Memory in Context: Personal Narrative and Social Change in
The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project

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Table of Contents

Rationale for Project: pages 3-4

Introduction: pages 4-9

Methodology: pages 9-11

Organizations and Programs in Richmond, VA: pages 11-15

Participant Biographies: pages 16-22

Common Threads as Expressed by Participants

Joining the Military: pages 23-26

The Creation of Masculinity through Service: pages 26-3

Homelessness Journey, Assumptions about Homelessness: pages 31-3

Barriers and experiences with ‘the system’: pages 37-40

Causes of Veteran Homelessness: pages 40-43

Civilian Military Disconnect: pages 43-46

Friends and Loneliness: pages 46-47

Difficulties of not having a Home: pages 47-49

Cycle of Homelessness: pages 49-52

Feeling a Need to Give Back: pages 52-54

Conclusion: pages 54-58

Bibliography: pages 59-62

Appendices: pages 63-196
The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project

Rationale for Project

The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project is a living history project based on a collection of personal stories from the homeless veteran community in Richmond, Virginia. The project looks at the larger narratives and common threads in the collected oral histories to place them in the context of a public and collective memory through dialogue with scholarly research. Inspired by The Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project conducted by Daniel Kerr, the purpose of this project is to provide a deeper understanding of a marginalized population and to help give these people a voice with which to tell their story and be heard.\(^1\) It is my hope that I can provide a service; a platform for these individuals to share their story- whatever one they feel is important to their own history- in an attempt to understand the current state of the homeless veteran population in America beyond the analytical and scholarly research that has been done in the past; beginning to break down the boundaries that exist between those who are homeless and those who are not. Oral historians have found that giving someone the opportunity to tell their story is beneficial not only to them, but to the population as a whole because it allows for the formation of dialogue between two distinct groups; in this case those who are homeless and those who are not.\(^2\) The project is a cultural product that exhibits the oral histories of homeless veterans and their perspectives;

\(^2\) For similar oral histories see Studs Terkel Hard Times, and Daniel Kerr’s Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project.
contextualizing the individual narrative of the homeless veteran in the frame of the larger public memory. The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project is presented as an interactive video website that allows the audience to connect directly with the veterans’ stories and thoughts. The oral history videos on the website are largely unedited to allow for the veteran to tell their story with little interruption or influence and allow the audience to engage with their stories as a primary source for individual interpretation.

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Introduction

Homelessness is a concept that many people choose to avoid thinking about in their day to day lives. It is uncomfortable to equate yourself to the person standing on the street corner that you pass every morning on the way to work. Thoughts like “oh that could never happen to me” and “the guy must be homeless because…” often are the first thoughts that cross peoples’ minds when they encounter a homeless person. But what many people do not realize, or choose not to think about is that 14.8% of people live at or below the poverty line here in America.³ Many more than that struggle every day to make ends meet, and many are thrust into poverty or homelessness due to circumstances beyond their control such as a family tragedy, 

job loss, medical conditions, legal fees, and divorce. Because of this high poverty rate, many Americans are only one crisis and paycheck away from being homeless. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, in January of 2013, 610,042 people in the United States were homeless on any given night.

However, statistics on the homeless population can be difficult to interpret and nail down as the average number of people who are homeless, including veterans, fluctuates on a daily basis. Many people shift in and out of homelessness because sometimes they will have enough money for a cheap hotel stay, have a friend to stay with, take up residence in a local shelter, or are picked up by law enforcement and are spending the night in jail.

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans estimates that approximately 11% of the adult homeless population are veterans. Further, it is estimated that 1.4 million veterans are perpetually on the verge of homelessness “due to poverty, lack of support networks, and dismal living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing.” These numbers are astounding to many Americans, asking why there are not better services to help these people. But at the same time, many of these people make assumptions about the homeless population and their reasons for being

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homeless that are directly contradictory to previous statements about wanting to help.\textsuperscript{8} The homelessness statistics are even more complex because they do not necessarily include people who have no legal residence and are hopping between friends and family members. There are also many people who do not want to be found and counted, and thus homelessness numbers tend underestimate the reality of the problem. Due to the inadequacy of statistics and surveys, it can be difficult to really address the problem of homelessness from a quantitative point of view without assessing the qualitative factors such as cause and story behind each individual. Oral histories of homeless veterans can offer a remedy to the problem of inadequate statistics and the assumptions many people have about the homeless and veterans.

The Cleveland Homeless Oral History Project, conducted by Daniel Kerr, worked to identify key factors in the growth and perpetuation of homelessness in the city by talking directly to those impacted - the street homeless. After talking with service-providers in the area, Kerr realized that the only way to truly assess the problem of homelessness was to talk to those who were actually homeless to find out what barriers they faced and have them assist in finding the solutions. Kerr began conducting an oral history project that looked at the personal histories of the homeless in Cleveland. He found that “nearly all participants combined their experiences with a larger political and structural explanation of the causes of

homelessness,”9 showing that many of the societal stereotypes about the causes of homelessness are false. The gentrification of neighborhoods was one of the overarching themes Kerr found throughout his interviews. When real estate developers became concerned with revitalizing poor areas of the city, they tore down “single room occupancy hotels, better known as flop houses,” leaving many people with nowhere to go, as they could no longer afford to live in their old neighborhood. 10 Subsequently, the government effectively made the act of homelessness illegal through the development of vagrancy and loitering laws. Those who lost their inexpensive housing because of the revitalization projects essentially were stuck living illegally with nowhere else to go. Once they were arrested for crimes such as loitering and sleeping in public, regaining housing became nearly impossible because having any sort of criminal record creates barriers when trying to get a job that will allow one to afford housing.11 The Cleveland Oral History Project goes beyond statistics to broaden the scope of what people consider to be history by adding a new set of voices to the record. In addition, his project “emboldened homeless people to act and become agents for social change.”12

Researchers have been working to create a dialogue with and around the street homeless population to change these stereotypes and work for change.13 Kerr’s oral history project was broadcast on the radio and in a public square to encourage the

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9 Kerr, “‘We Know What the Problem Is,’” 34.
10 Ibid., 38.
11 Ibid., 34-40.
12 Ibid., 27.
13 Buch, “The Impact of a Service-Learning Project.” And Kerr, We Know What the Problem Is.”
homeless population to talk about their struggles and unite to be a force for social change and reform in their own community. The University of North Carolina in Charlotte, created a community based learning class to help dispel stereotypes associated with the homeless while encouraging a dialogue to foster connections between the college and the local homeless population in order to create a civically minded community that works for social reform. Jim Hubbard published a series of photos of the homeless called American Refugees to encourage people to examine the photos and find the similarities between themselves and the homeless. In keeping with these efforts, the Forgotten Fight Oral History Project aims to be a platform for a marginalized group of people to be able to add to the conversations around the intersection of the homeless and veteran population while providing depth and reality to the homeless veteran statistics.

The stories of the Forgotten Fight Oral History Project show that while different in age, gender, race, and life experience, the participants each share similar sentiments on their homelessness journey that represent significant commonalties of experience between all ten of the participants. The common threads shared by the interviewees range in complexity from their reasons for joining the military, the sense of masculinity and belonging developed through military service, difficulties

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14 Kerr, “‘We Know What the Problem Is,’” 27-45.
asking for help, giving back to their community, and a sense of pride in their journey and their families. During their struggles with homelessness, interviewees remembered extensive experiences of disappointment and let down that caused them to be weary of seeking help and losing any sense of security and stability they had found in their homeless situation.

Entering the military as young individuals desiring and being promised job stability and an escape from unstable economic conditions, many of the participants relied on the structured support system of the military to teach them critical life skills and provide them with a foundation to grow as a civilian member of society. While the military did provide them with these things, their service only granted them a temporary reprieve from their struggles in life before entering the military, and in their words did not cause their struggles with homelessness. By using the dialogue from oral histories and the common themes expressed by the participants, society can begin to take a different approach at potential opportunities for change. Oral histories, such as these, prove to be a valuable way to learn about the intricacies of people’s lives and how they fit into a population identity. Once the nuances of that population identity become clear, society can begin to address the potential for specialized and specific population oriented change.

**Methodology of Project**

The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project allows a wide audience to interact with the recorded interviews of veterans about their homelessness journey through an
online webpage. Additionally, the videos are accompanied by transcribed copies of the interviews. The success of this research was highly dependent on finding individuals willing to participate in the project. The final product comes about in collaboration with Virginia Supportive Housing and Liberation Family Services, both located in Richmond, VA. While much background on the issue of homelessness was established through interviews with service providers in Pennsylvania, the project and interviews themselves were conducted in Richmond, Virginia. After completing preliminary background research and interviews, the oral history portion of the project was conducted the week of March 15, 2016. Interviews were arranged and organized with the help of Virginia Supportive Housing’s Libby Tofflemire, the Veteran Services Supervisor, veteran case manager Desiree Taylor and Mr. Fletcher of Liberation Family Services. Interviews conducted with Harold, James, and Evette took place in their homes. The remainder of the interviews took place at the Liberation Family Services Transitional House in downtown Richmond. All interviewees signed informed consent forms that explained the rationale of the project, conditions of the interview, and allowed them to pick a method of documentation for their oral histories. Most interview subjects opted in for video and audio recording. Richard was the only one who did not want his image used but agreed to an audio interview. Interviewees were asked to review the questions before starting the interview so that they could think about what they wanted to

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17 The word journey is used to talk about the interviewee’s struggle with homelessness. For many of those interviewed, they did not view their homelessness as being over or static, despite being housed. The word journey is used to convey the general cycle of homelessness.

18 A copy of the informed consent form is located in the appendix
say, or ask the interviewer to avoid certain questions or topics. No one opted out of any questions. Once the interviews were completed, they were electronically saved and processed. A team of six people, two of whom are Franklin and Marshall students, transcribed each interview. Transcribed copies of the interviews are being sent to each participant so that they may have record of their participation in this project to do with as they wish. The video and audio copies of each interview have been saved in their original form as well as in addition to being processed for this project. Thematic clips for this project were extracted and processed, but left largely unedited. In many clips, the interviewer’s questions and voice have been removed so that the clip is truly the veteran’s story and original voice. Clips have been linked together in some cases by theme or topic.

The Organizations and Programs in Richmond, VA

Homeward

Homeward is a non-profit organization in Richmond that works to “prevent, reduce and end homelessness by facilitating creative solutions through the collaboration, coordination and cooperation of regional resources and services.” They provide valuable data collection services to the Richmond community on the state of homelessness by doing the Point in Time Count twice a year in addition to

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19 A copy of the questions can be found in the appendix
20 Transcribed copies of the interviews can be found in the appendix
21 According to Doing Oral History's best practice methods, it is acceptable to remove the voice of the interviewer in order to provide the subject the full focus of the interview.
conducted year round research. The author assisted them in the January 2016
Point in Time (PIT) Count as a volunteer assigned to a portion of the metro
Richmond area to survey. During the PIT Count, volunteers go out into the
community to look for homeless individuals. Individuals are counted, surveyed, and
given a small bag with some seasonal essentials. The data and surveys collected
during the Point in Time Count are “critical in building an effective community-wide
response”\(^\text{23}\) in eliminating homelessness. The research is used by other local
organizations in order to tailor their services to the needs of the community. In the
July 2016 PIT Count, 607 adults were counted as being homeless in Richmond and
79.4\% of those people opted to fill out the survey for more information. Of that
group, 22.7\% identified themselves as veterans with 96.3\% being males and 64.4\%
of the veterans being African American. Their average age was 51.9 years old.\(^\text{24}\)

**Virginia Supportive Housing**

Virginia Supportive Housing (VSH) is a non-profit organization that was established
in 1988 with the purpose of “develop[ing] and provid[ing] permanent supportive
housing for homeless single adults.”\(^\text{25}\) Unlike other organizations, they use the
‘Housing First” method that works to house the individual before beginning to
tackle other troubles such as mental health care, substance abuse, and job searches,
as it can be extremely hard “for homeless individuals to overcome those barriers


\(^{24}\) Homeward Point in Time Count Data, Appendix 1.

http://www.virginiasupportivehousing.org/about.
while living on the streets.” Once the person is housed, VSH case managers work with them to help get them the care and services that the individual needs to be successful. Since 1988, Virginia Supportive Housing reports that they had great success working with the Richmond homeless community, saying that of those who they have worked with, 95% do not return to homelessness and the average income of a VSH individual increases by 127% within a year of becoming involved with the programs, as the addition of stable, permanent housing is a key factor in an individual’s ability to hold a steady job.  

Liberation Family Services
Liberation Family Services (LFS) is a transitional housing facility in South Side Richmond that was previously known as Freedom House. When Freedom House announced its closure in 2013, Liberation Family Services absorbed the Freedom House property and facility to be able to continue serving those in crises. Liberation Family Services provides transitional housing, food, job search assistance, clothing, access to public transportation and case management to all residents at the facility. They work to make sure that 100% of their veteran clients “receive benefits, counseling and transportation to the VA Medical Center” when they need it. LFS contracts with other service organizations in the area to provide financial counseling, health and wellness counseling, and permanent housing support for


27 “About VSH.”

their clients, reporting that 83% of their residents move into “self-sufficiency and permanent housing within 12 months” of entering the LFS programming model.29

**HUD-VASH Voucher Program**

These organizations, Virginia Supportive Housing specifically, are administrators of the HUD-VASH voucher that helps house homeless veterans secure stable and affordable housing. The HUD-VASH program’s “primary target population is the veteran who has experienced multiple episodes of homelessness, is suffering from mental health and/or medical complications, has been homeless four or more times in the prior three years, or who has been continuously homeless for one year or longer.”30 In 1992, the V.A. partnered with Housing and Urban Development to create a program that combined case management with subsidized permanent housing solutions to help homeless veterans find and keep stable housing. The HUD-VASH voucher program pairs veterans and case managers, who work together to assess their situation and create a Housing Stabilization Plan. This plan takes into account the veteran’s needs in terms of types of housing, mental and physical health care, and recovery treatments in order to “enhance the veteran’s ability to live in safe and affordable permanent housing of his or her choosing.”31 The HUD-VASH program works with the Housing Authority and landlords to supply affordable housing options for veterans. The housing voucher requires the veteran to pay

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29 “Our Service.”
approximately 30% of their income to the landlord, and the Housing Authority will pay the remainder.  

To be eligible for a HUD-VASH housing voucher, the veteran must fit the McKinney-Vento Act definition of homelessness where they are either, “lacking a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence, or identifying as his or her primary residence a shelter, welfare hotel, transitional or temporary housing facility, or public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation.” The veteran must also be eligible for VA medical services, and need case manager assistance in securing housing.

The participants in this project come from many different parts of the country, but all ended up in Richmond, Virginia at some point during their homelessness journey. All have since been housed through Virginia Supportive Housing and the HUD-VASH voucher program or are in transitional housing through Liberation Family Services. The participants in this project were referred to Virginia Supportive Housing and Liberation Family Services through a variety of other organizations, ranging from the veteran’s hospital, to the Salvation Army. As expressed in their interviews, they felt positively about their experiences with these organizations and their current state in life. Many of them reflected on the hope and positivity these organizations provided for them as they were assisted in their journey out of homelessness.

33 Ibid., 13.
34 Ibid., 13.
Participants

The following is a brief biographical overview of each participant’s life as they related it throughout their oral history and thus communicate a summary of the interviewee’s personal narrative. The following biographies reflect much of the interviewee’s personal word choice when describing events in their lives.

Evette

Evette is a U.S. Air Force veteran, serving from 1983-1985. She joined the military because there were no jobs available at the time and she was looking for job stability and an opportunity to travel. She was honorably released from service through a Red Cross program before her service contract was up when her mother became terminally ill and needed constant care. During her time in the military she served as an administrative specialist where she processed orders and helped with general base operations. She later served as a mail clerk, and finally a special orders clerk where she worked directly under the base commander helping with administrative duties in Azores, Portugal. She traveled extensively overseas during her time in the military to places like Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Originally from Philadelphia, PA, Evette moved to Richmond after her mother died and she became homeless in Pennsylvania. She found an apartment in Richmond, where she made a deposit and began the move south. Upon arriving, she found that the apartment had been a scam and she quickly ran out of money while trying to find somewhere else to live. She then became homeless and soon began living in the Richmond winter overflow housing. When the overflow shelter closed for the
season, she began living on the streets where she lived under a bridge with a community of other homeless people. She has been working with Virginia Supportive Housing for almost two years and has been successfully housed for a year through the HUD-VASH program. She spends her time now helping her elderly and disabled neighbors live independently and is looking for part time work to help fill her time.  

Harold

Harold is a U.S. Army veteran originally from Shamokin, PA, a small coalmining town in central Pennsylvania. Joining the Army in 1984, Harold served as a team leader in a cohesion unit in Monterey, California. He views himself as having been chronically homeless since childhood as he was raised in a foster home and released from the system at age 18 into a homeless situation. After leaving the Army with an Other Than Honorable discharge for substance abuse, he returned to Pennsylvania and his biological family where he eventually ended up homeless after going through some family and medical issues with his mother and sister. He came to Richmond in March of 2015 on his last $200.00. Shortly after arriving in Richmond, he connected with Virginia Veterans and Family Support (Formerly Virginia Wounded Warriors) where his caseworker helped him find housing through the HUD-VASH program. He is now house-mates with James, who also participated in this project. Harold spends his time now working on crafts and projects through the VA and hopes to one day build his own house on top of a hill.  

35 Evette was the only female available to be interviewed for the project.
James

James is a U.S. Army and Navy veteran from Richmond, VA. He joined the military in 1986 and served 22 years between the 2 services. While in the military he served in field artillery, as military police (MP), and then finally in special ops. James was deployed to Panama and also served in Gulf War 1. Additionally during his time in the service he was stationed in England, Japan, Korea, and Germany. James became homeless when the lady he was living with died and he could not afford to take over the lease of her apartment. He then moved in with his grandparents and soon after, his grandfather died. He could not afford to support his grandmother on his own, and he was then left with nowhere to live. He lived on the streets, in his truck, and bounced from place to place before partnering up with Virginia Supportive Housing and becoming a participant in the HUD-VASH voucher program to obtain permanent housing. James spends his time now taking classes at the VA and is working on his struggles with alcohol. He hopes to buy his own home soon.

Calvin

Calvin is a U.S. Navy veteran who is originally from Columbia, South Carolina. Calvin served in the Navy from 1976 to 1983 as a navigator on a nuclear submarine. He did eight deterrent patrols and was underwater on the submarine for 90 days at a time. On his first submarine mission, he was the only African American out of the 150 sailors on board the ship. After serving on the submarine, he was a Navy Absentee Collection Unit Officer. He left the military with an honorable discharge and went
into the construction business. Work brought him to Richmond and he ended up staying, as he liked the city. He lost his construction job and soon ran out of money, finding himself homeless. He entered into the VA assistance program for homeless veterans and ended up in transitional housing with Liberation Family Services. He has been housed at LFS for a year and a half and says he is working on overcoming his troubles with PTSD. He plans on moving to Texas for work soon.

Carl

Carl is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who is originally from Arlington, Virginia. He joined the Marines in 1972 with his best friend from high school when he was 17. In the states, he was stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and then Cherry Point in North Carolina. He was then sent overseas and served in Okinawa, Japan. During his time in the Marines, he worked in motor transport preparing vehicles for use and participating in delivery convoys. Carl left the Marines in 1975 for medical reasons. He became homeless in 2015 after he lost his job and could no longer afford his home that he shared with his wife. Upon losing the home, he and his wife separated. He spent this time staying with friends and family before accepting help from the VA and coming to stay at Liberation Family Services. Carl currently spends much of his time reading and listening to jazz music. He hopes to own his own house again and have a healthy, fulfilling relationship.

Cordell
Cordell is a U.S. Army veteran who is originally from Newark, New Jersey. He was drafted right out of high school in 1967. He served as a finance clerk for three years before his conscript was up in 1970. From there, he used his G.I. Bill benefits to attend Essex County College. He is a recovering addict and has been clean for 25 years. He became homeless in 2014 when he moved out of his apartment complex after a murder took place in the main office. He was expecting to find affordable housing quickly, but was unable to do so. He ended up living on the streets before hooking up with River City Veteran’s Employment program where they directed him to a recovery house where he stayed prior to coming to Liberation Family Services. Cordell spends his weekends checking out the local flea markets and reading. He hopes to leave Liberation Family Services and find a place of his own.

Don

Don is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who is from Cleveland, Ohio. He went to Ohio Institute of Technology before joining the Marines in 1978 where he was stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. After leaving the Marines, he returned to Ohio to be with his friends and family and begin a career. He became homeless in Ohio after losing his job. He bounced between staying with friends and sleeping in his car. Becoming very depressed about his situation and how difficult it was to get help, Don attempted suicide. Subsequently, he moved to Virginia to live with an old girlfriend. After a few months of living with her, and unsuccessful attempts to get a job, they broke off their relationship and he was homeless again. He phoned the Veteran’s Crisis Hotline and they advised him on finding shelter. He lived in the
overflow shelter temporarily and also on the streets in Richmond before finding housing at Liberation Family Services. Don spends his time volunteering and riding his motor scooter.

**Richard**

Richard is a U.S. Army veteran who is from Winston Salem, North Carolina. He joined the military right out of high school because no jobs were available and he felt the military would offer him a stable career as an alternative. During his time in the Army, he worked in field artillery and drove a tank for 3 years. He was stationed in Louisiana and Germany before he was honorably discharged. Later in life, Richard getting into legal trouble and using drugs and alcohol to self-medicate. When he had a heart attack in 2006, he decided to get clean and return to the straight path. In 2011 Richard moved to Virginia and found himself taking care of an elderly family member for about three and a half years. When she went into a nursing home, he was unable to afford her house and became homeless. He called the Veteran’s Crisis line and was directed to the V.A. in Richmond where he began working with a homeless outreach coordinator while staying at the shelter. Soon after, he moved to Liberation Family Services where he now lives. Richard just graduated from school where he got his supervising asbestos license. He has a few job offers and he hopes one of them will work out. In the meantime, he is looking for his own home and enjoys giving back to the community at LFS.

**Thomas**
Thomas is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran from Oklahoma. He joined the Marines in 1975 at the age of 17 with two of his cousins after being kicked out of his home by his stepfather and becoming homeless. After finishing his training in San Diego, California, he was put in a reserve unit in Tulsa, Oklahoma where he spent 19 months before leaving the military. He then became a drifter and traveled all over the United States, sleeping under bridges, in cars, and on the streets. When he came to Virginia he spent 26 years incarcerated in federal prison. He became homeless again upon being released from prison while participating in a transition program through the Salvation Army. Through this program he came to live at Liberation Family Services. Thomas spends his days writing fictional stories which he hopes to publish one day.

Wilbur

Wilbur is a U.S. Air Force veteran from Long Island, New York. He joined the Air Force in 1970. He was stationed in Texas, the Philippines, and Thailand. After leaving the military, Wilbur spent 30 years working as an operating room technician at the V.A. hospital in Richmond. He became homeless when his brother, who he was staying with, told him he could no longer stay there. Wilbur contacted the V.A. to help him get settled in new housing, and soon after he became a resident at Liberation Family Services. Wilbur enjoys sleeping and relaxing and he hopes to one day have a home and property of his own where he can have a variety of animals.
Common Themes as Expressed by the Participants

The participants were given a list of questions that would be discussed prior to their interviews. The questions asked about their military experience and journey through homelessness. The following thematic essays are engagements between their thoughts, scholarly research, and how the individual stories fit in to the broader themes discussed by all of the interviewees. While Harold and James wanted to be interviewed together, many of the interviewee’s statements seem to fit into dialogue with each other as they discuss similar feelings, thoughts, and stories relating to larger overarching themes about their experiences as homeless veterans.

Joining the Military

The interviewees often expressed a belief that the military offered the promise of an opportunity at stable employment and education during stagnant economic times and hardship. The service offered to provide training, housing, food, and discipline to help people stay out of trouble. They saw their decision to join the military as a way up in the world because they felt like they were “striving for something” more in their lives, whether through interesting jobs, educational prospects, travel, or looking for a way to escape their current situation.

Evette joined the Air Force in 1983 in hopes of traveling and of a stable, well-paying job in a bad economy as, “there weren’t a lot of jobs out in the Reagan administration and the military seemed like a career that I could travel. I was always

into traveling and getting away, so the military served that for me.”

As an only child, she knew the military would give her the opportunity to travel and see the world that her single mom wouldn’t necessarily be able to provide. In 1970, during the midst of the Vietnam War, the military was made up of only 4% volunteers with the rest having been drafted. In 1973, the draft was suspended and the military began to move toward an all-volunteer force after running volunteer recruitment trial runs in 1970 through Project VOLAR. Project VOLAR was designed to establish successful volunteer recruitment and maintenance of a strong all-volunteer force. Congress appropriated a large sum of money in for the fiscal year of 1973 to the military for enhanced operations and volunteer recruitment purposes. They set out with the intentions of growing the force by offering enlistment bonuses, money for education, and better pay. After encountering difficulties in reaching recruitment quotas and in order to meet recruitment quotas, recruiters often targeted economically depressed areas where people were more likely to be enticed by these incentives. In retrospect, this has often been labeled as an economic or poverty draft, as individuals from lower socioeconomic classes felt compelled to join as a means to support their family and thus became

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40 Statutes at Large. 92nd Congress, 2nd Session. Public Law 92-570 (H.R. 16593). Thursday, October 26, 1972
disproportionately represented in the armed forces. Evette saw a future for herself that sat outside of the confines of the life she had growing up. When she saw the potential for different life opportunities in the military, she decided to try and change her circumstances.

Like Evette, Richard, Wilbur, Thomas and Carl, all joined in the early to mid-1970s and could be seen as potential victims of this economic draft. Richard says, “really there wasn’t too many jobs and I hadn’t thought about my career straight out of high school. And I took ROTC so I kinda fell in love with the Army lifestyle and discipline and everything …” This shows how from an early age, Richard viewed the army as a stable job option for a job following high school in the same way as Wilbur who says:

...when I graduated high school, I did not want to carry any more books, so my father asked me what I was going to do because I wasn’t just going to sit around the house, so I said ‘I’ll join the Air force.’ He said ‘alright’ and off to Texas I went.

When asked about his job in the military and if it was challenging, Wilbur said:

Basically load bombs on airplanes. And that didn’t get me anything but people’s telling me you are training now to get a good job when you get out but I couldn’t see myself loading bombs on airplanes after I got out of the service.

The military provided Wilbur with an avenue for a stable job for a truncated period of time. His friends and family believed that it would help him develop job skills for

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43 English, Allan. *Understanding Military Culture.* 71.
the future, although he remained slightly skeptical, yet glad that he made the
decision to join. Many of the interviewees joined the military in the midst of the
Vietnam War, a daunting prospect as the casualty rates were very high; and so to
make the decision to voluntarily enlist and potentially be deployed to a combat zone
shows a need for a temporary break from an unstable civilian life.

The Creation of Masculinity through Service

Most of the participants in this project were African American men, with the
exception of Evette, who was a woman. The creation of masculinity was a sentiment
they expressed when talking about reasons they joined the service or what they got
out of their time in the military, making comments like, “it made me a better man.”

When Carl joined the Marines, he remembered, “my grandmother told me once that
it’s going to make a man out of me.” These comments show how especially during
a time where black men felt an particular need to prove their worth and manhood to
society in the midst of racial strife, there were also familial pressures to prove their
masculinity. This language of manhood and developing masculinity is an
important factor in the decision to join the armed forces as the interviewees felt a
need to earn respect from their peers.

49 During the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike, workers carried signs that said “I Am
a Man” to stand up against the system of labor oppression. This language of
masculinity became especially important to the African American community in the
years following the strike.
Cultural ideas of masculinity play an important role in the development of the male identity in society, and particularly the male identity and expectations cultivated in the military. Society expects men to be physically and mentally tough, the family bread-winner, competitive, self-reliant, and in control. When joining the military, a traditionally hyper-masculine institution, these characteristics are exaggerated and relied upon to create a strong and unified armed force. Upon returning home, should a soldier face any injuries, visible or invisible, these engrained ideas of masculinity can become a barrier to care and recovery. These extra masculine characteristics can prevent a soldier from seeking care or assistance as they are trained to be self-reliant and not show any weakness.

Calvin joined the Navy because he loved boats and was looking for a job that would allow him to work with ships and be near the water. When asked what his family thought of his decision to join, he said, “They thought it was a good idea to get out of the area I was in. Cause I had gotten into a little trouble as a teenager, a lot of fights, stuff like that.” For Calvin and his family, the military was there to help him achieve his career goals, but also to provide a structure and discipline that he was lacking in his civilian life. He later relates:

> Everybody treated me like a man. And then once I got qualified so fast, it really boosts my value to the ship cause the more people on board that are qualified, the better the boat operates.

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52 Ibid., 107-112.
This shows how Calvin valued his contributions to the ship in terms of his abilities causing others to treat him like a man. This was especially important to him as he was the only African American sailor on board the submarine, and so gaining the full respect of his fellow sailors was a top priority that could have drastically altered his experiences.

The expectations of masculinity for a civilian and for a soldier, while similar, vary slightly. There is a societal expectation for a man to care for his family, as a bread winner and as a father. A man is also expected to make something of himself and outrun adversity. As Finley discusses in her book *Fields of Combat*, many soldiers list their reasons for joining the military as a way to escape an option-less rural town, escape a life on the streets, and find means of challenging oneself and working on self-advancement through service. For the interviewees, the military proved to be a challenge and a way out and up with the learned discipline and options for higher education. For Don, he joining the military was because he felt a need to prove his ability to take on a challenge and take on intense discipline. When asked why he made the decision to join, he said:

...I need to do something, I don’t want to go back home. So I actually joined the Army when I was in Columbus, Ohio. That’s where I was going to school. I went to visit my mother, and a lot of the guys I graduated from high school with had joined the Marine Corps and they got out. “Man, you can’t do the Marine Corps, it’s this and it’s that...” So I’m more like the kind of person, I love a challenge. So I went to a Marine Corps recruiter, and I told him, “I’m scheduled to go into the Army, but I don’t want to go into the Army. I want to go into the Marine Corps.” And he said,” Ain’t, no problem, that’s fine.” So he had all my paperwork shipped from Columbus to Cleveland. And I didn’t
have to take the test over or nuthin’, they just went off my paperwork, my scores, from the Army, so that’s what put me in the Marine Corps.55

Don viewed his military experience as a challenge that he needed in order to be able to demonstrate his masculine abilities to his friends and family. The American military tends to attract people who relate to or identify with a “certain kind of hyper-masculine identity”56 and need for a challenge where they place physical and mental toughness, self-reliance, and emotional control at the forefront of their masculine character. Once enlisted, the military works to cultivate a shared sense of identity among soldiers that values these same traits. More feminine traits such as empathy, individualism, creativity, emotionality, and nurturance, are highly discouraged57 and essentially trained out of soldiers as they were thought to potentially “impede the use of lethal violence.”58

Masculinity’s influence on the soldier is perpetuated by the father-son or grandfather-son relationship. As Karner discusses in her article *Fathers, Sons, and Vietnam: Masculinity and Betrayal in the Life Narratives of Vietnam Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*, the father and son relationship has a large impact on the reasons many Vietnam era veterans decided to go to war and the subsequent shift in notions of masculinity. Their fathers and grandfathers were World War II veterans, for whom joining the service was part of a rite of passage into manhood.

These men came home from war and were acclaimed as heroes by society and role models for their children by their families, making their sons want to follow in their footsteps when the call for patriotic duty arose. Not only did sons feel the need to follow in their grandfather or fathers’ footsteps, but they also felt a need to surpass their fathers’ masculinity through their military service, especially if their father did not serve. When asked about his family life growing up, Harold said ”My grandfather was a retired WWII vet. My father was a slug.”\textsuperscript{59} This comment shows how, while he doesn’t directly say he served because of a family tradition, he uses the military as a qualitative identifier for his grandfather who served and then came home and gave Harold a job, versus his father who Harold continually talks about in a relatively negative fashion throughout the interview. While none of the interviewees explicitly related masculinity to their homelessness journey, many spoke about feeling looked down upon by people in society while they were homeless. Wilbur relates the contrast of military respect and ensuing masculinity to the feeling of becoming homeless when he says:

\begin{quote}
Ok, you watch television and going into the service, Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy it doesn’t matter, it’s a great thing, but once you get out people look down on you if you’re homeless or they don’t look at you at all. Like you’re there and you’re not there.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

This shows a big contrast to how a sense of masculinity is built up amongst service members and could continually influence the veteran’s ability and desire to seek assistance.

Homelessness Journey, Assumptions about Homelessness

From what the interviewees related during their interviews, their fall into homelessness was not a result of mental illness or substance abuse. Their journey with homelessness began when they encountered circumstances beyond their control such as job loss, or a death, that caused them to ultimately lose their home or the home they were staying in. They report struggling with mental health issues or substance abuse issues after they began to struggle with homelessness or the instability of bouncing between residences. The idea that veteran homelessness is a direct result of military service or mental illness is something that is compounded by societal stereotypes and assumptions made about military culture and homelessness.

When asked “how did you become homeless?” Evette answered “It was by accident.” Like most others, she became homeless after a series of family and financial disasters. Evette, Harold and Richard all lost their homes after the death of a family member who they were living with at the time. Richard said, “I stayed there for a few weeks after that until everything got shut off because I couldn’t pay the bills…” He stayed there as long as he could out of desperation and fear of being homeless.

Others lost their homes after losing their jobs and finding themselves in financial trouble and unable to keep up with mortgage or rent payments and then they

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couldn’t not find housing within their means. Carl Pollard remembered, “the economy was...somebody once called it a depressed area...”\textsuperscript{63} when referring to his old neighborhood and the inability to find a job to support his household.

Brendan O’Flaherty discusses homelessness as bad luck in his book \textit{How to House the Homeless}. He says, “risk matters because homelessness is a transient state for which onset cannot easily be predicted in advance...homelessness is a fairly unpredictable event in some people’s lives.”\textsuperscript{64} O’Flaherty’s argument holds true with the participants in this project. None of them were able to predict that they would become homeless, or go through multiple bouts of homelessness over the course of time.

When asked the question, “what types of barriers do you feel like homeless veterans face?” participants responded with a variety of different examples of barriers, but at the root of each of these barriers was either a community made barrier or a self-made barrier. They felt like stereotypes could be both community barriers and self-made barriers. Many discussed personal challenges they needed to overcome as being a barrier to their reintegration into society such as alcoholism, or not taking enough risks to change their situation.

\textsuperscript{63} Pollard, Carl. Interviewed by Kelsey Glander. Video. March 17, 2016
There are many negative stereotypes associated with and assumed about the street homeless population in the United States. The overarching stereotype is that the homeless community is made up of men who are “lazy, morally bankrupt, and potentially dangerous...unmotivated and work-averse; uneducated and lacking in marketable skills and talents; likely to abuse alcohol or drugs; or mentally ill.”

