

**E-galleys / Not for Resale / Available June 2022**



# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

**DAILY MEDITATIONS FOR MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS  
AND VETERANS IN RECOVERY**

( HAZELDEN )  
MEDITATIONS

**Distribution Contact: Simon and Schuster 800-223-2366**

# Leave No One Behind

*Daily Meditations for Military Service Members  
and Veterans in Recovery*



Hazelden  
Publishing

Hazelden Publishing  
Center City, Minnesota 55012  
hazelden.org/bookstore

© 2022 by Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation  
All rights reserved. Published 2022

No part of this publication, either print or electronic, may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the express written permission of the publisher. Failure to comply with these terms may expose you to legal action and damages for copyright infringement.

978-1-61649-918-1

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hazelden Publishing.

Title: Leave no one behind : daily meditations for military service members and veterans in recovery.

Description: Center City, Minnesota : Hazelden Publishing, 2022. | Includes index. | Summary: "A daily meditation book for service members who are in recovery, with each meditation written by a service member or veteran in recovery"— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022002888 (print) | LCCN 2022002889 (ebook) | ISBN 9781616499181 (paperback) | ISBN 9781616499198 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Recovering addicts—Meditations. | Recovering alcoholics—Meditations. | Soldiers—Meditations. | Veterans—Meditations. | Affirmations. | Devotional calendars.

Classification: LCC BL625.9.R43 L43 2022 (print) | LCC BL625.9.R43 (ebook) | DDC 204/.42—dc23/eng20220318

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022002888>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022002889>

This publication is not intended as a substitute for the advice of health care professionals.

Hazelden Publishing offers a variety of information on addiction and related areas. Our publications do not necessarily represent Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation's programs, nor do they officially speak for any Twelve Step organization.

Alcoholics Anonymous, AA, and the Big Book are registered trademarks of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

COVER DESIGN: TERRI KINNE  
TYPESETTING: PERCOLATOR GRAPHIC DESIGN  
DEVELOPMENTAL EDITORS: ANDREA LIEN,  
KAI BENSON, AND MARC OLSON  
EDITORIAL PROJECT MANAGER: BETTY CHRISTIANSEN

## Acknowledgments

Brian and Marlene Dooner

Dooner Social Ventures

Tim Joyce and Corlan Strategies

Kate Sperber

Kim Tapia, Polanko Group

Dijonna Wagner

Capt. Jeff Horwitz, JAGC, USN (Ret.), Chief Operating Officer, SAFE Project

Col. Scott Jensen, USMC (Ret.), President and Owner, Alpine Global Solutions

Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation Strategic Innovation Fund

Alta DeRoo, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

Quyen Ngo, PhD, LP, Executive Director of the Butler Center for Research, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

Jacqueline Braughton, PhD, LAMFT, Research Scientist, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

Jeremiah Gardner, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

Thank you to all the contributors, facilitators, writers, designers, promoters, and editors who worked so hard to make this book.



## Introduction

Meditation books have helped millions of people as they've made their way through recovery from substance use disorders and addiction. Ever since our first one, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, was published in 1954, Hazelden Publishing has created almost fifty of these books of daily inspiration. Some are for people who are in recovery from alcohol use; some are for people with other drug addictions. Over the years, we've published books tailored to a number of different demographic groups, but until now, we hadn't created one for people who have served in the military. We knew it was time to create a meditation book specifically for service members and veterans in recovery. And we knew that you should be the ones to write it.

We sent out the call for help and were in awe of the people who answered it. Some wrote their own meditations, and some told us their stories out loud so we could write their experiences to share with you here. We have included veterans and service members of different ages and from different eras of the military. There are men and women of various backgrounds, cultures, branches, ranks, and positions. These people have had experiences with both alcohol and drugs as well as many successes among their attempts at recovery—all of which help us relate to their journeys. Some of them share their histories of pain and trauma—physical, emotional, sexual—before, during, and after their time in the military. We do not shy away from any of these stories, because they are more common than many of us realize. If even one

of the 366 meditations in this book finds someone who needs to read it, we have succeeded.

When we first started asking veterans to help us write this book, they expressed some very valid skepticism that the stories and meditations might be filtered to make them more digestible by civilians—that the stories of what people went through when they served could be too graphic. This makes a lot of sense. Multiple contributors have mentioned that their time in the military is not something that people who haven't experienced it can understand.

