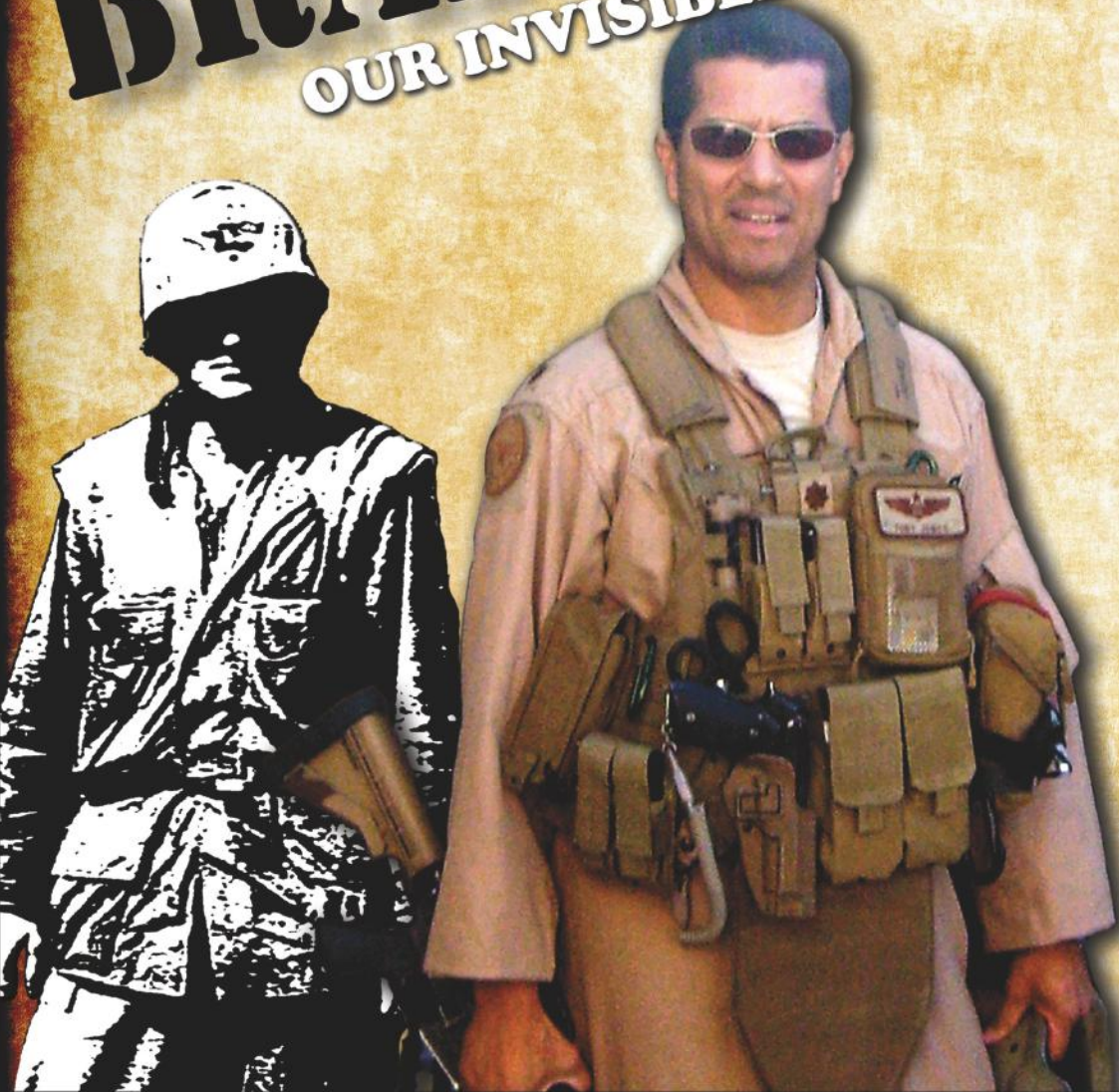




BRAIN PAIN

OUR INVISIBLE WOUNDS



Fighting Traumatic Brain Injury & Post Traumatic Stress
Anthony E. Jones, Major, Ret. USAF

BRAIN PAIN

Our “Invisible Wounds.”

Traumatic Brain Injuries and Post Traumatic Stress

Father
Khe Sanh

Son
Baghdad

Anthony E. Jones, Major, USAF Ret.



“Brain Pain is an absolutely fantastic book and needs to be read by all, especially medical and mental health personnel.”

Rear Admiral Joan M. Engel, 18th Director of the United States Navy Nurse Corps

**The complete book is available on
Amazon Books and Kindle.**

BRAIN PAIN

DEDICATION

To my father, who led by example, and showed me courage.

To my mother, who is an unsung hero and wife of a warrior.

*To all my family, friends and advocates who
have helped me navigate the new me.*

Copyright © 2016 by Anthony E. Jones. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission.

Copy, line and structure edits by Kate LeBoeuf, Shelley Copper & Eric Borden.
Cover art by Chess Crosby II. *Thank you all.*

Photographs and interior art are from the author's collection, unless otherwise noted.

Website: www.MajorAnthonyJones.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Major-Anthony-Jones>

Twitter: @majorbrainpain

ISBN-13: 978-0692768624

ISBN-10: 0692768629

First Edition / B / **Giveaway writing sample.**

ANTHONY JONES

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Walter “WK” Jones spent 22 years in the US Marine Corps before retiring. He joined the Marine Corps in 1953, served in Korea and 2 tours in Vietnam. He started off enlisted, being commissioned as an officer prior to deploying to Vietnam and retiring as a Captain. He then went on to join the US Capitol Police for 2 years before joining the US Border Patrol. Capt. Jones spent another 20 years as a Federal Agent, ultimately becoming a Pilot, flying over 10,000 hours in both fixed wing and helicopters. Service; Korea & Vietnam. Awards; Navy Achievement medal with “V” Device, Purple Heart, Combat Action Ribbon and Presidential Unit Citation.

