Prompt #1: Moral Injury (Eileen)

A term that has emerged in discussions about veterans processing the aftermath of war and military service is "moral injury." Moral injury involves the transgression of an individual's moral beliefs or ethical code, which can result in a serious "inner conflict" or schism within the self. Psychologists like Dr. Edward Tick have referred to moral injury as a "soul wound." As Syracuse Veterans' Writing group member Don Western said of moral injury, you "saw wrong, did wrong, didn't stop wrong."

Keeping in mind the prevailing definition(s) of moral injury, make sense of the concept in your own terms. Write about a specific time in your combat experiences or experiences serving in the military where "you saw wrong, did wrong, didn't stop wrong." How do you make sense of that experience now? And what do you feel are the long-term effects of that experience as you think back on it?

This writing prompt is part of a larger effort through Hendricks Chapel to address the concept of moral injury among veterans. A group of SU faculty, veterans, staff, and SU chaplains are working to address the issue of moral injury. Members of our writing group, including Don, Bob, Pete, Andrew, and Bill have taken part in some of the meetings, and Andrew and Eileen are serving on the planning group.

As part of a set of events addressing moral injury, we’d like to hold a public reading of veterans’ work on the topic of moral injury in October (date and space to be announced). We hope members of our group will generate pieces and take part!

Prompt #2 Near Misses (from Ivy)

I must have been about 12 years old when, one day, coming out of the house with my mother, I said, “Let me back the car out of the driveway.”

“Ok,” she said simply. I had absolutely no idea how to drive the car, let alone drive backwards. Our house was set on a hill, and the driveway sloped down sharply towards the street. For some reason, my mother did not get into the car with me. She must have given me a few basic instructions, but as the car started gliding downhill and she called, “Ok, now hit the brake,” I hit the gas instead and started flying backwards over the front lawn and steps. “Hit the brake! Hit the brake!” she yelled from the top of the hill. Panicking, I finally found the right pedal as the car crashed into our mailbox, just before lurching into the street.

Looking back on this moment, I can’t help but think about how things could easily have gone some other way. I could have hit another car, or worse, a pedestrian—or been
blindsided by another vehicle. My mother could have ended up in jail! What a nightmare this could have been, but instead, it’s just an embarrassing memory. A near miss.

Stories of near misses are, of course, commonplace in the genre of war memoirs, but they are also the stuff of everyday life. In addition to considering themes of danger, consider near misses in relation to things like love, success, failure, communication, etc. Write your own story of a “near miss.”

**Submission opportunity:**
"In partnership with Cal Humanities and the Center for the Book, So Say We All requests non-fiction submissions on the theme of, "Homecoming," for a 2014 anthology to be published this winter. We aim to creation a collection from multitude of voices, across generations and branches of service, that examine the transition from military to civilian life. Various interpretations of the theme are welcome, from the literal to the more abstract. Average submission length is around 1,400 words but longer works will be considered (shorter is always welcome too.) All submissions will be considered as first drafts, and we expect chosen participants to work with our editors on a rewrite. Compensation is in the form of two copies of the book."
Submit at: [https://sosayweallonline.submittable.com/submit/29620](https://sosayweallonline.submittable.com/submit/29620)
Visit www.sosayweallonline.com for more information.

Using this call for submissions (first-draft welcome), write about an experience with "homecoming" that examines the "transition from military to civilian life." As the writers above indicate, the theme of "homecoming" can range "from the literal to the more abstract."

**Other Opportunities coming up in September**

**Reading by Kevin Powers**

Kevin Powers:
Iraq War Veteran Kevin Powers, author of the *The Yellow Birds* and *Letter Composed During the Lull in the Fighting: Poems*, will be at Syracuse University for a reading and discussion on September 11. Details below. **On Friday September 12 in the morning from 9:00-11:30 a.m (breakfast served), our group has the opportunity to have a master’s class with Kevin Powers in the Humanities Center at SU (right across the driveway from the Writing Center). The master’s class will be a discussion and writing workshop with Kevin. This will be invitation only, so I'm getting to all of you first with this news.**
KEVIN POWERS
“FROM THE INSIDE OUT: A Veteran’s Perspective in Poetry and Prose”

Thursday, September 11, 7:00 p.m.
Watson Theatre in the Robert B. Menschel Media Center, Watson Hall

Kevin Powers is a U.S. Army veteran of the Iraq War and an acclaimed poet and fiction writer whose works include Letter Composed During a Lull in the Fighting and The Yellow Birds, which was a finalist for the National Book Award in Fiction and won the 2013 PEN/Hemingway Award for first fiction as well as the Guardian First Book Award for 2012.

