



**The  
Wretch  
in the  
Mirror**

**looks like me**

**by  
Reggie Davis**

**The Wretch  
In The  
Mirror**

*Looks Like Me*

*By Reginald L Davis*

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# Foreword

## A Mentor

When I first met Reggie over 27 years ago, his life was a disaster primarily due to his high-risk alcohol abuse. I remember saying he had the desperation of a drowning rat, trapped on the Titanic. I agreed to be his mentor because I believed he had a sincere desire to change his life. Not only did he change his life for the better but he has positively influenced the minds of thousands of young people by first touching their hearts.

In this book he briefly shares some of the preventable tragedies he not only witnessed as a paramedic, but also experienced in his personal life. I have watched him transform himself from a state of hopeless desperation to a truly amazing example of the power of grace. During the past 27 years of his recovery he has been passionately committed to helping others. His current priority is to help college students and military warriors avoid or minimize the types of trouble he **learned first hand**. Reggie has spoken to and facilitated prevention training for thousands of young people. He's shared with hundreds more of those incarcerated or in the midst of some kind of alcohol/ drug related trouble. Many of them would contact him later with stories of successfully returning to society.

At his retirement from the USAF Reserve I watched him receive a medal for helping reduce the military bases' DUI rate by 50 percent over a two-year period. He asked me to serve as best man when his wife and he renewed their 20-year vows of a once troubled marriage. My family has witnessed the amazing musical talents of his son and daughter, both promising artistic college students. Reggie is a great motivational speaker who feels no shame in sharing his personal real life nightmare if he believes it will convince one young person to think twice about their high-risk choices.

I don't have the words to express how privileged I feel to be called a friend and mentor by Reggie. He rose to the rank of Chief Master Sergeant (E-9), the highest rank an enlisted warrior can achieve. As a Paramedic supervisor he continues to assist in saving lives and reduce suffering.

I believe with this book and his commitment to sharing his life's story, he will no doubt help save many more lives before his journey is complete.

**Christopher Gadsden**

Military (ret), Police Officer (ret), Mentor and Friend

## Preface

Reading the following heart breaking statistics was my primary motivation for writing this book; over 35 college students die each week from alcohol related incidents and a military warrior commits suicide every 36 hours - National Institutes of Health and Department of Defense.

As a Paramedic for 30 years I came to realize I had only truly saved several at risk lives as a hands on life saver and possibly hundreds more as a DUI Intervention Educator. The real potential of saving thousands more by sharing my story of 'The Wretch In The Mirror' gave me the courage to pass on the personal lessons I learned in The School of Hard Knocks.

The 'Wretch in the Mirror' is based on my EMS and military careers of helping others while learning to deal with my own hurts, habits, and hang-ups. I share several stories of walking through the real life nightmares of my patients and my own. What I discovered was significant positive behavior changes are enhanced through increased targeting of the affective learning domain. In other words, often the most effective way to reach their heads is through their hearts.

This book is dedicated to all those who lost their lives battling their own hurts, habits, and hang-ups. I consider myself a survivor who benefited from their struggles as well as my own. I have learned that generational curses can be suppressed, if not cured.

For, there is always a better choice in life, even when we are unable or unwilling to make it. I would like to thank my wife Lillie, son Daniel, and daughter Faith Lyn for their support. I also, thank those who allowed me to share some of their stories that are a part of my own. I give special thanks to my editor, Mrs. Amanda Lanphere and reviewer B. Hallman.

"If you inspire people to change their hearts, they can change their minds." - Reggie Davis.

## **Who Am I?**

I am the only son of two alcoholic parents, one functional and one not so functional. At age 7 my biological mother abandoned my older sister and me. She was not so functional and prone to periods of abuse and neglect. I always loved my mother because I understood she was too ill to do the right thing. At age 22 I learned she had died of the complications that came with her life style. When my sister was dying I forgave her for abandoning me for drugs and the streets when we were growing up. At my father's funeral, I thanked him for saving my life because he was functional enough to provide a stable environment for me in my youth.