Anthony “Tony” Jones, graduated from George Mason University, then joined the US Air Force in 1980, was commissioned as an officer, and then graduated from flight school earning his Navigator wings. He then served with the 8th Special Operations Squadron as an Electronic Warfare Officer, flying MC-130's. He served in Desert Storm / Desert Shield and Operation Iraqi Freedom. During Iraqi Freedom, he was the Director of the Personnel Recovery Cell in Baghdad.

He now owns Core Group Security which conducts investigations, operations and training in Executive Protection and Technical Surveillance Countermeasures. Service: Desert Storm & Iraqi Freedom. Awards: 2 Purple Hearts, Army Combat Action Badge, Defense Meritorious Service, Meritorious Service and the Joint Service Commendation medals. He lives in Las Vegas, NV.

BRAIN PAIN

CONTENT *(Sample Booklet)*

Prologue. “Back Here”	1
1.) Defective	5
2.) Khe Sanh. “Preparation”	13
3.) Baghdad. “Pedaling fast”	27
4.) Brats. “Doing the job”	43
5.) TBI. “Welcome to the <i>Chaos</i> ”	55
6.) More Pills?	77
7.) The System.	91
8.) PTS. “ <i>Chaos</i> has many faces”	103
9.) Horse Therapy. “Buddy”	117
10.) Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy.	129
11.) How’s it going?	143
12.) Warrior Pride.	157
13.) Sports Concussions.	167
14.) 22 a day.	179
15.) Moving Through.	195
16.) Lessons Learned.	203
Epilogue. “Heaven is Real”	223

ANTHONY JONES



CHAPTER 1

DEFECTIVE

In high school I did a report on Ernest Hemingway's short story, "**Soldiers Home.**" It was also an attempt to understand my father's post-Vietnam experience. (He'd been hit several times during the siege of Khe Sanh.) The story follows a young World War I soldier home after the war. He returns to a home and community where he no longer fits in or is understood. Society keeps on churning, yet he can't see his place in it. He's lost his ability to love and feel compassion, and his irritability dispatches those close to him. He's survived; being the best soldier he could, yet he longs for the sense of clarity he once had.

Finally, I get it. When the uniform comes off, you hang up a piece of your soul, right next to that box everything else goes in. Dad and I had survived similar combat experiences. We had both survived multiple explosions. Mine in Baghdad, his in Vietnam.

I survived, but I didn't return with my old brain. I left it "over there." When your mind starts to go, your abilities diminish. The time it takes you to process and calculate thought swells. Time slows as your memory catches up. Your brain betrays you with convoluted and incorrect memories, if any at all. There's a certain discomfort those around you feel. They can't see it, but they know it. Just by interacting with you, they realize you're slower. Even more so, because they can't see, they fear it. It's the "**Invisible Wound.**"

BRAIN PAIN

Acquaintances start to disappear, friends tread lightly and colleagues try to understand what you've become.

Socially, I'm now a different person. While everyone around me is sharp and quick-witted, I stumble trying to make a point. I call this, "**Access Dyslexia.**" Meaning, it's harder for me to access the information in my brain. When I'm trying to make a point or argue a position, I can't hold my own in any conversation, discussion or argument, especially a debate. I think that I know in my head what I want to say, but I'm unable to access it quickly and retort, or I just lose the thoughts altogether. The harder I think, the more it hurts. Then the smoldering firestorm of pain in my brain intensifies, overwhelming me into mental retreat. Agh! Agh!

Then, *frustration* sets in. The more frustrated I get, the worse the direction my mind takes. *Chaos* just noticed its opportunity; sliding into my brain through the cracks. My mind explodes with hypervigilant thoughts, like a stuck record, sparking out of control. Frustration is at the heart of *Chaos*. It starts with a simple brain fart, then intensifies when my memories hide out. Frustration grows to anger; my heart rate increases, my blood pressure rises then a firestorm of electrical shocks manifests into an explosion of Brain Pain. Peripherals disappear and the focus tightens as the anger bursts forth exponentially. With me, there are the constant mini-explosions of pain, churning and spiking, enabling my *Chaos*, confusion and disarray. *Suicide?* Yep, he's visited me too.

I call my nemesis, *Chaos*. Dad calls himself *Defective*. To look at us, and the hundreds of thousands like us, you wouldn't know. The shrapnel scars have long healed, but it's an on-going battle.

For a long time I chose not to engage. I second-guessed myself constantly, trying to figure out if my memories and decisions were correct, because so often they're not. Until the gift of clear thought, learning, processing and predicting, is taken away, you don't appreciate it. You take it for granted. I did. My best friend Richie told me that for the first few years afterward, "I seemed to think I had TBI written on my forehead." My self-doubt was leading me down a path to complete social isolation. After a lifetime of living with the results of my fathers' Vietnam experiences, I was now living with the results of Baghdad. My father lives with his Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress (PTS,) as do I.

ANTHONY JONES

Chaos is the sum of TBI and PTS, i.e. headaches, anxiety, lethargy, irritability, anger, memory loss, frustration, depression, alcohol and drug abuse and bad choices. *This leads to weakening links in what I call our mental health “Chain,” or our newly damaged mind. Chaos eats away at these links. A healthy “Mental Health Chain” is the result of having proper morals, values and ethics, reinforced by well thought out choices.*

The links in our Chain are constantly assaulted by headaches, depression and anxiety, which leads to anger, irritability, memory loss and frustration, which leads to loss of trust and feelings of betrayal, which leads to poor decisions, which lead to a dissolution of family and friends, which leads to bad financial decisions, which leads to personal destitution, which leads to overwhelming disappointment, which then leads to their perceived last choice, suicide. *Chaos attacks this Chain until a damaged link snaps; 22 veterans a day. This process has been repeated over and over with way too many NFL concussion veterans as well.*

Most can relate and understand the ramifications of the recent NFL concussion crisis, because of the lawsuit played out in the media, and because of the movie “Concussion.” The ***next concussion crisis*** will come from the aging Vietnam veterans who were not diagnosed and forgotten, and the Iraq / Afghanistan combat blast-induced veterans. Remember, many of the injured are A-Type personalities, having experienced prior concussions growing up in high school, college and military training. Multiple concussions can lead to a higher probability of Alzheimer’s, Dementia and ***Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE)***.

