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The Shamanism Magazine

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We hope you enjoy reading the article. Nicholas Breeze Wood (editor)

BURYING THE WARRIOR

A Modern Medicine Journey

Duncan Wordley

Where do journeys begin? With birth, adulthood, karmic destiny formed through lifetimes, with the awakening of a sense of purpose, or from disillusion with what is? For me, all this - and more - is true. I have always had a restless wind blowing through my heart. I felt different to family and peers, an outsider looking for the way back into the glass castle of normality, an ugly duckling unaware of swanhood.

I started to read Carlos Castaneda when I was seventeen, and prayed to meet a shaman. I battled and conformed, became married and unmarried, searched libraries and book shops for truth and information. Closed my heart and lived in my head, lost lonely and arrogant.

By the age of thirty I had lost my joy and creativity, hiding all my anger and frustration behind a smile that hurt. A successful head of drama, I moved to working with young criminals and kept many from custody, although in reality, I was the one locked up. I spent all my spare time and money searching and researching, looking desperately for the thread that would release me, for a teacher to change me.

I trained in Transactional Analysis, not to be a therapist but to release my frozen creativity. I managed to trick myself into feeling; after nearly three years the first tear fell and my heart was ready to seek its path.

The year was 1987, I was thirty-three. I went to a one day workshop on the Medicine Wheel. It was a home-coming, and as I listened to the teachings I felt that I was not hearing these for the first time, but rather remembering something deep and powerful inside myself. I felt my early prayers awakening within me. I became deeply involved.

The teachings were profound and represented a true home coming and rebirth. I found my 'path with heart' and started jogging to catch up with my self.

I apprenticed to several teachers and had a huge appetite for learning. I was like a sponge soaking up knowledge. I trained with Gabrielle Roth and started to combine dance and movement with my medicine work.

I became successful as a teacher and travelled, doing workshops in Britain and Europe, continuing my apprenticeships and learning. I wrote articles, appeared on radio programmes and TV, even

sat on the couch with Richard and Judy, the hosts of the successful British morning TV show. Life was sweet and full of magic.

However, change is the nature of life, and for me things changed. I started to have doubts about some of my teachers and this led to doubts within myself. There was criticism of Europeans involving themselves in indigenous, non-European traditions, and allegations about the integrity of so called 'plastic medicine men' too. I became distracted and disillusioned, struggling with myself and what I carried.

Eventually I realised that I had to leave my apprenticeships and make my own way, to try and become a 'medicine man' in my own culture. I walked away heartbroken.

I had so much invested in the medicine ways, my work, status, friends, magic, most of what I considered 'me' was wrapped up in it somewhere. I became lost, desperate and disillusioned. My work started to fall apart. I tried to continue teaching as an independent 'medicine man', but something was not right.

I redesigned my life, gave away



my sacred pipe and made my own. But, I had lost confidence in my own magic and nothing seemed to work.

After a long process of prayer and reflection, I did a deal with Spirit. I agreed to walk away for five years, after which everything about the Medicine that was left would be mine. I put my medicine tools away, bought a suit, and returned to the world of the 35-hour week.

I was successful in what I did, but it all felt like a backward step, my heart was counting down the clock.

The five years expired and I eagerly joined my sacred pipe, to let Spirit know I was back, and to find whether my destiny still lay in the Medicine direction. I was anxious and unsure as to whether I still had what it took to do the work, especially without the support of a teacher. But, the initial signs were good, and so I decided to quit my job and trust.

Weeks after this decision I received a phone call from a woman whose partner had been a soldier and who was experiencing problems with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Making no promises, I agreed to meet him.

I had some knowledge of the effects of this disorder, without knowing its name, as both my grandfather and my father had their own personal legacies from the First and Second World Wars. I remember as a child being woken

by the screams and sobbing of my grandfather, and watching unseen from my bed as he wept into his hands in the small hours. He had been in the British Expeditionary Force and had fought at the battle of Mons (the first battle, in 1914) and had spent three years on the front line before being sent to India to train colonial troops. Over three decades later he was still tortured by the memories of warfare in its crudest and most brutal form.

My father, too, would sometimes wake confused and disturbed by the memories of naval battles, encounters with death and the loss of friends. I remember the haunted look in his eyes after one of these experiences.

I had been fascinated in my younger years by the plight of Vietnam veterans trying to adjust to normal existence after the hell of war. Swiftdeer, one of my teachers, was one such person who had found relief through the 'medicine path' after being driven crazy by his experiences. This, however, did not prepare me for my encounter.

