

WE HAPPY FEW: AN EXPLORATION OF THE FEAST OF CRISPIAN
AND MILITARY STORIES IN SHAKESPEARE

A THESIS IN
THEATRE

Presented to the Faculty of the University of
Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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B.A Creighton University, 2015

Kansas City, Missouri
2018

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the theatre group Feast of Crispian, a non-profit organization which brings together professional actors with post-deployment service veterans. The group formed in 2012 and is in the process of teaching and strengthening emotional resources that veterans need to overcome traumatic and reintegration issues. This thesis examines the group's methods, backed by accounts from veterans who participated in the programs they sponsor. Along with a focus on Feast of Crispian, the thesis also lists and gives information on other theatre programs in America that cater to veterans. Next, it goes through Shakespearean plays and analyzes texts that reflect and relate to the feelings of soldiers and their families. Finally, the thesis explains how I intend to set up a theatre program that serves veterans and maybe other at-risk communities.

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “We Happy Few: An Exploration of the Feast of Crispian and Military Stories in Shakespeare,” presented by Ellen Patricia Hayek, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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PREFACE

Near the end of William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the newly crowned King Henry V gives a speech to rally his troops into battle against the French enemy forces. In his speech, he tells them that they are a "band of brothers" who are bound together by this action for their country. Almost as if this battle is sacred. He tells them that whether they live or die, they will be remembered forever, that this act will in some ways make them immortal. The truth is that many of them will not survive the battle that occurs in the next scene, and as audience members we know that this land that they won from the French, would be lost by none other than Henry's own son. But Henry's soldiers are pulled into the picture of glory that Henry paints. In a sense, he puts on a performance that changes his soldiers' minds about war and its outcome. His speech is powerful enough to move his soldiers to follow him into almost certain death.

Today, men and women in America are drawn to the military for various reasons. It could be for internal reasons such as of a sense of duty or national pride. It may also be for external reasons such as the promise of financial stability or persuasion from family members to join. While some soldiers are able to enter the military and leave it in relatively stable mental and physical health, there are others who are not so lucky. Many soldiers today suffer from untreated trauma that can lead to chronic pain, paranoia, and insomnia. This in turn leads to alcoholism, drug abuse, and homelessness. This doesn't just affect the soldiers, but their family members as well. Many wives and children of returning soldiers experience distance from their loved one and even verbal or physical abuse in the worst-case scenarios.

Many of these traumatized soldiers end up alone and may consider taking their own lives due to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

What is PTSD and why does it affect veterans so greatly? PTSD is a mental disorder that some experience after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event such as combat, natural disaster, or sexual assault. The truth is everyone experiences some form of trauma in their lives. When a person's physical or mental safety is threatened, the amygdala, a part of the brain controls the way humans react to certain stimuli and sends alerts of the possible danger. The hippocampus, which is the brain's memory center, and the prefrontal cortex, the cerebral cortex which covers the front part of the frontal lobe, are responsible for cognitive thought that decide whether a person is in danger or not. When danger is confirmed, an instinct kicks in to determine how a person should react. This is known as the "fight or flight" instinct. Depending on the danger, a person may fight or combat the threat, or run away if he or she is outmatched. Biologically in "flight or fight", a flood of hormones is released from the brain to the body. When this happens, all internal activities change to make escape easier. A pause in digestion, an increase in oxygen, and an emptying of the bowels are all possibilities. When a person is successful in escaping the danger, the body returns to a pre-fear functional state. Trauma occurs when that person is not successful in escaping. Any time a person is reminded of his or her trauma, the brain loops back to the memory of the traumatic event, as if it is happening all over again (Bremner).

As someone who is studying the arts, I find it easy to feel helpless when thinking about all these men and women. Since I come from a military family, I had the desire to help, but couldn't help feeling that there was nothing I could do. Yet over the past couple of years, I have found that this could not be further from the truth.

The truth is that theatre in one way or another has always held elements of healing. Some of the early origins of theatre were rituals and religious rites. Many of these rituals and rites included healing or the expulsions of evil spirits. One of the first people to speak of this was the classical Greek philosopher Aristotle. In his work of dramatic theory, titled *Poetics*, Aristotle says the function of tragedy in Greek theatre was to induce catharsis.

Catharsis is a release of deep feelings, specifically fear and pity, to purge the senses and the souls of the spectators (Aristotle 41). These cathartic feelings are experienced empathically for the characters in the play by the individuals watching the performance and they share that theatrical and cathartic experience with others in the audience. This magnifies the release and allows for an adjustment in the community's attitude as a whole. According to Aristotle, drama's purpose is not simply for education or entertainment, but also to release harmful emotions which in turn will lead to healing in the community. Richard Kearney, the Charles Seelig Professor in Philosophy at Boston College, stated regarding Aristotle's views of catharsis

For Aristotle, it was generally the chorus or commentary which cut across the fictional pretence of the drama and interpolated the message of the story. The audience thus found itself thrown back on itself as it were, suddenly removed from the heat of the action, reflecting on the 'hidden cause of things'. But if this movement of fear were to be taken to its extreme, we would end up as cold voyeurs, mercilessly contemplating the horrors depicted on the stage. That is why Aristotle insisted on a certain balancing of these opposing stances – subjective and objective, attached and detached, proximate and distant. And it was precisely this balancing that resulted in catharsis — that singular experience of release, equanimity and calm which issued

from the mutual encounter and surpassing of pity by fear and of fear by pity. In short, catharsis invites us a) beyond a pathology of pity to compassion and b) beyond a pathology of fear to serenity. It literally purges two of our most basic affects - pathos and ethos - until they are distilled and sublimated into a healing brew. It might almost be compared to a homeopathic remedy which finds the vaccination or antidote within the disease, turning malady into health (Kearney 52).

Aristotle tapped into what theatre does that would make is applicable for soldiers. It creates a balance of proximate and distant it gives a release of pity and fear that is shared with those around you, leaving only a sense of calm. This is a sense of calm that I have experienced through the theatre many times, but it was only years later that I realized it's true potential.

Everything changed when I went to a conference for people who work with prisoners on Shakespeare plays. There I met a group called Feast of Crispian, whose work is primarily with military veterans. They did this through a combination of therapeutic exercises and performances of Shakespearean scenes. This added more appeal to me, since I have had a love of Shakespeare since I was a child. Throughout the year I have been on a journey to understand why Shakespeare works for these veterans, and to see whether I could replicate these exercises and results in a program of my own.

What makes the Feast of Crispian program special is the way the founders understand emotion. The way they see it, everyone experiences emotional reactions to situations in their lives, both happy and sad. These emotions lead to physical reactions. For example, fear makes you run and hide. In the military, those reactions are not what is needed for survival. Soldiers are taught to ignore many of their emotions, especially those based on empathy. The problem is that these experiences and this training often rewire the brain. As stated above,

when serving, this may help them survive. But when the soldiers go home, these men and woman cannot properly experience emotion in the same way as they did before. Certain connections in their brains are not working properly. This change causes change in communication which leads to the disintegration of relationships.

So why is Feast of Crispian a good program for these afflicted veterans and their families? Feast of Crispian is a theatre program, and theatre thrives on emotions. It does not matter whether those emotions are real or not. And it turns out the brain does not care either. When veterans are able to “fake” emotions, even just one emotion, the brain recognizes this impulse and starts rebuilding those pathways. With this recognition, the process can start to reestablish genuine human emotions from the veteran.

In this thesis, I explain what I found through Feast of Crispian, and how I hope to use its teachings as well as my knowledge of Shakespeare and veteran culture, to craft my own program. In the first part, I discuss the theatre programs that already exist in the military. I have found that there are many people who recognized the healing elements that theatre holds for veterans. The next part will explore the program that started it all for me, Feast of Crispian. After a brief history, I will go step by step through a weekend in the program, adding comments by former soldiers who participated in the weekends. After that I will explore Shakespeare’s plays for how they portray both war and the military complex. Finally, I will explain how I would like to set up my own program in the future and what I would need to make it as successful as possible.

CHAPTER 1

THE THEATRE AND THE MILITARY

Theatre's ability to convey stories and connect the audience with the players makes it a great bearer of truth. At the same time, the theatre is also important for its ability to allow players to take on another identity. These attributes of theatre make it a unique tool of recovery for people overcoming trauma, including military veterans. There are several scientific studies that show the benefits of theatre for veterans.

Dr. Sally Wasmuth and Kevin Pritchard watched the progress of veterans who were doing a theatrical project. The veterans were struggling with substance abuse disorders. According to a study reported in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* published in May 2016,

In this study, we examine the feasibility and acceptability of a 6-week, interdisciplinary, occupation-based theater project for facilitating community engagement and substance use disorder (SUD) recovery in veterans. All data were collected at baseline, post intervention, and 6 weeks and 6-months follow-up intervals. Of the invited veterans, 24% consented to participate, and 50% were retained. Average attendance was 91%. Considerable improvements in social and occupational participation were noted at post intervention and at 6-week follow-up, but were not retained at 6 months. No important change in self-efficacy was noted. Of the participants, 86% remained abstinent for 6 weeks following the intervention. Theater provides a feasible and acceptable resource for potentially facilitating SUD recovery. Larger controlled effectiveness studies of theater are needed to examine

whether robust and notable recovery outcomes in people with SUDs can be linked to participation in theater (Wasmuth).

From this study, it appears that participation in theatre improved the participants' substance-abuse problems, if they chose to stick with the program. This study gives a glimpse into the help that theatre can offer these soldiers who have fallen into substance abuse. Aside from looking at studies, I wished to find theatre programs that served and worked with veterans. What I found were a variety of programs that speak directly to the diverse experiences of soldiers.

The first program I came across in my research was Theater of War, which produces readings of Greek plays to give veterans a chance to see their stories performed onstage. It is an organization that allows soldiers to witness their stories being told through Greek theatre. When I first heard about Theater of War, its creator Bryan Doerries was presenting in Kansas City, where I was residing. This was during the time I was learning about Feast of Crispian, so I was trying to pay attention to mentions of soldiers and theatre. A friend encouraged me to go to this event so I went and listened to the presentation. Through this talk, I learned all about this program which also helped traumatized soldiers through the Greek arts.