Many of these stereotypes are so engrained in communities, that the homeless population has difficulty breaking free of these figurative chains to stop the cycle of homelessness. They then become a victim of these assumptions by their neighbors, service providers, potential employers, law enforcement, and city government.

According to many of the interview subjects for this project, the stereotypes extended even further when considering veterans specifically as many were thought to be crazy because of the reputation of the Armed Forces. On this subject, Don commented:

> Because the Marine Corps has a reputation. And once you go through the Marine Corps, if you are weak minded, yes, you are gonna come out crazy. Because the Marines, the training that you go through, it’s a mind game. It’s a mind game, but it’s also a survival game. So, if you follow they mind game they way they want you to, they brainwash you, you come out crazy. I’m a little bit stronger than that. When I first went in, got off the bus, at 3:30 in the morning, and this little guy is hollering and stuff, and I’m like, “What the hell I done got myself into?” But, I did my 3 years. I got an honorable discharge. I got out. And I’m not crazy.

Wasserman tries to go beyond the stereotypes in his study, suggesting that the negative qualities associated with the homeless, especially substance abuse and

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mental disorder, are often a result of being homeless, but are not necessarily the initial cause of homelessness and thus do not define the homeless population, and they work to create a dialogue with and around the street homeless population to create change. When asked about these same barriers and stereotypes, Wilbur said:

Homeless veterans. There’s the stigma where, oh you’re homeless, people look down on you. Ok, you watch television and going into the service, Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy it doesn’t matter, it’s a great thing, but once you get out people look down on you if you’re homeless or they don’t look at you at all. Like you’re there and you’re not there.67

Wasserman and Clair spent four years working with the homeless population of Birmingham, Alabama to create an ethnographic study that they hoped would defy the conclusions and “generalized understandings”68 of the current state of social sciences in the study of homelessness and dispel the stigma that most homeless feel like they face. Over the course of their study, they found that many outreach workers and service providers to the homeless, such as shelter operators, felt that generally all of the street homeless were “diseased in some way, whether it be mental illness, alcohol, or drugs,”69 thus reinforcing the stigma. If outreach workers and service providers apply these assumptions to the homeless population, it is hard for those not directly involved in servicing the homeless to think anything different of the homeless population in their communities.

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69 Wasserman. At Home on the Street, 60.
The service providers that Wasserman and Clair worked with did make a distinction between people who were generally homeless, bouncing from shelter to shelter, and the people who made the choice to live on the street and not utilize shelter services. They felt that those who made the decision to live on the street must be crazy not to utilize services. But when the researchers interviewed the homeless population on this question, they had a very different response as to why they did not engage many of the resources available. They felt that not only were the shelters dirty, but that they were also extremely unsafe as they did not know the people who they were sleeping next to, drugs were illicitly traded, and all inhabitants were in close proximity with the germs of the person next to them.\textsuperscript{70} Along this same line, Evette recounted her shelter experiences in detail throughout her interview. When asked about the places she had stayed since becoming homeless she said:

If you walk up near the projects, you will find a little secret underpass where we used to live at. We had three large queen sized mattresses down there. There was a futon down there. There was a makeshift stove down there. We had a makeshift port-o-potty down there. So, when I got underneath of there, I didn’t find myself comfortable but at the time, the shelters were so over ran with mental health people. And with me taking the kind of medicines that I take, it was just totally unbearable. Like, I wasn’t able to sleep at nighttime because people would be up and moving around me and would make me scared. And then there was the level of theft that was going on. So if you laid your pocketbook down, it was guaranteed that when you came back, it was not there. So under the bridge was a relatively safe location for me.\textsuperscript{71}

As seen in Evette’s comments, many people may choose to stay in a homeless situation to avoid the hassle and stress associated with the shelter system.

Wasserman and Clair found that the stigma of substance abuse and mental illness is

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 61-63.
dominant because “those people are particularly visible. Their behavior draws attention, whereas the person who is homeless but does not exhibit these behaviors is more likely to go unnoticed,” and therefore inferences and assumptions about the population as a whole are easy to make, and are “then continually confirmed by daily interactions.”

Street homelessness is a “condition associated with increased daily hassles, decreased social support, decreased health status, and increased adverse life events,” which can throw a person into depression, or amplify any previously minor symptoms, thus being “a natural result of the condition, not the cause of it.” They also make the point that substance use by the street homeless population is much more likely to be overestimated and labeled as addiction than “a person of high socioeconomic status who ‘unwinds’ with a cocktail before dinner, wine with dinner, and a nightcap,” showing that society is much more willing to place negative stereotypes on a marginalized group in society.

For many the participants in this project who struggle with addiction or who have struggled with addiction in the past, substance abuse and alcoholism seemed to be the result of self-medicating to deal with personal troubles, including a fall into homelessness. Both Cordell and Richard were addicts early on in their lives, but had

72 Ibid., 72.
73 Wasserman. At Home on the Street, 72.
74 Wasserman. At Home on the Street, 72.
75 Ibid., 72.
76 Ibid., 73.
been sober for an extended period of time when they became homeless. Cordell talks specifically about how when he became homeless, it was very hard not to revert back to his old habits that he had worked so hard to put behind him. This shows that, like Wasserman and Clair suspected, substance abuse is not always the cause of homelessness, but is often an effect of or a reversion back to a past condition.

**Barriers and experiences with ‘the system’**

Often interviewees discussed how they struggled with receiving help from ‘the system.’ Whether it was the V.A. or other organizations offering assistance, ‘the system’ proved to be difficult to navigate and unnecessarily complicated. People struggled with finding accessible services and when they did access them, many felt looked down upon and shamed by seeking help for their current situation. When asked about barriers to care, Evette said:

> “you know, every time I go in for help, everyone’s looking down on me – that becomes depressing after a while. And it makes you feel like nobody really cares or gives a damn. Therefore, you get stuck and you’re in a situation and you learn how to live it.”

This sentiment “reflects a breakdown of societal supports and society’s capacity to care for its most vulnerable and needy. This breakdown results in substantial, and potentially preventable, health disparities and health inequities between homeless people and their age-matched housed counterparts.”

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78 O’Toole, Thomas and Erin E. Johnson and Stephan Redihan and Matthew Borgia et. al. “Needing Primary Care But Not Getting It: The Role of Trust, Stigma and
negative encounters with service organizations, some participants avoided seeking help as they did not want to go through the hassle of dealing with ‘the system’ or the let-down of being promised help and then not finding results. Cordell, who is currently living at Liberation Family Services, reported his experience with the local V.A. on trying to get a housing voucher so he could move out of transitional housing:

Well, okay supposedly I’m in the HUD-VASH program. And what that means is that they help you by getting you a voucher, and you know, because I’m on a fixed income. Well, seeing that I’m one of the people that do what you’re supposed to do, you know, like, I see – I have a mental health worker, I take medication, you know, yada, yada, yada, yada. The way this program is set up, I’m like one of the success stories, as far as following the program. You know what I mean. But to the people at the VA, that’s an excuse for them to say, “Okay, well you know what to do. You’re able to take care of yourself so we’re not going to give you a voucher.” You know like, they had me on an emotional roller coaster for about two months because they gave me one, they took it back, they gave me another one, they took it back. They gave me another one, you know? Just the different things that they do and, “We’re going to help you do this, and we’re going to help you do that.” They haven’t helped me do anything.\textsuperscript{79}

For Cordell, this experience seemed to be quite trying and complicated as he could not figure out what he needed to do to successfully retain the housing voucher. This encounter has made him hesitant to deal with ‘the system’ in the future.

But interviewees also discussed being their own barrier to getting off the streets or getting into permanent housing. When asked about barriers, Calvin said:

The only barrier I got is me stopping myself. Ain't nothing gone stop me, that's just the way I am. If you tell me no, another door open down the street. That's how I feel. I think the only barrier is yourself.\(^{80}\)

He opted not to expand much on this topic, but by speaking to other homeless veterans, it became clear what he meant. Self-made barriers seem to be the mental block one uses to protect themselves from let down and potential failure. Later in his interview, Calvin talked about taking risks and liking a challenge. Breaking free from the cycle of homelessness involves a certain level of risk taking by placing your trust in someone else to give you a hand up and get you to a place where you can take care of yourself and have your needs covered. Evette articulates these mental barriers and blocks that many homeless use for self-preservation, especially in respects to working with service organizations when she says:

There are walls that becomes built at different levels of homelessness, there are walls. Some people built walls because of their past family life and then they attach it to society as a whole. And then some people built up walls like me. My wall came when it came time to go inside. Ms. Desiree had found me a place where I could go inside but me going inside would have meant that I wouldn't have been able to move into my own place, but then it would've took longer. Rather me stay outside, which was the shorter thing. Which to them, kept me at the top of their emergency list. Like, we have versus me being inside which would have dropped me down the list two other people. But then you have a kind of resilience when you live outside and you’re homeless. So I think the barriers come from the community and then there are also self-made barriers.\(^{81}\)

Don voiced his frustration with the system when we talked about trying to receive services and barriers for homeless veterans when he said:

A lot of let down from the VA. They advertise they're there for their veterans. They're not. Just going through the system, and dealing with them, I don’t feel they’re there for the veterans because everything that, if we go to them for something we need, they send us to sources outside. "Well, go see these


people. Go to these people”, instead of saying, “Well, we have these people in place, and we can do this and this...” It’s not like that. It’s a lot of letdown.

On a similar cord as Evette, Don’s comments interact with other discourses about let down and disappointment from places that are supposed to be helpful. It was common for people to mention or allude to avoiding situations where they could face a let-down as a loss of hope would negatively impact their ability to survive on the streets or in their current situation. Evette remembers:

Like I was telling Ms. Desiree when I was homeless, “Don’t promise me anything. Let me go through the steps first without promising, oh here’s your keys, you know? And like it’s a carrot in front of a rabbit, like, don’t do that.82

Evette, like many others, did not want to enter a situation in which they would be potentially face disappointment. Once she had found a sense of safety and stability living under the bridge, she was worried about taking a risk and losing the one sense of security that she had.

**Causes of Veteran Homelessness**

When we discussed the causes of veteran homelessness, the answers varied, but most centered around key features of being too proud to ask for help, a loss of support system upon exiting the military, and the difficulty working with the system to get the help needed to survive. The idea of survival and resilience came up a few times with interviewees talking about how the military trained them to be able to survive with less and not struggling with that. Evette talked about this concept

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throughout her whole interview, integrating the idea of survival as a homeless individual and military training:

Veterans, especially, because we have lived in those elements, because we have lived in the jungles, they trained us how to live in the mountains and they trained us how to go without food and water and clothes and things of that nature and to struggle with what you have. I think that’s where the homeless veteran gets stuck at... And veterans, when you’re homeless, it’s a little bit harder for us to come inside because we’ve been used to dealing with the elements. We’re used to you know, being put in situations that are uncomfortable for us. Being homeless is not comfortable, it’s very uncomfortable. But when you’re a veteran, you’re trained to get used to the uncomfortable. We’re trained to get used to the unfamiliar. We’re trained to live off of sea rations, that’s where we call the home made, the things that we get when we go out in the field. We call them sea rations. We’re used to eating like that. So when homeless comes about, it’s...we deal with it. It’s not a really big problem for us because we’ve been used to it.  

Susan Ray discusses this paradox in a chapter of her book Beyond the Line concluding that homeless veterans are often thrust into homelessness in many of the same ways as non-veterans, but they tend to handle their homeless experiences differently due to their military training and experiences as, “veterans consider themselves better equipped to endure and are less fearful of the hardships of street life. However, they are also less inclined to seek or accept help because of their tendency to elevate the perceived “shame” of their situation.” This is a theme discussed and alluded to by other participants as well, “reveal[ing] that veterans’ experiences of homelessness are to some extent conditioned by their military experiences,” and training in mental toughness and personal discipline. This analysis fits closely with the attitudes of many of the participants in the project.

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84 Ray. Beyond the Line, 301.
They expressed pride in what their training had taught them and prepared them for but they also communicated the difficulties they faced when asking for help, demonstrating that military culture and the subsequent development of hyper-masculinity can act as a barrier to aid.

A few of the participants expressed a belief that the loss of support system found in the military environment impacts veteran homelessness. Calvin said, “because in the military you constantly around, you always have a support system. And reason why most of ‘em become homeless is because they lost their way.” The loss of support system upon exiting the military thrusts service members into an unfamiliar society with different expectations and ideas for them than they have of themselves. With no one there to share that experience and provide support and guidance, it is easy for people to begin to feel lost and struggle readjusting. Wilbur and others refer to the lack of support upon exiting the military as part of the reason they think veterans become homeless. Wilbur responded to the question:

Why do I think veterans in general become homeless? Because, you have a, you take a baby, you take a baby and you start to raise it and then about time that it's pushed out of the nest someone is there to catch it and put it back in the nest, in a different nest but in a nest and you put it back in the nest and it never learns to fly. So, but then when you’re finished with it, ok don’t say nest say a cage or whatever, but then when you’re finished with it if you don’t enjoy it anymore you just say ok, just leave the cage open and walk away from it and never come back. The veterans I think are about time they got ready to sprout wings and go out into society, here’s a uniform, that’s the chow hall, and here’s a job. Then after you’re finished with them, ok, go back home, but on your own. Well I’m back on my own, what am I supposed to do. I don’t wear clothes, I wear uniforms. I don’t go to the kitchen to eat; I go to the chow hall. I don’t go to the bedroom; I go to the bunk. And subconsciously there not ready for it. Ok, now an officer, he has college

behind him and a career or whatever and he’s, he can handle it better, but NCO if he doesn’t make a career out of the service, stay in the service, I don’t know.⁸⁷

While the military prepared the interviewees to do their job while in the service, they were then thrust into a very different civilian world upon exiting. After being conditioned to not admit to weakness, seeking out a support system can prove to be especially difficult, particularly when struggling with a situation like homelessness. Ray discusses how in her study, veterans exiting the military often found that the “structured military lifestyle can be poor preparation for the complex aspects of civilian life: housing, retraining, and education, etc.”⁸⁸ Homeless veterans she worked with often found themselves “floundering without a strong sense of individual adult identity and often feel isolated and alone in the civilian world.”⁸⁹

The experiences of veterans in her study align with the observations of interviewees participating in this project, showing how the sudden lack of structure and support system and be severely detrimental to the veteran’s ability to thrive in civilian society.

**Civilian Military Disconnect**

The civilian military disconnect is something that non-homeless service members talk about, and it was especially prevalent in these oral histories. When asked what civilians might not particularly understand about the experiences of veterans, I got a wide variety of articulations of the same general theme of civilians not

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⁸⁹ Ibid., 303.
understanding what service members go through and judging them off of images from the media. Interviewees talked about how civilians do not understand the training and mindset of a service member, especially when it comes to asking for help. Carl says:

They don’t understand the things that we’ve been through. They don’t understand us. I think they look at us as somebody that’s been through a lot. They just don’t quite understand. They don’t really understand us. They don’t ever really figure us out. A lot of times I think that they look at us as being really crazy in the head, something like that. I notice that a lot of them stay out of our way… I would want them to know that we’re just individuals that not only served our country but we’re not bad individuals, we just got problems like anybody else that we’re trying to work though and we’re very nice people and very helpful. I know I am.90

In a way, Don responds to this statement through our interview when he says:

If they haven’t actually been through what we went through, they draw conclusions off of T.V. instead of actual facts. So a lot of other people are misled about veterans. You do have some good veterans, and you have some bad veterans. I’m not saying we all are perfect, because we’re human, we’re gonna make mistakes.91

The interaction between these two statements is exemplary of the sentiments of other participants in the project. The combination of preconceived notions about veterans, the lack of understanding about the military from the general public, and the addition of homelessness makes for a large disconnect for the interviewees.

Wilbur shares similar thoughts on the civilian military disconnect when he says:

I don’t think they know, they don’t understand, they don’t know that war is Hell, it’s a horrible thing. They don’t know the horrors of war. You know what I mean. And there’s no way I can convince you of what I’ve seen and I’ve dealt with. I can tell you, but you would still not understand.92

On the same subject, Calvin said:

Most civilians don’t know the sacrifices that most vets made. Like you said, most kids go in at 18-19 years old, took on the responsibility of defending this country. Yes, a lot of us have paid for it with their life. And then a lot of us have paid for it with the medical problems that come with it, broken limb, amputated limb, mental. Like right now it would never go out of my head, being under that water. Being woke up at night thinking, oh its time for us to shoot this thing right now. It’s time for us to destroy the world. That would never leave my memory. Sometimes I know right now I know I talk in my sleep. I been woke up and talking. That kind of stuff you would never get over that kind of stuff. It’s just a part of life I guess. Dealing with it. 

For Calvin, dealing with his post-traumatic stress disorder is something that he feels like keeps him from connecting to other people in his life as he feels like others do not understand that. Calvin is currently enrolled in a VA mental health care program where he is working with a mental health worker on his struggles with PTSD, but this invisible injury from his time in the service is one that he believes that he will carry with him forever. The challenge of readjustment back to civilian and family life is already a difficult adjustment, but if the soldier is facing any sort of invisible injury, such as combat stress, readjustment is made even harder by the masculine ideals that have been so deeply engrained into them as “the shared emphasis on toughness and loyalty foster[s] an uneasy double standard” for confronting physical and mental health problems. These men have been trained and conditioned to not admit or show any weakness, and mental injury is seen as a major weakness. Soldiers are scared to admit they are struggling with combat stress or other issues because they do not want to be seen as weak, cowardly, or a sissy. They are also

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94 Finley, Fields of 109.
worried about the repercussions they might face from the military itself as one can be discharged for a mental injury.95

Friends and Loneliness

Engaging with the civilian military disconnect that many participants talked about, there is an aspect of loneliness that comes with that disconnect that is exacerbated by a homeless situation. All interviewees expressed feelings of loneliness even when they had someone to talk to everyday. Their current situation keeps them feeling like an outsider in society and causes loneliness, depression and secluding themselves. Those who have family, speak to their family when they are feeling lonely. Others talked about taking solace in religion for a sense of belonging and hope.

Ami Rokach conducted a study on the causes of loneliness in the homeless population and found that loneliness was generally caused by feeling one or a combination of “personal inadequacy, developmental deficits, unfulfilling intimate relationships, relocation/significant separations, and social marginality.”96 While homeless, one must focus on merely obtaining the necessities needed to survive, and not on personal development, making friends, or mental upkeep. Not only is there not time to do any of those things, as basic survival can be extremely time consuming, their marginalized position in society can make it difficult to make

95 Ibid., 110-112.
friends. About half of the interviewees related that they did not have trouble making friends, but still felt lonely and distant from those friends, their family and society. When asked about having close friends, Calvin said, “Well I can’t say a close friend, we just have a mutual bond. So yes, there’s a couple of people I mess with every day. I try to speak with everybody, I try to get along with everybody…” This shows how even while living in a place where you are in close proximity with people who share a similar story to you, it is still hard to establish close friendships.

**Difficulties of not having a Home**

A home is something many people take for granted on a day-to-day basis. For the participants, the struggles of not having a home are real. Many talked about missing the ability to have privacy, freedom to come and go whenever they pleased, and the ability to cook their own food when they wanted. Rokach talks about being homeless as being more than just not having a roof over your head. Many people do in fact have a place to sleep or go at night, but she deems a more useful definition to be the “lack of a secure and satisfactory home,” Engaging with the difficulties many felt they had when dealing with homelessness. When talking with Evette about the difficulties about not having her own home, she talked about her experiences living under the bridge and the difficulties she faced adjusting to that situation.

The hardest thing about not having a home is being able to get up in the morning and wash your face and brush your teeth. The things that you do naturally, is taking for granted when you’re outside. There is no get up in the middle of the night and get a drink of water, unless you have water that you

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97 Ibid., 38.
already transported down there. I think that’s the hardest part about
being...of not having a home, is just being able to go to the bathroom. We did
a lot of outside bathroom so that meant carrying handy wipes, that meant
carrying toilet paper. That meant going into public restrooms and things like
that and actually washing up.100

While the participants in this project are currently housed through transitional
housing or a HUD-VASH voucher, they still lack their own “secure and satisfactory
home”101 to be able to have comfort, privacy and enjoy simple comforts like cooking.

Cordell talks about how even though he has a place to live at Liberation Family
Services, he still feels like he does not have a true space and home of his own:

Just being – just not having my own space. You know? Having a roof over my
head? You know? Like here, there’s like – how many – I think there might be
twenty-five, twenty-seven people here now. You have about twenty, twenty-
five different personalities. SO you have to learn how, you know, everybody’s
pretty much on meds. So you have to, you know? Somebody might be having
a bad day and you know, you gotta be flexible. You gotta be able to you know,
think on your feet. 102

When asked about the difficulties he faced when he was street homeless James
discussed the mental difficulties the accompanied the physical discomfort and how
it is easy to get down on yourself and lose hope.

...homelessness was a beast. I mean, us being in the military, homelessness
was something else. Something to experience. When you have to struggle,
and live in the cold, live on concrete at times, and have to walk to get slips to
go to certain places. That was something else. And then you have family
members that put you out, knowing you ain’t got nowhere to go. And
sleeping in cars, sleeping in trucks or whatever, that hits you. You wake up
the next morning, knowing you need to do what you need to do to provide for
yourself, you don’t have no rest, you’re tired, hungry. That gets you. And you
feel like you wanna do something to somebody, or even do something to
yourself, but you gotta pick yourself up and say I’m stronger than this.103

101 Rokach, “The Lonely and Homeless.” 37
Not truly having a home of their own is something that these veterans find difficult to deal with in their own ways. It wears on them both mentally and physically and these discomforts can quickly turn into barriers for them as they try to deal with their situation.

**Cycle of Homelessness**

While not asked about this directly, most of the interviewees in this program were chronically homeless at one point. Harold even saw himself as being homeless in the future. Our conversations alluded to the cycle of homelessness and how hard it is to break free from the cycle. Evette talked about how easy it was to get stuck in the cycle of homelessness:

> A lot of homeless people, they go and rent hotel rooms to get off the street just to have a place to sleep, just to have a place to eat. But then it uses up their money so fast that they don’t – they don’t even get a chance to be stable. And then you have programs, like I was outside and there was a program that had opened and all this homeless people had got rooms. But they didn’t have jobs to maintain them. They lied their way into it. “Oh yeah, I get a check every month.” Because they had a couple dollars in their pockets so the landlord would go ahead on and take the stipend that the government, or that the state, or the federal, local government was giving them for that person without that person having a way to sustain their self. So then what happens? They go right back out on the streets again within ninety days. It’s a vicious cycle and the only way to pull yourself up out of it, to maintain stability, is to really want it. And after you stay outside for a couple years, you don’t want it anymore - you just get used to it. You – those people become your family, they become your friends, they become your enablers – they enable you to stay outside.¹⁰⁴

This detailed description of the desperation that people go through to find housing, only to lose that housing and struggle with chronic homelessness shows how

difficult it can be to break the cycle when an individual is in distress about their situation and has received a lot of previous disappointment. As Evette relates above, she feels that some homeless are forced into such desperate situations that they feel the need to lie and cheat the system to attempt to better their situation, only for it to be made worse in the long run due to temporary solutions.

In their book, *At Home on the Streets*, Wasserman and Clair discuss the struggle to break free from the cycle especially when the health care system or criminal justice system is involved.

The health-care and criminal justice systems become increasingly problematic obstacles once an individual becomes homeless, since contact with them becomes more frequent. Individuals who are homeless are more likely to become sick as a result of their living conditions or injured because of the type of work they perform. Exacerbating the later, the informal nature of their employment leaves those who are homeless little recourse for work-related injuries. They are also more likely to be arrested for misdemeanor crimes such as vagrancy, because they are forced to do private things in public spaces. Since they are often unable to pay the fines for these arrests, they accumulate debt in the court system.  

This quote reveals how circular the problem of homelessness really is. As the authors discuss, a person often becomes homeless after a living a life on the brink of poverty and losing their job. Once they lose their job, they lose health care and the ability to pay for their house and car. When they cannot pay for those things, many end up homeless. This sudden thrust into homelessness can lead to severe depression or the exacerbation of the symptoms of a current mental condition like

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105 Wasserman. *At Home on the Street*, 80.
schizophrenia. Because they have no access to health-care, many chose to self-medicate with drugs and alcohol, thus hindering their ability to find new stable employment or keep up with family ties and leaving them to find work through a temp agency or manual labor. Once a person has entered this ‘revolving door’ of homelessness, escape can prove very difficult, as the obstacles seem to become more insurmountable the longer one is homeless. But despite of circular set of obstacles, the participants of Wasserman and Clair’s study “[saw] their lives on a course: one switch sent them into homelessness and another in the future will take them out of it.”

While Harold sees himself as heading “back to [his] tent” in the future should things not go his way, other interviewees see themselves as having broken free from the cycle at this point in their lives. This shows that these people remain optimistic on exiting homelessness despite the many obstacles they may face.

Interviewees for this project and in the study conducted by Wasserman and Clair all talked about having very negative feelings about the shelter environment because it was dirty, dangerous, and made them feel like complete degenerates because many of the shelter programs “conceptualized homelessness as an addiction problem.” For most of these men, addiction is not the reason they are homeless. It is something that some, not all, use to cope with their situation and therefore they do not want to be labeled as a homeless addict, because that definition is so narrow, confining, and

107 Ibid., 78.
108 Ibid., 100.
110 Wasserman. At Home on the Street, 115.
full of negative connotations. While the shelter assistance programs can be very useful for getting off the streets, there is a barrier to entry caused by the imposed identity that all homeless are addicts or mentally ill. People struggle asking for help to begin with because it hurts their pride and sense of masculinity, but it takes an even bigger hit on one’s pride and self-esteem when asking for help also means acknowledging and taking on a stigmatized identity as your own.

Feeling a Need to Give Back

Every interviewee brought up feeling a need to participate in volunteer work or give back to the community through small acts of kindness. When asked about this sentiment, they all talked about how they feel a need to give back because they know what it is like to struggle. They do not view charity or helping someone as a hand-out, they viewed it as a hand up in a time of need. Wilbur comments on this idea of a hand up versus a hand out when he says:

“I’m going down the road, come on I’ll give you a hand, let’s go. But I’m not gonna put you in the wagon and pull you down the road and when I get down there I’ll tell somebody you’re up here but I ain’t coming back this way. So I would say give me a hand up not out. Fletcher is trying to get somebody here, give us here, give me here a hand up and the fact that, yeah here’s a place to stay, right now. And a hand out would be ok, you can stay here forever. But I don’t want to stay here forever.”

Wilbur feels like it is his duty to help people along the way when he is able, but not go so far out of his way to help that he puts himself in a bad position.

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All the participants expressed a strong internal desire to help others in times of need throughout their interviews. When talking about giving back to the community, Evette expressed how she feels about giving back to people as something she does on a daily basis.

It gives you a level of satisfaction in your life. You know, it makes you feel good when you come in, when I looked at and I see where I used to live at and when I say you know, “Living underneath the bridge was worth it.” Would I do it again? No, absolutely not. And would I tell anybody? No, no. But I would like to go back and help the people that are underneath there – if I could get on some type of program or something like that. Whenever you come from a homeless situation whether you're a vet or not, you always have a sense of wanting to give back, all the time and that’s important...

She feels a need to give back because she knows what it is like to be in a compromising situation. She also talks about what she receives when she gives in the form of happiness and satisfaction. When Don was talking about his volunteer work with the Boy Scouts and the motor scooter repair company, he said:

...and you see that glow, and their eyes light up, it makes me want to cry because the simple fact is I'm soft-hearted, and if you're happy, boy, I'm bubbling over with happiness. Even though someone gave it to you, I helped make you happy because of my knowledge.

Most related that one of the reasons they give back to people is because it makes them happy or makes them feel satisfied, thus giving them a feeling of belonging in a community where they fit with a marginalized population. On the topic of why he gives back Wilbur says, “Yeah, that is my mission in life, to help my fellow man, or whatever. But that’s what I'm here for.” They do not see their actions for others

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as a sacrifice, but rather as an act to build themselves and the other individual up, thus contributing to their overall happiness.\footnote{Singer, Peter. \textit{The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism is Changing Ideas about Living Ethically} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 103}

\section*{Conclusion}

\textbf{Being Proud Despite their Situation}

Being homeless generally doesn’t evoke happy thoughts. Many who are homeless fall into patterns of depression and anxiety about their situation and have trouble seeing past their immediate situation. When asked “what are you most proud of?” the interviewees seemed a little shocked. All of them expressed pride in their families, children and grandchildren specifically, and many talked about being proud of finally being able to accept help, being housed and “that I am still alive.”\footnote{Nettles, Don. Interviewed by Kelsey Glander. Richmond. Video. March 18, 2016.}

In light of the barriers and bad circumstances these veterans feel like they have faced, they still have things in their lives that they are proud of and things that are worth living for, showing that their homeless situation, while causing them stress and difficulties, does not impact their ability to remain positive.

\section*{Daily Life and Hopes for the Future}

Interviewees are currently spending their days doing things they enjoy such as reading and writing. Many are working to find employment if they are not already employed, or plan on spending more time doing volunteer work. They all have set goals to one day own a home of their own and have a lifestyle that they are able to
support without assistance. Many of them hope to rebuild past relationships with family or cultivate health romantic relationships in the future.

As the author of *Happiness* relates, “we could not be happy without setting ourselves goals...If our goals are too low, we get bored. If our goals are too high, we get frustrated.” The participants in this project have all set goals that are realistic for their futures and are actively contributing to their future happiness by striving for these goals and moving out of homelessness.

As of November 11, 2015, the state of Virginia announced that it has functionally eliminated veteran homelessness, being the first state in the country to do so.

According to the state, the functional end of veteran homelessness means that, “veteran homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring in [the] community.” While many veterans are still homeless, and many will experience homelessness in the future, the service community in Virginia, and Richmond in particular has been able to come together to build a system where they “continue to house more veterans each month than the number who enter the homeless services system.”

Despite these claims about functionally eliminating veteran homelessness, many veterans still choose to remain homeless and out of reach. Additionally, functionally ending veteran homelessness only means that these veterans currently have a roof

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119 “Veterans.”
over their head, but it does not mean that they have secure and satisfactory home”¹²⁰ or that they will not become homeless again in the future. For many of the interviewees, homelessness is not as simple as finding a roof over their heads. It is a cycle that impacts all aspects of their lives. While the veterans who participated in this project are technically a part of the functional end of veteran homelessness, their aspirations for the future of exiting the transitional housing phase and owning their own homes, shows that ending homelessness goes much deeper than a physical roof of any kind. Many of the participants alluded to feelings of still being homeless despite being housed and not on the streets, when they talked about the difficulties of living in transitional housing with others.

The divide between those who are homeless and those who are not is both a physical division and a social division, as “homelessness is not purely an economic disadvantage but also a stigmatized social identity that is given meaning according to its conceptual distance from the norm,”¹²¹ creating an us vs. them dichotomy and a social separation that is difficult to articulate and overcome. Many turn away and view the homeless as a distinctly different, and inherently lower status of person, forgetting that at the core, we share many inherent similarities and life experiences. This us vs. them dichotomy pressures those struggling with homelessness to embody the stories they hear about their population.

Society doesn't know how to treat homeless people with dignity. Homeless people, regardless... There’s a level of negativity that makes, that makes society look down on homeless people. Yeah, most of them, majority of them

¹²¹ Wasserman, At Home on the Street. 2.
are dirty, they’re not well kept, or well groomed. And whenever you roll up on somebody and they’re not well groomed or they may have an odor, it seems to make people step back. That’s a normal reaction. But if you look behind all of that physical stuff, you still find a human being that has a heart, that bleeds, that cries, that has happy times, that has all the regular emotions that a normal person does.¹²²

These oral histories, in addition to past and future oral histories, have the ability to help the participants in this project and others facing homelessness overcome the stigmas associated with the homeless.

The oral histories of these veterans show that the military proved to only be a temporary reprieve from disadvantaged personal conditions prior to entering the military and was not the cause of homelessness. While life seemed to improve upon exiting, interviewees were generally thrust back into the same or similar conditions that spurred them to join the service in the first place. These difficult circumstances, partnered with sudden life events created the homeless situation that they currently find themselves in. Oral histories prove to be a valuable tool in examining the issue of veteran homelessness. The themes expressed by the participants show that each of them share a similar experience of service and journey through homelessness that is not apparent to an outsider at first look. Their stories can provide valuable insight for service providers on how to best help veterans cope with homelessness and contribute a fresh perspective to civilian society on the state of veteran homelessness as oral histories are accessible to a wider audience and allow more

people to directly engage with the stories. When problems of homelessness are presented in statistical and analytical fashions, the problem feels distant and peripheral. But when one hears the stories of someone going through a homelessness journey, the issues become real and hard to ignore or misinterpret. Through the Forgotten Fight Oral History Project, the voices of homeless veterans in Richmond VA, remind us that the struggles in the homeless community extend much more complex than the societal stereotypes. These stories and voices have the power to spur important societal and service oriented change in dealing with the homeless veteran community.
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Appendix 1

July 2014 Snapshot of Veterans

Experiencing Homelessness in the Richmond Region

The following data were collected in Homeward’s 9th summer (July 29, 2015) count of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the Richmond region. A total of 607 adults and 89 children were counted, and 79.4% of adults completed the Homeward point-in-time survey. The statistics below represent the 22.7% of individuals who indicated that they were veterans.

- 96.2% of adults are males, and 3.8% are females. 53.8% are or have been in families (including those who are married, as well as those who are separated, widowed, or divorced) or are currently partnered.
- 2.9% of veterans have children living with them.
- A majority of veterans report that they are African-American (64.4%), followed by White (26.0%). 4.0% indicated that they are Hispanic.
- The average age for adult veterans is 51.9 years.
- 32.2% of veterans reported that they served in combat. 67.0% were honorably discharged. 19.0% of all discharges were general.
- 48.1% have just a high school education or GED. 29.8% attended some college, and 14.4% have a college degree or higher.
- 78.1% have been to jail and/or prison. Of those serving time in jail and/or prison, 60.0% reported having felony convictions, and 38.7% reported being homeless before incarceration.
- 24.3% have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. Of those experiencing domestic violence, 25.0% had experienced it in the past year.
- 52.6% report having a problem with alcohol sometime in their lifetime. Of those reporting a problem with alcohol, 72.0% are currently in recovery.
- 46.4% report having a problem with drugs sometime in their lifetime. Of those reporting a problem with drugs, 79.5% are currently in recovery.
- 45.4% report having a mental health problem sometime in their lifetime. Of these, 59.1% are currently being treated, and 56.8% are taking medication for mental health problems. 90.9% have received treatment or counseling for mental health problems sometime in their lifetime.
- 41.9% report having a long-term disability. Of those reporting a long-term disability, 67.6% indicated that their disability was drug or alcohol abuse; 57.1% indicated that their disability was a mental illness; and 48.6% indicated that their disability was physical. (Note that respondents could select multiple disability types.)
- 34.0% are employed. Of those who are employed, 25.0% work full-time, 43.8% work part-time, and 31.3% do day labor or temp work.
- The median length of time respondents have lived in Greater Richmond is three years, and 29.3% have lived in the area for 20 years or more.
- The largest percentage of respondents (51.5%) reported having their last housing in Richmond. Others indicated previous housing in Chesterfield (8.2%), Henrico (5.2%), and Hanover (1.0%). 15.5% of respondents last lived elsewhere in Virginia, and 16.5% lived in other states.
- In the past three years, most homeless persons have been homeless once (41.7%) or twice (31.1%). 27.2% have been homeless three or more times during this time period.
- 49.4% have been homeless for ten months or less.