CTE has been found in nearly every former NFL player’s brain that has been examined posthumously by autopsy. ***Recently published reports have shown that CTE was also found in 4 of 4 deceased US military combat veterans exposed to a blast or multiple blasts in combat. This is literally just the tip of the iceberg.*** The first concussion crisis was sports related; the next will be our warfighters. It’s catching up with us.

My father was blown up 4 times in Vietnam. He and hundreds of thousands of blast exposed veterans were forgotten, left out in the cold. *I parallel this with what was done in the past with many NFL veterans. They were denied and left on their own. We never tracked*

BRAIN PAIN

blast victims from Vietnam, but they did track NFL players and their concussions. *Through my research, what I've noticed*, with concussion experienced athletes, is the slow deterioration throughout their careers and afterwards, mostly leading to deteriorating marriages and businesses, sometimes ending in suicide. More than likely, the same occurred with Vietnam blast exposed veterans.

What's occurring in the NFL and other sports, regarding final recognition of concussion injuries, is just now being looked at with those grouped from the Vietnam War, 40 years ago.

The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have *birthed a new group* of blast related TBI recipients, who over the next 40 years will have to be dealt with. As many as 320,000 war veterans are estimated to have some form of TBI, and upwards of 60% of those were combat and blast related. This is the next "Combat Concussion Crisis."

I've learned it's not getting better, but with treatment, it's not yet getting worse. I fight my fight, "**Doing The Work (DTW)**," wondering if and when I'll deteriorate? Some estimates are that TBI victims are 50% more vulnerable to the onset of neurodegenerative diseases such as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, Dementia, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

I've also learned I have a voice, something I can share with others about moving through this. I had no desire to write this. No desire at all. Although I've always enjoyed writing, all my passions have dissolved. In-depth thinking manifests pain, which can bring me to my knees. *Putting this on paper was physically painful, redundantly painful*. But the pain is going to be there anyway. Might as well get the most out of it. There are lessons here. *My story relates how I "Do The Work" to strengthen our mental health "Chain."*

Two people stood out as I wrote this. The first, legendary Chicago Bears football player Dave Duerson, 50, who called his headaches "Starburst Headaches." The other, Lt. Col. Raymond Rivas, 51, who was my age when first blown up in an explosion. His headaches took over his life. My neurologists called mine Migraines, Post Concussion Syndrome, then Cluster Headaches, but since first being hit, I've called it "Brain Pain." I've never called them "Headaches," because they weren't, they were pain. "Headache" just seemed to minimize them.

ANTHONY JONES

Everyday, as thoughts get jammed in my head, hundreds of electrical shock-like explosions occur in my brain. It's 24/7. Literally hundreds of thousands since being hit; first thing in the morning until I finally make it to sleep. Nine years out, they are still there. Whether they're smoldering in the background, or sending bolts of lightning through my skull, there's not a day that goes by that I don't endure them. Like an electric fly zapper, snapping and tasing my brain, scattering and dismissing any coherent thoughts I might have at that time.

My memory fails me on a regular basis. I can't remember significant events, days or weeks in my life. I have the photos, but it's like there's a stranger in them; not me. I just can't remember. I'm lost inside my brain, trying to find my way out.

Having just turned 60, I want what I can remember; my memories, thoughts, values; where I've been, what I've done, to be preserved for the future. Five, ten, fifteen years from now, this journal, which turned into a manuscript, is my way of preserving the stories of my life. Maybe someday, in my old age, somebody will read them back to me.

No "woe is me" here. I made the decisions that got me here. My soul told me that this was the table I wanted to play at. They're offering you Baghdad. Hell yeah! That's my table. There's my chair. Let's play! My soul also knew the consequences. I've known them my whole life. I learned them early on. I learned them while my father was at Khe Sanh, Vietnam in 1968. I learned them the day the Green Sedan full of Military Officers in their full dress uniforms pulled into our cul-de-sac. The "Notification Team." When that officer stepped out of that car and stared directly into my eyes, the game was real.

There are lessons here of understanding and coping with this "Invisible Wound." I grew up in the same house with these wounds, and then they moved into mine. Everything here is my story, true and the best recollection of my memories. I wanted to tell this story from my perspective. In other words I had to "do the work." MY defective brain translating MY thoughts into MY words. *I will end up repeating myself, but this is my new brain's voice and I appreciate the readers' understanding of this.* Putting these words down has been a cathartic and healing process, reinforcing and strengthening my

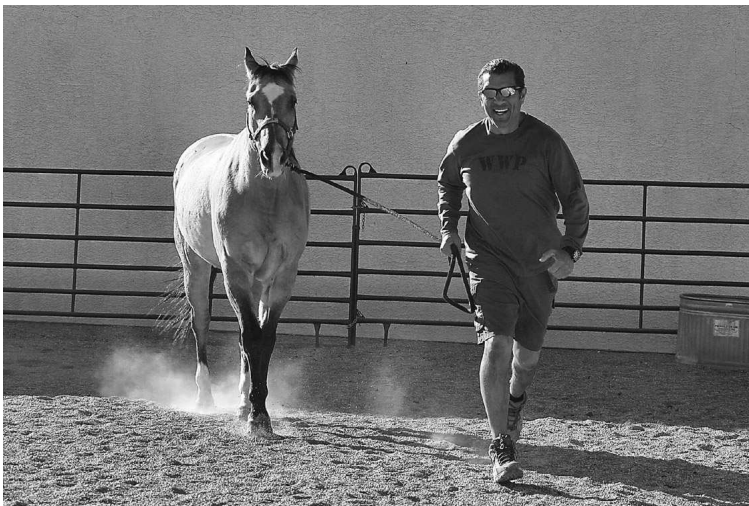
BRAIN PAIN

resolve. It has also been painful, both emotionally and physically.

I'll discuss my blast related deployment events. This isn't a combat story; it's more of a "back here" story. *This is my perspective of how I fight what I call Chaos.* It's the nemesis that may one day kill me. It has tried. It's a fight for my life. As with any fight that's worth fighting, you've got to come up with a plan: a plan of how to train, prepare, adapt and survive. *Chaos* is always there, lurking and waiting for an opening. This is my management plan. No simple "One, two, three and you're good." It's a continuous new lifestyle of "doing the work."

