Memoir of Blindness and Listening*," and the poetry collections "*Only Bread, Only Light*," and "*Letters to Borges*". He's a graduate of the Iowa "Writer's Workshop" and a Fulbright Scholar. He's taught at the University of Iowa, Hobart and Williams Smith Colleges, and the Ohio State University. Currently, he teaches at Syracuse

University where he holds a university professorship in disability studies. He's a frequent speaker in the U.S. and abroad, and you can learn more about Steve and his work at his website StephenKuusisto.com. That's StephenKuusisto.com.

Doug Anderson is the author of three books of poems, of which "*The Moon Reflected Fire*" won the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and "*Blues for Unemployed Secret Police*" a grant from the Academy of American Poets. He's a playwright as well. His play "Short-timers" was produced at theater for the New City in New York City in 1981. He's also written a memoir, "*Keep Your Head Down: Vietnam, the '60s and a Journey of Self-Discovery*." His most recent book of poems is "*Horse Medicine*." His work has appeared in the Massachusetts Review, Poetry, Plow Shares, the Virginia Quarterly Review, the Southern Review, Field, as well as other publications. He has written critical articles for the New York Times book review, the London Times literary supplement, and the Boston Globe. He's taught at Emerson and Smith Colleges, the University of Massachusetts, and the MFA programs of Pacific University of Oregon and Bennington College. He's an affiliate of the Joiner Institute for the Study of War and Social Consequences at UMass Boston, and he is currently helping to design an institute for refugees and veterans at the University of Massachusetts. Doug served in Vietnam as a corpsman with the Marine infantry battalion.

As a reminder, listens, *Veterans, Disability, and the Power of Literature* contains themes and descriptions of war that some may find unsettling. If you find this content objectionable, you may choose not to listen. Additionally, this webinar contains some mild profanity that some may find offensive. Finally, the contents of this webinar don't necessarily reflect the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HCL, HHS, Syracuse University, the Burton Blatt Institute, or the Southeast A.D.A. Center and you

shouldn't assume endorsement by of any these entities. So Doug and Steve, welcome to our episode today and I'll turn the webinar over to you.

Steve Kuusisto:

Thank you very much, Barry. Let me also add to Doug's bio. He's the author of extraordinary book of poems called "*The Moon Reflected Fire*" which is available from Alice James Books, a terrific poetry press here in the U.S. It's a remarkable book of poems. So I wanted to put in a plug for that too.

In our last episode, we talked a good deal about the dynamics of the history of veterans writing poetry and literature, and how writing by people who have experienced war has been central to the art of creative writing from the beginnings of recorded writing. We mentioned Homer and the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, and certainly, we spent some time talking about the remarkable poetry that came out of World War I. Then we took a little turn and we talked about the ways in which veterans come home and have to contend with disablement as an important part of what we might call "re-entry" of going on, and we read some poetry that touched on those themes.

I thought that today we might read some more poems that illustrate the many kinds of issues that veterans, both with and without disabilities, face when they come home. I wanted to point listeners to a couple of interesting websites if I might. One is called acolytesofwar.com. Acolytes of war is one word, .com, and you will find a page there called Time Now: The Iraq & Afghanistan Wars in Art, Film, and Literature. They have a page devoted to 22 American, Iraq, and Afghanistan war poets and there's an extraordinary range of contemporary poets, men and women, who have served in the armed forces

and have written memorable poetry about those experiences. Some of the poets on that page are not veterans, but have written about the experiences that come from living with and talking with veterans. Let me add that on that page, you will find a couple of interesting links along with the poems. One is to a website called Warrior Writers, which is a terrific, both website and project to bring together veterans with combat experience who seek to write poetry. They do workshops all over the U.S. and it's a vital resource for more information should you be interested in becoming a poet or picking up poetry.

So I wanted to start there to point people to a couple of interesting sites. I know Doug comes with a lot of material in mind. I have a few poems here by Warrior Writers that I'd like to read. What do you say, Doug?

Doug Anderson:

I say let's do it. We talked quite a lot about Wilfred Owen "Dulce et Decorum est," as an example of the war poetry of World War I which was, in fact, the end of any romantic idea about war that might have been voiced by Tennyson or Yeats, and for that reason they were excluded from the larger anthology of English poets that was edited by Yeats because they didn't write in a tasteful way. But there was one poet of World War I that was interesting. His name was Rupert Brooke. He never actually got to the war. He died of dysentery while waiting to be shipped to Gallipoli. So the poems he wrote were all imagining war. I'd like to read one of them now just to show- for contrast to show the carryover of romantic thinking about war prior to the actual experience of modern warfare.

Steve Kuusisto:

Very, very interesting. Yeah.

Doug Anderson:

This is called "The Soldier."

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air
Washed by the rivers, blest by the suns of home

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Okay. There you go.

Steve Kuusisto:

"Under an English heaven."

Doug Anderson:

Yes. Yeah, like even heaven is colonial. But you can see there that this young man, who is going to have an unfortunate death from dysentery which saved him from probably being cut to pieces in Gallipoli, had an entirely different idea of what the war was about whereas, people like Wilfred Owen knew precisely what it was about, and they would have none of this romanticism, they would have none

of the nationalism. They were all about getting the exact detail of human suffering as it occurs in war. In “*The Things They Carried*”, there’s a short section where Tim O’Brien has created an almost poetics of war literature and it’s called “How to tell a True War Story.”

Steve Kuusisto:

Yes.

Doug Anderson:

“A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things they have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue. As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil.”

This would describe Owen, of course, that he’s not pulling any punches. He’s not trying to thrill anyone at home with how glorious war is. He’s telling you just exactly what it’s like. There’s another ironic point. In “*All Quiet on the Western Front*” by Erich Maria Remarque, there is a character of a school teacher who is teaching these young German boys “*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*” and doing a great deal of posturing from behind his desk. The same bit of Latin that the British boys learned about how glorious war should be and how you should be happy to die in it. And later on, of course, this pompous school teacher ends up in the war himself, the draft being what it was and the Germans were losing so many people. And he turns out, of course, to be a coward. The epigraph to “*All Quiet on the*

Western Front” reads like this: “This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped at shells, were destroyed by the war.” A lot of people read this. I’ve seen students read this and not have any idea what they’re talking about. He’s talking about the people who managed to get home with all their limbs and their eyes and went back to a so-called life, but, in fact, who were destroyed by the war which I understand to mean that they were horribly traumatized, that they would never see their life the same way again. And because, like the veterans of the Vietnam War, Germany had lost that war, they had that on top of it. Their opinions were not terribly appreciated. They were not proud to have lost it and they probably shut up. This is a common thing. World War I and Vietnam are so close together in tone and emotional texture and moral ambiguity that they really fit. It’s very good to talk about them in the same session.