Steve was very close to the edge, by his own admission a desperate man, a tortured soul, living in a private hell that was so far from any normal experience, it was almost incomprehensible.

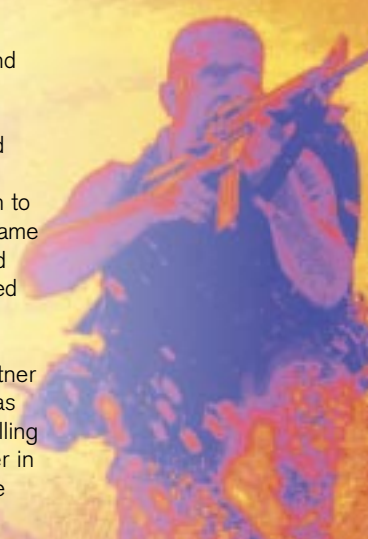
As he talked I could feel his pain; it both frightened and touched me. He had first

experienced the syndrome as a young soldier in Northern Ireland, and had gone on to compound this for a further twelve years in the British Forces, eight of which had been as a Special Forces sniper. Then due to injuries sustained, he was returned to his unit, considered unfit for normal duty, with the prospect of a desk job. He took it badly and driven by pain, despair and hopelessness had followed a death wish as a mercenary, through a series of known and forgotten wars for a further eight years.

His symptoms were extreme. He suffered from daytime and night-time hallucinations and terrifyingly real flashbacks. His nights in particular were filled with dreams of past conflicts, he was afraid to sleep and had on occasion seriously injured his partner during these dreams and flashbacks. He was suicidal, dangerous and desperate.

Whist talking to him he would drift into memories which clearly frightened his partner and began to seriously worry me. But at the same time I knew what he needed and how I might help him. I suggested what I believed might work.

After ten minutes he went outside for a cigarette. His partner told me she was amazed he was talking to me, and was even telling me things he had never told her in years. "He does not usually like people." she said.



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He came back into the room, looked me in the eye and said. "I have never trusted anyone in my life, no one. But something tells me to trust you. I'm desperate and I want you to help me." I agreed and arranged for him to come to my house the following week.

He arrived to start working and his story slowly unravelled. It was far, far worse than I could have ever imagined. We spent the day building a sweatlodge and talking.

I discovered that he was a true warrior, who, since a small child had wanted to be the 'best of the best'. When barely a teenager he had travelled to Asia without his parents and returned with a black belt in a very coveted martial art, the youngest ever to achieve this

survived and kept returning home. He had been shot, blown up, captured and tortured, he had survived and escaped. He had been treated twenty-six times for serious battle injuries (he did not count things such as flesh wounds as serious), been repaired and had returned to fight again.

Then he met a young woman and fell deeply in love. He wanted to stop. He tried to find a place for himself in the civilian world, but his past returned to haunt him with a vengeance. He had fallen into a dark space from which he could not extract himself.

We talked for a long time and then went into the dark heat of the sweatlodge. I encouraged him to trust in spirit and to pray. His

partner had warned me not to touch him, that it could be very dangerous for me. As he was leaving I asked him for a hug and we embraced. That seemed to break a barrier and lay a foundation of trust. A powerful human moment, and the sealing of a contract between us.

He phoned me days later, excited. He felt different, and had had the first restful, un-tortured night's sleep for years. He

wanted to continue the process.

The next week he arrived again. He had agreed to do a 'shamanic burial'; he wanted the killer inside him to die. It had to be a long time, we agreed on thirty-six hours.

At this point I will say that Steve was not your normal soldier. Through his martial arts he had touched spirit. He said that up until the point he became a mercenary he had spirit guides, but these departed with his death wish. As a sniper he had a technique of opening his chakras and becoming one with the land as he infiltrated behind enemy lines, moving silently and alone towards his targets.

Colleagues he had shared this with had often laughed. But as he said, "I am alive and they are dead". This openness and his connection to the earth helped me to connect with him, increasing our mutual trust.

I never discuss the detail of a client's personal ceremony, but I will say that for me, it was the most frightening thing I have ever done.

As soon as I had sealed Steve in the earth and opened my monitoring of the ceremony, the full impact of what I was doing hit me. The energy of what he was releasing was like nothing I had ever experienced. The most scary part were the visits I made to him every twelve hours.

When I approached his grave I really had no idea as to his psychological state, or where he believed himself to be. I was terrified. I have always been able to look after myself, and have done loads of work with violent and dangerous people, and apart from natural fear and caution I have always been confident in my ability to handle myself.

