

Writing a Story of Hope and Healing With Help From a VSO Friend

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Joel Capell sat at a book signing for his new memoir when a man came in and offered him a bit of rope. Capell took it, unsure what it meant. The man explained it represented the hope he found in Capell's book.

"No More Hope and No More Rope," said Capell. "That chapter in the book is one of the lowest points of my life."

The two men talked and cried. Capell was amazed. Not only was he there, but he was helping someone else. It was something he never would've imagined himself possible of years earlier. Capell is grateful for the rope thrown to him during a dark time. It came from the assistance navigating the VA he received, and the encouragement to tell his story, from friend and VFW accredited Veteran Service Officer, Zac Miller.

Capell, of Mount Victory, Ohio, joined the Army 23 years ago to pay for school. He spent most of his time in the National Guard as a combat engineer and has served three tours in the Middle East.

For a while, life seemed good. Capell considered himself bright and ready to take on anything. He married and gradually earned his degree.

"Then I went to war," said Capell. "I was in shambles after coming home from Iraq."

Physical injuries, from his service, left Capell with pain in his back, knees and elbow. He also had undiagnosed post-traumatic stress (PTS) that was taking a toll on him. Capell spiraled downward, got a divorce and was drinking too much. He went to the VA for help,

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and was encouraged to try writing. He began journaling in the form of letters to a spouse he didn't have.

After 10 years, Capell had a large collection of letters, a better state of mind and a new marriage. But during his last deployment in 2017, the old feelings returned. Capell began writing letters again, now to his wife, Jennifer, and sent them home. She was overwhelmed and asked that he save the letters until he returned. He kept writing and eventually let a fellow service member read them. The response Capell received pushed him to share more. Capell kept finding that people connected to his stories and the idea to publish them was born.

Once home, Capell began to share his book idea to bring Jennifer and others into his experiences in the Army. With his wife's support, he realized he needed to seek out additional support, and he reached out to Miller who works in Coshocton County, Ohio.

Miller and Capell became friends while serving in the same unit and after they were deployed together in 2017. Now living a few counties away from each other, Capell finally called his friend. Miller walked with him through the process of getting the help he needed.

"Zac understood because he'd been through the process himself," Capell said. "He told me to document everything and promised to help me work through it all."

Capell is thankful that Miller kept his promise. He now has the benefits he earned and is getting all the care he needs, something he didn't have when struggling for years on his own. He feels he's been given the chance to heal and be a better husband and father to his four children.

"Issues like PTS had not been completely diagnosed until this last year," said Capell. "I had Zac's number for years, and I would've been eligible years ago, but never fully spoke up. It took someone from the outside to notice and make me sit and talk."

Miller is grateful for the chance to help his friend and he enjoys the rewarding work of serving the men and women who have returned home from deployments and need support.

"It gives you a sense of accomplishment when you see a veteran's life changed for the better because of something you did, to see the guidance and assistance you provided pay off," Miller said. "As a VSO you are able to make huge impacts on people's lives in positive ways, and not just veterans but the families as well."

With his book, "Radio Silence," published and [available on Amazon](#), Capell hopes his story will move other veterans to reach out to those around them and to the VFW and people like Miller for help.

“When a rope is extended, never let go,” said Capell.

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