Doerries told us about his background. He had not been in the military or had family in the military; in fact, he did not have any connection to them at all. But he had a great love for the classics, especially Greek plays. His girlfriend struggled with cystic fibrosis for a long time, and he cared for her up to her death. He stated that after her death he understood the Greek tragedies in a way he never had before. So many of them were about how people dealt with their own emotional pain and suffering. Over time, he found the connection between the emotions of the solidier characters in the plays and the ones who struggle today. He realized

that the Greek playwrights lived among soldiers and understood them in a way that is harder for us today since many people are separated from soldiers unless there is one among their family members.

Doerries set up readings of Greek plays including *Ajax*, *Madness of Heracles*, and *Oedipus the King*. He brought accomplished actors from the stage and screen. He had readings first for the soldiers and their families. Although he did not know how they would react, he was surprised by the positive outcome. After the readings, there was time for discussions and comments from the people in the audience. Many soldiers spoke about how alone they had felt in their own pain, and how it was a relief to see their stories being portrayed. These Greek plays also went into the effect war had on soldiers' families. Many wives and children of soldiers felt as if they could finally connect with their fathers, sons, and brothers after so long. Doerries decided to expand these viewings so other members of the community could attend the readings and take part in the discussions. As time went on, Doerries saw that Greek plays could reach many other people besides soldiers.

In 2014, when Michael Brown was killed by officer Darren Wilson, the community of Ferguson, Missouri, was divided over the issues of both racism and police brutality. Doerries made the decision to bring a Greek play to the area. He chose the play *Antigone*, by Sophocles, about a young woman who is trying to give her brother a proper burial that he was denied. This spoke to the members of the community who were aware that Michael Brown's body had been left in the open for several hours. Afterwards both black and white individuals were able to speak their thoughts about the situation. Though Doerries did say that some spoke out of line, most were civil and wanted to have open discussion. I am from Ferguson, and while I did not live in the area where Michael Brown died, I grew up with

people who did. For weeks, the news would focus on my hometown and I felt as if the place I had lived all my life became ground zero for racism. It was a tough time and made me feel helpless. I knew that discussions had to happen, but I felt that all around me people were shouting at each other and not listening. I wished that I could reach them. When I heard about *Antigone*, I realized that theatre could still be that entry point. So while I want to work in performance with soldiers, I think that the readings are important to other communities as well as to the military.

These readings help initiate conversations about the visible and invisible wounds of war and other kinds of conflicts. The program puts on community-specific productions that address public health and social issues. Some of the topics include prison reform, gun violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and police and community reform. The company's hallmark projects are the readings of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. Its goals are to destigmatize psychological injury to increase awareness of post-deployment psychological health issues, to publicize information on available resources and to foster greater family, community, and troop resilience. Over the years notable actors joined in the readings; these have included Adam Driver, Jesse Eisenberg, Paul Giamatti, Jake Gyllenhaal, Alfred Molina, Frances McDormand, and many others. Theater of War has been presented to military and civilian audiences throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. Over 80,000 service members, veterans, and their families have participated in these performances (Theater of War Productions).

Theater of War productions have grown and supported many other programs. Some examples of programs are Addiction Performance Project, End of Life, Prometheus in Prison, and Artist in Residence in NYC. Addiction Performance Project presents dramatic readings

of the third act of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* as a catalyst for discussions about addiction and how it touches patients, families, and health professionals (Doerries 266). End of Life presents readings of ancient Greek plays as a catalyst for discussions about the challenges faced by the members of communities who work in the field of palliative care, hospice, geriatrics, and nursing. Prometheus in Prison is a project which presents readings of *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus as a catalyst for discussions about supervising and rehabilitation prisoners in both correctional facilities and in communities. All these programs see the Greek plays as a way to initiate discussions about needed topics of the present (Doerries 209).

As I was listening to Doerries's talk, I was both fascinated and intrigued. This was different from what I had experienced with Feast of Crispian, but it had the same goal. It tapped into the emotions of soldiers and gave them opportunities to connect with their friends and families. One breakthrough may be reached through watching, and one might be accomplished through performance. I could not help wondering what could happen if these could both be part of one program. Both felt needed. It also made me reconsider who I wanted to help in the future. Because of my family's background, I initially wanted to focus on soldiers. However, I also acknowledge that many people have trauma and that plays could connect to many different people.

After doing more research, I found that most of these programs come from organizations that work with troubled individuals from low-income areas. One of these is CRE (Create, Reflect, Empower) Outreach, a performing arts theatre in Los Angeles, California. Since 2007, CRE Outreach utilized theatre, the performing arts, and educational programs in Los Angeles as a means to enhance self-esteem, encourage self-expression, and

empower individuals to overcome the challenges in their lives. They support many focused programs.

Veterans Empowerment Theatre or VET comprises a variety of performing arts workshops and opportunities where veterans are allowed to voice their own stories. Through theatre, they get to explore their personal tragedies and triumphs. Another program is Heroes' Stories which encourages participants to explore creative elements and uses artistic expression to find a path to overcome addiction, deal with PTSD, and reintegrate into society. This specific art therapy program works to present a first-hand view of soldiers' experiences in their most raw form in theatre. Heroes' Stories hope to give audiences greater insight into the difficulties facing veterans returning from deployment.

In February 2015, CRE's program Full Scope joined up with Theatre of the Blind. Theatre of the Blind is the country's only theatre troupe composed entirely of blind actors. It helps blind and visually-impaired individuals become self-sufficient. This collaboration produced an original production titled "Nobody Told Me." It was based on real-life stories of veteran participants from CRE. Following one of the performances, Joseph Chicas, the current Veterans Affairs Coordinator, reached out to three of the veteran participants who were homeless and assisted them in finding affordable housing (Simson).

Along with its theatre programs, CRE Outreach teamed up with Los Angeles based veterans service groups including the L.A. Department of Military and Veteran Affairs. In 2016 CRE launched a hiring initiative titled Give Vets Jobs. It provided under-served veterans with job skills and interview training to promote employability. From all these programs, I could tell that working with veterans was benefitting both CRE and the people they helped.

Another nonprofit organization is Theatre Communications Group or TCG. It conducts research for and about the American not-for-profit theatre field to assess the changing needs and conditions of the theatre community, to chronicle the field's growth, to support national advocacy efforts, and to create resources to aid theatre professionals in their work. In March of 2016, TCG launched the Veterans and Theatre Institute or VTI. It is a program for veterans and active military personnel to study, experience, and create theatre. TCG developed unique curricula for four communities through engagement with military and community partners. The goal was to build sustainable relationships among veterans and the theatre community. Playwright and veteran Maurice Decaul led VTI as TCG's first official artist-in-residence, constructing curriculum and programming over a three-year development period. VTI is supported by Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's Building Demand for the Arts program. As of now, VTI is still in the midst of its three-year program (Simson).

Some of these programs work with universities. Our Warrior Chorus, started by Aquila Theatre in New York City, uses ancient literature to build dialogue regarding the veteran experience, war and service. It creates and shares art that includes modern stories anchored by the shared experience of classical works. It made its debut at the University of Texas in Austin through their performing arts program. Our Warrior Chorus encompassed a variety of programs, including the NEH-funded Warrior Chorus program and the National Endowment for the Humanities funded *Between Athens and Afghanistan: Ancient and Modern Expressions of War* program. In *Between Athens and Afghanistan*, veterans explored ancient texts, then led several group discussions in New York City (Sanchez). This program was funded by the NEH and ran through April 2017.

According to an unnamed Warrior Chorus participant and US Army Sergeant,

I liked that the experiences were filtered through classical literature. This distance allows both performers and audience members to use their imaginations in an empathetic way, rather than merely evoking sympathy. Classical literature places the emphasis back on character and story, and helps reject the laziness of labels. The abstract nature of myth also allows individuals to flesh out their own experiences with some combination of memory and imagination (Sanchez).

Some of these programs are getting into the public eye because of the people driving them. Adam Driver, an actor famous for his role in *Star Wars*, brought media and social awareness to the theatre and military communities. Driver joined the military after the attack on the 9/11, and served in the Marines for a little over two years before being discharged. He founded Arts in the Armed Forces or AITAF. AITAF performs theatre for all branches of the military at US installations domestically and around the world. Like most of the other programs, it focuses on creating performances and leading discussion afterwards. The core program consists of contemporary American plays and monologues presented by theatre-trained professional actors and actresses. They choose plays that feature diverse themes, ages, ethnicities and experiences to create a complex and unique experience for the audience. After each of AITAF's performances, the actors interact with the audience through a question-and-answer session as well as a more informal mingling period. This makes AITAF similar to Theater of War. Their goal is to use the powerfully emotional shared experience of live theatre to open up conversations. They believe these conversations are capable of bridging the divides between military and civilian, service member and family member, the world of the arts and the world of practical action. And it seems that is what all of the programs hope to accomplish (Ugwu).

Starting a program for veterans doesn't even have to take a whole group or even a well-known performer, sometimes it only takes one ordinary person with passion. US Army veteran Stephan Wolfert performs in a one-man show in which he uses lines from Shakespeare to explain the toll that war has taken on his psyche. Throughout his show, he tells his audience the story of his troubled childhood, service, and post-war life. He explains that while struggling during his service he stumbled across a production of *Richard III*.

