

“From Hell to Healing: A Journey to Peace with Rapid Trauma Resolution Therapy®”

We were having lunch at a local café discussing my book Angel Walk: Nurses at War in Iraq and Afghanistan when suddenly tears were running down his cheeks. He pulled out an old, tattered and yellowed newspaper article from his pants pocket and whispered to me, “I haven’t shared this with my wife or anyone else. I just can’t.” The 1969 article said that Chief Warrant Officer John Marqua, my dear friend of many years and fellow Unity Church board member, was a decorated Vietnam Helicopter pilot with an Air Medal with 24 Oak Leaf Clusters (each signifies 50 hours of combat flying), four other medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross for Valor. I was simultaneously awed by this clear evidence of his bravery; but, also greatly concerned by his immediate and emotional response in such a public place.

As a retired senior Army Nurse Corps officer and mental health promoter, I knew that I was witnessing the visceral pain of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and unresolved grief. As a certified Rapid Trauma Resolution (RTR)® therapist and a former recipient of that powerful treatment, I also knew that immediate relief was available for my friend, my fellow veteran, my Chief. One week later, Chief Warrant Officer John Marqua was freed from the bondage of his traumatic Vietnam memories in one treatment session provided by Dr. Jon Connelly, founder and developer of Rapid Trauma Resolution Therapy®. John Marqua recently sat down with me to describe his journey from the hell experienced in Vietnam to his powerful RTR® healing in Dr. Connelly’s office in southern Florida.

Hell in Vietnam

The Chief summarized his August 1968 to August 1969 Vietnam tour as “months of boredom and moments of sheer, stark terror.” His job as a LOCH (Light Observation Reconnaissance Helicopter) pilot usually found him “first on the scene” with the battalion commander or executive officer, reconning the area or carrying supplies; other times “we had heavy contact and heavy fire fights.” Although weapons were not normally mounted on this type of helicopter, the Chief and his mechanic stone mounted M60’s on the LOCH to “give some support fire in case we got under attack.” The Chief then went on to describe his most challenging assignment. “We were by Highway 13 ... got a hot spot so they marked it and tracked it. We were doing grid work and we would go out maybe for thirty five or forty minutes and then come back ... By the time we got back a whole convoy had been destroyed ... And the irony of that is the next day I had the job of picking up all the bodies from the convoy ... [T]he smell and the stench of burning flesh and rotting flesh was really, really strong.” When asked how he handled that experience while in country, he responded: “You know, you swear a little bit, you go have a couple of beers at night and try to get a good night’s sleep. There’s something resilient about somebody who’s twenty, twenty one, twenty two years old with a lot of testosterone. You blow it off; this is what it is. I’m going to get through this year and make sure I do my job. If I can help someone live through it, that’s great.”

Home ...

The Chief doesn’t remember a lot about when he first came home in August 1969 except that it was “real intense ... I did have some nightmares but that seemed to subside after awhile. I remember driving my car and a bird came right in front of me. I almost drove off the road because it was reminiscent of incoming fire. I ducked down to avoid it.” He described himself as “evolving” over the next 22 years with

priorities switching from day to day survival, to making a living and having a family. He was a full time pilot, managed an apartment building, and created a million dollar manufacturing company. "I used to brag about working a hundred hours a week; I was walking around like a zombie. That's how I buried all of the stuff. [But then] everything started to unravel..." His manufacturing company burned to the ground, his wife asked for a divorce, he could not sleep at night and "I started smelling the burned bodies, the rotting bodies that I had lived with back in Vietnam."

It was at that point in 1990 that the Chief reached out for help. He sought counseling from the VA and received Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), described by some patients as "talk therapy." For the first time since he had returned home, he talked with other veterans about his Vietnam service and shared the pain that had been bottled up. With the help of a different support group, John also grieved over the loss of his marriage and his business and started questioning his own driven, intense, self destructive behaviors. These were his first steps on his healing journey, but he wanted more.