Jonathan Shay, the psychiatrist we introduced yesterday as having written “*Achilles in Vietnam*” and “*Odysseus in America*,” was probably the person who most succinctly articulated what post-traumatic stress disorder was in the Vietnam generation and also how moral injury occurs. Here is a quote from “*Achilles in Vietnam*.” “Melodramas of moral courage provide satisfaction through the comforting fantasy that our own character would hold steady under the most extreme pressure of dreadful events. But we must face the painful awareness that in all likelihood one’s own character would not have stood firm.” I’m recalling how Donald Trump recently shamed a certain POW because he got caught. He was further shamed because he cracked under torture. And we see in the movies, guys who refuse to crack under torture. There may be, in fact, people who refuse to crack under torture, but 99.9% of human beings crack under torture. 99.9% of human beings are horribly affected by war. Some worse than others. And there’s also the problem of comparative suffering. Here’s another quote by Jonathan Shay. “All who hear should understand that no person’s suffering can be measured against

another person's suffering. It can be extremely damaging if anyone makes comparisons. Combat veterans frequently doubt that they are worthy of treatment, knowing other vets who are worse off now or went through worse than they did. Many survivors of trauma obstruct their own healing by placing themselves in 'hierarchies of suffering', usually to their own disadvantage." This is an important thing.

Steve Kuusisto:

That's a very, very important thing. I am blind and I have worked in disability communities and it is the case with veterans and it's also the case with the civilian disabled that this business of comparing pain often comes up. It's as though, 'well, you know, this other person has it much worse than I do and, therefore, I shouldn't speak about the problems I have.' This is a particularly bad problem for people, and veterans in particular, but also civilians, who have invisible disabilities who then feel that they can't talk about them. PTSD being a remarkable example of this, right? It's not viewable per se, and you think that mind over matter will fix it. If you just think the right things, right? Or engage in the right things. Versus that other person who came home missing legs or blind. And I think that's a real problem.

Doug Anderson:

I think it is, too. And you know, there's a lot of shaming going on about PTSD right now. People, particularly on the far-right who seem to forget they have an unconscious, are very cynical about people who, for example, have disability. There was a guy, usually PTSD, people don't know they have PTSD until their life starts to fall apart. Whether it's their marriage, their job, here's an example. I have a local friend who's an Afghanistan vet who was with the Special Forces unit and they were running security on a convoy in Afghanistan and IED went off and killed couple of people and injured him. But worse than that, after his wounds had healed was the PTSD, and he was pretty much in denial about it. He was in the

Special Forces. He wasn't really interested in showing himself as vulnerable in any way. So, one day, he's home and somewhere in Gardner, Massachusetts, he's driving along, and he's entering an intersection and a guy passes him very fast and cuts in front of him in the middle of the intersection. All kinds of triggers went off.

Steve Kuusisto:

You bet.

Doug Anderson:

He ended up chasing this guy down, chasing him into a parking lot and blocking him with his car and getting out and running up to the guy, and was getting ready to punch him through the glass of the window. The guy is furiously dialing 9-1-1 on his cell phone. When at the last-minute, he stops himself, and instead of punching the guy through the glass, rips the wing window off the car. The cops show up. Both the cops were Afghanistan vets.

Steve Kuusisto:

Interesting.

Doug Anderson:

So one of the cop says, 'You know, there was a camera back in that intersection and you changed lanes in the middle of an intersection, which is illegal. And tell you what, we're not going to write you up if you forget about your wing window.' That's the point in which my friend decided that he needed help, and he went to the VA. I was in a group with him. He's a really interesting guy. And that was his first cognizance that he was reacting to things as if he was still in the war. That in a convoy, if somebody passes you, they're very likely to be the enemy.

Steve Kuusisto:

Exactly.

Doug Anderson:

So all these triggers, and he just saw red. He just totally lost it. So a lot of guys, guys that don't picture themselves as being proactive and going to a therapist end up, by default, going to a therapist. This stuff is real and as much as certain politicians would like to laugh at it, people have it the rest of their lives. Their nervous system has been irremediably altered. What they do is they learn how to live with it.

Steve Kuusisto:

They learn to live with it and that alludes to something I mentioned yesterday in our podcast about how disability is permanent. You live with it for the rest of your life and you learn managing strategies and coping strategies, and also learn how to think creatively with it, but it's a real fact. And then you have to move through the ordinary world and that world is never the same either. So you have to contend with that too, right? Not only are you changed, but the world will never be the same again because that disabling condition puts you at a remove from the ordinary in certain ways.

Let me read a poem here. This is by Kevin Powers and Kevin Powers comes from Richmond, Virginia, and he served both in Mosul and Tal Afar, Iraq. He came back and, like many veterans, came home and took up poetry writing. He studied and got a graduate degree in poetry writing from University of Texas in Austin. He won an award- first book award from the Guardian, a really great newspaper, for his first novel, "*The Yellow Birds*" and this is from a book of poems of his called "*Letter*

Composed During a Lull in the Fighting.” And this is called “Improvised Explosive Device” and it begins with an epigraph, a quote before the poem begins.

The blast from an improvised explosive device moves at 13,000 mph, gets as hot as 7,000 degrees, and creates 400 tons of pressure per square inch. “No one survives that. We’re trying to save the kids at 25 meters and beyond.” Ronald Glasser quoted in the *Army Times*.

If this poem had wires
coming out of it,
you would not read it.
If the words in this poem were made
of metal, if you could see
the mechanics of their curvature,
you would hope they would stay covered
by whatever paper rested
in the trash pile they were hidden in.
But words or wires would lead you still
to fields of grass between white buildings.