## **We cannot escape our heredity**



**Like our shadow, it is always with us**





## **Drugs and Alcohol don't mix**

Around age 10, I witnessed a horrific accident involving an intoxicated jaywalker who staggered in front of a speeding motorcycle. Drugs also impaired the motorcyclist during his fatal encounter with the intoxicated pedestrian.

I ran to the scene with the other curious onlookers and watched in horror, as the ambulance medics seemed to be knee deep in the blood of both victims.

When it was over, the other young spectators at this fatal accident went back to talking, laughing and playing. As for me, I was so disturbed by what I had witnessed, I ran home and crawled into my bed, but my blood-filled nightmares would not let me sleep.



**Welcome to my bloody nightmare**



Still traumatized and consumed with fear, I swore to myself I would never ever have anything to do with badly injured people. Even after many years, I still think about that day. Ironically, for 30 years I have worked as a true creature of the night- one whose calling is to walk through the bloody real nightmares of others. I am an Emergency Medical Technician (A Paramedic)!



## **My First Drink**

I drank abusively the very first time I drank and every time thereafter. Sometimes I indulged in recreational drugs like marijuana, but my first and true love was alcohol.

My stepmother, with the best of intentions, had arranged for me to be part of the school integration busing initiatives that took minority students like me into predominantly white neighborhoods like Bensonherst, Brooklyn.

When I reached **middle** school I had to rely on the public transit system of buses and trains. This created a twofold problem for me. First, not being in a street gang, I was often chased, harassed and even robbed at gunpoint by gang members. This was because I had to travel through their turf in order to catch the trains and buses to Bensonherst.



## **New Utrecht High School**

Secondly, many of the whites in Bensonhurst resented integration and some took it out on the minority students caught in the middle. It did not bother me as much being called the 'N' word several times a day, but being spit on and physically assaulted was difficult to deal with. Often minority students who dared fight back would have guns drawn on them by the police. In a case of mistaken identity, I once had an officer stick his gun in my back and remove me from the train, to be interrogated.

By the time I turned 18 I was failing my senior year of high school and no longer cared. I resented my school experience and the neighborhood I grew up in. I was getting very depressed with how my life was going. The only peace and escape came from a bottle or drugs. Soon they did not work anymore, and I found myself a depressed drop out in search of a solution in a bottle.



**Keep your hands up**



## **My First Car**

My father made a deal with me that he would buy me a car if I would go down south to live with my aunt and finish high school.



## **I worked on a roller coaster and in a mall candy store**

I had always enjoyed going south for the summer because I could work for my own money and hangout with my family.

Once in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, I was re-motivated and focused on finishing school. I had two great part-time jobs, one at a new mall and the other on a roller coaster. I still drank excessively on occasion, but my jobs and school kept me occupied with limited free time.



School was surprisingly different, having been taught that southerners were more racist than northerners. That was not the case for me, based on my personal experience. Several years later I remember reading a national news story about a young man murdered in Bensonhurst by an angry mob, because of his race. The fact that I was no longer out numbered 20 to 1 seemed to play a major role in limited acts of overt racism.

My senior year in high school I planned to sign up for an auto mechanics vocational course, mainly to impress my father who was a very good shade tree mechanic.



**The Funeral Of Yusuf Hawkins**



## **Health Occupation Class**

A friend told me I should sign up for the Health Occupations course instead. I asked him what Health Occupations was all about, but he did not know. He only knew it was full of the opposite sex, so I signed up.

I was one of two males in the Health Occupations course and we had a great time.

I thoroughly enjoyed the course, not because of all the girls, but because I had found a career field I really enjoyed - health care. After high school, a cousin and I applied to be janitors at a neighboring town hospital. They hired my cousin as a janitor and me as an orderly in the (ER) emergency room because of my high school health occupations course.

I thought it was a pretty cool job compared to mopping floors, until a patient walked in covered in blood reaching out to me asking for help. I ran and told the nurse someone was bleeding to death in the waiting room and I didn't think I could handle the job. I wanted to quit.





The nurse was very kind and patient. She asked me not to leave as I watched her wipe all the blood away to reveal a very small cut to the patient's forehead. I even helped the doctor sew up the wound by passing the instruments to him as he sutured the wound closed.