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Appendix 2

Forgotten Flight Oral History Transcript
(3/18/2016)
KG: Kelsey Glander
TB: Thomas Brooks
Transcribed by: Jackie Salg

KG: And here we go. Okay, so first off, what is your name and can you tell me about yourself, where you grew up and a little bit about your family life growing up?

TB: Okay. My name is Thomas Wade Brooks; middle name, Wade. For all practical purposes, I had a pretty good upbringing even though I didn’t – my mom set up some, well she set up some secrets that were designed to down me, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: Excuse my French. But and then when she had a bout with skin cancer she decided to spill the beans and by then I was twenty-seven years old.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And she picked the worst time in my life to drop that bomb, a couple of bombshells on me. And it’s an ongoing scenario with me right now to try and bridge the gap to that side of the fence that with which has been kept away from me.

KG: Right.

TB: And on a good note pertaining to that situation is, I finally got a picture of my real father.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I was fifty years old when that happened. And [pause] I’ve been trying to bridge the gap to that side of the fence.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And running into obstacles left and right pertaining to that. People have died and moved on or whatever the case may be. But I have attempted to bridge that gap, okay. And like I said, many, many walls have popped up in front of it and I think it’s because of the huge time lapse scenarios.

KG: Yeah.
TB: But at the back of mind, I know that if I take- or get on my feet here, get back into the driving more, then I will be taking trips to be able to present myself to that side of the fence.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And on an interesting note, that side of the fence, my father had two sisters that is confirmed; novel writers. But the bad news about all that is those two sisters have died also.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I got a lot of mixed emotions about that and I’m not going to go into too much details about that.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Because right now everything is on an investigative level with me.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But, excuse me.

KG: [Laughs]

TB: I ate something a while ago and I don’t know why my stomach is growling. Maybe it’s this hot chocolate.

KG: [Laughs]

TB: But like I said, it makes me more determined, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: To connect with that side.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah and hopefully God and myself is talking about all that and I’ve been incarcerated for twenty-six years, four months in this state. And I’m on paper cleared up until I turn sixty, which is two years away. And I regret not having obtained my MOS while I was in the military.

KG: Mhm.

TB: I was not a happy camper with the fact that I had been declined my MOS: Military Occupational Specialty. And I became what they called, as mom would put
it, a tumbling weed gathers no moss, okay? And I think it was all that at, the time that I had done, that really played the key role on her to get around to accepting the fact that she had in fact lost her son.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Okay? If she would've lived another six months on the tail end of me getting ready to make parole, she would have seen her son coming out of prison after serving seventeen years.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But it was meant to be. I lost her on the verge of making parole.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I got a lot of mixed emotions about that. But at the same time, when she dropped those bombshells on me twenty-four years earlier, I was in the mode of rejecting it simply because I was looking to spend the rest of my life in prison.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And so I told her that I wished to God she would have never told me about that.

KG: Right.

TB: But she had an opportunity when I was like eight years old to actually spill the beans when she saw me going through the family important papers.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But the excuse she threw at me back then was, “Well, you take after my dad.” And having no pictures of him, I assumed that – I was contented with that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Okay? And then she waited x many years later to go on and spill the beans.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Yeah. Oh.

KG: So when did you join the military and what lead your decision to join?
TB: I was striving for something, okay? And my cousin, Allen, myself, and Ronnie [undistinguishable], all three of us went on what they called the buddy-buddy system.

KG: Mhm.

TB: I was seventeen years old. Allen was seventeen years old. And mom knew that I was – I was a young man back then, okay? And she knew yeah that I was a drifter, okay? And all the more reasons for her back then, to let me know. But no, she waited ten years later to drop the bombshell on me.

KG: Mhm.

TB: The two bombshells. But...

KG: Was your mom proud when you joined the military?

TB: Yes, she was. I got pictures. And boot camp, there was one picture in particular, inside my boot camp album; San Diego, California. I didn't know it at the time, but they had these photographers going around but we were more or less concentrated on our activity inside of boot camp.

KG: Yeah.

TB: And one of our camped out areas they showed me a picture of me reading one of my mom's older sister's last letter to me.

KG: Mhm.

TB: My favorite aunt, Rose and every time I see that picture too, it comes to my eyes because she died subsequently after that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: She was my favorite, favorite aunt. Thought the world of that woman. And little shadows of the past, it just threatens to engulf me.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah.

KG: What was your training like and what are some of your most memorable moments from training?

TB: Graduation day.
KG: Yeah.

TB: Yeah. Dressed in uniform, yeah, the medals, yeah. But subsequently after that, I found out that I was [undistinguishable] marked for reserves and I wasn’t a happy camper with that.

KG: Right.

TB: I wanted to be in the regular Marine Corps, back then.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And now, subsequently after that, actively involved in the Reserves in Tulsa, outside of Tulse, Oklahoma; the panhandle of Oklahoma.

KG: Yeah.

TB: [Undistinguishable], back out that way.

KG: Mhm.

TB: [Undistinguishable] Ranch, Reserves Unit.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Which was like, a hundred fifty miles from where my home was at.

KG: Yeah.

TB: I had problems with my pickup truck so I had my thumb out and I was hitchhiking to my post and a bunch of hippies came over riding in a gray van, threw a broken beer bottle at me.

KG: Oh, man.

TB: And after that, I got out of the Corps.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah.

KG: How long were you in?

TB: I wasn’t in there long, nineteen months.

KG: Yeah.
TB: Yeah.

KG: What was it like to leave? What was it like to leave the military?

TB: Well, it was a thing – let me back up one second, okay?

KG: Okay.

TB: There, outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma, my parents – and this is on the tail end of me graduating out of boot camp.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And setting up shop inside of the Reserves and everything and at one point I walked back up to my house and my dad had his knees on my mom’s chest on the floor and I broke that up, real quick.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Yeah and yanked my dad up against – well, I didn’t hit him.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I let him know I do not appreciate what he was doing, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: That was the first time I had ever seen him do that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And subsequently after that, they came into agreement that I needed to be put out and I was homeless from that point on.

KG: How old were you?

TB: Seventeen. Yeah. My parents had signed for me to go in at the age of seventeen.

KG: Mhm.

TB: If I had have been there like a couple months later, I would’ve been eighteen years old.

KG: Right.
TB: But dad decided to come in and put the brakes on the fact that he controlled my mom, his wife, without me interfering, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: So I became, what they called, a tumbleweed that gathered no moss.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I let him know before I left that place I was going to check in on my mom, you know?

KG: Right.

TB: And I asked him point blank, “Don’t do anything. I won’t stand for it.” That’s what I let him know.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And for all practical purposes, he was my dad, okay? Yeah, because three months pregnant, my mom decided to hook up with him.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And he came in to rescue her, thus rescuing me in the process. And so he knew I loved him, okay?

KG: Yeah.

TB: And I have my ifs and buts about that. I wasn't going to be rough with him, just going to try to shake some sense into him.

KG: Right.

TB: But he knew I loved him. Loved him and my mom as well and my sister and my brother as well. And just before I went into the Marine Corps, like two summers before, I was instrumental in saving my brother and sister’s lives out there on the Arkansas River out there in Oklahoma. God intervened big time on that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And my brother and sister went into a dare, who could wade out in the deepest side of the water, quicker. And not knowing about underwater currents, they grabbed them up and started transferring them out to deeper waters, okay?

KG: Mhm.
TB: And my dad had a cast on his leg and he took that off. He fell out of the chair, the lawn chair and crept to the water’s edge.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I just kept screaming at them to hold on, okay?

KG: Yeah.

TB: And at that point in time, I looked up at God and said, “God, please I don’t want to go through this life without my brother and my sister around.” And he heard my prayers and I was able to get a huge driftwood out of a sandbar.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And he gave me the strength to do that, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And mom ran up to the top of the bridge and she was screaming bloody murder trying to get a pedestrian on the other side of the bridge to stop.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And God heard my prayers that day, okay? And he gave me the strength to do all that and I was a hundred fifteen pounds sopping wet, back then. And they came down, [undistinguishable] to me and [undistinguishable] went out, as soon as I used that wood to get to my brother and my sister, and thus saved their lives. And it was a beautiful day.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Because God heard my prayers.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah.

KG: [Coughs] Sorry. What were your relationships with other members of the military like and do you still keep in contact with them?

TB: I was pretty much a loner, yeah, very much a loner. And what I had accomplished and I put my nose to the ground and [undistinguishable]. Yeah, that’s what I did.
KG: Do you keep in contact with any of them, with any people you knew back then?

TB: No.

KG: No?

TB: No.

KG: What brought you to Richmond?

TB: What brought me to Richmond?

KG: Yeah.

TB: The fact that my mom and my dad had their roots out here.

KG: Okay.

TB: My mom from [undistinguishable] and my dad from [undistinguishable] County.

KG: Okay.

TB: And my biological dad, from with his [undistinguishable], his [undistinguishable], before I came into the world. But that’s an ongoing issue with me.

KG: Mhm. How did you become homeless?

TB: I think it stemmed from the fact I knew something was missing, okay? And I was halfway through my teenage years and mom you know, she had more than enough opportunities to let me know. I became a drifter after the Corps, okay? And that’s what I did. I mean I crisscrossed the continental U.S. numerous times, seeking myself out.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Sleeping under bridges, barns, what have you and I always had military gear.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Such as a sleeping bag and a duffel bag with me.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And that’s what I did and she had opportunities then, you know?
TB: To spill the beans but she waited until I saw her [undistinguishable] out for being real, real stupid and real colorful and real stupid back in the middle part of the nineteen-eighties. And then she decided to spill the beans because she knew that I was on a path of destruction. Yeah I was on it and...but she said all of those secrets, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: I love her and she knew I love her and I just wished to God that she had come clean with me ten, fifteen years earlier.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But no, she waited and waited, waited, waited, waited.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And she came to terms with the fact that waiting was not working.

KG: Right.

TB: You know because I was getting away from it all even to getting to the point of becoming a damn hermit.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Literally and that’s what I did.

KG: Mhm. Can you tell me about the different places you’ve stayed during that time as a drifter?

TB: I stayed in Oregon, I stayed in New Orleans, I stayed in San Francisco, I stayed in Montana, picking up jobs as I went along, getting enough pocket money and it was temporary work.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And rolling out of town with just a few bucks in my pocket, and just wandering, seeking and I was on the verge of becoming a full-fledged criminal.

KG: Mhm.

TB: That’s what I was doing.
TB: And I regret that but God saw me through all of that for some reason.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And it's just, it's issues that I've become, trying to come to terms with okay, because me and God is talking about it, right?

KG: Yeah.

TB: And that's a good thing, without that, if I ever got a notion in my head, “He does not really exist.” But I can't say that because I've seen miracles occur.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I know he's there, I know he's listening to me, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And he bestows miracles upon me not on my timescale, but rather on his when I'm more suitable to receive them.

KG: Right, mhm.

TB: And that's my take on the matter.

KG: What is the hardest part about not having a home?

TB: Well, considering all my drifting, okay, I could easily lapse back into that mode of thing.

KG: Right.

TB: Yeah even to the point of swimming out to an island and living on the island or whatever, okay? I know how to build things; I know how to live off the land and everything else. What do you mean?

KG: Is there anything [coughs] that you feel that you would like about having a permanent place of residence? Or did you just not decide or?
TB: I would feel that way if I could connect to that side of the fence, you know?

KG: Mhm, okay.

TB: And I feel that way, okay and it’s given me aspirations to eventually own my own place, okay?

KG: Right.

TB: Even to the point of, I got introduced to product and that’s something that’s ongoing with me as well. And they’re giving me great reviews on a product that only that, when I’m not messing around with that I’m writing off drafts, okay?

KG: Right.

TB: And that comes from, like I said, the side of the fence that’s been kept away from me.

KG: Tell me a little bit more about your writing.

TB: I write all fictional, I breathe life into a character and I run with them, I can put them, place them in a given situation because they are in fact, an extension of me.

KG: Right.

TB: Yeah. This is my first rough draft, that’s what I did.

KG: Mhm.

TB: I proposed a lot of characters in my book and getting caught up in the politics of that, they find in the book writing world, that less is more, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And they might come through and stipulate, so okay “This segment needs to leave this segment. That segment has to leave.” And I got a lot of mixed emotions about that because those characters are an extension of me.

KG: Right.

TB: Yeah but at the same time, when they put [undistinguishable], they’ve got to entertain the notion that I want [undistinguishable] and that’s the author’s option, okay?

KG: Right.
TB: So I feel real comfortable with that. But on a time scale, they’ve got to like, okay this is more feasible at this point in time, you know?

KG: Mhm.

TB: But you do have the option, and they pointed out to me that I do have the option to propose the uncut version.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I got all the ideas for other books, as well.

KG: When did you start writing?

TB: In prison.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Fifty years old.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah.

KG: Hold on, I’m thinking here. What’s your daily life like now? What do you do from day to day?

TB: I’ve taken, doing a lot of follow up on jobs, [undistinguishable] the computer as facts, is what I do.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah, just as a follow up scenarios, is what I do. And I begin my new job on the twenty-second, a couple days from now.

KG: Where are you working?

TB: [undistinguishable] came through, you know handles - you know [undistinguishable], right?

KG: Mhm.

TB: We took him - he knew that I was looking for work and everything. He set up this one situation where they came and did workshop programs in here, okay?

KG: Mhm.
TB: And they came through on flag waving jobs, okay?

KG: Okay.

TB: So I signed up to for that because I had experiences with that last year at another temp agency with that.

KG: Okay.

TB: But listening to [undistinguishable] talk about it, this new one that's coming up on the twenty-second, is going to be full time.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Okay, so I'm putting the other one on the back burner even though that boss is trying to contact me as we're sitting in right now, he's left a couple notes on my computer.

KG: Yeah.

TB: He wants to see me for some reason, you know because that's where I got my original license as a certified flag waver. But the only draw back with all of that is that it's on a temporary scale.

KG: Right.

TB: So I'm keeping that as an option on the back burner.

KG: Mhm.

TB: That's what I'm doing.

KG: What brought you here, to [LFS]?]

TB: What brought me here was the fact that the administration at [undistinguishable].

KG: Mhm.

TB: On my point of entry, decided to disrupt my beneficial work for the Salvation Army.

KG: Okay.

TB: And that's what I was doing.
TB: I did that for a total of three years.

KG: Okay.

TB: And they knew that I was right across the street and [undistinguishable] rehab at the Salvation all together because I was [undistinguishable] comfortable, I liked what I was doing there.

KG: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

TB: Meeting interesting people.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah and they give you a heads up on certain situations. There was one situation where the work supervisor put a note up on my work area, on a two by four, take the number, and they wanted me to be on the look out for this one pocketbook, okay? Ladies turn in their pocketbooks, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I was in charge of pocketbooks, men’s bill holders, women’s bill holders, scarves, socks, and belts, men’s ties.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah. I had six items that I had to pick through and designate to said thrift stores, three of them.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And that’s what I did. And I was real, real comfortable with that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Which required a little bit of cleaning of this, that, and everything else in between.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Because women for the most part, they got hard rock candy and bubblegum sticking back out one end of a pocketbook and what have you, you know? But anyway, he came through, found me and came through, the work supervisor and he
said, “Tom,” he said, “Man, I’m looking for this one pocketbook.” And so what’s up? He says, “Well, this woman’s misplaced her two certified checks.” I said, “Okay, as soon as I process out of…” the huge roll bins that they go there?

KG: Mhm, yeah.

TB: “It’ll eventually show up.” And it did and it was like three weeks later.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Okay? And I’m sitting at my desk and I was processing that pocketbook. At one point I said, “Look at the sign.” I looked over at the sign, looked down at the pocketbook, “Oh my god, this is it.” I had a few seconds earlier, dumped the contents in the trashcan, right? [Laughs]

KG: Mhm.

TB: So I took and set the purse down, put my little, little bit bigger than that trashcan, and I took those envelopes out and lo and behold, it was two certified checks. And I took the pocketbook, took the envelopes with the [undistinguishable] checks in them.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And walked it right into Don’s office and an hour later then, they asked for the lady that had been the original owner of the pocketbook.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah she was in [undistinguishable], she said, “God bless you son. And now I can pay my rent.” And I felt real good about that.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Yeah and it was...yeah.

KG: How’d you get involved there?

TB: How did I get involved there?

KG: Mhm.

TB: A slow transition back into the streets from the penitentiary level.

KG: Okay. What was that, through a program?

TB: Yeah, they wanted me to have a slow transition back into the street.
KG: Okay.

TB: And the best available place was the rehab of the Salvation Army.

KG: Mhm. Is that a live in place, or where were you living at the time? There?

TB: Yeah, mhm.

KG: Yeah. What was it like coming back into regular society? What was that transition like?

TB: Well administration, like I said, they came through because they knew that I was ready up for where I most comfortable with.

KG: Mhm, right.

TB: “You've done everything in rehab and you've done it really well, it’s time for you to move on.” You know?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And so they came in and designated me for this place.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And so here I am.

KG: Yeah. Do you have friends here, people you talk to everyday?

TB: Mhm.

KG: What are your relationships like here?

TB: Helping them out whenever I can.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Even the staff down here.

KG: Yeah, why?
TB: What do you mean?

KG: Well, why do you feel the need to help out?

TB: I know which side of my bread's being buttered on.

KG: Okay.

TB: And where my blessings are.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah.

KG: What do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experience of veterans?

TB: [Pause] That might be open and vulnerable to PTSD [undistinguishable] okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: But for the most, to give you the heads up on certain situations. Five days before Christmas, I lost an uncle.

KG: Mhm.

TB: My last remaining uncle down there in [undistinguishable] Richmond. He was ninety-three years old. What was weird about that was he was a marine himself.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And he never did talk to me about that.

KG: Yeah.

TB: You'd think he would've but he never did.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I was shocked when I walked up inside, [undistinguishable] funeral home in [undistinguishable] area?

KG: Mhm, yeah.
TB: A lo and behold, on the memorial table was his DD214, all folded, tattered, and everything else. And it was inside of a picture frame with glass in front of it, and I was shocked to see that, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: Now I looked up behind me and they had three dressed up blue marines back there. One of them with a bugle to play taps, send it, send out taps.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And so they came in and did that presentation simply because my uncle had been in World War Two. He had been in the Korean conflict.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And he lived until he was ninety-three years old.

KG: Yup.

TB: And like I said, I was shocked. I had no idea, you know? You’d think – and I think that stems from the fact that when people that have been subjected to war, okay? They really don’t want to talk about it, simply because in the Marine Corps, it’s a favorite saying in there that you got associates but you do not have friends, okay?

KG: Okay.

TB: Simply because of PTSD issues.

KG: Mhm.

TB: You get real close with anybody out there, next thing you know, they’re gone.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And that blood is on you.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah. It could be anything. It could be stepping across a land mine. It could be somebody opening up on my buddy with a machine gun.

KG: Mhm.

TB: All that, okay? And it creates PTSD issues if you get really close with somebody.
TB: Because one minute they’re there, the next minute they’re gone.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Scattered to the wind. Yeah, body parts flying everywhere.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And that’s really the reason why the Marine Corps drilled that into us.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Okay? Not to – you got associates, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: You got comrades but you don’t have friends, okay? And that, for the most part that’s hard to accept.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Especially the one who stands out and you got – you don’t like the guy, okay? You think his purpose is demeaning you like, “To whom he is,” and everything.

KG: Mhm.

TB: So in a way, it goes against the grain.

KG: Right.

TB: You know? When you lose that friend, that comrade, that associate, then it become a living hell.

KG: Mhm.

TB: One minute there and the next minute gone.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And [pause] and then they call them in for what they call, debriefing.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Simply because you lost your friend.
KG: Mhm.

TB: You know but with all the debriefing in the world, it's not - back in [undistinguishable] the living soldiers are still alive. “How did this happen God?” You know what I’m saying?

KG: Mhm.

TB: But it was his time and that's a hard thing to accept.

KG: Right.

TB: Yeah.

KG: Where were you stationed?

TB: San Diego.

KG: San Diego. The whole time?

TB: Yeah. Well no, no, not the whole time. I was air marked for Air Reserves in Oklahoma state.

KG: Oh, right, right, okay, got it. What types of barriers do you feel like homeless veterans face?

TB: I try not to get caught up in the politics of that.

KG: Yeah.

TB: If I see a down and out soldier, I lead him to water, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: That’s the aquarian inside of me and tell him, “Miracles happen here.”

KG: Mhm.

TB: And they came in, I got one ready to come in now.

KG: Yeah.

TB: And me and him go back a long ways.

KG: Yeah?
TB: Yeah. So what else do you need to know about that?

KG: Why do you think veterans become homeless?

TB: It can stem from a lot of things, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: In my case, it stemmed from not knowing the other side of the fence.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah. Or it can be something very, very horrific that occurred during their one up years.

KG: Mhm.

TB: It can be anything.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Deny this. Deny that and secrets kept and secrets that are designed, like I said, to down that soldier.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah. It’s like Timothy McVeigh, that situation, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: They really don’t want to talk about that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But he was executed and rightfully so, okay? Simply because of what happened to the children out there, you know?

KG: Mhm.

TB: But what they don’t want to talk about is how they created that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah and it came in the form of them, while he was defending his country, the IRS was busy taking his roots away from him.
KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah, causing his parents to give up the farm.

KG: Mhm.

TB: A farm where that boy grew up and did everything in the world to be a great American kid.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Okay? A farmer kid. But they swept that under the rug, you know? He came back home, homeless, yeah.

KG: Mhm.

TB: His heritage, wiped out because of some overdue tax situation, with the economy sucking and everything else, excuse my French, but you would think they would've given him an alternative, you know?

KG: Mhm.

TB: Perhaps put him in a farm of his own choosing.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But no, his roots and his stomping grounds had been taken away from him.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And he was not a happy camper with that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Even to the point of waging a war against the U.S. government.

KG: Yeah.

TB: And that’s what he did. He paid the ultimate price for it. But it’s, like I said it’s situations that just become overbearing, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: When hope is lost, a solider’s going to react. There’s no ifs, ands, or buts about that.
KG: Mhm.

TB: And some of us feel that it was rightfully so, some of us feel that they were wrong.

KG: Mhm.

TB: You know, because you've got [undistinguishable] for which to get on your feet and become a member back into the world, you know? A contributor to the economy and pillar back into the community, you know a lot of people do that?

KG: Mhm.

TB: Certain situations man just drives people to the edge. And that’s when they get real stupid.

KG: Mhm. How do you feel about charity?

TB: I got a giving heart and I have no problem with availability only. I’ve helped out animals as well as people, okay? Blessings come my way through doing that, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I feel really good about that.

KG: Why do you feel the need to give back?

TB: [Pause] Because I’ve been down that block before.

KG: Mhm.

TB: I’ve lived that life before and [Pause] it’s instilled in one’s idiosyncrasies.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Okay? Yeah.

KG: Is there anything you regret in life?

TB: Yeah, yeah, well yeah.
KG: Anything you’re willing to talk about?

TB: [Pause]

KG: You can say no.

TB: No, I regret not being informed.

KG: Mhm.

TB: About my mom’s secrets when she had an opportunity to do that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: When I was much younger.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But she decided to sit on the secrets way too damn long.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I got a lot of regrets in turn, from that. But I still love her, that will never change. I miss her, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I regret not being more of a nephew to my aunt.

KG: Mhm.

TB: I regret that to this day, okay? And her kids and I argue about that.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And her youngest and oldest live down there [undistinguishable]. She’s a book publish – she’s had a couple of books published at [undistinguishable], okay? So we’re comparing notes on that. Stacy Morris, is her name.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I got her card in my bill holder and I’m real proud of her, okay? But we get into arguments over the fact that her mom, she was the love of my heart, okay?

KG: Mhm.
TB: Because here was a woman – Aunt Rose, she had six floors, okay? And she wanted a son but [undistinguishable] she was quick to come get me, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And with all these daughters around, okay?

KG: Yeah.

TB: And she would literally yank me back up in her truck and I was like knee-high to a bar of soap back then, okay?

KG: Yeah.

TB: And I loved that woman. [Laughs] Good God I loved that woman because the way I look back on it now was she wanted a son around, okay? [Laughs]

KG: Yeah.

TB: And it was all good and everything and I’ve got a lot of mixed emotions about the fact of who she was married to, my Uncle Bill, because he was a regular piece of shit in my book. He mistreated his kids, he mistreated my favorite, Aunt Rose and that – to give you a heads up on a certain situation, when I was like twelve years old, Bill caught one of his daughters, okay, so it was Donna, and his second oldest daughter asking my mom for a cold biscuit, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: And mom was taking a plate of cold biscuits out of the refrigerator in our house. And she handed the biscuit to Donna, okay? The cold biscuit, hard, cold, biscuit.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And Bill came out of the backroom, took his belt off and started whipping Donna all over the kitchen and if I had found shells for my shotgun that day, I would’ve taken his legs from underneath him.

KG: Mhm.

TB: Because I read him like a book. His idea of groceries for his family was beer and cigarettes, okay?

KG: Right.
TB: And that did not sit too well with me. Him whipping his daughter or something because she was hungry and she wanted a cold biscuit.

KG: Yeah.

TB: My mom saw me go get my shotgun. I could not find my shotgun shells; they were hiding them from me.

KG: Mhm.

TB: But I had intended [undistinguishable] coming out of me at that age, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: Yeah, I would've taken his legs from underneath him.

KG: Mhm.

TB: I was prepared to do that. My mom came back in seen me with a shotgun, looking for my shotgun shells, she got the shotgun away from me.

KG: Mhm.

TB: “Don’t do this son.”

KG: Yeah.

TB: Yeah, subsequently after that, they moved down to [undistinguishable]. That whole family got scattered.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I got a lot of mixed emotions about that as well.

KG: Mhm.

TB: All because my uncle was a drinker. Bill was a drinker and those kids suffered it, okay?

KG: Yeah. What are you most proud of?

TB: What am I most proud of?
KG: Mhm.

TB: What I’m doing now.

KG: Yeah, what is that?

TB: All my rough drafts.

KG: Okay.

TB: Yeah and I’m very, very, very optimistic about all that and my product as you know.

KG: Yeah.

TB: And I got a firm getting ready to go represent me on my said product.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And that’s an ongoing issue with me right now. And I’m proud of my art accomplishments, okay?

KG: Mhm.

TB: Because it gives me an opportunity to beat the [undistinguishable] into my maker, God behind Him giving me those talents.

KG: Mhm.

TB: And I do a lot of decorative handkerchiefs and posters and drawings as well.

KG: Cool.

TB: And it’s almost, [undistinguishable] very, very, prolific on woodwork.

KG: Yeah.

TB: Uh-huh.

KG: That’s awesome. What are your goals for the future?

TB: Get my books into the old [undistinguishable].

KG: Yeah?
TB: Yeah.

KG: Anything else?

TB: Facilitating more times with my daughter and my granddaughter.

KG: Okay.

TB: And those are ongoing things with me.

KG: Cool. And lastly, is there anything else you’d like to share about your experience?

TB: No ma’am.

KG: Okay.

TB: I pretty much covered everything I wanted to cover.

KG: Sounds good. Thank you.

TB: I’ll take this.

KG: Yeah.

TB: I’ll take this and you said you’re coming back in tomorrow?

Appendix 3

Forgotten Fight Oral History Transcript
March 17, 2016
Interviewee’s Name: Richard L Deloch
Interviewer’s Name: Kelsey Glander
Transcribed by: Claire Stringam

KG: So can you tell me about yourself, where you grew up, about your family life growing up, and if you didn’t grow up in Richmond, when you came here and why.

RD: I grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina as a kid I lived there until I was 17 years old and I moved to Delaware with my sister and my father died we moved up there and I moved up there, went to high school for 6 months, graduated high school and right after high school, I joined the United Stated Army.

KG: How did your family feel about that?
RD: They were happy about it because the city was kind of fast, it was a fast life and I was a country boy. They used to tease me about my accent and all that so they were pretty thrilled about it.

KG: What led to your decision to join?

RD: Really it wasn't too many jobs and I hadn't really thought about my career straight out of high school. I took ROTC so I kind of fell in love with the army lifestyle and discipline.

KG: Cool. So what was your training like?

RD: The training was pretty good, cause I was always an athletic kid. I was in pretty good shape. I could do a lot of push-ups and everything so that was pretty easy part.

KG: Do you have any specific memories from training that really stood out to you?

RD: Yeah, I was on guard duty one night and got sprayed by a skunk. I was in Ft. Sill (?) Oklahoma and it was real dark, I mean pitch black dark and I stepped on something and heard a noise and then got the smell and it was like...I never forgot that.

KG: So once you finished your training, what was your job in the military?

RD: I was a 13 Bravo which is a cannon crewman, I was field artillery. I drove a tank for 3 years.

KG: Did you like that?

RD: Yeah it was fun, it was fun at first. I guess when we went overseas with like the training exercise, it was extra cold in Germany and it's just staying out in the woods a lot. I got used to it after a while but it was kind of hectic at first.

KG: So they stationed you in Germany, they move you anywhere else?

RD: I was in Ft Sill Oklahoma for Basics, then I went to Bamburg Germany then I went to Ft Pope Louisiana.

KG: Can you tell me a little about your experiences in those places?

RD: Germany was real nice; I really got a chance to see the world. We went on leave a lot. I went to Rome, Spain, Japan, and Korea. It was good to see other cultures. Some places welcome the armed forces and some places didn't, so it was a challenging experience.

KG: Can you expand a little bit on that?
RD: Well some places in Germany they didn’t like American soldiers because they felt as though we would come over and deal with their daughters or their wives and then once we leave the service we just take off and leave families behind and stuff like that. Then there was some that was really caring they applauded what we was trying to do, the protection and stuff like that.

KG: So tell me a little more about your job when you were in Germany specifically.

RD: In Germany we was more like on guard duty, like military patrol. We would patrol the bases. When something happened in the German community they would call us in to protect and keep peace basically.

KG: How long were you in the Service?

RD: 3 years.

KG: Are there things that you miss about being in the military?

RD: I miss the, I guess I would call it the freedom. It’s not like you really had a lot to worry about cause you knew what your job was every day. You wouldn’t had to worry about being fired or laid off. I had the chance to meet some real nice men from all over the world, we became real good friends.

KG: Do you keep in contact with any of them now?

RD: A few of them.

KG: What are they up to?

RD: One of my main friends he’s in Coatsville PA. He works at the VA hospital there. He got his nursing degree and we talk maybe once every two or three months. I went and saw him last year. He’s doing good. He’s got a family, grandkids. It’s real nice, real nice friend.

KG: Did your military service change your world for you?

RD: I would say it did because I was, I guess I was exposed to different cultures and different like, it seems like drinking went hand in hand with military because that’s basically what the fellas did every weekend after work and whatever. It changed my life as far that aspect. It also made me more strong, more disciplined. It taught me how to save money as well, manage money. I really had a chance to save money.

KG: Why did you leave the military?

RD: I had an honorable discharge. My son was born when I was in the military, my first child. I had brought her; I was in Ft Pope, LA at the time. I was going to reenlist and she brought my son down to visit me just a month before I was supposed to get
out because I wanted to stay, we knew we was going to get married. She didn’t like LA so she went back to the states. It was just a big mix up so I just end up just getting out. I would say now I think that was a mistake, I really do, but I can’t’ change it, can’t change it.

KG: So what did you do upon exiting the military?

RD: I got out of the military. I became a correctional officer for a few years - 2 years. I started having problems. [interruption] I started drinking heavily when I was a guard at the prison, I end up making wrong decisions. I started making money from the outside, bringing it inside. I got caught and they gave me a choice to resign or be prosecuted so I got out of that field. So I went to school and got my asbestos license. I was an asbestos technician removal for like 3 years or so. The money was good and my relationship had went down the drain. I basically lost my family for a while so I started drinking more and more and I introduced to drugs and things started spiraling downhill. The money that I was making I was spending it as fast as I got it. I ended up, I found a checkbook and I forged a check, matter of fact I forged a couple checks. I was handing them out to people for them to cash and get the money. It was a stupid thing now that I think about it but they all turned on me. I ended up doing some time in the penitentiary for it, which I didn’t have to do because I was new to the system. I didn’t know anything about the system so I could’ve just taken a plea bargain and paid the money back, but my lawyer, the public defender, talked me into it “Let’s take it to trial”. I got slammed for four years. I did almost 3 years before I got out.

KG: How did you end up in Richmond?

RD: Well, I was living in Delaware and my sister, my oldest sister lives in the south Boston area and I just got tired of Delaware so I asked her I said “well look.” I had a heart attack when I was in Delaware, and I told her I was tired of living in the city, can I move down and she was like “Pack your bags and come on.”

KG: How long have you been here?

RD: I moved down here in 2011.

KG: How did you become homeless?

RD: I was taking care of an elderly person, part of our family. I took care of her for like 3.5 years. She got real sick and she couldn’t stay home alone so they put her in a nursing home so I was taking care of the house for a while but I was on disability and the money that I was receiving wasn’t enough to cover the whole household. So I had to make different plans, different arrangements. I think I stayed there for 3-4 weeks after that, til everything got shut off cause I couldn’t pay the bills.

KG: Where did you stay after that?
RD: After that, I got on the phone; I called down here to Veteran’s administration and I was just lookin for, I got on the crisis line matter of fact and called the homeless line for veterans and they asked me where I was at. I told them I was in south Boston area and they told me everything you can deal with is up in the Richmond area. So I just packed a bag and jumped on a bus and came to the bus station and went to Maguire and started talking to a homeless outreach advisor. I stayed in the shelter for maybe 2-3 nights, something like that, and one of them told me about Mr. Fletcher here and I called him up and talked to him on the phone, we had a brief conversation and I came in the next day and talked with him, like the story I’m telling you and he was like, “Come on in!” and I been here I think I got here in December.

KG: So how long was that process, from the time when you lost the house to when you came here and worked?

RD: About 3 weeks.

KG: You mentioned working with the VA, how does working with them compare to working with other organizations?

RD: It seem like it was more opportunities, you know, even though they did have waitin lists for a lot of shelters, the veterans was like put like put a little bit up on the scale. I don’t think if I wasn’t a veteran, I don’t think I would have had help that quick.

KG: Can you tell me about your first day here?

