



MILITARY RESILIENCE™
PROJECT

Personal Testimonials

Ground Hero Trips

June 29, 2011

"Going to the Ground Zero site was a semi-spiritual experience. I feel privileged to have been at the area where thousands of people lost their lives, and to see rebirth. The builders working at the site really put a lot of thought into the whole area. The new construction truly is a commemoration to the 9/11 victims and their families. When the construction is finished, the world will be amazed by what has been built."

~DL, Air force

"For me, the trip to Ground Zero was closure. After the 9/11 attacks, I joined the armed services. I have been deployed many times since. The Ground Zero Memorial shows that where there is death... life can continue. I am glad I was given the opportunity to experience something so amazing. Seeing this first hand makes me so proud to serve and defend our nation."

~MC, Army

"I had a great time, and a sad time, knowing that many people lost their lives. It was good to see a beautiful monument going under construction that will bring our people together."

~EM-R, Army

"This trip to Ground Zero is the equivalent of me going to the Black History Museum in Birmingham Alabama. I haven't been to a museum or even something symbolic to our nation's history in years. While I was there, I was inspired to see how many construction workers have been putting countless hours of dedication to once again rebuild something that was once a monument of freedom, full of light and hope. Even though Pearl Harbor was the last attack on America, it too today shows us that life will always blossom again. When this project is done, the memory will remain, but the driving force will be even stronger."

~CM, Army

"While I was visiting Ground Zero, I felt like I was lost in a dream surrounded by an infinite sea of hope and inspiration. The planning and execution of this monumental project leaves the mind to feel in awe over the positive possibilities that mankind is capable of. Out of tragedy comes hope and out of hope, comes inspiration and out of inspiration, comes greatness."

~MM, Army

"This event has given me more closure, showed me there is hope, and made me feel that I mean something. It made me feel alive."

~JR, Army

"I very much appreciated my visit to Ground Zero. It somehow made my three deployments since 9/11 feel that much more worthwhile. I was honored to be provided the chance to visit the site of 9/11, which I will not forget. I had no idea the respect that the NYC Firefighters held for soldiers prior to my visit to the Vinegar Hill Fire Department."

~DO, Army

"This tour of Ground Zero was nice. To see the progress of the after-math was truly beneficial to me."

~ZT, Army

"This trip was absolutely great. I feel honored and privileged to have visited such an important part of American history. Despite the tragedy of many people losing their lives, they will always be honored and remembered. Then being able to visit a firehouse was priceless. The hospitality

and kindness from the firefighters was second to none. June 29, 2011 will always be one of the best days of my life."

~LH, Army

September 22, 2011

"To me, this trip was a great experience because I got to see the reason I fought and served my country. The experience I felt was sad, but good, because so many people were lost but we began over as a country and realized what freedom really was."

~DL, Army

"On September 11, 2001, I was just finishing up P.T. We were on a bus and heard that the twin towers were on fire. When I arrived back to my barracks room, I saw smoke in the towers. I saw the second plane hit on live television. After that moment, I knew my life would change forever. When I arrived at the 9/11 memorial, I was amazed. I love how our country, and especially New York City, made such a tragic day and site into a beautiful memorial. The trip made me feel great about what I have done for our country. I am and always will be proud to be a United States American."

~CC, Army

"The trip to ground zero was moving. I recommend everybody to go. I was touched by all the lives lost on 9/11."

~JJ, Army

"To me, this trip was amazing. To see and hear all the information of that tragic day opened my eyes to what people went through. I'd highly recommend anyone that has the opportunity to go; jump at the chance."

~SG, Navy

"The experience was quite overwhelming. I am glad the program allowed us to experience this spectacular event."