The first time I saw a patient brought in and the paramedics were administering CPR, I refused to take over the chest compressions. I was afraid to touch someone who appeared dead to me.

My next shift I was waiting at the ambulance back door entrance for my turn to do some chest compressions. When the opportunity finally came I remember telling the doctor, "I'm doing my very best, but I still keep feeling the patient's ribs breaking." The doctor told me, "Don't worry about it. Ribs sometimes break, even when we do CPR correctly."



As I was wheeling the body to the morgue, I thought to myself how strange it was that sometimes the practice of medicine harms people, in order to help them.



As I gained more experience as an ER orderly I started to befriend and admire the EMS paramedics. Many of them seemed to have a great deal of confidence and pride, sometimes bordering on arrogance. They seemed to know that most people could not do what they did for a profession. I signed up for an evening Basic EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) course while attending college during the day.

I completed my basic EMT course but ran out of money for college and decided to enlist in the U.S. Air Force. Because of my limited medical background, I was given a bypass test during basic training. This allowed me to skip the technical school for Medics in exchange for on the job training at Wilford Hall Medical Center.

I worked 6 months on the hospital's orthopedic ward before being transferred to the ER for the remainder of my 4 years on active duty. During those 4 years working in the Air Force's largest medical facility and first trauma center, I became part of an elite group of emergency care medics. We worked busy twelve-hour shifts where I mastered such skills as inserting IV needles, reading EKG's, medication administration and suturing wounds.





It did not take long before I joined in with the crowd that played as hard as they worked. I drank abusively on my days off and sometimes on my days on, even at work on occasions. I was always attracted to those coworkers making high-risk choices, like myself. Often they included my immediate supervisors, friends in law enforcement and anyone else who could keep up with us.



Trouble came in the form of disciplinary write-ups for fighting in bars, not showing up for duty (AWOL), damaging government property, disrespecting superiors and several other infractions that would end your career on the spot in today's military.



**In Trouble Again**



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

OFFICE OF THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL

17 JAN 1952  
Rear Judge Advocate

1952  
See 0047110  
7 JAN 1952

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From: Commander, Naval Logistics Group 1  
To: Lieutenant Commander Walter Francis Fitzpatrick, USN,  
101-30-4482/1140

Subject: ACTS OF DISHONOR

Re: 1st Award of Total Dis-honored Status to LCDR Walter  
Francis Fitzpatrick  
101-30-4482  
101-30-4482

1. Reference is to a record of proceedings of your special court-martial that took place on 3 April through 5 April 1950, at Naval Legal Service Office, Naval Station Treasure Island, San Francisco, California. After appropriate consideration of all pertinent facts your case, a panel of members determined that you were guilty of violating Article 37 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, specifically, being derelict in the performance of your duties regarding the administration and expenditure of Navy, Welfare and Recreation Funds.

2. As reflected by reference (a), on 15 July 1950, you signed a check out of Navy, Welfare and Recreation Funds for the sum of \$7,000.00. This check was for you for a trip to Hawaii. The purpose of this trip was to attend an Officers' Ball. You failed to justify your source of funding by stating that the purpose of the trip was to attend a Navy, Welfare and Recreation Ball. If you had done so, your trip would have been authorized.

3. As further reflected by reference (a), in August 1950, you made several purchases of electronic equipment from credit trip out of Navy, Welfare and Recreation Funds. A large portion of the expenditures, \$2,000.00, was for two color televisions, two General Electric, and two other electronic equipment which were appropriated for your pleasure and that of the commanding officer. You were warned before, both before and after the purchase, of the impropriety of this purchase.

4. As reflected above, your judgment fell far below that which is expected of a naval officer, particularly that expected of an Executive Officer. Your actions show the high level of trust and responsibility that was bestowed upon you by the United States Naval Service. In accordance with references (a), (b) and (c), you are hereby reprimanded.

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## I can't remember how many disciplinary letters I received

I overslept one morning, and when my supervisor called and woke me, with a severe hang over, I replied by saying, "Hell no, I'm not coming to work". The next morning I was standing at attention in front of my commanding officer again explaining that I did not remember refusing to come to work. I had already been threatened with a demotion in rank the next time I got into trouble. They let me keep my stripe and gave me my first Article 15.