I'd grown up the son of a Marine, a combat veteran of Korea and Vietnam. I had already seen and lived under the umbrella of Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress. My dad's nightmares are still vivid in my mind and seared into my character. The lessons of my childhood motivated me to "*nip this in the bud.*" I had no desire to be *Defective* too.

We are just now acknowledging TBI, but much like football concussions, the real manifestations are yet to be realized; ten, twenty, thirty, forty years from now. There are thousands of professional athletes, hundreds of thousands of military warfighters, and millions of civilians, fighting this injury. This is my journey, but it could easily be the journey of so many others, civilians and military, who suffer with TBI and PTS... *Chaos* has found cracks in my armor.



'Buddy' running me around the ring. (photo courtesy Karen Swigart)

ANTHONY JONES



CHAPTER 9

Horse Therapy

“Buddy”

This first time I met Buddy, a beautiful golden-beige, 13-year-old Buckskin Gelding, he walked over and greeted me by snorting right in my face. Then he pitched his head up and down until I began to stroke his forehead. Equine therapy was completely new to me. The first time I groomed him, it took way longer than expected. Almost forty-five minutes. Stroke and brush, rear to front then the other side. Switch brushes, and then do the same. Then untangle his mane and tail and brush some more. Wax on, wax off. Then try and get him to raise up each leg to clean out his hooves. I remember leaving there that first day, thinking to myself, is this for me or did Buddy just get a forty-five minute massage for free? But from that first day, *I never left there without a smile.*

It was 2009 and the start of me once again participating and engaging in life, but I was years away from realizing it.

For High School graduation, my dad brought me a faded red 1966 Ford Falcon. It was about as ugly as a week old rotten tomato in 100 degree heat. It needed body work, a paint job, stereo, interior work, engine work and wheels. Even so, attached to it was a sense of love and freedom. For years I'd been helping Dad work on cars and now I had my own and I started working on it. All my life I had been the “grab” kid; grab that for me, grab this for me. From as early as I

BRAIN PAIN

can remember, I was handing him wrenches as he explained how and why he was replacing an alternator or bleeding the brakes. Now it was my turn. Dad sold his boat to buy me this car! It was a gift that would turn out to be instrumental in my life. It was the beginning of me venturing out on my own and applying the lessons I had learned. Dad had always been the “fix it” guy, and now I was doing the same, while finding my own way.

Now, this car ended up being many things to me, but most of all, it helped get me through college. Not from driving back and forth, but from the skills I learned while restoring it. I used those skills in other jobs, to work my way through college. I learned *hustling* from Dad. He’d make extra money buying cars, fixing them, and then reselling them. I’d end up doing the same through college. I also learned that anything worthwhile, you have to work for. **It was the genesis of “doing the work.”**

I learned to do bodywork and paint with my Falcon. It was my first canvas. At the time I didn’t know anything about bodywork and paint, but I learned. Since I didn’t have the money to get the bodywork, paint and custom paint done, I bought a book, read it, and proceeded to do it all myself. I did all the bodywork, fixing the dents and rust, we then went through an iteration of stripes and colors, allowing me to experiment and practice. By the end, it had a sweet stance, new wheels, shiny interior and interesting to say the least, custom paint job. I was driving around in my own advertisement and other people started to hire me to do *their* cars and vans. *Sometimes the gift isn’t about the gift itself; it’s what you do with it.*

My next project was a 1959 Volkswagen panel van. My dad and I rebuilt the engine, fixed the brakes and added custom tires and wheels. I also fixed all the rust and primed and painted it, the first time blue with silver flames, the last time black with silver ghost stripes. It was my first custom interior as well. I gutted it, added shag carpet on the floor and ceiling, wood paneling on the sides, custom bubble portholes on the sides, a refrigerator and sink, and a stereo in the dash. It also carried all of our band’s gear to and from our gigs. It was the epitome of a seventies badass van! I had several more vans during college. Parents of my girlfriends hated to see me coming! That boy with the van! Back then; if you had a van, you had to have custom paint. I discovered I knew how to draw back in high school.

ANTHONY JONES

If I could see it, I could sketch it. These skills and my determination facilitated incredibly well, in improving my financial situation. In other words, “I was making bank,” for a college kid.

A lot of my custom paint jobs included flames, murals and airbrushed artwork, which was popular. Much like Harley and Hot Rods festivals are popular now, van festivals were popular then, hence the sayings, “Keep on trucking.” We’d convoy to the festivals, 20-30 vans deep. Once there, I’d set up shop with a sign, get out the compressor and a case of beer and go to work.

Most of my customers would show me a piece of art or an album cover and want that on their vehicle. I’d quote them a price; we’d haggle, and then get to work. I recreated lots of album covers and murals by the artist Frank Frazetta. Conan Style pieces. I also had a team. I’d pay the neighborhood kids to sand and tape, then I’d pencil out the art on the side panels, get my background colors laid, then go to work airbrushing the scene. Afterwards, I’d lay down a coat of clear, let it dry and collect \$500, for two days work. Back in the late 70s, I was doing pretty well. I’d spend a little, but most would go into the bank for tuition and books. My dad helped out as much as possible and my now married sister and her husband kept a roof over my head for a couple of years. So, once again, Team Jones was adapting and my plan had come together. That Ford Falcon was **the catalyst** for me making it through college and onto my career path. Now Buddy and Equine therapy would be **the catalyst** for me to start “doing the work” in my recovery.

In 2008, after my release from Wilford Hall Medical Center in Texas, I returned to Las Vegas. I was assigned to a local psychologist at the Nellis Air Force Base Mental Health Facility. It was there that I met Dr. Valerie Galante. She is a Ph.D., Licensed Clinical Health Psychologist and published author. Dr. Galante was now the seventh or eighth psychologist I had seen. As I mentioned earlier, I never fully understood the various mental health issues. Unfortunately, I, as many others do, saw it as an regrettable weakness. My point of view was, “That’s what friends are for.” Talking about issues with close friends, who already knew me, allowed me to springboard problems off of them and work through some things.