~RG, Army

February 13, 2012

"We arrived in lower Manhattan on a cold and crisp morning early on Feb 13th. As we arrived at the 9/11 museum we were met by one of the most amazing people I have ever met. Working for FDNY for over 30 years Lee's story will forever be imprinted in my head. Being a Vietnam veteran himself, he understood the pain in each and every individual's eyes. We walked through the photo gallery that love ones donated pictures of the fallen family members. It actually placed

a picture to the name of the giant scroll adjacent to it. Once we left and were outside, my heart was in my mouth as I was reflecting about what I had just witnessed.

We departed to our next tour which was the actual memorial sight where the towers stood. You could actually feel the spirits still present and it brought chills to my bones and made the hair on my neck stand up. You really have things put into perspective when standing in a park with all the new Freedom Towers being constructed adjacent to the old buildings in the neighborhood. It was a real treat to place my hands on the metal plates which are heated and leave a momentary imprint of my palm. Finally, while walking out of the park we all had the opportunity to touch the Survivor Tree.

Our final stop was at Vinegar Hill Firehouse which housed Engine 80, Ladder 23. We sat down and ate this lunch that could have fed three times the people. The ice was broken and the stories became reality as each and every one spoke. Some funny some so real but to understand that both we and they placed our lives in danger daily created a quick and common bond. The ride back was quiet; it was like everyone was overwhelmed on one hand, and reflecting on the other. What a day for the first time being back to New York since that tragic day..."

~SB, Army

"The trip to Ground Zero was pivotal in my recovery. The staff has a great amount of experience in treating service members and it shows. I recommend this program to anyone who is suffering from PTSD."

~MB, Navy

"My trip to Ground Zero was amazing. On our way to Ground Zero, many thoughts were racing through my mind. Will this trip make me angry? Will I feel some kind of closure? This is where it all started. Anxiety levels started to rise as we approached the unknown. First stop, visitors center. It was as if we were reliving 9/11 through Mr. Ielpi's experience, his memories. His son perished as a result of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. A fireman's jacket and helmet are some of the only remains of Mr. Ielpi's son, on display at the Tribute Center. It was an honor to be on Mr. Ielpi's tour, as a feeling of both sadness and pride filled my heart. Next stop, Ground Zero Memorial. Not what I expected. It seemed a little informal to me. As I approached the memorial, I noticed the names on the metal display. I tried to touch every name that I could, as if I were sending them messages, "You will never be forgotten." It was then that I put to rest all of the questions I had. This trip was not about me. To me, it was about paying my respects to those were murdered, and to those who gave their lives while trying to save lives."

~MP, Army

"Monday, February 13, 2012 in New York City: A Great Day! Ground Zero Memorial and the Tribute Center touched the memory of the impact 9/11 had on America. Lee Ielpi is a special

man and was very well received and respected by us. To top it off, the Vinegar Firehouse was superb and to us, it was an honor and a thrill to partake in their stellar hospitality. Thanks so much.”

~KD, Army

“After 9/11 happened on live television, I felt a purpose in my enlistment in the US Navy. I served for those who lost their lives that day and the many who perished trying to save lives. I began calling the site “Ground Hero” because 343 heroes died trying to save thousands who were murdered that day. The staff took us on a field trip to the 9/11 Tribute Center, where I met a father (Mr. Lee Ielpi), who had lost his son during 9/11, as well as many firemen who were his friends. I am overcome with emotions as the Tribute Center is incredible. As our group travels to the 9/11 Memorial Site, I feel my service to my country is worth something. Everything I have gone through is choked up in my throat as we walk into a quiet hallowed ground, where the names of the fallen are stamped on metal slabs surrounding World Trade Center #1 and #2 waterfall memorials. The sound of people speaking quietly, the sounds of the water, sends a sense of peace and closure to me. Ground Hero has given me a place to see, touch, hear and feel that my service is done. My injury to me was worth it and what an honor it is to be able to touch the Survivor’s tree with my embattled hand. I am a survivor, my life will continue, just as the 9/11 Memorial will continue to survive and grow. Ground Hero is alive with the memories of the Americans who died there and the NYPD/FDNY who perished trying to save lives. I feel peace. To make the trip even more awesome, we visited the Vinegar Hill FDNY gang, where the firemen cooked us lunch. I will always cherish this day. You all have given me a sense of closure and peace plus the hope and strength to go on. Thank You!”