## *Article 15*

YES

NO

**You have proven yourself a disgrace to the  
Uniform**

Article 15

The Article 15 is a harsher form of military discipline compared to those disciplinary letters of reprimand I received. I earned more than my share of Article 15's.

Article 15, of the Uniform code of Military Justice (UCMJ), and Part V of the Manual for Courts-Martial, constitute the basic law concerning nonjudicial punishment procedures.

**Heads we throw him out today**



**Tails we throw him out next week**

**After we torture him**

**High risk drinking starts out as fun,**



**But frequently ends in some form of trouble**



## **Broke my hand fighting at the club**

I was a very effective and productive worker when fit for duty, but I was probably never 100% fit most of my active duty career. I completed a paramedic course and several college courses before my drinking compromised any additional formal educational opportunities. Once I broke my hand fighting and had to drop out of college.

I went from a teenager who avoided street gangs and violence to a pistol packing, outlaw type, frequently getting into altercations while under the influence.

During the last year of my enlistment the commander advised me that my next incident would be my last in the military. Shortly after that warning, I was called in by the new commander who was ready to throw me out of the military without any additional provocation.



**My cop friends carried guns, so I did too**



## **Chief Master Sergeant Stripes**

Even though disappointed with his decision, I knew I had made more than enough high-risk choices to deserve not only a discharge, but potential incarceration as well.

Fate intervened when I was given a reprieve by a Chief Master Sergeant who saw something in me I had yet to see in myself. He had a closed door meeting with the new commander and somehow persuaded him to give me one last chance.



**I finished my active duty enlistment and joined the Air Force Reserves while simultaneously starting my primary civilian career as an EMS Paramedic.**



**Flying High**



## **Dark Glasses only hide the truth**

Like most 911 medics I have walked through hundreds of real nightmares belonging to the patients I have cared for. I believe there is a real lifesaving value in warning others of the cost of high-risk behavior. I will share several of those real life nightmares at the end of this book. They have stayed with me through the years.

I never felt like I drank too much because of the tragedies I dealt with in my profession, but because I loved the effects it had on my mind, body and soul.

After relocating to Charleston, SC it took me less than two years of high-risk choices to nearly destroy my marriage, both careers (EMS & Reserves) and my health.

Most of my trouble was with the same issues I thought I had left on active duty, like missing days at work, marital problems and not being fit for military reserve duty.



**There was never enough but always too much**



## **I could no longer drink enough to do it**

In the end my self induced problems and emotional pain brought me to the shipwreck of my soul, often referred to as "hitting one's bottom."

On the verge of termination from my employment and separated from my wife, I found myself in a deep state of depression. I prayed for God to give me the strength to pull the trigger of the gun to my head and free me from the pain of living.

Fortunately I could no longer drink enough to get to the state of mind I needed to pull the trigger. I had damaged my internal organs to the point of experiencing severe abdominal pain and vomiting blood before reaching that self-destructive blood alcohol level.

## **Too sick to drink**



## **Too sick not to drink**



## **Surrender or die**

I remember an agonizing night as I wrestled with my inner demons. Suddenly my inner voice clearly told me what it was I had to do. I felt like the Grim Reaper himself had given me an ultimatum, surrender or die.

Hopeless desperation led me to the door of recovery and there was no doubt in my mind, body, and soul that I was down to my last two options-live sober or die trying.

In time I found myself surrounded by a group of concerned strangers who offered me a form of unconditional love I had never known.



**Here comes the sun**



## **‘To Thine Own Self Be True’**

They persuaded me to look in the mirror of my soul and see myself for the undeniable wretch I had become. The reflection in the mirror asked my forgiveness for what I had done to his life. I forgave him. I promised him from that day forward I would never place the love of any person, thing or substance above my love for him.



Recovery is not easy. It required a level of honesty, trust, and commitment that many struggle with for a lifetime. I was blessed to find a mentor who was willing to help walk me back from the edge of destruction. He knew the way because someone had done the same for him.