I was transfixed. There I sat in the audience, yet there I stood there on stage. Like me, a soldier. Like me, conceived, gestated, born and raised at a time of national war. For me it was the American war in Vietnam. For Richard, the War of the Roses. Okay, sure, my family wasn't murdering each other to become the king of England, but some days it felt like they might. Like me, deformed. He even had the same posture I had when I was paralyzed in high school; to the right and slightly back. And like me, in spite of our deformities, joining the military and excelling. And like me, finding that that military service is probably now over. And like me, wondering now what? Now what? Who am I now? Hearing this poetry, feeling this rhythm in my body, seeing a veteran on stage, I couldn't sleep that night. Well, I rarely slept in those days anyways but that night it was because I had a mission. That mission was to be at the bookstore the instant that they opened so that I could buy the book *Richard Eye-Eye-Eye*. And I start reading it and I can't understand a goddamn word. So I rent the movie (Boraev).

After seeing the play, Stephan reported back to his unit and resigned his commission. After that, he took acting classes. He noticed the different way he interpreted the texts from his fellow students. He went back to draw together lines in Shakespeare's play that are spoken

by soldiers and former soldiers including *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Richard III*. His show is deeply personal and shows the lifelong struggle that vets go through (Boraev).

I'm battling to rewire around the trauma and that's a lifelong process but that's where Shakespeare and theatre comes in because it's been the most effective tool in my life, and with the veterans I've been working with. They get around that hypervigilance, that insomnia, these traces of military behavior (Boraev).

Stephan Wolfert is also involved with an organization called DE-CRUIT, which possibly has the most similarities with Feast of Crispian. DE-CRUIT is an interdisciplinary program designed to help military veterans overcome the obstacles of transitioning from military service back into their communities. Countering the military's intense indoctrination and training, DE-CRUIT uses routinized techniques derived from principles of classical actor training including experiential analysis, symbolic representation, and spoken verse to transform military solidarity into solidarity among treatment group members to communalize the process of healing from the trauma of war. The DE-CRUIT model combines these techniques with treatment elements from two state-of-the-art therapeutic approaches: the first is Cognitive Processing Therapy or CPT which focuses on re-construal of traumatic events and accompanying reactions to enhance an individual's sense of mastery and safety. The second is Narrative Therapy which involves the externalization of previously-internalized narratives and a re-examination of habitual reactions to trauma-based triggers. This integrative model is comprised of three major components, each of which is an extension of existing evidence-based treatment principles that are readily adapted for use with military veterans (Ali 60).

Everything I have read, makes me believe there is a kind of safety in exploring our worst fears through someone else. At a time when many people hope for representation through the arts, it turns out that soldiers are no different. This is what I hope to discover through Feast of Crispian.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF THE FEAST OF CRISPIAN

Feast of Crispian is a non-profit organization that brings together groups of professional actors and veterans who are post-deployment service. They use theatre exercises, group circles, and Shakespearean scenes to provide emotional resources that veterans may need to overcome both traumatic and reintegration issues. The exercises are modified acting techniques that get the veterans onstage, speaking, moving, and making the emotional connections that telling Shakespeare's stories entail. The journey I have traveled to understand this group has been long, and with each new detail I learn, the more I wish to be a part of it. Feast of Crispian is a program created and run by three people: Bill Watson, Nancy Smith-Watson, and Jim Tasse.

Nancy Smith-Watson is an actor and a trauma-informed somatic bodyworker. She has a BA in Drama from the University of Washington and did her professional training at Circle in the Square professional conservatory in New York City, where her teachers included Nikos Psacharopoulos, founding artistic director of Williamstown Theater Festival, and Michael Kahn, artistic director of The Shakespeare Theater in Washington D.C. While working as a professional actress, Nancy also trained in massage and somatic bodywork therapies. She trained in Integrative Somatics from Sensorimotor Psychotherapy developer Pat Ogden and has thirty years of experience as a Hakomi Bodyworker. In 2013, she completed director training with Shakespeare & Company in Massachusetts and returned to Milwaukee to launch Feast of Crispian.

The second member is Nancy's husband, Bill Watson. He is an actor, director, and teacher of acting and theatre for four university faculties over thirty years. He is currently an Associate Professor of Theatre at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). He was hired at UWM in 2005 to create an undergraduate Bachelor of Fine Arts in acting degree program. He headed this program for ten years before co-founding Feast of Crispian, where he facilitates, trains and directs. He has taught Shakespeare text and performance for over 30 years and has directed and acted professionally in dozens of Shakespeare productions. He has acted with First Stage, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre and In Tandem theatres, and directed for Marquette University, UWM, and Feast of Crispian. Bill also trained in psychotherapeutic skills with Phil Del Prince of the Hakomi Institute.

The third member is Jim Tasse. Along with being an actor, director, and teacher, he is a Vietnam-era veteran. He served in the US Navy as a hospital corpsman from 1971-1975. He has performed with many Milwaukee theatre companies, including Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, The Milwaukee Rep, Next Act and In Tandem. He has explored classical texts as a director and teacher and has acted with Milwaukee Shakespeare, The Illinois Shakespeare Festival and The Feast of Crispian. He also served as Associate Artistic Director for Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. He trained with UWM's Professional Theatre Training Program and with Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts (Watson).

In 2012, the Smith-Watsons and Mr. Tasse were looking for an under-served community and found a need in the growing population of veterans, though they had originally thought to work with the juvenile justice system. Getting into the Veterans

Administration involved a series of people introducing them to people. The first person was one of their county's aldermen, who are called council members in other cities. The alderman introduced them to a founder of another veterans support organization, Mark Flower, who created the Grassroots Empowerment Project. Mark connected the couple with the people who would finally get them in the doors of the Milwaukee VA Medical Center including a VA/Medical College community engagement person, and a VA staffer who had an interest in alternative programs for veterans.

In 2013, Nancy had written the proposed curriculum for the program. Nancy, Bill, Jim, and a couple of the people from their non-professional umbrella organization met with people from the Milwaukee VA to discuss how this might work. At that meeting, they asked a lot of questions. Their answers must have been acceptable because they left that initial meeting with a promise that they would run it up the chain of command at the VA, and with an admonition that they should be patient. Much sooner than expected, they got an invitation to come to the VA and meet with one of the recreational therapists.

At the first meeting, there was discussion of possible outcomes and how the three would handle them. For example, what if one of the veterans was triggered and started acting out in aggression? The members of the VA wanted to make sure the three were serious and knowledgeable. After these issues were resolved, there was one more meeting to deal with logistics, including what space would be workable and available, and how Nancy, Bill, and Jim would recruit participants and determine dates. They were asked to register as volunteers, which included a broad form with personal information, fingerprinting and a background check, and a tuberculosis test as well as orientation. The week before their first weekend, Nancy, Bill, Jim, Mark Flower, and three staff members of the VA did an extensive

demonstration in the domiciliary cafeteria at dinner time. They had seven veteran participants that first weekend, and the outcome was powerful enough that they were asked back (Watson).

My own experience with Feast of Crispian began with the program called Shakespeare Behind Bars. When I was in college I took a Shakespeare class. During one of the classes, we watched a documentary about Curt Tofteland, the founder and producing director of Shakespeare Behind Bars. He goes to prisons and performs Shakespearean plays with the inmates. While I was watching the documentary, what stood out to me was that the prisoners, whom I would recoil from in any other situation, shared my love of Shakespeare. That was astonishing to me. I also saw that the inmates related to these characters in ways that I would never have thought of before. Throughout the rest of my undergraduate experience, I thought about this group. I felt I was getting closer to understanding what I wanted to do, but I was not there yet.

Between undergraduate and graduate school, my aunt contacted me about an opportunity. She worked at University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, and found that not only was the school hosting a conference based on Shakespeare in Prisons, but she was friends with Peter Holland, McMeel Family Chair in Shakespeare Studies and Associate Dean for the Arts, who was one of the hosts. She got me in contact with Professor Holland, and I asked him if I could possibly volunteer with the conference. He agreed and my aunt said I could stay with her. I was able to get time off from my job, so I traveled to South Bend for the conference. While most of the time I was setting up or leading people to different locations, my favorite job was taking notes during presentations.

One of the presentations I sat in on was about Feast of Crispian, a program created by Bill Watson and Nancy Smith-Watson. They introduced themselves as a group of actors from Milwaukee who worked with veterans. My interest was immediately piqued, because of my background. My father is a retired colonel, and I had two cousins in active service. During the presentation, I participated in the exercises and listened to the talk afterward. What stuck out to me most was a former prisoner's statement that soldiers and prisoners are the same; the only difference was how they are viewed by society. After the conference, I could not stop thinking about that group. When I got home I did my own research and found out as much as I could.

When I came to graduate school, I knew that I would have to write a thesis that would not only encompass my education, but also be a stepping stone into my future. I knew that I wanted to focus on Shakespeare, but put a spin on it that I could follow into what was forming into my life's journey. I decided to get in touch with Feast of Crispian.

I emailed Mrs. Smith-Watson, whom I got to know as Nancy, and told her about my interest. She gave me her phone number and we had a long discussion over the phone. I told her about my background and why I was interested in her program. She told me about her background and how she started working with veterans. I asked her if I could learn about their techniques and she suggested I come to one of their weekends. Finding the right weekend took some time. Because I was still in school in Missouri and they were in Milwaukee, it was difficult.

Months after the call, Nancy told me that Feast of Crispian would be having a conference in Seattle in June 2017. Over the next couple of months, I prepared myself for the conference. Nancy connected me to another participant who lived in Seattle and who agreed

to let me stay with her and her family over the weekend. When the weekend arrived, I flew to Seattle where I met my fellow participant. I found out that she signed up for the conference not because she wanted to work with veterans, but because she wanted to work with other groups, like youths from low-income neighborhoods. She also told me of her love for Shakespeare. It was my first glimpse into all the interesting people and ideas I would come across during that weekend in Seattle.

On the first day, I met the Smith-Watsons as well as all the participants. They were a range of ages and occupations. Some were involved with the theatre, some with education, and some with the military. There were people my own age and much older. Like the woman I was staying with, they all had different reasons for being there. I got to know all of them over this experience.