RD: My first day, to be honest with you, I was tired. I was mentally drained, really, because I worry a lot. And here I am in Richmond and I don’t know a soul. I don’t know a soul so I was like, you know I always saw Richmond on the news about shootings and all this and I was like “Oh god, I gotta be in a house before it get dark.” Just a whole bunch of things was going through my mind. It really wasn’t like that but it was, it was real encouraging and I met Jay and I met Mr. Fletcher and Kathy and everybody, they welcomed me with open arms. It was like, “Anything I can do for you let me know, anything anything, anything.” It got to the point where I was like “Is something wrong with me? Why everyone keep saying “anything you need”. It’s like am I missing something?” But it really wasn’t like that, they was just reaching out to me.

KG: Can you tell me about the day that you lost the house?

RD: I lost it the day she left really, but the when the lights went out that part just, and it was cold too. I was like, I had a choice, I have a daughter that lives in Delaware, and she was like “dad you can come back here.” But I was like “I don’t wanna go back there. I had some very trying times. I don’t wanna go backwards.”
so I was just, I pray a lot, I'm a god fearin' man, so I just hit my knees every night and I asked “God help me out. Help me, help me.” And he answered my prayers, he answered my prayers.

KG: What is the hardest part about not having your own home?

RD: I guess it's the privacy and being able to come and go and then you have to deal with other people's personalities, and problems, likes and dislikes. I always had my own but it's just like going back to the military days when you with a whole bunch of guys [undistinguishable].

KG: Do you think your military training prepared you at all for this situation?

RD: Oh yes, oh yes. I don't think I would be able to deal with it, because the military made me a people person. It gave me a lot of discipline, a lot of patience. I don't think if wouldn't a went through the military and had the experience, I don't think I would have patience with this. I'm pretty sure I woulda left by now. Pretty sure I would have.

KG: What's your daily life like now? What do you do from day?

RD: Well, I just completed school. I just graduated school, got my supervisor's asbestos license back. I've just been doing a lot of computer work and submitting applications. I have 3 job offers now. Basically I'm just doing things, I'm trying to find a house or apartment or whatever. It's very productive. I don't just lay around. I can't sit still. I gotta be doing something. I try to volunteer around, do little things, whatever need to be done, give back to the community so to speak. I'm grateful for what I've been given since I've been here, so anything need to be done, I'm the first one on board with it.

KG: How do you feel about charity in general?

RD: Charity is fine; I used to have an issue with it at first because it made me feel as though, that I was helpless or hopeless. But now it's to the point that, it used to be, back in the day, awhile back, that charity was welcome. I used to look for handouts and people giving out free stuff, free things but now, if I don't need it, I don't take it. I don't bother with it.

KG: Why do you feel the need to give back?

RD: I've done a lot of things in my life that I'm not proud of, you know and I've been in situations that I know if god wasn't with me I woulda never made it out of it, so I just thank god for just protecting me, keeping me under his wings because I see so many soldiers that been through some of the same things that I've been through, drugs and alcohol, and they lose their mind. And I just thank god that I'm still able to
learn. The things that I’ve been through, I’m surprised I even have a brain to be honest with you.

KG: So what are some of your goals for the future?

RD: Well I have four grandkids and I wanna get back into the work environment and own my own home one day. Get my license back and get me a car, pickup truck or whatever and just live life on life terms. Raise my grandkids.

KG: Do they live close?

RD: They live in Delaware.

KG: What types of barriers did you feel like you faced as a homeless veteran during that period before you were housed, or even now?

RD: I would say that the finances are not that great. And I know the cost of living up here is higher and the housing market is a little bit higher than it was further down south. I would say some of the barriers are, I just don’t like going behind other veterans who have been offered services from different places they get it and abuse it and then that same company might say “well hey look, somebody else did it like that, he might be trying to do the same thing.” Like misrepresented it or something like that.

KG: How do you feel that the fact that you’re a homeless veteran, currently housed, shapes the way that others think about you?

RD: Some people, I think they look at you different in some ways, but a lot of people don’t know that I am homeless. I don’t really talk about it. It’s not that I’m a private person, but I feel as though some things you just don’t have to mention unless it comes your way, because people will judge you and stereotype you by that.

KG: How do you feel about those judgements and stereotypes? What are some of the things that come to mind?

RD: It’s hurtful. It’s hurtful. It makes me think “Wow, am I really that person that they say I am, or classify me as?” Because a lot of people say people who are homeless, they have to have a problem. People are homeless because you just can’t pay your bills, you have nobody else left. It don’t have to drug, and alcohol and mental issues. It’s a whole lot of different reasons why.

KG: I think a lot of people don’t realize that they themselves are only one paycheck away from being homeless.

RD: Exactly.
KG: What do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experience of veterans? What would you want them to know?

RD: I would want them to know that we are hard fightin people. I mean, we put our life on the line, you know, a lot of people step over a veteran or say, well just because they see a veteran with a sign they say “Oh he just wanna get something to drink or something.” There’s a lot of us that really, we are genuine people. We are more than a social security number.

KG: In general, why do you think that veterans become homeless?

RD: I think the military have a lot to do with it, because a lot of us went in when we was young and had some experiences that we never experience before, and it’s like, it’s a big change from everyday living you know. It makes you stronger too, and some people it makes weaker. It all depends on the frame of mind that a person is in, you know. For the veteran’s that been through war, if you never seen a dead body before then all of a sudden you see your best friend get their head blown off, that’s enough to just, you know, that’s shocking right there. Even though I was in peace time but I still hear the stories. My father was in the war time. My father got messed up with it as well. My father was an alcoholic behind that.

KG: Is there anything in life that you regret?

RD: Yes, picking up that first drug.

KG: What are you most proud of?


KG: What are some of your favorite memories since you exited the military?

RD: My first job and owning my own home. I had my own home at one point in time. My first home, my first car. Everything was paid. Just having ownership to something. That was actually my first time really owning stuff.

KG: Do you have people here who you hang out with and talk to every day?

RD: Yeah, the gentleman that just left. Mr. Stewart, that’s my right hand man. Mr Jay, Mr Fletcher, Kathy. There’s a few more brothers up there that we talk, we interact.

KG: Do you find it’s easy to make friends in your current situation?

RD: Yes. Some certain people, their goals are not the same. Some of us come here to go to school and do what we have to do and that’s mostly people that I have more in common with. That’s the most people I really hang out with.
KG: Do you ever feel lonely?

RD: Yes.

KG: What do you do to cope with that?

RD: I read my bible.

KG: Elaborate on that, what does it bring you?

RD: It calms me down, it brings me peace. It puts my patience back into me cause sometimes I can be over hyped but I read my bible and say “Peace be still.” And I just calm down and get back into myself.

KG: Have you always been religious?

RD: Yes. Strayed the path but I was born in the church every Sunday.

KG: Is there anything else you’d like to share with me about your experience?

RD: I just like to say something about this place. This place is wonderful. I feel as though this place has really turned my life around. I think if I would’ve went anywhere else I don’t think I would have came as far and as quick as I did since I been here. They tapped me into the right resources. It’s like almost too good to be true sometimes but you know, I know it’s a plan. It’s all a plan. I thank God for this place.

KG: Is there a specific moment of that that stands out to you?

RD: Yeah, because I’m on disability, my plan was to get a job but I knew if I get a job that’s just an ordinary job like that then I would be cut off from my benefits. Then the asbestos clicked in my mind. I was like “That’s a pretty good job.” Even though it’s toxic, but hey, I know how to do it. Then I talked with the agencies and they was like “if you wanna go to school we’ll pay for the school.” They paid, they wrote me out a check. They paid for my school. They paid for my license and everything and all I had to do was just open my mouth.

KG: Are you currently licensed or are you getting…?

RD: I graduated and got my certificate. Now you have to send off another check to get the license from the state of Virginia. So they should be here any day now. I had job offers before I even got my license back.

KG: That’s great. Do you have an idea of where you want to go with that?
RD: Yeah, it’s two companies in Rico (?) County and there’s another one, I just got another one, the other day in Blacksburg, Virginia Tech.

KG: It’s beautiful over there.

RD: Yeah, I was googling. I was looking it up. That one just came in on my email the other day. It’s good to have choices, you know what I mean? It’s good to have choices.

KG: Do you feel like there was a time in your life when you didn’t have many choices?

RD: Yes, oh yes.

KG: Can you talk about one of those experiences?

RD: I would say when I was bound down with my addiction. I felt hopeless. I felt like every day my only focus was to find out how I was going to get that fix. I wasn’t worried about anything, family, friends, nothing mattered but that. But now I thank god that I do have a good relationship with my family. That’s one thing. I burned a few bridges with family but it was repairable, you know, so I feel good about that.

KG: What helped you kick the addiction?

RD: I had a heart attack. 2006. I was in a crack house, smoking crack. I just got paid, pocket full of money, pocket full of drugs and everything. I just started breathing funny, started sweating. Everybody thought I was just, you know. I passed out on the floor and everybody left. They left me for dead on the floor. It just so happened, I was on the floor for like an hour so they told me before somebody else came in and instead of just leaving me there they called an ambulance and took me to the hospital. And they said, I’ll never forget it; they said “Relax, you’re having a heart attack.” How you gonna tell me to relax when I’m having a heart attack? That was March 13, 2006. I just asked God I said “If you help me do this I will never do it again.” Never happened. Never happened.

KG: So that’s what, 8 years now? 9? Congratulations, that’s awesome. I’m sorry that you had to have a heart attack.

RD: But it took that to...

KG: Bring you around, and talk to God about it. So what did you do after the heart attack? What was your next move?

RD: After that I went to Coatsville (?), matter of fact with a friend of mine. He said “How you doing?”. I stayed in the hospital about, I guess 4 months. But I had an incident with my surgery, anesthesia leaked into my arm and it left my arm paralyzed, so I had like four surgeries to release the tension. It still won’t go all the
way. So I had to go through rehab all over again and learn how to use my arm all over again for like, almost a year so I went through that then I went to Coatsville (?) to a rehabilitation center. I was clean so I was trying to get a place up there but my time ran out so I could have stayed at another shelter but I moved. I didn’t stay up there.

KG: Where did you go next?

RD: I went to Delaware, got me another apartment, kept myself focused, spent more time with my kids and my grandkids. And I was just time to go; it was just time to go. I moved on in life.

KG: Nothing wrong with that. Ok, that’s all I have for you unless you have anything else you want to talk about.

RD: No, I just want to thank you for listening to my story. I love your stories. Telling me your studies and everything.

KG: Thank you so much for talking to me.

RD: No problem.

Appendix 4

Forgotten Fight Oral History Transcript
March 18, 2016
Interviewee’s name: Wilbur Evans (WE)
Interviewer’s name: Kelsey Glander (KG)
Transcribed by: Anita Ely

KG: So, first start off with your name and tell me a little about yourself, where you grew up, what your family was like growing up and where you’re from.

WE: Wilber Evans, I’m from Long Island, NY. I’m the oldest son, I got like 5 sisters, 3 older than myself 2 brothers both are younger than me. I grew up in Long Island NY, a place called Wine Dance. I think I had a very nice childhood.

KG: What was it like having that many siblings?

WE: We always enjoyed ourselves and never needed anybody to play with, somebody was always around. I think my brother next to me was my best friend, other than that I don’t have any. But, we’re alright.

KG: Yeah
WE: I stay in touch with him. My baby brother is in California right now. He got out of service and stayed on the West Coast. My baby sister she was in the service, right now she’s traveling in her work. She spent 6 months in Alaska this past winter.

KG: Wow!

WE: And now she is in Hawaii for 6 months.

KG: Cool! When did you join the military and what branch?

WE: I joined in ’70 and I was in the Air Force. I went to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. From there I went to Clark Air Base in the Philippines. After that I went to Udorn in Thailand and that’s it.

KG: What led to your decision to join the military?

WE: Well, I graduated high school I did not want to carry any more books so my father asked we what was I gonna do cause I wasn’t just gonna sit around the house so I said I joined the Air Force. So off to Texas I went.

KG: What did your family think of you when you decided to join? Were they proud?

WE: They were proud and happy for me and I think they felt better when I got out and came home.

KG: Right

WE: But, overall they were pleased with my decision and later when I got me a good job after I got out working for the VA Hospital, trying to retire from that now. But, ok.

KG: What was your training like? Your training in the Air Force?

WE: Ok, I basic training and then I went to Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado, trained as a weapons mechanic.

KG: Ok

WE: Basically load bombs on airplanes. And that didn’t get me anything but people’s telling me you are training now to get a good job when you get out but I couldn’t see myself loading bombs on airplanes after I got out of the service.

KG: What do you remember most about your training?

WE: What do I remember most about my training? Oh, me and a partner of mine we bought a ’58 Chevy, pink and white but the color didn’t matter, we had
transportation. We were taking out these 2 girls, they were twins, and they were in the Air Force also. But that was alright, that’s what I remember most.

KG: So tell me a little bit more about your job in the military. What did you do in the Air Force?

WE: Oh, like I said I loaded weapons on airplanes.

KG: Did you pick that? Or was it assigned to you?

WE: Assigned to me.

KG: What did you find most challenging about it?

WE: The most, I don’t think it was very challenging at all.

KG: Yea, ok. Can you tell me about the different places you were stationed? And what were they like?

WE: Well right after Tech School I got orders to go to Minot, North Dakota and I didn’t like that at all cause its cold up there and I don’t like the cold. So another guy who’s the same thing he had orders to go the Philippines and he didn’t like that so we had an opportunity to switch orders and the Air Force said it was alright to do that so he went to Minot, North Dakota, he was from North Dakota, and I went to the Philippines where it was warm. And, Clark Air Base is, was the largest air base at the time in the Air Force. And since then it has been rolled by a volcano and it’s not there anymore, they didn’t rebuild it as far as I know. But it was right, it was alright. What was the question?

KG: Just tell me about the places you were stationed.

WE: Oh, so right after I got to the Philippines I went TDY to Thailand and that’s where I did most of the work that working with the F-4 and it was alright, I enjoyed it.

KG: What was your daily life like there?

WE: Get up in the morning, go to work, then come on back home. People, it’s like you live right on the flight line, and it was alright.

KG: What are some of your most memorable experiences from your time in the military?

WE: Most memorable experiences. Couldn’t be too memorable, I can’t think of anything, right.
KG: No worries.

WE: I enjoyed it, it was alright. I liked working with the aircraft.

KG: Are there things you miss about being in the military?

WE: Naw

KG: No?

WE: Naw, not that I miss. When I got out they asked me is there anything we can do to make your transition back to regular more life easier. I said, yeah put me back where you got me from.

KG: So, tell me about coming home and exiting the military. What was that like?

WE: Ok, when I left it was the first time I had really been away from Wine Dance that I could remember and I had to pay somebody to go with me all the way to Texas, somebody was with me, and coming home, I came home by myself. So maybe that coming home, maybe within a year after I came home my mother built a house down here and so I had to move down here so I never really got to go back home in a way, so I don’t know.

KG: Why did you exit the military?

WE: Why? It was a time when they were cutting back and stuff like that and I didn’t enjoy being told to go cut the, go mow lawn and paint a building and stuff like that. You want an early out, yeah I’ll take that.

KG: Did you make a lot of friends while you were in the military?

WE: I don’t think I ever have had a lot of friends. I made acquaintances and some I dealt with more than others but I don’t think I had a lot of friends. Cause a friend is someone that’s with you to the end. Right now I only think I have one friend.

KG: Do you think your military service changed your world view?

WE: My world view? I don’t think so, no.

KG: Ok

WE: Because I’ve always had an open mind as far as world views, people are people all over the world. Treat me right and I try and treat you right, so.

KG: When you left the military what did you do? You said you moved down here with your mom and then what?
WE: My mom was building a house up the country so we up and moved everybody here. Everybody that moved, the older kids I think me, Bernard, Gennie, the only child was my baby brother, he’s the youngest, and he moved down with my mother, everybody else was old enough to get out on their own so that’s what we did. And I came down to work at the VA hospital and it’s been nice, I enjoyed that.

KG: What did you do there?

WE: I was an OR, operating room technician.

KG: OK

WE: When you have an operation, the doctor says scalpel I would give scalpel.

KG: Got it, cool.

WE: So I did that for 30 years, trying to retire now. I have a nice time, I had a full life. I don’t think I missed too much of nothing.

KG: That’s good. So how did you become homeless?

WE: Oh, how did I become homeless? I was living in Florida and my brother came down. Said why don’t you come back with me, so I did and I was staying with him at the time. My motorcycle got stolen and so I had no way to get back and now he’s saying that you got to do something you can’t stay here permanently so he went up to the VA hospital and gave them my name and they started sending me services from there and one thing lead to another and here I am.

KG: Tell me about the places you’ve stayed since having to leave your brother.

WE: Oh, they’ve been alright. I’ve stayed West Grace, 11 West Grace Street and that’s alright. 507 at the VA hospital; that was alright physically but mentally it was a challenge.

KG: Why do you say that?

WE: Because they wanted to make it like you’re a veteran, yeah we’re gonna help you, but you’re still in the military, everybody still got this military attitude towards you. And it’s not the military anymore, this is my life now. I’m not in the military anymore but they still want to get up in the morning, make up your bed, go to chow, come back home. And even this, I understand that they got to have some kind of discipline here but these are grown men and you don’t tell them you got to be home by 8 o’clock if you ain’t doing something, you got to sign out if you ain’t doing nothing. You know, it’s not the military anymore; I didn’t sign out and sign in when I was in the military.
KG: Yeah. So how did you send up here?

WE: How did I end up here?

KG: At LFS?

WE: I went to William Bird Motel with 507 and I couldn’t pay the rent so social worker said they would try and find me another place, and this is it.

KG: Yeah

WE: But I like it here.

KG: Yeah. What’s the hardest thing about not having your own home?

WE: The hardest thing about not having my own home? I’m really trying to think of something.

KG: What’s something you miss about…

WE: Not having my own home?

KG: Yeah

WE: Having, I don’t know.

KG: Ok, that’s fine. What’s your daily life like now, what do you do every day, what’s your routine?

WE: I’m not working so I get up in the morning when I get up, sometimes I don’t get up in the mornings. Really. The only reason I’m up now is they told me to come meet you at 11:30 and I’ve been sitting out there but I usually don’t get up til 12 or 1 o’clock.

KG: OK

WE: And usually the church will bring supper and a couple of night’s they haven’t done that, last couple nights they haven’t done that and I had to make for myself but it’s been

KG: Just hanging out?

WE: Just hanging out, yes.

KG: Yeah
WE: I get bored a lot.

KG: Yeah, I was about to ask what you do for entertainment?

WE: I get bored a lot.

KG: Yeah, Do you have a person that you talk to everyday or a person that you consider a close friend?

WE: Not here, no.

KG: Somewhere else?

WE: Yeah, a guy I went to high school with

KG: Ok, can you tell me about him?

WE: Tell you about him?

KG: Yeah, about your relationship with him.

WE: He's a veteran also. He got married about a year, 2 years ago, something like that. He seems to be going alright. We hooked up and went to Colorado maybe 3 years ago.

KG: Yeah

WE: He seems to be enjoying life. I'm having a heck of a time.

KG: Yeah, can you elaborate on that? What do you mean?

WE: What do I mean?

KG: Yeah

WE: I go where I want, do what I want, get up when I want, have a heck of a time.

KG: What types of barriers do you feel like homeless veterans face?

WE: Homeless veterans. There's the stigma where, oh you're homeless, people look down on you. Okay, you watch television and going into the service, Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy it doesn't matter, it's a great thing, but once you get out people look down on you if you're homeless or they don't look at you at all. Like you're there and you're not there.
KG: Is there a specific instance in your life where you can think of that happening? To you or someone you know?

WE: A specific instance, no.

KG: Ok. What do you think civilians don’t know about the experience of veterans?

WE: I don’t think they know, they don’t understand, they don’t know that war is Hell, it’s a horrible thing. They don’t know the horrors of war. You know what I mean.

KG: Uh huh

WE: And there’s no way I can convince you of what I’ve seen and I’ve dealt with. I can tell you, but you would still not understand.

KG: Right

WE: What it was.

KG: Right. Why do you think veterans in general become homeless?

WE: Why do I think veterans in general become homeless? Because, you have a, you take a baby, you take a baby and you start to raise it and then about time that it’s pushed out of the nest someone is there to catch it and put it back in the nest, in a different nest but in a nest and you put it back in the nest and it never learns to fly. So, but then when you’re finished with it, ok don’t say nest say a cage or whatever, but then when you’re finished with it if you don’t enjoy it anymore you just say ok, just leave the cage open and walk away from it and never come back. The veterans I think are about time they got ready to sprout wings and go out into society, here’s a uniform, that’s the chow hall, and here’s a job. Then after you’re finished with them, ok, go back home, but on your own. Well I’m back on my own, what am I supposed to do. I don’t wear clothes, I wear uniforms. I don’t go to the kitchen to eat; I go to the chow hall. I don’t go to the bedroom, I go to the bunk. And subconsciously there not ready for it. Ok, now an officer, he has college behind him and a career or whatever and he’s, he can handle it better, but NCO if he doesn’t make a career out of the service, stay in the service, I don’t know.

KG: Yeah, well that makes sense.

WE: But I can’t get it together in my head like I want to.

KG: So there’s, are you trying to say that there’s not much of a support system when you leave the military, it doesn’t prepare you well?

WE: Correct. Ok, today is March 16, March 18 you’re out, bye. But what am I supposed to do?
KG: Yeah. How do you feel about charity?

WE: Oh, charity?

KG: When people offer you charity?

WE: Me personally I don't like it because I don't know how to accept it. Ok, I know one Christmas I'm walking down Broad Street and a kid got out the car and said here, thank you for your service, and I'm like ok, alright but what he was giving me was a gift. I mean it wasn't much but he was giving me a gift, and I didn't know how to accept it. It's like peoples tend to have problems saying thank you and I'm sorry, I mean like they don't know how to. It's the words are free and easy as much as one is (you were laughing, could not hear) and they feel more comfortable saying it then they say thank you and I apologize or something like that, you know what I mean. So it's easier.

KG: Why do you think that is? Why do you think it's hard to say?

WE: Because they use it more frequently. Little Wayne, Tupac didn't say it;

KG: Yeah

WE: Right. And they don't hear it that often.

KG: Yeah

WE: Even as children, you don't hear your father saying I'm sorry or I apologize that much, you know what I mean, you hear it but it not as

KG: Does, is it full, does it mean anything?

WE: Right, I don't know.

KG: Yeah

WE: Like I said I ain't have enough sense to go to college at the time, I didn't want to carry any more books. But what are you studying to be?

KG: I want to work...

WE: As a social worker? No?

KG: No, I want to work in like fund raising and development for an organization similar to like a non-profit. So similar to LFS and I feel the need to do that because I so in development and fund raising those are the people that make the action of the
mission possible. So I would like to help in that department so that the organization can continue to do the valuable work that they’re doing.

WE: You knew what you wanted to say

KG: What?

WE: But it’s hard to put into words

KG: Yeah

WE: Right, ok

KG: Yep. Do you like to help people?

WE: Do I like to help people?

KG: Yeah, or do you ever feel the need to give back?

WE: Yes, I do feel the need to give back. Do I like to help people? Yes, if I can. I think that’s why I enjoy working at the VA Hospital.

KG: Yeah

WE: I felt I was helping somebody every day that I went to work.

KG: Why do you feel the need to give back?

WE: Cause that’s what I’m here for.

KG: Yeah

WE: Yeah, that is my mission in life, to help my fellow man, or whatever. But that’s what I’m here for. I’m not gonna ask you the same question. But…

KG: No, that’s ok

WE: Why do you think you’re here?

KG: I feel the same way

WE: Oh what umm,

KG: Yeah
WE: Ok, I’m not here because I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I. I’m here because of we. Now if the house is on fire I am gonna run out, I am not going back in there to get nobody else. But if you can hook onto me on my way out we can get out of here because I’m getting out.

KG: Yeah

WE: You know what I mean?

KG: Right

WE: Follow me and stay with me but I don’t think I’m a hero, no.

KG: Is there anything in your life that you regret that you feel comfortable talking about?

WE: Is there anything in my life that I regret? Naw

KG: No?

WE: I would do it all again.

KG: Good. What are you most proud of?

WE: My children

KG: Yeah, why is that?

WE: They, I think that they were raised right and will carry on my name and I believe they will say they come to my funeral.

KG: Yeah. Do you see them often?

WE: No, not as often as I’d like to.

KG: Where do they live?

WE: My son lives in New York and my daughter lives in Atlanta.

KG: Ok. What are your goals for the future?

WE: I’d like to get me a place to stay, yeah get me a place to stay with hogs and dogs and chickens and cows and sit back and watch the grass grow. That’s about it.

KG: This is kind of an odd question and I’m formulating in my head as I go so bear with me.
WE: Ok, alright.

KG: But, to the average person, regular ole person walking down the street, if they see a homeless person on the side of the road what would you want them to do? Or say?

WE: Alright, what would I want them to do or say?

KG: Someone who's struggling.

WE: I'm going down the road, come on I'll give you a hand, let's go

KG: Yeah

WE: But I'm not gonna put you in the wagon and pull you down the road and when I get down there I'll tell somebody you're up here but I ain't coming back this way. So I would say give me a hand up not out.

KG: That's something that a lot of people have talked about in the past few days. What do you think is the difference between a hand up and a hand out?

WE: The difference, ok. Fletcher is trying to get somebody here, give us here, give me here a hand up and the fact that, yeah here's a place to stay, right now. And a hand out would be ok, you can stay here forever. But I don't want to stay here forever.

KG: Yeah

WE: I've got places to go and people to see. But right now I can't do it because my finances are not right and I need a place to stay to get them right.

KG: Right

WE: Now if you want to go down the road you can come on and go with me,

KG: Yeah

WE: And we can make it.

KG: Yeah
WE: It’s like the, do you watch the story on television, The Walking Dead?

KG: I do not.

WE: No, well ok. Well anyway, these people are together and they all contribute to the whole, and they making it, but if somebody to say I’m going with you but they just dead, dead weight and I got to stay, that’s holding you back, that’s holding me back.

KG: Yeah

WE: Where if I just leave you I can go on and what did you say your name was?

KG: Kelsey
WE: Kelsey, I left James down there on the side of the road can you send somebody back for him, and maybe you could

KG: Yeah

WE: But if you can’t you ain’t got time to worry about it neither, right?

KG: Right

WE: But he’s down there just sitting down on the side of the road

KG: Yep, I would agree with that.

WE: Ok, alright so we agree?

KG: Yeah, we do

WE: Alright

KG: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

WE: Nah

KG: No, ok then that’s all I have for you

WE: Oh, really? Alright

KG: Yeah

Appendix 5
KG: Okey dokey. So, we’re gonna start with if you could state your name for the recorders and tell me a little bit about yourself, where you grew up, where your family lived growing up.

CG: My name is Calvin Golf. I grew up in Columbus, South Carolina. I’m the sibling of fifteen kids. My mother and father worked very hard, both of them have deceased now. I guess that’s about it.

KG: What brought you to Richmond?

CG: Work brought me here. I’m an iron worker. I do tall buildings. While I was here, I decided to go through the [unintelligible] but the job ended. I ran out of money, so I came here to the homeless shelter. And while I was here, I obtained my general contractors license, and I got my own business now. And it ain’t doing to good right now, it’s all slow -- I’m hoping it’ll pick up. I’m on my way out of this house, I’m planning to go to Texas on the job. Probably on the 9th of April I should be leaving here.

KG: So when did you join the military?

CG: I joined the military on October 13, 1976.

KG: How long were you in the service?

CG: About five and a half.

KG: What lead to your decision to join the military?

CG: I just always liked the water, so I joined the Navy. I just wanted to be around water. I loved boats.

KG: Did you enjoy your experience?

CG: I loved it. I love the military, it was really cool.

KG: What did your friends and family think of your decision to join?

CG: They thought it was a good idea to get out of the area I was in. Cause I had gotten into a little trouble as a teenager, a lot of fights, stuff like that.
KG: What was your training like?

CG: I was aboard the USS Tacupsa (?), it's a SSBN nuclear power submarine. I did eight deterrent patrols. Each time you go out, they have a funeral for you, cause they don’t expect you to come back. Which, the Navy has never lost a nuclear power sub. It was good. Standing on the water for ninety days at a time -- I was a young man, I didn’t bother me at all. It just took a little while to get used to it. It was cool. It was a unique service. I first tried out for the UDT, I wanted to be a Seal. But I flunked out of that because of the swimming requirements. And I thought I was an excellent swimmer, but it wasn’t enough compared to a Seal, what a Seal goes through. So when I rang the bell to get out of Seals, they asked if I wanted to go into any other special services and they had submarines on there, so I took submarines. And while I was onboard a sub, my job was to navigate the ship. I did the time -- compute the time, compute the tides and currents, pulling in and out of port -- I actually drove the ship. Not so much drive, I directed it. Also on deck, to keep our course good to wherever we wanted to go at. It was a good experience. I wish I had stayed in and retired, but I didn’t, so.

KG: What are some of your most memorable moments from being on the submarine?

CG: Just I guess the knowledge you gain cause whatever your job is, you must know - - when you get sub qualified, you get S.S. behind your name. that means you qualified on that sub. That means every job on there, even if you were a cook, you must know what the navigator is doing, you must know what the agator (?) is doing, you must know what the propulsion plan is like, what the air conditioner system is like, the plumbing system, the water. You must know the whole operation of the boat. It was all really interesting. When I first got to the my sub, I was a dry dock, so I volunteered to go on the S.S. Henry Clay. That’s the boat I qualified on. They gave me a year to qualify and I qualified in three months. Cause there was just so much knowledge coming at you until you wanted to grasp everything cause I loved it so much.

KG: Can you tell me about your first day on the submarine?

CG: Well my first day on the sub, I got stationed -- like I said my sub was in dry dock, so I flew over to Charleston, to get aboard the Henry Clay. So we flew from Charleston over to Holy Loch, Scotland. And subs they always, when you’re overseas, they try to hide em. They put two sub [unintelligible] beside em and have a big blanket so you can’t see the sub. Once I got to Holy Loch, tired from a long trip, long bus ride to the ship, I went down, got checked in on board. I went down and got in my rack and went to sleep. And when I knowed it, the boat had done departed, so I’m out at sea, first time. I had been in assimilating machines, to do all the dive stuff but I never actualy dove. So when the boat started going under, it was a very unique experience. Your eyes and your ears start to, you gotta keep going like this, so you can pop your ears, it’s just like going up in a plane. And then after a while it just
settles down, you really don't know you're underwater, you're just in a tube. It's no windows on board, so right then from where you dive at, ninety days later, you come back up virtually the same spot. It’s just like ninety days sitting in this room. And during the time I was in, it was the Cold War with Russia, a lot of people don’t understand what that was about, I can explain a little bit to you. It was a war when, matter of fact, J.F.K. had stopped Russia from coming to Cuba, cause that’s when they had the Cuban Missile Crisis. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, we got them out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and it was a big thing for the U.S. and Russia cause it was a nuclear thing. It was a highly threat of war. That’s one reason why we had a funeral before you go. You sign over all your stuff. And you get your money before you go and put it in the bank or whatever. And they prep you just in case you don’t come back.

KG: What was that like, doing that every time?

CG: Y'know after a while it becomes routine, the first time I sort of, y’know, but I’m nineteen, 20 years old, a young man don’t really compute what’s happening at that point. You just sign it and keep on going. You figure you can handle the world. So it was cool. It felt weird after I got older, to know that I woulda had eight funerals so the ninth won’t matter.

KG: What did your family and parents think of you being on the submarine?

CG: They were very proud. The first time, I went out, there was 150 men on board and I was the only black man on board. So it was culture shock and not really having nobody to really communicate with. I did have friends on board, but having somebody from your same ethnic background, it was sorta weird not seeing another. So it didn't bother me. Like I said, in the 70s and 80s, it was still just like today, racial tension, but I didn't never had no problems on board. Everybody treated me like a man. And then once I got qualified so fast, it really boosts my value to the ship cause the more people on board that are qualified, the better the boat operates.

KG: Do you keep in contact with any of the friends that you made?

CG: Oh, I got a couple friends that I keep in contact with, yes. And being from Columbus, I always go back to the old crew, but now they moved it to Kingsby, Georgia. The boat I was on got decommissioned but they still, right now as we speak, they got some 19-20 year old guy out there doing the same job that I did, protecting this great country of ours.

KG: Where were you stationed for your five years? Besides underwater.

CG: My boat, like I said, was dry-docked in Kittering, Maine, Port Smith, New Hampshire. It’s a submarine base there, that’s where all the subs go on the east coast to be repaired. I was actually stationed out of Charleston, South Carolina but the
boat was in Kittering, Maine. And then after that I got a shore duty. I was a Navy Absentee Collection Unit Officer. We picked up any deserters in New England states, and upstate New York, and then we would transport them back to where they left from, anywhere in the world. So that was cool. And I wish I had pursued that because I did the same type of job that U.S. Marshals do now today. But I wish I had pursued that, but I got into construction.

KG: Where was your favorite place that you traveled to?

CG: I would have to say-- I've been to so many. I would have to say San Juan, Puerto Rico was good because and Rose van Rose (? P.R. was good, Saint Croix, Virgin Isles was good. Cause most every other place I've been, there've been different oriented people. And when I got to Saint Croix, the people looked just like me, they was black, so it was real cool there. I felt like I went back home. [laughs]

KG: When did you exit the military?

CG: April of, I don’t remember exactly when I got out. But I always remember the day you went in, it was very hard to remember the day you got out. I think it was April of 83.

KG: Why’d you leave?

CG: It’s hard to say. I was searching for something that I still haven’t found yet. Like I said, I wish I had stayed in and did twenty but I started to -- on board that submarine it's all repetition, you just do the same thing over and over again. It got sorta tiresome. And if I had never went on that shore duty billing, I have probably did twenty years. But as soon as I did that shore duty billing, I got a taste of life outside the military although I was still in the military but I was doing a civilian job so that’s all that led me to get out.

KG: How did members of your community -- do you feel like they treated you any differently after your military service?

CG: Yes, they treated me a whole lot differently! Because for one thing, they had never known nobody to be on a nuclear power sub, so it was a good feeling. A lot of respect. Anytime when people in the military, when they see you with your dolphins on, they really respect the submarine set because it takes a very special person to be submerged for three months.

KG: What was it like being submerged for three months with the same 50 people, 150 people.

CG: You only see a third of them most of the time, because of sleeping rotation. And your days are shorter, there’s only 18 hour days underwater because you’re in three sections, so it actually takes you 4 days to make 3 days good. And the most people
you see, it's the people who in your watch section and the people that relieve you. So the other ones, you very seldom do them unless you ain't got to do no calls, which I mean qualifying you could watch movies back then, you just had to bring your own movies. They didn't have the high tech-- I know they're living a lot better know, with the high tech, cause when I went there weren't no cell phones out there. So I know with the technology now it's a lot more comfortable on board. After being on board, after you stand your watch, you qualifield, it's like riding on a luxury ship. It's nice, temperature stays one thing, and it's super super clean, super quiet. Until you have a drill or something. Other than that you're just rocking like a baby in a cradle.