~JR, Navy, Marine

March 2, 2014

“I grew up on a farm. My family called me “nature boy”. Each season had a big impact on me. Winter is for going in and down. The frost works the earth, preparing it for new growth. The last month or so, I have been quite agitated. I do not know why. I felt I was not going deep down and this always scares me. I’ve had more depression, anger and anxiety than usual. Yesterday, you took me down, deep down. Maybe it was tears unshed keeping me from doing that.

Almost always, after an experience like yesterday, my dreams relive it. This time, I dreamt I was at Ground Zero the night before. Not the towers in flames but the Memorial. I had been there once before. I didn’t realize how emotionally charged I was until our opening circle and I heard it in my voice. I wrote on the “today” and “tomorrow” cards quiet and peace. I added nothing at the end of the day. I did not feel quiet or peaceful. I felt emotionally tumultuous. I am grateful for that. I went to a vet retreat with Dr. Ed Tick (War and the Soul) last fall. He talked briefly on how we fear “re-traumatizing” and “triggering” and run if we feel we are encountering it.

Re-traumatizing for me would be a rocket attack. That is not happening in NY right now. I am not going to be re-traumatized. I rarely watch a violent movie but I am often stuck watching violent previews and they are triggers for me. Dr. Tick says stay with the trigger. Don't avoid it. Be present with it. A vet said to me, after I had co-facilitated a VCD in Jan, "You took me deeper than I have gone in a long time and that's what I want when I come here." I don't remember the Tribute Center but I suppose I was there when I first visited the Memorial. Mickey replaying the last messages from the firefighters broke my heart. When I spoke at our opening circle about my anger on 9-11, what I hadn't understood or come to terms with is that anger had made my heart hard. A hard heart is something else that terrifies me. Tears break that hard heart. I went straight to the Survivor Tree at the Memorial. It took me a while to dare touch it but then I put a hand on an old wound, half rot and half healthy. I talked with the tree. I grew up talking with trees. I ask them what they want me to know. I never know when or where or how an answer will come. I said we are both survivors. I wished it a long life, a better life. I wished it plenty of sunshine, rain and good soil. I wished it plenty of love. I thanked it for letting me touch it. Then I walked over to the pit, listened to the water and put my fingers on the names of fireman. Back at the Survivor Tree, Mickey shaking my hand and saying 'welcome home', stunned me. I don't remember much about Viet Nam. I never came home. I knew I had become less than human. I knew I did not deserve to live. I was so angry I became an atomic bomb and then spent the rest of my life struggling not to detonate. What I had in the Army and would never have again was a camaraderie I would never stop missing. When I became less than human, it was lost forever. The firehouse visit was a powerful reminder of that. Their welcome and kindness I am not quite ready to accept. The names and photos on the walls of dead brothers was more heartbreak. Heartbreak after heartbreak after heartbreak, that was my day with you. I could not have asked for more. I am deeply grateful."

~EC, Army

Twelfth Night Testimonials

“The collaboration of MRP with the SIFP and JP and the other Community Organizations is a milestone moment reflective of respect for those who serve and have served on the front lines of freedom for the US. It is this freedom that protects artistic freedom and freedom of expression. My guest and myself, a Vietnam Veteran and a current Ensign in the USNR, were most appreciative of the complementary front row reserved seats. The show itself was marvelously staged, acted and awesomely entertaining. Thank you.”