So we were careful to make sure people knew that they could share their stories as honestly as if they were in a meeting with their fellow veterans, the insiders. There would be no judgment from us. This book doesn't need to help anyone but the people who have been there—or still are. This is your book. And just as important as what's written are the messages that aren't spelled out in words. As graphic as these written accounts may be, for the people who've lived these stories, what's left unsaid is just as impactful. If you've lived some of the same experiences as the contributors in this book, you can read between the lines. That's what happens when you tell your stories to people who are like you. You get it. You already know the context and all of the shared language. You can picture what's been written. It is powerful, it is real, and it is validating.

This is not just a book that will help people; it is a piece of history. Its existence is a testament to how we need to be there for the people who have served our country—

and the citizens of the world—because of the unique conditions you have faced . . . and continue to face.

There are different ways to read this book. You can read one meditation a day as a check-in and daily inspiration or read them all at once if you need a rapid infusion of insight from people who served with you and are recovering with you. We followed the fellowship tradition of using first names with last initials so you can see who contributed each of the meditations as well as their branch and years in the service. You'll find all sorts of themes throughout the meditations, including how to manage your memories, how to relate to your families, how to fight stigma, and how to suit up and show up for yourselves. On a broader level, you'll also learn more about how to figure out that you need help, how to ask for it, and how you can help others.

As Kenneth B. says in his August 18 meditation “We Are Not Alone,” “One of the biggest things in the military is that there’s not one mission that gets done by itself. It’s a team effort. You win together, and you lose together. Same for recovery.”

We want to extend heartfelt gratitude to all of the service members and veterans who made this mission and book possible.

Thank you,  
The editors



## Foreword

One thing we know for sure about addiction is that it does not discriminate. Every human being carries some risk for developing a substance use disorder. No amount of career or financial success insulates us. No fine-tuned moral compass. And no military rank, either. In fact, high-stress jobs can be a risk factor.

As a Naval Flight Officer who led major combat and humanitarian missions around the globe and an obstetrician-gynecologist who helped bring thousands of babies into the world, I grew accustomed to extraordinary, pressure-filled situations. But that didn't prevent me from developing a substance use disorder, just like so many millions of others do every year. Today, I am grateful because it was my substance use disorder that led me to recovery and to a renewed spirit of service, love, and connection that, to this day, aligns closely with the esprit de corps I so cherished in the military.

When Hazelden Publishing invited me to write the foreword for *Leave No One Behind*, I was both elated and humbled. Not only was it a chance to share my story of hope and healing but also a unique opportunity to connect again with my brothers, sisters, shipmates, and battle buddies.

*Leave No One Behind*, as we know, is the universal Warrior Ethos and a pillar of the oaths we took when volunteering to defend our country: *we shall never leave a fallen comrade*. As a veteran in long-term recovery, I embrace a similar commitment to always be there for those who seek the fellowship of recovery. This

anthology keeps me connected to both oaths and both communities.

As I read the entries—which span all services, Canadian and American—I feel strength, hope, and solidarity. They put me in a positive, healthy mind-space. I wish I'd had a resource like this when I was battling addiction and simultaneously trying to serve my country—serving two masters, if you will. The stigma was real, and shame clouded my thoughts. Addiction felt like weakness and failure, especially in an environment where we were expected to be the “best of the best.” I felt alone. *Leave No One Behind* is a daily reminder that we are not alone. A reminder that not only do we share common experiences around drinking, trauma, abuse, and stigma but also camaraderie, service, sacrifice, and survival.

Each entry is a deeply personal celebration of recovery, life, and freedom and an act of giving back. A symbol of triumph, victory, and gratitude. By sharing these powerful messages through our personal stories, we reduce stigma, help each other heal, and provide fuel for our sober lives so we are healthy enough to help the next veteran, neighbor, loved one, or friend.

I am grateful to all of my fellow veterans who contributed to this powerful anthology and to each of you finding it along your journey. While we may have served, experienced addiction, and found recovery at different times, in different places, and with different people, *Leave No One Behind* unites us once again as an intimately connected community and family. Each day's reading is like an extended hand, one veteran to the next. I hope

you feel that too, and that this becomes a treasure you turn to again and again—not just for the words, but for the spirit of one another.

Alta D., U.S. Navy 1991–2016

Alta DeRoo, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

JANUARY



## Stigma

There is a massive stigma for those of us who continued drinking in civilian life the way we did in the service.

People think, *There's that old drunk again. Now he's in jail; let's dry him up. He's not much good. He may have been, but he's no good for anything now. All those nice ribbons represented something, but he's nothing anymore.* They just laugh at you. That's all you are: a joke. That's hard to live with. Yeah.