If this poem were made of metal and you read it, if you did
decide to read or hear the words, you would see wires
where there were none,
you would pick up the slack of words, you would reel
them in, pull
loose lines until you stood in that dry field,
where you’d sweat. You would wonder how you looked
from rooftop level, if you had been targeted.
If these words were buried beneath debris, you would
ask specific questions, like, am I in a field of words?
What will happen if they are unearthed?
Is the entire goddamn country full of them?
Prefer that they be words, not wires, not made of metal,
which is almost always trouble. If these words should lead you
to the rough center of a field,
you’ll stand half-blind
from the bright light off white buildings,
still holding the slack line in your hand,
wondering if you have been chosen.
You’ll realize that you both have been and not,
and that an accident is as much of a choice
as saying, “I am going to read this poem.”

If this poem had wires coming out of it,
you would call the words devices,
if you found them threatening in any way,
for ease of communication
and because you would marvel
at this new, broad category.
This is another way of saying
we'd rely on jargon to understand each other,
like calling a year a tour,
even though there are never any women
in bustled dresses carrying umbrellas
to protect complexions. In moments
you might think these words were grand,
in an odd way, never imagining you would
find a need to come back to them,
or that you'd find days
that you were desperate
for the potential of metal,
wires, and hidden things.

And if this poem was somehow traveling
with you
in the turret of a Humvee,
you would not see the words
buried at the edges of the road.
You would not see the wires. You would not
see the metal. You would not see the danger
in the architecture
of a highway overpass.

If this poem has left you deaf,
if the words in it are smoking,
if parts of it have passed through your body
or the bodies of those you love, this will go a long way
toward explaining why you will, in later years,
prefer to sleep on couches. If these words have caused
casualties, then this poem will understand
that, oftentimes, to be in bed
is to be one too many layers
away from wakefulness.

If this poem was made of words
the sergeant said - after, like, don't
worry boys, it's war, it happens -
as the cab filled up with opaque smoke
and laughter, then it would be natural

for you to think of rote - *rauta*,
the old Norse called it, the old
drumbeat of break of wave
on shore - as an analogue
for the silence that has filled your ears
again
and particles of light
funneled through the holes made by metal
meeting metal meeting muscle meeting bone.

You would not see. You would not hear. You would not
be blamed for losing focus for a second: this poem
does not come with an instruction manual. These words
do not tell you how to handle them.

You would not be blamed
for what they'd do if they were metal,
or for after taking aim at a man holding a telephone in his hand
in an alley. You would not be blamed for thinking
words could have commanded it.

If this poem had fragments
of metal coming out of it, if these words were your best friend's legs,
dangling, you might not care or even wonder whether
or not it was only the man's mother on the other end
of the telephone line. For one thing, it would be
exonerating. Secondly, emasculating (in the metaphorical
sense of male powerlessness, notwithstanding the likelihood
that the mess the metal made of your friend's legs and trousers
has left more than that detached). If this poem had wires for words,
you would want someone to pay.

If this poem had wires coming out of it,
you wouldn't read it.
If these words were made of metal
they could kill us all. But these
are only words. Go on,
they are safe to fold and put into your pocket.
Even better, they are safe
to be forgotten.

Doug Anderson:

Wow.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah.

Doug Anderson:

That's a brilliant poem.

Steve Kuusisto:

That's Kevin Powers and the book is called "*The Yellow Birds*." And it's a really, really tremendous poem and it speaks to exactly the circumstances of your friend who was pulled over by the cops. The ordinary world ceases to be ordinary for those who have PTSD.

Doug Anderson:

Yes. It's almost as if your nervous system extends beyond your body - branches out.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. That makes total sense to me.

Doug Anderson:

We didn't have - well, there were what we called them command detonated mines in Vietnam where snipers would way for convoys to come by and blow it. But it was mostly things you would step on.

Steve Kuusisto:

Right. The Black Betty or the-

Doug Anderson:

The Bouncing Betty. It explodes once when you step on it, goes five feet in the air, and explodes again to get whoever else is still standing. And there were the foot traps. They would drive nails through a board and then file them to little fish hooks on the end and anoint them with feces and then bury them under leaves or something and indentation of the trail. This caused 50 cents to make and the casualty it would cause when someone steps on it costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to deal with the infection. Pungy sticks falling in a pit full of sharpened bamboo stakes. Constantly, constantly. And the poor guy walking point is, of course, the guy who walks into it or the radio operator whose antenna snags the trip wire high in the trees. All the time, the constant knowledge of not only being ambushed with automatic weapons but to have the entire landscape mined and booby trapped. Just that, just that, even if you escape being wounded, is enough to create a layer of the soul that you end up living with the rest of your life.

Steve Kuusisto:

Here's a poem by Chantelle Bateman that I've also gotten off of the website I alluded to before. This speaks exactly to what you're talking about and it's a terrific poem. It's called "PTSD."

sadness is the color of my eyes, of my heart
the same shade as distance
and some kind of Miles Davis on repeat
it's the sound I don't want anyone to hear
creeping out of my pillows in the morning
before the coffee and cigarettes begin
an avatar when I'd rather just be myself

my anxiety smells like teen spirit
and whatever it is that makes mean dogs bare their teeth

it sound like trees falling, like doors slamming
like a pin drop sometimes
like my mother checking on me...AGAIN
and feels like nothing

anger is the color I sometimes paint the town with
bright red, blood shot, and sparkling with tiny salt crystals
louder than incoming and the sirens they play when I hit the deck
bitter sweet and never offered cookies
I'm just a pile of tears needing to punch you

Doug Anderson:

Wow. Chantelle?

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah, her name is Chantelle Bateman.

Doug Anderson:

There were a lot more women toward the front in the last couple of wars, and in Vietnam, occasionally, a nurse would get hit in a forward aid station. But women are much more present in frontline positions these days and given what they call asymmetrical warfare, the frontlines can be anywhere.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yes, that's an incredibly important point. The frontlines can be anywhere. Yeah.

Doug Anderson:

And then they're inside your head. The frontlines are inside your head. You know, one of the things we talked about, Yusef Komunyakaa yesterday and we also talked about how war poetry, and we discussed this in "Dulce et Decorum est," can focus so luminously on particulars. In the case of

Owen, he used the green lens of the glass mask as a kind of optic, a cinematic device. I found the poem by Yusef Komunyakaa called "Starlight Scope Myopia." The Starlight Scope was a small infrared scope used in Vietnam to scan the tree line at night to keep watch at night and human beings would be illuminated in a kind of ghostly green image from their body heat. So Yusef in this poem has used an optic the same way as Owen did to look into the life of the enemy. This is called "Starlight Scope Myopia."