~Bob Raphael

“It was such a pleasure to have been a member of this Public Works ensemble. The professionalism, expertise and warmth of the artistic and production teams was a joy to experience each and every moment. Many elements needed to come together to make this show happen: the artistic vision, the music, the casting, the training of community members in song and dance, so much more. That synergy of effort, the complex planning and execution resonated with my experience in military campaign planning and execution. But here the end result was musical, artistic joy, not bringing force to bear on a strategic objective. I'm sure the parallels resonated with my fellow veterans in the cast as well, and from pirate, people of Illyria to Picachu we know we done darn good. Hashtag #12thnightveteranpride. Thanks to The Public and community partner The Military Resilience Project for this wonderful opportunity.”

~Col. (USAF, Ret.) James P. Stanton

“The parallels are strong: a lot of people making it happen with sweat, guts and smarts. Great show! The original music score was well written and performed with excellence! The way the show ended with everyone on stage was brilliant.”

~Robert Lambert

Employment Specialist /Case Manager

Easter Seals NY Veteran Program

“I wanted to thank you for the Twelfth Night voucher. I attended the show on Friday night and really enjoyed it! I appreciated the blend of professional stage actors with “civilians”- there was absolutely no differentiation between the two. I thought this adaptation of Twelfth Night was wonderful! I felt like I was watching a Broadway play! Once again, thank you for offering veterans like myself an opportunity to enjoy the arts in NYC (free of charge!) Be well,”

~Alice

“This past weekend I got to experience a live theatre performance of Twelfth Night at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park. The production was a wonderful adaptation of a classic set

in modern time with a lesson that love that is timeless. It was wonderful to see the city of New York working with many different agencies to bring this wonderful show to the public. It goes to show government can do great things!!!”

~Andrea Samide

“We had the privilege of accepting the Military Resilience Project VIP tickets to the performance of Twelfth Night at the Delacorte theatre last weekend. As a military veteran family, we were honored to be invited and encouraged to see that so many veterans and family members were given the opportunity to contribute to the NY theatre scene. The feeling of community that MRP offers is unmatched. The cast and crew of Twelfth Night demonstrated that same heart, community and spirit and we felt a part of something larger than ourselves. The show was exquisite and offered a respite to our family from the stress and juggling that our day to day lives afford us. We laughed and grinned from ear to ear, we were touched by the talent and the passion with which the performers told the story of love and acceptance that Twelfth Night is. The entire day was magical and we are so grateful to have been able to witness the miracle that was this show. From the youngest of us (7 and 10) to the adults in the bunch, we all took away something fun, light and provocative from Shakespeare's tale. Military Resilience Project is an organization with a powerful mission and matched with the Public Works dynamic at the Public Theatre, the feelings were raw, real and connected Thank you”

~Don, Ashia, Madeline and Bennett Mann

“I can't say enough how much I enjoyed being a part of Twelfth Night and sharing it with my family and friends. I am still overwhelmed by the brilliant talent I got to see up close during every rehearsal and performance, and I will always be proud to say I shared the stage with some of the most dedicated performers anywhere. It was an honor and a pleasure, and a great learning experience.

Most of all, I am thankful for the opportunity to meet and get to know so many outstanding people. For the first time in a very long time, I felt appreciated just for being me, and I hope all those whom I have met and connected with in some way felt my appreciation for them in return. Special thanks to you, Suzie, Mike, Ellie, and the rest of the group for welcoming me.”

~Shannon Rhett

“Was indeed a pleasure being part of the production Twelfth Night. What was so special is that we became a family. Especially love the words of the music which reflects on what's going on in the world we live in today. I kind of wish that the production was extended for a few more weeks.”

~Tom Barzey

“Twelfth Night was more than I could’ve ever hoped for. As an actor, the setting itself was overwhelming as there was an immense sense of professionalism in everything Public Works and The Public Theater did from the stage managers to the set to performance itself. But as a young adult and a human being, it was such a genuine experience to be with people who gave up their free time to be in this sacred and loving group, filled with people from all over the city, as well as the world. There’s nothing else I would’ve rather done this summer than be a part of this production. I hope to be in it again soon.”