But we drinkers just think, *If only I had someone to watch my back again.*

The thing is, we just need someone who understands—who can share our experience as someone who is a veteran and who has experienced addiction. When we start to connect with each other, the stigma dissolves, and we realize we are not unique. That means we can do this thing—if we stick together.

*Today I'll reject the stigma of recovery and remember that I can do this if I stick with others.*

—Dan N., U.S. Army, 1971–1977

## A Fellowship of Suffering

One of the things I like about AA is that they are people who have been marginalized. I get that.

It's a fellowship of suffering. I get that. If you hang in together, you have a chance to get through this thing.

Soldiers fight not for the hatred of the enemy in front of them, but for the love of the men behind them. Medals awarded almost always include caring for others while at peril for their own safety.

It's the same thing with recovery.

*I will fight just as hard for myself as for the suffering person beside me. I will leave no one behind.*

—Don E., U.S. Army, 1967–1970

## Alcoholism and Separating from the Air Force

When I separated from the Air Force, I was drinking heavily. It was difficult to transition back to civilian life after being in the military. It's such a difficult transition that you can't prepare for this change. All of a sudden, you're a civilian again. The camaraderie you had in the Air Force, the community and all the resources, are suddenly gone, and you're just home. Instead of that community, now you're back with people who don't understand what you went through while you were in the Air Force—especially your spouse. I had a lot of inner conflict with this. On top of that, I was trying to reconnect with my children. I felt like I had lost a few years with them, and it felt bad.

To be honest, I was just lost. I drank to manage that level of stress and isolation. The isolation fueled my alcoholism. I didn't know how to make this transition on my own. But eventually, I got help.

I got help by connecting with others in recovery. They helped me feel like there were other ways to cope with transitions in life—that I'm not alone.

*Today I will connect with others when I feel  
stressed or isolated.*

—Anonymous, U.S. Air Force, 1997–2000

## You Owe It to Yourself

You have done what countless millions have not or would not do. Under the direst of conditions, you have proven that you have what it takes to complete the mission. And now, as you continue the process, remember to include yourself. First and foremost, include yourself.

As your journey continues, put yourself up front. Give reality to the ghosts of your past. Once that's done, stop trying to alter your past. Don't regret your past, but don't shut the door on it. It is what it is. It should be a life lesson, not a life sentence. Manifest your best future. An infinite amount of possible futures wait for you to decide which one will be reality for you. Only you can decide which one.

*Just for today, for this moment, at this time,  
I will put myself first.*

—Ed C., U.S. Army, 1975–1979

## Willing to Do ANYTHING to Support My Recovery

When I was using, I became willing to do anything to get the next one. I spent years of my life trying to kill myself for things I had already survived. Trauma had become my master. Getting high was my only coping skill, and even that had lost its effect. I will never forget when the therapist from the VA asked me if I was willing to try and get help. I was scared, but I had nothing left to lose. I had just enough willingness to take her advice and get some help. When I saw my life starting to slowly get better, there was a turning point. I became willing to do whatever it took to become the person I was meant to be.

Before the trauma and before the drugs, I always felt I was meant to do something great. Now that I have put some time together, I see the value in practicing recovery principles in every area of my life. When I became willing, I started down my path to greatness.

*Today I will allow the seed of willingness to take root in my life. For my recovery to blossom, I must practice recovery principles in every area of my life.*

—Emil C., U.S. Navy, 1995–1997

## Culture Change / Change of Culture

There was a no-alcohol rule in Iraq. I thought, *I'm twenty. I'm in the military. I'm in a combat zone. Why can't I drink?* But buying into everything my supervisors said, I mentally and physically went with the flow and culture around me. I embraced my work and didn't deal with anything. I pushed my issues off to the side and stayed committed to the mission.

Then I returned home. It wasn't a combat situation, and alcohol was everywhere. I was left with myself to deal with what and how I wanted.

After my last big drinking binge, I reached out for help and discovered a different way of life—a different culture with the same rule: no alcohol.

*Today recovery is an extension of my personal culture and commitment.*

—Anonymous, U.S. Army, 2005–2009

## Rebuilding Bridges

It's taken me a long time to build up the bridges that I burned and to find my way back. I'm still learning. I have a hard time talking about it, because I'm not used to sharing this kind of stuff with others, particularly people who haven't been through it. But I know that this stuff is poison, and I need to tell my story. Somebody needs to hear this.

When I decided that I was ready to get this shit out of me, the first doctor I talked to was a resident. I started talking and her eyes looked so big and she looked like a deer in the headlights. Then she stopped me in the middle of my sentence and said, "I think we need somebody that's a little more qualified to handle this to talk to you." She didn't react that way out of malice. I've been through some serious shit, and it's heavy. I understand what she was trying to do, that she was trying to do the right thing, but what that response did in my mind was prove to me that I am the monster that I believed myself to be.

