Contemporary Media Forum: Books, Films, and Audiocassettes


This is a poignantly written book that gives a deeply personal look at therapy “from the other side of the couch.” Instead of a compendium of case scenarios presented by a clinician, Ron Zaczek’s approach is to examine his own therapy (and therapist) as he battles with his own Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Since Farewell, Darkness is not only about the author’s war experiences, but rather an attempt to find psychological peace, it goes beyond being another war story to being a testament to hope and recovery.

Ron Zaczek is a United States Marine Corps veteran who served as a helicopter crew chief and door gunner in Vietnam. He had kept those memories bottled up inside until one day in 1981 when he felt he was about to lose control, and entered therapy at a Vet Center. Farewell, Darkness begins with a simple Statement: “Three times I’ve lost control.” The rest of the book is an examination of what that means and how that feels for Zaczek. He spends six years in therapy dissecting his memories of Vietnam and connecting them emotionally. The fear and the pain, he did not allow or could not allow himself to feel in a combat zone, he discovers in the Vet Center. Zaczek is able to create for the reader a visual image of his Vietnam memories as they clutter up the office in the Vet Center. He quickly moves from the telling of the tale to the voice of his therapist striving for interpretation and insight. Since Zaczek’s writing about the war is so captivating, the reader too is brought back to the therapy by the interruptions of the therapist. Hence, the reader becomes aligned with Zaczek as he takes his memories through the therapeutic process. Ultimately, the symptoms of PTSD are not only understood by the reader but, are empathized.

Zaczek has a unique way of looking at his own periods of change and growth. In chapter 2, “Why...?”, he describes going through phases he en-
titles, Pariah, Nonperson, Victim, Anti-hero, and Tragic Figure. He explains the feelings of a rejected soldier, to feeling not real, to feeling some sense of recognition.

As Zaczek moves through each chapter, he is constantly in search of meaning to his war time experiences. He faces the grief for the death of his best friend, fear for his own life, shame over behavior required for survival, and the guilt for the surrender of his own soul. Anger has masked so much of these underlying issues, and control has kept them buried that dealing with each piece of his experience is a difficult task.

In the last chapter, Crispin's Day, Zaczek is ready to openly give encouragement to other Vietnam Veterans. Throughout his six years of individual counseling, he had been resistant to group therapy, but as part of his termination from the Vet Center he agrees to go to a group. In this last soliloquy, Zaczek enumerates the differences he sees in his life since therapy. He faces the question (as do so many Vietnam veterans), "What could I have done better?" and finds the answer that... "the cruel equations of weight and temperature and humidity were more powerful than a 19 year old's image of self and Corps. It tells me with logic, cool and clear that the memory that will never go away is undeserved punishment, and in that hour of that day I did the best a man could do, and should be proud." The main difference he finds is one of perspective. He no longer sees control in the same way. He no longer feels empty, alone or in despair; instead there is hope.

Farewell, Darkness is a must for anyone who wants to understand the psychological effect of combat as told by someone who has been there. It is an honest and heartfelt look at the brutality, comradeship, and code of honor that was the Vietnam War. It is also a look at the burden each veteran has carried since coming home. There is a price we pay for freedom, and Zaczek has found the words to tell us exactly what that is.

Captain Jacqueline Garrick, C.S.W., A.C.S.W.


Psychoanalyst Alper has had the courage to enter into the poetics of human behavior. In an attempt to be respectable, many mental health practitioners force themselves to be scientific. And science is a handicapping tool when it comes to the many and mysterious meanings of human exist-