~Lucas

“Just wanted to express our sincere appreciation to the Military Resilience Project for extending an invite to my husband and I for an incredible evening of live theatre at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park. We enjoyed an amazing adaptation of Shakespeare’s, “Twelfth Night” under a star-filled sky in one of the best venues in NYC! The acting, costumes and timeless message that the story conveyed was truly unforgettable! We wish to take this opportunity to thank this wonderful organization for all they do to make a difference in the lives of our servicemen and women who have given... and continue to give so much to make America the wonderful place it is!!! We look forward to many more wonderful programs sponsored by this amazing organization!!!”

~Lynda & Tom Dunn, Clifton Park, NY

“Wanted to share our feeling and thoughts regarding the production of a “Twelfth Night” that we attended in Central Park. The setting in the Park at the “Delacorte” could not have been more refreshing. The fresh air under the star’s and the wonderful weather we enjoyed were just right for a night out to enjoy this performance. From the opening number, to the last note played, we were totally engrossed with this modern day adaption of this play. I have seen “Five” different productions of this classic, and this, by far is my Favorite. Beauty best describes the musical experience we enjoyed, from the leads to all the supporting cast. Christine and I felt overjoyed with the experience, and cannot remember when we had a more enriching evening out. The cast was “Outstanding”. Your involvement, and contribution, to both support, and share this with us can never be repaid. We are indebted to you, and have our continued gratitude for making it possible to attend, and be in the audience to see this Shakespearean play in a whole new light. It will bring a warm feeling of joy for the future to come. In Short, we are still discussing this after attending several weeks later, and I just had to share our feelings of Joy and continued Happiness with the whole experience. Fans for life”

~“Veteran at Large”

Roy & Christine Dunn

Rockaway, NJ

Warrior's Weekend Retreat - A Look Back!

"On the last weekend in the month of may 29, 30, 31, we met aynisa, the co-founder of the military resilience project, along with suzie, randi, andrea, and rob "the shaman." i will explain later, not to worry, i promise. Myself and 14 other "lucky veterans" were invited to a warrior's weekend retreat, upstate ny in the adirondacks. All the fresh air you can breathe, free. Fresh clean lake to swim and fish in. A gem of mother nature left untouched by man. A weekend in the woods.

We were all physically fit, highly intelligent, good looking, and honorable. We may have served in different wars, but we all shared several warrior traits. They are honor, integrity, courage, and resilience. While many others said "hell no, we won't go" we said "yes we will."

Uncle sam finally gave something back, righting a wrong that went overlooked for years. To all the brave soldiers who have borne the bitter taste of battle, and asked for nothing in return, except their pride, dignity, and respect.

We all met friday for the first time in the bronx as strangers and returned as friends for life. Rob the shaman drove and drove and drove, as it was a long journey. He told us some tall tales, some of them were true, i'm sure. We drove rob crazy with questions, just like we used to do with dad. Ida, shy and reserved at first, proclaimed that she no longer laughs, so naturally she laughed all the way for the next 5 and 1/2 hours non-stop.

Finally, rob delivered us safely to our destination, paul's college. Located in the small hamlet of brighton, monroe county, upstate new york. Upon arrival, we were given packets of our itinerary for the weekend. Number one on the list was food. As we were late for lunch, dinner was served in the main dining room on a first come, first serve basis. Kudos to the fast and the hungry.

For now we are curious and anxious about the remaining part of our day and what it will bring. We have put our faith and trust in the capable hands of our intelligent, skillful, and trustworthy therapists. Workshops were the order of the day, orientation with aynisa, an evening with suzie and her Broadway talents. Suzie taught us to ask a question before you judge anyone.

A nature walk with rob, followed by a musical interlude with rob, because music soothes the savage beast, don't you think. It worked wonders for me. And we all love music. Wrap up with randi and aynis. Time to call it a night. Let's face it, who amongst us wants to miss this weekend.