“Serving: Standing Down Reading Group” Program sponsored by the Humanities Center at SU, please register with the host site coordinator:

Host-Site Coordinator: Mi Ditmar, Mellon Coordinator, Central New York Humanities Corridor, Syracuse University Humanities Center
(315) 443-5944
mmditmar@syr.edu

Serving: Standing Down
Syllabus

Facilitator: Christopher Kennedy, Associate Professor of English; Director of the Creative Writing Program, Syracuse University
c kennedy@syr.edu

Text: Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian (2013, Great Books Foundation)
At the introductory meeting, you will be loaned a copy of the text for the duration of the discussion group.
You will return the copy of the anthology loaned to you to the host-site coordinator when you complete your participation in the group.
If you would prefer your own personal copy of the text, you may purchase one directly from the Great Books Foundation store ($19.95 + tax and shipping):
A Kindle version is available for download for $9.95.

Serving: Standing Down is a reading and discussion program for veterans, providing a space to reflect on your service as well as the challenges and opportunities of transitioning from active duty to civilian life.
We will meet 5 times this fall: 1 introductory session, and 4 discussion sessions. The introductory meeting will be about 45 minutes long. The discussion sessions will each be roughly 90 minutes in length (with a break).

The discussion sessions are not academic seminars or lectures. It is important for you to come prepared to actively participate, having completed the recommended readings for that session. The group facilitator is just that: a guide who will offer questions or prompts; the discussion will be primarily among you, the participants.

**Introductory Session: 45 minutes**

7 p.m. Thursday, September 25  
304 Tolley Humanities Building

At this meeting, we will introduce the group’s facilitator, Christopher Kennedy, and the host-site coordinator, Mi Ditmar.

You will be asked to briefly introduce yourself.

We will review the discussion group format and schedule.

**Session 1: 90 minutes  Confronting the Enemy & Telling Stories**

7 p.m. Thursday, September 25  
304 Tolley Humanities Building

Please be prepared to discuss the following selections from the *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian* anthology:

- Foreword: To the Veteran  
- Preface  
- About Shared Inquiry  
- *Iliad* (selection) Homer  
- *In Pharaoh’s Army* (selection) Tobias Wolff

**Session 2: 90 minutes  Family Relationships, Homecoming & Grieving**

7 p.m. Thursday, October 9  
304 Tolley Humanities Building

Please be prepared to discuss the following selections from the *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian* anthology:

- Facing It Yusef Komunyakaa  
- What It is Like to Go to War Karl Marlantes  
- The Things They Carried Tim O’Brien  
- An Irish Airman Foresees His Death William Butler Yeats

**Session Three: 90 minutes  Heroism & Civilians in War**
7 p.m. Thursday, October 23
304 Tolley Humanities Building

Please be prepared to discuss the following selections from the *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian* anthology:

- **An Irish Airman Foresees His Death** *William Butler Yeats*
- **Guests of the Nation** *Frank O’Connor*
- **The Hardest Letter to Write** *Parker Gyokeres*

Session Four: 90 minutes  *Wounds*

7 p.m. Thursday, November 6
304 Tolley Humanities Building

Please be prepared to discuss the following selections from the *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian* anthology:

- **You Know When the Men Are Gone** (selection) *Siobhan Fallon*
- **Perimeter Watch** *Brian Turner*
- **Dust to Dust** (selection) *Benjamin Busch*

There will be snacks and refreshments at all of the meetings. At the introductory session we will be lending out copies of the *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian* anthology, but if participants prefer to purchase their own copies to annotate and highlight, the book can be ordered directly from the Great Books Foundation.