Gray-blue shadows lift
shadows onto an oxcart.

Making night work for us,
the starlight scope brings
men into killing range.

The river under Vi Bridge
takes the heart away

like the Water God
riding his dragon.
Smoke-colored

Viet Cong
move under our eyelids,

lords over loneliness
winding like coral vine through
sandalwood & lotus,

inside our lowered heads
years after this scene

ends. The brain closes
down. What looks like
one step into the trees,

they're lifting crates of ammo
& sacks of rice, swaying

under their shared weight.

Caught in the infrared,
what are they saying?

Are they talking about women
or calling the Americans

beaucoup dien cai dau?
One of them is laughing.
You want to place a finger

to his lips & say "shhhh."
You try reading ghost talk

on their lips. They say
"up-up we go," lifting as one.
This one, old, bowlegged,

you feel you could reach out
& take him in your arms. You

peer down the sights of your M-16,
seeing the full moon
loaded on an oxcart.

Steve Kuusisto:

You know, it's funny in this context to use this quote from the early 20th century American poet, Ezra Pound, but he did say notably that "poetry is news that stays news" and one of the things that veteran poets are able to do through the remarkable artistic alchemy of taking these dark and hard memories and putting them through the imagination and bringing them back out in words, putting them concretely on the page, is that they're able to write something in every case that is wildly new just as the experience itself was new. In that newness is a recognition that what has happened is, in fact, meaningful both for them and for us. It underscores the humanity of consciousness.

Doug Anderson:

It's peer utterance. It's as close as language can get to not being able to say anything at all. It's as close as language can get to music. Anything that is really almost pre-thought that expresses itself through music and images in such a way that it's indelible. There's a line in this poem, "inside our lowered heads years after this scene ends." There it is. There's the indelible image that stays luminous.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. That's right. That's actually better than Ezra Pound.

Doug Anderson:

And poetry is kind of like a yeast-like substance or something that when you react with it comes to life. Or like breathing on coals and suddenly the fire flares again. That energy remains contained according to the art. Another thing we talked about, Homer in the context of Jonathan Shay and also in the context of war literature. Homer, it's interesting that when people want to glorify war, they also quote the classics. I always know when somebody's using the word 'Homeric' that they've never read Homer. What they mean by 'Homeric' is glorious but Homer is not all that glorious. He's absolutely anatomical and precise in his descriptions of the sufferings of war.

Steve Kuusisto:

Right, right. That's right.

Doug Anderson:

Here's a section from Fagles' *Iliad*.

"So the bravest man in the broad realm of Troy took her hand in marriage, true, the very man Poseidon crushed at the hands of Idomeneus here, spellbinding his shining eyes, crippling his fine legs. He couldn't escape- no retreat, no dodging the stroke, like a pillar or tree crowned with

leaves, rearing, standing there rock-still as the hero Idomeneus stabbed him square in the chest and split the bronze plate that cased his ribs, gear that had always kept destruction off his flesh but it cracked and rang out now, ripped by the spear. Down Alcaethous crashed and the point stuck in his heart and the heart in its last throes jerked and shook the lance- the butt-end quivering in the air till suddenly rugged Ares snuffed its fury out, dead still.”

The elixir of suffering in that, that isn't glorified and this is how Homer describes battle.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. Well, there's that famous line in which Homer describes an arrow Odysseus has fired at one of the suitors that it punches through his throat up to the feathers and the guy goes down to choking death. A line that when I read it at the age of 30 caused me to quit cigarettes.

Doug Anderson:

That must have been Antinous. That was the first guy he shot.

Steve Kuusisto:

That's the first guy he shoots, that's right.

Doug Anderson:

The first of the suitors.

Steve Kuusisto:

And who, if anybody deserved it, he deserved it.

Doug Anderson:

Yeah, he was the leader of that whole dishonorable crew. I have a series of poems in "*The Moon Reflected Fire*" in which I tried to put some grunts in the *Iliad*. Not the heroes, but the common foot soldiers who had to dig the latrines at night and so on. I'd like to read a couple of them and these are my incursions into Homer. "Homer Does Not Mention Him."

Now follow one soldier home to Argos,
not Agamemnon nor Ajax nor Diomedes
but Petros the stone-cutter with his limp
and ruined shoulder from swinging a short-sword
all those years. Lungs rotten from the choking
yellow dust, sleeping cold nights
on the plain under a spear-propped shield,
heart hard as his heels from killing.
Not the sleek, oiled body of an Achaean prince
but Petros with his overlarge head,
beard like boar's bristles.
Home in his little village
on the gull-spattered cliffs above the sea
he waits at the door of his stone hut
for his wife to recognize him,
not as Penelope knew Odysseus disguised
but as a woman who sees a husband, only older,
something unnameable gone out of him.
And then he stammers,
We had three children when I left now there are four.
And the wind, snarling up the old road,

swirls a handful of dust over them,
a benediction against the bone-knowing
of what silence brings
beyond the clunk of the goat's bell.

Ten years in that war and then he goes home, what's left of him. There was, in Vietnam, a Special Forces operations in which some special operators killed some water buffalo, gutted them, and crawled inside them in order to ambush a Viet Cong cadre. It didn't work but that made me think of the Trojan horse. I wrote a poem end of this. This is called "A Bar in Argos."

They'll tell you it was a wooden horse;
I'll tell you it was not.
We gutted twenty oxen and
slid inside their empty bellies,
but for our short-swords, naked.
Then we're sewn up, delivered to
the city gates as an offering of peace
acquiescent to Troy's enduring power.
And that night while the cooks made
the fire to roast the beasts
with us as stuffing we cut
the rawhide sutures and were
born out of the stink and slime
killing first the cooks headfirst
in their vats, their legs kicking,
then moving through the streets
garroting centuries dousing their

torches and puddles, killing blindly,
twice killing our own, catching Trojans
in their beds and Odysseus ecstatic,
almost forgetting to open the city gates
the high point of his night when
with a pike he pinned a woman to her bed
right through her lover's back.
I tell you I was sick, still am.
It rots your soul. It's just that
anything you think is twisted,
Odysseus can give another twist
you wouldn't think was there to give.
I tell you, the man's a son of a bitch.
Wooden horse? Hell, we were
shat out of oxen to win that war.

