

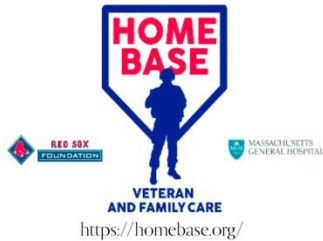
# AFTERMATH:

PORTRAITS AND REFLECTIONS OF VETERANS IN RECOVERY

A Collaboration Between:

Home Base Program and Harvard University Polo

Photographs by Deborah Bai - Lannon



[www.bostonequinephotography.com](http://www.bostonequinephotography.com)



**The Wenham Museum  
Wenham, MA  
2024**

# Photographer's Statement

Since Sept. 11, 2001, just over 30,000 veterans have died by suicide — four times more than the number of U.S. military personnel who died in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.\*

Although shocking, this horrific number doesn't reflect the true breadth of the cost of these wars. It doesn't account for lives endangered by alcohol abuse, drug addiction, domestic violence and/or sexual trauma.

Thankfully, many veterans with PTSD seek help from the Home Base Program, located in Charlestown, MA. Since 2020, I've been lucky enough to photograph more than 200 of them as they take part in *Respite Weekend* at the Harvard Polo Equestrian Center (The Farm) in my hometown of Hamilton, MA. *Respite Weekend* provides a welcome change of scene, and some much-needed relaxation from the rigors of the clinical program back in Charlestown.

Since 2020, I've been privileged to document the activities of more than 200 vets as they groom, tack and ride the horses. Over 50 of them have trusted me with their portraits, and with their thoughts on their experiences. What follows is a sample of the 33 images currently on display at the Wenham Museum (Wenham MA), along with selected quotes from the vets themselves.

I hope this exhibit will provide some small insight into many veterans' ongoing battles against the hidden and implacable enemy of PTSD - and help sensitize a civilian public to the often deep, personal, and indelible costs of military service.

The full exhibition is on display at the Wenham Museum, Wenham MA until October 15, 2024.

-- Deborah Bai Lannon

\*Sources: *Brigadier General (Ret.) Jack Hammond, Exec Dir Home Base WBUR Cognoscenti, Sept. 21, 2021*





*I had this tattoo covered over when I realized I still had a **soul**...*





*“This conversation needs to be more **open.**  
There is still *stigma* associated with mental health pertaining to  
**PTSD.”***

-- Jon



*My condition is PTSD and while I have it, it does not have me. I was totally shocked when I received my **diagnosis** - because one of my primary functions was to help **prevent it** in others.*





*We're ordinary people who've witnessed **extraordinary** things...*



*"I've seen human beings do **despicable** things to each other.."*



*I hate the fact that I have **PTSD/TBI**. It affects me everyday from dreams, my temper, my mood. However that being said, I would not change my time in Iraq for anything.*

*I fought along the greatest men I have ever known and am **proud** to **have served** this great country of ours.*



*As a civilian, I viewed **war** as very 'Hollywood', but it's **extremely violent** - and after you experience it, it changes the **outlook** you have on everything..*



*"I did my job well..."*

*At some point, you realize they're **people**, rather than targets...you still have to be **comfortable** taking them out.*



*In civilian life, you can often **rethink** a decision. In **combat**, you don't have that **luxury**...*