So I just clammed up, because it's hard to explain my experience to somebody that's never been through any of it. I didn't talk about it again until a few years back. Now I know that keeping the poison bottled up twisted how I saw myself.

*I will find people who understand where I've been  
... and I will be that person for someone else.*

—Bradley L., U.S. Army, 2005–2010

## Scars Heal

My friend and I were at an all-night eating establishment, and I got hammered. After I said some off-color remarks to somebody who yelled at my friend, I got jumped. They picked me up and put my face directly on the ground. I was charged with drunk and disorderly, and spent the night in jail.

Just over a week later, I fell asleep in my car in front of a gas station—the car was still running. I got a DUI.

Really, I should've gotten plenty more. Later, I wrecked a car. Things started to pile up; relationships changed. Friends went away.

In the past, I had backed out of an enlistment, so I decided to talk to those fine people at the Navy recruiting office again. I had my degree and wanted to explore options for getting an officer commission. I was told it would take a couple months to get me in. I knew that in another couple of months, I was going to get in a hell of a lot more trouble. So, I enlisted. Boot camp was amazing. It took the liquor away and put a little rigor in my life.

Over thirteen years later, I'm a sober naval officer with a small, visible reminder of my life before—a scar on my forehead from the night my face was on the ground.

*May our scars serve as visible reminders  
of our journey in recovery.*

—Matthew S., U.S. Navy, 2006—Currently Serving

### **Remove the Mask**

I was the poster child for the Army. In life in general, I always gave 100 percent effort. I never drank during the week. On the weekend, I let loose. I lived for the weekend. Monday came, and I would shake the cobwebs off and do morning PT.

I was very good at masking my life. If you were to look at me, there's no way you'd believe this guy had issues. I was a performer, an overachiever. But don't be fooled. I lied a lot. I lied, in my mind, for good reasons. I didn't want to disappoint. I wasn't trying to hurt people with my lies. My performance was a cover-up for ongoing issues.

As I walk my new journey in sobriety, I am learning I no longer have to perform.

*In recovery, I can present myself to the world  
without hesitation, hindrance, or regret.*

—Kory W., Canadian Armed Forces, 2009–2015

## Community in the Army and in Recovery

I joined the Army when I was seventeen years old. My first duty station was Berlin. If you ever think about what a POW camp looks like, that was Berlin, because we were surrounded by a wall and about 200,000 East German soldiers.

The bonds that I had with the people in my platoon were a huge part of my active-duty experience. These are the guys that you bled with, you sweated with, you trained with. You entrusted your life to these guys.

When I left active duty, I came back to the States and went to college. I immediately felt out of place. I was surrounded by other students who hadn't been deployed. I felt lost. I started drinking to try to feel normal.

But in recovery, I have found that solidarity again. The bonds that I have with my veteran community are amazing. We can talk about our time in the military and our time on the streets, because we've had the same experiences. It's almost like a family. These people are a key component of my recovery.

*Today I will seek out connection,  
because it is the opposite of addiction.*

—JR W., U.S. Army, 1987–1995

## Leave No One Behind

In the military, you hear, “Leave no one behind.” But the reality is, we get left behind all the time. Especially women.

I was left behind. I was left behind by poor leadership. I was left behind by female NCOs, and I was left behind by my command. I think this plays a huge role in how women feel when they get out of the military.

Even as an employee of the VA now, I’ve often closed myself off to female veterans, so I’ve had to work really hard to open myself up and connect with them. Now that I have, I’ve made some incredible relationships. The women are amazing. I wasn’t taught that as a woman in the military, so I know it’s hard for women vets to get support. But there are so many resources out there for women who are having difficulty getting back in the world.

Since I opened myself up to women veterans—especially the older ones—I’ve learned so much and gotten so much compassion in return.

*Today I am committed to leaving no woman veteran behind. Today I will offer a helping hand, a listening ear, compassion, and support.*

—Berlynn F., U.S. Marine Corps, 2009–2011

## I Didn't Trust Myself

When I was drinking, I didn't trust anyone. But what I've learned is, the root of that distrust was my lack of trust in myself.

I didn't trust anybody, because I didn't trust myself. I couldn't trust myself to stay sober, and I couldn't trust myself to stay out of trouble. Essentially, my life was unmanageable, so I wasn't about to trust somebody else!

But once I got into the veteran program and met these other veterans and developed a sense of trust and loyalty with them . . . that really helped me come to terms with what trust means and reminded me of the lack of trust I was dealing with in myself.

