

Interview on War-Related Trauma with Tom, a survivor

Hello, my name is Josie and I would like to welcome you back to Rising from the Ashes, Trauma Talks, a podcast series brought to you by the UB School of Social Work the Institute on Trauma and Trauma informed care. This series provides an opportunity for individuals to share their witness of how strength and resiliency has allowed them to rise from the ashes. Trauma talks follows people who have both worked within the field of trauma as well as those who have experienced trauma. Here we will reflect on how trauma informed care can assist those who have experienced traumatic events to embrace a new life of wholeness, hope, strength, courage, safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Today I am here with Tom. Tom is a veteran from the Vietnam War. On behalf of the Institute we would like to thank you for being here today and sharing your story with us. So now I'm going to let Tom begin with you the audience a little bit about his story.

1:15 **Tom:** Hello I'm Tom I'm a Vietnam veteran. I served in the United States Navy from 1963 to 1967. I joined the Navy out of high school because I was a solid c student in high school. I wasn't making really great grades, I wasn't going to go to college and at 17 I wasn't going to get a job, so I joined the Navy to learn a trade. My brother told me that if you go in the Navy you can become a hospital corpsman. You don't do anything as a hospital corpsman you sit aboard a ship in air-conditioning area and do nothing all day. It sounded really nice to me 1963 air-conditioning. I said that's really nice. So, I joined the Navy, I went to boot camp I ended up going to great lakes for boot camp. After that I went out to San Diego California to be a hospital corpsman. I went to learn the trade of being a hospital corpsman for a 16-week school. That was the fall of 1963 to the spring of 1964. While I was going to school there I was with the Navy and I noticed that one of the senior petty officers there had a little marine insignia on his ribbons. I was confused as a 17-year-old as to why a navy fellow would have a marine insignia on his ribbons. He said he was with the fleet Marine force. As a 17-year-old I didn't know what the fleet marine force is or was or anything like that. He said he served in Korea with the marine corp. He wore the Marine Corps uniform he fought and did all this stuff with the marine corp. And I didn't understand that at all. But he told me that the marines are part of the Navy that the Navy supplies the Marines with their medics, their doctors, their nurses, their dentists, and their chaplains. And you could volunteer and serve with the Marines. Now to a 17-year-old this is great I'm going to go with the Marines and be a medic. I said, "What do they do?" He said, "well right now it's peace time, it's 1964, '63, '64 they don't do anything" When the Marines go out into the field they just lag behind in an airconditioned ambulance. If they fall out from heat exhaustion, you take them back to the sick call area and you treat them. This sounds great because air-conditioned ambulance and all this other stuff. So, I signed up, I volunteered, and I went with the Marine corp. I ended up in Camp Pendleton out in California. I did my training at Camp Pendleton for a while and then I got my orders. I was dispatched overseas to Okinawa, in May of 1964. I was attached to the 3rd Field Battalion the 3rd Marines division infantry unit. So, I got to Okinawa late May of '64 and looked around the base and the base had all these trucks lined up, all over up and down the street. And I got there, and I said what are all these trucks here for? He says oh were on alert for Laos. And now I was 18 and I didn't even know what a Laos

