

Henry and George

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Henry Jr. is fifteen and George is twelve years old. Henry is in ROTC at his local high school and George is in middle school. Henry was eager to join the ROTC because his father was a senior NCO in the National Guard and was deployed to Iraq. Their father was a mechanic for a local Ford dealer in civilian life and had spent a lot of time with the boys explaining how things worked. He was a Scoutmaster and little league baseball coach. He was a favorite with all the kids. He gave every one a fair shake and worked with each boy to teach him to be the best he could be.

Henry Sr. was hit by an IED when he was with his six-member squad in Iraq. They were in a Hummer on patrol outside Baghdad. Four of his young crewmembers were killed immediately and a fifth had a severe head injury. Henry Sr. had a mild arm wound which had healed. He also had a concussion that left him deaf for a week after the IED exploded. Because he could not hear he didn't really know the extent of the injuries to his squad for a week after the explosion. His hand and arm wounds were relatively mild and easily treated. The four dead crewmembers were all young under the age of twenty. The other survivor was 21 and had serious facial and head injuries. In fact, he had not regained consciousness when Henry's hearing returned.

As the squad leader Henry blamed himself for the deaths of the young men he was in charge of. No matter how much the psychologist tried to convince him that he had done all he could do to protect his squad he grieved for their loss. He had the name of his squad tattooed on his right arm. Henry Sr. returned to his home and sought out psychological services with the Veterans Administration. He showed little or no interest in the boys or of his wife Judith.

Henry Sr.: Why are you wearing that ROTC uniform? Are you crazy? Do you want to get killed?

Henry Jr: Dad I thought you would be proud of me. I like ROTC. I want to go to summer camp at A. P. Hill next year,

Henry Sr. Over my dead body. Get me another beer from the fridge!

George: I'm off to my Boy Scout meeting at church.

Henry Sr.: Why are you wearing a uniform? I don't want to see a uniform in this house ever again.

Judith: Henry it's just a scout meeting at the church what's wrong with you?

Henry Sr. What have you done to my boys?

Judith: Ford called and asked when you were coming back to work. They seemed eager to have you. Mickey is the Service Manager now. You remember him?

Henry Sr. Yea, he was the smart elect kid that I trained. He doesn't know squat.

Judith: The VA has us scheduled for family counseling next Friday.

Henry Sr.: You and the kids go. I'm fine.

Judith: I think we all have to go.

Henry Sr. I don't need any of those shrinks bothering with my head. I need another beer. Henry get me a cool one.

Henry Jr. Gee dad this is your sixth beer.

Henry Sr. Shut your mouth and bring me another beer. I don't need your smart comments.

Friday Appointment

Social Worker: Are there any problems you would like to bring up to start with.

Henry Sr: No things are fine.

Judith: Henry has changed. He does not seem to want to go to work even though Ford has given him his old job back.

Henry Sr.: They don't understand. The slackers stayed behind and did not take a stand to avenge 9-11.

SW: Henry are you angry with them?

Henry Sr.: You don't understand. I was responsible for those kids and they were blown to hell and back. They are dead now. Everyday I see them. All good kids.'

SW: What do you think you can do to help them they are unfortunately gone?

Henry Sr.: It has to be different.

SW: What do you mean different?

Henry Sr. They were brave patriotic young men who gave their lives for the fat cats back home. No one back here gives a damn. They just go on their happy ways. I see the way the people at work think I was a sucker. The greedy slobs are cheating us and robbing us blind. Look at what the Wall Street bankers have done.

SW: Do they tell you that?

Henry SR. : No but they think it. Maybe I am nuts at night I dream about the IED and wonder why me. Why did I survive and the others die and Johnny boy is left worse than death mauled and screwed up in his head.

SW: Henry you have a here and now that you must live in. You must put aside the war and rebuild your life for your boys and wife.

Henry Sr. Nonsense, I can't get it out of my mind.

SW: We have to talk about it Henry and live for today and not yesterday. You have a wife and two wonderful boys who need you.

Henry: Yes I know, but the explosion keeps going off in my head.

SW: It was not your fault. You must live in the world we have today. I know there is grief, but you must grieve and move on.

Henry: Nonsense nothing seems to matter anymore.

SW: Your sons matter and need you to be there for them.

Henry Sr.: I see the bright flashes and hear the explosion everyday it is embedded in my brain. It repeats itself over and over. It is always there and it will never go away.