We started with all sitting in a circle. The Smith-Watsons explained that we should put our voices into the circle. When people participate in the circle, they are part of the community and will abide by its expectations. They gave us the ground rules for the circle; everyone must participate, but only at the level he or she feels comfortable with, no one interrupts or comments when another person is talking, speaking is kept to a reasonable amount of time, and everyone must treat each other with honesty and respect. One by one we went around the circle and answered four questions that Bill asked: what is your name, what is a small description of the landscape of your childhood, find a physical sensation in your body and give it a color, and where in the world do you feel the most yourself? I don't remember what my answers were, but I know that everyone's answers were interesting.

After we got through the circle, we further discussed the purpose of the circle. The Smith-Watsons told us that paying attention to physical sensations is hard for trauma

survivors. Asking to give a color to the sensation focuses them not only to pay attention to their body's sensation, but also consider what that might mean. The questions gave the Smith-Watsons a chance to understand who the people in their circle were. This makes it easier for them to determine who should be paired with whom, and what scenes should be used.

After the circle, we did a movement exercise called the walk-about. In the walk-about, we all walked around the room, careful not to bump into one another. While walking, Bill called out prompts to us. First, he told us just to walk at a normal pace. Then walk as if we were desperate to get somewhere. Then walk as if we are going somewhere we dread. And so on. But we were not walking the whole time. After a few minutes, we were told to stop and face a person, and maintain eye contact. For what seemed like several minutes we had to maintain this eye contact. Bill asks us to look for where the person in front of us held their anger, joy, sadness, and laughter. He said to remember that at that moment we were truly seeing each other. This exercise reminded me of how hard it was to retain eye contact. I myself often find my gaze drifting when I talk to someone. I was told that it is especially hard for veterans. War can destroy the feeling that total strangers are not dangerous to them. This is an opportunity for them to test this in a safe area. Bill and Nancy told me that they encourage the veterans to try to make eye contact in simple ways, as with the clerk at the grocery store.

I asked veteran participants Tim Schleis and Carissa DiPietro what they thought of the exercises. While they were both positive about the circles, Schleis told me he hated the walk-about, and hates it to this day. He felt that his partner could see his every imperfection, which was fueled by everything he was still holding onto. Despite all this, he did say the

exercises did bring closure to an important regret in his life. He explained the exercise in which you are walking alongside someone who you lost. He or she gives you a gift and then you have to let that person go. Tim said the person who he thought of was a friend whom he served with, who was killed on a tour. For many years he lost touch with his friend's family. After the Feast of Crispian weekend, he called his friend's spouse and apologized for falling out of contact with her. This reestablished their friendship. So as hard as it was, the walking exercise allowed him to restart and mend this relationship. DiPietro said the walking exercise was difficult because of how awkward it was. The purpose of the exercise was to try to see another person's pain, and she felt very naked doing it. Presently, if she does the exercise with someone she knows, it is easier. She did not think she would feel very comfortable with any stranger.

After these two exercises, we listened to a discussion about Shakespeare. The Smith-Watsons told us that the descriptive language of Shakespeare has honesty that many modern scripts rarely have. Modern plays often have characters saying one thing and meaning another. This is not useful to veterans who are already doing this every day. Shakespeare has no secrets from the audience. The characters in Shakespeare not only describe their own feelings, but they often have to give several descriptions to get the right words out. Like people in real life, the characters don't always say the right thing the first time. For veterans who are in a state of restrained emotion, this causes a deep exploration of emotions that have been repressed. By exploring these emotions through the mask of a character, the veterans can feel safe. They can access their own vulnerability.

The last thing that we discussed the first day was feeding lines. When Bill and Nancy have veterans do scenes they never ask for the scenes to be memorized. This is for many

reasons, but the most obvious is that due to trauma, some veterans' minds are not capable of memorization. Especially not of Shakespearean dialogue. Instead, while two veterans complete a scene, they are "fed" lines by Bill, Nancy, or another member of their team. They usually go through scenes twice. The first time, the veterans react in whatever way they wish, the second time they are given prompts. The prompts can help the veterans understand the deeper truth to the text, and see the connections with their own lives. One example would be asking "Are you a good soldier?" when saying Cassius's line, "I am a soldier I," from *Julius Caesar*. Whether the veteran will speak the line in pride or disgust says quite a bit. They ran through a couple scenes with us, feeding us the lines. I did one from *Henry V*, between Old Talbot and his son. I was playing the son and it was remarkable how connected I felt to his character. The child of the soldier begging his father not to send him away. It brought back my memories of my father leaving for a tour in Afghanistan. By the end of the scene, both the participant playing Old Talbot and I were crying. It may have been the closest to catharsis I have felt.

When asking the participants about their first scenes, I noticed that they seem to have cathartic experiences too. Schleis stated that when he first performed his scene from *Julius Caesar* he was able to get in touch with and release his anger. This was an anger that had been forced down for years and he feared unleashing it on those who did not deserve it. But when performing the scene Schleis was made to feel safe. As Nancy said, "To an actor, no emotion is unwanted." Schleis performed his scene twice and the second time he almost got into a physical confrontation with the other participant, so much so that they needed to be separated. He described it as one of the best experiences he had ever had. He also says that he keeps in touch with the scene partner he had from that day. DiPietro did the same exercise

and, like Schleis, found that the scene required her to express anger, which she herself says she never gives into very much. She also mentioned the release she experienced from doing a scene from *Othello* about spousal abuse with another female veteran. It appears that from the beginning Feast of Crispian recognized that anger may be the most important emotion for veterans to be able to express and the one which society doesn't seem comfortable with them expressing.

The next day was the second part of the conference. Bill and Nancy checked in with all the participants in our opening circle. The questions were less specific than the previous day. We were simply asked how we were doing, and what we were feeling at the moment. When the circle came to me, I told everyone I felt I was on the verge of something that I wanted to do with my life. I said that I was excited about this, but also frightened. I didn't know if I could handle being in a world that was so closed off to outsiders. I could never understand what it was like to have gone to war. I did not know what it was like to be trapped in a nightmare. Despite everything, I wanted to keep going.

Most of the day was spent learning how to do the feeding and dropping. Feeding is speaking the lines in the script for the veterans to repeat and dropping is feeding and then giving questions to the veterans to help propagate an emotional reaction. The Smith-Watsons would ask for volunteers to be the actors and the feeders. I only volunteered to act, because dropping scared me. But while I was acting, I was paying attention to what the Smith-Watsons told the feeders. We worked on position first. A feeder stood to the side, and slightly behind the actor. The feeder, text in hand, spoke small lines of text and paused to let the actors speak them. The feeder must stay out of the sight lines but near. The feeder cannot be seen, but some veterans have problems with people being at their back. This is especially

true for female veterans. Most of the time, the veterans will move about the room but the feeder will usually stay in the same place. The feeder would just need to speak louder so the veteran could hear. It was important for the veterans to know that the feeders would, for lack of a better expression, have their backs.

Feeding the lines sounds very simple, but must be done in a very controlled manner. As stated above, the veteran must be able to hear the lines no matter where they are. Also, the length of text the feeder delivered changed depending on which veteran the feeder was working with. If there is an obvious struggle from the veteran, the feeder must adjust. The feed can be anywhere from a single word to an entire line.

Whatever challenges a feeder may have, dropping lines requires even more. A feeder drops questions at the end of the lines. The dropped lines are made to direct the veteran's attention to his or her partner. The dropped questions also must connect to sense, experimental memory, and response within the veteran. Another thing to remember is that dropped questions define words and phrases, and translate into modern equivalences. It is good to associate drops with individual words. For example, if your line contains the word "Father," some of the drops can include, "Are you close to your father?", "Are you proud of your son?", "Do you love your father?", and "Do you hate your father?" The most important part is to keep watching your veteran and see if any of the drops are making an effect.

The Smith-Watsons told us about one experience when a pair of veterans were doing a scene from *A Winter's Tale*. When they came to the line "Then my wife is nothing," the feeder asked if the veteran felt that way. And the veteran could not say the line. The feeder encouraged the veteran, and he made it through the scene. Afterwards in discussion the veteran said that he could not say the line, because he realized that his wife was everything to

him. He then opened up about all the relationship problems he had been having at home. For the participants of the conference, some got drops right away, and some took longer to get the hang of it. Some asked overcomplicated questions and some questions were not deep enough. Some were able to connect with us and some were not. I stored all this information in my mind, knowing that I would need it in the future. Sooner than seemed possible, the day and the conference came to an end.

After we learned all the exercises and information, we were then told the next steps of a Feast of Crispian weekend. The point of Feast of Crispian is not to force change on anyone. It was only giving a safe space for their participants so they could explore their emotional experiences and expressions. If any of the participants found something that hit close to home, the Smith-Watsons would suggest using those moments in a play. The plays are a combination of Shakespeare scenes and original material. They are attended by the participants' friends and families, so they can share in their joy and accomplishment. An example this: two veterans were doing a scene from *Othello* when Othello dismisses Cassio for being drunk on duty and attacking a fellow soldier.

Reputation, reputation, reputation. O, I ha' lost my reputation,
I ha' lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains
is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation! (II.iii.246-248)

After the scene another man stood up and said, "That is what happened to me." He went on to describe the shame he had been feeling for years, which he thought he could not reveal to anyone. The Smith-Watsons told him write down the exact words his commanding officer had said before his dismissal, which the soldier could remember exactly. Months later, that speech was performed as part of a series of sketches that were performed.

This series of sketches led to an original play titled *Othello Deployed*. In *Othello Deployed* the veterans did most of the same scenes from *Othello*, but gave it a modern look, with soldiers wearing their own uniforms. Schleis said he played one of three Iago and his wife played an Emilia. DiPietro told me about an original scene inspired by the death of her oldest daughter. The girl was beaten to death by DiPietro's husband, who was also in the military. DiPietro said it was incredible to speak to the audience about the most painful event in her life, and to have the audience in tears along with her. Nancy believes the ultimate goal is to bring out the pain and shame the veterans feel they need to hide into the light, and then through performance, help them let go.