Steve Kuusisto:

One of the ironies that I find really singular about poetry written by veterans is that the poems reflect strength in vulnerability. Does that make sense?

Doug Anderson:

Yes.

Steve Kuusisto:

That it's not just that you have to be vulnerable to write the poem, but you have to be able to open up to the whole range, the whole panoply of complicated emotions. And that actually, as you do in

that poem, that process of opening up, which many would call vulnerability, is actually strength. That strength is the same strength that allowed to go off to war in the first place. What do you think about that?

Doug Anderson:

I think it's true. One of the things the brain does, when it wants to take care of you, is that the amygdala, the reptile brain, the snake brain overrides other more refined feelings. If you're in heavy fighting, you can't stop and weep for the guy whose dead lying next to you, or in my case, the guy who bled out and I couldn't do anything about it. You have to keep going. You have to stay clear. And, so, this enormous adrenalized force takes over and your training kicks in and you do your job. Then afterwards, you come home and a couple of things happen. First of all, the reptile brain relaxes a little bit, and you're able to start feeling things that you've been sitting on for a long time, and it can be fairly devastating.

Also ironically, the snake brain, the brain that has enabled you to stay dead ahead in the fighting, begins to misbehave. It begins to mistake trivial things for major threats. This is what happens to vets when they get involved with the police, that they lose it, because of one trigger or another, and they behave badly. Or they punch holes in the sheet rock at three in the morning and scare their girlfriends to death. Or they drink enormous amounts of booze or take drugs just to remain deadened. Or they get involved with just absolutely crazed sexual behavior, sex becomes a drug. And some of them even start doing risky things, because the part of them that protected them in the war needs to be walked like a beast. It needs to be aired and exercised and people join the police force, which is one of the first-

worst things that a returning vet can do. I was in therapy with a guy who was a prison guard. He was just back from Iraq and every day, he had to put up with the fact that his brain was telling him he was surrounded by threats. Any minute, one of these prisoners is going to stick a shiv in it. So that part of him never got a rest and sooner or later, he had to deal with it. That's what happens, you know? People are changed by protractive exposure to violence and protracted, years long sometimes.

Steve Kuusisto:

And, yet, there's a new kind of heroism for the returning veteran, right? Which is to say the quest for, I don't want to say healing, because I've already said that you don't really ever overcome a disability, but you learn to incorporate it into who you become and then you become a different kind of success. And that's something that people who do not have disabilities or who have not been in war don't typically know about. Can I read a poem here by a woman named Jennifer Pacanowski?

Doug Anderson:

Absolutely.

Steve Kuusisto:

She was or is a veteran and this is called "Strength and Vulnerability."

I have blue hair
I wear dresses
People ask me if I am a veterans' girlfriend or wife
because I advocate
And care so much about veterans' issues and rights

I am a female combat veteran with PTSD.
But now, in an interesting twist of events
I am a step mom
Of a nine-year-old girl named Juliana

And a seven-year-old boy name Jaxon

I have a service dog named Boo
And a rescue dog named Moxie, also with a touch of
the PTSD

I have days when my pain overflows onto the kitchen
floor while
I'm making lunch for the kids
The dogs gather at my feet to comfort me, to brace
my fall

We tell the children I cry because
"My heart hurts from the war."

Sometimes I sit alone and rick softly in the yellow
chair
My stomach aches
My back screams
Boo lays his head in my lap
Moxie wiggles her tail, unsure

Juliana walks up the stairs
She recognizes the look
She walks over to me and brushes my bangs away from
my face
And says,
"Everything is going to be okay."
And I believe her

Jaxon says I am 65% man
Because of the way I drive like his Dad
Because of the way I talk (curse) like his Dad
However, I am not

One night I woke from a nightmare
Especially horrible since I had not had one in so long
As if time had added to the potency of the flashback

Jaxon was sleeping with us
I got up with a jolt and went into the living room
To breathe, to write, to calm
I could hear Jaxon whisper to his daddy,
“Doesn’t Jenny know dreams aren’t real.”

I cried harder
Unfortunately, my nightmares are real

Juliana says,
“Jenny acts like a big kid.”

I laugh a lot since I met the kids
And swim in the pool watching over them

And some moments,
I’m just me
Not my PTSD
I’m just me that loves my dogs unconditionally

I’m just Jenny
The stepmom with the blue hair and tattoos that laughs
a lot

Doug Anderson:

Wow. Love it. The blue hair works so well in that.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. And you know, this is what I want to kind of get at today, right? There’s an extraordinary bravery in veterans’ writing that addresses how to live and what to do even with all the pain. And this is something we see a lot in veterans’ writings and we see it in the Disability Community as well. I am not

my PTSD. In my case, I am not my blindness, but it is there every hour of the day and I'm going to do a complex dance with it so I can be these other things as well.

Doug Anderson:

Yes, yes.

Steve Kuusisto:

And, again, people who haven't been through that kind of trial by fire in war, or, the extraordinary difficulties faced by disablement don't quite know that dual edged process, that twin dynamic of 'I am not this condition. At the same time, it's a part of me, and I'm going to navigate this successfully.' You hear a lot of people today rightly talk about the term "White privilege" and it is true that many people who are white in America never have to think about their position. They're just simply who they are, and they don't have to think about being other, being vulnerable, being frightened, being different and that's what word "privilege" really points to. At the same time, there's kind of an able-bodied privilege, right? People who don't have that invisible disability, the PTSD, or aren't overtly disabled or visibly disabled riding a chair or walking with a cane or a dog or what have you, they don't fully understand that every moment of that new life is provisional and complicated and it needs to be navigated. There's an extraordinary strength in that that everyone could learn from, I think.

Doug Anderson:

Yes and the courage you were talking about, the different kind of courage of people coming back from trauma, sometimes has extraordinary creative forms.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yes.

Doug Anderson:

I would say that about 75% of everything psychiatrists know about PTSD comes from working with veterans who have articulated particulars to them. And with writers, that's even more important that there's a tremendous creativity going on here. Last time I was at the Joiner Center, I was listening to a lecture by a Palestinian poet. And there's a guy sitting next to me, a young guy who have been in Afghanistan, and was getting his Ph.D. in Middle Eastern studies. He knew Dari, Pashto, and Arabic. He had learned those languages and what he brought home with him was a desire to understand where he had been in-depth. That's creativity. That's what you do with it. He's not at the bar bending his elbow. He's not hiding under his bed, although, I think that's a perfectly viable thing to do in particular situations. I have done it myself. But what he does with his suffering is that. It's the kind of thing I want to do with the institute I'm hoping to design.

