

There has been and always will be important people who do great things. I am not one of them. When I was asked to speak at this honorable event, I did not know that this wall was in existence. I must say that I am thankful to the people that have made this memorial possible, and to those that have worked so hard to make today's events happen. Were it not for their combined efforts we would not be here today in remembrance of the Global War on Terrorism's fallen, its veterans, and to raise awareness for the brothers and sisters that decide to take their own lives for conditions directly related to service. This is my generation's war, and like those before us, we bare scars.

We have answered the bugle's call over and over, and for many of us a few more times over. What's more we have been engaged in combat for a longer period of time than any generation of Americans before us. There has been no draft, and there will be no draft. Consequently that means numerous deployments for those that stay in service. Now, in an area like Lassen County it is not lost upon us that our brothers and sisters are still at war. Though, I would venture to say that there are many places in this nation where the ongoing war is an afterthought. While Americans continue to fight, we seem to be obsessed over pop culture's mindless celebrities, and the many other distractions that keep our heads buried in the proverbial sand. I personally believe that this is due in large part to the fact that less than 1% of us have served in these wars. To me, it's a numbers game, and when your group represents such a small number, it easy to forget, shrug us off, or buy us a drink and move on. Most Americans will never leave the safety and security of our shores. Our wars will continue in some way shape or form, more will fall, and even more will carry wounds of varying degrees, both seen and unseen.

My name is Brandon Guitierrez. I am a Marine and Navy Veteran. My service is not impressive, my sacrifice was average, and all of my medals are earned. As a Marine I served with the First Fleet Anti Terrorism Security Team Company. It was my Unit that responded to the USS Cole Bombing in 2000. On 9/11 we were already conducting security operations in the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and on the ground in Aden, Yemen. As everyone now knows, the world was forever changed on that horrible day. What's not so commonly known by the American people is that Units like ours already recognized that these escalations in terror attacks were imminent. I wish I could say that I was shocked when the Towers went down, but I and my Marines were not. This was the world we anticipated, got Intel reports on, and stood ready to confront.

As a Sailor I served as an F/A - 18 Plane Captain with Strike Fighter Squadron 81. In 2004 we deployed to the Gulf aboard the USS John F. Kennedy. For those of you that know your history that was the time when Marines would find themselves in a fight for Fallujah. Our Carrier Air Group assisted in that fight, and as the Marines and Navy do, that fight was won. I am thankful that I was able to do my small very part in the two deployments I was called to serve in. But for me it has never been enough. That notion has been a point of personal shame, and self torture for over a decade.

The guilt I carry for not sacrificing more for my brothers has continued to haunt me. While in service, I've learned of the deaths of several friends and fellow Marines. That news cut me deep, and a part of me died with them. This piece of my spirit will always be dead and buried in the sands and oceans of the Middle East. I think that bravery is something that pundits, politicians, and people of no experience like to talk about. My brothers and sisters don't call service bravery, They are hesitant to accept any accolades form combat service, because all of them have at least one friend who is no longer standing in formation. We call bravery duty, it is managed fear mixed with love. Nothing more, nothing less. People like them are not okay with standing by and letting others fight when the Nation calls. They are not complicit in the collective ignorance and amnesia that many Americans exhibit. That granite like character is what I love most about all of them. Yet, the price that is paid for walking that path is great and torturous. The ultimate sacrifices and dismembering wounds made and felt by thousands of us are the most obvious to the casual onlookers. But the mental aspects of rage, hurt, confusion, and regret are never so obvious. There is a disconnection between average Americans and our Veterans. That's not to say that the families of all Veterans are somehow not invested in the service of their loved one, on the contrary, oftentimes families will saddle themselves with the loss and injuries that our vets must endure. They are a part of us.

In one of the richest nations in the world, I find it disgusting that our combat veterans have such a difficult time receiving the medical care that they have an absolute right to. Why can't we do what is needed to be done in order to heal our warriors? How is it so hard to see that there is another war in America? On a daily basis over 22 American Veterans choose death over life. As I am speaking to you know, there is a man or a woman clutching a pistol, a bottle, a rope, or a handful of pills. He or she is lost in a pit of things like isolation, grief, guilt, and despair. Somehow it seems easier to just check out, because the pain will stop. Don't mistake what I'm saying, by the time I conclude this little talk, the deed will be done, and that veteran will move on into the spirit world, and he or she will leave behind grieving family, friends, and a million questions. Think about that, ponder what's important about your day and its little stressors.

We are in a fight, and that is a fight to save the lives of our warriors. They are the best of all of us. In service they are selfless, considerate, and loving people. They follow orders, march to the sounds of guns and explosions, and hopefully make it home after. We must recognize that they come home with a need for reconciliation. Healing must be our domestic weapon. Rage, guilt, and grief are a part of that process. But getting past that piece of the puzzle is different for all of us. I have swam in the oceans of despair and self hate for a very long time. I searched the bottom of every bottle I could buy or steal in the hopes of finding release from the hell of breathing sweet breath when my friends do not. I have failed more times than I can remember, but somehow I made it, and hopefully I will continue to do so.

My answer was in my culture, and the power of the mountains that surround us. Though, my sense of guilt is still with me, and if I could do it all again I would be side by side with CPL Gibson on that day near the Syrian Border. My sense of peace is where it needs to be today, but

given the chance, I would still go back and fall with him. I love CPL Gibson, SSGT Burkholder, and all of the other men and women I call brother or sister. I miss them, and I hurt for their families, and for what it's worth, I too have questions. We are Marines, we love the Corps, and though we know that death is a gamble once the title is earned, it's far better to be alive.

We must honor their memory by being honest about what we see and how we feel about the world, and about ourselves. The truth is not pretty, violence is not a video game, and war is not what you see in a movie. We don't seek glory for ourselves, we seek a sense of duty that provides the safety and security for the people we love. It is a duty we take serious, even in the face of danger. We are human beings, and we can be hurt too. Stop for a minute to realize that as we are sitting and standing here today, our warriors are still fighting overseas. Perhaps you would agree that it would do the American public good to remember that. With those things in mind, and when a veteran returns home, don't ask stupid questions. It's not important to know, nor is it any of your business if he or she killed anybody, if he or she has seen any children killed, if friends are lost, or if he or she regrets being in the military. Those are examples of stupid questions. I apologize if anyone feels that I am being crass, but I am a Marine, and we get to the point.

Instead, ask that veteran how he or she is doing, and if help is needed. Maybe just talk about the day and what you plan to do. Did you see the Giants game last night? That's a good question. Take him or her fishing, or to a movie. You see, it's important to get back to living, and by asking any of them to re-live experiences you do not share, means you're doing your part to keep wounds open. It is my opinion that if you have not chewed the same dirt, and you're not a healthcare provider, mother, father, wife, husband, or child of that veteran, keep the combat questions to a zero. Let's heal our warriors by not insisting that they remain engaged in combat.

I love the Marine Corps, I love my family, my lady, my son. I love to bow hunt, and spend time in the timber. I love my people, and I love life. It is precious, and it can be over in an instant. So I pray, in the next ten seconds, before he or she lets the hammer fall, that just maybe the good father above will show him or her that living is better than dying.

Semper Fi.