I was initially resistant to therapy, as I had been with every other psychologist, but I presented myself as open. It was another box I had

BRAIN PAIN

to check. Dr. Galante was understanding and intelligent. After working with her for a few months, she told me she was on the Board of Directors for a non-profit called, “**Spirit Therapies.**” It was a center that offered Equine/Horse therapy for veterans.

I had never been much of an animal person, and definitely never horse person. In college, I was thrown from a horse twice. It was an experience that left me with no desire to pursue horse riding. Counselling was already more than I wanted to be doing. Dr. Galante never pressured, which gave me time to bring down my walls and allow myself to be open to it. Spirit Therapy had started a new program called, “**Horses Healing Heroes.**” It was launched on September 11, 2009, two years out from my first alive day.

It was there I met Laurie Willmott, the owner. Laurie’s father and brother were both veterans and her husband is a retired Las Vegas Metropolitan Corrections Officer. Her father, Harold Carpenter, was a staff sergeant in the Army Air Corps, who served in World War II. Her brother, Steven Carpenter, also served in the Air Force, during the Vietnam War. Her family members were part of the inspiration and motivation behind Horses Healing Heroes. To Laurie, it’s her way of giving back.

Numerous studies have shed light on how military veterans with PTS are finding help with equine therapy. When Laurie started the program there were only a few of them around the United States, but today there are hundreds. She was able to convince me to be open to it. Part of my resolve with getting through my initial discomfort was the promise to myself to do the work, to nip this in the bud. I remembered how my father struggled with his nightmares and I didn’t want that to define *my* future.

There is plenty of science behind human-animal interaction. The relationship (love) affects us hormonally. It kicks in the **Oxytocin** in our bodies. Oxytocin is a powerful hormone, which acts as a neurotransmitter for the brain. It’s also called the bonding hormone because it plays a powerful role in bonding. It’s the one released when we kiss or hug, and the hormone that bonds all mammals to their babies. Oxytocin and the human-animal interaction effects largely overlap. Animal assisted therapies have been shown to be beneficial for social and interpersonal actions, anxiety and high blood pressure, reduction of stress, increased trustworthiness, reduced

ANTHONY JONES

aggression, enhanced empathy and improve learning, to mention a few.

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, or EAP, is a form of psychotherapy, focused on helping people overcome emotional and physical trauma by working with horses. EAP has been used to treat a wide range of mental health and basic human development issues including attention deficit disorders, behavioral disorders, substance abuse, child abuse and post traumatic stress. Although it's not clear when this therapy was first used, it can be traced back to the ancient days of Greece. Back then, horses were primarily used as a mode of transportation, but it's well documented that they were also used in the emotional assistance of individuals with disabilities.

The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship or PATH, is renowned and accredited with the methodologies and protocols for horse therapy, which are the standards within the industry. Their focus is more on the mental-health aspects of the human-horse relationship and interaction. They provide certification within the industry and work closely with the Wounded Warrior Project. For the first three to four years, Laurie funded the operation herself, only recently receiving PATH accreditation and being accepted into the Wounded Warrior Project family.

At Spirit Therapies, their first and primary charter was to assist with children with learning disabilities, mental challenges and autism. The goal of horse therapy is to provide interventions that would not be possible through interaction with other humans. The animal interacts with humans in ways that increase mutual trust between the two. Horses are not easily manipulated or bullied. They don't trust naturally but if respected they, in return, respect.

Being prey animals, horses are also herd animals. Herd animals live by a hierarchy of rules, a family system. They must communicate with each other with **body language**. They read each other and they read us. They are naturally curious and can mirror our human behavior. Horses not only read the subtle changes in our body language, but also feel our emotions, both negative and positive, and can sense our basic intentions of harm or safety. With humans, close to 60% of our communication with each other is done through body language.

BRAIN PAIN

On my first trip to Spirit Therapies I was introduced to several of the horses. As I mingled and interacted with them, **Buddy** showed interest in me. I've been working with him ever since. For the first several months, every Friday, I was introduced to the grooming routine and as I mentioned before, I wasn't really getting it. The free massage thing. My walls were up pretty high. Not getting it, but always laughing about it.

Grooming is the initial basic social interaction between the horse and human. Similar to the way we have seen many primates do for each other. It's part of the process. You're placed in the ring, an open working area, with your horse. There is always a safety instructor there. The first thing you do is place the halter on. Although a simple thing, it took a while for me to get it right. Then you must tie the rope with a particular knot to the fencing. Now the grooming begins. You're given a kit of grooming tools, and then you get to work. You start with a hard rubber brush; brushing in a circular pattern, front to back and left to right, then move to a hard bristle brush, doing the same thing. Next, you move to a soft bristled brush, then to the horse's tail and mane and lastly his feet. It took me a while to get the foot thing down, but now I can get them done pretty fast. His pedicure, I call it.

Although, it seemed like I was doing all the work, grooming and cleaning him, the daily debrief with Laurie, going over our interaction, often revealed the real trust building between Buddy and me. We were building a bond with each other. The horse, being a prey animal, has a primary instinct for flight. My instinct is the exact opposite, to fight. Together, we found a **middle road**. It's actually beautiful to see these honest interactions. *Like us, horses just want to survive.*

Most of my sessions at Spirit Therapies last an hour, some less, some more. But the majority of my sessions include working Buddy, or what they call lunging him. I've ridden him several times, but I find myself getting more from it by interacting on the ground. There is definitely a connection with Buddy that allows me to look at my daily life and see things more clearly. Every interaction had mistakes and successes. Buddy will react to how I'm feeling as I enter the ring. If I'm irritable, he'll notice and be standoffish until I start to relax. On more than one occasion, I've found myself being worked by him.

ANTHONY JONES

As I'm lunging him around the ring, I'll notice that instead of me directing him, he's maneuvering himself to direct me.

A great instructor can make the difference between a good or bad experience. Laurie, being a certified therapist, is not only there for safety, but also as an observer. She can see our interaction from the outside, and during our debriefs, will define the challenges and obstacles she's observed and how to work toward positive change. The challenges of the horse-human interaction often mirror things going on in my life, allowing me to step back, take a breath and move through with new insight. For instance, if I'm over-tasking myself, Buddy will notice my aggravation and stress and he'll pull back until I calm down. ***Pattern Interrupt***. Whether or not the goal of each session is achieved, the insight gained on how we moved through the interaction together is the reward.