Veterans and refugees have things in common. Usually, the refugees have had it really, really bad over a longer period of time, but they have things to talk about. Frequently the wars we get into are the very thing that creates the refugees. The constant instability that's created in the Middle East by the continuing wars and upheaval, the so-called regime change, the so-called Arab Spring all of these things which are, in fact, fractional fighting between the Shi'ite and the other fragmented groups within those groups. And a lot of it was precipitated by the wars that we began there. So we have thousands of people getting in little boats and trying to reach Italy because the place they live is no longer inhabitable or they're starving to death or they're in fear for their lives. So my idea is that veterans and refugees have a lot to say to each other and that it would be only right and only noble for them to collaborate in this. This, I think, is very much in line with what you were talking about, the heroism, the other kind of

heroism that's not the movie kind but is involved with growing your heart, growing your consciousness, understanding, and helping others.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. Helping others. Yeah, that's the thing. The bonds between poets and their audience are strong when we're talking about a veteran's community. There's veterans activism. There's veterans supporting veterans. And that's also something we see with disability poetry scene workshops, and the two interconnect by the way. But it's that sense of the writing, not as a rarefied library activity, some kind of Victorian academic exercise, it's real. It's naked. It brings people together. In a way poems are like tattoos.

Doug Anderson:

That's good. That's good. That's very good. Yeah, they are. And poems are in the sense of Martin Bouver, they are a vow state. They're a state of openness, of communion, of inviting the reader to share the deepest part of yourself, the hurting places, the places in which you're like everyone else.

Steve Kuusisto:

Right. Right. Which is to say a larger self, really.

Doug Anderson:

Yes. Much larger. Much larger.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. I'm going to read a little poem here by Dunya Mikhail. This is called "The Iraqi Nights."

In the first year of war
they played "bride and groom"

and counted everything on their fingers:
their faces reflected in the river;
the waves that swept away their faces
before disappearing;
and the names of newborns.
Then the war grew up
and invented a new game for them:
the winner is the one
who returns from the journey
alone,
full of stories of the dead
as the passing wings flutter
over the broken trees;
and now the winner must tow the hills of dust
so lightly that no one feels it;
and now the winner wears a necklace
with half a metal heart for a pendant,
and the task to follow
is to forget the other half.
The war grew old
and left the old letters,
the calendars and newspapers,
to turn yellow
with the news,
with the numbers,
and with the names
of the players.

That's the opening of the poem. It's a longer poem, but I wanted to read that because of that line, "The war grew old and left the old letters, the calendars, and newspapers, to turn yellow with the news." And I wanted to get your feedback on a thing that has been bothering me as a writer and public thinker, which is that these wars in the mid-East, in Iraq and Afghanistan, have now become America's longest wars and they have been going on for 16 years?

Doug Anderson:

Yep.

Steve Kuusisto:

And, so, at this point, it is very much the case that those wars have grown old and people here in the homeland never fully understood them anyway and now they're old news. And I think this must make it even harder for veterans.

Doug Anderson:

Well, it's like World War II was something that the whole country was behind. You would pick up Life Magazine and it would tell you which things to save like, 'don't buy nylons, because we need the stuff that makes nylons for the war efforts.' So women would start drawing them, the seam of the nylon on their legs. 'Loose lips sink ships.' And then you have whole spreads of what this or that unit was doing in this or that place. And the women's fashions had military shoulder pads. There was this huge organic effort in World War II. That is no longer the case. This is, the present war, like Vietnam, is war of choice. It's a theoretical war. It's a war that is intended to make political changes. It's not as if, even though we did have 9/11, it's not as if we'd been invaded. And you have the stop lost program where they can send a soldier back several times. Several times they can just keep reusing him. So he stays some for a while, and then he goes back, and then he stays for a while and goes back. So this way, they avoid the draft. They call this a reserve unit. This is what the W Bush did because the minute you have a draft, the whole country gets involved and the whole country wants to know why the war is happening.

So there's this alienation of the fighting men. These guys you see in airports in their desert fatigue walking through, half the people in the airport don't know who they are or what they're doing. They probably think they're National Guard on a weekend. They no idea. This war continues and there's a couple of generations of people who are very vague about these wars. Are they really happening? What are they about? Why did they start? Why are we involved? So there's an immense alienation that goes along with this. And here's a guy who's had several tours in the Middle East. He comes home and

he's deeply shaken and confused. Nothing that the politicians are saying makes any sense compared to what he's been through. People on the street don't know where he's been and don't care. This is a far cry from the victory parades and all of the imagery of a country united in a war. So alienation is a major contributor to PTSD and moral injury. They feel alone. They feel abandoned. There was a Com-x box in a city in Iraq that I saw a picture of and someone had spray painted on the side of the Com-x box 'America is not at war. The Marines are at war. America is at the mall.' And I thought that was one of the most precise expressions of that feeling. Alienation, political manipulation, politicians who can't remember why they're there, why the war started, or have changed their mind about it and don't care. Defense contractors making money hand over fist. The political wind shifting back and forth overnight. That is the condition of being a soldier or a marine in modern war.

Steve Kuusisto:

Here's a little poem by Paul Wasserman who's got a book called "*Say Again All*" and he lives in New York City where he's part of the veterans poetry scene there. This is called "15 months, 22 days."

1 war
6 states
5 countries
273 missions
1228.5 flight hours
30 rounds, unfired
15 days rest
4 medals
3 kills
1 case of friendly fire in the unit

2 cases of cowardice
1 case of cancer
52 steak nights
1 quasi-mutiny
5 divorces
1 pregnancy
1 unauthorized brewery
2 acts of bestiality, witnessed
34 paperbacks
2 overseas bars, right sleeve.

Doug Anderson:

Wow. Wow. Talking about the hash mark on the sleeve of the uniform

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah, and then everybody is at the mall.

Doug Anderson:

I love that list. I love the way that list accumulates all on its own.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yep, yep.

Doug Anderson:

And there's a certain point at which it turns dark.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. Extremely dark.

Doug Anderson:

Two acts of cowardice, I think, is the leap in the poem

Steve Kuusisto:

Right. Yeah.