Ironically his profession was law enforcement. I had avoided several DUI charges and arrests for other high-risk behavior only because of my friends in law enforcement. Of course, I always thanked whoever enabled me by going out and getting in more trouble.



**They always let me go but I never got away**



## **Smiling again**

I wasn't sure if I liked him at first because he always told people what they needed to hear instead of what they wanted to hear. I quickly realized how much I needed him because I could not manipulate, fool or BS him. He was in the military and knew exactly who and what I was, because he had already lived his own real nightmare.



**The Cop Who Would Not Let Me Go**  
**My mentor hugs me at my retirement**



## **Renewing 20 year vows with my best friend**

I began making amends by being early for work, always fit for duty, and volunteering for tasks above and beyond the call of duty. My wife returned and even though it took several more years, we developed a trust and respect that sustains us to this day.

## Promoted to EMS Supervisor



My Wife and children pinning on my EMS Captain Bars.

I began receiving awards, recognitions and promotions in my civilian career. I advanced to the position of Shift Supervisor, responsible for field operations in a major 911 EMS system during my shift.



**EMS Supervisor Response Vehicle**

## **The Highest Honor of My Career**



### **I wore them with honor and humility**

Unbelievably, I was promoted to the rank of Chief Master Sergeant (E-9) in the 16<sup>th</sup> year of my military reserve career - the highest rank an enlisted person can achieve.

Regrettably, I was never able to personally thank the E-9 who saved my early military career. I have tried to honor him and all those who showed me grace by becoming the best role model and mentor I could be. I devoted the majority of my remaining military career to working in the field of prevention and intervention with young and at-risk military personnel.

I have briefed, educated and shared my personal real life nightmare with thousands of young people/warriors, especially those already in trouble, treatment and prison. I hope to show them that the choice is up to them on how their nightmare will end.



**Chief Davis points to the most important people in the room, the newest warriors!**





## **My son, the Internet SUPERSTAR**

My first career choice was to be a performing artist (A Superstar), but I had one little problem, no talent. In my youth, I dreamed of becoming a famous singer and gifted musician, but I was unwilling to pay the price it would cost to succeed at what I wanted. Today I am a proud father of not one, but two amazing prodigies. My son, Violinist Daniel D, is a unique contemporary artist who plays all genres of music from Classical to Hip-Hop, on his violin.

My daughter, (Guitarist/Singer/Song-Writer) Faith Lyn has a unique style of music and a special way of inspiring her audiences through her performances. Faith and her brother have developed the discipline to maximize their talents as they continue to grow in character.



**My Daughter, Guitarist/Singer/Song-Writer**



I believe that some of us are blessed with special gifts for a purpose only the Creator knows, and that most of us can achieve success if we are willing to pay the required price. When life's experiences compelled me to change my attitude, I became willing to pay that price and learned to embrace the greater purpose for my life.

Along my life's journey God has given me everything I ever dreamed of, and more than I ever deserved. These blessings include my wife, who is my best friend, several successful careers and being the number one fan of two gifted musical artists willing to pay the price I could not.



**The amazing light of grace  
led me to the shore of **recovery****

No, I was not born to be a gifted musical artist, but predestined to be a fallen soul, saved by grace, for the purpose of helping those whose dreams have become nightmares.

Reginald Lee Davis,  
Humbly honored servant of humanity

## **The Stories**



## **The Crash**

When I had been a paramedic for about 7 years, we responded on a call for an assault with a knife. The first responders on the scene did not feel like it was a big deal because the patient was sitting up and appeared to be only stabbed in the arm.

I walked in the room where the patient was located and noticed right away something was very wrong. The patient appeared to be going into shock and was having some minor breathing problems. I looked at the wound in his upper arm and noticed there was very little bleeding.

Still, my gut feeling, what we call clinical judgment in the medical field, told me something else was wrong.

As I lifted the patient's arm to see if the knife blade went completely through his arm, I discovered it went into his chest also. That is why he was going into shock, and we took on a new sense of urgency.

I also noticed the patient was impaired by alcohol, which always complicates the care of trauma patients.

We quickly loaded him in the EMS unit and my partner started giving us that fast ride to the trauma center that drugs and alcohol abuse often lead to.

