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## Vietnam Veteran Finds Comfort in Horses, Helps Others Vets Cope

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# Vietnam Veteran Finds Comfort In Horses, Helps Others Vets Cope

by Adrian Hill

*Vietnam veteran William Goforth knows firsthand the challenge of returning to civilian life after a difficult deployment. He found comfort in horses, and now finds purpose in sharing his discovery with Post-9/11 veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Army veteran, and Wright State student, Adrian Hill of Englewood has today's Veterans' Voices story.*

William Goforth was drafted into the Vietnam War as a generator mechanic but once there he was assigned to tactical combat casualty care where he tended to critically wounded soldiers. When William returned home after serving he did not receive a hero's welcome.

"I faced the same problems that everyone else faced," says William. "We came back and we weren't welcomed and we didn't feel like we were part of this world and we weren't. We were a different individual after we went through the zone that we went through. It takes a lot of time to forget and you aren't going to be able to forget, so you have to deal with it."

William's way of dealing with his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was by working with horses.

"That trusting nature, the forgiving nature - everything about a horse is just therapy for the heart and soul. I jumped in with both feet and bought two or three horses and twelve or fourteen head of cattle and sure occupied my time and helped me cope with the different things I had to cope with. I don't think there was any other way to help heal me."

William's success with horses led him to the 4 Freedom Equestrian Team, an all-volunteer group at the Dayton VA that works with Post-9/11 veterans that are going through the PTSD counseling program.

"There's guys that have come into our roping sessions and they didn't smile, they didn't talk, and all of the sudden after twenty or thirty minutes of learning to twirl a rope, they were tickled to death because they roped a bale of hay, it made him smile," recalls William. "Then we put him on horseback and the guy sits up there, and I don't know how many kills he had under his belt but I know he had plenty, I could see it in him. He sat up there and roped one off the horse the first time he got up there and he started laughing. That just makes it all worthwhile. When you see somebody enjoying something, they're picking it up, their wanting to occupy their time with something else instead of sitting around thinking about what they have been through and what they've done and what's following them from their past, from the war."

I met an Army veteran who asked to remain anonymous. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and recently graduated from William's class.

"I always had a dog when I was in the service and he passed away two years ago, and horses are a good bridge to connect with something, and slowly reconnect with people," he said. "I met a couple of guys that had similar experiences as me in combat, so I brought them over here with me. They actually are going through the group and the class right now. It's rewarding to just help show guys that life can get better."

The 4 Freedom Equestrian Team at the Dayton VA has helped over one hundred veterans since the program began three years ago, and they believe there are many more veterans in the Miami Valley who could benefit from this innovative PTSD counseling program.

*Veterans Voices is produced in collaboration with the [Veteran and Military Center at Wright State University](#). Funding for this series comes from Ohio Humanities.*

Photo:

caption: William Goforth

credit: Adrian Hill