*Some things are just too **difficult** for a civilian to **understand**.*

*-- Kari*









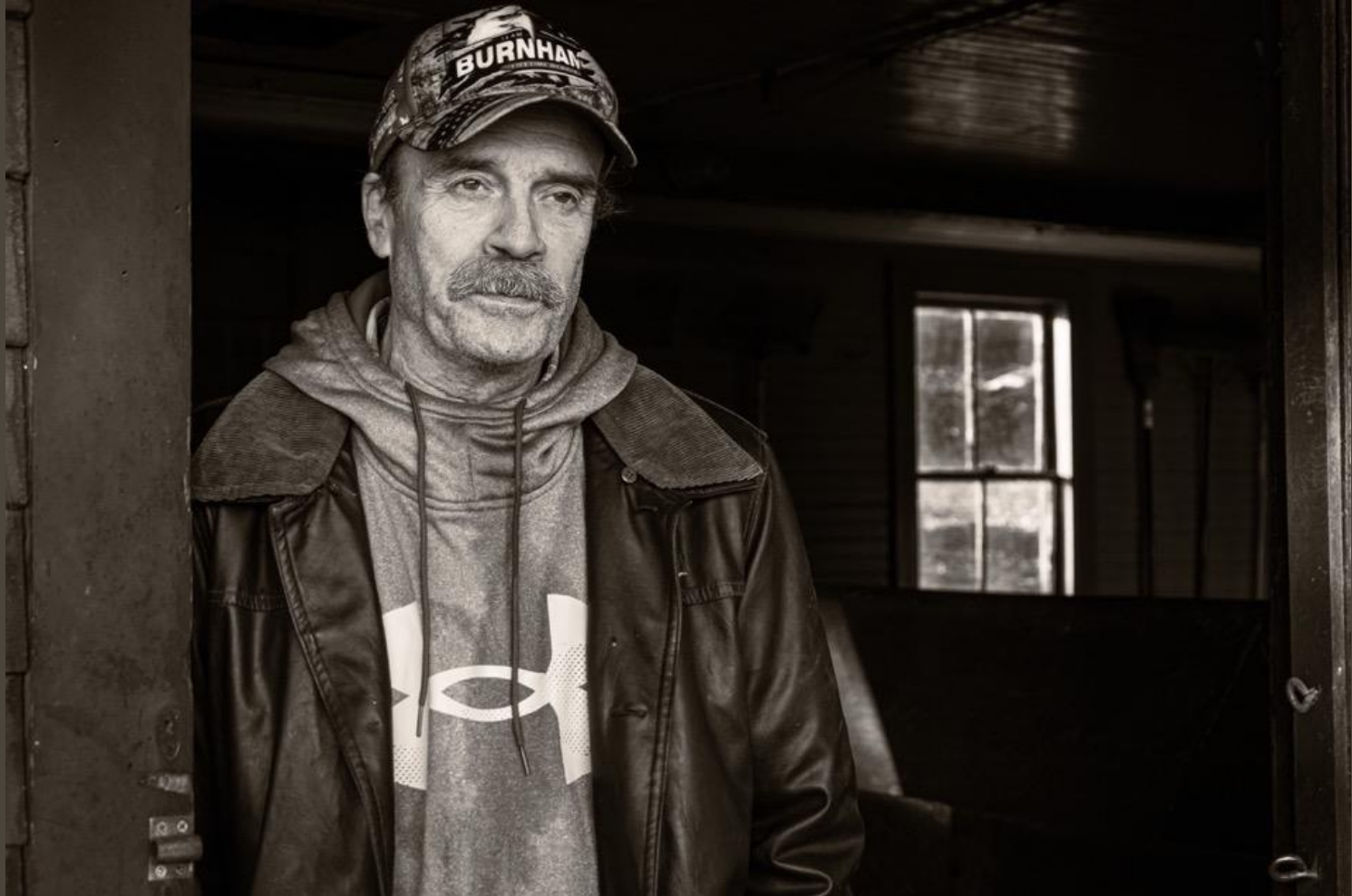


*Everything made me **nervous or jumpy** if it reminded me of something from Afghanistan  
ie trash or dead animals in the street, people walking too close to me, and loud, unexpected noises...*





*Sometimes, when things no longer **fit**...you have to let them go.*



*I am so grateful for the people who **didn't** give up on me.*



*Of all the constraints I have in my life, **shame** is no longer one of them.*

# Participant Reactions





*“I am honored to be chosen as one of the pictures that will be displayed. I love the idea to share these with the public.  
I just wanted to let you know that.”*

*Thank you.”*

**-- Jason, USMC**

*“Thank you for allowing me to express my opinion and experiences. I hope that the education that you are providing is helpful and opens the eyes of someone that is unaware of what we put ourselves, and our people through - to remain the best and protect our nation. If you ever want a "vet" to join you, please just reach out. I will always speak on behalf of my experiences and exposures.”*

**-- Mark, US Navy**

*“I feel honored you asked me to partake in your vision... I hope together we can connect with another Veteran and make a difference that helps them be healthier.*

*The answer was - and always will be - yes.”*

**-- Mia, US Army**

*“Thank you so much ...for what you are doing to shed light on our struggles, Deb.”*

**-Anika, US Army**

# Civilian Reactions

*“Deb’s work brought me to tears.”*

*-- Anonymous*

*“I knew about this project before....and I knew that it would be mind blowing but this truly went beyond any expectations . This is not just great - but incredibly important - work... It’s really amazing – not only photographically (I’d expect no less) but personally, socially and, dare I say - it’s politically transcendent. If there’s anything I can do to help you as you progress with it, I’d love to.”*

*--Marv G.*

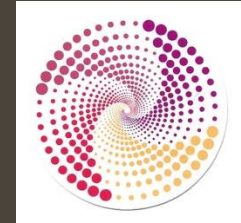
*“Your ability to convey these emotions through photography is remarkable. I walked away from the exhibit feeling both inspired and deeply connected to the veterans' stories.”*

*-- Tracey W.*

*“...your photo-essay about the Veterans completely awed me. In addition to the difficult challenge of developing a rapport with the vets and the precautions you had to consider in working with them and the horses, your portraits were creative, stunning and beautiful. I admire your devotion to the project and the excellent skills you marshaled to produce the images. I have to admit, this body of work made my own pursuits in photography seem like child’s play. I would hope someday this essay will grace the walls of a proper venue.”*

*--David G.*

*Aftermath* is currently on display  
at the  
Wenham Museum, Wenham MA  
until **October 15, 2024** (Tues-Sat 10am – 4pm)



If you know of any additional venues  
which might be interested in exhibiting this project,  
please feel free to put us in touch.

I can be reached at [DLannon.Aftermath@gmail.com](mailto:DLannon.Aftermath@gmail.com) or at 508-783-9543.

Thank you very much for your time.

**With much appreciation to the Veterans who helped bring this project to life.**

*and*

The Home Base Veterans and Family Care Program  
Coach Crocker Snow and the Harvard Polo Team  
Hamilton-Wenham Cultural Council  
The Massachusetts Cultural Council  
The Wenham Museum

