Eileen Schell, Ivy Kleinbart/Writing Assignments, September 17, 2011

1) In *What it is Like to Go to War*, writer and Vietnam Veteran Karl Marlantes argues that returning combat/military veterans need to have opportunities to integrate their combat and military experiences into their current lives. He argues that there need to be spaces in and out of the military for veterans to come to terms with what they have done, experienced, and witnessed.

He argues in the conclusion that: “We must be honest and open about both sides of war [its intensity, sense of common purpose, addictive adrenaline as well as the destruction, lost lives, dismemberment, chaos, grief, and loss]. The more aware we are of war’s costs, not just in death and dollars, but also in shattered minds, souls, and families, the less likely we will be to waste our most precious asset and best weapon: our young. The more we recognize the feelings of transcendence and the psychological and spiritual intensity of war, the easier it will be to prevent their appeal from clouding our judgment about going to war the next time.”

Drawing on Marlantes’ ideas and your own, write about what you believe is needed as veterans return from military service and re-integrate into civilian life. You may want to imagine your audience, as Marlantes does, as concerned civilians, family members, clergy, policy makers, and/or military officials who want to know what they can do to address the needs of returning military veterans. You may want to write this in the form of a letter or even as a call to action.

Variation: If this version of the assignment does not appeal to you, shift perspectives a bit and get back in touch with the idea of “getting out” or “coming home.” Write about the day you were released from military service—the day you “got out.” What happened on that day, and what do you recall about your feelings, state of mind, and sense of the future?

The Vets’ PTSD Project

2) Assignment #2 is to consider crafting a story for the Veterans’ PTSD Project. The Call for Submissions can be found at [http://veteransptsdproject.com/submission-guidelines.php](http://veteransptsdproject.com/submission-guidelines.php)

We reprint the call for submissions here so you can get a better sense of it.

"Fractures well cured make us more strong." -Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it." - Helen Keller

**A Veterans' PTSD Project Story**

- A Veterans' PTSD Project story is an inspirational, true story about ordinary Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines going through an extraordinary journey of Post-Traumatic Stress. It is a story that shows others that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and gives them hope to persevere through their darkest hour. It takes courage to share your personal story, and these first-person accounts touch the heart of the reader and give them insight they can use in their own lives. These stories are personal and, while often begun in grief or sorrow, they end in power, strength and perseverance.
• A Veterans' PTSD Project story is a first-person account that has a beginning, middle and an end that vividly describes how you coped through your emotions and injuries and tells the reader how you are doing today.
• A Veterans' PTSD Project story makes the reader feel more connected to the greater Veterans' community and inspires us to feel more thankful, more encouraged and more ready to take on the challenges we face today. Our goal is to make the reader feel, "if this Soldier made it, then I can, too."
• A Veterans' PTSD Project story extends to the reader who is searching for inspiration, meaning, help, or just understanding.

"Be the change you want to see in the world." -Mahatma Gandhi

Guidelines for a Veterans' PTSD Project Story

1. Tell your empowering story as if you were speaking to another Service Member who was thinking of getting help for his or her PTSD symptoms. Your story should be written in the first-person and have a beginning, middle and end. Be sure that you introduce your characters and your setting; this can include dialogue and should express your feelings. Walk the reader through your feelings before, during and after the conflict. At what point did you come to a fork in the road when you had to make a decision to seek assistance? It should end in how you overcame your obstacles and describe how you found positive change. Articulate the life principles you learned as a result of this struggle and how you applied what you learned through this journey.

2. Do not be afraid to be honest. Not everyone seeks or finds solutions in the same way. What would you want someone in a similar situation to know? Your story can be funny, caustic, moving, or sad; write what is true to you. Tell your story in a way that will take the reader along your journey with you. Don't leave anything out; small details may be what connects a reader to your narrative.

3. Consider some of these questions when crafting your narrative:

• Where did you serve overseas? In what campaign? Give the reader a feel of the circumstances under which you served, to include what was going on at home while you were serving abroad.
• What was your response to the combat experience?
• How did your response affect your family, your relationships, your work, and your life?
• How did you come to realize that you needed help to overcome your PTSD/CSD?
• How did you find the courage and motivation to seek assistance?
• What was your family or friends' reaction to your endeavors? Were there any unique circumstances?
• What relationships did you develop or strengthen to help you overcome your PTSD/CSD symptoms?
• How did you find help to overcome your circumstances? Where did you look for resources?
• What were your apprehensions, fears or questions when seeking help?
• What are the life principles you learned as a result of this struggle?
• Did you find a new identity or discover a new strength as a result of this experience?
• What were others' reactions to your change?
• How did you apply any life lessons learned to other parts of your life? (i.e., your family, work, relationships or spiritual life)

4. Keep in mind that your readers are other Service Members, Veterans and their families and loved ones. The goal of The Veterans' PTSD Project is to change the national conversation on PTSD from one of shame, fear and hopelessness to resilience after adversity and personal growth. A Veterans' PTSD Story
should inspire positive change and emotion in the reader. It is not a sermon, eulogy, biography or testimonial; it is strictly apolitical and is not ghost-written or told in the third-person.

"Take the first step of faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step" - Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Veterans' PTSD Project - Story Specifications

1. You can submit your stories via our website: www.veteransptsdproject.com or e-mail them to one of our story coordinators at shareyourstory@veteransptsdproject.com. Please note that we cannot accept attachments; please paste your story into the body of the e-mail. You can also mail your stories to: The Veterans' PTSD Project, P.O Box 2278, Methuen, MA 01844.

2. Stories must be non-fiction, written in the first-person and should be no longer than 1,200 words (one page is approximately 250 words). Please include a word count, the title, the story, and a brief biography at the end.

3. Please submit only stories that have not been previously published.

4. Due to the goals of the Veterans' PTSD Project, we cannot allow anonymous, author unknown or "as told to" narratives.

5. Please keep a copy of your stories for your records, as we are unable to provide you a copy of stories you have previously submitted.

6. If the story you wrote is published by The Veterans' PTSD Project, you will be paid $50 upon publication of the book and you will receive one free copy of the book in which your story appears.

7. When you submit your story to us through our website, you will receive an immediate automated response that we have received it. This is confirmation that your story has been accepted into our submission process. If you receive an error message when trying to submit, please contact one of our story coordinators for assistance at shareyourstory@veteransptsdproject.com. Please note that we cannot accept attachments; please paste your message into the body of the e-mail.

8. Please be patient, as reading each submission is an important and time-consuming process. Our story coordinators respect and honor your efforts by going over each submission individually. If your story is chosen for The Veterans' PTSD Project or any other projects, you will be notified and your permission to print it will be requested. Please know that we never publish anything without written permission from you, the author.