

Veteran's Day Reflection

Contributed by Zoey Trap, MS

Today is Veteran's Day, a day to remember and be grateful for all who served. Military personnel and veterans have one thing in common – they serve or have served. Beyond that they are as different as any other group of Americans, and it is important not to stereotype them but to meet them where they are.

In 1974, coming out of high school, I enlisted in the US Marine Corps. It was a decision made out of necessity as this was a year before Title IX went into effect. Although I was offered athletic scholarships from a few universities, none were sufficient to pay for college. In 1974 the military offered the GI Bill, and if you served for two years, you received four years of academic funding. So off I went to boot camp in Parris Island to begin my service.

After completing boot camp I was sent to USMC Barstow, California where I would become the first woman to train male troops in physical conditioning. I guess you could say I was an experiment. It was a time of life that formed me in many ways, providing me with strong drive, discipline, and high standards. Today I am proud of my service and honored to stand among so many veterans—men and women, alive and dead—who have given so much to our country.

While I was living in North Virginia, outside of Washington DC, I began working with veterans who had been injured in the Middle East and were struggling physically and mentally with life. This would change me forever and create a desire in me to serve in a new way. I was asked to teach Pilates to Steve who had been discharged from Walter Reed hospital. Steve had suffered serious injuries when his jeep overturned. As a result, he had spinal damage that resulted in pain and difficulty functioning in daily life. Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) was a factor for him which changed from day to day. Steve taught me so much as the first student with military injuries I worked with.

We began at the beginning with pain management, fundamentals, and the intro order. Before long, I began to tell when he walked in the door how he was feeling. There were days he was 'jittery' and had trouble focusing, and I learned when I needed to distract him and when it was better to be quiet and help him focus. As Pilates became part of his daily routine, he grew in stability, strength, flexibility, and just as importantly, his trust grew. Trust accelerated progress, and we got to know each other on different levels. He wanted to resistance train, but yet, it hurt him to do so. He wasn't able to take what he was doing in the studio out onto the weight floor...so, out I went to work with him on the floor. He started to make the connection that Pilates wasn't just for in the studio or just to do when he hurt, but something that was a way in life in so many ways.

As I got to know him and learn more about the PTSD, I taught him how to use breathwork to slow his nervous system down, how to scan his body to see where he was holding stress, and how to stay present. I worked with Steve for over one year until I moved. The last day I walked into the gym he stopped me to tell me that he and his wife were having a baby, something they did not think possible!

If you want to learn to work with veterans, especially wounded soldiers, it is so important to meet them where they are at and to work holistically. Seek out education and experienced professionals who can guide you to work with injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, amputations, etc. You can receive education and or volunteer through:

[The Warriors Project](#)

[Hope for the Warriors](#)

[Semper Fi Fund](#)