was. I didn't really to tell you the truth I didn't know how to spell Laos. So, I wrote home to my mother that I was on alert to go to Laos. And we didn't know anything about this and I was all gung ho, and they gave us a weapon, and they gave us. They didn't give us ammunition because they were afraid we would shoot each other in Okinawa. So that took all part of May, June, and a little bit of July. And that sort of subsided in July that order to go to Laos had decreased. So, we went about our training. All of a sudden in early August of 1964 there was The Gulf of Tonkin incident. Where the Americans accused the North Vietnamese of firing on some patrol boats. So, President Johnson decided that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution we are going to respond in force to retaliate against the North Vietnamese. So, we were stationed at Okinawa at the time, so the easiest thing for the American government to do at the time was to take troops from Okinawa and put them aboard a ship and send them to Vietnam. This was in August of 1964. So, I served in a battalion landing team as a corpsman from August 1964 up until January 1965. We really didn't see any action per say the biggest thing that happened there was a big flood there in Vietnam at the time and we did a lot of rescue missions. The ships I was on did rescue missions. I ended up going back to Okinawa. My battalion was again alerted, and they were again going to Vietnam in March of 1965. Those big landing in March of 1965 because I only had a few months left, I didn't go with them. I ended up staying in Okinawa and going to Japan. What had happened was my 13-month overseas tour of duty was up in June and what you can do is you are able to fill out a dream sheet and you can chose any base that you want to go to with the Marines. So, I chose Kenoy Bay Hawaii. Now that will be a nice place to go, anyway to make a long story short they told me we have good news and bad news. I did get the first marine brigade, but they were no longer in Kenoy Bay Hawaii. They were in Da Nang Vietnam. They said you can take your second choice which would be Iwakuni Japan. So, I ended up staying in Iwakuni Japan with the Marine Corp airwing. Great nothing to do, beautiful Japan it was really nice, eating good food and smiling all the time. I wanted to stay in Japan because it was a great duty. So, I decided to extend my tour of duty to stay with the airwing, it was a great duty. That was in June of '65 and Oct '65 the 1st airwing was not dispatched to Vietnam. So, my goal of avoiding going back to Vietnam was sort of mish mashed. Ended up at Da Nang. Ended up with a, what they call a fixed aircraft unit stationed at Da Nang. My job at Da Nang at the time was simply sick call. We would take care of all the anybody come in for sick call. We were placed on alert several times the base was apparently going to be mortared or attacked or something like that. And we would have to go into the bunkers and just sit and wait to be attacked. I was never attacked at all we sort of escaped all that. In early 1966 one of my fellow corpsman decided it would be a great idea to go fly in helicopters and rescue marines that were wounded. Somehow to me that ended up being a great idea. I have no idea how that became a great idea, but it did. So, me and my fellow corpsman decided to change units and go with Marine helicopter squadron out of Marble Mountain in Da Nang. I got to Marble Mountain in Danang in May of 1966 and they automatically put me on a helicopter to be a medic on a helicopter. The job of a medic is to go out with the helicopter and you go into a zone where there are wounded soldiers, wounded Marines were, and you rescue them. I forgot that they shoot at you when that happens. When a helicopter comes in it becomes a great big target and the enemy ends up shooting at the helicopter. I guess I failed to realize that. So, my very first day out we landed in a zone with the helicopter I'll tell you the name of the unit was VM02 we flew out of Da Nang we flew into a

zone and I was the corpsman aboard the helicopter. My job was to take care of any wounded people put aboard the helicopter. So, they brought in a couple of wounded marines the very first wounded marine they brought on that day was an African American individual and he was hit by multiple shrapnel wounds by a booby trap, so he had holes all over his body. Your training tells you if there are holes, holes in the chest you lay them on the infected side and you let the other lung open up. But he had holes in all parts of his chest. So, you couldn't do that, plus he suffered a trauma to the head he had shrapnel to the face there was blood, there was mud and there was all kind of trauma, so you couldn't do mouth to mouth and you couldn't lay him on his side, so that was my very first casualty, I had seen on the helicopter that day. Make a long story short we went back into that zone 3 different times. We went on 3 or 4 different occasions. We went back to the same zone, because as we were landing and bringing wounded out they were firing more mortars and rockets in there. They had more booby traps and they kept picking off our Marines little by little. So, the fourth time we went into this zone I ended up picking up another corpsman that was handing me guys before. He was eventually wounded. So, the first day I was out on this helicopter and we had multiple, multiple casualties, wounded, and dead. So that obviously that happened in 1966 and it's still imbedded in my mind. For the next, May, June, July August, September so for the next 6 months, 5 to 6 months. I flew various missions on helicopters. Each time we went in on what they call a medivac mission we received fire. Basically, the reason we were going in on a medivac mission was somebody was wounded in the area. Our job was to go down and pick the wounded or dead up and retrieve them. My job was to get them on a helicopter and administer first aid anyway possible. I would have anything from sucking chest wounds to traumatic amputations, arms and legs, multiple gunshot wounds, single gunshot wounds. Those are some of the casualties that we had. When we landed we were usually under some kind of small arms fire. But we didn't really realize we were under small arms fire until we got back to the compound and we counted the holes in our helicopter and you would see oh my goodness we got hit 3 times or we got hit 4 times. So, the trauma was on an ongoing daily basis. The more I flew the more I got alienated from the trauma because you sort of get used to going out there. You don't really think of getting fired at everyday but that's just the reality of it. One of the events that stick out in my life was the day I was wounded. It was 20 July 1966. We were on mission up near the demilitarized zone and we flew in on a very old helicopter it was called the CH34 it was a very, very old Korean War type helicopter. Very slow and we landed in an area in the valley and a big operation was occurring, Operation Hastings. And to that point it was the biggest operation in Vietnam for the Marine Corp. we were trying to repeal the North Vietnamese from coming over to the demilitarized zone. Operation started on 15 July it was a Friday. I didn't fly the first couple of days. The first day of the operation we lost 3 helicopters. They went into a valley area and they had bad coordinates and they getting fired upon and two helicopters collided with each other they went down a third helicopter went down it was hit by enemy fire and that helicopter was down. They lost a host of Marines that day. The areas were known to the Marine Corp at that time as helicopter valley. So, of anytime we hear of helicopter valley we know it happened exactly 15 July 1966 in the area. My first day of flying in Operation Hastings was 20 July. We landed, we came from booby, which I was stationed at, the base I was stationed at, to Da Nang area. And we landed in the rice patty and we just stayed in the rice patty until we were called for a medical evacuation. Sometime in the afternoon about 5 o'clock in the