KG: You're a tall guy, so what was it like sleeping in one of those tiny little racks?

CG: They're designed for-- I had to get a waiver to get on board, because of my height, so I filed a waiver, and they agreed to let me go on board. After you hit your head on that steel door a couple times, you know to duck. And it wasn't no problem. The beds are 74 inches, right at 6 ft 2in, and I'm 6'5''. So a little curling in.

KG: Toes hanging off the edge?

CG: No, the walls would slack up. We called them coffins, cause you could zip it, so you don't have to see anybody walking by, they don't see what you're doing, listening to your music. They were designed for a person 6'2'' or shorter, but it wasn't no problem.

KG: Do you think that your experiences in the military changed your worldview?

CG: Yes, it changed me in a lot of ways. It taught me how to get along with other ethnic groups. I don't care how man looks, or what color he is, just as long as he respects me. Cause I'ma give him respect, and I just demand it back. Race ain't ever been a problem for me, I wasn't raised like that. My parents were Christian. I been subjected to it as a young man growing up in the South, had separate water fountains for blacks and whites, but my mother and father never taught us to hate nobody cause of the color of their skin.

KG: What types of challenges have you faced since leaving the military?

CG: Well I've always been the type of person that goes-- if I set a goal, I'm gonna make sure I meet it. So the challenge was I started to get older and the reason why I'm here now is just to try and get my pension from the VA. Right now I just got diagnosed with PTSD and dementia, so I filed a claim for that recently. So like I said I'm about ready to step back into the work world. I wasn't working because so many appointments, I started to work one time when I first got here, I was working at Cleveland Construction, they're doing the big building right now on Broad Street. I was working with them, but with my doctors appointments, because I go to the doctor now, I can't keep missing three days a week. So right now my only measly income is just my food stamps. My little business ain't been doing good. So I'm trying
to go back to work full time. I got a doctors appointment today at 1:30pm, so after I'm done with you, I'm go upstairs and prepare myself to go meet my doctor. And hope she just give me a clean bill of health. So I can get back in the work force.

KG: So, how did you become homeless?

CG: A lot of ways. I coulda went back to South Carolina and been staying somewhere, but I just don't like to stay with nobody, so I just stayed in Richmond, let me just go ahead on through this VA program. Cause it's a long drawn out procedure to get any kind of help. I just been here, knocking around a little bit, I go and get day work, just something to keep some change in your pocket. I guess how I came home, is I just ran out of work, I guess.

KG: Tell me a little about your experience with the VA and other organizations you've worked with since becoming homeless.

CG: This organization is one of the best in the nation. Mr. Fletcher does a good job, they've got Malika on board. It's been a real blessing. I've done a lot here for Fletcher helping reno, cause I'm very good with my hands. I do a lot of the maintenance work here. I run a lot of his errands. Cause we only had one counselor, now we have two. So he had to juggle 25 people, now he's got it cut in half, so it's pretty cool now. I guess I been here the longest. About a year and a half. And Fletcher put up with me cause he know what I'm trying to get done here. So he's given me the opportunity to get that done. I know if I wouldn't have come here, I wouldn't have never have got my medical situation straight. Cause I didn't know all this PTSD. That's one thing I'm glad. It's a long drawn out. You really down on yourself cause you wake up and how'd I get here? I'm a US Navy vet, I got plenty of experience and work, and stuff and how you become homeless? It's just something that happened, I guess.

KG: How did you get involved here?

CG: When I first got to Richmond I was working, so I was staying in motels, so after the job ended, I stayed there as long as the money lasted. If you just footing out and nothing coming in, it [unintelligible] so it ran empty and I checked in to the homeless program, I forgot what it is, they referred me here, and when I came here I was only-- they had just changed over from Freedom House to LFS. [Unintelligible] took over the whole cause they're about to close the whole thing now. So he stepped up to the plate and got the building and got everything up and running again. For like the first six months, there was only like 10-11 people here. It was good, the smaller the crowd, less aggravations. But you got about a full house and I know it's about time for me to go. I had a blast here. I miss my family right now. So I'm planning on I get the clean bill of health today, I'm planning on going to Texas, I'm going back to work. So that's really good. I'm really looking forward to getting back out in the workforce.

KG: So besides here, where else have you stayed since becoming homeless?
CG: This is about the only place. I stayed a week, after getting homeless in Richmond, I forgot where I was at.

KG: Overflow?

CG: No, it wasn't overflow. Right down here across from the new jail.

KG: Oh, I know what you're talking about but I don't know what it's called.

CG: I don't know. The CAD something. So I checked into there and I think for the first five days, I was moved from church to church. In a different church responsibility. So the bus come pick us up at a designated meeting place, I did that for about a week. I was really tired of that. I was really about ready to say just going back home. They had an opening here, so I came here and I been here ever since.

KG: What's the hardest part about not having your own home or apartment?

CG: You don't have the freedom to come and go as you want. You gotta be in here at a certain time, you don't have to leave during the day. I guess that's about it. You just can't come and go when you want, you have to abide by other people's rules and regulations.

KG: Do you have a person here that you talk to everyday?

CG: Yes, a lot of them I talk to every day, a lot of them I mess with everyday.

KG: Close friend?

CG: Well I can't say a close friend, we just have a mutual bond. So yes, there's a couple of people I mess with everyday. I try to speak with everybody, I try to get along with everybody-- well I do get along with everybody, I don't have no problems with anybody here. I hope nobody has no problems with me. Cause I'm a big guy and I talk real loud and I don't mean to be no threat to nobody or nothing. I'm basically a gentle giant. If I can help you, I'll help you. I will do nothing to hurt you. As long as you respect me you have 100% of my respect.

KG: Is it easy to make friends in your current situation?

CG: Well, it's always been easy for me to make friends. I don't have no problems of meeting people. I don't have no problems of talking to anybody. I don't care what ethnic group you're from, racial background, there's always the common ground in everybody. I don't have no problem in that.

KG: Do you ever feel lonely?
CG: Yes, I miss a whole lot. Like I said, you can’t come and go when you want, you can’t do what you wanna do, you gotta abide by rules and regulations. So that’s why I’m looking so forward to leaving Richmond. It’s been cool though.

KG: So what’s your daily life like now, what do you do every day?

CG: My daily life is like I get up, I usually have a game plan, I get up and go do...

KG: Execute the plan. What might be part of that plan?

CG: Mainly making sure you make all your VA appointments, job searching, finding--I don’t wanna do nothing else, I mean for a new career. Cause a lot of guys get here and they wanna drive trucks and stuff. But I know what I wanna do and I been pursuing it. I always look online and see where the type of work I wanna do is real lucrative, pays good money.

KG: What kind of work?

CG: Iron work. Skyscrapers. Mostly nuclear power plants, mostly power plant jobs.

KG: What types of barriers do you feel like you face in your current situation?

CG: The only barrier I got is me stopping myself. Ain’t nothing gone stop me, that’s just the way I am. If you tell me no, another door open down the street. That’s how I feel. I think the only barrier is yourself. If you got the ambition to get up and do it, ain’t nothing gonna stop you. You know that. How did you feel when you first got to college, but if that’s something you really wanna do, you gon do it. I think more people say you know, the color of your skin, your tattoos, your hairstyle, but you made them barriers yourself. So if you don’t make no bread, you don’t have none. All barriers are meant to be broken down.

KG: I like that.

CG: You know what I’m saying? Matter of fact, I like challenges. If it’s not a challenge, I’m not gonna be hold my attention. If it’s too easy I’m not gonna want to do it.

KG: How do you feel that your status is a homeless veteran? What shapes the way that society thinks about you?

CG: Like I said, they talk about Jesus Christ, I’m nowhere near as good as that man. I can’t even touch the ground he walk on. You don’t never worry about what nobody say about you. No problem about that. I don’t care.

KG: What do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experience of vets?
CG: Most civilians don’t know the sacrifices that most vets made. Like you said, most kids go in at 18-19 years old, took on the responsibility of defending this country. Yes, a lot of us have paid for it with their life. And then a lot of us have paid for it with the medical problems that come with it, broken limb, amputated limb, mental. Like right now it would never go out of my head, being under that water. Being woke up at night thinking, oh it’s time for us to shoot this thing right now. It’s time for us to destroy the world. That would never leave my memory. Sometimes I know right now I know I talk in my sleep. I been woke up and talking. That kind of stuff you would never get over that kind of stuff. It’s just a part of life I guess. Dealing with it.

KG: Keep on moving on. Why do you think vets in general become homeless?

CG: Because most of them have lost – because in the military you constantly around, you always have a support system. And reason why most of ’em become homeless because they lost their way. I don’t think that’s the same problem I have, I just wanted to make sure I was alright because my people said you have to yourself checked out. You talk loud, you sure you can hear? And I said, that is a possibility. Cause I do talk really loud, because of my hearing. And I got a knee problem, I didn’t know I have acid reflux. So the VA has really opened up opportunities, and let me know what’s going on inside my body. And my PTSD, I usually go to bed here 8:30-10 I got back about 11, 2am I’m up and go back. Can’t sleep a long period of time because it’s always something egging at me. And most times I don’t think I can stand to hear the water running cause I was trained to hear no water in the boat cause if you hear water you gon sink. Just keen, I can almost, if I see water I start shaking, you got to stop this leak. What brings most vets to be homeless is they lose their way. They lost comradery. A lot of drugs and alcohol problems. It’s not only in the vet community, but I guess it stands out more when you see a vet standing there with a sign. You been serving this country, so you should be getting some kind of help, but everybody don’t get help. Everybody don’t seek help.

KG: Why do you think they don’t seek help?

CG: People get into a comfort zone. Everybody don’t wanna drive a Mercedes, everybody don’t want a big mansion. So if you get into that comfort zone, that’s what you want. You can’t look on nobody because he riding the scooter and you’re driving a Mercedes. Who’s happier? Who’s to say what’s right and wrong? I’m standing up on the hill, and you’re standing down there. That’s maybe where he wants to be at. So who is most successful? Money and houses and material stuff don’t make you successful, you gotta have peace in your heart and peace with God. I think that’s what success is about. It’s not all about the money and material things you have because God gives it all to you. You get it one day and one day it could be gone. I know there’s this young man, I just always [unintelligible] nice looking car. Nice, I still like to keep myself clean, but I don’t need to go buy some $500 sneakers. That’s ludicrous. Why? I don’t need that. As long as I keep my hygiene up, and my clothes clean, it could be cold as a devil, as long as I’m clean and ain’t stinkin’, I’m cool.
don't need no great big mansion. I never did. I got a younger brother, he's a preacher, he drives a big old Mercedes, a big old house, him and his son. And man, why you got all this space? You don't need it! It's waste! You do waste a lot, like you see people. I was raised up where you don't throw nothing off your plate, pass it down to your siblings, maybe they want some. I think I got off the subject.

KG: No, that's perfectly fine because I think it goes to my next question. How do you feel about charity?

CG: It's hard to say. You get mixed emotions. Let's look at the Wounded Warrior program. That guy had collected almost $350 million and he was spending it like it was his own. It's good to help people, but it must come just from your heart. Like most of the guys you see on the streets, holding them signs, I don't really get the method. Because I figure if I go out and get it, you can go out and get it too. If you really want something, you go out and get it. That's how I was raised. Now yes, some of the people out there do need the little change you give them. But there's other ways. I don't know how to answer that.

KG: Are there any specific examples you can give, that might help? Or instances? When you say the word charity, do you have any memories that come to mind?

CG: Like I said most charity...that's a hard one for me.

KG: Like receiving charity, has anyone ever offered?

CG: Like, I consider that this is part of charity. It's a lot of people doing stuff, like the people that come and feed us in the afternoon. They don't need to do that. That's just from the goodness of their heart and the grace of God. It's not-- I don't know. It's hard to say.

KG: Do you ever feel the need to give back?

CG: Yes. That's why I do what I do right here. I tell you [unintelligible], I do a whole lot of stuff.

KG: Is there anything in your life that you regret?

CG: Not staying in the Navy. Not having more kids. [laughs]

KG: What are you most proud of?

CG: As I speak now, I guess my two grandbabies.

KG: How old are they?

CG: 2 and 4.
KG: Do you get to see them often?

CG: Yes, pretty often.

KG: They're up here?

CG: Yes, they're up here.

KG: What are your goals for the future?

CG: Going back and getting this job. And I ain't gon' never retire, as long as I can get up and move, I'm gonna go and do something. I don't like to sit down. Matter of fact, I've been sitting in this chair too long. [laughs]

KG: Well, this is my last question here. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience that we didn't talk about?

CG: No, I don't think so.

KG: Okay. Sounds good. That's all I have for you.

CG: Thank you.

KG: Thank you, Have a good day, sir!

Appendix 6

Forgotten Flight Oral History Transcript
(3/16/2016)
KG: Kelsey Glander
EL: Evette Lewis
Transcribed by: Jackie Salg

EL: “I was actually running errands for a disabled [undistinguishable] who's more disabled than me and I stopped to give Kelsey this interview. I joined the military in 1983. As an only child of just my mother, my parents were divorced when I was two. There weren't a lot of jobs out in the Regan administration and the military seemed like a career that I could travel. I was always into traveling and getting away, so the military served that for me. I was a United States Air Forced veteran from 1983 to 1985. My mom got really sick and the Red Cross had me released, and that's how I got home. I've been traveled overseas to Portugal, Italy, Spain, Germany, and abroad in the United States. I was an administrative specialist. While I was in service, I worked on a very large Xerox machine, processing orders and then I was a mail clerk. And then I went to a specials orders clerk for a general of the base. That was like a highly secret job that I had and I was working with a lot of secret material. And...
I was stationed in Portugal in the [undistinguishable], that was my last base before I came home. The most memorable experiences from my time in the military, would have to be the parties. God, I’m just going to keep it real with you it was definitely the parties. The parties and meeting other people that I’d never met before from all walks of life. You get a chance to meet people that aren’t like you on a every day basis. You know, you get to meet people outside of your comfort zone. So that was very cool for me. And I kept a lot of my friends till about maybe ten years after I got out. And then we kinda all sorta drifted away. But I have wonderful pictures of my time in the service and I didn’t have any children and it was wonderful. I had a really good time. My family didn’t, well my mom really wasn’t feeling the service. She was very hostile when I went in and she was very happy when I came out. I guess maybe because [undistinguishable] only child, and being her only child, and being a girl child, kinda had her worried a little it about if a war was to break out, would I have to go to the front lines. I was all for it, I was like, “Yes, let’s go.” But my family was more or less concerned about that. But I really enjoyed my time in the service, especially the traveling. The traveling is what I recommend to my children. I have a son that’s been in the army for four years. He did his enlistment, came out a honorable veteran. And my youngest son is now talking about going in the air force, but he’s going in the medical field. So, I’m kinda pushing him towards it. It teaches you, it gives you work ethic. It teaches you how to wake up in the morning, that you know, you really have to go to work everyday. And it gives you some life skills that you don’t really get when you don’t get to travel. It teaches you how to live outside of your comfort zone. I left the military because my mom got really sick and there was nobody at home to take care of her. And the job that I had, because I had such a high security clearance, they would not allow me to do any kind of vacations or anything because I answered to the general of the base. So when he got ready to go somewhere, I had to be ready to go somewhere. When he got ready to come home, I had to be ready to come home and it was very constictive. I think if I didn’t have such that toxic of clearance, with the restrictiveness, I probably would have stayed then and did my whole twenty. Yeah, I do believe that. Challenges since leaving the military? Not a lot of challenges. I walked right out of the military into a state career job. I was a state worker for the state of Pennsylvania over twenty years after I left. So what it did was it gave me a working experience and a backboard and sounding board to jump off of. Where as though I jumped right into the state, moved around different places until I got settled. I was a case worker for the welfare office. I did that for like the last ten years before I became disabled. So that was a really good thing. My experience with being an [undistinguishable]? Well I first came into knowing about my VA privileges when I became disabled. And it was told to me that I could receive monetary benefits but I didn’t get hurt in the army, in the air force. So I saw no reason to tap into those funds. Those funds could be used for my brothers and sisters that are actually coming from the war, that need to have that placement, that needed to have those funds. So when I became disabled, I stayed on general unemployment side of it. I didn’t tap into the VA until I became homeless in Pennsylvania. I was homeless in Pennsylvania. One time after my mom had passed and we sold her house and money was distributed to my children, I found myself in a homeless position. And I had to tap into some funds up in Pennsylvania. But down
here, I became one hundred percent homeless when I hit Virginia. It was by accident. I had been looking for a place to live, somewhere that was relatively warm, but I wanted a commonwealth state.

KG: So that’s what brought you to Richmond?

EL: And that’s what brought me to Virginia because there’s only three commonwealth states left in the common[undistinguishable]. And that would be Kentucky, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. So I was totally done with Pennsylvania. I didn’t know anybody in Kentucky. So, I picked out Virginia. How I came to pick Richmond was because there were a hotel, I’m sorry an apartment ad, in [undistinguishable], Virginia. And that was originally was supposed to be where I went. Well, when I got down here I got picked up the whole house and I closed out everything and I got in the Uhaul truck. And I get down here, it was a scam. And they didn’t have an apartment ready for me. Now, at that point in my life is like don’t, can’t turn around because there’s nothing that you left behind you, so all you can do is walk forward. And being a veteran, and being at different places I guess that’s where the excitement lead into the adventure. Ok, well we’re gonna venture off and see what happens. Well, from [undistinguishable], sent me to Richmond for VA services. When I got here, I checked into what is called Tuckerhouse. I had an anxiety attack and I had lapsed into depression because I didn’t know how to go about getting my money back from the apartment. I had spent all, mostly depleted all my funds for the month, so I had to wait until my benefits clicked over again. Well, when they clicked over again I wind up being housed for twenty days for stress and depression. From there, I was having a hard time getting my medication. I came down with prescriptions but then trying to get them filled because of the narcotics that I was taking, was kinda hard on me, and with my medication going up and down I was just not stable. So from there, I found myself homeless and I wind up in what’s called the “overflow.” The overflow down here is when the shelters are all filled up and they have no more place for the homeless people in the city during the winter months. And as long as it’s under 32 degrees they open what’s called, an “overflow house.” And it’s stationed at, now I know one North four street, downtown Richmond, right where the transportation center is at. Well I found myself in there. I got hooked up with people who I thought were trying to find homes but were really caught into a cycle of homelessness like this is how they lived in the winter time. They knew about the overflow, they knew about the shelter system and how it works. And with me being a new comer, I was like prey to them because I had income. Sometime during the month of February, from February until April, I stayed housed at the overflow. Well, when the weather changed like it is now, what is nice days outside, they closed the overflow. I found myself with nowhere to go. One of the other people that homeless people told me about, what we called the bridge. It’s actually located at Chamberlain and Belvidere, right when you get on sixty-four, there’s a ramp that comes off on [undistinguishable] Drive. If you walk up near the projects, you will find a little secret underpass where we used to live at. We had three large queen sized mattresses down there. There was a futon down there. There was a makeshift stove down there. We had a makeshift port-o-
potty down there. So, when I got underneath of there, I didn’t find myself comfortable but at the time, the shelters were so over ran with mental health people. And with me taking the kind of medicines that I take, it was just totally unbearable. Like, I wasn’t able to sleep at nighttime because people would be up and moving around me and would make me scared. And then there was the level of theft that was going on. So if you laid your pocketbook down, it was guaranteed that when you came back, it was not there. So under the bridge was a relatively safe location for me. That’s the only real placed that I stayed since I lost my home. The hardest thing about not having a home is being able to get up in the morning and wash your face and brush your teeth. The things that you do naturally, is taking for granted when you’re outside. There is no get up in the middle of the night and get a drink of water, unless you have water that you already transported down there. I think that’s the hardest part about being...of not having a home, is just being able to go to the bathroom. We did a lot of outside bathroom so that meant carrying handy wipes, that meant carrying toilet paper. That meant going into public restrooms and things like that and actually washing up. And we missed our days. Like we had a routine; Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, were our shower days. Tuesdays and Thursdays were the days that we went to all you can eat buffets. At the time, I was not exercising my VA benefits. The VA actually kicked in for me, after the fact. When I went to the VA and I had a case manager but me and her didn’t get along very well. And then what happened was once they hooked up and they found out that I was living underneath the bridge, which was really an unsafe thing, and really emergency, as far as a veteran is concerned. They gave me Ms. [Desieree?], and they gave me outside, outreach homeless team. They actually and these people are actually hands on [undistinguishable]. And they would come down there and get me and take me to appointments and things like that. But the hardest thing about having a home is definitely the routine of being able to just go to your fridge and getting something cool to drink, having use of the bathroom, and just not even so much as having a safe place to live because I was relatively safe when I was under the bridge. And just not being able to do normal things like cook a meal for yourself. We did a lot of outside eating. And I think that’s what I miss most, was actually cooking. My day-to-day life now, I’m back to normal. I wake up every morning about ten and I start my routine as I [undistinguishable] in the bathroom and then cooking my own meals. And then what I do is I outreach a lot to people in my community that are a little bit more handicap than me. Like today, I’m running errands for a lady that lives across the street from me because she’s in a wheelchair. She has really bad COPD and is not able to walk really well. So she gives me her vehicle and then I do her errands for her. So that’s like a normal day for me. Yeah, I do have a close friend, I have a god sister that lives in Pennsylvania and we talk everyday. I didn’t talk to anybody when I was homeless. I had lost my home by accident and I had lost all my numbers. So I didn’t talk to anybody for about six months, and they were frantic. My children, I did get a chance to talk to my daughter, I talked to her everyday, two or three times a day. She is my middle child, she’s twenty-seven. And it’s my everyday, and talking to people, is like I’m back to normal again with my friends. Yeah, it’s hard making friends now because I’m at the place where I kinda wanna get a job, and I’m looking for a job, like a little part time job now that’ll help
me out financially, but it'll help me get out and meet more people. That's what I'm into now because I've been here for a year now so now it's like, ok it's time for you to get outside, meet new people, and then that way, you know I'm able to go into the community and learn my way around. Like, I only know one way in downtown and out. But the other day I was doing an errand for one of my neighbors and I learned a whole different way, I'm like, “Oh God, this is so much quicker.” So that's a good thing. It's easy to make friends in my current situation. I make friends easily, I'm a very, I'm open person. I talk to people all the time, I'm very communicative, and I talk to people a lot about things that I want to do and like to do, and stuff like that. So I do meet a lot of people. But then I have times where I been a bit lonely because I get home sick from my children; I miss my family, I miss my grand children but I Skype them or I message them. And then we can talk and I can seem them face to face and stuff like that, so that's good. The barriers that face homeless veterans? I think it comes from the community. When I was homeless, I saw people look down; you know if we asked them for a dollar, or for fifty cents? And there was a level of begging and panhandling that comes with homelessness because you don't have. People think, and even me with the income, people think that homeless people have money, they live in a house somewhere, but they don't. And they're clean, we were clean when I was outside even though I was only eligible to take a shower three times out of seven days. You know, you keep yourself together. They do, they give free haircuts. Most of the churches, they do a lot of outreach with the homeless people. But a barrier that I would say, the homeless person is their own barrier. There are walls that becomes built at different levels of homelessness, there are walls. Some people built walls because of their past family life and then they attach it to society as a whole. And then some people built up walls like me. My wall came when it came time to go inside. Ms. [Desiree?] had found me a place where I could go inside but me going inside would have meant that I wouldn't have been able to move into my own place, but then it would've took longer. Rather me stay outside, which was the shorter thing. Which to them, kept me at the top of their emergency list. Like, we have versus me being inside which would have dropped me down the list two other people. But then you have a kind of resilience when you live outside and you're homeless. So I think the barriers come from the community and then there are also self-made barriers. Yeah.

KG: Can you give me an example of a community barrier?

EL: Yeah, when wintertime comes the community is always giving out free food at Monroe Park. Every Saturday we met at Monroe Park at different churches and things and different organizations that would come out and give free food. Well as September rolled around, no I'm sorry, as June and July rolled into the Springtime, that eased off. There was nobody there; people taking vacations, summertime coming on the way and doing things and reacting with their own family kinda left a little loophole with the homeless people. So there wasn't that constant feeding, like there wasn't that constant attention, constant being given hygiene products and things like that, that they're really not able to buy on their own. People think that homeless people, yeah, we do live off of welfare benefits, we live off of food stamps,
and we live off of the money that they give us. [phone rings] Excuse me for one second. I have to run upstairs and get my phone.

KG: No worries.

EL: [Phone conversation in the background] Hi, I forgot I had to see you and talk to my case worker this morning. Soon as I get finished I have to run down to the [undistinguishable] I be over. I said I forgot I had to meet with my case worker this morning. No, I’m right across the street at home, she come to the house. Yeah, as soon as I get finished, then I run down there and [undistinguishable]. Okay. [Returning] She was wondering what had took me so long.

KG: [Laughs] No worries.

EL: Told her I had to meet with somebody. Where were we?

KG: So you’re talking about how there seems to be less community aid in the summer.

EL: Yes, there’s less community aid in the summer and it kinda pushes the homeless people into stealing, looting, scams, all kinds of craziness. But then when it gets back to the wintertime again, then everything goes back to being normal. Well what we as homeless people call normal. That’s normal times when we go and we shower, and the community, and the churches, and the community comes back out to feed and to pass out book bags, clothes, all kinds of stuff, clothes, jackets, pants, everything. So yeah, there’s a little gap in the summertime. I would say it starts about April and runs all the way until September. It’s definitely not the level of care there. The particularly experiences of veterans? They don’t know, civilians, society doesn’t know how to treat homeless people with dignity. Homeless people, regardless...I met people who had been homeless for ten years. When I was living underneath the bridge there was a man that lived on the other side of the [undistinguishable]. He had been living there for over fifteen years. He had his own TV, he had a generator down there and he had a set up where he had a three-bedroom apartment down there. And when I asked him, because I’m always curious, like, “What made you stay underneath of here?” And he said because most of the people that he meet, in his condition are very mean and nasty. There’s a level of negativity that makes, that makes society look down on homeless people. Yeah, most of them, majority of them are dirty, they’re not well kept, or well groomed. And whenever you roll up on somebody and they’re not well groomed or they may have an odor, it seems to make people step back. That’s a normal reaction. But if you look behind all of that physical stuff, you still find a human being that has a heart, that bleeds, that cries, that has happy times, that has all the regular emotions that a normal person does. Veterans, especially, because we have lived in those elements, because we have lived in the jungles, they trained us how to live in the mountains and they trained us how to go without food and water and clothes and things of that nature and to struggle with what you have. I think that’s where the homeless veteran gets stuck at. And
says as well, you know, every time I go in for help, everyone’s looking down on me – that becomes depressing after a while. And it makes you feel like nobody really cares or gives a damn. Therefore, you get stuck and you’re in a situation and you learn how to live it. That’s where we get these lifetime homeless veterans from. When you see somebody sleeping on a grate or sleeping on the street and you go up there and ask them, would they like to come inside, and they tell you no. They really, really mean that because they’ve been stepped on so many times, that they don’t want to release that hope. Like I was telling Ms. [Desiree?] when I was homeless, “Don’t promise me anything. Let me go through the steps first without promising, oh here’s your keys, you know? And like it’s a carrot in front of a rabbit, like, don’t do that.” Treat me with dignity. You know I chose to live underneath the bridge at the last hour because that’s where I felt most comfortable at. I didn’t need to go inside to have somebody that was mentally unstable say something or do something to me and then I attack them or they attack me. Now I’m involved in the justice system. Now I’m not going to get any help from the program because I’ve stepped over into a justice system type of situation. That’s why I think veterans become homeless. Because they get used to being where they are, where it’s stable, where they don’t have to put they’re hope. It’s like putting your hope, okay, like Ms. [Desiree?] told me, she said, “You can go inside, you know? We really want you to come inside.” And they was pushing me to go into this shelter but my whole thing was no. You’re not going into that place because I know what goes on in there and if I go in there and I get caught up in any of that nonsense, then that’s gonna make me be like, “Hey, I’m not into this.” But then where does that put me on the list as far as me receiving benefits? How do I go about getting off of the street like right away? It took me....[reads?] How do you feel when people offer you charity? I say thank you. There was this one church that we went to, it’s on – right there outside of James Ward. And we used to go everyday and eat and they served the greatest food. But they kept it real simple; you line up, you stay line, you come and then they serving seconds and thirds. But you don’t be rushed and be greedy about it. And when you put people, homeless people, in a situation like that, you find out that they’re very civilianized, that they’re really – we’re really people. We’re people that have fallen through a crack. And we don’t wanna stay here, we really wanna do better but there’s a level in society that wants to keep us there. They don’t wanna see the person that has urinated on themselves because we couldn’t the [undistinguishable] bathroom or we went into the public restroom and they told us, “Oh no, this is for customers.” Well what do you do? There were plenty of times that I had to actually go outside. I would find a parking lot and I just had to go. There were plenty of times that we panhandled, that we were hungry and we went into the supermarket and we came out with food. As far as going into a shelter, yeah, people go inside only when they feel comfortable. What I’m most proud of is pulling another person with me out of homelessness. His name is Jason and him and I have a relationship, he’s a very nice guy. There’s a twenty year difference between us though. And, but he was homeless with me. And we promised each other that if either one of us could pull each other out of homelessness, that the other person would help the other person out. So I did. And now he has a job and he’s stable and he’s living in a [undistinguishable] house and he helps his mom and his dad. And that made me feel really good, you know? I
haven’t talked to him in a while but he’s not in jail. I called the jail every week to make sure he’s not in jail or anything and he’s stable now. You know and he slipped into homelessness because he came from being incarcerated. He wasn’t even a veteran, you know? And veterans, when you’re homeless, it’s a little bit harder for us to come inside because we’ve been used to dealing with the elements. We’re used to you know, being put in situations that are uncomfortable for us. Being homeless is not comfortable, it’s very uncomfortable. But when you’re a veteran, you’re trained to get used to the uncomfortable. We’re trained to get used to the unfamiliar. We’re trained to live off of sea rations, that’s where we call the home made, the things that we get when we go out in the field. We call them sea rations. We’re used to eating like that. So when homeless comes about, it’s…we deal with it. It’s not a really big problem for us because we’ve been used to it.

KG: How has being a homeless veteran, at one point, changed your worldview?

EL: Oh, I look at homelessness at a totally different level now. When I see that person that’s outside panhandling or I see that person that I know that’s a vet because their [undistinguishable] or their medals or whatever advertisement they may have on their body, I look at them, not looking down on them, but looking at them on an equal level like, I been there before, so here’s a dollar. Or let me go and take you and get you something to eat. Or I will run and go get a meal and bring it back to them. Or if I know of anything that’s available to them, I try to offer assistance that way.

KG: That’s what one of the people who I was talking to yesterday, he said the same thing, cause he’s been there he feels a strong need to help and give and back when he’s able, yeah.

EL: Yeah, and I think that’s where my community services kicked in now with a lot of my neighbors because I see the need. Now before when I was outside in society, I was working and I was getting my career on. I didn’t see the homeless people, you kinda blank them out a little bit or you know, you’re so focused on what you’re doing that you don’t really see them. But now I see htem more. I can tell the difference between – in a group of people, I pick out the ones that are homeless. They have a certain stature to them. You know, they look a little bit different than a normal person, than a normal street person. And that’s what makes me give back a little bit more now, yeah.

KG: How do you feel about you know, previously having been a homeless veteran, how do you feel that makes society think of you?

EL: At one point in time, I thought society, I though had looked down on me because I’m like they have all these programs and stuff set up but where do I do I fit in? You know, that was my whole thing, with where does Evette fit into this? Where do I actually…where is my [undistinguishable] at, you know? Why can’t I get into…like, when I moved in here they told me, “Oh well we’re gonna help you pay your rent.”
Some I’m like, okay. And I had a really big [undistinguishable] when I first got here because I thought it was Section Eight…helps a segment of people and then the VA has the [undistinguishable] that helps the segment of people. Well, it’s totally unequal. It goes based on your income but what happens when your income fluctuates? Or like I’ve been living off of the same income for the last twenty years. I haven’t gotten an increase and the money I had back then was really good but now we’re moving into a generation, a whole other couple years, and it’s just not meeting the needs anymore. Society looks down on that. Like, we’re supposed to keep doing the same thing every month; it gets monotonous after a while. And that’s how I think people slip into homelessness because they just want to be able to go on a vacation. They just want to like, I need a car so desperately now that I was willing to take my house money to buy a car. But then I had to sit down and think, well you gonna wind up living in that car, so what do you do? So now I was into okay, well we’re gonna start saving for a car. But if you wanna car that costs, maybe if you go to an auction that costs seven to eight hundred dollars or a thousand dollars, and you can only save twenty-five dollars a month, look how long is it going to take you? You know, a lot of – there needs to be more programs that help homeless veterans. Don’t just, don’t just– we don’t want a handout. We want a hand up, you know? We don’t want you to give us nothing, you know, like there were plenty of times that I was willing to wash dishes, I was willing to do laundry, I was willing to go in and help people clean their houses and stuff, just to be able to sleep in a bed, to get up and go get a drink of water in the middle of the night. Or just like when the weather is inclimate – when the weather is inclimate, it’s so hard because we had to double up on clothes, or we had to sit outside. There were plenty of times that I just walked in the rain. Now, I don’t even use an umbrella because I’m so used to it. You know, once you get used to something, it becomes a habit. So….homelessness and being a veteran at some point in time, is learning. But there are other points in times you meet people that have just fallen through the cracks. And all we need is just a help, just a handout. You know, we don’t want to be looked upon like we’re dirty or stinky. One time yeah, I was a dirty girl because I didn’t know where to go to take a shower; there was nobody to tell me, “Oh, they’ll hand you a paper and say, well, you find it.” Well if you’re not into maps, if you’re not into street signs, there’s a level of uneducated people that are homeless vets. They, they [phone rings] we had the education…excuse me. Let me see who this is. This phone is acting really crazy today. We have the level of education, but we don’t have the level – but sometimes it gets lost. You know [phone rings] find computers…hold on. [Picks up phone] Hello? Hey… Okay, well let me finish up with her and then I be over. Okay. [Returns to interview] There’s always that level of a…there’s always that level of hope. You know, when you be outside for a long time you can lose hope real quick and say, “You know what? This is just how it is.” A lot of homeless people, they go and rent hotel rooms to get off the street just to have a place to sleep, just to have a place to eat. But then it uses up their money so fast that they don’t – they don’t even get a chance to be stable. And then you have programs, like I was outside and there was a program that had opened and all this homeless people had got rooms. But they didn’t have jobs to maintain them. They lied their way into it. “Oh yeah, I get a check every month.” Because they had a couple dollars in their pockets so the landlord
would go ahead on and take the stipend that the government, or that the state, or the federal, local government was giving them for that person without that person having a way to sustain their self. So then what happens? They go right back out on the streets again within ninety days. It’s a vicious cycle and the only way to pull yourself up out of it, to maintain stability, is to really want it. And after you stay outside for a couple years, you don’t want it anymore - you just get used to it. You – those people become your family, they become your friends, they become your enablers – they enable you to stay outside. And it becomes like crabs in a basket – “Oh no, you can’t leave us. You know, we want you to be here.” I had got caught up in that syndrome for a minute and if it wasn’t for Ms. [Desiree?] being a great case manager and letting me know, you know, “Ms. Lewis, these people,” this is my son coming in, “these people” you get a chance to meet my youngest. Hi, Just. I’m being interviewed. You good on camera? [Laughs] That’s Kelsey.