*On this day, I will think about trust and the importance of a sobriety circle.*

—Mike D., U.S. Marine Corps, 1970–1974

### Putting Pen to Paper

There are very few material things I need in this world, but I cannot be without pen and paper.

I speak only in meetings, so writing has always been a gateway for me to learn how to communicate my thoughts and feelings. It's been an integral part of my sobriety. I have journals from fourteen years ago that I still hold on to. They chart my evolution.

For me, writing is a form of meditation and prayer. Sometimes I write “Dear God” letters, and just go on and on. There are times I've even cussed God out—like, *What the fuck is going on, God?* That's the type of relationship I have with him.

If I'm feeling jacked up or off or something is bothering me, it's a sign I need to put pen to paper. It's a way of getting it all out. I pour everything inside me onto the page. It's like the feeling I have after I take a bubble bath; all those emotions go down the drain.

*Today I will chart my course by putting pen to paper, using writing as release. I'll use writing as a prayer.*

—Elora K., U.S. Navy, 1997–2007

## New Routine

I think we all still have a little manipulation left in us, no matter where we're at in sobriety. The Navy highly recommended I attend meetings, and I had to go get that stupid paper signed. I picked the treatment center director's wife to be my sponsor, because I thought it would look good on my record. They would be at the meetings, but I didn't know they didn't keep a record of my attendance. I honestly thought there was some chart or whatever.

Well, the thing is, they adopted me and treated me like a daughter. My first sponsor even coached me through labor with my oldest son. We developed such a close bond that, as the years went by, people new to the area thought my sponsor and her husband were my parents.

They spoiled me. They fed me. They picked me up and we'd go to their miniature farm. They'd have barbecues, meetings, and Easter egg hunts there. I told myself, *Let's just try this on for size, because what's happening now is way better than what was happening. I can deal with this.*

*As I travel the road of recovery, I willingly welcome  
new people and new horizons into my life.*

—Mary H., U.S. Navy, 1984–2004

## Becoming Myself

Long-distance running used to be my first “drug of choice,” until drinking took over. I started drinking before basic, but I really drank a lot when I was stationed in Germany, because Germany was all about drinking.

I grew up with an alcoholic father who was constantly getting admitted to the hospital and psych units. I didn’t want my drinking to progress to that point. I knew if I didn’t get sober, I was gonna die. I had tried to stop drinking. I went to Al-Anon, but I never worked the Steps. I’d get drunk, and they said maybe I needed a different program. I tried therapy, but the therapist said she couldn’t help me until I stopped drinking.

I didn’t get sober until after active duty, when I joined the National Guard. There was a girl in my Guard unit who helped me find some AA meetings. I started going to meetings all the time.

I had friends in my Guard unit who didn’t even realize I had a problem, because they were so used to seeing me drinking all the time. When I got sober, they were like, “Holy Moly, you’re totally different!”

*Today I am grateful that recovery has allowed me  
to become who I was meant to be.*

—Deb L., U.S. Army, 1981–1996

## High Expectations

I thought I could erase what happened in the past.

I had really built myself up for this career as a Navy man, because it was a family thing. It's what I wanted to do, but more importantly, it's what I thought would make my father and my family happy. I spent a lot of time preparing for the Navy, including ROTC. Seventeen years old and a signed waiver was all I needed for a new beginning and permission to conquer the world.

In my mind, joining the Navy just like my father and grandfather was a rite of passage. I had high expectations of what life was going to be like when I got into the military. All those expectations came crashing down when I was sexually assaulted in boot camp. I want to say it strengthened me or made me a better or a more resilient person, but it didn't. I struggled to maintain sobriety after the assault and trauma. I spent a lot of time just trying to erase what happened to me.

Many years later, I decided to reconcile my past with the military and get some help for the military sexual trauma using EMDR therapy. Having my trauma acknowledged didn't erase it, but it helped me develop an identity for myself. I know who I am today.

*The impact of trauma can be subtle, insidious,  
and even outright destructive. True acknowledgment  
is necessary for my healing to begin.*

—Emil C., U.S. Navy, 1995–1997

## Hitting Bottom

I was a heavy drug and alcohol user before I went into the Navy. I wasn't allowed to use drugs in the service, but I drank all the harder in the military. For my first duty, I was stationed on a minesweeper in Bahrain for about a year. I went out and drank whenever I could. When I came back stateside, I did more of the same.