As I was attempting to start an IV on the patient, I went airborne for a second as the EMS unit crashed into a drunk driver who ran a red light.

I quickly opened my eyes and realized my head, neck and back was slightly injured. I checked on the patient and my partner checked on the drunk driver.

Years later I would require neck surgery contributed to by the crash.

The critical patient did not die, but his care was delayed. I was transported to the hospital and the driver was charged with DUI.

The trouble we all experienced that night was the result of high-risk choices made by both parties.



## **To Lose A Family**

One day my EMS coworkers and I were lounging around the station experiencing one of those slow shifts you come to appreciate now and then.

We were dispatched on a call for an auto-ped (victim hit by car) not far from our station. On arrival I noticed an adult female lying motionless in the middle of the road. As I arrived at her side I realized she had several injuries, including an open head wound exposing some of her brain tissue.

Near her was a small child also lying motionless. The child looked to be approximately the same age as my son, who was two years old at that time.

As I rolled the child over to check for breathing, I noticed the child's skull was crushed in several locations, and I suspected a broken neck.

I told my partner we could only try and save the child because the adult victim had no signs of life and additional help was far away.



I called for a medical helicopter and placed the child in the ambulance while attempting to resuscitate him. After a closer exam and speaking to the trauma center, we realized there was no hope for saving the child.

I canceled the helicopter and made sure the coroner and EMS supervisor were en route to the scene.

As I sat in the back of the ambulance with the child's body I could not help but notice how much he looked like my son. I began crying uncontrollably, as I was imagining how I would feel if this was my family. I dried my face and pulled myself together before anyone noticed. It seemed to take a long time before my supervisor and the coroner arrived.

The EMS supervisor opened the back door of the ambulance and asked me if I was alright. I said yes. He closed the door until the coroner arrived.

When I got off work and arrived home the next morning my son met me at the door. I picked him up and held him too tight for too long, as he soon became agitated and wanted to be put down.

It took some time to deal with that incident because every time I looked at my son I saw the scene again. This was very early in my career when the rule was 'suck it up' and carry on. Years later when I first heard PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) described, I finally realized why I felt that way, back then.



## **I See A Cross on the Side of the Road**

My ambulance was one of several responding to a major high speed Boating Under the Influence accident involving several college students. When I arrived at my patient's mangled body it was obvious his injuries were life threatening. As I tried to reduce his severe bleeding and keep his internal organs from spilling out of his body, he regained consciousness for a moment and asked me if he was going to die. This caught me off guard but I replied by saying "I am doing everything I can not to let that happen". You see, that is what we are trained to say. Unfortunately, my eyes could not hide the truth of how hopeless I felt for him. This was the first time I cried for a dying patient.

## Those Left To Suffer



When I first started acting as Shift Supervisor, responsible for all the EMS units during my shift, my greatest fear was making any decision that would adversely affect the public or my coworkers.

One of the first major scenes I responded to as an acting supervisor involved the suicide death of the son of one of my coworkers who was also a good friend. I responded to the auto accident scene and witnessed the EMS crew working aggressively to revive him until they discovered he also had a fatal self-inflicted injury. I told the medics to continue trying to revive him until I spoke to a trauma doctor who agreed that his injuries were fatal and gave us permission to stop. It was after the call when the ambulance crew and I learned the victim was the son of one of our favorite coworkers. Shortly thereafter my boss called me and told me to go to my friend's home and tell her and her husband their son was dead.

Witnessing their inconsolable emotional pain forever convinced me that one's individual choices can devastate the lives of countless others. Even though the EMS crew and I knew we had done what we would have done for any patient in the same condition, we still felt like we should have done more.

This call troubled the EMS crew and me for a long time. I believe it helped contribute to one of the responders leaving our system.

I was fortunate to have a personal conversation with my friend and coworker several years later. She shared with me the memories of her son and her dealing with his death. She knew there was nothing we could have done differently to change the outcome. Somehow, on that fatal night, her words freed me of any guilt or second-guessing about our decisions.

**In The Name of Love**



While having breakfast near a shopping area, my partner and I noticed a police car at a nearby store. Suddenly our radio went off advising us of a double shooting at the same location.