KG: Hi.

EL: Kelsey, that’s my son, Justin. Justin is studying to be a nursing assistant.

KG: Really nice to meet you.

EL: Come say hi. Just say hi, get down.

KG: [Laughs]

EL: Say hi. I’ll talk to you in a minute. That’s my youngest. My kids kept me from being homeless. If my children hadn’t known that their mother was sleeping underneath a bridge, they woulda came down to Richmond and got me, but that’s not what I wanted. It was time for mommy – I came to Richmond and I moved out of my comfort zone because I didn’t want to be in their everyday lives because I was become stagnant and I didn’t want to do that. I didn’t want to be an at home grandmom that sat at home all day and watched the grandkids, that’s not what I envisioned for the rest of my life. I wanted a job, I wanted to get married again. I want a husband and not starting off on a whole new family but just incorporating you know, him into my life. And I just wanted some freedom, you know? And when my freedom came, it came with a cost. And my cost was being homeless for about almost a year, yeah.

KG: Can you tell me about the day you found out you’re going to be housed?

EL: Oh my gosh. Ms. [Desiree?] came and got me from underneath the bridge and she had me go over and sit and talk with one of the financial advisors over at the VA. And they had me sign all these papers and I was like, “Okay, I’m signing my life away.” And they were like, “No, we’re just applying you for a voucher.” So you know, I’m still not really understanding what’s going on. I’m like, “Okay.” She was like, “Evette, you have to go through the motions, you know, in order to get to what you need. So I’m like, “Okay, okay, okay. I’ll go through the motions to get what I need.”
And I came out and – well, I looked at two other apartments before this one and I didn’t like them. I was like, “No, this is just a straight no go. I’m not going through this.”

KG: Mhm.

EL: And then, she called me one morning and Leah was my other case manager with the VA, with the emergency [undistinguishable] people. And she was like, “Oh, we have this apartment for you to go and look at. We have a house for you to go and look at. We don’t know if you’re going to like it but it’s within your financial field. Why don’t you come and take a look? So I’m like, “Okay, I’ll go out here and take a look.” And it was no credit check because my credit is just pfft. But there was a background check – well, I don’t have anything in my background, not a felon or a misdemeanor or anything like that. So she was like, “Okay, we gonna come and pick you up.” So they came and got me from underneath the bridge and we came over here. So the girl actually comes up – you can imagine this place empty - I walk through the door and I’m like looking, “I’m like oh my God.” I was like, “This looks so nice.” You know, and I started, I’m like, “Listen, don’t show me something and then have me get my hopes up for it and then it falls through.” So I said, “Well, I know I’m not going to get this place, it’s too nice regardless of what my income looks like.” So we go ahead on, and they show me this place and I’m looking I’m like, “Oh God, it got a bathroom downstairs. It got a full bathroom upstairs. Plus, I don’t have anything in my background, not a felon or a misdemeanor or anything like that.” So she was like, “Okay, we gonna come and pick you up.” So they got me from underneath the bridge. I had made up my mind that this month we’re taking income and we’re going to find us a place to live. So being as though that my partner that I was with, Jason, had found him a job, he had got him a job, from actually panhandling. And one of the guys had asked him, “Did he work?” and he said, “Yes.” He does masonry work and all this kind of construction. So they gave him a job. So we were like, “Well we’re not even gonna think about that house because we don’t know if we’re gonna get it.” We going to go ahead and we moved into a room. So I was actually on a room on [undistinguishable] for a week before I moved in here. So she calls me that morning and wakes me up. And I’m like, “Ms. [Desiree?] you know, like at this point, what do you want? Are we gonna go look at more apartments?” So she was like, “No Ms. Evette. You can pick up your keys.” And I’m like, “Really?!” Like I have keys to a place that’s my own that’s not a hotel? Cause after a week I had gotten really lonely and really bored with sitting in the hotel. I didn’t know anything, anybody, there was no place else to go. And I didn’t want to start calling the homeless people that I knew because I knew that that would just send me right back down the rabbit hole again. So she was like, “No really, you can go pick up your keys.” And I was like, “I can go pick up keys?” And she was like, “Yeah.” And then I didn’t have to pay anything when I moved in. They paid for my first month’s rent, they paid for my security deposit. So I didn’t have to pay anything. But man, I still have the pictures on my phone. We picked up that day and we moved out, kissed our hotel room goodbye, like, “See you later.” I didn’t have to worry about no bed bugs or nothing like that. We didn’t have anything here. We slept on the floor for like just a day until they got us over to [undistinguishable] and
[undistinguishable] gave us some beds and stuff like that. But we were just happy to be inside and have some keys, man.

KG: [Laughs]

EL: You know, it was like once we got the keys, once I got the keys I was like, “We're good to go.” And I was surprised because at first when you come in from outside you're still in that state. A lot of bad habits that you bring with you, a lot of bad spending habits. People think that all veterans are drug abusers, we're not. Yes, I smoke marijuana everyday because of the disability that I have. It just takes the edge off the medicine and it makes me a little calmer with my anxiety. But then that stops me from getting jobs and things of that nature. But like I say, one day they gonna legalize and everything will be fine. So when we moved in but the [undistinguishable] program was eligible to be picked up because they don’t recognize me as a substance abuser. Like I don’t do cocaine, I don’t do heroin. There’s nothing wrong with having like, alcohol is legal but you can still be an alcoholic. Marijuana is legal, you can still be legalized as a pot head. But what pot head do you know that all they wanna do is head – you wanna run at the refrigerator hard. You know, it doesn’t lead you to a life of crime like most debilitating drugs do. So when we found out that we was having – that we moved into our place, I had a house warming and did have a lot of people come over. And then I found out most of them were kinda jealous because I live behind the VA and I am a veteran. And they was like, “Oh man, you know, you got this.” No, I got this because I kept going. I kept fighting and I kept having hope but not putting myself out there, still making my plan you know, to not lose my shelter. But just having hope hey, that you know, one day I’m gonna have my own place. You know, I am going to be able to come downstairs and fix my own breakfast and cook my own dinner so that that was a big thing. When she first told me that I got this place I was just ecstatic. Yeah, it was a good day.

KG: I’m sure.

EL: It was a really good day, yeah.

KG: Is there anything you’d like to share about your experience, either in the military or when you were homeless or becoming housed, or goals for the future?

EL: My goals for the future are I did play with my rent – well, I didn’t play with it actually, my father got sick and he had to have a thyroid operation. Me being an only child, I did take a portion of my rent money and they started sending me notices and they were gonna like, evict me. And I’m like, “Oh man.” And I got really depressed about it and the case manager that I have now, really is not on top of her game and she really didn’t give me the services for – but I did was I was very open, and I was very honest. And I went to court and I let them know, listen, I’m an only child. I plan on paying my rent, the rest of the portion that I do you, at the end of this month. So, what happened was my case manager ran up on me and she was like, “Listen, you
can’t do that because it really works on your nerves and it stresses you out completely. It puts a certain level of stress on you that’s not good. It makes you start thinking about you know, if I lose this place where am I going to go? So I just got recertified. They came, Sarah came out and they checked out the whole place and I told her I’m very happy with living here. And they recertified me again for another year. I have my voucher again for another year. I don’t know how long I’m gonna keep the voucher, but hopefully, it’s indefinite, because I can afford this place on my own if I had a part time job but even on my own, I would still stay here. It’s about a three hundred dollar difference with what they pay. But I like it. I like it here and I like Richmond now. And I’m starting to feel like I’m a member of the community, like I voted over here when we had the last primary and I’m starting to – they had a big barbeque and I won one of the raffles. So I got this Old Navy giftcard and I got online and I ordered me a shirt. So I say this is my new home shirt

KG: [Laughs]

EL: you know that I wear that when I do wear it, it makes me feel like I’m a person again. It gives you a level of satisfaction in your life. You know, it makes you feel good when you come in, when I looked at and I see where I used to live at and when I say you know, “Living underneath the bridge was worth it.” Would I do it again? No, absolutely not. And would I tell anybody? No, no. But I would like to go back and help the people that are underneath there – if I could get on some type of program or something like that. Whenever you come from a homeless situation whether you’re a vet or not, you always have a sense of wanting to give back, all the time and that’s important, is giving back.

KG: That’s awesome. I don’t have any other questions unless you …

EL: No, no I don’t.

KG: Okay.

EL: Yeah.

KG: Awesome, thank you so much.

EL: You’re welcome.

KG: Okay, turn this off.

EL: This is for you, your questionnaire.

KG: You can keep that if you want, I brought an extra copy for you.

EL: Okay, cool.
Appendix 7

Forgotten Fight Oral History Transcript
(3/16/2016)
James Phillip Jr: JP
Harold Smith Jr: HS
Kelsey Glander: KG
Other: unnamed woman in room
Transcribed by: Su Spina

KG: Okay. Okay. So, we’re gonna start off if each of you could tell me your name, how you came to Richmond, where you grew up and a little bit about your family life. That’s how we’ll start, so we’ll start with you.

HS: Harold Smith, Jr from Smoking, Pennsylvania. My grandfather was a retired WWII vet. My father was a slug (?) and I grew up in a coal mining town.

KG: Alright, James?

JP: Name, James Philip, Jr. I was born here, but I didn’t grow up here. And my grandparents raised me and my brother and I joined the military in 1986. That’s been it since.

KG: What brought you back to Richmond?

JP: My kids. I have two grown kids and now I have a grandson. And I said I was only gonna be here till 2002, but now I’m still here. That’s it.

KG: So can each of you tell me about your life today?

HS: Oh, I’m good. Alison, my case manager, her and I have been working together for the last ten months since I got here. I’ve been here a year as of March 2. She finally got me housing. There was a lot of red tape, a lot of hoops, but hippity hop, hippity hop.

JP: Yeah, I went through family when I first became homeless, and that didn’t work out. But now, I got housing. I went through everything: overflow, sleeping in trucks, and this and that. But now I’m okay. I’m good. I got my stuff under VA, my pension and everything, I’m good. I’m alright.
KG: So, when did you join the military, and what led to your decision to join?

HS: Well, I tried to get into the delayed entry program before I graduated in 1981, but some doctor, full disclosure: I had admitted to taking Dexatrim over the counter, y’know freakin dietary supplement. So he disqualified me for six months. Okay, so let’s go to college then. Tried Bloomsburg, but graduated from school, to go to another school? I didn’t see fit. So, October 28th, 1984, I was inducted.

KG: What branch of the service?

HS: United State Army.

KG: What did your friends and family think of your decision?

HS: My wife wasn’t too happy about it because I had to uproot her and take her to California and that’s where the divorce rolled in. My family was gung-ho about it, but she wasn’t. I picked the Army over my wife.

KG: James, when did you join?


KG: Why did you join?

JP: I wanted to get out of the lifestyle I was in.

KG: What did your friends and family think?

JP: They thought it was great. Cause I excelled in everything I did, when I was in basic training. I excelled in everything, so they though it was great.

KG: What was your training like and what do you remember most about training?

HS: I was inducted to a cohesion unit. We were buffalo soldiers, and our whole battalion trained together and got airlifted up to Fort Ord and Fort Bedding. So I didn’t have AIT (?) even though the ASPAB (?) said I could have been whatever I wanted to be. But I asked the recruiter, what’s gonna take me to California? Sign here, grunt, okay no problem.

KG: What was your training like? What do you remember the most?

JP: Trying to excel. I remember a competition with this guy, doing pushups. I was almost at 100 pushups, and he beat me.

HS: Probably by one. [laughs]
JP: Actually by two. [laughs]

HS: Cause I know Fort Benning, Dust Bowl, get up get down get up get down.

[laughs]

KG: What was your job in the military?

HS: Team leader.

KG: What did you find the most or least challenging or interesting?

HS: Maintaining the men. Because we were a cohesion unit, we went through basic training with everybody and we knew everybody on a personal basis. So the problem I had was when I got my rank, and the privates that didn’t get their rank, the comradery was still there. You know what they say about fraternization, I’m E4 (?), I’m not supposed to fraternize with privates. Yeah, but we’re a cohesion unit, that private helped me and I helped him, so I’m not allowed to fraternize with him. That was the most difficult part.

KG: What was your job? What was challenging?

JP: When I first went in, I was field artillery, and I went into MP. And then I had to get out of MP and went into Special Ops. Like me, him, you, and myself, you have to coop yourself together and think about everybody. Not think about yourself. That was a changing thing in my life. I wish I could have stayed in MP, I messed up. Special ops was better, I really enjoyed that better.

KG: Do you have a specific memory about Special Ops?

JP: Yeah, Panama. Who was in Panama... We had to do a lock-in [unintelligible]. We had to do a lock in, because we came under fire, so I grabbed a guy who was beside me. And then we landed. That was it. As long as he was okay. I coulda got shot. I won’t worry about it.

KG: What was it like thinking about, in that moment, thinking about him instead of yourself?

JP: I mean, he had kids, I have kids. But, I really won’t think it. I just wanted to be sure

[Someone knocks on the door]

JP: And we both still talk to this day.
KG: That's awesome. So, can you tell me about the different places you were stationed?

JP: England, Japan, Camp Casey in Korea, Germany, I can give you the list.

KG: Do you have a favorite?


KG: Were you ever deployed to a combat zone?

JP: Yeah, Gulf War.

KG: What was it like coming home from the Gulf War?

JP: I was just happy to be home. I came from St. Louis to the rec (?) center. And you come from the field of war, and then you go to a place where you're just dealing with paperwork. It didn't sit right.

KG: Why didn't it sit right?

JP: Cause I felt like I needed to be out there on the battlefield instead of sitting here doing paperwork. [unintelligible]

KG: So, Harold, can you tell me about the different places you were stationed and some of your memorable experiences?

HS: I'm not a combat soldier. And like I said, we were a cohesion unit, we were locked in a Camp Orb for three years. Gateway to the Pacific. My memorable experience is me and a couple of troopers, every weekend, renting a car at the Monterey airport and going up to Santa Cruz and hanging out at Yosemite National Park. I don't have combat experience, so therefore I cannot -- he can tell you more about that then I can.

Other: Yosemite had to be awesome.

HS: It is awesome!

KG: So you spent a lot of time there with your guys?

HS: No, I spent a lot of time with my guys. Because I was the platoon armorer, so I'd have to field trip the whole m16 (?), pull the trigger mechanisms out, wipe cloth this.

KG: This question is for you, James. From your memories of deployment, are there any things you miss about being deployed?
JP: Really, no. One thing I can say, it’s in my book in there, when I was MP, I was doing something [unintelligible] and they got away. And I was shooting for the head, but I hit him in the shoulder. I was kinda happy about that. I didn’t kill him. That’s about it.

KG: Is there anything either of you miss about your military experience in general? Just being in the military?

HS: Yeah, I miss the closeness out in the field and comradery. And playing with ordinance (?). Where else can you kill one person, 800 times. That’s all it is. At one point they told us, take all of the ordinates (?), in order to get the full budget from the Reagan administration, we had to go out and shoot everything. Throw the grenades, boom boom. M60s, M16s, and then here’s zero. And there you go, your full budget. So it’s pretty much all about money. And I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were an MP, you should have said that.

KG: So, what did your friends and family say when you exited the military?

JP: They was kinda glad. They saw a part of me that was, with the military stuff, they was glad that I was out of it and try to do something else in civilian life. That’s what we call life outside the military, civilian life. They was glad I was doing something outside the military, cause I was bad off. But I feel good now.

KG: Why did you leave the military?

JP: Actually my time was up, really. 22 years, I was done. Politics and everything, I had had enough. I can get out now? I’ll get out now.

KG: How about you?

HS: Uh, drugs. OTH (?), because of drugs. 23 years old, you wanna unleash a whole freaking battalion of men on Monterey, California? Yeah, I was OTH.

KG: How did your family respond?

HS: I have one sister, and that’s all the family I have. As far as community, come on, you’re talking about a dump in Smocking, Pennsylvania. It’s a coal mining town. All the industry left. And when they shut down the mines, they pretty much shut down the town. Our biggest excitement was Walmart SuperCenter coming in [laughs] and boom there it is!

KG: So what brought you to Richmond?

HS: My last $200 from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I was homeless in a warehouse, 22 below zero. And I had my last $200, went to the Amtrak train, how far can I go with this? Richmond, Virginia. And I got pretty much dumped off at homeless point of
entry. And I talked to Dio, you may know him as squirrel, but I don’t call him squirrel because of respect. He pretty much showed me the ropes, and that’s how I met up with Alison at Wounded Warriors, actually it was her superior in the same office. Yeah, she’s been hustling real good for me.

JP: Like what he’s saying, as long as you got strength in your legs, he kept going.

KG: You just keep truckin’.

HS: You got to man, I had to qualify every 2 months. 12 mile speed march. I had to get it down under three hours. Best time, 2 hour 11 min and 13 sec. Full gear. Yeah.

KG: So, both of you can answer this, or either one. What were your relationships like with other members of the military and did you maintain any of those when you left?

JP: No, I didn’t.

HS: Neither did I.

KG: Do you think your experience in the military changed your world view or relationships about the military and your community?

HS: Yeah, it made me a better man. And I look at every civilian as a civilian. When I took the oath, domestic terrorism and freakin’ foreign terrorism, I think with all the drugs that are out here, we have a lot of domestic terrorism going on and they’re taking advantage of the weak. And there’s nothing I can do about it.

JP: You feel helpless, at some point.

HS: Pretty much. And that don’t feel good.

KG: Are there any specific instances that stand out to you where you realized your world view changed? Going through your daily life and maybe something happened, and you’re like wow.

JP: I know that people I used to work with and [untintellible] with, and they’re not trying to do anything with themselves. And they come to me, and I’m not your savior. You have to come to be someone who wants to do something. Help yourself. You’re not trying to do that and I see that. I’ve been living here and traveling back and forth for about 10 years since I got out of the military, and I see these, I work with them, and I know them, and I try to help them the best I can. But I’m not going to go beyond myself to help you with what you’re doing. I know what you’re doing. No. It kinda hurts, in a way. I don’t wanna turn my back or anything, but if you ain’t trying to help yourself, I can’t help you. I got five kids.
HS: I only have two [laughs] and they’re both a handful.

KG: So have either of you worked with any organizations to help veterans since leaving the military? I think you mentioned Wounded Warriors.

HS: ASWAN (?) primarily, trying to square away with that dung heap they call a shelter down there in Richmond.

KG: I’m going there tomorrow.

HS: You are? Pay attention, sweetheart. Actually, it should be empty, because it shouldn’t be open above 40 degrees. But during the hurricanes and everything else, they close it down. So you have homeless people out in the rain. Me, I prefer not a shelter. I have my tent, I have it established. When this falls through, and I don’t get a decision, I’m going back to my tent. And that’s where I’m comfortable. By myself, leave me alone. I primarily remove myself from society. I get claustrophobic when I’m in a room with too many people like this. And I’m under the gun. So yeah. But, I thought I’d help. Richmond, Pennsylvania, they say screw Pennsylvania. As far as their vets, you’re on your own.

KG: I actually was trying to conduct this project up in Pennsylvania originally, no one wanted to work with me. No one wanted me to speak to anyone who received services and my hypothesis is because they were scared that these people would be disappointed in the services they received. I got the vibe that they don’t want people to.

HS: Cause in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, our main office is in a YWCA, so the YWCA is mainly concerned about sheltered women, abused women. And we’re in the fucking basement.

KG: Yeah, I’ve been there. I’ve seen it, I’ve talked to them. So what challenges do you feel like you’ve faced since leaving the military? When did you leave the military, by the way?


KG: What challenges do you think you faced?

HS: I didn’t. I just went from one homelessness to another. Cause my family didn’t really care about me, I was raised and born in a freaking foster home.

KG: How did you become homeless?

HS: My mother and father rejected me and put me in a foster home. So I figured from age 13, I became homeless. I was shucked around, but as soon as I turned 18, I was on my own. Homelessness starts. Yep.
JP: That’s the beast.

KG: How about you, James? How did you become homeless?

JP: I was living with a lady that I used to work with when I got out of jail. And she died. And I couldn’t take over the lease or anything, to where she was living. I didn’t have nowhere to go. And I actually moved in with my grandmother, and my grandfather had died, and she based everything on him when he was alive he would do this, do that. He’s gone! I can’t do all this.

HS: I concur on that.

JP: Basically she put me out, so I had to live on the street. I was even living in a truck in the backyard of her house, my grandparents’ house. Staying in a pickup truck at night. To make a long story short, you know what she wants me to do now? “If you have some time, you think you might be able to come over here and stay with me for a little while?” You really asking me that? No. I gotta place, an apartment.

HS: My mother did that to me. She ran away from the family, and as soon as she started dementia and physical ailments, all of a sudden now she wants me and I was told give until it hurts. Do not discriminate. Alright, Mom, what do you want me to do? Every day, three times a day, poke her in the stomach with freakin’ insulin. My stepsister and I would take turns, shifts, taking care of her. Felt an obligation though, because she’s a citizen. I looked at her as a civilian, not as a responsibility.

JP: It’s hard.

HS: You’re cutting deep. You’re cutting deep.

KG: Can either of you guys, or both, tell me what the hardest thing was about not having a home?

JP: I slept in a trash can.

HS: I slept in a dumpster. [laughs]

JP: Same thing, but I knew it was brand new. One of them flap over cans. I actually slept in one of them. It gives you a reality check of what you’re going through.

HS: And on the streets, no one’s your friend. No one is, man. It’s just a cutthroat freaking life. And that’s because they’re taking care of themselves.

Other: I’m gonna lighten up and say, I can imagine you sticking your head out of that can. [laughs]
JP: [laughs] Oh, I actually flipped over and cut myself. I was bleeding all over the place. I came out the back end of it, and the wheels rolled, and I fell. But it was at a friend’s house.

Other: Oh good, so you didn’t have to be graceful.

KG: So what is your daily life like now, what do you guys do from day to day?

JP: I go to classes, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. I go to classes over at the VA hospital. I told them I’m going to do moderate. Cause I drink. But I can’t see myself right now doing fully not drinking. So they know that. So that’s what I’m doing right now. Everything else, I deal with my kids, my grandson, and this and that. I just, I forget. I sent my son out to California. And I feel good about it, I have the money to do it.

HS: What’s the question again?

KG: What does your day-to-day life look like?

HS: I’m sitting waiting for this federal government to give me disability, the SSDI or whatever, cause I don’t get a pension, I get diddlysquat. So in two months, if that don’t come through, I’m out and back to my tent. That’s why I maintain my tent. It’s a simple life. And I’m doing crafts, these crafts from the hospital, the veterans hospital. Got to generate some kind of income. And I’m an alcoholic also, and I like my weed. [laughs] And D.C. just decriminalized it, so yeah.

KG: Is it easy to make friends in your current situation?

HS: No. Acquaintances, that’s all I have. Cause there are no friends, cause as soon as you turn around, it’s just like living in Philadelphia, City of Brotherly Love, as soon as you turn around they stick you in the back.

KG: Do you feel the same way?

JP: Yeah, like he just said. When you’re going through a situation, as you’re trying to do something, like myself, you have to distance yourself from where you was at. I still speak to them, but I know what you all about, and what you gone ask me for. Nah. Tough love. I’m sorry.

HS: Your problem, bro.

JP: I’m sorry, I can come home, and be at peace with myself and with what I’m doing cause I’m dealing with something on my own. I don’t got time for your problems. Gotta let that go.

KG: Do you ever feel lonely?
JP: Um, sometimes. He’ll tell you, I sit in that room, I been doing that for the last two and a half years now, I just sit in that chair and think. And I wanna sleep, but that’s not good.

HS: Seclusion and depression goes a long way. Cause the people that you think are your friends, they got a different agenda. And they pretty much take advantage of you and I get sick of it.

KG: How do you cope with that?

HS: Seclusion and depression. Go back to my tent, do puzzles, read a book. Just stay away from it.

JP: have you noticed her?

[unintelligible exchange between HS and JP]

KG: So Harold, what types of barriers do you feel you face as a previously homeless veteran and a potentially homeless veteran in the future? You talk about returning to your tent life. What kinds of barriers do you think you face?

HS: Alcoholism, that’s the bottom line. That’s my problem. Other than that, I’m good to go. Personally, I don’t really give a flying fuck about what people freaking think of me because at the end of the day, I gotta go to bed with me and I gotta get up with me. So, what everybody else feels, family betrayal and all this other freaking crap, I have on person in my life that I can rely on 100%, and that’s my sister in Pennsylvania.

[another unintelligible exchange between HS and Other]

KG: How often do you see your sister?

HS: I don’t. Since I moved here to Richmond, I haven’t seen her. Cause I got stuck with the alcoholism up there and she didn’t wanna have me in the house. I had to beat feet and leave.

KG: James, do you feel like there are any barriers that you face now towards whatever goals you may have for the future?

JP: No, I’m going to classes right now for alcoholism and my goals is to finish this and go to ASPAB (?) to get my license back. Other than that, I try to be strong. I ain’t that strong, cause I still drink. But I have support. It’s almost negative support, I got her, I got Paula, I got Yvonne, that kinda guide me to where I’m going. I try to slow it down and I have, but they don’t realize, but they are helpful.
Other: are you serious? They?

JP: You!

Other: I thought we were a pain in the butt the past few days. I’m just teasing.

JP: And Frank across the way. They’re all helpful.

KG: What do you think civilians particularly [phone rings]

[JP takes phone call]

HS: She’s probably trying to confirm if she [KG] showed up.

KG: So what do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experience of veterans and homeless veterans in particular and what do you think they should know?

HS: Comradery. Army unites people. Civilians don’t even know that. They should teach it in school. They really should. To look out for each other. It’s all a backstabbing people. I’m getting mine, fuck you, and bye bye.

KG: Why do you think that many vets become homeless? It’s almost what people would call an epidemic at this point.

HS: We seclude ourselves. You know what I mean. And we’re not particularly understood cause we do some strange stuff. If you go into my campsite, I got freaking early warning devices. You know what I said earlier. Civilians just don’t understand the comradery of soldiers being trained, brainwashed, going into a situation they know nothing about and take orders to do that. And then boom. That’s what happens.

JP: That was her. She just wanted to make sure you [KG] were here.

KG: I just asked Harold, but why do you think vets become homeless?

JP: Certain things come into their life. Sometimes things come into their life that’s just unexplainable, just happens. Then I was living with the lady and she died, I couldn’t take over the apartment. So I had nowhere to go. I became homeless. I been going to overflow and this and that, I couldn’t believe this was happening to me. 22 years in the service and I couldn’t believe this was happening to me. And I had the money to do something, but I wasn’t thinking about anything. I was like what is going on here. I kept strong, just like Harold, and made it through it. And now look where I’m at. And I really don’t wanna be here too much longer.
KG: Where do you want to go? What is your next step?

JP: I wanna get my own house, which I only had two of them prior to this when I was in the military. This has been a blessing, to be able to rebound. That’s what I look at, I’m rebounding and taking advantage of that. Cause, I don’t know if I told her about it, if you come back from overseas to an empty house, that’s something to deal with. Everything go. [unintelligible] and I’m okay. I’m living every day as another day to be stronger, to do what I gotta do.

HS: As far as the United States Army goes, our motto is, drive on with a hard on. Get up, get it done, go to bed.

JP: I was army and navy, so [laughs]

HS: Well, you lost something between the Army and Navy thing [laughs]

KG: Harold, where do you see yourself going? Do you have any goals for the future?

HS: Yeah, I wanna get back to my life. That I had. I mean, before all this menagerie freaking set in. I mean, my life ended in 2006, you know with jail, homelessness, but up until then I had my daughter, my son. I mean my daughter confides in me, but my son is still stuck on mom. He’s still in college, five years later, trying to get his masters degree in computer science or whatever and yeah. A little place I can call my own. Build my own house, on the top of a hill, and just live. Or not.

KG: This is kind of an odd question, but how do you do either of you feel when people offer you charity?

JP: I don’t like it.

HS: nope. It has an ulterior motive.

KG: Are there specific instances that you remember that stand out to you?

HS: Yeah, the Firm (?) Foundation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. They used me to create occupational construction. We got a conservation building at the foot of Peters Mountain, where we did all the shingles, and they turned around and fired me, and burnt me, after I did a $7-8k estimate. And I was supposed to get, and Bruce was supposed to get, $26.50 an hour to train four other people. And then they switched up the contract and now they’re being investigated by the federal government. So keep that in mind, stay away from the Firm (?) Foundation.

Other: I’m gonna take mom (?) her dish back.

[unintelligible dish conversation]
JP: I just put the water in it.

KG: James, are there any specific instances where people tried to offer you charity?

JP: No, I offer other people charity. I get kind of a guilty feeling sometimes if I see someone standing out on the corner, and I walk by. And if I have the means to provide, I might get a few steps, what am I gonna do with this? Probably buy a beer or something later. And I’ll take it back to them. To see the smile on their face, even though it might be fake. Cause they might go round the corner and get in a Mercedes.

HS: Domestic terrorism. Drugs.

JP: But that’s what I do.

KG: Do you feel the need to give back because you were once in that position?


KG: For both of you, what are you most proud of in your life?

HS: My son.

KG: Can you elaborate a little bit?

HS: I know his conception date was December 28, right after Christmas, in 1988, I think it was. And he was born 9/9/90. Yeah, that’s my proudest achievement.

KG: How about you, James?

JP: Doing what I’m doing to move forward, cause I’ve been procrastinating for many years. And I had the means to do everything I needed to do, but I’m actually doing it.

KG: Yeah, that’s awesome.

JP: I got a grandson now, I’m happy. Being in this environment, cause it took a minute. I had to go do some cobblestones, but now I’m in a situation like this and I’m happy. And everything that’s in here that you see, I pay for. I don’t have to rent it. I just pay for it. The other money that used to be used, was washed out. But now I’m good, I’m happy. I even bought the stuff for him when he moved in so they could watch TV in here.

HS: Yeah, the antenna.

JP: Yeah, so they can watch TV. Cause I got TV in my room. I’m actually comfortable. I know there’s a few things I need to do, like finish this course that I’m going through
right now, and another course that I need to go through to get my drivers license.
And then we'll be aight.

HS: So then you’re at the mercy of the system, once again.

JP: Yeah, well.

HS: Rules are rules.

JP: Well, I put myself in it, I need to get myself out.

KG: For both of you, is there anything that you regret?

JP: Ooh, that’s a loaded gun right there.

HS: I regret the first time I drank a beer, at age 9. Well yeah, my mom, I told you, she was illiterate, traveling me around the freaking bars and stuff, and my first job was actually a shoe-shining kit, that my grandfather bought me, so I can follow him around the bars and make a quarter here, a quarter there. Yeah I regret that day. Other than that, nope. I’m sliding through life, taking it as it comes.

JP: I regret my second wife. I did her wrong. And she was the best thing for me. But this has been since 1993, and we still talk. But I regret what I did to her.

KG: Is there anything else either of you would like to share about your experience, either in the military or as a veteran, or struggling with homelessness?

JP: homelessness was a beast. I mean, us being in the military, homelessness was something else. Something to experience. When you have to struggle, and live in the cold, live on concrete at times, and have to walk to get slips to go to certain places. That was something else. And then you have family members that put you out, knowing you ain’t got nowhere to go. And sleeping in cars, sleeping in trucks or whatever, that hits you. You wake up the next morning, knowing you need to do what you need to do to provide for yourself, you don’t have no rest, you’re tired, hungry. That gets you. And you feel like you wanna do something to somebody, or even do something to yourself, but you gotta pick yourself up and say I’m stronger than this. My grandmother put me out and then now she’s saying you got the time you think you can come over and stay with me for a little while. But how do I respond to that?

HS: Go. Go with a smile. That’s what my people told me when I was in a foster home. When your mother comes to you, even though she abandoned you, just go. Cause it’s gonna make her feel worse, cause you’re there, and that’s the glory of it. And that’s who it was.
JP: I’m sorry, I can’t get that feeling. I was trying to, but I can’t get that feeling. I know she getting ready to be 90, but. Okay. Alright. Talk to me. Help me on this one. Cause I got a good place now. I’m alright. I was in the street for a minute, for a while, and then I found a good place.

KG: Anything else you’d like to share, Harold?

HS: Yeah, plug Alison! Yes, I think she was an intern when I first met her. Yep.

KG: And what organization?

HS: Wounded Warriors, through Liberation Family Services. Well she got me into transitional housing for VA, cause I wouldn’t go into shelters.

KG: Yeah, I’m going to the transitional housing there.

HS: Even though the drama was still there, we still had one thing in common. Any other freaking, no, that’s why I chose a [unintelligible]

KG: Cool. And if y’all don’t have anything else, I don’t, that would conclude our interview. Well, thank you guys.

Appendix 8

Forgotten Fight Oral History Transcript
3.18.2016
Interviewee’s name: DN
Interviewer’s name: KG
Transcribed by: Stephanie Bovoso

KG: So, we’ll start with your name and if you could tell me a little bit about yourself and your life growing up, and where you’re from.

DN: My name is Don Juan Nettles. I’m from Cleveland, Ohio. I was born and raised in Ohio. A little bit about myself: I love to travel. I’ve been to college. I went to Ohio Institute of Technology. And from there I joined the Marine Corps. I went in and did 3 years in the Marine Corps. I got out of the Marine Corps. I am basically mechanically inclined. I have a different trade. I went to private investigating. I got a certificate for that. I’m a certified mechanic. I’m an electrician. I went back to school in 2009; I went to [Remington]College. I studied ET, electronic technician; so, I have a certificate in electrician technician. And what else do you want to know about? (chuckles)

KG: What brought you to Richmond?
DN: What brought me to Richmond? Oh, ok, let me go back. About this time last year I was very depressed. I was going to different sources, different people in Ohio. I even tried to get help, because everything was falling out from under me. So I went to, it’s called, Veteran’s Commission Center Commission in Cleveland, Ohio, where they’s supposed to give you help and everything. So I went to them and I told them, you know, at this particular time I had a place to stay; all I wanted was some food. So I asked them for a voucher for to get some food. And she’s like, “Well,” the lady said, “well we can’t give you just a voucher for food. We have to give you a voucher for rent...” And I said, “That’s a waste of money. I don’t want that.” And, you know, she acted real nasty to us, and I picked up on it, and I’m like “Ok.” So I say, “I had just started a job. That’s one reason why I needed the food; I just started the job and they I wasn’t there to ask for the money. So I told her, I said, “I have to go back to work. And she said, “Well,” she said, “I’ll, you know, let someone else talk to you.”