After I got out of the military, I added drugs back into the mix. It wasn't until last year that I really started to work on recovery. I had an episode where I was committed to the psychiatric ward at the local VA hospital, and that was due to heavy drug and alcohol use. After that, I've been in group meetings. Through the VA and weekly therapy, I've been trying to get through drug and alcohol issues. Now I am in recovery trying to live a better life.

I will say that going through that terrible hospital episode has helped me pursue sobriety. Sometimes hitting bottom can bring on the change that's needed to make different choices.

*Hitting bottom is painful, but today I will remember  
that it can motivate us to make a change.*

—John K., U.S. Navy, 2005–2009

## **How the Military Helps with Tools of Sobriety**

I got sober before I joined the military. I'd already been doing recovery work for seven years by the time I joined.

In basic training, they're going to get your ass out of bed at four o'clock, they're going to make sure that your uniform is spit-and-polish, and they're going to make sure that you know where to go and what time in what uniform.

Really all that is doing is just preparing somebody for life. Those are just simple life lessons that you're going to carry with you: suit up and show up, be punctual, and be there in the right uniform.

These are important lessons in the military. But they're also important lessons in life that new recruits probably don't know and aren't motivated to learn. So the military puts all these kinds of external motivations to do that.

In a lot of ways, I already had that external motivation from my time in recovery. I knew that in order to stay sober, there were things that I had to do and things I had to avoid. The military reinforced those lessons for me.

*Today I will use the tools of sobriety. I will suit up  
and show up and keep my obligations.*

—J. D., U.S. Army, 1985–1993/1998–2018

## Addiction Is Cunning, Baffling, and Powerful

I never said no to anything in the service, but alcohol was my primary drug of choice. I got deployed to Afghanistan in 2002. That's when my serious drinking started.

When we got there, there was nothing—no running water, no electricity—same conditions as in a combat zone. But there was still booze. It's really hot in the Middle East, so we worked at night and slept during the day. That was a hard adjustment for many of us, so we started sneaking alcohol in. A lot of us drank almost daily to take the edge off. Then we'd just pass out. I didn't realize it at the time, but something had changed. After several deployments, I started to feel invincible. There was a thrill to living on the edge. And alcohol was a big part of that.

But we weren't invincible.

I will never forget what I learned in recovery: Addiction is cunning, baffling, and powerful. It sneaks up on you, then takes over your life.

*All of this is why admitting our powerlessness  
is the First Step.*

—Kenneth B., U.S. Air Force, 2001–2007

### Who's Truly at Fault?

For so many years, I felt as though the Army had betrayed me. I now have a different opinion. I now feel as though it's not the Army's fault, nor is it the Army's responsibility, what I went through. Because I'm definitely an alcoholic. In other circles, I identify as an addict. I come from a very long line of addicts and alcoholics on both sides.

But this change in perspective is a gift from the sobriety program I'm a part of. Because for so many years, I did blame the Army. I've made a hell of a victim and a hell of a martyr. Like, let me be the one to take those bad experiences and turn them into a horrible excuse to completely destroy my life.

Because now, the same God that I used to wonder, *Where the fuck were you when I needed you most?* I now can look back and see those hard times, just like footprints in the sand. Those weren't times I was alone. Those were times he carried my sorry ass.

*Today I will examine areas where I feel like a martyr  
and take responsibility where I need to.*

—Jenna R., U.S. Army, 2005–Currently Serving

## Demons and Redemption

When I came home, I battled my demons for two years. The pills led to heroin and then wreckage.

I had been looking for absolution for all the things that I had done. But how could I ever have absolution when there were questions that would never be answered? So, instead, I found acceptance. I accepted what I had to become in order to survive. I finally understood that I became a monster in those moments, because monsters are what those moments required. Monsters got the job done.

But a monster is not truly who I am. Monsters don't feel the remorse that I feel. Monsters don't long for it to have gone any other way than the way it did. Monsters don't ache for redemption. But I do.

Today I work with the most vulnerable veteran demographic, those battling addiction. They aren't monsters either. They're battling their demons like I did. I go to prisons. I go out under bridges. I go to needle exchanges. I go where others won't go, because I've been right where my brothers and sisters are now. My goal is to be the person that I needed all those years ago that I couldn't seem to find. I want to give back without giving them a reason to give up.

*Today I will remember that there can be peace in survival.*

—Bradley L., U.S. Army, 2005–2010

### **Fear Factor**

For me, the motivating factor for not telling people I was in recovery was fear. I didn't know what that was going to be like. I was always afraid, not only about how I was going to be perceived but also of whether it would be held against me. Would it limit me? Would I be different?

So I never let my superiors know, because I wasn't going to give them an opportunity to treat me differently. I'm not saying they would, but that was my way of protecting myself from the unknown.

