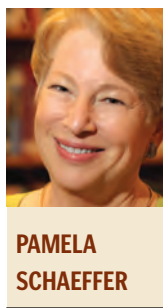


WAR AND US

The journey toward this issue of *Health Progress* — and it truly was a personal journey — began last October at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, where I attended the third annual Ruth M. McGinley Symposium on social justice for vulnerable populations. The event coincided with a stream of news reports about a spike in suicides among U.S. veterans, so my interest was particularly keen. It was piqued all the more when at least two of the speakers referred to a book by Edward Tick, Ph.D., called *War and the Soul*, which sets war and its psychological aftermath in an archetypal, or mythical, framework. This concept intrigued me, so after returning home, I ordered and read Tick's book, and invited him, along with Sr. Rosemary Donley, SC, the symposium's organizer, to write for this issue.



PAMELA
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Rarely have I been so moved by a book and so inclined to want to share it. Tick's stories and conclusions, drawn from decades of working with veterans, made me understand in a far deeper way the causes of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and how inept we, as a society, have been in supporting those who have fought wars in our name. That concept alone — fought in our name — brought me up short. I realized how I take national security for granted, yet am conflicted about war, which I generally, but rather vaguely and passively, oppose. This unexamined stance has led me, I realized, to distance myself not only from war itself, but from the men and women who have served our country, its government and citizens, and therefore me and my family, quite apart from whether I believed U.S. participation to be right or just. This distancing was perhaps easier because I have had little personal contact with veterans in my adult years.

Without shaming anyone, Tick makes it agonizingly clear how heavy the emotional, psychological and spiritual burdens of our vets can be and how alone they often feel in their pain. I was instructed by his deep regard for veterans, as well as by his reflections on the mythic dimensions of war. I learned, too, that young men and women who are attracted to joining the armed forces may be longing for a rite of passage, a hoped-for transformation to mature adulthood that, under terms of modern warfare, is likely to fail.

Through his extensive work with vets and their families, Tick has come to believe that PTSD is mischaracterized as a response to war's trauma. Rather, he writes convincingly, it should be understood as an identity disorder and a deep wounding of the soul, whose healing requires love, compassion, meaning-making and forgiveness, including self-forgiveness.

"Every soldier is Odysseus, in that the soldier's journey home from war is always long and complicated; his body often arrives long before his mind readjusts," Tick writes in the section of his book titled "War, Trauma, and Soul." The soldier's task is to make peace with the missing and the dead: those with whom — whether enemy or comrade — he or she may have shared a profound and unforgettable intimacy, Tick writes.

Tick also calls us to recognize our own complicity in the horrors modern warfare inflicts on our soldiers. "They come home stumbling out of hell. But we don't see them as they have become. Instead, we offer them beer and turkey dinners, debriefing and an occasional parade The severity and extent to which veterans suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder is in direct response to our culture's blindness about war's true cost."

What veterans need, he and other experts tell us, is to be restored to their communities. They need space to tell their stories, listeners who reverence their experiences and their memories, and rituals that help to mitigate their pain and remove their stain. In the manner of members of traditional cultures, who felt a deeply personal connection to their warriors, modern societies need to bring veterans home by helping them transfer responsibility for the killing and destruction to those in whose name they acted. They, and we, Tick assures us, can ultimately find redemption in rebuilding what has been destroyed, in joining with our former enemies to grieve one another's dead, and — in the manner of the veteran St. Francis of Assisi — to work together to sow peace.

In that spirit, we offer the contents of this issue to our readers, first, as members of the Catholic health care community with considerable resources for serving this vulnerable population, and second, as fellow citizens of a world that longs for peace. We think you will find in our articles and suggested references abundant material to ponder and use.

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