As we drove across the parking lot I noticed one victim lying on the sidewalk. I stopped long enough to notice he was still breathing and proceeded on to check the second victim. The second victim had an obvious fatal head wound and would be a poor candidate for resuscitation efforts without additional help. I grabbed a pregnant first responder to help me in the back of the EMS unit as I took the first patient to the hospital. The patient survived for a while before also dying. I later learned the incident involved a domestic murder-suicide that left a young child parentless. This was another one of those calls that took me a while to get out of my head. I could not stop thinking how unfair life can be, especially for a child.



## **I Watched Them Take Their Last Breath**

During the first two years of my civilian EMS career I continued to drink high risk. I had grown accustomed to seeing bad things happen to good people because of their choices. I found victims who hung themselves; others still clinching guns with half of their head blown off; motorcycle accident victims in several pieces and parts. Most of the bad things I saw involved alcohol and drugs. Still somehow I convinced myself that I was not like the people who were making the same high- risk choices I was making.

Early one morning around 5:00 am, I crawled into an overturned car soaked in blood, gasoline and alcohol, to witness three active duty military members take their last breaths, before the fire-rescue personnel could cut them out of the mangled wreck. At 7:00 am I got off work and had my first drink of the day.

My only thought of that morning's tragic episode was how that kind of unlucky accident would never happen to someone like me.



## **The Absolute Truth**

One night my EMS unit responded to a local college dorm to find a student turning blue and not breathing. I asked the other obviously intoxicated individuals present what happened to the patient.

They said they were having some drinks but would not share any additional information out of consequences for underage drinking. We had to insert a breathing tube into the patient's wind pipe before giving them that fast ride to the Emergency Room. As soon as we got the patient into the emergency room we were dispatched on a call back to the same dorm for another unconscious patient.

The second patient was also found in a life threatening condition. As I started to treat him I demanded the last intoxicated individual tell me the whole truth to help us better care for his friends. He admitted they were playing a drinking game using 190 proof alcohol.

The last student was still conscious and alert but I insisted that they go to the hospital also. I feared there might not be anyone around or willing to call for help if they became ill later. It was my hopes that those near death experiences would make it forever clear how easy high-risk fun can turn into tragedy.



## **To Troop**

I was called to active duty for Desert Storm. Part of my unit was deployed to Europe. As a flight medic, I got to fly all around Europe to places like Italy, France and Germany all in the same day. I flew on several long-range flights bringing our wounded warriors from Germany to the United States. I remember seeing soldiers burned so badly you could not tell if they were black or white; however, the conflict was limited and resolved quicker than expected. This led to lots of down time in Europe. Several of my activated reserve unit members had family members stationed in Europe. One of our young top troops had a father who was a Chief Master Sergeant. On one of our weekends off, he took us to his father's military base. His parents treated us like family and made us forget how far away from home we were, for a little while.

Occasionally we would play card games to pass the time. The other warriors would drink alcohol, but I had been sober for about six years at that time. I watched one of our unit's top troops drink everyone under the table several times during the card games. I felt like I



was looking in the mirror when I looked at him and his potential for success or destruction. One night, when it was only he and I still sitting at the table, I told him he was going to have some serious problems in the future if he did not change his ways. He assured me that was not going to happen to him because he had everything under control.

After we returned home from Desert Storm he had some problems that led to him committing suicide. Like many others in his reserve unit family who loved him, I felt the guilt of feeling like I should have done more.

When I became a Chief Master Sergeant I tried to make sure the troops I was responsible for were held accountable for their high-risk behaviors. They knew I loved them and would stand up for them, but sometimes love has to be tough to save those you love.



## **Losing My Humanity**

One night during my shift as an EMS Supervisor a car pulled out in front of one of my system's ambulances. The ambulance was en route to an emergency when an automobile with several passengers pulled in front of the EMS unit. While I was on the way to the accident the dispatcher advised me there were possibly three fatalities as a result of the wreck. This terrified me because I knew there were three individuals on the EMS unit that night.

As I arrived on scene I was comforted with seeing two medics standing near the unit. I was very relieved to see the third individual on the EMS unit alive also. For several days I could not get the crash scene out of my head and began to be troubled by the thoughts.