Sometimes I met with people outside of my command. One such person was a Navy counselor on a ship; we would meet for lunch. The neat thing was—he was in recovery. Talking to somebody like me was a lot easier than somebody who's judging me based on my education or training. Who better to go see on the other side of the desk?

*Today I will have a spirit of discernment  
when sharing my recovery with others.*

—Joe H., U.S. Navy, 1988–2015

## Therapy

Going to seek therapy is not seen as the most macho thing to do. The thinking is, *I should be able to take care of these issues myself.*

There were a few reasons I was hesitant to go to therapy in recovery. For one, I had done therapy growing up and I felt like it never helped me—actually, I felt like it made things worse. For another, I tried to see a therapist a couple times when I was in the military for my mental health, and both times it was a negative experience where this guy looked at me and literally called me a loser and told me that I was wasting his time.

But in recovery, I have found therapy to be helpful. Nowadays I see my therapist about once a month, where it used to be weekly. I think there was a period where we talked almost every day, and now I only talk to her like once a month as I need to.

*Today I will recognize that therapy can be used  
as one of the tools of recovery.*

—Dennis D., U.S. Army, 1997–2003

## Even Sailors Can Be Drunks

I'm Bud, and I'm an alcoholic. I've been sober forty-two years, but when I say sober, I mean sometimes I'm dry and sometimes I'm sober. When I'm sober, I'm at peace, happy, joyous, and free. When I'm dry, I'm too much in my head, ranting and raving.

My parents didn't really drink much, and I only drank a little in high school, because I was afraid they'd catch me. I joined the Navy Reserves in high school and went on active duty after graduation. That's when my drinking really took off. I left for my first deployment to the western Pacific in 1959, nine hours after I married my high school sweetheart.

I had an alcohol problem from day one. In Hong Kong, I hocked my high school ring that my parents got me so I could buy booze. And I remember coming back after drinking with buddies. The closer we got to the ship, the drunker we acted. They called us gangway drunks.

I bragged about how much I could drink, until something clicked and I started feeling guilty. Then this guy said, "Hell, son, you're not a drunk. You're just a sailor." It was just the excuse I needed.

*Today I'm grateful that in recovery we seek guidance,  
rather than offer excuses.*

—Bud N., U.S. Navy, 1957–1983

## Drinking in the Military

Drinking was just a way of life in the military, and everyone was doing it. At night in the barracks, everyone was expected to be drinking and hanging out. So it was just all normal life.

Not only that, if you weren't drinking, people would look at you funny, and they didn't know what to expect of you next. I went along with that pressure, because it was easier—plus I liked to drink. But alcohol definitely made things harder. With PT in the morning, my hangovers would keep me underhydrated and mentally scattered. Afternoons were okay, because by that point, I was sobering up.

But at night, I would just drink again and keep the cycle going. When I got out of the military, the drinking didn't stop. I showed up to work still reeking of booze, only now this behavior wasn't seen as normal. Thankfully, my boss was a veteran too, and he gave me a second chance. He said, "You're a good employee, and I know it's hard getting out of service, but you need to get some help." He gave me the number to the VA office, and I've been on this journey ever since.

*Today I will be grateful that I was able  
to stop the cycle of addiction.*

—Eric S., U.S. Marine Corps, 2005–2009

## Letting Go and Trusting God

My treatment counselors had seen people like me before, and they suggested I see someone for my military issues. They made an appointment for me at the local veteran center. In July 1993, just six weeks sober, I went. On the walls were some memorabilia—pictures of military things.

By the time I got in to see the counselor, all these emotions were pretty close to the surface. He asked me to describe a couple of events I found troubling. When I did, I noticed he was crying. He happened to be a Vietnam vet who had twelve years of sobriety. By the time I ended my session, I had what he called a flooding experience. Everything stuffed deep down inside came back all at once. I was terrified, and more than anything I wanted another drink.

What I did instead, I stopped at the local Vietnam memorial on my way home. I got down on my knees and asked God for help. I decided to turn my will over to a God I had abandoned twenty-five years ago. And I didn't realize it immediately, but the compulsion to flee to alcohol and drugs was gone.

*Even though I was sober, it took turning my will  
over to God for me to finally stop the automatic  
urge to drink or use drugs.*

—Doc D., U.S. Army, 1968–1970

## Sponsorship Saves

For years, I used to think that acceptance meant I had to like something to accept it.

Oh, no, I don't have to like it. I just need to accept it. To let it go. There's a lot of things I don't like about my life, but today is like, wow.