Working with horses also helps foster communication and problem solving. Just about every time I work Buddy, I'm communicating with him as he is with me. The way he turns his ears lets me know the direction he's listening to. Same with his eyes. In recent years, there have been times where I'm lunging three horses at the same time, having to problem solve their positioning in the ring, communicating their direction and keeping them working together. The workout helps build confidence. The animals reward us with their body language approval. Their tail wagging and nods equal smiles. The social interaction within a safe environment is a whole lot of fun, putting smiles on faces that have not seen them in a while.

This therapy also offers instant insight. Because horses are honest, they offer instant feedback, shedding light on the veteran's thoughts and feelings before he or the therapist are conscious of them. Negative feedback from the animal is often repeated until noticed and corrected. This is why I say Buddy is often *working me*, instead of me *working him*. This can also be beneficial for the therapist observing, helping to understand the veteran's interpretation of his environment and his interaction with that environment.

Animals are honest and pure, providing a non-judgmental environment for the veteran. Pre-injury, I was a very social person, but after my return, I thought everyone I came into contact with could see my mental deficiencies and judge me for them. Working with Buddy allowed me to strengthen my interaction skills, boosting my

BRAIN PAIN

confidence in a pure and trusting environment. There's no risk of rejection, criticism or judgment, only truth and connection.

I had a hard time with trust after I returned from Iraq. There's a certain safe feeling you get when you finally place your trust in another and vice versa. Although Buddy is a pretty big horse, he knows me and I know him. He trusts me and I trust him. Buddy was a big playful teenager but we knew each other's boundaries and adhered to the unwritten rules of engagement. We respect each other. We also understand the boundaries of assertiveness and aggressiveness. **Most importantly, it's a form of healing *that doesn't come from a pill!***

It's hard to get warfighters to make that first step; to do the work, to get out there and be open to the process. Once they do, then the positive energy seems to come out and a lot of our negative feelings are left at the gate. We've had many returning wounded warriors, who came to Spirit Therapies and enjoyed the experience, only to fall back into the simplicity of medications and alcohol, easily discovering excuses to not do the work. There have been many days that I could have easily come up with a reason not to go, but there has never been a day that I've left *without a smile*.

Spirit Therapy not only deals with wounded warriors, but their family members as well. Millions of children in the United States have had a parent deployed to a war zone. As I mentioned earlier in my chapter about "Brats," the children of warfighters often face their own battles here at home. My mom, sister, brother and I had been through the stress of possibly losing, not only our loved one, but the one who provided for our well being. It could sometimes be overwhelming.

Having grown up the son of a father at war and a mother who was our only support system, horse therapy would've been a great activity to participate in as a family. Today, an increasing number of military spouses and children are forced to deal with their own isolation and lack of support, while their spouses are deployed. With today's Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) military families are enduring not only multiple deployments, but shorter time between deployments and sometimes longer deployments. These parental deployments can lead to depression and isolation, as well as poor academic performance in children, as in my case. During my father's

ANTHONY JONES

second deployment I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. It was only through mentoring by my English teacher, that I found a way to get back on track.

The plethora of emotions that family members go through with parents returning from war with TBI and PTS, can be numerous. From the fear of losing their loved ones, to the joy of having them return alive, to the frustration and disappointments of their actions when they return. In my case, it was always being afraid of that military green car pulling up with the Marines in their dress uniforms.

For families, horse therapy is a form of emotional “pattern interrupt,” in a safe and trusting environment. It fosters communication between parents and children. It’s a friendly environment, where doing the work doesn’t always feel like doing the work. You’re focused on the moment. For me, doing the work also means exercising. Horse therapy is not only a mental exercise, but a physical one as well. Just about every time Buddy and I workout, we both break a sweat. Lunging, turning and practicing the various commands can be strenuous. It’s both a physical and mental exercise.

A major part of my TBI management strategy is exercising my brain. **The entire horse therapy process is one big “Solution Generating Machine.”** It’s filled with hundreds of choices; thousands of calculations and predictions for movements are being made. The consequences of these are immediate. It’s not just the horse that’s part of the interaction, but the instructor/observer, who can see it from another perspective, allowing for an introspective debriefing. Whether the workout goals are reached or not doesn’t really matter because its all part of the problem solving and brain exercise.

One of the other wounded warriors that participates in the program is Danny, an Army veteran. Danny returned from Vietnam socially dysfunctional and very angry. Much like many of us, he didn’t like crowds and lived his life in seclusion, staying away from others, with no toleration for them. When he was young he had been around horses quite a bit, training to be a jockey. He had been away from horses for over 40 years before coming to Spirit Therapies and being re-introduced to them.

Danny’s VA therapist recommended Spirit Therapies. After being around horses for most of his younger life, working with them

BRAIN PAIN

again brought him back to a place of relaxation. As he described it, “It took a large weight off my shoulders.” Working with horses helped his social interactions, patience and tolerance. He also volunteers, helping with the children, enjoying their interaction. Danny is “doing the work.”

Kim is another Army wounded warrior who returned from Iraq with the anxiety and guilt many of us have. Kim is one of the funniest guys I know and if you were to meet him on the street, you’d think he was just another funny guy who happened to be a veteran. Outwardly, he’s confident and funny, but throughout the years he’s been fighting a battle with the demons that followed him back home. He’s fighting to get the work done just like me. That is how we became friends. Doing the work is easier said than done. *Chaos* is insidious, nefarious and patient. It can re-engage you at your most vulnerable moments.

A few years ago, I met a wounded warrior with a service dog at an airport. The dog was lying at his feet and when I approached, he sat up, alerting his owner and putting himself in between the warfighter and me. The dog was kind, yet firm and on guard. It was incredible!

Service dogs are trained for up to six months and not all dogs graduate to Service. They are usually one to two years old at the time of placement, energetic and require a significant amount of attention, as animals normally do. But these dogs can sense anxiety, alerting their owner prior to fear settling in. *Pattern Interrupt*. The more the wounded warrior can control his anxiety, the more he can adjust to the slower-paced civilian life. The earlier they can be warned of high anxiety moments, the sooner they can catch themselves before their emotions get away from them and *Chaos* slips in.