Warrior Weekends ...

As time went on, John realized that he had more work to do. "I had some issues with my Dad. They were really deep and very powerful and I needed something real powerful AND male to deal with it. That's when I got into the Mankind Project or at that time it was called the 'Warrior Weekend' and that really, really helped." After his initial weekend, John transitioned into what is called an integration group where the men "cross check with each other." Over the next ten years, he remained in contact with the program and continued to grow personally. But, he never mentioned Vietnam after his initial counseling in 1990. John shared that his sister's doctoral work focused on veterans with PTSD, "But we didn't discuss too much about it. I thought I was alright." That temporary peace lasted until we had lunch.

Hell Revisited ...

"The book brought me back to a point that was really hard, in fact emotion wise, probably my lowest point." The Chief went on to describe the Vietnam scene and the pain attached to that memory that he has carried all of these years. "I went to Bien Hoa, to their field hospital because we had one of our pilots in there wounded. Right next to him was a young man that was just put together; he looked like Frankenstein. The top of his skull was blown off. He was full of tubes, gurgling and it made me nauseous.

"That was the first time, all year with everything I'd seen, that I almost fainted." John described how he raged against the war in 1969 and then again at our lunch in 2010. "I said, 'What is this kid's life? What kind of life is he going to have?' And I kept asking, 'For what?' Then your book brought that stuff back vividly; the resentment and anger... I just felt full of emotion and when I did talk about it, I felt a deep sadness. I cried and grieved over the situation. But, then you talked about this method where you could actually relieve something in one session. That was not my life experience with this stuff... But I'd done enough work to know that, yeah this needs to go away. "

A Lasting Peace ...

John Marqua characterized his time with Dr. Connelly as a “divine appointment;” essentially the right treatment, at the right time, with the right person. He described the session. “We sat and talked and I had a little knowledge, but I’ve never seen or experienced anything like this before. I know that Dr. Jon was moving his hands all the time and I know at some point I was suppose to start following and listen to his words. There was a comment that it might be something like hypnosis, but I never felt hypnotized... We talked about stress and traumas and one of the things I learned cognitively that really helped me, is to disconnect the re-thinking about something with the experience of it... I read a lot but that was the first time that light came on.”

“Dr. Jon had a real gift about explaining that human beings are so highly sophisticated that sometimes it works against us. If we re-think about something, we can experience the whole emotional trauma of it all over again [unless] we break that connection. I now have the ability to recognize that if I think about this, it is not really happening again. That’s the thing he kept talking about as he did the process. It wasn’t an emotional release, it was a different release...something shifted.” John felt the shift during the session and his family and friends saw it immediately; an energized, confident, quiet strength not evident before the treatment.

When questioned about this type of response to Rapid Resolution Therapy® Dr. Connelly frequently explains that the energies previously used to contain these unwanted emotions are then freed up and available to live a fuller, richer life. The RRT® website (www.rapidresolutiontherapy.com) explains the process in more detail: “The subconscious [part of the mind] controls emotions, desires, memory, habits, thoughts, dreams and automatic responses. One may consciously understand the value of eliminating problematic emotions, thoughts or behaviors but unless the subconscious mind is reached, enduring change is unlikely. By energizing the subconscious mind and eliminating the ongoing influence from troubling past events, blocked energy is released, healing takes place and change is automatic.” In other words, your mind is “organized and optimized. There are dramatic improvements in feelings and behavior.”

At our interview some ten months after his RRT® session, John Marqua reported that he no longer became intensely emotional when he talked about war or combat or politics, “It is like lifting a great weight off of me.” He went on to share a personal message for his fellow veterans who have served in Vietnam, Iraq or the Afghanistan and who might still be suffering: “There’s always hope to find total peace again in your life; in fact maybe more peace that you had before you went into war. Don’t ever give up until you find that peace. And with peace comes joy!”