Doug Anderson:

This is something like what we were talking about yesterday like putting nouns and things in poems. The power of the simple fact and the energy that it builds around it. The specificity of poetry.

Steve Kuusisto:

The specificity of poetry is what gives it its unique power because so much of what we do in language as civilized people is really driven by the automobile manual and the instructions for how to put together a lawn grill. In other words, much of our language is just utilitarian. It's just getting the job done, whatever that job is. And then some of it is about salesman ship. Selling yourself, selling a product, selling goods and services, and, yet, when we slow down and think about the depth of our feelings, and how complex those feelings are in relation to our surroundings, and God forbid, that a person stops and thinks about how lonely she or he actually is. That's almost taboo, certainly, in the 'go shopping at the mall' culture. We're supposed to be endlessly involved in buying and selling, and looking for things, and working to earn those things, and, yet, to stop and take a moment out and say, 'wow, what is this for? What is this life? What does it mean?' And I think many veterans really do confront these issues because war changes you. It just does.

Doug Anderson:

Yeah. The self that becomes available in the woods, the self that becomes available when you're with animals. What happens when you get off the interstate and smell the fresh cut hay and drive through farm country? What happens when you sit down with someone you've never really knew very well, and suddenly, there's an opening and you see that person and it's profound. This is what- this is the business of poetry.

Steve Kuusisto:

I'd like to read a little poem that I wrote. This has to do with my thinking about the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq and not being someone who goes to the mall, but instead, being someone who thinks about what's going on with his neighbors, and his neighbors are, of course, military families. I have to find this here. This is called "Life in Wartime."

There are bodies that stay home and keep living.
Wisteria and Queen Anne's Lace
But women & children too.
& countless men at gasoline stations.
Schoolteachers who resemble candles,
Boys with metabolisms geared to the future,
Musicians trying for moon effects...
The sky, which cannot expire, readies itself with clouds
Or a perfect blue
Or halos or the amoebic shapes
Of things to come.
The railway weeds are filled with water.
How do living things carry particles
Of sacrifice? Why are gods talking in the corn?
Enough to feel the future underfoot.
Someone is crying three houses down.
Many are gone or are going.

Doug Anderson:

That's a gorgeous poem. It's like spiritual acupuncture. It's just- you know exactly where to insert the needle.

Steve Kuusisto:

I became aware early that many of my neighbors were going off to war, and that their neighbors were going to the mall and it haunts me. And I think that's also something that maybe because I am blind and I do talk to veterans with disabilities and I do advocate for the disabled, which means everyone with a disability. I fly out on an airplane with my seeing-eye dog, and I talk to veterans on airplanes, and that's all how my thinking got sharpened around these ideas. But what if it has nothing to do with that and it has to do with just observing the world around, which is forever changed when you're in a country at war no matter how slick we try to pretend that it hasn't? I don't know.

Doug Anderson:

And you're also a poet. There's a theory of language that the more, the wider our range of language, the more we know. Which is kind of counterintuitive.

Steve Kuusisto:

Right.

Doug Anderson:

If you have this range, this incredible keyboard of language, this endless keyboard of language that specializes in nuances and avocation, you notice things. It comes with the poet's sensibility. This is how you navigate the world.

Steve Kuusisto:

And I would suspect that veterans who come home and want to write about their experiences are automatically entered. It's like automatically entering a sweeps stakes. You've automatically entered that sharp-edged place that poetry works with so well because those memories are so potent.

Doug Anderson:

Yes. Contents under pressure.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. You don't come home and say 'what do I have to write about?' It's there and the secret is to learn how to get it down on paper and shape it which can be done in a hundred different ways.

Doug Anderson:

It's things that must be spoken that keep nagging at you until they get expressed. They must be spoken. It's this instinct to witness. Carolyn Forché's book "*Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*." There's a compulsion to witness, to speak up, and they will be heard. It's like, it's another mode of a riot is voice of the unheard, but you're not burning down neighborhoods, you're making images, you're making music.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah, I'm thinking about that, because I think that, yeah, it's also the case that once we start to make music, then we're composing. And that is an important thing and maybe a good place for us to start to end up with, that by writing, by using the arts, by working with the arts, you're no longer a

passive recipient of suffering but you are, in fact, composing your life. And that's very powerful. Other people are not telling your story, you're telling your story. Everything changes with that. I mean, that's what that Jenny Pacenowski's story is about. She's telling her own story. She's not PTSD. She's the person who has it and experiences complex emotions, but is richly alive because of it.

Doug Anderson:

One of the things I like about your poetry, Steve, is that there's always something celebratory. It frequently comes out of a leap.

Steve Kuusisto:

Thank you.

Doug Anderson:

And it's steeped in suffering. It's steeped sometimes in anger, but there's always something celebratory. There's always something that says, 'look, we're alive. Here it is.'

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah. But I'm glad you said that. I appreciate that. I think that what I shared with veterans who write poetry is that I have to assemble myself a lot. Right? I get up, and I'm still blind and I still can't get behind the wheel of a car and drive somewhere on my own and feel independent. I have to walk a long way to get the bus and I have to take a taxi cab, which is expensive and wait 45 minutes for it to show up. Lots of little things happen all day long that are setbacks, right? I can't find an accessible version of a book or I can't find my way where I want to go or what have you. There are a hundred little setbacks that go with disablement and in the midst of all of that, you have to assemble yourself, and you have to say, 'ah, but over here, over here is the real thing.' I remember walking down the street in New York once,

and a woman, a baker, she was a Chinese baker. She saw me walking by with the guide dog and I don't know what reason she had for this, but she ran out and wanted to give me a Chinese cocktail billion with plums on the inside. She just thought I was the perfect guy to give this to and that is exactly an illustration of the thing. I'm walking along thinking, you know, woe is me and along comes this unforeseen cocktail bun with fresh plum on the inside and you've to stay open to this stuff.

Doug Anderson:

Is that in a poem?

Steve Kuusisto:

I put that in the new memoir, "*Have Dog, Will Travel*," it's in there somewhere. But if we don't stay open to the unforeseen but beautiful things that happen, then they have won, right? Whoever they are, the war-makers, the polluters, the-

Doug Anderson:

The closing hearts.