One of the amazing things I've learned in recovery is how to be somebody's sponsor. I have AA pamphlets and the sponsorship book. As your sponsor, I'm not willing to let you just flop around and not do something. I'm not going to let you waste your time; we're going to work together. That's something else I tell my sponsees: if you don't make progress with me, I will cut you loose so you can find the one that's supposed to be working with you.

*Today I'll remember that working with others  
through mentorship and sponsorship brings  
progress on my path of recovery.*

—Stephanie C., U.S. Navy, 1978–1983

### It Was the Norm

In the Army, I spent a long sixteen months in Iraq with the unit. It was hot—140 degrees in the shade—and sometimes below freezing at night. Iraq was something that I wasn't used to; it was different. It was also scary, because we were right in the middle of everything. We were looking for the bad guys—most of the time doing route clearance looking for IEDs and EFPs—anyone setting up those devices, all hours of the day. It was crazy.

After my deployments in Iraq, I found myself struggling with more than I brought with me into the military. There was so much that happened. Some people drank in the barracks in garrison and some, like me, ran the streets of Fayetteville. Within a week of our unit's return, we had one fatal crash due to a DWI, two suicides on base, and family violence. There was just a slew of turmoil, dilemma, pain, and suffering that came back with us. It was the norm.

We went through it all together as a unit. We kept quiet about it. We didn't speak about it.

*My addiction keeps me quiet. Sobriety serves as a loud-speaker. My sobriety helps me overcome the struggles, suffering, and discomforts of my past.*

—Armando S., U.S. Army, 2006–2009

## Stay for Yourself

I had two sons. One was born in August of 1989 and the other in February of 1991. My disease had progressed so much that I was still using, even though I had my children. They didn't have a mother during that time. They were with me, but I wasn't with them. I was putting the drugs before my children. It finally got to the point where I wasn't with my family at all. When my kids were no longer staying with me, I told myself that I need to do something different now.

Until that point, I hadn't heard about the VA. When I got out of the U.S. Air National Guard in '91, I never went. While I was using, my world was small. Another addict told me about the VA and the programs it offered. I got in contact with a representative and told her, "I need to get my life together."

My reason for going in was initially for my kids—to get them back. I'm glad that I went in for them, but I stayed for myself. Sometimes when you go into recovery it can be for one thing, but you got to stay for yourself. Anything can get you in there; only you can keep you there.

*The reason for you to stay in recovery is for you. If you don't stay for yourself, you're not going to stay.*

—Karen A., U.S. Air National Guard, 1980–1991

### One More Day

While serving in the Army, I did all kinds of stuff in Germany. I went to go visit somebody I knew from the base before and ended up learning all about the goodies that came from Turkey, if you know what I mean.

I ended up finding out about stuff I could make money on and had gotten some connections where I was stationed. It didn't last after I got back to the States, so it was easy for me to give it up. But alcohol was my main drug of choice throughout, I was well known for my ability to drink anybody under the table.

Nobody expected me to get sober. Thirty-seven years later, I'm still celebrating my sobriety.

*No matter what others think of my journey, today I look forward to celebrating one more day of sobriety—  
one more day of celebrating myself.*

—Gayle C., U.S. Army National Guard, 1976–1980/1984

## God Keeps Giving

I am grateful for the gifts of recovery. Obviously, I have to put in work toward this program. And I'm okay with doing it every day—for the rest of my life. I used every day—I also put a lot of work into that. But today I have these little changes in my life. I want to put the work into my recovery.

Looking back, I have so much more in my life today than I ever had before. I'm not talking about materialistic things; I'm talking about spiritual ones. From the glow in my eyes to the fire in my heart.

You can't put a monetary value on the life I have today. It's worth so much more than anything I've ever gotten.

*God keeps giving and giving and giving.*

—John F., U.S. Air Force, 1985–1996



Of the Americans who serve—and have served—in the United States Armed Forces, many struggle with alcoholism and addiction. What happens when the people who keep our country safe need saving? How do we fulfill our promise to leave no one behind?

We connect them to the other service members in recovery to their left and their right, who have been through similar circumstances, and who may be able help them.



These meditations were written for service members by service members. These people are serving—or have served—in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Air Force, Reserves, Army National Guard, Air National Guard, or the Commissioned Corps of the NOAA and Public Health Services and are in recovery from alcoholism or addiction. We thank them for their sacrifice and service.



[hazelden.org/bookstore](http://hazelden.org/bookstore)  
800-328-9000

ORDER NO. 4974

USD \$18.95 CAD \$25.95

ISBN: 978-1-61649-918-1  
5 1895



9 781616 499181