At the closing circle the Smith-Watsons gave us time to ask our closing questions. People's individual questions gave way to discussions of how we would take these lessons both to veterans and different communities. We discussed at-risk populations, especially children from underprivileged neighborhoods and women veterans. It was so exciting to be part of this discussion. The final circle ended with asking us to compliment another member of the circle. Nancy had me, and said that she truly believed that I was on the edge of something, reflecting what I said at the beginning of the day. She said she was excited to see what my future held. While I still held my own doubts, it was gratifying to have someone I had come to admire say how much she believed in me. It steadied my resolve to learn all I could, and make *Feast of Crispian* the subject of my thesis for my final year of my Master's Program.

CHAPTER 3

MILITARY EXPERIENCE IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Shakespeare might not have been a soldier, but war was an almost constant theme in his plays, and it cast a shadow over all the stories. Even if a war did not play a major role in the drama, as it did with the history plays, most Shakespearean works referenced either soldiers, military life, or war. This is explained by the environment in which the plays were written. Shakespeare lived in a country that had a violent and bloody past and present. The monarchs of the time, Queen Elizabeth and James I, both came from family lines whose battles for the throne destroyed the lives of many commoner soldiers. During Elizabeth's reign in particular, conflict was common. Although Shakespeare did not have any military experience that we know of, it is clear that he gained insight into soldiers. It is possible that Shakespeare may have come to know soldiers or lived among them during his life. Looking at the history and the time and the references in the plays, you see the shadow of war more clearly than ever.

Many of the conflicts that occurred during Shakespeare's lifetime centered upon Spain and Scotland. In 1554, Sir Thomas Wyatt led an expedition of 4,000 men from Kent to London as one part of a wider movement to remove Queen Mary I from the throne and stop her marriage to Philip of Spain. The rebels were stopped at Ludgate, where Wyatt surrendered. The surrender occurred on February 7, 1554. In the Battle of Carberry Hill in 1567, Scottish nobles won. As a result of the Northern Earls Rebellion, the Duke of Norfolk was imprisoned in the Tower of London and the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland were questioned about their part in a conspiracy to marry the Duke of Norfolk to Mary,

Queen of Scots. On November 14, 1569, the rebels entered Durham and restored Catholic worship in the cathedral there. They retreated when the Earl of Sussex raised an army against them. In the Battle of Yellow Ford, the Irish forces of Tyrone, Tyrconnel, and Fermanagh defeated English forces in Ulster. In Deputy's Pass, the Earl of Essex's army was defeated in Ireland at the location of Deputy's Pass. In the Essex Rebellion, the Earl of Essex was attempting to create a conspiracy and tried raising London in his support to move against Elizabeth. The rebellion ultimately failed, and the Earl of Essex was executed on February 25, 1601. In the Battle of Kinsale, the Irish forces of Tyrone and Tyrconnel were aided by the Spanish, and the English army was defeated in battle (Eakins).

Many of Shakespeare's histories and tragedies are about the desperate attempt by nobles to gain or keep power. Usually through war. Even Shakespeare's comedies often make references to the military and war. This suggests that Shakespeare was familiar with men who served in the military. Even if he was not particularly close with any, it is probable he lived around many. They might have walked the same streets, or lived in the same towns. In this section, I will go through a few Shakespearean plays and attempt to understand their depiction of military culture and life. I will start with the histories, then move to the tragedies and finish with the comedies.

Possibly the most well-known of the history plays are a part of what is called the *Henriad* plays. This collection consists of *Richard II*, *Henry IV parts 1 and 2*, and *Henry V*. These four plays paint war in almost every color as the complicated mess that it is. *Richard II* begins with a king who seems ineffective, weak, and unable to make simple decisions. As an audience member, we understand this is a less-than-adequate king. Yet as the plays go on, and the story continues in the plays based on the War of the Roses, exhaustion permeates the

mood of all the characters. This exhaustion comes from a life of never-ending battle. Soldiers question whether or not they should fight. Although the true cause of the wars is steeped in family conflict, the soldiers believe they are fighting for loyalty, English pride, and honor. This seems naïve until you go around and ask any American today why we are still involved in wars in the Middle East. Individual soldier's motives and the causes of war are rarely the same. And no character questioned those motives more than Sir John Falstaff. Falstaff is a popular Shakespearean character that appeared in three of Shakespeare's plays, and is mentioned in two more. He is a former soldier, who acts as a mentor and father figure to the fictional Hal, who will become Henry V. In *Henry IV part 1*, Falstaff criticizes the warrior's concept of honor:

Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how
if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can hon-
our set-to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief
of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What
is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What
is that 'honour'? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that
died o'Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No.
'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with
the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore
I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my
catechism (V.i.129-139).

Most soldiers come home with decorations of valor and people praising them for their honor. But honor cannot cure their wounds both physical and psychological, and it cannot help

when they fall on hard times. In fact, there may be quite a number of veterans who believe Falstaff speaks only truth here and should be listened to. But Falstaff is not portrayed as being right. The journey of Hal is to turn away from Falstaff's influence and take his place as a warrior king and his father's heir. Falstaff is viewed as a drunken wastrel and a coward, and Falstaff is supposed to be thrown aside for Hal to become Henry and gain maturity.

Did Shakespeare believe what Falstaff said about honor or not? It is hard to say, since in the next play that continues Henry V's story, Shakespeare writes war propaganda. He has Henry V give a speech to his soldiers who are ready to give up, and it is one of the most famous in all of Shakespeare's plays.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.

For he today that sheds his blood with me

Shall be my brother; be ne'er so vile,

This day shall gentle his condition.

And gentlemen in England now abed

Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,

And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks

That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day (IV.iii.60-67).

This speech, from which the group Feast of Crispian gets its name, speaks directly to the bonds of brotherhood that many soldiers acknowledge feeling. It also encourages men to go to war to die a glorious death. Now it should be said that Shakespeare wrote in favor of his patrons and Queen Elizabeth, so these topics are not surprising. Perhaps, like many writers, Shakespeare wrote to try to understand his country's history and the bloodshed that came from it.

Shakespeare understood the toll that war took on soldiers and their loved ones. One of the greatest examples of this was in the character of Lady Percy from *Henry VI part 2*. Lady Percy is the wife of Hotspur and the sister of Mortimer, who are both soldiers. She does not play a large part in the play; in fact, she is only in two dialogue scenes with her husband. But she gives insight into what it is like to have a husband who is still haunted by war.

And thou hast talk'd
Of sallies and retires, of trenches, tents,
Of palisadoes, frontiers, parapets,
Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,
Of prisoners' ransomed, and of soldiers slain,
And all the currents of a heady fight.
Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war,
And thus hath so bestirred thee in thy sleep,
That beads of sweat have stood upon thy brow
Like bubbles in a late-disturbèd stream;
And in thy face strange motions have appeared,
Such as we see when men restrain their breath
On some great sudden hest. O, what portents are these?
Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,
And I must know it, else he loves me not (II.iv.45-59).

Lady Percy cannot reach her husband emotionally or physically. She wants to be intimate with him, but he says he cannot because it will make him soft, which he feels he cannot be. Many veterans say it is difficult to become intimate with their loved ones when they return.

This may be due to feelings of weakness, regret, or shame. But the inability to voice or understand these feelings creates a rift between the two. Soon the spouse becomes confused, and questions whether or not there is still love in the relationship, as Lady Percy does.

Shakespeare's beautiful language puts into words a very real fear from veteran spouses and to an extent, loved ones. A fear as potent now as it was centuries ago.

The second series of history plays based on the Wars of the Roses, *Henry VI part 1 and 2* and *Richard III*. On the surface it is focused on presenting a Tudor-focused history to the masses. Shakespeare lived at a time when a king was meant to be ordained by God. But with all the deposing and changing of monarchs, it was hard to know which ruler truly had God's support. Reassuring the masses, that God was behind the Tudors, was something that Shakespeare could do through his theatre. Still Shakespeare still has much to say about war. The Duke of York goes to war with Henry believing he is doing what is right for both his country and his family. However, the scene where York is defeated by Margaret of Anjou hammers in war's cost. The queen wipes his face with a handkerchief with York's son's blood on it and mocks him by putting a paper crown on his head.

What hath thy fiery heart so parch'd thine entrails

That not a tear can fall for Rutland's death?

Why art thou patient, man? Thou shouldst be mad,

And I, to make thee mad, do mock thee thus.

Stamp, rave, and fret, that I may sing and dance.

Thou wouldst be fee'd, I see, to make me sport.

York cannot speak, unless he wear a crown.

A crown for York, and, lords, bow low to him.

Hold you his hands whilst I do set it on.
Ay, marry, sir, now looks he like a king,
Ay, this is he that took King Henry's chair,
And this is he was his adopted heir.
But how is it that great Plantagenet
Is crown'd so soon, and broke his solemn oath?
As I bethink me, you should not be king
Till our King Henry had shook hands with death.
And will you pale your head in Henry's glory,
And rob his temples of the diadem,
Now, in his life, against your holy oath?
O 'tis a fault too, too, unpardonable!
Off with the crown, and with the crown his head,
And, whilst we breathe, take time to do him dead (I.iv.88-109).

Paper crown, indeed. There are few images that display the fragile power that people in these plays desperately seek, at the cost of everyone around them.

The trilogy *Henry VI* portrays a king, very unlike his warrior father, who was led astray by his “she-wolf” queen, while *Richard III* shows Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as a monster who kills his wife and orders the deaths of two little children. In Shakespeare’s play, Elizabeth I’s grandfather, Henry VII, is the hero who freed the country from Richard’s wrath. Today, Richard III’s guilt in the princes’ death is seriously questioned. These plays show Shakespeare’s ability to create propaganda for a family that led its country to war several times, even to portray them as saintly. Propaganda that was regarded as truth for many years.

The other history plays give different lessons about war. *Julius Caesar* explores the dangers of revolution and how easy it is to be drawn into conflict. Similar to the character Henry V, Mark Antony is able to use his words to stir up the Roman citizens into going to war.