afternoon we were called to extract a wounded Marine from this valley area up near the demilitarized zone. Myself I was with the Corpsman, I had a pilot, a copilot, the crew chief, and a door gunner, there was 5 of us aboard this helicopter. We went into the zone the zone was in a valley which is really not a safe place to land a helicopter in a valley. Especially when you know they are throwing rockets they were throwing mortars and small arms fire. We landed in the zone and I looked out to my left and the Marines were about I would say about 15 feet from our helicopter firing toward the hills and toward the bush. I thought to myself boy this doesn't look good, this really not looking good. So, we turned to our door, our wide open door and they brought a wounded Marine out and the Marine was on a stretcher. They brought him out on a stretcher and we put him on the helicopter and he had a big wound in his gluteus maximus. He somehow how got his by a mortar or rocket and he had a big gaping hole in his gluteus maximus and I looked down at him and I looked back up at the door for the next casualty a mortar exploded. A mortar exploded about 20 feet from the door and it showered the helicopter and all of us in the helicopter with shrapnel, we all got wounded. We then as soon as we got hit we were all bleeding all over the place. I knew I was hit because I had a burning sensation in various parts of my body. Well as soon as we were hit, the helicopter was hit, the pilot took off. He flew up in the air and he took flying up out of the area, he flew up high out of the area. I'll tell you why later, as we were flying out of the area we have a sister ship with us another helicopter that was with us. We asked, the pilot asked what our condition was, and the other helicopter flew around us and all he said was oh my God. Because we were having sparks coming out of our rear end and we were leaking fuel. So, they told us we would never make it back to the base. So, we were in this helicopter and they said this isn't good. Plus, we are all bleeding and number 2 were in a helicopter that's probably not going to make it back to the base. We made it back about a mile from the base and we landed in another rice patty and other helicopters came and surrounded us and they took us away and I ended up in a hospital, I had multiple shrapnel wounds I ended up on a hospital ship. The USS Repose. For a few weeks and then I was returned to Vietnam, back to duty in Vietnam. I then served my remained, was this July, August, September, October, November, I then served the rest of my four-month flying with a helicopter squadron out of Flewby or with the helicopter squadron out of Da Nang area. I went right back to duty continued to minister to casualties. Continued to take small arms fire any time of fire that we encountered on a helicopter mission. In about October November they decided to move me out of Vietnam because I only had 4 months left in the military, in the Navy and I was rotated out and went to Okinawa. Okinawa to Japan and Japan back to the United States. When I got to Okinawa after leaving Vietnam I noticed I was extremely anxious, I was extremely nervous. I didn't know what it was about. I just didn't like anything that was fast I jumped at any noises that were going on it was jumpy. But I found out that if I started, if I took some alcohol the nervousness, the anxiety, and the jumpiness would really decrease. So, what I did while I was still in Okinawa and Japan I used drink a lot which took care of my nervousness, my anxiety. I could ride in a jeep, or an ambulance, or a taxi without any fear. It also took away any problems I had sleeping. So, I would drink heavily at night, so I had no problems sleeping. It just took care of all my issues. Then I was discharged from the United States Navy in March of 1967. I returned home in 1967, but my drinking really didn't stop. I had a great time back in the Buffalo area in 1967. I continued to drink, but I basically told people I drink to fall asleep I mean because that was what my issue