Steve Kuusisto:

The closing hearts. Then they have won. It seems to me that poetry is one way we fight against that. Which doesn't mean you can't be irreverent and have a whole range of emotions. I said to my wife just this morning, "We have a beautiful deer in our backyard." She was saying, "They're really beautiful." "But they're rats with hoofs," I said. "They eat all our bushes and they leave ticks all over the dogs," I said. "Why can't they go be beautiful somewhere else?" So you don't have to be a sap to be a poet but to stay open to that, just that wild sweet thing that's there that daily life just tends to make us ignore. That's why poetry matters.

Doug Anderson:

Yes, very much so. Very much so. And what to do with anger? What to do with anger rather than becoming dysfunctional or unloading it on the undeserving?

Steve Kuusisto:

Right. That's the biggest mystery of all; isn't it? How to work with that and turn it into something constructive. There's a whole floor of the library devoted to books that try to talk about this, right?

Doug Anderson:

Oh, yeah.

Steve Kuusisto:

Emotional intelligence and slowing down your fight or flee, the snake brain hijacking. We can learn to do some of that, it seems to me, but we're never going to be perfect at it.

Doug Anderson:

No, why should we be perfect? Fascists are perfect.

Steve Kuusisto:

Thank you for that. But that's one of the areas I struggle with. I share this with the audience that when I do lose my temper, I often feel great regret as though I should have been better than that. And that's not a useful state of mind.

Doug Anderson:

No. And I've done plenty of that.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah, right? I mean-

Doug Anderson:

To make art out of it

Steve Kuusisto:

To make art out of it and try to learn from it, but not to beat yourself up over it too.

Doug Anderson:

That's correct.

Steve Kuusisto:

I do a lot of self-beating.

Doug Anderson:

Yeah. That- that's PTSD big time-

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah, it is.

Doug Anderson:

Beating yourself up.

Steve Kuusisto:

Yeah it is. As you know, I grew up in a violent household and disabled with an alcoholic mother who would haul off and punch you. I do have PTSD, though it's not as compound a dynamic as the way

other veterans experience it. Which is to say, I'm not often going to be hijacked in the home improvement store by the sound of a cart going by and think that incoming fire is about to happen. But I still have that deep disappointment all the time that I didn't do better. No, there's actually a great poem by Brian Turner called "At the 7/11." No, no it's "At Lowe's," I'm sorry. It's about going to the home improvement store and he's there among the sheets of plywood and forklifts going along and cash registers are going on and during all of this, he is having flashback after flashback. It ends this way. He says, he's been through the whole story and:

Aisle number 7 is a corridor of lights.
Each dead Iraqi walks amazed
by Tiffany posts and Bavarian pole lights.
Motion-activated incandescents switch on
as they pass by, reverent sentinels of light,
Fleur De Lis and Luminaire Mural Extérieur
welcoming them to Lowe's Home Improvement Center,
aisle number 7, where I stand in mute shock,
someone's arm cradled in my own.

The Iraqi boy beside me
reaches down to slide his fingertip in Retro Colonial Blue,
an interior latex, before writing
T, for *Tourniquet*, on my forehead.

Barry Whaley:

Doug and Steve. I'm sorry to interrupt the conversation which has been wonderful. We are just about out of time and I would like to give you a minute or two to kind of put the cherry on this and take us home with some final thoughts if we could.

Steve Kuusisto:

So, Doug, one of the things that I know you know a great deal about is the contemporary scene for veterans who might be interested in learning about writing.

Doug Anderson:

Yep.

Steve Kuusisto:

And you might want to say couple of things, if you found this interesting, where people might go for more information.

Doug Anderson:

Yeah. For veterans, I would say that most VA facilities these days know where to go. I know that there is a lot of writing in the Pioneer Valley where I live. There's a lot of writing groups. There's a chapter of Warrior Writers here.

Steve Kuusisto:

Say more about them. I alluded to them earlier. That looks like a fantastic group.

Doug Anderson:

Yeah, they sort of spontaneously occurred in the area. I think Eric Laselecky is one of the prime movers, Preston Hood, former Navy SEAL has been very generous and his energy about this. He's currently the poet laureate of Green Field, is the possessor of the poet seat. and did a great reading not too long ago. So these guys are available. Look them up in the phone book or go to the VA and ask

about them or go online and find Warrior Writers and in the particular area or country you live in, and something will pop up. In particular, go to the Joiner Center for Study of War and its Social Consequences at UMass Boston. They have a writer shop every summer. Right now, they're struggling to stay alive because Congress has not been generous with funding, but they have got funding for next year, so there will be a writers workshop this summer. And they're online and all the numbers you need are online at their site. And there's lots of other opportunities. There's lots of vets reaching out to each other. I think most veterans' facilities have Iraq groups, CTP groups, and it's a place where you can network and the medical personnel often know about this, particularly, in the area of mental health.

Steve Kuusisto:

And that's the number one thing, really, is that when you enter into these communities focused on the arts, guess what? You discover you're not alone.

Doug Anderson:

Yes. Very, very important. Very important. And it's galvanizing to be able to sit in a room with people who speak your language.

Steve Kuusisto:

You bet. You bet.

Doug Anderson:

Who you don't have to explain things to or who have a certain amount of knowledge that allows them to immediately embrace you.

Steve Kuusisto:

Amen to that.

Barry Whaley:

Gentleman, thank you. This has been fascinating. I look forward to our final installment and to hear more from both of you. So thank you so much for the conversation. This has been great.

Thank you, again for joining us for today's part two of three in our webinar series *Veterans, Disability, and the Power of Literature*. Our part three conversation with the poets will be airing on Wednesday, September 26th from 2:00-3:00 p.m. Education credit is available after completion of verification of attendance to all three webinars in these series and completion of the three post-tests. You can request a verification of completion form and with other instructions will follow. Thank you for your participation, please complete the evaluation. Your feedback is important to help us determine the effectiveness of this webinar in meeting your needs and to guide planning for future webinars. The evaluation is available at Bit.ly/vets-lit-eval.

Again, thank you and we look forward to your participation in the final webinar in the series on Wednesday, September 26, and an archive will be available off the Southeast A.D.A. Center website at ADAsoutheast.org/webinars. If you have any questions, please contact the Southeast A.D.A. Center. Our number is 404, 541-9001. Our email address is ADAsoutheast@law.SYR.edu. Our website is ADAsoutheastADACenter.org. And thank you again for your participation.