These programs not only help the warfighter, *but help decrease the overall cost to our healthcare system and society*, by keeping our wounded warriors as productive members of society. Service dogs can also help children deal with the stressors of parents being deployed. They can provide social support to children, offering a calming presence, as well as helping the children deal with and communicate their fears, anger and anxieties.

Human-animal interaction therapies are not cures for TBI or PTSD, but they are instrumental tools in overcoming the various

ANTHONY JONES

anxieties that are new to the warfighter and their families. Animals provide unconditional trust, acceptance and bonding, helping us move through our anxiety and stress.

I did the work for almost seven years, not always understanding why, many times not wanting to go. Buddy reminded me to get going and search out alternatives for working through the brain pain and fighting *Chaos*. **Buddy** passed away in the spring of 2014, after the initial writing of this book. I've never been much of an animal or pet person, but that has changed. For those of you with animals, you can understand the pain of losing a beloved animal friend. He was young; only thirteen and it was unexpected. Colic. His last gift to me was the gift of sadness. ***I felt the loss. I cared.*** Something I hadn't done in a long time. He gave me more than I realized and helped me more than I can say. The program has been a consistent source of my recovery and never once, did I leave without a smile. ***We*** did the work.

It all started here for me. Working with Buddy and Laurie. Getting out, interacting with others, becoming engaged in the world, finding the courage to get back on the ski slopes, get out to the mountains, camping and biking, picking up my guitar and getting my jam back; ***the catalyst*** to get me going again – just like my Ford Falcon did in college.

I realized, through writing this book, I wasn't going to become a suicide statistic. 22 a day.

“Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift.” — Mary Oliver.

BRAIN PAIN



Me and 'Buddy.' (photo courtesy Karen Swigart)



Myself, Patrisha Perks, Spirit Therapies owner Laurie Willmott and Lynn Ross spreading the word and advocating for the “Horses Healing Heros” program.

ANTHONY JONES



CLOSE

AFTER ACTION

I believe the meaning of life is rooted in lessons learned. Lessons learned in the name of good and righteousness, strengthens our endeavor to persevere. We've been given this gift from our parents and ancestors. The propagation of our species. Lessons learned are the core of who we are, and the spine of our evolutionary process.

Exercising your body and brain is huge. It's easy to fall prey to sloth, lethargy, smoking, drinking and drugs. Exercise enhances your cardiac performance, leading to better oxygen flow, leading to more oxygen feeding your brain, leading to more natural endorphins. Looking back, this is what Dad did. He was a Marine and looked like the poster in the recruiting office. **He exercised, ate healthy and kept busy.**

Keeping myself in shape, exercising my brain and body, maintaining and even enhancing my skill sets keeps me ready for when everything goes bad. *Chaos* can take me there in a split second, not to mention the other maladies that come along naturally in life. Continually doing the work **prepares me for the inevitable setbacks** to come. It's like a savings account. When those dark days come, you're stronger and more capable of taking them on.

Remember, moving through is not always moving forward, but staying the course is. It's all part of the journey. Sometimes the plan doesn't work. The "flow system" is all about working around the obstacles and adjusting to the friction. It doesn't get better by

BRAIN PAIN

following a single path. There will always be paths and crossroads. Some things will work and some things won't work. Things that once worked may not work again. Keep searching! This journey will trigger frustration, anger and hypervigilance, all which can spiral out of control. Understand that these only occur *because* you're doing the work.

Life throws so much at us that we need to be able to understand what's really important, so we can make smarter decisions. My goal is to be to be happy, to once again enjoy my life. To smile, laugh and connect. When everything goes to black, what really mattered? Don't wait to find out. **I prioritized what's most important.**

Being honest with my brother Marcos led me to admitting; I was ebbing and flowing through peaks and troughs, and needed to slowdown and **find the middle road**. This was one of my biggest discoveries. After years of still thinking I was still my old self, I came to realize I wasn't. I may never be. The peaks and troughs of hypervigilance and depression were taking their toll. Once I found that I needed to operate the middle road and managed my life accordingly, my pain became more controllable. Slowing down is hard to do, but it's all part of doing the work. Just like running a race, I learned to pace myself.

I am losing some memories. Not just the short term ones, but the "life event" ones. Memories like dinners with friends, family visits, the special days. Last week my mom showed me photos of us at a dinner and I had no recollection; empty, gone. What I've seen through the years is that when my dad forgets something, he gets angry. I'm not going to be that person. I'm injured, not stupid. It's not my fault. I'm going to **embrace my injuries, and the memories I still have! Embrace yours!**

This is my new standard. I'm not the same person I once was. Just like nothing will bring back lost limbs, our brain and emotions have changed. To this day, my dad still fights those demons of Khe Sanh, but he's made them part of who he is and stayed the course.

Keeping busy and engaged is at the heart of our fight against *Chaos*. On one of those Wounded Warrior Project getaways I was re-introduced to mountain biking. I took the challenge and found it to be one of my new daily hobbies and smiles. **I'm living my new standard.**

ANTHONY JONES

Retraining your brain means learning to accept, adapt and adjust. Multitasking is problematical with a damaged brain. Don't spread yourself thin. Focus on the task at hand. I have specific daily routines that help me move through to the next steps. Simple things like going to bed at a specific time and getting up at a specific time; meds at night, meds in the morning, etc. Focused protocols in the morning give my brain time to warm up. In my case, my routine gives me the best chance for minimal pain and anxiety throughout the day. **Find your confidence** and stay the course. *Don't worry about the feeling stupid; just think about the being alive!*

How do you even describe loss of passion. Passion is almost synonymous with smiles, enthusiasm, excitement and infatuation. It takes over your soul and shines outward for everyone to see. Without passion the world can seem black and white, boring, lack-luster, dull and un-interesting. One of the traits that have always defined me was **my passion**. I was a musician, college athlete, military officer, entrepreneur, writer, restaurateur and security consultant. Post-injury, I lost all passion.

For a long time, my emotional connection to family, friends and the things that I love, were fogged over. Everything seemed dull and un-interesting. A large part of writing this was to try and re-acquire my passions and emotions.