was, I couldn't fall asleep. So, I ended up looking for something to do. I ended up getting a job as an orderly at a hospital at Buffalo General Hospital. I started working on the Psychiatric unit, and I really like working on the Psychiatric unit, but I knew I couldn't survive on \$2.06 an hour the rest of my life. So, I decided to go to school to become a laboratory technician. I ended up going out to Minnesota spend 2 years out in Minnesota becoming a laboratory technician. It was a technical school. It wasn't a college, just a technical two-year program. While I was there I continued my drinking on an ongoing basis. And the best thing for an alcoholic is to work in a liquor store. So, while I was practicing my alcoholism I also worked in a liquor store. So, my trauma continued to bother me, but I didn't think it bothered me. So, I finished up my time in school in 1969, I came back to Buffalo. I worked in a lab for approximately 1 month and I hated it. After going to school for 15 months, I hated it. So, I decided to reenroll in University of Buffalo. So, I enrolled in University of Buffalo in 1969, in the summer of '69 I received a bachelor's of sociology in 1974. When I finished my bachelors in sociology I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life I thought I would be a doctor, but obviously I wasn't going do it, I was going to apply for law school, apply to my master's program in sociology or go into nursing because I was a medic in the service. Ended up going to nursing school so I got a bachelor's of science in nursing from UB. So now I have a bachelor's of sociology which is sort of there. Bachelors of nursing which I could work with, so I work with that. I was then working in a psychiatric unit, so I liked running groups and doing therapy, so I decided to come back and get my master's degree in psychiatric nursing. So, ended back at UB and got a master's degree in psychiatric nursing. And worked at Buffalo General Hospital for a long time. In 1980 I ended up working on the west side of Buffalo doing outpatient counseling with drug, alcohol, and mental health patients. And in 1984, I learned that the nurses at work at the veteran's hospital in Buffalo was making more money than I was. So, for economic reasons in 1984 I went to work at the VA in Buffalo. It was there that I really discovered that I was drinking maybe a little more than I should be drinking. I was working the emergency room doing all the drug, alcohol, and mental health intakes. So, from 1984 to 1999, 2000, I worked in the ER for 17 years. Worked as a nurse, while I was there working as a clinical nurse specialist I learned a lot about substance use, both my own research and development and I decided to become a substance abuse counselor. So, in about 1995 I became a CAASAC substance abuse counselor and this way I could learn how to help people with their substance abuse problems and also maybe give myself some insight into how to control my drinking. If I could just control my drinking I would be ok. Not realizing that the core of my drinking was probably due to PTSD. But because I had gone to college and because I had a job, because I was married a couple of times. I didn't think I was really suffering from PTSD. I was just maybe over medicating a little bit. I was feeling good. It wasn't until about 1999 that I realized that I had a major problem with alcohol. I had joined the army reserves in 1986 and I was with an army reserved unit out in Niagara Falls and I was drilling with them and we would go out and drink a lot. But in 1999 I did have a major problem. I was running about 3 or 4 times a week, I was running races, I was running 5k's. I was telling myself because I could run 3, 4, 5 miles every other day or so that I couldn't possibly be an alcoholic. Cause alcoholics aren't able to do that I mean. How many alcoholics get up at 6 o'clock in the morning run 4 miles, dress up and go to work? But alcoholic actually took over at 5 o'clock in the afternoon when he ends up drinking and self-medicating. 1999 I ran a race out

in South Buffalo. After the race I went into cardiac arrest. I dropped dead. They paddled me back to life with the paddles. They paddled me back and I survived that whole incident. They did open heart surgery, triple bypass and that was in Friday 13, the last Friday the 13 in the old millennium. August 1999. However, that was just a small bump in the road. Most people would have stopped drinking at that point, but I continued to self-medicate for about another 8 years. I still worked, I self-medicated. I raised a family and dealt with my trauma until I started, I crashed and burned in the summer of 2007. Ended up going to detox, going into rehab, getting therapy for myself, and joining Alcoholics Anonymous which is part of my recovery.