And, like ok, so, when I left there, I called back to the office, and I said “Can I speak to My name is Don Juan Nettles. I’m a veteran. In my last four...The lady that I spoke to had a very nasty attitude towards me. Is there any way that I can talk to someone above her?” About 30 minutes later, my phone rings again, and it’s the lady. She’s like, “Well, so what is your problem, Mr. Nettles?” I say, “I don’t have a problem. I’m just trying to find out what do I have to do to get a voucher for some food?” And she’s like, “Well, like I told you, if you don’t fill out this, and fill out that, we’re not gonna give you no voucher.” And I say, “Ok, well, I don’t need all that.” And she just came out of the blue and said, “You know what sir, we can’t help you.” And hung up.

So that was an add-on to my depression; ‘cause, like I said, everything was falling out from under me, and everyone that I went to for help didn’t want to help. They closed the doors on me. Friends, family, and everything. So I got to the point where I didn’t want to live no more. So I tried to commit suicide. I took 120 Tylenols with codeine; and I guess the Lord wasn’t ready for me to go. And a friend of mine who’s house I was over, she came in and she saw me with different color to my eyes, so she took me to the hospital. And they pumped my stomach, and they gave me this black tar. I threw that up, and the next thing I know, they put me in the psycho ward. I was in the psycho ward for 2 weeks, and the more it went on, it’s like, you don’t belong here, ‘cause half the people up in that ward, I feel, they need to be here. They was really crazy. I was just depressed. So then this was right before Father’s Day, the weekend before Father’s Day, and I thought I was gonna get out that Friday. So I went in, you have to go in front of doctors and stuff, doctors, psychiatrists, social workers. They got everybody in this room; and they was asking me how do I feel. And I said, “I feel better.” And it was like, ok, so then I was like, “Can I have my clothes?” And they was like, “What you need your clothes for?” I said, “Sunday is Father’s Day and I have plans for Father’s Day.” And then the guy, he say to me, “You’re not gonna be able to go to your plans, ‘cause you’re not leaving.” So I’m like “Ok.” So I left out the room. I was pissaed. I was upset. And I came back in; I said, “Can I at least have my clothes?” ‘Cause when you there, just to make sure you don’t go nowhere, they keep you in pajamas. So when you leave, you cannot get off the floor, ‘cause it’s locked. So I went back in the room, I said, “Can I at least have my clothes?” They said, “No.” So I’m like, “Ok.” And I set in the little breakroom, and I’m pissed, and I’m thinking to myself, “Ok, Don, that’s what they want you to do;
they want to see how much they can push you before you actually break, and they say “he’s not cured yet, he still depressed.” I got used to it. But anyway, how I ended up here...the day after I got out, I was talking to some of my friends. One of the ladies, she came to pick me up, ’cause I couldn’t find anybody to pick me up from the hospital. So she came and picked me up; well, she came and picked me up because she wanted some money. So she came and she picked me up. The job that I had, I lost the job ’cause I ended up in the hospital. I went to get my last check. I cashed my check. She asked for some money. I gave her the money; and I’m saying to myself this is the whole reason of my depression; because I’m a kind-hearted person. I would give you my last before I do for myself. And, see, everybody knew that. And after I gave her the money and everything, it’s like, wow, man, you still out on the streets, you got nowhere to go. So I ended up in a shelter in Cleveland. Supposed to have been for veterans; and if anybody go to Cleveland, Ohio, to that shelter for veterans, I advise them they’d be better off sleeping in the backyard with a dog. Cause that’s how they...you know... we veterans, we fought for our country, and this is how we treated. So I had to stay there one night for them to consider me homeless. So I stayed there that one night, and the next night I couldn’t go back. I walked the streets, and walked the streets. And a lady-friend of mine that I used to date some time back, I called her, and we was talking and she was like, “What are you doing? You don’t have to be out on the street. You can come stay here.” So I went, and I was staying with her for a while. And it’s like, the man in me, if I can’t, if there’s nothing there for me to offer you for your hospitality, I feel bad. So I was starting to feel bad. Then another young lady that I used to date, about 15, 20 years ago, we kept in touch, we were friends, she lives here in Virginia. And she just happened to call. We were talking, and I told her what I went through. And she’s like, “I tell you what...,” she said, “I’ll send you a plane ticket. Come down here, start your life all over, get yourself together.” So I’m like, cool, so I came down here, I was here for 3 months, and every day that I was here, I walked up and down the Turnpike. Every business, if you go down there, you’ll see, every business has an application for me. I think I was putting in anywhere between 15 and 20 applications a day. And all this time, I was walking, and I was walking, I would say, probably 9-10 miles a day, just walking. I’d go down on one side then I’d go on back up, put in an application. And I finally, made my way all the way down to the Goodwill. But before then, the lady I was staying with, she approached me, and she was like, “What do you want?” I said, “What do you mean, what do I want?” And she, like, “Well, I’m looking for a relationship. I got needs” And I’m like, ok, here we go. You know, I knew this was gonna come out. And I told her, what I just went through, my mind is not mentally prepared to have a relationship, I said, because I wouldn’t be comfortable, and you wouldn’t be comfortable. And I would say, probably about a week later, she was like, “Well, I got needs.” And I say, “Once again, I wouldn’t feel comfortable because, and that means, like, I’m having sex with you to keep a roof over my head, and I would feel less than trash.” [11:03] I ain’t tryin to do that neither. So, like I say, four months went by... She was leaving, and she turned around and came back. And she said, “I need my keys.” And I said, “Ok”, and I gave her the keys. “it’s your house, I’m not gonna put up a fight.” And I gave her the keys. So I went in the room, and I’m sittin there watchin tv, about 8,
8:30, she came in and said "You have to leave". And I had just bought a scooter... all I had was a scooter... so I get as much clothes as I could get in my backpack and strapped all this on the back of the scooter. And I'm out ridding. I don't know the city, I don't have no friends or family here. So I'm riding. So I pulled over, I called the Veteran's Hotline, the crisis line. And the lady was saying, "There's nothing we can do." She said, "What you can do is, you can go over to this shelter downtown, and stay there for the night." I said, "Where's downtown? Where's the shelter?" She gave me the address. I put it in my phone. As I'm riding along, and all of a sudden the bike just cut off. It wouldn't start back up. I said, "God, what else is next?" I called the lady back, and I was talking to her and she said, "How far away are you?" And I said, "I don't even know where I am. I'm not from around here; I just moved up here." I set there for a minute after I got off the phone with her; I hit the starter, and it started up. I said, "Thank you Lord" I got downtown right about 9:30, 10 o'clock. I finally found the building, cause I didn't know where it was. So I went to check in, the door's locked. I knocked on the door, security came out, she's like, well, "You're too late. You have to be here at 8". But I didn't know. So I went back out and I called the Veteran's Crisis line again. And the lady was talking to me, And I said, I'm falling back into that same category that I was in before. While I was talking to her, the security lady came out, she said, "Come here" and we talked on the side of the building. She said, "This is what you do: give me your helmet. I'll take your helmet in. Walk down to the middle of the street, go out to the curb. Call the Richmond police. Tell them you're homeless and you need some place to stay. They will escort you in, they have to let you in." So that's what I did. The police came. They escorted me in. They gave me a little bitty mat with, they call it a space blanket. And you walk into this room, and there's all these people all over the floor. And it stunk. I took my soap, and I put it up under my nose and I lay down. I'm starting to fall asleep and I felt something crawling on me. I look over, and there's a bedbug. I got my stuff. I walked out. From about 3:30 that morning to about 7 o'clock, I just rolled, it was ice cold. I said, "I gotta go get some heat, I gotta warm up." So I went and I checked in to the Emergency Room at the VA. I told them the story {indistinguishable...about the arm...} the nurse came and I was layin in the bed and she seen that I was shivering, and she gave me all these blankets they just took out the dryer and she got me something to eat. The sun came up and I went to work. And that's how I ended up here. My story can go on forever.

KG: We're gonna backtrack a little bit. When did you join the military? (16:05)

DN: I joined the Marine Corps in 1978.

KG: What led to your decision to join?

DN: I was in college cause I had graduated. I hadn't finished college the first time. And I was like, I need to do something, I don't want to go back home. So I actually joined the Army when I was in Columbus, Ohio. That's where I was going to school. I went to visit my mother, and a lot of the guys I graduated from high school (with)
had joined the Marine Corps and they got out. Man, you can’t do the Marine Corps, it’s this and it’s that. So I’m more like the kind of person, I love a challenge. So I went to a Marine Corps recruiter, and I told him, “I’m scheduled to go into the Army, but I don’t want to go into the Army. I want to go into the Marine Corps.” And he said, “Ain’t no problem, that’s fine.” So he had all my paperwork shipped from Columbus to Cleveland. And I didn’t have to take the test over or nuthin, they just went off my paperwork, my scores, from the Army, so that’s what put me in the Marine Corps.

KG: What did your friends and family think? (17:20)

DN: When I went to the Marine Corps?

KG: Yes

DN: “Man, when you come out, you gonna be crazy!”

KG: Why did they think that?

DN: Because the Marine Corps has a reputation. And once you go through the Marine Corps, if you are weak minded, yes, you are gonna come out crazy. Because the Marines, the training that you go through, it’s a mind game. It’s a mind game, but it’s also a survival game. So, if you follow they mind game they way they want you to, they brainwash you, you come out crazy. I’m a little bit stronger than that. When I first went in, got off the bus, at 3:30 in the morning, and this little guy is hollering and stuff, and I’m like, “What the hell I done got myself into?” But, I did my 3 years. I got an honorable discharge. I got out. And I’m not crazy.

KG: Can you tell me a little bit about your time in the Marines? What memories stick out to you?

DN: All of ‘em! ‘Cause we used to, there was 7 of us, we called ourselves “The Magnificent Seven”. And we didn’t take no stuff. We all from different places, we had Moses; he was from Youngstown, Ohio. We had Carter; he was from Miami. We had Davis; he was from South Carolina. We had Whittaker; he was from Tennessee. Who else was there....Myself....I can’t remember now....there were 7 of us. We used to do some dirt. We used to go places, and a lot of places, a lot of little towns, don’t like Marines. So we ended up getting, we stayed in fights. Everywhere we went, we fought. Me and one of my partners, Carter, we became real close. We used to make bets. A lot of times we all went out together, or we went separate ways. So, when we go separate ways, the bet is, for every new girl that you meet, you gotta bring a pair of panties. That was our little thing. But do the panties gotta be the ones she had on, but like, no, you just gotta come up with some panties that was hers! If I meet a new girl, first thing we do is we go to the store, “You have to buy me a pair of panties”! So when we all get back together...
KG: Where were you stationed?

DN: Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. We’d get together, and we’d do our love chat and stuff...but what we used to do, how we made our money, it’s against the law in the Marine Corps...we used to do loan-sharking. We would fill our cars up with gas, maybe put $100 in our pockets, and the rest of our money, we’d put it together, and we’d loan it out. And, I mean, when we loaned it out, it’s $1 for $1. So, if I loan you $10, you owe me $20. You get a check on the 15th and the 30th. We would hold our money from the 15th to the 20th because we know that everyone else like to go out on the town, drink beer, do what they do, and they’re broke by the 20th. So we loan out the money and come pay day, you gotta give us our money. If you don’t give us our money, we beat you up.

KG: Do you still keep in contact with any of them?

DN: We did, for a while. Every year, we used to meet up at the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, and, maybe after 2 or 3 years, it got hard for us to meet up because to make reservations, you have to make reservations that same night before you leave for the next year. And it got a little bit too hard for us.  {21:58} We all just disbursed, and since then I haven’t heard from none of them.

KG: How did the members of your community respond to you after your military service? Do you think their opinions changed?

DN: No, they was waiting for me to actually be crazy. And it was like, “He ain’t crazy.” So it’s maybe not true what they say about the Marine Corps. But it is true, but it just didn’t happen to me.

KG: Did it change your world for you?

DN: Yes it did.

KG: How so?

DN: It made me look at things a little bit different. More of a survival. They did teach me how to survive. And it’s also made a better man of me. You go in as a boy and you come out as a man. You have to come out as a man if you want to live. So, you go in as a scared boy, and you come out with a strong mind, strong man.

KG: Why did you leave the military?

DN: It wasn’t for me. It wasn’t my type of life. One of the things that I disliked about it, {like} lieutenants, second lieutenants, captains, stuff like that. They have a certain sticker on their car, and every time you see that car, you have to salute that
car. The regular Marines had a red sticker. All the other colorful stickers were the officers, so you have to salute. So they may have their kids and these kids may be 16, 17 years old, with all their friends in the car. And they pull up and you still have to salute that car because it’s got that sticker. And I felt that, to me, that was, I would say, segregation. You know, racial, because most of your lieutenants were, no offense, Caucasians. And they’d sit there and laugh at you because they know you gotta salute that car. So it was like, “Hey, let’s ride up to these Marines and watch what they do.” It’s like something they get high off of because we gotta salute their car. So, little things like that, wasn’t for me. I was starting to mature, and I was starting to see more of the [...] it’s not for me. Everything that goes on out here in civilian world goes on on base. You just don’t hear about it, because if you hear about it, you wouldn’t want to send your kids. [...] You got murder, robbery, rape, robbery, all that (25:04) goes on on base, too.

KG: This is kind of a 2-part question. When you were in Ohio, how exactly did you become homeless then? Just remind me.

DN: I was working for this one company. It’s called K&D Management. They own all these big time apartment buildings, apartments, complexes, all of them in Ohio, in Cleveland. And I was working for them and I had got an apartment through them, so that half of my pay went towards my apartment, and then they gave me money. Something had happened where I needed a bedroom set. And so you go into these apartments, after people leased them, and we go into them and, we throw it away. So I went through the procedures to get the bedroom set. I filled out all the paperwork. I had my supervisor sign off. I had the building manager sign off. I had security sign off. And that’s the only way you could get the bedroom; you had to have all these signatures. So, I got the bedroom set. I strapped it on to the top of my truck. I took it home. And I would say, probably about a week later, they was saying that I moved property from the premises without permission. But I said, “I got the papers, right here.” So when they sent it to corporate, after they terminated me there, they sent it to corporate. So I wrote corporate a letter, because corporate was way out there in the boonies. So, when I went to go out there, they wouldn’t see me. Cause you have to go through theses gates and stuff like that. So I called and I faxed them a copy of the paperwork that I had. But that wasn’t any good, so, like I said, I was terminated. So my rent went from $250 a month to almost $700. And I don’t have no income; I’m not working. What can I do? I stayed there as long as I could; then I had to move. When I moved, I put half of my furniture, I gave it to my daughter. The rest of it, I put it in friends of mine, in their garage, where it’s still sitting at today. Then I was just basically out on the streets, wherever I could stay. Friends. I may go up a friend’s house and sit there and watch tv and fall asleep. Then when the sun come up, I had nowhere to go. Sometimes I’m out sleeping in my car. That’s how I ended up homeless.

KG: (28:25) How did you, so you’re in Richmond, how did you end up hooking up with {@...}
DN: That one night, I stayed downtown at the shelter. The next night, or the next day, I sold, I pawned everything I had. I got enough money to go stay in the motel that night. Then that Sunday night I went to another shelter, you have to go to so many shelters, I went to another shelter and I stayed there and then I went back to the VA, trying to get help from the VA. And they say, “Ok, there’s nothing we can do. What you have to do is, you have to go somewhere down here on West Gray Street to register there for being homeless, and then we can do something from there.” So I know you have to be there before 4 o’clock. So I left work, and I rolled all the way down there. I got there, my watch said 10 minutes to 4. But when I got there, the man said, “You’re too late. It’s 4 o’clock.” I said, “It’s 10 minutes to 4.” He said, “Well, it’s too late.” So, what am I gonna do? I went back to the shelter on 7th Street and I stayed there. That morning, I was off that Wednesday, I went there and I got there about 8 o’clock that morning. I sat there from 8 to 9 and they came out the room, out the back, and made an announcement, “All the shelters are full. We don’t have nowhere else for you...there’s no room.” So everyone else was getting up, was leaving, I set there. I stayed there, and I stayed there, until they finally called my name, and I went back. And the guy said, “You heard the announcement I made.” And I said, “Yeah, I heard the announcement, but somebody got to do something. I can’t take it out on the streets no more.” So he did intake on me there. I guess he’s for the veteran. So that night, or that day after I left there, in fact (indistinguishable) no, I was off that day. So, the next day he calls, me, he said, “I found you a bed, but it won’t be ready until (that Thursday).” So that’s how I ended up here.

KG: What did you do in between?

DN: Stayed out on the street.

KG: What was that like?

DN: Cold. It was kind of, it was weird, cause, like I said, I got a scooter, cause my license is messed up. And it don’t burn no gas. So I was able to ride. I usually keep like 2 or 3 dollars in my pocket, and it takes like $1.50 to fill it up. So I just ride.

KG: (31:40) What is the hardest thing about not having your own home?

DN: Dealing with the riff raff and staying in a place like this. It’s not for me, but it’s a roof, so I have to accept that much, but as far as dealing with people that’s supposed to be adults, that’s not adults, you can tell people that’s used to having things, and you can tell people that’s not used to having things. And you can tell the people that just don’t care. And all that’s here.

KG: Do you have people here that you talk to every day, that you’re friends with?

DN: Yes, I have some friends that we talk every day. My bunkie, I talk to him. And
there’s a couple other guys that I can communicate with. And some that I choose not to.

KG: Do you ever feel lonely? (32:45)

DN: Yes.

KG: How do you deal with that?

DN: I get on my bike and I ride.

KG: Nothing wrong with that! So, what is your daily life like now? What do you do every day?

DN: I was working. I’m not working anymore. I was trying to help somebody. Well, not help somebody. Going by the rules, but they said I didn’t go by the rules. If you get time, I can break that down for you! What happened was, there’s this lady named Miss Geraldine, she’s an old lady, but we were friends, we used to joke and stuff. So at the Goodwill, if you work there and you buy stuff, you can’t buy it in uniform. So, she wanted some items that she had gotten and they wouldn’t let her get them because she was in uniform. And she asked me would I get them after I punch out. “Sure” but I got a jacket, then, I was an employee. So I went to purchase them, my supervisor, she says to me, this was on a Saturday, “how did you shop so quickly?” I said, “I didn’t shop. This is Miss Geraldine’s stuff.” She said, “I just told Miss Geraldine she couldn’t get them.” She explained that it was because she was in uniform. So then she like, “I’m not gonna sell it to you neither.” And I’m like, “Ok” and I put the stuff back. I don’t understand...what’s the problem...I could see, if we was trying to steal it. We wasn’t trying to steal it. We were paying for it. And so I put the stuff back. And Monday, when I came in, she pulled me in the office and she gave me a warning and she gave Miss Geraldine a warning. Ok, we were warned. So, Tuesday, when I went in, I did my little work, I was driving the forklift, took the clothes to the back, moved the shoes and stuff. It was lunchtime. I was sitting in there eating my lunch. The Assistant Supervisor came by, and said, “I need you to come with me” (35:00) I followed her. I think we’re going back to the work area, but we’re going to the office. The Assistant Supervisor is there, and the Supervisor, and the guy from security, he was there. My supervisor says, “Did Miss Geraldine give you some items to buy...” No, she said, “You went out, you punched out, you put your jacket on...” All this is on camera. She said, “Did Miss Geraldine ask you to purchase some items for her? Is that the way it happened?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “Well, I need your badge. I need to terminate you”. I said, “Ok” and I took the stuff off and I gave it to her. I’m confused because I didn’t see where I did anything wrong. Probably about 5 minutes later, Miss Geraldine come out, ‘cause they terminated her too. So they terminated both of us.

Am I on the right question?! (laughs)
What was the question!?  

KG: It’s your story!  

DN: Right! I got lost! What was actually the question?  

KG: The question was: what your daily life is like now. (36:30)  

DN: Oh, ok. I’m not working. I was..., on my off-days at the Goodwill, I was volunteering for this company called The Free {Freedom?} Foundation. I was volunteering my time with them. On my day off, I would go up there, ‘cause I repair power scooters and wheelchairs. I used to do that for the veterans in Ohio. So when I came here and I was talking to the lady that’s over it, and she was like, “Yeah, I could really use some help.” And I was like, “I just want to volunteer.” So I was volunteering 5 hours a week. And she said, “You’re too talented. You have a lot of knowledge. I’m gonna see about hiring you.” So then, that Tuesday I got let go at Goodwill, that Wednesday I was working for her. She had text me on Wednesday and said the Assistant Supervisor came to her and told her I was terminated, so I’m not allowed back on the premises. And she told me, “Don’t worry about it.” So I’m like “ok”. So then later on that night, she text me back. She said, “Be here next Wednesday.” So, I went and I talked to her and she was telling me...I had called her because she’s also my Pastor at the church. I had called her Tuesday and told her exactly what had happened. So then she said that on Wednesday, the Assistant Supervisor, her name is {Zee}, she approached her. They knew I was supposed to work that Wednesday, and she said, “Don Juan Nettles won’t be here to work for you anymore because he is not allowed on the premises because he was terminated.” And she looked at her, and she’s like, “Ok.” But the Assistant Supervisor wanted a different response. I think she wanted her to go into what had happened. But she don’t know that already knew what happened. So then she said, “I just looked at her and said ‘Ok’.” She said she didn’t get the response out of her that she wanted, so she said she mentioned it again. And she said, “I looked at her again and I said ‘Ok’. “ And she said as soon as she left out of the office she got on the phone because The Freedom Foundation is not ran by the Goodwill. That’s a whole different organization. They’re just using space at the Goodwill. So she said that she called her District Manager and told her that she wanted me. And so the District Manager from her company went to the District Manager of the Goodwill and they said, “Can you show us somewhere where he actually did something wrong?” And she said, “Is it under theft? Did he steal something?” “No, he didn’t steal anything. He just went against policy.” She said, “Well, ok, y’all can’t stop us from hiring who we want to hire.” So that’s how I ended up back there. Every Wednesday I work 5 hours. The rest of the time...my SSI kicked in...matter of fact, the same day I got fired! So, between my SSI and that 5 hours a day, that’s how I do my time. The rest of the time, to get out of this building, I ride. I go everywhere, because I don’t know the city, so I have to ride to get lost to find my way around.
KG: (40:50) What types of barriers do you feel homeless veterans face?

DN: A lot of letdown from the VA. They advertise they’re there for their veterans. They’re not. Just going through the system, and dealing with them, I don’t feel they’re there for the veterans because everything that, if we go to them for something we need, they send us to sources outside. “Well, go see these people. Go to these people”, instead of saying, “Well, we have these people in place, and we can do this and this...” It’s not like that. It’s a lot of letdown.

KG: How do you feel that, the fact that you are a homeless veteran, shapes the way other people think about you?

DN: Actually, I don’t care how other people think! Right now, I’m just basically concerned about myself, my well-being, and my survival.

KG: What do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experiences of veterans?

DN: If they haven’t actually been through what we went through, they draw conclusions off of tv instead of actual facts. So a lot of other people are misled about veterans. You do have some good veterans, and you have some bad veterans. I’m not saying we all are perfect, because we’re human, we’re gonna make mistakes.

KG: Why do you think that veterans, in general, become homeless?

DN: Different things. Some veterans feel as if they come out, “I served my country, so now my country owes me something.” That’s the mentality that’s in some of the veterans’ heads, instead of just taking it as it is. That’s a little bit why I went through depression, because I said, “Ok, I served my country”, even though I went in during peacetime. I did get hurt in the service and I had to have surgery on my hand. So now that I’m getting older, I’ve got arthritis in my hand, I’ve got different spots on my arm that’s numb, and stuff. So I go to them, and I tell them, “Before I went into the service, I didn’t have these problems, but now I’m having these problems.” And they’re, like, “Well, you’ve been out of the service this long and why is it now just starting to show up?” I don’t know. You know, changes in your body, different things show up. So they’re saying that, (I had filed for disability), and they said that it’s not military related. So they denied me disability. I always get off the question!

KG: The question was: Why do you think veterans, in general, become homeless?

DN: Oh ok! Like I said, they depend on the government to look out for them because they say, “I went in and I gave you 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 years of my life, that you owe me something.” So, when everything runs out, then they feel that, as a veteran,
“They supposed to take care of me.” And that’s how a lot of veterans end up homeless.

KG: How do you feel about charity, like when people offer you charity?

DN: It’s kind of hard to say because nobody never offer me no charity! But, I mean, it’s nice. That shows that somebody, somewhere are thinking about giving. Someone has a kind heart, a giving heart, and don’t mind sharing.

KG: You mentioned how you used to volunteer for the scooter repair. Are there any specific reasons why you felt the need to give back, and volunteer your time?

DN: I used to do it all the time. Before I moved here, I was a Scout Master for 17 years. It’s more or less like the trophy that you see, when you see boys grow up and become men, and take the knowledge that you train them. And now for as far as repairing scooters and power wheelchairs, I volunteered to do that, simple fact is because I know how to do it, and to make someone else happy makes me feel good. So if, they don’t charge no money for none of this equipment. If you call, and you have a medical problem, and your doctor signs off, they give you this stuff. They don’t ask for no money. So that’s a charity. Not only do they feel good, when the people come in there to pick this equipment up, especially the scooters, and they get in there, and they ride, and you see that glow, and their eyes light up, it makes me want to cry because the simple fact is I’m soft-hearted, and if you’re happy, boy, I’m bubbling over with happiness. Even though someone gave it to you, I helped make you happy because of my knowledge.

KG: That’s awesome. Is there anything in your life that you regret?

DN: Being soft-hearted!

KG: So it’s both something you enjoy and regret as well?

DN: Yes.

KG: Why's that?

DN: Because I always end up like I say, I've always helped people so people that I help depend on me to help them, but then when I need help, they turn their back on me. You know...

KG: Why do you think that is?

DN: I don’t know. I have not been able to figure that out and sometimes I feel that I’ve been so generous because I am lonely and hiding from loneliness and the way I
get out of being lonely is like I am paying you to be my friend. And so that's how I feel sometimes.

KG: What are you most proud of?

DN: That I am still alive. Yes. Still alive, I have 6 beautiful kids, you know, my daughter, she is doing excellent you know, she went to [undistinguishable] college in Daytona Beach, Florida. She got her bachelors degree, she went to Kent State, she got her master’s degree. Now she is a professor at the University of Arkansas.

KG: That’s awesome. Do you see her often?

DN: No. Last time I seen her was about 3 years ago because she is in Little Rock and you know, it makes me feel good because I was a part of that because I made that trip 4 times a year for 4 years, you know cause you had to move them out of the dorm, move them back in the dorm, out the dorm, in the dorm, so I did that.

KG: That’s awesome. What are your goals for the future?

DN: Basically to get in, well I really can’t work that many hours now because of SSI, so, I still like helping people, you know, I guess I would never get out of that, as much as I try to get out of it, I don’t think I will be able to get out of it. And basically for myself to be able to live comfortably and...

KG: Do you think your desire to help people stems anywhere from the struggles you have faced in the past?

DN: Yes.

KG: Can you talk a little bit more about that?

DN: Like I say, I give my all, just like the one young lady I was dating before I came here, you know. I made a mistake, I don’t know, like I say I am basically looking out for somebody else but I opened up a checking account so I put her name on the account too so I have 2 checking accounts, a joint account, then I had my own account. So every time the money went into the account, instead of her texting or calling me and saying, “well I need this, I need that” she go in and just take all of the money out. But when I needed some money, there was no money. I called myself and I’d say well I’d do this, I’ll put overdraft protection on both accounts, that way if she takes the money out, I know I, if an emergency comes up, I can still get some cash. And bad idea. Cause she would go in there, she would take my paycheck, then go back later on and take the whole 500, so here I am $520 in the negative so when I get my check, off the top $520 is gone, you know and it was like, it upset me at that point, but then I was like ok well maybe she needed the money and I was like, they say you aren’t supposed to talk to yourself but I talked to myself and said “Don there you go being stupid again.” You know, so...
KG: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences? Or anything you would want people to know?

DN: Don't become homeless. Always try to better yourself. You know, and its basically, the whole thing is if you teach other people how to survive then you have to practice what you preach. So you know, like I say, I was a Scout Master for 17 years, I got boys you know that I brought up from knee high to taller than me, they are all out in the world, they are doing good. You know I had one young man, come to me, I didn't remember, I didn't recognize him, I was at the store getting some gas and he came up and he was like “your name Brother Nettles?” and I was like “yeah.” He said, “man I just want to thank your hand because what you taught me as a scout, I learned a lot.” It gave me chill bumps. Like chill bumps went to my mind and I could feel my eyes watering up because I laid hands on someone that was able to come back and appreciate what I did for them.

KG: That’s awesome. Well that’s all I have for you unless you have anything for me?

DN: Well, what do you think of my life?

KG: I think everyone has a very interesting and unique story. I think, I am actually really glad you shared all of that with me. Not everyone has been as open as you have been and so I really appreciate all the details and the path. It helped, to hear all that really helps kind of give a road, a road map to people's stories to see where they have been and where they are going in the future. That’s why I asked the goal question, you know see where somebody wants to end up. But yeah, I really appreciate you talking to me today.

DN: I have nothing to hide, its my..... [end]
CP: Actually, I used to live in Richmond, but what brought me to Richmond was a marriage that is...that didn't work out and I have family that's near here also and I'd be excited to come back to Richmond and to start over.

KG: Ok. When did you join the military?

CP: 1972

KG: What lead to your decision to join?

CP: Well actually I had a best friend that basically talked me into going, but after I got in I was happy that I had joined.

KG: Why do you say that?

CP: Because, they taught me discipline and they helped me to...with survive (?) it and made me feel important.

KG: Can you tell me a little about your training?

CP: Yes, training was very tough. The first time that I ever did boot camp it was a little scary, but after a while I adjusted.

KG: Do you have any memories that stand out to you about training?

CP: Yes, I have memories that stand out. I mean, you can't forget most of it anyway. When I first arrived, they greeted us and everything. Seeing how strict things were, you know, and how...I don't know, basically was just a very, I mean, everything had to be basically in order, so I remember all of that.

KG: How old were you when you joined?

CP: Seventeen.

KG: What did your friends and family think?

CP: My friend and my family thought that was a good thing for me. I think my grandmother told me once that it's going to make a man out of me. My grandmother said that. And I guess one of my cousins, guess he tried to, I don't know what he was trying to do. But he told me, 'you know who goes to war first don't you?' I said 'yeah I know', but you know, I guess he thought that was going to make me scared or something about going in, but it didn't bother me because he was in the Army, I was in the Marines.

KG: Where were you stationed?
CP: I was stationed in NC. Camp Lejeune, NC and I was stationed at Cherry Point, NC. Then I went overseas to Okinawa.

KG: What were your experiences that you remember the most out of each of those places?

CP: The convoys because I was in motor transport. We went on convoys. And walking guard duty, and what else, you know the working part of it, you know, keeping up the equipment making the deliveries. Delivering different machinery to different bases. All the crazy guys I was around. I remember all of that, yes.

KG: Did you like your job in the military?

CP: Yes.

KG: Did you pick it?

CP: No, I didn’t. It was chosen for me before we got to graduate from bootcamp.

KG: Tell me a little bit more about what you did? So you were in motor transportation, what did your day entail?

CP: I wasn’t a mechanic but I had to make sure that the jeeps and 65s (?) and 5 tons, make sure that they was, you know, serviced with the oil and stuff like that. Changing tires, by hand. (laughter) You know the experience. Wasn’t hard, but it was hard enough, but you know changing tires by hand and once in a while they give me the ammo (?) duty to go the rifle range and somebody got hurt there and had to rush him to the hospital. But other than that, it wasn’t a lot that we did, except for, make sure that the vehicles was ready for action.

KG: What was it like going overseas?

CP: That was different, I mean, first time going over there. I think they had some type of parade or something, the Japanese. All you could see was red, white. I don’t know, there was some kind of a celebration they was having. I don’t remember that. I don’t know what kind it was. Overseas was pretty nice, it was hot. It was very hot over there. It was actually pretty nice. I mean, we didn’t do (?) what we did when we was in the states, it was all the same.

KG: Tell me about the friendships you made when you were in the military.

CP: When I was in the military I had a lot of friends and we didn’t do a lot of partying or nothing like that but the guys they liked me a lot. They thought I was more like a laid back guy, so. And they nicknamed me. (?) It was something. But, I had a lot of friends over there, I mean, when I was in the military. We hung out every
once in awhile and in the town of some part of, (?) don’t remember the name of it, in Okinawa, and we would go out there at night and come on back. You know go out there, shop, and do things we shouldn’t be doing. (laughter) And that was it, you know. Just every day regular routine actually. Nothing all that different. Stayed there for just one year.

KG: Do you keep in contact with any of those people?

CP: I was, I started keeping in contact with one particular guy, but I lost all their contact numbers. I don’t know what happened to the book every body signed. I mean, if I find it I’ll start calling them, but I haven’t. I mean, my number has changed and half of them has probably changed from them moving from place to place. Probably kind of difficult to get in contact with some of them.

KG: When you came from Okinawa, how did your family or community respond to your homecoming.

CP: You mean, when I came out? Or when I came home?

KG: When you came back to the states

CP: They was always glad to see me. I guess they were proud of me. They, I don’t know, didn’t get a whole lot of response from that. I couldn’t tell. I mean, because There was a lot of stuff going on, too (undistinguishable)

KG: Do you think your military experience changed your world view?

CP: Yes, it made me more of an alert person and it Makes me look at things a lot different. Made me tough, really. Really tough. I’m not an angry person, but sometimes it depends on the situation. I guess when I feel like I’m being pushed or threatened, stuff like that, Other than that, I’m an easy going person, but yeah it changed my life, I feel like it made me a better person. I appreciate all the respect that people give me for being a veteran, that means a lot to me. Other than that, it taught me to cope with, you know, cope with situations that people can’t normally cope with, you know.

KG: When did you exit the military?

CP: I exited around ’75, somewhere around there.

KG: What was it like returning to civilian life?

CP: Not good.

KG: Not good?
CP: Hated it. I didn’t really want to come out as early as I did, but it happened.

KG: Why did you leave if I may ask?

CP: Medical reasons.

KG: What types of challenges do you feel like you’ve faced since leaving the military?

CP: The challenges is, I guess the challenges would be survival, being able to survive overall, no matter what it is and taking risks. It’s all a challenge. It’s a challenge, it’s trying to figure out where you’re going in life. Every day is a challenge.

KG: How did you become homeless?

CP: I became homeless when I lost my home and I told my wife that if we lost the home, we probably won’t be able to stay together and that’s not good because a house shouldn’t keep nobody together. I didn’t like the area we lived in and I made a mistake moving to that area that we moved to and I just had a struggle when we moved there. The only reason I bought the home there, it was a nice home and it was cheap. Homes was cheap there and the reason is because there was no work. The economy was, somebody once called it a depressed area, but I’m not there anymore and I don’t plan on going back there, so I let it go.

