

# Help us help them!

## MILITARY MARRIAGES MATTER!

Offering HOPE, HELP and HEALING for marriages experiencing the traumas of war — and keep it from destroying the marriage!

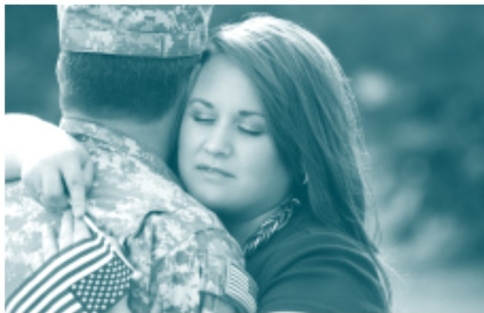
I joined the Army at the age of 19, entered flight school and became a helicopter pilot, flying Cobra gunships in Viet Nam. What young man wouldn't think this was cool. I graduated at the top of my class, was given the rank of Chief Warrant Officer, became an Instructor Pilot and flew for the CIA into Cambodia, a place we said we weren't in.

But "cool" isn't what happened. I faced daily the devastations of war. I, like so many others, carried on my shoulders the realities of life and death. What 20 year old is prepared for this? A fellow pilot whom I had to "ground" for unsafe practices even tried to kill me by throwing a smoke bomb into my hooch while I was sleeping and nailed the door shut.

Sure, I survived the trauma that is war. But I know now that wasn't true. I survived the combat, but not the trauma. Soldiers are taught how to kill, but we aren't taught how to deal with the killing. I was no different. The battleground was no longer some field, or air space, far, far away. Now it was within. And I found that scarier than anything I faced in Viet Nam. You feel detached and find it difficult to love anyone.

War and its' aftermath is both psychological and spiritual. It affects your head, your heart, and your soul. You're angry and confused and filled with doubts. You need a clear "rudder" to guide you, but can't be alone with yourself long enough to find one. And the combat zone has moved. Now it's your marriage.

For me it has almost daily effected my 43 year marriage to Lorrie as I acted out the conditioning that was designed to send any young soldier to war, but, unfortunately, can help to destroy a marriage. I closed myself off from the very person who loved me more than any other. I began to see my wife more as the enemy than my advocate, and unfortunately, my behaviors reflected that. While trying to make sense of what I was asked to do, of what I was trained to do, of what I did and didn't do, rather than knowing how to reconcile it, I lashed out. And Lorrie, and our children, became the victims. And the confusion grew, as did the questions and the accusations.



During this time, Lorrie and I went for help. I remember being told that 95% of the time, another's actions are not intentionally meant to harm you. My reaction? "That kind of thinking could get me killed!" "It all comes from a lack of trust," says the Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio, Archbishop for the Military Services, USA, and himself a veteran, "because trust has been betrayed." **Trust**, the most necessary ingredient in a healthy marriage, is all but lost in the horrors of war.

This is the story of the past forty years of our lives. Forty years ago I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD. I need to correct this now. Lorrie & I and our children were diagnosed with PTSD as its trauma was now in our home. Our spouses, our children, are the unsung heroes, the survivors, and too often the casualties of our military actions and experiences. They send their loved ones to war only to have them return changed, and in many instances, quite dramatically. Bishop Broglio reminds us that “After experiencing the hardships of separation, they find themselves reunited with a spouse who seems like a stranger to them.” They become the subject of a soldier’s anger, of their fears and self-doubt. And all too often, this leads to inappropriate or misunderstood behaviors that are harmful to the marriage and to other family members. Most are unprepared, and as our now adult children will tell you, they have horror stories of their own and are in need of the same **HOPE, HELP** and **HEALING** that I needed. “In the face of separations and the pain of post-traumatic stress disorder, it is challenging to live the life and love intended and blessed by Almighty God.”

In too many instances, the traumas of war are destroying the greatest support system our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines have, their marriages and families. We know we need to do something before there’s another failed marriage, before another suicide (and it’s up to 22 a day among veterans), before anyone else loses hope and feels abandoned and isolated. Each of these family members are in need of our care, our help and our support to reclaim their marriages and families as a place of safety and support.

**Military Marriages Matter!** is motivated by our story, and the stories of the many other couples we have met who have suffered with **PTSD** and other life-changing traumas of war. It’s also motivated by the marriages that didn’t make it. The divorce rate is staggering among active-duty and veterans. We want to change that. We believe we can help each of these couples and their families, and train others to help as well.

“Along with our personal journey, we have over 35 years working together in the field of marriage education and marriage and family ministry which has remained a constant “gift” to our marriage. We want to share this gift with them. For this purpose, we have founded **“Military Marriages Matter!,”** are designing a unique Retreat for military couples to be called **“Our Military Marriage...It’s a Matter of the Heart!”**, will organize small gatherings and create on-going relational and spiritual support. The goal for each will be...

- + **HOPE** to face the circumstances of their military marriage, and not only have it survive, but to thrive;
- + **HELP** to overcome the stressors, to identify the problems, and to learn skills for communicating, problem solving, and decision-making;
- + **HEALING** from a loving God, and a loving spouse, making their marriages stronger than ever, more supportive and with renewed trust; and the
- + **SUPPORT** of *“Marriage Angels!”*, the name we have given to trained married couples who will “watch-over” and guide each military marriage.



**HOPE, HELP, and HEALING** are all “inside” jobs. So is letting someone care about you. It’s all a matter of the heart. It’s led by new thinking and the love of the Lord. When we change the thinking, we change the outcomes. This kind of change isn’t demanded or forced, it’s given and it’s learned.

**Military Marriages Do Matter** because they create the support systems that can turn the aftermath of war into possibilities, growth and new beginnings. Spouses are in a unique position to be the best support system our active-duty and veterans can have to deal with the aftermath of war. It’s critical, though, they receive care themselves, and the help and courage to respond to the difficulties they face with responses that cultivate under-

standing and compassion. And, maybe, just maybe, these soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines can find within themselves and within their marriages, the peace of mind and strength of character to love and be loved again. And, then, to begin to return the favor.

We believe the Church is in a unique position to transmit this care, teach the skills, give the guidance, and offer the healing of its' Sacramental life, all in a more intentional and deliberate way. Bishop Broglio gives us a challenge when he writes, "I submit that we, as Catholics, have a duty to make our contributions to the psychological and spiritual rehabilitation of these brave young men and women who have sacrificed so much for their country...It is simply a question of responding to the moral imperative of the Gospel."

Join us in this cause. **MarriageBuilding/ConstruyendoMatrimonios USA** is seeking your help for the many Military Marriages, from Viet Nam through today's Gulf Wars, and their families. Please go to our website (**[www.marriagebuildingusa.org](http://www.marriagebuildingusa.org)**) to make your tax deductible donation today. No gift is too small. Volunteer to be a part of the TEAM. No experience is too limiting. And, if you are a Military Marriage in need of help, please email me at **[don@marriagebuildingusa.org](mailto:don@marriagebuildingusa.org)** or lorrie at **[lorrie@marriagebuildingusa.org](mailto:lorrie@marriagebuildingusa.org)**.

Fondly,

**DON (& LORRIE) GRAMER, M.A.** Family Ministry  
**MarriageBuilding USA**, Founders & Directors