25:09 **Josie:** That's great. I thank you for giving that overview of really the continuity really between your experiences overseas, in Vietnam and in the services and how that continued to be common thread continuing on and on through your life even up to now. Thank you. So as your talking what I hear a lot coming from your experiences are paying attention to what we call the 5 principles of trauma informed care. Which are safety, choice, trust, collaboration, and empowerment. These are the central aspects of trauma informed care. And what trauma informed care does is it asks us to pose the question what has happened to a person instead of what is wrong with the person. I definitely hear that being echoed in what you have shared. So, I want to move on to talking about your experience or sometimes the lack thereof those 5 principles. So, in terms of safety what I'm wondering is at any point in your experiences whether it was overseas or in our schooling or working, or having a family, or in recovery what part did safety play in helping you to seek help, or support, or reach out to people?

26:47 **Tom:** I don't think I wanted to because I didn't think I had a problem. I didn't realize that the experience, my experiences in Vietnam, although now they seem traumatic. At the time when you are 21, 22 years old you don't think of them as trauma because other people are going through that also. People get wounded, people get killed, people get traumatic amputations, so I didn't think I had a problem. I simply thought I was a typical 21-year-old fellow who survived a combat situation and I had to move on with my life. I don't think I looked at myself as having a problem. I didn't, because I didn't realize the extent of my trauma or that I had a traumatic even in my life. The things that I experienced in Vietnam were common place. That was my life. I experienced it and I came back to Buffalo and I was moving on with my life. My life included going to college, drinking, getting married, having a family and having a job. I didn't realize that the trauma was there. I didn't realize it.

28:01 **Josie:** Absolutely. I'm curious that around 2007 is when you hit rock bottom and went into detox and started to also look at that trauma and analyze your own post-traumatic stress symptoms. In that experience of the providers that you interacted with what allowed you or what brought that sense of safety of being able to revisit some of your experiences and recognize that as being potentially traumatic.

28:39 **Tom:** I think when I was drinking my insight and my judgement was real clouded. So although I had the trauma I masked it with the alcohol. So what happened I was never thinking clearly, I was never processing what happened. It wasn't until I actually sobered up for a period of time. When I say period of time, it took a while for the alcohol the coping thing to leave me. So when I sobered up for one month, wow, I started thinking clearer. When I sobered up for two

months Wow I'm really thinking clear. Then when it got to be 3 and 4 months. My really realized my thinking was better. When I started therapy I could actually verbalize my experiences without having my sensorium clouded. I was there and wow this is what happened. And this is what occurred, and this is why this happened, that's why that happened. But I had to be sober to do that. While I was drinking my insight and judgement was clouded. I had just couldn't think straight. And every time I had a good event or a bad event in my life prior to that I would turn to alcohol to either mask the event or celebrate the event. So, it really I say I drank for forty straight years. You know so I'm very lucky to have even survived this long. But I think I had to be alert to what had happened in my life and my therapist was able to talk me through all of that.

30:24 **Josie:** That's great. That's really insightful in what really paved the way for you to be able to experience the sense of safety was getting to that point of gaining greater clarity and being able to see your experiences for what they were without the influence of alcohol and substance. Thank you. The next principle is trust. Something that I'm curious to know is in your experience of working with your comrades in arms in Vietnam, what was the role of trust in one another as you were in the field or also not. Was there that sense of trust in one another? How powerful of a role in that?

