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VETERANS' CORNER

Bah humbug and Happy New Year

BY VICTOR CORTEZ

I write today for those who wish me a Happy New Year. I write for those who make a place for me at the table and wonder why it's empty. I write in honor of other empty chairs.

It's the holidays and I write to you today as an invisible wounded warrior. Not from gun, shrapnel, bombs or blade. Nothing I can splint, stitch or bandage. Nothing that earns ribbon, plaque or medal. It's a more insidious wound. One that festers, inflames, spontaneously, unbidden, unforgiving. And I write to you with humility, cognizant of how minimal my wounds are compared to so many others. Thus I am limited to sharing just my own "think" as we are all so different in our adjustments.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD sounds dramatic and tangible. Something one ought to be able to get ones hands on and strangle. But the opposite is more the truth. And more so during the holidays.

There are many more holidays that I have spent alone than there are those spent in the company of loved ones or friends. Not because of any lack of invitations, though socially unsavory, I still have my masks for all occasions and now with years of PTSD experience, am able to deftly maneuver among small groups, (without many strangers), deflecting triggers and expressing a cordiality not always more than mask deep. Truth be known I am more often anxious, feeling obvious, and tend to stick to the outer edges of any group, ready to bolt at the earliest opportunity. I tend to converse with few, being cautious of conversation that can stir my triggers. Always vigilant that one bad episode could explode the facade, expose the wounds vulnerability and infect those around me, causing more casualties to a war far and long away.

So I stay away. Not always intentionally. Sometimes I have every intention, (with hope of some progress in my self-analysis) to attend and enjoy. But, my entourage is too large. I carry too many in my memory that have no more Christmas, no Hanukkah, no Kwanzaa, no opportunity, no conversations, no vulnerability, no intentions, no New Year, no holiday.

So I stay with "THEM," often. Trying to Honor "THEM" by remembering "THEM." The ones that paid the ultimate price for others to celebrate. "THEM." The ones that come home and keep fighting demons as others celebrate. "THEM"And I weep in recognition that "THEM" includes my children, my wives, my friends who have also paid the price for others to celebrate by losing what I might have been for them.

I feel the worst is yet to come. I feel the worst must come by grace. I know my worst must be for "THEM."

One day I hope to release "THEM." To come to terms, stop the infection, leave the remembering to others. This will be the worst and the hardest for me as my investment is at the cellular level, imbedded so deep that it seems only grace can secure reprieve, as all else has only maintained it.

I tire now, as my mind once again starts its fixation on "THEM." I'll withdraw for the rest of the day reminiscing. Sharing the rest of my holiday with "THEM." But I know I cannot truly honor "THEM" yet. To truly honor those of "THEM." I must learn again to do as I hope you will do this New Year. Honor "THEM." Honor what you have gained from "THEM,". And for crying out loud, celebrate, celebrate, celebrate and honor in a New Year for "THEM."

OF INTEREST *Mail Tribune* articles available on the internet in chronological order:

- Oct. 11, 08 "Magnetic pulses aid depressed patients"
- No date for this. "You Must Remember This, Well Maybe Not." New drug for selective memory erasure

- Aug.14, 07 "Anti -depressants are putting a "Damper on Love"
- Oct. 8, 08 "Warrior mind training helps troops cope"
- Oct. 24, 08 "New Veterans home could be headed to Rogue Valley"
- Nov. 9, 07 "Homeless ranks include army of troubled vets"
- Nov. 25, 08 "VA opens health care outreach clinic in Grants Pass"
- No date. "Officer nominated to become nation's first female four-star."
- May 18, 08 "Before and After"
- June 2, 08 "More troops suffer from stress disorder"
- No Date. "Democrats seek resignation of VA mental health official"
- July 21, 08 "Loss of an American Hero"

Thanks for the submissions, especially one particularly long and heady one. It's a tough read so I take it by bits. Please submit shorter bits for publication. Hopefully someone will create a website for us and the longer versions can be posted for a read.

Meeting of VPCITO Veterans Parenting, Community In That Order will be held on Thursday, January 9 at the Applegate Community Church at 7:30 pm. All interested persons are invited to attend.

PULLED BY THE ROOTS OR WILL IT GROW

The birth of the Applegate Farmers Market was a difficult but rewarding birth. The vegetables were welcome to those who participated. The volume was a disappointment for those who participated but once. They missed the growth from one box of zucchini the first day, to a variety of 38 different fruits and vegetables, along with a variety of crafts and flea market items including Kathy the rock lady, Larry the video guy, Victor of the GREEN air conditioners and a turnstile of miscellaneous garage, attic and closet cleaners adding yet more color to the seasons of vegetable fare.

Many thanks to those who participated. Veterans exchange and VPCITO would like to especially thank Vince and Marie of Whistling Duck, Chris of Blue Fox Farms on Thompson Creek, Tue of Murphy Public Market for their generous contributions to making this happen. I would also like to thank Jackie of the Applegate Store and Cafe for the venue. Without them none of it could have happened.

Hopes for next year are that people will grow a little more in their gardens with Applegate Farmers and Flea Market in mind. It may not become the financial boon that the other markets can offer, but with the coming times hopes are that it will become a weekend social event that draws locals together to trade, to socialize and to get to know each other better. Already this year I know of one connection that yielded a 1/4 mile road dozing, that saved a neighbor \$1,200.00 and kept the money in the Applegate corridor. It is our hope that next year's weekend Applegate Farmers and Flea Market will yield more such connections while we as Applegaters enjoy the company and talents of our neighbors and yes still exchange a few dollars, while keeping it local. So be prepared. Bring your veggies, your crafts, your tractor, your fundraiser, your stuff, your abilities and share them with your neighbors. Until then, may all your seeds bear fruit and all your fruit bear seed.

OUT.

Victor Cortez

Victor may be reached at the Applegate Store parking lot, in a beige van, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.