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up
To such a sudden flood of mutiny.
They that have done this deed are honourable
What private griefs they have, alas, I do not,
That made them do it. They are wise and honourable,
And will no doubt with reasons answer you.

I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts (III.ii.201-207).

In this scene, Antony turns the crowd against Brutus and Cassius. He does this by first assuring the people he does not blame Brutus and Cassius. At the same time, Antony is able to almost deify Caesar in the minds of the people. This leads to a war over Rome. Brutus and Cassius kill Caesar because they fear he will become a tyrant. By the end of the play, Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius are all dead, and Rome is left with three tyrants, one of them Antony. It is hard for people to not connect this to modern times, when the US army got rid of one tyrant in the Middle East, which led to the rise of a radical military group. The follow-up play, *Antony and Cleopatra* warns against using war to deal with personal matters or matters of pride. There are many scenes in which Antony goes to war against the good advice of his fellow military men, which leads to the death of many of his men.

Even more than the Henriad plays, *Troilus and Cressida* shows the demoralized warriors in a war that seems both purposeless and endless. The play takes place during the

later years of the Trojan War, which began according to classical sources, with the abduction of Queen Helen of Sparta by the Trojan Prince Paris. While the war means a great deal to the royal characters of Troilus and Cressida, the Trojan soldiers are realizing they have much less of a reason to fight. They question why they are going to war over a woman they stole. The soldier Thersites says,

Here is such patchery, such juggling and such
knavery! All the argument is a whore and a cuckold. A good
quarrel to draw emulous factions and bleed to death upon.
Now, the dry serpigo on the subject! and war and lechery con-
found all! (II.iii.64-68)

It is brought up over and over again how ridiculous Helen's kidnapping is to the soldiers. Shakespeare gives a voice to at least some of history's many disgruntled soldiers who were tossed into a war they barely understood.

Possibly the play that understands soldiers the most is the tragedy *Othello*. *Othello* opens with a group of soldiers who are from different backgrounds, but have bonded over many battles and trust each other greatly. At least that is how it appears on the surface. Unfortunately, their inability to put their trust in the right people is what leads them astray. Why is that? Why would Othello and Cassio put so much faith in Iago, even over their wives and loved ones? People who are not part of the military may forever be baffled by this. But military members told me that they understood Othello's actions. Some service members trust each other more than they do their family members, friends, or anyone else in their lives, because those service members understand what others have gone through. Desdemona and Emilia show what it is like to be the wife of a soldier who is experiencing paranoia and

PTSD. When Desdemona feels her husband pulling away from her, she appeals to Iago, his comrade, to help her reconnect with her husband.

O good Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him; for, by this light of heaven,
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel:
If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,
Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense,
Delighted them in any other form;
Or that I do not yet, and ever did.
And ever will—though he do shake me off
To beggarly divorcement—love him dearly,
Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much;
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love. I cannot say 'whore,'
It does abhor me now I speak the word;
To do the act that might the addition earn
Not the world's mass of vanity could make me (IV.ii.2918-2933).

Similar to Lady Percy, Desdemona does not understand why her husband is pulling away from her. It is true that she does not know that Iago is manipulating him. However, as seen later in the show, even when the truth is revealed to her, there is nothing she can do. Othello simply trusts his comrades in a way he does not trust her. Then, there is Emilia. She is the

wife of a soldier who treats her horribly. Iago manipulates Emilia to get him Desdemona's handkerchief. She knows this is wrong and yet still yearns for his love. Still, Emilia does seem to have more self-awareness than Desdemona, as later on she speaks that men can drive their wives to do terrible things. Both Desdemona and Emilia are portrayed as highly sympathetic, and the pain that their husbands put them through is never downplayed.

There are many characters in tragedies that show signs of damage from a lifetime of battles, and these include Macbeth and King Lear. Throughout the plays, they descend into paranoia and push everyone in their lives away. In the opening of *Macbeth*, the title character is praised for his brave actions in war. As stated by a fellow soldier to their King Duncan,

For brave Macbeth-well he deserves that name!
Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valor's minion
Carved out his passage till he faced the slave,
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him
Till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops
And fixed his head upon our battlements (I.ii.18-26).

Macbeth shows his military prowess throughout the show. He manages to execute many people and even arrange assassinations. Yet, it is only after his enemies change that audience members get to see the lack of empathy and ruthlessness that war demands from Macbeth. Only his fellow soldier Banquo recognizes this unnatural behavior for what it is, until the very end. And while his wife Lady Macbeth is not a soldier, she almost shows signs of PTSD, when she is haunted by the king's murder.

Out, damned spot; out, I say. One, two,—why,
then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier
and afeard? What need we fear who knows it when none can
call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the
old man to have had so much blood in him? (V.i.30-34).

Macbeth is a soldier, through and through. His story shows a man who, along with being ambitious, cannot separate himself from the war.

The title character of *King Lear* is similar to Macbeth in that he cannot separate himself from the warrior he was. Through the first two acts of the play he feels he must surround himself with knights. He reacts very violently when his daughters ask him to send these knights away. For someone who spent his life fighting to protect and expand his territory, those knights became part of his identity. War becomes part of a soldier's identity that he cannot easily separate from.

Shakespearean comedies have always focused on the common people and through them, there is a small glance into the common soldier. None of the stories has war as a main focus. Instead, being a soldier is revealed as a fact about a character's past. For example, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick, Claudio, Don John, and Don Pedro are coming back from a war. Beatrice is told about Benedick's great work in "battle," by a messenger.

M: He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.

B: You had musty victual, and hath an excellent stomach.

M: And a good soldier too, lady (I.i.40-43).

The characters' backgrounds make them very attractive to the women in the play, suggesting that being a soldier was considered an attractive career choice for one. Interestingly enough,

this play has another soldier character who is led to believe that woman he loves is unfaithful with a fellow service member. This does speak to the loyalty that many soldiers expect from each another. However, other than at the beginning, wartimes are never brought up again. It does appear that most of Shakespeare comedies have men alluding to some kind of battle experience. Petruccio in *Taming of the Shrew* states,

Have I not heard great ordnance in the field,

And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?

Have I not in a pitched battle heard

Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets' clang (I.ii.198-201).

This is an indication that he has survived many battles and takes great pride in them. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the male characters leave at the end to go to war, with no indication whether or not they will live or die. Falstaff from the *Henriad* plays returns in *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Shakespeare also makes reference to other historical conflicts and warrior classes. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the historical characters, the mythical Greek king Theseus and the Amazonian queen Hippolyta are mentioned to be celebrating their marriage as a way to end the war between their people. While Shakespeare did not go into great detail about the Amazon's history, he showed great knowledge of historical conflict.

Reading through all these plays may not reveal Shakespeare's true feelings towards war, but it does suggest that perhaps he understood it more than people realize. Every part of war he explores through his plays. In *Troilus and Cressida* and the *Henriad* plays he explores the mixed feelings of soldiers towards war, both the good feelings of patriotism and brotherhood, and the disillusionment that many soldiers experience later on. *Othello* and the character of Lady Percy explore the pain that many spouses and family members experience,

especially when their loved ones feel more connection to their fellow soldiers. *Much Ado about Nothing* shows the attraction that many people outside of the military have towards military members. And the references go on and on. Reading multiple Shakespeare plays makes it clear that he did have insight into the trials and tribulations of the soldiers and their families.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR MY PROGRAM

I now know with growing certainty that my goal is to start my own theatre program that will benefit veterans, using the methods that I learned through Feast of Crispian and through my research into other programs.

After going to the Feast of Crispian conference, my first instinct was to get involved in the Veterans Affairs hospital and home communities. I knew I needed to make connections and find out where programs like the Feast of Crispian would work. I looked around and called several locations for volunteer positions. I got a call back from VA St. Louis Health Care System. It was a Veterans' hospital that had two locations: John Cochran Division and Jefferson Barracks Division. I went to the first location for an application. According to their website,

The VA St. Louis Health Care System provides inpatient and ambulatory care in medicine, surgery, psychiatry, neurology, and rehabilitation, and many other subspecialty areas. It is a two-division facility that serves veterans and their families in east central Missouri and southwestern Illinois. The John Cochran Division, named after the late Missouri congressman, is located in midtown St. Louis and has all of the medical center's operative surgical capabilities, the ambulatory care unit, intensive care units, outpatient psychiatry clinics, and expanded laboratory. The Jefferson Barracks Division is a multi-building complex overlooking the Mississippi River in south St. Louis County. It provides psychiatric treatment, spinal cord injury

treatment, a nursing home care unit, geriatric health care, rehabilitation services, and a rehabilitation domiciliary program for homeless veterans (Gunter).

The first thing that struck me about this experience was how long and detailed the process was to simply volunteer. I had to fill out a form, where I explained my interests and what I could bring through my volunteer work. After turning it in, I waited for a reply. After two weeks, I was asked to come in to get my fingerprints scanned. That took some more time since the first time I went the office was closed so I needed to go in a second time. After getting them scanned and cleared, I was told I needed to get a background check. After passing this check, I was able to come in and participate in the orientation. This all took about a month. At the orientation, I was told the rules of the hospital. Most of what I was told was standard; don't get in the nurses' or doctors' way and treat the vets with respect, but I was also told signals to check whether there were hazardous materials or dangerous patients. Although this made me nervous, I understood that it was something I had to be used to if I wanted to work with vets.

After the training, I was assigned a job. I told the administration about my experience with Feast of Crispian and I how I wished to bring a program similar to VA homes and hospitals. While very enthusiastic about my ideas, they told me that they did not have any arts or theatre programs that would work to my benefit. Although I did not expect to be running scenes with vets, I had hoped to speak to an activities director, but this would not be the case. While slightly frustrated, I still decided to volunteer as a way to better understand the VA hospitals and health system. I volunteered through the middle of July until the middle of August when I went back to school, which would allow me to have the experience as well as a part time job.