KG: What year was that?

CP: Last year.

KG: Tell me about the places you’ve stayed since losing your home.

CP: I’ve stayed with my family, my daughter, my grandkids, my first wife, and that’s what, that’s where I’ve stayed at for awhile, the last few years, few months.

KG: What’s the hardest thing about not having your own home right now?

CP: I guess the hardest thing about not having my own home is, I guess, not having my own home means that I just have to, I mean, starting over I guess. Not having my own home means starting over. That’s hard, but I’m capable of starting over somehow.

KG: How did you get hooked up with LFS?

CP: Through the VA.

KG: What was your experience like with the VA?
CP: It's good, I mean, they care about me. They've been showing me that. They've been trying to help me for the last, I don't know how many years. Ever since I came out of the military actually.

KG: You said trying to help you, what do you mean by that?

CP: They're trying to help me cope with all my problems.

KG: What's your daily life like now? What do you do every day?

CP: I read. I write. I like to write. I'm working on a journal. I'm going to have to redo it though. I'm working on a journal. When I have time I put models together. Jets and stuff like that. I go to Barnes and Nobel a lot and I read. I listen to music. Jazz music. Relaxing music. That's the type of music I like. I...that's all I do. I don't hang around people. I mean, I'm around people when I go to the bookstores and places like that but other than that I'm always alone.

KG: By choice?

CP: Yeah

KG: Do you ever feel lonely?

CP: Yeah, sometimes. I know, my first wife is very supportive, so she stays, I always talk to her a lot. Every day. Every once in a while I feel a little lonely. I just like being alone a lot, I guess.

KG: Nothing wrong with that. What types of barriers do you feel like you've faced as a homeless veteran?

CP: Staying away from places that I shouldn't be like bars. Drinking you know? Or going in bad neighborhoods. Staying out of those areas. That's a barrier, I mean, it's not a barrier for me because I don't go. But it would be a barrier if I went there, but the bar could be a barrier, but I don't go there now. Just being, that's the barriers for me.

KG: How do you think your veteran status affects the way people think about you?

CP: I've noticed that because of my caps and things they notice I've been in the Marine Corps, and everything like that I get a lot of respect. A lot of people like getting to know me from different places. They see me all the time. I go into department stores now and shop, you know, and after awhile they get to know me, they. A lot of them know my name. I don't try to make it my business for everyone to know me. And I don't want everyone to know me. I mean, it's alright.

KG: You're just a private person.
CP: Yeah.

KG: What do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experience of veterans?

CP: They don’t understand the things that we’ve been through. They don’t understand us. I think they look at us as somebody that’s been through a lot. They just don’t quite understand. They don’t really understand us. They don’t ever really figure us out. A lot of times I think that they look at us as being really crazy in the head, something like that. I notice that a lot of them stay out of our way.

KG: What would you want them to know?

CP: I would want them to know that we’re just individuals that not only served our country but we’re not bad individuals, we just got problems like anybody else that we’re trying to work though and we’re very nice people and very helpful. I know I am.

KG: Can you expand on that? Being helpful? What do you mean?

CP: If I, I mean, if I see anybody that’s having a hard time with, you know, broke down on the road, anything, or having a problem getting around. Just, you know I just try to be a help to somebody if I feel like they need my help. A lot of us veterans don’t like nobody doing something for us. I know I don’t. It is what it is, I guess.

KG: How do you feel about charity? Like when people offer charity?

CP: That’s very much appreciated. I think that that’s good. That there’s people out there willing to help others, like that. And because if it wasn’t, for me, everyone can’t afford this and that you know and don’t have enough money to buy food and clothes, stuff like that. I think that’s a good thing.

KG: Do you ever feel the need to give back.

CP: Yes, I haven’t exactly been in the position to do that, but hopefully I will one day.

KG: Is there anything in life that you regret that you’re comfortable talking about?

CP: First of all I regret being in this position. I feel like I did this to myself. My childhood wasn’t the greatest of all and that helped me to be strong, too. I regret mostly, being in the position that I’m in right now. I regret it, but I’m thankful that there’s, I’m thankful for this place, I’m thankful for the people here, because if it wasn’t for them or any other organization a lot of us would probably be, somewhere we wouldn’t want to be.
What are you most proud of?

I'm proud of my...I can't say accomplishments, because I haven't really accomplished a lot yet, but I'm proud that I was able to buy a house. I'm proud of that. I'm proud of my grandkids. I'm proud of my...I'm proud of them. I'm proud of, I don't' know what I'm supposed to be proud of other than them. I can't think of anything.

What are your goals for the future?

My goals for the future is to have my own place again. I already set a goal, I got myself an automobile. My goal is to be in another healthy relationship one day, whether it's with my first wife, we plan on getting remarried, but whether it's with her or anybody else. My goal is to, just to, be able to live independent and to be happy. Happier. I don't know. I mean, I don't have a lot of goals right now. I mean, I already set one goal by getting my own automobile or my own place, I guess. I don't know if I'm going back to my first (?), I don't know what's going to happen. I don't have too many goals right now.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience or your story?

No, I don't. I don't have anything else.

If you don't have anything for me, then I'm through.

Thank you

Appendix 10

Forgotten Flight Oral History Transcript
(3/17/2016)
KG: Kelsey Glander
C: Cordell Tolar
Transcribed by: Jackie Salg

Okay, so we’re gonna start if you could state your name and tell me a little bit about yourself, where you grew up, your family life, and if you didn't grow up in Richmond, what brought you here?

Okay, my name is Cordell, first name, middle initial, J, last name, Tollar. I'm not from Richmond. [Laughs] I’m from New Jersey. I grew up in Newark, New Jersey.

KG: Okay.
CT: I came here – my family however, is originally from Virginia.

KG: Okay.

CT: So I have relatives and stuff here. I came here for a change of pace. I had a situation where me and one of my kids bought a house together and it didn’t work out and I needed to get away from her before I killed her.

KG: [Laughs]

CT: [Laughs] So, here I am.

KG: Can you tell me a little about your life today?

CT: Pretty much, I’ve been here for a little over a year. I’m a Vietnam era vet. I’m also a recovering addict and [undistinguishable] in twenty-five years, so that consumed a big part of my life, over thirty years, as a matter of fact. I’m sixty-eight.

KG: Okay.

CT: So, here I’m basically trying – this is called transitional housing. So I’m just basically just trying to transition to the next phase of my life.

KG: Okay. When did you join the military and what lead to your decision to join the military?

CT: I initially got drafted. When I joined the military, I got drafted in June, the third, 1967 – basically right out of high school. Matter of fact, I graduated from high school when I was seventeen and back then, you had to be eighteen to legally get a decent job. So – and waiting for – actually, I wanted to go away to school but it wasn’t happening, so I – on my eighteenth birthday I got drafted. And I had ten days to do whatever I wanted to do and then reported to Fort Dix.

KG: How did your friends and family react? What did they think?

CT: Well, basically at that time everybody was getting drafted, ya know? Like, if they weren’t getting drafted – well, basically – well, we had a plan when I was in high school; it was me and four other friends. We were gonna join the marines and yada, yada, yada. But what happened was we had one friend who didn’t like school so he quit. By the time we had graduated from high school, they had sent his body back from Vietnam so that was the end of that plan.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know, so anyway, I ended up getting drafted and I did my basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey.
KG: What was the training like?

CT: It was –

KG: And what branch of the service?

CT: I was in the army. Training is basically is, they tried to get you indoctrinated to their way of doing things. So after eight weeks of that, I went to Fort Benjamin Harrison to finance school. After leaving Fort Benjamin Harrison...my sinuses are messed up...

KG: Yeah, mine are too, it’s okay.

CT: Now I almost bled to death here.

KG: Oh my gosh.

CT: I busted a blood vessel. But anyway, I ended up in Cleveland, Ohio at a missile base. And I was a finance clerk; I stayed there for five months. Then I left Cleveland and I came right back home to New Jersey to a place called Highlands, New Jersey. Highlands, New Jersey is like a resort area near the water, fishing area, stuff like that but it’s also another missile base. And I worked, now they call it Staples, so I ran something like that in the military.

KG: Okay.

CT: And I was in the military for three years.

KG: What are some of your most memorable moments from your training portion or from the beginning?

CT: Not a lot.

KG: Not a lot?

CT: No, because I - from the beginning didn’t like the military.

KG: Yeah, why not?

CT: There was a lot of stuff going on back then that a lot of people aren’t aware of. You know, you have – I told you I was eighteen when I went into the military. So I never really got a chance to experience a lot of life and stuff. And I knew about racism and stuff but I didn’t know to what extent it existed until I got into the military, you know, so...
KG: Can you elaborate a little more on that?

CT: When I was stationed in Cleveland, Ohio, we used to go to the USO.

KG: Mhm.

CT: And they would give us tickets to the basketball games and the movies. There was a movie that came out: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* We couldn't go to the movie theater to see it because of the bomb threats; they threatened to blow up the movie theater if they showed the movie. Now I don't know if you know about that movie, it's Sydney Poitier. And he started dating – did he? I think he dated a white woman; he went to meet her family.

KG: Mhm.

CT: Okay, they didn't take too kind to that.

KG: Right.

CT: Alright. Then we had – you ever see the show *Mash* that came on television –

KG: Yeah, mhm.

CT: *Mash*, okay. It was years before the military would even let them show that on military bases.

KG: Oh, wow.

CT: A lot of people don't know that either.

KG: Interesting.

CT: You know? And then like, we had a couple of the race riots at the peer over on Fort Dix.

KG: Mhm.

CT: So, and then at the same time, like I told you, I'm from Newark, I drafted June the third, 1967 – the following month, we had the riots in Newark.

KG: Mhm.

CT: So, a lot of stuff going on.

KG: Yeah.
CT: You know, a lot of stuff to think about and then like I said, I was only eighteen. So I'm like, you know...

KG: Yeah, did they ever send you overseas?

CT: No, no.

KG: What was it like exiting the military?

CT: Actually, when I got outta the military it was fun.

KG: Yeah?

CT: Because I had a chance to – I started working like – I got outta the military at 70'. And that was sorta like the time when you could go anywhere and get a job. Like, as a blue-collar worker you could go anywhere.

KG: Mhm.

CT: People even – the post office allowed, I don’t know if you would know, because you weren’t even born yet.

KG: [Laughs]

CT: But nobody even wanted to work for the post office.

KG: Mhm.

CT: Until after 1969, they had this massive postal strike – nation wide postal strike and then they started paying decent wages in the post offices. And a lot of people, you know, you could go to the post office, you could go to Western Electric, General Electric, Ford Motors, General Motors, there are all places in New Jersey. Here was the tobacco industry and stuff. And you know, DuPont; you name it. So it was good and then I got introduced – I got a chance to go to college.

KG: Okay, where did you go?

CT: I went to Essex County College.

KG: Cool.

CT: You know, so you know, I got a chance to do some things.

KG: What was it like going to college after having served in the military?
CT: It wasn’t that bad actually, because there were a lot people. At that time there were a lot of vets coming home and a lot of vets -

KG: And a lot of people similar to you.

CT: Yeah, so there were a lot of vets that had stuff in common with you.

KG: Mhm.

CT: You know what I mean, outside of being in the military and stuff? And so you know, like I said, it was a fun time, actually in the beginning, you know? I got introduced to drugs in college.

KG: Mhm.

CT: You know, so.

KG: Are there things that you miss about being in the military?

CT: No.

KG: No? How did your family when you decided to go to college?

CT: Well actually, my father just wanted, because like – you’re moving outta- he wasn’t, my father wasn’t, my father wasn’t one of those – he had eight sisters. My father is from Cumberland County. He had eight sisters and no brothers. And my mother is from Buckingham County, out in the boonies.

KG: Yeah, my boyfriend has a- his family has a cabin in Buckingham.

CT: Yeah well, that’s where they’re from.

KG: Yeah.
CT: I -

KG: [Laughs]

CT: And my mother had eight brothers and sisters, so you know, they – with my father, he didn’t really care. But my mother, she was just happy, you know, because she always said, you know like, “My job is to feed you, keep a roof over your head, yada, yada, yada. Your job is to go to school and get an education because your father only went to the tenth grade. Now you can either move out, you can either do that, move out, or I’m gonna kill you.” So those were my choices.

KG: [Laughs] So tell me a little bit more about college.
CT: It was – I was always a good student when I wanted to be.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know what I mean? Because I was one of those kids, when I was in school, when I was in regular school, I really didn’t have to study hard, you know what I mean? I was pretty good in school when I wanted to be but I always gravitated towards the negative, you know? So, but college was a lot fun because I’m a people person.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know what I mean? So I became president of the Entertainment Committee and stuff like that. So we put on a lot of functions. Most of my classes were pretty interesting, you know? Once again, it didn’t – it wasn’t that hard…

KG: Yeah.

CT: …when I wanted to apply myself, so.

KG: You mentioned a lot of other vets going to school at the same time as you. Did you know anyone from, you know, your unit or stay in touch with anybody who also went to college?

CT: No, no. Actually, these were all new people I met along the way, you know?

KG: Okay, okay.

CT: Because see like, back then our GI Bill was better than what they have now.

KG: Yeah, yeah it is. [Laughs]

CT: Because what they have now sucks.

KG: Yeah. [Laughs] Do you still keep in touch with any of your friends from the military?

CT: No, most of the people that I grew up with, or associated with, a good percentage of them are no longer with us.

KG: Okay. Why did you leave the military after only three years?

CT: I didn’t like.

KG: Okay, yeah?
CT: [Laughs] I did not like it.

KG: Understandable. Do you think that your service changed your worldview?

CT: Not really.

KG: Okay.

CT: Because see, by me being stationed so close to home, I was home a lot.

KG: Yeah.

CT: Because actually I only worked, I worked from eight to four and then I would go home and come back to work the next morning.

KG: [Laughs] I’d say that’s the best type of drafting for Vietnam.

CT: Yeah because a lot of people didn’t even believed I was in the military.

KG: Yeah...yeah. What types of challenges have you faced since you left the military?

CT: Like now or in general?

KG: In general, yeah.

CT: Okay well like right now, one of biggest, especially being in this state, I’m a three time convicted felon.

KG: Okay.

CT: So those are barriers that I have to overcome here.

KG: Mhm.

CT: Because this place so backwards, you know what I mean?

KG: [Laughs] Yeah.

CT: It’s like they have – and some of the things they do are illegal, you know what I mean?

KG: Mhm.

CT: I just lunch with somebody yesterday, a friend of mine that works – well actually she works for the homeless now – but she used to manage the apartment complex that I used to live in.
KG: Mhm.

CT: And a lot of the places we go to looking for housing, you know, they say, “Well we don’t except felons.” Well if you’re dealing with [undistinguishable] or getting any of their monies that’s illegal, that’s discrimination.

KG: Right.

CT: A lot of people don’t know that.

KG: Mhm.

CT: And the way the state is set up, if you are a felon they take away all of your rights. I’m from New Jersey so I have most of mine. Like, I can vote and stuff.

KG: Yeah.

CT: Here, it's like [makes sound]. You know what I mean?

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know, so those are some of things that I'm facing right now. Plus this system that they have at the VA...

KG: Yeah.

CT: ...which sucks.

KG: Yeah, can you tell me more about your experience with the VA or other service organizations?

CT: Well, okay supposedly I’m in the [undistinguishable] program. And what that means is that they help you by getting you a voucher, and you know, because I’m on a fixed income.

KG: Right.

CT: Well, seeing that I’m one of the people that do what you’re supposed to do, you know, like, I see – I have a mental health worker, I take medication, you know, yada, yada, yada, yada. The way this program is set up, I’m like one of the success stories, as far as following the program.

KG: Right.
CT: You know what I mean. But to the people at the VA, that’s an excuse for them to say, “Okay, well you know what to do. You’re able to take care of yourself so we’re not going to give you a voucher.” You know like, they had me on an emotional roller coaster for about two months because they gave me one, they took it back, they gave me another one, they took it back.

KG: Oh, man.

CT: They gave me another one, you know? Just the different things that they do and, “We’re going to help you do this, and we’re going to help you do that.” They haven’t helped me do anything.

KG: Yeah. How did you become homeless?

CT: Well, I lived – I don’t know if you – well you’re from, you say you’re from Richmond?

KG: Yes.

CT: So you know where Chamberlain Avenue is?

KG: Yes.

CT: Okay, I lived on Chamberlain Avenue.

KG: Okay.

CT: And one day this nut came into the office, murdered one lady and almost murdered the other one.

KG: Oh my gosh. When was this?

CT: This was like almost two years ago.

KG: Okay.

CT: And it got to the point where I was afraid to come out of the house. I was like, “Oh no, I can’t do this one.” You know, because there was always something going on, and you know this is the stuff that— I told you I was a recovering addict - that I stay away from it.

KG: Right.

CT: You know what I mean? So I was, “Nahhh. I can’t. I can’t do this one.”

KG: Yeah.
CT: So I gave up my apartment and put my furniture and stuff in storage and I thought I was going to be able to find housing and stuff right away, and I couldn’t.

KG: Mhm.

CT: So I ended up on the streets for a minute and then there’s a place down the street called Rivercity that works with vets.

KG: Mhm.

CT: You ever been there?

KG: I have not.

CT: Oh, okay well anyway, where –

KG: But I know where it is.

CT: Okay, but one of the counselors that worked there, he knew somebody that had a recovery house so they let me stay there for a couple of months until I came here.

KG: You mentioned – I think that you said you’ve been sober for twenty-five years. Is that…

CT & KG: Clean for twenty-five years.

CT: There’s a difference.

KG: Okay. Did –

CT: One deals with the substance…

KG: Yeah.

CT: If you don’t know the difference one deals with the substance - AA deals with the substance. Alcoholics, I mean, Narcotics Anonymous deals with the disease concept.

KG: Mhm.

CT: Which is all-inclusive.

KG: Right.

CT: Okay, so…
KG: Have you – when you became homeless, was that really hard to...?

CT: Well actually, the recovering community is who helped me.

KG: Okay, right.

CT: You know, so...once you buy into the concept and the system, like you can always – you know, you'll find somebody that will help you.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know and that's what happened for me.

KG: That's good. How long were you struggling with homelessness before you hooked up with them?

CT: About two months, yeah about two months, somewhere along in there.

KG: Can you tell me about the places you've stayed during that two months?

CT: Yeah, well it was the summertime.

KG: Yeah.

CT: We would sleep in the park. Meet a young lady, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

KG: [Laughs]

CT: You know? Like been around the block a few times, so.

KG: [Coughs] Sorry, I've got sinus problems too with some post-nasal drip. What was the most hardest thing for you during those two months?

CT: I'm a street person, you know? And so because using drugs I would like – I'm from New Jersey – but I would go to New York and escape for two to three weeks; just hanging out, meet different people, hustling to support my habit, whatever. So it wasn't, actually it wasn't really a big deal, you know, because you learn how to live off of the land.

KG: Right.

CT: You know and wherever you go, you know weed when you see it.

KG: Yeah. What's the hardest or what's something that you struggle with now in your situation?
CT: Just being – just not having my own space.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know? Having a roof over my head? You know?

KG: Yeah.

CT: Like here, there’s like – how many – I think there might be twenty-five, twenty-seven people here now. You have about twenty, twenty-five different personalities. SO you have to learn how, you know, everybody’s pretty much on meds. So you have to, you know? Somebody might be having a bad day and you know, you gotta be flexible. You gotta be able to you know, think on your feet.

KG: Right.

CT: And with me, I’m a little older than, actually I’m the second oldest person here.

KG: Mhm.

CT: So I’ll be sixty-nine in October. Washington is seventy but wait we got one other guy.

KG: [Laughs]

CT: But he’s a pain in the behind. He’s seventy-five but...you know, so you have to, you know, know how to deal with people because you’d never know...

KG: Yeah. Can you tell me about your daily life now? What’s your every day look like?

CT: Well I’m at the VA between two to three times a week.

KG: Okay.

CT: I have, like, this is nitroglycerin.

KG: Mhm.

CT: I have a stain in my heart. I have a herniated disc in my lower back. I have a – I had cysts on a kidney so now they’ve formed a mass so it’s more I have to go see about that. I have high blood pressure, slightly enlarged prostate. What else? Depression, which I take medication for. That’s pretty much it.
KG: So you just hanging out at the VA? What do you do on the days when you’re not at the VA?

CT: I do the flea markets on the weekends.

KG: Okay, that’s fun.

CT: I’ve been every weekend. I have my own business too.

KG: Oh, that’s cool. Tell me about that.

CT: Well, actually I got downsized from my job in 2004 for waste management. So prior to that, I had started my own business. So I just kept at it.

KG: What kind of business?

CT: Like during the summer, I’ll sell like women’s sun dresses.

KG: Okay.

CT: Infinity scarves, stuff like that, you know?

KG: Cool.

CT: I just started – we just invested into men’s styles. That went pretty well, so.

KG: Awesome.

CT: And then like, I like to read a lot to so then I’m at the library a lot. I went to Northside Learning Center, became computer literate, so I’m on the computer a lot looking for different merchandise, looking for different information, stuff like that, so.

KG: Cool. Do you have friends here? People you talk to everyday or people in your life that are...?

CT: Pretty much.

KG: Yeah?

CT: There’s family members and a few people that I met here. I don’t talk to everybody, you know?

KG: Yeah.
CT: I don't like drama, I don't like a whole bunch of stuff going on so if that's what you're doing then you won't see me.

KG: Yeah. Is your family close by?

CT: Mhm.

KG: Yeah? Do you –

CT: Because I had a lot of family members that I grew up with that moved back here.

KG: Okay. What – can you remind me what brought you to Richmond?

CT: I needed a change, from killing my kid.

KG: Oh, right.

CT: [Laughs]

KG: Is it easy to make friends in your current situation?

CT: Of course it is. I'm a people person, so I need people wherever I go. Like my youngest daughter, I know, you know we were here for the family reunion? And we took the down to Busch Gardens and all of a sudden this girl was like, “Hey, Cordell, how you doing?” She was like, “Where you know here from?”

KG: [Laughs]

CT: But she used to live in Newark and now she lives in some place in Virginia and we just happened to …

KG: Be at the same place.

CT: Yeah, so you know, but I’m always meeting somebody, somewhere.

KG: Yeah, yeah. Do you feel that the fact that you're a homeless vet shapes the way other people think about you?

CT: Well most people don't know I'm homeless.

KG: Right.

CT: Because I’m one of those kind of people, that if you see me, you wouldn’t know unless I told you. You know, or you wouldn’t even know because I know one time I was on trial and I got to court before my lawyer and they thought I was the lawyer.
KG: [Laughs]

CT: [Laughs]

KG: That’s funny. What do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experience of veterans?

CT: Well, see, a lot of people judge, you know what I mean? They never walked in they’re shoes, but they’re real quick to judge other people, you know what I mean? And you know, which is very unfair. You know, or just like, I told you I’m a three time convicted felon.

KG: Mhm.

CT: If I didn’t tell you, you wouldn’t know.

KG: Yeah.

CT: If you go – anybody that I’d have dealings with in here, like if I ask somebody from here to write a reference for me?

KG: Mhm.

CT: I could get one just like that.

KG: Right.

CT: You know what I mean, and you would say, “Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.” Then when I tell you about my background, and people go, “Ohhhh.” But that’s not who I am.

KG: Right.

CT: You know what I mean? So these people, they’ve been around me long enough, they know who I am.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know? So.

KG: Why do you think that, I know your situation was a little different, but why do you think that veterans in general, become homeless?

CT: Well a lot of vets don’t feel like dealing with the system because the system stinks, you know especially in a place like this. This place is hard. You know what I mean? It’s really, the system stinks and a lot vets just say, “You know what,?” You know what I mean, they don’t feel like dealing with the system. You know, you have
mean that have been wounded, all kinds of problems, you know? And no one actually – it's all talk and no act. Because when I first got here, I used to do volunteer work with this agency that worked with returning citizens from prison. And we used to meet with the governor, and all of these politicians, and all of these people and we wanted to change recidivism and all of this stuff, and we wanted to do all of these things, and it's all talk. You know, in a lot of ways, it's the same thing with vets. It's the same thing; it's all lip service. You know what I mean? Because like I told you, I'm on a fixed income, my monthly income is a little under eleven hundred dollars.

KG: Mhm.

CT: You know, with a voucher I would only have to pay like, thirty percent of my income towards rent.

KG: Yeah.

CT: There should be a question. You follow what I'm saying?

KG: Yeah.

CT: There shouldn't be a question. This place, the minimum wage – I was getting food stamps and the lady – and what happened was at the time, my income was only nine hundred and eighteen dollars but being a Vietnam era vet, I qualified for a partial penchant, which was a hundred and fifty-two dollars.

KG: Mhm.

CT: Hundred and fifty-four dollars. My food stamps were a hundred and forty-six dollars. The lady – they could my food stamps down to – no, it was a hundred and twenty-six dollars – they cut it down to forty-six dollars.

KG: Oh, wow.

CT: And the lady was like, “Well, your rent’s only five hundred and sixty-five dollars.” Duhhhhh....five hundred and sixty-five dollars out of.....?

KG: Yeah.

CT: Right.

KG: Utilities, life bills.

CT: Right, right. So you know, you do the math.

KG: Right.
CT: You know, but this is one of those places where the minimum wage is seven dollars and twenty-five cents and a lot people, you know they think it’s crazy, but they don’t know just how crazy it really is.

KG: Right.

CT: You know what I mean? So, you have a lot of people that get left out when you do that.

KG: Mhm.

CT: And it just so happens that a lot of them are vets.

KG: Yeah. What are you most proud of?

CT: Of being a good father because like, my youngest daughter, we’re like husband and wife.

KG: [Laughs]

CT: We’re both libras; we’re joined at the hip.

KG: Yeah.

CT: If I don’t check in every three days, it’s like, she’s calling around she’s, “Where is he at, what’s he [undistinguishable].”

KG: [Laughs]

CT: And then I have a son in North Carolina. It was like, I hadn’t seen him in like twenty-five years. So we managed to bond and build a relationship. So those are the things that, you know, I’m proud of.

KG: Mhm.

CT: You know, most everything that I accomplish due to bad choices that I made, you know like I messed them up or that’s a [undistinguishable] in my past. You know so, you know. But, and I’m like a... like here I’m like a, what would you say? Like if somebody wants to know something, they come and ask me?

KG: Okay.

CT: They’re always looking for me. [Undistinguishable]

KG: [Laughs] Is there anything in life you regret?
CT: [Pause] I do but you can’t take it back.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know what I mean? It’s done. What’s done is done. All I can do now is be the best person I can be going forward, that’s it.

KG: What are your goals for the future?

CT: Get out of this place. You know what I mean? I know a lot of stuff, I - you know, like I’ve accomplished a lot. I’ve lost a lot you know, because of the choices that I made so I don’t really, you know – it’s not – you know, I just want like peace of mind. That’s basically what I want. You know what I mean?

KG: Yeah.

CT: Want to be able to come home, relax, enjoy myself, I like music, you know what I mean? I like shows and stuff like that. You know, those are things I still do.

KG: Yeah. How do you feel about charity, when people, you know people coming in to volunteer places or organizations that are...?

CT: I do it.

KG: Yeah.

CT: I was working with [undistinguishable] until my back went out.

KG: Okay.

CT: So I had to stop doing it.

KG: Yeah.

CT: You know they do different things. You know, I go and volunteer and do what I can do but you know, I believe this would be a much better place if more people did. You know what I mean? Because right now this great country that we live in is so divided and so messed up. Like, we all live on the same planet.

KG: Yeah. Why do you feel the need to give back?

CT: Because somebody helped me. You know, I didn’t get clean by myself; people helped me. So that’s how we pay it forward because you helped somebody else.

KG: Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your experiences?
CT: Oh, well jail’s not fun to talk about.

KG: [Laughs]

CT: [Laughs] Being sick because you don’t have drugs, that’s not fun. But, we pretty much, you know? I’m divorced and stuff like that but you know.

KG: Okay, that’s everything unless you have anything else to add or?

CT: No.

KG: No, okay. Thank you.

CT: We good?

KG: Yeah, let me get all of this stuff.

Appendix 11

The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project Interview Questions
These questions are a guide and roadmap for the interview. Not all questions will be asked. I follow the lead of the interviewee and what they feel comfortable discussing. What they talk about often times guides me to the next question; which may or may not be a variation of one of the following. Some of the questions will not pertain to every interviewee. Before an interview, the interviewee may review all questions and point out questions they are uncomfortable answering so I can avoid that topic and line of questions. They also may point out questions that they would really like to answer so that we can be sure to get to those.

1) What’s your name? Can you tell me about yourself, where you grew up, family life etc.? If you didn’t grow up in Richmond, when did you move to the Richmond area and what brought you here?

2) Can you tell me a little bit about your life today? (Family, age, etc.)

3) When did you join the military? And what led to your decision to join the military? What did your family and friends think?

4) What was your training like? What do you remember most about your training / what were the most memorable moments?

5) What was your job in the military? How did you pick it? What did you find most/least challenging/interesting about it?
6) Tell me about where you were stationed? What experiences do you remember the most?
   a. Were you ever deployed? If so, what was your deployment like?
      (When were you there? Where were you stationed? What did you do? What moments stand out to you as defining your time there?)
   b. What was it like coming home from deployment?

7) Can you tell me about some of the most memorable experiences from your time in the military? Why do they stand out to you?

8) What are your most important memories of your deployment/military service? Are there things that you miss about being deployed/being active duty/etc.?

9) How did members of the community or your family respond to you after your deployment or military service? How did that make you feel? Are there specific moments that stand out to you?

10) What were your relationships like with other members of the military while you were in the service? Tell me about specific memories of people/events/etc. that are meaningful to you. Do you still keep in contact with any of them?

11) Why did you leave the military?

12) Do you think the experience of deployment or military service changed your worldview, relationships, attitude about the military, etc.?

13) What types of challenges have you faced since leaving the military?

14) Tell me about your experiences with the VA and other organizations that serve veterans. Did you ever use any of the services provided to you when exiting the military such as VA hospitals, the G.I Bill, Reserve Education Assistance, etc.?

15) How did you become homeless?

16) How did you become involved with Virginia Supportive Housing? how long have you been involved? When did you start using their programs? How does working with them compare to your experiences working with other organizations.
17) Tell me about the other places you’ve stayed since losing your home.

18) What’s the hardest thing about not having a home?

19) What is your daily life like now? Can you tell me a little about the things you do from day to day?

20) Do you have a person you talk to every day, or a person you would consider a close friend? Tell me about that person.

21) Is it easy to make friends in your current situation? Do you ever feel lonely?

22) What types of barriers do you feel like you face as a homeless veteran?

23) How do you feel that the fact that you are a homeless veteran shapes the way that others think about you?

24) What do you think civilians particularly don’t know about the experiences of veterans and homeless veterans in particular? What do you think they should know?

25) Why do you think veterans become homeless?

26) How do you feel when people offer you charity? Are there any specific instances you remember? How do you feel about accepting charity?

27) What are you most proud of? Is there anything you regret?

28) Is there anything else you’d like to share about your experience?

**Appendix 12**

Informed Consent Form
Oral Histories for Research for “The Forgotten Fight”
Led by Kelsey Glander and Joseph Clark, American Studies Department, Franklin and Marshall College

Description of the Project:

The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project aims to bring to light the struggles and stories homeless veterans in context of the public and collective memory of recent history. The Forgotten Fight team hopes to create a public humanities project through which military veterans can tell their own stories, in their own words. We believe that this project will illuminate and humanize the many struggles that
homeless veterans face in the communities that we live and work in and call attention to a marginalized population that is often overlooked and stigmatized. We hope that by making public the experience of those who have undergone these struggles, we can prompt larger conversations about homelessness and the place of the veteran in our society.

Memoir Donor Consent:

I, ________________________, of ___________________________ hereby permanently give, and convey to The Forgotten Fight Oral History Project my oral history, which it is currently in possession of and which consists of ___________________________.

In so doing I understand that my oral history will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, publicly presented, or broadcast in any medium that The Forgotten Fight project, led by Kelsey Glander and Joseph Clark, shall deem appropriate.

In making this gift I fully understand that I am granting all legal and literary property rights which I have, or may be deemed to have, in my oral history. Additionally, I grant my rights, title, and interest in any copyright, which may be secured under the laws now or later in force, and effect in the United States of America. My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of: reproduction, distribution, and preparation of derivative works, public performance, public display, as well as all renewals and extensions.

By signing this form, you acknowledge the following (Please initial after each bullet):

• That your participation in the interview(s) related to this project is voluntary and may be discontinued at your discretion at any point. ______

• That you will receive no compensation for your participation in this project. ______

• That you have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the purpose, nature, and conduct of the project and that you have received satisfactory answers to those questions. ______

• That your interview will be audio and/or video recorded for purposes of accuracy and context, and that those audio and video recordings may be used in any subsequent derivative works, public performance, public display.
Individual Interview Stipulations (check all which you are comfortable with)

a) I consent to an audio recording of my oral history for purposes of accuracy 

b) I consent to a video recording of my oral history for purposes of accuracy 

c) I consent to the use of use of the audio of my oral history in subsequent derivative works relevant to the project description 

d) I consent to the use of use of the video of my oral history in subsequent derivative works relevant to the project description 

e) I consent to the use of my oral history in subsequent derivative works relevant to the project description provided that my comments be anonymously attributed or a pseudonym assigned 

- That the content of your oral memoir, once completed, becomes the property of the project and may be used at the discretion of the Kelsey Glander in accordance with the above description and for any future scholarly and public history purpose, including presentations at academic conference and meetings, public exhibitions, and publication in articles, edited chapters, monographs, and other forums 

- That you will, upon receipt, review the transcript of your oral memoir for inaccuracies of fact and return it to the project representatives within 14 days.

- You will, upon review of the transcript, identify any portions of the memoir on which you wish to set any restrictions on use and will, in writing, indicate the page and paragraphs that you wish to restrict and the duration of the restriction. The interviewee reserves the right to stipulate as follows:
  - No researcher shall quote from my oral memoir in any derivative works, public performance, or public display without my written approval of the quotes that he or she has chosen.
  - Your oral memoir shall be closed until _______ or until your death, whichever comes first.
  - That until _______ or your death, whichever is earliest, any or all of your comments be made anonymously or a pseudonym is assigned in any derivative works, public performance, or public display.

- That your failure to return a corrected transcript or to stipulate any restrictions within 14 days shall represent your acknowledgement that the transcript is accurate to the best of your knowledge and that your oral history may be used without restriction as specified by this agreement.
• That you have read and understand this document.

_____________________________  ______________________________
Signature of participant        Signature of Interviewer

_____________________________  ______________________________
Participants’ Printed Name      Interviewer’s Printed Name

_____________________________
Date

This release is adapted from Donald A Ritchie, Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide 2 ed. (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 256-57.