31:17 **Tom:** Well, when you are with a unit, any type of military unit you build that trust and spirit of the crop with each other. You will often hear men don't die for their country in combat, they die for each other. I was willing to risk my life to go save other fellas who had the green uniform on. I didn't know their name, many of the times I didn't know the other fellas on the helicopter with me. The pilot, the other men, I didn't know but we were there for each other. If I had to go out and pull a wounded marine back to the helicopter I trusted that the guys in the helicopter would lie down fire for me, and the Marines had to trust me that I would go and render care. So, the trust factor I had to trust them that they would protect me in any way possible to keep me from being injured or wounded and they the Marines had to trust me that I would render first aid to the best of my ability. So, the trust factor went both ways. When we went out on a mission we went out on a mission to rescue other Marines or South Vietnamese that were wounded or injured. They had no name to us, they didn't have names to us. All we knew was they were allies, and we were going to do this together and we are going to help each other survive this momentary event. And the even maybe only took 10 to 15, maybe 20 minutes in our lives, but we were at that time we were bonded by a brotherhood of being in the military. You know so I don't have a lot of connection with the fellows that I served with at all. We just don't, it's been 50 years. So, we've all gone our own ways. Some of us are still alive and some of us aren't. But at that point in time we were friends, we were comrades. We were colleagues, we were intertwined by a mission, and the mission was the mission I had was to get people aboard a helicopter, save their lives, bandage them up, and get them back to safety as soon as quickly as possible. Sometimes I was able to do that, and sometimes I wasn't. And the times I wasn't that's what haunts you, especially at a medic. Medics have a very high suicide rate and a very high alcoholism rate, which I found out later on.

33:40 **Josie:** Yeah, it makes sense. I mean you really just touched on these principles of safety and trust those are really organizing principles it sounds like of what you really did on a day in and day out basis. Your mission was to bring your comrades whether you knew them or not to safety. And to also have trust in the people around you to help you to do that successfully. That's very powerful. The next principle is choice. The thing I'm curious about in terms of choice is 1997 when you kind of hit your bottom and had a change. Did you find that you had choices from that time moving forward? You said that Alcoholics Anonymous is a big part of your recovery and that you spoke to a therapist about your post-traumatic stress symptoms. Did you find you had options and choices in approaching those symptoms and really establishing what your recover would look like?

34:47 **Tom:** The year was actually 2007. I wasn't even sober I'll be sober 10 years this year. I had hit bottom, I neurologically couldn't write my name. My hands were trembling, I could feel my liver getting larger. Being a nurse, I sort of knew the signs and symptoms of alcohol abuse or alcoholism. But I wasn't in such deep denial, I wasn't going to do anything about it. I wasn't an alcoholic. Because I was lying to myself, I didn't have this problem. It wasn't until I just hit bottom, I wanted to stop drinking, I really, really wanted to stop drinking. But I couldn't, I could not stop. Once I picked up that first drink, I was off to the races. I would always tell myself today I'm not going to drink. And later on in the day I would say I'm just going to have one drink, and that one drink led to another drink that lead to another drink. And it's hard for people who don't have addictive personalities like I do to understand that. Because people think well you could just not have that first drink. There's no choice in not having that first drink. You don't want to have the first drink. So, what happens, it once I was able to detox and even a short period of rehab, rehabilitation. I really realized I did have choices. You know my choices were to stay sick, stay sick as I was, or to go on another path. There was a fork in the road and you either take the one that you are on and that road was terrible for a long-time people didn't trust me, I was having arguments with people it wasn't good. It wasn't a healthy, healthy, path. My physical health was failing so I went down the other path. I was able to secure an understanding therapist who she was really able to pry the things out of me little by little. You know you hear the analogy peeling the skin of the onion away while she was able to do that. In addition to seeing her in therapy I was also going to AA. Ok I wasn't neglecting my alcohol but also, I had the PTSD thing going on. I had to go up two forks in the road. I had to deal with the PTSD because that was where the trauma was coming from. And the alcohol abuse was the reason was used to treat the trauma. Or was it the trauma was making me, which was it? I had to deal with both of the issues. So, I had to come to a decision and it's much easier to come to a logical decision when you are sober. Rather than when your mind is clouded with alcohol or drugs or whatever else your using. Addiction is addiction and I had a powerful addiction. But once I was able to put that down and able to stop shaking a little bit, and my liver started coming back to normal and my thinking started to clear up. And that's what the most important thing was. Once I put the liquor down, my thinking became clearer. Then I was able to process a lot of the information about my Vietnam experience. Why this happened, why that happened and the therapist that I had she was very, very understanding about my alcoholism. And it wasn't until almost 3 years, or 3 or 4 years into therapy when I was trying to talk to my family, a couple of years into therapy that she had told me that her father was an alcoholic. So, that all the things that I had talked about she had

lived through with her father. So, she was able to guide me along, she was able to carefully guide me along not only with my alcohol abuse but also with my family etcetera, etcetera where AA was working on my alcohol abuse. So, eventually the two came together and allowed me to gain a little more inside and awareness of what was going on with me.