Throughout the month I volunteered I went to the VA once a week and gave out books to the vets. During my orientation, I mentioned that I loved literature as well as theatre so they gave me a book cart. From what I could tell, the staff was efficient but also overwhelmed. I received no training for my job and was simply told which floors to go to and sent on my way. If I had a problem, I needed to figure it out on my own. I was supposed to report to the volunteer office, but often there was no one available to talk to me as they would be busy taking care of a future event. I first started working on the weekdays, but there was hardly any staff around so I switched over to a weekend. Having people around made me feel more secure, but most of the time it was just me and my cart.

On the cart there were paperback books as well as puzzles, cards, magazines, and crafts. The books were a mixture of westerns, mystery, romance, and historical fiction novels. The books were all donated to the VA. In the third week I was volunteering, there was a great donation of several boxes of books. They were mostly all in good condition and I was told that was rare; most of the books they received were falling apart or had some sort of food or water stains. I tried to organize the books and make sure there were new choices for the veterans every week. Something that stuck out to me was that the veterans liked westerns and mystery novels, but the majority of the books were romance novels. In fact there was only one veteran to request a romance novel in the time I was there. It was clear to me that the people who were donating the books were just giving them away, and not thinking about who they were giving them to. But as the phrase goes, beggars cannot be choosers, and in this case, I found there were many beggars in the VA system.

Every week I would go to the floors where the veterans were receiving medical treatment, both in the short and long term. Very rarely did I go to the hospital one week and

see the people that I encountered the previous week. I would go to each room and ask if the veteran inside would like anything from the cart. While for the most part they declined, about a quarter of the veterans would take something from the book cart. They were allowed to keep anything they took, and if they did not like what they took they could simply leave it in the room for the next person. Another part of my job was to read to the veterans if they requested it.

This happened only once when I sat with a man who requested I read him a science fiction novella. I tried to speak slowly and loudly. Halfway through the story, I saw that the veteran had fallen asleep. He was very apologetic, and asked that I start from the beginning. I did so, and he was thankful. Still, most of the time, I only gave books to the vets. When I first came to the hospital, I admit, I was concerned about how I would be treated because of my obvious youth, but no one was ever disrespectful. Although many did not want anything on the cart, they were very polite, and even thanked me just for coming around. I believed it helped just to see someone different, who had a smile and showed genuine interest, especially with the monotony that is these men's lives.

There was one veteran I saw several times, which was unusual. He had many medical issues, which I was not informed about. I was told by nurses that he tried to get them into conversations while they were treating him so that they could stay around longer. The first time I went to his room I offered him a book, he turned me down in a gruff way. I was ready to leave quickly but then he started asking me questions. He asked where I lived, and why I had come there. I tried to answer him as honestly as I could. He told me about how he didn't want to live anymore, and how he didn't believe God would forgive him for all the sins he had committed in both his life and service. I didn't know what to say to that. He asked me to

pray with him and I did so. He seemed unbelievably grateful to me. It was an experience that I won't ever forget. These men told me they felt like burdens on their families. They were isolated from the world and each other. I wanted to do something for them, but I was not sure what.

What I saw made me more and more certain that a program like the one I had in mind might not work in many hospitals. Most theatre programs need communication and movement. They need a place where people could come one day a week. First, there is a lack of available rooms. Even for just a weekly gathering it would be hard to get a rented space. The second point is the patients. The veterans are there for injuries and illnesses that usually keep them bedridden. They would not be able to walk around or face each other. While I believe I could work around some ailments, even those requiring walkers or wheelchairs, I could not deny that some people would be left out. While I still plan on starting by sticking to the Feast of Crispian's plan, perhaps I could also go to veterans' rooms and read scenes with them. This might not always work, as through my own experience I learned that they might turn me away. But those who would like to do scenes, and cannot move around, would be able to experience Shakespeare.

As stated before, when I worked at the VA Hospital I noticed that where I was working might not be a suitable place for my program. Most of the veterans there were either bedbound or in wheelchairs. Those men would need something different. This is where I think organizations like Theater of War could help. I think a good mixture of both performance and visual art would be a good way of helping these men and women.

When I spoke to Schleis and DiPietro, I asked them why they believed Feast of Crispian worked for them. They explained to me that the Smith-Watsons take the time to

listen to everyone who entered their space. They also surrounded the Feast of Crispian participants in a safe environment, and didn't hide the fact that they did not understand what it was like to be in war. Schleis described feeling welcome and wanted every time he came for a weekend. This is important to both of them since veterans often do not feel welcome or wanted in society.

To make this program work, I must be well aware of my own inexperience. I will never understand what it is like to a military participant. I cannot hide that fact or pretend that I am anything that I am not. This is why I wish to find someone who served in the military and bring them into my project. A person who can truly understand what the veterans have been through could act as a bridge for me. My job must be to create an environment of enthusiasm and acceptance, and understand that I will stumble at times. The Smith-Watsons told me of a time when they had a veteran perform a scene from *Macbeth* that left him so shaken that they lost sleep that night. I also have to listen to what my participants want and need. The Smith-Watsons said that at the beginning they focused on scenes solely about war but found that what the veterans needed were scenes about relationships. Lastly, I must accept that not everyone will outwardly benefit from my program. People will come and go and no program is perfectly fit for everyone. Like the Smith-Watsons, I will have to pay attention to the community around me and find what they need instead of just acting to fulfill my own desires to make a change.

What is important to me at the moment is to figure out how to create a program that will ultimately be successful. Along with a location and the right people, I will need to apply for grants. I will need money for transportation, scripts, actors, and scenic materials if, like Feast of Crispian, I plan on putting on any live performances. Looking around for potential

grants, I came across the National Endowment for the Arts or NEA. The NEA benefits nonprofits in more than 4,500 communities across the United States. According to NEA Chairman Jane Chu,

It is energizing to see the impact that the arts are making throughout the United States. These NEA-supported projects are good examples of how the arts build stronger and more vibrant communities, improve well-being, prepare our children to succeed, and increase the quality of our lives (TCG).

It is great to know that organizations like NEA are supporting so many different nonprofit theatre programs. But I kept looking around for grant programs that specifically focused on veteran theatre programs. The most prominent one I was able to find was the Theatre Communications Group's Blue Star Theatres Grant Program.

This past December, the North Carolina Arts Council awarded \$75,000 to serve military personal, veterans, and their families who live in North Carolina. In New York, TCG teamed up with Blue Star Families, which provides free resources, services, and opportunities to more than 1.5 million military family members. Together they announced a third round of Blue Star's Theatre Grants, which are meant to strengthen the relationship between Blue Star theatres and their local military communities. One hundred and fifty-two TCG members have already signed up to participate in Blue Star Theatres. According to Teresa Eyring, executive director of TCG,

In a time of growing political division, the service of our veterans and military families remains a shining example of citizenship and civic engagement. We're grateful to partner with MetLife Foundation and Blue Star Families to support the

growing connection between theatres and their local military communities through this the third round of the Blue Star Theatres Grant Program (TCG).

Blue Star Families builds communities that support military families by connecting research and data to programs and solutions, including career development tools, local community events for families, and caregiver support. Since its inception in 2009, Blue Star Families has engaged tens of thousands of volunteers and served more than 1.5 million military family members. Blue Star Families believes that all military families should be able to serve and simultaneously build thriving and healthy families. According to Noeleen Tillman, the executive director of Blue Star Families,

Blue Star Families is thrilled to partner with Theatre Communications Group on a new grant program designed to provide military families with greater access to theatrical performances. The participating theatre companies are set to offer an array of lively and entertaining productions, as well as serve as engaging Blue Star Families partners, helping to strengthen community bonds and foster a greater understanding of the military lifestyle (TCG).

Blue Star's Theater Grants receive funding from MetLife Foundation,

MetLife Foundation is pleased with the continued growth and success of the Blue Star Arts program. Programs such as Blue Star Theatres play an important part in building bridges between military families and their local communities, and we are proud to provide support (TCG).

I couldn't find any other grant programs that were specific for soldiers but I am sure more will be created in the years to come. For now, I need to present myself in a way that shows the great potential of my program, both for veterans and for the entire theatre community.

Feast of Crispian works as a military-theatre program because it uses people from both a theatre background and military background. The Smith-Watson's program is very new and still finding out what is working and what is not. Because of this, I also must find out what works and what doesn't through my own program. I must find VA homes and hospitals that are looking for new activities and potentially new treatments. This project will take a triangulation of good luck, the right people, the right financial backing, and the right place to get it off the ground but I believe this is possible.

At this point I think the best next step is try to take an apprenticeship position with a theatre group that works with Veterans. Although I was happy to have a weekend with Feast of Crispian, more time would allow me to learn and explore the methods to a greater extent. Even if I could not work with Feast of Crispian or Theater of War, there are surely other theatre not-for-profits that offer apprenticeship positions.

This year I am taking a theatre management class, where I am learning how to start a theatre company. My plan is to have a program that will consist of several weekends with the veterans, work on the Shakespeare scenes, workshop any original works that may come out of those weekends, and then have a performance. Between the performances I wish to have readings of plays and discussions afterwards. Perhaps a mixture of Shakespeare, Greek, and modern texts. The performances at the start will only be for family and friends. If those performances go well, and the veterans are interested, I would open those performances to the public. The readings would be open to the public from the start.

For my program, I am committed to a seven to ten-year plan, depending on how quickly I am able to establish myself. First I need to create a budget plan. This is not a theatre group that I think will need a large budget. We will not need a fancy set, costumes, or

makeup. Still, I will need money to rent spaces and spread the word about my program, or else it may go unnoticed by those who could most benefit.

Then I will need to create a Board of Directors. My hypothetical board consists of both a female and male veteran. The reason I want both is because women and men can have very different experiences in the military, and different traumas can arise from those experiences. Having one of each sex will go a long way to making a program that is comfortable for all. I also plan on having an artistic director who can work with little to no scenery. The shows I plan on putting on in the beginning will be informal to not put pressure on the veterans. This may change over time, but I think finding someone with that experience would make a fantastic asset. I also plan on having a community politician on my board. I want the program to evolve and be a community program and help as many veterans and families as I can. I also need to get involved with the VA in whatever town I end up in. Hopefully I can hold weekends and sessions in their hospital. If not, I am sure I can find community centers or other small rentable spaces that would work.