Steve however, was something different, and I knew that I was so far out of his league that any pretence in this case was useless. I humoured myself with the phrase 'Today is a good day to die'. I faced the fear and the 'Rambo'-induced fantasies.

Despite my fears, during the ceremony I experienced a profound sense of protection and support from the powers that work with me, as well as an incredible heart opening that allowed me to truly pray for his healing. The medicine signs were overwhelming and the behaviour of the local buzzards in particular were extraordinary.

After the allotted time I released Steve from the earth. I took him straight from the grave into a sweatlodge that I had been preparing for him, before first light. He was considerably weakened by his ordeal.

It is never an easy thing to face one's self and actions. What this man had to face was indescribable and took immense courage and determination and confirmed his status in my eyes, as a true warrior, and greatly increased my growing respect.

The results were dramatic. Steve felt much better, his desire to kill himself had gone. He experienced a period of peace both during and after the ceremony, and found that the power of some of his nightmares had receded.

After this, he would come to me after his attendance at 'Combat



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honour. He had exceeded his own expectations.

He was an expert in every aspect of war and death-bringing, a man of immense courage and loyalty both to his country and his companions. He has medals for bravery but cannot talk of them because of the British Government's Official Secrets Act. But the cost had been extreme.

The British Army had been testing for PTSD since 1916. Steve had one of the highest ever scores on this test. He had killed a vast number of people, lost countless friends and had seen more death, destruction and horror than one could possibly imagine.

For eight years as a mercenary he had been trying to kill himself, taking on suicidal and dangerous missions, often alone. But he

Stress', the charity that works with this disorder', and he became fascinated by 'the medicine' and hungry for more knowledge. We became firm friends, somehow bonded through trust and the sharing of the sweatlodge ceremony, which he found was very helpful to settle the energy and memories that the therapy he had undergone had brought up.

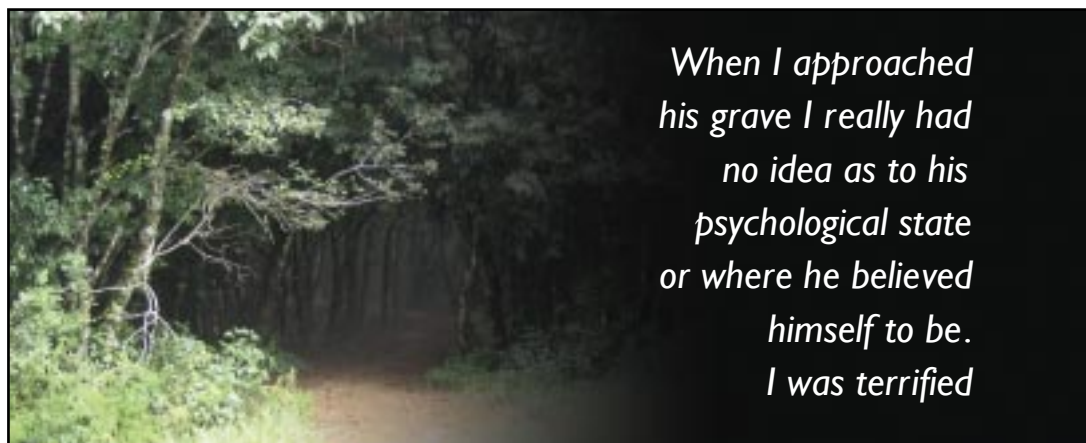
The Combat Stress therapists have found his recovery extraordinary, and Steve is now able to undertake group work and other activities which before were impossible for him. He was more relaxed and less dangerous to work with.

Several years on and he is doing well, able to deal with himself and people in more positive ways. He has regained access to his children who are now able to sleep over.

He still suffers from the PTSD, but he now feels able to live with himself and participate in the world, more at ease and peaceful.

The effect upon me was also dramatic, because during the process I had rediscovered the power of my medicine and a growing confidence and trust in my abilities as a healer. I felt I no longer needed the support and backing of a teacher, and felt whole again and empowered in my work.

Working with Steve had been a healing for me too. It had opened a path to my own heart



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knowing and intuition. Spirit had given me a test and I had come through it wiser and more deeply connected with my Medicine and myself. My knowledge was directly relevant to someone in great pain and suffering and, with the help of Grandmother Earth and Spirit, this suffering had been reduced and healed.

Since Steve, there has been another soldier and many other people with pain and trauma, as well as those with the usual everyday neuroses that is endemic in our culture.

I find that through talking and working with people I just seem to know what each needs and how best to be of service. I have acquired over time a 'medicine bag' of tools and organic techniques that can empower and heal, and I use these with the support of the Earth and my own

inner guidance. I have been working to make what I have learned mine own. I now teach again and run online courses in Medicine Wheel and shamanism, and my personal journey continues.