“Doing the work” for me, started with Spirit Therpaies program “Horses Healing Heros” and my horse “Buddy.” I started to feel the connection and love. That led to me taking up snowboarding, mountain biking, camping and finding my guitar again; all in attempt to re-ignite my passions. Biking, skiing and guitar playing were all things I loved as a kid. Those days of innocence and bliss, sans the adult responsibilities, put smiles back on my face. I'm trying to find mine, try finding yours.

Do the work, (DTW.) It's so simple, yet so hard. You woke up this morning; you're walking and talking. You're alive, so get your ass going! Only you can turn the keys and put it in drive. Only you can “do the work.” *“Do The Work” to strengthen your mental health “Chain.”* Otherwise *Chaos* will slip in and bite your ass with his razor sharp teeth. He'll shake you back and forth, ripping out your soul. All the while, you're lying on the couch watching cable, saying you'll get to it tomorrow.

BRAIN PAIN

Writing this has strengthened my hope of staving off a future of neuro-degenerative disease. Although hard, exercising my brain to access information, formulate the thoughts, positions and opinions has helped me believe that my brain is “working around” its deficiencies and that my memories are still intact, somewhere.

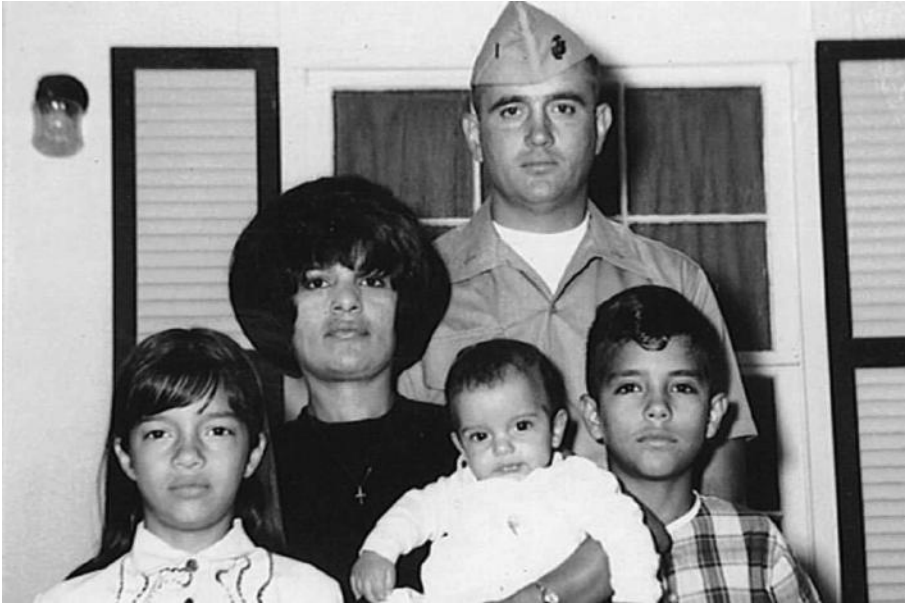
Keep engaged, busy and purposeful! Of course, life will continue to throw challenges and obstacles at us. I hope to continue my resolve of doing the work, pedaling as fast as necessary to ride my line, to keep my balance and leave *Chaos* behind. I’m staying the course, chasing my clarity, seeking my comfort, finding my clam, hoping for many more smiles along the way. *Pedal. Bleed. Repeat!*

Will you do the work? Up to you!

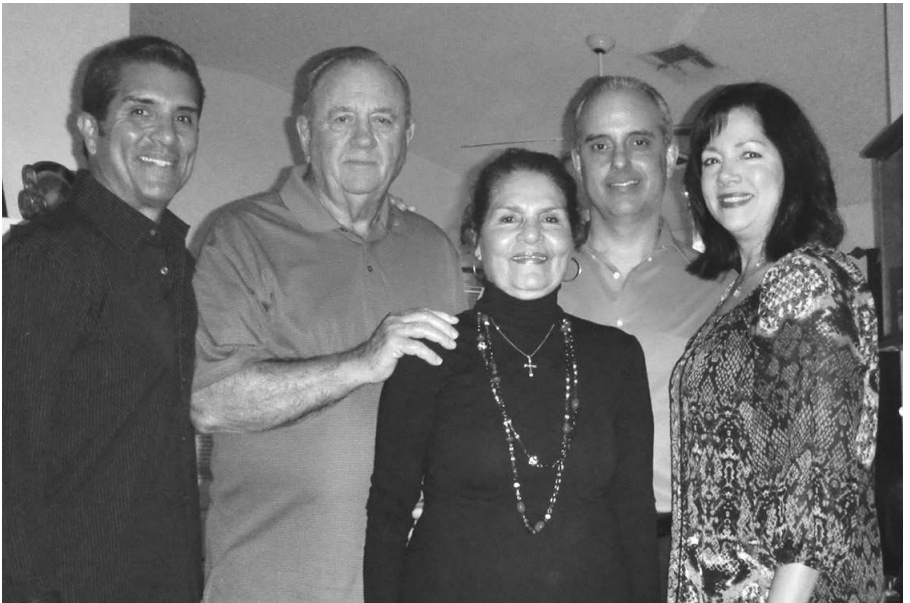
DTW



ANTHONY JONES



Team Jones.



Me, my dad "WK," my mom "Anna," my brother "Marcos" and my sister "Pamela." Walking, Talking, Happy to be here!!!

BRAIN PAIN



Taken during a followup visit to the Baghdad ER, (28th CSH). This is the natural light that showed up. I call this my Angel Photo.

Faith moves me forward, doing the work.

Excerpt Chapter - "Horse Therapy"



www.MajorAnthonyJones.com

"Brain Pain is an absolutely fantastic book and needs to be read by all, especially medical and mental health personnel."

Rear Admiral Joan M. Engel,
18th Director of the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps

"An astonishing account of one mans journey into the deepest recesses of a mind wounded by war. A personal yet scientific look at the effects of Traumatic Brain Injury."

Special Forces Major
David Messer, Vietnam Veteran

www.SpiritTherapies.org