This next year I will be moving to Tuscon, Arizona. This is where I plan to make my start. While remaining in one location would be fine, my ideal goal would be to travel and converse with other organizations like the ones I discussed in Chapter 1. It would be amazing if eventually I could present at a conference, like the Shakespeare in Prisons one I went to several years ago. This will allow me to learn from other programs' successes and failures, and pass on my own knowledge.

For many years I questioned whether a current society really needed Shakespeare any longer. Although I knew Shakespeare's plays and sonnets would survive long after I died, I did question whether the plays could make impacts on or even change people's lives. It turns

out they were indispensable, among the unlikeliest of people. Both of the veterans I spoke to had their lives changed by the Bard, and now are on track to a more hopeful future. This is what I wish to do with my life. I wish to show the wisdom that Shakespeare attained and imparted through his words. I want to be there when a veteran, caught in the chains of the past, is able to act out his or her own rage, despair, and joy through the Shakespearean characters I have grown such a connection to. I want to join in the millions of people in programs who recognize the theatre for the healing power that it has always had. And one day, I want to proudly state that I have indeed joined the “band of brothers.”

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW WITH TIM SCHLEIS

1. How did you first hear about Feast of Crispian?

My wife and I were watching a TV program on PBS, and they were featuring a promotion for Feast of Crispian. At the time, I was deep in depression from my PTSD. I was doing several types of counseling, but not getting far. My marriage was also very strained. In fact, just prior to going to Feast of Crispian, my wife June and I were separating. This was two weeks prior to our 20th wedding anniversary. So I was at a very low point in my life. It was actually June who called Bill and Nancy Smith-Watson and set everything up for me to attend a conference in December of last year. I went in not expecting much and it turned into the best three days I could have had. Through Feast of Crispian I get more out of them in three days than I get out of any one on one counseling. Feast of Crispian gets you up and moving and deals your emotions then and there. You are also with other veterans who have gone through things you have gone to. There is solidarity in that. And it really taps into your issues. Now in the military you don't have a place for emotions. Use the image of a duffel bag. You pack your feelings down in the duffel bag during your time in the service. When you come back home you have a duffel bag of emotions that can explode at any time, and often does. With Feast of Crispian, it is like I take my emotions out little by little, play with them, and then put them away but I felt I have dealt with some of the crap.

2. Why did you decide to attend a meeting?

I wanted to give it a try. In Milwaukee, the program is somewhat known in the veteran community, and I have seen a number of vets try it. The problem with Feast of Crispian is that the timing of it can often clash with other programs. We may start the weekend with 20 people on the first day, and then may have eight on the second since many times we are competing with AA. Also, the program is known, but not well publicized. But the people in it who gain something from it really stick with it. An example is that an original play we are doing this year *Othello Deployed*, there are people who have been in the program for four years. In *Othello Deployed* we do most of the same texts from Othello but we bring it into the modern age, with soldiers' uniforms that we are all familiar with. I am one of three Iago and my wife, who I got back together with, is playing an Emilia.

3. Tell me about your experience with the circles at the beginning and end.

My first circle was very hard. I am a private person that does not like to reveal information about myself. But I opened up, and by the Sunday. It was easier for me to open up and tell people about my experiences and how I was feeling. When Nancy and Bill asked about the landscape of your childhood, I had to think about what I could say. My childhood wasn't a good one, but it was easy compared to most that I heard around the circle. When they asked about the color of my body sensation I told them my color was black. Since then my color has not changed much, it was black and now it is dark red. By Sunday I felt more relaxed and I was feeling more hopeful. I was not feeling alone, I found my pack. The circle is something that works well for me.

4. Tell me about your experience with the walking exercises.

I hate the walking exercise and I still hate it. When my partner was looking in my eyes I felt that he or she was seeing every imperfection. Throughout my military career, I have not come to grip with everything I had to do, with the lives I have taken. I know I was doing my job, but it is a very hard thing for me to live this though I try to find a reason. It's like I am hearing the voice saying how can you live with yourself? Still it does bring me some closure. One of the exercises you are told to imagine that you are walking alongside someone who you lost. He or she give you a gift and then you have to let that person go. My person was a friend who I served with. Both of our families were extremely close. He was killed on a tour I was not on. For many years I lost touch his wife and kids. After the Feast of Crispian weekend, I called her and I apologized for not staying in touch. As hard as it was, the walking exercise allowed me to restart and mend this relationship.

5. Tell me about your first experience doing a scene.

We did the tent scene from *Julius Caesar* with Brutus and Cassius. I played Brutus. Another veteran named Bruce played Cassius. Bruce and I both had anger issues and this is a scene that calls for anger. Nancy and Bill let us go with it. We got so into it that they had to separate the two of us. We had so much anger and raw emotions. Nancy and Bill said we went from 0 to 100. When we did the scene again our anger not only returned but got worse even after they started dropping questions. It was the best two days that we had. I did not know Bruce before this, but we still keep in touch today because we went through that emotional journey with each other.

6. Is there any particular Shakespeare play or scene that speaks to you? Why or why not?

Brutus and Cassius. Old Talbot and Young Talbot from *Henry V*. I do not have good relationships with either my father or my son. But I felt that if the relationships were better, it would be like theirs. They would both refuse to leave and abandon me.

7. What was your rank? Where did you serve?

1978-2004. Retired as a First Sergeant. 21 years with tanks. My first three years were as a combat engineer.

8. How much Shakespeare background did you have?

I knew nothing of Shakespeare and I had no interest in him. If you had told me years ago what I would be doing in the future, I would have laughed.

9. Why do you believe Shakespeare works so well?

It is still relevant today. War is war and emotions are emotions. You used to talk about and then in recent years you didn't. But Shakespeare speaks truth and lets you explore what emotions really do to people. An example is Othello. People believe Iago is mad because Othello passed him up for a position. While this may be true, it could be that Desdemona is standing between Othello and Iago. It could also be the fact that Cassio and Desdemona are from wealthy families while Iago is not. There are many interpretations you can have with the play. These interpretations made it so you can find your own way to relate to the story and the characters.

INTERVIEW WITH CARISSA DIPIETRO

1. How did you first hear about Feast of Crispian?

I joined up with Feast of Crispian four years ago. At the time, I had PTSD from my service as well as trauma from having been raped while in service. This along with a

depressive disorder made it so I spent most of my days in bed. My routine became: take my five children to school, go home, get in bed, get up, to go and get my kids and then go back to bed. It got so bad that the kids would have to have dinner in the bed with me, just to be able to spend time with me. I made a New Year's Resolution that I needed to make a change in my life. In January, I saw a flyer for Feast of Crispian. I emailed Nancy Smith-Watson about joining the program and she responded to me in moments. So, I signed up for a weekend intensive. I went not sure what would happen. When I entered the room, there were 20 men in the room and I was the only woman. I stood by the wall for a time, but when another woman showed up I felt comfortable enough to join the group.

2. Why did you decide to attend a meeting?

Along with my more recent depression, I was struggling with a trauma that happened several years earlier. Just before 9/11, my daughter was beaten to death by her father who had also been struggling with a depressive disorder. Even during my depressive episodes, I knew I had to live because she couldn't.

3. Tell me about your experience with the circles at the beginning and end?

Nancy and Bill asked simple questions to get us talking. When they asked about the landscape of my childhood I told them I grew up across from a Christmas tree park. I thought that giving a feeling in my body a color was a little weird, but I can do it easily now. The circle felt like a safe place and I came to see I could trust the people in it. The circle was actually the first place I told about being raped in the service.

4. Tell me about your experience with the walking exercises.

It was difficult because how often are you asked to do that. It was terrifying whether it was male or female. It was awkward because someone is looking at you trying to find out your pain. You felt very naked. Now, if I do the exercise is someone I know it is easier, but I do not think I would feel very comfortable with any stranger.

5. Tell me about your first experience doing a scene.

At Feast of Crispian, the first scene you usually do is the tent scene from *Julius Caesar*. It is an intense scene where they are fighting. I am not a person who easily gives into anger. So, it was an interesting scene to explore. The scenes also brought up problems I had trouble expressing. I did a scene from *Othello* between Desdemona and Emilia with another female veteran and some of the questions about marital abuse really punched me in the chest. I had been in therapy for over a decade and it never worked for me. But with these scenes, it brought things up that I could not even contextualize. Now, when I go to therapy I know what to discuss because of the scenes.

6. Is there any particular Shakespeare play or scene that speaks to you? Why or why not?

As stated above, the scene in *Othello* with Desdemona and Emilia deeply affected me. But what I believe matters more, are the plays that come out of our program. We create our own plays that are built from what we discover doing scenes. We did a play showcase last year that was a series of scenes based on different problems. The show was called "And Come Safe Home." One scene was about rape, and one was directly inspired by the death of my child. It was an incredible moment to speak about

the death of my child and have the audience in tears with me. It was a very cathartic moment for me.

7. When did you serve?

I served in the Army from 1999 to 2003.

8. How much Shakespeare background did you have?

Very little. I read *Romeo and Juliet* in high school and saw the movie version with Leonardo DiCaprio. However, it was very difficult to understand and I was not interested in exposing myself to it any further.

9. Why do you believe Shakespeare works for your program?

Shakespeare is still relevant today, his plays include themes of rape and death and their aftermaths. Shakespeare was one of the first to write characters with clear PTSD. When you speak the metaphor, you have to think about what you actually mean. In this character, you feel safe and it is incredible to speak these words.

10. What do Nancy and Bill do that gives you the best results?

Nancy and Bill take the time to listen. They surround you in this bubble of safety and don't hide the fact that they do not and cannot understand war, but they always let us know they are there for us. When you do these plays, people are so excited to see you, you see that you are welcomed here.

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