The truth is, I have learned to deal with seeing lots of death and horrific injuries. It was not the loss of life I saw that night that bothered me; it was the fact that it did not bother me. I was troubled by the fact that I was so glad to see my coworkers alive that I had no remorse for the lives lost. This fact continued to haunt me for days as I wondered if I had lost all my compassion for humanity, or if I was losing my mind.

Fortunately I participated in my first official CISD, Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, shortly after the incident. The purpose of a CISD is not to find blame but understanding and acceptance. Present at this debriefing was a facilitator whose EMS system had

experienced a similar tragedy. We were each given the opportunity to share our thoughts and feelings.

When our EMS Medical Director (physicians who are responsible for EMS workers' medical care) became very emotional and shared how he felt the same way I did. His words gave me instant peace of mind because he was a brilliant man of high character, integrity, and compassion.

So if he was experiencing the same feelings, then maybe I was not losing my humanity, but only having the same reaction as others who do what we do.

As I left the debriefing, I thought to myself, "Well if I am losing my mind, at least I am in outstanding company. "



## So We Meet Again

During my past ten-year commitment to spreading the message of prevention, something became very clear to me. Some people will still stick their hand in the flames of trouble even after you show them the burnt scar tissue of your soul.

Occasionally when I visit a military prison to support some of the warriors whose crimes involved alcohol and drugs, a new inmate will call my name out having first met in an earlier prevention setting. That's ok with me because they seem to listen more attentively the second time we meet.

I have whispered in the ears of unconscious, drug overdosed, and badly injured patients, simply reminding them that we have met before and I am here for them. This group frequently develops a sincere appreciation for intervention help after they realize they have become '**that guy**'.

On several occasions I have taken care of coworkers in the emergency services field who have attempted suicide after excessive abuse of alcohol and/or drugs.

Once I helped carry a lifeless body to one of the waiting EMS units, all the time remembering I had recently seen this young face in a classroom I spoke at.

A man of faith and a good friend of mine caught me by surprise when he was responsible for a felony DUI auto accident I was initially responding to before being diverted to another emergency. There is no discrimination in The School of Hard Knocks; anyone can enroll, no matter what age, race, sex, economic status, position or title.



## **Our Freedom**



**Has always come at the sacrifice of those willing to give  
up their' tomorrows**

*I hope I have used my life to earn what they have given for  
me*

**The real skill to managing the fires of life is**



**Knowing at what point to stop spraying the flames and  
pull the alarm for help.**

## **Drugs and medication abuse always**



**Come with hidden prices we never intended to pay.**

**The consumption of alcohol is not the problem**



**The problem is who, when, why, where, and how.**





**Invisible wounds are difficult to see**

## **The greatest Challenge**



**Is treating the greater number of internal injuries along with the external injuries**



**Even though I served 29 years in the reserve, including 5 years of active duty, I didn't consider myself as one who truly experienced war on the frontline.**

**However, many war veterans have described war as Hell.**

**I've been to Hell.**

**War never ends;**



**Only the battlefield changes**

## **Our high-risk choices**



**Not only have a monetary cost  
but  
rob us of precious time we  
can never replace**

**Chief Davis points to the most important people in the room during his retirement.**

**The Newest Troops!**



**“They don’t care how much you know,  
Until they know how much you care”**

(Teddy Roosevelt, Cavett Robert and John C Maxwell)

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## The Heart Breaking Facts

85 college students die each week from alcohol related incidents. 1 military member commits suicide every 36 hours. The National Institutes of Health and Department of Defense.

"Wretch in the Mirror" is based on my 30 year history of helping others while having to deal with my own hurts, pain, and hang-ups. This book and 'Music with a Message' live presentation are a tool of motivatin greater buy-in of present (evidence based) life saving risk reduction initiatives.

Our "Music with a Message" concept has demonstrated the potential value of using music, humor, and other endorphin stimulator's, to lay the foundation for the targeted audience's (cognitive-affective) buy-in of lifesaving risk reduction initiatives. contact info: [ddpromusic@yahoo.com](mailto:ddpromusic@yahoo.com)