38:53 **Josie:** That's really a directly ties into the next principle, being collaboration. I was curious about that it sounds like that the therapist you connected with helped make those connections between your trauma experiences, your alcohol use, and then you were just touching on after a few years of therapy you also reached out to family and pulled them into some of your story and narrative and that's really the essence of collaboration. That's really amazing to hear that all of those pieces of what was going on you here and now your past experience, and the addiction that you were experiencing was really drawn together by that therapist. It's really amazing to hear. The last principle is empowerment. And I'm curious to know and especially since you are a therapist and learning she was about to peel those layers of the onion. What were some of the things that she communicated to you either verbally or nonverbally that helped you to summon that inner strength to continue walking down the road to recovery? To look at your experiences and discuss them?

40:88 **Tom:** She allowed me to tell my story. She allowed me to share with her although I denied my trauma for a long time, it was there. I talk about the repercussions about what occurred in my life after that and how it connected to my trauma. She was able to coordinate all of that. I knew the trauma, and I knew my life. But how did my trauma affect my life. Why was I doing the things I was doing in my life, because of my trauma. What she was able to do was take my trauma and intermingle it with how I acted in life and how I behaved in life. And because of the way I acted and behaved in life is why the alcohol came in. I came in to ease or self-medicate my traumatic events, my behavior etcetera. So, she sort of brought it all together for me. I think the most important thing was she was allowed me to talk and brought it all together for me, and number two she was nonjudgmental. The things that I told her, the things that occurred from the time I left the service until the time I met with her 40 years later she was non-judgmental and she was very open with me in those situations. The fortunate thing for me, I think was she was a couple years older than I was she was about my age so she lived through the time frame that I lived in so when I talked about things that happened in 1960 or '65, or '70 she was able to identify with not only the life in the united states at the time, the thought process of the united states the shootings at Kent State, all the trauma that occurred in the '60's she could incorporate that into the therapy session also. Because a lot of that, leaving a combat situation especially like in Vietnam and coming back to the United States, all of a sudden we gave up Vietnam we just surrender we leave all the things behind. The guilt, the anger, and the shame that I must have felt or something. So, she was able to incorporate her own experience, her own history into the therapy session. And she always encouraged me to continue with AA. She always encouraged me. You have to work with your AA sponsor. I'm helping you to come this far you have to go the rest of the way and that's what I tried to do.

43:08 **Josie:** Sounds like she was a really powerful force, in normalizing especially having live through those same decades and national and international events and she sounds like she was a

great champion for you to do what you needed to do to continue on the road to recovery and to working through your experiences. Thank you so as kind of a final question. For those who are listening, and either are providing services for vets or are vets themselves, do you have any final words when you think about these 5 principles? Anything you want that you would like to say or leave people with?

43:55 **Tom:** avoid you own signs and symptoms of a disorder. Just because you are in a helping profession or trying to help others, you may be carrying some baggage along with you. If you are out there and you're dealing with other people who have trauma and you have your own trauma, try to deal with that also. It's easier to help people from a point of being secure with your own ideas and secure with your own feelings and helping them to become more secure with their own ideas and feelings. If there are substance abuse issues, have the person deal with their substance abuse issues. You can't deal with PTSD issues until the substance abuse is on the side. Because my experience is the thinking is very clouded. It's difficult to work through traumatic events and trauma when the mind is clouded with alcohol. Alcohol or whatever other drugs people choose to use. My suggestion would be to examine why you are in the field. Examine your trauma and what benefits you might, what your trauma or experience might help others survive their trauma.

45:26 **Josie:** Definitely appreciate it. So, on behalf of the trauma and trauma informed care I would really like to say thank you for taking the time to speak with me today and to share your story and your witness of strength and resiliency it's really been a pleasure, thank you.