Saturday morning brings such promise. Only time for a quick shower, breakfast, fuel for the day, and we are ready for another amazing day in paradise. Swimming, kayaking, canoeing on

glorious st. Regis lake. A little cold at first, but if you just dove in and under, you were just fine. Waterside qi gong with rob "the shaman," stretching with suzie, boy i thought i'd never reach my feet again. What, was that another cartwheel by suzie? How does she do it? I was once that limber. "Yesterday when i was young" a great song by roy clark and it fit me perfectly.

A warrior chat with aynisa, actually it sounded more like a pep talk to me. I've heard them before and they all work. We're all helping each other with words of encouragement and actions. For we have learned our lessons from the service, leave no man/woman behind. You have to be so pc today.

Saturday morning, rob drives us to baker's mountain, and we are on our first hike up, up, and away. The trail is well marked, along with two guides. One in front and one bringing up the rear. But you still have to climb by yourself, one step at a time. Right, left, right, left, wait. Where have i heard that before? Baker's mountain awaits. We are starting our ascent, here we come. You will not defeat us city slickers. Wow, this is more fun than i could have ever imagined.

Hiking up baker, 15 physically fit warriors, this is gonna be like a walk in the park. We are fearless, for we have weathered so much more, really just how hard could it be? One couple comes down with their two dogs. Another couple hiking with their 2 children and a baby along for the free ride. Other hikers along the way both going up and coming down, looking no worse for wear. For the most of us, i'm sure this was our first hiking experience, and we loved it. So nice let's do it twice.

We have finally reached the summit, together. And what a view to behold. We took some precious time to take it all in. The beauty of nature left untouched. A few pictures, a few hugs. A life changing experience. Good people=good times. And now back to camp courage and just in time, for dinner is ready.

Tonight we have an evening workshop with aynisa and randi. They will teach us how to embrace all the positive energy in the universe, to appreciate the positive ideals and principles in our lives, to learn how to rid ourselves of all the negativity that surrounds us. Including negative people with bad karma. How to replace energy with positive energy. To remove our weaknesses, and to fill them with our strengths. From now on we only think positive thoughts and surround ourselves with positive people.

There is nothing more relaxing and comforting than a roaring fireplace. Ablaze with some of the brilliant colors of the universe, reds, whites, blues, and yellows. Tonight's workshop is to write some of the negatives going on in our lives or some things you can't let go of that are still hurting you. You will need to toss them into the fireplace, as fire consumes everything. The fire

will help you cleanse your mind, purify your soul, and heal your aching hear. Follow this with music by rob 'the shaman.' he will lead us in what i call a native chant. Just listening to his chants, repeating them over and over, you find yourself enterting into a zen like state. Okay the mystery that is rob revealed, and why we call him "the shaman."

Sleep comes easy tonight, as it was a full and fulfilling day.

The birds are chirping, signaling the dawn of a new day. Sunday morning arrives much too early, for it means this fabulous weekend of self discovery, keen insights, and inner perspective, is fast drawing to an end. First, breakfast, and next a scavenger hunt in a light drizzle. We were broken up into groups of four, and given a list of 20 items to find. The hardest item to find was an acorn. The first group to find all of the items wins. Two groups were really clever, as finding an acorn here was very difficult. One group drew a picture of one. Antother pasted a picture of one on their paper. First prize was a free ride back to the city. But rest assured, none of us were left behind.

Here's a heartfelt thank you to aynisa, suzie, andrea, randi, and rob, for they have given so much of themselves. They all deserve a big shout out. "Hey guys thanks, we appreciate all you have done for us." and a special thank you to rob, who drove 12 hours or more with no complaints. On the way back home, we stopped at a veteran's home, who welcomed us with open arms and a big spread of food. Life doesn't get any better than this.

Our ride home was quiet and still, as everyone is tired and beat from the experience of a lifetime, as advertised. All returned as friends for life."