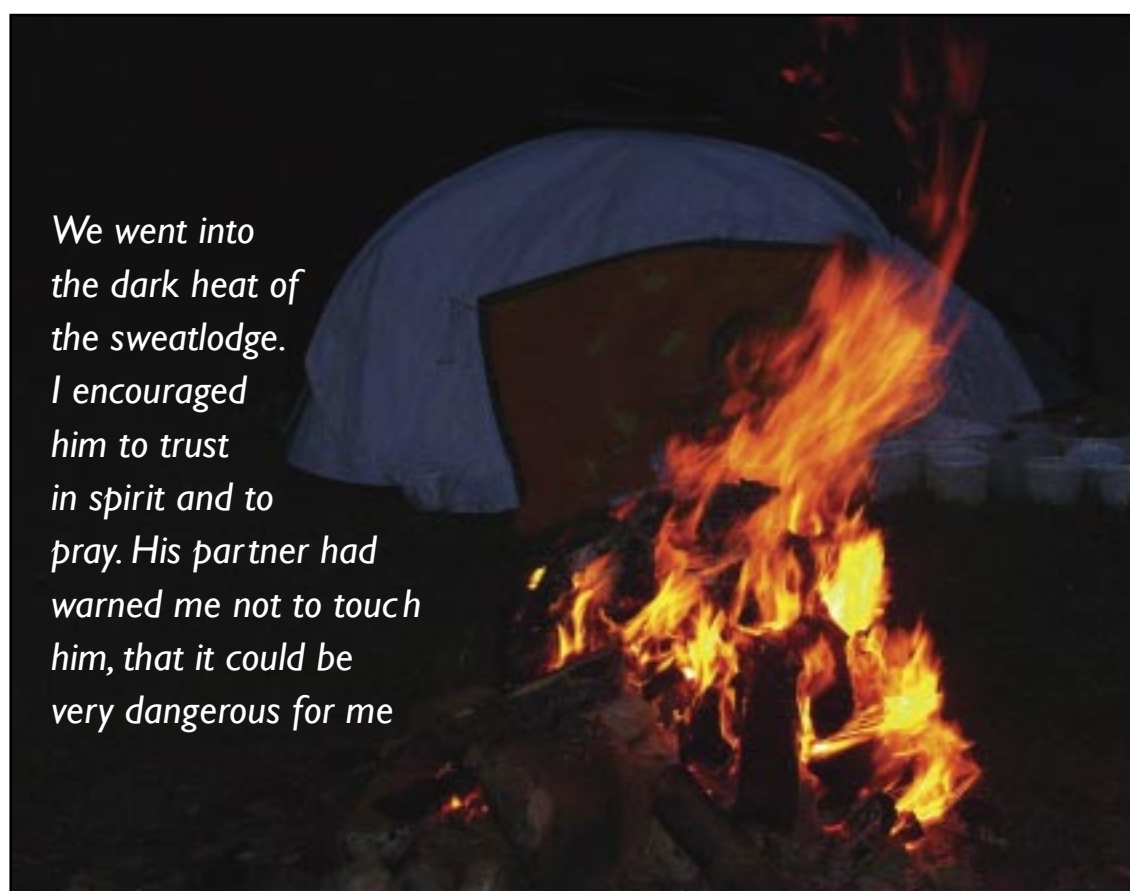
But it seems that the incidence of PTSD is increasing, or is at last being acknowledged for what it is. I have, since my encounter, contemplated this and its effects upon all of us. We live still in times of war, and the last century in particular was full of its reality and horror.

What I have come to realise is that as well as its legacy of death and mutilation, it also contaminates the minds and hearts of the survivors, often erupting as anger and violence effecting relationships, children and relatives in profoundly disturbing ways.

We may all, without conscious knowledge, be its victims.

NOTES: 1 - The UK charity Combat Stress www.combatstress.org.uk

Duncan Wordley has been teaching shamanism, dance and Medicine Wheel for the last 22 years. He has trained in Transactional Analysis and psychotherapy, but has gone on to reach outside his culture to find those teachers who are rooted in the wisdom of the body and the earth. An accredited 5 Rhythms Teacher since 1989, Duncan has studied with a wide range of shamanic teachers from a variety of traditions and has undertaken several apprenticeships, the longest lasting ten years. He works with both groups and individuals covering a wide range of contemporary shamanic perspectives. www.medicinewheelshamanism.co.uk duncan@medicinewheelshamanism.co.uk



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